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Shapeshifting in Octavia Butler's *Wild Seed* and Nnedi Okorafor's *Lagoon*

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Abstract:

This study examines shapeshifting as a post-colonial metaphor of race, gender and resistance in the novels *Wild Seed* and *Lagoon*. In both science fiction novels, the conceptions of race and gender are highlighted through portrayals of shapeshifting and the post-human. From this position, this study explores the ways in which novelists, Octavia Butler, in *Wild Seed*, and Nnedi Okorafor, in *Lagoon* in particular, deploy shapeshifting, that is, the blurring and destabilization of boundaries, as a tool for aesthetic and socio-political engagement in postcolonial and post-independence narratives. In both novels, the technology of the immortal shapeshifters does not threaten the nature/culture nor does it serve colonialism. Indeed, science and knowledge are productive and shared among people.

Shapeshifting is a narrative device in postcolonial science fiction that functions as a mode of resistance against colonialism, oppression and imperialism in different historical contexts in both novels. This study demonstrates how shapeshifting symbolically facilitates a process of decolonization by resisting and altering received constructions of gender and race. Furthermore, it explores effective sites of decolonization aiming at demonstrating “resistant” identities represented as an immortal shapeshifter in *Wild Seed* and an extraterrestrial in *Lagoon*. *Wild Seed* and *Lagoon*, deploy the juxtaposition of traditional magical elements with science fictional materials, and the way the shapeshifting protagonists establish justice in society.

Key words: Shapeshifting, Wild seed, Lagoon, science fiction, resistance

Résumé:

Cette étude examine le changement de forme en tant que métaphore post-coloniale de la race, du sexe et de la résistance dans les romans *Wild Seed* et *Lagoon*. Dans les deux romans de science-fiction, les conceptions de la race et du sexe sont mises en évidence à travers des représentations du métamorphose et du post-humain. À partir de cette position, cette étude explore la manière dont les romanciers, Octavia Butler dans *Wild Seed*, et Nnedi Okorafor, dans *Lagoon* en particulier, déploient shapeshifting, c'est-à-dire le flou et la déstabilisation des frontières, en tant qu'outil de réflexion esthétique et d'engagement socio-politique dans les narrations postcoloniales et postindépendance. Dans les deux romans, la technologie des protagonistes immortels ne menace pas la nature / culture et ne sert pas le colonialisme. En effet, la science et le savoir sont productifs et partagés entre les individus.

Shapeshifting est un dispositif narratif de la science-fiction postcoloniale qui fonctionne comme un mode de résistance contre le colonialisme, l'oppression et l'impérialisme dans différents contextes historiques des deux romans. Cette étude montre comment shapeshifting facilite symboliquement un processus de décolonisation en résistant et en modifiant les constructions reçues de genre et de race. En outre, il explore des sites de décolonisation efficaces visant à démontrer des identités «résistantes» représentées comme une protagoniste immortel dans *Wild Seed* et un extraterrestre dans *Lagoon*. *Wild Seed* et *Lagoon* déploient la juxtaposition d'éléments magiques traditionnels avec des matériaux de science-fiction, ainsi que la manière dont les protagonistes établissent la justice dans la société.

Mot clés: Shapeshifting, *Wild seed*, *Lagoon*, science-fiction, résistance

To the memory of my father

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Introduction: Shapeshifting as a Narrative Trope

The novels I study here seem to confirm Octavia Butler and Nnedi Okorafor's belief in the science fiction as a practical mode of narrative. Yet, what these novels deploy is the accumulation of colonial and postcolonial violence after independence and different means of resistance in confronting violence. The notions of shapeshifting and responsibility loom large in this respect. After elaborating the key concepts of shapeshifting and non-violent resistance in chapter 1, this dissertation focuses on Nnedi Okorafor's shapeshifters and their semi-violent resistance in chapter 2. I will argue that in relation to postcolonial violence, post-colonial theory goes hand in hand with a narration, which resists old patterns of resistance and violence. Significantly, this narration also resists the temptation of violence and the most important characteristic of all shapeshifters of these novels is their role to educate people and social awareness.

The first chapter outlines theoretical issues, which are elaborated on in the next two chapters. I will unpack the concept of shapeshifting and the ways in which it intervenes in my reading of the novels. I will relate the concept of shapeshifting to questions of postcolonial history, resistance and postcolonial violence. Using speculative fiction both writers portray the possibilities of transformation and a better future, based on change and wisdom with the help of shapeshifters. Finally, in relation to the literary texts, I will argue that resistance and shapeshifting mark the content of the novels. The necessity for change and the act of shapeshifting protagonists reflect the importance of responsibility in conflict situations. The final chapter specifically explores the fundamental shifts and the possibility of change through a process of negotiation exemplified through the representation of the president of Nigeria, a process which leads to a constructive revision.

One of the threads tying the novels together is the trope of monstrosity . Shapeshifting is a part of “monster studies.”¹ This field explores monsters and monstrosity from an array of methodological and theoretical perspectives across the humanities and sciences. The monster is full of symbolic and subversive meanings, often critical of society, and so is the shapeshifter. I will draw on Jeffrey Jerome Cohen’s concept of monstrosity in *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* (1996) and explore this notion in relation to Okorafor’s *Lagoon* and Butler’s *Wild Seed*. I intend to link the two novels through the ways in which Cohen’s text negotiates shapeshifting monsters with resistance, and study how shapeshifting rewrites the notion of liberation evoked in *Lagoon* and *Wild Seed*. *Lagoon* explores and negotiates social liberation through marginal voices and female shapeshifters with a focus on the inevitable role of violence. Okorafor explores marginalized female perspectives on the horrors of injustice through the character of the bone collector roads through the Old Spirit. In *Lagoon* the Old spirit, Udide is a spider storyteller. Story setting foregrounds the ways in which the responsibility to narrate violence becomes entangled with the apparent necessity to enact liberating or revolutionary violence. Storytelling and forms of narration portray the need to address trauma and the effect of silenced memories. In this sense, reading *Lagoon* and remembering the history of colonization, suggest continuity rather than rupture between the violence of the old colonizers and that of military rule. Through this novel, I return to the idea of shapeshifting with a focus on responsibility in a situation of political and

¹Chris Koenig-Woodyard, Shalini Nanayakkara, and Yashvi Khatri in their introduction to *Monster Studies* explain that this field investigates monsters and the monstrous, monstrosity, and the monstral through a wide range of methodologies that include anthropology, biology, the classics, cultural studies, gender studies, geography, history, literature, philosophy, religion, and zoology. *Monster studies*, is a relatively new area for an old academic field; it applies new critical tools and methods to the study – the excavation and interpretation – of old monsters (sometimes in refurbished bodies) that literary and classics scholars have been discussing since antiquity.

The phrase "monster studies" emerged in critical parlance in the mid-1990s, around the 1996 publication of the Cohen-edited collection of essays *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, which includes his "Monster Culture (Seven Theses)" – a piece that is paradigmatic to the field. <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/689089>

structural violence. The focus of Okorafor's novel is social awareness and the main character's responsibility as an agent of change. In *Lagoon*, the role of the frightening shapeshifters develops through a relation with claims to human rights and shared knowledge.

In both novels, the conjuncture of the strange and the familiar, of stasis and metamorphosis, plays tricks on the perceptions of the reader and the shapeshifting protagonists who are different or "other." In *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (1982), Julia Kristeva argues that monsters are created through the process of othering, which evokes the female shapeshifters of *Wild Seed* and *Lagoon*, who are different but dissolve institutional hierarchies and power structures. They subvert the hierarchical positions race and gender in their creation of a world in opposition to the imperialist governments. Both novels show how colonialism and imperialism grind down and dehumanize the people within it. The representation of the past and the future is merged in the trope of the shapeshifter who can inhabit various m of time. At the same time, the trope of shapeshifting is intimately related to but not synonymous with the postcolonial trope of mimicry. I will first discuss the notion of postcolonial mimicry and then the novels' context of genre, science fiction.

Homi Bhabha's Notion of Mimicry

Wild Seed condemns colonialism and slavery and my first chapter explores the ideology of slavery in *Wild Seed*, using Homi Bhabha's notion of mimicry and the idea of shapeshifting as means of resistance. It also studies the relationship between shapeshifting and mimicry in the course of the narrative. Butler deploys the construction of race through male antagonist Doro's New World in the context of racist ideologies including scientific racism. I examine how shapeshifting operates as a form of resistance against racialized social relationships and, in particular, of Doro's ambitions to breed racially superior human beings in *Wild Seed*. For this

purpose, Homi Bhabha's postcolonial and cultural theory of mimicry is applied to the text. Mimicry places the colonized subject in the ambivalent position of the hybrid subject who is neither colonizer nor colonized, but something in between. This hybridity disrupts the social control of the colonizer. In addition, it can be argued that although mimicry and shapeshifting work together in *Wild Seed*, the main difference is that shapeshifting moves within the power structure that is given and refuses that structure.

In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha explains the colonial subject who is 'white but not quite' uses this ambivalence to reflect the tyranny of the colonizer to himself, and to mock the rational claims of the colonizer's logic. As Bhabha writes: "The ambivalence of colonial authority repeatedly turns from mimicry—a difference that is almost nothing but not quite—to menace—a difference that is almost total but not quite" (Bhabha 131). Bhabha's concept of mimicry is thus a way of reflecting back, a way of registering one's presence. Bhabha maintains the dynamics of ambivalence to locate the Third-World intellectual. In *Wild Seed*, Anyanwu learns the new language and adapts the dominant culture, knowledge and regulations and thereby clearly walks around the paradigm of binary confrontation, but never, for a moment, forgets her roots or becomes an 'other.' This is a 'menace' that cannot be theorized. Anyanwu is a shapeshifter, and her ever shifting, ever evasive location creates multiple possibilities and this is perhaps what Bhabha considers as the condition of the Third-World intellectual in the First World.

Mimicry is a critique of colonial domination and exploitation and functions through the presence of the Third-World intellectual who uses the English language and often inhabits a First-World location. Therefore, mimicry is not only a strategy of protest, but also a medium to negotiate possibilities of a dialogue. Mimicry is the result of the colonial oppression and entails the pervasive strategy of cultural imperialism: "Colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable

Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite. Which is to say, that the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an ambivalence” (Bhabha 122). The subject position of this mimic man has shifted from its conclusively binary one of the colonized ‘other. ‘He is now ‘other’ but ‘not quite.’ He is a hybrid subject who is neither colonizer nor colonized, but something in between. This hybridity displaces the social control of the power centre. As Bhabha writes, “the reforming civilizing mission is threatened by the displacing gaze of its disciplinary double . . .” (Bhabha 123). In *Wild Seed* the talented hybrids of the New World imitate Doro/the colonizer, but their intellectual capacity or ‘talent’ is a threat for Doro. Therefore, the conflicted colonizer (Doro) kills one of his children every so often for no other reason but to maintain his dominant position. The hybrid children of *Wild Seed* try to honour their origins, while writing a history that has been erased by colonizer. This is what Bhabha calls the ‘metonymy of presence’—a camouflage, a form of resemblance, which differs from or defends presence by displaying it in part, metonymically: “The desire of colonial mimicry—an interdictory desire—may not have an object, but it has strategic objectives which I shall call the metonymy of presence.” (Bhabha 128). Thus, through mimicry the colonized subverts the colonizer’s ideology. By appropriating a dominant language and culture, the colonized subjects return a distorted image of their world to the colonizer, which, according to Bhabha, has an unsettling effect on their authority. This, however, is not enough for Butler or Okorafor and their shapeshifting protagonists seek to change the social order and not just to menace or reflect a distorted image of the colonizer. The female writers use science fiction and history together to highlight racism, while deploying how people/creatures of different racial backgrounds can work together. Both novels find ways for the voices of alienated people to be heard by giving voice to a black woman and by confronting racism and oppression rather than ignoring it. As Afrofuturistic novels, both *Lagoon* and *Wild Seed*

suggest to the reader ways in which to examine both their past and their present to think about what kind of future they desire.

Science Fiction and Shapeshifting

This study examines shapeshifting as a post-colonial metaphor of race, gender and resistance in the novels *Wild Seed* and *Lagoon*. In both science fiction novels, the conceptions of race and gender are highlighted through portrayals of shapeshifting and the post-human. From this position, this study explores the ways in which novelists, and Octavia Butler, in *Wild Seed*, and Nnedi Okorafor, in *Lagoon* in particular, deploy shapeshifting, that is, the blurring and destabilization of boundaries, as a tool for aesthetic and socio-political engagement in postcolonial and post-independence narratives. In both novels, the technology of the immortal shapeshifters does not threaten the nature/culture nor does it serve colonialism. Indeed, science and knowledge are productive and shared among people. Furthermore, John Reider argues in *Colonialism and the Emergence of Science Fiction*:

many of the repetitive motifs that coalesced into the genre of science fiction represent ideological ways of grasping the social consequences of colonialism, including the fantastic appropriation and rationalization of unevenly distributed colonial wealth in the homeland and in the colonies, the racist ideologies that enabled colonial exploitation, and the cognitive impact of radical cultural differences on the home culture. (Reider 33)

In his article “Postcrisis African Science Fiction,” Mattheew Omelsky explains: “Our current historical moment, as Slavoj Zizek has put it, is apocalyptic time, the time of the end of time” (261). He believes that we live in the moment of global ecological crisis and of the ever-impending collapse of Capital. Therefore, it is a relief to imagine the moment after the crisis. Afro-Science fiction is a transformative and revolutionary art form to imagine black people in the future. In

recent years, African artists have begun to articulate this “moment after,” in African literature and film that speculates upon post-crisis African futures. Both novels blend African magical elements with science fiction. Looking at *Wild Seed* and *Lagoon*, I examine the juxtaposition of traditional magical elements with science fictional materials, and the way the shapeshifting protagonists establish justice in society. For instance, *Lagoon* dramatizes a lot of angry or suppressed people and behind this rage lies anger against racism and the desire to denounce it and deconstruct it. While the citizens are angry, they are not criminalized. In fact, Okorafor opposes a complex image of Nigerian citizens to the reductive, racist and criminalizing stereotypes of Nigerians projected in such films as Neill Blomkamp’s *District 9*.

