

**GOTHIC IMAGINATION AND CONSTRUCTION OF MONSTROUS  
BODIES IN SELECTED FICTIONAL WORKS OF NNEDI OKORAFOR**

**ROBERT KIPKOECH SUM  
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**DECLARATION**

This thesis is my original work and has not been presented for the award of a degree in any other University

Signature:..... Date:.....

**Robert Kipkoech Sum**

**C82/34751/2016**

**Supervisors**

We confirm that the work reported in this proposal was carried out by the candidate under our Supervision

Signature:..... Date:.....

**Dr. J. K. S. Makokha**

**Department of Literature, Linguistics and Foreign Languages**

**Kenyatta University**

Signature:..... Date:.....

**Prof. Speranza Ndege**

**Department of Humanities,**

**University of Embu**

**DEDICATION**

To:

My three children Chebet, Kipchumba and Jepkorir:

You always make me want to do more and I hope one day you appreciate why I  
do this

My wife; Beatrice:

I am glad you have walked this journey together with me and this achievement is  
also yours

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**ABSTRACT**

The Gothic writing has often been perceived as a form of Western fiction-making. This apparently is based on the fact that Gothic genre originated in Europe in the late eighteenth century, and has been widely exploited in the West (Europe and North America). Contrary to these assumptions, it can be confirmed that Gothic mode has indeed been appropriated by many non-Western fiction writers. An in-depth interrogation of the selected fictional works of Nigerian-American Nnedi Okorafor, namely *Who Fears death*, *Akata Witch*, *The Book of Phoenix* and *Zahra The Windseeker* reveals that she does indeed appropriate Gothic elements. This thesis seeks to portray how unique Gothic motifs like monstrosity, villainy, morality and others have been appropriated, transformed and complicated in Nnedi Okorafor's selected novels. Some of the most enduring features of Gothic fiction addressed in this study are monster/monstrosity and oppression. A monster is presented either as a corporeal being that is grotesque, unnatural and often threatening or an individual whose conduct is adjudged inhuman, evil and subversive by a given society. There is a remarkable correlation between monster/monstrosity and oppression. An individual who is either considered nonconformist, or associated with evil risks being labelled as monstrous and thereby subjected to oppression. Equally, an individual, system or institution which subjects people to oppression is often portrayed as monstrous. The main objectives of this thesis therefore are: to explore the aspects of Gothic tradition in Nnedi Okorafor's selected novels; critically examine significance of monstrous representation; and highlight the relevance of Gothic mode in delineation of ethno-racial realities of oppression in the selected Nnedi Okorafor's fiction. This study adopted psychoanalytic theoretical postulations of Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung, and Anna Freud to explain how monster and monstrosity is generated. Freudian concept of "dream work", for instance, can be seen as possible explanation for creation of images of fantastic monsters and creatures found in Gothic fiction. This thesis finds that Nnedi Okorafor does indeed appropriate Gothic elements in her fiction. It also establishes that motif of monster/ monstrosity is a significant feature of Okorafor's fiction and has been represented or presented variously. Lastly, this study finds that oppression is one of the key aspects of Okorafor's fiction.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **1.0 CRITICAL FOUNDATIONS: MAPPING GOTHIC IMAGINATION AND CONSTRUCTION OF MONSTROUS BODIES**

#### **1.1 Background of Study**

Gothic tradition in the world literature has a rather long history and it is pervasive. Starting in the late eighteenth century, it has been able to spread from Europe to all parts of the world. Its archetypal features like creation of sense of uncanny, monsters, macabre scenes, superstitions, and recuperation of history, among others; are easily discernible in many written works of fiction (Botting 15-18).

Early works of Gothic fiction were characterized by a rebellion against constraining neoclassical aesthetic ideal of unity and order with an aim of reinstating a suppressed medieval imaginative freedom (Kilgour 14). In other words, it was an aesthetic revolt against tyranny of classicism and Enlightenment reason (Kilgour 14). Drawing on the myths, legends and folklore of medieval romances, Gothic conjured up magical worlds and tales of knights, monsters, ghosts and extravagant adventures and terrors, demons, corpses, skeletons, evil aristocrats, monk and nuns, and fainting heroines (Botting 2). These were considered barbaric and retrogressive by the Enlightenment and Neoclassic advocates for they were diametrically opposed to values they espoused. Yet by the end of eighteenth century, there was a growing fascination with everything Medieval boosted to a certain extent by the rise of Graveyard School of Poetry

and Edmund Burke's treatise on the sublime and beautiful in 1750s (Milne 281). The graveyard poetry, characterized as it was by attention to ruins, graveyards, death, and human mortality, rejected vanities and vices and embraced possibilities of infinite bliss of afterlife (Milne 281; Botting 15). Burke's work and the graveyard poetry can thus be seen as having provided philosophical, thematic and literary context to the early Gothic fiction.

The Gothic literary movement started with the publication of Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto: A Gothic Story* in 1765 (Clery 21). This was to be followed by other publications including William Beckford's *Vathek* (1786); Clara Reeve's *The Old English Baron* (1778); Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) and the *Italian* (1797); Matthew Lewis *The Monk* (1796); Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818); and Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) among others. This study found that, these pioneer works of Gothic fiction laid foundation for the future Gothic works. An analysis of Okorafor's fiction indeed revealed that it appropriates many motifs and themes from the pioneer Gothic fiction.

Since its inception the Gothic has evidently undergone significant transformations. Such transformations are generally attributed to changing concerns of their times (Botting 2). In later fiction, for instance, the medieval features like the castle gradually gave way to the old house: as both building and family line, it became the site where fears and anxieties returned in the present

(2). As the genre spread into different geographical locations, new topics were evidently added into its repertoires. Thus while American Gothic retained several motifs associated with pioneer Gothic, there were notable transformations owing to the fact that the New World had its own unique mysteries (Botting 75).

The adaptability of the Gothic apparently reinforces Fowler's argument that though it may have begun as "fixed genre" it later "yielded a gothic mode that has outlasted it" (qtd. in Balmain 2). This new gothic mode arguably fits, or is easily appropriated to diverse settings. The adaptability of the Gothic mode can be seen as an implicit disavowal of notions, notably by critics like Hogle, that Gothic is "a form of Western fiction- making" (7). Furthermore, Hughes argues that non-Western Gothic fiction should not be considered "a copy of an original" but rather as an "indigenous genre with similar themes and concerns to that of the Western Gothic" (qtd. in Balmain 2). Arguing from the above perspective, this study found that the Gothic mode too can be successfully adapted to navigate African complex realities.

Comparatively few studies have been done on Africa's Gothic. One of the few African writers who have carried out studies on Gothic is Lily Mabura. In her article: *Breaking Gods: An African Postcolonial Gothic Reading of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Purple Hibiscus and Half of a Yellow Sun*, Mabura sets out to establish how the Gothic motifs have been appropriated in the texts. She identifies

renowned African literary icons like Chimamanda Adichie, Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka and Ayi Kwei Armah as African writers whose written works contain some Gothic elements (205). Among the African American writers, Toni Morrison is noted for appropriation of Gothic elements especially in her seminal novel, *The Beloved* (Punter and Byron 55). Since the authors mentioned above are largely postcolonial, it would seem that postcolonialism is one of the contexts which create a nexus for Gothic in Africa. Postcolonialism with its “apparent insistence” on a period ‘after’ is prone to threat of return of the past along with buried histories and repressed traumas (Punter & Byron 55). This study found that some of the Okorafor’s selected novels indeed thematise postcolonialism, haunting and return.

Folklore is another aspect of African literature which shares a lot in common with the Gothic. The Gothic world, as already mentioned, is noted for its preoccupation with superstitions, legends and folklore of the European past (Botting 94). African oral narratives too, create fantastic worlds where voracious extraordinary creatures, troublesome spirit children coexist with ordinary human beings on the same earthly plane (Akivaga & Odaga 52; Bloom 61). Teeming with superstitions, myths, mysteries and monsters; Africa’s folklore aligns well with the pioneer Gothic fiction. Okorafor’s novels like *Who Fears Death* (2010), *Zahra the Windseeker* (2005) and *Akata Witch* (2005) conjure settings where masquerades, shape-shifting and flying people, flying reptiles, magic, sorcery and

traditional African societies thrive alongside modern technology. Such commingling of old/mythic and modern/futuristic historical dispensation(s) arguably aligns well with the Gothic's role of recuperating pasts that offered stability, permanence adventure and divine mysteries (Botting 15).

### **1.2 Parallels between Nnedi Okorafor's Life and her Fiction**

An in-depth study of Nnedi Okorafor's selected novels has revealed her remarkable appropriation of Gothic motifs and themes. Nnedi Okorafor's article *Organic Fantasy* (2009) outlines the guiding vision behind Okorafor's imaginative works. It affirms that fiction writers often infuse their life narratives, aspirations and perspectives into their works. In the text, Nnedi Okorafor admits that her literary imagination is influenced by two things: her complex African (Nigerian) and American heritage (276) and her magical view of the world.

Nnedi Okorafor was born to Nigerian Igbo parents who immigrated into the United States of America to study (Wabuke). She therefore grew up straddling the two worlds, the United States and Nigeria, without actually fitting into either. Okorafor, seemingly, does not consider this situation a predicament but rather as a vantage position which affords her an opportunity to see from multiple perspectives. She refers to herself as Nigamerican/ Naijaamerican as opposed to Nigerian-American because the latter aptly describes her hybrid identity (Okorafor, *Broken Places* 67). During an interview with Hope Wabuke (*The*

*Root*), Okorafor attributes her preference for science fiction and fantasy to her cultural mix:

Being raised as a Nigerian American is all over my work. That hybridity, the conflicts, the similarities—the fusion of those two cultures combining and conflicting—that is why I am who I am and why I write what I write

Okorafor further acknowledges pivotal role of American upbringing in instilling in her knowledge and desire for science fiction writing. She, however, desired a writing which departs from traditional western-oriented perspectives in order to accommodate the black's science and futuristic aspirations. Nigeria, with its age-old superstitions, beliefs in magic, mysticism and current political upheavals, became Okorafor's source of inspiration (Hand).

Okorafor's desire to include unrealistic/fantastic elements into her fiction is inspired by her feeling that the world around her seems magical (*OF* 276). To her, the sensation of “hopping” from one culture (African) to another culture (American); encountering and interacting with different ethno-religious groups; or interacting with natural phenomena can only be described accurately in the language of science fiction and fantasy. Okorafor uses her bus ride across Nigeria as an example to demonstrate how an encounter with different cultures and people generates a sensation of being a shape-shifter or an alien in a place (278). She thus concludes that fantasy is the most accurate and truthful way to describe such a reality (279).

Okorafor projects her personal experience, feelings and unique perspectives through her protagonists. In *Akata Witch (AW)*, Sunny Nwazue is portrayed as a great athlete and witch whose main shortcoming is albinism (261, 3). Like Sunny, Okorafor was born in the United States to Nigerian parents of Igbo ethnicity (Alter). Both Okorafor and her protagonist straddle two worlds without “really fitting into either” (Alter). Albinism could be considered a metaphor for cultural destitution experienced by those (like Nnedi Okorafor) who have become so detached from their roots that they have become strangers among their own people. “Ugly” and “otherworldly” as Sunny is referred to in the text could be seen as an indirect reflection of people’s attitudes and feelings towards those who have been alienated from the culture (*AW* 116).

One also notes that most of Okorafor’s protagonists are female. Her attitude apparently is inspired by a number of reasons. First, Okorafor grew up in an environment of extreme racism and the main source of support and reassurance during those challenging moments days were her sisters and parents (Okorafor). Her admiration for her sisters and women became imprinted in her psyche. Secondly, during an interview with Hope Wabuke of *The Root*, Okorafor highlighted tribulations of women in Africa especially as targets of rape. This arguably propelled her to offer them (women) empowering roles in her fiction. Okorafor indeed confesses that she has keen interest in the stories of “complex flawed African women and girls” and strongly feels that “their stories” should be

retold in a manner that they (women and girls) emerge victorious (John). True to this assertion, Okorafor fields heroines that are unique, peculiar and complex in ways which make others uncomfortable or fearful: Onyesonwu (*Who Fears Death*) is a talented mixed race girl; Phoenix (*The Book of Phoenix*) is a winged, destructive woman; Sunny Nwazue (in *AW*) is an albino; and Zahra (*Zahra The Windseeker*) has vines growing in head.

Flaw as indicated by Okorafor is not limited to the physical; it could also refer to the social aspect of an individual. Onyesonwu in *Who Fears Death (WFD)*, for instance, can be considered subversive in that she not only violates Jwahirian custom's requirement that a girl maintains chastity until marriage, but she also instigates her friends to do the same (*WFD* 204, 242). By selecting the flawed female characters for prominent roles in her fiction, Okorafor is trying to caution prejudiced minds that the female's perceived weakness could actually become their strength. Okorafor proceeds to bestow upon the protagonists noble attributes and immense strength which enable them to protect their people from oppression and steer them in right directions.

There are recognizable similarities between Okorafor and her protagonists. One of the most discernible attribute is hybridity. This element is more noticeable in Phoenix and Onyesonwu. Onyesonwu is a mixed- race while Phoenix is a winged, immortal woman. As Nigerian-American woman, Okorafor straddles two separate

cultures. This makes her liminal being who cannot claim full membership to either side and has to be contented perching on the interstice. Her hybrid nature however has become her strength since she has been able to merge or exploit her rich multicultural perspective in ways that enrich both cultures. She has created a sub-category of science fiction called Africanfuturism which is more “rooted in African culture, history, mythology and point of view” (Wabuke).

At the age of thirteen, Okorafor developed a condition called scoliosis, the curvature of the spine (Edoro; Okorafor 16). Spinal fusion procedure had to be performed to rectify the condition before it could get worse. When the surgery was conducted, however, Nnedi Okorafor became paralysed from the waist down. Losing the use of her legs was the most traumatizing and agonizing moment in her life since she would not be able to participate in athletic events. Okorafor was a super athlete who had won many medals in track events (Okorafor, *Broken Spaces* 16). She reckons that she would have gone mad in that hospital if she had not found a way to keep herself busy by writing stories (Hand). Okorafor chooses to represent this excruciating condition through some of her female characters Sugar Cream and Nuumu (AW 186; WFD 228-231). Both characters had scoliosis and it was more severe for Nuumu. Okorafor presents the two characters as orphaned or abandoned to describe a state of loneliness or desolation that attend individuals who suffer from the condition (scoliosis and paralysis). Nuumu, in particular, can be considered a better surrogate for Okorafor’s condition and

feelings since she developed scoliosis at exactly the same age as Okorafor (thirteen). As Onyesonwu was trying to heal Nuumu, the latter seemingly did not fight to live as her spirit shot from her body into air with a “high-pitched scream of glee” (*WFD* 230-231). When asked why she would not heal Nuumu, Onyesonwu replied “she wouldn’t let me...it was her choice”. Nuumu’s desire for death arguably reflects and re-enacts Okorafor’s feelings on her hospital when she learnt the bitter truth that she was paralysed from the waist down.

### **1.3 Gothic and Oppression**

Gothic fiction is especially noted for its preoccupation with monstrous villains. The pioneer Gothic works of fiction like Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897) and Mary W. Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818) feature monsters like Count Dracula and gigantic being called Frankenstein’s monster respectively.

The term monster also applied in aesthetic judgements to works that were unnatural and deformed, that deviated either from the regularity attributed to life and nature or from the symmetry and proportion valued in any form of representation (Botting 18). In other words it is inextricably linked to the otherness. Murgatroyd indeed confirms that by virtue of being presented as alien, monsters represent “the other” (2). ‘The other’ by definition refers to a site or location upon which we project all the qualities that we – as individual subjects, social groups or even nations – most fear, or dislike, about ourselves (Childs &

Fowler 164). The other denotes a negated form of self but that which is imperative to construction of the self (Ryan 367-372). The other is not something outside or beyond the self, as the traditional Cartesian perspective would have it; rather, it is deeply implicated in and with the self (Ryan 369). To conflate otherness to monstrous body, therefore, is to implicitly acknowledge centrality of the monster in construction of politics of the normal and natural. Frankenstein's monster in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1897), for instance, can be seen as Victor Frankenstein's alter ego in that it manifests the latter's latent monstrosity. An analysis of the selected Okorafor's novels revealed that monsters' attributes of being 'the other' as well as the 'alter ego' plays a vital role in construction of identities in her fiction.

The notion of monster has found different expressions in different communities in the world. Tales of ogres, giants, devils and hideous creatures without names abound among diverse Africa communities. Oral narratives documented by Akivaga and Odaga narrate voracious and virtually invincible creatures which once roamed the world (52). The creatures could be killed but in some cases, a slain monster could still come back to life and cause more damage (52). Similar cases occur in West African tales among monstrous spirit children called *ogbanje* in Igbo (or *àbíkù* among the Yoruba) who torment their parents by dying soon after birth only to re-enter the womb of the same mother and be reborn (Bloom 61).

Gothic often portrayed monstrous beings as being overly subversive, villainous, depraved evil and under worldly (Botting 18; Kearney 4). This belief perhaps was passed from Greek mythology where there existed dangerous and uncompromising monsters like the werewolves, Erinyes, vampires and Gorgons among others (Murgatroyd 6-39). Greek myths, however, do show that not all monsters were wicked and dangerous. Certain races of giants and a winged horse called Pegasus are depicted having being helpful to gods and humans (Murgatroyd 56). Likewise in Kenyan oral tales there are horrific man-eating ogres, which on the verge of their death; mended their wicked ways by giving back all the lives and property they had devoured (Akivaga and Odaga 52).

The arguments above serve to dispel prevailing notions, especially in the early Gothic fiction like Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), that deformed or grotesque looking beings are necessarily wicked and dangerous. Okorafor indeed seems to acknowledge this reality as she portrays some of her hideous-looking and extraordinary characters in her novels as either victims of oppression or heroes (TBP 11; 220). The genuine monstrosity anticipated in Okorafor's fiction is the intrinsic monstrosity: the one that manifest itself through inhuman acts and extreme subversiveness of individuals (Asma 9).

Another Gothic aspect that is closely linked to monstrosity is oppression. Featuring prominently in the early Gothic novels notably Ann Radcliffe's *The*

*Mysteries of Udolpho* (1797) and Charles Brockden Brown's *Wieland* (1798); oppressions through persecution, social tyranny and terror have remained persistent themes in many works of Gothic fiction. In fact the horror genre, which often features terror and oppression, is considered to have developed from the Gothic (Milne 280-281).

Gothic Acts of tyranny and persecution are portrayed as being perpetrated in the following ways: by social monsters exemplified by depraved, selfish individuals like Montoni in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* or monk Ambrosio in M.G, Lewis' *The Monk* (1796); by literal monsters like Count Dracula in Bram Stoker's *Dracula* ; and by a society against an individual deemed monstrous by virtue their unnatural, malformed or hideous looks as in the case of Frankenstein's creature in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*.

The theme of oppression has generally evolved since then, influenced to a larger extent by changing global socio-historical and economic environment. Contemporary postcolonial and colonial Gothic like Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) and Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1902) respectively conceptualize theme of oppression in terms of slavery and racism. This study found that the theme of oppression is preeminent in Okorafor's selected and therefore qualified to be accorded exclusive review as a chapter.

A fleeting glance at works of Gothic fiction, especially those which thematise horror, monstrosity and extreme cruelty; could create an impression that such works have no relationship to empirical or socio-historical reality of a given place. The fact is, no matter how weird or surreal certain literary works are; they always relate to reality. Bennet & Royle indeed assert that fiction cannot be disassociated from their immediate historical context (113). White, on his part, contends that art is a simulacrum of the real and its complementary role in historical discourse of a place should not be ignored (147). The genuine account of any reality, he insists, should comprise the historical reality as well as artistic (fictional) reality too (147). Cast in futuristic apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic settings, some of Okorafor's selected novels may seem unrelated to the current Africa's reality. On a closer scrutiny, however, it was revealed that African futuristic aspirations and anxieties are built on the contemporary and the past realities.

#### **1.4 Statement of the Problem**

Despite its embeddedness in European culture, history and aesthetics, Gothic art has shown remarkable ability to reinvent and re-establish itself as mode of representation in other parts of the world. Nnedi Okorafor's works have shown unwavering trend towards Gothic genre through her adoption of salient Gothic motifs and conventions. Her fictional works, however, recast and rework some of the conventions of the genre in ways that not only habituate the Gothic mode to

African realities but also problematize certain aspects of those realities. Her construction of monsters, monstrosity and villainy, for instance, to a certain extent departs from procedures used in original works of Gothic fiction and medieval romances. Despite the tendency of Okorafor to appropriate Gothic motifs in her works of fiction; serious studies are yet to be carried out on them as contemporary works of Gothic fiction, especially in Africa. More so, terrain of Gothic literature is yet to be fully appreciated, explored and exploited in Africa. This study therefore critically examines Okorafor's selected works of fiction as avante garde Gothic literature, emphasising not only how they incorporate elements of Gothic fiction, but also how they recast themes of monster, monstrosity and oppression. This study will enrich African literary criticism by providing another perspective to study and analyse African literature.

### **1.5 Objectives**

- i. Explore aspects of Gothic tradition in the literary imagination of Nnedi Okorafor.
- ii. Analyse significance of monstrous (re)presentation in Nnedi Okorafor's selected fiction.
- iii. Examine the relevance of Gothic mode in delineation of ethno-racial realities of oppression in the selected Nnedi Okorafor's fiction.

### **1.6 Research Questions**

- i. In what ways have aspects of Gothic tradition manifested themselves in the literary imagination of Nnedi Okorafor?
- ii. What is significance of monstrous (re)presentation in Nnedi Okorafor's selected fiction?
- iii. To what extent is the Gothic mode relevant in delineation of ethno-racial realities of oppression in the selected Nnedi Okorafor's fiction?

### **1.7 Justification of the Study**

Gothic generally shares similarities with indigenous African art as it also feature folklore, superstition, moral issues, monstrosity, and the divine issues among others. Gothic, as such, constitutes an enrichment of African literature and therefore should be given more prominence.

Secondly, as observed in the previous sections, any discussion on Gothic genre engenders deeper reflections on self-other dichotomies and what they entail. The genre portrays monster characters in the literary works as visual representation of that which “threatens the purity of the human form as that form was intended by whomever or whatever is presumably responsible for that universal design” (Scott 34). In many cases, the monsters are representation of ordinary human beings who are deemed to have abdicated their humanity through their socially deviant actions or habits. It is equally important to note that fictional monsters are also

monsters are visual representations of projected fears and anxieties (Person et al 125; Asma 125). Finally, within an environment of xenophobia, monster character(s) represents a foreigner or a stranger (Carroll 196). Understanding monster in the light of the descriptions and explanation provided above is vital in every society as it helps quell any surge in social oppression. It does this by presenting dehumanization and alienation of the perceived other as social persecution which has no solid and rational foundation. This concept is crucial especially in Kenya and the rest of Africa where instances of ethnic and racial animosities and violence have sometimes surged to untenable levels. In such instances, dehumanization of the perceived enemy is known to take centre stage and further aggravate the already worse situation (Scheffler 59). The process of dehumanization leads to an exclusion a “group or individual from moral consideration” (Moller & Deci 44). This implies that the assailants do not consider the affected victims as full human beings deserving of any humane treatment.

Thirdly, Nnedi Okorafor, a Nigerian-American writer is one of the leading authors of Black speculative fiction. In her article *Organic Fantasy* (2009) Okorafor confirms that the guiding vision behind her imaginative works of fiction is influenced by two things: her complex African (Nigerian) and American heritage and her magical view of the world (276). Her cultural mix, multiple perspectives, and experiences of racial oppression in America (Wabuke 5) have

arguably influenced her works. Okorafor coined the term Africanfuturism and Africanjujuism to refer to her fiction characterised by fusion of science fiction and fantasy. Her fiction largely features fantastic elements, African folklore and mythology, monsters, and futuristic technology, among others. Many of these elements are generally related to the Gothic.

In addition, Okorafor fields flawed, subversive but empowered and mainly female leading characters in her fiction (John). Many of these characters face censorship, opposition and oppression from their communities because of their perceived difference and subversion. Zahra in *Zahra the Windseeker*, Onyesonwu in *Who Fears Death*, Phoenix in *The Book of Phoenix*, and Sunny in *Akata Witch* are all flawed, talented and face some form of oppression from their respective communities. Sometimes, as in the case of heroine of *Who Fears Death*, they are regarded as monsters and excluded from their respective communities. Okorafor's consistent utilization of the Gothic elements, including monstrous characters and motif of oppression, therefore, makes her the most appropriate fiction writer for this study. Finally the four selected texts shown above fit into this frame of research since they satisfactorily incorporate Gothic elements and motif of oppression.

## **1.8 Literature Review**

### **1.8.1 Gothic Fiction**

Gothic literature maybe considered an aesthetic revolt against prevailing conditions with view to re-enacting the past ways of life that are seen as having given the society more stability, order and coherence. Pioneer Gothic writing, according to Kilgour (3), was characterised by a rebellion against constraining neoclassical aesthetic ideal of unity and order with an aim of reinstating a suppressed medieval barbaric and imaginative freedom. It drew on myths, legends and folklore of medieval romances which enabled a re-enactment of fantastic world and tales of knights, monsters, ghosts, demons, corpses, skeletons, evil aristocrats, monk and nuns, fainting heroines, bandits, extravagant adventures and terrors (Botting 2). The list grew in the later part of the Gothic period to include “scientists, fathers, husbands, madmen, criminals and the monstrous double signifying duplicity and evil nature” (Botting 2).

The Gothic plots featured “decaying, bleak Medieval castles “full of hidden passageways” and ruined churches, abbeys and graveyards; all meant to re-imagine the feudal past associated with barbarity, superstition and fear (Botting 2). In the later fiction, however, the castles gradually gave way to the old house: both as building and as site of family memories where fears and anxieties returned in the present. In Okorafor’s fiction, for instance, the Towers in *The Book of Phoenix* can be seen as playing similar role played by the medieval castles and old

haunted houses in earlier Gothic fiction. The replacement of the key Gothic sites like medieval castles by simple houses in the later fiction attests to the fact that Gothic genre has been undergoing transformation.

Gothic fiction is also characterized by its tendency to privilege aesthetics based on affect associated chiefly with the sublime (Botting 2). The sublime is associated with grandeur, vastness, obscurity and magnificence as seen, for instance, in craggy mountainous landscapes (Botting 25; Baldick 247). Botting (3) argues that the sheer magnitude of such natural spectacle not only stimulates emotions of terror and awe in the viewer, but also offered a glimpse of infinity and awful power, intimations of a metaphysical force beyond rational knowledge and human comprehension. This study built on the above foundation to argue that the sublime has been utilized in Okorafor's fiction. Elements of the sublime in Okorafor's fiction, however, seem to depart from purely natural phenomenon to artificial forms associated with the science fiction.

The dawn of Gothic literary movement in the late eighteenth century elicited a lot of backlash and censorship from Enlightenment and Neoclassic adherents who saw it as being overly retrogressive and subversive. First, the Gothic fiction reconstructed the medieval past and its aesthetics which already had been adjudged barbarous and uncivilized (Botting 2-3). Secondly, it urged reader's credulity towards fantasy and superstition which featured criminal villains,

perverts, and portrayed monsters in an attractive light (18). While this study acknowledges deleterious nature of villainy, perversion, and monstrosity to societal moral order and cohesiveness, it also reframes or redefines certain aspects of those terms in ways which may differ from original Gothic rendering of the terms. This study also questions dominant beliefs, conceptual systems, or worldview which ascribe such terms. Earlier Gothic fiction, for instance, viewed monster as that which not only deviated from the nature and regularity accredited to life, but also from “symmetry and proportion valued in any forms of representation” (Botting 18). This study assesses the extent to which Okorafor’s portrayal of characters deemed monstrous or subversive in a given social setting redefines the concept of monstrosity and subversion.

Though implicated in subversion societal norms, however, Kilgour notes that the Gothic fiction always ends up re-establishing the same norms. It achieves this by denouncing the subversive elements it is associated with (Kilgour 8). Gothic fiction, for instance, can portray a vicious act in positive light, then later punishes the act before reaffirming the system of “social and moral order”(Kilgour 8). In the seminal gothic fiction like Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, Victor Frankenstein is portrayed as an ambitious, consummate scientist who would do anything to create a human being. There is little censorship or interdiction of his project on moral grounds until he creates a villainous monster which, though being a victim in itself, causes so much damage to the society. Victor finally realizes his grave

error and suffers accordingly. Kilgour's analysis is a useful point of departure for this study as it helps in identification of authentic subversive elements, acts of subversion, and social norms of a community. This study therefore borrowed Kilgour's Gothic insights to scrutinise how Okorafor attempts to re-establish societal norms in social settings portrayed in her works of fiction.

Characters in Gothic fiction have their own uniqueness. The Gothic villain, for instance, was portrayed as being antisocial, self-centred, detached, predatory, demonic, hypocritical, egotistical, fragmented, alienated, sexually perverted, and subversive (Kilgour 12). The Gothic novel is often characterised by battle between antithetical sexes where an aggressive sexual male (symbolizing an obsessed, selfish and alienated individual of modern age) out to indulge his will is set against a passive spiritual woman (symbolizing restraint and normativeness) (Kilgour 12). Building on this tradition, this study delved into Okorafor's fiction to find out to what extent the above mode of characterisation is appropriated or complicated.

Symbolism is a very significant technique in most of Gothic works. Darkness, graves, churchyard, death, and ghosts, decaying, bleak castles; and eerie forests are common examples. Darkness, for instance, figuratively represented that which threatened the "light of reason with what it did not know" (Botting 21). Darkness, gloom and night not only testified to limitations and uncertainty of

neoclassical/Enlightenment knowledge, but also gave reign to wild imagination about mystery creatures which could be lurking in dark. It is, however, noted here that the use of the element of symbolism in Okorafor's work is influenced to a larger extent by its science fiction setting. This study sought to find out how Okorafor utilises the motif of symbolism in the selected texts.

Science fiction shows overwhelming tendency to appropriate Gothic conventions and motifs. Science fiction owes immense debt to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, which, according to Aldiss and Wingrove was the first science fiction novel (39). The images of strength and power that are established, for instance, through the opposition of human and machine, or ordinary human and scientifically generated superhuman, arguably draw on the masculine elements of Gothic fiction. Nnedi Okorafor's works are majorly based on science fiction. This study thus set out to discover Gothic associations in Okorafor's science fiction works.

Female Gothic, though admittedly a contested field according to Wallace and Smith, has had significant influence among contemporary female novelist like Nnedi Okorafor (15). Female Gothic is seen as deriving heavily from the pioneer Gothic works written by the female authors like Ann Radcliffe (Wallace & Smith 16). Among the features highlighted for the female Gothic fiction include: "the imprisoned and pursued heroine threatened by a tyrannical male figure, it explained the supernatural, and ended in the closure of marriage" (Wallace and

Smith 3). This study attempted to find out to what extent does Okorafor's selected works of fiction conform to the conventions of the female Gothic fiction.

