Examining the Role of History in *Black Panther* and Octavia Butler's *Kindred*.

Omotoyosi E. Odukomaiya
(Department of English, Southern Illinois University Carbondale)

ABSTRACT: *The dystopian trope often associated with the African continent has given rise to a plethora of counternarrative, rejecting this pessimistic view. In 2018 when the Black Panther was released, the intent of the film was to project an inspirational, positive outlook for the continent as well as for Africans in diaspora. With the aim of contributing to the trending conversation surrounding Blackness and the lived experiences of Black people (in diaspora and in the motherland), this article explores the Afrofuristic fiction as a genre, through an examination of Octavia Butler's Kindred and Ryan Coogler's Black Panther. Also, this article discusses the essential role of history in Afrofuturist fiction as well as the representation of the historical accounts of Africans and African Americans. A close examination of both works reveals that they espouse Afrofuturism in seemingly contrasting ways.*

KEYWORDS: *African Cosmology, Afrofuturism, Blackness, Black Panther, Slave Narratives*

I.   Introduction

Afrofuturist fiction relies significantly on history, in an attempt to imagine an alternate universe. Though categorized as fiction, this genre must depict the worldview of Africans as realistically as possible, and to do this, novelists and writers explore historical accounts of Africans. I intend to explore how much of history is represented and to what extent authors alter history as they create alternate universes submerged with fantasy. This paper will examine Octavia Butler's *Kindred* and Ryan Coogler's *Black Panther* to understand the role of history and the historical accounts of Africans in these works. It may appear like an overstatement to say that these works incorporate the Afrofuturist ideology (when the original Black Panther character premiered in 1966, while *Kindred* was published in 1979) because Afrofuturism was only coined in 1993.Nevertheless, both works seem to espouse aspects of the Afrofuturist ideology in seemingly contrasting ways. On the one hand, *Black Panther* adopts an Afrocentric imagination that hinges on histories from the African continent, which I argue is predominantly the Yoruba pre-colonial history. On the other, Butler reassesses the historical accounts of the antebellum African American slaves in the south of America. While *Black Panther* vividly represents the worldviews and cultural ethos of Africans in the "motherland", Butler depicts the experiences of African Americans.

According to Adriano Elia, Afrofuturism includes the works of creative artists, which depicts the lives of Africans that effectively counters the stereotypical representation of people of African origin. In other words, the function of Afrofuturism is to position Black people as spearheading technological innovations, thus rejecting the narratives about the roles of Africans and African Americans in the world. Alondra Nelson describes the concept as "sci-fi imagery, futurist themes, and technological innovation in the African diaspora" (Nelson 8). Interestingly, Sofia Samatar claims that some critics argue that African literature coming out of the African continent, bearing a resemblance to Afrofuturist arts cannot be categorized as Afrofurist, because the concept is an American coinage. (Samatar 175). While this may appear to be a valid assertion, it is inconceivable to think that Afrofuturism, as an ideology, will exclude the continent, which was once home to African American ancestors. How do you address issues regarding the African race without making references to Africa and African cultures emanating from the continent? It does seem like the critics Samatar refers to, may be reproducing the same hegemonic forces, that was predominant before the emergence of Afrofuturism. Although an African American directed *Black Panther*, the film embodies the African cultural ethos that mostly defines the genre, which is less evident in Butler's *Kindred,* for reasons I shall be addressing elsewhere in this paper.

II.   Ryan Coogler, *Black Panther*

Critics clarify that one of the defining features of the Afrofuturist work is its "spiritual difference from traditional sci-fi and fantasy writing" (Hoydis 71), which creates original narratives that depict the African cultural identity in juxtaposition with technology and science. Kodwo Eshun also claims that Afrofuturism, as a concept, must acknowledge that the African continent should be prioritized as "the object of futurist projection" because the west has portrayed the continent as one that perpetually exists in dystopia. (Eshun 293). Going by these definitions of Afrofuturism, we can agree that, of the two texts explored in this paper, *Black Panther* blatantly exemplifies the Afrofuturistic ideology. *The Black Panther* film, which draws from African cultures in order to make the Afrofuturist vision of Wakanda work, combines both traditional African worldviews with technological advancements. The film's depiction of African traditions highlights women warriors, ancestral "worship," as well as traditional religious ethos that, I argue, mirrors the West African Yoruba religious beliefs. Some critics have acknowledged that there is often the conflation of the mythical, magical, and sci-fi. However, Nalo Hopkinson, in an interview with Jene Watson-Aifah, contends that from an African worldview, it is impossible to distinguish between "a spiritual life from a technological life" (Hopkinson in Watson-Aifah 168). Hopkinson's assertion is apparent in Ryan Coogler's depiction of the role of the African traditional value system in the Afrofuturist ideology. Despite the technological advancements in Wakanda, powered by Vibranium, Wakandans do not let go of their identities as traditional African people with a unique history, thus projecting the core elements of Afrofuturism. Hoydis maintains that Afrofuturism combines the history of Africans with fantasy and sci-fi. In the same vein, Robert Heinlein articulates that speculative fiction "must be possible to the universe as we know it" (Heinlein 74), consequently implying that Afrofuturist fiction should be, in a sense, historically correct. *Black Panther* effectively incorporates the historical reality of African culture and spirituality even as it imagines an alternate world.