In addition, it can be claimed that both novels are also tainted by racism, imperialism and oppression; thus, I argue that shapeshifting is a narrative device in postcolonial science fiction that functions as a mode of resistance against colonialism, oppression and imperialism in different historical contexts in both novels. My thesis demonstrates how shapeshifting symbolically facilitates a process of decolonization by resisting and altering received constructions of gender and race. Furthermore, it explores effective sites of decolonization aiming at demonstrating “resistant” identities represented as an immortal shapeshifter in *Wild Seed* and an extraterrestrial in *Lagoon*.

Shapeshifting and Resistance in *Wild Seed*

The paradox in *Wild Seed* is that the colonizer creates a false impression of a promised land and thus implies that wealth and power is available to the people of the New World. For instance, Doro vows to give his people “land and seed” and tells them “others will teach [you] to live in [your] new country [that] is a good place” (Butler 64). Anyanwu, the female protagonist, leaves her homeland for the “New World” and establishes a new society. Shapeshifting is her weapon

against Doro through and articulates female resistance to colonial ideology and power. I explore this form of resistance further through a reading of shapeshifting as a form of non-violent resistance based on knowledge sharing and wisdom. I will then investigate shapeshifting and its gender configurations in *Lagoon*.

The dynamic of shapeshifting in *Wild Seed* proves a version of justice which is collective and creative through time and which has as much to do with the future as with the past that echoes the narrative strategies of Afrofuturism.² It is as much a reflection of the past as a projection of a brighter future in which black and African cultures do not hide in the margins of the white mainstream. In *Wild Seed*, Butler points to the violent configuration through the racially separated colonial and white people in Doro's new world. Yet the passage signifies both Frantz Fanon's description of colonialism's violent compartmentalization of space in *The Wretched of the Earth* (31), but it also stresses the resistance as well as the desire and potential for change, which is demonstrated by overcoming boundaries through shapeshifting. The description of Doro's new world is the novel's starting point for the emergence of resistance among the new citizens/slaves.

Shapeshifting and the 'Supernatural' in *Lagoon*

In *Lagoon*, a novel set in Lagos, Nigeria, shapeshifting is a means of survival, decolonization and the establishment of social justice. Shapeshifting is a crucial pillar in *Lagoon*'s plot structure and revolves around the extraterrestrial ambassador, Ayodele, and her mission to change Nigeria and the world. Three human protagonists, Adaora, a marine biologist, Agu, a Nigerian soldier, and Anthony, a hip-hop singer help Ayodele in her mission. The realm of the

² The term Afrofuturism, coined in 1993, seeks to reclaim black identity through art, culture, and political resistance. It is an intersectional lens through which to view possible futures or alternate realities, though it is rooted in chronological fluidity

supernatural appears as a part of West African culture. In the second chapter, the relationship between the alien shapeshifter and the traditional African ‘supernatural’ will be examined.

In *Lagoon* the supernatural occurs, for example, in the figure of the swordfish who chooses to be in a woman’s shape. It reminds the reader of the African divinity, called Mawu or Mahu,³ a female creator who establishes harmony by creating gods of justice, the sea and the earth. The supernatural in *Lagoon* also establishes justice and rescues the earth, the sea, as well as the people. In the second chapter, I will study the relationship between shapeshifting and the ‘supernatural.’ *Lagoon* is neither about apocalyptic and dystopian ends nor about revenging gods.

Violence, Petro-fiction and Water

Frantz Fanon has had a remarkable impact on anti-colonial theory and struggle. It seems that his conclusions on colonial oppression are helpful for an effective decolonization and for a critical understanding of anti-colonial violence. Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth* discuss revolutionary anger, which is also a critical theme in *Lagoon* and I will study it using Sianne Ngai’s theory of affect. In a biography on Frantz Fanon, David Macey describes anger as “a truly Fanonian emotion” (27). It is, as he says:

A response to his experience of a black man in a world defined as white, but not to the “fact” of blackness. It was a response to the condition and situation of those he called the wretched of the earth. *The wretched of the earth* are still there, but not in the seminar rooms where the talk is of post-colonial theory. They came out on the streets of Algiers in 1988, and the Algerian army shot them dead. [...] Had he lived, Fanon would still be angry. His readers should be angry too.

³ A female being. She is a mature woman, and often a mother who is gentle and forgiving. She is also seen as the god who owns all other gods and even if there is no temple made in her name, the people continue to pray to her, especially in times of distress.

(27)

For Fanon, colonialism is marked with violence and sufficient resistance to violence occurs when the colonial subject uses violence to regain his agency. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon describes: “Colonialism is not a thinking machine, nor a body endowed with reasoning faculties. It is violence in the natural state, and it will only yield when confronted with greater violence” (Fanon 23). Fanon believes in operating different forms of violence against the colonizer by the colonized: “Each individual forms a violent link in the great chain, a part of the great organism of violence which has surged upward in reaction to the settler’s violence in the beginning” (Fanon 93). Additionally, in “On Violence,” the first chapter of *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon insists on the necessity of physical violence in the struggle for liberation. “Violence is liberating in two ways; it binds people together through the creation of a national consciousness, however, as signifying, it delivers the colonized from his inferiority complex implanted through the oppressor’s racism” (Fanon 51). In *Lagoon*, however, shapeshifting is a non-violent means of resistance and the shapeshifting aliens save nature/culture and humanity without violence or militarized action. However, unlike *Wild Seed*, violence is inevitable in the liberation process of *Lagoon*. A central agent of violence in both *Lagoon* and the present post-Independent history of Nigeria is oil and the pollution and corruption it causes vis-à-vis Nigeria’s ecological and the political environment. To some extent, therefore, *Lagoon* is both science fiction and petro-fiction.

Graeme Macdonald, in his article “Oil and World Literature,” defines petro-fiction as a literature that addresses the production, consumption, and/or consequences of petroleum-based energy and/or petroculture. In a 1992 *New Republic* review of the first two novels in Abdelrahman Munif’s renowned petro-quintet *Cities of Salt* (1984), Amitav Ghosh pondered the absence of the Great American Oil Novel (GAON). “Why, he asked, in the nation where oil is virtually sacrosanct

and where the industry remains a prodigious force, had literary responses to its significance for American life been so scant?" (Macdonald 7-31). For Ghosh, this silence of American cultural production reflected the production of oil itself. Okorafor deploys the oil problem in *Lagoon* from both environmental and economic point of views. The oil fields of Nigeria do not bring comfort for the people of the country who only witness the negative consequences of the oil industry such as water pollution. *Lagoon* is a petro-fiction in which the alien shapeshifter is part of an environmental catastrophe. The narrative warns against water pollution and the anger of the earth in different parts of the book using such metaphors as a "rainbow" for oil pollution or a "shifting street" as a passage of spirits. No one can stop "the ones who bring the rainbows" (Okorafor 3) except the shapeshifter swordfish. Corrupted governors who ignore people and environment are real aliens and their presence stifles and slowly kills the land and its people and nature by either unsafe roads or polluted water.

As with oil, Water is symbolically significant in both novels. In the Atlantic slave trade, water designated the imperial infrastructure of exploitation, commerce and the Middle Passage. For the colonized people, water symbolizes sacred spirits such as Mami Wata, and is an inseparable part of African mysticism that brings harmony to life. As a colonial infrastructure for the sugar and slave trade, however, water is commodified and loses its symbolic or sacred supernatural function for the colonial subject. However, the shapeshifters of *Lagoon* and *Wild Seed* inhabit this infrastructure (water) and appropriate it to their own specifications. Ultimately, they resist and undo historical narratives through which black women and/or slaves are locked into particular positions that are marked as slavery and oppression. In both novels, colonial patterns of water exploitation are challenged by shapeshifters and through the genre of science fiction. The alien shapeshifters in *Lagoon* detoxify the water and Adaora the female protagonist

is a marine biologist. Anyanwu the shapeshifting protagonist of *Wild Seed*, considers water a comfortable home that gives “freedom” and gives her time to “think through confusion, take away boredom” (Butler 168). Thus, water is a powerful force in both novels.

In the second chapter, I consider colonial relationships between Nigeria’s corrupted government and water, focusing on the separation of land and water, corrupted beliefs and Old spirits. I will study different ways in which the shapeshifting protagonists protect water. In *Wild Seed* and *Lagoon*, the colonizer’s influence is felt in the divisions that separate the village, the riverbanks, and the people from one another. In my readings I will emphasize the role knowledge and awareness plays in challenging oppressive relationships that continue from the past into the present. If the past conventionally determines the future, these two novels, as my readings suggest, rewrite the future and thereby change the past. It is for this reason that science fiction becomes a productive genre in postcolonial writing.

Chapter I:

Shapeshifting in Octavia Butler's *Wild Seed*

I argue that shapeshifting is a narrative device in Octavia Butler's novel *Wild Seed* that functions as a mode of resistance against colonialism, oppression and imperialism. *Wild Seed* is the story of two immortal Africans named Doro and Anyanwu. Doro, the male protagonist, has been alive for almost 4,000 years. He has great power and influence and yet he is alone. Doro kills and changes bodies and fears no one until he meets Anyanwu a shapeshifter woman who is a healer and fears no one until she meets Doro. Doro dreams of breeding a new race of immortals and when he encounters Anyanwu, the shapeshifter and healer, he knows that he has met his true mate. Although only 300 years old, she is Doro's equal, perhaps the only other one of his kind on Earth. However, she has sprung from "wild seed", beyond his control, and she becomes Doro's implacable enemy. "Wild Seed" is a metaphor for a free and independent person who does not conform to oppressive structures. *Wild Seed* is a direct indictment of colonialism and slavery denouncing the colonizer's ideology. This chapter explores the history of slavery in *Wild Seed*, using Homi Bhabha's notion of mimicry as a configuration of resistance and its possible relationship to concepts of shapeshifting. Butler contextualizes Doro's New World in ideologies of racism, including scientific racism. I examine how shapeshifting operates as a form of resistance against the racialization of social relationships and, in particular, of Doro's project of breeding racially superior humans in *Wild Seed*. For this purpose, Homi Bhabha's postcolonial and cultural theory of mimicry is applied to the text. More specifically, mimicry is a counter-discourse that I want to challenge through shapeshifting. Shapeshifting is a trope that constructively criticizes the popular notion of mimicry as a mode of resistance in postcolonial studies. In shapeshifting, there is no colonial referent whereas in mimicry a colonial referent is essential. However, they both embody a form of resistance through which the system is undermined from within rather than from

without. Shapeshifting disrupts the rules and regulations through which the relationship between the colonized and colonizer function. In colonial and postcolonial literature, mimicry is most commonly seen when members of a colonized society imitate the language, dress, politics, or cultural attitude of their colonizers. Homi Bhabha highlights the colonizer's ambivalence with respect to his position towards the colonized Other. For example, the simple presence of the adapted/shifted Anyanwu in Doro's new world is evidence of the ambivalence that destabilizes its claim for absolute authority or unquestioned authenticity. In addition, it can be argued that mimicry and shapeshifting work together in *Wild Seed*, but the main difference is that in *Wild Seed* shapeshifting moves within the given power structure but ultimately rejects the structure in which it resides. The shapeshifting subject destabilizes the absolute authority of the colonizer and male dominance.

In *Wild Seed* adaptation processes, including learning English (the language of the colonizer) and adapting to the culture of the colonizer, resonate with mimicry. However, shapeshifting goes beyond mimicry as a more powerful and practical form of resistance with tangible results. More specifically, a colonized shapeshifter does not require recognition by the colonizer and does not recognize the colonizer. Shapeshifting resists the coloniser/colonized binary implemented through a power differential in education, knowledge and wealth sharing. Moreover, it implies wisdom through adaptation and fosters survival and the establishment of justice while honoring an ecological balance in which all creatures and people can live together peacefully.

