Africanfuturism, the Posthuman Turn, and the Black Cyborg in Nnedi Okorafor's *Noor* (2021)

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Abstract

This paper aims to analyze Nnedi Okorafor's Africanfuturist novel *Noor* (2021) in relation to the posthuman figure of the cyborg. It draws on both posthumanist theory and Africanfuturism to situate Okorafor's novel within more extensive conversations about Black futurity. It discusses Okorafor's departure with earlier movements of Black futurism, especially Afrofuturism, towards "Africanfuturism." It then sketches out the major tenets and concerns of her Africanfuturist project in relation to critical posthumanism. Placing her work within the wider scene of posthuman critical thought, it highlights how Okorafor centers Africanfuturism in *Noor* and utilizes technological cyborgization as a means of transcending black human limitations of all sorts: biological, social, or political. It is argued that Africanfuturism, in its engagement with the cyborg figure, challenges and disrupts (post)humanism's Eurocentric ontological conception of the (black) human. The paper finally concludes that Okorafor's *Noor* provides an example of the narratives informed by the insights of a 'posthuman Africanfuturist approach' that places the posthuman principle of enhancing African people's lives and future through new technological advances at the center. As such, the paper offers an intersectional approach to Okorafor's concept of Africanfuturism and adds new dimensions to understanding the synthesis of technology and the Black body through a posthuman lens.

Keywords: Africanfuturism, cyborgs, Okorafor, *Noor*, posthumanism

Introduction: Racist Representation of Africa in Science Fiction

Africa is often missing in science fiction's envisioning of the future. For long, science fiction has supported supremacist ideologies of development that assign the model of human achievement and progress to the white Western culture, overlooking any possibilities for future configuration to the 'Other world.' Acting as a justification for the colonization of the other backward world by the more advanced European colonial powers, this hegemonic ideology has often been justified and reinforced by many popular science fiction narratives and movies, such as *Star Trek (*1966), *The Matrix* (1999), *Black Panther* (2018), and *Black Is King* (2020), in which the representation of black people remains either missing or stereotyped as alien. Thus, according to many critics of the genre, such as Christian Jimenez (2019), science fiction has been mostly dominated by white supremacist ideologies where the black body remains as "either absent altogether or represented only in subordinate position" to the White superhuman hero (177). In the same vein, Lisa Dowdall (2020) claims that Western science fiction reasserts long-disproved theories of racial inequalities and perpetuates for "the dehumanizing ideologies that justified colonialism and slavery" (150). This dehumanizing view of Africa and its people issues from the Humanist belief that Africa [and Blacks] has been that of a continent [and a people] that contributed little or nothing to human ideas and civilization (Hill 5). Moreover, being complicit with the interests of the Euro/American coloniality of power and its ontological conception of the Other, the representation of Africa in popular science fiction often appears to bear out the negative prediction that Africa is "the zone of the absolute dystopia" (Eshun 392). This Humanist view of Africa perpetuates "the colonial idea of Africans as the condemned people of the earth, the anthropos of the planet and the wretched of the earth" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 253). Being widely circulated within global discourses of development, including science fiction, these images of Africa and its condemned people reinforce

the boundary between the continent and the advanced world, with the result that "so-called third world subjects are positioned at a primordial state of human progress, situated within a constricting teleology of always aspiring to, yet never able to attain, the position of white Western Man" (Wynter 310). Thus, science fiction has been both an outcome, and an exponent, of such colonial and racist standards of human progress and achievement.

This negative attitude towards Africa and its people has become a recurrent trope in mainstream western science fiction which, along with its white Western corporate technofuturist ideologies, views Africa's future as bleak and apocalyptic, denying the continent any possibilities for development or transformation. However, for Africa and its people, this bleak view and its apocalyptic manifestations are not a possibility of the future. Rather, "the apocalypse has already come," as Taryne Taylor (2024) declares, "a century or more ago in the form of colonization, slavery, and genocide" (2). Thus, if the future has already come centuries ago, what is the role of the Black writer in the current posthuman age? Further, if a new future is reaching for Africa and its people, how do they reach towards it, especially in a globalized posthuman world characterized by unprecedented technological and scientific advances? How do African writers of science fiction respond to the cultural shifts brought by the posthuman turn and how do they negotiate the growing impact of new technologies on the Black human body? The task now is to build a better future, one that is imagined by Africans and for Africans. Therefore, the major goal of this paper is to examine how African futurist writers, specifically the Nigerian-American Nnedi Okorafor, have responded to the current posthuman, technologically-based remaking of humanity with an African perspective. It will be argued that such a future has inspired significant African futurist modes of representation. Of the various forms of black futurisms that have been recently developed, Afrofuturism stands out prominent.