### **1.8.2 Monster and Stranger**

*Collins English Dictionary-Complete and Unabridged* (2014) offers two definitions of a monster: first it is a large, imaginary creature that is often ugly and frightening. Secondly, monster has been applied to an ordinary human being who is physically deformed, cruel, wicked or inhuman. Individuals are considered inhuman when they commit horrific deeds (Asma 8).

Another aspect to consider when conceptualizing monster is impurity. Drawing from Mary Douglas' *Purity and Danger* (1966), Carroll notes that something is regarded as impure if it transgresses or violates the schemes of cultural categorization (31). The impure includes those which are considered categorically interstitial, contradictory, incomplete or formless (Carroll 43). Since literal monsters possess most of the above attributes, they are therefore considered impure. It is through the impurity that monsters develop their capacity to horrify (Asma 184). Impurity also applies to actions and behaviour which violate social norms and sanctions of a given community (Douglass 40). Monstrosity in literal or metaphoric sense has been clearly illustrated in Okorafor's fiction. It is worth noting that monstrosity, like some of the other elements associated with early Gothic fiction, has undergone some transformation. This study sought to establish

to what extent the concept of impurity has been appropriated in the development of monstrous beings in Okorafor's novels.

Conceptual metaphor approach as expounded by Lakoff and Johnson could also offer an alternative means of understanding the nature and the genesis of monster (3). This approach posits that human's conceptual system is metaphoric in nature (3). The use of metaphor implies unconscious denial or rebuttal of the referent (Tyson 29). Monster as a metaphor therefore would represent those whose rationality, sensibility and humanity have been denied or revoked by human conceptual system.

Another way to understand the genesis of monsters would be to consider them as product of unconscious fantasy (Person et al. 125). This assumption has been further reinforced by Asma's argument that monsters and their prototypes reside in the human unconscious (184). Bearing these in mind, it would be logical to conclude that fictional monsters are actually projections of the real monsters in the human unconscious. Projecting a monster onto an individual could arguably transmute him/her into the monster. This study borrowed the above arguments to analyse how certain characters in Okorafor's fiction have been shorn of their humanity through unconscious projection non-human attributes.

The concept of monster can also be understood within inter-ethnic or inter-racial relationships. After all, Carroll argues that horror fiction featuring monster characters often contains themes of xenophobia (197). The monster in such fiction is a representation of that which needs to be banished from the community in order to protect the community's sense of self (196). For fictional monsters to achieve this objective, they are usually presented as threatening, subversive, and impure. Filth as used here not only applies to corporeal or physical attributes, but also to actions, behaviors, and ideas when they partake of the immoral, the inappropriate, the obscene, or the unaccountable (Cohen qtd. in Tyler 22). This study scrutinised Okorafor's fiction for the elements of subversiveness, impurity and capacity to threaten among the entities/ individuals considered monstrous. It equally attempted to find out if impurity, non-conformity and bizarre appearance of a fictional character necessarily constitute villainy.

Travel and adventure accounts like Homer's *The Odyssey* (1999), Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (1998) and Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (2007) often depict encounters with monsters, savages, cannibalistic and uncivilized beings. Such accounts may not be realistic but they nonetheless inform about people's reactions they encounter strange civilizations. Asma argues that fear and anxiety often lead to gross exaggeration of the real and ordinary situations (22). He further argues that monsters are "the most extreme personified point of unfamiliarity" (26). It can be observed from these arguments that human beings are predisposed to

dehumanise or demonize any unfamiliarity. Such impulse perhaps is precautionary as strange environment or people could promise possibilities of danger or unfriendly encounters. The protagonists in Okorafor's novels *Zahra the Windseeker* and *Akata Witch*, for instance, are often referred to using dehumanizing terms because they look different. They are made to look like strangers in their own respective communities because certain aspects of their physiognomies create a sense of the uncanny.

According to Skinner & Shack, the term stranger is also metaphorically employed in literature as a device to cast characters in "shadowy, ill-defined social roles" (1). In their scrutiny of some of the William Shakespeare's works like *The Merchant of Venice* (2000), *Othello* and *The Tempest* (1998), Skinner & Shack find that characters who are presented as foreigners like Caliban, Othello and Shylock have been negatively portrayed. Their actions, words and physiognomies literally articulate the social boundary isolating them from mainstream society.

The relevance of the "stranger" to this study, however, lies in the fact that the domain of strangers sometimes characteristically intersects and at times fuses with that of a monster. This assumption is buttressed by Kearney's argument that monsters arise from underworlds, strangers intrude from hinterworlds, and gods generally reside in otherworlds beyond us (4). The worlds mentioned generally share similar attributes: they are remote, unknown and not easily accessible. The

home of Count Dracula in Transylvania, for instance, has been described as remote and inaccessible (Stoker 32). Thus in the body of Count Dracula, foreigner and monster fuse together. Building on the above arguments, this study sought to establish how strange/foreign nature and unfamiliarity of some characters in the selected texts contributed to their social exclusion and ultimate oppression.

Another instance which helps highlight the proximity between stranger and monster is their impact on the established order. According to Carroll (196), monster is an embodiment of political or social “entities which threaten the established social order at the level of nation, class, race, or gender”. According to Skinner and Shack, presence of a stranger too challenges an established social order in a given place (15). This perhaps relate to the fact that foreigners’ perspectives and ways of life are bound may clash with those of the mainstream society. Both the monster and the stranger are therefore implicated in the subversion of order in a society.

An ambivalent attitude towards strangers by a host community can be seen as arising out of the need for self-preservation and protection of common interests. Kristeva indeed observes that features of a foreigner “captivates” and “rejects” at the same time (3). This implies that they (the features) may captivate if they identify with those of the host. The same features, however, may revolt if they differ from those of the host. This contradictory nature of the foreigner’s features

renders his/her image permanently scarred (Kristeva 4). Kristeva's argument above can be appropriated in this study to find out how the peculiar nature of some characters and their actions in Okorafor's fiction predisposed them to social oppression.

### **1.9 Theoretical Framework**

This study employs the postulations and views of the psychoanalytic theory as its theoretical premise. Psychoanalytic theory as propounded by Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), an Austrian physician, postulates that human mind contains a dimension called the unconscious which is partially accessible to consciousness (Rivkin and Ryan 389). This part houses repressed desires, feelings, memories, and instinctual drives which are majorly concerned with sexuality and violence. Arguing that our mental lives derive mainly from biological drives, Freud noted that "the highest achievements of civilization are inseparable from instinctual urges towards pleasure and release of excitation and energy" (qtd. in Rivkin and Ryan 389).

Freud, however, found that unconscious wishes do find expression in dreams and this largely owes to the fact that during the sleep the "vigilance of the repressive ego in regards to the unconscious desire is stilled" (Rivkin and Ryan 390). A dream presents the unconscious material in a distorted form that is more acceptable to the consciousness. The "dream work" is the name Freud used to

refer to the process by which the unconscious material is presented in a form that eludes the censorship of the ego (Freud 295). The process of dream work involves displacing the unacceptable unconscious material onto acceptable images, condensing several different but related elements into one image and turning the drives into their opposites (Freud 296).

Dream-work is certainly connected to creative works of art. In their analysis of Sigmund Freud's essay "Creative writers and daydreaming" (1907), it is noted that fantasies or daydreams provide some of the topics used by creative writers in their works (Person, et al. 122). These daydreams are constructed in a similar way to the usual dreams but with more emphasis on secondary revision. Some daydreams are unconscious since their origin is a repressed material (Person et al.125). Also included in this category are primal or universal fantasies: an unconscious material which is a product of heredity. All these considerably influence fiction writers or creators of work of art by providing them with material for their creativity. Person's postulation above is a useful point of departure for this study as it attempts to explain how creative writers like Nnedi Okorafor possibly constructed monstrous characters in her fiction.

Basing on the above explanation, it can be deduced therefore, that a monstrous creature in a written work of art is a manifest content which has undergone secondary revision. Monsters are presented in literary works as liminal,

uncategorizable creatures because they combine features of more than one creature. This presentation is akin to psychological processes of condensation where several different but related unconscious materials are condensed into single image (Rivkin & Ryan 390). Unconscious material is presented in the form that easily evades the censorship of the conscious. The materials for monster creation are unconscious fantasies (including primal or universal fantasies) (Person et al. 125). This study analysed Okorafor's fiction to find out to what extent her creation of monsters or monstrous characters in the texts parallels the psychological processes of condensation.

According to Anna Freud, an ego uses defence mechanism of projection to protect itself from sense of guilt and unpleasant self-criticism (90). It does this by externalizing or projecting them outwards. This defence mechanism closely resembles Jung's shadow projection: a scapegoating technique where an individual or a group projects something they feel dimly disturbed about—some half-conscious or even totally unconscious source of anxiety—onto another individual or group (Burnett, *et al* 11). Shadow consists of consists of those “aspects of the personality of which the individual is unconscious or would prefer to repudiate, such as envy, hatred or other unacceptable, disavowed or repressed material” (Corbett 40). In other words, shadow as espoused by Carl G. Jung, encompasses everything which lies outside the consciousness. It resembles Freud's entire domain of the unconscious (Stevens 78). According to Stevens,

“shadow is experienced — when it is experienced — as a threat” (80). To defend oneself from this threat one often makes use of a variety of defence mechanisms like repression or projection (80). Shadow projection is an unconscious externalisation of individual’s shadow (inadequacies, shortcomings, anxieties) onto others which in turn transmutes them into devils, vermin, or enemies (Stevens 81; Snowden 92).

Since anxiety or fear, as already explained, is often embodied as monsters, its projection onto an individual or group transforms them into monsters (Asma 185). This process is accompanied by purgation of guilt and feeling of self-righteousness for the burden of guilt has shifted to a scapegoat. This study endeavoured to examine the selected texts for evidence of the projection and how this impacted the targeted individual(s).

Scapegoating is an unconscious process which is responsible for many historical horrors including incarceration, executions, isolation, and exile (Burnett, *et al* 12). Kearney sees the mechanism of scapegoating at work in host- stranger relationships where the former often shifts their guilt to the later in order to remain ‘saintly’ (33). This study utilised the mechanism of scapegoating to argue that some characters considered monstrous in Okorafor’s fiction are indeed embodiment of projected anxiety. In addition, the study scrutinised the theme of

oppression for a possible association with the mechanism of scapegoating or shadow projection.

Another aspect of psychoanalysis used is the uncanny. The term ‘uncanny’ denotes that which appears to depart from what is perceived or assumed to be the normal (*Advanced English Dictionary*, 2017). Freud, however, uses the term to refer to the effects of the unconscious that surprise us and create an effect of "uncanniness" because we are unaware of the operation of the unconscious. (Rivkin & Ryan 418). It is the kind of frightening “which leads back to what is already known” (Freud et al. 3676).

In his study of the German term *unheimlich*, whose closest semantic equivalents of the English term are ‘uncanny’ or ‘eerie’, Freud et al found that it etymologically corresponds to ‘unhomely’ (3679). In his further analysis of the term, found out that at certain level, the meaning of *unheimlich* (uncanny) merges with its antonym *heimlich* (homely). He therefore deduced that *Heimlich* (familiar, homely) should be understood as belonging to two sets of ideas that that are different yet not contradictory: on the one hand, it refers to that which is familiar or agreeable and on the other hand that which is hidden and kept out of sight. In the light of this, therefore, *unheimlich* or uncanny means something which has been revealed but ought to have remained secret or hidden (Freud et al. 3676).

In an attempt to clarify his position on the source of the uncanny, Freud uses E.T.A Hoffman's short story *The Sandman* (1885). The Sand-man in the Hoffman's short story provokes the uncanny because of his association with the explosion that killed Nathaniel's father many years ago, and his ability to punish little children by removing their eyes. The latter is regarded as the principal cause of uncanny feeling because, according to Freud, et al. (3684), it is associated with castration complex.

Freudian concept of the uncanny can be seen as having a profound relevance to this study because of its close relationship to monster. Beal, for instance, considers monsters the personification of the uncanny for they stand for that which endangers one's sense of security, stability, peace, integrity, well-being, health and meaning (5). Carroll too argues that the concept of the uncanny provides basis for psychoanalytic correlation of repression and monster (174). The ability of fantastic or fictional monsters to provoke considerable dread is therefore connected to their capacity to evoke a profound sense of uncanny. This study found that the concept of uncanny provides basis for understanding nature of the monsters in the selected literary texts. Treatment of Zahra as monster in *Zahra the Windseeker*, for instance, could relate to the fact that her hair provokes a certain sense of uncanny. The study accordingly reviewed Okorafor's monstrous characters for possible associations with the uncanny.

Uncanniness seems to haunt Gothic art since its inception in seventeenth century. Pioneer Gothic works including *Frankenstein* and *Dracula* have characters who evoke profound sense of uncanniness owing to their countenance, as well as their unbridled physical, sexual and magical power. In fact one could contend that Gothic genre faced backlash and censorship owing to its uncanny nature as it interrupted the largely forgotten and surmounted past into the present.

### **1.10 Methodology**

The study was based on qualitative research design. The main aim of qualitative approach is to gather an in-depth understanding of human behaviour and reasons that govern such behaviour. This model therefore often requires smaller but focused samples than large samples. Qualitative methods provide information only on the particular cases studied.

#### **1.10.1 Research approach**

In order to achieve the objectives for this study close reading and in-depth analysis of selected Nnedi Okorafor's novels was carried out while applying the relevant tenets of psychoanalytic theory. Analyses of the texts were carried out to determine their Gothicism and how the mode has been appropriated in African literature. Textual analysis was also examined how monstrous bodies and villainy have been constructed.

### **1.10.2 Sampling**

Nnedi Okorafor's fictional works have been chosen for this study because they incorporate monstrous characters, theme of oppression, and other elements associated with Gothic fiction. The selected texts are contemporary and certainly have relevance to objectives and subject matter of this study. Okorafor's works of prose fiction include novels, novellas and short stories. Her novels are *The Shadow speaker* (2007), *Zahrah the Windseeker* (2005), *Who Fears Death* (2010), *Akata Witch* (2011), *Akata warrior* (2017), and *Lagoon* (2014). The novellas comprise the Binti trilogy: *Binti* (2015), *Binti: Home* (2017) and *Binti: The Night Masquerade* (2018). Out of these, *Who Fears Death*, *The Book of Phoenix*, *Akata Witch* and *Zahra the Windseeker* were selected because they appropriate requisite elements of Gothic fiction like monsters, oppression, villainy, sublime, uncanny, and romance among others.

### **1.10.3 Data Collection**

Data was collected through close reading of the selected texts *Who Fears Death*, *The Book of Phoenix*, *Akata Witch* and *Zahra, The Windseeker*. Data was also collected from relevant secondary material including books, book sections, encyclopaedias, journal articles, periodicals, theses, dissertations, and articles from websites. Data collected included the background information, evolution of the Gothic genre, aspects of Gothic fiction in the relevant texts, monster or

monstrosity, motif of Gothic oppression, theoretical framework and some material on methodology.

#### **1.10.4 Data Analysis**

The selected texts were analyzed through an examination and interrogation of the collected units with respect to their bearing on the monster, Gothicism, oppression and theoretical framework. The extracted data from the selected primary texts augmented by relevant data culled from secondary sources were analysed accordingly and interpreted in line with the objectives and theoretical framework.

#### **1.10.5 Scope and Limitations**

This study focused exclusively on the selected African works of fiction which substantially appropriate elements of Gothic fiction including monstrosity and oppression. The selected works of fiction were studied as avante garde Gothic works in Africa which, apart from reflecting contemporary realities in the continent, manage to retain its grounding in Gothic genre. The study nonetheless encountered some straightjackets especially since there is little data and few studies done on Gothic fiction in Africa.

## CHAPTER TWO

### 2.0 ASPECTS OF GOTHIC TRADITION IN THE LITERARY

#### IMAGINATION OF NNEDI OKORAFOR

##### 2.1 Introduction

Since its inception in eighteenth century in Europe, Gothic fiction is ubiquitous across the world. Notable Gothic features can indeed be seen in African seminal fictional works like Daniel O. Fagunwa's *Forest of Thousand Demons* (1938), Amos Tutuola's *The Palmwine Drinkard* (1954) and Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* (1991). The debut of American-born Nigerian fiction writer, Nnedi Okorafor, into the field in 2005, signals that the Gothic tradition is gradually gaining foothold in Africa. Her adoption of Gothic mode to recast African challenges and aspirations like ethno-racial challenges, social oppression, and empowerment shows Gothic can indeed offer radically fresh means of highlighting Africa's complex reality. The genre's preoccupation with superstition, mystery and aligns well with African world of folklore where similar tropes and motifs are a commonplace. Uniqueness of the Gothic mode therefore lies in its use of modes of representation that could be considered irrational and unrealistic. This chapter attempts to consider the nature of contemporary African gothic by studying the main Gothic elements found in Nnedi Okorafor's selected novels.

Okorafor's Gothic cannot be adequately understood without studying its antecedents. Modern Gothic fiction arguably draws significantly from pioneer Gothic works such as Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), Matthew Lewis *The Monk* (1796), Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), and Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897). A good number of features from these original works have become archetypes to be found in later Gothic works. In nutshell, they have contributed to a continuity of the genre.

Okorafor's fiction arguably bears archetypal features of Gothic fiction. First it is implicated in a rebellion against modern scientific and social ideals that attempt to undermine systems of folklore, superstition, divine mysteries, indigenous science, and external control. As seen in *Zahra, the Windseeker*, *Akata Witch* and *Who Fears Death*; Okorafor's fiction draws on myths, legends and folklore of traditional African communities.

One of the most common motifs in Gothic fiction is the monster character. These characters abound in Nnedi Okorafor's fiction. Monstrosity in Okorafor's works, however, is a problematised space. On the one hand a monstrous character represents a villain; on the other hand, however, it represents nonconformists who are oppressed for standing up against what they perceive as violation of their rights. Like their antecedents, Okoraforian monsters attempt to illuminate the dark

side of human existence (Milne 282). The above introduction affirms that substantial Gothic elements do exist in Okorafor's fiction. This chapter therefore intends to offer a broader discussion on aspects of Gothic tradition in Nnedi Okorafor's novel.

## **2.2 Setting, Journey and the Sublime**

Original Gothic plots featured “decaying, bleak Medieval castles “full of hidden passageways” and ruined churches, abbeys and graveyards (Botting 2). All these were meant to re-imagine the feudal past associated with barbarity, superstition and fear (2). In the later fiction, however, the castles gradually gave way to the old house which acted as site of family memories where fears and anxieties returned in the present (2). The Life Gen's towers in Okorafor's *The Book of Phoenix (TBP)* offer ideal Gothic setting. The two- hundred year old Tower 7, for instance, is described as being a home, as well as a prison:

The 28th floor of Tower 7 was my home. Yesterday, I realized it was a prison, too. I probably should have suspected something. The two-hundred-year-old marble skyscraper had many dark sides to its existence and I knew most of them. There were 39 floors, and on almost every one was an abomination. I was an abomination. I'd read many books and this was clear to me. However, this building was still my home (7).

The tower from the descriptions given has the hallmarks of Gothic home which is bleak and entrapping. Its numerous floors where clandestine scientific research takes place not only create an atmosphere of fear and suspense, but also recreate a setting reminiscent of gloomy castles with “hidden passageways” common in

early Gothic works (Botting 2). By all description, the heroine Phoenix Okore was virtually a prisoner in the place she called her home.

A sense of uncanny is created when something looks real or seems real but is not real. Freud ((3679) uses the concept of *unheimlich* (unhomely) to explain the term uncanny. It is a condition which is experienced when a place or a thing which used to be familiar or homely suddenly becomes unfamiliar. Phoenix's home at Tower 7 has been described as *unheimlich* (unhomely) or uncanny when it should be *heimlich* (homely) or canny. This fact is made clear in the above excerpt, when the narrator (Phoenix) starts realizing that the 28<sup>th</sup> floor of Tower 7 is not only a home but also a prison. This knowledge makes her uneasy and uncomfortable.

All the prisoners or the internees in the tower have been referred to as abominations. Abomination as used in the excerpt does not refer to vicious or vile actions of the prisoners but to their unnatural physical looks and danger associated with them. They were created by scientists through aggressive genetic manipulation, cloning and altering (*TBP* 8). They are referred to as abomination by the narrator because of their monstrous, grotesque and inhuman attributes (*TBP* 1). The speciMen, as the prisoners/internees are referred to, are used for a wide range of experimentation in the tower. These internees therefore can be regarded as victims of oppression. The actual abominable and monstrous people

are the scientists who created, dehumanised and confined the prisoners in the tower.

Imprisonment and entrapment in a building or a home, as seen in Phoenix's situation above, is one of the most common and enduring motifs of female Gothic fiction (Wallace and Smith 6; Olson xxvi). The imprisonment and threats directed at the heroine in works of Gothic fiction are usually perpetrated by a tyrannical and malevolent male figure or his female surrogate (Wallace & Smith 3; Punter & Byron 279). If Phoenix in *The Book of Phoenix (TBP)* represents the Gothic motif of damsel in distress, then the LifeGen Technologies staff, also known as the Big Eye, arguably represent tyrannical male figure. The Big Eye refers to the evil, soulless scientists who use devious means to recruit people into LifeGen facilities where they are used for cruel scientific experimentations (*TBP* 8). Bumi, a Nigerian lady assigned by the LifeGen to watch over Phoenix, could take the place of the female surrogate as indicated above (Wallace & Smith 3).

Phoenix Okore's confinement at the Tower was conditioned on her lack of knowledge of what freedom, home and free will really entails (*TBK* 7). This was so because after her creation in Tower 7, Phoenix had been raised and conditioned to consider her horrendous situation in the Tower as normal (9). Once she woke up to the sad reality of her situation, her passion for freedom from the confinement could not be contained and she escaped from the Tower.

Gothic setting is also associated with memories, fears and anxieties which tend to haunt occupants from time to time. In *Who Fears Death*, the protagonist Onyesonwu Ubaid Ogundimu has been presented as a very unhappy girl. She has had to endure so much pain in her life because she was a product of rape. Onyesonwu was an *Ewu*: a child “born from violence” (115); “a bad luck” and one who “comes to this world with soiled souls” (127). Villagers’ attitude towards her was markedly hostile:

It was odd. Mostly, people shunned me because I was *Ewu*. But sometimes women crowded around me. “But her skin,” they would say to each other, never directly to me. “It’s so smooth and delicate. It looks almost like camel’s milk.”  
 “And her hair is oddly bushy, like a cloud of dried grass.”  
 “Her eyes are like a desert cat’s.”  
 “Ani makes strange beauty from ugliness.”  
 “She might be beautiful by the time she goes through her Eleventh Rite.”  
 “What’s the point of her going through it? No one will marry her.”  
 Then laughter. (8)

Onyesonwu’s life was uncomfortable in her native village of Jwahir. Her community, which was supposed to confer upon her a sense of belonging, and cushion her from any discomfort or threats, instead regarded her as a mistake and an outsider. Onyesonwu was conceived through rape by a Nuru assailant during one of their murderous rampage in Okeke land (21). The community projects fear, pain and destructiveness associated with Nuru on Onyesonwu. She tried to bury her past and move on. However, her looks and the sad story of her conception always returned to torment her. Her home village where she lived had become a

haunted site where her worst fears and anxieties dramatically replayed. From the descriptions given Onyesonwu's home village was simply unhomely (Uncanny).

Journeys form most significant motifs in the Gothic fiction (Punter and Byron 279). Journey is a means of escaping from entrapment or confinement instigated by the male protagonist (278). Conversely, as portrayed in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, the primary purpose of journey is to hunt down or pursue a person with intent to harm. In *Frankenstein*, Victor Frankenstein pursues the monster he had created across the cold summits of Swiss Alps to the frozen regions of the Northern Europe with aim of killing it (58, 102).

In literary or symbolic sense, the journey motif could represent development and growth of the heroine. It leads to an ultimate acquisition of agency and empowerment which enable the heroine survive and succeed in a constraining world of patriarchy (Punter and Byron 279). Journey, in literary or metaphoric sense is a common phenomenon in Okorafor's fiction. In *The Book of Phoenix*, *Who Fears Death* and *Akata Witch*; journeys play a pivotal role in development of the main characters. Sunny Nwazue's progress through life from being a stigmatized albino girl into a talented footballer and a powerful witch is presented as journey (*Akata Witch* 23, 261, 334).

In *The Book of Phoenix*, Phoenix's transition from a helpless prisoner in Tower 7 to a liberator has been described as journey. Phoenix, a female created and domiciled in the tower, initiates a massive escape that saw many inmates leave the place that had virtually been prison. Phoenix, however, is shot and due to her unstable nature bursts into flames and burn to ashes (*TBP* 36). A week later she rises from her ashes, develops wings, and with help from her loyal friends flies to Africa (*TBP* 34, 58). Africa becomes a new experience and an eye-opener to her. Stepping in African soil triggers her self-rediscovery and sense of belonging. She finds love, acceptance (*TBP* 65) and true home which sharply contrasts with the home she had been raised at Tower 7. In Africa, Phoenix is humanised, given a new name, religion and made to believe that she is also God's creation (*TBP* 62,80,81). Buoyed and invigorated by her new sense of self, Phoenix finds reason to enjoy her life and fight to protect her new identity and people she had come to regard as her new family. She calls Africa real home and regards America as false home (*TBP* 93). When she is forced to go back to America, she uses all her knowledge and lethal ability to destroy the evil LifeGen Technologies.

In *Who Fears Death* the role of journey is also expressed. In the text, Onyesonwu Ubaid -Ogundimu, accompanied by her five friends, leaves her village and embarks on a long, adventurous and often perilous journey into the desert. Her trip takes them through several towns, villages until she finally arrives at her biological father's town of Durfa (383). During the journey, she was able to

actualize all that she had learned from a great sorcerer Aro and acquire much more (154). She was able to reverse Eleventh Rite Juju (the circumcision rite), for her friends Luyu, Binta and Diti by reconstructing the flesh that had been cut off (248). Onyesonwu continued developing her sorcery and mystic abilities like restoring life, foraying into spirit world and back, and interacting with otherworldly beings called masquerades (231, 310-319). At the end of her journey she had acquired enough knowledge and strength to be able to face her father Daib, defeat him, and rewrite *The Great Book* (408). The journey was thus empowering in that, it was instrumental in her physical, social and spiritual growth.

One also notes that in a number of Gothic texts, confidante characters play major roles in enabling major characters succeed in their quests. Confidante characters are those who are trusted by the major characters and help them develop their heroic characteristics. The role played by confidante characters in protagonists' journeys is noteworthy. As already seen in *WFD*, Onyesonwu was able to succeed in her venture partially because she had her most trusted friends by her side. Mwita, her boyfriend and fellow *Ewu*, played an important role in helping her understand herself better. Mwita not only helped Onyesonwu understand her special abilities like shape-shifting but also helped her tame her impulsiveness and unbridled anger (60, 113).

The journey thus emerges as one the most significant motifs in Gothic fiction designating not only a physical activity, but also spiritual, emotional and social growth. Journey is instrumental in acquisition of agency and empowerment which enable the heroine survive and succeed in a constraining world of patriarchy. This is especially true for Onyesonwu and her mother Najeeba. The journey enabled Onyesonwu hone her sorcery skills which not only helped her become a great healer but also defeat Daib and end the costly ethnic strife between the Okeke and Nuru. Journey as means of escaping from entrapment or confinement is clearly portrayed through the character of Phoenix. Finally journey is a means of self-discovery, acquisition of a new identity and sense of belonging.

Another significant Gothic element that is connected to setting is the sublime. Since its inception in seventeenth century, Gothic art has been characterised by affinity to aesthetics based on affect associated chiefly with the sublime (3). The sublime is a quality of awesome grandeur in art and nature (Baldick 247). It is often associated with terrifyingly impressive natural phenomena such as mountains, storms, and the sea (Botting 23-25). The sheer magnitude of such natural spectacle stimulates emotions of terror and awe in the viewer (3). It also offers a glimpse of infinity and awful power (3). Mary Shelley's descriptions of terrific storms and grand mountains like Jura and Mont Blanc certainly evokes feelings of the sublime (102-103). Such experience, arguably, heightens

appreciation of the divine mysteries which apparently had been relegated by the rationalism of the Enlightenment.

The manifestation of metaphysical forces, the supernatural and terrifying incidents in the pioneer Gothic was meant to stimulate emotions of terror and awe (Botting 3). Such experience reawakened the appreciation for the divine mysteries had been watered down by the Enlightenment rationalism. In *The Book of Phoenix*, there is a repeated reference to a powerful desert storm called Ungwa (210 –211). The storm is linked to a supernatural occurrence because every time the lightning crashed, there was an appearance of a woman dancing in the flash (211). The couple, Sunuteel and his wife, who witnessed the supernatural occurrence, were convinced the woman in the flash caused the storms (211). The occurrence enabled Sunuteel access detailed information about sins committed by his people in ancient times (*TBP* 211). The role of the storms as the element of sublime, therefore, was to convey divine warning.

While nature still contributes to the attainment of the sublime in contemporary Gothic, it should be noted that artificial forms and sceneries have gradually forayed into the Gothic sublime. This is strongly felt in science fiction where massive buildings, machinery and life forms produced by futuristic technology have “terrifying sublimity of Gothic architecture” (Botting 108). In *The Book of Phoenix*, some of the most impressive features which could be associated with the

Gothic sublimity are the seven massive towers and the Backbone. The towers in the text are the tallest human-made buildings where advanced scientific researches take place (*TBP* 123). The Backbone is an extremely tall tree that reaches nearly two miles into the sky (197). Its extraordinary growth had been enhanced scientifically at Tower 7 (8). The splendor and awe associated with the impressive features described evoke powerful feeling of the sublime. The sublime associated with science fiction architecture, however, heightens appreciation for scientific progress.

### **2.3 Subversion and Retrogression**

The Gothic genre from its inception was deemed retrogressive and subversive for a number of reasons (Botting 3, 18). First, it helped reconstruct the Medieval past and its aesthetics which already had been adjudged barbarous and uncivilized (6). Secondly, it urged reader's credulity towards fantasy, supernatural and superstition thus leading to slackening of the moral and rational fibres which bound ordered the society (3). Thirdly, the fiction portrayed monsters (the symbol of vice) in attractive light, thus encouraging vice rather than virtue. The Monster, by aesthetic judgment, referred to works which not only deviated from the nature and regularity accredited to life, but also from "symmetry and proportion valued in any forms of representation" (18). Finally, the Gothic displayed illegitimate power, violence and perverted sexual tendencies (3, 18).

The Gothic themes of subversion and retrogression run deep in Nnedi Okorafor's fiction. Okorafor's *Who Fears Death* is constructed around illegitimate power, violence, perversion and superstition. The Nuru people presume they have moral duty to rape, enslave and ultimately wipe out the dark-skinned Okeke (19). This supposition is based on the erroneous interpretation of certain portions of The Great Book to the effect that the Okeke had in the past offended *Ani*, the supreme God. *Ani* had then turned her back on the Okeke and used the Nuru to unleash Her wrath on them (356). The Okeke therefore find themselves living at the mercy of the hostile Nuru people who are determined to ultimately wipe them off the face of the earth (16). It is, however, proven at the end that the supposed *Ani's* curse on the Okeke never really existed (410). This implies that Nuru's actions like their rape, torture, enslavement, and the murder of their Okeke neighbours were illegitimate as they were not morally or spiritually sanctioned. The actions also confirmed that the belief in the supernatural and superstition as shown in the text could contribute to slackening of moral and rational fibre leading to the negative consequences.