In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha explains that the colonized subject has developed several resistance strategies that, once combined, have a subversive potential against the colonizer. Drawing from Jacques Lacan's notion of camouflage, Bhabha argues that "The effect of mimicry is camouflage. [...] It is not a question of harmonizing with the background, but against a mottled

background” (qtd in Bhabha 85). Colonial mimicry comes from the colonizer’s desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of difference, that is, as Bhabha writes, “almost the same, but not quite” (Bhabha 89). However, Bhabha’s theory of mimicry has limitations and is not without its critics. For instance, Aijaz Ahmad and Benita Parry criticize Bhabha for establishing a postcolonial theory that overlooks the material colonial contexts and post-independent realities of the former colonies. For example, in his book, *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* Ahmad suggests, that “Between postcoloniality as it exists in a former colony like India, and postcoloniality as the condition of discourse by such critics as Bhabha, there would appear to be a considerable gap” (Ahmad 25). There are many more critics of this work and many scholars that find it useful.⁴

Postcolonial theory, hence, has several strategies for constructing productive spaces to revise and reinvent the dominant English language and literature of the empire. One of them is mimicry which in Bhabha’s terminology relates to the colonized adopting the languages and forms of Empire but in so doing alter and distort the dominant meanings of colonial authority like the way Anyanwu reproduces her culture in the “new language” (Butler 65). However, in “Signs of our Times”, Benita Parry discusses *The Location of Culture* and criticizes the “linguistic turn” in cultural studies, more particularly, Bhabha's dependence on psychoanalytical and linguistic explanations of cultural identities. In *Post-Colonial studies: A Materialist Critique*, she further criticizes the “linguistic turn” and recommends a materialist post-colonial analysis that studies colonialism and economic exploitation of the colonized people by imperialism. In his article “Of

⁴ “Mimicry” is defined by the Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin as “ an increasing important term in post-colonial theory, because it has come to describe the ambivalent relationship between colonizer and colonized. When colonial discourse encourages the colonized subject to “mimic” the colonizer, by adopting the colonizer’s cultural habits, assumptions, institutions, and values, the result is never a simple reproduction of those traits. Rather the result is a “blurred copy of the colonizer that can be quite threatening” (121-131).

Mimicry and Man” (86), Homi Bhabha discusses how, as part of the so-called “civilizing mission”, the colonial authorities wanted their colonized subjects to imitate the manners, language, and society of the imperial center. However, they wished this imitation only to be partial, in so far as their colonized subjects were to remain ‘separate,’ still requiring British rule.

Wild Seed reflects such attitudes in many different parts of the narrative. For instance, Doro highlights the notion of ‘separation’ by separating his children/slaves from the ordinary residents of the New World/North America. Bhabha identifies this ambivalence as “the effect of a flawed colonial mimesis, in which to be Anglicized is emphatically not to be English” (Bhabha 87). In this regard, no matter how talented his children are, they must always respect Doro’s rules, and he, the master/colonizer controls their minds to make sure this “separation” is respected. He kills one of his most talented children because “she was able to send and receive thoughts” (Butler 126). Based on Bhabha’s theory, the colonized, after a long relationship with the colonizer, develops ambivalent feelings toward the colonizer which results in either positive or negative emotions. Karen P.L. Hardison in her article “What is the concept of ‘mimicry’ as presented by Bhabha in reference to post-colonial literature?” suggests that this ambivalence is apparent in “colonial and post-colonial literature and that it creates beings (who then may write literature) who hybrids of their own cultural identity and the colonizer's cultural identity.” However, in *Wild Seed* the female protagonist has agency and, even after thousands of years, she is not a “hybrid” with ambivalent feelings toward the colonizer/Doro. In contrast to slaves, Anyanwu can theoretically leave anytime she wants. Further, “she would not adopt a European name or call her children by their European names”—though she had consented to give them European names at Doro’s insistence. Her children could “speak and understand [their own language] as well as she could” (Butler 103). The shapeshifting protagonist educates people of the New World and “even Isaac, after all the years,

could understand and speak fairly well” (Butler 103). This goes well beyond mere mimicry and also maintains their mother’s identity.

By mimicking and adopting a dominant language and culture, the colonized subjects return a distorted image of their world to the colonizer, which, according to Bhabha, has an unsettling effect on the authority of the colonizer. In *Wild Seed* Doro’s children (the products of his breeding project) must obey his rules as he exerts total control over their minds and bodies. Doro/the Master places value on enhancing their supernatural abilities, thus forcing them to imitate the New World’s culture and language. However, the story dishonors such a colonial mission and Doro’s project fails in the end. Further, Doro changes bodies but unlike Anyanwu, he is not a shapeshifter. Rather, he possesses and inhabits a living body and then discards it. The shapeshifter only uses her own body to change into other figures. In contrast, Doro is a parasite with destructive functions that harm nature and humanity as a whole. Thus, *Wild Seed* is a direct indictment of colonialism and slavery and denounces the colonizer’s ideology of racism and of the production of a new race (modern slaves who speak English) to imitate the colonizer’s culture. I argue that in *Wild Seed* mimicry cannot be adopted as an effective means of resistance because it is unable to reflect a distinctive image to the colonizer.

Some of Doro’s most talented children imitate and obey Doro initially, but then try to achieve autonomy as people with agency; however, Doro ultimately kills them. Based on Bhabha’s theory, the symbolic colonizer/Doro “fears the potential power of the colonized subject” (Bhabha 62). Despite Doro’s vast power (including mind control) he is afraid of challenges to his authority by his people. In particular, Anyanwu frightens him because” [she] had too much power. In spite of Doro’s fascination with her, his first inclination was to kill her” (Butler 96). Doro fears her because he can neither control her mind nor kill her when she shifts into an animal shape. She

overcomes colonialist power structures and thus, the colonizer/Doro has no authority over her: “But she had too much power. In her dolphin form, and before that, in her leopard form, Doro had discovered that his mind could not find her. Even when he could see her, his mind, his tracking sense, told him she was not there” (Butler 61). Shapeshifting, at the level of both mind and body, is her weapon against Doro, the male antagonist and embodies female resistance against colonial ideology and power.

I explore this form of resistance further through a reading of shapeshifting as a form of non-violent resistance based on knowledge sharing and wisdom. In *Wild Seed* Anyanwu develops and establishes different forms of resistance as she escapes Doro and his oppressive system by transforming into a dolphin shape and into the borderless world of the ocean where no tyrant can rule over her. Then she delves into his mind and deconstructs his assumptions about his breeding project: “He did not command her any longer. She was no longer one of his breeders, nor even one of his people in the old proprietary way. He could ask her cooperation, her help, but he could no longer coerce her into giving it. There would be no more threats to her children” (Butler 188). Moreover, in the end, she proves herself as the healer of her nation and the world by shifting her society’s values and altering Doro’s perspective.

The role of shapeshifting is crucial in *Wild Seed* because it also projects a livable future composed of a shared sense of truth. The dynamic of shapeshifting in *Wild Seed* supports a version of justice which is collective and creative over time and which has as much to do with the future as with the past and echoes the narrative strategies of Afrofuturism. It is as much a reflection of the past as a projection of a liberated future in which black and African cultures do not have to bear the brunt of racism, racialized violence, and inequality. Anyanwu’s society has all the criteria of a democratic government in which people of any race or gender have agency over their lives.

For example, Anyanwu carries the memory of her people, and as an educator, when she leaves Africa. On her journey, she does not become ‘other’ or a ‘slave,’ but she becomes more powerful as she gains knowledge and educates herself. At the beginning of the narrative, shapeshifting emerges as a means of survival but gradually by both shifting Doro’s mind and redistributing knowledge, shapeshifting becomes a means of restoring order. Doro protects Anyanwu’s people and “he stopped her cross-country plans by putting her and her people on one of his own clippers and returning to her one of the best of her descendants by Isaac to keep her safe from storms” (Butler 189). Such remarkable transformation and radical change in Doro’s behavior highlights the magic of education.

In *Wild Seed*, shapeshifting is part of a dynamic process of knowledge production and management: “It was always useful to be able to camouflage oneself to hide or to learn the things people either would not or could not deliberately teach her about themselves” (Butler 60). Under these conditions, shapeshifting is also creative and future oriented. As I will show, shapeshifting in *Wild Seed* provides a new form of moral authority and fosters a new set of social relations. Shapeshifting takes the raw material of one world such as people, ideas, connections and obligations and reassembles them. The lines of inclusion and exclusion are redrawn to form a new version of community, one that is more inclusive of difference. The value of shapeshifting is to resist by creating a secure society. However, it is only one person that is a shapeshifter and hence exceptional. But resistance and survival are communal projects. As a result, shapeshifting is a form of productive resistance rather than a form of reflection. As a component of *Wild Seed*’s plot shapeshifting does not end but helps commence a safer and better future. The final reconciliation between the protagonist and the antagonist reinforces this fact. Therefore, the colonizer is not removed physically but the act of ‘colonization’ vanishes as a result of transformative power of

shapeshifting in Butler's novel. There is no 'camouflage,' 'war strategy,' or hidden destructive intention. Shapeshifting in *Wild Seed* intervenes the infinite cycle of war, revenge, and trauma by maintaining a secure society. Therefore, different forms of shapeshifting such as adaptation, submission and reconciliation profoundly reconfigure the relations between resistance, survival, and knowledge sharing. After reconciliation, Doro asks Anyanwu to educate his people: "Teach them responsibility, pride, honor. Teach them whatever you taught [Anyanwu's son] Stephen" (Butler 149). Henceforth, the notion of mimicry is insufficient to account for its variant and flexible formats in *Wild Seed*.

Butler sets *Wild Seed* in the pre-colonial era, when tyrannical leadership had frustrated many people of Doro's 'New World.' In an interview, Butler acknowledge her admiration for change and her reaction towards exploitation and injustice. When Stephen W. Potts asked her, "Are you suggesting that people in subordinate positions should recognize and exploit what power they do have?" Butler answered, "You do what you have to do. You make the best use of whatever power you have" (Potts Science-Fiction Studies). In a similar manner to Anyanwu, Butler's methods of resistance are non-violent.

As an engaged writer who refused injustice, Butler chose the 'pen' to resist as it is obvious in her different works, especially the *Patternist*⁵ series of which *Wild Seed* is one volume and makes it a characteristic example of nonviolent resistance. In *Wild Seed*, Anyanwu, the female

⁵ The *Patternist* series (also known as the *Pattern master* series or *Seed to Harvest*) is a group of science fiction novels by Octavia E. Butler that detail a secret history continuing from the Ancient Egyptian period to the far future that involves telepathic mind control and an extraterrestrial plague. Butler's first published novel, 1976's *Patternmaster*, was the first book in this series to appear. From 1977 until 1984, she published four more *Patternist* novels: *Mind of My Mind* (1977), *Survivor* (1978), *Wild Seed* (1980) and *Clay's Ark* (1984).

protagonist, resists Doro's violence and tyranny by all peaceful means even by adapting to the new language or culture. Frantz Fanon says, "To speak a language is to take on a world, a culture" (Fanon 67). However, unlike Butler, Fanon advocates violent and revolutionary resistance, which will be discussed in the second chapter. Anyanwu learns English with patience, although she really dislikes it. For Anyanwu, "It was always useful to be able to camouflage oneself to hide or to learn the things people either would not or could not deliberately teach her about themselves. This when she could speak English well, of course" (Butler 60). She knows it is only through knowledge and adaptation to her new situation that she will be able to create a better life for her descendants. She preserves her own culture and language, but even as a representative of an African tribe, she finds it wise to adapt to the modern world.

Adaptation is a "smart" form of resistance that Anyanwu adopts in order to protect herself and her people against the violent repercussions of the oppressor. It is also a biological strategy of survival. Her most powerful weapons are wisdom and shapeshifting. She knows, through experience and intuition, that "to fight something, you need to know it well" (Butler 43). Thus, she convinces herself to study and learn all she can about the "new" situation. Through the narrative, we witness Anyanwu's struggle with Doro's rules that enforce obligatory marriages and learning English. She first resists openly and demonstrates her disapproval of such rules and says, "[she] will not obey because even a slave must follow his/ [her] own thoughts sometimes" (Butler 73). Anyanwu's position is borne out in *Black Skin, White Masks* when Fanon describes the reason of such negative reaction against the new language in colonised countries. "Every colonized people- in other words, every people in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of his local cultural originality finds him/herself face to face with the language of the civilizing nation, that is with the culture of the mother country" (17-18). Faced with this

situation, Anyanwu gradually considers English like ‘magic’ and asks Doro to teach her. It appears that with a new language or a new culture she can gain the power of knowledge as a form of resistance. By decoding the unfamiliar, she conquers the obscure domain of difference or “separation.” Therefore, by shapeshifting she resists colonization and exploitation. She does not forget her Igbo heritage and insists on maintaining it and decorating her home according to West African standards, giving her children African names, and establishing kinship networks based on her homeland’s communal structure. Neither Anyanwu nor her community is yet “hybridized” because they respect their Igbo heritage and maintain it.

According to Bhabha, mimicry is a means of resistance but the shapeshifting subjects of *Wild Seed* do not try to reflect the image of Doro. The new language and culture empowers them with knowledge to resist the colonizer/Doro. Butler manifests yet another way in which Anyanwu’s relationships with her children help to protect the children from dehumanization and further express her subtly increasing influence over Doro. She often speaks as though she has never left home. She forbids killing animals, establishes her Igbo culture, and makes even earthen pots in the New World: “Anyanwu makes earthen pots, variations of those she had once sold in the marketplaces of her homeland, and stout handsome baskets. People bought them from her and placed them around their houses as she had” (Butler 95). Therefore, her children have culture, agency and independence.