First coined by the American writer Mark Dery in the 1990s, Afrofuturism designates a cultural and literary movement that represents the experiences and concerns of African American writers in response to the prevailing Euro-American techno-culture. It was originally developed as a response to the exclusion of African Americans from a techno-culture scene that was dominated by "images of technology and prosthetically enhanced future" (Dery 180) and overlooked any possibility of black futurism. As such, Afrofuturism's main goal is to bring the marginalized experiences of African Americans into conversation with modern science and technology. This aim has been eloquently articulated in the work of the leading authors of Afrofuturism, especially O. Butler, S. R. Delany and N. Hopkinson, who questioned the normative tendency of Western science fiction and attempted to recenter the representation of black futurity and experience in science fiction. The synthesis of African Americans' unique experiences with Western techno scientific culture enables Afrofuturist thinkers to transform, rather than to reject, the conventions and principles of the science fiction genre to produce innovative images of marginalized Black futures where Black people are fully articulated culturally, politically and socially. Thus, Afrofuturism plays a crucial role in reconstructing the relationship between science fiction and Black futurism.

However, despite its centrality to the development of contemporary Black science fiction, Afrofutuirsm remains a predominantly Westernized subgenre of science fiction where Afrofuturist authors work from an African American marginalized position. Therefore, Afrofuturism is often criticized for being limited only to the African-American diasporic experience, negotiating only their needs and concerns in relation to the contemporary techno-culture (Dery 181). In turn, it dilutes the peculiarities and the diversity of native African cultures, cosmologies and experiences. Therefore, many African authors claim that Afrofuturism does not bridge the gap between science

fiction and black futurism, and, thus, African science fiction requires its own identity. For example, the Nigerian British writer Tade Thompson claims that "Afrofuturism is specifically American … and 'geopolitically inappropriate' as a descriptor of speculative fiction from the African continent" (qtd. in Samatar 175). Similarly, at CoNZealand, Nigerian author Oghenechovwe Ekpeki describes Afrofuturism as "mostly pertain[ing] to the broader diaspora to the exclusion of stories from within the African continent itself" (qtd. in Hanchey 577). In the same vein, South African author Mohale Mashigo argues that Afrofuturism often exploits the African continent "as a costume or a stage to play out … ideas" instead of addressing African materialities and situated cosmologies (xi). Thus, to go beyond the limitations of Afrofuturism and bring Africa back to the futurist imagery, new voices, with different aesthetic values and techniques, are needed to prompt a distinct futurist movement that not only represents but also emerges from Africa. In other words, there is a need to develop authentic African narratives that are not dominated by Western culture and do not reproduce the stereotypical images that have for long devalued the representation of the African continent. Among the recent growing movements that attempt to sidestep the limitations of Afrofuturism and its African American orientation is *African*futurism.

From Afrofuturism to *Africanfuturism*: Out of the Past into the Future

The frustration with the delinquent aesthetic potential of Afrofuturism as a westernized subgenre of science fiction has kicked off the rise of the new movement of Africanfuturism. Unlike Afrofuturism's inclination towards diaspora, Africanfuturism stresses the need to root the genre of science fiction in Africa, emphasizing its own needs, peculiarities, and diversity. Expressing her frustration with the Afrofutirist narratives she encountered in her childhood, the leading Nigi-American figure of Africanfuturism Nnedi Okorafor recalls:

> Growing up, most science fiction novels and films presented boldly white male–dominated worlds where I knew I could never exist on my own terms. In these narratives, I found that I, more often than not, empathized with the aliens/others more than the protagonists, so reading these stories felt more like an attack on my person than an empowerment. I also resisted the themes of exploration with the intent to colonize that ran so strong in these narratives. They never felt right to me (especially being the child of immigrants from an African country colonized by Europeans) or interesting. (*Broken Places* 4)

First coined in 2019, the term "Africanfuturism" was created by Okorafor out of her disappointment with the limited scope and ideological bias of Afrofuturism to designate the growing body of literary and cultural work that reconstitutes the relationship between Africa and the contemporary globalized high-tech culture. In particular, Africanfuturism is an emerging subgenre of science fiction that recognizes the amalgamation of real African cultures and experience with the imaginative, accentuates the role of technologies in envisioning optimistic futures for African countries, and centers African perspectives over Western points of view, as she explains: "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'" ("Africanfuturism Defined"). Her departure with Afrofuturism is provoked by the premise that African continental concerns and material realities are being obscured through labeling African work 'Afrofuturist.' Rather, she contends that Africanfuturism has different stakes from the Western-centered Afrofuturism. The

primary goal is to assert that Africa and its people belong in the future, and that this future should be imagined by Africans and for Africans.

