Alternative futurities in Nnedi Okorafor's *Binti: The Complete Trilogy* and Julie Dash's *Daughters of the Dust*

by

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Abstract

This thesis explores alternative Black futurities in Nnedi Okorafor's Africanfuturistic/Afrofuturistic science fiction trilogy *Binti: The Complete Trilogy (*2015-2019) and in Julie Dash's independent movie *Daughters of the Dust* (1992), with a focus on alternative images of Black womanhood and the Himba and the Gullah cultures. It discusses the radical futures that the Gullah and the Himba women choose for themselves where the Himba and the Gullah cultures play major roles. I argue that Okorafor and Dash deliberately position the Himba and the Gullah cultures in their futures through the cultural practices of Black women. In these multiple futurities, the Himba and the Gullah women exist in multiple ways (scholar, culture bearer), embody radical futurities (multispecies communion, rebirth, queer), all the while carrying and continuing the Himba and the Gullah cultures into the future. The Himba and Gullah cultural elements and practices like the *otjize* and remembering the ancestors act as sustaining forces for the Himba and the Gullah women. These cultural practices and elements exist in the past, present, and future simultaneously, transcending temporal boundaries. In this thesis, my motive is to look at how Okorafor and Dash explore the different ways in which Black women and Black culture can exist in the future, without being bound or defined by colonial or racist stereotypes. By exploring two different projects (science fiction and independent film) by Okorafor and Dash, I attempt to discover how these Black artists articulate the relationship between reimagination (of the future), rebuilding (Black womanhood), and representation (of Black culture) through different mediums in order to alter the way Black bodies and Black futures are represented.

In the introductory chapter, I discuss the way different theorists have explained Afrofuturism and situate my own position within this growing discourse. The term Afrofuturism

is often attributed to Mark Dery**.** He defines it as "speculative fiction that treats African-American themes and addresses African-American concerns in the context of twentieth-century technoculture—and, more generally, African American signification that appropriates images of technology and a prosthetically enhanced future" (180). Alondra Nelson and Kodwo Eshun extend Dery's concerns regarding both technology and appropriation in Black futurist projects. Nelson emphasizes the "sci-fi imagery, futurist themes, and technological innovation in the African diaspora" (9). For Eshun, "Afrofuturism studies the appeals that black artists, musicians, critics, and writers have made to the future, in moments where any future was made difficult for them to imagine" (294). My thesis closely follows Ytasha Womack's definition of Afrofuturism. For Womack, Afrofuturism is "an intersection of imagination, technology, the future, and liberation" that "combines elements of science fiction, historical fiction, speculative fiction, fantasy, Afrocentricity, and magic realism with non-Western beliefs" to redefine "culture and notions of blackness for today and the future" (9). It is a form of communication about history as much as futurity, wherein Black creatives self-define Blackness in ways that do not distort them into what Alondra Nelson identifies as the "primitive" (5) and Sofia Samatar mentions as "savage" or "bestial" (186).

In the second chapter, I focus on the Himba cultural elements and Binti's radical futurity in Okorafor's *Binti* trilogy, a story about a Himba woman's intergalactic journey to attend a university. In this text, although spaceships and aliens (the more "obvious" markers of science fiction) are present, the surviving tools that empower Binti are revealed to be the ancient cultural tools of her Himba community and the Zinariya, mainly the orange clayed *otijze* and the *edan* disc. The *otijze* becomes the healing material strengthening Binti and her chances of survival on the spaceship and the *edan* counters the language barrier with the alien species. I argue that

Okorafor challenges the stereotypical image of "primitive" (Nelson 5) Himba culture and Black womanhood. She celebrates the radical futurity of a Himba woman, who becomes a scholar in the Oomza University in space and engages in multispecies communions with alien species and a living technology/organism. Binti does not embody the image of Himba women who are regarded as "near savages" (Okorafor 132), "near slaves" (Okorafor 46), and "dirt bathers" (Okorafor 6) by the dominant group Khoush in the trilogy, and by the colonialists in reality. She is a harmonizer who attempts to dissolve an ongoing war and secure a better future for herself and for her Himba community through the Himba cultural tools and her radical and multiple identities. Throughout the *Binti* trilogy, Okorafor upholds the cultural elements of the Himba community, transforms those elements into powerful forms of technology, and thus positions them in the future.

In the third chapter, I argue that the Gullah cultural practices like tending to the graveyard and keeping a glass of water under the bed, along with the Gullah food culture act as active agents for the Gullah women in forwarding their multiple and radical futures in *Daughters of the Dust.* The film depicts a Gullah family contemplating migration from the Igbo Islands of South Carolina to the US mainland in the early 1900s. In the film, the Gullah women Nana Peazant, Eula, and Yellow Mary choose futures that are different from what colonial narratives impose on them. While the Gullah culture and their future were attempted to be wiped out and made non-existent by colonialists, Nana Peazant secures both by practicing the Gullah traditions to guide the members to their futures. Eula's future is not defined by slavery or the physical violence she suffers from. She defines her own character and chooses to be more than a site of invasion. She nurtures the unborn child and helps the other women to nurture their many futures. Yellow Mary, too, chooses her future where she breaks the assumptions that Black women can only be seen as

silent, meek characters (Womack 7) who need to suppress their identity and sexuality (Bambara 126). She breaks free from all these restrictions by being bold about her queer identity. By exploring the alternative worlds that Okorafor and Dash create for Black people in their projects, I want to add to the conversations on the importance of creativity and imagination in projecting and rebuilding Black culture, womanhood, and futurities.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

This thesis explores Black futurity through the alternative images of the Himba and the Gullah cultures and Black womanhood in Nnedi Okorafor's Africanfuturistic/Afrofuturistic science fiction trilogy *Binti: The Complete Trilogy (*2015-2019) and in Julie Dash's groundbreaking independent movie *Daughters of the Dust* (1992). I argue that Okorafor and Dash deliberately position the Himba and the Gullah cultures in their futures through the cultural practices of Black women. In these multiple futurities, the Himba and the Gullah women are not restricted and have multiple ways to exist (as more than a human, as a scholar, as a queer Black woman, as a culture bearer) and multiple destinations to choose in their futures (earth, space, Ibo island, mainland). Traditional cultural elements or practices like the *otjize*, the red clay mixture that Himba women apply on their bodies and hair, and Gullah rituals of remembering the ancestors, are not just parts of the distant past but active agents in forwarding a Black future that breaks linear notions of time.

Both Okorafor and Dash represent cultural practices as integral parts of Black futurity. For example, in *Binti*, the *otjize* becomes a part of Binti's intergalactic journey, saving her from death at the hands of alien Meduse. In *Daughters,* the Gullah traditions of tending to the graveyard and keeping a glass of water under the bed to remember and reconnect with the ancestors become sustaining and guiding forces for Nana and Eula's futures. These help them to guide the other members of the family to their own diverse futures. Black women perform the acts of continuing/forwarding cultural and ancestral history to build alternative futures. Through positioning the Himba and the Gullah cultures in the future and enabling Black women to have radical and multiple futurities, Okorafor and Dash are resisting the conventional colonial idea

that Black culture and Black women cannot exist in the future because they are “primitive” (Nelson 5) and “savage” (Samatar 186).

The objective of my argument is to uncover how these two projects position and celebrate particular Black histories and cultures (the Himba culture in *Binti* and the Gullah culture in *Daughters of the Dust*) in the future and by doing so rebuild images of Black womanhood that oppose racist and stereotypical caricatures. I have chosen a science fiction novel and an experimental film to explore the different mediums through which Okorafor and Dash envision Black futurity. This helps me to explore how these Black artists are using different mediums to depict different worlds and ideas of futurity which are not limited to a definite space or time. In Okorafor’s trilogy, Binti embodies a radical future by becoming part human, part alien species, and part living technology. She grows out of the Himba community’s gendered expectations of domestic and reproductive futurity and chooses instead to be a scholar in outer space while living in a body that is more than human. Dash’s movie is based on the Great Migration during the early 1900s when the Gullah people decide to choose either to stay on the Ibo island or leave for the mainland. In the movie, the Gullah women have distinct characteristics and distinct ways of envisioning their futures. Nana Peazant looks at a future where the Peazant family can continue their Gullah cultural practices even if they leave Ibo island for the North. Eula represents a reproductive future where she and the other Gullah women can acknowledge their past scars of slavery and not let those scars confine their future. She envisions that the Gullah women can choose any future that they want and have many paths to choose in their life without being defined by slavery. Yellow Mary represents a queer woman who chooses a non-domestic and non-reproductive futurity. Her future embraces being a proud queer woman who chooses to live

her life resisting the domestic Gullah communal role of a woman. These three women choose to stay back on the island, but each has her own vision of the future.

Nnedi Okorafor calls *Binti* Africanfuturistic[1] instead of Afrofuturistic. She says in her blog post on *Nnedi's Wahala Zone Blog* that Africanfuturism is "concerned with visions of the future, is interested in technology, leaves the earth, skews optimistic, is centered on and predominantly written by people of African descent (black people) and it is rooted first and foremost in Africa. It's less concerned with 'what could have been' and more concerned with 'what is and can/will be'." For Okorafor, Afrofuturism deals with African American tropes (based on Mark Dery's definition of the term) and thus she wants to call *Binti* Africanfuturistic because it deals with African history and culture.[2] I am using "Africanfuturism/Afrofuturism" in my thesis when I talk about *Binti* since I regard "Africanfuturism" to fall under the definition of "Afrofuturism," yet I respect Okorafor's categorization of her own work. On this topic, Bettina Burger says, "Despite Okorafor's categorization of the Binti trilogy as Africanfuturism, rather than the more established term 'Afrofuturism,' it shares the African science-fictional characteristics that the term encompasses" and also that,

> Ytasha L. Womack, for example, states that an Afrofuturist cultural medium—be it a text, a movie, or a song—typically needs to include "a person of non-Euro descent a hundred years into the future" (2013, p. 7; emphasis in original), but does not impose any further restrictions on said person, allowing for individual Afrofuturist texts to represent the wider African diaspora(s). The genre can thus ensure that people of color, especially

[1] FitzPatrick says, "Okorafor recently considered the productive distinction of the term "Africanfuturism (which is somewhat similar to Afrofuturism, but is specifically and more directly rooted in African culture, history, mythology, and perspective, where the center is non-Western" (72).

[2] Okorafor says, "Africanfuturism is similar to "Afrofuturism" in the way that blacks on the continent and in the Black Diaspora are all connected by blood, spirit, history and future. The difference is that Africanfuturism is specifically and more directly rooted in African culture, history, mythology and point-of-view as it then branches into the Black Diaspora, and it does not privilege or center the West."

> Africans or people with an African background, can be visualized as playing a significant role in the future of humanity. (365)

I have chosen Ytasha Womack's definition of Afrofuturism for my thesis as it does not confine Afrofuturism to a certain geographical space for Black people.

While *Binti* is an Africanfuturistic/Afrofuturistic text featuring interplanetary travel, aliens, and speculative technologies, *Daughters of the Dust* is not an Africanfuturistic nor Afrofuturistic movie per se. *Daughters* looks at the migration of the fictional Peazant family in the real moment at the dawn of the twentieth century when the Gullah people had to make difficult choices. I study these two projects in my thesis because they both imagine alternative and multiple Black futurities, one rooted in science fiction, the other a fictional representation of a past historical moment. Even though they are two different projects, they both imagine radical Black futures not bound by Western ideas of linear temporality, and they both center and celebrate Black culture. Even though *Daughters* is not an Africanfuturistic/Afrofuturistic project like *Binti* that contains the technological tropes of science fiction, it imagines and builds Black futures in many ways that are important for Black culture and Black people. Dash shows the importance of imagining Black futures, as Black people were denied their own futures by slavers and colonialists.

Objective

Okorafor's Africanfuturistic/Afrofuturistic vision in *Binti:* The *Complete Trilogy* contains many obvious markers of "technology" such as living (organic) technology, spaceships, and intergalactic travel. At the same time, it also focuses on existing African cultural elements like the *otjize*, and the Himba hair braiding tradition. My objective is to argue that through this juxtaposition, Okorafor inserts cultural elements of the Himba people and their history into the

future, as forwarding agents of futurity. *Binti* tells an alternative story about the Himba culture and their history where they are not unintelligent "savages" (Samatar 186) with no knowledge of technology and science (the common stereotype held by whites/colonizers) but are intellectual scholars and mathematicians, and their technology is more adept than others in the world of the trilogy.

In *Daughters of the Dust*, I will discuss Dash's cinematic techniques in depicting the recollection of the Gullah culture as some family members leave for the North as part of the Great Migration. I argue that the Gullah traditions of remembering the ancestors, food preparation, and familial bonding during mealtime that Dash represents through the process of recollection become a part of the future, enacted and continued by the Gullah women. I will also focus on Black womanhood and explore characters like Nana Peazant, Eula, and Yellow Mary, to reveal the different layers that Dash provides to Black female characters, as opposed to the monolithic character of a "mammy" (hooks 74) "mulatto" (hooks 73) or "prostitute" (hooks 69). I will also discuss the different ways in which the women characters envision their futures: Nana chooses cultural continuity for the family, Eula has a reproductive future and a future that is not defined by slavery and violence, and Yellow Mary chooses a non-reproductive and non-domestic futurity.

Even though *Binti* and *Daughters* are projects with two different settings (outer space in the future versus Ibo Island, North Carolina in 1902), both produce Black futuristic visions. The objective to put these two projects together is to discuss that while *Binti* looks at the future exclusively through Africanfuturism/Afrofuturism within the realm of science fiction, *Daughters* does so through a fictional vision based on real-world history. Significantly, both center Black people deciding their own futures. Through these projects, Black people whose history has been

systematically erased, and whose future has been depicted as non-existent by colonizers, enslavers, and White supremacists, are given the freedom to imagine their multiple futures. In both projects, Black women, their stories, their cultures, their histories, and their futures take center stage. Dash and Okorafor show how it is possible to talk about Black people and their futures without mentioning white people.

On Afrofuturism and Afrofuturists

The main critics who have discussed Afrofuturism as a theory are Mark Dery, Alondra Nelson, Kodwo Eshun, and Ytasha Womack. In this section, I will first discuss these critics' definitions of Afrofuturism and the elements of Afrofuturism that they mainly focus on. I will then move into a more detailed engagement with Ytasha Womack's *Afrofuturism: The World of Black Sci-Fi and Fantasy Culture*, which most closely aligns with my project.

Mark Dery first coined the term Afrofuturism in his essay "Black to the Future: Interviews with Samuel R. Delany, Greg Tate, and Tricia Rose" in 1994. He defines Afrofuturism as "speculative fiction that treats African-American themes and addresses African-American concerns in the context of twentieth-century technoculture—and, more generally, African American signification that appropriates images of technology and a prosthetically enhanced future" (180). Dery discusses science fiction, hip hop culture, cyberpunk, and graffiti art when he talks about Afrofuturism. He discusses different projects that deal with technology based on science fiction, and how those Afrofuturistic projects use technology and science fiction as opposed to how dominant culture uses them (Dery 185). In the graffiti, comics, and science fiction projects he mentions, Afrofuturists use sonic sounds, vocal sounds, electronic drums, and technology that allow Black people to imagine their futures in space and beyond. Dery engages with Samuel R. Delany in his interview where Delany talks about the need for

projects rendering futurity and ideas of tomorrow for Black people. Delany says, "We need images of tomorrow, and our people need them more than most" (190). He relates the absence of images of the future for Black people with the constant erasure of the past of Black people by the colonialists. Tricia Rose says that the imagination of the future of the Black people (where they will go in the future) can take place when there is an imagination of the past (where they came from) (Dery 215). Delany's and Rose's statements emphasize the importance of futuristic projects for Black people to stir the imagination of Black futurity. This makes projects like *Binti* and *Daughters*[3] so important, as they not only provide images of Black futurity but also represent and recollect Black cultural pasts. Greg Tate adds to the discussion that science fiction can enable a Black person to know himself and his cultural and spiritual history. He says, "Knowing yourself as a Black person - historically, spiritually, and culturally - is not something that's given to you, institutionally; it's an arduous journey that must be undertaken by the individual" (Dery 210).[4] Dery's conversation about Afrofuturism with Samuel Delany, Greg Tate, and Tricia Rose includes the topics of the future for Black people, cyclical time or coexistence of time, the fantastical or fictional world of science fiction, hip hop culture, digital music technology, and a knowledge of science to resist racism.

In her "Introduction: Future Texts" (2002) of a special issue of *Social Text* dedicated to Afrofuturism, Alondra Nelson says that "Afrofuturism can be broadly defined as 'African American voices' with 'other stories to tell about culture, technology and things to come.' The term was chosen as the best umbrella for the concerns of 'the list'— as it has come to be known

[3] Even though *Daughters* is not an Africanfuturistic/Afrofuturistic project, it is similarly committed to imagining radical futures in the context of the historical moment of the Great Migration. The film captures a Gullah family imagining their futures, something that was historically denied to Black people.

[4] In her Africanfuturistic/Afrofuturistic journey, Binti gets involved in the process of knowing herself, her multiple identities, and the cultural and spiritual history of the Gullah and the Enyi Zinariya communities.

by its members— 'sci-fi imagery, futurist themes, and technological innovation in the African diaspora'" (9). Nelson regards images of science fiction and other ways of telling stories of culture, technology, and futurity by African Americans as parts of Afrofuturism. She includes the discussion of technoculture, digital networks, R&B music, forums, virtual communication or connections, information technology, fiction, poetry, digital photomontage, and design technology within the field of Afrofuturism. In her essay, Nelson discusses and gives examples of Western media and advertisements where Black people are shown as "primitive" in contrast to "modern" technologies (5). She explains how Black people are used as exotic beings in these representations and have no connection to modern technologies and devices. Nelson describes a Land Rover ad that circulated in South African magazines (publication date is not mentioned) where a Himba woman from Namibia is shown with bare breasts, standing in a desert as the fast-paced Land Rover passes her by. "Her 'feminine primitiveness'" (Nelson 5) is presented through this ad where her primitivity is shown as a contrast to modern technology. This Himba woman is placed in a position of a static past "eating the dust of technology" (Nelson 6), while the car rushes towards the future, leaving her far behind. As opposed to these stereotypical images, Afrofuturists use creative platforms like fiction, music, information technology, and digital networks to project Black people with advanced technology and to position them in futuristic projects.[5] Nelson discusses the works of Alexander G. Weheliye, Ron Eglash, Anna Everett, Kalí Tal, Nalo Hopkinson, and many more Afrofuturists. They use their creative mediums and imaginations to show that Black people and technology are not polar opposites, but that Black people are equipped with technology and futurity in their past, present, and future.

[5] For example, in my thesis, I explain how Okorafor uses science fiction to position a Himba girl in outer space and represent Himba people possessing advanced technology. Binti is not only skilled in technological knowledge but also merges with living technology in the trilogy to become more than a human. Okorafor celebrates the presence of a Himba body in a futuristic outer space and allows Binti to explore the many ways in which she can exist across space and time.

