AFROFUTURIST HORROR: AN EXPLORATION OF LIBERATION THROUGH BLACK
HORROR

By

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation is concerned with the growing project of Afrofuturism and its emphasis on visualizing a liberated Black future. Although Afrofuturism is continuing to grow as an aesthetic and critical thinking practice, in literature Afrofuturism tends to ground itself in science fiction and fantasy narratives. Thus, this dissertation fills the need for an Afrofuturist grounding in horror narratives with an emphasis on Black Horror as defined by Robin Means Coleman. Given this gap, as well as our current sociopolitical climate's myth of decolonization being obtained through non-violent means and a shaming of marginalized groups fighting for liberation, this project argues the importance of horror works in complexly imagining a liberated Black future. Using feminist, gender, and sexuality theories, definitions of the horror genre, and Afrofuturism this dissertation coalesces a theory tracing a Black Queer Horror Aesthetic called Afrofuturist Horror. I argue for and create a theory of reading Black Horror works grounded in Afrofuturism to create more nuanced and complex conversations about obtaining liberation that often uses violence and the grotesque. Specifically, this project uses Afrofuturist theories and definitions of horror to read Black Horror works ranging from vampire to slasher, and conjure narratives.

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents and husband.
Thank you for believing in and supporting me.

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Introduction

"I have no speech. No name. I live in the action of death, the blood cry, the penetrating wound. I am destruction. Absolute. Alone."
– Amber Benson as "Tara" speaking for Sineya, The First Slayer, in season four, episode 22 of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (2000)

Like many young girls being raised by a feminist in the 90s, I grew up watching *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. I envisioned myself as Buffy Summers, wielding a stake and channeling magics to fight back the forces of evil. But this fantasy eventually faded when the show attempted portraying Sineya, the First Slayer. In the finale of season four, the Scoobies encounter Sineya in their dreams after channeling her spirit to fight the season's Big Bad. Sineya is a Black woman with "unkempt" dreadlocks and wears, what appears to be, linen bandages like a mummy that do not cover her body. She is covered in sand and ash as if she has lived in the wilds for centuries and has white "tribal" paint covering her face. As a young Black girl, I was cautiously optimistic when Sineya appeared on my television. I was cautious because Kendra (played by Bianca Lawson), the only Black slayer given a real storyline on the show, died by the second episode she appeared, but I was optimistic as a young Black girl seeing someone who looked like her on her favorite show. I was correct to be cautious.

Sineya does not talk throughout the episode and instead is spoken for by a white woman named Tara, a powerful witch on the show. Sineya is associated only with death, destruction, and isolation. It's quickly made clear that her whole purpose is to juxtapose Buffy Summers— dark versus light, human versus inhuman, death versus life. Her positionality echoes the arguments made by Kinitra Brooks in her watershed work on Black women's horror aesthetics, *Searching for Sycorax: Contemporary Hauntings of Black Women's Horror,* where Brooks argues that Black women's renderings in horror are often overly simplistic and that "[B]lack women horror characters are plagued by their construction as a mistreated tool used to further the more careful

and consideration construction of other characters" (Brooks 8). Sineya's silencing and her associations with monstrosity, death, and isolation are tools used to enhance Buffy's complexity by juxtaposing the two slayers. Much like how Brooks found these constructions of Black women in horror problematic, I do as well.
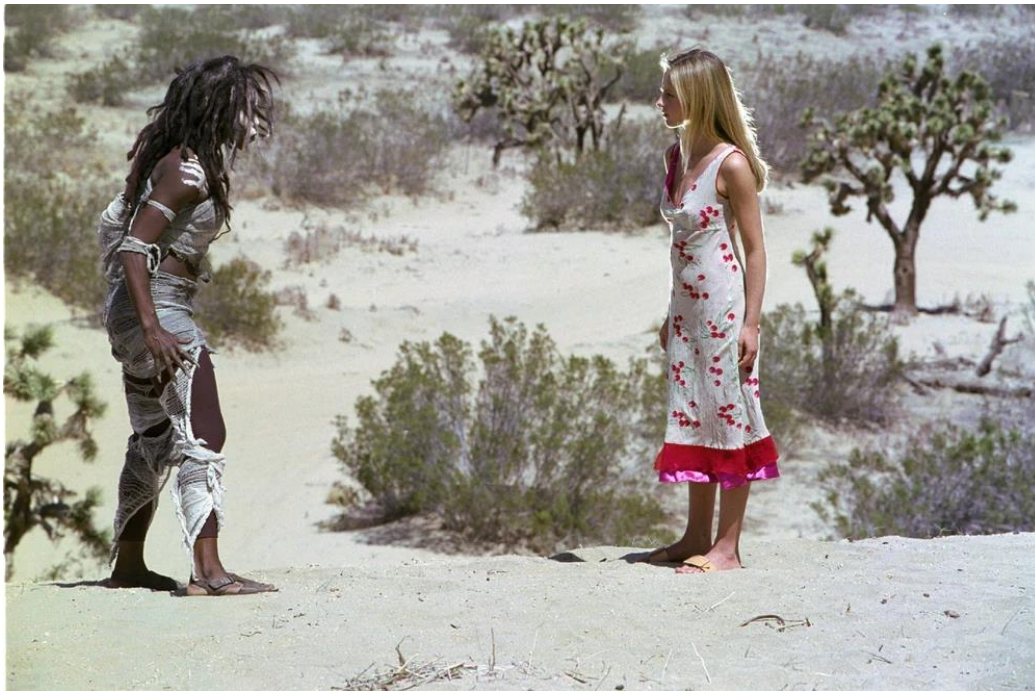

Figure 1. Sharon Ferguson as Sineya, The First Slayer, and Sarah Michelle Gellar as Buffy Summers in season four, episode 22 titled "Restless"; *Buffyverse Wiki;* buffy.fandom.com, 9 June 2010, buffy.fandom.com/wiki/Restless.

I was disappointed that we rarely see Sineya again in the series, but as I got older and learned about the show runner's abuses of power and overall misogynist behavior I was not surprised. And, as a lifelong horror fan, I have come to learn that the only people who can truly get at the complexity of Black culture, experience, history, etc., are Black creators themselves. As Brooks explains, "When black women themselves construct more realistic portraits of black female characters, the risks, stakes, or effects are a more holistic and inclusive depiction of the lived realities of black womanhood" (Brooks 11). In other words, Black creators hold the experiences as participants of Black culture to more holistically and complexly imagine Black

characters in horror. This does not mean that non-Black creators cannot represent or explore Black culture in their horror constructions, as there are plenty of works, some of which I discuss in this project, that do so well. Rather, Black creators as members of and participants of Black culture and its multitudes have the unique ability garnered by their lived experiences necessary to expound on Blackness with more nuance and complexity than someone from an outsider's perspective would be able to.

While I enjoyed *Buffy* and it will always have a special place in my heart, I've grown to love and appreciate Black Horror texts (literature, film, television, etc.) even more as these have allowed myself and other Black people to see ourselves in a future of our own making and have placed us in the horror world as survivors and fighters rather than simply victims or overly-simplified monsters. Sineya was made a monster by the white writers that imagined her, but I believe she could have been so much more if she has been placed in the right hands.

While the history of horror is starkly whitewashed, Black Horror is having a moment; or, as a colleague of mine described it, there is a Black Horror Renaissance happening right now. By Black Horror, I am referring to Robin R. Means Coleman's definition of Black Horror in *Horror Noire* as cultural products that "are informed by many of the same indicators of horror films, such as disruption, monstrosities, and fear," but these films "have an added narrative focus that calls attention to racial identity, in this case Blackness — Black culture, history, ideologies, experiences, politics, language, humor, aesthetics, style, music, and the like" (Coleman 7). Therefore, Black Horror is the primary interest and focus throughout this project.

Black Horror is having a moment, but why? What does it mean that Black Horror films, books, television shows, and comics are saturating popular culture? My immediate response is simply that we need it to have a space where we can safely imagine Black and brown bodies fighting back against oppression since the fighting back that we see in horror films is demonized

in our realities. In Darieck Scott's most recent book, *Keeping it Unreal: Black Queer Fantasy and Superhero Comics* (2022), Scott revisits the important work of fantasy in pop culture stating that "The core meaning of 'fantasy' is drawn from its contrast with what it, precisely by such contrast, helps constitute: reality" (Scott 10). In other words, to fantasize or engage fantastical texts is to imagine a different reality. In Black Horror, another type of fantastical text, this reality can be a place where Black people can act on monstrosity, violently refuse oppression, and we (the viewers) cheer them on.

The ability for Black Horror to challenge reality is an important concern of this project. Furthermore, this project is concerned with how Black Horror serves as a space to imagine complexly liberated Black futures that are especially generative for Black women and/or Queer folks through a critical framework I term *Afrofuturist Horror*. Afrofuturist Horror responds to Kinitra Brooks's seminal work on Black women's horror aesthetics where she states that "the construction of theories of horror must become applicable to both the characterizations of black women and black women horror creators. This more nuanced theorization would serve to strengthen horror studies as a whole and act as a template for future critiques that include the multiple intersections of racially gendered horror constructions" (Brooks 10). In other words, horror studies must expand and shift as cultural shifts happen. Thus, it must consider the large body of work being produced by Black creators themselves in our current moment. While Brooks's work does in fact provide a template for thinking about Black women in horror with more complexity, I expand this template by considering queerness to attend to the intersections of race and gender-as-spectrum rather than gender-as-binary. Further, these considerations of queerness are grounded in an Afrofuturist sensibility that asks us to imagine a world where Black people can and do fight back, by any means necessary, against oppression.

This project fills a gap within the Afrofuturist project that attends to Black Horror critically and extensively. To actively engage within the Afrofuturist project and framework, I center critical and creative Black voices to explore the complex conversations we have about ourselves amongst ourselves and the unique ways that we use horror to speculate about futures created for us by us. In other words, non-Black voices are not prioritized in this project to create an exclusively Black space which is not commonplace in horror studies. In the sections that follow, I first define my theory of Afrofuturist Horror as a Black Horror aesthetic for and by Black women and/or Black Queer folks. I then explain the theoretical frameworks that scaffold the critical framework of Afrofuturist Horror. Finally, I outline the canon, or long past, of Afrofuturist Horror to understand its diasporic concerns and its grounding in a particular American past that begins with the transatlantic slave trade.

Defining Afrofuturist Horror— A Black Queer Horror Aesthetic

Afrofuturist Horror is governed by the tenets of Afrofuturism which are the following: 1) The recovery of lost, hidden, or erased histories of the African diaspora; 2) Highlighting or centering epistemologies, cosmologies, and ontologies of the African diaspora; 3) Emphasizing chronopolitics, or the idea of circular time; 4) Using alternative worlds (like the horror genre) to speculate about Black futures; 5) Healing Black traumas; 6) Protection of the most vulnerable members of the Black community (such as Black women and/or Queer individuals).

Although the term was not coined until 1994 by Mark Dery in *Flame Wars*, Afrofuturism has existed as early as the nineteenth-century embedded in the Black speculative practice. In the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Black speculative practice, figures such as W.E.B. DuBois, Pauline Hopkins, and Charles Chestnutt, were beginning to employ the conventions of genres like sci-fi, horror, and fantasy to speculate about possible futures for Black people that were not doomed with repeating the oppressions that Black people have faced in the past. The

long existence of Afrofuturism via the Black speculative practice has put Dery's original definition into critique as he focused solely on "speculative fiction that treats African American themes and addresses African American concerns in the context of the twentieth century technoculture— and, more generally, African American signification that appropriates images of technology and a prosthetically enhanced future" (Dery 180). To move from this definition, which focuses solely on representation and visibility of Black life in association with techno-narratives, Black creatives, thinkers, and activists began recovering past work from the Black Speculative practice as a way of reclaiming lost and forgotten histories and contributions that pre-date the term Afrofuturism itself. Afrofuturism has since developed beyond simply including Black people and Black culture in sci-fi. With the advancement of technology comes the advancement of Afrofuturism and its many branches. This advancement necessitates other genre considerations such as horror and its ability to speculate about liberated Black futures that use violence and the grotesque to achieve them.

Influenced by Horror, Gender and Sexuality, and Afrofuturism scholarship, Afrofuturist Horror is a theory that challenges a collective imaginary steeped in white supremacist and heteropatriarchal ideologies and practices through works of horror. Further, Afrofuturist Horror expounds on the groundwork laid by Kinitra Brooks in *Searching for Sycorax* of tracing and defining a Black women's horror aesthetic by tracing a horror aesthetic that privileges queerness thus attending to sexuality rather than just gender as it intersects with race. By governing Black women's and/or Black Queer individual's conceptions of horror through the tenets of Afrofuturism, Afrofuturist Horror intervenes in the Afrofuturist project by creating an explicit exploration of horror as a tool or vehicle for doing the Afrofuturist work of speculating futures for Black women and/or Black Queer folks. As there are already extensive studies of

Afrofuturism in the fantasy and sci-fi genres, this project serves as the first substantial exploration of Afrofuturism in the horror genre.

Afrofuturist Horror, as a branch of the Afrofuturist ideology and aesthetic practice necessitates that the work it analyzes is created by Black people for an intended Black audience and that centers Black culture, history, and narratives in a way that subverts stereotypes and speculates about possible liberated Black futures with special attention to uplifting Black women and/or Black Queer folks through complex characterizations. There are several aspects of Afrofuturist Horror as a theoretical framework for reading Black women and/or Black Queer individual's horror texts.

First, Afrofuturist Horror privileges Black monstrosity as a power source or mode of agency rather than a limitation. It reminds us that when one is made the monster time and time again, it cannot be a surprise when one begins to act on that monstrosity. Further, this focus on Black monstrosity attends to how Black creators reimagine and repurpose the monstrosity that previous, Eurocentric, constructions of horror have mapped onto them much like how other Afrofuturists remix and recast the alien trope. Second, Afrofuturist Horror insists on blurring binaries such as male/female, human/inhuman, Black/white, alive/dead, etc. to push against Eurocentric binary systems thus challenging a collective imaginary (which I outline later when I explain the theoretical influences of Afrofuturist Horror). Next, Afrofuturist Horror highlights the violence necessary to fight back against oppression. In other words, violence is a necessary and accepted method for fighting back against oppression in a Black Queer horror aesthetic. Finally, Afrofuturist Horror, much like the overall tradition of Afrofuturism, is concerned with a Black liberated future where Eurocentric epistemologies, cosmologies, and ontologies are either fully rejected or are challenged. Overall, my theoretical framework of Afrofuturist Horror not only aids in the larger Afrofuturist project of recovery by reaching back into the past of Black

Horror texts that inform our current Black Horror Renaissance, but it allows us to see more complex and nuanced readings of Black women and/or Black Queer individuals in Black Horror. Further, the theory of Afrofuturist Horror allows us to have more complex conversations about violence, who is entitled to violence to achieve their liberation, and why. While I've detailed what Afrofuturist Horror is, I think it is helpful to describe what it is *not* as well.

Afrofuturist Horror is not the simple representation of Black Queer individuals and/or Black women in horror. As we've seen, representation is not enough and would befit what Robin Means Coleman terms, Blacks *in* Horror rather than Black Horror. As Coleman contends, "These [Blacks *in* Horror] films have historically, and typically, been produced by non-Black film makers for mainstream consumption" (Coleman 6). Thus, films like *Candyman* directed by Bernard Rose as an adaptation of Clive Barker's "The Forbidden*,"* despite its titular character being Black, would not be a part of the Afrofuturist Horror framework as the film is created by a white filmmaker and truly centers a white woman rather than our titular Black Candyman himself.

Another example of what Afrofuturist Horror *is not* is depicted in the film *Antebellum* (2020). While one of the members of the directorial duo of Gerard Bush and Christopher Renz is a Black individual (Bush) and the protagonist of the film played by Janelle Monáe is a Black woman played by a Black Queer individual, the premise of the film makes it antagonistic to the framework of Afrofuturist Horror. Specifically, the film centers Veronica, a modern-day Black woman on her book tour, played by Monáe, who is kidnapped and wakes up on a Louisiana plantation as an enslaved person. While the film follows Veronica's mission to escape the plantation, much of the film spends time depicting the horrors of enslavement quite vividly. Due to this focus on enslavement and the depiction of its horrors, an Afrofuturist Horror framework

cannot be applied as it simply reifies the history of American racialized enslavement that many

are already familiar with while highlighting and perpetuating Black people as victims rather than

agents of our own liberation. While the protagonist escapes in the end, this liberatory effort is

overshadowed with the time spent depicting racialized violence and horror of enslavement. With

Afrofuturist Horror's grounding in Afrofuturism, Julian Chambliss argues that Afrofuturist work

must "celebrate Blackness and reject the burdens of the past" ("Afrofuturism and Black

Culture"). Thus, works like *Antebellum* do not fit the Afrofuturist project of speculating about

liberated Black futures that are not burdened by the traumas of the past and therefore cannot befit

my theoretical framework of Afrofuturist Horror.

Figure 2. Janelle Monáe and Tongayi Chirisa in *Antebellum* (2020); "Spoilers! Let's discuss the roller coaster of emotions 'Antebellum' just put us through"; *USA Today;* USAtoday.com, 20 Sept. 2020, www.usatoday.com/story/entertainment/movies/2020/09/19/antebellum-spoilers-lets-discuss-ending-we-didnt-see-coming/5704307002/.

In the following section, I attend to the theoretical influences of my theory of Afrofuturist

Horror. These influences highlight Afrofuturist Horror as a Black Queer horror aesthetic that is

grounded in newer iterations of the Afrofuturist project such as Afrofuturism 2.0 and Afrofuturist

Feminism. Further, I detail the definitions of the horror genre that demonstrate a need for an

exploration of Afrofuturism in horror with special attention to Black Horror.

Theoretical Influence and Components of Afrofuturist Horror

Afrofuturism 2.0

Reynaldo Anderson's "Afrofuturism 2.0 & the Black Speculative Arts Movement: Notes on

a Manifesto" (2016), describes the growth of Afrofuturism as a movement, aesthetic, and theory

since the term's founding in 1994 by Mark Dery. Anderson calls this move from Afrofuturism's

original definition to a more current iteration "Afrofuturism 2.0." Anderson explains that:

> Afrofuturism 2.0 is the beginning of both a move away and an answer to the Eurocentric
> perspective of the twentieth century's early formulation of Afrofuturism that wondered if
> the history of African peoples, especially in North America, had been deliberately erased.
> Or to put it more plainly, future-looking Black scholars, artists, and activists are not only
> reclaiming their right to tell their own stories, but also to critique the European/American
> digerati class of their narratives about cultural others, past, present and future and,
> challenging their presumed authority to be the sole interpreters of Black lives and Black
> futures (Anderson 228).

Thus, given the evolution of Afrofuturism to Afrofuturism 2.0, an Afrofuturist work must be

created by Black people with an intended Black audience. Further, the work must interrogate

Western, Eurocentric narratives about cultural "others" and the presumed white authority over

those narratives. This notion of Afrofuturism 2.0 being created by Black people for Black people

is central to my theory of Afrofuturist Horror.

Combining Coleman's definition of "Black horror" and Anderson's definition of

"Afrofuturism 2.0" creates a working definition of Afrofuturist Horror that demonstrates its

emphasis on moving horror works from Eurocentric ideologies, mythologies, and practices and

instead centers the need for horror stories that showcase Black history, culture, and ways of

knowing that privileges the lived experiences of Black women and/or Black Queer folks in its

exploration. Therefore, Afrofuturist Horror not only consists of Black people creating horror works that center us and our experiences, but it also seeks to use those experiences in horror narratives to speculate about a liberated Black future that challenges our collective imaginary.

The Collective Imagination

In Ebony Elizabeth Thomas's, *The Dark Fantastic: Race and the Imagination from Harry Potter to the Hunger Games* (2019), Thomas argues that all fantastical stories with Black characters, especially Black women, are entirely driven by having the cultural "other" in their narrative because even if the "other" isn't physically present they are still impacting the course of the narrative. Further, Thomas is especially attentive to the need to create, recover, and showcase stories that rethink and interrogate the collective imagination. Thomas describes the collective imagination as the imagination steeped in the ideology of white heteropatriarchal society. Thomas states, "The traditional purpose of darkness in the fantastic is to disturb, to unsettle, to cause unrest. This primal fear of darkness and Dark Others is so deeply rooted in Western myth that it is nearly impossible to find its origin" (Thomas 19). Thus, the collective imaginary is so pervasive that it perpetuates narratives about the Dark Other as something to be feared and conquered. In the American context in which this project grounds itself, Blackness is a particularly resonant example of the Dark Other Thomas describes here.[1]

Given the pervasiveness of the collective imaginary as Thomas explains, it is important to have stories that rethink the collective imaginary and hold a mirror up its failures through what she terms restorying: "Restorying describes the complex ways that contemporary young people

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[1] To theorize about the Dark Other in the fantastic, Thomas utilizes Jefferey Jerome Cohen's *Monster Theory* from the perspective of the monster rather than the hero as Cohen does. In doing so she posits that it is unknown what the reaction to the Dark Other is in the fantastic when you are the monster whereas Cohen posits there is both fascination and fear of the Dark Other (monster) in the fantastic (Thomas 20-23).

narrate the word and the world, analyze their lived experiences, and then synthesize and recontextualize a multiplicity of stories in forming new narratives" (Thomas 159). In other words, to restory is to repurpose stories that already exist to complexly reflect our realities as they pertain to narratives about race, class, gender, and sexuality. Thus, restorying restructures and interrogates of collective imagination by considering the lived experiences of Black people and other people of color and allowing them to be the interpreters of those experiences in the fantastic.

Similarly to what Anderson poses in his construction of Afrofuturism 2.0, there is a need for fantastical narratives (namely, horror in my undertaking) to be reinterpreted through the eyes of Black people to challenge a collective imagination steeped in white heteropatriarchal hegemony. Thus, influenced by Coleman, Anderson, and Thomas, my theory of Afrofuturist Horror works to challenge the collective imaginary anchored in white supremacist and heteropatriarchal ideologies and practices through works of horror. While the need to challenge this collective imagination in the fantastic, including horror, prompts the need for a Black Queer horror discourse grounded in Afrofuturism to imagine alternative futures for Black people, one of the core tenets of Afrofuturism is to imagine a future that aims to protect the most vulnerable members of the Black community. Thus, Afrofuturist Horror is further influenced by Susana Morris's Afrofuturist Feminism as it is directly concerned with the futures of Black women who are particularly vulnerable and mistreated members of the Black community.

Afrofuturist Feminism

In Morris's essay "'Everything is Real. It's Just Not as You See It': Imagination, Utopia, and Afrofuturist Feminism in Octavia Butler's 'The Book of Martha'" (2019), Morris defines Afrofuturist feminism as "a strategy for naming and navigating complicated and often vexed

histories and visions of the future," that centers Black narratives, "and is fundamentally interested in transgressing conventional systems of power and dominance, especially as it relates to the intersection of race and gender" (Morris, "'Everything is Real'" 78). Thus, Afrofuturist feminism pushes past dominant narratives of feminist methodologies that have historically centered White women to move towards a methodology and praxis that centers Black women, and considers past experiences, present experiences, and the implications of those experiences on the future.

Afrofuturist feminism combines Black feminist studies and Afrofuturism in a generative way that illuminates the important counternarratives within Black creative works and speculates about liberated Black futures that center Black women and/or Black Queer folks. Afrofuturist feminism is influential to my theory of Afrofuturist Horror due to its embracing and highlighting of Black women and/or Black Queer peoples' lived experiences. This not only adds complexity to the characterization of Black women and/or Black Queer folks in Black horror, but it also emphasizes speculating a future where Black women and/or Black Queer folks' lived experiences inform the obtaining of that future, which is an important aspect of Afrofuturist Horror in that it uplifts lived experiences as valid forms of knowledge. While Afrofuturist Feminism tends to liberated futures for Black women, there must be a more clear grounding in queerness to truly obtain an Afrofuturist future that aims to protect the most vulnerable members of the Black community.

Queerness and Futurity

Queerness and its relationship to Afrofuturism has most extensively been explored by Kara Keeling in *Queer Times, Black Futures* (2019). Keeling explores the relationship between important elements of Afrofuturism such as imagination, technology, liberation, and the future

within the context of capitalism (Keeling 4). In doing so, Keeling stresses the importance of the imaginary in creating and speculating about Black futures; thus, the project calls for alternative modes of knowledge and knowledge production that disrupts that current, Eurocentric, systems of knowledge production to challenge "quotidian violence," which is "the violence that maintains a temporality and spatial logic hostile to the change and chance immanent in each now; a quotidian violence presently holds in place a spatiotemporal logic that is hostile to the queerness in time" (Keeling 17). Here, Keeling refers to the erasure of other modes of thinking and being that go against a particular social contract. Quotidian violence is how the social contract antagonistically maintains itself at the expense of all "other" epistemologies and ontologies.

Throughout the text, Keeling anchors time and space in queerness and the idea that there are times and spaces that lie outside of our Western and Eurocentric understanding of these constructs. Keeling defines queer as "[a] mode of relationality that generates surprising, pleasurable excess within the social precisely because it is structurally antagonistic to the properly social. At the same time, it also appears as what must be banished from the social; therefore, those perceived to inhabit 'queer' suffer the brunt of the violence that maintains normative relations" (Keeling 88). Queerness, then, refers to the opposing relationship certain individuals and knowledge systems have to the status quo.[2]

Specifically, to be queer is to oppose the status quo not just in how one identifies but in how one relates to and acts toward the social structures resulting from quotidian violence. Further, queerness is often positioned as something to eradicate from society and quotidian

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[2] José Esteban Muñoz also defines queerness as future-oriented in both being and doing in *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* especially in the introduction and chapter one.

violence is enacted on those who are perceived as queer whether in appearance or behavior. Thus, queerness becomes a form of deviance and in Afrofuturism, that deviance creates spaces of excess to explore possible futures. Keeling explains that "These Afrofuturisms' investments are not in the future, or even a future, but Now—a now that Afrofuturism constantly destroys through its insistent discordance with it, unleashing presents with pasts that never were and will be" (Keeling 69). Thus, to engage in the Afrofuturist project is to engage with a queering of time and space in the present moment to challenge what the "now" entails and to create space(s) to consider the past and the future all at once. To challenge the "now" means "Abolishing the systemic structures through which white existence reproduces itself," which, "might create conditions under which it becomes possible to be otherwise" (Keeling 74). Thus, Keeling encourages a queering of Eurocentric epistemologies, cosmologies, and ontologies to make space for Black women and/or Black Queer individuals to create futures for themselves where their deviance is not "othered," rather, it is normalized.