Learning the colonizer’s language can be a form of peaceful resistance not just ‘camouflage’ and ‘mimicry’ as Homi Bhabha suggests in his essay. This is because by obtaining awareness and living in a new environment, Anyanwu performs a kind of shapeshifting, as it is part of her nature in addition to being a form of adaptation and a means of self-defence. Further, as a literate woman, she has the opportunity to shift the society around her and to expand her

peaceful culture. Unlike Doro, she is incapable of mind reading and she has no desire to learn or to intrude upon others' thoughts and choices, because she believes in free will. Therefore, instead of capture, dominance, and dictatorship, she chooses community, equality and justice. Anyanwu, unlike Doro, never invades people's minds the way he does on the slave ship. Doro deceives people with false promises of a happy secure life and evokes the false propaganda of capitalist society. For instance, Doro promises to give his people "land and seed" and tells them "others will teach them to live in their new country [that] is a good place" (Butler 64). However, his children are only breeding slaves and he treats them as prisoners and shows no mercy to them.

Anyanwu's resistance makes sense through the forming of a non-hierarchical society. This contrasts with the colonizer/Doro, whose desired utopia is nothing but a terrifying dystopia. She believes in the right to choose and challenges Doro/ the colonizer directly on the slave ship as "a freeborn woman" (Butler 64). Anyanwu is among her people, eats, lives, and works with them, and there is no oppressive law in her society. She punishes criminals but her people are not afraid of her. She seeks no "separation" or "superiority" which implicitly renounces Bhabha's notion of mimicry. Anyanwu even "breastfeeds" her people's children when they are sick or incapacitated (Butler 180), which is a powerful metaphor for sharing and caring. Such behaviour suggests that only through hard work, knowledge, and solidarity, can Anyanwu envisage a better future for her community. She never relies on magic and teaches her people to become healers "so that they can heal themselves and their families without depending on what they see as my [her] magic" (Butler 198). Anyanwu asks her people to learn the processes and procedures of making remedies and medicines for their problems rather than expecting miracles or wishing for a 'goddess,' a leader or any supernatural hero to perform these tasks. She encourages active responsibility for achieving one's wishes.

In the society Anyanwu creates, people are free to choose, and to gain wisdom at the same time. There is a chapel as reliable as old ‘African kinship’ and ‘temple. ‘One is not supposed to believe in any God. Anyanwu believes that “people must be their own gods and make their own good fortune” (Butler 13). Her people practice community, which is why they have the courage to criticize Doro and talk to him freely, which is another form of adaptation and/or resistance. This suggests another form of shapeshifting, which is also a form of wisdom. Anyanwu has witnessed like a ‘goddess’ and as an ‘immortal’ (Butler 92) how irrational civil war has damaged the history of her nation over slavery and due to the rigidity of biased minds. As a rational person with a kind heart, she suffers when she finds terrifying punishments have been established by unwise leaders for simple misunderstandings, instead of punishment, reconciliation or negotiation have the capacity to heal much of the communities’ wounds.

In addition, for centuries, Anyanwu keeps her name, although, it is not a common one even in her own village. She has no intention of changing it even when Doro wants her to do so. She even mentions, as a newcomer to a woman of the New World/ North America that she will not accept a western name and Doro should translate it because it is ‘culture’ to her. The metaphor of the ‘sun’ represents her central role and preciousness to Doro. For instance, it is Anyanwu who changes the rules and shifts the imposed irrational laws into more reasonable ones:

‘Anyanwu.’ She said it very slowly, but still, the woman asked: Is that all one name?

Only one. I have had others, but Anyanwu is best. I come back to it.

Your word for my name is ‘Sun,’ she answered. Doro said he would find an English name for me, but I did not want one. Now he makes English of my name.

Anyanwu shrugged. He has not changed his own name. Why should he change mine?

The woman gave her what seemed to be a look of pity.

What is Culture? Anyanwu asked.

What it means?

‘Yes’. (Butler 76)

Nevertheless, flexibility is Anyanwu’s most powerful weapon which is another form of shapeshifting. It is only after the final reconciliation with Doro and securing the protection of her people that Anyanwu chooses the simple name “Emma,” which means “grandmother.” Choosing a *hybrid* name perhaps resonates with the flexible afro-futuristic vision of Butler: “In California, she finally took a European name, Emma. She had heard that it meant grandmother or ancestress, and this amused her. She became Emma Anyanwu (189). Not only does Anyanwu have children of different races, but also, instead of being an unknown person in a village in Africa, she becomes Emma, a global phenomenon, a new peaceful mother to the Earth, embracing everyone and everything.

Anyanwu’s community is characterized by mutual respect and understanding far from any Eugenic idealisation or pure progressive intentions. Her society is a combination of ‘progress’ and tradition, similar to her full name, Emma Anyanwu. Anyanwu desires to go beyond restrictive borders and arbitrary rules, exploring the New World with fresh learning possibilities. Throughout *Wild Seed*, Anyanwu transforms her body into a variety of life forms. With each human form, of any race or gender, she assumes a different social and individual position and, subsequently, she gains a particular worldview and increases her knowledge. As a result, she is not reduced to the binary system of the colonizer/ colonized, trapped between ambivalent feelings and separate borders. Anyanwu finds freedom in dolphin form and considers dolphins as people because after spending time in their community, she understands that they are much more sensitive and peaceful to humans. During her long life, she has had the chance to gain experience in the shape of other

animals such as an eagle or a leopard as well as people of different colors, genders or races. However, it is only with dolphins that she finds peace to such an extent that she considers forgetting her idealistic desires and immortal children and to enjoy the beauty of a borderless free life with dolphins. She prefers a dolphin's shape because "The freedom of the sea eased worry, gave her time to think through confusion, took away boredom" (Butler 168). By discussing the dolphin community, she shows that she thinks of them more highly than of real humans. Indeed, she actually refers to dolphins as people.

From Anyanwu's perspective, dolphins look as if they are more advanced and civilized, because they would never harm their own kind or, even worse, their own children. Shapeshifting Anyanwu can be regarded as a fictional representation of Donna Haraway's "cyborg" identity as defined in her essay "A Cyborg Manifesto."⁶ Specifically, Anyanwu embodies Haraway's "bodily realities in which people are not afraid of their joint kinship with animals and machines, not afraid of permanently partial identities and contradictory standpoints" (Haraway 31). When she takes the dolphin shape she enjoys being with them. "A dolphin swam to meet her, paralleled her, observing her out of one lively eye. This was a male, she realized, and she watched him with interest. After a moment, he swam closer and rubbed his body against hers. Dolphin skin, she discovered, was pleasantly sensitive" (Butler 58). For Anyanwu dolphins are "creatures like herself—creatures she was finding it harder to think of as animals. Swimming with him or her was like being with another people. A friendly people. No slavers with brands and chains here. No Doro with gentle, terrible

⁶ "A Cyborg Manifesto" is an essay written by Donna Haraway and published in 1985. In it, the concept of the cyborg is a rejection of rigid boundaries, notably those separating "human" from "animal" and "human" from "machine". She writes: "The cyborg does not dream of community on the model of the organic family, this time without the oedipal project. The cyborg would not recognize the Garden of Eden; it is not made of mud and cannot dream of returning to dust" (2)

threats to her children, to her” (Butler 58). The word ‘brand’ refers to the actual branding of slaves with the seal of their owners. It is also a metaphor for the capitalist governments that label people in hierarchical societies that are run by lies, threats, and false promises: “It could be no more alien to her than the world she had just left” (Butler 132). Anyanwu is wise enough to detect such shifted forms of slavery and prefers resistance by choosing to leave and refusing to be a member of it. Therefore, shapeshifting is an essential element in this book. Butler employs the convention of science fiction⁷ and through the shapeshifting of characters, she explores the depths of human nature and the necessity of resisting violence even by abandoning an irrational and sick society when one is not powerful enough to defeat it. Therefore, Anyanwu escapes and “he [Doro] would not enslave her again and she would never be his prey” (Butler 212). However, it is deceptively easy to consider Anyanwu’s submission to Doro as weakness or docility. Anyanwu submits to Doro’s reign because doing so dissuades him from mortally harming her or her people. Therefore, her wisdom/magic is to forge links with others through acceptance, and cooperation, rather than through domination and intimidation. Her willingness to adapt, to compromise, and to establish connections with others allows her to protect her people in ways that are more rational.

It seems that in *Wild Seed*, different forms of resistance, such as shapeshifting or reconciliation, evoke the necessity of independence by free will. People of any race or gender choose how to live as free individuals which contrasts with Doro’s unification laws. I assume that if Anyanwu shapeshifts into different races and genders it is to gain experience and knowledge. She decides to choose with a wider vision instead of submitting to dictators or killing for irrational reasons. In fact, she remains a black woman, not as a sign of race or gender superiority but to draw

⁷ Though published in 1980, *Wild Seed* diverts from the typical Second Wave “future utopia” narrative that had dominated the feminist science fiction of the 1960s and 1970s.

attention to a more important issue, which is humanity. Similar to Bhabha, difference is not a weakness in Anyanwu's community and therefore it does not end in racism. Her children are free to choose a partner of any race or color. Even if she collects people with special features or capabilities, it is not for a "competition" with Doro's "seed village," but rather, to protect them from potential dangers because Anyanwu knows Doro might harm them or use them for his own selfish purposes. She respects her people and treats them equally despite their physical and racial differences. When Doro accuses Anyanwu of competing with him by raising "witches," she responds by assuring him that she is not:

Then why have you surrounded yourself with the kinds of people I seek out? Why do you have children by them?

They need me . . . those people. She swallowed thinking of some of the things done to her people before she found them. They need someone who can help them, and I can help. You don't want to help them, you want to use them. (Butler 145)

Although Anyanwu is hundreds of years old and is immortal, although she creates a vibrant community and is worshipped as a demi-goddess, she considers herself a simple part of the planet that she inhabits. In addition, she tries to protect her world and avoids harming nature, humans and animals. Unlike Doro, she never means to produce a unified racial community and she does not achieve her goals by eugenics.

Doro's breeding can be interpreted as a potential allegory of globalization, where power and the economic system are more important than humanity and people themselves. For instance, Doro normally leaves his people for long periods to do business and find new 'seeds' and he acts like a slave master. Moreover, whenever he comes back, he begins to test his breeds /children and to check their abilities. If he suspects one of his children is more talented than he is, he kills him

or her for no reason other than considering the child as a potential danger. Doro's competitions never end until the end of the novel. He acts like a 'global agent' and trades slaves and brands his own people:

There were slavers on the coast. An English factor lived there, an employee of the Royal African Company, and incidentally, Doro's man. Bernard Daly was his name. He had three black wives, several half-breed children, and apparently, strong resistance to the numerous local diseases. He also had only one hand. Years before, Doro had cut off the other.

Daly was supervising the branding of new slaves when Doro and Anyanwu pulled their canoe onto the beach. There was a smell of cooking flesh in the air and the sound of a slave boy screaming.
(Butler 25)

In contrast, Anyanwu always remains near her people to help them, cure them and teach them. Her presence is like a sun that gives light and brightness; cultivating their minds is her ultimate goal. She decides to be their grandmother (Emma), instead of a cruel dominant immoral figure like Doro. Anyanwu's character suggests that humans are all parts of the same body or system and are responsible for the planet they inhabit, where a tree or a dolphin is as important as a man or woman of any race or gender. She disagrees with any kind of superiority or dominance over other creatures; in some cases, she even prefers animals like birds and dolphins to people. Such a worldview evokes Gayatri Spivak's argument in her essay titled "The Imperative to Re-Imagine the Planet." Part of her studies concern the notion of the global and globalization, which is inseparable from imperial power, as well as reactions and challenges to it. Moreover, globalization is also about the economy and business. In this regard, it is very similar to colonisation because the earth and all its inhabitants, such as humans, plants and other species suffer from its consequences. For instance, globalization consumes natural resources and by increasing

industrialization, or building factories that pollute the environment, all species suffer from its negative effect. We are not owners of this planet and we have no right to ruin it even if the people in power and capitalist governments try to escape their responsibilities. Similar to Spivak's argument, Anyanwu cares about the planet, which "we inhabit . . . on loan" (Spivak 44). Once, Anyanwu threatens Isaac and prevents him from killing a dolphin because she believes they are people and not things. She refuses to let Isaac bring any more dolphins aboard to be killed. "They are like people," she insisted in her fast-improving English. "They are not fish!"⁸ She swore she would have nothing more to do with Isaac if he killed another of them" (Butler 45). Thirty-nine years after *Wild Seed* was written, we read Anyanwu as a green citizen of the planet for contemporary times. For instance, when Doro says there is nothing evil about consuming animal milk, she says, "it is for animals and I am not an animal now" (Butler 127). She is also loyal to her Igbo culture and "the custom not to drink animal milk" (Butler 126). Anyanwu believes in harmony with nature/culture rather than in the necessity to change it. The shapeshifter protagonist does not need to be recognized by the colonizer's culture. Anyanwu preserves her culture and changes the colonizer's ideology but not by force or violence. Perhaps the most significant example is Doro who holds ultimate power and is recognized even as a "God" among his people. He freely decides to change his violent, cruel behaviour after reconciling with Anyanwu and after assuring her "means no harm" (Butler 127). Doro has lived more than four thousand years as a human; however, cruelty seems to be inseparable from his identity. Indeed, he has practiced violence and savagery as a normal behaviour for centuries. In contrast, through the course of the narrative, Anyanwu

