Storytelling as a Defamiliarizing Technique in Hopkinson's Midnight Robber and Okorafor's Lagoon

سرد القصص كتقنية تغريب في "منتصف الليل" لهوبكنسون "وبحيرة" لأوكورافور

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Abstract

One of the key features of Afro-diasporic women's speculative fiction is its focus on the storytelling techniques adopted from the oral tradition. The present paper examines Nalo Hopkinson's Midnight Robber (2000) and Okorafor's Lagoon (2014) and their endeavour to merge stylistics of defamilarization with the traditional African and Caribbean Folklore and mythology in which the effect of estrangement occurs through the use of storytelling. Relying on Viktor Shklovsky's and Darko Suvin's theories, this study focuses on a sum of narrative techniques that these Afro-diasporic women writers inject in their works to unfold a tale of folkloric science fiction. Hence, defamiliarization is very significant for reading such novels inasmuch as it demonstrates how black female authors of speculative narrative, particularly science fiction, blur the boundaries between the oral tradition and the written text. Equally, it is paramount to look more closely at how the authors employ and utilize those folkloric African aspects in their own sense of aesthetic. This paper has shown that the formal tropes adopted by these writers have added a new perspective from which the western science fiction could be challenged.

Keywords: Defamiliarization, speculative fiction, science fiction, storytelling.

ملخص البحث:

تتمثل إحدى السمات الرئيسية للخيال التخميني للمرأة الأفرو-ديسبورية في التركيز على تقنيات سرد القصص المعتمدة من التقليد الشفوي. تبحث هذه الورقة في(Midnight Robber 2000) لهوبكسنسون و Lagoon (2014) لاكورافر وسعيهما لدمج أساليب التغريب مع الفولكلور والأساطير الأفريقية والكاريبية التقليديةبحيث يحدث تأثير التغريب من خلال استخدام سرد القصص. بالاعتماد على نظريات فيكتور شكلوفسكي وداركو سوفين، تركز هذه الدراسة على مجموعة من التقنيات السردية التي تضخها هؤلاء الكاتبات من أصل أفريقي في أعمالهن لكشف قصة الخيال العلمي الفولكلوري. وبالتالي، فإن التغريب مهم جدًا لقراءة مثل هذه الروايات بقدر ما يوضح كيف أن المؤلفات السود للسرد التخميني، وخاصة الخيال العلمي، يطمسن الحدود بين التقليد الشفوي والنص المكتوب. وبالمثل، من الأهمية بإمكان النظر عن كثب في كيفية استخدام المؤلفين لتلك الجوانب الأفريقية الفولكلورية بمفهومهم الجمالي. أظهرت هذه الورقة أن الاستعارات الشكلية التي اعتمدها هؤلاء الكتاب أضافت منظورًا جديدًا يمكن من خلاله تحدي الخيال العلمي الغربي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التغريب، التخمين، الخيال العلمي، السرد القصصي.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Recently, there has been a notable interest in speculative fiction, specifically science fiction, among Afro-diasporic women authors. By keeping up with techno-scientific modernity, they have become a driving force behind the growing vanguard of international science fiction writers, countering the dominance of science fiction as a purely Western genre and contributing to the birth of Afrofuturism. This paper employs the methodlogical approach of Afrofuturism to examine Hopkinson's *Midnight Robber* (2000) and Okorafor's *Lagoon* (2014) as examples of speculative texts.Through the use of storytelling as a defamiliarizing technique, these works explore how African mythology and Caribbean folklore are essential in creating new worlds and perspectives, breaking down the boundaries between oral and written texts.
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2. Storytelling as a Defamiliarizing Technique:

2.1 Overview of Afro-diasporic Women's Speculative Fiction

Women authors of the African diaspora have risen to prominence in literary canon in the twenty-first century, moving beyond the fringes of male-authored literature. Through prestigious honors, best-selling books, and profound insight into women's experiences, Afro-diasporic women's creative artistry has received critical praise. They explore through a critical lens, the ways in which women in the global age of social, economic, and political transformation create new ways of telling the stories.

Afro-diasporic women's speculative fiction is a literary genre that tackles stories weaved by authors of the African descent on the experiences of black people and specifically black women from all corners around the world. The African Diaspora was created by five primary migrations, including the trans-Atlantic slave trade and the "Middle Passage". Women have been central to these experiences and processes, both by their presence and their role in the development of new communities. (Davies, 2005, par1).