Ancestral veneration is at the center of most African religious cultural practices, and it is also a part of the Wakandan religion. The religious rituals and the vibrant spirit world inherent in the *Black Panther* is what many have claimed to be an indication that the film is deeply rooted in the African culture. For instance, during the enthronement ceremony of T'challa as the new King of Wakanda, T'challa is given a potion that restores his supernatural strength, after which he goes on the "ancestral plane" to seek counsel and wisdom for his role as the new King. He says to his ancestor, "tell me how to best protect Wakanda, I want to be a great king, just like you"(*Black Panther*). The Yoruba religious system typically relies on ancestors for guidance on how its kingdoms should be governed. The Yoruba people consult the cult of ancestors, also referred to as *Baba nla*, who represent the third category of spiritual beings, much like T'chaka's role in *Black Panther*. While the first category of spiritual beings is the supreme being, also known as *Olodumare* (the Almighty God), the second category of spiritual beings includes the Yoruba pantheon known as *Orisa*, a group of spirits/deities. The Pantheon goddess, Bast, which the narrator references in the opening scene of the film is originally known as an ancient goddess from the Egyptian religion, but Bast also replicates the Yoruba pantheon spirit, mainly because historians have traced the origins of the Yoruba people of West Africa to ancient Egypt. Hence, the similarities are not shocking.

The narrator, in the opening scenes of *Black Panther*, assumes the role of a griot, which is an element of the West African tradition. The film, which opens with a scene of a dark screen, lit by twinkling stars, begins with a boy's voice asking his father to tell him a story. The boy says to his father, "tell me a story of home" (*Black Panther*). The father then narrates how Wakanda came to be: "Millions of years ago, a meteorite made of vibranium, the strongest substance in the universe struck the continent of Africa affecting the plant life around it" (*Black Panther*). While the narration of the creation of Wakanda is fictitious, the griot tradition is not. The tradition is one peculiar to many cultures in West Africa. Germaine Dieterlen confirms that the role of the griots includes tracing descendants of lineages as well and transferring historical knowledge of culture, from one generation to the next. Dieterlen states that " the bards, also known as griots, have special knowledge of genealogies" (Dieterlen 124), and they also preserve cultural history, such as mythical creation stories, through oral traditions. Bert Bower and Jim Lobdell identify griots as "record keepers of the people" who keep histories of people's ancestors (Bower and Lobdell 166). The West African griot tradition is also apparent in Coogler's portrayal of Zuri as Wakanda's priest. Bower and Lobdell highlight the role of griots as the King's trusted ally since the King relies on "the griot's knowledge of history on current problems" (Bower and Lobdell 166). More specifically, *Black Panther* depicts the Yoruba priests, also known as *Ifa Priest*, through Zuri's role. Zuri, who conspicuously wears a purple *Agbada* (a robe worn by prominent Yoruba men), oversees the enthronement process of T'challa. Like the *Ifa Priest*, who performs a vital role in the enthronement of a new *oba* (King), Zuri offers T'challa a magical potion, which sends him on the ancestral plane, as a part of the enthronement ceremony. Zuri also puts the Panther mask on Tchalla, which represents the right of passage in African tradition,

during his fight with M'baku. Zuri's role as a spy fits into the griot's role as the King's trusted ally. It is the younger Zuri, sent by T'chaka to Oakland, who reveals Njobu's crimes. In his roles as griot for the Wakandan nation and as the King's trust ally, Zuri recounts to Tchalla the incidence between N'jobu, and T'chaka, as T'challa demands "What happened to my Uncle N'Jobu? My father told me he disappeared" (*Black Panther*). Despite a promise Zuri makes to T'chaka vowing not to tell T'challa the truth, T'challa compels Zuri into compliance as he says, "I am your King now" (*Black Panther*), after which Zuri tells T'challa about Njobu crimes. The older Zuri played by Forest Whittaker, addresses the nation of Wakanda saying, "Zuri, Son of Badu, give to you, Prince T'Challa, the Black Panther" (*Black Panther*), thus underlining his role as the overseer of the cultural heritage of Wakanda. Also, Zuri offers a path to the throne for anyone willing to challenge T'challa in a fight, and after T'challa successfully defeats M'baku, Zuri consummates the enthronement process by saying "I now present to you, King T'Challa" (*Black Panther*).