⁸ Ursula Heise in her book *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet* analyzes the relationship between the imagination of the global and the ethical commitment to the local in environmentalist thought and writing from the 1960s to the present. Part One critically examines the emphasis on local identities and communities in North American environmentalism by establishing conceptual connections between environmentalism and ecocriticism, on one hand, and theories of globalization, transnationalism and cosmopolitanism, on the other. It proposes the concept of "eco-cosmopolitanism" as a shorthand for envisioning these connections and the cultural and aesthetic forms into which they translate.

teaches her people to be real humans with courage, free will and mutual respect. Occasionally, some distressing incidents happen. She even loses a beloved child. If her people make a wrong decision or simply make a mistake, they face its consequences which reflects the importance of responsibility. She does not speak the language of power and oppression, but if someone dies for hiding the transition process or rejecting the principles of sharing (perhaps democracy), it is the cost that she or he must pay. For example, in *Wild Seed*, Anyanwu loses some of her people, including her beloved child, because they hide their 'transition' or ignore a simple illness, and she cannot save them. Life in *Wild Seed* is mostly about the fight for survival but for Anyanwu, it appears to be the search for freedom via shapeshifting. It seems that by resisting the colonizers through mimicry, the colonized subjects become passive robots who only imitate the colonizer and have no chance of changing either their oppressors or their own situations. In such an environment, experience or real knowledge as independent individuals with distinct identities do not exist for the colonized. Instead, the ultimate goal is to reflect the colonizer. It is through knowledge that one can achieve agency or become a better member of society. One can learn a lot through trial and error and share knowledge that helps other people like the experience of "transition for Nweke". "Nweke [Anyanwu's beloved child] had been all Doro had hoped for and more. But she was dead because of her talents" (Butler 190). Different examples and various types of evidence in the novel, contradict Bhabha's argument, because knowledge brings change and it is creative. This is demonstrated through Anyanwu as she tries to gain knowledge and learn, even in a hostile environment. She was once "a goddess, a woman through whom a god spoke" (Butler 5) in her remote village in Africa. She was worshipped and protected, but her real virtue, I believe, is her courage to change and her effort to provide a better life for her kin. She pays a heavy price for freedom, confronts many obstacles and loses her safe corner when she battles Doro. She is cheated

and exploited by him but learns how to survive and save her people through shapeshifting, wisdom and free will. These traits that cannot be achieved through mimicry. Doro, also, as a spirit who is more than four thousand years old needs education. The only lesson he needs to learn after many centuries and endless struggles with Anyanwu is how to compromise: “Anyanwu could not have all she wanted, and Doro could no longer have all that he had once considered his by right. She stopped him from destroying his breeders after they had served him” (Butler 219). This is the magic of shapeshifting which, unlike mimicry, provides a multitude of opportunities for fundamental change in the behaviour of individuals and communities.

In the novel *Wild Seed*, Anyanwu cares about people, and she wants her children to be safe. Her children too, despite their racial differences, stay together in the village and experience struggle, pain and loss to learn how to first survive and then serve their family and community. Unlike Doro, Anyanwu does not intimidate, torment, or dominate those who surround her; they are not her slaves. Rather, they are family: “she gathered people to her and cared for them and helped them care for each other” (Butler 140). Unlike Doro, Anyanwu builds a community based not on genetic considerations, race or blood, but choice, “affiliation”⁹ and manages to create a society that has its own autonomy based on solidarity and community. When Anyanwu foresees the American Civil War, her community moves to avoid any possible damage:

She [Anyanwu] settled for protecting her children and any grandchildren or even strangers who became members of her household. These were hers to protect, hers to teach, hers to move if she

⁹ As explained in Edward Said’s *The World, the Text, and the Critic*, by filiation, Said means the writer’s natural and organic connection by “inherited location.” And affiliation is a “network of relationships that human beings make consciously [...] often to replace the loss of filiative relations in modern society” [174,50]

wished. When it became clear within a few years that there would be a war between the Northern and Southern states, she chose to move her people to California. (Butler 189)

Furthermore, Anyanwu, always seeks peace instead of taking sides or any kind of interference. By making such rational decisions she once again proves her flexibility and wisdom. This ethical power can be deployed as a symbolic challenge to the forms of social, economic and political power against which people struggle. Anyanwu and her community may disagree with Doro's methods of leadership and his tyrannical laws and behavior against his own children but they never try to kill him or attack his society. This approach is not just because of Doro's great power but primarily because they prefer negotiation.

Doro, on the other hand, will settle for nothing less than total obedience and tries to force Anyanwu to obey him: "What will I have to do next to teach you to obey?" (Butler 19). Anyanwu eventually seems to submit to Doro. Nevertheless, she also resists him through gaining greater wisdom and adapting to her circumstances. However, Doro never fully believes her transformation, because he is a mind reader and he knows that despite her apparent docility, she still resists his inhuman methods. In the end, he does not want to lose her, not only because she is the "Wild Seed" and thus immeasurably valuable to him, but also for her talents and capacity to establish a successful society. This is, something he is manifestly incapable of doing although he exerts considerable effort and searches the world to find special people for his breeding program.

In addition, at the end of the narrative, Anyanwu offers Doro her life as sacrifice in an attempt to halt the endless struggle between them. Ironically through this act, she gains total power over Doro/the colonizer. Her courage and his fear of losing an irreplaceable companion frighten him, so he accepts her demands, and they reach a final reconciliation. When Anyanwu decides to commit suicide, it is Doro who is virtually destroyed:

‘Please, Anyanwu’. Listen. She was still alive. ‘Listen to me. There isn't anything I wouldn't give to be able to lie down beside you and die when you die. You can't know how I've longed . . .’ He swallowed. ‘Sun Woman, please don't leave me.’ His voice caught and broke. He wept. He choked out great sobs that shook his already shaking body almost beyond bearing. He wept as though for all the past times when no tears would come, when there was no relief. He could not stop. (Butler 220)

Anyanwu is his only hope for redemption, the -Wild Seed, - the only person whose productivity means a lot to him and whose genetic abilities are tremendous. Through the novel, Doro thinks of humans primarily as livestock intended to further his breeding projects. Butler reveals how modern colonization perpetuates the scientific racism by deploying the links among race, slavery and colonialism. However, it is actually Anyanwu that transforms Doro. She teaches him a lesson and ultimately, shifts and heals his immoral behavior. In addition, Doro's intended eugenic utopia devolves into a dystopia. He can never achieve what he seeks through his inhuman breeding system. This is an allegory of the failure of scientific racism on a human level, regardless of technological advances, because modern colonialism and new ways of exploitation speed up the process of dehumanization and lead to more efficient methods of human manipulation. In this manner, the role of independence and the value of individual resistance to tyranny are lost.

Shapeshifting as nonviolent resistance is the central narrative of this novel and we can match it to similar postcolonial works¹⁰ at her time or even in very recent theories or movies.¹¹

In sum, I believe that Butler in *Wild Seed* uses the motif of shapeshifting, to broaden the readers' scope of awareness of accepted values and principles. Moreover, I think that in Butler's

¹⁰ The protagonist of *Lagoon*, by Nnedi Okorafor, (which will be discussed in next chapter) is a female scientist who is also a symbol of wisdom and responsibility who tries to save the people of her country and change their world vision in order to react as a responsible member of the society and planet. For instance, we can trace such virtues and themes as wise resistance in Tansi Labou's book, *Life and a Half*, which appeared in 1979. Both Anyanwu and Labou's protagonist Chainada epitomize defiance, determination, courage, compromise, and, above all, wisdom. They strive for freedom, but, given their obstacles, they learn to make advancements through concessions. For example, both of them submit to the symbolic orders of their respective authorities for a while. Chainada marries the Providential Guide who has killed her father and so does Anyanwu by marrying Isaac and Doro. In the end, both Anyanwu and Chainada manage to provide a better society for their people, which means less violence in *Wild Seed* and the prohibition of weapons in the new world in *Life and a Half*. In Anyanwu's case, this happens after centuries of fighting and final reconciliation between Doro and herself. This is also about a peaceful life for the members of their society.

In addition, the West in *Life and a Half* symbolizes globalization in Spivak's theory. The representatives of the West are just interested in money and power. For example, when Laisha talks about the value of Chainada's poems and says, "This poem has a depth of a heart," (Tansi 52) the American just responds: "Cash, my dear friend, could not care less about the depth of hearts. It knows only the depth of numbers," (Tansi 98)

On the contrary, Chainada's descendants do not believe in mapping the earth and very clearly defend the earth as it is, the planet in its natural form like a forest:

It makes no damn difference to me whether we are in Katamalansia or Pamarachi, or
Chambarachi.
What are they?
Countries, territories.

The earth has no name except forest (Tansi 66).

However, as expected in resistance literature, Chainada survives through her poems and after so much violence and her children at last remain loyal to the cult of the earth and the planet. Chainada not only shapeshifts violence into peace by wisdom and adaptation, but also teaches her children that redemption will be achieved only by free will. Moreover, the failure of the Eugenic program of "Guide breeding" reinforces this idea. Power might be presented as a symbolic challenge to the forms of social, economic and political power against which Anyanwu and Chainada struggle. They disagree with Doro's and the Guides' ways of leadership and their tyrannical laws and behavior against their own people. Unlike Doro or the Guides, who do not hesitate to eliminate potential threats, they never try to kill them. This is not because Anyanwu and Chainada lack the means or capacity but because they prefer negotiation. In addition, neither the Guides or Doro settle for anything less than total obedience. "What will I have to do next to teach you to obey?" Doro complains (Butler 17). In *Life and a Half*, nobody has the right to think about or question the Guides: "Nobody thinks anything about the Providential Guides. That is the law, it's law number one" (Tansi 34). Anyanwu and Chainada have both made the ultimate concession to dictators. Nevertheless, they resist with wisdom and patience.

¹¹ The recent Oscar winning movie *Shape of the Water* (2017), directed by Guillermo Del Toro, deploys a creature who is a healer and is worshipped by the indigenous people of the Amazon River. This alien that lives in the water seems to be more human than the people in power who struggle restlessly for money and more power. This creature is comparable to the dolphins for Anyanwu and is more human and peaceful. Shapeshifting is the climax of the movie as the female human character shapeshifts into a creature who is able to live and breathe under water.

novels, mimicry as a popular dominant postcolonial theory is not the core of the narrative because Anyanwu utilizes shapeshifting to focus on what makes us alike as human beings or simple creatures or parts of the planet in any form. Adaptation, wisdom, and negotiation are remarkable representations of shapeshifting in *Wild Seed*. Adaptability is also the nature of the book itself considering the threads that connect it to contemporary post-colonial literature and cinema. Some scholars such as Govan and, Sandra have note that *Wild Seed* revisits a variety of myths. While most see Doro and Anyanwu's creation of a new race as an Afrocentric revision of the Judeo-Christian story of Genesis¹². John R. Pfeiffer sees in Doro's "voracious... appetite for existence" a reference to the Faust myth and to vampire legends¹³ which is a significant aspect of monster studies.

¹² See Govan, Sandra Y. "Homage to Tradition: Octavia Butler Renovates the Historical Novel" (79–96).

¹³ See Pfeiffer, John R. "The Patternist Series: "Magill's Guide to Science Fiction & Fantasy Literature (1-3).

Chapter II:

Shapeshifting in Nnedi Okorafor's *Lagoon*

Shapeshifting in science fiction provides a narrative path towards decolonization. For instance, in contemporary times, we confront continuous forms of colonization, neo-colonization, and neo-imperialism, and, more recently, globalization. Therefore, decolonization does not necessarily end colonization. In other words, achieving independence does not immediately eradicate traces of a colonial mindset or forms of colonial exploitation. This idea applies specifically to petro-economies and corrupted governments in certain African countries such as Nigeria. Frantz Fanon, the influential philosopher and psychiatrist when writing about trauma of colonialism, believed that without destruction and violence, black people's consciousness and subjectivity could not be freed. Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth* explains that "destruction of the colonial world is no more and no less than the abolition of one zone, its burial in the depths of the earth or its expulsion from the country" (Fanon 41). I challenge this argument by discussing the role of shapeshifting and nonviolent resistance in *Lagoon* and how they function as a means of survival and the establishment of justice in society. However, shapeshifting is not entirely peaceful or non-violent as the novel's narrative demonstrates. Okorafor highlights this issue by deploying various scenes of violence through physical transformation. I will use Comaroff and Comaroff's theory articulated in *The Supernatural and Millennial Capitalism* to support my argument. The realm of the supernatural is a part of African culture and so the relationship between the shapeshifting extra-terrestrial in *Lagoon* and the traditional African belief system will be examined. In *Lagoon* aliens are not the same as traditional African voodoo. In this chapter, I also employ theoretical texts by Sianne Ngai to examine dysphoric affects, such as anger and indifference towards the people of Nigeria. Although there is considerable rage in *Lagoon*, it is dissimilar to

Fanon's revolutionary violence. The source of fury in *Lagoon* has its roots racism, misogyny and injustice. The novel is an attempt to denounce and deconstruct these colonial attitudes.

In *The Wretched of the Earth* Frantz Fanon explains, "The proof of success [in decolonization] lies in a whole social structure being changed from the bottom up. The extraordinary importance of this change is that it is willed, called for, demanded" (34). In a similar manner, shapeshifting in *Lagoon* is a way of effectively exploring different practices of 'decolonization.' The supernatural becomes a transformative power in Nigeria's post-Independence society dramatized in *Lagoon*. Total transformation occurs on different levels, and with the help of shapeshifters, especially in the context of the novel's petro culture/economy, the dissolution of a corrupt government, and the supernatural/Alien formation of a harmonious society through shared knowledge. Moreover, shapeshifting is a way of reacting constructively to the failure of post-colonial independence nationalisms. It is related to female forms of agency and underlines a gendered process of transformation.