Subversive nature of the Gothic mode manifests itself in the way it casts aspersion on certain dominant cultural practices like female circumcision, enforced chastity and female victimization in general. Such practices are oppressive and not consistent with the will God. Through the characters Luyu and Diti, it is amply demonstrated that the circumcision is a curse rather than blessing as it interferes

with intimacy (*WFD* 85). Here, the text projects a firm, unequivocal stand against the tradition (circumcision) which is seen as oppressing women in the guise of empowering them. The requirement of a woman to maintain her chastity till marriage is construed as indirect elevation of men (husbands) to status of gods (*WFD* 86). The breaking of the eleventh rite curse that happens later in the course of the novel is an implicit affirmation that the cultural practice should to be discontinued (242). It can thus be concluded that the Gothic also lends itself to evaluation of existing cultural practices with a view to rectifying any underlying flaws.

As a shadow that haunts the dominant realities in a given social setting, the Gothic invites a rethinking and re-evaluation of dominant regimes of truth and systems of thinking. Sometimes it may try to explain what the dominant knowledge systems have left unexplained. *The Book of Phoenix*, for example, pictures a futuristic society where precedence of scientific knowledge and rationality over the divine is markedly apparent. The pre-occupation with awe-inspiring scientific infrastructure and discoveries significantly upstages any divine mysteries in the text. The scientists appear to have taken the centre stage as creators and determiners of human destiny. At the end, however, it is shown that God is in control and would never let human beings manipulate the earth as they wish (220). Phoenix is chosen by the Ani to “wipe the slate clean”, to rewrite

history, and to destroy the sinful earth by fire so that a new, better dispensation would come (220-221).

From this perspective, it can thus be argued that Okorafor uses the Gothic mode to question oppressive dominant cultural practices and knowledge systems which have upstaged the divine influence and cause unnecessary suffering among some members of community especially the female. *The Book of Phoenix*, for instance, attempts to reconstruct the divine mysteries to contain excesses of scientific knowledge. The text also re-imagines the transformation of the dystopian state depicted into a utopia of the orderly past which assured permanence and unity. The role of subversion and retrogression in this section is to show that human culture and science, as depicted in the texts, are neither infallible nor absolute. They can be enlisted to serve selfish interests. When patriarchy and patriarchal values hold sway in a social setting, the female are often disadvantaged. The implicit argument here is that there is need for external control and censorship to curtail excesses of human freedom, scientific advances and culture.

#### **2.4 Monstrosity, Villainy and Morality**

The domain of the monster is a problematised space in Nnedi Okorafor's fiction. While some of the monstrous beings in Okorafor's fiction are portrayed in positive light, earlier works of Gothic unequivocally associated monsters with

vice (Botting 18). Punter and Byron's perspective on the social role of monster is arguably informative:

What is primarily important for the Gothic is the cultural work done by monsters. Through difference, whether in appearance or behaviour, monsters function to define and construct the politics of the 'normal'. Located at the margins of culture, they police the boundaries of the human, pointing to those lines that must not be crossed (263).

The appropriation of monstrosity into cultural politics of the normal and proper has far reaching consequences on the way it is perceived. This implies that a perfectly normal person with right disposition and nice looks like Mwita and Onyesonwu in *WFD* can still fit into the paradigm of monstrous depending on a cultural perception of a given people (10, 61). For the Okeke, members of mixed-race population called the *Ewu* were inevitably monstrous. People, for instance, acknowledged that God endowed Onyesonwu with beauty highlighted by her "smooth and delicate" skin (10). Yet as an *Ewu*, she was condemned to live a life of a pariah as an untouchable for her entire life. The *Ewu* lived precarious lives in that there was always a conspiracy to hurt them. Onyesonwu's close relatives for example blamed her for some of the problems they faced including the death of her father. For them, Onyesonwu was supposed to be killed (116).

The *Ewu*, as portrayed in the text, generally lacked sense of belonging. They were never comfortable staying with any of their parents (whether real or adoptive) or their relatives for fear of exposing them to harm (65). Even those who chose to befriend them were often threatened by their families (186). The sight or an

encounter with an *Ewu* generally generated sense of the uncanny among the residents owing to internalized superstitious beliefs about them. Some even had nightmares about them every night (*WFD* 116). The *Ewu* never really belonged in any community. Jwahir village had offered a home to Najeeba, together with her daughter Onyesonwu, after fleeing her home village. As she grew up, however, Onyesonwu had to content with the fact that she “was never meant to stay” there (14). She was “the other” and an unwanted presence. Jwahir had just been the land of sojourn for Onyesonwu but not a home.

The attitude of people towards the Onyesonwu since she was young made her feel different. Like any other *Ewu* child, she was regarded as anything but normal. She was regarded as volatile, ill-mannered and bestial (210). These stereotypes made her consider herself abnormal. She thought of herself as “a black stain”, and “a poison” (11, 14). To be an *Ewu* was therefore to be abnormal. The abnormal people were bound to be hated whether they do good or wrong (236). At Banza town, the disdain and disregard for the *Ewu* was conspicuous. The *Ewu* girls in those parts engaged in prostitution as means of livelihood (223). They were liable to be treated indecently and even raped in the town and no one would come to their rescue (220). The *Ewu* neither had parents nor people of goodwill to protect and care for them. They chose prostitution as means of earning a living because there were no other jobs available for them. The society had condemned them to be outcasts as well as prostitutes (220).

From the descriptions given so far, it makes sense to argue that, from the perspective of the ordinary Okeke people, the *Ewu* were virtually monsters. Monstrosity can be socially ascribed to an individual who, for some reasons, is considered inhuman or inherently evil (Asma 8; Cohen 13). Monstrosity is also associated with the abnormal (Foucault 62) The *Ewu* people as already stated were ascribed evil, abnormality, violence and pain. It did not matter if they tried to live a normal life, try to be helpful, or be kind— they were always stigmatized and stereotyped. Onyesonwu certainly helped her friends by healing, protecting and even risking her life for them. Despite that, however, she could not change the negative way some of them felt about her (*WFD* 244). In nutshell, members of the *Ewu* population were the innocent victims of scapegoating. The Okeke society projected their anxieties, dysfunctions, and sufferings to the *Ewu* people.

A relentless hatred and prejudice against an individual could render them unnecessarily vindictive and defensive. At several instances in the text, Onyesonwu had to use her magical powers to defend herself even if this was not necessary. For most part, Mwita, her faithful companion always tried to dissuade her from engaging in violent acts (222). Apparently, by succumbing to violence as mode of defence, Onyesonwu would be justifying the common assumption by the Okeke that “*Ewu*-born eventually become violent” (32).

The above situation recalls Frankenstein's monster in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (2012). In this science fiction Gothic novel, Victor Frankenstein achieves his dream of creating a human being. Revolted by its deformed, unnatural aspects; he immediately abandons his creature and runs away (87). Feeling abandoned by his creator and spurned by every human being he encounters, Frankenstein's creature becomes truly wicked and started killing people (169). In the similar manner, the burden of social exclusion and ostracism often forced Onyesonwu to be overly defensive and aggressive. At one time, she would have killed four men in the town of Banza who wanted to rape her had it not been for the timely intervention of her close friend Mwita (*WFD* 222). The implication of these statements is that, the burden of ostracism and oppression can predispose the affected individual into violence. The responsibility for the extreme reactions of Onyesonwu or any oppressed individual should therefore rest firmly on the society which oppresses them.

Thus in the real sense, the *Ewu* as epitomized by Onyesonwu, were neither abnormal nor monstrous. Just as Frankenstein's monster was a creation, the alleged monstrosity of the *Ewu* people was a creation too. The ostracism, dehumanisation and suffering the *Ewu* and their families had had to undergo were not justified. The *Ewu* were got caught up in the hostility between the Nuru and the Okeke. It was revealed at the end of the text that the basis of Nuru – Okeke conflict was a lie. The supposed curse of *Ani* on the Okeke never existed (410).

This implies that the Nuru-Okeke conflict that had claimed a lot of lives was based on an untruth. It also means that the discrimination and subsequent torture of the children of mixed parentage, the *Ewu*, were not justified. In the actual sense, the real monster was Daib of Durfa who perpetrated the violence, the mass rapes and murders and strongly resisted the rewriting of The Great Book even when it seemed the right to do in order to end the conflict (395).

#### **2.4.1 Villainy**

Villainous character is always considered the chief architect of vices and evils in the fiction. In some of the early works of the Gothic, the villain was represented by a monstrous being (Botting 18). According to Cohen, the artistic generation of monsters as hideous looking creatures is meant to reify their underlying immoral state (13). In other words, the repulsiveness and grotesquery of monsters' countenance symbolize the repulsiveness and repugnance of their moral perversion. According to Punter and Byron, however, modern Gothic works tend to invite sympathy for monsters (265). This tradition, for instance, can be seen in Mary W. Shelley's *Frankenstein* (Botting 108). The main reasons why some monstrous beings attract so much sympathy is because their tribulations are seen as resulting from their opposition to conformity and repressive social norms (265). The real villain in this instance, therefore, is the oppressive social system or individuals.

The Gothic villain is often portrayed as being antisocial, self-centered, detached, predatory, demonic, hypocritical, egotistical, fragmented, alienated, sexually perverted, and subversive (Kilgour 12). Many of these attributes are found among villains in Okorafor's fiction. In *Who Fears Death*, Daib Yagoub, the arch villain, fits into the frame of demonic, self-centered, egotistical, and sexually-perverted. Daib has no qualms about annihilating the Okeke people for his own selfish agenda (395). He uses his sorcery to instigate his soldiers to murderous rampage and depravity which often resulted in violent rape of Okeke woman, tortures, and senseless murder of the Okeke people (19, 76, and 395). Daib personally confesses that nothing thrills him more than bashing Okeke woman's head after raping her (395).

The villainous beings in Okorafor's fiction are generally set against female protagonists. This follows Gothic pattern where tyrannical and malevolent male figure is always out to threaten and exert his selfish will over a hapless heroine (Wallace and Smith 6). In *Who Fears Death*, Daib fits into the profile of a tyrannical and malevolent male villain. In the final showdown, the novel's heroine Onyesonwu confronts the arch villain Daib and defeats him. The defeat signals the victory of good over evil because peace between Nuru and Okeke is finally restored (*WFD* 410).

In *Akata Witch*, the evil sorcerer Black Hat Otokoto is set against Sunny Nwazue. Black Hat Otokoto's wicked desires know no bounds. His malevolence reaches its zenith as he uses his advanced sorcery to summon the dreaded *Ekwensu* (the devil) to wreak havoc and destruction on the earth (AW 324). In order to succeed in his evil plans, Otokoto sacrificed innocent children (309). Otokoto is finally defeated by Sunny and her friends and the world is rid of the danger he had started unleashing (AW 322, 324).

One unique feature of Okorafor's villains and heroines is ability to use magical or supernatural powers during their fights. The villains Black Hat Otokoto and Daib are adept at using magic (juju). Okorafor incorporates African spirituality and mysticism in her fiction because she believes her works should be "rooted in African culture, mythology and point of view" (Wabuke). The infusion of magic into the characters, therefore, can be considered a form of empowerment.

Corporate villainy is foregrounded in *The Book Phoenix*. It revolves around a large enterprise called LifeGen Technologies which deals mainly in scientific research. The LifeGen scientists and staff, derogatorily called the Big Eye, are evil, soulless people who use devious means to recruit people into LifeGen facilities where they are used for cruel scientific experimentations (TBP 8). Phoenix, the text's heroine, is one of the inmates at LifeGen's research facility

called Tower 7. She eventually escapes the confinement and later uses her lethal power to destroy the organization.

It can be deduced that majority of Okorafor's villains are selfish, wicked and monstrous. This contrasts sharply with the heroines, who are depicted as selfless, empowered and flawed. The flaws can be identified as follows: Onyesonwu is a mixed-race girl; Sunny is albino; and Zahra has vines growing in her hair. On one hand these flaws are the main reason for their oppression, but on the other hand the flaws significantly contribute to their strengths. Sunny's condition of albinism, for instance, was an indirect blessing because it augmented her sorcery skills. Albinism imbued Sunny with natural ability to be invisible at will. As a result, she was able to help defeat Black Hat Otokoto and Ekwensu (*AW* 324).

#### **2.4.2 Morality**

Moral ideal plays a major role in the construction of monsters and villains in Gothic fiction. Monsters or villains are often sculpted from characters who do not conform to moral codes of a given social setting. During the era of the Enlightenment, Gothic was often charged with subversion of societal norms (Kilgour 8). The advocates of the Gothic, however, took exception arguing that Gothic fiction does vindicate morality, virtue and reason (30). The fiction, for instance, can portray a vicious act in positive light but ultimately punishes the act before reaffirming the system of "social and moral order" (8).

Okorafor's novels offer examples where the immoral, the subversive and the irrational are indulged for considerable length of time before finally being punished. In *The Book of Phoenix*, the unscrupulous scientists, with protection and support of government and some influential individuals, engage in immoral and inhuman scientific researches which include manipulating, deforming, crippling and enhancing people and other creatures in order to achieve certain selfish ends (40). The researchers popularly known as the Big Eye pursue their venture aggressively and without moral scruples. Driven by profit motive, the Big Eye carry out elaborate and often unsafe experiments using people as guinea pigs and this causes many deaths (219). The scientists appear unstoppable and quite invincible because they had discovered ways to make themselves immortal (198). At the end, however, the Big Eye and all the beneficiaries of their research and inventions met their nemesis and perished in fire (221).

Okorafor applies similar concept in *Who Fears Death*. The evil perpetrated by Daib and Nuru against the Okeke – brutal rape, murders, enslavement, mutilation, castration, and other atrocities– is tolerated in substantial portion of the text (76). At the end, however, justice prevails, the lie is revealed and the wickedness is punished. Thus, as per the tradition of the Gothic fiction, vice is ultimately banished and the morality is vindicated.

Finally in *Akata Witch*, the reader is introduced to a girl called Sunny with skin condition called albinism. She is despised by many people including her teachers. The reader is also introduced to murderous sorcerer called Black hat Otokoto on the prowl, kidnapping and killing children for rituals (19). The presence of the powerful ritual killer on the loose is causing so much fear among the residence. At one time it is reported that boy's eyes were gouged out (AW 146). His malevolent acts reach their peak when he successfully summons the devil (Ekwensu) to wreak havoc among the humankind (AW 324). Villainous Otokoto is finally defeated and the whole community he terrorised could now breathe a sigh of relief.

The examples have proved that morality does relate to villainy and monstrosity. Morality is one of the most important essences of a society without which it could not survive. Morality is associated with normality, continuity and orderliness of the society in such a way that anyone or anything that interferes with it instantly generates uncanny effect. The uncanny effect is created when what is regarded as usual, familiar or normal are transformed into their opposite (Bennett & Royce 38). Morality is created by suppressing some impulses and habits; reinstating the impulses therefore creates sense of uncanny. According to Freud, uncanny means something which has been revealed (or reinstated) but ought to have remained secret or hidden (Freud et al. 3676).

One way through which Gothic fiction demonstrates the centrality morality is by creating a situation where virtue is pitted against the vice and despite an apparent strength of the vice, the virtue always prevails. The villainous character is always imbued with all sorts of evil so that everyone would be repulsed by the vice and upholds virtuous living. This pattern is noted in the Okorafor's fiction. Villainous characters/entities like Otokoto, LifeGen Technologies, and Daib are so steeped in evil and wickedness that their defeat is a cause for celebration. Okorafor's appropriation of morality, villainy and monstrosity for African gothic fiction shows that morality is also an essential element of African culture.

## **2.5 The Gothic and Nostalgia**

Gothic has always managed to retain its appeal because of the nostalgia it arouses through its depiction of customs, architecture, adventure and romance (Botting 4). An imaginative escape into unattainable past of phantasmagoria, superstition, possibilities, and external control arguably intrigues many contemporary African readers. This is so because oral culture still holds sway and constitutes an essential part of African imagination (Irele 8).

Okorafor's fiction definitely registers a remarkable fidelity to oral tradition and skepticism towards an unchecked autonomy. In *Who Fears Death* and *Akata Witch*, for instance, there is reference to the old Nigerian art of sorcery where knowledge of *Juju* is considered an empowerment (*AW* 32; *WFD* 154). In the

world created in the texts, masquerades, flying reptiles, spirits, liminal beings, shape-shifters, monsters, God and the devil exist side by side with the modernity (*WFD* 298-332; *AW* 324).

In the *Akata Witch*, an interesting adventure into the world of magic and what it portends for Orlu, Sunny, chichi and Sasha, unfolds. Here, arts of witchcraft and sorcery stigmatized in parts of Nigeria are accorded prominence and global status (78). This could be interpreted as an attempt to reinstate traditional African art that had been overshadowed and marginalized by the emergence of the modernity and religious moral codes. As in oral narratives, *Akata Witch* and *Who Fears Death* use fantasy and the unreal for didactic purpose: to enable characters understand and locate their latent abilities and talents. Sunny, for instance, got to understand that though her albinism had been an obstacle, it was also her strength as it gave her an edge over her friends in art of sorcery (116). Her advantage could be seen in the way she was able to cross over to spirit world and back with an ease (116).

In *Who Fears Death*, Onyesonwu, being a child of mixed parentage was stigmatized as an *Ewu*. But it later emerged that she was hugely endowed with abilities like healing, restoring the dead to life, shape-shifting and manipulating elements of the nature to serve certain purposes (*WFD* 221, 229, 247-259). It can be argued that her ability to transform into various creatures symbolizes her

inbuilt capacities which relates to her uniqueness. The moral lesson adduced from these is that individual's uniqueness should be accepted as it may prove to be beneficial at the end.

In retrospect, quest for nostalgia indeed has been a major motivating factor for Gothic fiction writers. The pioneer Gothic writers, for instance, saw an opportunity to create nostalgia about pre-Enlightenment past where strong bonds which connected "individuals to an ordered social world" existed (Botting 15). There was also an earnest desire to reintroduce the "organic wholeness" of the medieval period, where individuals were defined by their membership to a larger society (Kilgour 11). Then, the religion was the only authoritative source of knowledge about universe and the sole regulator of human relationships (15). All these, had been weakened by rationalism of the Enlightenment (15). The rise of Enlightenment and Neoclassicism with their emphasis on rationalism and autonomy rendered interpersonal relationship mechanistic and selfish (Kilgour 10). Limitation of the human rationality and desire for the organic wholeness are two important Gothic motifs expressed in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. *Frankenstein*, one of the early Gothic novels, describes an intelligent scientist called Victor Frankenstein who, having successfully created a human being, fails to control his creation. The creature, feeling unloved and abandoned by his creator, starts taking revenge on his creator by killing his family members (100).

The failure of Frankenstein's project arguably signals the limitation of human rationality and the need for external control to curtail human excesses.

Just like Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, Okorafor's *The Book of Phoenix* critiques omnipotence of science and human rationality. It depicts an imaginative futuristic society where "mad" scientists, ardent to make cutting scientific discoveries perform wicked and inhuman experimentations on human beings and creatures confined in their facilities (*TBP* 6, 8, 17). The consequences of these aggressive studies are the production of monstrous human beings and creatures which, in the text, are referred to as the abominations (8, 11). The actions of "the mad scientists", as they referred to in the text, generally put the world in danger. The expression of dissatisfaction and social aversion towards such unchecked scientific practices is captured through the sad demise of LifeGen's research facilities and staff in the hands of Phoenix – the ultimate human weapon they created (221).

The demise of LifeGen Technologies, together with scientists and staff running the massive corporation, is an indictment on human's capacity to be "self-regulating, autonomous" organism capable of governing himself without need for external restraining force (Kilgour 11). *The Book of Phoenix* invokes the wrath of God (*Ani*) to show that human knowledge and autonomy have limitation and that God can intervene, often with devastating consequences, if certain limits are

exceeded. The reference to the God, the symbol of orderliness and perfection, is also seen an implicit desire for inculcation of moral ideal and humanity in any scientific venture. It is also an implicit invitation to the authorities to rein in on rogue scientists who prey on the poor and unsuspecting people whom they hoodwink, capture and use for inhuman experimentation.

Finally, the nostalgia for the organic wholeness is addressed through the condition of excluded individuals in society described in Okorafor's selected texts. The excluded individuals like the *Ewu* in *WFD*, *Zahra* in *Zahra the Windseeker*, and *Sunny* in *Akata Witch* experience varying levels of alienation. The *Ewu*, arguably the most alienated group, suffer because they are born through the rape of the Okeke women by the Nuru men (*WFD* 21). *Zahra* was alienated because she had vines growing on her head (*Windseeker* 9). *Sunny's* troubles were caused by her albinism (*AW* 23). The mentioned individuals did everything possible to ensure that they were unconditionally accepted within the fold of their respective societies. Onyesonwu for instance underwent female circumcision in spite of her parents' prohibition because she thought it would normalize her life (*WFD* 36). The tribulations facing the characters described underscores significance of the organic unity by showing that all members of a society regardless of their shortcomings should be accepted as they make the society complete. It can be observed from the challenges facing the characters mentioned that baseless

superstitions, people's attitudes, and certain repressive social norms are obstacles to organic unity within a community.

In conclusion therefore, Okorafor's fiction appropriates Gothic style of arousing the nostalgia through imaginative escape into unattainable past. The element of nostalgia is very much relevant in Africa because oral culture still holds sway in African imagination. Reference to masquerades, flying reptiles, spirits, liminal beings, sorcery, shape-shifters, monsters, and gods, creates nostalgia about the past when such beliefs and practices were part and parcel of everyday life. Re-imagination of such beliefs could be interpreted as an attempt to reinstate traditional African art that had been overshadowed and marginalized by the emergence of the modernity and Western religious moral codes. Okorafor's fiction also generates desire for organic wholeness where an individual is defined by their membership to a larger society. Lastly, the *Ani* is portrayed as the supreme God who severely punishes those who transgress the moral law. In *The Book of Phoenix*, the evil scientists are punished for trying to make themselves immortal and shapers of the world just like God (220). Centralisation of God creates nostalgia about the past when belief in the gods took precedence over human achievements.

## 2.6 Gothic and the Female's concerns

The main reason for inclusion of the female aspect of the Gothic is that most of the protagonists in Okorafor's fiction are female. Moreover, the female in the fiction constitute sizable portion of characters who undergo oppression. The concern for female Gothic as an offshoot of Gothic literature was urged by the need to counter falsehood, misconceptions and assumptions about women (Wallace and Smith 3-4). Female Gothic novel therefore can be seen as protest novel as seeking to generate its own versions of truth from women's perspective.

Bearing in mind the pre-eminence of the female Gothic as a subgenre of the Gothic literature, it is important to understand some of its distinctive features. Anne Radcliffe is indisputably the most successful Gothic writer of her time (Botting 41; Wallace & Smith 42). Her novels like *The Sicilian Romance* (1790) and *Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) are therefore given precedence when identifying distinctive elements of the female Gothic. Accordingly, the most common features of female Gothic's plot are: a heroine who is pursued, threatened and often imprisoned by tyrannical male; supernatural which is always explained; it is always written by a female author; and ends in closure of marriage (Wallace & Smith 3).

Okorafor appropriates elements of the female Gothic to highlight challenges facing her female characters and explore possibilities for their empowerment.

*Who Fears Death* stands out as epitome of women's oppression. The text creates a society where rape is deployed as weapon to exert maximum suffering to an adversary. During each of several organized attacks against the Okeke, the women suffered more. In one of such attacks, the Nuru warriors rape the Okeke women sadistically, and with impunity as expressed in the following excerpt:

He pulled her legs apart and kept singing as he bore into her. And between songs, he spoke Nuru words that she couldn't understand. Heated, biting, snarling words. After a while, anger boiled up in Najeeba and she spat and snarled right back at him. He grabbed her neck and his knife and pointed its tip at her left eye until she grew still again. Then he sang louder and bore more deeply into her (WFD (20))

Rape as a weapon was meant to rub powerlessness and impotence of the Okeke men on their faces. It was also meant to destroy of Okeke's families because if an *Ewu* child is conceived as a result of the rape, then as per Okeke's customs, it would still belong to the husband of the rape victim (21). Families invariably broke up because the affected man often found it difficult to live with a wife who has been raped by their arch adversary; let alone be a father to a product of rape. Thus a victim of rape was forced to suffer thrice; first from the assailant, then from her husband, and finally from the rest of the community. In the text, an incident is told of a woman who was gang raped by five Nuru men. She survived the ordeal but when her husband learnt that she had got pregnant from the rape, she murdered her and the unborn baby (367). Situations like these generally explain why some rape victims like Onyesonwu's mother, Najeeba, chose to leave their village altogether (24). Attitude towards women as depicted creates a

situation where what seems normal and mundane for male members of the community does not seem so for female members. Restrictive, suffocative, and non-egalitarian patriarchal system is less homely for the female.

Another facet of female oppression highlighted by Okorafor is forced confinements and inhuman treatment in scientific research facilities. *The Book of Phoenix* details horrors subjected to the inmates at Tower 7 such as aggressive genetic manipulation, cloning and altering (8). This produced monstrous women: one had four breasts, the next one had lion claws and teeth, and the other one had a twisted spine (1). The women confined in the Tower 7 were willfully transformed into freaks of nature to achieve certain scientific results.

In the text there are several female characters whose experiences align them with the archetypal damsels in distress (Punter and Byron 279). There is HeLa, a dark woman of Indian ancestry who was confined in Tower 4. HeLa is portrayed an immortal woman whose blood is being sold for billions by the Big Eye to rich clients who want to live forever (186). Because of her value, she is imprisoned against her will at the Tower where she is continually exploited by the Big Eye.

Another woman victim of the Big Eye Corporation is Vera Takeisha Thomas. Vera is of African American descent and is chosen to be a surrogate mother to Phoenix. She was however unaware that the baby she was carrying was dangerous

and could cause serious damage to her health (206). As soon as she delivered successfully, she was separated from the baby and transferred to a correctional facility where she was confined in a special room (204). Vera suffered and died from cancer she contracted after being continually exposed to radiation from the baby she was carrying (207).

In her reading of Mary Beard's *Woman as Force in History*, Wallace and Smith draws attention to woman's image which, throughout ages, has been represented as ghostly haunting (26). This is because the woman is disembodied and disempowered by being subjected to male's authority especially when they are married (26). In consolidating this stance, Wallace in *Female Gothic Histories: Gender, History and the Gothic* contends that the "being" or "legal existence of the woman is suspended during her marriage" (2). Gothic thus represents the woman as spectral and intangible entity subsumed within male's power structures.

The representation of women's existence as ghostly haunting is not very conspicuous in selected Okorafor's fiction. There are, however, several images in the fiction which evoke disembodiment of the woman especially within male dominated social setting. *Who Fears Death*, for instance, is set in an African society where a system of repressive patriarchy still holds sway. Welfare of the female is not accorded tangible consideration. When a woman or young girl is sexually molested or raped, it is their fault. After the rape of the Okeke women for

instance, there is a repeated use of “death” and “spirit” in association with the rape victims (21–25). The women who survived the ordeal still chose to refer to themselves as dead (21). The use “dead” in this context could mean social death resulting from stigma and prejudice. Elsewhere, women are referred to as “the walking dead” (221). This reference seemingly extends the marginalization and the disembodiment to encompass all the women, whether direct victims of abuse or not.

Some of the rape victims like Najeeba, Onyesonwu’s mother, found life in her village impractical after the ordeal and decided to leave altogether (24). Her wanderings in the desert marked the beginning of her ethereal, ghostly existence as she is referred to as *Alusi*, the desert spirit (24). *Alusi* ghostly existence can be seen as a reification of real woman’s nature in the society. Ghost is insubstantial and inconsequential. The ghostly reference therefore speaks to inconsequentiality and nullity of the women in the society depicted in the text.

Desert can be used metaphorically to describe the desolation that defines woman’s existence in a repressive society. It is a life that is often full of loneliness, hardship and pitfalls. This kind of existence is made abundantly clear in Najeeba’s confession that “the human world is harsh” but “the desert is lovely” (25). That she chooses to dissociate herself from the human world and prefer solitude and harsh realities of the desert must signify that woman’s conditions in

the society is much worse. It implies that despite being in a company of her family, friends and loved ones; a woman still feels lonely and alienated by the system that she supposedly belongs. Choice of desert as an alternative existence, for Najeeba, could symbolize acceptance of woman's reality in the oppressive society rather than living a lie. This situation parallels that of eighteenth century woman as depicted in early Gothic novel, whose worth in the society was measured in terms of sex (Wallace 2).

However, while the ghostly existence of a woman in female Gothic is meant to signify their erasure and disembodiment, it simultaneously signifies their empowerment. Najeeba is known as *Alusi*, the desert spirit, owing to her audacious journey into desert alone, her epic struggle against grim realities of the desert, and her giving birth alone and unaided (*WFD* 24-31). Her ultimate triumph should be seen as display of power rather than weakness. *Alusi* or desert spirit, as Najeeba was referred to, therefore, can be seen as reification of her innate power that propelled and inspired her to survive and succeed in an otherwise hopeless environment.

Najeeba's daughter, Onyesonwu, arguably, stands out as an epitome of the woman's empowerment in *WFD*. In the text she comes across as an unhappy but strong girl who could not easily submit to stigma, prejudice and male domination. Whereas the *Ewu* girls, especially in Banza town, had readily submitted to sexual

objectification, Onyesonwu refused to be stereotyped and demanded respect (220-221). Her audacity, sensibility, and headstrongness bolstered by her inborn extraordinary abilities strongly contrast with the heroines depicted in the pioneer Gothic fiction. Whereas the heroines were portrayed in earlier Gothic as being in constant flight from tyrannical male figures who pursued; Onyesonwu chose to confront the male tyranny head on (Wallace & Smith 6; *WFD* 221, 393)). She, for example, took a battle right into the doors steps of her biological father, Daib, who was also her mortal enemy (*WFD* 393).

Onyesonwu's power is accentuated by her magic and intrinsic abilities like shape-shifting and healing. As *Eshu* (shape-shifter) Onyesonwu is able to transform into any creature (*WFD* 59). Because of these extraordinary abilities, she is able to transform into a bird and fly to distant places (63). She also has ability to cross over to the world of spirits, interact with them and glide back to the physical world (158). Her exceptional abilities not only helped her defend herself against both seen and unseen enemies, but they also enable her protect her friends and loved ones. As a healer, Onyesonwu was able to bring back to life a dead animal or a person (*WFD* 116, 158). She could also restore any part of a body that had been willfully or accidentally cut off (242).

The extraordinary abilities accorded to Onyesonwu as noted above, arguably, attest to the fact that, beneath the semblance of weakness in a woman of lies a

great strength that could be harnessed to benefit community. Onyesonwu's extraordinary achievements evidently relates to "great energy" which resides in her (*WFD* 156). She was able to use her great energy to heal, defend woman's honour, and save lives (221,259). She was able to use her special abilities to rewrite The Great Book and bring to an end the endless cycles of ethnic violence that threatened to wipe out the Okeke community (408). Thus Onyesonwu can be seen as the unsung heroine, the savior, who was willing to risk her own life to better the lives of the people who had all along made her life impossible. This singular attribute differentiates her from her villainous biological father and an avowed enemy, General Daib, who uses his great sorcery to perpetuate his selfish agenda of ethnic cleansing and thwarting the rewriting of the Great Book (395).