As an Afrofuturist fiction, *The Black Panther* depicts the civilization of the African culture prevalent in pre-colonial Africa, through the portrayal of the empowered Wakandan women. Although, Derilene Marco argues that the representation of Wakandan women is "a post-feminist assertion" or "a popular culture crop"(Marco 9) --hence displacing the historical roles African women played in pre-colonial Africa-- Myron Strong, and Sean Chaplin establish that "divine femininity" is one of the common themes in Afrofuturistic writing" (Strong and Chaplin 59), especially because colonial history records how the European colonialists diligently worked to suppress and ignore these aspects of the African tradition. Pre-colonial history shows that the Yoruba society empowered its women, and the film makes this abundantly evident through the all-female army of T'challa. The Yoruba kingdom had notable female warriors as well as female Kings who ruled kingdoms. *The Black Panther*, notably alludes to one of the warriors under the control of the Oyo empire. The Dahomean amazons, represented by Wakanda's Dora Milaje army group, restate the inspiring position of women in Yoruba Kingdoms. Perhaps we should note that the Dahomey kingdom, modern-day Benin Republic, was under the influence of the Oyo Empire and was, as a matter of fact, one of the Yoruba kingdoms outside the territorial boundaries of the Yoruba indigenous location. Strong and Chaplin acknowledge that Coogler "pulls from aspects of pre-colonial Africa, particularly the Kingdom of Dahomey" (Strong and Chaplin 59), which confirms the influence of the 17th century Dahomey amazons on the Dora Milaje. Also, Princess Shuri's role as the only prominent scientist in Wakanda, illustrates what Julia Hoydis describes as "unique kinds of females who do not fit into the positions that Euro-American racial or patriarchal hierarchies assigned to African women" (Hoydis 74). Princess Shuri, not only designs communication devices, equipped with "audio surveillance systems" (*Black Panther*) and sound absorbent shoes, she also heals Agent Ross, using futuristic medical equipment that appears to combine African medicine and technological appliances, a point I shall discuss later on in this paper. It also appears that the role of women in T'challa's life and his reign as a king, imitates the role of the Oshun goddess in Yoruba cosmology. Patrice Rankine, a Professor of Classics and the Dean of the School of Arts & Sciences at the University of Richmond, asserts that T'challa "does not know his true beauty until Oshun touches him" (Rankine). In other words, just like the Oshun goddess, the women that surround T'challa inspire him to be the king he is destined to be.

The notion of an uncolonized African continent seamlessly fits into the counter-narrative elements of Afrofuturism. Although Ethiopia is the only country that was, in reality, never colonized on the African continent, nevertheless, Italians occupied the country. This reality contrasts the portrayal of Wakanda as a nation because there were no foreigners, other than Agent Ross, whom T'challa orders to be taken with him, to provide quick healing for him using Wakanda's futuristic health system. The film imagines an alternate world where there is an African country that is not only uncolonized but also one that is self-sufficient and does not receive foreign aid, "nor engages in international trade"(*Black Panther*). This depiction of Wakanda ties into Elia's definition of Afrofuturism, as the critic, perceives that the essence of Afrofuturism as a genre, is to counter narratives about the roles of Africans and African Americans in the world. Eshun also defines Afrofuturism or Afrofuturistic art as one that "challenges the idea of Africa as a metaphor for dystopia and catastrophe, suggesting instead an optimistic-or at least an unbiased -vision of the future of Africa" (Eshun 291). Fundamentally, Adriano's and Eshun's assertions, as well as *Black Panther* negate the representations of dystopia and chaos, associated with the African continent, and this is precisely the image Wakanda projects, a nation that can rule its citizens without foreign interference of any kind.