Afro-diasporic women's speculative fiction often combines elements of science fiction, fantasy, and horror, it is also notable for its focus on Afrofuturism. The latter was first coined by Mark Dery (1994) in his seminal collection "Flame Wars : The Discourse of Cyberculture" in an attempt to define speculative fiction which deals with the African American themes and concerns in a techno-cultural society. Afrofuturism expresses and encourages the black imagination born out of the oppressed people who are looking for an alternative world through black lens. Through the "intersection of imagination, technology, the future, and liberation" Afrofuturists, whether through literature, visual arts, music, or grassroots organizing, redefine culture and notions of blackness for the present and the future (Womack, 2013, p.11). This genre offers an opportunity for these writers to express their experiences which are formed by their racial and ethnic identities. Further, Womack emphasizes the movement's diversity, stating that it "combines elements of science fiction, historical fiction, speculative fiction, fantasy, Afrocentricity, and magic realism with non-Western beliefs" As a result, it is "a total reenvisioning of the past and future speculation rife with cultural critiques" (Womack, 2013, p. 9).

2.2 Storytelling as a Defamiliarizing Technique:

Oral traditions are oral heritage that is transmitted from one generation to another through the words of the mouth. They help people make sense of the world and teach them about their culture. Africa has an interesting bulk of storytelling which is an important shared event that uses words, gestures, singing, facial expressions, body movements and acting using sometimes masks and costumes to make stories memorable and interesting.(' World Affairs Council of Houston') Storytelling is then a central component of the oral culture with its epics, songs, epigrams and folk tales which were all orally recited and foretold until more recent times when literacy has disseminated. The oral tradition is manifested in Afro-diasporic women's speculative texts in many facets. Caribbean, African folklore scattered throughout and give the writing more traditional African flavor.

Storytelling techniques are adopted within the works of the Afro-diasporic women's speculative fiction as a defamiliarizing strategy to challenge dominant narratives and offer alternative perspectives. The word "defamiliarization" was reproduced from the word *ostranenie* meaning "making strange". In his essay "Art as Technique," Viktor Shklovsky (1917) mentions about how art makes objects unfamiliar and introduces the terms practical and poetic language, in an attempt to indicate his notion of *ostranenie* (defamiliarization). Defamiliarization takes many facets by different critics and scholars; Darko Suvin's (1990) theory of Science fiction criticism is considered as a hallmark and resource for many subsequent critics that developed it. Suvin considered science fiction "as the literature of cognitive estrangement" , which is "the factual reporting of fictions". His notion of "cognitive estrangement" refers to the way science fiction estranges or distances readers from their knowledge and assumptions about what constitutes reality in order to move them to question those very assumption. Defamiliarization has been evolved to be used frequently to denote works of science and speculative fiction of the African daispora.

Interestingly, black women of the diaspora use non human beings or non realist worlds to defamiliarize social categories. There are a number of ways to explore defamiliarization in black speculative fiction works, one form is the use of magical realism which creates a sense of otherwodliness and disconnection from reality. Another form is the use of science fiction elements like futuristic setting or worlds, strange and alien creatures, using scientific or technological terminology which can create a sense of unfamiliarity with the world and the characters' place in it. Moreover, the speculative fiction penned by Afro-diasporic women employs distinctive methods of storytelling and narrative structures, resulting in an effect of defamiliarization. These authors serve as a vital link between the contemporary Western technological realm and the rich African legends and folktales. By incorporating oral traditions, they not only establish a new genre that is not purely Western, but also validate the notion that speculation and extrapolation bear a strong connection to African traditions. It is imperative to note that conventional African mythologies are replete with supernatural elements, which could serve as the impetus for non-realist literatures (Serrano, p. 43).) One way to elucidate the defamiliarizing effect in speculative narratives is to explore how these women authors

use African mythology, Caribbean folklore to create new worlds and perspectives. Another approach could focus on how black writers use science fiction to critique dominant narratives about race and technology exploring alternative visions of the future and black humanity.

Thus, the utilization of storytelling as a defamiliarizing technique engenders the presentation of commonplace concepts and constructs in novel and unfamiliar manners. This approach is particularly efficacious insofar as it challenges the preconceptions and expectations of readers, ultimately compelling them to adopt divergent viewpoints and perspectives. The resultant effect of such a process is one of estrangement, whereby readers are prompted to view the world in a markedly different manner..