"In Further Considerations of Afrofuturism" (2003), Kodwu Eshun defines Afrofuturism "as a program for recovering the histories of counter-futures created in a century hostile to Afrodiasporic projection and as a space within which the critical work of manufacturing tools capable of intervention within the current political dispensation may be undertaken" (301). He also says that "Afrofuturism studies the appeals that black artists, musicians, critics, and writers have made to the future, in moments where any future was made difficult for them to imagine" (294). Eshun talks about building futuristic projects by and for Black people, as Black futurity is constantly portrayed as dystopian and hostile in global and political scenarios. Eshun considers "audiovisions of extraterrestriality, futurology, and technoscience fictions" (293) significant parts of Afrofuturism. He also sees African sonic processes as an integral part of Afrofuturism. Eshun discusses *The Last Angel of History* (1995) *and Brothers from Another Planet* (1993) to talk about the way they use African sonic processes as telecommunication/Black secret technology to create futuristic, "mythological, programmatic, and cosmological world pictures" (295). In his discussion on Afrofuturism, Eshun also includes music projects like Sun Ra's "group, the Arkestra; Le Perry's recording studio, the Black Ark; and the *Mothership Connection,* Parliament's 1974-1981 album cycle" to illuminate their futuristic elements like the presence of aliens, space travel, and visuals of outer space (295). Through these discussions, Eshun identifies sonic processes, extraterrestrial presence, space travel, Black codes or secret communicative technology, human-machine connections/cyborgs, music, and sonic fiction within the field of Afrofuturism. Reorienting Black history, merging the boundaries of temporality to disturb linear temporality, and including the past of Black history in the future to challenge the "primitivity" of Black people are considered to be the goals of Afrofuturism. Eshun states that "Afrofuturism's specificity lies in assembling conceptual approaches and

countermemorial mediated practices in order to access triple consciousness, quadruple consciousness, previously inaccessible alienations" (298).[6] Eshun sees the extraterrestrial presence in science fiction as an element that Afrofuturism uses to represent the dislocation and alienation that Black subjects feel due to racism/racial hierarchies. For Eshun, Afrofuturism exists in literary, sonic, digital, fictional, visual, and theoretical platforms, enabling many ways to explore the futurity of Black people (301).

In *Afrofuturism: The World of Black Sci-Fi and Fantasy Culture* (2013), Ytasha Womack defines Afrofuturism as "an intersection of imagination, technology, the future, and liberation" that "combines elements of science fiction, historical fiction, speculative fiction, fantasy, Afrocentricity, and magic realism with non-Western beliefs" to redefine "culture and notions of blackness for today and the future" (9). Womack's definition focuses on reenvisioning Black culture and Blackness across temporalities (past, present, and future). She emphasizes the combination of futurity, technology, imagination, and liberation, through the different mediums of Afrofuturism, like "literature, visual arts, music, or grassroots organizing" (Womack 9) and many more. Womack does not talk about a specific Black culture or a certain geographical area while talking about Black people or Blackness. Her definition has more to do with the rebuilding of Black culture and Black futurity where she sees Afrofuturism as a "total reenvisioning of the past and speculation about the future rife with cultural critiques" (9). Womack's definition of Afrofuturism is the one that I relate with the most because her definition does not bind Afrofuturism to a specific space or genre to explore the futurity of Black people and to represent Black culture. Her definition resists the idea that Black people do not belong to the future.

[6] Binti engages in gaining access to these triple consciousness (part Himba, part Meduse, part Enyi Zinariya) and quadruple consciousness (part Himba, part Meduse, part Enyi Zinariya, part New Fish) in the *Binti* trilogy. In her Africanfutursitic/Afrofuturistic journey of gaining multiple identities, she challenges the existing Himba communal standards for women (limited to domestic and reproductive futures) and the dominant institutional narratives of the Khoush (that depict the Khoush as the superior and the Meduse as the inferior/monster).

Rather, it celebrates the representation of the Black people and their culture in the future, where Blackness comes together with technology, imagination, and freedom. Womack discusses that it is important to envision Black people in futuristic spaces where they are not just silent, meek, or dead characters, but have their own stories to tell from a non-Eurocentric position, something that is lacking in Western media (7).[7] In her book, Womack adds new dimensions to Afrofuturism by exploring how the Afrofuturists tell their stories through different/many mediums like science fiction, fantasy, digital media, social platforms, digital video, graphic arts, gaming technology, cosplay, music, and cosmology.

From Music to Cosmos: Many Ways of Imagining Black Futurity

W. E. B Du Bois, Sun Ra, George Clinton, Octavia E. Butler, and Alondra Nelson have some of the prominent Afrofuturistic projects that stir conversations about alternative futurities. Along with their work, Afrofuturistic projects experimenting with music, astronomy, and the knowledge of the cosmos have also been important in imagining alternative futurities. In this section, I will briefly discuss these projects. Black creators have been using science, technology, music, digital platforms, and other realms of imagination to rebuild the images of Black people and Black culture that Western media restricts into stereotypes ("mulatto," docile, "prostitute", "criminal", maid). Womack mentions, "Visual artists, graphic artists, musicians, poets, DJs, dancers, writers, and filmmakers—each immersed in works with strong sci-fi and historical fiction themes, often" flirt "with an Eastern or African philosophy," "utilizing black characters or aesthetics to deconstruct images of the past to revisualize the future" (22). These Black artists that Womack mentions experiment with technology starting with musical technology,

[7] Okorafor positions a Himba young woman, Binti, in a futuristic space in her Africanfuturistic/Afrofuturistic trilogy, where Binti is a scholar with a radical future of becoming more than human. Okorafor reenvisions Black futurity and represents a Himba culture that resists the stereotypical image of their people and culture as "primitive"(Nelson 5) and celebrates their many ways of existing in the future.

cybertechnology, cinematic technology, steam-powered technology to science fiction technology in their projects. Physics, astronomy, literature, mathematics, philosophy (Womack 20), music, and cultural and spiritual history all become mediums through which Afrofuturists reimagine Black futurity.

W. E. B. Du Bois's science fiction short story "The Comet" (1920) discusses the way the racial hierarchy is shaken after an apocalypse and how a Black man becomes the figure of life and survival in a post-apocalyptic world. His novel *Dark Princess* (1928) imagines a Black futurity that, as Alex Zamalin mentions in his book *Black Utopia: The History of an Idea from Black Nationalism to Afrofuturism* (2019), visualizes "the conditions for achieving a Global South utopia, in which all people of color [are] united for collective self-determination" (8).

In the 1950s, Sun Ra the Jazz artist created new waves in imagining Black futurity which includes music, space, cosmology, and "mythological images and icons such as space iconography, the idea of extraterrestriality, and the idea of space exploration" (Eshun 295). Both Ra and musician George Clinton used the "idea of a song mythology from the cosmos, highflying African-inspired space costumes, wordplay that challenged logic, and the use of traditional and electronic instruments to redefine sounds and push for universal love" (Womack 57).[8] Through their music they create an experience that makes Black people want "to push forward and move beyond their time" (Womack 64).

Octavia E. Butler's science fiction trilogy *Lilith's Brood (1987-1989),* science fiction short story "Bloodchild" (1995), and many of her other texts envision alternative and radical Black futures in a world where racial, environmental, and economic imbalance create havoc. Butler is the inspiration for many science fiction writers. Womack mentions, "In a hypermale

[8] More information on Sun Ra, his music, and his Afrofuturistic movie *Space Is the Place* can be found in Ytasha Womack's chapter "Mothership in the Key of Mars" from her book *Afrofuturism: The World of Black Sci-Fi and Fantasy Culture.*

sci-fi space where science and technology dominate, Butler provided a blueprint for how women, particularly women of color, could operate in these skewed realities and distant worlds" (110). Butler created women characters who transcend the linear idea of space and time in her texts. Nnedi Okorafor is inspired by Butler's writing too. Speculative fiction writer N. K. Jemisin also mentions that her lead Black female characters were inspired by Butler's books. Through her books, Butler has instilled the motivation of adding lead female Black characters in futuristic spaces for many science fiction writers.[9] Butler's work has also inspired performance artist Staycee Pearl's, artist Nicole Mitchell's, and artist Krista Franklin's dance, music, and art projects (Womack 112), which explore Butler's work.

Internet, websites, and social platforms have become an explorative space for Black futurities. Alondra Nelson's Internet Listserv (1998) works as a hub for Afrofuturists to share their ideas with each other and with the world. They discuss Afrofuturism and its many ways of creating different futures for Black people.

Through experimenting with different tunes, rhythms, instruments, beats, different compositions, and "chord arrangements" (Womack 58), and introducing African beats in music with electronic instruments, Black musicians create an experience that takes the listeners to a futuristic space/outer space. Like science fiction, music involves a machine-human connection (Womack 67), where technology and Black creators come together to create an alternative world for Black people, allowing them to imagine Black futures where they are not bound to any stereotypes.

Womack mentions "Afrofuturists are intrigued by Africa's ancient wisdom and ancient wisdom from around the world" (80), for example, "the Egyptian deities, the Dogon (Mali-born

[9] Womack says, "Many Afrofuturist writers and artists credit their complex story lines and the popularity of women heroines in Afrofuturist novels and art to Butler's influence with writers, filmmakers, and artists" (119).

ethnic group) myths, water myths, and Yoruba orishas (West African ethnic group) and many more (80). The Dogon people could understand cosmology and could understand the star and the moon and their orbits, without any instruments in the early 13th century (Womack 85). Afrofuturists post stories and videos about the stars on websites inspired by the Dogon cosmology. Dogon astronomy is also used as an inspiration for Black students to show the future-based knowledge that the Dogon people had, "that predates Western discoveries" (86) and modern technology.

Art exhibitions like *African Cosmos: Stellar Arts* (2012) by curator Christine Mullen Kreamer blends the knowledge of the Cosmos that Black people have had for centuries with Black culture from different places of the world, including art, African mythology (like the Dogon myths), and science. This exhibition proves what Wanuri Kahiu, the director of the Afrofuturist movie *Pumzi,* says: "Afrofuturism has always been a part of our culture" (Womack 91). This cosmic, astronomical, scientific, and mythological knowledge has been present in Black culture even before the term Afrofuturism was coined. Black artists have been using this knowledge to create projects, by centering Black people, Black culture, and Black futurity in their representations.

Chapter Summaries

I have divided my thesis into three chapters, Chapter One: Introduction, Chapter Two: Himba Culture, Black womanhood, and futurity in *Binti: The Complete Trilogy,* and Chapter Three: Gullah Culture, Black womanhood, and futurity in *Daughters of the Dust.*

Chapter two focuses on Nnedi Okorafor's science fiction trilogy, *Binti*. In the first section, "Himba Culture and Futurity," I focus on the representation of the Himba cultural element *otjize* to argue how Okorafor places this in the future as a surviving force, breaking the

stereotypes of "primitivity" related to the Himba culture. I also discuss the technological/mathematical knowledge embedded in the Himba hair braiding tradition to argue for the continuity of this Himba tradition from the past into the future through generations of Himba women. These Himba cultural practices become a bridge between the past, present, and future, connecting Binti with her futurity. In the second section, "Black Womanhood and Futurity," I argue that Binti's *okuoko* (Binti's hair transforms into alien Meduse's tentacles, *okuoko,* after she becomes part Meduse)*,* her rebirth, and her multispecies communions with aliens and living technology enable a radical future wherein she defies death and becomes more than a human being. Binti chooses to be a scholar in a University in outer space, breaking the colonial assumption of both the text and reality, that the Himba people are unintelligent and "savages" (Samatar 186) with no future. Binti becomes a scholar who engages in radical multispecies communions and breaks the colonial and cultural traditions of living under roles assigned for the Himba women by both the dominant group Khoush and the Himba community in the trilogy. I also discuss how the *edan* (a mysterious metal object) and zinariya technology (an alien technology of communication by the humanoids named the Zinariya) enable her to grow into her multiple identities and help her to reach her radical future.

Chapter three focuses on Julie Dash's cinematic masterpiece, *Daughters of the Dust*. In the first section, entitled "Recollection of the Gullah Culture and Futurity," I look at the Gullah traditions of tending to the graveyard and keeping a glass of water under the bed to engage with their ancestors as ways in which the women characters keep their culture alive and continue it into the future. I also discuss Gullah food culture, including familial bonding during mealtime and meal preparation by the Gullah women, as important cultural practices that tend actively to the future. In the next section, "Black Womanhood and Futurity," I argue that the Gullah women

Nana Peazant, Eula, and Yellow Mary represent multiple futures for Black women. I discuss their individual preferences for the future. They choose futurities that are different from what colonial narratives impose on them. Nana Peazant chooses a future where she guides her family to continue practicing the Gullah culture and remembering the ancestors no matter which destination they choose (the island or the mainland). While the Gullah culture and their future were attempted to be wiped out and made non-existent by colonialists, Nana Peazant secures both by practicing the Gullah traditions to guide the members to their futures. Eula, who is pregnant after being raped by a white man, chooses that her future will not be defined by slavery or the white man's violence. She inspires other Gullah women to choose their futures where they respect each other's scars and imagine that they deserve a good future. As a queer Black woman, Yellow Mary embraces a future that is different from the other Gullah women, which is non-reproductive and non-domestic. She chooses her future where she breaks the assumptions that Black women can only be seen as silent, meek characters (Womack 7) who need to suppress their identity and sexuality (Bambara 126).

In this thesis, my motive is to look at how Okorafor and Dash explore the different ways in which Black women and Black culture can exist in the future, without being bound or defined by colonial or racist stereotypes. I want to explore how *Binti* and *Daughters of the Dust* are important projects of envisioning Black futurity, which enable Black culture and Black womanhood to transcend the linearity of space and time.

Chapter Two: Himba Culture, Black womanhood, and futurity in *Binti: The Complete Trilogy*

Binti: The Complete Trilogy is an award-winning science fiction trilogy of novellas written by Nnedi Okorafor, an American Nigerian author.[10] Okorafor has divided this trilogy into three books: *Binti* (2015), *Binti: Home* (2017), and *Binti: The Night Masquerade* (2018). In *Binti* (2015), Okorafor's protagonist Binti travels to outer space as a scholar who gets admission to the prestigious Oomza University. Binti's interstellar travel is disrupted when she faces the Meduse, an alien community,[11] before reaching the Oomza University. The Meduse kill all the passengers on board except for Binti and the pilot. The Himba cultural element, *otjize,* and the Enyi Zinariya technology, *edan,* play a big role in Binti's survival. In the second book (2017) Binti comes back to her homeland along with the Meduse, Okwu. She feels that she is impure from becoming half Meduse and embarks on a journey of getting to know her other identity as half Enyi Zinariya. She ultimately accepts her identity as half Enyi Zinariya by ingesting the Zinariya technology that records the history of the Enyi Zinariya into her DNA. In the third book (2018) Binti is positioned as a master harmonizer[12] who tries to bring peace between the Khoush and the Meduse in their war, but the Khoush kill Binti in an attack. Binti is reborn in this book, and she comes back to life with the help of a living technological spaceship, New Fish, and ultimately goes back to the Oomza University with her identity as part Himba, part Meduse, part Enyi Zinariya and part New Fish.

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[10] Okorafor has received a number of awards for her Africanfuturistic/Afrofuturistic science fiction novel series. *Binti* won the Hugo, Nebula, and Nommo awards for the best novella and was nominated for the Locus award, British fantasy award, and British SF association award (best short story). *Binti* is also scheduled to be adapted by Hulu. *Binti: Home* was nominated for the Hugo award, Locus award, and Nommo award. *Binti: The Night Masquerade* was nominated for the Hugo award, Nommo, and British fantasy award.

[11] Meduse are extraterrestrial beings in the trilogy who look like jellyfish and have tentacles called *okuoko*.

[12] A master harmonizer is someone who can use mathematics to solve complicated equations and produce currents and bring harmony among people.

In this chapter, my focus will be on how Okorafor deliberately positions the Himba cultural traditions of applying the *otjize* and hair braiding within an intergalactic, mathematical, and futuristic world to subvert the colonial idea that Himba people are "primitive" (Nelson 5). I will also explore Okorafor's representation of Black womanhood by showing that Binti's body is not a naked/primitive spectacle for the colonial gaze. Rather, it becomes a container of multitudes of identities and different kinds of futures (as opposed to "primitive" pasts). Toliver mentions that through her project Okorafor constructs "a physical and symbolic space where they can explore Black girl identities, digging behind societal ideas about what it means to be Black and female and creating room for Black women and girls to define their existence in numerous and nuanced ways (133). Binti imagines a version of Black womanhood that represents many ways of existing, with multiple identities and futures. In these multiple futures, she denies her homebound domestic roles, becomes a scholar in outer space, and embodies being part human, part alien species, and part living technology through multispecies communion and rebirth. Her body becomes a literal space that holds alternative ways of existing as a Black woman in the future (carrying alien tentacles *okuoko*, living technology DNA). Joshua Yu Burnett quotes adrienne maree brown in his article about carrying many worlds within, where she says "we hold so many worlds inside us. So many futures. It is our radical responsibility to share these worlds, to plant them in the soil of our society as seeds for the type of justice we want and need" (122). Binti carries many worlds within her, which makes her body more than human, and with these many identities and an evolved body, Binti takes the responsibility to help the Himba community grow and become more.

Throughout *Binti*, Black womanhood emits the essence of resistance, agency, and self-regard that breaks free from misrepresentations and defined roles. Binti's hair becomes a part of

multispecies communion, her hands and DNA carry the *edan* and the Zinariya technology (both of which are the most advanced technology in the universe of the trilogy), and her body becomes a part of outer space near Saturn's ring. Okorafor presents "an intersection of imagination, technology, the future, and liberation" (Womack 9) through *Binti*. By fusing existing cultural practices of the Himba people with speculative future technologies, Okorafor imagines a radical future for Binti to travel around the rings of Saturn, completely liberated from colonial stereotypes, expectations of her community, and her self-doubts about her multiple identities.

Literature Review

Since Okorafor's *Binti* trilogy is a recent publication, there have been just a few critics and writers who reviewed or discussed it. Among those reviews, most are based on the first book. Critics have reviewed *Binti* through four general categories, which are 1) African cultural connection, 2) the presence of multiple identities and multispecies connection, 3) Black womanhood, and 4) futurity/Afrofuturism. Bettina Burger's "Math and magic: Nnedi Okorafor's Binti trilogy and its challenge to the dominance of Western science in science fiction" (2020), Joshua Yu Burnett's "'Isn't Realist Fiction Enough?': On African Speculative Fiction" (2019) and S. R. Toliver's "Afrocarnival: Celebrating Black Bodies and Critiquing Oppressive Bodies in Afrofuturist Literature" (2020) include discussions of all these aspects of *Binti*. Dustin Crowley's "Cosmos and Polis: Space and Place in Nnedi Okorafor's SF Author(s)" (2019) discusses the presence of African cultural connection, multiple identities and multispecies connection, and futurity/Afrofuturism in the trilogy. Jessica FitzPatrick's "Twenty-First Century Afrofuturist Aliens Shifting to the Space of Third Contact" (2020) focuses on two categories which are multiple identities and multispecies connection, and futurity/Afrofuturism.