A look at the history of pre-colonial Yoruba Kingdoms showcases the Utopia inherent in Wakanda .The Yoruba society had grandiloquent empires which existed before the colonization of Africa. The Yoruba people and its kingdoms were famously known for their vibrant enduring culture, as well as the strong political-economic societies that thrived during the pre-colonial times. Dierk Lange articulates that "among the peoples of Africa, the Yoruba stand out as especially rich in testimonies of their past" (Lange 307). Lange goes on to

state that Ile-Ife, the traditional capital of the Yoruba Kingdom, along with the mythical historical tradition, and the terracotta Bronze artwork attracted the attention of Europeans. The civilizations of the Yoruba people marveled the Europeans to the extent that European historians presumed that the creativity was influenced by the early influences of the Mediterranean civilizations This history of the pre-colonial Yoruba society evidently demonstrates how Coogler may have drawn from the past glories of the African continent, to imagine a fictional African country like Wakanda. Conspicuously, we see a reference to the Nok art from the Yoruba Empire when Erik Killmonger visits the British museum to take the vibranium artifact. When, Killmonger asks the museum attendant about the historical origin of an art piece, the attendant responds that two of the art pieces were from 7th century and 16th Century Benin (according to historical records, Benin was a kingdom under the Yoruba Empire).

Princess Shuri's laboratory represents the result of the coming together of technology and the African cultural ethos. As with the setting of the Wakandan society, Shuri's laboratory projects Afrofuturist aesthetics, as the walls are designed with African art and textiles. The props in the lab are also emblematic of the African cultural identity. As a scientist, Princess Shuri, dons herself with African-looking attire and even when she wears white, which represents the Euro-American outfit for scientists (white lab coat), she wears a stylish and unique white dress. In a similar manner, her patient, Agent Ross, wears what appears to be a Kaftan made with African textile. Her tools, particularly, the Vibranium which she uses to heal Agent Ross, as well as the claw-like gauntlet she uses to fix his wounds, are African inspired. These props, costumes and designs, in a scientific laboratory, reecho Nalo Hopkinson's assertion, that from an African worldview, it is impossible to differentiate between technology and the African spiritual ethos, suggesting that there is an intersection of religion and science-technology in the African cultural world. Hopkinson's claim bears likeness with Strong and Chaplin's views, as they argue that the collusion of vibranium with Africa "altered Wakanda's environment and created a fusion of plant life that was both earth and alien…..that gives *Black Panther* an Afrofuturist perspective and acts as a vine that threads the past, present and future throughout" (Strong and Chaplin 58). Reiterating Hopkinson's, Strong and Chaplin's statements, it does appear like Coogler projects that the purple heart-shaped herb, which grants superhuman strength, speed, and instincts, combined with the technological geek knowledge, as represented by Princess Shuri, represent the solution that will drive Africa's future liberation from neo-colonialist developed nations.

III.   Octavia Butler, Kindred

While *Black Panther* adopts the African cultural and pre-colonial history in its Afrofuturist vision, Butler looks to the history of slavery to imagine an alternative world, where an African female is assertive. Dana, Butler's protagonist, involuntarily time travels back and forth from 1972, California to antebellum Maryland. Through the eyes of Dana, the novel depicts the lived experiences of African slaves on plantations. Butler deviates from the prevalent form of slave narratives at the time, since she combines fantasy and science fiction as a means to focus on the intersections of racial and gender oppression experienced by African female slaves. Essentially, Butler explores the worldviews, realities, and lived experiences of African Americans, who were cut off from their African ancestors and shipped to the Americas for slavery.

If Afrofuturism, as a concept, implies a futuristic outlook, marked by technological advancements, like Mark Dery, queries, how then does a slave narrative like *Kindred*, adopt a futuristic outlook? Most critics establish that though *Kindred* is a slave narrative, it employs certain aspects, crucial to the Afrofuturist ideology. Madhu Dubey acknowledges that, on the surface, speculative fictions of slavery may seem antithetical to the futuristic outlook characterized by Afrofuturism, but because they utilize non-realist literary devices, they project futurism. Butler's neo-slave narrative utilizes time travel as a tool to send Dana, a contemporary writer, back in time to bring to light, critical issues overlooked or inadequately addressed by historical slave records. That time travel is fictitious is a given, but the history of slavery inherent in *Kindred* is not. However, it is through the paranormal device that readers can identify with the experiences of slavery, consequently eliminating the ideology of distance which characterizes previous slave narratives. Robert Crossley, whose essay serves as the reader's guide to the 25th Anniversary edition of *Kindred*, contends that "though *Kindred* is not itself a work of science fiction, Butler has brought to the creation of this narrative, the sensibilities of an author who works largely outside the tradition of realism" (Crossley 265). Essentially, Crossley, just like Dubey, argues that the non-realist elements in *Kindred* (i.e. time travel) coupled with Butler's reputation as a sci-fi writer seep into our reading of the novel. Natelegé Whaley adds to the notion of non-realism associated with Afrofuturism and by extension Butler's *Kindred* as the critic asserts that Afrofuturism is "a way of helping people push past barriers and limitations of space and time" (Whaley), not to change the past, but to re-envision the past, in an attempt to understand the past "as something more than history" (Dubey 780) to change the

future. In a similar manner, Adriano Elia denotes that Butler employs time travel to "address socio-political discourses… …and to investigate the amplified effect of old slavery on contemporary people" (Elia 20-21). In other words, time travel as a device, enables Butler to revisit historical slavery such that modern-day readers can understand the legacies of slavery in the contemporary American society. Therefore, we can infer that it is Butler's use of time travel that makes *Kindred* an Afrofuturist writing.