3. Examples of Storytelling as a Defamiliarizing Technique in Nalo Hopkinson's *Midnight Robber* and Nnedi Okorafor's *Lagoon*:

Midnight Robber and *Lagoon* are significant examples of speculative fiction, a genre that includes other genres and subgenres like science fiction, fantasy, horror, and the gothic and makes social commentary on modern society by inventing alternate beings and ways of life. Written by black women of the diaspora at Twenty- first century, the works analyzed here portray to a great extent the hybridization of science fiction and fantasy genres that black women writers produce to warp up the reality within an alternative and new outlook outside the limits of the "generic normativity" (Dowdall, 2013, p.182)

In their use of the oral tradition, both writers estrange their readers from the reality and calling them to extrapolation as Nalo Hopkinson asserts, "Speculative fiction is a great place to warp the mirror, and thus impel the reader to view differently things that they've taken for granted" (Glave and Hopkinson, 2003, p. 149). Besides, Hopkinson and Okorafor estrange the readers from the genre itself. Because the genre of speculative fiction is set by definition in an alternate reality, it demands an inherent distancing on the part of the reader - cognitive estrangement. Hence, defamiliarization is very significant for reading such novels in which it demonstrates how black women's speculative fiction reconfigures the codes of reality and the codes of interpretation and analysis (Jones, 2015 p. 117)

Suvin's (1990) theoretical framework he introduces in his book *Metamorphosis* which focuses particularly on science fiction poetics is relevant to adopt in reading Nalo Hopkinson's *Midnight Robber* and Okorafor's *Lagoon* such as the theoretical concept of the "Novum" and "Cognitive Estrangement". The latter is very similar to the concept of defamiliarization that the Russian formalists perceive as the central strategy of all literature However, in offering such critical reading, Suvin's theory proves to be incomplete. For Hopkinson and Okorafor transcend the rational side of the text and its link to the empirical environment to intermingle even with the affective side of the text. Hopkinson crafts science fiction of her own blending AI technologies with the Afro-Caribbean oral traditions as a respect for the Middle Passage's significance, enjoyment of West Africa's Anansi oral storytelling tradition, and even a taste for sorrel, a West Indian fruit beverage as a foundation on which her narrative is framed. (Gregory E. Rutledge, p.12) The Anansi, a trickster figure of West African origin who Hopkinson refers to as "the cunning spider-man," provides the novel's infrastructure.

Likewise, Okorafor infuses science fiction tropes with west African oral tradition encompassing the alien invasion as central event through which the whole story revolves around weaving a futuristic vision of the logos. *Lagoon* is a work of art which is inspired and rests upon national greatness and has been bequeathed to her nation Nigeria. Aiyetoro and Olaoye (2016) in their article "Afro–Science Fiction: A Study of Nnedi Okorafor's *What Sunny Saw in the Flames* and *Lagoon*" display how Okorafor merges elements of magic and science fiction in its contents. They consider *Lagoon* as novelty in Nigerian literature which " marks a completely new turn in the history of Nigerian fiction and can be described as full-fledged Nigerian science fiction" (2016, p. 226) stressing the fact that" many oral elements in Nigerian literature are fantastic in nature"(2016, pp.230-231) that Nigerian literature started as an oral tradition which dates back to mid twentieth century.

The blending of mythology, magic may drop a literary work from the genre of science fiction which are rendered as unscientific mythological elements. However, considering the context of the West African understanding of science and mythology, "these elements are not "unscientific""(Anderson, par: 5) . Lucy Anderson mentions how Falen found that indigenous residents of Benin defined the occult as a 'science.'" And she Further takes evidence of the overlap between science and magic that can be found in precolonial Igbo metallurgy practices, where rituals and religious ideas embedded in the ironworking process were ritual and religious. (Anderson, par: 5)

Okorafor employs certain aspects of African mythology in *Lagoon*, such as Ijele's apparition in a café near Bar Beach or the presence of the Haitian spirit Legba. Adaora's husband makes allusions to witchcraft and accuses her of being a marine witch. This intersection between elements of African folklore and science fiction de-familiarizes the genre itself which is uncommon with the western parameters of science fiction tropes. "myth, orality, and indigenous belief systems are intrinsic to African modes of speculative storytelling" (Bryce, 2019, p.3).