Although both Afrofuturism and Africanfuturism proceed from common grounds, "through blood, spirit, history and future" ("Africanfuturism Defined"), Okorafor argues that the major contribution of Africanfuturism is the emphasis it places on the cultural differences of African oriented themes and needs which undoubtedly deviate from current realities of African-Americans. Africanfuturism aims to expand the scope of Afrofuturism beyond its Eurocentric limitations and influence in order to express indigenous African experience and sensibility: "Africanfuturism is specifically and more directly rooted in African culture, history, mythology and point of view and then branches out to African Diaspora" ("Africanfuturism Defined"). Thus, while Afrofuturism is deeply influenced by the Western tradition of science fiction, Africanfuturism widens the scope of this tradition to imagine Africa's future from an African perspective "emerging from the contexts, cosmologies, and complexities of African continental life" (Hanchey 119). Okorafor's project endeavors to re-center Africa and its people within the futuristic scene and to challenge the presumed authority of the futurist Euro/American narratives as the sovereign representatives of Africa and its future potentiality. As Sandra J. Lindow (2023) explains, "her internal camera has always been on the devastating effects of colonialism on Africa, its cosmology, its continental life, and its present and future potential to become an international power" (6). In order to bring Africa back to the global scene, Okorafor believes, it is necessary to reconstitute its relationship with the current techno-scientific transformation of the world and how this transformation has reshaped the lives and futures of Black people on the continent not in diaspora. It is particularly at this point of techno-scientific transformation that Okorafor's Africanfuturism engages with the posthuman turn.

Africanfuturism and the Posthuman Turn

Okorafor's engagement with posthumanism begins with the transhuman promise of using advanced technology to improve people's lives. Basically, transhumanism is a philosophical and cultural movement that is based on the extropian principle of enhancing people's lives and future through advances in science and technology. This core principle is clearly stated at the outset of the Transhumanist Declaration that "[H]umanity will be radically changed by technology in the future" (The Transhumanist Association). Transhumanists believe that science and technology can enable human beings to transcend their limitations of all sorts, biological, natural or social, and expand their abilities beyond their 'vulnerable' human boundaries. For example, advances in technologies, such as genetic engineering, information technology, virtual reality and artificial intelligence, can help people to extend their life-span, maximize their physical capacities, control their own mental attitudes and regulate their feelings and emotions. As such, it asserts the reasonable use of available technologies to improve human beings' physical and non-physical capacities. The purpose of this technological reformulation of human life is to give birth to posthuman subjects which, still belonging to the human species, possess both human and technological traits together in one entity. The promise is that human beings' rational incorporation of technology would help them transcend their present human form with all its vulnerabilities and anxieties, to become "happier, smarter, healthier, and more intelligent, live longer, and be better at actualizing their goals at the individual and societal levels. At this stage, we will no longer be talking about humanity but transhumanity—a stage where all humans have moderately use of technology to enhance themselves, being half-human and half-technology" (Chimakonam 55). Through her Africanfuturist project, Okorafor foresees the viability of reshaping the African

human condition through technology, a condition where African people use technology to enhance their abilities, transcend their limitations, and engage with the posthuman.

Guided by the life-enhancement principles of transhumanism, Okorafor's vision of the posthuman condition in Africa aims at the promotion of intelligent life in the continent to transcend its entrenched (post)colonial constraints via the rational use of technology. In fact, Okorafor's project is not the only attempt to explore Black artists' engagements with the posthuman. Earlier contributions can be found in Kristen Lillvis's *Posthuman Blackness and the Black Imagination* (2017). Drawing on posthuman theory, Lillvis introduces the term "posthuman blackness" to refer to black people's engagement with the future imaginary from a historical perspective, destabilizing the boundary between history and potentiality and demonstrating the continuity between black subjects' past and future. Yet, Lillvis's project of posthuman blackness remains Afrofuturist as its scope remains focused on African American literature and experience. Drawing from her African roots, Okorafor, unlike Lillvis, adopts transhumanism's zeal for enhancing black people's life and transcending the limitations imposed upon them by the (post)colonial discourse in order to create Black posthuman subjects that fit into the future. She embraces the transhuman potential to upgrade African people into posthuman subjects, adopting its values of "perpetual progress, self-transformation, practical optimism, intelligent technology, open society, self-direction, and rational thinking" as her mutation of posthumanism (More 5). In her engagement with the posthuman turn, Okorafor creates an African variant of posthumanism that reconstitutes the black subject's relationship to technology. The key element that embodies this spirit of posthuman transformation and progress in Okorafor's Africanfuturist project is the cyborg figure.