Another level of woman's empowerment which has been given attention is ability to overcome death. Onyesonwu, as earlier noted, could cross over to the realm of death and still be able to return to life (*WFD* 319). Phoenix too possesses this extraordinary attribute as she is described as the woman who could rise from her ashes (*TBP* 33). The ability of the heroines to transgress the borders of life and death could symbolize their unique resilience in face of adversity. Okorafor's heroines as exemplified by Onyesonwu and Phoenix thus represent spirit of an African woman to fight for and repossess her agency, place of honour and recognition in an oppressive society. This characterization of a woman as strong and self-possessed departs from that of earlier Gothic fiction which sought to

portray the female as a weakling, inclined to faint, and always on the run from a tyrant male (Botting 107).

Okorafor is proposing a new narrative for the African gothic fiction which seeks to empower the female living in repressive patriarchal systems. As depicted in *WFD*, women undergo oppressive practices ranging from victimization, rape, scapegoating, and outright brutalization. Though the *Ewu* population in general is subjected to social exclusion and sporadic acts of violence, it is the *Ewu* women and girls who bear brunt of such acts. None of them, no matter how pretty or morally upright they are, are allowed to get married to Okeke or Nuru men (*WFD* 8-10). They are excluded from job market and many have resorted to prostitution to earn a living (*WFD* 223). Through characters like Onyesonwu, Okorafor constructs empowered women who successfully stand up against such oppressive social systems.

Okorafor's fiction also projects an African woman who takes a firm stand against repressive culture. In the *WFD*, for instance, Onyesonwu's friends show every disposition to repel against cultural practices or beliefs which curtails the enjoyment of their freedom or demean their humanity. Luyu, for instance, strongly disagrees with chastity condition imposed on women by the society (82). She considers enjoyment of sexual act a gift from God and the society should not place obstacles on that path. The girls unanimously resolved to have eleventh rite

course reversed, with the help of Onyesonwu, so as to fully enjoy their sexuality (242). In the desert the women engage in sex without restraint. Some of them even indulged their sexual desires with men who were not their boyfriends (266, 292). This kind behaviour contravenes the norms of the Jwahir people.

A working society is generally characterized by conformity to certain values. As exemplified through the actions of Onyesonwu and her friends, contemporary Gothic works often valorize rebellion against conformity and repressive moral system (Punter and Byron 265). *Ewu*, the hated mixed- race, according to Okeke were to be treated as outcasts or a prostitutes (*WFD* 220). They were exempted from moral consideration and often made scapegoats for ills facing society. Onyesonwu, for instance, was falsely accused by her relatives of causing the death of her father and the plans to eliminate her were afoot (116). When her close friends chose to accompany her to on her journey to the west, they were severely threatened by their families (182).

In spite of what seemed like a sanctioned hatred against the *Ewu*, certain members of the community opted to treat them humanely. First, Fadil Ogundimu, the blacksmith, loved Onyesonwu so much that he married her mother Najeeba (*WFD* 13). According to him, how a child is conceived is not the child's fault and that it is primitive to hate somebody for no valid reason (11). Secondly, against the severe warnings and threats from their families, Onyesonwu's friends Diti, Binta,

Luyu and Fanasi decided to accompany her on her journey to the West (183). It was difficult and often treacherous journey but their attachment to one another made it feasible. During the course of their adventure, the group encountered different kinds of people with different customs and perspectives. The *Ewu* girls at Banza town, for example, engaged in prostitution to earn a living (223). Despite the discrimination and the abuse the *Ewu* girls often suffered, Onyesonwu and her friends treated them fairly well (235). Onyesonwu's friends, as well as her father, are therefore portrayed as members of the society who take a firm stand against unjust and repressive moral system.

### **2.6.2 Romance**

Romance is one of the most enduring motifs of Gothic fiction appropriated by Okorafor. Gothic romance, however, has undergone much transformation since its first thematisation in pioneer Gothic fiction. The early Gothic fiction were characterised by powerless, fainting heroines always in need of valiant man – reminiscent of archetypical knight in a shining armour– to come to their rescue (Botting107). The heroine would then marry her rescuer and together they lived happily ever after. This kind of Gothic romance comes to life in Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* where Theodore rescues Isabella from forced marriage to Manfred and later marries her (187).

Okorafor appropriates the romance motif but with some notable transformations. In *WFD*, there is an obvious romantic relationship between Onyesonwu and Mwita (203). Their relationship however is not based on hero's muscular or knightly advantage over heroine but rather by mutual affinity. Mwita can be considered a cross between Byronic hero and traditional Gothic hero exemplified by Theodore in *The Castle of Otranto*. Byronic hero is far from being bland or virtuous; he is flawed and almost villainous but is readily acknowledged by the heroine as a soulmate (Punter & Byron 95).

Mwita's role in Onyesonwu's life is that of a "life companion" (*WFD* 237). Rather than being the traditional Gothic hero who shields the heroine from any harm, and even take a bullet for her; Mwita works together with Onyesonwu to defeat their common enemy Daib (396). Similar romance also occurs in *The Book of Phoenix* between Phoenix and Saeed (14). Another aspect to note in this romance is that situations always conspire to bring lovers together. Saeed and Phoenix are united by their experiences of captivity in Tower Seven while Onyesonwu and Mwita are brought together by their shared origin as *Ewu* (10, 61-62)). Finally the romance does not necessarily end in formal marriage.

## **2.7 Gothic and the Uncanny**

Gothic works are characterized by a pronounced sense of terror, macabre and gloom that seems to suffuse the whole landscape creating an atmosphere of fear

and dread (Botting 1). Okorafor's fiction exploits this element fully in *Akata Witch, The Book of Phoenix and Who Fears Death*. In *Akata Witch*, for instance, there is a murderous sorcerer called Black hat Otokoto on the loose who is always kidnapping and killing children for rituals (19). The situation has become so grim that parents warn their children not to walk alone (20). Elsewhere there is an enormous river monster lurking in the tumultuous water under the bridge, threatening the lives of those who crossed the bridge (70). All these escalate a sense of imminent danger or foreboding that characterise works of the Gothic. That which provokes fear and dread is called the uncanny (Freud, et al 3675).

Sense of uncanny is also promoted by macabre environment. Elements of macabre and morbid are generated by graphic and explicit descriptions of death, decay and desolation. These elements on the one hand signify the temporality of human existence and on the other hand depict limitation of science and modernity in their ability to forestall such eventualities (Botting 22). A vivid portrait of the macabre and the morbid is captured in the following excerpt:

...cargo consisted of human bodies. Hundreds and hundreds of them. Dead. Not Africans. These dead people had pinkish pale skin and thin straight-ish hair like most of the Big Eye and the lion woman. When was this? Where was this? Why were the Big Eye scientists just *standing* there watching with their clipboards and ever-observing eyes? It was not like watching a 3D movie. Even the best ones could never look this . . . true. Bodies. And I could *smell* them. The whole hallway reeked with their rot and blood and feces and bile (*TBP* 24)

The graphic description of death and corruption in the above extract heighten the feeling of uncanny associated with threat of death and extinction. It is an implicit warning against the blind reliance on science and modernity rather than seeking divine assurance (Botting 22).

From the onset, the Gothic has been known to shadow the progress of modernity and its values by exposing its underbelly (Botting 1). Gothic does this by prefiguring the possible threats to values espoused by the modernity. The perceived threats are associated with the natural and supernatural forces, imaginative excesses, religious and human evil, social transgression, and spiritual decadence (1). By doing so, the Gothic becomes an agent of the uncanny.

*The Book of Phoenix* describes a dystopian society in futuristic world where scientific and social achievements have reached an unprecedented level. Yet beneath this semblance of progress lies unchecked evil, social transgression, and spiritual decadence. At the end, technological advances backfire; the freaks and superhuman creatures that had been created in scientific facilities go berserk and wreak havoc on their creators and the immediate world (196, 221).

The sense of uncanny in the above scenario is elicited by threat to the order and conformity which emanate from unchecked technological advances, deterioration of moral principle and spiritual decadence. According to Beal, uncanny is that

which threatens one's sense of order and security (6). The Big Eye scientists, as depicted in *TBP*, carry out aggressive scientific adventurism which generally makes the world unsafe. Their genetic manipulation and cloning, for instance, destabilize the natural and the divine order as they produce immortal, winged, and deformed human beings (11, 27). These freaks and monsters have been referred to as abominations because they arguably do not conform to the nature and the normal. In view of this, therefore, one could support Beal's view that the monstrous is indeed the personification of the uncanny (8). The defeat of the scientists that is witnessed at the coda of the story, arguably, is meant to signal the restoration of order and sense of security.

## **2.8 Conclusion**

This chapter has demonstrated that Gothic mode is ubiquitous and has manifestations in African literary imagination. Since its inception in Europe in the late eighteenth century, the Gothic has spread to many parts of the world. The reason for its pervasiveness possibly lies in its versatility and adaptability to the unique realities of different places. As the genre made headway into new, unfamiliar terrains, its original features underwent adjustments to match the new reality. It has been noted, for instance, that old medieval castles which characterised the earlier Gothic written works gradually gave way to ordinary old houses. Such houses, however, should be associated with past fears and anxieties which often return to haunt the present occupants.

Okorafor appropriates the Gothic motifs of horror, persecution and mystery to lay bare the grim realities assailing the worlds created in *The Book of Phoenix* and its sequel *Who Fears Death*. In *TBP*, for instance, the unscrupulous scientists, with their cutting discoveries and ruthless scientific experimentation on humans cause terror, persecution and an apocalypse. The use of the above motifs of horror and persecution also points out to another significant role of the Gothic mode — highlighting the dark side of human existence. The Gothic mode allows for a momentary indulgence in such horrible acts. At the end, however, the vices are punished and moral order is restored.

Gothic excesses marked by the use the sublime; mystery and retrogression achieve the role of instigating an imaginary return to cultural beliefs and divine mysteries of the past which were the foundation of community. In *The Book of Phoenix*, for instance, there is an imaginary return to the ancient times before the god Ani unleashed her anger on sinful earth. The Gothic subversiveness is exposed when cultures of negative ethnicity, criminalization of nonconformists, scientific adventurism, racism, and blatant disregard for cultural heritage are vehemently attacked. Such cultures, as already shown, inevitably create monsters.

Monstrosity definitely plays a significant role in Okorafor's fiction. Monstrosity has been problematised in a way that both perpetuates and disavows some of its archetypal aspects. The *Ewu*, for instance, were regarded as monstrous by the

Okeke because they were conceived through the rape of Okeke women by the Nuru men. The representation of their predicament in the text, however, is likely to elicit sympathy from readers who feel that they are unjustly treated. The real villain and monster in such situation, arguably, is the system that excludes and persecutes the *Ewu*.

In her engagement with the female Gothic, Okorafor highlights a relatively disadvantaged position of the female in the social settings created in her texts. In *WFD* she compares women to “walking dead”. The representation of the woman as intangible and expendable being is likely to evoke the Gothic representation of the woman as ghostly apparition in pioneer Gothic works. It is, however, proven that uniqueness of the woman is actually her strength. Unlike most of their predecessors (the heroines in the pioneer female Gothic), Okorafor’s heroines possess more strength than their captors. The earlier heroines were depicted as being overly emotional, sentimental, given to the refinements of the eighteenth century where fine feeling were signs of virtue and nobility, and inclined to faint at “the smallest shock”(Botting 42). Phoenix possessed so much strength and consummate intelligence which not only enabled her and some of her fellow inmates escape the confinement, but also helped bring down the Big Eye Corporation (*TBK* 29, 36).

Following the appropriation of the Gothic mode in Okorafor's literary imagination, the following suggestions can be made: the Gothic as literary form continues to evolve in response with emerging realities; the mode is better suited to highlight African historical and social realities due its preoccupation with folklore, mystery, horror and obscure pasts. Owing to its appropriation all over the world, it is no longer tenable to consider Gothic literature as Eurocentric.

## CHAPTER THREE

### 3.0 SIGNIFICANCE OF MONSTROUS (RE)PRESENTATION

#### 3.1 Introduction

Monsters are often represented or presented in different ways in the literary texts. To represent basically means to describe, embody, or take place of, or stand for something (*Collins English Dictionary-Complete and Unabridged* (2023)). In other words it means to bring an image of a monster clearly before the mind. Words can be used to embody or personify a monster. The reason for representation of monster or monstrous body is that monster is not a fixed ontological category. Monsters are presented as creatures or beings which are unfaithful to the nature by virtue of their liminality. Monsters can also be represented by ordinary human being. These human beings, however, have to fulfil certain conditions to be regarded as monstrous. Sometimes monstrous body is represented by inanimate entity like a corporation or an institution. In all these, monstrous representation or presentation serves particular purposes in the texts.

Monster as a term and concept has far reaching implication in literature, societies and religions. The term monster has its origin in the Latin word *monstrum* which, in turn, derives from the root *monere* which means to warn (Asma 13). This etymological aspect of the term renders it ominous and fear-laden. This implies that it can be associated with impending doom or judgment and consequently people are apt to react to it with a certain degree of apprehension. Monster can

also be used to refer to the following categories: a large, imaginary creature often ugly and frightening; an ordinary human being who is cruel, evil, or inhuman; and certain physically deformed people (*Collins English Dictionary-Complete and Unabridged* 2014).

From the definitions offered above, it can be deduced that monster exists as a physical entity or as a metaphor. The former applies to the monster in its literal or manifest form while the latter refers to ascribed monstrosity. Okorafor's fiction teems with monsters of various kinds. Some of these monsters include mutants and freaks created by scientists in laboratories; flying reptiles and masquerades; and mysterious river creatures ((*TBP* 11; *WFD* 298, 310; *AW* 70).

Okorafor derives her fictional monsters mainly from fantasy and native folklore. African folklore indeed is replete with monsters which include ogres and giants (Akivaga & Odaga 52 &63), and *Ogbanje* (spirit children) of West Africa (Bloom 61), among others. Okorafor derives some of her monsters like the masquerades and the Ekwensu (*AW* 324) from West African mythology. Though these folkloric monsters can be described as extraordinary and otherworldly, they were neither alien nor exotic to the world. According to Carroll, they "were accommodated by the metaphysics of the cosmology that produced them" (16).

Presence of literal monsters like the masquerade can be considered an imposition of an extraordinary character in the ordinary world. Their presence, however, serves specific roles. During her trip to the desert with her friends, Onyesonwu encounters a large flying lizard and a masquerade (*WFD* 298, 307). These monstrous creatures appeared during the most trying phase of Onyesonwu's journey. She was getting prepared to meet and fight her father Daib of Durfa who was a very powerful sorcerer. The encounter with creatures played a significant role in strengthening her physically and spiritually. The physical contact with the masquerade left her ill and on the verge of death (302). Her healer prevailed upon her to pray to God (Ani) for the divine healing and after that she was completely cured (316-317). The masquerade therefore played an important role in strengthening Onyesonwu's belief in God.

Presentation of monsters as anticipated in this chapter, therefore, encompasses detailed description of the nature and types of monstrous beings in Okorafor's fiction, relationship between monster and conformity, and significance of major aspects of the monster. While monsters are generally judged by their unfaithfulness to nature (Huet 132), it is imperative to note that certain actions and behaviour also determine monstrosity. Failure to conform to moral codes of a given society, for instance, could render one monstrous. The ritual killings committed by Black Hat Otokoto in *Akata Witch* have generally transmuted him into a monster (19). It is also important to note that not all beings who are

monstrous by virtue of their appearance are necessarily evil or dangerous. Though Seven and Phoenix in *The Book of Phoenix* can be considered monstrous because they are both winged (51, 53), they are not evil. There are instances when Seven, a winged man, is described using phrases like “a benevolent force” and “New York’s Angel” (*TBP* 196). Such phrases portray him in positive light.

### **3.2 Types of Monsters in Okorafor’s Fiction**

The Gothic effaces the border separating world of fantasy or myth from the ordinary world. The merging of the world practically allows the extraordinary beings to stray into the ordinary world. These extraordinary creatures are arguably monstrous because they are unassailably other to the world where they find themselves. In *Akata Witch*, there is river creature without name that is said to be older than the time (71). The earthbound beings or creatures are temporal and identifiable by specific names. The creature described, therefore, is what Carroll would refer to as an extraordinary creature in ordinary world (16). Monsters intrude into the ordinary world because they have something to say. Monsters are associated with warning (Asma 13). They arise from “underworlds” of society’s consciousness (my emphasis) to pinpoint fault lines or absurdities inherent in a society’s thinking or its self- knowledge (Kearney 4). The kind of monsters described here belongs to a category referred to as literal monsters. Literal monsters are generally identified by their bizarre looks and extraordinary capabilities.

Literal monsters can be created by conflating distinct entities like animal and human into one body. The conflation of the categorically distinct entities can be continuous or discontinuous. The former leads to a category of literal monsters called fusion monsters and the latter are called fission monsters (Carroll 43). Fusion monsters are interstitial—they combine attributes that are considered to belong to categorically distinct entities (Carroll 33). The monsters in Tower 7 exemplified by the woman with the lion’s claws and teeth, and the winged man called Seven are examples of fusion beings (*TBP* 11). This category could also be expanded to include creatures or beings who possess attributes which are not intrinsic to their category. *Kyopungo*, the flying lizard in *Who Fears Death* is a fusion monster in that it can fly and is extraordinarily huge (308). Lizards, by category, are flightless, and terrestrial.

Fission beings differ from the fusion ones in that, the categorically distinct entities inhabit one body discontinuously. This implies that the contradictory elements are not fused into one spatio-temporal entity but “the identity changes or alternates over time” (Carroll 46). Fission monsters include shape-shifting human beings who are able to transform themselves into different creatures at different times. The *Eshu* in Okorafor’s *WFD* are basically shape-shifters (60-61). The *Eshu* include characters like Onyesonwu, Aro and Najeeba. As an *Eshu*, Onyesonwu could transform herself into any creature she imagined. She could, for instance,

transform herself into a mythical creature like the Sphinx (222) or into an ethereal entity like a spirit (*AW* 152; *WFD* 113).

Another kind of monstrosity identified in this study is ascribed monstrosity. This kind of monstrosity can be inscribed on targeted bodies either through projection or when they (the bodies) are perceived to have deviated from the sanctioned norms. Monstrous body is considered a site where projected ideological crisis, social anxieties and fears are embodied, examined and subsequently “resolved” (Wright 27; Ng 5). The implication of this argument is that even morally upright individuals can still be transmuted into monstrous bodies through projection. The *Ewu* group in *WFD* can be considered victims of monstrous projection.

The “normal” human body has often been considered as an expression of order in a society (Wright 48). This implies that bodies which do not conform to the ideal of the “normal”, whether physically or behaviourally, are coded as “monstrous” (Ng 2; Carroll 203). When ordinary people engage in extremely wicked acts, they are deemed by some communities as having forfeited their humanity. Such people are considered monsters because inhuman qualities have been conceptually mapped onto them (Asma 14). A case in point is Daib Yagoub in *WFD* who instigates his soldiers to carry out massive rape, murder and torture of innocent Okeke people (396). By all indications, Daib enjoyed causing endless sufferings to the hapless Okeke and even kept digital records of his atrocities in his office

(394). By the virtue of his inhuman deeds, Daib is considered a monster. Daib and his ilk belong to a category of monsters called moral monsters.

The monsters in Okorafor's fiction can further be grouped into two main categories: monsters by accident, and monsters by design. Accidental monsters, as the name suggests, are those who were predisposed or transmuted into monstrosity by circumstances outside their control. This group includes Phoenix Okore in *The Book of Phoenix*, Zahra in *Zahra, the Windseeker* and Onyesonwu in *Who Fears Death*. Onyesonwu and Zahra suffer dehumanization and rejection due to their appearance or circumstances surrounding their conception (especially in the case of Onyesonwu). Zahra has a vine growing in her hair whereas Onyesonwu is a mixed-race child born through rape (*ZWS* 4; *WFD* 24). Phoenix was created by the scientists to be a human weapon (*TBP* 27). Her body can generate huge amount of heat which is lethal enough to incinerate anything on the face of the earth (*TBP* 221). Phoenix, however, has been portrayed as a person who is inherently good but often urged into a destructive mode for plausible reasons.

The monsters by design refer to the category of characters who are deemed to have lost their humanity by engaging in deeds which are socially condemned. Examples of this kind of monstrosity are the LifeGen scientists in *The Book of Phoenix*, Black Hat Otokoto in *Akata Witch*, and Daib in *Who Fears Death*. The

actions of these villainous characters are selfish, sadistic, exploitative, premeditated and outright evil. The evil committed by the LifeGen scientists in their clandestine research facilities knows no bound. In a bid to achieve their objectives, the scientists carry out inhuman, harmful and often painful experiments on living animals and human beings (*TBP* 17, 67). They also engage in aggressive genetic manipulation and cloning which often result in severely deformed and sometimes extremely dangerous people and creatures (8). So malformed and freakish are some inmates that they are simply referred to as “abominations” (8, 11).

### **3.3 The Monster and Conformity**

Monstrosity whether by nature or by attribution serves important moral purposes within a given social setting. In the word of Cohen, the monster’s often dreadful physical appearance is meant to be a reification of the creature’s moral state (13). This implies that hideous and repulsive nature of some monsters in the Gothic fiction testifies to their inherently perverted and evil nature. People who rebel or fail to conform to social sanctions and norms are therefore presented as monstrous.

It must however be noted that not all monsters are evil. Botting observes monsters are also sites of identification, sympathy and self-recognition (qtd.in Punter and Byron 265). Monsters attract sympathies because their woes are seen as resulting

from their resistance to conformity and social repression (Punter and Byron 265). In Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, for instance, the Frankenstein's creature tells his creator "I was benevolent and good; misery made me a fiend" (128). By this, the creature sought to defend himself from the crimes he committed by passing the blame to the society and his creator who alienated him. Thus, what might seem proper and normative in the eyes of a society may actually be repressive to some members of the society. When Phoenix escaped from the Tower 7, the LifeGen branded her as "a winged human" and "an abomination" whose death should be forgotten quickly (*TBP* 130). The LifeGen, in essence, was trying to demean and dehumanise her because she refused to conform to life of confinement, exploitation and abuse at the Tower 7. Phoenix's actions are likely to evoke feelings of sympathy from the readers for she is fighting against injustice meted out to her by an oppressive institution. By moral standards, therefore, Phoenix cannot be considered a monster.

Similarly, in the eyes of the Okeke, all the *Ewu* were outcasts (*WFD* 220). They were born of violence and were expected to ultimately become violent (32). An *Ewu* child was a "black stain" and "a poison" (14). In other word the *Ewu* or the mixed-race offsprings of the Okeke and Nuru parentage were monsters who were supposed to be eliminated (116). Despite alienation and the harrowing treatment subjected to mixed-race people, it is quite clear to any objective mind that the victims were blameless.

Social exclusion and persistent oppression of individuals like the *Ewu* constitute a psychological burden on victims. Such victims evidently are characterized by undue defensiveness and heightened sensitivity to any remarks or actions directed at them by others. Onyesonwu, for instance, is highly sensitive to any utterance, attitude or actions which demean, degrade or criminalise her. When gossips and diatribes against her in the market become unbearable, her reactions are extreme (*WFD* 164). Another example is what happened in Banza town when four men attempted to rape Onyesonwu. No one came to her help for, reportedly, in the Banza town all the *Ewu* are prostitutes (223). Onyesonwu immediately resorted to her magical powers and would have killed all the four men had it not been for the timely intervention of her close friend Mwita (222). Psychological experiences therefore can be seen as exerting considerable influence in her reactions having been raised in the society that denied her love and sense of belonging.

Despite her momentary lapses, it would seem that Onyesonwu attracts more admiration and respect for her audacity and passion with which she fights for her rights to be recognized and accepted. Her outstanding abilities, and the way she uses them to help others, has earned her reputation even outside the borders of her community (*WFD* 222). Onyesonwu is therefore likely to attract sympathy for her sorrows while the society that persecutes and excludes her is however portrayed as villainous.

Conformity to the nature, communal moral code or worldview influences determination or presentation of monstrosity. Characters like Phoenix are regarded as monstrous because they are unfaithful to nature. Onyesonwu is regarded as a monster by her community because she was born of rape. Close scrutiny of the texts, however, reveals that monstrosity is mainly attributed to characters who commit extremely evil acts. Though Phoenix is a liminal being and has capacity to destroy, she is portrayed as saviour, defender and a victim of oppression. In a similar manner, Onyesonwu's acts of subversions and shape-shifting abilities are portrayed as forms of empowerment instead of signs of monstrosity. Non-conformity to certain moral codes or worldview does not necessarily render an individual monstrous. Certain dominant beliefs, especially those laced with superstitions, can be oppressive and cannot be reliably used as yardstick for judging characters within a particular social system.

### **3.4 Significance of Major Aspects of the Monster**

To achieve a much deeper understanding of monsters or monstrosity as a category, it necessary to analyse certain specific elements that shed more light to their uniqueness and significance. The nature of monsters, accordingly, can be broadly discussed under the following aspects:

### 3.4.1 Otherness

Monster has been portrayed as subversive elements bent on wrecking society. It is “a compound of all that is unclean, uncanny, unwelcome, abnormal, and detestable” (Carroll 20). Monstrous beings, whether emanating from within a society, or coming from outside, are always treated as aliens or intrusive elements in the society. These instances attest to the fact that monsters in the work of fiction are projection of those elements which are presumed to be antithetic to ordinary people or moral codes of a given society. Monsters therefore suggest themselves as “the other” of the human beings (Carroll 196).

According to Child & Fowler, “other” designates that which is different (164). It is a site for projecting all that people fear or dislike about themselves (164). It encompasses all that threaten one’s sense of self. The *Ewu* in the society depicted in Okorafor’s *Who Fears Death* are considered a threat because they are composite of the Okeke (the self) and Nuru (the most dreaded enemy). They incorporate the unwanted and the uncanny into the perceived pure body of the Okeke. The *Ewu* are generally hated by the Okeke. There are times, however, when their unique features are praised (*WFD* 10). This means the *Ewu* are hated and feared for what they represent rather than for who they are. It can be argued that the *Ewu* inspire so much abhorrence and fear for the following reasons: most of the them were product of the rape and violation of the Okeke women; their looks bear resemblance to the Nuru who are the most dreaded enemy of the

Okeke; and they are a constant reminder of community's guilt as they are victimized and oppressed despite being innocent (19, 11, 167).

The "other" also is implicated in the formation of self. This assertion is reinforced by Ryan & Booker who argues that the construction of the subject (self) is inseparable from the construction of its other (369). Sense of self is achieved by distinguishing oneself from those considered to be different. "The concept of me is predicated upon what is not me" (Childs & Fowler 165). It would seem from above discussion that the "other" is either part of the self which has been externalized, much like a diseased part of one's body that had to be excised; an entity existing outside of the self but considered harmful to coherence of the self; or an entity which stands in sharp contrast to the self but nonetheless instrumental in construction of the self. The latter signals the significance of the other as a site for projecting and exorcizing all that is considered harmful to society's self-image. The mixed-race population of the *Ewu* brought so much conflict to the sense of selfhood of either of the communities. This is because they incorporated traits that neither of the communities in conflict desired. As a result they were relegated to the fringes of the community as outcasts (*WFD* 220).

Racism as one of the leading agents of othering arguably implies an existence of extreme differences between people of different races. In an environment of heightened political tension, the differences are at times exaggerated into

“monstrous aberration” (Cohen 7). In case of such occurrence, members of particular race may be divested of their humanity while other races maybe invested with superiority. The institution of chattel slavery in America, for instance, progressively eroded the humanity of the enslaved blacks until, at the end; they were nothing more than just monsters (Frederickson 276). American dominant, hegemonic discourse sought to create a huge gap between the enslaved blacks and the white people so that, while the former were regarded as wild beasts, the latter were archetypal human beings unsullied in any way (Fredrickson 276). Okorafor’s fiction, especially *The Book of Phoenix*, makes an attempt to recreate a futuristic form slavery which re-imagines the antebellum slavery. This mode of slavery is characterized by dehumanization of mainly black people by being kidnapped, hoodwinked or lured into research facilities called The Towers where they were used for inhuman scientific experimentations (*WFD* 66-67).

The process of othering leads to homogenization or lumping together of those considered as other. This attitude stems from inability of the beholder to recognize them as individuals owing mainly to internalized prejudicial beliefs. Indeed Smith (2011) in his book *Less than a human: Why we demean, enslave and exterminate others* attempts to highlight instances where humans have been dehumanized and deprived of their individuality. In such cases, the targeted people are thought of as fungible, that is, “parts of undifferentiated mass” (Smith

30). In order to buttress his argument, he uses an example from George Orwell's writings when he was in Marrakech:

“It's always difficult to believe that you are walking among human beings ...Are they really the same flesh as yourself? Do they even have names? Or are they merely a kind of undifferentiated brown stuff, about as individual as bees or coral insects?”(Smith 30)

The imagery used by George Orwell to describe the Moroccans calls into question his partiality towards non-European people. By questioning the authenticity of their humanity, physiognomy and individuality; Orwell is essentially admitting to himself that the white people are more authentic human beings than non-whites. Drawing on Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978), Mountz describes how the Western subjects, positioned at the center (as self), relies on the self-other binarism to homogenize, feminize and essentialize the East (the other) (329). It can be observed from this discussion that racist discourse makes it possible to naturalize, centralize and humanize dominant race while denying the same privilege to other races. This implies that any departure from worldview held by the dominant race is considered aberrant, unnatural and ultimately monstrous.

The relationship among the Nuru, the *Ewu* and the Okeke is evidently characterized by homogenization of the perceived other. The mixed-race *Ewu*, for instance, are shorn of their individuality by being constantly referred to as the *Ewu* rather than by their individual names (*WFD* 105, 109). On several occasions, Onyesonwu had to demonstrate her displeasure at not being called by her real name (105). *Ewu's* lighter complexion was used as yardstick to measure their

otherness. No matter how silky or alluring their features may seem, they were always described in terms of their “unhealthy skin” and “foul odour” (61). The Nuru too are not spared as the Okeke refer to them as “foul and dirty” (71). This practice of homogenizing or lumping together all people based on their shared characteristics arguably entrenches the culture of othering in community’s psyche.

In conclusion therefore, it is important to note that Othering is at the core of monster fiction. This means any character presented as a monster is generally meant to be an Other or an antithesis to ordinary human characters in the fiction. Othering lead to oppression through practices like stereotyping, exclusion, and violence.

### **3.4.2 Physiognomy and Physical Attributes**

Physiognomy is the outward appearance or countenance of anything especially when it provides insight into its character. Physiognomy generally matters when studying literal monstrosity. The monsters or the monstrous beings in the texts, for the most part, are identified by appearances which in many instances are markedly different from the ordinary characters in the texts. Their portrayal in this sense is significant as it is meant to emphasize their difference and propensity to harm.