The dynamics and science of time travel, according to Crossley, is irrelevant to Butler's purpose and it clarifies why Dana's arm is amputated in both worlds. Unlike other science fiction texts where lacerations in the past do not transfer to the present, Dana bears her physical wounds in both worlds. Dana narrates, "I was almost comfortable except for the strange throbbing of my arm. Of where my arm had been. I closed my eyes again, remembering the way I had been hurt-remembering the pain" (*Kindred* 9). In Essence, not only does she lose her arm, but Dana can also feel the pain even in the present. Drawing from Nadine Flagel's argument, the pain that Dana experiences surpass the physical as it is more of a mental grief than it is physical. Flagel writes, "pain's legitimacy secures trauma's reality" (Flagel 232). In other words, Flagel asserts that not only were there physical scars of slavery (marked on the bodies of slaves) but also figurative scars of slavery's trauma, exist in the Black man's psyche and their lived realities. Therefore, Dana, who loses her arm as she travels through time, also some part of her identity, which she can never regain.

Evidently, Dana's lost arm (in both worlds) is a significant motif in understanding Butler's intentions as a reader. The prologue begins with Dana attempting to reconcile the loss of her arm and the fact that she is unable to explain the circumstances leading to the loss of her arm. Dana recounts:

I lost an arm on my last trip home. My left arm. And I lost about a year of my life and much of the comfort and security I had not valued until it was gone. …. "How did you hurt your arm?" they asked. "Who hurt you?" My attention was captured by the word they used: Hurt. As though I'd scratched my arm. Didn't they think I knew it was gone? I tried to think through the drugs, through the distant pain, but there was no honest explanation I could give them—none they would believe. "An accident." (*Kindred* 9)

This excerpt suggests that the loss of her arm jolts Dana out of the superficial comfort she has with her husband in 1976, California, to the realities of the history of slavery, and its haunting legacies in the present. Dana's reaction to the Police, and her perception of their anticipated reaction to her response, symbolizes the American system's invalidation of the impacts and legacies of slavery in the modern society since she wonders if the Police would believe her explanation about how she lost her arm. In other words, Dana's supposes that regardless of the explanation she gives for her amputated arm, the Police would not believe her because, as Lawrie Balfour puts it, the reactions of the Police "reproduces a pattern of white incapacities to believe what Black Americans are saying about the conditions of their lives" (Balfour 178). Although Dana loses an arm due to time traveling between 19th century Maryland and 1970's LA, which causes her arm to get stuck in a wall, her lost arm represents Butler's attempt at depicting ways in which old slavery dismembered Black female bodies, and Black communities.

Dana's amputated arm also represents a critique against the appropriations of the word "slavery" in the modern world. Her lost arm (in both worlds) serves as evidence for the damages caused by slavery, and the savagery of the institution of slavery, which in stark contrast to the contemporary usage of the word adulterates the severity of the old slavery. Dana's arm and its relationship to time travel foregrounds the extreme brutality of the old slavery in contrast to the "slave market," which Dana alludes to, in 1972 California. Dana qualifies the labor agency, "that regulars called the slave market as the opposite of slavery" (*Kindred 53)* because unlike the old slavery which was characterized by captivity, forced and unpaid labor, the agency, at least offers a wage and did not, in the real sense, enforce or enslave its workers (*Kindred 53).* The slave market metaphor, within the context of *Kindred,* is a double-edged sword, which is critical of appropriations of slavery and capitalist economies. As a critique against capitalist economies, Butler appropriates the zombie metaphors peculiar to slavery, as Dana describes the work that she does for the agency as "mindless work done by non-people" (*Kindred* 53).