In my construction of Afrofuturist Horror, its facet of blurring binaries is a particular type of grounding in queerness that challenges epistemologies and ontologies that label certain bodies (non-white, non-heteronormative ones) as deviant. Furthermore, my grounding in queerness affirms the protection of vulnerable members of the Black community like Black women and/or Black Queer individuals by carving out spaces for them to safely exist by uplifting Black Horror that is antagonistic to the status quo.

The Horror Genre

Many scholars have thought through the importance and attraction of the horror genre and our fascination with it. It's been speculated that the images in horror remind us of repressed wishes or desires in some way and allow us to see them acted out from a safe distance. We are

fascinated with horror despite its grotesque and violent images because the actuality of some repressed desires may appear in disgusting ways when acted upon (or represented on screen or in narrative). As horror scholar Xavier Reyes further posits, our fascination with horror can be "seen as a form of sublimation of repressed desires," which makes it "one of the most honest genres" (Reyes 12). The horror genre does more than just allow us to live out our darkest or most repressed selves and indulgences in print or on the screen. Horror provides an honest telling of what happens when we confront the systems that cause us to repress certain desires, which often involve violence and radical change. Thus, horror serves as a vehicle for my research as it provides speculation about more radical modes of attaining liberation and of a Black future that is not rooted in Eurocentric epistemologies, cosmologies, and ontologies. Given Black people's horrifying history, there's not a ton that a horror movie can do that we have not experienced in our own lives. For Black people, especially Black women and Black Queer folks, reality can be scarier than fiction. Thus, there needs to be further consideration of the horror genre as generative for Black people, which is the goal of Afrofuturist Horror.

Due to the genre's ability to tackle taboo topics, I find it to be the most salient for doing Afrofuturist work because it allows us to speculate a more radically liberated future for Black people that actively challenges social norms, binary thought, and constructions of identity through sometimes violent means or through grotesque imagery. Thus, Afrofuturist Horror is a form of Afrofuturism that uses the imagery and characteristics of the horror genre to attain an Afrofuturist revisioning of a Black future. This is not to say that other branches of Afrofuturism do not also do this, rather, that Afrofuturist Horror does this speculation with an emphasis on the grotesque and violence in a way that emphasizes the complexities of our realities. These theories of horror as an honest and introspective genre that provides us a safe space to act out our most

grotesque and violent desires is influential to Afrofuturist Horror and its tenets of embracing

Black monstrosity and in its emphasis on violence being necessary to achieve liberation.

How Afrofuturist Horror Works— The Queer Oppositional Gaze

The oppositional gaze, bell hooks argues, is enacted by Black women to attend to the

counternarratives that are not as easily seen through an assumed white gaze. This gaze can be

applied to horror works to similarly highlight counternarratives as well as to blur binaries such as

gender and human/nonhuman. hooks explains that "Looking at looking back, black women

involve ourselves in a process whereby we see our history as counter-memory, using it as a way

to know the present and invent the future" (hooks 131). Thus, applying an oppositional gaze to

Black Horror allows us to speculate about a future for Black people that challenges the collective

imaginary. Kinitra Brooks operates within the oppositional gaze in her creation of a Black

women's horror aesthetic and "advocate[s] for all horror critics— not simply black women— to

use and expand the oppositional gaze, to move beyond the simple binaries that too many Western

horror texts perpetuate" (Brooks 30). My theory of Afrofuturist Horror not only expounds on

Brooks's Black women's horror aesthetic, but it also expands hooks's oppositional gaze. More

specifically, Afrofuturist Horror expands the oppositional gaze into a queer oppositional gaze.

By expanding into a queer oppositional gaze, the gender binary is challenged, and sexuality and

gender can exist on a spectrum to look from and through. While the oppositional gaze operates

within the male/female gender binary, I contend that a queer oppositional gaze has the potential

to create "a space for the assertion of a critical black [queer] spectatorship," that 'do not simply

offer diverse representations, they imagine new transgressive possibilities for the formulation of

identity" (hooks 130). In other words, the experiences of Black Queer folks inform this

oppositional gaze to speculate about new ways of seeing themselves in the Afrofuture of the

horror genre. By expanding the oppositional gaze into a queer oppositional gaze, I aid in the complexity of Black women and/or Black Queer individuals' characterizations in Black Horror.

In the section that follows, I detail the long past of Afrofuturist Horror contending that there is a long history of Black Horror engaging with Afrofuturism in literature. The canon I develop below begins with texts grappling with the transatlantic slave trade and does ground itself in an American context but considers the impact of the diaspora. Afrofuturism demands a constant engagement with the past in order to speculate about a future. Thus, I want to define what the past looks like for Afrofuturist Horror and the early literature that impacts the definition I have mapped out so far through summaries of the literature that builds the canon of Afrofuturist Horror. To begin, I turn to Martin Delany's *Blake; Or, the Huts of America.*

Afrofuturist Horror's Long Past— The Canon

Originally published serially in 1859, Martin Delany's *Blake; Or, the Huts of America,* details a fictionalized account of an insurrection of enslaved people influenced by real-life insurrections that happened before the novel was published (namely, Nat Turner's 1831 rebellion). The storyline follows Henry Blake, whose wife Maggie has been sold to Cuba, as he wrestles with Westernized religion and travels across the states where enslavement was legal inciting small parts of a larger systemized insurrection at each stop. By the end of the first portion of the book, Blake eventually returns to his old plantation in Mississippi and leads his remaining family to Canada. In the second portion of the book, Blake travels to Cuba to further his mission and message of resistance. However, this second portion, and the book in total, does not have a clear ending as the final chapters have been lost over the years. While *Blake* cannot be considered a traditional work of Black Horror, it is an important Afrofuturist work that alludes to the horrors of enslavement with a uniquely future-oriented mission.

However, there are moments in *Blake* where elements of Black Horror are explored. At one moment in the novel Henry notes the organization of the conjure practitioners in the south: "Gamby Gholar, Maudy Ghamus, and others were High Conjurors, who are ambassadors from the Swamp, were regularly sent out to create new conjures, lay charms, take off 'spells' that could not be reached by Low Conjurors, and renew the art of all conjurors of seven years existence, at the expiration of which period the virtue was supposed to run out; holding their official position by fourteen years appointments" (Delany 115). In this moment, Delany's character notes not only the structure of the community of conjurers but seems to normalize their existence and purpose within the enslaved community. Thus, Delany's *Blake* is an early work that emphasizes the cosmologies of the African diaspora as normal thus adhering to the facet of Afrofuturist Horror that challenges or destabilizes Eurocentric epistemologies, cosmologies, and ontologies in favor of those from the African diaspora. The presence of conjure and its various elements is a common theme in the early canon of Afrofuturist Horror.

Charles Chestnutt's *The Conjure Woman and Other Conjure Tales* (1899), demonstrates an even larger commitment to embracing and highlighting African diasporic cosmologies and epistemologies in its centering and normalizing of conjure traditions. *The Conjure Woman* consists of several short stories told from the perspective of a white northern man who recently moved to the south and buys an old plantation vineyard with his wife. In each story, the man and his wife are told a story by the long-time plantation resident, Uncle Julius. In each of these plantation stories, Julius talks about conjurers with special attention to a conjure woman, Aunt Peggy. The collection begins with the short story "The Goophered Grapevine," which was made famous when it was republished in Sheree Thomas's *Dark Matter* anthology. In the story the heads the collection, Uncle Julius tells of a goopher put on the vineyards to deter them from

staying there as this is his home. Many of the stories have a similar ending where the white man believes that the stories Julius tells are told to keep them from intruding on Julius' way of life.

For example, in the short story "The Gray Wolfs Ha'nt," the man tells Julius that he wants to clear out the trees on the land by the swamp that he "owns," and Julius tells him not to because he'll be disturbing the ha'nts (spirits or ghosts). Julius then tells the story of Dan and the conjure man whose son Dan kills over a woman named Mahly. When Dan seeks the protection of a conjure woman (Aunt Peggy), he is given a life charm to bury. The conjure man eventually finds it and disposes of it so that Dan can be harmed again and convinces Dan to kill his wife by saying that a witch is riding him at night (really it is the conjure man who is). The conjure man says that she will appear as a black cat and in order to get rid of her he must turn into a wolf and bite her in the neck. When Dan makes this transformation, his wife turns back in to a woman and he decides to kill the conjure man for revenge. After he kills the conjure man, he remains a wolf who is said to have spent the rest of his days by his late wife's grave and that he and his wife still haunt the woods. The story ends with the white man, in the story's present, still clearing out the woods and finding a honey tree that he believes Julius had been using for personal reasons (selling honey, eating it, etc.) and that this is why he told the story to keep him from disturbing the woods he used.

The story outlined above in *The Conjure Woman* demonstrates a few of the tenets of Afrofuturist Horror in that there is an inversion of the typical conjure-woman-as-evil narrative as it is the conjure man of the story that causes the chaos. Further, there is a blurring of binaries between human/animal as the humans transform back and forth from animals in Julius's story. Finally, the presence of conjure and its normalization as a part of everyday life on the plantation ruptures the story from Eurocentric epistemologies, cosmologies, and ontologies. Finally, the use

of violence by the characters of Julius's story is not necessarily demonized and instead is a simple part of their realities. Overall, *The Conjure Woman* traffics in imagery, tropes, and elements popular in Black Horror as well as Afrofuturism.

Although not published until 2001, Zora Neale Hurston's 1920s collection of oral histories titled *Every Tongue Got to Confess* is a salient example of Afrofuturist Horror's multiple facets. This collection of folktales contains fifteen sections ranging from tales about God to tales about talking animals, witches and haunts, and fools. Examples like the story "The Witch Woman," embrace the power that comes with Black monstrosity: "There was a witch woman wid a saddle-cat who could git out her skin and go ride people she didn't like" (Hurston 63). This witch woman "riding people she didn't like" demonstrates acting on her monstrosity as a "witch woman." Further, her ability to shed her skin is a physical blurring and rupturing of barriers that challenges the binaries of human/nonhuman. Finally, the collection's emphasis on staying true to the southern Black vernacular demonstrates an Afrofuturist Horror adherence to rejecting and challenging white Eurocentric epistemologies of how "proper" language functions.

Another important work in the Afrofuturist Horror canon is Gloria Naylor's *Linden Hills* (1986). Modeled after *Dante's Inferno*, *Linden Hills* depicts a slow descent through an affluent Black neighborhood. Through a third-person narration, we learn about many of the legacy residents of the Linden Hills neighborhood. The founder of the community, Luther Nedeed, becomes the figurehead who makes the major decisions about who gets to live in the most desirable part of the neighborhood at the bottom of the hill, Tupelo Drive. Coming from a long line of Luther Nedeeds, each Nedeed is a mortician living at 999 Tupelo Drive (the very base of the hill of Linden Hills) which is the cemetery land. The first Luther Nedeed founded Linden Hills in 1820 and each Luther Nedeed to follow lived in the same house as the first and inherited

the business from the Luther that came before them. Similarly, each Luther Nedeed had a wife whose sole purpose was to provide them a dark-skinned son who would then become the next Luther Nedeed. However, in Naylor's novel, the Luther Nedeed we follow has his wife locked in the basement with their dead, light-skinned, son that Luther assumes is the product of infidelity or some other form of deviance on her end. While we do not discover the identity of Nedeed's wife until the end of the novel (Willa Prescott Nedeed), we do get her perspective from within the basement throughout the novel as she grapples with remembering her own identity and reading about the Mrs. Nedeeds that came before her. Thus, we follow the Nedeed legacy as it deteriorates along with the rest of the Linden Hills and its residence.

One of the most salient adherences to Afrofuturist Horror in this novel is its overall critique of Black respectability politics and by grounding Eurocentric constructions of what success looks like and challenging whether Black people can achieve success by adhering to these principles. While the other tenets of Afrofuturist Horror are missing (there is not a clear queering of binaries or a Black monstrosity that an audience might root for and Black queer sexuality is not explored), the clear critique of Eurocentric epistemologies, cosmologies, and ontologies through the deterioration of the Linden Hills neighborhood throughout is still an important facet of Afrofuturist Horror and the Afrofuturist project as a whole.

On the other hand, Octavia Butler's novel, *Fledgling*, is an incredibly impactful novel on the canon of Afrofuturist Horror as there are clearer uses of violence to achieve liberation, a clearer blurring of binaries through an exploration of the posthuman, a rejection of Eurocentric systems and epistemes, and these explorations are done by centering a complex Black Queer character.

Fledgling centers a seemingly young Black girl who awakens in extreme pain with injuries to her skull and burns covering her body. This young girl spends days in a cave in the woods healing and resting, consuming the meat and blood of deer to survive and heal. Once healed enough to walk, she ventures to wherever her body takes her. In this journey she stumbles on a small village that had been burned to the ground. As she looks to satisfy her hunger and figure out who she is, she comes across a man in his mid-twenties named Wright who takes her in when she suddenly bites him leading him to teach her a bit about her kind, vampires. After this, they struggle on a journey to find out who she is, what she is, and who her family is. When she finally finds her father, he tells her that her name is Shori Matthews and that she is a part of a specific vampire lineage called the Ina and is, in fact, 53 years old despite her childlike appearance. Shori is unique in that she has had her genetics altered to give her melanated skin and human genetics as well as her vampire ones. This allows her to walk in the sunlight without dying, although she does still burn a bit. Eventually, her father and his village are attacked and murdered as well. The rest of the story follows Shori, Wright, and the other "symbionts" that Shori garners as they try to discover who has been doing these attacks and why they have done so as well as Shori's place in Ina society. *Fledgling* can be read through Afrofuturist Horror in her grappling with her identity as more-than-vampire and more-than-human as well as in her fighting to protect herself, her symbionts, and larger community at the end of the novel.

Early in the novel, while still trying to learn about who she is, Shori says, "'I think I'm an experiment. I think I can withstand the sun better than… others of my kind. I burn, but I don't burn as fast as they do. It's like an allergy we all have to the sun. I don't know who the experimenters are, though, the ones who made me black'" (Butler 31). Thus, she recognizes her multiple marginalized identities as Black, girl, and vampire and the specific positionality she has

given those multiple identities.[3] She understands that she's not invincible, but she does have an advantage that others of her kind do not have— she can be exposed to sunlight. Further, she understands that this is not "normal" and decides she must be an experiment of some sort. In other words, Shori recognizes that she is an outsider in multiple communities. Thus, Butler's creation of a complex Black woman vampire enacts Afrofuturist Horror as it embraces Black feminism's "project of acknowledging Black women's complex humanity" (Brooks et al. 245). Shori is an outsider as a Black Ina and an outsider being a Black Queer woman making her complex in her humanity and in her vampirism thus embodying a posthuman. However, what's important is that she recognizes the power that comes with her multiply marginalized positionality.

Rather than being doomed by her difference, she holds more power in her ability to exist in and out of sunlight unlike other vampires who will die in sunlight. Butler makes Shori's multiple intersecting identities a power source; thus, not only subverting narratives that vampires cannot withstand sunlight, but also how these multiple identities can make a person more well-rounded or have power that others do not. Butler forces us as readers to remain in the ambiguity of Shori's identities just as Shori must in noting that just because she can withstand sunlight and is technically immortal it doesn't mean that she cannot be killed. In fact, all of her vampire family has been killed leaving her alone to grapple for community. Overall, Butler enacts an Afrofuturist feminist epistemology through the horror narrative. As Morris explains: "Butler's visions of the future are often ambivalent ones that reveal an ongoing struggle for peace and justice" (Morris, "Black Girls" 155). In other words, Butler's vision of the future forces us to

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[3] Chuck Robinson's article "Minority and Becoming-Minor in Octavia Butler's *Fledgling*," Robinson argues the importance of Shori's identity as a minority both within the Black community and within the Ina community as a process of becoming that rejects Eurocentric political ontologies.

remain in those ambiguities or in the blurring of binaries as there is no clear right or wrong way to achieve peace and justice, which is furthered as Shori's attempts to find a community of her own.

Shori eventually finds community to help her learn more about herself by the end of the novel. However, this community isn't totally welcoming to her due to her being Black. There are some members of the community who she cannot trust such as Katherine Dahlman who vehemently opposes Shori's presence in the community and, after being found guilty during the Ina trial for killing one of Shori's symbionts, is sentenced to having her legs amputated. Rather than accept her sentence, Katherine attacks Shori to kill her. Shori reacts to the attack by killing Katherine and says, "'Either she was terrified of my getting control of her or her pain overwhelmed her. I had not bitten her for nourishment or out of affection. I meant to destroy her throat, tear it to pieces'" (Butler 306). In other words, Shori's response to Katherine's attack is to fight back with means to kill. Shori acts on her rage and uses violence towards Katherine who killed one of her symbionts and has agreed with the racist response that Shori should not be a part of the community and has attempted to kill her now.

Rather than having Shori refuse to fight back, Butler has Shori fight back against one of the people who has wronged her and her community thus enacting a rage that Black women are often asked to repress lest she be labeled "the angry Black woman." Further, Butler blurs the lines of right/wrong and human/nonhuman through Shori's multiple intersecting identities as well as her acting on her rage by the end of the novel. Thus, Butler demonstrates how vampire narratives by Black people typically take up intentional cultural projects that "trouble normative notions of race, fantasy, and power that vampires so often represent in dominant popular discourse" (Morris, "Black Girls" 146). In other words, Butler, like other Black creators of vampire narratives, trouble normative notions of race and power as they are traditionally

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represented in horror. *Fledgling* then is an Afrofuturist Horror project that subverts a traditional horror narrative for the purpose of speculation about the future of community and hybridity.[4]

Overall, Butler enacts a queer oppositional gaze that pictures a future imagined by Black women and/or Black Queer individuals that forces us to remain in the ambiguities or in the blurring of binaries as there is no clear right or wrong way to achieve peace and justice, which is furthered as Shori's attempts to find a community of her own. Shori's sometimes violent means of attaining peace and justice point to a complexity offered by Afrofuturist Horror that imagines a Black radically liberated future through the violent or grotesque means of horror. Thus, violence or rage are important aspects of the horror genre that are employed by creators of Black Horror that make a text consistent with Afrofuturist Horror; thus, a complex exploration of Black women's identity and what attaining liberation may look like. Another example of Afrofuturist Horror is L.A. Banks's *Vampire Huntress* novels in their centering of non-Western beliefs and practices.

Vampire Huntress

L.A. Banks' *Vampire Huntress* series (2003-2009) recovers and centers non-Western epistemologies through the legend of main character Damali, the Neteru— a vampire hunter chosen by the Most High to lead the fight of good versus evil. Damali is a sword and dagger wielding, vampire hunting, badass with the ability to bring comfort and hope to those she interacts with. *Vampire Huntress* speculates about a possible reality where Black women, like Damali, joined by a multicultural team of guardians (community) can quite literally beat back the hordes of evil represented by vampires. Much like *Fledgling*, the series hits each of the facets of

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[4] Briana Whiteside's article "Sites of Resistance: Justice, Healing, and Liberation in Octavia E. Butler's *Fledgling*" published in the *Femspec* journal explores the novel as resistance-centered and argues the value of the Black vampire in challenging Eurocentric power structures.

Afrofuturist Horror. Two salient examples of the series' adherence to Afrofuturist Horror is the weapons that Damali uses in her fight against evil and in the physical transformations of Raven, a Black woman vampire.

The weapons that Damali is equipped with, a sword and dagger named Madame Isis and Lady Isis, are inscribed with Adinkra symbols equipped with a handle forged from Kemetian pyramid metals. Banks writes, "The ornate gold handle commanded her attention as she studied the goddess cast from Kemetian pyramid metals that slayed a serpent, wondering how many high priests had used it to defend themselves. Running from the authorities as a kid, fending off drunken adults, even running from a gang shootout was deep, but not as off the hook as this" (Banks, *Minion* 114-115). Before Egypt was colonized by Greece and renamed Egypt, it was known as Kemet which meant "coal black." The history of the sword and dagger mesmerizes Damali, and she feels the intensity that comes from the blades forged by people who built pyramids and worshipped gods and goddesses alike.

Kinitra Brooks explains in her creation of a Black and female horror aesthetic called "folkloric horror," that "[B]lack women horror writers have grounded their aesthetic in the traditional religious practices of Africa and privilege the realization of the black spiritual feminine" (Brooks 15). In other words, Black women have a particular history of privileging spiritual practices and traditions from the African diaspora to challenge Eurocentric understandings of Blackness and Black womanhood. While this particular series is grounded in a more heterosexual framework and gender binary system, the privileging of African religious traditions in the series still allows it to fit into the Afrofuturist Horror framework as it still shares the larger concerns of the Afrofuturist project through the horror genre. These traditions are embraced to produce counternarratives about Eurocentric religious practices. In basing the series on African spiritual traditions and mythology, Banks furthers this practice of Black women's

privileging of African diasporic beliefs as a means of subverting the Eurocentric vampire narrative, which still holds merit despite its lack of queerness. Rather than Christianity and the cross being the sole repulsion of vampires in the series, any religious symbol given intention can serve the same purpose. Therefore, in wielding a blade with a history steeped in African spiritual mythology, Damali recovers spiritual traditions that are often erased. Further, Damali reclaims and empowers this African spiritual tradition by using them to thwart evil.

Madame Isis and Lady Isis' spiritual histories go even further than Kemet. Banks writes, "Made of Vatican and North American silver, and South American alloy cast with Dogon steel from the motherland, it had been fired in Samurai furnaces, parts of it passed around the world from female Neteru to Neteru until it was completely constructed" (Banks, *Minion* 119). Thus, the blades were created from an amalgamation of elemental metals from various cultures and passed on for generations until it was completed. Therefore, the process of creating the blades themselves serves to de-hierarchize difference in culture and religion. In other words, one culture or religion is not placed above another. Rather, each one has something to offer the Neteru and each Neteru has something to offer the next. The creation of and history behind Lady and Madame Isis paired with Damali's wielding of them in battle demonstrates the recovery project of Afrofuturism in which lost and hidden practices, spiritual beliefs, and myths are recovered and reclaimed to give them power thus rejecting Western Eurocentric beliefs and spiritualities. While the multicultural emphasis is placed on the blades to de-hierarchize spiritual practices, a further di-hierarchizing takes place in the series through the character Raven and her position as Black woman and vampire who can turn into a panther.

Raven, who we later find out is the once daughter of Marlene (a seer and mother-figure to Damali and her guardians). However, Raven has become the second lieutenant to Master vampire, and Big Bad of books one and two of the series, Fallon Nuit. She is known for being

both seductive and terrifying in her tight leather pants and her ability to transform into a panther with large fangs. Arguably, it's Raven's ability to transform from human, to vampire, to panther (not necessarily in this order) that demonstrates a de-hierarchization of binary thinking in that things aren't as simple as human/nonhuman. There are layers and complexities to the ideas of human/nonhuman that Raven's characterization points to. Further, this complexity echoes that of the horror genre as Coleman explains that "Another hallmark of the horror genre is its complexity. Just as it can contribute the most rousing, heroic, and imaginative narratives, it can also generate films featuring chilling, abhorrent, unspeakable violence. It cannot be ignored that physical and emotional violence are often central in the horror film genre" (Coleman 5). Thus, the complexities uncovered in the blurring of binary thinking about human/nonhuman are an essential part of reading Black horror. Violence is a necessary component of Afrofuturist Horror because it emphasizes the need to obtain liberation through any means necessary. In the series, violence is used to blur physical boundaries and breakdown barriers.

For instance, the moment in which Raven must seduce and kill the brother of Carlos Rivera (romantic interest of Damali), Banks writes:

> Her fingers dug into his flesh, her French manicure becoming retractable claws surrounding his arms with an iron grip. His member was locked in a freezing, slimy cavern, and then acid began to burn away the skin of his groin. Pain so intense sent him into immediate shock; he shook and gulped air, eyes wide, and silent scream strangled him as he watched massive incisors rip through her gums like they were giving hideous birth (Banks, *Minion* 153).

In this scene, there is a physical breaking down of barriers occurring as Raven's claws rip through her manicured nails and her fangs penetrate her gums. Further, the warm and soft space of her genitals has turned cold and uncomfortable transitioning from comforting womb-space to "slimy cavern." Thus, her becoming a monster breaks down the barrier between human and nonhuman as her humanness is what seduces Carlos's brother, but it is her ability to become a

monster that gets the job done. While she is clearly a villain of the story (until later books where her released soul becomes an ally of the guardians), she carries great power in her ability to transform from something human-like to nonhuman. In other words, Raven's character blurs the binary of human/nonhuman in multiple ways— her vampire-ness, her previous human status and human appearance, and her ability to turn in to a panther.

Overall, the *Vampire Huntress* series points to various forms of de-hierarchization of spiritualities and traditions and destabilization of binaries demonstrates the potential of Afrofuturist Horror. Rather than dwell on the Black female vampire as simply a monster, Banks troubles this in reminding us of her humanness that is disrupted by her monstrousness and vice versa. Further, Banks reclaims and recovers African spiritual practices that are often erased and displaced for Western Christianity and Eurocentric spiritual beliefs.