Among these critics, I relate more to Bettina Burger. Burger talks in detail about Binti's multispecies communion and Binti's hair, which helps me to discuss how these elements enable an alternative future for Binti not limited to reproductive futurity. Burger's discussion about stretching the boundaries of temporality helps me in my discussion of the *edan* as an object that defies the limits of time, challenges the concept of old as "primitive" (Nelson 5), and represents that an old metal like the *edan* can not only be a part of the future but also change it for the better. In addition to Burger, I find Toliver's ideas on Okorafor's representation of Black women in the trilogy helpful in talking about how Binti's body resists the stereotypical categorization of Black womanhood into a definite maternal/reproductive/domestic role or space.

In this chapter, I will focus on Nnedi Okorafor's Africanfuturistic/Afrofuturistic[13] vision to explore how she represents Himba cultural objects like the *otjize* and makes them significant tools for Binti's survival in her intergalactic/futuristic journey. I will also focus on multispecies communion and Binti's rebirth to discuss how her body becomes a part of a radical future of becoming more than a human being. I also explain how the *edan* and the Zinariya technology help her to attain a radical future and identity. I first discuss the Himba cultural elements like the *otjize* and the hair braiding tradition/technology in the "Himba Culture and Futurity" section to give an idea of how these cultural tools cross temporal bounds and become a part of Binti's futuristic intergalactic journey, challenging the colonial narratives of categorizing the Himba people as "primitive" (Nelson 5). I continue the discussion of Binti's hair into the next section of "Black womanhood and futurity" with a focus on its transformation into *okuoko*, representing a multispecies communion. I discuss her rebirth alongside this, to explore the different kinds of futures that she has as part human, part alien species, and part living technology.

[13] I have explained in the introduction why I call *Binti* an Africanfuturistic/Afrofuturistic text.

Different Communities in the Trilogy:

The Himba are a human community that exists in our current reality. The Khoush, the Meduse, the Desert People or the Enyi Zinariya, and the Zinariya are fictional communities in the trilogy. The Khoush are fictional ethnic human beings. The Meduse are extraterrestrial beings who look like jellyfish and have tentacles called *okuoko*. The Zinariya are solar, "tall, humanoid, gold people" (Okorafor 330), who "had landed in earth's desert to rest and refuel on their way to Oomza Uni" (Okorafor 183). In the desert, they meet the oldest, small, nomadic, and human clan Enyi Zinariya which the Himba people call the Desert People. The humanoid Zinariya share their alien Zinariya technology with the Enyi Zinariya. The Enyi Zinariya people ingest the biological nanoids/living organism zinariya to communicate with the humanoids. There exists a hierarchy of power, where the Khoush dominate and see the Himba and the Meduse as inferiors, and the Himba regard the Enyi Zinariya as inferiors.

The Khoush are the group that dominates the Himba and the Meduse. Khoush see Himba as "near savage" (Okorafor 132), "near slaves" (Okorafor 46), "dirt bathers" (Okorafor 6), and "animals" or "tools" (Okorafor 243) because of the way they look and smell (Okorafor 5).[14] Binti expresses, "The Khoush had always seen my people as expendable, tools to use, toy with, and discard, useful animals until we weren't useful anymore" (Okorafor 241). The irony is, that even though the Khoush ridicule the Himba people for their clothes, skin color, and the *otjize*, it is the technological prowess of the Himba people that creates the communication device for the Khoush, known as the astrolabe.[15] As well, the Khoush have been in a long war with the

[14] Khoush frown upon the use of the *otjize* on the bodies of the Himba.

[15] Astrolabe, a device with dials in it used for communication, is like a wireless connection that also connects the earth and outer space, like an "interstellar smartphone" (Burnett 128). Binti's father owns an astrolabe shop, and Binti makes the best astrolabes. Binti describes astrolabes as objects carrying "the full record of your entire life on

Meduse. The Khoush want to establish and continue their superiority in this power struggle where they see and influence others to see the Meduse as "inferior" and "enemies" (Okorafor 12). The Khoush force colonial narratives through books and educational institutions to forcibly position the Meduse as monsters, evil, and enemies. Binti says, "The Khoush built the lessons into history, literature, and culture classes across several regions." "The Khoush expected everyone to remember their greatest enemy and injustice. The Khoush even worked Meduse anatomy and rudimentary technology into mathematics and science classes" (Okorafor 12). This is similar to historical and ongoing instances of colonialism's dehumanization that Womack talks about when she states that "dehumanization was wrongfully encoded in laws, violently enforced, perpetuated by propaganda and stereotypes, and falsely substantiated by inaccurate science, all to justify a swath of violent atrocities in the name of greed" (Womack 31). The Khoush have been systematically instilling misinformation about and framing the Meduse to spread violence and hatred. This hatred is not earthbound but spreads across outer space. Khoush Professors and students in the Oomza University see Okuwu, a Meduse, as a monster, devil, and enemy, too. Kristen Lillvis explains that "Afrofuturism remains suspicious of authentic histories and identities and favors, instead, the interstitial spaces between powers, cultures, subjectivities, and temporalities" (60). Through her trilogy Okorafor challenges the narratives and histories that claim to be true, forwarding the idea of Afrofuturism that Lillvis talks about. Okorafor shows that the historical narratives and mediums that claim to speak the truth about definite events and communities, can be challenged. Through the Khoush and their domination over the Meduse, Okorafor represents that it is important to challenge false narratives and be suspicious of the authenticity that dominant groups like the Khoush propagate.

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it- you, your family, and all forecasts of your future" (Okorafor 233). Binti's father and her family are well known around the world for making the best astrolabes.

The Meduse are the non-human alien/extraterrestrial community in the trilogy. They are in a long fight with the Khoush where their identity is misinterpreted by the Khoush. They do not have faith in any human beings because of the Khoush and initially try to kill Binti, thinking that she is Khoush. The Oomza University has stolen the Meduse chief's stinger and the Meduse plan to get it back by invading and attacking the spaceship that Binti takes to go to the University. All the passengers on board are killed except for Binti and the pilot. I discuss this incident in detail in the next sections. Binti and the Meduse, who are both marginalized by the Khoush, come together and the Meduse chief gets back his stinger with Binti's help.

The Zinariya and the Enyi Zinariya are the other fictional communities in the trilogy. The Zinariya are humanoids who are from the sun. They are described as "golden people who glinted in the sun. They were solar" (Okorafor 183). The nomadic Enyi Zinariya who are described as "old old Africans" (Okorafor 182) ingest biological nanoids that allow them to communicate with the Zinariya. Their nervous system is fused with the humanoid zinariya technology through this ingestion. The oldest community, which is looked at as "primitive" (Nelson 5) by the Himba, become the most technologically advanced community (with alien technology in their nervous system). The Himba look at the Enyi Zinariya as "primitive and mentally unstable" (Okorafor 160).[16] Before learning the history of the Enyi Zinariya, Binti too was trapped in the loop of these stereotypes. She recalls growing up learning about Enyi Zinariya as uncivilized Desert People. She says, "I had been raised to view the Desert People, the Enyi Zinariya, as a primitive, savage people plagued by a genetic neurological disorder" (Okorafor 184). Through this statement, Okorafor represents how misinterpretations about one community spread across generations. Okorafor presents a hierarchy of stereotyping and marginalization through different

[16] The Enyi Zinariya clan priestess the Ariya says, "To Himba and Khoush we are the savage 'Desert People,' not the Enyi Zinariya" (Okorafor 194).

groups, where the Khoush look at the Himba and the Meduse as marginalized, and instead of fighting this marginalization or standing up against it, the Himba people further marginalize the Enyi Zinariya.[17] But Okorafor also disrupts this marginalization by placing the Enyi Zinariya as the oldest group with the most innovative technology to exist (alien technology in their nervous system). They have knowledge about the old and mysterious element/technology *edan*, or the god stone, that belongs to the humanoid Zinariya. This disproves the idea that old equals primitive or futureless. This *edan* becomes the element that saves Binti from the attacks of the Meduse and also helps her to communicate with them. It becomes an element that guides Binti to her future where she can be a scholar and float around in outer space. It becomes a connection between the past, present, and future as I explain in the next sections.

The Enyi Zinariya have a unique, intelligent, and advanced way of communicating and recording memories, called zinariya. Instead of depending on technological devices, they become like devices by ingesting biological nanoids. By ingesting the nanoids, the entire history of the Enyi Zinariya is recorded in one's DNA.[18] Zinariya has to be activated which means that it

[17] The Himba people think they know everything about the Desert People but they do not even know the history of the Enyi Zinariya. Binti's grandmother who is an Enyi Zinariya describes their technology. She says, "And contrary to what you believe, we have technology that puts yours to shame and we've had it for centuries…' 'We didn't create it, though' she confirmed. 'It was brought to us by the Zinariya. Those who were there documented the Zinariya times, but the files were kept on paper and paper does not last. So all we really know is what elders read and then what the elders after those elders remembered and so on'" (Okorafor 182). After meeting the Enyi Zinariya and learning about their history Binti says, "I watched the Enyi Zinariya with new eyes" (Okorafor 186). Truth unchains her mind (Womack 15).

[18] I am quoting the passage that describes this process of communication in order to explain how innovative this technology is: "It was a living organism tailored for our blood that every member of the clan drank into his or her system with water. Biological nanoids so tiny that they could comfortably embed themselves into our brains. Once you had them in you, it was like having an astrolabe in your nervous system. You could eat, hear, smell, see, feel, even *sense* it" (Okorafor 183). This is an inbuilt device and advanced technology that no one can take or steal, and neither can anyone colonize it. Womack mentions the colonization of bodies through technology where, "technology is too often brought to bear on black bodies (branding, forced sterilization, the Tuskegee experiment, and tasers come readily to mind)" (32). There exists a long history of oppressive and racist medical experiments conducted on the Black population, including the notorious "Tuskegee syphilis experiments, in which, over the course of forty years, the U.S. Public Health Service conducted an experiment on 399 black men in the late stages of syphilis, without their knowledge, in an effort to study the effects of nontreatment" (Francis 137). In contrast to

comes through awareness and acceptance, and it cannot be forced upon someone. It is based on a connection that needs no wire or wireless transmission of data. Rather, the Enyi Zinariya communicate by moving their hands in certain motions. It is an advanced, biologically embedded communication method that challenges the colonial narrative of "primitive" (Nelson 5) communities and cultures. The Enyi Zinariya are the most intelligent and innovative beings in the trilogy who not only come from a distant past but also belong to the future. Crowley mentions that "Despite having been written off as obscure "Desert People," the Enyi Zinariya are directly connected to the universe through their technologies of communication" (278). The Enyi Zinariya are not "primitive" people but people who are technologically more advanced than any modern technology.[19]

While the Khoush, the Enyi Zinariya, and the Meduse are fictional communities in the trilogy, the Himba people are based on a real community. Okorafor distinctly focuses on cultural elements like the *otjize* and the Himba tradition of hair braiding in the trilogy. Bettina Burger mentions that "Binti's cultural background is made explicit by both hints and overt statements, making it clear that Okorafor is not portraying a generic "African" culture but a very specific cultural tradition—that of the current-day Himba people of Namibia, transposed into the far future" (365). The Himba are an Indigenous group who reside in Northern Namibia on the side

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such instances where Black people and their genes were exploited, the nanoids of the Enyi Zinariya are a part of a technology that advances their community and helps them grow. The nanoids are passed from generation to generation and they have alien technology inside their DNA. Zinariya is a technology where nothing is taken out of their body. Rather, something is added inside them to be more and to grow more.

[19] Mwinyi, an Enyi Zinariya, says, "'I saw how you looked at us. Just like every Himba I have ever encountered, like we're savage. You call us Desert People, mysterious uncivilized dark people of the sand'" "'Do you even know the actual name of our tribe?'" (Okorafor 179). Binti's grandmother overrides these stereotypical perceptions. She points out that the difference between Himba and the Enyi Zinariya is that the latter are old Africans, whereas the Himba are young. But just because they are old does not mean that they are uncivilized. She says, "And contrary to what you believe, we have technology that puts yours to shame and we've had it for centuries" (Okorafor 182). Binti has trouble processing this information as she was raised to believe narratives about "primitive" Desert People. But challenging that belief, her grandmother reveals the real truth about how advanced they are. She says, "We 'Desert People' knew of Oomza Uni before other people on Earth even had mobile phones!" (Okorafor 183).

of Kunene River near the Kunene region previously known as Kaokoland. They are mostly engaged in pastoral work and have a secure economy from herding livestock animals with their knowledge about land (Bollig and Heinemann 269). Himba people are rooted in their cultural traditions, remain engaged in their pastoral life, and are an isolated tribal group.[20] Anthropologist Michael Bollig explains the isolation of the Himba people, talking about the Kunene region in Namibia,

> In 1917 the South African government took hold of the region, disarmed local people, and established three tribal reserves. In the 1920s borders were instituted and any trade across international and internal boundaries was suppressed. Local herders were forced back into subsistence pastoralism. (330)

Due to this forced geographical isolation and suppression of inter-border communications and commerce, the Himba people have maintained a unique culture of their own and retained their cultural traditions and their pastoral lifestyle. Their traditions, cultural customs, dress-up, ornaments, and lifestyle make them distinctive. Due to the climatic condition and lack of water in the Kunene region, they do not take regular baths. They use red ochre, known as the *otjize* in the trilogy, on their bodies and take smoke baths to keep their hygiene. Himba men do not use ochre on their bodies.

Western media and magazines have a long history of portraying the Himba people as "primitive" (Nelson 5)and without futurity. A weekly German journal *Motour Reise & Verkehr* (1997) reports Himba as "A tribe without a future" (Bollig and Heinemann 297). Other publications like *Sunday Telegraph* (1998)*, The New York Times* (2000)*, The Observer* (1997),

[20] Michael Bollig & Heike Heinemann mention the lifestyle of the Himba people as "established traditional life" (288) with a "peaceful and tradition-bound tribal life" (285).

and the Daily Telegraph, focus on the primitivity of the Himba people. Joshua Yu Burnett explains,

> The Himba are, unlike the Khoush, a real ethnic group, native to the Namibian desert. They are traditionalistic with deep ties to their land. Such traditional cultures are almost always relegated in collective imaginations to the past and not to the future. They are assumed to either be gone already or on the way out, overwhelmed by modernity and outside forces. As Alondra Nelson observes, the Himba people have been used by advertisers as exemplars of the past that is to be displaced and replaced by advanced technology. (127)

Western media and publications connect Himba people's traditions with primitivity, placing them in a void where time does not exist. "The pastoral Himba of Namibia's semiarid northwest have been objects of colonizing and globalizing cameras over the last century. They have been presented as isolated, subsistence-oriented herders, savage beauties, polygamous patriarchs, and persistent desert dwellers. Timelessness and marginality have been salient topics of the visual presentations of herders in Namibia's northwest" (Bollig and Heinemann 267). They are presented in Western cultures as the tribe that has no future, that is totally detached from technology, that is "savage" (Samatar 186) and "primitive" (Nelson 5), that has no time frame in their system making timelessness a part of their lives, and that exposes women's body and portrays their bodies as available for sexual pleasures for tourists.

Okorafor's Africanfuturistic/Afrofuturistic trilogy challenges these representations of the Himba people, especially the Himba women in her trilogy.[21] Samatar says that Afrofuturism

[21] Himba women's bodies have been objectified in postcard pictures, movies, and descriptions in magazines like *Marie Claire* and *Liebe Sünde* with their bare breasts. They are oversexualized with notions of promiscuity and

expresses "awareness of the power of images and reject[s] a global visual culture saturated with negative representations of blackness" and "seek[s] to intervene in the theater of images that has historically fused blackness to savagery, bestiality, and destitution, as part of a project of re-envisioning space and time for black subjects" (186). Through her trilogy, Okorafor breaks these stereotypes that produce Blackness/Himbaness as "savage" or "bestial" (Samatar 186) and uses her imagination to rebuild their culture and womanhood and position them in a futuristic space and time. Womack says that "Afrofuturism stretches the imagination far beyond the conventions of our time and the horizons of expectation, and kicks the box of normalcy and preconceived ideas of blackness out of the solar system" (16). Through her Africanfuturistic/Afrofuturistic trilogy, Okorafor imagines Binti's multiple futurities through multispecies communion, rebirth, and space travel, which all resist stereotypical ideas about Blackness. Okorafor is both resisting colonial narratives of timelessness about the Himba people and celebrating the culture of the Himba people by positioning them in a speculative future. Crowley states, "Okorafor's sf operates simultaneously in past, present, and future, blending future-oriented sf with mythic elements that draw heavily from tradition in order to illuminate 'the manifest and latent hope-content of the present world' (Dowdall 175), with hope itself always aimed at a productive future" (269). Okorafor enmeshes beliefs, culture, traditions, science, and technology in this

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deemed as "wild and free- a fantasy which obviously is very apt for a trendy women's magazine in Europe" (Bollig and Heinemann 299). Their pictures and representations become a visual medium of colonization by the white gaze, wherein the Himba bodies are colonized and objectified. They are shown as "primitive" (Nelson 5) people, who are a spectacle for tourists and white colonizers, where the propaganda of "wild" and "savage" are used to demean and exploit their bodies. Bollig and Heinemann also mention this stereotyping of the Himba people in visual and literary mediums saying, "This form of presentation of Himba people 'as the last remainders' fits with the mouth-to-mouth propaganda amongst tourist that the Himba are the 'last real savages'- well worth having seen (or photographed) before they cease to exist" (300). These coverages, records, images, narrations, and filmic representations do not focus on the Himba people or their culture. Rather they exploit them and misuse the Himba's distinct culture and traditions as examples of primitivism, savagery, and objects to gaze at. Sandra Shields rightly says, "Those who want beautiful, bare-breasted Himba women for their cameras are not interested in the realities of Himba history" (9).

Africanfuturistic/Afrofuturistic project, where the cultural elements become a part of the future, rendering hope for a positive and communal space for the Himba people. Okorafor makes the Himba cultural tools like the *otjize* a part of futuristic technology and allows a Himba young woman to travel to a University in outer space. Okorafor includes stereotypical notions about the "primitivity" (Nelson 5) and "savagery" (Samatar 186) of the Himba people in her trilogy when Binti is stared at by others because she is the only Himba girl on the shuttle. But Okorafor does not only show this stereotyping in her trilogy. Rather, she focuses on the intergalactic journey of a Himba girl and the way she survives in the future by using the Himba cultural tools and traditions.