As an Afrofuturistic fiction, Butler's protagonist depicts the multiple layers of oppression the female slave encounters on the plantation. Dana, like most female slaves, plays the role of nurturer and almost gets raped in the process. She is racially oppressed as she is whipped, leaving scars that remain visible on her back, in 1976, California. Nonetheless, Dana remains a strong female character, who demands to be called by her name and not "nigger." Dana assertively declares that she could accept Rufus as her "ancestor, her younger brother, her friend" (*Kindred* 260) but certainly not as a master, or her lover. Dana rejects the two roles that the

antebellum American society imposed on female slaves. Flagel alleges that Dana "tries to socialize and control Rufus" and that "the novel's climax substitutes the death of a man for the rape or death of a woman" since she finds control "not in nurture but in murder" (Flagel 222-223). In other words, Flagel affirms that unlike traditional slave narratives, where the woman may assume a powerless role, Dana does not as she manipulates Rufus and eventually stabs him to death.

Whaley argues, like most Afrofuturist critics, that what distinguishes Afrofuturist fiction from other forms of science fiction is its focus on "feminine expressions and contributions of women to humanity" (Whaley). Strong and Chaplin note that Afrofuturistic fiction rejects the negative stereotypical tropes associated with Black femininity, and Butler certainly incorporates this notion in *Kindred.* Dana alters our perception of female slaves as docile beings who lack agency. Dana, not only demands respect from her supposed "master," Rufus, but she also controls him into securing her eventual birth. Dana assertively and consistently demands that Rufus defer from calling her or any Black person "nigger" as she sensitizes him on the consequences of racial stereotyping. Dana says to Rufus, "I'm a Black woman, Rufe. If you have to call me something other than my name, that's it…Look, I helped you. I put the fire out, didn't I? ...All right then, you do me the courtesy of calling me what I want to be called." (*Kindred* 25). Dana boldly calls Rufus "white trash," hoping that he too, feels disparaged by a contemptuous racialized name. In reality, the audacity shown by Dana would have earned her severe punishment if she were a real slave in the 1800s. But, as Whaley asserts, Butler uses time travel as a means to help descendants of slaves, like Dana, "to push past limitations" that defies time and space enabling a reconciliation of the past, but also highlighting the realities of the past that still linger in the present reality (Whaley). Hoydis clarifies that female protagonists in Afrofuturist writing "often possess special abilities or are sorceresses and god-like figures"(Hoydis 75). Hoydis also asserts that these female protagonists typically opt for a "nonviolent resolution" (Hoydis 76). While we may agree with the former—since Dana has the involuntary ability to travel through time and space, making it her "special ability" —the latter seemingly proves to be untrue of Dana's resolution. Even though Dana's action (i.e. the murder of Rufus) arose out of a compulsion to prevent her rape, unlike Nnedi Okorafor's protagonist Onye in *Who Fears Death,* whom at the point of rape, opts for a non-violent punishment for her abuser, Dana has a premeditated intent, ready to attack Rufus at the slightest attempt. Once she senses Rufus' obsessive declarations for her to remain in antebellum Maryland, Dana becomes uncomfortable and finds her way to the attic stairs, where she keeps her knife.

As effective as the time travel device is in Butler's novel, Dubey implies that, in some sense, it alters the history of slavery that we know. When Rufus attempts to rape Dana, she stabs him in the side and triggered by fear, she escapes to the twentieth century. Dubey says that Dana's escape into the future at that moment was "an option that was obviously not available to Alice or any other antebellum slave" (Dubey 791). Saidiya Hartman recapitulates a similar occurrence of a certain slave named Celia charged with the murder of her master, who had raped her repeatedly. Hartman explains that because Celia was a slave, and slaves "could not give or refuse consent, nor offer reasonable resistance, they were criminally responsible and liable," and as a result, Celia was sentenced to her death by hanging (Hartman 82). Unlike Celia and Alice, who could not escape rape -or in Celia's case, the consequences of the murder of her abuser- we can conclude that Dana's disfigured arm represents the repercussion of Rufus's murder as she narrates "He collapsed across me, somehow still alive holding my arm…I pushed him away somehow-everything but his hand still on my arm…something harder and strong than Rufus's hand clamped down on my arm squeezing it, stiffening it, pressing into it…something cold, paint, plaster, wood-a wall" (*Kindred* 261). Evidently, although she escapes rape and the consequences of murder in the antebellum south, Dana's Black body, undergoes mutilation so that she can become a free woman.