The canon and long past of Afrofuturist Horror is complex. Not every work always adheres to each tenet of Afrofuturist Horror. However, each text troubles Eurocentric epistemologies, cosmologies, and ontologies in favor of those from the African diaspora whether in their critiques of Eurocentric systems or in their exclusion of them. Further, there is not always an adherence to queerness or inclusion of overtly queer characters in these texts and I believe that the contemporary resurgence of Black Horror that we see today does a much better job of including queer characters (both in behavior and in their non-adherence to "normality"), which is why the texts I analyze throughout this project are mostly contemporary. In the chapters that follow, the texts I analyze don't necessarily share the same ideology as it pertains to challenging both heteronormativity and white supremacy, but instead they represent themes and tropes common in Black Horror such as the vampire, the final girl, and African diasporic folklore. Overall, these texts are united in a particular Afrofuturist ideology that demands Black people's

survival in horror and thus an insistence that Black people will exist in a future of their own creation.

Chapter Overview:

The first chapter titled "The Possibilities of Monstrosity: Black Vampire Narratives" centers Black women and/or Black Queer vampire narratives. Primary works this chapter analyzes are the following: Nikyatu Jusu's short film *Suicide by Sunlight*, *The Gilda Tales* by Jewell Gomez, and Nalo Hopkinson's short story "Greedy Choke Puppy" compared with *The Tomb of Dracula* comics. I argue that vampire narratives by Black women and/or Black Queer individuals become a means of reclaiming power and re-signifying Blackness as a sign of potential rather than limitation and hold up a mirror up to the insufficiency of white heteropatriarchal structures that uphold specific definitions of "human." Further, I argue that Black vampire narratives serve an Afrofuturist purpose because they envision a future steeped in the past that challenges Eurocentric notions of monstrosity and disrupts binary thinking regarding human/nonhuman and gender categorization. I explore how Black women and/or Black Queer individuals' constructions of vampire fiction depict Black vampires as beyond the constructions of "human" by re-signifying Black monstrosity thereby demonstrating a Black Queer horror aesthetic grounded in the Afrofuturist project of imagining a complexly liberated Black future for all Black folks.

The second chapter titled ""They Will Say I Shed Innocent Blood. You Are Far From Innocent': Becoming an Afrofuturist Survivor" uses Robin R. Means Coleman's theory of "enduring women," and Kinitra Brooks's work on Black women in zombie horror to further analyze the Final Girl trope as famously explained by Carol Clover in *Men, Women, and Chainsaws* (1993). Specifically, this chapter looks at Black women and/or Black Queer

individuals in various cultural products as what I term Afrofuturist Survivors. The chapter looks to the following films and television series as the foci of analysis as these works all center Black women and/or Black Queer people who survive the horrors of their storylines: *Sugar Hill* (1974)*, Candyman* (2021), and *Swarm* (2023). In this chapter I argue that Black creators subvert the traditional Final Girl trope in ways that attempt to challenge both the slasher and the system and speculate about a liberated future for Black women and the Black community through their constructions of Afrofuturist Survivors. Further, I apply an Afrofuturist reading of these texts to highlight a queer opposing gaze that Black Horror works engender and the power of the queer opposing gaze in speculating about radically liberated futures where Black women and/or Black Queer people survive.

The third chapter titled "Magic is Ours Now": Afrofuturist Horror Using Black Tools to Solve Black Problems," centers what Kinitra Brooks terms folkloric horror. In this chapter I analyze Ayize Jama-Everett and John Jennings' *Box of Bones* graphic novel and Misha Green's series adaptation of *Lovecraft Country* to showcase the counternarratives and imagined futures that Black Horror works allow through an Afrofuturist reading that highlights non-European cosmologies, epistemologies, and ontologies through spiritual traditions, beliefs, and practices. Thus, I argue that Black tools (epistemologies, cosmologies, and ontologies of the African diaspora) are the best ways to fix Black problems and that the Afrofuturist sensibility that permeates Black Horror helps to normalize the presence of and importance of African epistemologies, cosmologies, and ontologies in the horror genre.

This project, and its points of analysis is meant to highlight the works of Black women and/or Queer folks in horror as well as the conversations that we as Black folks have about our cultural products. Thus, in the chapters that follow, I look at texts with majority Black creators at

the helm and privilege the voices of Black scholars as I believe that a Black Horror Renaissance necessitates a complex and holistic Black space for thinking about this work. Afrofuturist Horror is simply a beginning for thinking about this Black Horror Renaissance and its concern with our place, and how we demand our place, in the future by any means necessary. Each of these texts is united in their Afrofuturist ideology— they assert that Black people (especially Black women and/or Queer folks) will exist in the future by having their Black characters survive the horrors of the text. These texts and their creators are not always perfect or in agreement in how they represent Blackness, queerness, or the melding of the two, but they all beg the same question: When you've been made the monster your whole life, can people really be surprised when you act on your monstrosity?

Chapter 1

The Possibilities of Monstrosity: Black Vampire Narratives

The AMC adaptation of Anne Rice's steamy novel, *Interview with the Vampire,* has stirred up conversation about vampires, blackness, and queer love in pop culture as it has shattered our previous understanding of Rice's *Vampire Chronicles*. Throughout my own viewing experience, I have been extremely drawn to Claudia's character. In the 1994 film, she's played by a young Kirsten Dunst mirroring Rice's description from the novel as a white doll, but in the television adaptation she is portrayed by two Black women— Bailey Bass (season one) and Delainey Hales (season two and onward) (Rice 87). Another important rewriting of Claudia's story is that instead of being spitefully turned by Lestat against Louis's wishes as in the novel, in the television adaptation Louis begs Lestat to turn Claudia, to save her, so that he can have a renewed purpose in his immortal life.

The deliberate choice to have Claudia portrayed as a Black girl saved from a house fire by Louis rather than fed off in a hunger-frenzy marks an important moment in the reimagined *Vampire Chronicles* tale. As a mortal child, Claudia was a weak orphan left to the mercy of her abusive aunt. But as a vampire, Claudia has power and strength she couldn't have imagined in her mortal life, and with this power Claudia begins a journey of discovery about herself, the vampire world, and the complexly changing human world around her. Not only does making Claudia a Black girl rather than a white girl create a more complex characterization of the child vampire, but the relationship between her, Louis, and Lestat is further complicated. For starters, there's a much deeper connection between Claudia and Louis as two Black immortals from New Orleans that is amplified by the fact that they can hear each other's thoughts, and Lestat cannot hear either of theirs. This dynamic creates a Black experience that is entirely their own that not

even the powerful Lestat can touch where they can protectively share their thoughts and desires with one another. Further, their new familial structure troubles the traditional nuclear family. Her "Uncle Les" and "Daddy Lou" are clearly in a queer relationship and adding a Black adopted vampire child to the family is not "normal" under the terms of compulsory heterosexuality. While this isn't normal for the time period of the narrative, it has become the norm in our current time which the series reflects quite well. These very intentional moves in the television adaptation challenge our understanding as viewers of the traditional vampire narrative and its relationship to queerness, race, and gender in a productive and future-oriented way. This adaptation allows Black audiences to see themselves in the complexity of Claudia and Louis and in their power. The productivity and potential that arise from vampire narratives that attend to race, gender, and sexuality are essential to the growth of horror as a genre and an object of study.

The need to challenge the collective imagination through re-storying as Ebony Thomas argues in *The Dark Fantastic* is the important step being taken in the *Interview with the Vampire* adaptation and its deliberate inclusion of blackness and Black characters despite being written, produced, and directed by majority white people. While this series adaptation makes important and necessary changes to entice a modern-day and wider-reaching audience with relevant conversations about race and sexuality, there is still a majority white authority over the text and the racialized narratives of Louis and Claudia. Thus, this work is a part of a Blacks *in* horror tradition rather than a Black Horror tradition and cannot necessarily fit in the canon of the Black Horror Renaissance we are currently seeing. This does not make the work any less interesting, simply, it is not the main concern of this project. Rather, this project explores a Black and Queer horror aesthetic of Black Horror.

In our current Black Horror Renaissance, one of the common horror themes creators utilize is the idea of monstrosity.[5] A particular monster of interest is the vampire, which Wesley Snipes made incredibly popular and exciting for Black audiences in the *Blade* films. However, the vampire, as noted in the discussion of *Interview with the Vampire* above, is also a particularly queer monster. In horror, the vampire quite literally blurs the lines between human and "other," but what happens when the vampire *is* the "other?" How does the Black vampire challenge our understanding of humanity and gender? To begin this work, I first look at how the terms "human" and "humanity" have been defined and reproduced in cultural production and how Black horror and its constructions of the Black vampire challenges those definitions. Further, I examine how horror uses monsters, like the vampire, to invoke fear in its viewers and readers through the making of an abject and the abjection response in relation to these definitions of the "human" to explore the potential of the Black vampire as a posthuman.

To explore Afrofuturist Horror theory through the Black vampire, I first look to Sylvia Wynter's critique of the "human" and "humanism" and its connection to Julia Kristeva's theory of the abject other to explain how the "other" has been established and later codified in pop culture. Then, I explore the history of monstrosity and its relation to the race, gender, and sexuality. And finally, I employ a close reading of Black women and/or Black Queer individual's horror with special attention to Afrofuturist Horror theory and the specific facets of it that Black vampire fiction adheres to as a means of asserting the futurity of Black people— namely, the embracing of Black monstrosity and the blurring of binaries by complicating notions of the abject other and re-structuring the relationship between monstrosity, abjection, and humanism.

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[5] Some additional films about Black monstrosity include Bomani J. Story's *The Angry Black Girl and Her Monster* (2023), Jordan Peele's *Us* (2019), and texts like Victor LaValle's *The Ballad of Black Tom* (2016) or his graphic novel *Destroyer* (2017).

Analyzing cultural products ranging from novels to comics, to short films and their representations of the vampire, I explore the Black vampire's potential to assert a futurity for Black women and/or Black Queer folks in Black Horror that transcends Eurocentric definitions of human and monster that white vampire fiction does not. In this chapter, I close read *Marvel Masterworks: The Tomb of Dracula* comics*,* Jewell Gomez's novel *The Gilda Stories* (1991), Nalo Hopkinson's short story "Greedy Choke Puppy," and Nikyatu Jusu's short film *Suicide by Sunlight* using Zakiyyah Iman Jackson's *Becoming Human,* Giselle Anatol's *The Things that Fly in the Night,* and Susana Morris's work on Afrofuturist Feminism as critical frameworks for understanding the generative potential of Black women and/or Black Queer individuals' vampire narratives. To explore the Afrofuturist potential of Black women and/or Black Queer individuals' vampire narratives and their ability to challenge Eurocentric constructions of social hierarchies like gender, sexuality, and even perceptions of time, I look to Reynaldo Anderson's "Critical Afrofuturist Theory." Thus, this chapter highlights the Afrofuturist sensibility that permeates Black women's and/or Black Queer folks' horror traditions.

Human and Humanity: Establishing an Abject "Other"

In Sylvia Wynter's, "The Ceremony Must be Found: After Humanism" (1984), Wynter calls for a new definition, or a rupture from, the human and humanism and its definitions put in place by white cisgender European men during the Enlightenment. Wynter explains how the terms "human" and "humanism" were created and codified through cultural products such as literature arguing that the concept of humanism was based on a shift from a religious definition to a more secular one. Literature and science were beginning to restructure how individuals saw

themselves and were also being used simultaneously to codify the notions of "human" and "humanity" as defined by "rationality" or "Rational Man."[6]

This definition of "human" as "Rational Man" can be further seen when Wynter explains the justification of enslavement used by European colonizers: "[T]he African mode of cultural reason was seen as a non-reason; and his internment in the plantation system as slave labor, as being carried out for the purpose of rationalizing him/her as an inferior mode of being in need of rational human baptism" (Wynter 35). It is important to note that these definitions of man as "rational" needed a referent, or an "other," to be irrational or embody non-reason. In other words, the human and humanism would not exist without the other, specifically in an American context, without Black people as well as Indigenous people. As explained by Wynter above, Black people had to be enslaved by white people to maintain the illusion of white men and white people as embodiments of reason and Black people as embodiments of non-reason. This was essential to creating, codifying, and reproducing this white-centered definition of human and humanism.

According to Julia Kristeva in *Powers of Horror* (1982), the abject is, "that pseudo-object that is made up before but appears only within the gaps of secondary repression. The abject would thus be the 'object' of primal repression" (Kristeva 12). Thus, what is made abject is made an "object" meant to represent the repression of an "other" within us. The abject, then, is the undesired "other" that one casts off in order to be able to distinguish the self as a subject rather than an object. Much like Wynter's explanation of humanism as defined by rational versus

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[6] Wynter explains that: "[T]he human, who had hitherto imagined its mode of being through mythic/theological figurative schemas, would now come to image itself—and to act upon the world in the mode of that imagination—through the great poetic schemas which refigured and configured the first form of the secularly chartered human being: the world of its order of things" (Wynter 33).

irrational man, the "other" is made abject and must necessarily be made abject in order to reaffirm humanism as strictly white, male, and rational. All things not fitting that description are made abject, which triggers abjection (the horrific response to the "other").

Our reaction, abjection, to the abject is a reminder of the identification yet rejection of the "other" within ourselves and since we reject the abject in ourselves that we see in the other we cast it off into something we can't completely rid ourselves of such as literature, television, and film. Kristeva explains that "By suggesting that literature is its privileged signifier, I wish to point out that, far from being a minor, marginal activity in our culture, as a general consensus seems to have it, this kind of literature, or even literature as such, represents the ultimate coding of our crises, of our most intimate and most serious apocalypses" (Kristeva 208). Horror literature (and other cultural productions such as film, comics, etc.) provides a place to cast the abject, or cultural other, from us while simultaneously preserving it. It should come as no surprise, then, that Blackness has long been made abject in horror works. Darieck Scott explains that "Blackness does the cultural (as well as the economic, social, political, psychological, and psychic) work of signing, of bearing the abjection that the human—as ending to that position by dint of creating blackness—pretends—lies—fantasizes—that it can slough off" (Scott 31). In other words, to be Black is to be abject. This preservation and replication of the abject in literature codifies certain notions of what is abject, or what is horrifying, through the creation of monsters that resemble or signify the cultural "other," that are often depicted as Black, female, and/or queer. While this codification of Blackness as abject has been established, I contend that Black creators are changing the signified, or meaning, associated with the Black monster by embracing monstrosity.

A Brief History of Monstrosity

Pop culture, Black studies, feminist, and gender and sexuality scholars have explored the relationship between gender, race, and abjection in cultural products depicting monsters. Specifically, Barbara Creed, Harry Benshoff, and Leila Taylor have explored both the limiting and possibly resistance-centered depiction of monsters as cultural others, or the abject. Further, scholarship like and Brandon Callender's asks readers to consider the supernatural aspects of horror (the monsters and all their absurdity) as a key component of the horror genre's merit for thinking through being abject.

In *Darkly: Black History and America's Gothic Soul* (2019), Leila Taylor links the history of goth culture and horror to the Black American experience. One of the arguments she makes is that Blackness has always been conflated with monstrosity. Taylor explains, "Blackness is often used as a metaphor for any number of social ills: poverty, crime, violence, drug use, promiscuity, broken families, ignorance…to be Black is to *be* the fear, to be the thing that goes bump in the night hiding under the bed" (Taylor 67). What Taylor points to here is the historical conflation of Blackness with social ills and things to be feared much like monsters in horror. Further, Taylor explains that the dehumanization of Black people and the condemnation of Blackness is an act of monster-making itself:

> The Black body (not Black person, but body) is susceptible to violence without reason, degradation without ramification, and available for exploitation. The monster is despised and feared by the very nature of its monstrosity. The monster is dangerous and threatening and therefore can be tortured, killed, or maimed with impunity. It may sound like I'm equating monstrousness with Blackness. I'm not. What I am saying is that the process of dehumanization is a process of monster-making. But monsters have power (Taylor 79).

Thus, to occupy the Black body is to be *made* the monster in the eyes of the oppressor so that the oppressor can sustain the white heteropatriarchal systems that benefit them. However, as Taylor

points out, monsters have power, and this power is a form of resistance that allows Black people to reclaim monstrosity to their advantage. Similar to the conflation of Blackness and monstrosity, women have also been long represented as monsters in horror.

Using Kristeva's *Powers of Horror* (1982) and Kristeva's theory of abjection as a framework, Barbara Creed argues in *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, and Psychoanalysis* (1993) that normalized patriarchal structure and practices pin women as monstrous due to the female form being inherently abject in its ability to dissolve the barriers between living/dead through menstruation and the ability to grow and birth another human being. Creed explains that "The monstrous-feminine is constructed as an abject figure because she threatens the symbolic order. The monstrous-feminine draws attention to the 'frailty of the symbolic order' through her evocation of the natural, animal order and its terrifying associations with the passage all human beings must inevitably take from birth through life to death" (Creed 83). Therefore, women in horror are monsters in their ability to trouble the symbolic social order (a heteronormative patriarchal structure) through the female body's ability to cross the line between living and dead as well as human and nonhuman. Like the way blackness is *made* monstrous, women are made monsters due to their abject positionality but also in their agency as they dissolve the symbolic social order through very natural processes such as menstruation, pregnancy, and birthing. Creed's work reiterates that the designation of women as "monsters" in horror works is based on women's agency as life creators and disrupters to the social order. Thus, gender is constructed to equate femaleness with monstrosity and maleness with humanity. Queerness is similarly depicted as monstrous within horror as another identity made abject due to its dismissal of the status quo.

Harry Benshoff's *Monsters in the Closet: Homosexuality in the Horror Film* (1997)

directly as well as indirectly builds off of Creed's work by tracing non-heterosexuality and its

relationship to the monster in horror films. Benshoff argues that horror films, specifically

monster films or creature features, are easily coded and read as queer: "The sociocultural linkage

of movie monsters and the homosexual exists not just within horror movie culture, but as

thoroughly permeated mainstream US culture, its various gay and lesbian subcultures, and

perhaps most importantly, the individual psyches of people everywhere, whether they be horror

movie fans or not" (Benshoff 273). In other words, the linkage between queerness and

monstrosity is not limited to horror films. Rather, this linkage appears in both our collective

cultural understanding of queerness and across all mainstream representations of queer culture.

Thus, the genre that is the home to the monster (horror) becomes one of the best points of

analysis for exploring our collective understanding of queerness and queer culture and how it has

been made monstrous.

Further, Benshoff contends that "almost all of the monsters and villains from the classical

period are the products of foreign lands or foreign agents, and many of them play upon racist

fears as well as homophobic ones, conflating and blurring their stereotypical signifiers"

(Benshoff 59). Thus, monsters aren't simply equated with women or queer folks; rather,

monsters are equated with any and all cultural "others" thus making Blackness and

"nonnormative" genders and sexualities into individuals to be feared. However, as time has

passed, monsters have been purposely made queer, or other, as an attempt to challenge the

dominant narratives about cultural others. While this seems like a logical and rational attempt at

disrupting harmful narratives about marginalized people, most attempts both codify and reify the

troubling link between monster and other that encourages people to view cultural others as

monstrous and frightening. While this is true, I argue that Black Horror, as we will see throughout this chapter, purposely takes up the monstrosity that has previously been used to further marginalize them to instead revise those tropes as a source of power. Thus, Black Horror re-signifies monstrosity as a source of power rather than a limitation.[7]

Benshoff further argues that using monster tropes and imagery as a "safe space to be queer" is actually limiting because the conflation of queerness (as well as Blackness and femaleness) and monstrosity "permeate[s] mainstream US culture, its various gay and lesbian subcultures, and perhaps most importantly, the individual psyches of people everywhere, whether they be horror movie fans or not" (Benshoff 273). While making monsters deliberately queer can be limiting due to the pervasiveness of conflating monstrosity and queerness, there needs to be room for both blackness and queerness to be explored through depictions of monstrosity that does not simply denote the monster as a tragic reflection of a collective Black trauma.

Brandon Callender contends that Blackness and queerness can be located in horror in a manner that does not dwell on reality but instead uses the paranormal and supernatural to the advantage of the two to dismiss the singular narrative of Blackness and Black life as collective

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[7] Henry Louis Gates, Jr.'s *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism* (1988) created what he refers to as "Signifyin(g)." Gates argues that the use of the Talking Book trope allows readers to "[w]itness the extent of intertextuality and presupposition at work in the first discrete period in Afro-American literary history" and reveals the tensions between Black vernacular and the "[l]iterate white text" that has been turned into a theme by Black writers who were "[l]iterally writing themselves into being through carefully crafted representations in language of the black self" (Gates 131). Further, Gates argues that "The trope of the Talking Book became the first repeated and revised trope of the tradition, the first trope to be Signified upon" (Gates 131). Thus, Gates's work provided a reclamation of Black writing from a Black vernacular perspective that allowed it to speak for itself as well as showed the importance of Black literature in revising tropes applied to Black writers. The importance of reclaiming Black produced texts through analyses and critiques by other Black scholars through a changing of signifying within tropes used to represent Black bodies and Blackness.

trauma only. Callender explains that "By swapping out superficial horrors for social ones, black subjects today enter into the horror genre as its rivals, if not its foils. Instead of reeling from horror's intended 'dreadful pleasures,' they experience a horror that arises more traumatically, more personally, and more incidentally as a result of their racial consciousness" (Callender 69). In other words, by only focusing on the social (namely, racial) commentary of horror, viewers miss out on the playful aspects of the genre that demonstrate a specifically Black Queer aesthetic and enjoyment that "push[es] back against accounts that either too sweepingly reduce black life to horror or reduce black pleasure in horror to a cathartic way of working through traumas that they readily share with a larger black collective" (Callender 81). Thus, Black Queer understandings of monstrosity and the supernatural in horror do not force the viewer or reader to only identify with the real-world horrors depicted in the genre but also allows Black viewers to enjoy the playful and silly aspects of mainstream horror without tying their viewing experience to simply re-living or sitting with collective trauma.

By embracing the supernatural aspects of horror (or the monsters themselves) rather than the reality that underscores the work as encouraged by Callender, I contend that the Black Queer monster holds potential in its ability to physically disrupt the status quo and to make audiences question what is truly scary. This does not mean that the realities that these works reference are ignored, they are simply not the dwelling place of Black Horror. To borrow from Darieck Scott's undertaking of the fantasy genre, I am not "interested in the origins of fantasies or the whys of fantasy" (Scott 10). I am interested in *how* fantastical genres (namely, horror) "impinges on how we view or how we imagine or how we live with blackness," and how the imagination "arises from somebody's interest in a better world, with variable meanings attached to what counts as better and what is the compass and content of the world that the fantasy [or any fantastical genre]

seeks to escape from, improve, or obliterate" (Scott 10). Afrofuturist Horror is interested in *how* the horror genre can be used to obliterate reality. Or, put in appropriate macabre language, how it can be used to imagine the slaughter our oppressors and their systems of power.

In this evolution of the horror, the genre expanded from the big screen to our living rooms with the rise of televised horror shows. Due to this growth, however, "a batch of increasingly violent and sexualized, more realistic human monsters quickly arose to fill the void left open by this shift in signification" (Benshoff 176). In other words, now that people were using television horror to show comedic monsters (*Munsters, Addams Family*, etc.) there became a need for cinema to make monsters scarier. This need for more screams was then filled with monsters that resembled humans; thus, blurring the lines between human and non-human.

A popular and particularly powerful example of this human/monster hybrid is seen in the image of the vampire. If a monster is created to help us identify ourselves as subjects rather than objects, what does it mean when the monster traverses the boundaries between human and monster, the boundaries of gender, and the boundaries of race? The Black Queer and/or Black woman vampire not only troubles notions of human versus nonhuman but also provides a posthuman form of agency not often given to Black characters in horror. I posit that the vampire trope radically refuses and destabilizes our collective understandings of "human" and "nonhuman," which allows us to imagine futures in which Black people can radically demand changes through violence and a wielding of power that Black monsters are typically asked to suppress (that being their thirst for blood and their rage). This ability to imagine the future through the horror genre with an emphasis on Black vampires that do not fit the "typical" vampire narrative befits an Afrofuturist ideology of asserting a complexity of Blackness in the future.

***The Tomb of Dracula*: Conflations of Darkness, Femaleness, and Monstrosity**

Jeffery Cohen's "Monster Culture (Seven Theses)" (1996) argues that society creates monsters that are reflective of the ideologies of that particular culture and time (Cohen 4). Looking at monster narratives allows us to learn more about the culture that birthed them. If, as Cohen posits, the monster is reflective of the sociocultural climate in which they are created, it should come as no surprise that the vampire (a monster/human hybrid) is a historically white character in our Western context.[8] Despite being historically white, the vampire character is often queer (sexually and in their "otherness"). Dracula, arguably the most famous vampire character, codifies notions of darkness as "other" as well as reflects cultural anxieties about the threat of a darkened "other" often rooted in his queer sexuality. Further, this white vampire narrative works to establish the binaries of human/nonhuman and gender that permeate classic horror.

The first issue of Marv Wolfman's 2021 reprint of the first volume of *Marvel Masterworks: Tomb of Dracula* (1972-1979) begins with the rise of Dracula prompted by the arrival of Frank Drake who discovers that he is a descendent of Dracula and inherits his legendary castle. In this issue, the readers get their first look at the Count as made famous by Bram Stoker's novel. Count Dracula's first appearance occurs when Clifton, the disliked acquaintance of Frank Drake, removes the stake from the skeleton of the Count after finding his tomb (see Fig. 3). In this single panel, there is a clear contrast of the light-colored human

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[8] Jerry Rafiki Jenkins traces the history of the vampire as a Black trope with a rich history in Africa and the Caribbean in his first chapter of *The Paradoxes of Blackness in African American Vampire Fiction*. To do so, he rejects the origin of the vampire being grounded in the Dracula character. For the purposes of this project, I begin with Dracula to demonstrate the codifications of the Dark Other in white vampire fiction as a starting point for complication Eurocentric notions of vampirism.