Okorafor presents the topic of Himba isolation in the trilogy as well. She mentions that the Himba people do not leave their homeland, Osemba and that the desert is the only home and the only space where they allow themselves to exist. Instead of traveling outside, they travel inwards. But she also presents the Himba as technologically knowledgeable and advanced. They are the group that help the Khoush and the entire world, even the Oomza University, with the instrument of communication known as the astrolabe. "The Himba people are the creators and makers of astrolabes, devices of communication" (Okorafor 252). Himba are the best harmonizers and the best mathematicians and have their own economic and cultural sustenance in the trilogy. Okorafor deliberately mixes reality (Himba people do not leave their homeland) with fiction (advanced communicative technology, space travel) to challenge the colonial narratives of Himba people being "exemplars of the past that [are] to be displaced and replaced by advanced technology" (Burnett 127). Through this, *Binti* promotes what Womack says about Afrofuturism as "a total reenvisioning of the past and speculation about the future rife with cultural critiques" (9). Okorafor attempts to establish the Himba culture and people across all

timelines, stretching, bending, and exploring temporality and space and challenging the linearity of futurity.

Himba Culture and Futurity

Okorafor subverts the Khoush ideas that the Himba people are "savage" (Samatar 186), "primitive" (Nelson 5), and uncivilized because of their cultural traditions and their lifestyle. Burnett mentions that "she makes the Himba not only modern but projects them into the future as well" (128), refusing to box the Himba in a timeless zone devoid of advancement and possibilities. In this section, I am going to argue how Okorafor deliberately positions the Himba cultural elements *otjize* and the Himba hair braiding tradition in the future which resists the Western stereotypes that the Himba culture is timeless and "primitive" (Nelson 5). Okorafor celebrates the Himba culture through the *otjize* and the hair braiding traditions by making them a part of the future that will help Binti survive.

Otjize

Okorafor maintains the existing Himba cultural practice of applying red ochre or *otjize*, a "sweet smelling red clay" (1) in her trilogy. It is made from clay and oil from Osemba in the trilogy, where red clay is considered sacred. Okorafor brings this cultural element of the Himba people into the intergalactic space of her science fiction trilogy to infuse reality with fiction and culture with futurity.

On her way to the spaceship, Binti is violated by a Khoush woman who smells her hair and says, "It smells like jasmine flowers" (Okorafor 5). While another woman asks, "Not shit?"

"I hear it smells like shit because it is shit" (Okorafor 5).[22] They continue relating the thickness of Binti's plaits with feces and question if it is real hair. Toliver says that "the women feel entitled to her body. They feel empowered to dehumanize her as easily as if they are critiquing a painting they find distasteful" (141). Furthermore, Binti is mocked, humiliated, and dehumanized by the Khoush for using the *otjize.* Binti becomes the object of gaze in the colonial eyes of the Khoush women. Though the *otjize* "marks her as marginalized Other, it also provides her salvation" (Burnett 123) by healing the injured Meduse and creating a chance to communicate with the Meduse without violence.

While the Khoush students, professors, and Binti are traveling to the Oomza University in a spaceship, the Meduse commit *moojh-ha ki-bira* or "great wave" which is the "Meduse form of killing" (Okorafor 12). They kill all the passengers on board except for Binti and the pilot. In one of the museums in the Oomza University, run by the Khoush, the Meduse chief's stinger is on display. Scholars from the Oomza university stole the stinger and put it on display without permission. The Meduse are headed to the Oomza University and kill all the passengers on their way to get back what has been stolen from them. The *otjize* and the metal object *edan*, which I will discuss later, play a big role in saving Binti from the *moojh-ha ki-bira.* Okwu, one of the Meduse on the spaceship that tries to kill Binti, realizes the healing power of the *otjize.* When part of its bruised tentacle touches Binti's *otjize*-covered arm, it gets almost healed. Binti notices this and says, "…I realized something odd. Its withered tentacle didn't look as withered. Where it had been curled up tightly into itself, now it was merely bent" (Okorafor 27). From that point onward, instead of looking at Binti as an enemy that it wants to kill, Okuwu has normal

[22] Toliver relates this incident with the humiliation that the Black people have to go through for their hair in their daily life in reality: "the women who touched Binti's hair without her permission, commented on the authenticity of her hair, and judged the cleanliness of her people are literary representations of the real people who demean Black women's hair and bodies every day" (141).

conversations with her, trying to understand what this healing element is made of. Binti understands that the "*otjize* had really been what saved" her (Okorafor 46). This is the same *otjize* because of which Binti and the Himba people are seen as "primitive", "savage", "dirt bathers" and "filthy" (Okorafor 6) by the Khoush.

Okorafor takes this Himba cultural element that is seen as "primitive" (Nelson 5) and places it in a futuristic space where it becomes a healing agent that saves Binti from being killed. Binti mentions that "The *otjize* created by my people, mixed with my homeland. This was the foundation of the Meduse's respect for me" (Okorafor 55). The element through which the Khoush disrespect Binti becomes an element that helps Binti achieve the respect and trust of the Meduse and survive. Toliver comments, "Her *otjize* symbolizes a metaphorical rebirth of the Himba culture in a new land. It is a lasting remnant of home and healing in a land that was initially defined by surveillance and control" (143). A substance on Binti's skin that represents her culture and reminds her of her home, the *otjize* encompasses the role of a healing substance whose qualities and efficacy transcends space, time, and species. Toliver notes that "In *Binti*, Okorafor shows how two marginalized beings come together in an effort to get justice for both" (145). The initiation of this coming together is possible because of the chance of communication between the Meduse and Binti that the *otjize* creates. Okorafor molds the efficacy of the *otjize* in this way where it represents more than a Himba cultural symbol and becomes part of a speculative future. This refutes the assumptions of European narratives about the Himba people being "savage" (Samatar 186) and timeless in reality and also the assumptions of the Himba people being "savage" (Samatar 186) and "primitive" (Nelson 5) by the Khoush in the trilogy. Dustin Crowley argues that Okorafor "'challenges the tendency or desire to imprison the African mythic mode in an essentialist or nostalgic distant past,' instead adopting the temporal freedoms

of sf to maintain living linkages between Afro-mythology and Afrofuturism" (270). In this way, Okorafor challenges the stereotyping of the Himba people that happens both in the trilogy and in reality and celebrates the Himba cultural element *otjize* by positioning it as a future tool of survival and healing. One of the other Himba traditions that Okorafor represents through her trilogy is the hair braiding tradition.

Himba hair or ododo

Okorafor uses her imagination and the tradition of African hair and braids to express the history, dexterity, and aesthetics that Himba hair carries. Himba have their history coded into their hair. Binti's hair carries codes and patterns that are not just a tradition of her community but also mathematical. A fellow scholar on the spaceship, Hera, asks Binti about her exact twenty-one plaits "braided in tessellating triangles" and if that has any code embedded in them (Okorafor 10). Binti talks in her mind and explains how the braids in the hair are coded and the patterns speak of her "family's bloodline, culture, and history" (Okorafor 10). Her father designed the codes, and her mothers and aunts taught her braiding (Okorafor 10). This reflects the Himba practice of braiding that is passed on from one generation to the other.[23] Okorafor shows that "Hair braiding is a technology" (Dabiri 220) and through the coding that exists in the Himba hair braiding patterns in Binti's culture, she shows that the science and mathematics of

[23] This is similar to critic Emma Dabiri's experience of hair braiding and the way this African culture and tradition is passed on through centuries. Dabiri shares her encounter with an African hairstylist who braided her hair with an intricate design containing geometrical patterns. She asked how the stylist does this with precision and she replied that she goes along with what she designs. Dabiri then says, "The type of knowledge she possesses might be understood as what the American artist and academic Nettrice Gaskins describes as belonging to 'embodies memory institutions' or 'technologies of the African past.' That this particular stylist of the African Caribbean demonstrates a connection that has been passed down over the centuries, sustained across both oceans and time, a direct link back to a past that the European understanding of history describes as unrecoverable" (219).

Black people are not limited to abstract knowledge but are used in daily life (Dabiri 218).[24] Through the Himba hair braiding that is designed with mathematics and codes, "Okorafor depicts mathematics in a way that empowers African people and confirms her Africanfuturist fiction as rooted in African traditions with no need to refer back to an imaginary Western default" (Burger 366). Burger continues, "Binti's hair, for example, displays tessellated patterns that tell a story through mathematics and it continues to play an important role through its transformation into tentacles, which allow Binti to communicate with the tentacled Meduse" (367). Binti carries her coded hair, which is braided into her family's history, owning/representing Himba tradition into the future. When this hair transforms into *okuoko*, it makes her a part of a radical future of multispecies communion. Dabiri mentions that this tradition of braiding "operates as a bridge spanning spaces between the past, present, and future. Braiding is a tangible material thread connecting people separated by thousands of miles and hundreds of thousands of years" (224). Binti's coded hair connects the past, present, and future as Dabiri mentions. She carries the history of her family, and the age-long Himba tradition of braiding that is passed on from one generation to another generation, into outer space, establishing her culture as a part of the future. This hair braiding tradition is an important part of the Himba culture and acts as a storage of historical data and connects Binti in outer space with her home. Dabiri mentions that,

> The story of indigenous African technology and its spiritual and philosophical orientations is little known. Unpicking the braid reveals much more than we might ever imagine. To this day, there exists an agenda that perpetuates the idea that Africans could barely produce mud huts, let alone grasp technological innovation. Technology is not

[24] Emma Dabiri states, "In the Western educational system maths is taught as something abstract, removed from everyday life. In contrast, African hairstyling culture is a place where maths is unconsciously applied in each step of the process" (218).

> really a concept we associate with traditional Africa, and tech certainly isn't the first image conjured up when we speak of hairstyling. (206)

Okorafor blends technology, mathematics, and culture through Himba braiding patterns, which are mocked by the Khoush in the shuttle.[25] As opposed to the stereotypes related to Black people that they are not capable of being technologically intellectual, as Dabiri mentions, and that they lack futuristic innovations, Okorafor equips the Himba people—particularly the women—with technological and mathematical power. In this way she once again interlocks the braiding of hair of the Himba community in reality with her fictional Himba community, projecting the intellectual, calculative, and innovative way of not only braiding hair but also braiding history into the hair. Okorafor combines this innovation with the passing of ancestral and historical knowledge of Binti's family, which makes the hair braiding technology/tradition exist in the past, present, and future. Binti contains her heritage and history in her plaits and braids, which are parts of her womanhood, and carries them with her into outer space.

Black Womanhood and Futurity

Okorafor challenges the roles assigned to the Himba women both inside the fiction and in the real world.[26] Through her character Binti, Okorafor calls for "the subjection of all forms of

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[25] Dabiri mentions that "Afro hair was- and in many places still is- stigmatized to the point of taboo" (8) and that "people of African descent are subject to scrutiny, fetishization or censure, and sometimes all three, because of our hair" (21). More information on the stereotypes of African hair and the cultural legacy that the Black braiding style contains can be found in Emma Dabiri's *Don't touch my hair.*

[26] I have discussed earlier how the Himba women are represented not as individuals with agency but as bodies which can be colonized, violated and sexualized in colonial narratives and visual media. The "aestheticizing presentation of Himba women to a simple eroticization" (Bollig & Heinemann 299), where their "primitive sexuality" is highlighted and are represented as "wild and free" (Bollig & Heinemann 299) is an example that the Himba women are either represented as sexual or as domesticated beings, for whom the connotation that being wild and free holds is sexual. Okorafor too, provides examples and incidents of the several stereotypes that are attached to the Himba women within the community. Okorafor depicts these stereotypes and through Binti, she breaks those stereotypes and barriers, positioning Binti's body and her womanhood in a place and time that denies a linear future.

traditional authority—parental, gendered, gerontocratic, religious, social, governmental—to interrogation and deconstruction" (Bryce 11). In the Himba community, women are assigned specific roles where they have to lead a domestic life and they are valued and respected only when they get married and have children. They are not allowed to cross the homeland and they have to look pretty to have a suitable husband. Binti projects an alternative representation of Black womanhood and a celebration of Black womanhood outside the assigned conventional roles forced upon the Himba women. While Binti tries to debunk the existing "rigid expectations" (Okorafor 114) and molds, others are unwilling to do so.[27] Binti's willingness to (re)build and (re)tell through the beads of "un" is seen as almost blasphemy in their (Himba) holy necklace. The Khoush look at her "as a near savage" (Okorafor 132) and her own people look at her as a stranger, all because she breaks conventions. She breaks the conventions of domestic and reproductive futurity by embodying a radical future of being part Himba, part Meduse (alien), part Enyi Zinariya, and part New Fish (organic technology). She becomes the first Himba scholar who leaves the homeland and chooses to pave the way for future Himba generations to dream of space and beyond, breaking colonial stereotypes. Okorafor is "(un)doing" (Sharpe 13) the conventional norms through her fiction, as Womack suggests. Okorafor is "re / seeing, re / inhabiting, and re / imagining the world" (Sharpe 22). She is creating alternative ways of breaking conventions, through Binti's body and her unchained mind.

Binti's body resists the traditional boundaries imposed by her Himba community. She refuses domestication or stasis and celebrates the multitudes that her body and her future hold. Okorafor engages her in the Afrofuturistic "exercise in transcending familiar boundaries" (Womack 42). Binti's body contains multitudes as she goes from being Binti Ekeopara Zuzu

[27] I want to needle the words unwinding, unravelling, unmasking and unveiling in a thread with the word (un)willing.

Dambu Kaipka of Namib to becoming Binti Ekeopara Zuzu Dambu Kaipka Meduse Enyi Zinariya New Fish of Namib. In this becoming, Binti's body performs the acts of holding (the *edan*), transforming (her hair), carrying (her Himba culture, the *otjize*), evolving (her DNA), communicating (with multiple species), growing (multiple identities), reviving (rebirth), enabling (the futurity of her own and the Himba community) and encompassing (the space in Oomza University and near Saturn's ring).

Binti's *okuoko*

After the spaceship attack, Binti proposes to act as a harmonizer between the Meduse and the Oomza University for negotiations to get the Meduse chief's stinger back and the chief agrees. Binti has been communicating with the Meduse with the help of the metal object, *edan*, that she carries. The chief thinks that if a mediator needs a metal to talk to the Meduse to feel safe, then the professors in the Oomza University might not trust the Meduse. For the Meduse and Binti to communicate directly, a stinger is plunged into Binti's spine (Okorafor 39) without her consent. Binti becomes half Meduse after this and she does not need the *edan* to communicate anymore. In that process, her braided hair, or "ododo" turns into *okuoko,* tentacles that are "soft transparent blue with darker blue dots" belonging to the Meduse (Okorafor 54). She feels like her body is strange and she knows that she cannot braid her hair as she used to. Her hair, replaced by the *okuoko,* creates doubts in her head about her purity. These doubts represent Binti's internalization of the Himba community's conventional ideas about the purity and beauty of the Himba women. These conventional ideas about beauty later come out through Binti's sister, Vera.

Vera is the voice that upholds stereotypes and restrictions imposed on the Himba women. She claims, “You’re so ugly now, Binti. You don’t even sound the same. You’re polluted” (Okorafor 144). Binti’s appearance (with her *okuoko*) makes her ugly now and her multiple identities are frowned upon in her community, according to Vera. The ideas that a Himba woman has to look a certain way (pretty), stay in a definite place (Osemba), and serve a definite purpose (get married and rear children) to be able to be honorable, place Binti as an impure pariah in the Himba community. Binti not only leaves Osemba to be a scholar but also returns with a Meduse, the enemy of the Khoush, who are forced to be enemies of the Himba people, too. Moreover, she returns with *okuoko* on her head which subjugates her to ugly remarks and humiliation. Binti thinks of going on a pilgrimage because she also believes that she is impure for becoming half Meduse. Binti’s hair no longer fits the fixed future that is assigned for a Himba woman in the community because she is not considered pretty anymore for her to get married.

However, her *okuoko* writhes (Okorafor 146) with a different future where Binti is not only a scholar but also engaged in multispecies communion, a communion that is not to another man or to produce a child. It is only when Binti meets the Enyi Zinariya priestess, Ariya, that she understands the reason why her *okuoko* writhes and why she has “toxic anger” (Okorafor 108) (which makes her feel impure). These feelings are because she needs to control that part of her that is part Meduse now, not because she is “unclean” (Okorafor 192). It takes time for Binti to grow out of these conventional perceptions about Himba womanhood and futurity and step into alternative examples of Black womanhood and futurity. In this alternative Black womanhood and futurity, she becomes a scholar in outer space, engages in multispecies communion, is literally reborn, and becomes more/evolved where her body becomes more than a human by fusing with the Meduse, the Enyi Zinariya, and the New Fish. The activation of the Zinariya

technology in her DNA, the transformation of her hair into *okuoko,* and the revival of her body through living technology are all examples of Binti's multiple and radical futurities.

Binti as a new kind of woman

Binti is the first Himba woman to be accepted to the Oomza University. She excels in mathematics, is a master harmonizer who can produce currents by "treeing" (Okorafor 10), and not only survives a deadly attack on the spaceship by the Meduse but also acts as a negotiator between the Meduse and the Oomza University. But in the eyes of her Himba community, she is not worthy whatsoever because she leaves the homeland and is selfish to fulfil her dreams. Binti becomes "something new by being able to communicate with the Meduse, something no other human can do, but it also essentially strips her of her Himba identity, guaranteeing that, even if she returns to her homeland, she will be forever marked as an outsider" (Burnett 125). She is marked, disgraced, and outcasted because she is now part Meduse. Binti expresses how conventional roles are affixed on the Himba women in the community when she says that a "gold marriage necklace … meant more to everyone here than my traveling to another planet to be a student at the greatest university in the galaxy" (Okorafor 145). The concern that Vera has is that Binti's future has become invalid and meaningless because Binti is not pretty enough to marry a man, and no one knows what kind of children she will bear. Vera's fear also centers around Binti instigating/inspiring other Himba girls to follow the path of a future that does not lead to a conventional domestic life.

Binti breaks free from all these conventions, restrictions, stereotypes, and roles, which makes her wild and free in an alternative way through Okorafor's science fiction. Burger rightly states that "*Binti* and other Afrofuturist and Africanfuturist narratives, 'enable Black

communities to reimagine new possibilities'" (367). Binti engages in a new kind of future with new possibilities of being free to be a scholar, to be independent, and to be comfortable in her choices. She is wild[28] and fearless in facing the Khoush, the Meduse, and her Himba community. She survives literal death and is reborn into a collective identity to speak about growth which will bring a better future for the Himba. In this trilogy, the better future as Burger mentions is "about fostering better communal living" that "shows that only a deep understanding between different cultures can eventually lead to peace" (368). Binti is a collective being who cannot be tamed or domesticated. Toliver comments on *Binti* saying that Okorafor uses "Afrofuturism to redefine the ways in which Black women and girls' identities are imagined and depicted" (133). Okorafor celebrates the wildness and freedom in Black womanhood as opposed to the domesticated womanhood that the Himba community craves for the women, or the sexually promiscuous or "primitive" (Nelson 5) womanhood that the Western media portrays. Okorafor imagines futurity that relays messages of hope, liberation, imagination (Womack 9), growth, innovation, and collective prosperity through Binti. Binti envisions a future that has the imagination or possibility of a new world; a world where the Himba and the Enyi Zinariya do not fight amongst each other with misunderstood remarks, where they come together to be stronger against the Khoush who continue to dominate and colonize the two groups, and where a/any Himba girl can be a scholar (or anything she wants) and fly across space with her multiple identities and without being an outcast. Binti carries the mysterious metal object *edan* when she boards the spaceship, which becomes the most advanced technology that saves her from the Meduse in space and secures her future. The *edan* helps Binti in her process of growing more as a human being who is part Himba, part Enyi Zinariya, and part New Fish. It also helps her to

[28]Merriam Webster defines wild as "living in a state of nature and not ordinarily tame or domesticated."

transcend the boundaries of temporality, by connecting her with the future (the people of time and space).