Additionally, due to their hybrid positionality, these Afro-diasporic female writers deconstruct the traditional conventions of both genre and canon and blur the line between which is an African and which is an African American. Given the fact that the author is American born of Nigerian parents who was reared in the United States, Okorafor's *Lagoon* is fraught with American and Nigerian cultural allusions and languages that bridge the cultural divide between non-Nigerian readers and the book itself. She essentially describes her hybrid state as a *Naijamerican*"'Naija' is slang for 'Nigerian', implying an intimacy and familiarity with Nigeria. Also, *Naijamerican* is one word, implying a hybridized new individual whose parts cannot be separated." (Amonor, par3)

The power of storytelling is demonstrated in *Midnight Robber* and *Lagoon*. Through form and content, the present has been defamiliarized "while offering endless possibilities for the future" (232). *Midnight Robber* tells the story of Tan-Tan, a teen protagonist who grows from a child to an adult throughout the novel, first on the planet Toussaint and then, after being sent to the prison world of the New Half-Way Tree. The narrative starts in Toussaint, a utopian planet where the society witnesses the high peak of development, the world is totally submitted to an artificial information system that imposes organization and lessens the hard efforts for its inhabitants. While the plot sets around some 200 years into the future, *Midnight Robber* introduces what Samuel Delany

depicts as the "distortion of the present" that is commonly known in Afrofuturism (qtd. in *The Last Angel of History)* Tan-Tan identifies with the "Midnight Robber" masquerade, which is a Trinidadian metaphor for exile. It is a story of an African prince who escaped and became a robber to survive.(Hopkinson& Dianne, 2003)

Through the introduction of nanoparticles into the Earth, the Marryshow Corporation planted Toussaint "like God entering the woman; plunging into the womb of the soil to impregnate the planet with the seed of Granny Nanny,""her hands and her body".The Granny Nanny, a form of artificial intelligence, controls Toussaints' inhabitants' lives through the " Nansi Web", The Nation Worlds are, then, monitored, safeguarded, and protected by Granny Nanny Web, a vast data collection system.

> The tools, the machines, the buildings; even the earth itself on Toussaint and all the Nation Worlds had been seeded with nanomites—Granny Nanny's hands and her body. Nanomites had run the nation ships. The Nation Worlds were one enormous date-gathering system that exchanged information constantly through the Grande Nanotech Sentient Interface: Granny Nansi's Web. They kept the Nation Worlds protected, guided and guarded its people. (Hopkinson, 2000, p.10)

The nanobites gather and pass on Toussaint-related information to Granny Nanny which is connected to system of small unites known as "eshus" that takes control of the individual life and keeps them safe. An artificially intelligent messenger that travels between the planets and serves as a conduit between the inhabitants only the ''pedicab'' runners who provide local transportation, according to Suvin, "*SF is distinguished by the narrative dominance or hegemony of a fictional 'novum' (novelty, innovation) validated by cognitive logic*" (Suvin, 1979, p. 63, emphasis in the original). The nansy web is Hopkinson' fictive newness that creates a fictional world different from the real world and that adopts "a cognitive logic" or even" scientifically methodical cognition" (Suvin, 1979, p.66). The novum represents the difference in a fictional text that Suvin duplicates as 'imaginative difference' ". Hopkinson's use of the Granny Nanny as a novum in her fictional world is a prime example of how she incorporates imaginative difference into her work. By linking the Granny Nanny to logical tendencies and using it as a symbol, Hopkinson creates a unique and thought-provoking narrative that challenges readers' perceptions of reality. Such novum "attributes not only to the difference but to the symbolism in the text and hence technology is metaphorical". The Granny Nanny is Hopkinson's invented novum that is linked to logical tendencies which bears many symbolic transfigurations.

Besides, the locals of Toussaint are provided with ''earbuds'' which assure them to stay on-line with Granny Nanny anytime. This led "to information flow, but at the expense of privacy". (Booker &Thomas, 2009, p. 300). However, the runners stay always off-line as being away from the technological use but not as primitive, they are known by their performance of manual jobs. According to Irene Morrison, the Nansi Web and Granny Nanny are colonizing technologies which contain colonial connotations that helped "Afro-Caribbean- descended settlers during their 'leave taking' from earth"(Morrison, p.8).