In a cultural sense, Stella Setka, notes that Butler's use of time travel "invokes the phantasmic by incorporating elements of Igbo cosmology" (Setka 93) since it enables Dana to connect with her ancestors, thus embodying aspects of the Afrofututist ideology. Setka argues that it is the paranormal device that lets Dana understand "the spiritual worldview" of her ancestors, which bears semblance to the West African Ibo cosmology (Setka 93). In other words, like Coogler, Setka argues that Butler draws from the African spiritual worldview. The critic particularly argues that the traumas that Dana witnesses and experiences reflect those of the *Ogbanje*, an Ibo word for a spirit child who travels between worlds. The *Ogbanje*, who causes and attracts grief, is tied to the spirit world, and as a result, they are born several times, but also die several times because of their spiritual ties to the *Ogbanje* spirit realm. So just like Dana, who goes back in time reluctantly to save her ancestors, the *Ogbanje* involuntarily goes back to the spiritual realm (through a physical death in the real world), called by fellow *Ogbanjes*. Both Dana and the *Obanje* experience trauma and travel in between worlds, consequently provoking empathy in readers. As argued by Setka, these parameters connect *Kindred's* spiritual

sphere to the Ibo tradition. Although Setka makes a compelling case for the African cultural ethos inherent in *Kindred*, the *Black Panther* unambiguously depicts the African traditions more vividly than *Kindred* does.

Alienation is also central to the Afrofuturism discourse, since African Americans have been cut off from their African ancestry and have also been excluded from the American society. Through Dana's experience of slavery in antebellum Maryland, Butler depicts the alienating effects of slavery on African Americans. Dana demonstrates a struggle between alienation and belonging several times during her "journeys" between California and Maryland as she recounts: "I could recall feeling relief at seeing the house, feeling that I had come home. And having to stop and correct myself, remind myself that I was in an alien, dangerous place. I could recall being surprised that I would come to think of such a place as home" (*Kindred* 190). The estranging effects of experiential slavery, makes Dana feel that Weylin's plantation, had now become home, because amid the uncertainty, as a Black woman stuck in a world that was not hers, she got accustomed to Weylin's home. She also knew that in as much as the plantation was the only thing close to home for her, it was, a dangerous place. Dana's mental struggle also comes into play when she returns to her real home (i.e., 1976 California) as she says, "it hadn't felt homelike" (*Kindred* 191) because her experience of slavery had taken a part of her. Dana's mental battle, which Dubey describes as " a trope of the haunting"(Dubey 789), illustrates the experiences of slaves, who contemplated freedom through rebellion or to continue to persevere. Dubey argues that haunting as a tope for slavery depicts how institutionalized racism in contemporary American society, serves as a continuum for the alienation, debasement, and oppression of African Americans.

In contrast to Butler's handling of estrangement, *Black Panther* adopts a more inspirational approach (at least for the Black race). Just like Bernadine Evaristo's *Blonde Roots*, Coogler estranges racism through Agent Ross's presence in Wakanda. Princess Shuri, who calls Agent Ross "colonizer," describes him as "another broken white boy" who needs to be fixed (*Black Panther*). Princess Shuri's sarcastic tone in her communication with Agent Ross is symbolic of estrangement. Agent Ross asks Princess Shuri, "is this Wakanda," to which Princess Shuri responds, "no Kansas"(*Black Panther*). Doubting her assertion about how long he had been in Wakanda, Ross says to Princess Shuri, "I don't think so. Bullet wounds don't just magically heal overnight" (*Black Panther*), but she again sarcastically counters him with the potency of Wakanda's technology. Similarly, M'baku and the Jabaris caution Agent Ross against speaking, with loud barks as he utters, " You cannot talk. One more word, and I will feed you to my children". M'baku, though in a seeming humorous tone, attempts to put Ross in his place, an alien in Wakanda, stripped of his freedom of speech.

IV.   Conclusion

The success of *Black Panther* and Butler's debut novel indicates that Afrofuturism is indeed more than a concept, but a movement, a political mission, and an emancipatory agenda that Africans and people of African descent must hold on to. *Black Panther's* Wakanda projects the notion that Africans can be both "contemporary" in the sense of technological advancements (like the pre-colonial Yoruba Kingdom) and still hold on to their religious and cosmological values and belief system, consequently dispelling the stereotypical binary of the traditional primitive world (Africa) and the modern new western world. In projecting a futurist African nation, *Black Panther* adopts the Yoruba cultural history, consequently making the Afrofuturist concept palpable. Characters in Coogler's film display fully what it means to be African, in every sense, from the rich display of African textures to the theatrical dance moves, the spiritual worldview depicted, combined with technology, we can say it is the best celebration of African history and culture.

On the other hand, Butler's *Kindred* projects futurism by empowering her protagonist, with agency and involuntary time-traveling abilities. Butler's novel, unlike *Black Panther* that is more celebratory, *Kindred* reflects the traumas experienced by African Americans. Nevertheless, Butler successfully counters the narratives associated with African Americans and stirs contemporary African Americans of the legacies of slavery in the present world. Butler, in her novel, calls African Americans to challenge the status quo and to change the future by evaluating their current position in American society. In all, both works depict how similar, but also how different, the worldviews of Africans on the African continent, and African Americans are.