Edan

The *edan* is a mysterious metal/electronic device that Binti finds in the desert of her homeland. She finds it attached to the root of a flower while digging in the sand. It is a "stellated cube" with "designs all over it, adept loops and swirls and spirals whose lines never touched each other" (Okorafor 169). It produces a "soft sound" "Like the low husky voice of a woman" (Okorafor 170) when Binti moves it. The Enyi Zinariya call it a "god stone" (Okorafor 172), which is an advanced technology that has a consciousness of its own. Initially, she explains, "*Edan* was a general name for devices too old for anyone to know it functions, so old that they were now just art" (Okorafor 6). But eventually, she learns that the *edan* is the most advanced technology of the humanoid Zinariya, going beyond the limitations of space and time. It defies temporal linearity by breaking the boundaries of the past, present, and future. It saves Binti from the Meduse by acting as a shield and a translator, and places her in the future (around Saturn's ring), where she recognizes her collective identity and acknowledges the multitudes that her body carries. When Binti reaches the rings of Saturn with the help of the *edan*, she finds out that the people from space called "the people of time and space" have been communicating with her through the *edan* even before she stepped on the spaceship. This oldest of technologies helps Binti to connect with her future. Through situations like these where Okorafor presents the simultaneity of temporal frames, "She challenges 'the tendency or desire to imprison the African mythic mode in an essentialist or nostalgic distant past,' instead adopting the temporal freedoms of sf to maintain living linkages between Afro-mythology and Afrofuturism" (Crowley 269), which disrupts "hegemonic narratives that compromise black histories and threaten to erase

black futures" (Crowley 270). The *edan* refuses to have a linear meaning and carries currents of growth, hope, and survival, refuting the concept that anything old is static, linear, and has no technological possibility. The *edan* helps Binti to evolve into her multiple identities.

The *edan* works as a catalyst in Binti's growth which is required for Binti to face the Khoush and work as a master harmonizer between the different communities. Ariya asks Binti, "If you hadn't found the *edan*, would you have questioned and grown" (Okorafor 191)? The *edan* helps Binti question existing norms, stereotypes, and her identity and envelope her collective body and mind together with strength, growth, consciousness, and acceptance. Through the golden ball inside the *edan,* Binti is connected with the past, present, and future. Binti says, "No instructions. No purpose. But it could make you more, if you let it, I'd found it" (Okorafor 330). Bettina Burger rightly says, "Okorafor's *Binti* series may be set in the future, but its meaning stretches beyond that—the trilogy strives to change past, present and future by causing them to 'become more' (NM, p. 193), a development that Binti ultimately embraces" (374). The representation of challenging temporality goes perfectly with what Lillvis says about Afrofuturism in her chapter, "The present and future, then, become part of 'ancient' history" (65). Okorafor proves that "old doesn't always mean less advanced" (Okorafor 172). The direction of temporality does not have to be linear and through this Africanfuturistic/Afrofuturistic text, Okorafor breaks that linear trajectory. Lillvis explains that "Afrofuturism, the cultural aesthetic of a specifically black posthumanism, contends that boundary crossings enable black subjects to connect to black history in the present and also find authority in the potentiality of the future" (58). This is exactly what Binti goes through in the trilogy, where she connects to the history of the Enyi Zinariya through the zinariya technology and the *edan*, and at the same time, she holds multiple identities in outer space and beyond. In

this way, Binti, "the African subject of the future harnesses the potential of nature *and* technology to realize her dream of a new reality" (Bryce 5). She uses the technological prowess of the zinariya and the *edan*, all the while connecting to the history of the Himba people and to her multiple identities, to create an alternative life for her where she is free from all restrictions and obstacles.

Zinariya technology

Binti's DNA carries the zinariya technology and by physically ingesting the nanoids, she becomes more through another multispecies communion. She asserts her multiple identities saying, "I was Himba, a master harmonizer. Then I was also Meduse, anger vibrating in my *okuoko.* Now I was also Enyi Zinariya, of the Desert People gifted with alien technology. I was worlds" (Okorafor 204). In her voyage of learning the history of the Enyi Zinariya, Binti learns that she is part Enyi Zinariya and has the Enyi Zinariya DNA like her father. To be able to truly acknowledge the Enyi Zinariya parts of her, she revisits their history and travels back to ancient Enyi Zinariya history. Binti's experience/urge of getting to know the history of the Enyi Zinariya is similar to seeking what Afrofuturism seeks which is "to return, to reclaim history as a necessary part of becoming" (Samatar 189). In this process of seeking, Binti's body experiences pain that she thinks is similar to childbirth. This pain is that of the birth of Binti's identity as part Himba, part Meduse, and part Enyi Zinariya. Binti finds harmony in her being "many things" (Okorafor 267) made from the chaotic pain of rebirth. Binti chooses a different future with a body that contains multitudes, getting out of the "rigid expectations" (Okorafor 114) of adhering to a domestic and biologically reproductive future, breaking the boundaries of her home and communal expectations. She evolves, grows, and becomes more. Binti's body becomes a part of a new life, not through reproduction but through rebirth. Okorafor puts Binti's body through the

pain of rebirth instead of birthing, which breaks the stereotypes of Himba womanhood as destined for domesticity and childrearing.

Rebirth as a different kind of futurity

Binti goes through death and rebirth, to contain, carry and accept her multitude of identities. The journey from being a Himba girl to being Binti Ekeopara Zuzu Dambu Kaipka Meduse Enyi Zinariya New Fish of Namib speaks of a future and Black womanhood that is not limited to the boundaries of Osemba or just the womb of Binti. Her entire body is invested in the future that she dreams of as a scholar and as a master harmonizer, which goes through growth, change, and multispecies communions. Through these multispecies communions, Okorafor celebrates the multiple ways in which Black women can exist in their chosen futures, without being restricted to a domestic, dominated, and/or reproductive role. Okorafor challenges the linearity of identity, space, and time attached to Black womanhood through these fictional communions/communications. Binti's multispecies communion/communication is enacted through her becoming part Meduse, part Enyi Zinariya, and part New Fish. Binti suffers and survives death, is reborn, and becomes more than a human being through multispecies communion with the Meduse, the Enyi Zinariya, and the New Fish. Binti and her body transcend linear temporality.

Binti goes through death and rebirth, which is part of the radical future that Okorafor represents. Going back to Osemba after the zinariya activation, Binti learns that the Khoush attacked Binti's family since they sheltered Okwu, a Meduse (an enemy of the Khoush). Binti, the master harmonizer, tries to clear the misunderstanding between the Meduse and the Khoush and bring peace. But the Khoush back out of the reconciliation with the Meduse at the last

moment and start to attack the Meduse. During this battle, Binti is injured, and she dies.[29] But through Binti, Okorafor refutes the idea that death has to be the end of life for Binti. As Womack mentions, "Fatalism is not a synonym for blackness" (11). Binti's death does not signal the end of her life or the end of her future. Through merging with the living technology, New Fish, and through rebirth, she evolves as a part human, part alien, and part living technology. Binti outlives her death with the help of Miri 12 and "deep Miri" (Okorafor 322) and is revived. Miri 12 is the spaceship that is present in the trilogy that enables intergalactic travel. The Miri 12 spaceship that saves Binti when she dies is the New Fish, the baby of the Miri 12 spaceship Third Fish. Binti explains, "The ship was a magnificent piece of living technology. Third fish was a Miri 12, a type of ship closely related to a shrimp. Miri 12s were stable calm creatures with natural exoskeletons that could withstand the harshness of space. They were genetically enhanced to grow three breathing chambers within their bodies" (Okorafor 8). The New Fish, a newborn Miri 12, has microbes carrying "bacteria, good viruses, and other microorganisms" (Okorafor 322) in its breathing chamber. These microbes blend with Binti's genes, repair her body, and save her (Okorafor 322). Binti, with the biotechnology of the New Fish survives, is reborn and becomes part New Fish. Binti is now part Himba, part Meduse, part Enyi Zinariya, and part New Fish.

Binti's rebirth and the merging with the New Fish represent the many ways in which she can exist as a Black woman. These many ways of existing celebrate the Black body being more than human, transcending the boundary between human and living organism/technology. Burger explains this process of revival of Binti, "Through Binti's placement in New Fish's breathing chamber, the microbes inside are able to resurrect Binti by forging yet another union, leading to both Binti and New Fish becoming 'more' (NM, p. 157) in a mutually beneficent 'multispecies

[29] Mwinyi and Okwu start a journey towards the Oomza University with Binti's dead body in the New Fish. But Binti, with the biotechnology of the New Fish survives, takes rebirth, and becomes part New Fish.

muddle'" (373). Notably, New Fish says, "Most Miri 12s never do this. We don't become more. We are ships because we like to travel, that's what mother said. Until she harbored you" (Okorafor 321). Binti and New Fish both become more through this merging. Talking about the technologically enhanced body, Jane Bryce suggests that "African speculative fiction may also be seen to complicate the Western sci-fi fantasy of the technologically enhanced body, the cyborg figure that transcends human frailty" (9). In Okorafor's science fiction, it is not only Binti who becomes part Miri 12, but she is also the first woman to help Miri 12s grow and become more. Instead of giving life to a biological human child through reproduction, she nurtures her multiple identities that help her grow into her futurity as more than a human. Crowley mentions that "part of her growth is learning to let go of an overly restrictive understanding of place-based authenticity" (278). Binti becomes so comfortable with her identity and home being many things and many places that she even feels pleasant being in outer space near Saturn's Ring. The concept of space and home stretches in the trilogy for Binti, where she exists in different places (Osemba, Oomza University, Saturn's ring). Crowley connects the stretching of space to the alternative universe in Okorafor's novel with creating new communications and says, "Okorafor's work deploys a sense of spatial elasticity across many scales, charting an open, connected geography that allows for reimagined interactions and identities" (278). Space and time are not limited in the novel and "Infinite space is no longer seen as a negative space, but as an exhilarating vastness that allows Binti to fly rather than to fall" (Burger 371). Binti could move, fly, and live in that space without feeling alienated. She takes the lead in being in outer space saying, "This was my mission. My purpose. And it was fantastic" (Okorafor 331). It is as if she always belonged there. Binti recognizing her mission aligns with what Du Bois says about the recognition of the self, "In those sombre forests of his striving his own soul rose before him,

and he saw himself,— darkly as through a veil; and yet he saw in himself some faint revelation of his power, of his mission. He began to have a dim feeling that, to attain his place in the world, he must be himself, and not another" (71). From questioning herself and her journey, Binti crosses all the darkness-filled obstacles from within and outside the community. She listens to her voice that says her collective name, to realize her mission and to be confident in her decisions and herself.

With the acknowledgment of her multiple identities, she becomes stronger as a master harmonizer and more confident as an individual. She also envisions a better future for the Himba community. As Toliver mentions about Binti, she can "undermine oppressive paradigms and imagine societal change and renewal" (133). With her growth, she brings growth to others. Binti believes in productive and communal communication or "moments of human-to-human confrontation and communication among groups that have been in contact for a long time, but only in tense, problematic, and divisive ways" (FitzPatrick 72). The Enyi Zinariya and the Himba community knew each other's existence but only in a problematic way where one (the Enyi Zinariya) was always looked down on by the other (Himba) and dehumanized for their culture. Thus, their coming together and reconnection is the symbol of "a futurist re-connection and re-orientation" (FitzPatrick 71). "Binti shifts her sense of identity from a focus on ethnic difference to a shared humanity" (Crowley 272) and being more than human. Binti's hope of a better future for the Himba community is "the hope of a higher synthesis of civilization and humanity, a true progress" (DuBois 72). She says, "There's been terror and death and destruction, but I want to pull harmony out of that now. We can" (Okorafor 263). Binti's message reflects hope, possibility, and futurity that is built on communal and universal connection, knowing that there might be difficulties in the future like in the past. This resonates

with Burger's statement that "The decision to accept these rough beginnings and form something positive out of those new communities recalls notions of African philosophy such as uBuntu, which postulates "a universal bond of sharing that connects all humanity" (Dabiri, 2019, p. 233) and encourages present-day cooperation despite a previous history of violence in order to ensure a liveable future" (365). Binti believes that together the Himba community and the Enyi Zinariya community can build a future that will not limit them in their misjudgments and will help them to bond with each other.

From existing in outer space to reaching the futuristic space of Saturn's ring in a Miri 12 to being a liberated collective individual who can fly through outer space without fear, Binti's Africanfuturistic/Afrofuturistic journey is the representation of a Black character beautifully claiming/owning her space in intergalactic paths (Womack 9). Binti surrenders to the air so she could ride it (Morrison 337). At the end of the trilogy when the people of time and space ask her name, she says that her name is Binti Ekeopara Zuzu Dambu Kapika of Namib but then she boldly says, "No. My name is Binti Ekeopara Zuzu Dambu Kapika Meduse Enyi Zinariya New Fish of Namib" (Okorafor 331). She owns her name, her multiple identities, her body, all her hybrid body parts that have evolved, and her spaces (homes) without any doubts or hesitation. With this acceptance and understanding, she paves ways for other communities to grow within and outside their boundaries.

Chapter Three: Gullah Culture, Black Womanhood, and Black Futurity in *Daughters of the Dust*

Written and directed by Julie Dash, *Daughters of the Dust* (1992) was the first film by a Black woman director to receive a theatrical release. With Arthur Jafa's cinematography, Dash's direction, writing, relentless distributing efforts[30], and performance from actors like Cora Lee Day (Nana Peazant), Alva Rogers (Eula), Kaycee Moore (Haagar), and Barbara-O (Yellow Mary), this movie received several awards. It won the Sundance Film Festival Award, an award from the National Film Preservation Board, the Boston Society of Film Critics Award, and the New York Film Critics Circle Award, along with being nominated for several others. Despite the accolades, many distributors and the Hollywood industry decided the fate of this movie by dismissing it as a non-appealing and non-acceptable movie (Dash 8). However, Dash was already bringing waves of changes to Black filmmaking by introducing an alternative representation of Black womanhood and Black futurity. The film focuses on a particular day in the Peazant family, of Gullah descent, who are traveling North from the Ibo island of South Carolina. The family is preparing to migrate off of the island and Nana Peazant, the great-grandmother of the family, is reluctant to let the family go, fearing their detachment from their cultural history. At the end of the movie, some of the members migrate North while other members decide to stay, giving different meanings to Black futurity after enslavement. Dash captures the family having a last get-together before they are divided, and their great-grandmother shares her wisdom about the need for connection between those who leave the island and those who do not, about the memories of their ancestors, and the significance of

[30] Mellencamp mentions, "Daughters is about love, respect, acceptance, and beauty rather than fear, hatred, and neglect. It embodies hope, not despair. It celebrates harmony and life rather than disaster and death. No wonder the distributors had trouble!" (87).

retaining their Gullah culture even if they leave. My main focus in this chapter is to argue how Dash explores different kinds of futures for the Gullah women through the use of the Gullah cultural traditions. In this way, Dash celebrates the Gullah culture and represents alternative forms of Black womanhood and futurity, where the Gullah women, their culture, and their futures are not fixed in the past and are not defined by slavery. I mainly focus on Nana Peazant, Eula, and Yellow Mary and discuss the different paths they choose and how the Gullah culture enables them to exist across temporalities.

Dash's is an alternative project, as *Daughters of the Dust* rebuilds the stereotypical images of Black people created by colonialists. The Gullah women characters retell and recollect the stories of Gullah culture, depicted by Dash's directorial vision. Mainly, Dash centers on the Black body and Blackness. Jennifer A. Machiorlattie mentions that *Daughters* centralizes "the role of women as the 'keepers' of cultural memories … revisioning the cinematic iconography of Black women" (98). Dash breaks the boundaries of conventional Hollywood movies that project Black women as "mammies" (hooks 61), "prostitutes" (hooks 69), "criminals" (hooks 136), and helpless. Through characters like Nana Peazant, Eula, and Yellow Mary and their recollections of the Gullah culture and memories, Dash creates a groundbreaking movie with an alternative vision of Black womanhood. bell hooks mentions her encounters with Black women who said that "All my life I have experienced my absence on the screen. Nothing that I could relate to" (41). That Black women can be "attractive", "appealing" (Dash 53); that they are not to be reduced to "mammies" (hooks 61) "prostitutes" (hooks 69) or oversexualized bodies; that their bodies can be the focus of an aestheticized cinematic lens wherein they each choose their paths in life; and that their trauma or scars from the past do not identify or nullify their future, these are the visions that Dash creates through this movie. This movie is not about spurring the old scars

of Black women to make the wounds fresh again but to look back at the scars and not be defined by them, to look at the scars and acknowledge how they are going to choose their futures knowing that their bodies and minds have been scarred. Greg Tate mentions that this movie "is less about the horrors of the slave as a way of life than about how that horrific institution shaped the interior life and life choices of the slaves and their descendants" (Dash 70). *Daughters* in this way is an alternative project[31] that does not portray only the horrific images of whiplashes, beatings, lynching, and rape as most of Hollywood does when it comes to depicting slavery. Dash says, "we have all seen those things before and we've become very calloused about them. I wanted to show it in a new way" (31). Dash creates new images of and for the Gullah women, she recollects stories about Blackness and Black culture.[32] The sense of the future, characters, and stories are not linear, and they vary from one person to another.[33] Some women decide to

[31] This alternative story is of the Gullah people who are not confined in the conventional roles of Black people portrayed as slaves, "mammies" (hooks 61), and "primitive" (Nelson 5) beings provided by Hollywood and its white gaze. Distributors, mostly white men could not visualize Black women at the turn of the century in a movie, where they are not "mammies" or "prostitutes" (Dash 8). They could not perceive "a film with a strong family, with characters who are not living in the ghetto, killing each other and burning each other down. And there weren't going to be any explicit sex scenes, either" (Dash 8). But Dash, through her relentless efforts, was able to not only release this movie in theatres but also stir different conversations around it.