On the other hand, *Lagoon* tells the story of an alien invasion that at first throws Lagos into utter disorder before reforming society in an idealized way bringing together

extraterrestrials and humans. Adaora, a marine biologist, Agu, a soldier, and Anthony, a rapper, are the three Nigerian protagonists in the story who encounter the alien envoy Ayodele, whom they attempt to protect so she can convey her message of peace to the Nigerian people and President. *Lagoon* begins with a statement fronting the book in which the words of two Lagos residents are duplicated in a way that instantly reveals the true subject of the book. Okorafor initiates her novel with a deep and captivating epigraph, "The cure for anything is salt water – sweat, tears, or the sea," which emanates from the literary genius of Isak Dinesen, an illustrious Danish writer and the pseudonym of Baroness Karen Blixen. She further proceeds to delineate the notion of Logos as a multifaceted construct that embodies the quintessence of Lagos being a no man's land, where the city belongs to everyone and no one. The phrase "Eko o nibaje!" (Lagos will never be destroyed!), which was uttered by a protester from Ajegunle District to local reporters on the night of the momentous occurrence, reinforces the idea that Lagos is an entity that exists beyond the realm of human ownership. Okorafor also delves into the paradoxical nature of Lagos, a city that is notorious for its inefficiencies, yet remains a hub of significant occurrences. Lastly, she recounts the experience of an American white woman who was at the wrong place and wrong time, which serves to highlight the complexity and unpredictability of life in Lagos

Due to their integration into the African cultures of the authors' origins, both *Midnight Robber* and *Lagoon* display a number of particularly unique elements that completely diverge from conventional science fiction tropes, such as various representations of elements from African mythologies and folklore. These tropes defamiliarize the science fiction itself.

The language plays an important factor in oral storytelling; the language used in *Midnight Robber* is similar to a folktale tradition which emphasizes repetition of words, phrases and lines. Hopkinson transfers oral tradition and speech patterns to the written word. It is an epitome of "Speakerly Text," as described by Henry Louis Gates Jr. (as cited in Marshall, 2016, p. 220)

Moreover, Hopkinsons renders language as 'an alien' by means of entwining the elements of Caribbean folklore and science fiction with Creole to create a unique genre that "departs from the traditional methods of nation building employed by canonical Caribbeanwriters" (Mukherjee, 2012. p. 204). The poem 'Stolen' by David Findley serves as its intriguing epigraph. The poem displays "the profound power of Creolised English as well as the Midnight Robber's subversive Robber-talk"(Marshall, p. 210)

> I stole the torturer's tongue!
> […] watch him try an' claim as his own this long, strong old tongue's
> new-remembered rhythms…
> hear this long tongue! fear this long tongue!
> I know this tall tale to be mine too, and I'll live or die by it.
> I stole the torturer's tongue!' (Findley in Hopkinson, 2000, epigraph).

In doing so, *Midnight Robber* was able to eliminate tensions between textual and oral culture, as well as between creator and creature,' master' and 'slave'. (Boyle, 2009,

p.181). Hopkinson transforms the English language as she hybridizes it by mixing British Standard English, American English with Trinidadian and Jamaican creole "hacking" a language that harkens back to the Middle Passage, slavery, and imperialism. 'Hacking' is not only concerned with   characters' creation of code in speech, but it also involves "their conceptions of community." (Enteen, 2007.p. 282) The predicab runner, Beata scribbles in a manner that unveils Hopkinson's intention to hack the written language to imply oral language by coining new words: She[Beata] "hummed something that sounded like nannysong, but fast, so fast, a snatch of notes that hemidemisemiquavered into tones [Antonio] couldn't distinguish" (Hopkinson, 2000, p. 9)

Hence, Hopkinson abrogates the imperial cultural pattern, and " its aesthetic, illusory, standard of normative or 'correct' usage, and its assumption of a traditional and fixed meaning ' inscribed' in the words" (Ashcroft et al 2002, p. 37). The technologies that are used in *Midnight Robber* adopt a striking names which are unfamiliar to those that exist normally in science fiction (Mukherjee, 2012, p. 4). Hopkinson rejects to adopt one singular language and she abrogates the Euro-centric predisposition of technological language resulting in an " innovative medley of science fiction and folklore" (Mukherjee, 2012.p. 1) she avers "'I am fascinated with the notion of breaking an imposed language apart and remixing it"((Hopkinson, 'Code Sliding', 2006) Granny Nanny is used in the novel as a substitute of the white dominant scientific terms to designate the artificial Intelligence (AI) , "four-eye" which is a Caribbean word, is also used in the novel to designate the communication system, "four-eye" stands for "a seer" a being that is able to see in all the dimensions" and communicate with the beings there"(Hpkinson & Glave, 2003, pp. 149-50) Nanny Song which" is a type of language based on new sounds, and its understanding the song which is key to the survival of the Caribbean community in Toussaint"and it is a code of nanny's communication.