Similar to Fanon's argument, fundamental social change has a cost because alien presence in *Lagoon* is accompanied by violence. Like the upheavals of independence, shapeshifting is not a smooth and painless process. Even for Ayodele, the alien shapeshifter, transformation seems to be painful because it is a mechanical process that is accompanied by a grating sound that is reminiscent of breaking bones (Okorafor 28). Moreover, the sound of the shifting process kills many sea creatures and frightens the people of Lagos: "As she (Ayodele) happily swims away in triumph, the loudest noise she's ever heard vibrates through the water. MOOM ...several smaller fish, jellyfish, even crabs, float, belly up or dismembered" (Okorafor 4). Comaroff and Comaroff in *The Supernatural and Millennial Capitalism* explain such circumstances as "contradictory effects of millennial capitalism and the culture of neoliberalism" (32). Comaroff and Comaroff try to draw

attention to, and interrogate, the distinctly pragmatic qualities of the messianic, millennial capitalism of the moment: “A capitalism that presents itself as a gospel of salvation; a capitalism that, if rightly harnessed, is invested with the capacity wholly to transform the universe of the marginalized and disempowered” (199). Millennial capitalism refers to the capitalist instrumentalization:

The increasing relevance of consumption, alike to citizens of the world and to its scholarly cadres, in shaping selfhood, society, identity, even epistemic reality? Like the concomitant eclipse of such modernist categories as social class? Like the “crises, widely observed across the globe, of reproduction and community, youth and masculinity? Like the burgeoning importance of generation, race, and gender as principles of difference, identity, and mobilization? (Comaroff and Comaroff 199)

Ayodele, tries to cut the pipeline as a metaphor of capitalist society and rescue sea life from the ecological violence wrought by multi-nationals and globalist corporations.

Change in *Lagoon* is often chaotic although the extraterrestrial shapeshifters claim to be peaceful messengers, “we do not want to rule, colonize, conquer, or take. We just want a home.” (Okorafor 96) this is not borne out in subsequent events. Violence becomes inevitable. Indeed, after the first encounter with alien life, the situation in Lagos descends rapidly into chaos. This encounter brings “the aliens” and “the local” into a dialectical interplay (Comaroff and Comaroff 58). In addition, *The Supernatural and Millennial Capitalism* demonstrates the tendency of capitalism to produce a world of increasing differences in wealth, environmental catastrophes, moral and gender conflicts and invisible (yet very real) class distinctions. Okorafor portrays these conflicts through the course of the narrative. She highlights Ayodele’s kidnapping by the invisible, marginalized people who are struggling with different problems. She devotes many chapters such as “MAMA”,

“MOZIZ”, “THE PLAN” and “WHALA” to demonstrate the conflicts. She harnesses the anger of Lagos but this is not a sign of barbarism; rather, -it is a result of governmental corruption, unemployment and injustice. This anger is symbolized in Ayodele’s kidnapper, Moziz, a young man who is trying to study medicine but he is compelled to suspend his studies because of work protests: “a struggling medical student forced to take the year off due to strikes,” (Okorafor 49). The reader is encouraged to have empathy for him: “Moziz, was meant to be somebody, just like his name implied” (Okorafor 49), but financial problems impel him to resort to violence as a solution for his situation. He is Philo’s [Adaora’s nanny] boyfriend and made her a “thousand and one promises, including marriage and a big, big house” (Okorafor 55). *The Supernatural and Millennial Capitalism* explores how the triumph of the free market leads to violence, marginalization and a crisis of moral values symbolized in Father Oke and the environmental violence engendered in Nigeria’s petro-economy which is actualized in its polluted waters. The capitalist strategy of production to consumption, and hence of labor to capital ruins nature as for the sword fish the polluted water was “Once delicious” (Okorafor 5). Further, the consumption culture creates social class under prevailing political and economic conditions that put a lot of pressure on different members of the society.

Shapeshifting is a central motif in *Lagoon*’s primary plot and the alien presence has a totalizing effect. At some point in the narrative the ‘visitors’ take over all the screens in the country while they persuade the president of Nigeria to approve them as friends and announce his position in a speech: “The president of Nigeria makes a speech that is broadcast simultaneously to every device with a screen in Nigeria and far beyond” (Okorafor 276). Shapeshifting revolves around the alien ambassador, Ayodele, and her interactions with three human protagonists: Adaora, a

female marine biologist,¹⁴ Agu, a Nigerian male soldier, and Anthony, a Ghanaian hip-hop artist. Blending science fiction elements with fantasy and folklore, the novel constructs its three human protagonists as shapeshifters with distinctive, magical abilities. For instance, Adaora can create a shield around herself and breathe underwater, Agu has superhuman strength, and Anthony can make his voice heard and understood at great distances. However, when a meteorite plunges into the ocean and a tidal wave overcomes them, the three protagonists find themselves bound to one another. Together with Ayodele, they must race through Lagos and against time itself in order to save the city and the country.

In the course of the narrative, *Lagoon* blurs the boundaries between science fiction, fantasy, and horror in a manner that mirrors how alien/human shapeshifters resist injustice and the distinctions between race, gender, and sexuality, which echoes the narrative structure of *Wild Seed*. For instance, the swordfish, like Anyanwu's dolphins, "is a creature from the deepest ocean caves of old" (Okorafor 6). Moreover, water is a key symbol in *Lagoon* as well as in *Wild Seed* as is made evident in the reminiscences of Ayodele: [She] "remembers her last form, a yellow monkey; even while in that body, she loved to swim. The water has always called her" (Okorafor 4). The water itself has transformative powers. In *Lagoon*, different characters such as Adaora or Howra the second wife of the president, repeat a crucial sentence in its original Igbo form: Aman Iman Water or its English translation: "water is life" (Okorafor 250). Water is the basic

¹⁴ Polina Levontin in her article "Scientists in Nigerian science fiction" explains that Science fiction is a recent genre classification in Nigerian literature. Currently, there is only a limited body of work available in English, but it has been growing steadily since 2000. African literature tends to be analyzed from the perspectives of race and ethnicity, (post)colonialism and globalisation. However, I am more interested in the role that science-fiction could play in the conversation about science and scientists. Canonical works from North American and European authors have been considered in this way, but to my knowledge little has been done to interrogate the narratives around science in Nigerian literature. In particular, the figure of the scientist has been examined extensively in Western literature, but not in Nigerian science fiction (Nigerian SF). The most recent research indicates that long-enduring stereotypes are finally being eroded. The representations of scientists in contemporary fiction do not fit as easily into a typology as they did prior to the 21st century.

element of life on earth and associates with female reproducing. It is one manifestation of the planet's subject position

Lagoon, similar to *Wild Seed*, is an Afro-futuristic novel. In an 1994 interview with Samuel R. Delaney who inaugurated the term, Mark Dery defines Afrofuturism as “speculative fiction that treats African American themes and addresses African American concerns in the context of 20th-century technoculture and, more generally, African American signification that appropriates images of technology and a prosthetically enhanced future” (Serpell 2016).¹⁵ In addition, in an interview with *Light Speed Magazine* Okorafor acknowledged that she was inspired by Octavia Butler: “I was immediately blown away because within the first few pages [of *Wild Seed*], I found myself reading about an Igbo shape-shifter in Nigeria who was a woman, but hiding in her village as a man. Oh my goodness, that was it. I was hooked. Of all of her books, *Wild Seed* was the perfect one for me to start with” (Okorafor). *Lagoon* is an African novel but it is not all about Afrofuturism. Okorafor in her acknowledgments, praises Lagos a number of times: “Thank you, Lagos, Nigeria, for being Lagos, Nigeria” (299). She also thanks her daughter Anyaugo, who evokes Anyanwu, “who was the first person to hear the summary of *Lagoon*” (300). The first chapter of *Lagoon* was first published as a short story and won a number of prizes. As well as featuring characters with fantastical powers, the novel incorporates various African folkloric and mythical figures who manifest themselves and interact with the material world after being awakened by the aliens. *Lagoon* is also petro-fiction in which the shapeshifter alien is part of an environmental catastrophe. The narrative warns against water pollution and the “anger of

¹⁵ Okorafor recently appeared on a panel at the Black Comix Arts Festival in San Francisco. Asked about the future of Afrofuturism, she responded this way: “I think that we’ll see more Africans directly from the continent writing this kind of literature. I think that what they’re going to write is going to have, like, a different flavor as well. And what I also would like to see in terms of “Afrofuturism” is just more diversity in the types of writing. I’d like to see female writers, writers with disabilities, just more variety *within* Afrofuturist writing.

the earth” in different parts of the book using such metaphors as a “rainbow” for oil pollution or a “shifting street” as a passage of spirits. No one can stop “the ones who bring the rainbows” (Okorafor 3) except the shapeshifter swordfish. The sea creature is on a mission to which she is fiercely dedicated: to destroy the pipeline by puncturing it with her sword. The novel’s scenario of an alien invasion liberates Nigeria from its dependence on oil. However, it has also turned out to be more destructive than positive, as the aliens themselves point out: “your land is full of a fuel that is tearing you apart” (Okorafor 113). Instead of being important because it is a petro-state, Nigeria becomes crucial as the nexus for alien visitors. Furthermore, the swordfish is an alien who chooses to adopt a woman’s shape. This is reminiscent of the African Divine voodoo or Creator, called Mawu or Mahu, a female creator who establishes harmony by creating gods of justice, the sea, and the earth. The supernatural in *Lagoon* also establishes justice and rescues the earth and the sea, as well as the people. The supernatural is responsible for life and death on earth and for all that happens to people and plants and animals. Similar to what Comaroff and Comaroff suggest, it appeals to the occult in pursuit of the secrets of capital generally rely on local cultural technologies: on vernacular modes of divination and oracular consultation, spirit possession and ancestral invocation, sorcery busting and forensic legal procedures, witch beliefs and prayer. But the use of these technologies does not imply an iteration of, or, a retreat into, “tradition.” On the contrary, their deployment in such circumstances is frequently a means of fashioning new techniques to preserve older values by retooling culturally familiar signs and practices. As in cargo cults of old, this typically involves the mimicking of powerful new means of producing wealth (Comaroff and Comaroff xv–xvi). It evokes both Bhabha’s notion of ‘mimicry’ and Fanon’s notions of ‘supernatural’ and ‘occult sphere.’

Lagoon is neither about apocalyptic and dystopian ends nor about revenging gods or voodooos. Adaora believes that the alien shapeshifters chose their landing site partly because Lagos is a place where an “other” can escape attention: “Adaora was beginning to see why Ayodele's people had chosen the city of Lagos. If they had landed in New York, Tokyo, or London, the governments of these places would have quickly swooped in to hide, isolate, and study the aliens. Here in Lagos, there was no such order” (Okorafor 64). Absence of order makes the invasion easier for the aliens. In Lagos people are struggling with different problems, fed up with the corrupted government, and the effects of structural adjustment programs, they desire change.

Fanon focuses on resistance in literature and culture as well as on militarized resistance. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon argues for the right of colonized people to use violence in their struggle for independence: “The colonized man finds his freedom in and through violence” (Fanon 86). In *Frantz Fanon: A Biography*, David Macey indicates, “Fanon’s idea of praxis is the counter violence of the colonized is a form of ‘praxis’ or human action that negates the violence of colonization” (Macey 478). Fanon believes that without experiencing destruction and liberation through struggle, black people’s consciousness and subjectivity cannot be freed. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon designates that “the native is ready for violence at all times. From birth, it is clear to him that this narrow world, strewn with prohibitions, can only be called in question by absolute violence” (Fanon 37). In *Lagoon*, however, shapeshifting is a non-violent means of resistance and the shapeshifter aliens save nature/culture and humanity without violence or militarized action. In fact, the military figures in the violent superior of Agu. Agu prevents his commanding officer from raping a girl and subsequently flees the army and meets Adaora and Anthony.

Ayodele plays the role of an alien ambassador, dispensing wisdom from a more enlightened race and critiquing human failings like violence, greed, and racism: “Human beings have a hard time relating to that which does not resemble them. It's your greatest flaw” (Okorafor 67). In other words, humans cannot handle difference. However, notwithstanding the relative absence of violence, the alien invasion of Lagos, can be interpreted as a form of settler colonialism. Yet, Ayodele’s character resembles that of a leader in the struggle for decolonization. Fanon argues that “decolonization brings a natural rhythm into existence, introduced by new men, and with it a new language and a new humanity” (Fanon 66). Fanon has a utopian point of view but he recognizes the supernatural as a liberating power.