In her "Manifesto for Cyborgs" (1985), the prominent posthuman critic Donna Haraway describes the cyborg as "cybernetic organism, a hybrid form of being between human and

machine," generated by advanced technology (5). The cyborg is a posthuman subject that amalgams the biological and human aspects with technology to form a whole new entity. Basically, cyborg identity is hybrid, signifying the interconnected, relational and symbiotic relations of the human to the non-human. In other words, both components of the cyborg figure, i.e., the human and the technological, are closely interwoven, neither capable of existing independently from the other. Basically, Haraway used the cyborg imagery to find "a way out of the maze of dualisms in which we have explained our bodies and our tools to ourselves" (181). The cyborg figure is an attempt to redefine the concept of the human away from its dualistic basis, namely, the separation of the self and other, that preserves domination of the Western, white, masculine Man over all those constituted as "others" like women and people of colors. The major contribution of Haraway's cyborg theory lies in its challenge to such dualisms as self/other, Black/White, human/machine, and male/female that have served as the ideological basis for the White Man's suppression of the Other for long. For Haraway, as Sherryl Vint (2020) explains, the cyborg is "a creature without dualisms, a figure of both/and that was always and simultaneously human and machine, natural and cultural" (223). Turning human beings into hybrids, cyborg identity provides an opportunity for human beings to learn "how not to be Man, the embodiment of Western logos" (173). It produces 'different' posthuman subjectivities that compellingly challenge dominant exploitive Western ideologies. Now the other becomes an integral part of the self, eluding any kind of domination of one side over the other.

Nonetheless, the ontological basis of cyborg identity maintains the same notion of the technological supremacy of the White Man over the other 'primitive' world. That is, the cyborg figure remains a western-centered construction intended to represent White Man's control over the technology He invented as well as the other natural world. Thus, in spite of its role in liberating

the human subject from the anthropocentrism of Humanism's ossified dualistic structures of identity, the posthuman cyborg continues to be a tool of expanding the White Man's exploitation of the technologically backward Other. In its perception of the Other, cyborg ontology rests on a dualistic view of Europe as a technologized paradise and Africa as a primitive region, violated by Western exploration and colonization. Black Africans have been animalized, as Zakiyyah Iman Jackson (2020) reveals, within "the imaginary of global raciality" which is deeply rooted in Western philosophy for centuries and has continued to influence the posthuman discourse today (89). Thus, the posthuman transformation of Black subjects becomes problematic, as Michalinos Zembylas (2018) clarifies: 'when certain people have never been treated as humans—as a result of ongoing colonial practices—post-human approaches advocating a move away from humanism might be seen as an alibi for further denial of humanity to these same people" (255). Therefore, the ontological basis of cyborg formation is denounced by Okorafor for embracing white, Western perspectives in addressing the critical question of what it means to be a posthuman subject in a globalized, technological-driven world, overlooking the potential of black cyborg formations under similar conditions. In her critical approach to posthumanism, Okorafor draws attention to the problem of the absence of Black people from this scenario of posthuman development, raising the question of the viability of the Black cyborg figure within a globalized world governed by the laws of (Western) science and technology. What kind of identity does a Black cyborg have? Can the Black cyborg speak? In what way does the Black body correlate with a posthuman interpretation? It is exactly the potential of the cyborg figure to think beyond the dualism of cyborg identiy formation that makes it such a potent image for Africanfuturism.

Okorafor criticizes the explicit racialization of the cyborg figure by the White normative standard of cyborgization and the absence of the black cyborg from the posthuman scenario of

development. She sees in the cyborg figure the answer to the problem of the absence of the Black subject from the future. She insists that Black cyborgization enables new forms of Black consciousness and futurism by imagining black cyborg figures that are able to transcend their limitations through technology. As such, the Black cyborg functions as a symbolic other to the universal white (post)human figure of western thought. It thematizes the exclusionary and discriminatory tendencies of the humanist and posthuman discourses that have categorized the "missing people...those marked by race, gender, orientation, colonialism, labor, or in other ways" as inferior to "the abstract, universal, and putatively 'neutral' man of western thought" (Braidotti 165). The following section explores the intersection of Africanfuturism and posthumanism in Okorafor's recent novel, *Noor*[1]. In order to explore the paradigm of the posthuman in Okorafor's novel, it is argued that the figure of the cyborg is decisive in the novel, especially in the technological modification of the black human body.