[32] bell hooks talks about the fictional universe that Dash creates in the movie. She says that *Daughters of the Dust* constructs an "imaginative universe around the question of blackness and black identity" (Dash 28). Through the imaginative Peazant family and the unfolding of their stories through recollection and their futurity through dialogues, Dash does "something very different" where she shows "Black families, particularly Black women" as they were never seen before (32). Dash mentions, "It provoked them, and that made me see that I had created something important, a film that caused its audience to think and react and come to grips with their own memories" (22). Even though the family is fictional, the stories of recollection and the cultural history of the Gullah culture resonate with the audience who have similar experiences or stories, and who have never seen their stories retold or recreated on screens before (except for the caricatures made out of their images and their stories).

[33] This movie, unlike a conventional Western movie with Western ideas of linear temporality, includes a narrative style that follows the African Griot style of storytelling that Dash explains "would come out and come in and go out and come in" (32). Dash includes multiple narrators and the story of the Peazant family is unraveled with Nana Peazant, the great-grandmother (the oldest of them all), and the spirit of the unborn child (the youngest of them all) as its narrators, where the visuals keep moving from past, present, and future in a non-linear way. One moment, the audience gets to see the household of the Peazant family in their everyday present life or the spirit of the unborn child, the future of the Peazant family, roaming around the graveyard of the ancestors, the other moment the audience sees young Nana Peazant and her husband Shad Peazant holding the earthy dust in their hands contemplating the outcome of agriculture. In this way, Dash allows the audience to travel freely between different timelines instead of restricting them to a definite timeline of slavery followed by emancipation.

leave whereas some like Nana Peazant, Eula, and Yellow Mary decide to stay. Through this, Dash represents that these Black women can navigate their own lives and are independent to choose from the options they have. Whatever path they choose, the future is not limited to a definite place, or a definite story eclipsed by the horrors of slavery alone.

Literature Review

As a groundbreaking film in Black cinema, *Daughters of the Dust* has been generally viewed from a few prominent perspectives. Among them, the 3 most discussed topics are 1) the recollection and retention of Gullah history and culture (Toni Cade Bambara, 1993, Patricia Mellencamp, 1994, Joel R Brouwer, 1995, Sheila Smith McKoy, 1999, Jennifer A. Machiorlatti, 2005, Foluke Ogunleye, 2007, Sara Clarke Kaplan, 2007, LeRhonda S. Manigault- Bryant, 2014); 2) Black womanhood (Toni Cade Bambara, 1993, Patricia Mellencamp, 1994, E. Ann Kaplan, 1997, Yvonne Tasker, 2002, Jennifer A. Machiorlatti, 2005, Foluke Ogunleye, 2007, Julie Dash, 2007, Jeannine King, 2010, Mel Lewis, Melissa L. Cooper, 2020); and 3) time and temporality (Sheila Smith McKoy, 1999, Jennifer A. Machiorlatti, 2005, Sara Clarke Kaplan, 2007). I focus on the recollection of the Gullah culture and its connections to Black futurity, with a specific focus on Nana's rituals in the graveyard to remember the ancestors, Eula's reconnection with her dead mother by keeping a glass of water under the bed, and the Gullah food culture. I focus on these cultural practices to explore the way Dash presents these traditions as breaking the boundaries of the past and crossing into the realm of the future. Through the traditions of remembering the ancestors by these Gullah women, the ancestors become a part of the past, present, and future. The meal preparation where the Gullah women cook meals for the family, during which they recollect, carry, and continue on the Gullah food culture enables and continues the familial bond. I also discuss Black womanhood and Black futurity by talking about

Nana Peazant, Eula, and Yellow Mary as characters who envision their own futures and make their voices heard. These women are the carriers and containers of futurity, the Gullah culture, and alternative forms of Black womanhood who speak stories of independence, hope, and a life that is not confined to slavery.

In the "Recollection of the Gullah Culture and Futurity" section of this chapter, I argue how Dash presents slavery in alternative ways using signs like the indigo stains, instead of showing the brutal violence of slavery, to enable the Gullah women and their futures to be at the center of the movie without being defined by slavery. Patricia Mellencamp's discussion of Gullah cultural continuity through characters like Nana in "Making History: Julie Dash" helps me to argue how through the Gullah traditions, cultural continuity is ensured. Jennifer A. Machiorlatti too talks about how the Gullah spiritual and cultural memory is kept alive through food, language, and elders like Nana in "Revisiting Julie Dash's "Daughters of the Dust": Black Feminist Narrative and Diasporic Recollection." Machiorlatti's article helps me when I discuss how the Gullah women engage in food preparation, where this culture has been passed on for generations and serves as a bonding tradition that allows the family members to talk, eat, and pass on their memories of language and the food culture to the next generation. In this way, the Gullah food culture and the tradition of the family having meals together and sharing a familial bond are not just parts of the past but a part of the future, too, where the family members engage in this culture before they leave for the North. I draw a lot of information about the Gullah culture's ties to their ancestors from LeRhonda S. Manigault Bryant's "Talking to the Dead: Religion, Music, and Lived memory among Gullah/Geechee Women."

In the "Black Womanhood and Futurity" section, I argue how Gullah women like Nana Peazant, Eula, and Yellow Mary break free from the colonial linear characterization of being

"mammies" (hooks 61) and "prostitutes" (hooks 69). Instead, they represent Black womanhood that emits multitudes of characters, creating alternative ways of being and existing in the future as Black women. I also talk about Yellow Mary's sexuality and argue that she represents Black queer womanhood, challenging the idea that the future of a Black woman has to be reproductive or heteronormative. I also argue that Dash uses her camera to focus on the bodies of these women to position them at the center of the plot where their bodies carry the cultural past and their future. Toni Cade Bambara, Jennifer A. Machiorlatti, Foluke Ogunleye, and Mel Lewis and Melissa L. Cooper talk about Dash's way of presenting Black women in an alternative/positive way where they are cultural containers, and liberated individuals with their own voices, opinions, and futures. Their discussion helps me in my argument about Nana Peazant's, Eula's, and Yellow Mary's roles in enabling different forms of womanhood and futurity. All three women choose the island as their future but with different visions of futurity. For Nana, the future and the Gullah culture belong together, where she continues to be the bridge between the ancestors and the coming generations (a bridge between the past, present, and the future) through different rituals and becomes the bodily representation of the Gullah cultural continuity. Eula seeks a communal future as well as an individual future, where they can all live without being marked by the haunting memories of slavery. Yellow Mary chooses a non-reproductive future and to stay back on the island with Nana Peazant and Eula, which represents that futurity can be envisioned in many ways by the Black women that do not have to be limited to a reproductive future. Most of the conversation about the futurity of these three women requires the understanding of the merging of temporality, transcending the boundaries of past, present, and future. This idea of merging the frames of time is discussed by McKoy, Machiorlatti, and Sara Kaplan. They discuss African cyclical time, and it helps me to argue that this cyclical time enables the Gullah women

to carry their culture and their womanhood through all the temporal frames, crossing the limitations of primitivity and choosing the different routes of futurity that they envision for themselves.

In organizing my chapter, I first discuss the recollection of the Gullah culture and futurity, and then I move on to discuss how this secures a sense of Black womanhood and Black futurity. In the "Recollection of the Gullah Culture and Futurity" section, I show how the Gullah culture is contained and continued through the Gullah women and this cultural continuity becomes a source of sustenance, fulfillment, and survival in the future for everyone in the community. The distinct culture of the Gullah people is not marked only by the past horrors of slavery. It continues to create sustenance for the Gullah people in the future. In the "Black Womanhood and Futurity" section, I argue that like Gullah culture, the Gullah women are also not defined by slavery. The Black women characters are part of the future not restrained by white people's time or settler time. Rather, their bodies are holders of the Gullah culture and Black futures that break the stereotype that Black people and their culture are "primitive" (Nelson 5) and can only exist in the past.

Recollection of the Gullah Culture and Futurity

The Gullah are people who have retained their cultural and spiritual beliefs along with their Gullah language because of the geographical isolation of the islands where they were enslaved.[34] Machiorlattie mentions the emergence and continuity of the Gullah language and says, "the Gullah language was a diasporic, hybrid language that resulted in the blending of several regional groups of Africans during the slave trade. The language, customs, and beliefs of

[34] In *Daughters of the Dust*, Dash heightens the cultural history and futuristic vision surrounding the Gullah community. Although the Peazant family is fictional, the culture religions, language, and history of the Gullah community that Dash represents in the movie are from her actual research of the Gullah people. Dash has done a lot of research on the Gullah community and the Gullah people to project a representation that retells the stories of the Gullah community.

these Africans closely resemble those of the Ibo, Yoruba, Mandinka and other West African tribes from whom they probably descended" (110). The Gullah people were brought from West and Central Africa to America "on the coast of North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida" (Green 573) and enslaved particularly for rice, cotton, and indigo.[35] The geographical isolation of the Gullah people on this island and the frequent absence of the white overseers due to environmental risks and danger worked as a catalyst for the retention of their unique culture. This enabled the Gullah people to continue practicing their culture and familial relationships.[36] But it was also by the passing on of their culture, their tradition of remembering and recalling their cultural past through oral storytellers or griots and elders, that the Gullah people sustained their cultural identity. Dash represents this distinct culture through the Black women who practice the Gullah cultural traditions and continue to practice them in the future. Dash mentions the Gullah people's recollection right at the beginning of the movie: "At the turn of the century, Sea Island Gullahs, descendants of African captive, remained isolated from the mainland of South Carolina and Georgia. As a result of their isolation, the Gullahs created and maintained a distinct, imaginative, and original African American culture. Gullah communities recalled, remembered, and recollected much of what their ancestors brought with them from Africa"

[35] Amy Lotson Roberts and Patrick J. Holladay mention the distinct cultural and religious practices of the Gullah people in their book, *Gullah Geechee Heritage in the Golden Isles.* They say,
"Gullah Geechee people are believed to be the only speakers of African American creole language in the continental United States. Food, music, storytelling, family, language, African heritage, crafts, fishing, agriculture, (especially the growth of rice), and the celebration of culture and people are all part of the fabric of the Gullah Geechee culture. The Gullah Geechee were also allowed to practice their religion, and isolation created a deep sense of kinship among the members of the community. Gullah Geechee culture remained a pure culture because of this isolation" (143).

[36] Machiorlattie quotes Litwack, "'not only did most of the slaves learn to endure but managed to create a reservoir of spiritual and moral power and kinship that enabled them under the most oppressive of conditions to maintain their essential humanity and dignity'" (103).

(*Daughters*). Dash shows how the elders like Nana Peazant pass this recollection to the children through different rituals and symbols.[37]

Instead of showing the harsh scenes of slavery—beatings, whippings, lynchings—Dash chooses to show signs of slavery through symbols and colors unique to the Gullah culture. Dash mentions that there have been so many ghetto and plantation stories and that sometimes these are the only ways Black people are expected to be represented in movies.[38] She wanted to create a different way of telling these stories, of showing the scars of the trauma of slavery without literally and visually showing the scarring of Black bodies. This allows her to position the Gullah culture and the Gullah women at the center without making slavery and the marks of slavery their only story. The focused shots on the hands of the elders with the indigo dye stains reflect the past of slavery when enslavers made them dye indigo. In some of the scenes, narration or dialogues represent the times of slavery where some of the elders describe how difficult it was for them to work under the violent conditions of the plantations or how their families were taken away by their enslavers.[39] In this way, Dash talks about slavery through elder storytelling using their recollection and words instead of violent visual representations. Objects like Nana's tin can

[37] Dash uses the Gullah language in her movie. Along with the language, Dash also represents the food prepared by the Gullah people through the picnic scene where women are preparing food for the entire family to enjoy before some of them migrate to North. Dash also shows the different forms of songs, dances, entertainment activities, and use of different sign languages through the young girls singing and playing on the shore, Eli and other men playing games. *Daughters* reflects the presence of spiritual and religious beliefs through Nana Peazant's belief in the old ways of taking bath wearing clothes or believing in the presence of dead ancestors among the living or paying homage to ancestors, Eula's way of connecting with her late mother through a glass of water kept under her bed or through Bilal praying to Allah and his belief in Islam.

[38] Dash mentions, "African Americans have more stories as varied as any other people in American society. As varied as any other people in the world. Our lives, our history, our present reality is no more limited to 'ghetto' stories, than Italian Americans are to Mafia, or Jewish Americans are to the Holocaust. We have so many stories to tell. It will greatly enrich American filmmaking and American culture if we tell them" (25).

[39] They also mention that there would be no way to know if they intermarried or caused incest by marrying a brother or sister because there was no way of telling if they married their family members who were taken away from them for slavery.

and the lock of her mother's hair[40] are other ways through which Dash portrays the memories of enslavement. Cotton and rice are used in this movie to show an alternative way of representing these products that profited enslavers. The Gullah women and young girls are depicted wearing white cotton clothes with different patterns on them. The elders cultivate a loving and teaching bond with the children, as can be seen when Dash's camera captures an elder showing different colors and patterns of cotton cloth pieces to a child. Instead of becoming a product of slavery or something that the colonists reaped benefits from by exploiting Black bodies, it becomes an aesthetic cloth wrapping the Black characters, making them consumers /wearers, not the consumed/weary. In the cooking scenes and the feasting scenes, rice becomes food that the Gullah people consume, not a product that consumes the Black body by being forced to produce it. These alternative ways of showing the legacies of slavery enable the Black characters and Black culture to be more than just that one thing. Slavery or being enslaved is not the only beginning and end to the story to be told about Black people.

Instead, Dash reintroduces the cultural and historical traditions of the Gullah community through different objects and symbols. Machiorlattie states, "Through the motor habits of the characters, employment of West African hand signals, foodways, Gullah culture and language, music, sound, folktales and costuming, Dash and the crew of *Daughters of the Dust* resurrect historical practice for audiences" (101). Dash recollects the historical practices of remembering the ancestors through Nana Peazant and Eula when they reconnect with the dead ancestors by tending to the graveyard and keeping a glass of water under the bed. It is their way of keeping the dead ancestors alive through their memories. My argument is that Dash rebuilds Black womanhood through the different cultural traditions and practices performed by the Gullah

[40] This lock of hair was the only thing that her mother could leave with her daughter when she was taken away by the colonialists for slavery.

women. The unique cultural practices of the Gullah people cannot be reduced to slavery or primitivity. Instead, they cross all frames of temporality—past, present, and future. The practices of Gullah culture by the film's women characters celebrate the many ways of being a Black woman and the many possible futures they choose.

Graveyard and ancestors

Nana Peazant is the embodiment of the connection between the ancestors and the family members. She maintains the Gullah tradition of tending to the graveyard, through which she remembers the ancestors who have died. They are kept alive through the physical presence of Nana Peazant when she cleans the weeds from her late husband Shad Peazant's grave. In this way, Nana becomes the culture bearer who keeps alive the Gullah culture of remembering and respecting the ancestors through the recollection of memories and traditions. Significantly, Nana sees the grave and the womb as alike. For her, the dead, the alive, and the yet-to-be-born are all connected in the same thread. They become one through Nana's words, "The ancestors and the womb, they're one, they're the same. Those in this grave, like those who're across the sea, they're with us. They're all the same, the ancestors and the womb" (Dash *Daughters*). The cultural and spiritual history is passed on from generation to generation, irrespective of space and time in this connection between the dead, the alive, and the yet-to-be-born. Mellencamp mentions that the "oral traditions" (88) or these passed on memories and recollections of the culture through generations is a "remembered history that lives through stories and through spirits" (88). The ancestors though physically not present are very much present in the memory and the future of the coming generations. Bryant mentions the spiritual presence of the dead among the living and says, "the dead are not interpreted as inactive or silent but as consistently present. Thus, while 'dead' alludes to one's physical absence, the ongoing spiritual presence of

the deceased is treated as normative and functional. In other words, in the lowcountry, the deceased, though physically transitioned, are very much alive" (105). Dash represents the Gullah community of the South Carolina lowland and how they are still connected with their ancestors through maintaining a connection with the dead. Nana says, "It's up to the living to keep in touch with the dead, Eli. Man's power don't end with death. We just move on to another place, a place where we go and watch over our living family" (Dash *Daughter*s). This makes the Gullah culture as much a part of the present and future as it is of the past. Dash puts Nana Peazant in the position of spiritual and cultural guide through the scene in the graveyard for Eli, who is doubtful of the protective power that their culture and their ancestors have. Eli, who feels lost after the rape of his wife by a white man, questions Nana, "Why didn't you protect us Nana? Were the old souls too deep in their graves to give a damn about my wife when some stranger was riding her?" (Dash *Daughters*). As Venetria K. Patton mentions, "Eula's rape has shaken Eli's belief in his grandmother and the old ways" (38). Nana replies, "Never forget who we is and how far we done come. There's a thought, a recollection, something somebody remembers. We carry these memories inside of we…. Eli, I'm trying to learn you how to touch your own spirit. I'm fighting for my life and I'm fighting for yours" (Dash *Daughters*). Nana asks Eli to call on the ancestors to guide him through his journey, to make sure that when the family moves to the North, they will still be connected to their cultural history, their ancestors, and their roots. Nana embodies the Gullah "cultural continuity" (Mellencamp 90). She wants her children to be guided by their ancestors in their journey toward their future. It is through the guidance of the ancestors as Nana suggests that Eli gets to connect with his cultural past and his ancestral roots again.

Glass of water under the bed

Eula keeps her late mother's memories and the connection with her mother alive in the future through the Gullah tradition of keeping a glass of water under the bed. Bryant talks about the Gullah culture of talking to the dead and how "religio- cultural activities (singing, storytelling, sweetgrass basketry, prayer, and dreaming) that calls one's forebearers to mind—often through a performance or (re)enactment… can sometimes lead to the experience of connecting with the dead" (16). Eula's dreaming is a part of the "religio-cultural activity" (16) that Bryant mentions to call upon the ancestors. Eula, like Nana, is a container and retainer of the Gullah cultural practices. Machiorlattie also mentions that "Eula, Eli's wife, is closely associated with Nana as she practices similar ancestral rituals - a jar under her bed with a note to the ancestors, newspaper print on the wall, a bottle tree to ward off spirits" (108). Through this ancestral ritual of keeping a glass of water under the bed, Eula carries, contains, and continues her connection with her mother. These age-long ancestral traditions of the Gullah culture performed by the Black women in the film make it possible for the past connections, ancestors, and memories to survive and continue into the future. Later in one of the scenes, Eula tells Yellow Mary about seeing her mother. Eula says, "My Ma came to me last night, you know? She took me by the hand" (Dash *Daughters).* To which Yellow Mary replies that her mother was dead long ago. Eula then continues, "I needed to see my Ma. I want to talk to her. So I wrote her a letter, put it beneath with a glass of water and waited. I waited till my Ma come to me" (Dash *Daughters*). This represents the spiritual connection that Eula tries to build with her late mother through her cultural connection to the Gullah tradition and finds a sense of security and comfort from this connection in the future.[41] It is important for her to feel connected with her mother and

[41] Nana also mentions this tradition of the living generation keeping the dead ancestors alive through remembering and recollecting.

to talk to her. Bryant mentions that "Talking, as employed by these women, initially occurs by sensing or feeling a deceased person's presence. Once that presence is acknowledged or interpreted as 'among us,' one can then communicate with the deceased. During this exchange, one listens to what the deceased has to say or tells the deceased about one's concerns, needs, or hopes" (105). With the decision to migrate North and the doubts in her relationship with Eli, Eula finds a sense of security and assurance in this bond with her late mother that this Gullah tradition allows her to have.