Monsters in Okorafor's fiction can be divided roughly into three main categories based on their origin and nature. First, there are those who were created in scientific research facilities like Phoenix. The next category belongs to the ordinary human beings who have special inborn capabilities like shape-shifting. The third category is occupied by extraterrestrial, fantastical or nonhuman creatures like the masquerades.

The physical attributes of the mentioned groups vary. The monsters created in scientific laboratories in Tower 7 are generally scary because of their nonhuman qualities or severely deformed bodies (*TBP* 11). There is, for instance, an African woman who is part- lion and part -human; and another woman with twisted spine who "could turn her head around like an owl" (11). Apart from these, there are winged humans exemplified by Phoenix and Seven (53 & 197). Many monsters in this category have capacity to threaten by their physical attributes which, according to Huet, are unfaithful to nature (132). One, however, is bound to notice that both Seven and Phoenix fail to elicit so much fear despite possessing wings. Despite possessing wings; Phoenix finds a home, protection, love and humanization from among the people she encounters in the coast of West Africa (*TBP* 58). This situation is better explained by Carroll who argues that there exists an evaluative category of the emotion which constrains objects upon which emotion can be focused (28). For an object to horrify it must meet threshold set by evaluative category, that is, it must be threatening and impure (29).

The masquerades as portrayed in the texts have capacity to horrify. The masquerades, which are the embodiment of spirits from the land of the dead, horrify because they are not only unearthly but also too ghastly to look (*WFD* 298). Shape-shifters can horrify because their appearance belies their true nature. Shape-shifting beings, represented by the *Eshu* in *Who Fears Death*, not only transforms into any creature they imagine but also make alteration on any parts of the bodies (154 & 242). When Onyesonwu transforms into a massive mythical creature called the Sphinx, she arouses a lot of dread from among those present (*WFD* 222). She nevertheless commands a lot of respect and admiration from the town dwellers who are aware of her kindness, generosity and gift of miraculous healing (223).

Social monsters from the perspective of this study are product of social exclusion, abasement and abjection. In Okorafor's fiction, they include the *Ewu* (the mixed-race population) and the evil characters like Daib (*WFD* 4 & 117). The monsters of this category are appraised more by what they stand for than how they look. Appearance does matter though, for in the case of the *Ewu*; their fairer skin is a marker of their identity. The *Ewu* are regarded as a black stain in the community's image (*WFD* 14). No matter how good looking, conformable or talented they are; they amounted to nothing other than just social outcasts (*WFD* 220). In the light of this, it can be argued that the monstrosity of these individuals does not stem from the physical threat they pose or horror they evoke; their monstrosity stems

from what they represent. If anything, some members of this category feel threatened as there is no assurance of their safety.

### **3.4.3 Agency**

Agency is one of the most identifiable markers of difference in many written works of art. Agency, by definition, is the faculty of acting or exerting of power (*Random House* 2010). It is basically a means by which results are achieved or certain ends are met. Monstrous agency in many cases is presented as exceeding that of ordinary human beings. Monstrous agency has capacity to put the human world in grave danger. When for instance *Ekwensu*, the devil, is successfully summoned by Otokoto, the world is momentarily endangered (AW 324). Gothic fiction has a tendency to set ordinary human protagonists against seemingly indestructible villainous monsters (Botting 89). This is meant to question the former's overall claim to superiority.

Agency pronounces itself mainly on character's physical, intellectual and social capabilities. As the name suggests, physical agency refers to physical capabilities of a character. Pioneer Gothic works of fiction portrayed literal monsters as category of beings endowed with extraordinary capabilities which defied rational explanation. Count Dracula in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, for instance, could move quickly down a steep wall like a lizard (Stoker 21). Frankenstein's creature in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* could run across a mountain at a "superhuman

speed”, bounding over “crevices in the ice” which an ordinary man would usually walk with caution (Shelley 127). These traditional qualities of monsters can also be seen in many Okorafor’s fiction.

In Okorafor’s fiction, the extraordinary physical capability is manifested mainly through movement and strength. Phoenix and Seven in *The Book of Phoenix* and Onyesonwu in *Who Fears Death* possess extraordinary ability to fly. Onyesonwu is able to transform into a bird and fly to distances (63). Phoenix and Seven, however, have wings and could soar up the skies (*TBP* 53). Phoenix superhuman strength can be seen in the way she could fly across the Atlantic from the United States of America to Africa (55-58). Seven, the winged man, displays strength of a superman in the way he grabbed a helicopter and hurled it into a nearby building (53).

Agency can also be analyzed on the level of intelligence. Level of intelligence among characters in the texts plays a major role in attainment of their goals. It often influences the outcome of the contest between a hero/ heroine and a villain. Monstrous villains in some of the earlier works of Gothic fiction were often characterized by paucity of intellect. One such character is Count Dracula. Though Dracula possesses a “mighty brain” which has supposedly evolved over centuries, certain faculties of his mind are described as being at infancy stage (229). To counter this shortcomings, Dracula is portrayed as having developed

uncanny capabilities which enable him to access ,exploit and therefore rely on faculties of people he controls (Stoker 230). This example therefore gives a human character an intellectual advantage over a monstrous villain.

There are situations, however, where those perceived as monsters demonstrate certain intellectual superiority over human characters. This tendency is common in science fiction where intelligent beings created by scientists tend to outsmart their creators intellectually and physically. An example is Phoenix in Okorafor's *The Book of Phoenix*. Phoenix is described as someone who could read a five - hundred page book in just two minutes and her brain would absorb "information and stories like sponge"(TBP 9). She was able to access all the information she asked for because, apparently, the LifeGen scientists did not think she would want to escape (10). All the inmates were generally considered tame (127). This supposition would later prove to be a serious miscalculation when the inmates led by Phoenix escaped from Tower 7 and later masterminded a plan to completely destroy the organization (105).

Supernatural agency is arguably one of the most conspicuous determinants of monster's otherness in this section. Supernatural generally refers to that which is above or beyond what is natural or explainable by natural laws (*Random House Kernerman Webster's College Dictionary*, 2010). Supernatural deeds and

occurrences in Okorafor's novels ostensibly draw from the local folklore and earlier Gothic forms.

One of the most outstanding displays of supernatural agency in Okorafor's fiction is through a character's invincibility or indestructibility. Phoenix Okore in *TBP* is essentially indestructible. After being shot repeatedly while trying to escape from Tower 7, Phoenix turned into a flaming inferno which precipitated chain of events leading to collapse of the Tower and destruction of almost all the staff and "every freakish thing inside"(31, 36) . Seven days later, she arose from the rubble with her memories intact (36).

Certain aspects of Onyesonwu's actions and life also fall into domain of the supernatural. First she is shape-shifting being who is able to transform into a bird or any other creature she desires (59, 222). Secondly, she has survived real death more than once (319). Onyesonwu is characterized as a person who could cross over to the world of the dead, popularly known as the wilderness in the text, and be able to glide back to the world of the living (*WFD* 156). In addition, Onyesonwu is vested with wide range of extraordinary abilities including ability to heal deformities; restore the dead back to life; and restore any part of the body that has been cut off (230, 158, 242).

Ascription of extraordinary abilities to characters situates them in the domain of the uncanny (Freud, et al. 3692). Characters are sometimes ascribed wicked intents (Freud, et al. 3692). People, for example, associated Onyesonwu with evil, violence and propensity to kill. She was even blamed for her father's death (*WFD* 6). This explains why Onyesonwu was overcome by self-loathing when a gigantic red-eyed cobra slithered up her body, and a moment later, an oily black vulture flew down and drove away the cobra (*WFD* 59). She was disgusted with herself because she attributed all that had happened to the evil she believed she had (59). Her life of *Ewu* was dehumanizing as it was and realizing that there was something extraordinary in her nature was more unsettling as it meant that those who abhor her would have more reasons to alienate her.

#### **1.4.4 Policing Boundaries**

Etymologically, monster is derived from the Latin word *monstrum* which is related to English verbs to show/reveal, warn or portend (Weinstock 1). According to Weinstock, monster has three major roles: warning against engaging in vicious acts or flouting societal moral codes; revealing the will of God/ gods; and exposing limitations of human knowledge (1). In all these, monster serves to illuminate boundaries which must not be transgressed.

Cohen (13) considers every monster as a double narrative: one that explains the genesis of the monster and another that details what cultural role the monster

plays. Frankenstein's creature, for instance, owes his conception firstly, to Frankenstein's unbridled desire to achieve unprecedented scientific breakthrough in creating a living a human being, and secondly, to a latent desire to recreate his dead mother (Huet 132). The failure of Frankenstein's dream as indicated by his reactions to monster he had created symbolizes the moral indictment on his finished work; it also a moral indictment on his innate desires that inspired his work (Shelley 86).

Okorafor's *The Book of Phoenix* constructs a futuristic world characterized by phenomenal advances in weaponry, genetic experimentation, enhancements and cures (11, 45). The scientists' penchant for unparalleled discoveries and technological advancement lead them to invent ways of conquering death while at the same time creating apocalyptic weapons (188, 27). In a bid to achieve all their aims, the LifeGen scientists engage in morally inappropriate and dehumanizing practices like subjecting humans to inhuman scientific experimentations which involved extreme tortures and abuses (145). Their aggressive genetic manipulation and alteration programmes lead to creation of freakish, badly-malformed beings (11). These scientific ventures generally lead to violation of the nature and endangerment of the life on earth (152).

The ambitions of the LifeGen Technologies, also referred "mad scientists", led also to creation of deformed, monstrous beings which collectively have been

referred to as the “abominations” (*TBP* 6, 8). Phoenix, one of the biggest achievements of the organization, was meant to be the ultimate human weapon (27). Her body could generate heat which was strong and lethal enough to scorch the entire planet and render it desolate (221). Phoenix in the end became the nemesis of the organization as she led to its destruction (31, 221). In so doing, she becomes a monster of prohibition who warns against unscrupulous scientific adventurism, inhumanity and desire for transcendence.

The devastation caused by Phoenix can indeed be seen as a warning against “unfettered scientific ambition” (Cardin 202). In a bid to be a creator, the LifeGen scientists had crossed the boundary between human and the divine and this, apparently, conflicted with ideal society anticipated in Okorafor’s fiction. Their defeat reinforces Gothic desire to re-imagine order and morality centered on the divine and metaphysical principles (Botting 31).

Phoenix and other superhuman beings in the Tower 7 can be considered an embodiment of the scientists’ social deviance emanating from unconscious desire to replace God in reshaping the destiny of the human beings and their world (*TBP* 4). Indeed the imposing Towers owned by the LifeGen organization could be seen as symbolizing desire for transcendence which has been cited as implicit subversion of the will of God (220). Secondly, it could also be argued that the monsters in Tower 7 represent their creator’s (the LifeGen scientists) descent into

moral degeneracy as manifested through their genetic alteration, illegal confinement, dishonesty, torture, and slavery. In nutshell, the monstrosities highlighted in the discussion are the reifications of the scientists' subversiveness, inhumanity and moral decadence.

The most notable similarity between Phoenix and Onyesonwu is their constructedness. While Phoenix is a projection of "mad scientists" military prowess, Onyesonwu is a projection of guilt, anxieties, and pain of the Okeke people. Both of them police societal boundaries, warning against severe consequences if certain societal or moral conventions are flouted (Weinstock 1). Onyesonwu and *Ewu's* plight in general, can be seen as a warning against unjust social oppression and weaponization of rape.

Despite traumatizing life she experiences as *Ewu* girl growing among the prejudiced people, Onyesonwu manages to gain reputation as mighty healer and sorcerer (222). She would later add peacemaking role to her garb after playing a major role in the defeat of ruthless General Daib Yagoub thus ending years of ethnic bloodshed between the Okeke and the Nuru communities (399). Onyesonwu also played a major role in the rewriting of the Great Book which led to the lifting of the supposed cursed placed on the Okeke by God (410). Since *Who Fears Death* is a sequel to *The Book of Phoenix*, Onyesonwu can be seen as

the reincarnation of Phoenix Okore as she completes the work of rewriting the Great Book that the latter had started (*TBP* 6).

The apparent elevation of the most despised girl in Jwahir is a moral interdiction on the Okeke and Nuru for their inhumanity against the mixed-race population of *Ewu*. This implies that Onyesonwu and Phoenix are indirect monsters as they reflect monstrosity of those who oppress them. The statement “*Ani* makes strange beauty from ugliness” seems prophetic indeed as it alludes to God’s hand in Onyesonwu’s elevation (*WFD* 10). The “ugliness” represents the people’s unfavorable attitude towards *Ewu* which leads to their dehumanization. Onyesonwu thus becomes the monster of prohibition as it warns against unjust treatment of a section of population of account of their physical appearance and nature of their conception.

### **3.4.5 Embodiment of Desire**

Attainment of certain desires in life is often hampered by restrictive societal conventions. The moral codes serve to ensure that the sanctity of a given culture is maintained and protected from practices that might render it impure. Cohen however, argues that monsters, while popularly known for terrifying and interdicting, also have capacity to evoke certain “potent escapist fantasies” (17). Cohen further argues that the monster opens up doors to possibilities of wish fulfillment, facilitates an access to freedom secretly yearned, pushes borders, and

enables attainment of “escapist delight” (17). The body of monster provides a safe conduit for “fantasies of aggression, domination, and inversion” (Cohen 17). Thus, though monster is portrayed as repulsive, frightening and perverse; its association with boundless freedom does make it attractive. Its habitation is not just a dark region shrouded in uncertainty and danger; it is also a realm of happy fantasies and liberation.

Gothic literary period lies astride the Enlightenment and Victorian age (Milne 2009). The Enlightenment and Victorian traditions privileged decorum, propriety, virtuous living, and morality and all that reinforce the belief in basic goodness of human beings (Milne 192). Gothic literature, however, reacted to those assertions by illuminating the dark, repressed side of human nature too (Milne 282). By this, it afforded readers an opportunity and means to push borders in order to satiate their desires. Pioneer Gothic novels like Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* and Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* evidently captured Victorian’s *Zeitgeist* in its exploration of characters’ inner yearnings including desire for escapist fantasies.

The monsters in *Dracula* awaken taboo sexual fantasies characterised by homoeroticism, inversion of male/female roles during sexual activity, and aggressiveness. Female vampires in the text portray themselves as sexual predators which violate sex norms of the period by initiating and dominating in sexual activity thereby usurping men’s roles (Browning, et al 132). Through their

inexplicable capacity to evoke in men certain forbidden desires, the vampires are able to enthrall the men, dominate them, and make them amenable for their wicked schemes. The following excerpt shed more light on the nature of desire created by the encounter with the vampires in the Castle Dracula:

There was something about them that made me uneasy, some longing and at the same time some deadly fear. I felt in my heart a wicked, burning desire that they would kiss me with those red lips. It is not good... The fair girl advanced and bent over me till I could feel the movement of her breath upon me. Sweet it was in one sense, honey-sweet, and sent the same tingling through the nerves as her voice, but with a bitter underlying the sweet, a bitter offensiveness, as one smells in blood... There was a deliberate voluptuousness which was both thrilling and repulsive, and as she arched her neck she actually licked her lips like an animal, till I could see in the moonlight the moisture shining on the scarlet lips and on the red tongue as it lapped the white sharp teeth (Stoker 54)

Jonathan Harker's confession above lend credence to the fact that the lady vampires in Count Dracula's castle indeed provoke repressed sexual desires that Harker ,himself, is powerless to stop. The fact the he submits entirely to the spell despite his misgivings and guilt conscience testifies to his inner desire to break away from straightjacket of restrictive Victorian sexual mores. One is bound to note that the vampire's sexual perversions are not stated explicitly but rather referred to indirectly. In his reading of Christopher Bentley's *The monster in the bedroom: Sexual symbolism in Bram Stoker's Dracula* (1972), Gelder noted that any explicit treatment of sexuality was forbidden during the period (70). The use of symbolism to describe the vampires' perversions therefore guaranteed the popularity of the novel.

The explorations of the earlier works above necessarily create a nexus between the old and new Gothic forms which places texts under scrutiny within the continuum of the Gothic literature. Monster characters have been portrayed as channels through which repressed desires find outlets. The most likely reason monstrous characters are chosen for this role is because they are not bound by moral or social codes of a given society. Artist or creative writers therefore create monstrous characters to vent their frustrations or disenchantments with constraining social norms.

The motif of desire in Okorafor's fiction is explicitly portrayed in the way Onyesonwu acts as an agent of wish fulfillment. This comes to live through actions of Onyesonwu and close her friends namely Luyu, Binta, and Diti. The four girls share strong bond that developed when they participated together in the Eleventh year rite — an age-old female circumcision rite undergone by girls who have attained eleven years of age (*WFD* 34). After the rite, the girls were supposed to refrain from sex until marriage. To ensure that this happened, the scalpel used for the clitoridectomy was treated with *juju* charm to ensure that a woman feels pain anytime she is aroused (82).

Onyesonwu, however, later recovered the part of the body that had been excised during the circumcision because it turns out that no part of Eshu's body "is ever permanently gone until death" (150). Onyesonwu was therefore able to enjoy pre-

marital sex much to the envy of her friends (203). Her indulgence in the forbidden delight generated a lot of desire among her friends. The girls wanted Onyesonwu to use her magical powers to break their *juju* curse so they too could enjoy the sex (204). Onyesonwu later found out that she could actually reverse the eleventh rite and accordingly fulfilled the desires of her friends (248). The girls were then able to enjoy sexual act with abandon, and in the process, subvert the communal sexual norms. The girls admittedly had been raised to shun any premarital sexual acts no matter how desirable it could be (289). Onyesonwu thus instigates rebellion against the Jwahir's sexual norms by unintentionally creating desire for the forbidden sex from among her friends.

The first step to the wish fulfillment, arguably, started when the girls were convinced to accompany Onyesonwu to the desert and away from the Jwahir (182). Journey to the West meant an escape from the restrictive rules of their home town. Places like Banza and Ssolu with their rather liberal outlook, contrasts sharply with conservative Jwahir. Banza town presented a picture of place with less stringent moral codes: there were taverns; residents dressed in manner that would be indecent by Jwahir's standards; people smoked "cactus sap cigars" which apparently loosens one's morals; and prostitution was tolerated (216-220). Binta and Diti's open-mindedness was apparent as they slipped into a tavern to drink and behave indecently with men they met (218).

“Ssolu moving village”, the land of the Vah people, presented even a more liberal image. Hospitality to strangers was upheld (273). The Vah people did not have strict rules governing sexual relationships; individuals followed their urges (293). Even Eyess, the daughter of Chieftess Sessa was not a biological child to her husband Chief Usson (292). For Onyesonwu and her friends it was a totally new world. Diti and Luyu found themselves being progressively drawn to the new lifestyle. Soon, they were spending night with different types of men (293). Luyu in particular demonstrates heightened sensuality as she sleeps even with Fanasi, Diti’s fiancé (254). All the escapades experienced by the girls and their companions like Fanasi, affirm the instrumentality of Onyesonwu in wish fulfillment— nothing would have happened without her. Onyesonwu becomes the catalyst that brings out the repressed desires in her friends Diti, Luyu, Binta and Fanasi.

#### **3.4.6 Monsters as Liminal Beings**

Liminality is one of the key defining features any monster. Booker defines liminality as a state or stage of transition (150). It is an intervening space or interstice between things. The notion that monsters are liminal entities therefore implies that they combine attributes of categorically distinctive entities (Carroll 33). They could fuse attributes of human and beast, human and supernatural or the dead and the living. By the virtue of being liminal creatures, monsters can therefore be seen as signifier of category crisis and concretization of difference.

Monsters are considered harbinger of category crisis in that they “resist any attempt” to be included in “classificatory order of things” (Cohen 6). Being hybrid creatures, monsters naturally resist any classifications based on hierarchy or binary opposition. By questioning ontological distinctions, therefore, monsters assume subversive as well as evasive nature.

Hybridity in Okorafor’s fiction manifests itself among characters who possess both human and animals features. In *The Book of Phoenix*, for instance, there are winged human creatures like Phoenix and Seven created at a research centre called Tower 7 (9). Phoenix cannot make a full claim to humanity because of her wings and supernatural abilities. In fact she seems to recognize her predicament when she remarks that Saeed is “more human” than she is (12). Seven and Phoenix can therefore be categorised as liminal creatures possessing human and birds’ features. Their liminal position enables them to problematize any ontological classifications.

Discussion on liminality could also extend to the metaphysical dimension especially when there is an element of transcendence in character’s natural existence. Phoenix is described as having repeatedly experienced death and rebirth (*TBP* 196). Her first experience was when she attempted to escape from Tower 7 and her body was riddled with bullets causing her to burn to ashes (*TBP*

36). She rose from her ashes after one week (*TBP* 34). Immortality places Phoenix astride the human and supernatural realm.

Discussion on monster as a harbinger of category crisis also broaches on shape-shifting. Shape-shifting involves a human character transforming into a character of a different ontological category. In Okorafor's fiction it has been noted that Onyesonwu and Sunny have capacity to shape-shift (*WFD* 59; *AW* 152). Shape-shifting, immortality, and liminality prove that monsters are indeed suspended "between forms that threaten to smash distinctions" (Cohen 6). This implies that monsters defy any attempt to classify them.

As liminal being, monstrous bodies can also act as concretization of difference. Monster represents that which is different especially in a way that is threatening to a society and should naturally be kept away from the society. Cohen affirms that monster is "difference made flesh" and that any loci or entity that is regarded or monstrous is "rhetorically placed as distant and distinct" even when its origins are from within (7).

The differences inscribed on bodies designated as monstrous not only serve to alienate them but also distance them so that, even though they originate from within a community, they are made to appear as if they are intruders from outside the community. The difference inscribed on Onyesonwu and the entire *Ewu*

population made them appear uncanny, ominous, and disgusting. They therefore suffer a great ordeal because they incarnate many attributes which are considered alien and monstrous to the Okeke. Though admittedly a beautiful girl, the ugliness projected onto Onyesonwu by her community was overwhelming (*WFD* 11). She was associated with death and nightmares (116). As an *Ewu* she was considered a “black stain” in the societal image; a poison and potentially violent girl (14, 32). Onyesonwu was regarded as an “outcast” and “other” to the Okeke (32). Normality among the Okeke, especially during times of ethnic war with the Nuru, was also tied to physical looks. Onyesonwu had lighter skin compared to the Okeke who were much darker (11). Because of this, many people looked at her with “fear and disgust” (32). Onyesonwu’s body was a concretization of the difference. The kind of treatment she received was a testimony that she was not considered a genuine citizen Jwahir.

That the monster is an embodiment of difference explains why cultural differences among communities sometimes cause ethnic strife. Cohen affirms that cultural differences may indeed be exaggerated into “monstrous aberration” (7). Racism and negative ethnicity can be considered as examples of how people can transmute an otherwise harmless cultural and racial difference into monstrosity. One of the major determinants of individuals’ sufferings in *The Book of Phoenix* is the skin colour. Most of those who bear brunt of LifeGen’s inhumane

experimentation and suffer the consequences are members of Black origin (203-204).

### **3.4.7 Monster as the Abject**

Abjection, the concept developed by Julia Kristeva (1982), is instrumental in evaluation of the monster and monstrosity. In her reading of Kristeva's *The powers of horror* (1982), Tyler finds that abject is a concept "that describes all that is repulsive and fascinating about bodies" (27). By these, she implies particularly to bodily experiences like death, decay, fluids, orifices, defecation, discharge, or vomiting, which unsettle bodily integrity (27). The abject represents that which one has to separate himself or herself from in order to live (3). Yet according to Kristeva, the real cause of abjection is not the filthy or unhygienic nature of the abject, but rather its association with "that which disturbs identity, system and order (4). This implies that the abject also encompasses that which undermines or confounds identity and the normative. Disgust as elucidated by Miller in *The Anatomy of Disgust* (1997) is definitely one of the key aspects of the abject. Disgust is evaluative category of emotion that determines and sustains "low rankings of people and actions considered disgusting and contemptible" (Miller xiv).

The implication of the above arguments is that the concept of the abject has been appropriated for those actions, ideas, tendencies and individuals that are

considered subversive because they are perverse and socially improper. Individuals could be considered filthy if certain aspects of their identities, or their physical appearances repulse their beholders (Cohen qtd. in Tyler 21). One of the primary aspects of the abject is liminality. Kristeva indeed confirms this assertion when she refers to the abject as “the in-between, the ambiguous, the composite” and that which “does not respect borders” (4). Liminality therefore provides a nexus between the abject and the monster. The monster in H.P. Lovecraft’s *The Call of Cthulhu* revolts, disgusts and repulses by virtue of its liminality: it has “cuttlefish heads, scaly wings, dragonoid bodies, an intolerable odour, a sticky texture, and green skin” (qtd. in Carroll 81). The creature conflates features of different types of creatures, not forgetting the fact its “sticky texture” and “intolerable odour” is evocative of bodily discharge.

The concept of abject has been appropriated in Okorafor’s fiction in a number of ways. The monstrous beings in *Tower 7* physically offend by their disgusting looks which results from their deformities and liminality (*TBP* 11). Examples of such monstrous beings are a woman with twisted spine and another one who has claws and teeth of a lion (11).

It is also worth noting that in some cases, feeling of the abject relates more to symbolic than somatic aspects of a subject. This implies that the feeling of the abject relates more to what the physical aspects symbolize than the physical

aspects themselves. In *WFD* for example, the *Ewu* are portrayed as fearsome and disgusting (32). They are described as having “unhealthy skin” and “foul odour” (61). These descriptions of the *Ewu* evoke a profound feeling of the abject. In reality, the *Ewu*, as the mixed-race population was referred to, neither had unhealthy skin or foul odour. In fact, there are instances in the text when certain aspects of *Ewu*'s appearances are positively appraised. Onyesonwu's skin, for instance, is said to be “smooth and delicate almost like camel's milk” (*WFD* 10). This positive appraisal generally questions the sincerity of the earlier negative comments. It makes the earlier comments seem defamatory rather than honest and objective evaluation of the *Ewu* people.

This therefore implies that the unhealthiness, the disgust and the smelliness may have nothing to do with the *Ewu*'s physical nature but with their identity. The mixed-race or the *Ewu* population disturbs the identity of the Okeke as they incorporate the qualities associated with the Nuru. The Nuru are considered subversive and inhuman because of their association with conspiracy, rape, murder and destruction of the Okeke property. The survival of the Okeke, arguably, is contingent on abjecting the Nuru and all that relates to them which, in this case, include the *Ewu*. This practice arguably leads to the victimization and alienation of the *Ewu*.

Sunny Nwazue in the *Akata Witch*, however, presents a rather different picture because she has “an ugly, sickly color” despite being pure blood Nigerian (116). Her albinism affects the appearance of her eyes, skin and hair rendering her “otherworldly” (116). She is associated with ghosts and sorcery (23). All these references — sickly, ugly, otherworldly—arouse the feeling of disgust and therefore, the abject (Miller xiv). Otherworldly implies that Sunny has one foot in the natural world and the other one in spirit world. This assumption renders her a liminal being and distances her even more from her community. But again, like in the case of the *Ewu*, the feeling of the abject in Sunny’s looks could arise from assumption that albinism portends something extraordinary and possibly harmful to the community’s identity.

Abjection also results from degradation or abasement of oneself (Tyler 20). This basically applies to willful or deliberate engagement in acts which devalue one’s physical, moral or social status. When an intelligent character like Onyesonwu transforms herself into an animal, she may be deemed to have degraded herself. That explains why she had felt very uncomfortable when she had first learnt that she had shape-shifting abilities (59-60). Onyesonwu, however, transforms into beasts for good reasons. Her ability to transform into a bird or terrifying mythological monster like the Sphinx could be considered a form of empowerment (*WFD* 15 & 222). Onyesonwu accepted her condition (shape-

shifting) because she felt it would help her defend herself from her powerful biological father who wanted her dead (60).

### **3.4.8 Monsters as the Uncanny**

Monsters, whether in fiction or real life, are considered as having propensity to harm or frighten. Monsters are personifications of the uncanny (Beal 4). The uncanny belongs in the realm of the frightening and the dreadful (Freud et al.). This therefore implies that, as a personification of the uncanny, a real monster is bound to evoke a certain degree of fear and dread.

True to the above assertions, Okorafor's fiction presents archetypical monsters which are certainly frightening and dangerous. Her fictional world is roamed by masquerades, winged humans, and bizarre and baleful creatures without names. *The Book of Phoenix* features a gigantic sea monster spotted by Phoenix as she flew across the Atlantic. The uncanny nature of the creature can be described in the following excerpt:

Its giant red body was bulbous like the sack of a jellyfish, but the skin looked thick and tough like an elephant's. It had three massive tentacles that it used to propel itself forth and an equally massive round head with squishy yellow swiveling bug eyes. The creature was the size of thirty houses. Large houses. It was not a giant squid or any kind of cephalopod. If anything, it looked mammalian. The creature looked up at me with those yellow eyes, staring for a long time (58)

The gargantuan sea creature described above does have all the hallmarks of archetypical monster with capacity to threaten and harm. Its massive size and grotesque looks combine to give the monster a nightmarish and unearthly appearance. That the creature stared at Phoenix with interest arouses the feeling that perhaps it wanted to devour her or was just intrigued by her. But either way, Phoenix had to fly higher for fear that the creature could leap and get at her (58). Her action proved that the sea monster had capacity to frighten.

Human beings can also evoke the feeling of the uncanny when their physical attributes and certain aspects of their habits are dreadfully odd. One is likely to cringe when he close proximity to such person. Count Dracula's peculiar nature, for is instance, elicited so much fear that when his hands touched his guest, Jonathan Harker, the latter "could not repress a shudder" (Stoker 42). As noted above, monsters generally elicit fear because of their perceived propensity to harm.

The uncanny can also be constituted by a fright evoked by the return of repressed complexes and beliefs (Freud et al. 155). Hostile relationship between the Nuru and the Okeke can be used to clearly highlight this reality. There is no doubt that the constant attacks by the Nuru severely traumatized Okeke people. Some were maimed and left to die, others disfigured, and many women were gang-raped (*WFD* 365-367). Such inhuman atrocities imprinted indelible marks on victims'

psyche. Any sight of an *Ewu*, Nuru or any entity related to the Nuru's violence was therefore likely to unlock the repressed fear among the victims. When Onyesonwu uses her sorcery to enable the people of Jwahir witness how her mother and other Okeke were raped by the Nuru, she causes so much panic and fear among them. Some screamed, others sobbed, children ran helter skelter, and other people fainted (*WFD* 164). Onyesonwu's actions have been likened to poking a "sore part of Jwahir's psyche" (167). Her actions unlocked repressed anxieties and trauma that perhaps should have remained locked. Because of this, therefore, Onyesonwu is associated with the uncanny.

### **3.5 Conclusions**

Monsters in fantastic works are often associated with warning or omen (Asma 13). The term has also been applied to ordinary human beings who are cruel, evil, or inhuman. In other words, the monster represents an entity which is unfaithful to both natural and social order. By virtue of their uncanny, scary appearances or inhuman nature, monsters are predisposed to cause fear or terror among the ordinary human they encounter.