Posthuman Africanfuturist Manifestations in *Noor*

Noor (2021) is an Africanfuturistic novel in which Okorafor transforms the distinctive features of science fiction, especially cyborgization and technology, in order to offer alternative visions of the future from a black African perspective. The novel explores the possibilities for intervention within the future beyond the white supremacist imaginary that excludes Africa and its people in its future imaginings. Okorafor's purpose is to disconnect science fiction from its Euro-American visions and ideological fantasies about Africa as an uncivilized, undeveloped, barbaric, and violent place. Thus, running throughout the novel is a utopic futuristic thread of progress and development of Africa, a 'place that was too far ever to get to. But maybe someday it would not be' (Okorafor, *Who* 286). This place is skillfully captured in the futuristic Nigeria imagined by Okorafor in *Noor*

where aspects of prosperity and development are diverse. For example, the country relies on large-scale flying drones to deliver goods and genetically modified food:

> Delivery drones were always local, and these warehouses made it so that they never had to travel far to pick up items and deliver them. Thus, inside was like . . . well, a hive of drones. Ultimate Corp warehouse roofs had launch and landing pads, and their advertisements boasted that these roofs, the sides of the buildings, and the land owned by Ultimate Corp were all green, covered with the super grass known as periwinkle. (*Noor* 108)

Moreover, in the futuristic Nigeria people use technology to filter dust and generate power. For instance, Zagora, a Moroccan young girl, describes how wireless energy is transferred from the solar in the desert: "Automated solar-powered trucks loaded with equipment drove across these lands creating solar farms of five-mile radiuses. Across the desert, these trucks drove, stopped, and dropped self-powered and programmed Wi-Fi enabled solar panels like large seeds. Thousands of them. . . ." (*Noor* 33). People also are dressed in clothing that could absorb sunlight and transform it into energy: "Some wore the traditional long flowing garments, but most wore sun gear, a stylish Ankara clothing made to absorb energy from the sun into a small battery in the side pocket that could be used to power appliances" (67). These futuristic scenes envision a new future potentiality that substantially denounces the stereotypical image of Africa as the 'Dark Continent,' a place "caught in a perpetual cycle of poverty, corruption, violence and disaster" (Bisschoff 611). More importantly, this futuristic imagery establishes the novel's epistemic delinking from mainstream science fiction.

Okorafor's future imaginary about Africa functions as a process of what Walter Mignolo (2009) calls 'epistemic disobedience' (3). This form of epistemic and cultural resistance subverts and delinks the established posthuman connection of progress and development with only whiteness. In other words, it creates a counterfuture that disturbs the coloniality of the future by the White posthuman discourse (Eshun 288). This counterfuture aims at motivating change in the present, "the potential of the future lies within us, in the present, and must be activated in a determined and meaningful way" (Dowdall 186). Once articulated collectively, the activation of this counter future potentiality "can affect the current social imaginary to change how Indigenous people now think of themselves 100, 500, or a thousand years hence" (Lewis 14). In this way, *Noor* widens the futuristic scope of the science fiction genre by providing a space to imagine indigenous forms of the future that are intricate to the African people, "even if they are not recognized within global, particularly Western futuristic resonances" (Bisschoff 612). Thus, the contribution of Okorafor's approach to the future lies in its defamiliarizing effect: while mainstream science fiction approaches the future through the lens of western tradition and values, Africanfuturirsm's counterfuture is informed by African indigenous realities which are considered primitive by the global capitalized system that privileges a Eurocentric model of scientific rationality and technological advancement.

Like many of Okorafor's earlier novels, *Noor* is energized by the current vibes and principles of posthumanism, especially technological cyborgization. Black cyborg identity is Okorafor's starting point for the articulation of an Africanfuturist rendition of the posthuman. As mentioned earlier, "Africanfuturism is concerned with visions of the future, is interested in technology" ("Africanfuturism Defined"). In *Noor*, alternative futures are made possible through the synthesis of technology with the Black body, allowing for the production of the novel's hybrid

protagonist AO, a black cyborg woman whose ontological configuration resonates with the broad posthuman condition in which human beings live with technologically and prophetically upgraded bodies. *Noor* tells the story of Anwuli Okwudili, a black cyborg woman who is known throughout the novel as AO (Artificial Organism). AO was born disabled, with one human lung and one limb, "with "a gnarled stump" where her left arm should have been, "withered and misshaped" legs and "intestinal malrotation." She had a reconstructive surgery where she was given a "prosthetic arm and intestines made of genetically grown and enhanced spider silk" and "leg exoskeletons" that allowed her to walk (*Noor* 19). Unfortunately, at the age of 14, she was further injured in a car accident with the result that she replaced her lower limbs with fully automated artificial legs. After the accident, she relied upon biotechnology to augment her body and overcome her disability: "If you could, wouldn't you replace your damaged legs with cybernetic ones? Why hold onto malfunctioning or poorly formed flesh and bone only because 'we were born with it?'" (15). Finally, she augmented her neural system with artificial implants to enable her connect effectively with the digital signals all around her either from her own internal artificial cybernetic neural system or the natural ones in her brain:

> I was given an artificial 3D-printed second lung that expanded as I grew. They gave me the prosthetic arm and intestines made of genetically grown and enhanced spider silk. They gave me leg exoskeletons that allowed me to walk while using, and in spite of, my withered leg. My withered legs were crippled even further. I'd had to finally have them removed and get full cybernetic leg transplants. Because it took so long for my nerves to fuse with each leg, I learned what it was to sit or more often lie down for weeks at a time. I was in too much pain to be a wheelie. When I was seventeen and able to give my consent to remove the arm stump, over my parents' pleas to keep this

> withered useless piece of flesh and bone, the doctors gave me my cybernetic limb. When they explained the procedure and showed me the robotic arm, I asked, "Why cover it with flesh?" My parents couldn't afford it, I didn't need it. I am part machine. I am proud to be part machine. (16)

AO's cyborg transformation embodies the transhuman promise of enhancing human life through enhancement technologies, such as genetic engineering, biotechnology and Artificial Intelligence, which reconfigures the potentiality of black futurism as she succeeds in transcending her bodily limitations. Her cyborgization points also to the absolute reality that black humans belongs in the future, that they have the inherent "Will to Evolve," the innate desire "to expand (their) abilities in pursuit of ever-increasing survivability and well-being" (Young 39). This will for progression and development is apparent in AO's reflection on her body augmentation:

> The implants made me better. Except that after I healed, the implants brought these vicious headaches and sometimes I smelled things. I'd been enduring them as the price I paid for normalcy. Since they didn't hurt anyone else and only hurt me a little, I just accepted them as part of my new being. No implant or augmentation was ever free of aches, pains, or strangeness; these were a small price to pay for the ability to move about the world on my own terms. And they were better than having to take a drug to treat problems caused by a treatment. (*Noor* 14)

In addition to her success in transcending her body vulnerabilities, AO turns into a symbol of the breakdown of the black human-technology boundary in the futuristic Africa imagined by Okorafor in *Noor*. The power of AO lies in her intimacy with technology which once enabled the white Man's control over a feminised natural world. Overcoming her body defects, she now gives

way to a posthuman Black cyborg subject who masters the promise of tranhuman immortality and progress. The Black body is not static but, like the white body, is compatible with and improvable through technology. Okorafor claims AO as a symbol of such a futurity beyond all the limitations imposed upon her as a black 'disabled' woman living in contemporary postcolonial Nigeria. All forms of human vulnerability that AO might face, such as racial marginalization, gender discrimination and physical disability, are minimized through becoming a cyborg. As a metaphor for posthuman blackness, AO brings the two irreconcilable opposites, i.e., technology and blackness, together, corresponding to "the inextricable weave of the organic, technical, textual, mythic, economic, political threads that make up the flesh of the world" today (Haraway 181). In other words, being a black cyborg is evidence of being human in the first place because the cyborg entity combines both humanness and cybernetic, a position that has been denied by both humanism and posthumanism's white supremacist discourses.

Furthermore, AO embodies the posthuman state of African people. When AO passes into a black cyborg, she turns into a posthuman subject, occupying a position beyond the stereotyped black human. Her cyborgization prompts a specific state of posthuman blackness grounded in the disruption of black human boundaries and the synthesis of outsider identities within the self: the machine within the human, the male within the female, the white within the black (Clarke 92; Haraway 174). Her cyborg identity destabilizes the apparently stable boundaries established between the self and the other, complicating the process of identifying "a core essence that constitutes 'true' humanness" (Rossini 4). She derives power from occupying a hybrid space, what Karabelo Shirinde (2022) calls "a Black-techno third space," between dualistic ideologies, such as humanist, patriarchal, colonialist or racial (39). This in-between position enables her to seize the tool, i.e., technology, used to exclude her from the future imagery. In doing so, she provides "a

way out of the maze of dualisms" in which Black people have been long caught, and problematizes the stability and coherence of "the statuses of man or woman, human, artefact, member of a race, individual entity, or body" which support dualistic structures of identity (Haraway 181; 178). She becomes, to use Haraway's expression, the "illegitimate offspring" (151) of posthumanism, with no biological limits, ideological molds, genealogical history or parental legacy that predetermine her role. She very often exists in states that are beyond standardized (hu)manness, instead of being confined by singular identifications like that of race (black), species (human), and gender (woman).