(Clifton) and the dark Dracula. The panels first show the bleached white skeleton of Dracula being surrounded by mist and being brought back to life. Then, in the next panel on the same page, there is a shift from the bleach-white skeleton to a blue-skinned figure with dark black hair and black eyes. Further, the black cloak the figure wears has pointed tips that resemble bat wings, and the blue tint of Dracula's skin matches the blue, shadowy background of the panel. Clifton, who occupies the same panel with his back facing the reader, is dropping the stake thus showing the peach-toned color of his skin and blonde hair. The contrast of light-colored Clifton compared to the darkened Dracula who matches the shadows of the background is one of the first instances of darkness being equated with the monstrous; thus, codifying darkness as "other" and abject. Therefore, the notion of human as white and male and thus rational that Wynter rejects is systemically reproduced. This representation of darkness as monstrous and the codification of the cultural other as nonhuman and monstrous is also seen in the character of Isla Strangeway (the bride of Dracula).
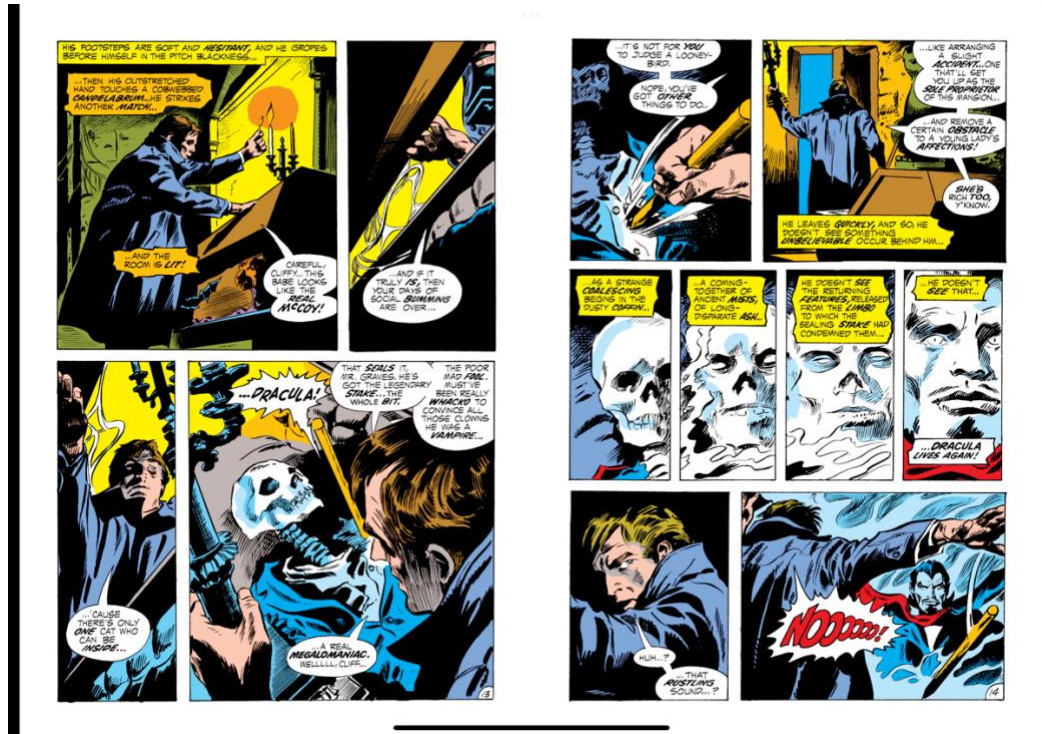
Figure 3. Marv Wolfman's 2021 reprint of the first volume of *Marvel Masterworks: Tomb of Dracula* (1972-1979) panel from Issue 1.

Isla Strangeway's first appearance in issue four positions her as a powerful woman with

means as she purchases the castle from Frank Drake. Although she's positioned as a powerful

woman, that power is displayed as monstrous through her visual representation as well as her

desires expressed in dialogue (see Fig. 4). While positioned in front of a picture of herself,

presumably nude, from twenty years prior Isla looks visibly older with bags under her eyes and

wrinkles, which do not exist in the old photos she stands in front of. Isla says to her assistant

Godfrey, "'I was a model, Godfrey…The greatest beauty of my day! Now time eats at that

beauty— eroding it, destroying it! I won't accept it! I'm not like others… Beauty life mine

shouldn't have to age! And if medicine and science can't undo the ravages of time— I'm

perfectly willing to turn to magic and the occult'" (Wolfman, "Through a Mirror" 19). This

dialogue, layered with the image of her as visibly older, depicts her as an old hag, another

monster trope. Further, her desire to use the occult to become younger positions her as vain in

her concern with beauty and in her preference to become a monster rather than grow older. Again, Wynter's description of how the human has been codified as white, male, and rational is enabled as the reader is meant to understand Isla's character as a monstrous being who desires an even more monstrous physical form. Thus, Isla becomes a darkened woman (darkened in her desires as well as she is one of the few dark-haired women of the series) and therefore a monster.

Figure 4. Marv Wolfman's 2021 reprint of the first volume of *Marvel Masterworks: Tomb of Dracula* (1972-1979) panel from Issue 4.

While *The Tomb of Dracula* comics give viewers a visual of what a monster looks like (non-human, darkened, and often female) paired with language to describe the monsters that we see and read about, the construction of the monster changes over time as creators look to challenge these established signifiers that impact the collective imagination. As seen in the examination of the *Tomb of Dracula* comics, creators must push past the collective imagination

and begin restructuring our understanding of the horror genre and, more specifically, of the vampire image and narrative.

The close readings in this chapter center vampire narratives by Black creators to demonstrate the re-storying that they have done that are steeped in an Afrofuturist sensibility in that they challenge the binary-thinking so essential to white heteropatriarchal understandings of humanity.[9] In these close readings, I argue that vampire narratives by Black women and/or Black Queer individuals become a means of reclaiming power and re-signifying Blackness as a sign of potential rather than limitation and hold up a mirror up to the insufficiency of white heteropatriarchal structures that uphold specific definitions of "human." Further, I argue that Black vampire narratives serve an Afrofuturist purpose because they envision a future steeped in the past that challenges Eurocentric notions of monstrosity and disrupts binary thinking regarding human/nonhuman and gender categorization. I explore how Black women and/or Black Queer individuals' constructions of vampire fiction depict Black vampires as beyond the constructions of "human" by re-signifying Black monstrosity thereby demonstrating a Black Queer horror aesthetic grounded in the Afrofuturist project of imagining a complexly liberated Black future for all Black folks.

Vampires—Cultural Products from "Humanism" to "Human 2.0"

Zakiyyah Iman Jackson's, *Becoming Human: Matter and Meaning in an Antiblack World* (2020), challenges the liberal humanities and the notions of human and humanism that have been upheld to devalue Black people. Rather than thinking of Black people as "dehumanized" Jackson explains that Black people are vessels open to shaping rather than dehumanized animals. Jackson asks: "Is the black a human being? The answer is hegemonically yes. However, this, in actuality,

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[9] See Thomas 162.

may be the wrong question as an affirmative offers no assurances. A better question may be: If

being recognized as human offers no reprieve from ontologizing dominance and violence, then

what might we gain from the rupture of 'the human'?" (Jackson 20). Jackson demonstrates the

possibilities of Blackness and Black being when ruptured from the traditional concepts of

"human" and "humanity"; thus, by demonstrating the possibilities of Blackness and Black being

challenges Kristeva's notion of what is abject in society. Rather than casting off Blackness as

abject, it is maintained as possibility. Therefore, when the monster, who is historically abject,

embraces Blackness (Black culture, history, and being) what becomes abject is whiteness and its

systems of oppression. This "new" notion of what is abject serves an Afrofuturist purpose by

rejecting Eurocentric concepts of abject and abjection, which is especially salient in cultural

products exploring soucouyant folklore and vampire narratives.

In *The Things that Fly in the Night: Female Vampires in Literature of the Circum-*

Caribbean and African Diaspora (2015), Giselle Anatol traces the shifts in how the soucouyant

narrative is portrayed. Anatol notes that the soucouyant differs from traditional vampire

narratives like *Dracula* in how the soucouyant is made abject. Anatol explains that the

soucouyant "[a]rouses the ambivalent repulsion and fascination associated with the 'unnatural'

border crossings of her repeated transformations" because she can peel off her skin and slip back

into it while also maintaining her everyday woman appearance (Anatol 27).[9] Therefore, the

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[9] "The soucouyant is not abject because she elicits the paradoxical sense of loathing and
temptation generated by things that occupy the fragile border between living and dead[...] She
instead arouses the ambivalent repulsion and fascination associated with the 'unnatural' border
crossings of her repeated transformations: her capacity to peel off her skin and her ability to slip
it back on and take on the appearance of an everyday woman, both of which hint at her
traversing the boundary between corporeal body and intangible spirit; her talent for turning into a
ball of flame, not once, but night after night; her adeptness at inhabiting both the day and the
night; and the transgressive sexuality implied by her nocturnal journeys" (Anatol 27).

soucouyant is not abject simply because she is both desirable and repulsive, rather, it is because of her potential to cross borders by shedding her skin and sneaking into people's houses at night only to come back, put her skin back on, and walk around like an ordinary woman during the day. The soucouyant is abject in her potential and power that lies in her back-and-forth transformations and her mobility rather than in her fragility as a walking corpse like in typical vampire narratives. Therefore, the monster (the soucouyant) isn't simply the darkened female other. Rather, her mobility and potential to transform is what is truly monstrous.

The potential associated with these transformations of the soucouyant demonstrate the shift in how the monster is represented in Black Horror compared to white-created horror or even Blacks *in* horror. Black Horror develops a new epistemological approach for understanding monstrosity and its potential to speculate about alternative and possible futures where the monster can wield their power productively. This is what Jackson calls for when she states, "Consequently, a new epistemology and transformative approach to being is needed rather than the extension of human recognition under the state's normative conception" (Jackson 28). Since humanity, as defined and critiqued by Wynter, and notions of the human are limiting, Black creators must seek other means of representing Blackness that doesn't rely on using the unfitting definitions of "human" and "humanity" such as the posthuman.

Typically, the posthuman is associated with sci-fi and the images of the cyborg.[10] In Dan Hassler-Forest's *Janelle Monáe's Queer Afrofuturism* (2022), Hassler-Forest expounds on

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[10] Donna Haraway's "Cyborg Manifesto" (1985) is an important work in posthumanism as she contends that "Cyborg imagery can suggest a way out of the maze of dualisms in which we have explained our bodies and our tools to ourselves [...] It is an imagination of a feminist speaking in tongues to strike fear into the circuits of the supersavers of the new right. It means both building and destroying machines, identities, categories, relationships, space stories. Though both are bound in the spiral dance, I would rather be a cyborg than a goddess" (Haraway 181).

Jackson's exploration of liberal humanism and its anti-Blackness arguing that posthumanism allows us to see as well as challenge this anti-Blackness. Posthumanism and the posthuman describe what comes *after* humanism with special attention the intersections of race, gender, and sexuality that humanism, as noted by Wynter, is predicated on and is oppositional to in its definition. Hassler-Forest argues that posthumanism departs from the original definitions of humanism by "reveal[ing] the pathological ways in which liberal humanism has always had to define 'Man' as distinct from and therefore superior to categories such as animal, woman, slave, sexual deviant, etc. This is accomplished by short-circuiting liberal humanism's subject/object binary that separates organic from artificial humans" (Hassler-Forest 91). Thus, I contend that the Black vampire is posthuman, or what I refer to as Human 2.0, in its denial of liberal humanism and embracing of monstrosity. Arguably, Black women and/or Black Queer individuals' horror constructions do posthumanist work by making the monstrous other a powerful agent rather than something or someone to be feared by the audience. Rather, the thing feared in Black women and/or Black Queer people's horror is often whiteness and its systems of oppressive power. This subversion of what is abject and thus what is feared shares similar principles with Afrofuturism as they both work to challenge oppressive Eurocentric systems of power.

In, "Critical Afrofuturism: A Case Study in Visual Rhetoric, Sequential Art, and Postapocalyptic Black Identity" (2015), Reynaldo Anderson posits a Critical Afrofuturism Theory that, "operates from a standpoint that intersects theories of time and space, technology, class, race, gender, and sexuality and delineates a general economy of racialization in relation to forces of production and apocalyptic, dystopian, and utopian futures" (Anderson "Critical Afrofuturism" 183). A Critical Afrofuturist Theory pushes Afrofuturism past simply being an

aesthetic practice or movement and instead considers it as a lens for viewing and reading speculative cultural products that considers how time and space, technology, and various intersecting identities such as race and gender operate in a given cultural product and encourages speculation about liberatory futures for Black people. While Critical Afrofuturist Theory provides the method for reading Black women and/or Black Queer horror texts, operating within an Afrofuturist Feminism framework creates a reading of a Black women and/or Black Queer individuals' horror aesthetic tradition that attends to gender more deliberately.

Susana Morris's Afrofuturist Feminism is described as centering Black women and their lived experiences to speculate about a future that challenges Eurocentric systems of power that have historically centered the positive futures of white people and the negative, or non-, futures of Black people (Morris "Everything is Real" 78). While Morris's framework is specifically considering Black women, I push this further in my analysis of Black women and/or Black Queer characters as well as creators of horror. Thus, a Critical Afrofuturist Theory that considers a queer epistemological approach serves as a framework for the readings that follow in order to highlight how Black women and/or Black Queer horror creators employ an Afrofuturist sensibility that disrupts oppressive Eurocentric power structures that normally dominate speculative and horror texts. This approach more complexly considers how the Black vampire transgresses the boundaries of human/nonhuman by refusing and destabilizing our collective understandings of "human" as well as these narratives allow us to imagine futures in which Black people can wield beyond-human, or posthuman, power to gain liberation for themselves and their communities. I begin the following close readings with Jewelle Gomez's *The Gilda Stories* as it emphasizes the Afrofuturist sensibility of Black women's horror works by exploring community-building, humanism, and queerness.

Reading the Black Vampire: Complex Black Womanhood, Community, and Queerness in
The Gilda Stories,* "Greedy Choke Puppy," and *Suicide by Sunlight

The Gilda Stories

Jewelle Gomez's titular character in *The Gilda Stories* finds herself grappling with the intersecting identities of being Black, queer, and vampire. Beginning in 1850 and spanning to a speculated 2050, Gomez's novel details the long life of a vampire who escapes enslavement in the beginning of the novel and is later transformed into Gilda, a vampire named after her own sire. Each chapter of the novel marks another chapter in Gilda's life in various locations across the United States. Gomez details events of Black American history through Gilda's involvement in each major period of that long history. Throughout the novel, Gilda has relationships with people of all genders, some of whom she turns into vampires like herself. In these relationships, Gilda works to cultivate a community "with a distinctly queer sensibility" that is rooted in learning from one another's experiences (Morris "More than Human" 39).

One of the most noted ways that Gomez reinvents the vampire genre is through the blood sharing process Gilda and her partners use to survive. When Gilda (the sire) is teaching the Girl (before present-day Gilda is named Gilda) about the blood sharing process she says, "'There is a joy to the exchange we make. We draw life into ourselves, yet we give life as well. We give what's needed— energy, dreams, ideas. It's a fair exchange in a world full of cheaters. And when we feel it is right, when the need is great on both sides, we can re-create others like ourselves to share life with us'" (Gomez 45). Rather than taking the life from the blood-supplying human, they take enough to sustain themselves while giving back a transfer of dreams and energy that are beneficial to the supplier. Thus, the process is rooted in sustaining and creating life rather than draining and destroying it. By practicing a feeding process that refuses

death, the Gildas and their partners disrupt the normative construction of vampires as simply blood thirsty monsters. As Susana Morris argues, "These vampires constitute a threat to the social order because they reject the violence and tyranny that is the foundation of the dystopias they live within, not because they prey upon humans." (Morris "More than Human" 39). In this rejection of violence through a blood *sharing* rather than a blood *letting* process, Gomez's vampires employ an Afrofuturist sensibility that reimagines our understanding of the vampire trope as well as creates a life-supporting, thus, future-oriented process that emphasizes the humanity of a Black vampire that is, arguably, more humane than the human population she exists within due to her rejection of violence and tyranny through this process of providing hopes and dreams to those whose blood she feeds on. While one of the facets of Afrofuturist Horror denotes the necessity of violence to achieve liberation, the blood *sharing* process of the Gildas does not negate its place in the Afrofuturist Horror canon as it still embraces Black monstrosity just with complexity. Arguably, biting someone's neck and feeding off of them still is a level of violent behavior; however, Gomez's approach to this already-violent act is complex and challenges a typical animal-like feeding in other vampire narratives.

As The Girl's mother explains before she is turned into a vampire and is still enslaved, the (white) humans that surround them do not behave humanely: "'They ain't been here long 'nough. They just barely human. Maybe not even. They suck up the world, don't taste it'" (Gomez 11). The "humanity" that has been acceptable (white, cis, heterosexual notions of humanity) actually dehumanizes those who do not fit the criteria despite also being human. Thus, Gilda and her community of life-affirming vampires challenge what it truly means to be human by behaving with more humanity than the white, heterosexual men who have set the parameters

for being human. However, this does not mean that violence isn't employed at all when it comes to assuring a future for Gilda and her community.

While discussing Eleanor, a vampire who has attracted the attention of Gilda, the bartender at Sorel's place, Anthony, tells Gilda to prepare herself for the more violent types of vampires in their community like Eleanor. Gilda responds,

> 'It soon became clear that although the institution of enslavement was no longer sanctioned, our world had not become a more hospitable place for me or my people. Often it was only the gifts that I acquired in this new life that saved me from those we call civilized. My safest, surest moments were spent in the wild with those we call animals. I doubt there's much here for which I am not prepared' (Gomez 82).

Gilda explains that ordinary humans are more of a threat to her as a Black queer woman and that she has felt safest in the presence of non-humans and away from places deemed "civilized." Gilda directly challenges normative understandings of safety and security as well as human/nonhuman through her experience being oppressed as a Black queer woman finding more safety amongst "nonhumans" and "nonhuman" spaces. Further, her abilities as a vampire—her ability to enact and get away with violence— have often kept her alive and safe in that she can physically protect herself from harm inflicted by racists and homophobes alike.

While she is more than human, the afterlife of enslavement has deemed her less than human.[11] Jackson explains that "Slavery's technologies were not the denial of humanity but the plasticization of humanity" (Jackson 71). To be plastic or plasticized is to have the capacity to be shaped and misshaped or to be stretched into or beyond a shape. During enslavement and its afterlife, certain ideas of human/nonhuman were made plastic; or were codified to benefit a

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[11] Saidiya Hartman defines the afterlife of enslavement as the trauma and proverbial fingerprint that racialized enslavement left on the United States and on the African diaspora in *Scenes of Subjection* (Hartman 29).

white patriarchal society.[12] Thus, to be a Black, queer, woman does not fit this definition of human or humanity. In other words, Gilda's positionality as a Black, queer, woman and vampire cannot fit the definition of human that was codified during enslavement and Gilda is aware of this social construction. Her knowledge of these constructions of human/nonhuman allows her to use her gifts as a "monster" to challenge codifications of "human" by using those gifts to survive despite the physical and emotional violence white patriarchal society has enacted on her during her lifetime both before and after becoming a vampire.

By finding herself safest amongst non-humans (specifically, animals) she rejects normative ideas of "civility" where "civilization" is actually incredibly dangerous and life in the wild amongst the animals is safer. As Morris posits, "*The Gilda Stories* is a foundational Afrofuturist feminist tale of black counter-pasts and counter-futures. The world the novel depicts is one where the hegemony of patriarchy and imperialism are challenged by black women's visions of a society without normative divisions of power (Morris "More than Human" 41). In rejecting these Eurocentric ideas of humanity and civility through Gilda's character, Gomez constructs both a queer and Afrofuturist sensibility through the vampire trope that directly challenges a white patriarchal understanding of humanity, civility, and the power structures that govern these concepts. Gomez further challenges dominant understandings of humanity and power through the vampire trope by having "human" society crumble while vampires continue to survive, thus, challenging whose futures are able to be imagined.

Gomez writes,

The psychological impact of having no distant future to contemplate was staggering. People had grown restless and impatient with themselves, then surly and ruthless. Finally, they discovered the existence of the Vampire. They began to believe in the myths they had heard with chilled pleasure as children and to put their faith in the creatures with

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[12] See Wynter, 35.

infinite regenerative powers (Gomez 235).

This moment in the novel serves a few purposes. First, it critiques the exploitation of cultures that have been previously, and purposefully, erased or denied by white heteropatriarchal ideas of power in that vampire culture is not acknowledged until humans want to exploit it for their gain. This idea mirrors what we see in American history where Black spiritual beliefs like conjure or rootwork are purposefully erased and vilified to empower a white Christian sensibility, but in our contemporary moment are being misused and exploited for capitalist enterprises by white spiritualists.[13] Further, as Morris explains, "The novel illustrates that human life and culture will perish without a radical restructuring of power," and that Gomez's vampires' ideas about identities and relationships (community and intimate) "promote a self-preservation that is not predicated upon the subjugation and/or annihilation of other species, unlike humans in the world of the novel (Morris "More than Human" 41). In other words, Gomez depicts vampires that disengage with Eurocentric notions of identity, community, and self and instead engage with identity formation that does not revolve solely around the death and destruction of the "other" (in this case, the "other" are the humans). Thus, the dependence on and sudden turn to the vampire by the humans in the novel to survive their post-apocalyptic situation demonstrates an

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[13] According to Katrina Hazzard-Donald in *Mojo Workin': The Old African American Hoodoo System,* "Hoodoo has endured numerous labels, among them black magic, witchcraft, devil's work, and superstition, though other less pejorative names include spirit work, root work, conjure, spiritualism, psychic work, or simply 'the work'. Similar to some missionary treatment of African traditional religion as evil, the conceptualization of Hoodoo as the devil's work is not new; this long-standing conceptualization of conjure as evil sometimes leads contemporary informants to refer to conjure as witchcraft and to view it as a force opposing Christianity" (4). Further, Hazzard-Donald explains that African syncretic spiritual traditions have historically been exploited by non-Black practitioners: "Workers of old tradition Hoodoo would be outnumbered by and achieve lower levels of visibility than the marketeering outsiders interested in the commercial exploitation of Hoodoo" (157).
Also see page 16 for more about marketeered Hoodoo.

Afrofuturist understanding of speculating about a future that no longer relies on Eurocentric notions of survival. This idea echoes a common idea amongst Afrofuturists that the past of Black individuals has been one of constant adaptation and ability to survive despite living in a system that was designed to oppress and exploit Black people.

As Reynaldo Anderson argues, "The Afrodiasporic worldview can be demonstrated by the fact that in religion, history, art, politics, and literature, Africans and their diaspora have repeatedly chosen to find a way to *resist or transform* their circumstances rather than to *rationally* accept their condition" (Anderson "Critical Afrofuturism" 182). The history of constant survival, adaptation, and refusal is essential to an Afrofuturist understanding of the future and Afrofuturist art utilizes this theme to create counternarratives that disrupt our Eurocentric understanding of history. By having the humans in the novel embrace their vampirism, Gomez rejects Eurocentric systems of power as they have caused the downfall of the society in the novel and instead embraces the way of the cultural "other" (the vampire), which privileges posthumanism rather than liberal humanism.

Gomez employs an Afrofuturist sensibility that speculates about a future that encourages the monstrosity associated with the vampire as well as the monstrosity associated with the Black body as these Black vampires, like Gilda, are able to transcend their circumstances and showcase the great power that comes from generations of survival and adaptation combined with the power of the vampire. Gomez seems to re-signify the vampire as seemingly more humane than the humans of the novel thus challenging the specific binaries of human/inhuman and embracing a posthuman, Human 2.0. Thus, Gilda and her vampire community become the ultimate immortals suggesting that, "Black women vampires, therefore, become not only more than human but

perhaps most human in their understanding of power, reciprocity, and community" (Morris "More than Human" 40).

"Greedy Choke Puppy"

Originally appearing in Sheree Thomas' collection of Black speculative fiction, *Dark Matter,* in 2000 and then republished in *Skin Folk* (2001), Nalo Hopkinson's "Greedy Choke Puppy" is a short story following a Caribbean woman, Jacky, and her grandmother. It is quickly revealed that Jacky is a soucouyant, and by the end of the story the reader discovers that her mother, who is dead, and her grandmother are soucouyants as well. What's interesting about Hopkinson's approach to the soucouyant narrative is that she notes the potential of being a soucouyant by giving us Jacky's internal monologue while she is in soucouyant form. Hopkinson writes: "*Inside my skin I was just one big ball of fire, and Lord the night air feel nice and cool on the flame! I know then I was a soucouyant, a hag-woman. I know what I had was to do. When your youth start to leave you, you have to steal more from somebody who still have plenty. I fly out the window and start to search, search for a newborn baby*" (Hopkinson 136). In this moment, Jacky's internal monologue explains her coming to know that she is a soucouyant and what she needs to do to survive. She needs to shed her skin and fly at night to cool down the fire inside of her. This fire inside of her is her power, but that power can cause hunger or, in her case, a thirst for the lifeblood of newborn babies. Jacky is a monster not because she is a Black woman, but because she is a not-whole Black woman. By not-whole I'm referring to the fact that she does not have love in her life.

As her grandmother notes, it isn't romantic love that she necessarily needs and instead tells her to find other forms of love to cool her inner fire. Her grandmother says, "'When we lives empty, the hunger does turn to blood hunger. But it have plenty other kinds of loving,

Jacky. Ain't I been telling you so? Love your work. Love people close to you. Love your life'" (Hopkinson 143). Thus, the soucouyant narrative engenders a rejection of Eurocentric constructions of love that equate love with romantic partnership. Instead, the soucouyant is encouraged to love themselves, their lives, their work, and their community to cool their inner fire. Further, the skin is positioned as a limiting barrier to the soucouyant rather than a space of desire as seen in typical vampire narratives. Again, this is seen in Jacky's inner monologue. Hopkinson writes, "*The skin only confining me. I could feel it getting old, binding me up inside it. Sometimes I does just feel to take it off and never put it back on again, oui?*" (Hopkinson 140). Jacky's Black woman skin feels physically oppressive, and she desires to rip it off and never return to it and instead live out her days as a ball of fire. Her desire to do this comes from her hunger that needs to be fed with love. However, by spending her time seeking romantic love rather than love for herself, her work, or community, Jacky doesn't satisfy her hunger. Thus, romantic love, a Eurocentric construction meant to uphold capitalist society by creating more workers, is not suitable. It is not a one-size-fits-all model much like humanism is not. Therefore, Hopkinson's soucouyant narrative rejects notions of humanism and the constructs that come with it (such as romantic love being necessary to become a whole and healthy individual). Rather, Hopkinson embraces the monstrous Black woman soucouyant as a means of exposing the systems that can create the monster while also showcasing the potential freedom that comes from shedding one's skin and sneaking around at night to satiate one's hunger for love.