However, Fanon also believes that decolonization is the veritable creation of “new men”. This creation he says “owes nothing of its legitimacy to any supernatural power; the “thing” which has been colonized becomes man during the same process by which it frees itself” (Fanon 37). Yet, he speaks of the “occult sphere” of where the people “dwell” as the birthplace of freedom:

After centuries of unreality, after having wallowed in the most outlandish phantoms, at long last the native, gun in hand, stands face to face with the only forces which contend for his life, the forces of colonialism. And the youth of a colonized country, growing up in an atmosphere of shot and fire, may well make a mock of, and does not hesitate to pour scorn upon the zombies of his ancestors, the horses with two heads, the dead who rise again, and the djinns who rush into your body while you yawn. The native discovers reality and transforms it into the pattern of his customs, into the practice of violence and into his plan for freedom. (Fanon 57)

In committing to the norms of traditional schema that arise out of the creation of magical authorities, each member of the colonized community has come to develop a new understanding of her/his role and condition. The mythical and magical realm grants moral agency to the

colonized participants. Another positive aspect of the engagement in the magical world is that it grants worthiness and communal function to all. It restores the sense of self that was abolished by the colonizer. Change or revolution happens in the occult sphere where people live: The “occult sphere is a sphere belonging to the community which is entirely under magical jurisdiction” (Fanon 55). In the occult place there is the supernatural and in *Lagoon*, the people of Lagos believe in spirits and witches, such as the sea witch. But the novel’s use of shapeshifting and the animation of non-organic matter, such as the road, belongs to the occult as means of transformation. The narrative form and its content dramatize the occult sphere of people. The Christians believe in Father Oke and never question his dignity or his legitimacy because he claims that “God speaks through him” (Okorafor 44). This claim gives him license to abuse his power and position.

Fanon claims to be rational but he contradicts himself in *The Wretched of the Earth*. He says he is interested in the “fantastic” and uses “djinnns” as an example to show that bodies inhabited by the supernatural, escape the control of the colonizer. Thus, it seems that Fanon is not entirely against the supernatural and in fact, it is where he believes the revolutionary change lies. In the anti-colonial struggle, Fanon writes, the “honest intellectual,” committed to social change, enters “The zone of hidden fluctuation” or “occult instability” (Fanon 127). These places constitute secret sanctuaries in which the colonized subjects are sovereign and can solidify their communal identity. They make it possible for the colonized masses to unify their forces in order to fight the colonial order. The Voodoo services are protective because they remain invisible to the colonizers’ eyes. Furthermore, supernatural and magical powers reveal themselves as essentially personal. In contrast, the settler’s powers are visible with their alien origin. There is no need to fight against the colonizers since what counts is the frightening enemy created by myths. In *Lagoon*, Okorafor devotes some chapters to the ancient spirits and monsters of Lagos such as The

Road Monster, Third Eye Blinded Bat who is a symbolic vampire, Mami Wata the sea witch and Udide the Great Spider who is the narrator of *Lagoon*. In her story, Udide says: “Today, as the sun rises, there may as well be a sign on all Lagos beaches that reads: HERE THERE BE MONSTERS” (Okorafor 228). As if by using capital letters, Okorafor highlights the importance of the monsters, as the inseparable part of the narrative: “The monstrosity was so terrifying [...] that woman was from outside this earth, yes. But that thing that thing that was haunting the road, it was from *here*” (Okorafor 206). For instance, Father Ok as a symbolic colonizer is not afraid of aliens, but he is afraid of witches and the local supernatural. Despite the fact that the old spirits support the aliens in their mission, they remain unknown to these new settlers as well, because “spiders play dirty” (Okorafor 292) and they never trust an outsider completely.

Fanon believes that therapeutic violence works both ways towards the colonizer and the colonized. He recognizes the psychological devastation that violence brings on both colonizer and the colonized. He believes that colonization has installed a particular kind of violence in the collective body of the people. Fanon argues that the interiorized colonial violence has to come out at some point and constitutes the colonized’s “nervous condition.”¹⁶ The failure of post-colonial nations and the rise of new imperialisms generate tension and “the nervous condition”. In other words, once the mind of the oppressed experiences freedom in and through collective actions, its reason becomes a force of revolution. When the imperialists or aliens in *Lagoon* come from the outside and impose what they think is the best for the locals, it is still an invasion regardless of intent. Even though the alien intentions may be benign, the invasion is not the path to freedom for the people of Lagos. In *Lagoon*, after the first encounter with the aliens visitors people feel

¹⁶ Jean-Paul Sartre, the French existentialist philosopher, in the Preface to Frantz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth* introduces the idea of “nervous conditions,” a psychological state of mind to which the colonized were generally subjected.

insecure and dizzy. The “invasion turned Lagos [into] a big zoo. Everyone is contained by lots of walls and lots of gates....but there is no security” (Okorafor 33). Eventually, “the madness wash[es] in to the streets” (Okorafor 199). But in *Lagoon* old spirits and magical forces support the aliens. Mami Wata, Udide, the Road Monster and Ijele, “one of the greatest spirits of Nigeria” (Okorafor 199) help the aliens in their mission because Udide, the storyteller, embraces change. Similarly, Mami Wata takes Father Oke to the water and “no one ever saw Father Oke again.” Therefore, Fanon argues change resides with and in the people and their relationship to the “occult” in Fanon’s sense.

Nevertheless, in *Lagoon* the ‘awakening’ process follows a process of wisdom and knowledge sharing. In *Lagoon*, the supernatural emerges either as alien shapeshifters or as primordial goddesses. The novel’s narrator is the primordial spider/goddess Udide (full name: Udide Okwanka), who toils unceasingly in the spirit sphere underneath the earth. She is the ultimate tale-spinner and is an agent change, hence she deeply approves of the aliens’ arrival because of the changes they bring to Lagos, (her favorite city), to Nigeria, Africa and the world. This is made evident when she comments that, “This metropolis is just getting started [...] the coming of these new people is indeed a great twist to Lagos’s tale” (Okorafor 229). However, at the same time she is an allegory of the history of Lagos. Okorafor changes the name of the novel from Lagos to *Lagoon* and explains in the epilogue “this city takes its name from the Portuguese word for “Lagoon ” because apparently they could not come up with a more creative name” (1). This word, like Udide, evokes the colonial history of Lagos to remember the past and protecting the country in the contemporary times. However, for spirits such as Udide, the aliens are the ambassadors of change and not a threat to Lagos.

Fanon in *The Wretched of The Earth* argues that primary contradiction in colonial society is not just between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, but also between the ‘European/white rulers’ and the ‘Arab [Nigerian] population.’ The division is not just one of class but also one of race. This fundamental opposition is not simply between ‘colonialism’ and ‘anti-colonialism’ but “the need for a redistribution of wealth” (Fanon 98). Therefore, the bourgeoisie will be the next form of colonization that matches governmental corruption in post-independence African countries. This is what happens in *Lagoon* but Okorafor challenges such arguments and her supernatural shapeshifters try to stop the cycle of imperial repetition manifested in the Bourgeoisie standing in for the colonialists of old. The three protagonists are from different parts of the bourgeoisie and they are “mutants.”

Shapeshifting and Social Awareness

I now wish to trace shapeshifting and the importance of social awareness against the symbolic order in *Lagoon*. Despite some significant differences, most Nigerians share dysphoric affects such as anger, indifference, and passivity. Agu, understands that people are angry in Lagos, angry at Nigeria and, angry at the world: “The alien invasion was just an excuse to let it all out” (Okorafor 173). Indeed, people in power, such as “Father Oke” or the president of Nigeria himself demonstrate a stark lack of empathy and are generally oblivious to the sufferings of others. This is borne out with their reactions to the protagonists and to the alien visitors themselves. The alien/human shapeshifters represent change, which threaten the status quo. Thus, they are labelled as a menace to society. Adaora the female protagonist, who represents wisdom, change, and responsibility, highlights this matter even while fighting with her husband: ‘No, no, not all the Christian stuff,’ she said. ‘Ayodele spoke of her people being catalysts of change. Wherever they go, they bring change’ (Okorafor 158). In addition, Adaora is different from most women in her

country, as she is well educated, rational, and avoids superstitious beliefs. Adaora's unconventional behaviour threatens patriarchal dominance with the result that Father Oke and her husband call her a "marine witch," the very worst kind of witch. In other words, she is labelled an alien among her own people. Indeed, this difference is her way of objecting to a cruel society and a repressive spouse and it makes her an outsider. It seems that in *Lagoon* the human shapeshifters are the "other" members of the society. They are not aliens but they are different from most people of Lagos. Symbolically, they are placeholders for the ways in which the post-colonial society deals with change and liberation or decolonization. They resist the symbolic order and people in power. For instance, Agu hits his commander who is also the president's nephew and tries to stop him "from raping a woman" (Okorafor 26). Adaora also resists her misogynist husband who calls her "a marine witch" and father Oke, who is a corrupt priest and misleads people with his false promise of salvation. Of course, ironically the husband and father Oke demonstrate that they are superstitious and believe in witchcraft and supernatural, the very thing of which they accuse Chris's wife. After the alien invasion, Lagos drowns in "chaos" but the president is not among the people to alleviate their fear.

In contrast to Fanon's idea about violence, shapeshifters encourage awareness and resistance in non-violent ways. Okorafor also restages the encounter with different but wise strangers, and when Rome and Seven hear about the kidnapping plan, despite their need for the money they suggest, "who better to understand than a shapeshifter [...] this is what we have been waiting for" (Okorafor 74). She also speculates how an alien invasion might play out differently in a country that remembers the invasion: "This wasn't the first invasion of Nigeria, after all" (Okorafor 144). : Ancient spirits and people still remember the pervious invasion by the "Portuguese who did not even ask the name of the country from one the natives" (Okorafor 1).

Furthermore, a symbol of Nigeria's collective anger is the raging "bone collector" road that devours the guilty and innocent alike: "I have always collected bones. I am the road" (Okorafor 206). Moreover, Nigeria's worst diseases are "pervasive corruption and unsafe roads" (Okorafor 207). Perhaps, that is the reason for the presence of agents of change (and human or alien shapeshifters). In Nigeria, public health and safety do not matter to its political rulers. The arrival of the aliens reveals Nigeria's social problems but also brings hope for resolving them because the people of Nigeria have empathy with the aliens/others at the same time. Perhaps, science fiction tropes in *lagoon* enable Okorafor to imagine a solution for the current problems of Nigeria. For example, Adaora tries to persuade the people of Nigeria that the aliens want to save Nigeria and the world through their peaceful technology but the government and Father Oke attempt to distort the truth. Okorafor implies that we need to move towards a new state of awareness because colonialism/neo-imperialism disembodies people and alienates them from their own existence and sense of independence. Therefore, Okorafor is not interested in exploring the politics of corruption and failure. Rather, the drive has been towards breaking these patterns and imaging another possible future. She portrays a superstitious, misogynous society in which a police officer, who is also ironically the nephew of the president, tries to rape a woman. She criticizes the failure of post-colonial governments to account for the excesses of sexism and occult capital. They squander oil and natural resources and are unable to offer people basic comfort and security. For instance, every year many people die on the "Lagos-Benin Expressway" (Okorafor 207) because the government has no intention of constructing newer, safer roads. As a response, Okorafor chooses Mami Wata "the goddess of all marine witches" to change the corrupt Father Oke. It seems that Father Oke experiences "change" because he regrets hitting a woman: "He felt his heartbreak. Why had he slapped that woman so hard yesterday morning" (Okorafor 235). Perhaps Mami Wata took him to

the liquid, shifting world of water to free him of rigid and inflexible attitudes. Therefore, He is unable to torture a woman by accusing her of being a “marine witch.” It appears that he regrets his actions but only when he realizes he cannot escape Mami Wata, or, to put it differently, the context of “the occult sphere” of the people.