Therefore, AO escapes identification due to her cyborg transformation. Throughout the novel, she is identified neither as a human nor as a machine. In some people's eyes, she is partially human; while others consider her a robot. One day, while shopping at a Nigerian local market, a group of five men harassed and bullied her augmented body, repeatedly asking: "What kind of woman are you?" (*Noor* 16). Appearing to be beyond their perception, people around AO fail to identify her as human or robot, man or woman, real or imaginary. Frequently repeated throughout the novel, the question about AO's true identity reveals that she succeeds in transforming into a fully posthuman figure with no encoded identity. When she ignores their question, a man attacks her fiercely, with the result that her body "burst into silver" activating "a warm itchy pain, like something had ruptured" (17). She brawls with the five men in self-defense and, with the help of her 'superhuman' body abilities, killing them all. After the fight, she flees to the desert, feeling no regret for killing the attackers for their discrimination against her 'difference.' She is frustrated with society as nobody protected her during the strike. After the attack, she realizes that her society accepts her only "as well as they could," as an alien "out of their knowledge" (20). They perceive her difference as a trouble rather than an advantage.

AO's cyborgization sheds lights on the issue of disability and difference which emanates from technological cyborgization. Her cyborg transformation results in an extraordinary (different) posthuman subject that is distanced from the human groups and society in which she lives. The mother of her boyfriend, DNA, calls her a "robot girl" (*Noor* 76), asking her if she was a woman at all and if she could satisfy her son's romantic and sexual needs because she was using artificial body parts (75). Similarly, in describing her relationship with her parents, AO reflected that they never liked her due to her body augmentations: "I don't think each of them will forgive me for not dying, nor will my father ever forgive my mother" (18). After the news of the market's attack spreads widely across the country, they describe her as an insane and diabolic girl controlled by an evil spirit (166). The problem for AO is that the society in which she lives does not accept her difference and unique identity, as she reflects on the market incident: "So why are people staring at me today? 'Stop staring at me', I muttered. Then all those men started beating me, and it was their wild eyes I saw between fists and feet…no one helped me" (15; 17). Although AO is proud of her cyborg transformation through which she defeated her childhood difficulties—"I am part machine. I am proud to be part machine. I was born twisted and strange by their standards. And after so much recovery, I was somehow amazing" (19)—it comes to be the source of intolerable prejudice and alienation:

> To many Nigerians, I was trouble... An abomination. Priests, reverends, bishops, pastors and imams, holy men all over West Africa said so. To replace an organ or two with cybernetic, 3D printed, non-human parts was fine. People needed pacemakers, new limbs, skin grafts etc. but if you were one of those people who seemed to be'more machine than human' for whatever reason, one of those who 'refused to obey the laws of nature and die,' you were a demon. (10)

AO becomes a terrifying cultural figure, which "refuses to obey the laws of nature," because it hints at the radical potential of a fusion of blackness and technology. While she serves as a progression from anthropocentric humanity and its dualistic structure, humanity still sustains its superior position via a closed off hierarchy with emphasis on its perceived separateness from the non-human other. AO represents difference; she is often portrayed and described as having different or even superior reasoning faculties and abilities to that possessed by humanity which makes her a threat to humanity's hierarchical systems. Sharing aspects with categories already outside human normativity, she becomes othered herself, losing her former privileged status and then forced to partake in similar alienating and discriminatory experiences already experienced by other cyborgs. In other words, her difference becomes a threat to the other 'humans,' and thus, prompts antagonism and hostility. In this way, becoming cyborg is also to become alienated. Her physical and cultural connections to technology are regarded by the human races in the story as a form of corruption and decay, and her cyborgization turns into a toll of her exploitation and suppression rather than liberation and progression.

To sum up, it is argued that AO depicts the fullest possibility for Okorafor's cyborg representation of Black people. Through her cyborg protagonist, Okorafor reconsiders the relationship between Black cyborg bodies and technology as the result of what Alyassa Collins (2024) calls "necessary symbiotic evolution—an escape to a future that is unpredictable" (530). More specifically, AO's cyborgization has a twofold indication. First, AO signifies the recognizable form of posthuman black cyborgism: the blend of technology and black human biology. Second, she represents the cyborg's sociopolitical potential to reveal and unsettle the social and bodily limitations of those who are marked as different by society. These moments of doubled experience enable AO to "engage in moments of (self) reidentification, agency, and