On the other hand, *Lagoon* as multi-layered narrative shows"the possible effects of an alien invasion on different individuals in Nigerian society."(Olaoye& Aiyetoro, 2016, p. 239) By setting the most focal events in Nigeria rather than America or England, Okorafor deconstructs the familiarity of the first encounter narrative hence, in this sense the genre itself is defamiliarized, or as Derrida states, 'Deconstructed' in order to serve its ''artistic purpose''(30-31).

In *Anansi's Journey: A Story of Jamaican Cultural Resistance*, Emily Zobel Marshall (2012) demonstrates how the Anansi framework changed as the stories transitioned from the setting of a West African environment to a plantation in the West Indies. Anansi tales are an Akan-Asante cultural tradition that dates back to the people who lived in Ghana, West Africa. They had distinct social and political purposes in Asante villages. This Anansi folktale tradition spread across the African diaspora and specifically into the Caribbean with the forced emigration of Africans during the Atlantic slave trade. Ananse tales "depict a physically vulnerable creature using his intelligence to prevail over larger animals" (Marshall, P. 6) and initially accomplish a political purpose by offering a respectable forum for political discourse and criticism, which ultimately strengthens community ties as she avers:

There were certain rules to be adhered to if one wanted to complain about or mock the powerful in a tale what would protect the teller from causing offence. First, the tales must only be told after nightfall. Second, there must be a public disclaimer made before the start and at the end of each story to show that the tales were not strictly true [...] It was in this way that the tales played a vital political role as a medium for members of the Asante community to air their issues publicly. This public airing could end in resolution or simply diffuse negative emotions into laughter and mockery, thus avoiding the buildup of resentment and retribution" (Marshall, 2012, p. 22).

Indeed, *Midnight Robber* and *Lagoon* are influenced by western science fiction tropes like cyborg, aliens, climate fiction and cyberpunk. However, Okorafor opts to base the abilities of her heroes on African mythology that gradually become associated with a number of African folkloric figures(Bawin, p. 51) Hopkinson has intentionally drawn upon the Caribbean oral traditions and carnivals with her science fiction novel as an intricate masterpiece that eludes any type of facile categorization. Various allusions and incarnations are made implicitly and explicitly in *Midnight Robber* and *Lagoon.*

In an interview with Times Warner, Hopkinson avers that so many stories and paradigms for technology are based on Greek and Roman myth and language; "we call rocket ships 'Apollo,' communication devices 'telephones,' and a human-machine interface a 'cyborg.'"which has an impact on both the names and types of the technologies that are developed. So, "what technologies a largely African diasporic culture might build, what stories its people might tell itself about technology." (Hpkinson & Glave, An Interview with Hopkinson, 2003, p.)For that reason, Hopkinson intermingles effortlessly the traditions of the past with the technological inventions in futuristic space blending legendary and the myths of the Robber Queen and the douens with AI and nanotechnology. The names that have been advocated to these AI technologies have significant allusions to Afro-Caribbean traditions and contain a colonial connotation.)

> Granny Nanny stands for the Obeah woman who "became the matriarchal figure of   escaped Maroons in Jamaica" also known as "Grandy Nanny" or "Queen Nanny," The artificial intelligence that safeguards all the people in a planetary system becomes Granny Nanny, named after the revolutionary and magic worker who won independent rule in Jamaica for the Maroons who had run away from slavery. Rather than being a "Big Brother" paradigm it is an affectionate reference to her sense of love, care, and duty.(Hopkinson, Time Warner Bookmark Interview, 2000)

Granny Nanny is regarded as a national hero of Jamaica because she led the Windward Maroons in their fight against the British with strength and wisdom. Nanny has a complex symbolic meaning and even takes on the meaning of love, care, duty and above all feminine wisdom. Arguably, Hopkinson uses AI names that stemmed from religion, like eshu" The operating system that runs a dwelling named after the West African deity who can be in all places at once, who is the ghost in the machine.(Hopkinson, Time Warner Bookmark Interview Hopkinsons 's transplantation of the Afro-Caribbean folktales foretold by the eshu to an anonymous listener, in that, the reader encounters multiple, competing, and contradictory meaning, such foretelling

technique raises the reader cognitive estrangement; the story is shaped in an oral mold. Hopkinson's novel embraces the African diasporic experience in a significant manner by employing the strategy of trickesterism. This concept was introduced to the Caribbean and the United States through stories told by slaves in Yoruba culture, which featured the trickster god Esu and figures similar to Esu, such as Bret Rabit (Allen & Williams, 2012, p. 77). Through the use of trickesterism, Hopkinson is able to subvert traditional power structures and challenge dominant narratives, ultimately bringing to light the resilience and agency of African diasporic communities.