While embracing this monstrousness to expose systems that create monsters, Hopkinson also complicates the abject positionality of the soucouyant. Kristeva explains that the abject "[K]ills in the name of life—a progressive despot; it lives at the behest of death— an operator in genetic experimentations; it curbs the other's suffering for its own profit…" (Kristeva 15). In

other words, the abject being is something that benefits or lives because of the death of another. For Jacky, this is the lifeblood of newborn babies. However, Hopkinson doesn't make this a necessity for survival, thus complicating the abject position of the soucouyant. Instead, the soucouyant can cool their bloodlust, or their inner fire, with love— namely, love outside of the constraints of Eurocentric, heterosexual romantic love.

In challenging the abject status of the soucouyant by making her able to survive off of more than blood or death, Hopkinson demonstrates an Afrofuturist sensibility that, "[E]stablish[es] a counternarrative and undermine[s] or delegitimize[s] the power of the *Leviathan*, the Eurocentric social contract that institutionalizes and maintains the power of the elite and the *people's* ability to collectively imagine or organize for an alternative future" (Anderson "Critical Afrofuturism" 179). In other words, by rejecting the need for heterosexual romantic love as the only acceptable and fulfilling form of love as well as allowing her soucouyant characters to survive off of love rather than blood, Hopkinson imagines a liberated future where Black individuals can rely on communal love while maintaining their individual power.

Suicide by Sunlight

In the seventeen-minute film, *Suicide by Sunlight* (2018), Nikyatu Jusu combines the classic day-walking Black vampire character within a scientific framework for how melanin protects black people from the sun much like in Octavia Butler's *Fledgling*. Overall, the film remixes a familiar subgenre of horror as a tool for speculating about a future where Black women can be mothers, sexual beings, and powerful all at once, thus, breaking Black women out of boxes they have been forced into. Unlike Hopkinson's soucouyant, Jusu's main character Valentina does not need to strip off her skin to be powerful. But Jacky and Valentina are similar

in their loneliness as Black women and monsters. Valentina must find a way to control her blood lust so that she can see her children who are kept from her by her ex who views her "condition" as dangerous despite their daughters inheriting their mother's same vampirism.

While Valentina is kept from her daughters, she is also isolated along with the rest of the Black vampire community, which the short film medium assists in portraying. At multiple moments, scenes cut from the main storyline following Valentina to interview-style camera angles and close-ups of forlorn and longing faces of various Black vampires. During one of the moments where the camera pans to the faces of these Black vampires and then cuts back to Valentina, a monologue of a Black preacher plays in the background in which he says, "'This is a sign of the end of days! Men can walk among monsters'" (Jusu). At this moment, the viewer can infer that even amongst the Black community, the Black vampires are made abject or other and thus monstrous.

Rather than attempt to fit in by repressing her bloodlust, Valentina gives in to it and kills the new woman who has been mothering her children as a means of getting them back by any means necessary. Jusu's choice for Valentina to act on her monstrosity as a means of healing trauma (her separation from her daughters) echoes Jackson's understanding of ontological plasticity in which she explains that Black people are made "impressionable, stretchable, and misshapen to the point that the mind may not survive— it potentially goes wild," and "are well beyond alienation, exploitation, subjection, domestication, and even animalization. (Jackson 71). Plasticity here refers to the capacity for Black people to be shaping/misshaping and being stretched beyond limits. Black people, in our creative works as well as in the history of the concept of "human," have always had the potential to be more than what alienation has made us (less than human). Thus, in our constructions of Black monstrosity in horror, our ability to

stretch beyond the limits of humanity forces us to become posthuman. Valentina's alienation as both a Black woman and vampire is simultaneously limiting yet holds great potential. Acting on her monstrosity causes her alienation, but it is also her monstrosity that breaks that alienation by allowing her to reunite with her daughters, which is important because they are also vampires and must learn how to exist in a society that views them as less-than-human due to their Blackness and their being women while really being posthuman, in their Blackness and their monstrosity.

Figure 5. Natalie Paul as Valentina in Nikyatu Jusu's *Suicide by Sunlight*. "Short Film: *Suicide by Sunlight*"; Taliesin Meets the Vampires; Taliesinttlg.blogspot.com, 1 March 2020, taliesinttlg.blogspot.com/2020/03/short-film-suicide-by-sunlight.html.

To further the argument that Jusu's short film uses monstrosity to rupture notions of "humanity," Anatol explains how vampire and soucouyant narratives tend to move in and out of the genre. Anatol explains that Black authors move in and out of the vampire genre in their constructions of Black vampires in that "they resist and reject the idea of non-normative sexual desire as deviant, the Black woman's body as a site of aberrant behaviors, and the nuclear, heterosexual, patriarchal family model as the only one able to provide stability, protection,

contentment, and joy (Anatol 188). In other words, these Black vampire narratives *queer* familial

structures as created and perpetuated by the Western, hegemonic, white imagination. In Jusu's

short film, the viewer does not see Valentina fighting to get her ex back but instead sees her

fighting for a family of her own definition (simply her and her daughters being together).

Further, during one of her nights out, Valentina jumps from body to body feeding as she

needs to while dressed in a slinky black dress and dancing in a nightclub. Her desires are queer

in that we see her dancing and feeding from men and women alike. Thus, Jusu ruptures the

Eurocentric construction of non-normative sexual desires and non-nuclear familial structures as

deviant, as codified by white humanists in definitions of human and humanity, and instead

embraces the "non-normal" as both normal and necessary. While traditional Eurocentric

depictions of Dracula similarly code the vampire as queer (sexually), it still upholds white

hegemony in its demonizing of darkness and cultural "otherness" that Black vampire horror

embraces. By acknowledging and visually demonstrating a Black woman's complex sexuality,

Jusu demonstrates both an Afrofuturist and Black Feminist sensibility as "It is the study,

theorization, and recognition of Black women's horror that creates a vital literary voice

continuing the Black Feminist project of acknowledging Black women's complex humanity"

(Brooks et al. 245). A Critical Afrofuturist theoretical reading that also considers a Black

feminist epistemology highlights this complexity of Black women and their experiences. Thus, in

Jusu's exploration of Valentina as a complex sexual being, the viewer can also speculate about

the possibilities of a liberated Black woman's sexuality that does not classify her as "deviant" or

further othered.

Figure 6. Valentina feeds off of a random woman in a nightclub in *Suicide by Sunlight*. "Suicide by Sunlight"; *Short of the Week;* Shortoftheweek.com, www.shortoftheweek.com/2020/02/27/suicide-by-sunlight/.

Finally, Jusu's construction of the vampire complicates the abject as cultural other. As Kristeva explains, what is abject is what is cast off from ourselves as a repressed desire that cannot be acted upon (Kristeva 12). Valentina represents the abject in that she embodies repressed desires (immortality, strength, etc.). However, Jusu complicates her abject status by showing the benefit of acting on those repressed desires or impulses (namely, rage) to heal the trauma caused by being made abject— Valentina can get her daughters back by enacting her rage. Again, Black women's horror becomes a vehicle for exploring the potential of the monster and denying the constraints of "human" and "humanity" to create a hybrid being that is human plus monster.

Conclusion

Anatol notes that as time goes on, "[t]he fright associated with the peeling of the skin as well as the drawing of blood from another person remains, but a distinct shift occurs so that the action evokes a sense of agency and power" (Anatol 9). Therefore, in a Black Horror, the

monsters become powerful agents and the new things to fear are the old structures in place that have historically threatened to turn Black people into monsters. Early horror works like *The Tomb of Dracula* pay special attention to contrasting, visually, the dark/black monstrous "other" from the white victims and protagonists. However, as Black Horror employs monster narratives, especially vampire ones, there is a new epistemology that begins the work of restructuring and redefining what it means to be human by showcasing Black women vampires as beyond human, or posthuman, human 2.0. By creating these "human 2.0's," Black women creators of vampire and soucouyant horror fiction are enacting an Afrofuturist sensibility that speculates about a reality that embraces the complexity of Black women and/or Queer folks' identities and ruptures those identities from the Eurocentric bases they stem from (the notions of human and nonhuman).

Chapter 2

"They Will Say I Shed Innocent Blood. You Are Far From Innocent": Becoming an Afrofuturist

Survivor

The 1974 Blaxploitation film *Sugar Hill* follows Diana "Sugar" Hill (played by Marki

Bey) on her quest to avenge her murdered fiancé, Langston, after he's murdered by a mob boss

who wants to buy their business, "Club Haiti." Sugar is the quintessential Black female

protagonist of the Blaxploitation 70s—a "hot mama" and a "sexpot" (Coleman 135, 140). To

avenge her partner, Sugar seeks the help of a Mambo who connects her with Baron Samedi, the

Iwa of the dead. Baron Samedi grants her the power of his zombie army and one by one Sugar

and her army of the undead slay the mob hitmen that murdered her honey ending with the mob

boss in charge. *Sugar Hill* serves as an important cultural product of the Blaxploitation

movement, the production of cultural products in the 1970s where power shifted to being

"wielded by a formerly disempowered minority figure" (Benshoff 201). The Blaxploitation film

era, despite its Black Power ideologies and overall themes of Black empowerment, was

extremely misogynistic often subjecting Black female characters to abuse (sexual and physical)

and rife with homophobia and overall anti-queer sentiment (Coleman 120). Despite the era's

shortcomings regarding its treatment of Black women and/or Black Queer people, films its

produced like *Sugar Hill* served important cultural work in terms of representing a Black woman

in a position of power and white men as powerless victims of her revenge.

Sugar Hill also presents one of the first well-known Black Final Girls who not only

survives the violence of the film's white mobsters but enacts her rage to demand justice for their

crimes against her lover using Baron Samedi's zombie army to do her dirty work. As one of the

first Black Final Girls, Sugar sets the stage for powerful Black women protagonists in horror as

being resourceful and clever fighters as well as survivors. I argue that Sugar's character also set the stage for Black Queer survivors in horror texts as well. For Black women and/or Black Queer folks, being a Final Girl isn't just about surviving. It's also about demanding a future for themselves as well as creating a community and engendering a community's future. Sugar's character fights using the powers of Vodou and her zombie army, but there are flaws with her imagining as she is caricaturized as the overly sexual jezebel trope as she fights her battles in a lowcut, tight jumpsuit with an afro and does her business meetings with straightened hair. Arguably, the writing of her character by a white man (Paul Maslansky) factors into her stereotyped portrayal. This begs the question: what happens when Black creators, especially Black women and/or Black Queer individuals, are given control over the Final Girl narrative? Specifically, what is the potential of the Final Girl in Black Horror?

Final Girl + Enduring Woman = Afrofuturist Survivor

The Final Girl character has increased in popularity over the years within the slasher subgenre of horror but has been theorized and speculated about for some time now. Carol Clover's *Men, Women, and Chainsaws* (1993) was a watershed work that analyzed the slasher, occult, and rape-revenge films of the 1980s with special attention to gender and sexuality. Clover argues that the appeal of these films comes from the Final Girl character as the audience is able to relate to her as a victim and a hero.

Clover defined the Final Girl and problematized the horror genre for its fascination with violence inflicted on women explaining that the Final Girl becomes relatable to the audience as the movie progresses due to her gender slippage. In her definition, Clover explains that "The Final Girl is also watchful to the point of paranoia; small signs of danger that her friends ignore, she registers. Above all she is intelligent and resourceful in a pinch" (Clover 39). Further, Clover

argues that the Final Girl is "abject terror personified" (Clover 35). In other words, the Final Girl not only experiences abjection but she embodies abjection in her ability to teeter the binary of gender and embody just enough monstrosity to survive. Although the Final Girl is vigilant, intelligent, and able to survive the violence of a slasher, she's often, problematically, white. Further, Clover's definition is dependent on white hegemonic understandings of gender and sexuality where the white, male, middle class audience's identification with her is due to her ability to slip into a more masculine role to defeat the slasher (Clover 40).

As many horror fans know, Black women and/or Black Queer people rarely survive long or are not present at all in the slasher subgenre. However, with the rise of attention to Black Horror, more and more Black Final Girls are being recovered from past works (like Brandy in *I Still Know What You Did Last Summer*) and deserve the same exploration and treatment as white Final Girls have been given. However, I want to trouble the term Final Girl even further as it excludes a whole population of gender queer individuals who may or may not identify as women or "girls." Thus, the term I am privileging to describe the role of the Black woman and/or Black Queer survivor of a Black Horror slasher text as an Afrofuturist Survivor. This term is more encompassing of the complexities of Black Queerness without assigning a binary gender or sex to the characters explored in this chapter.

The role of the Final Girl in Black Horror as well as in Blacks *in* Horror has been explored most recently and most extensively by Robin R. Means Coleman in *Horror Noir* and Kinitra Brooks's *Searching for Sycorax*. Coleman and Brooks' undertakings of the Black Final Girl (which Coleman terms "enduring women") and Clover's conception of the Final Girl serve as the frameworks of this chapter paired with Afrofuturist theory to understand the importance of the Afrofuturist Survivor in creating alternative futures within the slasher subgenre of horror. In

my exploration of the Afrofuturist Survivor I am not only explicating the complexity of the "Final Girl" in Black Horror, but I am troubling the previous constructions of them that adhere to white gender heteronormativity.

Brooks explains that Black women are often associated with monstrosity in horror and that this association "stems from the stereotype of the [B]lack Superwoman, also known as the 'strong [B]lack woman'" and that this stereotype of the strong Black woman "ignores the complexity of [B]lack womanhood and its radical potential to subvert multiple problematic identities simultaneously" (Brooks 25-26). In other words, Black women, in Brooks's theory, in horror are often seen as monstrous or supernatural in their ability to withstand pain and to show strength in the face of hardship. This dehumanization of Black women and/or Black Queer people is common in horror as they are often labeled as so able to withstand pain/hardship that they are a monster or a monster for acting on their pain and hardship. For instance, Sugar in *Sugar Hill* is dehumanized by the men who attempt to buy her club from her as they do not think a woman can run a business and then she is further dehumanized and sexualized by the same men when she confronts them moments before unleashing her zombie army on them.

Further, Coleman explains that "With no real way to defeat the evil (systems of inequality) that surrounds them, Black women in horror films could be described as resilient 'Enduring Women'" (Coleman 132). In Coleman's undertaking of Clover's Final Girl theory, rather than being called a Final Girl, Black women who survive slashers are called "Enduring Women" or are simply seen as "strong Black women" because although they may defeat the present evil (the slasher) there is still no escaping the systemic evil that is ever-present and thus they must endure said evil. Coleman further explains, "Much like the White Final Girl, Black women stare down death. However, these Black women are not going up against some

boogeyman; rather, often their battle is with racism and corruption" (Coleman 132). Again, the history of the Final Girl seems to be centered on white women who only need to survive the monster or slasher at hand while Black women must face the larger system of oppression even after the slasher or monster is defeated. Again, I'd like to complicate this notion by applying an Afrofuturist lens as the simple survival of Black people in horror is, in itself, a form of speculating about a future through the horror genre. In my exploration of the Final Girl in Black Horror, I apply an Afrofuturist reading to argue that Final Girls of Black Horror are more than just "enduring women" and more than Final Girls. The Final Girls of Black horror are in a league of their own and are united by a single Afrofuturist ideology— Black people will survive, and we will be present in a future of our own making by any means necessary. Thus, I push forth a more gender-inclusive term to describe the survivor and ultimately, the one who faces the monster or slasher in the end, through the Afrofuturist Survivor. These Afrofuturist Survivors are governed by the idea that they will survive by any means necessary and, through the tenets of Afrofuturism, imagine a future for themselves and their communities thus fighting back against the present-evil of the slasher or monster as well as the monstrous system of oppression that they exist within.

I contend that Final Girls in Black Horror are *more* than Final Girls and *more* than Enduring Women as Black Horror works with a Final Girl attempt to fight back against both the slasher/monster as well as the system itself rather than simply endure it. These Final Girls of Black Horror, that I term Afrofuturist Survivors, demand a future through small, revolutionary, acts of survival and justice often using violence to both stay alive and to fight the monster or killer. To make this argument, this chapter explores *Candyman* (2021) and the television series *Swarm* (2023) to show how Black creators depict Afrofuturist Survivors that subvert the Final

Girl trope in ways that attempt to take on both the slasher and "the system" to speculate about a liberated future for Black women and/or Black Queer folks and the larger Black community. Through my assertion that Black Horror centers Afrofuturist Survivors rather than Final Girls or Enduring Women, I employ a queer oppositional gaze that reads Afrofuturist Survivors' deviance as necessary and powerful to fight against the slasher and the system.

Candyman (2021)

Bernard Rose's *Candyman* (1992), based off Clive Barker's short story "The Forbidden," follows a graduate student in Chicago named Helen Lyle (played by Virginia Madsen) as she explores the urban legend of the Candyman that has been proliferating Chicago's Cabrini-Green housing project. During her research, Helen not only summons Candyman by enacting the legend (standing in front of a mirror and repeating his name five times), but she learns about the history of Candyman himself. According to legend, Candyman's (played by Tony Todd) real name is Daniel Robitaille, and he was the son of an enslaved person and was a renowned painter who fell in love with and impregnated a white woman of a family he was hired to paint. This interracial relationship leads to Daniel's lynching by a white mob who sawed off his hand and covered him with honey that attracted bees that eventually stung him to death. After his torture and mutilation, his body is burned on a pyre at the site of the Cabrini-Green project housing thus birthing the legend of the Candyman. After learning more about the people who live in Cabrini-Green through intrusive interviews and the legend of the Candyman, Helen simply concludes that the residents of the Cabrini-Green neighborhood employ the Candyman legend to cope with the class and racial inequities that they face. However, the discredit of his legend leads Candyman to latch on to Helen telling her that he must shed innocent blood to maintain his legacy asking her to "be [his] victim" and join him and become a legend (Rose). Where Helen is

Candyman's victim in the original film, Nia DaCosta's re-quel (amalgam of a sequel and a remake) asks its Final Girl to be his witness thus marking a shift in thinking about the impact and potential of the Candyman legend by Black creators taking up the text.

Brianna Cartwright, played by Teyonah Parris, stars as an interesting and complex Afrofuturist Survivor in the *Candyman* (2021) remake. From the very beginning, Brianna is seen in relation to her boyfriend Anthony, a tortured artist, despite her status as an art curator who ultimately becomes the reason that Anthony's work is showcased at all. Brianna's complicated relationship with tortured artists spans back to her childhood during which she witnessed her father, another tortured artist, commit suicide in front of her. Due to this traumatic past, Brianna is observant and sensitive causing her to be one of the only characters able to see Anthony's change as Candyman takes him over. Thus, Brianna is initially marked as Clover's Final Girl as she "Is also watchful to the point of paranoia; small signs of danger that her friends ignore, she registers" (Clover 39).

Brianna also bears the trauma of the men in her life as she has witnessed her partner's demise as well as her father's suicide. The trauma experienced by Brianna mirrors the trauma Black women often endure as they are expected to support and carry the burdens of their whole community and the men around them with "no real way to defeat the evil (systems of inequality) that surrounds them" (Coleman 132). Due to this history and her clear marking as both an Enduring Woman as well as Final Girl, I argue that Brianna is an Afrofuturist Survivor as she takes control of her trauma in her ability to survive physical attacks and to take control of the trauma she has been forced to bear. The scene that resonates with me, and I'm sure other viewers, is the final scene of the film in which the resurrected Candyman, Anthony, is invoked by Brianna to save her life.

After her gruesome showdown with Billy, the man who resurrects Candyman played by Coleman Domingo, the cops arrive only to arrest her and shoot Anthony. As Brianna sits in the back of the cop car, she listens to the officer tell her that she must tell the story that they want, which is that Anthony was the killer and his murder by the police was justified, or she will go to jail as an accomplice to murder. At this moment, Brianna, who has been looking at the police officer's eyes through the rear-view mirror throughout the scene, asks the officer to readjust the mirror so that she can see her own face and she'll tell him "what he wants her to say" (DaCosta). Instead, Brianna risks the ultimate sacrifice— she summons Candyman.

Candyman, now Anthony, slaughters each police officer at the scene including the one who threatened Brianna. After slaying the police, Anthony's face changes to that of Daniel Robitaille, the original Candyman (played by the late Tony Todd), and tells Brianna to "'tell everyone'" what she witnessed (DaCosta). Again, where Helen was his victim, Brianna is his witness. Brianna is the only person who survives the successful resurrection of Candyman in the scene as well as she is the only person in the whole film to summon him and not be killed by him. Brianna's ability to summon Candyman for her own protection demonstrates one of the ways DaCosta's adaptation challenges a white hegemonic collective imagination, which sees the Candyman legend as the monstrous Black man who kills aimlessly. Rather than Candyman killing Brianna, the summoner, he kills the white cops who threaten her, which demonstrates to the audience that the real monster is not him but the system that created him (white supremacy and the violence enacted to maintain it). Instead of killing a victim of those systems, much like himself, he disrupts the system itself by slaughtering its foot soldiers thus challenging the collective imaginary that marks him as the monster to be feared. Further, Brianna's summoning

of Candyman recalls the history of forceful resistance and refusal used by Black revolutionaries in response to oppression.

According to Kellie Carter Jackson in *We Refuse* (2024), what Brianna does to survive is revolutionary because "A revolution requires sacrificial, life-altering, permanent change for the benefit of everyone, particularly those in most need. A revolution is not a revolution unless it pursues a better society for all" (Jackson 39). The act of summoning Candyman is a sacrifice Brianna makes that initially puts herself in danger, but the act of summoning Candyman is also Brianna's means of taking control of her and Anthony's narratives and her own fate. She potentially sacrifices her life to protect these stories. Furthermore, her killing of Billy (the man who resurrected Candyman) to survive is life-altering for her as having to take a life has deep psychological implications on a person's psyche no matter the situation. Brianna will never be the same after what she has done to survive, which is often the case within Clover's Final Girl theory (think Laurie Strode's development into a doomsday-prepping recluse in the *Halloween* franchise).

Brianna's survival and indirect slaughtering of the police that threatened her life and took the life of her partner (and many others) constitutes a revolutionary act. This revolutionary act ensures not only her survival but the survival of the accurate story about what happened that night with the police. She survives by any means necessary to take control of her narrative, and this ultimately ensures the protection of her own community and loved ones as their lives are remembered and retold with accuracy. Thus, Brianna does more than endure and survive as the typical Final Girl or Enduring Women tropes call for as she commits revolutionary acts to ensure some semblance of a future for herself, her community, and their stories, which makes her an Afrofuturist Survivor. While Brianna's fate seems to demonstrate that of the Enduring Woman

more than the Final Girl where "the evil enveloping Blackness [is] enduring," Brianna's fate is more complicated than simply surviving and enduring (Coleman 144). Rather, Brianna's character demands a future for herself and Anthony's narrative that will continue long after the credits roll. While Brianna's summoning of Candyman itself is a revolutionary act, her particular method of summoning Candyman challenges the collective imaginary's understanding of what is abject and utilizes an opposing gaze.

DaCosta's remake challenges the collective understanding of the abject "other" through the violent deaths of the white people in the film by only letting the viewer, as well as the doomed character, see their deaths in the mirror. These confrontations with death in the mirror echo Kristeva's notion of the corpse as "the utmost of abjection" since it reminds us of the things that we try to push aside (our own mortality) so that we can live our lives (Kristeva 4). Instead, the deaths in DaCosta's *Candyman* force victims to experience their death in the mirror; thus, they come face to face with their own mortality and the abjection that comes with it. DaCosta's insistence on having white characters, specifically those like art curators who are gentrifying neighborhoods, die while looking in the mirror quite literally places a mirror up to the violent history and ongoing trauma caused by white supremacy and racism. This insistence forces the audience to recognize how Black people (Candyman in this instance and the violent legend that birthed him) are made abject as Black people's presence reminds white people of their historical mistreatment and violence towards them that they want to remove from themselves. DaCosta is challenging the abjection toward Candyman by simultaneously making the victims experience abjection toward themselves through their reflection in the mirror. However, Brianna's summoning of Candyman in the final scene differs from the summoning alluded to above.

Most Black people are familiar with a typical Candyman summoning— stand in front of a mirror and say "Candyman" five times. While this is typical summoning practice, Brianna's method immediately sets her apart from his previous victims as she does so through the rearview mirror of the police car where she can only see her eyes (see fig. 7). This difference in looking sets Brianna's summoning apart from the others throughout the film as she looks herself in the eyes and claims the power of Candyman. Thus, Brianna enacts an opposing gaze. bell hooks has explained the power of the opposing gaze and the attempts to block it much like the cop tries to do to Brianna. hooks explains "That all attempts to repress our/black peoples' right to gaze had produced in us an overwhelming longing to look, a rebellious desire, an oppositional gaze. By courageously looking, we defiantly declared: 'Not only will I stare. I want my look to change reality'" (hooks 116). This is just what Brianna does. She demands to look at herself in the eyes rather than the typical Candyman-summoning point of view. This literal oppositional gaze ultimately changes her reality because another key detail in Brianna's summoning is that after she says her final "Candyman," he materializes in her reality rather than in the mirror. Thus, her oppositional gaze is also queer, or antinormative, in that she looks herself in the eye and that her summoning results in the corporeal manifestation of Candyman. He no longer exists only in the mirror— Brianna has unleashed him. Symbolically, by not having to watch the slaughtering of herself in the mirror by Candyman and instead being able to be witness to the real-world killing of the cops that threatened her and killed her partner, she seemingly wields the power of Candyman without having to take on the pain (outwardly or inwardly) of Candyman himself. Instead, she unleashes the pain into the world and uses it to enact justice and to engage in a revolutionary form of survival— one where she survives, and the future of her community and their stories survive.