In *Lagoon*, the alien invasion is not only televised but also live streamed to all mobile devices. The aliens use multimedia to promote themselves: “So many people in Lagos had portable chargeable glowing, vibrating, chirping, tweeting, communicating connected devices; practically everything was recorded and posted online in some way, somehow quickly. The modern human world is connected like a spider’s web” (Okorafor 181). Okorafor's narrator perceptively explains that, even as millions begin to take an interest in the unfolding of this African drama, the world watches “mostly for entertainment” (Okorafor 194). However, Ayodele insists that the decision to come to Lagos was a very deliberate one and that the aliens wish to integrate into Lagosian society and become “citizens,” a part of its future. In addition, the aliens in *Lagoon* symbolize change. They are shapeshifters who help locals make fundamental changes and resist the corrupt and militarized atmosphere of post-colonial Nigeria. The alien visitors are not the same as the colonizers who exploited the natural resources of African countries. The aliens “cure” the water from oil pollution and they do not want to rule. They start a constructive negotiation with the people of Lagos; however, violence is inevitable and a minute after the second great sound eruption by the aliens, “all the car and building windows were shattered; birds, insects, and bats fell to the ground” (Okorafor 114). Fanon, similar to the alien shapeshifters, is a utopianist who seeks change. However, in *The Wretched of the Earth*, he argues for the right of colonized people to use violence in their struggle for independence with the total destruction of the colonizer. Revision or negotiation has no place in Fanon’s theory, whereas in *Lagoon* change means awareness of the

people of Nigeria who are already oppressed. Their superior technologies and ability to heal humans and shapeshift into multiple beings affect every living creature in Lagos. This includes fearful people such as Father Oke, and Chris, Adaora's paranoid husband who is convinced his marine biologist wife is a water witch in disguise; Moziz and Jacob who saved Ayodele from the road monster, and finally, the Nigerian President, all of whom eventually embrace the true change the shapeshifters bring. Okorafor breaks old patterns and creates different forms of resistance in *Lagoon*. The story contradicts the authorities' imposed frames of lifestyle that undermine free will and repress original thought. For Okorafor, writing is an expression of a creative force: not to make a statement or combat a particular image but to mirror a need for social 'change'. *Lagoon* is about the first contact with the aliens. The shapeshifter aliens choose the strange form of a swordfish or a bat. They describe themselves as "gas who wishes to be citizens" (Okorafor 29). Okorafor then studies the different reactions of characters who represent various facets of Nigerian Society. The one thing they have in common is their shared responses of fear and anger. The narrative bursts with anger and influences different characters and dialogues. Aggression devours society. For example, the narrative is full of vulgar, violent expressions, such as "stupid olofofo poke nose woman," "idiot empty headed girl," and "fuck" (Okorafor 185). This anger moves through the narrative, is embedded in many of the characters, with each narrating his or her own painful story: scientists or priests, soldiers, students, Fisayo, teenagers, parishioners, even the bone collector street, they are all angry and disoriented. Sianne Ngai, in *Ugly Feelings*, explains that:

Although dysphoric affects often seem to be the psychic fuel on which capitalist society runs, envy, paranoia, and all the emotional idioms I examine are marked by an ambivalence that will enable them to resist, on the one hand, their reduction to the mere expressions of class resentment, and on

the other, their counter-valorization as therapeutic “solutions” to the problems they highlight and condense. (Ngai 3)

To read *Lagoon* is to enter a world of anger, complexity, and disruption. The majority of the people of Lagos shares dysphoric affects, such as anger, indifference, fragility and passivity, estrangement, confusion, and disconnection which echoes in Sianne Ngai’s notion of “meta feeling”:

What each moment produces is the inherently ambiguous effect of affective disorientation in general – what we might think of as a state of feeling vaguely “unsettled” or “confused” or more precisely, a meta-feeling in which one feels confused about what one is feeling. This is “confusion” in the affective sense of bewilderment, rather than epistemological sense of indeterminacy. (Ngai 14)

Okorafor gives us a view of the first contact between aliens and the people of Lagos. Change/transformation becomes the ruling trope of the narrative: “If there is one city that rhymes with ‘chaos,’ it is Lagos” (Okorafor 214). The people of Lagos are passive, angry and hold superstitious beliefs. There is rank, poverty, corruption and unemployment; ignorance makes the situation worse and generates tumult and localized violence. Okorafor depicts angry yet inert people who have no idea of what they want and are wholly uncomfortable with change. Therefore, the aliens are not the true threat; ignorant humans who are afraid of change are those who are truly dangerous: “You are evil! Zena [the president’s first wife] shouted at Ayodele who healed the president. The president has three wives and with his illness, Zena has become his support system again” (Okorafor 231). Therefore, Zena is angry with the aliens and is fearful of Ayodele’s healing powers. *Lagoon* dramatizes a lot of angry or suppressed people; behind this rage lies deep bitterness against racism and an intense desire to deconstruct it. Okorafor gathers up all the

inhabitants of Lagos from the city's past, present, and future including old gods and new alien arrivals. *Lagoon*, with its sprawling vibrant setting and shapeshifters, is an African novel and works in a manner that rejects Nigeria's passive and corrupted society. Nigerian society needs change and it starts with the awareness of its people. In the novel, the idea of change is manifested in the figure of aliens and it is different from the imposed notion of "enlightening". In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon provokingly says, "the final aim of colonization was to save them from darkness, [...] and to lighten their darkness [...] which is associated with "barbarism, degradation, and bestiality" (149). However, the human shapeshifters of *Lagoon* resist injustice in the post-colonial era of Nigeria in different ways and are part of the society themselves like Agu, Anthony and Adaora. Therefore, the change and awareness of people in *Lagoon* utilizing the trope of shapeshifting is different from the so-called enlightenment and degradation of the people of Lagos. The shapeshifters try to save a society whose inertia has made resistance to the status quo all but impossible. Awareness is Ayodele's mission: "My people sent me for a reason. We are a collective. Every part of us, every tiny universe within us is conscious. I am we, I am me [...] you people need help on the outside but also within" (Okorafor 268). Adaora knows those in power have all but destroyed society and she feels a deep urge to stop them: "Lagos was riddled with corruption, but she could not imagine living anywhere else. And its ocean life was fascinating. And problematic. It needed her. Lagos needed her. And Adaora had to go where she was needed" (Okorafor 65). This task she is able to accomplish by awakening other members of society by challenging their superstitious beliefs by asking them "why" and "what if" questions during her conversation with the president, Father Oke and her husband. Ayodele, the ambassador of change, helps Adaora in her mission by mentioning the importance of knowledge: "School will bring you more success than marriage" (Okorafor 69). Moreover, Adaora started the process of change in

her home. For instance, Kola, her daughter, knows that “the waters are all dirty and dead because of the oil companies” (Okorafor 68). However, her efforts are impeded by Chris her increasingly paranoid husband. After many years of marriage and two children, he comes to distrust his wife in large part, because of the malign influence of Father Oke. He obeys Father Oke unquestionably and becomes one of his most orthodox parishioners. They are both misogynist and employ violence as a means of maintaining their positions of power and as a means of exerting control. Chris is also alienated and lost in the imposed choices of other people. In sum, the essential difference between Adaora and Chris is that one has agency and the other is a victim or, in other words, a ‘confused person’ according to Ngai’s description of “meta feeling”. This difference is highlighted in Chris’s respective attitudes toward other people, his children, his wife, and Anthony. Chris is an invisible Nigerian and *Lagoon* fights historical invisibility by drawing the world’s attention to Nigeria. During the conflict, between Chris and Adaora, something remarkable happens. Chris insults and slaps Adaora but she does nothing. Even when he hits her, she shows no reaction, but she waits and listens to him as if her primary motivation is curiosity. She is cautious and curious to observe how people in power, like father Oke can change people’s determinacy and free will into uncertainty and confusion. Chris, in contrast, never knows what he is doing or why, which is not surprising given the fact that he lacks agency. He displaces his fear and anger onto his wife, who is, in his mind, a disobedient woman. She is the “marine witch” who is the ultimate symbol of female evil of which Father Oke warns Chris. Chris does not find his voice because he is driven by fear and hatred, which come with feelings of invisibility and weakness. This anger and hostility resides in many characters. The burden of Chris’s transformation from a gentle and understanding husband into a violent misogynistic and insensitive monster, who hits his wife, rests on the dominant order and is a direct consequence of his “nervous condition” due to his socially and

politically oppressed position. In contrast, in *Wild Seed*, Anyanwu, is a nonconformist who desires change and feels responsible for her people and in this she is comparable to Adaora. Both female protagonists avoid violence and love water, the fluidity of which is a symbol of rejecting the rigid rules that govern the patriarchal status quo. This rejection is summed up in Chris's wretchedness and comes from the unforgiving reality of having a "troubled" wife:

My wife...she is troubled. He wrung his hands, desperate and stressed [...] something has taken her, wrapping his arms around himself. There were sweat marks around the collar and the armpits of his white cotton shirt. [...] I am sorry to say my wife has become a marine witch. (Okorafor 61)

Chris comes to project his fear, anger, and despair onto the figure of his wife, who is able to resist injustice and reject his accusations. Further, Adaora as a scientist reflects realities instead of superstitious beliefs. However, the mirror is not only a reflecting one; it is also a transforming one, as it shows Chris and Father Oke the true location of their dread and anger. She asks them to look at themselves, as she asks Chris, believing that they will find the answer within themselves. Adaora brings change with the help of Ayodele. The ancient spirit, Mami Wata, collected Father Oke to pave the way for social change. Thus, the narrative shows that even in nonviolent philosophies, it is sometimes inevitable to eradicate an obstacle. For instance, Ayodele, sacrifices herself to save the Nigerian people by transferring her knowledge to them. She transforms their minds by wiping out ignorance and passivity and brings about real change. Therefore, aliens and Adaora try to augment the awareness of people.

Ultimately, Ayodele, decides to fundamentally change people and becomes part of their bodies and minds: "whispering, [she] explains her decision: she is not a singular being, but part of

a collective. And she knows: “You people need help on the outside but also within,” adding, “I will go within [...] you’ll all be a bit ... alien” (Okorafor 268). As Ayodele allows herself to disintegrate into a white mist, a final sonic boom occurs. Adaora at once understands. Ayodele has become part of everyone and everything around her, thus she transforms them forever. “Lagos will never be the same,” Adaora says, and she realizes that both of the following are true: “Ayodele was gone. Ayodele is here” (Okorafor 269). Freedom entails being with paradox and difference.

The president of Nigeria makes a speech that is broadcast simultaneously to every device screen in Nigeria and beyond. He says: “The occasion that has put me here before you tonight is momentous. It marks another kind of transitional shift. Now listen closely to me. This shift is cause for celebration, not panic. I will say it again: celebration, not panic” (Okorafor 276). Thus, the president also becomes part of the social awakening brought about by Ayodele and emphasizes “celebration” rather than “violence” and “destruction” in his speech. Perhaps, *Lagoon* change refers to a form of revision, instead of revolution, because it is based on negotiation with the president of Nigeria becoming part of the change¹⁷.

Finally, *Lagoon* with its complex narrative of society tells us far more about ourselves than the characters themselves. At the heart of the text is the need for change in a nonviolent manner. Notwithstanding this position, it is sometimes inevitable to sacrifice or remove obstacles to change. Therefore, shapeshifting while a pillar in *Lagoon*’s primary plot is not without violence. Okorafor’s novel underlines this in the depiction of Ayodele’s sacrifice. This has a long tradition in the religious belief system of the Yoruba (the second largest ethnic group in Nigeria). Okorafor

¹⁷ See “On Alternative Readings.” The special issue of *African Science Fiction* of the centrist journal of *Poco Studies*.

dismantles figures of ignorance and replaces them with symbols of resistance and awareness by respecting culture/nature and connecting with people on a human level.

Conclusion

This thesis is about shapeshifting and aims to denounce imperialist ideologies of identity. Shapeshifting has become a very popular metaphor in our present post-human age, which is partly visible in del Toro's film *The Shape of Water* and Ryan Coogler's film *The Black Panther*. These Oscar winning movies support public interest in the shapeshifting trope. Similar to the shapeshifters of *Lagoon* and *Wild Seed*, both directors use the medium of media and the shapeshifter trope to combat ignorance that is often manifested in deeply racialized North American cultural attitudes. del Toro's male antagonist, the Colonel, embodies various dimensions of a corrupt racist society. This even extends to his sexual proclivities, as he prefers silence in women and actively covers his wife's mouth. Shapeshifting resists such behavior in *The Shape of Water*. The shapeshifter characters communicate differently which is a form of resistance. In other words, a new language must be found in order to inhabit the planet in a more balanced way. For example, English, the dominant language of the film is at the service of the capitalist governors who are incapable of establishing peace and most of them are corrupt. Communication happens through silence and in spite of, exclusion from mainstream discourses. The marginalized shapeshifters thus represent these different forms of discourse.

Some individuals may feel progressive anxiety when confronted with shapeshifters and evolving subjects. Perhaps the current evolution of the human makes us feel dread not only with regard to society but also when faced with the inconceivable inhuman within. This process unsettles the category of the human and thus also the category of the natural. The post-human subject is, therefore, an unnatural form, which disrupts the boundaries of human. We witness the metamorphosis and shapeshifting of the female protagonists into a new biological existence that is increasingly the result of the rigidity of the social order. We may question what utility shapeshifting tropes serve as long as poverty, misery, and the capitalist system remain in society.

Optimistically, del Toro rescues his female protagonist through shapeshifting but even in the seemingly happy ending, clouds persist. Eliza rescues herself and finds a chance to write herself into the person she wants to be. This suggests that one may take charge of one's own destiny and environment to refashion a utopic vision. This allows the person to instruct the world with the agency of his/her own vision rather than the one imposed by outside forces.

Shapeshifting also indirectly questions the situation of women in our present time. For example, in *Lagoon*, Chris is an educated man who nevertheless hits his wife and feels completely justified in his behavior. Doro, the male antagonist of *Wild Seed*, tries to control Anyanwu, which again reinforces the notion of his perpetual need to contain and direct the rebellious body. Like Doro in *Wild Seed*, or Chris in *Lagoon*, the colonel in *The Shape of Water* and the Provincial Guides in *Life and a Half* are also dominant and controlling. All the female protagonists of these works, such as Chainada in *Life and a Half*, Eliza and Zelda in *The Shape of Water*, Nakia in *The Black Panther*, Adaora in *Lagoon* and Anyanwu in *Wild Seed*, refuse their designated roles as the domestic woman. In *The Shape of Water* Zelda, the black woman, with her double burden is not a domestic, docile creature which makes her very different from her submissive, passive husband. Instead, she risks her life to uphold her values and virtues as a human.

In sum, the texts I have discussed in my thesis, question the supposed manifest destiny of human colonization of the planet. Science fiction often takes the long-term view that survival of the species will require humans to develop a solution for saving the earth. However, the notion of post-humanism in these works raises doubts about this idea. In addition, there is vast potential for postcolonial approaches to science fiction based on the use of the fantastic to destabilize Western scientific worldviews. In both novels, shapeshifters either as a metaphor of a sea witch or an alien

are productive and educators. Moreover, their technology is neither a threat to nature/culture nor at the service of colonialism.

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