Works Cited

[1].   Nelson, Alondra. "Introduction: Future Texts." Social Text, vol. 20 no. 2, 2002, pp. 1-15. Project MUSE.

[2].   Samatar, Sofia. "Toward a Planetary History of Afrofuturism." Research in African Literatures, vol. 48, no. 4, 2017, pp. 175-191. EBSCOhost, doi:10.2979/reseafrilite.48.4.12.

[3].   Hoydis, Julia. "Fantastically Hybrid: Race, Gender, and Genre in Black Female Speculative Fiction". Anglistik: International Journal of English Studi.es, no 26.2, September 2015 pp. 71-88.

[4].   Eshun, Kodwo. "Further considerations of Afrofuturism." CR: The New Centennial Review , Vol. 3, no. 2, 2003, pp. 287-302, EBSCOhost, doi:10.1353/ncr.2003.0021.

[5].   Watson-Aifah, Jené and Nalo Hopkinson. "A Conversation with Nalo Hopkinson." Callaloo, vol. 26, no. 1, 2003, pp. 160-169. EBSCOhost.

[6].   Heinlein, Robert A. Crumbles from the Grave. Ed. Virginia Heinlein . New York: Ballantine, 1989.

[7].   Black Panther. Directed by Ryan Coogler, Marvel Studios, 2018.

[8].   Dieterlen ,Germaine. "The Mande Creation Myth." Africa: Journal of the International African Institute, vol. 27, no. 2, 1957, pp. 124-138. EBSCOhost.

[9].   Bower, Bert, and Jim Lobdell. History Alive! The Medieval World and Beyond. Teachers' Curriculum Institute. 2005.

[10].   Marco, Derilene (Dee). "Vibing with Blackness: Critical Considerations of Black Panther and Exceptional Black Positionings." Arts, no. 4, 2018, pp 1-10. EBSCOhost, doi:10.3390/arts7040085.

[11].   Strong, Myron T., and K.Sean Chaplin. "Afrofuturism and Black Panther." Journal of Water Resources Planning & Management, vol. 145, no. 4, Apr. 2019, pp. 58-59. EBSCOhost

[12].   Rankine, Patrice. "The Mythic Truth of Black Panther." Society for Classical Studies, 26 Feb. 2018, classicalstudies.org/scs-blog/rankine/blog-mythic-truth-black-panther. Accessed 12, Sept. 2020.

[13].   Lange, Dierk. "Ife and the origin of the Yoruba: Historiographical Considerations." Ife: Annals of the Institute of Cultural Studies 6, 1995, pp 307-318.

[14].   Crossley, Robert, and Octavia Butler. "Reader's Guide: Critical Essay." Kindred, 25th Anniversary ed. Boston: Beacon Press, 2003.

[15].   Whaley, Natelegé. "From Octavia Butler To 'Black Panther:' Afrofuturism Now, Then and Tomorrow." Revolt , 27 Feb. 2018, revolt.tv/2018/2/27/20824357/from-octavia-butler-to-black-panther-afrofuturism-now-then-and-tomorrow. Accessed 6 May 2020.

[16].   Dubey, Madhu. "Speculative Fictions of Slavery." American Literature, vol. 82, no. 4, pp. 779–805. EBSCOhost.

[17].   Elia, Adriano. "Old slavery seen through modern eyes: Octavia E. Butler's Kindred and Haile Gerima's Sankofa." Altre Modernità (2019): 20-30.

[18].   Butler, Octavia E. Kindred. 25th Anniversary ed. Boston: Beacon Press, 2003.

[19].   Flagel, Nadine. "It's Almost Like Being There": Speculative Fiction, Slave Narrative, and the Crisis of Representation in Octavia Butler's Kindred. Vol. 42, no. 2, 2012, pp. 216–245. EBSCOhost, doi:10.1353/crv.2012.0010.

[20].   Balfour, Lawrie . "Vexed Genealogy: Octavia Butler and Political Memories of Slavery." Edited by Deneen, Patrick J., and Joseph Romance. Democracy's Literature: Politics and Fiction in America. Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005. Pp. 171-190.

[21].   Hartman , Saidiya. "Seduction and the Ruses of Power." Callaloo, vol. 19, no. 2, 1996, pp. 537-560. EBSCOhost.

[22].   Setka, Stella. "Phantasmic Reincarnation: Igbo Cosmology in Octavia Butler's 'Kindred.'" Melus, vol. 41, no. 1, 2016, pp. 93–124.