Figure 7. Still from *Candyman* film of Teyonah Parris and Brianna looking herself in the eye of a rear-view mirror. DaCosta, Nia, director. *Candyman,* Universal Pictures, 2021.

Figure 8. Still from *Candyman* film of Teyonah Parris as Brianna looking forward while Candyman kills a cop outside of her window. "How the Newest Iteration of Candyman Brings the StoryFull Circle with its Ending"; *Pop Sugar;* Popsugar.com, 27 Aug. 2021, www.popsugar.com/entertainment/candyman-2021-ending-explained-48479057.

DaCosta's *Candyman* requel presents viewers with a complex combination of Final Girl

and Enduring Woman that manifests in an Afrofuturist Survivor in Brianna. By embracing the

monster (Candyman), Brianna is a Final Girl as she "is effectively phallicized" and "the plot

halts and horror ceases" (Clover 50). In Clover's construction of the Final Girl, to become

phallicized is to take on more masculine traits symbolically (the Final Girl often wields a phallic

shaped weapon that eventually she uses to penetrate the slasher). This is problematic when the dimension of race is considered in this development of a Final Girl as Clover describes it. Specifically, this alludes to a masculinity often mapped on to Black women that denies them their full complex Black womanhood and that masculinity, often equated with strength, as Brooks contends, "is read pejoratively even as the strength of the (white) final girl is read as positive, plucky instead of pathological, independent initiative and not a series of acts threatening castration" (Brooks 20). Thus, the Final Girl definition Clover posits cannot encapsulate Brianna's character without placing the stereotype of the strong black woman onto her which ultimately dehumanizes her.

Furthermore, unlike the Final Girl trope Clover defines, Brianna does not have the same type of Final Girl ending where "Day breaks, and the community returns to its normal order" (Clover 50). Rather, her ending seems to be one of the Enduring Woman as "The Enduring Woman knows that significant challenges remain for her, and for her community" (Coleman 137). Brianna knows that the systemic oppression she and her community face is still there, but her revolutionary act of summoning Candyman to take control of her own narrative and the narrative of the community demonstrates an Afrofuturist sensibility that is future-oriented. Thus, DaCosta's *Candyman* remixes and repurposes the Final Girl trope through the Afrofuturist Survivor, a Black woman (in Brianna's case) who not only endures and survives but engages in revolutionary acts to envision a changed world for Black folks. As Kellie Jackson Carter explains, "Revolutions are not needed to improve a system. They are needed to create a new world" (Jackson 40). The Afrofuturist Survivor in Black Horror does just that by embracing the monster to change their world rather than return to the world exactly as it was before because that world is one of oppression for them and their community.

Further, as an explicitly Black Horror requel, DaCosta's *Candyman* reveals a counternarrative about Black women bearing the burden of their entire community's trauma. While Brianna may bear some of the trauma of her community in her role as Afrofuturist Survivor, she also makes deliberate choices throughout the film to denounce herself of those burdens such as not sharing her story or her relationships to artists to a possible employer. While she may carry some of those burdens with her, they do not define her, and she is able to demand a future created by her for herself. In this future Brianna demands control over her own narrative, those of her loved ones, and even the Candyman legacy.

Swarm (2023)

The 2023 mini-series, *Swarm,* created by Janine Nabers and Donald Glover follows the exploits of the serial-killing superfan, Dre, played by Dominique Fishback. Dre's serial killing spree begins when her idol, the show's fictitious Beyoncé-esque figure, Ni'Jah, goes on tour and drops a surprise album. As this happens, Dre's foster sister Marissa announces that she will be moving out of their shared apartment and moving in with her cheating boyfriend, Khalid. Upset about this announcement, and Marissa's lacking interest in the Ni'Jah tour, Dre exposes Khalid's infidelity prompting Marissa to leave enraged. While out celebrating the surprise Ni'Jah drop, Marissa commits suicide, which the Ni'Jah fanbase (The Swarm) speculates was caused by Ni'Jah's latest surprise album. Distraught, Dre decides to see Khalid and, in a fit of rage, kills him by bashing his head in with a nearby salt lamp. This first kill catalyzes her years-long killing spree and journey to see her favorite pop star, Ni'Jah. The mini-series traffics in the violence and absurdity of horror and effectively employs a serial killer who, I argue, is also an Afrofuturist Survivor.

Dre can easily be seen as a killer based on Clover's definition that the killer is "usually large, sometimes overweight, and often masked. In short, they may be recognizably human, but they are only marginally so, just as they are only marginally visible— to their victims and to us, the spectators" (Clover 30). Dre, in comparison to the quintessential white Final Girl, is a larger-bodied Black person with a sugar-addiction (we see Dre constantly eating junk food and even scarfing down a whole cherry pie after murdering Khalid). Dre is also marginally visible as she goes about killing for years undetected. She goes undetected for years because she is constantly discarded by the Black community due to her "abnormal" behavior and even her queer sexuality as we see her transition from Andrea, to Dre, to Tony throughout the series. However, this queerness in behavior, gender presentation, and sexuality and her ability to survive her circumstances seemingly befit Clover's Final Girl definition as well because "Her smartness, gravity, competence in mechanical and other practical matters, and sexual reluctance set her apart from the other girls and ally her, ironically, with the very boys she fears or rejects, not to speak of the killer himself" (Clover 40). Dre's sexual queerness and thus gender slippage throughout the series help her to survive the systems that oppress her and allow her to go undetected as a killer. Thus, Dre's queer positionality seemingly *queers* the Final Girl trope by making Dre both a survivor and a killer. Dre occupies a role that complicates the traditional slasher genre in both her Blackness and queerness as she "actively refuse[s] to identify with either the victim of the gaze or its perpetrator, excavating a place of agency (rupture/disjuncture) outside of the powerful dynamic" (Brooks 29). In other words, Dre's character defies the traditional roles of either victim or perpetrator as she is both thus making her more than a Final Girl and more than an Enduring Woman. Thus, Dre is an Afrofuturist Survivor whose refusal culminates in a powerful and complex position of both killer and survivor.

One of the most salient demonstrations of Dre as a serial killer and Afrofuturist survivor is the penultimate episode of the series titled, "Falling Through the Cracks." Framed as a true crime documentary, the episode follows Detective Loretta Greene, played by Heather Alicia Simms, who has been tracing the connection between Dre's killings and Ni'Jah's followers, The Swarm, online. Detective Greene digs deep to learn more about Dre and follows her leads to Houston to visit Marissa's mother (Dre's foster mother), Patricia Jackson. Patricia explains that when Marissa and Dre were kids, Dre stabbed one of Marissa's friends at a birthday party, prompting the family to kick Dre out of their home and back into the foster system. However, Patricia also notes that Marissa and Dre were incredibly close telling the interviewer "'There's a closeness with girls that doesn't always have to mean that they're, you know, funny…they loved each other, they needed each other'" ("Fallin' Through"). In other words, Patricia understood that the two needed each other, but she also notes that Harris, her husband, didn't "understand" this and didn't like their closeness, which is why she comments about them being "'you know…funny'" ("Fallin' Through").

Figure 9. From left to right: Chloe Bailey as Marissa, Dominique Fishback as Dre, London Rose as young Dre, and a young Marissa (uncredited actor). "Are Dre and Marissa Actually Sisters in Swarm? Their Backstory Explained"; *Capital the UK's No. 1*

Figure 9 (cont'd).
Hit Music Station; Capitalfm.com, 22 March 2023, www.capitalfm.com/news/tv-film/swarm-dre-marissa-sisters-real-related-episode-6/.

While Patricia understands that Dre and Marissa are incredibly close and rely on another in a non-romantic way, Harris cannot ignore Dre's queerness, or deviance from norms. Ultimately, Patricia does not do anything to protect both Dre and Marissa as Dre's one moment of true violence prompts them to effectively excommunicate her, sending her back into the foster system and abandoning her entirely as a member of their family. Despite their parents' rejection of Dre, Marissa and Dre find their way back to one another as young adults as they share a home together and even work at the same mall kiosk together. The two clearly share an incredibly close bond where they depend on one another for comfort and companionship. However, as we see in Dre's killing of Marissa's boyfriend Khalid and her quick exposure of his infidelity when she realizes Marissa may move out of their shared apartment, Dre's love for Marissa seems to be more romantic than Marissa's love is toward Dre. Thus, Dre is markedly queer as both her behavior and sexuality do not fall under the criteria of compulsory heterosexuality or neurotypicality. And it seems that Harris, her foster father, noticed this queerness when they were kids and thus took a zero-tolerance-policy stance toward her and her behaviors. This turning against Dre in a vulnerable time in her life as a young queer person is one of the first instances that marks them as an Afrofuturist Survivor as Dre is displaced from the first form of community many Black people get to experience— the Black family unit.

Gwen, the girl Dre stabbed when they were kids, was good friends with Marissa before the family brought Dre into their home. The episode weaves in interviews with Gwen throughout the episode to learn more about the stabbing. Gwen notes that she was even shocked at how quickly the Jacksons discarded Dre after the incident saying: "'You know, it is just crazy how

you can just say 'deuces' to your foster child like that…I don't know that girl was messed up'"

("Fallin' Through"). Even before this comment, Gwen notes the family's treatment of Dre

explaining that "'Marissa's parents made Andrea sleep in the attic'" ("Fallin' Through"). Before

Dre has even been officially discarded by the Jackson family, who promised to protect her by

taking her in, she's been banished to the attic to physically separate her from them even within

the home. From this information alone it should be no surprise that the family sent her away

immediately following her first incident. Not only is Dre discarded by the people who took her in

in the first place, but Dre then loses the one protector and family member she's ever had when

Marissa dies, thus sparking her killing spree.

Although Dre's complete forced isolation from family and friends doesn't make her kills

"right" in a Western understanding of morality, it is an understandable and predictable reaction

to being without community. In other words, her lack of community even within the family unit

turns her into the killer she eventually. But it isn't until Marissa—Dre's sister and the only other

person who seems to share the same love of Ni'Jah that Dre has—dies that Dre begins cracking

the skulls of Ni'Jah haters. Clearly, Dre's love for the only family member she's ever had and

the person who shares her love of Ni'Jah without judgment and takes care of them despite some

of Dre's lack of understanding of social cues is conflated with Dre's love for Ni'Jah. Thus, when

Marissa dies, Dre's obsessive and violent behavior is amplified as she turns to the last person

that she believes has ever been there for her, Ni'Jah. Dre's lacking community is quite different

than Brianna's position in *Candyman* as Dre's killing spree is prompted by a search for

community (via the Ni'Jah fanbase) while Brianna fights to maintain the futurity of her

community. In either case, the goal is common— to demand a better future for themselves by

any means necessary.

When a person is constantly discarded and treated as inhuman, it should be no surprise when they begin to act accordingly. Dre isn't born a killer, but the trauma she experience after her sister's death coupled with her history of being discarded and left unprotected by systems that were theoretically supposed to protect her (i.e., the child welfare system) culminates in uncontrollable violent urges. As Jackson argues, "More often than not, instead of seeking protection, Black women positioned themselves as protectors" (Jackson 88). Dre embodies this logic as she has been left unprotected and instead takes the role, albeit to the extreme, of protector of Marissa's memory via her/their love of Ni'Jah. Although she is a killer, an Afrofuturist reading contends that she also embodies the elements of a Final Girl and Enduring Woman as she both endures and survives these circumstances and uses the invisibility that she has garnered from her isolation and lack of protection to remain undetected. While she seemingly fits both the killer and Final Girl roles, she actually seems to be more than these traditional definitions cover, thus making her an Afrofuturist Survivor.

Dre does somewhat fit the Enduring Woman trope because "for Blacks, the horror (or the monster) was located within Whiteness—Whitey, the system, the man (Coleman 144). In Dre's case, the system, influenced by whiteness and the respectability politics and optics that come with her family's adherence to whiteness and its structures is the evil that she has faced her whole life. However, Dre is fighting back against those structures by entirely ignoring them and killing those who wrong her (and Ni'Jah) instead of enduring them as she has her whole life. Further, by fighting back against the structures that have, for lack of better terms, abandoned her, Dre's is an Enduring Woman, Final Girl, and killer. Thus, Dre's character demonstrates an Afrofuturist sensibility as "Afrofuturism creates new realities by recovering basic reality reflections and projecting them into possible futures. Indeed, [A]frofuturism challenges a de

facto black science-fictional experience" (Lavender 12). Rather than simply accept her reality, Dre creates her own reality where she does not need to adhere to respectability politics, gender norms, or even the norms of being a killer or Final Girl to belong. Dre finds power in the very horrors she is trying to survive and uses them to create terrors and violence on her own terms in her quest to meet Ni'Jah. Thus, she demands a better future for herself where she can fit in on her own terms and where The Swarm can become her community.

The series seems to be making a couple of arguments: 1) if you let it, white supremacy and its logics can be all-encompassing and must be combatted and 2) the lacking protection of Black women and/or Black Queer folks will not liberate the Black community from white supremacy and will, in fact, make liberation harder to obtain. By quickly discarding Dre as well as physically separating her from the family even within the house itself, the Jackson family cleaves to the parts of white supremacy that they benefit from as they live in a nice house in a quiet, seemingly white, neighborhood. The respectability politics they cling to, their nice upper-middle class home in a seemingly white neighborhood, leave Dre unprotected as protecting her may "lower their social status." Dre's persistence in maintaining her closeness with Marissa even after being discarded by their parents demonstrates Dre's demands for a better life and future—one where she is seen, accepted, and loved. But when Marissa dies, she must turn to the next closest thing she has which is Ni'Jah and The Swarm. As Swarm member Darryl Robinson, played by Chris Gerard, explains in an interview from the episode "'We're a family…we take care of each other'" ("Fallin' Through"). If The Swarm believes themselves to be a family looking out for one another, where else would a young and isolated fan turn to?

Another important moment in this episode is when Detective Greene and the interview team go to the foster agency to probe more into Dre's childhood. Ms. Kirby, the social worker

they attempt to interview, shuts down their attempts almost immediately stating about Dre and all foster care children: "'She was lonely, and she was looking for acceptance'" ("Fallin' Through"). Ms. Kirby seems to be the only one saying exactly what has happened to Dre— she was looking for acceptance and did not receive it. Her advocacy is not limited to Dre but to all children in foster care. While this is still support of Dre, she is largely unmentioned any further by Ms. Kirby, but her stance about Dre and all foster children being lonely and searching for acceptance is still an important moment in the episode as it reminds viewers of how the system largely fails certain types of children— Black, atypical children. As Detective Greene explains, "I look at Andrea's case sometimes I see nothing and sometimes I see myself" ("Fallin' Through"). In other words, Dre could be any young Black girl and/or queer person left unprotected by their community. Further, Detective Greene and Ms. Kirby's exclamations serve as a reminder that this could happen to anyone, but it mostly happens to those who do not fit normative roles. Dre did not fit the mold of the Black middle-class Jackson family, and in order to maintain their good standing in the community, they quickly discarded her using their means to pay off Gwen's family after the incident and immediately putting Dre back into the foster system. Another example of Dre's status as Afrofuturist Survivor and killer is depicted in another communal failure to protect her in episode four titled, "Running Scared."

By this episode, our Afrofuturist Survivor and killer stumbles upon a group of white women who refer to their "women's empowerment" group as DecaWin. To the trained eye, DecaWin appears to be a cult. The head of the group, played by Billie Eilish, tells Dre that she must share a secret or sacrifice something of hers (her phone in this case) to be "held accountable" in the group and so that the group can "feel safe" to share things with one another. In reality, this logic puts potential members at the mercy of the cult that prays on individuals

looking for acceptance and community. This logic echoes that of other familiar predatory cult groups like the Church of Scientology.

A few things stand out in this episode: 1) DecaWin is a large group of white women and Dre is the only non-white person present. 2) By prying into Dre's past, they attempt to manipulate Dre into conforming to DecaWin and advertise this group as an accepting and loving community. In reality, this group of white women who attempt to "empower" young, Black, queer, Dre can never actually understand her perspective or where she is coming from no matter how much information about her past she divulges. Simply, their white feminist ideals of community and acceptance cannot match the community and love that Dre *needs* and has been discarded from— love from her own, Black, community. This is emphasized when Dre tells Eilish's character that she finds death "beautiful" and that "'It's equal, it happens to everyone'" ("Running Scared"). Because of her lifelong mistreatment, Dre embraces death as the great equalizer— the only thing we *all* have in common is that we'll die someday. However, as a killer and survivor, Dre commands control over equality. Once again, Dre's character is Final Girl, Enduring Woman, and a killer. Thus, she demonstrates an Afrofuturist sensibility where she demands a future for herself where she *can* fit in by killing those who do not accept her and having endured being discarded by those same people for so long making her an Afrofuturist Survivor rather than a Final Girl or Enduring Woman. Further, her rejection of DecaWin demands a particular type of community acceptance as she understands that true community and acceptance cannot be built on lies.

Dre's alienation from her own community and embracing this alienation in order to get away with murder is a small act of revolution by enacting her rage to demand a future of acceptance for herself. This acceptance, Dre believes, will ultimately come when she meets

Ni'Jah. In *Sister Outsider* Audre Lorde has famously explained the differences between anger and hatred in the context of race and gender. Lorde argues that anger and fury can be useful tool for liberation but hatred breeds oppression: "Hatred is the fury of those who do not share our goals, and its object is death and destruction. Anger is a grief of distortions between peers, and its object is change" (Lorde 129). Lorde specifies that rage or fury are similar to anger as they are both "appropriate reaction[s] to racist attitudes" and that rage and fury specifically arise "when the actions arising from those [racist] attitudes do not change" (Lorde 129). In other words, anger and enacting the rage that arises from that anger are appropriate reactions for Black women and/or Black Queer people to have when oppressive heteropatriarchal hegemony persists. Anger and the rage that comes from that anger have the potential to shake the room and create change.

Anger and rage are what viewers see felt and enacted by Dre in response to her lack of community and the alienation she experiences. Arguably Dre's ability to be both slasher and Afrofuturist Survivor serve as her means of changing her reality by enacting her anger and rage. Her killing in response to the trauma she has endured constitutes a form of revolution as "Revolutions are not needed to improve a system. They are needed to create a new world" (Jackson 40). Dre isn't looking to improve the whole world. Rather, she is looking to improve her own reality by finding the love and acceptance she has not been given. Further, because this medium (television) and genre (horror) allow us to act out what this scenario could look like in the real world (using violence to change your reality) a catharsis can be reached that allows viewers to see the suppressed rage that Black women and/or Black Queer people often endure to be acted on. Dre acts upon her rage as a killer in order to survive her circumstances. Dre's survival is itself a triumph, but the horror genre allows this triumph to be pushed further as "Women of Color in America have grown up within a symphony of anger, at being silenced, at

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being unchosen, at knowing that when we survive, it is in spite of the world that takes for granted our lack of humanness, and which hates our very existence outside of service" (Lorde 129). Dre has experienced all of these things at a young, formative age and was not given the support and love she needed to become a part of a larger community. So, Dre turns to the only community where she has felt seen and loved, The Swarm. And Dre will protect this community by any means necessary, including murdering those who try to stop her from meeting their leader and obtaining the community acceptance she has been searching for.

Conclusion

An Afrofuturist reading of both Brianna in *Candyman* and Dre in *Swarm* highlights a particularly queer oppositional gaze. In other words, an Afrofuturist reading allows us to look at the past and the oppressive systems that have governed our bodies and realities and actively challenge them by highlighting the complexities of Black womanhood and Black Queerness with the future in mind. Thus, reading the Final Girl of Black Horror, or the Afrofuturist Survivor, requires a meta-analysis of our oppositional gaze as viewers and the oppositional gaze of the Final Girl trope itself as seen in the power of Brianna's gaze in *Candyman* and Detective Greene's gaze of Dre in *Swarm*.

If there were an equation to explain how the Afrofuturist Survivor should be understood it would be the following: (Final Girl + Enduring Woman) (Revolution + Future) = Afrofuturist Survivor. In other words, revolutionary acts and a demanded future multiply both the Final Girl and Enduring Woman trope in Black women and/or Black Queer creators' horror aesthetics, which generates complex characterizations of Black women and/or Queer people in Black Horror. The Afrofuturist Survivor in Black Horror then, does not simply have to endure the systems and powers that be after the monster or slasher is killed. Rather, the Afrofuturist

Survivor has altered their reality and their future for the good of themselves and often their community. This does not mean that the Afrofuturist Survivor will not have to deal with the trauma of what they have endured, but they have begun revolutionary acts that have changed their reality. Liberation and survival are not easily attainable for the Afrofuturist Survivor, but they are both possible and must be taken by any means necessary.

Chapter 3

"Magic is Ours Now": Afrofuturist Horror Using Black Tools to Solve Black Problems

Many people are familiar with at least one cultural product in the horror genre that attempts to represent African Traditional Religions. In these representations, African Traditional Religions (hereby referred to as ATRs) are displayed as "evil," or "black magic." The first that comes to mind is the Netflix series adaptation of the *Sabrina the Teenage Witch* Archie comics— *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*. Throughout the show, ATR is positioned as inferior and opposed to the Eurocentric spiritual tradition of the show's protagonist, New England, witches like Sabrina Spellman herself. One of the images and moments that stand out to this viewer is in the character Mambo Marie and her power deriving from Vodun.

Mambo Marie LeFleur, played by Skye P. Marshall, is not a character from the original Archie comics and instead was added to Roberto Aguirre-Sacasa's adaptation during its third season. Marie appears in the very first episode of the season when two of the Satanic Church of Night witches, Ambrose and Prudence, seek her help while in New Orleans as they are looking for alternative magics that differ from their own, satanic, powers. What's important to note is that the first time that viewers see Marie, it is in a very Black context. Ambrose and Prudence are two of the only Black witches in their coven and they are in New Orleans, a city with a large population of Black people and a rich history of Vodun, seeking out the help of someone who looks more like them as their satanic-derived powers have not proved fruitful. This introduction gives the character of Mambo Marie subversive potential as it positions ATR as a powerful magic wielded by all of the Black witches in the show. However, as the narrative progresses, Marie's representation falls apart as she is used by The Church of Night to help save their coven while being entirely disrespected and looked down upon by those same witches.

Figure 10. Skye P. Marshall as Mambo Marie in the *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* Netflix series. "Who is Mambo Marie from 'Chilling Adventures of Sabrina' Season 3?" *Seventeen*; Seventeen.com, 31 Jan. 2020, www.seventeen.com/celebrity/movies-tv/a30733060/who-is-mambo-marie-chilling-adventures-of-sabrina-part-3/.

The second time viewers see Marie it is when the "hedge witches," or the witches who do not belong to covens, are called to assist The Church of Night in getting their powers back. The "hedge witches" are quite literally marginalized as they are not accepted by any covens and instead survive on their own. Making Mambo Marie a part of this group of "hedge witches" further marginalizes her and positions her as a witch whose practices are inferior to The Church of Night. Further, Zelda Spellman expresses deep dislike of Marie to Prudence after Marie arrives with the hedge witches telling her she does not want her involved in the fight to get their powers back since she is a Christian (in the show's universe, Christianity and Satanism are constantly at odds and in a struggle for power and dominance). Thus, Marie and her practice of Vodun are disempowered and placed below Satanism in the show's hierarchy of spiritual power. While the show takes quite a lot of care in representing Vodun un-stereotypically, in fact, Marie vehemently refuses the commercialized voodoo that is often peddled to tourists in New Orleans,

it still places ATR at odds with and inferior to the Satanism of the New England witches thus codifying a hierarchy of spiritual traditions that historically disenfranchises ATR placing non-Eurocentric spiritual traditions at the bottom of the hierarchy and Eurocentric ones at the top. Therefore, this chapter, once again, turns to Black Horror rather than Blacks in Horror (i.e., *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*) and the particular representations of ATR in Black Horror to embrace them and recast them into the present.[14]

Kinitra Brooks refers to this particular subgenre within the Black Horror tradition as folkloric horror. Folkloric horror, according to Brooks, explains the unique ability that Black women creatives have "to interweave African-influenced folklore with the Westernized genres of horror, fantasy, and science fiction…" (Brooks 98). With this project's overarching concern with how horror functions within the larger Afrofuturism project, folkloric horror becomes a particular subgenre of interest as it embodies the Afrofuturist tenets of highlighting and emphasizing African diasporic traditions and spiritualities to speculate about a future where these epistemologies, cosmologies, and ontologies are re-casted and normalized.

Afrofuturism, as an aesthetic and ideology, is always conscious of the historical erasure of beliefs and traditions of the African diaspora and works to subvert the Eurocentric myth of modernity by promoting counternarratives that de-hierarchize sociocultural systems that oppress Black people such as the hierarchy of spiritual traditions. Thus, this chapter explores the counternarratives and imagined futures that Black Horror works allow through an Afrofuturist analysis highlighting non-European cosmologies, epistemologies, and ontologies through spiritual traditions, beliefs, and practices. I contend that Black Horror's implementation of ATR promotes counternarratives about its very erasure while simultaneously working to destabilize

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[14] See Coleman 6.

the hierarchy of spiritual traditions historically used to oppress and demonize Black folks who participate in ATR. To make this argument, I apply a Critical Afrofuturist Theory to folkloric horror visual works, to explain how Black Horror texts themselves highlight counternarratives to disrupt a hegemonic white imaginary and to speculate about new, often radical, tools for liberation through the horror genre's insistence on embracing the violent and grotesque. My analysis centers on sequential art and its display of grotesque and violent imagery to show African diasporic epistemologies, cosmologies, and ontologies in action and with complexity.