The findings indicated that the monster is a composite of parts which naturally belong to categorically distinct creatures. The conflation of those parts can be either continuous (as in fusion monsters) or discontinuous (in fission monsters). Fusion monsters like the winged human beings in the text (*TBP* 11) are

interstitial—they combine attributes that are considered to belong to categorically distinct entities. In the fission beings category, the categorically distinct entities inhabit one body but in different times. Shape-shifting human beings, the *Eshu*, in *Who Fears Death* can be said to belong to the category of fission beings because they possess uncanny ability to transform into different creatures at any time.

Monstrous nature can be ascribed onto ordinary human bodies either through projection or when they are perceived to have engaged in extremely wicked, inhuman or subversive acts. The *Ewu* people, for instance, were ascribed evil, abnormality, violence and pain. It is, however, apparent that they were not truly evil or abnormal; they were victims of projection and scapegoating. Villainous characters like Otokoto in *AW* and Daib in *WFD*, however, can be genuinely considered monstrous as their actions are admittedly wicked, inhuman and subversive.

Monsters in Okorafor's fiction are characterized by several unique features which include peculiarity of their countenance and agency, otherness, embodiment of desire, transgressive nature, uncanniness, liminality, and abjectness. Some of the monsters are characterized by physical attributes which are either unfaithful to nature or contradictory to society's perception of perfect human nature. One of the main reasons for their peculiarity is liminality or hybridity. Liminal beings

fuse attributes of human and beast, human and supernatural or the dead and the living. As such, they “resist any attempt” to be included in “classificatory order of things” (Cohen 6). Monster’s agency has also been portrayed to be peculiar in that, in many cases, it tends to exceed that of the ordinary human beings. Phoenix’s intellectual capacity and physical strength, for instance, has been shown to be way above that of the ordinary human characters in the text.

Monstrous presence polices boundaries. As a monster, for instance, Phoenix spearheads an aggressive attack against Life Gen Technologies (The Big Eye) and its co-conspirators leading to their total annihilation. She thus becomes a monster of prohibition as she warns against unscrupulous scientific adventurism, inhumanity, moral decadence, and desire for transcendence.

As an embodiment of desire, the study established that monsters possess special capacities to evoke “potent escapist fantasies” (Cohen 17). Since its inception in the early Gothic fiction, the monster has always been constructed as an agent of subversion and transgression. Since they are not subject to prevailing social norms and conventions, monsters’ transgressive actions, at times, push boundaries and in the process evoke certain desires from among the morally upright individuals. Onyesonwu, for instance, has been portrayed as an agent of sexual wish fulfillment. She successfully reverses the Eleventh rite for her friends Luyu, Diti

and Binta thereby enabling them satiate their sexual desires in total contravention of Jwahirian social norms (*WFD* 248).

Monsters can be associated with the abject. The term abject is used to refer to concept “that describes all that is repulsive and fascinating about bodies” (Tyler 27). They include those bodily experiences which unsettle integrity of the body and one has to separate himself or herself from in order to live (3). Abject is not only limited to bodily experiences but also to anything which disturbs identity, system and order (4). There are elements of the abject in Okorafor’s monsters. The monstrous beings in *Tower 7*, for instance, physically offend by their disgusting looks which results from their deformities and liminality (*TBP* 11). The *Ewu* (mixed-race individuals) and the albinos in Okorafor’s novels like *Sunny* are considered the abject because they disturb identities of their respective communities.

Finally, monsters are identified by their propensity to harm or frighten. This is so because monsters are assumed to naturally belong in the realm of the uncanny and are therefore bound to evoke a certain degree of fear and dread (Beal 4). Okorafor’s fictional world indeed is roamed by masquerades, winged humans, and baleful creatures without names lurking in seas and rivers. Human beings can also evoke the feeling of the uncanny when their physical attributes and certain aspects of their habits are dreadfully odd or fearful.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### 4.0 COMMUNAL AND ETHNO-RACIAL REALITIES OF OPPRESSION IN THE SELECTED NNEDI OKORAFOR'S FICTION

#### 4.1 Introduction

Social oppression is one of the most discernible concerns in Nnedi Okorafor's fiction. Oppression happens in many ways. One of which is nonconformity to social norms, worldview or ideology of a given society. Characters who subvert or deviate from social conventions risk being considered rebels or aliens. Oppression also happens in more overt forms like exploitation. This kind of oppression often engenders violence, and degradation. Violence, degradation and persecution also result from foreign aggression. In *Who Fears Death*, for instance, the militarily superior Nuru often causes intense sufferings to Okeke community through their constant attacks.

Those who feel oppressed are often constrained to make choices to either resist the oppression in all its forms or accept it. In the texts like *Who Fears Death*, *Akata Witch* and *The Book of Phoenix*; there is a remarkable effort by some of the oppressed to engage in constructive resistance. This chapter therefore attempts to: explore development of oppressive systems within social settings depicted in the texts; examine various modes of oppression like objectification, violence, slavery, exploitation, among others; and finally explore strategies adopted by the oppressed in their resistance against the oppression. It is also important to note at

this point that oppression is one of the key elements of the Gothic fiction. Gothic fiction from its inception is characterised by tyrannical males and series of pursuits through caverns or underground tunnels, and monstrous and inhuman oppression of one class by another (Botting 108). Even setting which sometimes is characterised by labyrinths, claustrophobia, ruins, prison; is emblematic of oppression, fear and helplessness (Punter & Byron 179).

#### **4.2 Discourse, Conformity and Oppression**

Social reality is generally created through social interactions at various levels. Language plays a major role in the construction of social reality (Halliday 2). The form of language which is useful at this level is discourse. Discourse is meaning making process. Discourse is generally used to designate the forms of representations, codes, conventions and habits of language that produce specific fields of culturally and historically located meanings (Brooker 78). The *Ewu* term among the Okeke, for instance, does not just represent the mixed-race population; it is also associated with violence, abnormality, among others (WFD 21, 32). It is therefore an oppressive term and many mixed-race individuals are evidently uncomfortable being referred to by that name (105).

Context matters a lot in discursive processes. Discourse within a society, for instance, is influenced by social values and conventions (Halliday 2). The society and its stipulated conventions provide paradigms or parameters for determining

good or bad, vicious virtuous, normal or abnormal. Any serious deviation from the set paradigms is likely to attract some social condemnation, stigmatisation or even violent denunciation. In works of Gothic or horror fiction; deviations or nonconformity are concretized in monstrous body (Carroll 16). Arguing from the similar perspective, Foucault considers monsters' existence as violation of societal and natural law (55). In fact he finds that the "entire problematic of abnormality" is set out around the monster (Foucault 62). The 'normal' human body is often considered "an ideal physical and symbolic" representation of "certainty and order" in a given society (Wright 48). This implies that presence of a deviant entity provokes a rethink of stability of nature, society and the normal. Since these paradigms generally form the core of a given culture, any opposition to them is regarded as abnormal and subversive. It leads to automatic denunciation and punishment of the perpetrators. In Gothic fiction, the punishment is often represented by the defeat or elimination of horrific beings or monsters (Carroll 200). The monsters in the horror fiction basically represent members of a society who do not conform to the normative and order as conceived by the society (Carroll 203).

Conformity, however, is a subject that is often broached whenever discussions on oppression arise. This is because certain perspectives, ideologies or norms adopted by a society maybe oppressive to some members of the society. Yet everyone is expected to conform to them or risk being considered subversive.

Hostile attitude towards those considered different or aberrant is deeply ingrained phenomenon in the world portrayed in Okorafor's fiction. Such individuals are often subjected to different kinds of oppression like physical torture or exclusion.

Sometimes, as in the case of heroines like Onyesonwu and Zahra; oppression does not necessarily result from nonconformity or subversiveness of the oppressed. It results from projection and scapegoating. People for instance are revolted by Zahra's peculiar hair because, apparently, "they give them a glimpse" of repressed memories (*ZTW* 8). The people of Ooni Kingdom are plagued by a general fear of the unknown which seems to intensify with the sight of Zahra's dada hair (8). The people of Ooni Kingdom arguably project their collective unconscious (shadow) onto Zahra, and indeed to all the dada. This leads to their oppression.

In a similar manner, the Okeke project their fears onto mixed- race population called the *Ewu*. The Okeke people, for a long time, have endured brutal raids by the neighbouring Nuru whose ultimate mission is to annihilate them. All the Okeke people are often wary of Nuru's threats hanging over them like the Sword of Damocles. When Onyesonwu uses her magic to conjure up the vision of past Nuru raids, she causes a lot of panic, commotion and cries in the market (*WFD* 164). Onyesonwu's actions above are described as having prodded "a sore part of Jwahir's psyche" (*WFD* 167). This "sore part of the psyche" can be considered

the Jwahirian collective unconscious (shadow) which houses their vulnerability, helplessness, precariousness, and guilt. This repressed content, the shadow, is externalised onto the *Ewu* through the mechanism of projection. When the shadow is projected onto an individual, the ego perceives the individual as evil (Snowden 92). This generally explains why the *Ewu* girl like Onyesonwu, despite her good-natured disposition and magnanimity, is still ascribed evil and abnormality (*WFD* 11, 36). She is regarded as a poison, a black stain, born of pain and potentially violent (14, 32). The *Ewu* are treated as outcast and prostitutes (*WFD* 220). It is apparent from examples offered that there is no adequate justification for Zahra's and Onyesonwu's unfair treatment. They are victims of shadow projection.

The only options available for the oppressed are either to accept their fate as the persecuted and alienated, or resist the oppressive social practices. Certain members of the oppressed groups like the *Ewu*, for instance, are portrayed in the text as having resigned to their fate and become prostitutes and outcasts (*WFD* 220). Other members of the group like Onyesonwu, however, vehemently resisted by refusing to be stereotyped, objectified as a prostitute, or called *Ewu* (105, 222).

Despite their subversiveness, the oppressed elicit a great deal of sympathy from those who believe in their cause (Carroll 208). The domain of the oppressed in Okorafor's fiction has become "sites of identification, sympathy, and self-

recognition” (Punter and Byron 265). Those who persecute them are always portrayed as the villains.

### **4.3 Abnormality**

Okorafor’s fiction contrives forms and situations which constrain a discussion on the abnormal. The keen observation on some of the main protagonists like Sunny, Onyesonwu and Zahra reveals that the sufferings ailing them directly attribute to their difference. The three characters above are considered different in ways which border on abnormality. Their looks, habits and uncanny associations render them abnormal by the respective communal standards. Sunny, as already seen, has a condition called albinism. She is considered ugly, wrong, otherworldly, and with one foot in physical world another one in the world of spirits (*AW* 116). These reactions suggest that her condition provokes uncanny feelings among some members of her community.

Zahra’s weird dada hair and vine growing on her head also makes her target of insults and defamatory remarks like freak, monster, snake lady, and witch (9-12). The remarks and the attitude of people towards the characters in question generally make them appear unnatural and abnormal in the eyes of their respective societies. As for Phoenix, her existence too is considered abnormal. Her home was not a conventional home as she had thought earlier. Her home turned out to be a research facility as well as a prison (*TBP* 7). She was created to

be an ultimate biological weapon (27). Phoenix was considered a “dangerous non-human person” (206). Phoenix and all the inmates, seemingly, were meant to accept their reality as slaves or objects to be perpetually exploited for scientific expediency (8).

Onyesonwu’s abnormality lies in being the daughter of a rapist, a killer and an avowed enemy of the Okeke community. Foucault observes that a person can be considered abnormal if he/she is a “descendant of” a person adjudged monstrous by a given community (Foucault 60). For that, Onyesonwu is scapegoated and made to bear all the burden of ethnic hate the Okeke harbour against the Nuru. The community ascribes criminality and evil intent to her in the belief that since she was born of violence (rape), she will grow up to be violent (*WFD* 32). By ascribing criminality onto her, Jwahir society literally transforms Onyesonwu into a monstrous being. This implies that she is keenly watched for any evil manifestation. Onyesonwu indeed recognizes the painful reality that she is not “normal” and however hard she tries please the “normal” people, she would always be spurned (32, 236). Her neighbours do not consider her a bona fide citizen of Jwahir. They believe that she should be stoned to death (116).

The experiences of three protagonists clearly show how individual’s difference can be transformed into an abnormality and monstrosity. This suggestion evidently reinforces Cohen’s assumption that monsters lurks at the gate of

difference (7). One inevitably becomes a monster when his or her peculiarities are exaggerated into “monstrous aberration” (7). This happens particularly when an attribute or something perceived as sinister or uncanny is attached to individual’s difference. Zahra’s strange hair, for instance, evokes repressed memories from among the Ooni people (*ZTW* 8).

The above examples affirm that society provides parameters for determining what is normal, abnormal or monstrous. Foucault indeed considers nature and society to be the frame of reference for the monstrosities (57). He considers monsters’ existence a violation of societal and natural law (55). This implies that the presence of a monster as a phenomenon within a society provokes a rethink of nature, society and the normal. It questions the validity and stability of such paradigms. Since these paradigms generally form the core of a given culture, any opposition to them is regarded as abnormal. Foucault indeed finds that in the past, the “entire problematic of abnormality” was set out around the monster (62). A careful survey of the experiences of Zahra, Onyesonwu, Phoenix and Sunny clearly affirms that monstrous body is still regarded as an abnormal presence. This explains why in many works of fiction featuring monstrous villain, the monster is normally banished or destroyed at the end in order to restore normality (Carroll 200). This assertion does not in any way validate the social oppression of the perceived monsters. It does however show that society is liable to err in its

beliefs and doctrines regarding treatment of those regarded as abnormal or monstrous.

#### **4.4 Relevance of Afrofuturism and Indigenous Futurism**

Social reality in Nnedi Okorafor's fiction is arguably created through a fusion of elements associated with indigenous futurism, Afrofuturism and the Gothic. Afrofuturism can be defined as a way of imagining possible futures through a black cultural lens (Womack 9). In order to achieve this, Afrofuturism combines elements of science fiction, fantasy, magic realism, speculative fiction and Afrocentricity (9). Proponents of Afrofuturism note that black people are conspicuously absent, or are acutely marginalized in the world history, notably, in the history of science (Womack 7). Afrofuturism speculates about the future and the past in order to reconfigure the present (Womack 137). In *TBP*, for instance, Okorafor appropriates Afrofuturist perspective to critique the racist's characterisation of Black bodies as objects for exploitation. Like other Afrofuturist authors, Okorafor denounces the positioning of "Black bodies" as monsters but instead situates oppressive systems and individuals as true monstrous bodies (Toliver 3).

Indigenous futurism can be seen as a literary movement which expresses indigenous perspectives of future, present and past within the contexts of speculative fiction and related subgenres. It grew up as response to the diminution

of native intellectualism and indigenous science by the mainstream science fiction (Dillon 2). Through the indigenous futurism, therefore, traditional communities can position themselves in the genre (science fiction) associated exclusively with the Western futuristic aspirations (2).

Gothic fiction and science fiction are connected in that the latter has shown an overwhelming tendency to appropriate common Gothic motifs. The motifs include creation of atmosphere of terror and suspense, tyrannical fathers, sequences of pursuits through tunnels or caverns, mad scientists, and inhuman oppression, among others (Botting 107,108). The images of strength and power that are established, for instance, through the opposition of human and machine, or ordinary human and scientifically generated superhuman, arguably draw on the masculine elements of Gothic fiction. In *The Book of Phoenix* there is a description of “mad scientists” subjecting people to inhuman oppression at Tower 7 (6, 8). Afrofuturism or black science fiction can therefore be read and analysed within the Gothic tradition.

Okorafor’s speculative fiction expresses anxieties about possibility of the past and present injustices persisting into the future. The fiction exposes a sustained rupture among members of African society and the continued Western interference as the prime factors which make any contemplation of optimistic African future a mere façade. The twin challenges are described as having led to

ethnic bloodletting, persecutions, intolerance, and racial exploitation. The conflicts are projected into the future. The battle between the Nuru and Okeke in *WFD*, for instance, takes place in post-apocalyptic Africa. The futuristic representation of the conflicts can be seen as an expression of anxieties about past and contemporary socio-political and ideological conflicts and oppressions enduring into a distant future. This in turn is an implicit call for a determinate and decisive action to forestall or bring such conflicts to a conclusive end. Some have even argued that the occurrence of the apocalypse at the end of *TBP* which doomed the errant civilization is ardent call for an urgent global response to the current racially and ideologically charged political environment (Eubanks 6). But one could still argue that the apocalypse expresses anxiety about the ultimate destruction of the world if nothing is done to end racism and all forms of oppression in the world.

The piecing together of the future, past and present is presented variously in Okorafor's fiction. In *The Book of Phoenix* and its sequel *Who Fears Death*, pasts are re-enacted as precursors and determiners of the present situations. *The Book of Phoenix*, for instance enacts a futuristic dystopian era spanning two centuries marked by advanced scientific knowledge (6). The period is also characterised by exploitation of human beings as slaves to be used for medical experimentation (8, 145). The era comes to a sad end during a great apocalypse which is seen as *Ani's* (God) retaliation against the wicked world (221).

*Who Fears Death* presents post-apocalyptic era which characterised by a bloody ethnic conflict pitting the light- skinned Nuru against and the dark-skinned Okeke people. During this futuristic period, the past is accessible mainly through the Great Book (*WFD* 31, 356). In nutshell the two futuristic texts, *Who Fears Death* and *The Book of Phoenix*, offers a panoramic view of past, present and future from Afrocentric point of view. Afrofuturism and indigenous futurism are resistance strategies inasmuch as they oppose marginalisation of the Black people in the history of science and futuristic aspirations. It is through these perspectives that the Black writers can honestly speak against oppressive social norms and ideologies.

#### **4.5 Oppression**

It can be deduced from the preceding discussion that certain oppressive attitude and practices like dehumanisation, slavery, ethnic conflicts, and persecution on account of nonconformity to social norms are hinted as the major encumbrance to full attainment of African futuristic aspirations. This sub-section thus offers a broad elucidation on the theme of oppression and means by which the oppressed engage in constructive resistance.

Okorafor cast spotlight on social conditions in various traditional setting with a view to exposing practices and tendencies which engender oppression. She uses lived experiences of three girls namely Sunny Nwazue, Zahra and Onyesonwu

Ubaid-Ogundimu illustrate the harmful effects of social oppression. *Akata Witch* exposes a cultural society where having a skin condition like albinism causes one to be treated like an outsider. Sunny Nwazue, an albino, is perfectly normal and a talented girl of “pure Nigerian blood (116). Because of her condition, however, she is regarded as abnormal. Her trainer Anatov, for instance, does not hide his disgust for her skin, hair and eyes (47). His partiality makes him find fault in anything Sunny does especially during their first encounter at Leopard Knocks (48). When Anatov comments about Sunny being “yellow on all levels” just as she wiped mucus from her hands, he was probably comparing her skin colour to the mucus (48). His derision hurts Sunny deeply.

Zahra undergoes similar tribulations because of vine growing in her hair (4). Zahra was born a dada (4). According to Ooni culture where Zahra belonged, a dada-born was destined to be wise and extraordinary (4, 5). The hair of any dada was not to be cut (5). As result, Zahra’s hair grew longer and longer and by the time she started her school she looked quite strange. Her long hair, together with vines attached to it, made her the subject of ridicule. She was called mean names like snake head, vine head, freak, and monster (11-12). Ooni society is quite diverse, civilized and generally developed. But despite the progress, the dada nature is not truly tolerated in the society (7). Apparently, the Ooni’s dislike for dada strange hair stems from the general fear of unknown that is embedded in the communal collective psyche (7). The dada hair is likened to a “forbidden jungle”

within the Ooni society signalling to everyone that it did not fit and never would (7). Under such circumstances it seems futile to imagine that Zahra could gain any acceptance and be treated as normal person. This explains why she eventually gave up trying to blend into the society (7).

Zahra's situation closely resembles that of Onyesonwu in *WFD*. Both girls made remarkable efforts to fit into their respective communities but had to give up after sometime. Their respective societies would not accept them, much as they tried, because their looks arguably provoke a profound sense of the uncanny. The oppression Onyesonwu undergoes relates to her physical looks appearance and circumstances of her conception. Born of the rape of an Okeke woman by a Nuru man, Onyesonwu's physical appearance resembles more of the Nuru than her native Okeke people (*WFD* 21, 10). Onyesonwu and the mixed-race *Ewu* in general, were expected to grow into violent beings (32). She tried her best to do all she could in order to fit into the Jwahir community. Against the wishes of her mother and father, she participated in the Eleventh Rite (female circumcision) hoping it would make her "normal" (36). But still she never got the acceptance she craved for. Due to unrelenting stigma and stereotypes she faced, Onyesonwu eventually left the village (201).

Another form of oppression that manifests itself in Okorafor's fiction is grounded on ethno-racial beliefs. *Who Fears Death* describes two ethnic groups, the dark

skinned Okeke and light-skinned Nuru, who are in constant fight. The militarily superior Nuru tribe, led by their ruthless commander Daib Yagoub, continually raid the Okeke villages, destroying property, raping, maiming and killing without any compassion. They carry out the atrocities because they believe it is what the Great Book supposedly demands of them (*WFD* 102). According to the Great Book, the Okeke in the past had offended *Ani* God by committing a lot of evil (364). God had then unleashed her wrath on the Okeke (356). She later sent Nuru from the stars to continue her work of chastising the Okeke for their past iniquities (356). It is later revealed, however, that the curse on the Okeke never really existed (410). Daib had exploited his people's ignorance to carry out his own selfish plans against the Okeke.

The Great Book, and the main cause of Okeke's sufferings, can be understood as the most revered book among the Okeke and the Nuru. Each person had their own copy. There is, however, widespread doubt about the authenticity of certain portions of the text (*WFD* 406). These are the sections known as The Lost Pages which implicate Okeke alone in the transgression of *Ani*'s ways (364). According to the great sorcerer Aro, Okeke as used in the Great Book referred to all the human beings — Nuru and Okeke alike (155). Thus as soon as the Great Book was rewritten by Onyesonwu, it was possible for the Nuru and Okeke to co-exist in peace (410).

Racial oppression as a concern appears in *The Book of Phoenix*. The text describes the seven towers which are the scene of some of the worst human rights violations. The Towers, the property of LifeGen Technologies, specialize in a wide range of scientific researches notably genetic alteration and manipulation, enhancing arboreal growths, and cloning (*TBP* 8-9). The towers pride themselves in opening up new horizons in field of medicine, tracking, and cybernetic technology (45, 89, and 91). These gains, however, come at the expense of people and creatures used for the experiments. The speciMen, as the guinea pigs are referred to, are subjected to barbaric and often lethal experimental processes which engender intense tortures and abuses all in the name of “getting information” about them (17, 145, 219). The most outstanding feature among all the inmates is that they are mostly black. This reality raises questions about the corporation’s racist attitude towards the black people. There is a very strong indication that majority of people who have suffered irreversible harm to their health after being subjected to unsafe experimental procedures are black (203). In fact, the most conspicuous research subjects — Phoenix, Mmuo and Saeed— all have links to Africa (119, 128, 146). This therefore proves that racial consideration does play a major role in selection of people to be used in scientific experimentations.

#### **4.5.1 Modes of Oppression**

Oppression has been portrayed as one of the key concerns in Okorafor's fiction. Oppression basically involves one group, usually the dominant, exercising tyranny, abuse, and exploitation and degradation over others (Young 5). Oppression involves social degradation of an individual or a group of individuals on account of their membership to a specific social group, and often results from structures of domination and subordination and corresponding ideologies of superiority and inferiority (Charlton 8). The group in question maybe considered inferior, despicable or disgusting. Individuals belonging to such a group could therefore be considered a dent in a good image of the whole society. The *Ewu* in *Who Fears Death* generally possess features of such despised social group. They are abused, degraded and violated because they are considered outcasts and prostitutes (*WFD* 220). For that they are a blemish to the communal image. The theme of oppression can be fully examined by analysing forms through which the oppression occurs. These forms or faces of oppression can be categorised into the following: violence, slavery, exploitation, marginalisation and degradation.

##### **4.5.1.1 Violence**

Violence is one of the most significant faces of oppression (Young 67). Physical violence involves acts like killing, beating, maiming, raping and destroying (68). Violence could also take the form of harassment, intimidation, ridiculing, humiliating and degradation (68). The oppressed groups or individuals are often

wary of spates of unprovoked attacks targeted at them. Onyesonwu, at her tender age, was already wary of men trying to grab her any time she ventured to market (*WFD* 10). It is quite logical such men would only want to hurt or molest her. Such was the kind of life many members of *Ewu* group had to content with in regular basis once outside the relative safety of their homes. As a grown up girl, Onyesonwu survived attempts on her life. After her father's death, in which she was implicated, some of her family members hatched a plan to kill her (116).

Violence as mode of oppression is given more elaboration in the context of Nuru – Okeke ethnic conflict. The conflict between the two ethnic is characterised by massive rape, killings, maiming, and destruction of property. Ethnic cleansing is perpetrated by the Nuru against Okeke with an aim of gradually routing the latter from all the land they occupy (*WFD* 371). An account of one of such gruesome attacks paints a horrible picture indeed: there was a smell of “blood, sweat, semen, saliva, tears, urine, faeces, sand, smoke...” (373). This clearly shows that there was a widespread destruction, rape, bloodshed, and deaths. Weaponized rape not only hurt victims, but also degrades them.

In *The Book of Phoenix*, violence occurs within the context of exploitation. Phoenix for instance was shot at a close range by Bumi and the bullet went straight through her leg (*TBP* 16). It was an experimental shooting meant to elicit certain reaction from the subject with an aim of “getting information about” her

(17). The scientists apparently were more interested in results than screams of pain from Phoenix. They believe that “nothing great comes without pain” (17). They therefore have no qualms about subjecting the inmates to the worst imaginable sufferings as long as it would lead achievements of their objectives. A similar experience involved another black inmate called Mmuo whose skin was all peeled off without the use of anaesthesia (145). Sometimes the experimental processes caused deaths. The text reports of an instance where an entire family perished from lead poisoning due to unsafe experimentations of (219).

The total disregard for the pain and sufferings of victims of violence apparently stems from lack of moral consideration for them. This attitude sometimes stems from doubt of victim’s humanity by the attacker. It has been found that there is indeed a significant link between violence and dehumanization (Moller and Deci 44). The process of dehumanization makes it easy for oppressors to inflict more damage on fellow humans by “allowing them to exclude a group or individual from moral consideration” (Moller and Deci 44). Dehumanisation is a process of stealing humanity of others, or distorting the vocation of attaining full humanity, by an unjust order (Freire 44).

LifeGen Technologies is characterised by extreme cases of dehumanisation and inhuman cruelty. Dehumanizing treatment of the inmates like Mmuo, Saheed, Phoenix, and Seven at LifeGen facilities can be linked to racism. The evocation of

Trans-Atlantic slavery and the Nazi Holocaust in the text can be seen as an attempt to situate LifeGen's atrocities in the continuum of historical human rights violations. It points out to a possibility of deeply entrenched racist ideology at work in the LifeGen's operation. This ideology possibly influences the choice of black people to be candidates for dangerous, inhuman experiments. The choice of Vera Thomas, a black woman, to carry a very dangerous pregnancy was met with acclamation by the LifeGen Technologies. They declared her a "perfect" choice and could not ask for a better carrier (*TBP* 202). During the nine months of pregnancy, Vera was continually exposed to dangerous radiation from an unborn child growing in her womb (205). As a result she got cancer. As soon as she had given birth, she was separated from the baby and whisked away to a correctional facility secretly owned by the LifeGen (207). Most of the inmates at the facility were African Americans and reports about their health conditions had been deliberately kept secret (203). This fact therefore reinforces the assertion that racism has strong influence in LifeGen's operations. Just as Trans-Atlantic slavery deprived the enslaved black humanity as a prelude to exploitation, the LifeGen Technologies too denied the inmates their humanity in order to exploit them as guinea pigs.

#### **4.5.1.2 Slavery and Exploitation**

Slavery and exploitation are forms of oppression which are linked to objectification and dehumanization. Slavery and exploitation deprives one of their

humanity in that feelings and autonomy of the victims are not taken into consideration by the slavers. Slavery and exploitation features in *The Book of Phoenix* and *Who Fears Death*. *TBP* features exploitation of human beings as guinea pigs in LifeGen's research facilities in the United States of America. The human beings confined at the research facilities known as The Towers were acquired through deception, kidnapping or other irregular means. Mmuo, for instance, was kidnapped in Nigeria by masked men and flown to the United States where he ended up in Tower 7 (*TBP* 119). Over the years, Mmuo's body was subjected to various alterations and fusions (120). As a result Mmuo acquired special abilities like walking through all matter, and communicating by telepathy (120, 23). As for Saeed, he was picked from the streets of Cairo by LifeGen's agents and flown to the United States where he ended up at the Tower 7 (128).

Objectification and dehumanization often occur within structures of slavery and exploitation. As already explained, objectification involves considering one as inert, serviceable, devoid of feelings, and lacking in autonomy (Nussbaum 257). When one is declared inert, it means that his or her lacks in agency (Nussbaum 257). When one lacks agency, it means he/ she has to be directed by others. Since many individuals naturally possess these faculties, the exploiters or slavers always devise ways to deprive, impair or stop them from using the faculties. At the Tower, for instance, the staff, popularly called the Big Eye, always try to monitor and control the activities of the inmates (also known as the SpeciMen). Many of

inmates are confined in rooms to control their interactions and movement (*TBP* 11). Monitoring devices like chips and have been implanted in their bodies to enable the Big Eye track their activities and changes in their bodies (16). Thus, as the text states, the speciMen were “perfectly contained” at the Tower (8). “Contained” in this context would refer to being deprived of autonomy and agency. Inasmuch as the speciMen lived in this kind of condition, they were veritable slaves. With regulations to contain the inmates in place, even knowledge for them was not power (8).

Objectifiable subjects must be serviceable — useful and capable of being put to service. In accordance to this requirement, the LifeGen’s operatives were meticulous in their selection and recruitment of subjects for study. Resilience, strength and intelligence appear to be some of the main factors taken into consideration. When for instance LifeGen’s agents raided WaZoBia’s hideout, they shot all students but Mmuo (119). It is apparent that they had no intention of harming him. They were aware of Mmuo as a highly skilled engineering student who “could walk through wood” (120). As for Saeed, he was found in streets of Cairo (*TBP* 128). Having survived the harsh life without family, Saeed elicited powerful primal survival instincts (128). With that kind of experience, the corporation surmised that Saeed probably had right credentials to survive the rigorous processes at LifeGen’s laboratories. HeLa too had nearly the same

experience as Saeed. She was the only survivor of water that swallowed their island (187).

The LifeGen's operatives targeted the hopeless, desperate and the poor. Given their pathetic situation, it would be easy to lure them into trap with promises of money or better life. Furthermore, since many of the victims did not have families or support, it was easy to nab and spirit them away to far off places without arousing much suspicion. This is how Saeed, Mmuo Vera Thomas and HeLa ended up in Tower 7. Vera Takeisha Thomas, for instance, had just lost her children to fire, and separated with her husband. So when she heard a possibility of better prospects with the help of LifeGen Technologies, she jumped at it (*TBP* 202). Vera accepted to be a surrogate mother to Phoenix (202).