Monsters, cyborg, shapeshifting creatures are at the heart of the poetics of defamiliarization in speculative fiction. Okorafor incorporates shapeshifting creatures through the incarnation and symbolic transfiguration of various figures from Igbo culture. With her three major characters in the narrative, she uses and alludes to Mami Wata, "a West African water deity comprised of the upper body of a beautiful black woman with long braids and the tail of a colourful fish." (Hugo, 2017, p. 49) with her abilities to shapeshift between male or female bodies.

Of great importance is Adaora's symbolic transfiguration of Mami Wata as sometimes referred to as a "Marine witch," a water spirit of witchcraft "the goddess of all marine witches," due to her water-themed skills. The Igbo totemic figure of the leopard, a symbol of power and protection, is commonly linked to Agu and his superhuman strength. The pan-African divinity of the storyweaving spider is embodied within Anthony's rhythm and his capacity to move those who hear him. (Bawin, 51) Science fiction conventions are embodied in these individuals' supernatural abilities, however, Okorafor ties her science fiction to its African ancestors (Okorafor, TEDTALK X 2017) the Nigerian folklore is picked up to be the origin of her supernatural aspects.

> This originality is notably visible in the fact that the extraordinary abilities of the protagonists are thematically associated with animals (fish, leopard, spider), which links the supernatural with the science fiction features of the novel but rather with the animistic and totemic tradition of Nigerian culture, deeply rooted in natural and animal elements." (Bawin, 2020, p. 51)

In addition, other entities from Nigerian mythology that materialize concurrently with the extraterrestrial invasion are presented by Okorafor; the appearance of the deity Legba during the riots: ''Boy, did I have a story to tell my mother. Legba, the god of the crossroads was alive and well in the country of his origin'' (Okorafor, 2014, p. 214). In addition to the appearance of Ijele in a masquerade ceremony as person dressed in a costume to honor spiritual beings, but this masquerade appears to be more than this. ''This was not some guys dressed up in an elaborate costume […] Holy shit, this was Ijele. The chief of all Masquerades, Igbo royalty'' (Okorafor, 2014, p.199). In a similar vein, the novel unveils another character Udide Okwanka, the huge spider deity who weaves tales, Okorafor emphasizes him by having him narrate the novel.

According to Shcklovsky (1917), art is a sum of literary and artistic devices that the artist manipulates to his work. Okorafor has used another narrative trope to trap the reader's perceptions ; the narrator the Igbo deity Udide Okwanka that has emerged later in the novel . It is just in chapter 44 that Udide Okwanka enunciates himself as the narrator "I am Udide, the narrator, the story weaver, the Great Spider " (Okorafor, 2014,

p.290) welcoming his readers. The whole chapter is written in Italics wherein the reader realizes that the narration of past events of the story has been foretold by Udide Okwanka. " I spin the story. This is the story I've spun" (Okorafor, 2014, p. 290) This technique of having the narrator introduce himself and take control of the story is a common device in African storytelling. It adds a layer of authenticity to the narrative and invites the reader to fully immerse in the story.

The narrator keeps his eye on the events without being involved in its realm; he knows it all because he creates it all. Through his lenses, the characters' view points are variously knitted. Adaora, Agu, Anthony, Chris, Fisayo, swordfish, bat ect. "I've knitted their stories and watched them knit their own crude webs" (Okorafor, p. 290). Likewise, the different stratum of the story have been carefully weaved. The story appears to be a net in which all the voices, stories, and characters view points overlap in *"great tapestry"*.Okorafor makes a halt and pause in this chapter wherein the readers situates the narrator who was omnisciently invisible. The visibility of the narrator refers to two important points: The nature and the identity of the narrator that the author wants to emphasize.