Writing in response to a growing cultural movement in comic studies, Deborah Whaley's, *Black Women in Sequence: Re-Inking Comics, Graphic Novels, and Anime* (2015), explores representations of Black women in comics and other sequential narratives. In doing so, Whaley argues that "Sequential art is a viable form for understanding how popular literature and visual culture reflects the real and imagined place of women of African descent in nation making, politics, and cultural production" (Whaley 8). In other words, sequential art provides an understanding of how Black women and/or Black Queer individuals are perceived in the national imagination and how the nation sees Black women's roles within the system of white heteropatriarchy. Further, sequential art, which encompasses all visual mediums that can be viewed in sequence (or out of sequence), such as comics are a uniquely queer medium.

In Darieck Scott and Ramzi Fawaz's special issue of the *American Literature* journal, they explain that "The formal character of comics—the idea that you can have indefinite iterations of a given story that never reproduce a single trajectory—helps clarify the ways that fabulation underwrites our realities, in decidedly queer ways" (Scott and Fawaz 202). Thus, comics and sequential art are queer mediums that more adequately reflect the queerness of some realities. Thus, sequential art is the focus of this chapter as its unique ability to be read or, as

Whaley describes it, the "optic cognitive experience" of sequential art allows for a more engaged viewing or reading of the work as there is not one way to view or read sequential art and it can therefore be engaged on many cognitive levels thus highlighting a queer approach to reading and interpreting text (Whaley 14). I analyze Ayize Jama-Everett and John Jennings' *Box of Bones* graphic novel and Misha Green's series adaptation of *Lovecraft Country* and their uses of Afrocentric epistemologies, cosmologies, and ontologies such as conjure and Sankofa as these sequential artworks are exemplars of Black Horror and folkloric horror that allow for a robust Critical Afrofuturist Theoretical reading. I contend that an Afrofuturist reading of these texts highlights how a Queer Black Horror aesthetic destabilizes Eurocentric hierarchies and binaries by embracing Afrocentric epistemologies, cosmologies, and ontologies and normalizing their presence and importance in horror.

Box of Bones

Ayize Jama-Everett and John Jennings' *Box of Bones* (2021) is a work of Black Horror that can be read through a Critical Afrofuturist framework as it creates complex counternarratives about the history of enslavement and the consequences of hatred and revolution as well as it destabilizes the hierarchy of binaries such as good and evil as well as destabilizes the hierarchy of institutional knowledge production encouraging learning from the experiences of others rather than from a textbook. When read through a Critical Afrofuturist lens, this graphic novel shifts our perspectives of Blackness and Black culture by showing just how complex it is. Further, the use of violence and grotesque images showcase the complexities of the history of Black resistance. It is not fixed in stereotypes but instead takes different forms. Combining the Critical Afrofuturist reading of *Box of Bones* along with the violent and grotesque imagery it employs to create these counternarratives makes this comic a substantial example of Black Horror's Afrofuturist sensibilities. *Box of Bones* is grounded in Sankofa and this

grounding in Sankofa destabilizes, or de-hierarchizes, Eurocentric epistemologies, ontologies, and cosmologies and places epistemologies, cosmologies, and ontologies from the African diaspora at the forefront.[16]

Figure 11. Gauge releasing the Nobody from the box of bones and the monster enacting her revenge in *Box of Bones* by Ayize Jama-Everett and John Jennings; "Book One," *Box of Bones*; Rosarium Publishing; 2021.

In book one of *Box of Bones* the origin story of the box itself is told. In this origin story, a light-skinned Black woman named Gauge uses it to seek revenge on a group of white people who sexually assaulted and beat her as well as her friend Jim (the narrator of this memory). However, she must sacrifice her soul to whatever comes out of the box and must sacrifice her body to close it. The monster that comes out of the box to enact Gauge's revenge is referred to as The Nobody (see fig. 11). This monster has Medusa-like hair that resembles a combination of twisted roots and silver chains. Its head detaches itself and attaches to its victims as well as the chains and roots (hair) act like knives piercing through victims' chests. The images themselves depict intense bloodshed of white people as Gauge enacts her revenge. When read through a

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[16] The concept of Sankofa comes from the Akan people of West Africa that means "it is not taboo to go back and fetch what you forgot" ("The Power of Sankofa").

Critical Afrofuturist lens, one sees the destabilizations of hierarchies clearly in the bloodshed of white people rather than having to see the bloodshed of Black people. The visualization of the violence and bloodshed by Black people enacted on white people aids in this destabilization as viewers are used to seeing the historical violence and bloodshed enacted by white people onto Black bodies in cultural products.

Further, as this story is being recounted by our main character Lindsay Ford, a Black PhD student who is tracing the history of the box as a part of her thesis, the emphasis is on the story itself as retold by her grandfather Jim. Lindsay explains that her interest in pursuing this research is personal on some level. She says, "'My only personal motivation rests in making sense of the stories my grandfather told me before he died. They have antecedents and precedent in other tales in the literature'" (Jama-Everett and Jennings). In other words, she's less concerned with the folkloric literature itself as she is with learning from the experiences shared in stories by her grandfather. These lessons and experiences are often rooted in violent and grotesque imagery, which befits the Afrofuturist project as it is a past experienced by Black people, retold by Black people, to reimagine Black people's history of refusal and violent retribution.

Lindsay's character enacts a queer oppositional gaze. In other words, Lindsay, as a Black woman, constructs a new way of looking, or a new way of knowing, that counters the Eurocentric models and structures of learning through her focus on understanding her family's experiences. Lindsay's focus on learning through her grandfather's stories destabilizes the hierarchy of learning as set by European standards that position academia and empirical evidence as the highest form of learning. Considering that "Afrofuturism emerged in response to the transformation of African peoples through the oppressive forces of various forms of discrimination, urban life, and modernity," the emphasis on non-traditional forms of learning as a

means of reclaiming the stories of Lindsay's community produces a counternarrative that recalls a history of Black people's various forms of resistance to oppression, which included violent resistance and a reliance on African diasporic epistemologies, cosmologies, and ontologies (Anderson "Critical Afrofuturism" 179). This is a history that is often erased in Eurocentric depictions of Black history, and a Critical Afrofuturist framework allows the reader to see the liberatory potential of the counternarratives of Black people's radical resistance to oppression as well as questions the linear progress narrative of modernity by bringing past modes of resistance and learning (in Lindsay's case learning through experiences and stories of experiences) into the present to speculate about the future. This Critical Afrofuturist reading of the graphic novel demonstrates a changing understanding of Black resistance as well as showcases those from the African diaspora as the keepers and makers of our history and mythologies. Another important counternarrative this graphic novel emphasizes is how Black people can be made monstrous by systems of oppression and the text destabilizes the hierarchy of oppression itself by exploring a history of intra-racial violence and challenging the colorist hierarchy that places lighter Black folks at the top of the totem pole of Blackness.

Book four takes place on a Haitian plantation owned by the Souvants, a mixed-raced couple, in which the man's white father has given them a large amount of land and the woman's white family has left her a large amount of enslaved people to tend to that land. The image of the Souvants (see fig. 12) depicts them as elegantly dressed and light skinned. However, the panels below the image of the couple show contrastingly dark-skinned people in lesser-quality clothes, some with whipping scars on their backs. Thus, the Souvants, in their appearance alone hold themselves above the Black people who tend to their land. In fact, the descriptive text explains that the Souvants' "Cruelty was legendary, as were their prodigious yields. Their wealth was

matched only by their cruelty…" (Jama-Everett and Jennings). In this visual alone, Jama-Everett and Jennings begin to point to a history of interracial violence that functioned under the logic of white supremacy— if one had lighter skin or white ancestry, they held higher standing than dark-skinned folks; thus light-skinned folks asserted dominance with extra violent force to showcase that they were "better Black people" because of their proximity to whiteness.

Figure 12. The Souvants and enslaved peoples working on their land in *Box of Bones* by Ayize Jama-Everett and John Jennings; "Book Four," *Box of Bones*; Rosarium Publishing; 2021.
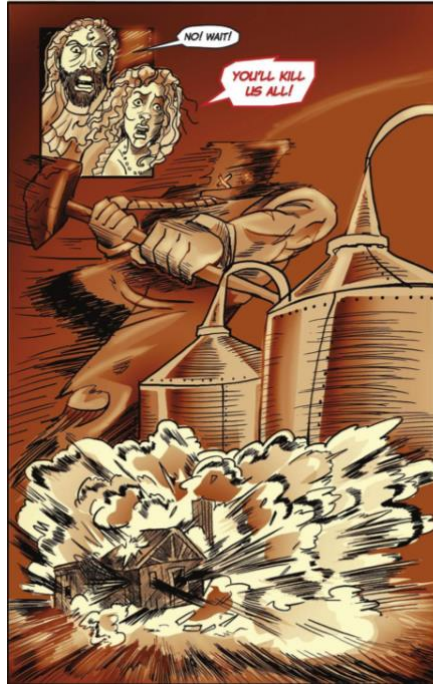
Figure 13. The Suffering destroying the plantation in *Box of Bones* by Ayize Jama-Everett and John Jennings; "Book Four," *Box of Bones*; Rosarium Publishing; 2021.

The cruelty of the Souvants leads to a revolt by the enslaved people of the plantation who decide to open the box and unleash their rage in the form of a monster called The Suffering**.** At the end of the story, The Souvants, who have climbed to the roof thinking they could avoid The Suffering's wrath, and The Suffering, having ripped through the Souvants' guests, decides to smash a silo that causes an explosion of the entire plantation (see fig. 13). Rather than die, the Souvants are instead made dark by a combination of rum and sugar that stains their skin. In this instance, Jama-Everett and Jennings call attention to the falsehood of colorism that enforces a notion that the closer in proximity one is to whiteness, the less likely they are to experience the suffering that comes with being Black and enslaved.

When read through a Critical Afrofuturist theoretical lens, one sees that Jama-Everett and Jennings are destabilizing the hierarchy of whiteness through a reminder that, due to the systems of white supremacy, one's Blackness will often be eclipsed by any proximity to whiteness

(including a higher socioeconomic status) and thus subject them to suffering and pain as dark-skinned Black people have been. Further, in the revenge of the dark-skinned enslaved folks of the story, Jama-Everett and Jennings produce a counternarrative about the intraracial violence that occurred during enslavement and continues today due to colorist beliefs and practices. While there is a rich history of Black people coming together during enslavement to resist oppression, there's also an unspoken history of intraracial violence especially of violence enacted by light-skinned Black people onto dark-skinned Black people. This counternarrative of intraracial violence is a lesson to learn from this history to speculate about a future where intraracial violence stops and real coalition can begin to consider alternative futures and set a precedent for coalition building since "the Afrofuturist location is a compass in relation to other futurisms" (Anderson, "Critical Afrofuturism" 179). In other words, applying an Afrofuturist framework to this violent history emphasizes the counternarrative about intraracial violence that allows readers to speculate about a future by learning from this past and to begin a coalition of futurisms within our community as well as other non-white communities. Further, the graphic novel befits the Afrofuturist Horror subgenre as it uses images of violence and the grotesque typical of the horror genre to demonstrate the complexities of this history of intraracial violence.

A Critical Afrofuturist theoretical reading of *Box of Bones*, a work of Black Horror, demonstrates the power of counternarrative and hierarchal destabilization in speculating a liberated future. Further, it shows how Blackness and the perspectives of Blackness are becoming more complex as Black people reclaim and produce their own visual horror narratives that use images of violence and bloodshed to highlight the complexity of the Black experience. Thus, challenging Eurocentric notions of Blackness through an Afrofuturist approach begins to answer Anderson's question in "Notes on a Manifesto" of "'What is the responsibility of the

Black artist in the twenty-first century'" (Anderson, "Afrofuturism 2.0" 231). Answered simply, it is the responsibility of the Black artist in the twenty-first century to showcase the complexities of Blackness and reclaim and recast a history of resistance to speculate about possible Black futures. Misha Green's adaptation of *Lovecraft Country* exemplifies this work as well.

Lovecraft Country

The 2020 television series *Lovecraft Country* is an adaptation of Matt Ruff's novel of the same name. While the novel does good work in terms of using the horror genre to explore the atrocities of racism during Jim Crow, Misha Green's series adaptation elevates the novel as the experiences of and with racism and sexism are taken up by a Black Queer woman to speak on the various lived experiences of Black people with more complexity due the simple fact that there are some complexities about Blackness that a white person simply cannot portray because they do not have that experience. Thus, this chapter decidedly focuses on the series adaptation rather than the novel to both showcase and normalize portrayals of complex Blackness by Black creators themselves.

In the series, we follow the main character, Atticus (Tic) Freeman, as he journeys across the country to find his father and to learn more about his mother's family history. But Tic does not brave this journey alone. He is also joined by his uncle, George Freeman, and a longtime friend, Leti Lewis. During the journey, the trio come face-to-face with otherworldly monsters, an exclusive group of rich white men (called the Sons of Adam) practicing magic (called The Language of Adam), and with Tic's heritage as he discovers he is a direct descendent of the leader of The Sons of Adam. The series references H.P. Lovecraft and utilizes Lovecraft's mythology to question who has access to these magics and to challenge the *real* terror in the world (systemic racism and white supremacy).

The show uses H.P. Lovecraft's mythology with a twist as it calls attention to the white

supremacist beliefs and practices that fueled Lovecraft's stories. Afrofuturist scholar and creator,

John Jennings, refers to this work of remixing and repurposing Lovecraft's work as racecraft.[15]

Jennings uses this term that stems from the work by Barbara and Karen Fields where they use the

term racecraft to refer to the prevalence of racism. They argue that racecraft, "refers instead to

mental terrain and to pervasive belief. Like physical terrain, racecraft exists objectively; it has

topographical features that Americans regularly navigate, and we cannot readily stop traversing

it" (Fields 20). Further, they argue that "racecraft is not a euphemistic substitute for racism. It is

a kind of fingerprint evidence that racism has been on the scene" (Fields 20). Thus, racism

functions like a spell or a form of witchcraft on the American imagination that leaves its traces

on everything. Jennings takes this further by referring to racecraft as a way of acknowledging

that racism is pervasive but that racism, and its signs, can be reinterpreted to ultimately change

its signifier (meaning). In other words, repurposing H.P. Lovecraft's mythos to call attention to

racism and white supremacy and to make these things feared rather than normalized is a form of

racecraft. Racecraft serves Afrofuturist aims by subverting the tropes of Lovecraftian horror that

imagines monsters as cultural "others" while also blurring binaries and highlighting

counternarratives. Thus, there is an queer sensibility to racecraft in Black Horror that also allows

for an Afrofuturist reading of the work.

Misha Green's adaptation of *Lovecraft Country* highlights specific epistemologies,

ontologies, and cosmologies of the African diaspora to aid in the racecraftian work of remixing

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[15] In an interview with Frederick Aldama titled "John Jennings Talks: Afrofuturism, Horror &
Race Theory & Comics," John Jennings describes racecraft as using the metaphors HP
Lovecraft's work gave us for talking about "the other" combined with Fields and Fields'
construction of racecraft as the mystical power of racism.

Lovecraft's mythos. The show employs principles like Nommo (the act of using words to create one's reality and Sankofa, two beliefs and practices rooted in the African diaspora, to challenge what is *really* scary in the world.[16] Green's construction of the Black women in the show and their ability to wield Nommo and Sankofa for their internal development while also impacting their reality and futures demonstrates Black Horror's reliance on Afrocentric beliefs and practices to challenge the collective imaginary. The wielding of Nommo and a grounding in Sankofa are most prevalent in the third episode titled, "Holy Ghost," and the final episode of the series titled, "Full Circle" as the characters use African diasporic epistemologies, cosmologies, and ontologies to determine and demand their futures.

"Holy Ghost"

"Holy Ghost," centers Leti Lewis, played by Jurnee Smollett, as she grapples with her mortality and her strained relationship with her sister, Ruby. In the previous episode, Leti was killed and brought back to life by the Sons of Adam (a group of white magic-wielding men hell-bent on achieving immortality). Now days later, Leti still has not processed her death and resurrection and begins doing so by purchasing an old Victorian house on the Northside of Chicago called the Winthrop House. Unbeknownst to her, eight Black people were brutally murdered in that house as a part of experiments by Sons of Adam member and scientist, Hiram Epstein. While Leti intends to turn the house into a boarding home for Black Chicagoans, this is not received well by the entirely white neighborhood. Leti's white neighbors begin terrorizing her and her boarders by committing racist acts like burning a cross on their lawn. While being terrorized on the outside of the house, Leti also cannot find peace inside of the house as the ghosts of Epstein's victims as well as Epstein's ghost begin haunting her. Leti takes matters into

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[16] Nommo is another West African concept from the people of Mali that explains the power of the spoken word to change or impact reality ("Nommo").

her own hands by seeking non-Western methods from African Traditional Religions (ATR) to heal both herself and the house throughout the episode. In other words, Leti turns to uniquely Black tools to solve Black problems.

The episode opens in a Black church with the camera focused on a dejected Leti sitting in a pew as church members praise, sing, and dance around her. Accompanying the scene is a voiceover from a 2017 Nike commercial with a voiceover by Leiomy Maldonado. This opening immediately calls attention to one of the focal points of this episode— spotlight and reliance on ATR. In Katrina Hazzard-Donald's *Mojo Workin': The Old African American Hoodoo System* (2013), Hazzard-Donald explains that the traditional method of praise and worship (often associated with dancing, singing, and catching the holy ghost), comes from an African-derived religious and sacred dance circle called the Ring Shout (Hazzard-Donald 61). The Black church's adoption and transformation of worship practices demonstrate both preservation and embracing of ATR despite attempts during enslavement to erase ATR and its methods. As worshippers dance and praise around Leti in slow motion, Leti's appearance remains morose as she attends church to try to grapple with her previous death and resurrection. Thus, the episode sets up an exploration of ATR and its variations as Leti's method of attempting to heal herself and, eventually, her very haunted house.

While Leti experiences other-worldly occurrences from the moment she and her boarders move in, it isn't until days nine and ten in the house that she begins to truly investigate the history of the Winthrop house and learns more about Hiram Epstein and the eight Black people he kidnapped and tortured in her basement. During her research, Leti discovers the identities of each individual who Hiram Epstein killed in the house as well as she finally begins to open up about her death experience telling Tic, "'I can't live in fear. I won't. I gotta face this new world head-on and stake my claim in it'" ("Holy Ghost"). Up until now, Leti hasn't talked about what

happened to her and how she feels about it as well as she has been living in a state of both fear and depression. Once she learns more about the murdered individuals in her home, whose souls are trapped in that house with the soul of their killer, Leti's attitude changes and she decides to take action. In her effort to take matters into her own hands, Leti finds empowerment and healing in ATR when she turns to a Mambo Priestess to help release the souls trapped in her house.

The mambo, Martine, arrives at the home with Tic, Leti, and a goat. It is important to note that Martine is referred to as a Mambo, which is a particular spiritual practitioner associated with Vodun. In a series written for *The Root,* Kinitra Brooks, a scholar and practitioner of Lucumí, explains that this isn't wholly correct as a Mambo would not call on the Orisha as Martine does later on in the episode and instead would call on a loa. Thus, the episode has a clear mixing of African diasporic religious traditions which Brooks argues is purposeful because there are so many spiritual traditions within the African diaspora that are incredibly complex and the show attempts to highlight many of them in this mixing of traditions (Brooks "The Safe Negro"). There is an excess produced in this melding together of ATRs that provides a space to imagine a world otherwise where multiple traditions from the diaspora can exist together. Thus, this melding together of ATRs becomes a type of queering of ATR.

Before they enter the home, Mambo Martine performs a ritual sacrifice, slicing the goat's throat and letting the blood pool into a bowl below. While Tic and Leti watch, Tic asks Leti where she found Mambo Martine to which Leti replies, "'Mama couldn't really commune with the dead, but she was a hustler who believed in doing her research'" ("Holy Ghost"). From this dialogue, viewers receive details about Leti's history: that her mother used to pretend to have medium capabilities to make money and that her mother, and now her, consulted experts and had researched-based knowledge of actual conjure practitioners in the community. Leti is tapping into her own lived experiences as knowledge— the lived experience of knowing that there are

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African Traditional Religions that can serve as powerful spiritual tools for her healing and communing with the spirits in her home. Her immediate turn to ATR rather than Eurocentric Christianity honors Afrocentric spiritual traditions not often seen in possession horror. Rather than have Leti call on a Catholic priest as most possession horror does (think, *The Exorcist*), Green highlights and recasts conjure as an equally important spiritual weapon. Thus, the episode demonstrates an Afrofuturist sensibility that centers the metaphysical dimensions of Afrofuturism that "includes and engages ontology or the meaning of existence, relations between the ontological and epistemological or the truth-functional aspects of knowledge, cosmogony or origin of the universe, cosmology or structure of the universe," through "naturalistic Afro-Diaspora traditions" (Anderson & Jones x). In other words, to center the epistemologies, ontologies, and cosmologies governed by ATR, the episode engages the metaphysical dimension of Afrofuturism that challenges a Eurocentric status quo that traditionally places white Christianity at the top of the religious hierarchy in possession horror.

While Leti's calling on a mambo to cleanse the house is important, Mambo Martine's protection and cleansing rituals are imperative to the Afrofuturist sensibility of the episode. As mentioned, Martine begins the exorcism process with the sacred killing of a goat and uses the goat's blood to mark seals of protection on herself, Leti, Tic, and the entryway of the house itself. This process is common amongst ATR rituals such as in Lucumí where blood must be offered for "the egún (or spirit) work to be done" (Brooks "The Safe Negro"). To call upon the Orishas for assistance in the spiritual cleansing, the Orishas must first be fed. Blood and earth are powerful elements in all religious practices; however, their use in ATR is often looked down upon by other Eurocentric religions despite their similar purpose (i.e., it's okay to "consume the blood of Christ" and light herbs in practices of Catholicism but the offering of blood and herbs to Orisha is demonized). Racist attitudes have informed these Eurocentric hierarchies of religion

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and to demonstrate ritual elements of an ATR on-screen is a powerful refusal and subversion of this narrative. Thus, Martine's ritual not only showcases details of an ATR, but it also refuses the demonization of ATR in its sole use as a weapon to fight the evil within Leti's house. This narrative is furthered by Martine's invoking of Orisha to help her cleanse the house.

Once in the basement, Martine feels the presence of the spirits inhabiting the house and asks Leti and Tic to join hands with her, forming a prayer circle. After the trio join hands, Martine calls out, "'Mama Oya, I your dutiful servant, call upon you to use me as a vessel, so together we may cleanse this space of these tormented spirits'" ("Holy Ghost"). Two things are apparent at this moment: 1) that Martine plans to invoke the Orisha, Oya, to assist her in the cleansing, and 2) that Martine desires her body to be used as a vessel, or to be possessed, by Oya. In Lilith Dorsey's *Orishas, Goddesses, and Voodoo Queens: The Divine Feminine in the African Religious Traditions*, Dorsey explains that "Some devotees believe Oya is both the gatekeeper and queen of the dead. She carries her whip and machete, or twin swords, ready to battle all obstacles that stand in her way," and "just like the changing winds that she commands, her form is often flexible and elusive" (Dorsey 68). Oya "is the walking embodiment of change" (Dorsey 184). An invocation of Oya is both an acknowledgment and an embracing of Afrodiasporic world-ordering systems and beliefs with special attention to protecting women and children as Oya also serves as a protector of women and children. Asking Oya to use her body as a vessel, or to possess her, demonstrates an alternative understanding of spirit possession in horror.

Again, I turn to Lucumí practitioner and Black Horror scholar Kinitra Brooks's article on the episode where she describes possession as "not always demonic in our lived experiences and as we are often ridden by spirits in our weekly worship practices, Black church folks shout when they are possessed by the Holy Ghost, olorishas are ridden by their tutelary orisha, and horses are mounted by the loa in Vodun" (Brooks "The Safe Negro"). In other words, possession and its

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many forms is quite common across spiritual traditions of the African diaspora and in lived experiences is something that is feared. This completely differs from Eurocentric representations of spirit possession in horror where spirit possession is positioned as something to be feared and immediately associated with the demonic (once again, *The Exorcist* comes to mind). Not only does this subvert the traditional possession horror narrative, but it enacts an Afrofuturist sensibility by countering the narrative that people from the African diaspora do not have their own religions and practices as they have all been erased. Instead, the episode and Martine's embracing of spirit possession to exorcise the house of Hiram Epstein's malevolent spirit not only highlights the viewpoints of ATR practitioners but normalizes these traditions. From an Afrofuturist perspective, this attempt at normalizing ATR and its various manifestations through the subversion of possession horror demonstrates how "Africans and their diaspora have repeatedly chosen to find a way to *resist or transform* their circumstances rather than to *rationally* accept their condition" (Anderson 182). Thus, by invoking Oya and embracing ATR as the tool necessary to save their futures, the episode spotlights the history of the African diaspora and its cosmologies, ontologies, and epistemologies endurance and survival despite attempts to erase it. Thus, an Afrofuturist reading contends that the use of ATR as the preferred weapon of Leti to cleanse her home de-hierarchizes Eurocentric religious traditions and highlights the counternarrative of an African diasporic spiritual tradition that was purposefully and violently erased to privilege those same Eurocentric religious traditions and beliefs. The episode continues the work of de-hierarchizing Eurocentric religious traditions in Leti's use of Nommo to effectively cast Hiram out of her home and to heal her own trauma and the trauma of the Black ghosts trapped in her home.

As Martine engages in the cleansing, she is violently opposed by Hiram's spirit which attacks her and Tic to thwart their efforts. However, Hiram's attempts do not stop Leti as she

calls on the spirits of the murdered Black folks trapped in her home to help her cast him out proclaiming, "'You're not dead yet! You can still fight!'" ("Holy Ghost"). While she is addressing the spirits, she is also addressing herself as she was killed and brought back to life for a purpose unbeknownst to her until this very moment. Finally, Leti invokes the names of the dead as she begs for their help— "'Betsey, Phillip, Lucy, Jasper, Anarcha, Rufus, Grover, Olivia'" (Green). One by one, the spirits of Betsey, Phillip, Lucy, Jasper, Anarcha, Rufus, Grover, and Olivia materialize in a circle in their grotesque and mutilated forms from their experimentation murders. For example, one of the ghosts is a seven-foot-tall man with the head of an infant.