The processes of luring, kidnapping, interning and exploiting human beings can be seen as dehumanizing practice indeed. It degrades the victim's sense of self and disregards their feelings. Denial and disregard for feelings of others is consistent with the objectification (Nussbaum 257). Vera's experience as mentioned above can be a good example. Her fortunes had just plummeted: she had lost her family and needed support and reassurance to continue living (*TBP* 202). Then along comes an opportunity to be a mother again and restart her life with the help of the LifeGen Technologies. She, however, was duped into carrying dangerous pregnancy that would ruin her life forever. As soon as she

gave birth, the baby was taken away from her without even being allowed to kiss it goodbye (203). The act made her go crazy. To further aggravate her already sore situation, she had developed deadly cancer because of being exposure to radiation for such a lengthy period. It can thus be concluded that the LifeGen did not consider the feelings or safety of the inmates. Some were subjected to horrendous pain as part of experiment (8, 145). There were burnings, electric shock, poisoning, disembowelling and reconstructing; all done without “numbing medicine or anaesthesia” (66-67).

Exploitation is inseparable from slavery. On the one hand exploitation is a mechanism where a person who controls a resource enlists the effort of others in generating of value by means of that resource, but excludes the others from the full value added by their effort (Tilly 98). Slavery on the other hand involves acquisition and ownership of fellow human beings, recognized as chattel, with an aim of exploiting them. Slavery can be an institutionalized enterprise like the Trans-Atlantic slave trade (Sum and Kisurulia 1). It can also be a clandestine operation practised by certain individuals outside the law. The LifeGen Corporation, for instance, acquires its slaves by trickery or in connivance with rogue operatives and agencies of various governments. Mmuo was a member of radical student group called WaZoBia which was against the foreign oil companies which continually exploited Nigerian oil wealth in connivance with the corrupt military government while the ordinary Nigerians wallowed in poverty

(*TBP* 117). The WaZoBia planned coup against the corrupt regime but it was foiled and the members were killed or captured. Mmuo was captured and spirited away to the United States where he ended up at Tower 7 (120). In this case Mmuo and members of group were victims of corrupt regime and foreign oil companies which were uncomfortable with their political agitations.

That the LifeGen Technologies thrives in exploitation of the inmates comes to light in the story of HeLa, Vera, and Saeed. HeLa was the sole survivor from an island swallowed up by water in India (*TBP* 186). The LifeGen found that she was immortal and that her blood could be injected to veins of other people to enable them attain immortality too (187). The corporation therefore makes a lot of money selling her blood to those who can afford. Vera Thomas fell into trap of exploitation when she was duped into agreeing to carry an implanted “project” embryo (202). The baby she carried was special; it emitted radiation which progressively damaged Vera’s organs and by the time the baby was born, her health had deteriorated irremediably (205). The LifeGen succeeded in facilitating reproduction of “special person” but at the cost of Vera’s life (202). As she was no longer of any use, Vera was dumped in special correctional facility where she would stay until her eventual death (203).

Phoenix was created to be the ultimate human weapon (*TBP* 27). She was created to be used for nuclear or biological warfare (41). Phoenix could generate

tremendous, destructive heat that could lay waste buildings and vaporize water bodies. She could, in the process, burn up but would later rise from ashes like the mythical Phoenix (33). Undoubtedly, Phoenix would be deployed as human nuclear deterrent and the LifeGen Corporation would surely make vast gains financially and in influence. In addition, there is harvesting and selling of body parts of some of the inmates (*TBP* 169). The inmates involved are special non-aging children of African origin whose body parts can grow again after being removed (170). It can thus be observed that LifeGen Technologies was all about exploitation and slavery.

While *The Book of Phoenix* preoccupies itself mainly with imaginative evaluation of futuristic social realities, it nonetheless gives a momentary glimpse into some of the major historical injustices. The text re-enacts Trans-Atlantic slavery and the Nazi Holocaust of 1940s. The two historical events represent the darkest moments in the world history. The periods are characterised by a systematic exclusion, abuse, exploitation, degradation and decimation of people based on racial convictions. Trans-Atlantic slavery was characterised by organized capture of Africans and transportation to America through the Middle Passage (Sum and Kisurulia 1). The decision to sanction the capture and enslavement the blacks by the Europeans was based an assumption that black people was “hardier race” (Goodell 4).

Holocaust refers mainly to the systematic persecution and murder of European Jews during the period of the Nazi reign in Europe between 1933 and 1945 (Lacqueur xiv). As more territories came under Nazi control in the wake of German lightning victories in the initial stages of Second World War WW2 (1939 – 1945), the mobile killing squads called *Einsatzgruppen* was formed ( Dams and Stolle 119)). The purpose of the *Einsatzgruppen* was to round up the Jews and other “undesirable” population and dispose of them (Laqueur 488; van Tonder 11). The Nazi high command would later scrap this direct, bloody execution and replace it with death camps (Laqueur 488). The death camps or the concentration camps were internment centres where millions of Jews, Gypsies and political prisoners from the Nazi occupied Europe were confined. The inmates at the camps perished from malnutrition, overworking, diseases and murder in gas chambers (36, 67). Medical experimentation was another evil visited upon the inmates interned in the concentration camps (412). Many victims of the experimentation suffered debility, irreversible organ damage and, in either way, they had to be liquidated (414).

The brief accounts of Trans-Atlantic slavery and the Holocaust provided above is not, in any way, meant to be a digression from the subject of the study. It is considered significant as it provides insight into the nature of ideology at work in the current and possible future forms of slavery as envisaged in *TBP*. The reconstruction of slavery and the Holocaust necessarily creates chain which links

past, the present and the future. It shows that the ideology that gave birth to African enslavement in the past could still be active in the distant future as it is in the present. This assumption becomes much clearer in the following excerpt:

To them, I wasn't a human enough to be a threat. I was their tool. I was nothing to worry about or fear. They saw me as they saw Africans made slaves during Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade hundreds of years ago. They saw me as many Arabs saw African slaves over millennium and how some still see African today. The Big Eye didn't think they needed to put leash on me because my leash was in my DNA (*TBP* 136)

The notion that the black race is inferior and should be subjugated and exploited by perceived superior races apparently still exists. The fact that many confinees in the LifeGen's facilities were blacks confirms that Okorafor attempts to construct a form of slavery that re-imagines the Trans-Atlantic slavery. As technology becomes increasing sophisticated, so do modes of recruiting and exploiting slaves. They become less overt and less suspicious but victims are still predominantly black. In the antebellum slavery, the slaves were threatened, brutalized and tormented into submission. In the narrative of his life in slavery, for instance, Douglas explains how a slave master would whip an errant slave till the blood on her naked back start dripping to the floor (6). In the futuristic era depicted in *TBP*, however, the old methods of torture or physical coercion of the slaves into subservience is no longer necessary. The slaves (inmates) are monitored and controlled using chips implanted in their bodies and with help high-tech surveillance system (16). What remain unchanged, however, are the exploitation

and the perception of the black people as subhuman creatures undeserving of any moral consideration.

The inmates at The Towers were veritable slaves inasmuch as they had no control or say over their bodies, destiny or what happens to them. They were there to be exploited and treated in any manner the corporation deemed appropriate, and with no regards for their feelings. Some of them, like Saeed, suffered irreversible alterations to their bodies. Saeed was created to be a human weapon who, in the event of nuclear warfare, would never be affected by radiation or cancer (*TBP* 146). His digestive system, however, would never tolerate the normal food; he could only survive on metal shavings, glass, and crumbles of rust (13). He could easily die from eating the normal food (14).

Certain experimentations were evidently unsafe but this did not deter the Big Eye from carrying on with them anyway. The entire family of Koffi, for instance, perished due to lead poisoning during early stages of experimentations on cybernetic limbs (219). The text also casts spotlight on conditions of predominantly black inmates interned in some correctional facilities closely related to LifeGen Technologies (203). These inmates suffer from various health conditions which have no cure. By all indications, the inmates' health predicaments are linked to the LifeGen.

The above examples therefore affirm that medical research facilities could become theatres of slavery. Slavery in this context can be seen as a system which confers upon an individual or institution a right to absolute authority over another individual's autonomy, body, agency or even fate leading to exploitation of the latter. The racist ideology which gave rise to the human experimentation and other abuses at the Nazi death camps seems to be operating once more at LifeGen's towers. This argument is strengthened by a scene in *TBP* where the Big Eye scientists were watching films of the Holocaust with keen interest (24). It was a horrible film full of death, blood and gore. Phoenix could not help but wonder why the scientists were watching such ghastly films at all (25). The re-enactment of scenes from the Holocaust could be seen as an expression of anxiety about possible recurrence of similar horrors in the future.

#### **4.5.1.3 Marginalisation and Degradation**

Marginalisation is considered one of the most dangerous forms of oppression (Young 63). It involves material deprivation or exemption from useful participation in social life (63). When individuals are displaced to margins of their society, they are likely to see themselves as aliens. Marginalisation leads to degradation of affected population inasmuch as it makes them feel inferior to the relatively advantaged section of population. Degradation generally means the act of lowering ranks or status (*Merriam-Webster Dictionary*). Victims of harassment, intimidation, or ridicule often feel degraded and humiliated (68).

Marginalisation is mainly experienced in group or communal level. The most outstanding case of marginalisation in this study is that of the *Ewu* population. The *Ewu*, as already seen, are subjected to marginalisation because they are descendants of Okeke and Nuru parents. In the socio-cultural setting depicted in *WFD*, it is almost scandalous for Nuru and Okeke to intermarry or even have an affair. This state of affairs arose because of the bloody conflict that had existed between the two ethnic groups for long. Most of the *Ewu* living among the Okeke are the product of rape. Onyesonwu for instance was conceived as a result rape of her mother by a Nuru soldier (19). The *Ewu* are marginalised and hated by both the Nuru and the Okeke.

The *Ewu* living among the Okeke basically have no meaningful social life. Even the few friends they have do not trust them entirely. Other than Mwita who was a fellow *Ewu*, Onyesonwu had three other friends — Luyu, Diti, and Binta. The four girls share special bond that developed during the Eleventh rite (40). Even then Onyesonwu had to constantly endure sarcastic and dehumanising remarks from Diti. During one of their fights, Diti denigrates Onyesonwu by comparing her to an animal (208). The words burned inside Onyesonwu's "like regurgitated bile" (212). She was sick of hearing such degrading remarks, and it hurt more when they came from people who were supposed to be her close friends (209).

No matter how attractive or well behaved they were, the *Ewu* were not likely to be accepted for marriage to any “normal” Okeke (*WFD* 10). No one would sanctions such marriage because it would mean according *Ewu* full acceptance and recognition as member of the society. The *Ewu* were outcasts who brought shame to their families (32, 48). Because of this, most of them had to move away from their homes to live in more tolerant and liberal places like Banza town. Even then, it is apparent that they could never find decent means of earning a living and had to resort to indecent vocations like prostitution (223). It also apparent from what happened to Onyesonwu that the *Ewu* are liable to be raped or treated indecently in public places and no one would defend them (220). The treatment of the *Ewu* people as prostitutes and outcasts amounts to degradation of their humanity.

Degradation is also experienced at the communal level. This occurs among the Okeke people. The constant violence directed at the Okeke by the Nuru has gradually worn down their self-dignity. Many of them had lost will to fight or flee (*WFD* 365). The parents no longer cared to look after their children adequately and instead turned to drugs in order to forget their tribulations (365). Many of them had neglected themselves and their bodies smelled like faeces because of drugs they smoked (365). All these attest to the fact that continued attacks, intimidation and harassment does indeed lead to degradation the victims.

#### **4.5.2 The Gothic Mode and Oppression**

Oppression is undoubtedly one of the principal concerns of Okorafor's fiction. As already discussed in previous section, oppression appears in different forms. One of the most consistent patterns in modes of oppression is the tendency to dehumanise the victims of oppression. Dehumanisation is a response to a situation where one wants to harm another person or group of people but is restrained by inhibitions against harming them (Livingstone 101). Dehumanisation provides ways of overcoming such inhibitions by questioning humanity of the targeted group (101). Sometimes this happens when the targeted group are deliberately deprived of essence which would make complete human beings. One clear instance in Okorafor's fiction is when LifeGen's staff chose to refer to the confinees using impersonal pronouns "it" (*TBP* 170). This particularly happened to a confinee called HeLa who, as the text states, was a perfectly normal woman (170). Apparently the guard assigned to HeLa was falling in love with her and the top researchers thought such development would not be good for the establishment. Dehumanizing the inmates therefore was meant to discourage any cozy relationship between them and the staff.

Dehumanisation deprives individuals of their humanity transforming them into monsters instead. Monster is at the core of Gothic art (Punter and Byron 263). Okorafor therefore appropriates the Gothic concept of monster to explore development of concepts and belief systems which lay ground for social

oppression. Apart from dehumanisation, there are other Gothic elements which significantly assist in the reinforcement of the theme of oppression in Okorafor fiction. They include horror, terror, superstition and setting.

Horror and terror are some of the most recurrent motifs in written works Gothic (Botting 46, 48). These two elements not only amplify enormity of oppression in the texts, but also highlight severity and intensity with which it is committed. The experiences which inspire horror and terror in Okorafor's fiction include the chilling murders committed by Okototo and the materialization of *Ekwensu* devil (AW 19, 324). Ethnic conflict between Nuru and Okeke and barbaric treatment of the confinees at LifeGen's towers also inspire feelings of terror and horror.

To visualize the motif of terror and horror better, the inhuman treatment of the confinees in at LifeGen's towers can serve as perfect examples. The inmates at LifeGen's towers were subjected to electric shocks, poisoning, disembowelling and reconstructing (*TBP* 67). All these were done without the use of anaesthesia (67). One of the inmates called Mmuo had his skin peeled off and then grafted back without the use of numbing medicine (145). The fact that all these were done without anaesthesia make the experiences extremely horrifying (67). Some of those who had experienced such barbarity in the hands of Big Eye scientists preferred death than continue living as speciMen (187). Horrible treatment of inmates in Tower 7 in the guise of "getting information about" them is no

different from story in *The Monk* where Ambrosio imprisons poor Antonia in the underground vaults of monastery and rapes her in order to satisfy his carnal lust (Botting 50). The display of terror and horror in the magnitude described above situates Okorafor's selected novels in continuum of Gothic tradition.

The element of superstition is also significantly appropriated in Okorafor's fiction. Superstition is a major aspect of African folklore and Gothic fiction. Curses and omens, for instance, are instrumental in the development of the theme of oppression. The tribulations of the Okeke are supposedly attributed to God's curse on them for sins committed by their ancestors a long time ago (*TBP* 3; *WFD* 100). The Nuru takes advantage of the curse to justify their attacks and oppression of the Okeke people (*WFD* 100). The persecution of the *Ewu* too is influenced certain beliefs and superstitions. There is, for example, a belief among the Jwahirians that one who is born of violence inevitably becomes violent (32). This belief justified the abuse and the exclusion of the *Ewu* throughout the Okeke territories.

Motif of omen manifests itself clearly in Onyesonwu's extraordinary dreams and visions. In one of the dreams she saw her own death through lynching (*WFD* 136). The dream was fulfilled later when she was dragged into a hole and stoned for causing death all the men in Durfa (*WFD* 411). Onyesonwu experiences a great deal of suffering from her ominous nightmares and visions. She is sure that her

death through lynching is inevitable. Furthermore, she has visions of a thing with red eye which wants to harm her (69, 71). She was later to learn that the thing in her visions is her biological father Daib Yagoub (251). From all these instances, therefore, it makes sense to conclude that the theme of oppression and suffering could not have been developed fully without the appropriation of the Gothic element of superstition.

Setting also presents itself as one of the most pre-eminent Gothic elements appropriated to elucidate the theme of oppression. The towers in *The Book of Phoenix*, for example, are associated with sufferings of many people confined within its walls. The towers in many ways resemble the haunted Medieval castles which were the common feature in pioneer Gothic works (Botting 2). Having survived for centuries, the LifeGen's towers not only houses staff, equipment, and inmates; but it also houses memories which have gathered during the entire stretch of time. It is at Tower 7 that the chilling memories about the Nazi Holocaust and Trans-Atlantic Slavery are re-enacted (25,136). Judging from the reactions of inmates who were watching Holocaust slides on the large screens, they must have been shaken to the core. The interruption of the past into present as noted in many works of Gothic arguably fulfils the Gothic design that past is never fully surmounted (Botting 1). The images associated with Trans-Atlantic slavery and the Nazi Holocaust of 1940s therefore portend a return of race-spawned evils of the past during the contemporary time and in the future.

The two hundred year- old Tower 7 is described as being both home and prison (*TBP* 7). It is associated with abomination because the aggressive scientific research works taking place there led to creation of freaks and monsters which are collectively referred to as abomination (8, 11). With the numerous floors and rooms housing the slaves, freaks, creatures, and staff members; the tower easily recreates an atmosphere of fear and suspense reminiscent of gloomy Gothic castles with “hidden passageways” common in early Gothic works (*TBP* 7, Botting 2). The dark winding passageways of the Gothic castles where hapless victims of villainous tyrants are imprisoned are indirectly represented in the towers (Botting 52). The Tower 7 for instance is a vast structure with many floors, rooms and corridors. Its state of art security system and ever present security agents monitoring every move and behaviour of the inmates makes it almost impossible to escape (*TBP* 9, 22).

#### **4.5.3 Redemption and Resistance**

Black politico-cultural aspirations envisioned in Afrofuturism include rooting for the purely Black perspective in the contested imaginable future (Womack 7-9). But while this includes reflecting on oppressive practices which dent the Black’s self-image, it also involves highlighting strategies which counteract such practices. Okorafor’s fiction indeed portrays transformative resistance to oppressive forces as an ultimate redemptive strategy which assures prospective future for the black people.

Resistance against oppressive figure is highlighted in Okorafor's fiction. Okorafor appropriates the Gothic mode to facilitate the identification and the punishment of villain. Gothic mode allows villains to indulge in evil for considerable length of time before finally handing them deserving punishment (Kilgour 8). This is line with Gothic's objective of exposing vice, punishing it, and restoring the virtue (8). In *WFD*, the Nuru led by Daib Yagoub organize campaigns of massacre, torture and rape against their Okeke people. At the end however the real villain, Daib, is exposed as the following excerpt shows:

“It's easy to work juju on soldiers. They become like cows, producing and producing milk. Me? I prefer to bash an Okeke woman's head in after I've had her. Except your mother.” His smile faltered. His eyes went far away. I enjoyed her. I didn't want to kill her. She should have given me a great, great son...” (*WFD* 395)

Daib manipulates his soldiers and misleads his community to hate the Okeke in order to achieve his selfish agenda of annihilating the latter. His plans however fail at the end when the lies are exposed and he is defeated by Onyesonwu (399, 410).

There is an involvement of the supernatural being in the punishment of the villain. This is a common practice in works of Gothic fiction. Part of Gothic agenda has been to restore belief in the divine mysteries (Botting 15). This Gothic ideal has evidently been appropriated by Okorafor. The ultimate defeat of Daib, for instance, did not happen only through the power of Onyesonwu; it also involved “something wholly outside of and unconcerned with humanity” (*WFD* 398). The

entity being indirectly referred to here is Ani (God). It signals Daib's downfall as part of the divine retribution. In *The Book of Phoenix* too, the destruction of the LifeGen Technologies and the entire wicked world by the hands of Phoenix Okore is compared to divine wrath (*TBP* 221). Phoenix calls herself "Ani's soldier" commanded to "wipe the slate clean" (220).

According to Carroll, the confrontation and defeat of monster in works of fiction could be read as restoration of normality (200). Monsters in many works of Gothic fiction represent villains (Botting 18). By the sheer enormity of their evil, the LifeGen's scientists were veritable monsters. The normality that is anticipated when the villain is removed includes the restoration divine order and justice for the oppressed. With the defeat of Daib, peace reigns once more between the Nuru and Okeke (*WFD* 413). This also implies that the mixed-race population stigmatized as *Ewu* will claim their place in the society as bona fide citizens.

Oppression leads to gradual erosion of humanity of the oppressed. It has also been noted that slavery and exploitation that take place in the LifeGen's facilities are largely premised on dehumanisation of the inmates. This process is facilitated in various ways. First the inmates are all classified as speciMen (*TBP* 9). This classification renders them separate from the rest of humanity. One notes the consistent use of pronoun "it" by the LifeGen's staff to refer one inmate called HeLa (170). HeLa is a perfectly normal woman interned in Tower 4. The security

agent in charge of HeLa was warned not to talk her but to always keep his gun trained at her (170). The use of impersonal pronoun to refer to HeLa apparently is meant to deny her humanity and stop any “normal” human being from socializing with her.

The most appropriate step to redeem the dehumanised bodies therefore is humanisation. The first phase of Phoenix’s humanisation starts when she escapes from Tower Seven, flies to Africa, and lands on the coast of Senegal where she is given a hearty welcome by a woman (*TBP* 58). The woman she meets is not afraid of her wings (58). She tries to introduce Phoenix to Islamic religion insisting that she must wear the burka for it is freedom (59). That a woman welcomes Phoenix and accepts her despite her uniqueness signals that she regards Phoenix as human. In Ghana, Phoenix finds more acceptance as people she encountered all welcomed and hugged her (60). She is given a new name “Okore” which means eagle in the local language (62). Phoenix then meets a man called Kofi whom she becomes romantically involved (65). Kofi makes Phoenix realise that she is not only an ordinary human being, but she is also God’s creature (80 81).

To further re-establish the Black’s humanity and bolster idea of Africa as cradle of humanity, Okorafor devises a concept of the Black as “traceable direct descendant of Mitochondrial Eve” (*TBP* 97). She uses a character named Lucy, an

adopted Ethiopian girl who was found to possess complete genetic blueprint of entire human race (97). This argument is meant to give the black people more genuine claim to humanity on account of being the direct descendants of the first human ancestor. The argument could also be seen as an oblique attack against the slavery era racist and pseudo-scientist claims that the black race was inferior and could not possibly share the same origin as more superior Caucasian race (Jackson and Weidman 50-51). If that line of argument is followed, then Okorafor would be implying that the Black race is more superior on account of being direct progeny of Biblical Adam and Eve.

Empowerment is another device utilized to enable redemption of the oppressed. Okorafor appropriates elements of speculative fiction, science fiction and fantasy to critique premises of social injustice and racial ideology. These elements not only provide a space for realisation of many opportunities and capabilities which reside among the oppressed, but also question veracity of dominant discourse. This space transforms uniqueness of many oppressed individuals into strength. The *Ewu*, as represented by Onyesonwu, are ostracized, dehumanized and regarded as “black stain” within the society (*WFD* 14). But as it turns out, Onyesonwu is supremely talented. She is a talented healer, brave fighter, saviour, and peacemaker. She not only helps break the Eleventh rite juju for her friends, but she also heals many dying and wounded Nuru and Okeke people during the war (242, 368-374). Onyesonwu, with the help of her close friend Mwita, risks

her life to defeat Daib (397-400). Onyesonwu finally rewrites The Great Book and succeeds in bringing peace between the warring communities of the Nuru and The Okeke (408-410). In doing all these, she fulfills her role of saviour and peacemaker.

Okorafor similarly appropriates science fiction and speculative fiction to debunk racial myth of the White supremacy and the Black inferiority. In *The Book of Phoenix*, for instance, there is tacit acknowledgement of the Black strength and resilience. Okorafor exploits this fact to facilitate the Black empowerment. The speciMen (inmates), most of whom are black people, are exposed to inhuman medical experimentation and they survive. Mmuo is flayed without the use of anaesthesia; Phoenix is repeatedly burned; and Vera is duped into agreeing to carry a radioactive baby in her womb (*TBP* 145, 17, 202). Despite all these, the victims survived the processes. The ability of the black inmates to undergo such horrendous experimentation and come out alive is an implicit admission of their extraordinary strength and resilience. Even if some of them like Vera succumbed to experiment-related complications later in her life, she had nonetheless demonstrated her resilience.

Empowerment in the text also happens through the association of members of the black race with agelessness and immortality. Agelessness is portrayed using examples of long-lived black children confined at Tower 4 whose organs

regenerated after being removed (169). Some of them were seventy year old yet they stayed children (169). On the issue of immortality, Phoenix and HeLa are provided as good examples. HeLa, a black Indian, was found to be immortal and anybody who is injected with her blood also attains immortality (187). Phoenix on her part is immortal having risen from her ashes after burning up to death (33). Agelessness and immortality as empowerment strategies seem to also take a garb of resistance as they position the black people as saviour. This argument is buttressed by HeLa's confession that she has life in her blood and that her blood "is a river of time" (187). This contrasts sharply with the LifeGen scientists whose unscrupulous or "well-intentioned" actions have caused numerous deaths and sufferings (145, 219).

Transformative or constructive resistance is another strategy utilized to redeem oppressed bodies. This kind of resistance not only overcomes the oppression and punishes the oppressor/oppressive system, but it also aims to re-establish just, cohesive and progressive social system. Constructive resistance involves building ideal social relations and society rather than just tearing or destroying that which one objects to (Sorensen 47-78). Constructive resistance in Okorafor's fiction is manifested by the actions of the oppressed characters. Phoenix's resistance against the LifeGen Technologies, for instance, can be considered constructive because it intended to end "modern day" slavery (*TBP* 206). It aimed at restoring

respect for human dignity and life which apparently had gone down the drain during the two hundred years of LifeGen's reign.

Onyesonwu harbours so much anger and disappointment at the way her community hates her and the mixed-race people in general. Even her friends and close family members sometimes infuriate her or even conspire to harm her (*WFD* 116, 212). Despite all the sufferings she experienced, Onyesonwu did not carry out revenge against her enemies. She instead endeavored to give back love, understanding and sacrifice to ensure her society is transformed into a better place. She remains loyal and magnanimous to her friends. Despite some of her close friends like Diti saying hurtful words to her severally, Onyesonwu still agrees to help them all by breaking the Eleventh rite juju for them (212, 241-48). Onyesonwu heals many sick and wounded Okeke people even though some of them vehemently denounce her for being *Ewu* (366-368).

The crowning moment of her sacrifices is when she had to risk her life to fight Daib and rewrite the Great Book. Onyesonwu was aware of the fate that awaited her, that she would be lynched to death, but she nonetheless made her journey into the heartland of her enemy's territory (*WFD* 136). At the end she defeats Daib, rewrites the Great Book and ends years of bloody ethnic conflict between the Nuru and the Okeke (399, 413). Onyesonwu and her close friends sacrificed their lives so that peace would reign among the Nuru, the Okeke and The mixed-race

(*Ewu*). Onyesonwu's resistance was constructive in that it was a panacea for the ills facing her society like persecution of the *Ewu* and bloody ethnic conflict that had claimed numerous lives.

#### **4.6 Conclusion**

Oppression is generally one of the most significant concerns in Okorafor's fiction. It happens within a communal or ethno-racial setting, instigated by certain norms, worldviews and ideologies which are considered immutable as they constitute foundation of respective cultures. Like in all other aspects of social reality, discourse plays a major role in social oppression by generating language and codes which stigmatize objectify and ostracise others. The society and its stipulated conventions provide paradigms or parameters for determining good or bad, vicious or virtuous, normal or abnormal. Conformity is more than just observing or living up to expectation of society. Sometimes individuals' looks or circumstances surrounding their conception may render them nonconformists. Zahra in *Zahra, the Windseeker*, the mixed-race in *WFD*, and Sunny in *Akata Witch* are all nonconformists by virtue of their unique physical appearances. They are oppressed because social schema of classification excludes them from the communities where they supposedly belong. Nonconformity to the set paradigms is likely to attract some social condemnation, stigmatisation or even violent denunciation. In many works of Gothic, fantasy, or horror fiction; it has been seen that deviations or nonconformity are concretized in monstrous body.

Conformity however becomes a challenge, and a cause for resistance, if social norms and conventions are oppressive to a section of population. In *WFD*, the social provisions regarding the conduct of mixed-race (*Ewu*), their status in society and their treatment are discriminatory and oppressive to the *Ewu* themselves and their loved ones. Those who find themselves at the receiving end of discriminatory social norms and ideologies always have two options available for them: conform and suffer indefinitely or engage in constructive resistance and cling to hope that the society will reform its oppressive ways. In the first option, the status quo remains and the oppressed continue wallowing in state of abjection and suffering like the compliant *Ewu* and speciMen (inmates) in *WFD* and *TBP* respectively. In the second option (resistance), there is chance that one may succeed in eventually transforming the society for the better. The latter may not come easily especially if the social concept being challenged is part of foundational myths. It has been shown that subverting dominant norms and ideologies is tantamount to drifting into domain of the abnormal. A subversive element assumes a form of fictional monster that has to be banished in order to restore order and normality. Despite bottlenecks and blind alleys which characterise paths of resistance, Okorafor shows that it still remains the viable option against oppression.

Okorafor fuses elements associated with indigenous futurism and Afrofuturism in order to recast the themes of oppression and resistance in a way that reflects

African point of view and aspirations. The indigenous futurism and Afrofuturism imagine possible futures through a black cultural lens (Womack 9). These perspectives enable imaginative reconnection with the past and future with view to reconfiguring the present. Within the space provided by these perspectives; oppression is envisioned comprehensively. Oppression is classified as either arising within a community or perpetrated by ethnic and racial ideologies. Oppression is further classified into various modes like slavery, objectification, exploitation, violence, and degradation among others. While these modes of oppression are illuminated Okorafor's fiction, however, opportunities for resistance and redemption of oppressed bodies are also provided.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### 5.0 SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 5.1 Summary

This chapter summarizes all the findings for this study and their implication on the general understanding of the Gothic criticism and its ramification. The chapter particularly revisits all the conclusions of this study which directly relate to the objectives and research questions which the study sought to answer.

The first objective of this study was to explore aspects of Gothic tradition in the literary imagination of Nnedi Okorafor. The investigation set out to trace the evolution of the Gothic genre from being a “fixed genre” serving as “Western fiction-making”, to “a gothic mode” which became pervasive and ubiquitous (Balmain 2; Hogle 7). The findings suggested that pervasiveness and adaptability of the Gothic mode attributes to its remarkable ability to undergo transformation and habituation to certain realities, or diverse geographical and social settings. As the Gothic genre spread into different geographical locations, for instance, it was found that new topics were added into its repertory (Fowler 170; Botting 75). This leads, in some cases, to alteration or transformation of its stock features. The medieval castles that were a common occurrence in the earlier Gothic fiction, for instance, transformed into old haunted houses in the later Gothic fiction (Botting 2). In Nnedi Okorafor’s fiction, however, the Gothic setting is represented by the

two- hundred year old Tower 7 which has been described as being a home as well as a prison to the heroine Phoenix.

Investigation also found that there exists certain similarities between Gothic literature and African oral narratives. They are both noted for their preoccupation with superstitions, legends and folklore, myths, mysteries, and monsters among others (Botting 94; Akivaga & Odaga 52) These similarities explain why it is convenient to appropriate Gothic mode to highlight Africa's complex reality. Nnedi Okorafor, an American-born Nigerian, indeed appropriate Gothic tropes and motifs to recast African challenges and aspirations like ethnic and racial challenges, social oppression, and quest for empowerment.