Similarly, reminiscent of a folktale tradition, *Midnight Robber* opens with a voice of a narrator, paving the reader for the story: "Oho. Like it starting, oui? Don't be frightened, sweetness; is for the best. I go be with you the whole time. Trust me and let me distract you little bit with one Anansi story" (Hopkinson, 2000, p. 1). One of the Anansi tale' tendencies mentioned by Marshall is to qualify " public disclaimer " at the start and the end of the story. This is clearly displayed in *Midnight Robber* in which Eshu declares at the start of the book"let me distract you little bit with one anansi story"The novel comes to a close with the Eshu's parting words: "Call that George, the story done. Jack Mandora, me nah choose none!" (Hopkinson, 2000, p. 329) . These formal devices set up the foundational basis for the Eshu's tale as a storyteller and situate the novel as the Eshu's tale. (Korsnack, 2019.p. 31)

In similar vein, Debra Providence (2020) maintains that the lines between the traditional storyteller and the science fiction elements in Hopkinson's novel are blurred in *Midnight Robber*. According to her, Hopkinsons's usage of call-and-response pattern in the introduction denotes the usage of oral forms in *Midnight Robber* along with the storyteller's continued use of nation language. It is also the first instance of Hopkinson's novum, which 'deterritorializes' both the well-known traditional oral element and the foreign 'technology from without'. The storyteller skillfully established a dichotomous relationship between Toussaint and New Half-Way Tree—a duality in the characters of the two planets—that Tan-Tan, the protagonist, will be greatly influenced by as she grows. "New Half-Way Tree is where Tan-Tan end up, and crick-crack, this she story,"(Hopkinsons, 2000. p.3) the narrator says as she concludes her description of these two realms.

The story marks some narrative interruptions and intrusions, when Eshu the narrator starting and restarting in an attempt to introduce the context story for the listener. This recalls the structure of oral traditional stories. The narration is frequently interrupted to shift the scene to Tan- Tan the robber queen that is role played by Tan- tan the protagonist, this shift is marked by bold-face type which "which immediately alert the

reader to the digression and serve as a simultaneously reminder of the Eshu's narrative presence."(Korsnack, 32)

At the end of the novel, Eshu unveils the curtain on some other member and interlocutor whom he foretells his story, the unborn child in Tan-Tan's womb through which the effect of estrangement occurs **"**Eshu, typically, adopts an Anansi persona, tricking the reader and making them work hard to create meaning and follow the thread

'Well, maybe I find a way to come through the one-way veil to bring you a   story, nuh? Maybe I is a master weaver. I spin the threads. I twist warp 'cross weft. I move my shuttle in and out, and smooth smooth, I weaving you my story, oui?' (Hopkinson, 2000, pp. 2–3)

Using storytelling techniques, Hopkinson and Okorafor have unfolded an oral science fiction tale blurring the line between the written and spoken form which estranges the reader from the science fiction genre itself. Notably, both of the authors not only utilize and incarnate existing mythological figures but they also attempt to modernize them by changing the circumstances surrounding their appearances. Hence, both authors use tales from the folklore in their own way to mold it in a new perception. Hopkinson asserts in an interview that she intends to make Tan-Tan's story as a part of a folktale to be passed down through generation" as happens with tales that are passed down through oral tradition—the stories of her life would become blended with older folk tales"

Moreover, through the storytelling as a defamliarizing technique, the thematic content is treated in these works in multiple ways exploring themes of identity, race, and gender through the lens of African spirituality and mythology. In this context, Hopkinson asserts that the Carnival imagery that is used in the novel is a revolutionary celebration to mock whites and overthrow accepted world order. (Hopkinson, Time Warner Bookmark Interview) and "midnight robber" masquerade is the guise that Tan-Tan adopts to hide behind as a metaphor of exile and alienation after being raped by her father. Tan-Tan's story is an expression of the children's hidden agony and suffering by their family member. The guise of midnight robber is then a way to be adapted once again in that society.

4. CONCLUSION

As a corollary, the current paper contends that both Hopkinson and Okorafor have adopted newfangled strategy through which they challenge and break away from conventional tropes of the Western science fiction adding new flavor, that heralds their appropriation of Afro-Caribbean and West African cultural traditions as a means of reclaiming and celebration. Indeed, technology acts as the nova in many dominant science fiction narrative; however, in Afro-diasporic speculative fiction, it has been adorned with graceful folkloric traditions. It is worth noting that both writers demonstrate clearly their intentions to transcend the limitations of Western science fiction and offer a fresh take on the genre that is both empowering and transformative. Both writers blur the line between the written and oral form of the text.

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