power" (Collins 521). Yet, the posthuman AO, by virtue of these changes and their resultant difference to established human traits, is often automatically considered as different and therefore alien, consequently exposing her to a variety of discriminatory practices. Her posthumanisation becomes the source of her alienation.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the study adopted a posthuman Africanfuturist framework to analyze Okorafor's recent novel *Noor* in relation to one of the central motifs of the posthuman age: technology and cyborgization. In *Noor*, Okorafor fantasizes an African posthuman world permeated by technological advances and inhabited by Black cyborgs. Okorafor is especially interested in the cyborg figure for its ability to blur ideological boundaries and question petrified categories of identity. This task is fully realized through AO's prosthetically enhanced body which appears to be incompetent with the stereotypical representation of African people as savage and barbaric. Her cyborgization opens two future worlds for her: her disabled body is enhanced by embracing prosthetic technology and breaking the human-machine boundary, and the incorporation of a fluid movement between various identities: male/female, black/white, human/machine. These futures are based on affinities rather than dualism. In writing Black futurity through the Black cyborg AO, she redefines what it means to be human, shifting the ontological frame from posthumanism to Africanfuturism.

Yet, although AO's cyborgization enables her to escape both her bodily and ideological limitations, she is de-humanized and conceptualized as a threat to established social order and dominant ideologies. However, Okorafor is so optimistic that Africa and its people can efficiently overcome the limitations of their postcolonial condition through the wise use of technology,

becoming happier, smarter, and wiser. Okorafor's utopic vision calls attention to further research on the problem of technology and difference. Humanity is depicted as terribly flawed and constrained by its own rigid hierarchical tendencies which do not permit free transformations towards more desirable and more beneficial states of being. There is a need to reconsider hybrid states of being which are already present in our everyday reality. Examples of these discriminations abound; from inter-racial to inter-species to socio-cultural hybridity, persons who are perceived to have affiliations with different or lesser 'others' suffer discriminations, marginalization, and alienation from the more privileged populations.

Notes

1. Okorafor draws the novel's title, *Noor*, and many of its ideas from African contexts. Noor is the name of a power station in Morocco, known also as *Ouarzazate* Solar Power Station, and is the world's biggest solar plant (Okorafor, Twitter).

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المُستَقبَلِيَّة الإفريقية وما بعد الإنسانية والسايبورغ الإفريقي في رواية «نور» لنيدي أوكورافو (٢٠٢١)

الملخص

ترنو هذه الدراسة إلى تحليل رواية «نور» (٢٠٢١) التي تنتمي إلى مذهب المُستَقبَلِيَّة الإفريقية في ضوء مفهوم الإنسان المسيَّر آليًا أو «السايبورغ»، وذلك بتطبيق منهج بيني يجمع بين نظريتَي ما بعد الإنسانية والمُستَقبَلِيَّة الإفريقية لتسليط الضوء على رؤية الكاتبة نيدي أوكورافو لإعادة تصور المستقبل في إفريقيا. وفي سبيل تلك الغاية تناقش الدراسة انفصال أوكورافو عن المناهج التقليدية لصياغة المستقبل الإفريقي وقيامها بتأسيس نظرية «المُستَقبَلِيَّة الإفريقية»، فضلاً عن عرض السمات المميزة لتلك النظرية وأفكارها المغايرة لما هو متعارف عليه عن شكل المستقبل في القارة السمراء في ضوء نظرية ما بعد الإنسانية النقدية. ومناط هذا التزاوج بين مفهوم أوكورافو للمُستَقبَلِيَّة الإفريقية وما بعد الإنسانية هو تسليط الضوء على الدور الذي اضطلع به مفهوم السايبورغ الإفريقي الأسود في رواية «نور» للتغلب على مختلف العقبات التي تواجهه سواء أكانت بيولوجية أم اجتماعية أم سياسية، وهو ما أسفر في نهاية المطاف عن تغيير الصورة النمطية الوجودية عن الإنسان الإفريقي على أنه عدوٌ للتقدم والتكنولوجيا. وتخلص الدراسة إلى أن رواية «نور» قدمت نموذجًا للرواية المستقبلية الإفريقية التي تتبنى مباديء نظرية ما بعد الإنسانية التكنولوجية في تعزيز قدرات الإنسان الإفريقي من خلال التكنولوجيا والتقنيات الحديثة، وإن دراسة «نور» على أنها سردية إفريقية مستقبلية ليضيف منهجًا بينيًا جديدًا لإعادة تخيل المستقبل في إفريقيا وعلاقة أهلها بالتكنولوجيا الحديثة في ضوء ما بعد الإنسانية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: المُستَقبَلِيَّة الإفريقية، السايبورغ الإفريقي، أوكورافو، نور، ما بعد الإنسانية