Among the Gothic motifs found in Okorafor's fiction are setting, plot and journey. The findings revealed that Gothic setting indeed exists in Okorafor's fiction, especially in *The Book of Phoenix*. The two-hundred year Tower 7, described as being a home as well as a prison, certainly possess the hallmarks of Gothic home. This is because it is very old, has numerous floors, entrapping, and creates atmosphere of fear and suspense (7, 66). These features parallel the old, bleak Gothic castles with "hidden passageways" where heroines were imprisoned and threatened by tyrannical males (Botting 2; Wallace & Smith 3).

It was also observed that journey motif indeed plays an important role in Gothic fiction. In pioneer Gothic fiction, it was a means of escaping from entrapment or confinement instigated by the male protagonist (Punter & Byron 278). Such role is also apparent in Okorafor's *TBK* when Phoenix is escaping from entrapment in Tower 7. Journeys described in Okorafor's fiction are often portrayed as perilous and epic in nature. Protagonists embark on journeys in quest for an empowerment, self-delivery, self-rediscovery, and sometimes to fulfill a divine mission. In the course of their journey, they indeed discover their unique abilities, vanquish their enemies and liberate their people from oppression. Onyesonwu, for instance, leaves her village on a treacherous mission that sees her come face to face with her father who is also her mortal enemy; defeats him, rewrite *The Great Book* and liberate her people the Okeke from decades of bloody ethnic feud with the Nuru (*WFD* 410). Onyesonwu left her village of Jwahir as a despondent, downtrodden and despised *Ewu* girl but ended her journey a heroine, a peacemaker and saviour (413). One notable difference between Okorafor's heroines and the heroines of the pioneer Gothic fiction is that the former possess more strength and fortitude to withstand and fight challenges set against them. The earlier heroines were depicted as being overly emotional, sentimental, given to the refinements of the eighteenth century where fine feeling were signs of virtue and nobility, and inclined to faint at "the smallest shock"(Botting 42).

In seeking to highlight the challenges facing the female, Okorafor appropriates the elements of female gothic. One of the main features of the female gothic is a heroine who is pursued, threatened and often imprisoned by tyrannical male (Wallace and Smith 3). Okorafor's selected novels represent the plight of the female in a number of circumstances. First, they are major victims of forced confinement and horrible treatment as guinea pigs in LifeGen's research facilities (*TBP* 9, 11). Secondly, they are got up in the cross fire of ethno-racial hostilities between the Nuru and the Okeke and as a consequence suffer not only from brutal rape, but also from stigma associated with the rape (*WFD* 19-24). Thirdly, they bear brunt of retrogressive cultural practices like female circumcision and enforced chastity. Lastly, the female are subjected to discrimination because of their strange physical appearance like weird hair or albinism (*ZTW* 10; *AW* 23). Some of these harrowing experiences align the victims with the archetypal damsels in distress (Punter and Byron 279). Okorafor, however, chooses to portray her heroines as strong characters who do not flee from oppressive situation as in the earlier Gothic fiction, but confront the tyranny head on (Wallace & Smith 6; *WFD* 221, 393).

Another aspect of Gothic tradition in Okorafor's fiction is subversion. The Gothic genre from its inception was deemed retrogressive and subversive in that it valorized concepts and ideas like fantasy and superstition which then were considered barbarous and retrogressive. Such ideas were considered to

responsible for the slackening moral and rational fibres which bound ordered the society (Botting 3). Okorafor's fiction is indeed constructed around illegitimate power, violence, monstrosity, perversion and superstition. The activities of villains like LifeGen's scientists in *TBP*; Otokoto in *AW*; and Daib in *WFD* generally centre on violence, monstrosity and perversion. These villains are however vanquished at the end in line with the Gothic's core aims of ultimately defeating vice and restoring morality, virtue and reason (Kilgour 30).

As a shadow that haunts the dominant realities in a given social setting, the Gothic invites a rethinking and re-evaluation of dominant regimes of truth and systems of thinking. On the one hand it may, for instance, question the validity of dominant, oppressive norms like female circumcision, enforced chastity and discrimination of mixed-race population as seen in *Who Fears Death*. On the other hand it may try to reconstruct divine mysteries and recuperate the pasts that are considered to have guaranteed unity, stability and virtuous living. This happens particularly at the time when a society is seemingly drifting away from virtuous and principled living in favour of selfish pursuit of wealth, knowledge and fame like in the case of LifeGen's scientists in *TBP*. In seeking to carry out these roles, the Gothic assumes subversive nature as it contradicts the dominant realities.

Recuperation of pasts through depiction of customs, divine mysteries and adventures are some of the ways through which the Gothic mode manages to

arouse the nostalgia. Okorafor fiction, for instance, creates a futuristic society where the knowledge of the ancient Nigerian art of sorcery, the *Juju*, is considered an empowerment (*AW* 32; *WFD* 154). In the world created in the texts, masquerades, flying reptiles, spirits, shape-shifters, and monsters exist side by side with the modernity and social realism (*WFD* 298-332; *AW* 324). By opening the portal through which the past can be accessed, Okorafor affords her readers an opportunity to reconnect and experience the African unique past of adventure, divine order, miracles and cosmic unity. It is also an implicit invitation to the societies depicted in the text to inculcate the past moral ideal, humanity, divine rules in everyday life.

The earlier Gothic had re-enacted the medieval past and its aesthetics also as an attempt to reintroduce the “organic wholeness” that had largely waned with the rise of the Enlightenment. Organic wholeness is experienced where individuals are defined by their membership to a larger society (Kilgour 10). Okorafor’s fiction indeed expresses desire for the organic wholeness through tribulations of the excluded individuals like Zahra, Onyesonwu and Sunny. Lack of the organic unity can be considered a bane to African social progress and futuristic aspirations as it thwarts any attempt to tap into potentials of certain members of a society who are considered peculiar or unique. The three female characters mentioned above suffered unjust alienation and persecution.

Sense of uncanny is another Gothic element found in Okorafor's fiction. According to Botting, uncanny situation is created where there is a palpable sense of terror, macabre and gloom that seems to suffuse the whole landscape creating an atmosphere of fear and dread (1). An atmosphere of fear and dread in Okorafor's *Akata Witch* is created; for instance, by the presence of murderous sorcerer called Black hat Otokoto on the prowl who is always kidnapping and killing children for rituals (19). Elements of macabre and morbid are generated by graphic and explicit descriptions of death, decay and desolation. *WFD* for instance uses graphic images like gore, blood and intestines to describe the bloody nature of the war between the Nuru and the Okeke (161). The sense of uncanny in the above scenarios is elicited by threat to the order and conformity by the unchecked activities of powerful villainous individuals like Otokoto, or wicked warlords like Daib who instigates ethnic cleansing.

The second objective of the study was to investigate the significance of monstrous (re)presentation in the texts. The investigations revealed that monster as used in fictional works refers to a large, imaginary creature often ugly and frightening. Monsters in fantastic works are often associated with warning or omen (Asma 13). The term has also been applied to ordinary human beings who are cruel, evil, or inhuman. In other words, the monster represents an entity which apparently is unfaithful to both natural and social order. By virtue of their uncanny, scary

appearances or inhuman nature, monsters are predisposed to cause fear or terror among the ordinary human they encounter.

The findings indicated that the monster's physical nature is a composite of parts which naturally belong to categorically distinct creatures. The conflation of those parts can be either continuous (as in fusion monsters) or discontinuous (in fission monsters). Fusion monsters are interstitial—they combine attributes that are considered to belong to categorically distinct entities (Carroll 33). The monsters in this category include the winged human beings in *The Book of Phoenix* (11). In the fission beings category, the categorically distinct entities inhabit one body but in different times. Shape-shifting human beings, the *Eshu*, in *Who Fears Death* can be said to belong to the category of fission beings because they possess ability to transform into different creatures at any time.

The findings also showed that monstrous nature can be ascribed onto ordinary human bodies either through projection or when they are perceived to have engaged in extremely wicked, inhuman or subversive acts. The *Ewu* people, for instance, were ascribed evil, abnormality, violence and pain. It is, however, apparent that they were not truly evil or abnormal. The *Ewu* were victims of projection and scapegoating. This affirms an assumption that monstrous body can be considered a site where projected ideological crisis, social anxieties and fears are embodied (Wright 27; Ng 5). Villainous characters like Otokoto in *AW* and

Daib in *WFD*, however, can be genuinely considered monstrous as their actions are wicked, inhuman and subversive.

The findings established that monsters in Okorafor's fiction are characterized by several unique features which include peculiarity of their countenance and agency, otherness, embodiment of desire, transgressive nature, uncanniness, liminality, and abjectness. These aspects underline enigmatic nature of monsters, and highlight their opposition to nature and social order. Okorafor's monsters are characterized by physical attributes which are either unfaithful to nature or contradictory to society's perception of perfect human nature. One of the main reasons for their peculiarity is liminality or hybridity. As liminal beings, monsters fuse attributes of human and beast, human and supernatural or the dead and the living. As such, they "resist any attempt" to be included in "classificatory order of things" (Cohen 6). Phoenix, for instance, cannot be categorized as a full human because she possesses wings. Monster's agency has also been portrayed to be peculiar in that, in many cases, it tends to exceed that of the ordinary human beings. Phoenix's intellectual capacity and physical strength, for instance, has been shown to be way above that of the ordinary human characters in the text.

The investigation further found out that monstrous presence serves three major functions: warning against subversion of societal moral codes; revealing the will of God/ gods; and exposing limitations of human knowledge (Weinstock 1). All

these functions can be condensed into one major role — policing of boundaries. As a monster, for instance, Phoenix spearheads an aggressive attack against LifeGen Technologies (The Big Eye) and its co-conspirators leading to their total annihilation. She thus becomes a monster of prohibition as she warns against unscrupulous scientific adventurism, inhumanity, moral decadence, and desire for transcendence. The defeat of the Big Eye reinforces Gothic desire to re-imagine order and morality centered on the divine and metaphysical principles (Botting 31).

As an embodiment of desire, the study established that monsters indeed possess special capacities to evoke “potent escapist fantasies” (Cohen 17). Since its inception in the early Gothic fiction, the monster has always been constructed as an agent of subversion and transgression. Since they are not subject to prevailing social norms and conventions, monsters’ transgressive actions, at times, push boundaries and in the process evoke certain desires, often amoral, from among the morally upright individuals. The monster opens up doors to possibilities of wish fulfillment; facilitates an access to freedom secretly yearned; and enables attainment of “escapist delight” (Cohen 17). Onyesonwu, for instance, has been portrayed as an agent of sexual wish fulfillment. She successfully reverses the Eleventh rite for her friends Luyu, Diti and Binta thereby enabling them satiate their sexual desires in total contravention of Jwahirian social norms (*WFD* 248).

The study also revealed that monsters can be associated with the abject. The term abject is used to refer to concept “that describes all that is repulsive and fascinating about bodies” (Tyler 27). They include those bodily experiences which unsettle integrity of the body and one has to separate himself or herself from in order to live (3). Abject is not only limited to bodily experiences but also to anything which disturbs identity, system and order (4). There are elements of the abject in Okorafor’s monsters. The monstrous beings in *Tower 7*, for instance, physically offend by their disgusting looks which results from their deformities and liminality (*TBP* 11). The *Ewu* (mixed-race individuals) and the albinos in Okorafor’s novels like *Sunny* are considered the abject because they disturb identities of their respective communities. *Ewu* are portrayed as fearsome and disgusting with “unhealthy skin” and “foul odour” (*WFD* 32, 61).

Finally, monsters are identified by their propensity to harm or frighten. This is so because monsters are assumed to naturally belong in the realm of the uncanny and are therefore bound to evoke a certain degree of fear and dread (Beal 4). Okorafor’s fictional world is roamed by masquerades, winged humans, and baleful creatures without names lurking in seas and rivers. Human beings can also evoke the feeling of the uncanny when their physical attributes and certain aspects of their habits are dreadfully odd or fearful.

The third objective of the study was to find out the relevance of Gothic mode in delineation of ethno-racial realities of oppression. The investigations showed that oppression is indeed one of the most significant concerns of Gothic fiction (Punter & Byron 288). Oppression occurs in many forms notably exclusion, physical persecution, or speech. Language, for instance, plays a major role in the construction of social reality (Halliday 2). *Ewu* term as used in Okorafor's *Who Fears Death* has a negative connotation and its use to refer to an individual or a group recasts their image in negative light. The term implies that the targeted individuals are violent, abnormal, aberrant and outcast (WFD 21, 32, 220). It is therefore an oppressive term.

The findings showed that oppressive treatment of individuals stems from the belief that their actions, whether conscious or unconscious, contravene the stipulated social norms and conventions. It also stems from an assumption that they are unnatural, nonhuman, or their existence portend evil or doom for a society. Members of these groups are therefore regarded as abnormal and monstrous, and should therefore be kept away from ordered society. Deviations from the stipulated social code or from the nature are concretized in monstrous body (Carroll 16). The 'normal' human body, however, is often considered "an ideal physical and symbolic" representation of "certainty and order" in a given society (Wright 48). The impulse to exclude, eliminate or subject the supposed abnormal, monstrous or nonconforming individuals to any form of suffering, is

apparently propagated by a need to restore or maintain the order and certainty in a society. All the sufferings the characters like Onyesonwu, Sunny, Zahra, Phoenix, or Mmuo undergo relate to the fact that they are considered nonhuman, different, uncanny, or abnormal. Nonconformity, subversiveness or difference are not the only reason for the oppression. Textual evidence shows that the characters like Onyesonwu and Zahra also victims of shadow projection and scapegoating.

Demand for Conformity, however, is not without challenges. The findings confirm that certain perspectives, ideologies or norms adopted and held sacrosanct by a given society are often flawed or oppressive to some members of the society. Yet every bona fide member of the society is expected to conform to them or risk being labelled as subversive. The Jwahirian female circumcision rite and the culture of despising and tormenting the *Ewu* are portrayed as inherently erroneous. Yet anyone who showed any inclination to defend the cause of the *Ewu*, or chose to become their close companion was threatened with dire consequences. When Onyesonwu's close friends chose to accompany her on the trip to desert, they were severely reprimanded and threatened (*WFD* 182). Transforming an individual's peculiarity, difference or nonconformity into abnormality or monstrosity has been portrayed as flawed social concept. That is why many oppressed characters in the above text have been portrayed as heroes or heroines.

The study delved deeper into the theme of oppression to reveal its ramification, and how the oppressed bodies are finally redeemed through constructive/transformative resistance. The role of Afrofuturism and indigenous futurism in elucidation of the black people's sufferings was brought into focus. Through Afrofuturist perspective, for instance, the sufferings are depicted and magnified into such a scale that they culminate in an apocalypse. Within the Afrofuturist and African futurist spaces; racist, inter-communal and intra-communal oppressions are profoundly highlighted. There for instance the racist exploitation of the Blacks as specimen (guinea pigs) in LifeGen's facilities; the brutal persecution of the dark-skinned Okeke by the Nuru tribe (Arabs); and the oppression of individual like Onyesonwu, Zahra, and Sunny due to the perceived peculiarity of their physical attributes or characters.

The findings shed light on various modes of oppression in Okorafor's fiction namely objectification, violence, exploitation, marginalization, and degradation. Objectification for instance, implies regarding and treating an individual as violable, fungible, inert, commodifiable/ transferable, unfeeling and serviceable (Nussbaum 257). Objectification often gives rise to acts of violence such as rape, killing, maiming, destruction, beating, intimidation, harassment, and degradation (Young 68). In Okorafor's fiction, objectification manifests itself in Nuru's violence against the Okeke, and in the barbaric treatment of the inmates at LifeGen's facilities. Nuru's assault on the Okeke for instance was characterised

by the widespread killings, rape, torture and destruction (*WFD* 19-24). Another form of violence identified above is degradation. Degradation is basically aimed at deliberately lowering one's dignity, worth or humanity. Weaponization of rape by the Nuru was a calculated measure to degrade the Okeke women and make the Okeke men feel emasculated. The mixed-race *Ewu* also suffer the same fate in the hands of Okeke people. They are degraded and marginalised to the extent that some of them have accepted to live as outcasts and prostitutes (*WFD* 220).

Slavery and exploitation also operate within structures of dehumanization. This is because slavery is predicated on violability, serviceability and insensateness of the targeted bodies. The investigation indeed showed that LifeGen staff in *TBP* treated their inmates like slaves devoid of feelings, autonomy and agency. They carried out any form of experimentations on them no matter how unsafe or painful they were. For them, the inmates were objects to be used to achieve results.

Finally, oppression is presented as a dent in an African self-image and a major obstacle to Africa's futuristic aspiration. Thus while the Okorafor's fiction sheds light on modes of oppression; it also highlights counteractive strategies to contain the oppressive practices. Transformative resistance to the oppressive forces is adopted as an ultimate redemptive strategy which assures prospective future for the black people. This kind of resistance aims at not only overcoming the oppression, but also re-establishing just, cohesive and progressive social system.

The findings showed that transformative/ constructive resistance is achieved through direct confrontation with, and defeat of oppressive force; humanization of the dehumanized bodies; and through empowerment of the oppressed. Confrontation with oppressive forces is enacted through active resistance by the oppressed characters like Onyesonwu, Sunny, Phoenix, and Zahra against the oppressors. All these heroines are noted for their strong will and determination to fight against any attempt to demean or persecute them in any way. They embody the spirit of transformative resistance as their actions eventually transform the fortunes of their respective communities. Onyesonwu for instance not only succeeds in ending destructive ethnic feud between the Okeke and the Nuru, but she also helps restore respect and humanity to the denigrated mixed-race *Ewu* population. One also notes that there is an involvement of the supernatural being in the punishment of the villain. This further justifies the resistance as it endorses its efforts to restore the society back to order characterised by recognition of divine authority.

It was noted that oppression led to gradual erosion of humanity of the oppressed. The inmates at Tower Seven, for instance, were called speciMen and often referred to using pronoun “it” (*TBP* 9,170). Such references effectively dehumanized the inmates at the Tower. The most appropriate step to reclaim or redeem such dehumanized bodies, therefore, would be humanization. Humanisation takes place when sullied, degraded, dehumanised or monstrous

bodies are recognised as normal human bodies. The best example that can demonstrate this process of humanisation is Phoenix. Phoenix, a speciMen, escapes from her captivity in the Tower and flies to Africa where on arrival is heartily welcomed, given a home, and new African name (58-62).

The investigations also revealed that redemption can also be realised through an empowerment of the oppressed. Empowerment is largely enabled by turning uniqueness or peculiarities of the oppressed individuals into strength. The *Ewu* individuals like Onyesonwu, for instance, are supremely talented. Onyesonwu is a shape-shifter, talented healer, brave fighter, saviour, and a peacemaker. This kind of empowerment is transformative in that it does not aim at portraying the oppressed as being better than anyone else, but rather affords an opportunity to realise and acknowledge the wide range of opportunities and capabilities which reside among those deemed peculiar, different, monstrous, or unique. Onyesonwu, for instance, has been portrayed as a girl who, in many occasions, was willing use all her abilities and even risk her life in order to help her community despite the fact that the latter was responsible for all her tribulations. She confronts the military commander of the Nuru, Daib, fully aware of fatal consequence of such an act. She does this not only for her own sake, but also to secure a lasting peace between Nuru and Okeke (*WFD* 396, 419). Another purpose of transformative empowerment is to question the veracity of certain social practices, norms and beliefs which tend to oppress certain members of the society. Belief in

monstrosity of the mixed-race children, for instance, added to tribulations of the Okeke people as it not only hurt the mixed-race children but it also victimized their mothers, majority of whom, were victims of rape.

Okorafor's fiction also critiques the Western-based myth of the White superiority and black inferiority by associating characters of African descent with resilience, agelessness, immortality, carriers of complete genetic blueprint of the entire human race, and extraordinary capabilities. This nature of empowerment is broadly expounded in *The Book of Phoenix*. It is enacted through the characters of Phoenix, who is immortal and extraordinarily strong; HeLa, an ageless woman at Tower 4; Lucy, an Ethiopian woman who possesses the complete genetic blueprint of the entire human race; and Mmuo who survives inhuman treatment at Tower 7. This kind of empowerment, however, cannot be seen as an attempt to upstage the White supremacy and replace with the Black supremacy. It is an attempt to install virtues of tolerance and respect for all human beings regardless of colour, peculiarity or creed. It is spurred by notion that all human beings are equal and can contribute positively to global progress. HeLa and the long-lived children at Tower 4, for instance, could help the world reverse the biological process of senescence (*TBP* 169, 186-188). The depiction of Black empowerment is also an implicit indictment on fallacy and dishonesty of racial ideology and ideologues (exemplified by the LifeGen scientists) who readily acknowledge value and extraordinary nature of the black bodies yet continue to trample on their

dignity and doubt their humanity for selfish reasons. Phoenix's resistance and eventual destruction of the LifeGen Technologies and its associates, however, cannot be considered an act of revenge or black uprising against the white barbarity. It is a transformative resistance which aims at ending "modern day" slavery and restoring the world to the order characterised by virtuous living, racial harmony and centrality of divine (*Ani*) authority (*TBP* 220).

## **5.2 Conclusion**

Nnedi Okorafor's fiction, as shown in the selected novels, appropriates motifs and tropes which are generally associated with the Gothic fiction. Utilization of such motifs and tropes apparently is motivated by the desire to find new ways of recasting Africa's complex reality. Gothic has evolved from being a fixed genre associated with the Western countries to a pervasive mode whose influence can be seen in contemporary African literature, notably Okorafor's fiction. The evolution has seen slight transformations in archetypal Gothic motifs and themes to suit new realities. Gothic can be considered a convenient mode for it shares a number of similarities with African folklore.

Okorafor's fiction appropriates a number of tropes and motifs which are typically Gothic. They include journey, subversion, and sense of uncanny, nostalgia about past occurrences, critique of dominant discourse, morbid and macabre, monsters and villainy among others. Okorafor's novels are also noted for their tendency to

include science fiction elements. Science fiction genre is generally considered an offshoot of the Gothic novel having developed from Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, one of the early Gothic novels. Gothic is often considered retrogressive, contradictory, ominous, or detached from reality. Appropriation of the Gothic elements in the Okorafor's fiction, however, is seen as having played a major role in foregrounding significant concerns like social and racial oppression, empowerment, history and culture, dark side of human life, fragility/temporality of human existence, and need for the divine control.

Okorafor also appropriates the concept of monster and monstrosity. The term monster is often used to refer to a large, fantastic creature often ugly and frightening. It is often applied to ordinary human beings who are considered cruel, evil, inhuman or depraved. Monster, as used in Okorafor's fiction, generally represents an entity which apparently is unfaithful to both natural and social order. Monsters conflate parts or attributes which naturally belong to categorically distinct creatures. Flying reptiles, winged and shape-shifting human beings in Okorafor's fiction can therefore be considered monstrous. In addition, Okorafor represents monstrous beings as embodiment of desire, the abject, the uncanny, and often extraordinary. By virtue of their uncanny, scary or unnatural appearance, monsters are predisposed to cause fear or terror among the ordinary human they encounter. Monster serves significant social roles notably warning against subversion of societal moral codes; revealing the will of God/ gods; and

exposing limitations of human knowledge. In Okorafor's fiction, monsters are represented as embodiment of desire, the abject, the uncanny, and as the warning against transgression of certain boundaries.

Individuals considered monstrous or different in a society are sometimes ascribed evil, abnormality, violence or pain. This attitude lays ground for oppression. In Okorafor's fiction, the oppression occurs in various forms notably exclusion, physical persecution, objectification, violence, exploitation, marginalization, and degradation. It also occurs in form of dehumanization or objectification. This attitude is seen as having laid ground for exploitation through enslavement, rape or being used as guinea pigs in scientific research facilities.

In Okorafor's fiction depicts certain communal settings where 'normal' human body is considered a representation of certainty and order. Those considered peculiar, monstrous, or nonconformist are therefore deemed agents of disorder and thus unfit to be treated as genuine members of a society. Oppression also occurs in form of dehumanization or objectification. This attitude is seen as having laid ground for exploitation through enslavement or rape. The oppression is presented as a dent to an African self-image and a major obstacle to Africa's futuristic aspiration. Okorafor accordingly presents transformative resistance as the best remedy to the condition. The transformative resistance is achieved through direct confrontation with, and defeat of the oppressive force;

humanization of the dehumanized bodies; and empowerment of the oppressed. The ultimate aim of the resistance is to re-establish progressive social system characterised by cohesion, selflessness, tolerance, respect for the nature, and celebration of an individual's uniqueness.

### **5.3 Recommendations for further Research**

The Gothic literature has evolved from being the field associated exclusively with the Western world to the one which is accepted all over the world. African writers and critics, however, are yet to fully acknowledge and embrace Gothic mode as fiction making and as an area of serious literary study. It is the recommendation of this study that African scholars and literary critics should consider carrying out more critical studies on literary works which are considered to Gothic.

Female writing is on the rise in continental Africa and among Africans in the diaspora. As seen in Nnedi Okorafor's fiction, conventions of female Gothic fiction are gradually being applied in African female writing. This is mainly because since its inception, female gothic fiction has proved reliable and appropriate mode for highlighting challenges facing women and offering solutions. This study therefore recommends that African female critics and scholars carry out more studies especially on works which appropriate elements of the female gothic.

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## APPENDICES

## Appendix I: Approval Letter



KENYATTA UNIVERSITY  
GRADUATE SCHOOL



E-mail: [kubps@yahoo.com](mailto:kubps@yahoo.com)  
[dean-graduate@ku.ac.ke](mailto:dean-graduate@ku.ac.ke)  
Website: [www.ku.ac.ke](http://www.ku.ac.ke)

P.O. Box 43844, 00100  
NAIROBI, KENYA  
Tel. 810901 Ext. 57530

## Internal Memo

FROM: Dean, Graduate School

DATE: 30<sup>th</sup> November, 2020

TO: Robert K. Sum  
C/o Department of Literature, Linguistics  
& Foreign Languages  
KENYATTA UNIVERSITY

REF: C82/34751/16

SUBJECT: APPROVAL OF RESEARCH PROPOSAL

This is to inform you that the Graduate School Board at its meeting 18<sup>th</sup> November, 2020 approved your Ph.D. Research Proposal entitled "Gothic Imagination and Construction of Monstrous Bodies in Selected Fictional Works of Nnedi Okorafor".

You may now proceed with your Data collection, subject to clearance with the Director General, National Commission for Science, Technology & Innovation.

As you embark on your data collection, please note that you will be required to submit to Graduate School completed supervision Tracking and Progress Report Forms. The Forms are available at the University's Website under Graduate School webpage downloads.

By copy of this letter, the Registrar (Academic) is hereby requested to grant you substantive registration for your Ph.D. studies.

Thank you

  
REUBEN MURIUKI  
FOR: DEAN, GRADUATE SCHOOL





c.c. Chairman, Department of Literature, Linguistics & Foreign Languages  
Registrar (Academic) Att; Mr. Richard Chweya

Supervisors:

1. Dr. J.K.S. Makokha  
C/o Department of Lit. Linguistics & Foreign Languages  
KENYATTA UNIVERSITY
2. Dr. Speranza Ndege  
C/o Department of Lit. Linguistics & Foreign Languages  
KENYATTA UNIVERSITY

RM/cao

### Appendix II: NACOSTI Research Permit

 <b>REPUBLIC OF KENYA</b>	 <b>NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY &amp; INNOVATION</b>
Ref No: <b>236385</b>	Date of Issue: <b>17/June/2023</b>
<b>RESEARCH LICENSE</b>	
	
<p>This is to Certify that <b>Mr.. Robert Kipkoeh Sum of Kenyatta University, has been licensed to conduct research as per the provision of the Science, Technology and Innovation Act, 2013 (Rev.2014) in Nairobi on the topic: <b>GOTHIC IMAGINATION AND CONSTRUCTION OF MONSTROUS BODIES IN SELECTED FICTIONAL WORKS OF NNEDI OKORAFOR for the period ending : 17/June/2024.</b></b></p>	
License No: <b>NACOSTI/P/23/26566</b>	
Applicant Identification Number <b>236385</b>	 Director General <b>NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY &amp; INNOVATION</b>
Verification QR Code	
	
<p>NOTE: This is a computer generated License. To verify the authenticity of this document, Scan the QR Code using QR scanner application.</p>	
See overleaf for conditions	

**THE SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION ACT, 2013 (Rev. 2014)**  
 Legal Notice No. 108: The Science, Technology and Innovation (Research Licensing) Regulations, 2014

**The National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation**, hereafter referred to as the Commission, was established under the Science, Technology and Innovation Act 2013 (Revised 2014) herein after referred to as the Act. The objective of the Commission shall be to regulate and assure quality in the science, technology and innovation sector and advise the Government in matters related thereto.

**CONDITIONS OF THE RESEARCH LICENSE**

1. The License is granted subject to provisions of the Constitution of Kenya, the Science, Technology and Innovation Act, and other relevant laws, policies and regulations. Accordingly, the licensee shall adhere to such procedures, standards, code of ethics and guidelines as may be prescribed by regulations made under the Act, or prescribed by provisions of International treaties of which Kenya is a signatory to
2. The research and its related activities as well as outcomes shall be beneficial to the country and shall not in any way;
  - i. Endanger national security
  - ii. Adversely affect the lives of Kenyans
  - iii. Be in contravention of Kenya's international obligations including Biological Weapons Convention (BWC), Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO), Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear (CBRN).
  - iv. Result in exploitation of intellectual property rights of communities in Kenya
  - v. Adversely affect the environment
  - vi. Adversely affect the rights of communities
  - vii. Endanger public safety and national cohesion
  - viii. Plagiarize someone else's work
3. The License is valid for the proposed research, location and specified period.
4. The license any rights thereunder are non-transferable
5. The Commission reserves the right to cancel the research at any time during the research period if in the opinion of the Commission the research is not implemented in conformity with the provisions of the Act or any other written law.
6. The Licensee shall inform the relevant County Director of Education, County Commissioner and County Governor before commencement of the research.
7. Excavation, filming, movement, and collection of specimens are subject to further necessary clearance from relevant Government Agencies.
8. The License does not give authority to transfer research materials.
9. The Commission may monitor and evaluate the licensed research project for the purpose of assessing and evaluating compliance with the conditions of the License.
10. The Licensee shall submit one hard copy, and upload a soft copy of their final report (thesis) onto a platform designated by the Commission within one year of completion of the research.
11. The Commission reserves the right to modify the conditions of the License including cancellation without prior notice.
12. Research, findings and information regarding research systems shall be stored or disseminated, utilized or applied in such a manner as may be prescribed by the Commission from time to time.
13. The Licensee shall disclose to the Commission, the relevant Institutional Scientific and Ethical Review Committee, and the relevant national agencies any inventions and discoveries that are of National strategic importance.
14. The Commission shall have powers to acquire from any person the right in, or to, any scientific innovation, invention or patent of strategic importance to the country.
15. Relevant Institutional Scientific and Ethical Review Committee shall monitor and evaluate the research periodically, and make a report of its findings to the Commission for necessary action.

National Commission for Science, Technology and  
 Innovation(NACOSTI),  
 Off Waiyaki Way, Upper Kabete,  
 P. O. Box 30623 - 00100 Nairobi, KENYA  
 Telephone: 020 4007000, 0713788787, 0735404245  
 E-mail: dg@nacosti.go.ke  
 Website: www.nacosti.go.ke