Through these scenes of reconnecting with their ancestors, Black people who are supposed to be just slaves or maids, whose history, lineage, and ancestors were forcefully erased and detached, are positioned in the future. The Gullah culture, which is deemed "primitive" (Nelson 5) becomes a medium for the Gullah people to carry their memories of their ancestors into the future and to gain comfort from the spiritual and cultural connections in the future. In this way, the Gullah culture becomes a medium of sustenance for the Gullah people in the future. Dreaming is one of the ways Bryant says the Gullah people listen and talk to the ancestors or the dead members of their family. She also explains that "In this form of communication, a loved one who has passed on talks through a dream and offers comfort and direction to the dreamer or admonishes her to act or live in a particular way" (Bryant 109). Eula chooses to be guided and comforted by her mother to receive direction in a life that seems to be divided between the island and the mainland and between her marriage and her unborn baby's identity. Eventually, talking to her mother gives her a sense of direction to stay on the island and an understanding of her position in life, which enables her to give further direction to the other Gullah women's choices. The Gullah culture thus transcends the linear idea of temporality where, even though Eula's mother is no more, she resides in Eula's memories and exists in Eula's life and future. This

Gullah tradition of keeping a glass of water under the bed helps Eula to regain strength when she feels unsure of the decisions that she has to make for her future about leaving/staying on the island and also because of the problems in her marriage. This tradition guides her to her future where she not only prepares herself to cross any obstacles but also helps other Gullah women to do the same. She helps them to acknowledge and accept their past scars of slavery which help them to believe that they can have any future that they want. The Gullah culture helps Eula understand that there are many paths to choose for the Gullah women, which open their ways to many different futures. For example, Haagar chooses to leave the island for better economic/social possibilities for her children on the mainland, Iona chooses to stay on the mainland with her partner/lover, and Eula, Yellow Mary, and Nana Peazant choose to stay on the island to be close to the land where their ancestors lie. Dash also depicts the crafting skills that the Gullah community possess, such as sweetgrass basketry and quilt making that are passed on from generation to generation.[42] Audiences gets to see a glimpse of these cultural crafts through

[42] In some of the scenes, the women carry babies wrapped up in colorful blankets. Some scenes show the use of colorful quilts made with patches of different fabrics. They use it while they sleep and in some of the picnic scenes, while in some parts these quilts dry in the sun. Quilt making is an important part of the Gullah culture. Roberts and Holladay say, "Gullah Geechee craftsmanship was superb and included numerous types of handmade items. Many Gullah Geechee craft traditions were important for day-to- life day and include sweetgrass basket 'sewing' (i.e., weaving of marsh grass), cast net making (generally a circular net that is thrown to catch fish), smoking mullet and other seafood, quilting (often to make use of many pieces of fabric), blending herbal medicines and potash (ashes that come from burning wood and plants) and soap making" (185). Dash pays attention to details and focuses on different patterns of work done on the quilts. Especially in two of the scenes, Dash makes the characters spread out the different kinds of quilts, where a strong wind is blowing, and the members are trying to gather the quilts. Audience gets to see the use of "many small pieces of fabric" (Roberts and Holladay 192) in the spread-out quilts. Dash also presents the tradition of "sweetgrass basket 'sewing'" (Roberts and Holladay 185) in the movie, using her camera work, her direction, and her aesthetic vision. Instead of randomly showing baskets lying around somewhere she shows these baskets in everyday use of the Peazant family. This aligns with what Roberts and Holladay say that these crafts were used for their daily activities and "household chores" (200). Dash also shows a glimpse of sweetgrass basketry through Nana. Nana sits in her chair in one of the scenes and sews a basket using sweetgrass. The Gullah women prepare for their family feast by putting vegetables, fruits, and other food items in the sweetgrass baskets. This is a reflection of the Gullah traditions and their crafting culture. Bryant mentions that "sweetgrass basketry is a simultaneous labor of love and of intention, for it is an artisan's craft that is passed down from generation to generation" (114). These sweetgrass baskets that they took time to prepare with care later become a part of their daily life where they prepare meals for the family with love, intent, and care. Dash does not

Daughters, where the Peazant family uses these crafts for their own purposes and not for slavers. Audiences also gets to see the different kinds of food and delicacies that the Gullah people have.

Gullah Food

Food and food preparation are also integral parts of the Gullah culture. Food brings the family and the community together to prepare and cook meals for its members with care. Dash focuses on the food items by zooming in on the food and the baskets full of fruits and vegetables while showing the chatting and laughing women who are preparing the meal. Women in the community pluck the chicken's feathers, cut cabbage, wash rice, peel corn, pick crabs, cut onions, and prepare prawns all the while talking, giggling, teasing, and laughing among themselves, speaking in the Gullah language. Brouwer mentions how "These physical elements which Dash chooses to include in her frame are reminders of West African customs, habits, ways of living" (7). They are not scrambling for food or pleading for food. Instead, their hands are busy preparing a feast for themselves. Gullah food and the time that they spend during their mealtime nourish the Gullah people and help them to sustain their familial bonding into the future.

These meal preparation scenes represent the relationship that the Gullah community has between food and familial bonding, ensuring the continuation of their traditions into the future. This food culture and tradition of meal preparation are carried into the future by the Gullah women. They prepare the food with care which the family members share, while talking, smiling, and being close to each other. Talking about Gullah food, Amy Lotson Roberts and Patrick J. Holladay mention, "The Gullah Geechee people have particularly distinctive foods, dishes, and foodways (where food and culture meet to create unique history, heritage, and

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only show the preparation of the baskets but also how they become a part of their daily life which has been going on for generations.

experience of shared culinary traditions) … Beans, peas, okra, yams, peanuts, benne (sesame seeds), seafood, smoked fish (mullet), shrimp, oysters, grits and others are longtime staples in Gullah Geechee dishes" (206). Dash exhibits most of the items that Roberts and Holladay mention and represents the staple food and delicacies of the Gullah community. The Gullah food culture and social gatherings are heightened, where the richness of their delicacies and the bonding and care of the family members get reflected on the screen. On the eve of the migration when some family members will leave for the North, the Peazant family has a final feast together where they spend time and eat in each other's proximity. Thus, food becomes a connecting source between the family, creating a bond between those who will leave the island and those who will stay. Among the food items, Dash first shows okra on the screen in a close-up shot. That scene leads up to another scene with an elderly woman playing with the children using parts of okra and talking to them fondly. This becomes a teaching moment between the woman and the children. The elderly woman is passing on her knowledge of the Gullah language to the children by teaching them words like "sojo," "deloe," and "diffy" (Dash *Daughters*).[43] Cutting the okras also become a playful bonding time between a grandmother and her grandchildren. This is the form of history that is "passed on from grandmother to daughters and sons, a living history that is nourishing, not diminishing" (Mellencamp 76). Through food, conversation, care,

[43] The elder recalls the few Gullah words that she remembers: "Pot called - Sojo. Water - Deloe, Fire - Diffy" (Dash *Daughters*). The use of the Gullah language is another way of representing the history and culture of the Gullah community. Machiorlattie talks about this language and says, "Northern European (dominant) American culture did not want to acknowledge that any African-ness was retained among the slave population and their descendants" (109) and thus ridiculed this Gullah language, saying it was not retention of African language rather an underdeveloped language. Brouwer also mentions that the Gullah language was mocked by saying it was spoken by those with "jungle-tongue[s]," "thick lips," and "flat noses" (6). But Dash changes that narrative by letting her characters speak in the Gullah language. History is revived, the retention of the Gullah culture and the language is emphasized, and the narrative that Black people do not have anything to take or retain in the future is refuted.

and recalling Gullah words, history becomes an emotion, a living agent that is passed on to future generations.

Black Womanhood and Futurity

Nokwenza kaPlaatjie mentions that Julie Dash transcends "the limitations of the hegemonic industry" when it comes to depicting Black women throughout *Daughters of the Dust* (12). The same cinematic technology which was used to create minstrel performances and caricatured or humiliating projections of Black people on screen and kept Black culture and Blackness as something in the background to reflect primitivism is used by Dash to represent Blackness and Black women aesthetically. Machiorlattie mentions women as cultural containers in the film and that "The cinematic narration confirms a sense of history, connection, and memory through women's bodies, voices and recollections" (112). The same bodies of Black women which were shown as a scale to heighten and brighten whiteness and white stories or which were reduced to oversexualized or colonialist-dominated bodies are represented as aesthetic bodies, as culture bearers of futurity. The same people who were denied any sort of future are given confident voices in the movie that speak to different kinds of futures: Nana Peazant chooses to continue the Gullah cultural practices into her future and guides the other family members to stay connected to their culture even if they leave the island. Eula chooses to stay on the island close to Nana Peazant, guiding the Gullah women to acknowledge that their past scars of slavery do not mark their future. She helps the Gullah women realize that they can cross any obstacles to create the futures that they choose for themselves. Some choose the island as their future, and some choose the mainland. Yellow Mary positions herself as a queer, independent, and proud woman who denies a domestic and reproductive future. She embraces a sexual freedom that allows her to have a female partner. She chooses to stay on the island, where

she wants to share the space with her family (Nana and Eula) and have a familial bond that does not reproduce a maternal identity for her. She chooses the space (the island) that she can hold on to for her future (Dash *Daughters*). Haagar decides to move to the mainland to secure a social and economic future for her children that she believes it will provide. Whereas her daughter Iona chooses to stay on the island with her partner/lover and spend her future with him. In this way futurity gets many directions, creating many ways to exist for the Gullah women.

Nana Peazant

Nana Peazant's understanding of the future is to guide the Peazant family so that even if they choose to leave, they can still stay connected with the Gullah culture through practice and continuation. She believes that being physically present on the island is not what defines the Gullah culture. They can continue this culture by practicing cultural traditions and recollecting cultural memories. Patton mentions that Nana "is the bringer of life, the conduit to the spiritual regeneration of the ancestors, the bearer of culture and the center of social organization'" (33). She keeps the family together and voices the words of spiritual, ancestral, and cultural recollection to guide them into their future. Amine mentions that in Dash's works, "the female figure is central and makes possible the transmission of history and culture" (3). Nana shows that it is possible to retain their cultural continuity even when they are outside their ancestral home and that they can have a future that carries their cultural and ancestral memories. Machiorlattie says, "Through the elder Nana's voice, Dash speaks as cultural historian" (102), but it is not only through her voice but also her body that Dash shows how she becomes a conduit of carrying the Gullah culture into the future.

The movie starts with a closed shot of young Nana's hands letting out soil. The background is completely out of focus and blurred to center the hands. Dash shows an alternative

image of the Black body, which is not "a mute and static backdrop for White folks' actions in the foreground" (Bambara 129), but rather it becomes the focus. In a scene where Nana is taking a bath fully clothed, she narrates, "I am the first and the last. I am the honored one and the scorned one" (Dash *Daughters*). These paradoxical sentences draw attention to the Black body, which contains multitudes. The Black body is not confined to a certain timeframe or status. She is both the first one and the last one, the honored one and the scorned one, which make her stand on infinite lines of temporality. In the scene near the graveyard where Nana imparts wisdom to Eli, Dash uses a smooth transition from Nana's extended hand towards Eli to the girls all huddled together playing, laughing and happy near the shore, as if they are being held inside Nana's hands (Machiorlattie 107), all coming across in a cross dissolve[44] on the screen.[45] Nana's hands are in the care of the past, present, and future. She takes care of the graves; she takes care of Eli and takes his hands in hers to guide him. When Nana is clearing the weeds from the grave of her late husband, her physical presence and closeness to the grave connect her living body to the dead spirits. Nana's body is taking care of the children on the island and the ancestors in the graveyard, being the link between these different worlds. Nana's back has not only been bent to work in the plantations,[46] but it also has been carrying the Gullah cultural and ancestral connection and history in the present and into the future.

Some scenes focus on Nana's face, capturing her facial features, expressions, and emotions. Right after the spirit of the unborn baby appears on the screen running across the shore of the island, a close-up shot of Nana's face shows her smiling and nodding as if to welcome the spirit. Nana's smile fills up the screen. Her smile is an acknowledgment of and a token of

[44] This cross dissolve creates an image that is almost like the spacetime holding the cosmic object in the middle of the spacetime continuum, creating a curve or warp that can traverse temporality and create alternative reality.
[45] Through the cross-dissolve Dash is showing that Nana takes care of all the children by carrying their cultural past in herself.
[46] "We back bent down while we did planting" (Dash *Daughters*).

appreciation for the help that the ancestors have sent through the spirit of the unborn baby, as she asked them for guidance on the eve of the migration of some of her family members.[47] Machiorlattie mentions, "When the ancestors are called upon by Nana Peazant to guide the family over to the mainland safely, she sees no temporal borders" (113) and this becomes evident after a few scenes. Nana is seen with a tin can[48] in her hand, hugging it and smiling, looking at the horizon, while feeling the wind of the spirit in her body. Dash is celebrating cyclical time[49] through Nana, where "Cyclical time suggests the persistence of traditions and practices that are as much a part of the present as they are the past" (Machiorlattie 112). Nana is in the present, carrying the memories of the past in her hands while taking in the breath of the unborn baby of the future. Dash uses close-ups in two other scenes to focus on Nana's face again. In one of the scenes, she is in the process of making a sweetgrass basket while recollecting how difficult the days of slavery have been for them on the island, and in the other, she rustles through the contents of the tin can and takes out her mother's hair while remembering her mother. In both scenes, Nana's face is amplified, and the camera focuses on the emotions expressed through her eyes while she is remembering.[50]

Dash shows this tin can first in the scene where Nana is clearing the weeds from the grave of her late husband. She sits on the tin can while communicating with him. Nana at once is

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[47] The spirit of the child says, "Nana prayed for help. I got there just in time" (Dash *Daughters*).

[48] Nana carries her memories from the past in the tin can which is also called the "scraps of memories" (Dash *Daughters).* The tin can represents her connection with the past (for example, she carries her mother's hair in the tin can, reminding her of her mother) that she carries along with her in the present and she later makes the tin can a part of the ceremony for preparation of the future of the other members.

[49] In cyclical time, there are no temporal borders or boundaries. Past, present, and future are all enmeshed in cyclical time.

[50] Nana's mother's memory takes a physical form through the hair and becomes a part of the "spiritual regeneration" (Patton 33) that helps the family connect with their cultural past and take this connection to their future. Her hands are marked blue because of the indigo dye, and at the same time carries her mother's hair and is kissed by the family members to receive guidance from the ancestors. Dash shows that "Women in fact have been the primary caretakers and transmitters of aspects of Gullah/ Geechee religious culture and have retained an ongoing position as culture keepers" (Bryant 63). These Gullah women like Nana are historians, honored bodies carrying the recollection of their ancestors, pathfinders, and guides of the future.

holding both her husband's and her mother's memories through the grave and the tin can. This tin can is a record of Nana's mother's existence that historical records would not be able to show.[51] It carries the history of Nana's childhood. She holds the tin can when she sits on a chair, sewing a sweetgrass basket and then rustling through the contents of the can as if rustling through old memories to relive them again and to make those memories a part of the future of her family members. Nana mentions, "When they come today to kiss these old withered up cheeks bye-bye. I'm going to have something more than a farewell waiting for them. You see I've been working on a plan" (Dash *Daughters*). The tin can, which contains the old memories, is positioned in the future as Nana uses it to guide the family members who have chosen to leave the island. The tin can and its "scraps of memories" (Dash *Daughters*) are part of her plan to reconnect the family with their ancestral past and to continue the memory of their culture in their futures, irrespective of the space and time they encompass.[52] Nana sews elements of that tin can along with her mother's hair into a "hand sewn leather pocket" (Dash 127), which Dash also terms "Hands" (Dash 150) in her script. Nana adds her own hair to the pocket. While adding it she says, "When I was a child, my mother cut this from her hair before she was sold away from we. Now I'm adding my own hair. There must be a bond, a connection, between those who go North and those who remain, between us who are here and those who are across the sea. A connection" (Dash *Daughters*).[53] She continues the process of building and rebuilding connections between the living and the dead, between the members and their culture, between

[51] This is a Gullah cultural practice of keeping the memories of the people who were taken away, killed, and stolen from family members. In this way, those people survive in others' memories for as long as they live, and then this history and memory are passed on to the next generation.

[52] The tin can comes to a full circle when in one of the scenes, Eula holds it in her hands while delivering her speech of unity while being hugged by Nana and Yellow Mary. It lies at the center of these three women, while the family looks at them, sharing emotions and embracing their cultural history.

[53] This reflects how spiritual and cultural leaders or culture carriers and nurturers like Nana are in a constant process of rebuilding their culture in order to keep it alive in the family for as long as time exists.

the ones staying on the island and the ones leaving, and between the past, present, and future. Right before some of the family leave for the North, Nana takes her position as the spiritual and cultural guide again and holds the pocket or "Hand" (Dash 150). She binds it on top of the bible with Saint Christopher's charm that she takes from Viola and places it in her own hands and calls all the members to kiss her hands in a spiritual ceremony. This "spiritual regeneration" (Patton 33) conducted by Nana helps everyone except Haagar to come together and acknowledge the presence of ancestral souls and the persistence of their cultural legacy. Even Viola, who was reluctant to be a part of this regeneration for fear of getting swayed away from Christianity, comes forward and kisses Nana's hands. Although Haagar turns her back on the Gullah cultural and ancestral history and its continuance, her daughters take part in the ceremony. Dash calls this scene "A Root Revival of Love" (158) in her script. They kiss Nana's hands, hug her, and shed tears, accepting the cultural history that their mother wanted them to leave behind. Through her body, Nana makes sure that they understand that they all have the same soul (Dash *Daughters*), which will keep them connected in the future, even if they leave the island. She says, "This hand it's from me from them, from us" (Dash *Daughters*). Nana becomes one with the ancestors. She speaks not only on behalf of the ancestors but as one of them. For this scene of spiritual and cultural recollection, Dash takes a wide-angle shot with all the family members in their surroundings and then moves to an extreme closed shot of Nana's hand with the bible and the pocket tied together. This accentuates Nana's hands and the "Hand," (Dash 150) both of which create a pathway of connection between the generations in the face of familial rupture.