Figure 14. Seven-foot-tall man with a baby's head attached in place of his regular head as one of the mutilated dead in episode three of *Lovecraft Country*. "Lovecraft Country Episode 3: Holy Ghost Review"; *Ravenous Monster*; Ravenousmonster.com, 4 Sept. 2020, ravenousmonster.com/movies-tv/lovecraft-country-episode-3-holy-ghost-review/.

Figure 15. The ghost of Hiram Epstein surrounded by the ghosts of his victims working together to cast him out of the house. "Lovecraft Country Hits its Stride, and Jurnee Smollett Shines, in 'Holy Ghost'"; *The Unaffiliated Critic;* Unaffiliatedcritic.com, 6 Sept. 2020, unaffiliatedcritic.com/2020/09/lovecraft-country-hits-its-stride-and-jurnee-smollett-shines-in-holy-ghost/.

These mutilated ghosts join hands and accompany Leti chanting, in Creole, "Nou chase w," which translates to "we chase you" or "we cast you out." As they chant, Hiram's ghost appears in the center of their circle and slowly begins to deteriorate in front of them. While Hiram deteriorates, the ghosts of his victims slowly morph back into their selves before their mutilation and are effectively made whole again by the time Leti finally shouts, "'Get the fuck out of my house!'" ("Holy Ghost"). This powerful image of the mutilated dead becoming whole again while Leti demands that Hiram's ghost gets "the fuck out her house," demonstrates the Afrofuturist principle of healing Black traumas as Leti confronts her own and demands a space for herself in her new life while effectively helping Hiram's victims heal their more physical traumas. Further, Leti uses the power of Nommo to shape her reality thus emphasizing and normalizing an African diasporic knowledge system that believes in the power of the word to shape reality. By using Nommo, Leti's character not only uses the "Black tools" at her disposal

(calling on the ancestors is her last-ditch effort to cast Hiram out) but in using those tools her character normalizes alternative ways for thinking about possession horror. Thus, Green demonstrates an Afrofuturist sensibility to Black Horror that queers the traditional subgenre of possession horror that would rely on the words from the Bible, the direct invoking of God, or even more holy water to get the job done. Rather, Green has her characters use Black tools (ATR and its various manifestations) to solve their problems which demonstrates an adherence to the Afrofuturist tenet of embracing, highlighting, and normalizing epistemologies, cosmologies, and ontologies of the African diaspora.

This scene also highlights a counternarrative of the history of medical experimentation that was often conducted at the expense of Black people. Many are aware of the historical violence inflicted on Black bodies in the name of scientific and medical advancement.[17] One popular example is the 1972 Tuskegee Syphilis Study where hundreds of Black men with syphilis were promised free medical care but were not told that they indeed had syphilis nor were they treated for it despite treatment becoming available for the illness during the experiment. Rather, they were left to die, slowly, while unknowingly passing syphilis on to other community members all under the guise of "understanding more about the effects of syphilis." While most people hear about this and understand the violent racism that informed that particular study, it is relegated to the past. By showing examples of medical experimentation conducted on Black bodies on screen, Misha Green refuses to relegate this history to the past and reminds viewers

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[17] In *Afrofuturism: The World of Black Sci-Fi and Fantasy Culture*, Ytasha Womack details how with technological advancement came more experimentation that Black bodies in America suffered the brunt of. She specifically references the Tuskegee Experiment and the immortal cells of Henrietta Lacks as experiments that were conducted in the name of advancement (36).

Janell Hobson also explores this history in the third chapter of her book *Body as Evidence: Mediating Race, Globalizing Gender* in pages 67-69.

that these experiments on Black and brown bodies did not suddenly stop and no longer exist. Green re-stories the history of medical experimentation on Black bodies as something only existing in the past and asks viewers to consider its impact on our present and thus the future.

Throughout the episode, Leti shifts from fearing the ghosts in her home to embracing and learning from them as well as working with them to better all of their realities. Thus, Leti not only relies on African diasporic epistemologies, ontologies, and cosmologies to heal by invoking the ancestors, but she also denies the false linear progress narrative of modernity and instead embraces a chronopolitical understanding of time. In other words, Leti's turn to the ancestors and ATR in this episode is grounded in Sankofa as she reaches into the past (by invoking the ancestors) in the present moment, to change her reality and the realities of Hiram's victims. Overall, the episode employs an Afrofuturist sensibility that uses the grotesque to re-story the history of medical experimentation on Black bodies and to de-hierarchize Eurocentric religious epistemologies, cosmologies, and ontologies as the only tools for combatting hauntings.

"Full Circle"

The final episode of the series follows our proverbial Scooby Gang as they attempt to stop the villain, Christina Braithwhite from achieving immortality. Christina spends the entirety of the show working towards her goal of achieving immortality, a feat none of the men before her ever achieved. However, to achieve the immortality she seeks, she needs Tic's blood. In order to stop Christina, the gang retrieves *the* book of spells called The Book of Names.

The episode relies on nonlinear constructions and understandings of time and space that are productive to the Scooby Gang as they can manipulate time to achieve their goals in the present in order to change their futures. Already, the episode is abundant with elements of Afrofuturism— nonlinear time constructions and belief in magic. However, I argue that the episode is a strong example of folkloric horror's Afrofuturist sensibility as it uses the horror

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genre combined with an Afrofuturism to stop cycles of violence and better the future for all Black people. As a work of folkloric horror, the episode relies on African diasporic epistemologies, cosmologies, and ontologies like the belief in circular time, or Sankofa, coupled with a remixing of Lovecraftian horror mythology to cement a better, liberated, Black future.

The episode opens with the gang trying to save Dee, who has been cursed by the Sons of Adam and is slowly dying by being transformed into a pickaninny caricature. Hippolyta, Montrose, Leti, and Tic are gathered around Dee trying to find a solution when Leti and Tic suddenly fall to the ground and pass out. Tic and Leti wake up in the ancestral plane where they encounter Dora (Tic's mother), Hattie (Dora's grandmother), and Hanna (Tic's ancestor) who inform them that their unbinding of the Book of Names has brought them there. It is on this ancestral plane that the two learn how to use the book. Hattie teaches Leti the spell she will need to stop Christina from obtaining immortality and Dora, Hattie, Hanna, Leti, and Tic use the book while together on the ancestral plane to perform a spell that restores Dee to health in their reality. What's striking about this opening to the episode, is the reliance on the information they receive from the ancestors during their time on the ancestral plane to impact their futures.

Leti and Tic's experience on the ancestral plane highlights a non-Eurocentric epistemology (obtaining knowledge from the ancestors) and exemplifies the West African concept of Sankofa as the past, present, and future are conflated, and linear time is rejected. The ancestral plane itself represents the past as it is the space where their ancestors reside after their deaths. To commune with the dead on the ancestral plane is to engage with the past, in the present moment of their reality, to change their future reality as well as it implies a continuation of life after death as the dead are still present just on a separate plane. Anderson contends that "An Afrofuturist is consciously or unconsciously writing, painting, or artistically expressing the lives of African peoples in relation to other sentient beings in the past, present, or future(s) and is

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released from a static representation of a *particularist* form of identity that is free and remains politically or artistically engaged" (Anderson 182). In other words, the reliance on the ancestors and the information they receive from them on the ancestral plane represents an Afrofuturist sensibility that de-hierarchizes linear time and challenges Eurocentric methods of obtaining knowledge that does not rely on the past, or entities from the past, to receive information to impact their future. Thus, the episode marks a grounding in Sankofa and rejects the false narrative of modernity that time moves linearly and that once the past is over it no longer matters. Rather, the episode asks the viewers to accept their world which relies on Afrocentric constructions of circular time (Sankofa) to order their reality and to gain knowledge and insights that will ultimately impact their reality once they leave the ancestral plane.

The episode is grounded in what Kinitra Brooks, Alexis McGee, and Stephanie Schoellman term "speculative sankofarration" where "specters and their haunted are framed as active, transformative events" that "[B]lack women horror writers render using sankofarration in a sustained effort to capture their positionality and purpose" (Brooks et al. 239). Therefore, grounding a horror work in Sankofa gives agency and purpose to the past and the dead. This notion of giving agency and purpose to the dead is an Afrocentric belief and practice. The final episode of the series cements its grounding in Afrocentric epistemologies, cosmologies, and ontologies by giving the dead ancestors continued purpose and spaces of agency like the ancestral plane. Further, the ancestral plane is a space of excess, an elsewhere where the dead can reside demonstrating a queer temporality. Kara Keeling defines a queer temporality as a place that "names that dimension of the unpredictable and the unknowable in time that governs errant, eccentric, promiscuous, and unexpected organizations of social life" (Keeling 19). Making Leti and Tic obtain the knowledge they need to save their family's future happen from within the ancestral plane highlights a reliance on Afrocentric epistemologies and cosmologies to

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solve their problems and a spatiotemporal queering that allows them to gain important information from an "elsewhere" that challenges linear time and space. Again, Eurocentric tools are not being relied on to solve Black problems. This is furthered as their healing of Dee also happens on the ancestral plane.

As mentioned earlier, Dee is actively fighting off a curse placed on her by the Sons of Adam while Leti and Tic try to save her from within the ancestral plane. The curse has been slowly and painfully shifting Dee's appearance into a pickaninny caricature of herself turning her into an embodiment of Topsy from Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin.* Physically, Dee's hair has twisted into knots and her mouth has become a wide bright red painted-on smile, and her arm, which is the site of her body where the pickaninny curse begins, appears to be wooden or tree-branch-like. While the curse is in place, Dee is the embodiment of the past as she is meant to look like Topsy, a caricature of a Black girl represented as a buffoon or unintelligent and animal-esque, which opposes who Dee is— smart, creative, and charismatic. By forcing her into the body of a pickaninny, Dee is placed into a body that represents a particular version of the past and the history of enslavement that cemented the very pickaninny caricature. When Dee is saved, her body is restored to her old self but the arm where the curse took hold remains hardened and dead— a physical reminder of the past.

Figure 16. Diana Freeman, played by Jada Harris, lying in bed with an atrophied arm. "Lovecraft Country 1x09: 'Rewind 1921'"; *Father Son Holy Gore;* Fathersonholygore.com, 12 Oct. 2020, fathersonholygore.com/2020/10/12/lovecraft-country-1x09-rewind-1921/.

In this final episode, Dee's character becomes a physical embodiment of Sankofa. Now saved, Dee must cope, in the present moment, with her violent encounter with the Sons of Adam, the death of her friend (Emmett Till), and the upcoming fight her family will undergo to save themselves. It is in the final act of the episode that Dee's future, the future of her family, and of all Black people is guaranteed.

Having lost her arm, Hippolyta (her mother) constructs a new cyborg arm to replace it. In the final scene of the episode, Leti believes to have beaten Christina as she binds all white people from ever being able to perform magic and leaves Christina trapped under rubble telling her "'Magic is ours now'" before walking away for good ("Full Circle"). While the act of binding all white people from performing magic seems like the logical end to a cycle of white heteropatriarchal violence, it does not guarantee the end of this cycle because Christina, the agent of this violence, remains alive. It is when Dee arrives at the scene that the cycle ends.

When Dee arrives with a black shoggoth at her back, she finds Christina under the rubble

who begs for her help.[18] Dee responds to Christina, "'They still haven't learned'" ("Full Circle"

Green). She then bends down to Christina, extending her new cyborg arm, and wraps her metal

hand around Christina's throat. Dee uses her cyborg arm to squeeze Christina's throat eventually

popping it like a stubborn pimple. Dee's cyborg arm is a physical embodiment of the future as

the arm was built and placed to heal her pain from the past (from the curse and the trauma of

being cursed) and is used to cement her future by truly ending the cycle of violence by killing

Christina. The cyborg imagery itself implies a futurity that challenges the white hegemonic

collective imagination that does not pair Black bodies or culture with technological

advancement. Janell Hobson explains in *Body as Evidence: Mediating Race, Globalizing Gender*

(2012), that there is a digital divide perpetuated in pop culture that relegates Black people to

more "primitive" imagery and associations while allowing white people and whiteness to be

more freely associated with technological advancement (Hobson 95). Hobson praises

implementation of the cyborg imagery when in conjunction with a critical engagement with race

and gender in Janelle Monáe's work stating that "Monae effectively disrupts expectations for

'primitive blackness' since her imagined revolution is not based in liberating the masses from

technology but, rather, in mediating between the two impulses of digitization and 'nature,' thus

leading to a transcendent, trans-human creation that blends humanity with virtual fantasy and

history with the future" (Hobson 109). Thus, the image of the Black woman and/or Black Queer

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[18] H.P Lovecraft describes shoggoths in *At the Mountains of Madness* as "shapeless entities composed of a viscous jelly which looked like an agglutination of bubbles; and each averaged about fifteen feet in diameter when a sphere. They had, however, a constantly shifting shape and volume; throwing out temporary developments or forming apparent organs of sight, hearing, and speech in imitation of their masters, either spontaneously or according to suggestion" (Lovecraft).

cyborg melds together humanity and technological advancement with serious considerations about race and gender to subvert the narrative about the digital divide that denies Black people's involvements in technological advancement.

The use of a robotic or cyborg image through Dee's arm immediately calls attention to a body blurring the boundaries of human and non-human and this immediately begins transgressing Eurocentric notions of liberal humanism where non-white bodies are deemed non-rational humans.[19] Further, Dee's use of the cyborg arm to kill Christina demonstrates a radical mode of obtaining a future that does not rely on Eurocentric understandings of morality and instead relies on a more cyborg understanding that does not cling to the rigid rules of liberal humanism about what is right and wrong and what bodies are allowed to perform violent acts. Not only does Dee cement a future by truly ending Christina and her cycle of violence, but Dee is also an embodiment of the future both as a young girl and through her cyborg arm.

Therefore, Dee embodies Sankofa as she was a representation of the past, in her present body, and when she is healed the cyborg arm replaces the remaining traumatic manifestation of the past and becomes a representation of the future. The conflation of time is bound up in her body and she uses this sankofarrated body to cement her future. Dee's character as an embodiment of Sankofa contributes to a larger de-hierarchization of how to end cycles of violence. Again, Brooks et. al explains that "Black women horror writers' incarnation of speculative sankofarration complicate the representations of trauma and resist easy solutions in potentiality of healing through horror" (Brooks et al. 241). In other words, Black women and/or Black Queer folks' horror aesthetics privilege Afrofuturism by complicating Eurocentric understandings of trauma and how to heal from it. By having Dee actually kill Christina with her

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[19] See Wynter 35.

cyborg arm, the episode showcases a non-Eurocentric method to ending cycles of violence that

ultimately challenges a white hegemony that has historically relied on violence to reify itself.

When the viewer sees her turn her eyes up to the full moon, shoggoth roaring up at it in the

distance, with her cyborg arm at her side, it is clear that she has cemented a future for herself, her

family, and Black people everywhere. Furthermore, the future she has created is not one tied to

Eurocentric beliefs and practices as it is grounded in Sankofa, an Afrocentric concept. Thus, the

series furthers an argument that Black tools are needed to solve Black problems, and the use of

horror complicates this by allowing violence to be a manner of obtaining a future by any means

necessary.

Figure 17. Diana staring up at a full moon while her shoggoth howls at it in the
background. "A Scardey-Cat Recap of *Lovecraft Country* Episode 10: 'Full Circle'";
Elle; Elle.com, 19 Oct. 2020, www.elle.com/culture/movies-tv/a34413547/lovecraft-
country-episode-10-full-circle-recap/.

Conclusion

Throughout this chapter, I have walked you through examples of sequential art that uses

the visuals of the horror genre to speculate about liberated Black futures with a grounding in

folkloric horror texts. Both *Box of Bones* and *Lovecraft Country* engage in a core tenet of

Afrofuturism: embracing and highlighting Afrocentric epistemologies, cosmologies, and ontologies. Both works are grounded in Sankofa and use the layers and complexities of Afrocentric beliefs and traditions to organize their worlds allowing them to highlight counternarratives and blur binaries ultimately challenging Eurocentric world-ordering and belief systems. While both texts don't always actively engage in challenging white heteronormativity by centering queer genders or sexuality, the texts engage in queer methods that disrupt "normativity" through amalgams of Afrodiasporic traditions and practices and through their methods of production (i.e. comics and graphic novels as uniquely queer mediums). Further, both of these works exemplify a Black Queer horror aesthetic that is steeped in Afrofuturism as both texts are Black Horror works (works of horror created by Black people with an intended Black audience) that demonstrate Afrofuturist sensibilities such as their reliance on and highlighting of Afrocentric epistemologies, cosmologies, and ontologies to reiterate the idea that Black problems require Black solutions or tools to fix them not Eurocentric ones.

Conclusion

"Okay, now let that shit just mutilate her white ass and leave!"

— Regina Hall as Brenda in *Scary Movie* (2000).

Brenda Meeks, played by Regina Hall, in the *Scary Movie* franchise is not only hilarious, but her character is arguably one of the most relatable Black women in horror for Black women and/or Black Queer viewers. Brenda often says what Black viewers are thinking. When Cindy, played by Anna Faris, finds herself in trouble as the franchise's quintessential white Final Girl, Brenda is often there to remind her that her behavior is not smart. For instance, in the epigraph above Cindy has drawn the monsters chasing her to where Brenda is safely hiding. When Brenda sees that the monsters are going to possibly capture Cindy giving her time to escape and stay alive, she says "let that shit just mutilate her white ass and leave!" (*Scary Movie*). Brenda expresses an idea that most Black women and/or Black Queer people know and are forced to confront in everyday attempts to fight oppression— the idea that when the chips are down, that white women wouldn't try to save you so why should you try to save them? This is a harsh reality, and Brenda delivers it with such comedy that we can discern it as a clear work of fiction, but it still reflects our reality. This reflection of reality, although exaggerated and satirical in this example, quite literally holds a mirror up to the failures of the horror genre and its treatment of Black women and/or Black Queer individuals. This failure reminds us that the Western, white, hegemonic collective imagination needs to be challenged even in our fantastical imaginings for our reality to have a shot at change.

Early in this project, I crafted a definition of an Afrofuturist Horror theory. Afrofuturist Horror challenges a collective imaginary steeped in white supremacist and heteropatriarchal ideologies and practices through works of horror. With its grounding in Afrofuturism,

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Afrofuturist Horror theory centers Black Horror rather than Blacks *in* horror to attend to the unique, experience-informed, ways that Black creators subvert stereotypes and tropes of the horror genre to speculate about possible liberated Black futures with special attention to generating a future that includes and is safe for Black women and/or Black Queer folks. The works I've analyzed throughout this project do not always contain each and every facet of Afrofuturist Horror theory; rather, they are united by an Afrofuturist ideology that asserts that Black women and/or Black Queer people will exist in a future of their own making by any means necessary.

The first two *Scary Movie* films, directed and written by the Wayans brothers, can be seen adhering to an Afrofuturist Horror theory to some degree. In the films, we see a Black woman survive by any means necessary as Brenda leaves the white woman protagonist, Cindy, to fight her own battles and face the monsters on her own to assure survival and futurity for herself. While she is often still killed in each film, she always comes back to say what we're thinking and to obtain her future by any means necessary even if that means she must "let that shit just mutilate [Cindy's] white ass and leave!" (*Scary Movie*). Brenda, and many other Black women and/or Black Queer characters in Black Horror, challenge the collective imaginary associated with the horror genre— that the Black women and/or Black Queer people do not survive the monsters or the systems that create the monsters. As we've seen throughout this project, Afrofuturist Horror points toward a Black Queer Horror aesthetic where Black Horror texts highlight counternarratives that disrupt Eurocentric binaries, ideologies, and practices and encourage the embracing of those counternarratives. The melding of Afrofuturism and horror is important for highlighting these counternarratives but it also demonstrates the importance of reading and studying pop culture as it often mirrors our sociocultural moments and histories and

provides a space to challenge the norms and ideas of these sociocultural moments. For Black Horror creators, pop culture is a space to not only challenge the collective imagination that informs the history of horror but also is a space to normalize Black survival and futurity.

In Janet Casey's *Teaching Tainted Lit: Popular American Fiction in Today's Classroom* (2015), Casey argues for the merit of teaching popular culture and explains that "A popular text, is in a visceral sense, for and about a present moment; it actively reverberates with its time to a degree that is not always true of allegedly transcendent 'high' art, and it offers the opportunity to study cultural processes not in retrospect, but as they are unfolding" (Casey 12). In other words, studying popular culture is imperative because it allows us to reflect on the sociocultural moment during which the text (or film, show, song, etc.) is produced and how that text is both shaping the sociocultural moment and shaped by it. Pop culture texts are not only more widely accessible (able to be viewed or read), but they allow us to understand the sociocultural moment as it is happening rather than after the fact whereas most "literary" texts tend to be fixated on the past. With this focus on the present and, ultimately, the future and the past, it should be no surprise that Afrofuturism traffics in pop culture. While so-called "literary" texts are included in my analyses throughout this project, they are not the primary focus as I look to television, film, and genre fiction to emphasize the merit of pop culture as being world/reality shaping while influenced by the world. Specifically, I have argued that horror pop culture created by Black creators for an intended Black audience has a unique vantage point to critique and challenge a collective imagination that is steeped in white heteropatriarchal ideologies and practices. While each work doesn't always critique both white supremacy *and* heteronormativity, they are still united in an Afrofuturist ideology of asserting Black people's existence in the future.

As I argue in the first and second chapters of this project, Afrofuturist Horror is interested in how the monster is made abject and how Black Horror texts, especially those created by Black women and/or Black Queer individuals, draw attention to the systems that makes an individual the abject, or monster. Further, I contend that Afrofuturist Horror theory requires an embrace of the abject status often associated with being a monster or monstrous to challenge what is *actually* scary arguing that the white heteropatriarchal systems that make monsters and abject subjects are the things to fear rather than the monsters themselves. The monsters then embrace their monstrosity in various ways as a power source to fight back against the system itself. Specifically, in the first chapter, I posit that vampire narratives within the Black Horror tradition have an Afrofuturist sensibility where the Black vampire can act on/use its monstrosity to demand a future for themselves in a way that challenges our collective understanding of who is human and who is not. Furthermore, the second chapter argues that Final Girls, which I term Afrofuturist Survivors to be more inclusive of gender and sexuality as well as to denote the difference between Clover's conception and mine within an Afrofuturist framework, in Black Horror do not simply fight a monster or slasher, but that they fight both the slasher and the system itself. Afrofuturist Survivors fight the slasher or monster as well as the system by taking on some of the roles of the monster to garner the power and energy to fight back against systems of white heteropatriarchy. Thus, Afrofuturist Horror theory works to subvert typical monstrosity narratives arguing that embracing the monstrosity assigned to Black individuals has the potential to transform the future and provides the ability to demand a future by any means necessary.

I have argued throughout this project that true liberation, in the context of Afrofuturist Horror, is a break from Eurocentric epistemologies, ontologies, and cosmologies and instead requires an embracing of Afrocentric ways of knowing, being, and ordering the world. Thus, in

the third chapter, I turn to what Brooks terms folkloric horror texts that center this idea through an exploration of spiritual traditions and epistemologies of the African diaspora such as the use of Sankofa and conjure in Black Horror. I contend that these texts better highlight counternarratives and disrupt binary thinking in order to speculate about liberated Black futures where the presence and practice of African Traditional Religions is normalized. Further, the use of African spiritual traditions, beliefs, and concepts that have been violently and purposefully erased in favor of Eurocentric traditions and practices not only aids in the recovery project of Afrofuturism but gives agency to these previously erased or hidden traditions and finds power in them.

Overall, one of the central arguments of this project has been that the violent and grotesque imagery expected of the horror genre can be generative to the Afrofuturist project. Specifically, the use of violence in Black Horror challenges the collective imagination's understanding of who is allowed to do violence to demand or assert their futures and who is not historically allowed to enact violence. Despite there being a rich narrative of violent refusal and resistance to oppression in Black American history, this history is often erased or eclipsed by the notion that Black people must be non-violent to gain liberation. Meanwhile, violence is being enacted on Black bodies every day to deny us access to liberation. Thus, Afrofuturist Horror theory embraces the violence of Black Horror as violence is used to examine the complexities of obtaining liberation and asserting a place in the future that rejects the Eurocentric notion that gaining liberation requires non-violent action. Again, works like *Box of Bones, Lovecraft Country,* and *The Gilda Stories* enact an Afrofuturist Horror theory because they overtly emphasize counternarratives about violent retribution as necessary to liberation and demanding a future for ourselves.

While violence is an expectation of the horror genre overall, to see violence enacted by Black people, especially Black women and/or Black Queer folks, recalls an important Black feminist concept of rage and anger being useful tools for fighting back against oppression. Audre Lorde has historically argued that "Women of Color in America have grown up within a symphony of anger, at being silenced, at being unchosen, at knowing that when we survive, it is in spite of the world that takes for granted our lack of humanness, and which hates our very existence outside of service" (Lorde 129). Thus, Afrofuturist Horror becomes a space to imagine a world where Black women and/or Black Queer folks can act on that anger and rage and refuse to be silent. If, as Lorde posits, "Anger is an appropriate reaction to racist attitudes, as is fury when the actions arising from those attitudes do not change," then it is important to see Black women and/or Black Queer folks have a space to engage in this righteous rage (Lorde 129). The Black Queer Horror aesthetic steeped in Afrofuturism that I have mapped out provides this space.

During a time where conversations about violence and justice are growing, I find it important for Black people to have a space to channel that productive anger and horror is a great spot to do so as it can provide both catharses to the creator and viewer while also showing viewers that there are other options out there and that things could be different. In horror, there is a level of violence that is expected and supported by an audience so it becomes a salient space to do Afrofuturist work where one can slaughter their oppressors to survive and act out their righteous rage.

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