Through this scene, Nana becomes a bridge between the past and the future. She welcomes the family with her hands to acknowledge the spiritual presence of the ancestors from the past, the physical presence of all of them in the present, and how the memories of this

presence will guide them in the future. Nana says, "Take my hand. I'm the one that can give you strength. Take me wherever you go. I'm your strength. Take my hand. Take me wherever you go. I'm your strength" (Dash *Daughters*). The repetition of these words almost sounds like a rhythmic verse, as if both welcoming the family towards their ancestors and setting them off for their journey towards their separate futures.[54]

Eula

Eula represents reproductive futurity, as she is carrying a child after she is raped by a white man. However, Eula's future and her body are not defined by this violence. For her, her future lies in acknowledging the scars of the past and using that as a shield to protect herself and the Gullah women from obstacles in the future. Eula believes that the Gullah women can imagine and deserve to have different kinds of futures and many ways to exist. Dash never uses the word "rape" in the movie (Machiorlattie 103).[55] This is an attempt by Dash to decenter rape or colonial violence from Eula's story. Instead of showing Eula as a victim or an oversexualized being, she is shown as a vocal woman, a caring mother, a respected member of the family, and someone who talks about a communal future. Instead of showing her womb as a site of invasion, it becomes a container of the future. Instead of showing Eula's womb as unchaste, the womb becomes a temporal womb carrying a baby that travels throughout the movie, breaking time and space limitations. The unborn child becomes the narrator in the movie; a connection between the present (womb), the past (ancestors), and the future (new life/beginning). Eula's womb thus becomes temporal and the carrier of traditions and memories. Venetria K. Patton comments on

[54] As Nana Peazant's body is a paradox being both the first and the last one, her hands also become a paradox in this way.

[55] "Traditionally, black women have had to deal with the realities of 'being ruined' as part of their lives and psyches. The word 'rape' is never used in the film, suggesting silent but prevalent scars that mark many black women (and men) in their lineage" (Machiorlatti 103). More information on rape and healing of Black women can be found in Jennifer A. Machiorlatti's "Revisiting Julie Dash's "Daughters of the Dust": Black Feminist Narrative and Diasporic Recollection."

this idea of women as mothers and culture bearers, "The woman is revered in her role as the mother who is the bringer of life, the conduit to the spiritual regeneration of the ancestors, the bearer of culture and the center of social organization" (27). Nana is the bearer of culture and the bringer of life who sustains the Peazant family and now Eula is the carrier of both life and culture in her temporal womb. Through Eula, Dash breaks the pattern of representing "Black women in one of two ways: they're either struggling with their sinful nature and promiscuity, or they are hyperreligious and superstitious caricatures of Black womanhood" (Lewis and Cooper 224). Eula represents a "positive image of Black womanhood" (Ogunleye 158), where she helps other Black women in the community to feel fearless when they look at their past scars instead of letting those scars define their future.

When other women in the community taunt and judge Yellow Mary for her sexual preferences and her history of being sexually violated by whites, Eula delivers a speech that at once looks back at the past scars of slavery, their present dilemmas/doubts about their womanhood, and a hopeful vision of the future. I am quoting the monologue to make the discussion of futurity clearer:

> Deep inside we believed that they ruined our mothers and their mothers who had come before them, and we live our lives always expecting the worst cause we feel we don't deserve no better. Deep inside we believe that even God can't heal the wounds of our past or protect us from the world that puts shackles on our feet... There's going to be all kinds of road to take in life. Let's not be afraid to take them. We deserve them because we are all good women…. We wear our scars like armor for protection. Thick, hard, ugly scars that no one can pass through to ever hurt us again. Let's live our lives without living in the fold of old wounds. (Dash *Daughters*)

Eula is not asking anyone to forget what happened to them in the past. She is asking the women to be respectful to each other and to understand that they are powerful women with scars of the past that do not define them. This enables the women to look at other women not with self-doubt and disrespect but with compassion, understanding, and belief in their collective womanhood; womanhood that is not defined by rape, slavery, or colonialism but through how they look at their pasts with kindness, compassion, and valor, and envision futures that they all deserve. At that point, "the family as a unit is deliberately centered" (Holmes 49) and it also centers what Bambara calls "'women's perspective, women's validation of women, shared space rather than dominated space'" (Machiorlattie 99). Dash mentions in *Daughters of the Dust: The Making of an African American Woman's Film* that "through Eula, the relatives are drawn into a healing circle and mend their rifts" (xiii). Dash, through Eula and this scene, celebrates Black womanhood and their myriad futures. She gives an alternative way to deal with the sexual violence that the women had to face during slavery, where they are not defined by it. Her words speak of self-regard, "self-expression and acceptance" (Machiorlattie 105). Eula voices her vision of the future not as a victim of slavery but from a point of view of a Black woman who has dreams (of gaining respect and trust among other Black women) and who reflects the different ways in which other women in the community would choose their future or dreams. Eula serves a responsibility that Bambara talks about, "There is a responsibility to self and to history that is developed once you are whole, once you are well, once you acknowledge your powers" (Sanchez 278). She presents an alternative image of Black womanhood and focuses on communal and familial bonding, especially between the women.[56] Eula's dialogue or, as Bambara mentions, the "women's validation ceremony" (139), conveys a message similar to

[56] Dash says, "I want to do something very different… I want to show Black families, particularly Black women, as we have never seen them before" (32).

what Bambara says, "*people can awaken, people can change, and in changing enable each other. We can be concerned with something larger than ourselves. We CAN rise above our training. We can think better than we're taught. And we can transform a society" (*205). Eula's monologue is transformative, empowering, and capable of bringing positive change in the community of women and their future. McKoy talks about this strength and connection within the family, "the family's survival becomes dependent upon their regaining an understanding of their place in time. It is an understanding that can only be gained from connecting with their African past" (219). Eula instills this sense of mutual respect and understanding within the women in the family. Even though others see them as ruined, and even though they know how their mothers or grandmothers were ruined, they deserve various paths, they deserve to choose their futures, and their scars will remind them to never let anyone define who they are and what they deserve.

Eula reminds the Gullah women before they are about to leave for better economic possibilities and futures in the North, that they cannot simply escape the past sexual violence of enslavement by moving on to the future/North. Whether they stay or leave the island, they have to acknowledge that they have a past that holds a grip on their memories. Through Eula's monologue, Dash "offers a distinctive resolution to the haunting traces of the Southern past" (King 478). The scars or the "haunting traces" (King 478) cannot be wiped out of their memories, these need to be acknowledged to attain "future freedom" (Kaplan 521).[57] A gentle, kind touch of acknowledgment to the scars of trauma is what Dash is trying to depict the Black women giving themselves through Eula. This will allow them to look into their conscience and

[57] Kaplan says, "Eula's call for a multiply- located, continuing relationship to an *impure* past of raced and sexualized violence suggests what the first steps might be toward articulating a political claim based upon the ethical impossibility of ending the process of mourning genocide. She argues for a confrontation of the always-present past that neither seeks to distance it nor to grant it the privilege of pure origins, but instead marshalls it as one part of a militant move toward future freedom" (521).

not to look at someone and decide they do not belong in the community because they are ruined.[58] Eula's monologue relates to what bell hooks says about valuing each other, "We cannot value each other rightly without first breaking through the walls of denial which hide the depth of self-hatred, inner anguish, and unreconciled pain" (19). Dash looks at the past of enslavement through Eula's monologue with the sentiment of collective and individual growth and traversing the distance between temporality and space to understand that Blackness and Black people are not to be fixated in a definite time or space.

Yellow Mary

Yellow Mary represents a queer futurity where she defies heteronormativity, embodies lesbianism, and embraces a non-domestic and non-reproductive life. She is a queer Black woman who comes to the island with her female partner Trula. Her body is an embodiment of a future that challenges the expectations of her family members, as she is not interested in biological reproduction as a means of securing a future. She represents Black (queer) women who "need not suppress sexuality to be acceptable in the society" (Bambara 126). Dash mentions that Yellow Mary is a prostitute and an independent businesswoman (66).[59] Yellow Mary becomes the object of contempt for the family because of her sexual (non-reproductive and non-heteronormative) and familial preferences (Dash 66). She and Trula are met with snarky comments, intense and judgmental gazes, cold shoulders, and crooked brows, as they chose a life that defies heteronormative gender roles and the possibility of bearing children. In Mel Lewis

[58] This resonates with Kaplan's idea of understanding the process of melancholia, which is to realize the significance of understanding pain from the past in both the present and the future. Kaplan asks, "how best to understand the continuing political, ethical, and social significance of the past losses, wounds, and grievances of African chattel slavery and subsequent forms of black unfreedom; not only in the present, but for the future?" (513). Kaplan and Dash both suggest that it is important for Black people to place themselves in the past with an understanding of what the past entails in order to place themselves in the present and in the future.

[59] Dash mentions that in her research she "found out that most prostitutes of that time were involved with other women. Their 'significant others' were other women, so they were bisexual" (66).

and Melissa L. Cooper's article, Cooper relates to Yellow Mary and says, "They've been 'ruined' in the ways that so many Black queer folks, including myself, feel they are 'ruined,' self-exiled, outcast, or abandoned, perhaps all of these. But Yellow Mary comes home, with Trula, grounding herself, even if leaving again seems inevitable" (220). Some of the community members point at her with detest and call her "ruined," a "heifer," "wasted," "shameless hussy," and "buzzard" (Dash *Daughters*).

Kaplan mentions these looks of detest and says that Yellow Mary[60] signifies a "'constellation of traumatic associations' including sexualized violence, miscegenation, racial passing, and overt and uncontained sexuality; it is precisely this conjuncture of significations that makes Mary a destabilizing figure for the majority of the Peazant women" (520). Both Viola and Yellow Mary went to the mainland but one (Viola) is adored and respected, whereas the other (Yellow Mary) becomes vilified. Bambara mentions, "Yellow Mary's walk, posture, and demeanor are in stark contrast to that of the Christianized cousin Viola" (126). Viola talks about religion, moral deeds, and the right ways to live, whereas Yellow Mary is a woman who is independent, bold, free from domesticated life, and does not care what people think about her bisexuality or her prostitution. Yellow Mary mentions that if she was ruined, she was ruined by white people[61] and had to nurse white people's children even when she wanted to come back home. She says,

> My baby was born dead, and my titty was full of milk. We needed money so I hired out to a wealthy family, some big, supposed to be, muckety mucks off Edisto Island high falutin' buckra. They go to Cuba, I go. I nursed their baby and took care of their children.

[60] Yellow Mary is mixed race which points to the sexual violence of rape that enslaved women suffered by their slavers.
[61] Gullah people refer to white people as "buckra" (Bryant 29).

> That's how I got ruined. I wanted to go home and they keep me. They keep me. So I fixed my titty they send me home. (Dash *Daughters*)

Most of the members are repelled by Yellow Mary's non-domesticated, non-reproductive, bisexual, "ruined" (Dash *Daughters*) body. They say, "Yellow Mary gone off and got ruined," "You never know where her hands have been. I mean I can just smell the heifer" (Dash *Daughters*). They associate Yellow Mary's body with prostitution and lesbianism which makes them look at her as a different kind of woman, someone who is not fit for their community or fit to be a family woman. Unlike other women like Haagar, whose future is to have a domestic and reproductive life and to secure a better life for their children, Yellow Mary presents a different understanding of futurity. What Yellow Mary wants in her future is to feel connected to a place (the island) that she can hold onto and to continue being the proud queer woman that she is. Hearing from the elders even the young girls say that Yellow Mary is not a "family woman" but that she is a "scary woman" (Dash *Daughters*). The women on the island do not want to touch her or stay close to her and even try to keep their children away from her.

Despite Yellow Mary's history of being "ruined" (Dash *Daughters*) or being sexually violated by white people or colonialists, she decides her own life. She chooses a life where she does not necessarily have to lead a heteronormative life—marry a man and procreate. She is proud of her sexual identity and is not ashamed of her past. bell hooks mentions Yellow Mary's lack of interest in domesticity saying, "Yellow Mary says that she is not somebody who is gonna be working in the kitchen. We know that she disavows a certain kind of domesticity" (Dash 67). Unlike Haagar who believes that a woman is considered to be pretty if she knows how to cook (Dash *Daughters*), Yellow Mary chooses a future where she does not see cooking as a vital part of being a woman. For Yellow Mary, cooking or meal preparation does not hold significance in

her life, which makes her different from the other women on the island. This is not a way for Yellow Mary to disavow the Gullah food culture. It is Yellow Mary's way of choosing a future where she rejects the conventional idea of a Black woman's identity being defined by cooking in the kitchen, as Haagar suggests. Yellow Mary has chosen a life and a future without domesticity and fixed heteronormativity attached to her body. Bringing Trula with her as a partner, not deciding to cook in the kitchen, and choosing a future that allows her to be queer are all parts of her chosen future. bell hooks comments on Yellow Mary and the presence of lesbianism[62] in the movie and says, "when Nana Peazant is talking with Yellow Mary, it's clear that Yellow Mary really is a new kind of woman. And it is obvious that her newness doesn't just involve her historical experience of rape and exploitation, but her own sexual choices" (Dash 66). Dash is not only presenting an alternative form of Black womanhood through Yellow Mary as a Black queer character but is also resisting the idea that Black movies are homophobic (Dash 66). She uses an analogy to explain how she keeps herself away and safe from the remarks that try to touch her body with labels and names. She thinks of a pink satin case[63] that she spotted in a shop. She imagines that she puts away all her bad memories inside that case and can look back at those memories whenever she wants to which means that she is in control of those memories. She says,

> in my mind, I put all those bad memories in that case, and I locked them there so that I could take them out and look at them when I'd feel like it, and so I could study them when I want to and figure it out you know? But I didn't want them inside of me. I don't let nothing in that case or nobody outside that case tell me who I am or what I should feel about me. (Dash *Daughters*)

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[62] It is very much possible that Yellow Mary has a bisexual orientation in the movie. At one-point Yellow Mary tells Eula, "Wish I could find me a good man Eula. Somebody I could depend on. Not that I'd want to depend on him. Just to know that I could if I had to" (Dash *Daughters*), expressing her wish to have a man in her life, while she has a female partner, Trula. She might be attracted to both genders.

[63] Yellow Mary's pink satin case is not unlike Nana Peazant's tin can of memories.

Although people look at Yellow Mary as unchaste and as a ruined woman, Dash through this monologue keeps her untouched from everyone.

Through Yellow Mary, Dash also focuses on the urge inside Black women to feel connected to their homes, to their ancestors, and to the names that their loved ones used to call them. During the scene where Nana Peazant falls apart crying because her family is leaving, Yellow Mary shares how she feels about the island. She says,

> I've been on my own for such a long time I thought I wanted to be that way. You know I'm not like the other women here, but I need to know that I can come and hold onto what I come from. I need to know that people here know my name. I'm Yellow Mary Peazant. And I'm a proud woman not a hard woman. (Dash *Daughters*)

Through this, Yellow Mary shares that she wants her future to be in a place that she can hold on to. She is a proud queer woman who chooses a future that does not align with the domestic and reproductive futurity that others envision. She wants to be remembered as a proud queer woman and have a bond/connection to the island that she can hold onto, which does not position her in a domestic/maternal role. She wants to know that she can come back to Ibo island where people know her name and remember her.

Yellow Mary is proud and confident about her life choices of being an independent businesswoman and traveler and having a female partner. But she also longs for the place which gave her name, and she wants to return to that place. At the end of the movie, Dash shows a departing boat with most of the Peazant family on board including Trula, but Yellow Mary is not there. Dash uses a medium shot to capture Yellow Mary clothed in a different brownish cloth rather than her white cloth, braiding her hair, and standing in front of a big tree. The scene focuses on the expressions on her face. Yellow Mary decides to stay on the island and cries while

Trula departs. When Yellow Mary comes to the island, she meets Nana Peazant, talks to Eula, becomes a part of the "spiritual regeneration" (Patton 33) that Nana conducts, listens to Eula's monologue about choosing different futures for themselves and respecting each other's scars, and decides to stay on the island. She chooses the island as her future without compromising her sexual preferences and undomesticated lifestyle. She represents the idea that Black women's futures and the Gullah culture can be queer, unrestricted, free from domestication, and free from the cycle of reproduction. Her futurity denies any of the imposed, expected, or assumed roles of heteronormativity and embraces a different future as a queer Black woman.

Daughters of the Dust is a movie that celebrates the cultural, ancestral, and spiritual history of the Gullah people, changing the way the white gaze has depicted Black women and their womanhood. It boldly recognizes the sexual violence that Black women had to suffer during slavery. It voices Nana's cultural and spiritual future where she guides the family members to practice their Gullah culture irrespective of space and time. Eula helps herself and other Gullah women to not let their past scars or slavery define their bodies and futures, and Yellow Mary embraces a non-domestic and non-heteronormative future. It creatively resists the white anxiety-driven assumptions of Blackness and Black culture. Instead, it is a celebration of the Gullah culture, the Gullah women, and their multiple futures.

Conclusion

Through my thesis, I explored the multiple ways in which Black artists like Nnedi Okorafor and Julie Dash envision Black futurities and represent alternative images of Black womanhood and Black culture than those created by the white gaze. Through this discussion, I took forward my desire to look at how Black artists use different mediums (science fiction and cinema) to resist alterity and oppression, celebrate their culture, and represent Blackness outside of colonial narratives. My desire to know this "how" started its journey with Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*. In my BA thesis titled "Alterity and African American Fiction: A Case Study of *The Bluest Eye,*" I focused on alterity and what caused Pecola to reach the desperate need to achieve blue eyes. After defending my thesis, I realized that I wanted to find out the "how," now that I had explored the "why." My MA thesis is a step towards finding that "how;" how can this loop of racial oppression be challenged/altered if not entirely wiped out? I started to think that it is as important to raise a voice from within as it is to raise a voice against those outside, who spew hate and discrimination. In search of these voices, I found Toni Morrison, Julie Dash, and Nnedi Okorafor among others, who have their own take on creating alternative lives and alternative futures. I looked at Okorafor's science fiction trilogy *Binti* through an Afrofuturistic lens to discuss the Himba cultural elements as active agents in Binti's futurity, and Binti's journey of attaining multiple identities and multiple futures. I explained how Okorafor enables a Himba girl with a radical future of becoming more than a human. Binti transcends temporal and spatial boundaries, as well as the boundaries between Black bodies and living technology, celebrating many ways of existing in the future. In Dash's *Daughters,* the colonial idea of "primitivity" linked to the Gullah culture is resisted through the recollection and practices of the Gullah women. My discussion on this recollection is focused both on the resistance to colonial

stereotypes and on the celebration of the Gullah culture through the continuous practice of the cultural traditions and rituals by the Gullah women. I specifically focus on Nana Peazant, Eula, and Yellow Mary to explore Dash's cinematic technique in imagining multiple ways of representing Black women with multiple futures. Dash presents that Black futurity can be free from being defined by slavery or colonialism only, and can contain cultural continuance, including queer futures. By exploring the alternative worlds that Nnedi Okorafor and Julie Dash create for Black people in their projects, I want to add to the conversations on the importance of creativity and imagination in projecting and rebuilding Black culture, Black womanhood, and Black futurities.

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