

**Interview of fiction writer
Iheoma Nwachukwu**

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4
5 Kimberly Williams: [clicking] My name is Kimberly Williams. I'm a University of Florida
6 doctoral student in the English Department. Today is January the 31st,
7 2020, and we are at Zora's Place in Eatonville, Florida, and I am
8 speaking with...
9
10 Iheoma Nwachukwu: Iheoma Nwachukwu.
11
12 Kimberly Williams: Awesome. Thank you. And we are here today to discuss Afrofuturism
13 [clicking] regarding the [clicking] Zora Neale Hurston Festival and
14 Conference. [Inaudible 0:25] [tsk] [0:26] Can you tell me a little bit
15 about yourself and how did you get into the world of Afrofuturism?
16
17 Iheoma Nwachukwu: [tsk] Well, I, um, [throat clearing] I write fiction. I write, um, mostly
18 literary, literary, um, fiction.
19
20 Kimberly Williams: Okay. [papers rustling]
21
22 Iheoma Nwachukwu: Uh. But with, um, some part of it, it's s-, [speculative 0:49] fiction.
23
24 Kimberly Williams: Okay.
25
26 Iheoma Nwachukwu: But which I call realism. Right.
27
28 Kimberly Williams: Ah.
29
30 Iheoma Nwachukwu: But of course, you know, it's – when you write about, you know, the
31 supernatural, ghosts, and stuff like that, it's called magical realism. But
32 of course, as an African, it's, it's real life.
33
34 Kimberly Williams: Yeah.
35
36 Iheoma Nwachukwu: Right. Um. So, um, [clicking] that's basically what I do. I used to play
37 chess, professional chess, for 10 years...
38
39 Kimberly Williams: [Inaudible 1:15].
40
41 Iheoma Nwachukwu: ...in Nigeria. Um. [tsk] And I, I give it up when it, you know, didn't
42 pay the bills. Um. As such, I d-, I don't do it professionally anymore
43 but I, I play from time to time. Um. [tsk] And so of course my
44 relationship with Afrofuturism comes from, you know, that speculative
45 aspect. And I did write a story, um, years ago when [tsk] Gaddafi died,
46 Muammar Gaddafi, the d-, dictator, um, [tapping] leader of, of, um,
47 Libya. And so – a-, and that's, uh, basically how I f-, f-, w-, how [throat

1 clearing], excuse me. [throat clearing] Excuse me. How I got invited to
2 the festival was through, you know, that story that I published.
3
4 Kimberly Williams: [Inaudible 2:03].
5
6 Iheoma Nwachukwu: Uh. And the story – the thing about the story is basically i-, it looks at
7 Gaddafi and what he represented to the people.
8
9 Kimberly Williams: Okay.
10
11 Iheoma Nwachukwu: And so like how the West played this double-faced game with Gaddafi
12 and with Libya.
13
14 Kimberly Williams: Okay.
15
16 Iheoma Nwachukwu: A-, a-, and basically just, you know, looked at that relationship.
17 Basically looks at Gaddafi's last days in the sewer before he was killed.
18 I just imagined what...
19
20 Kimberly Williams: Hm.
21
22 Iheoma Nwachukwu: ...that was like. But also usin' that as a platform to get out his double-
23 edged, um, relationship with the West. But sometimes, you know, it was
24 beneficial to the West and then when it wasn't beneficial anymore...
25
26 Kimberly Williams: Mm-hm.
27
28 Iheoma Nwachukwu: ...they plotted to take him down.
29
30 Kimberly Williams: Okay.
31
32 Iheoma Nwachukwu: And the problem with that story was that no journal in the West wanted
33 that story.
34
35 Kimberly Williams: Okay.
36
37 Iheoma Nwachukwu: Uh. Not here in the U.S. and not in the U.K.
38
39 Kimberly Williams: Mm-hm.
40
41 Iheoma Nwachukwu: And eventually it got published, um, in South Africa.
42
43 Kimberly Williams: Hm.
44

1Iheoma Nwachukwu: And then when Bill Campbell put, you know, his, um, anthology
2together, that's how [he 3:05] found that story and then it made its way
3back to the U.S....
4

5Kimberly Williams: [Inaudible 3:08].
6

7Iheoma Nwachukwu: ...which is really very interestin'. And so, of course, it tells you about,
8you know, how beneficial imp-, and impor-, importance Afrofuturism
9is...
10

11Kimberly Williams: Yes.
12

13Iheoma Nwachukwu: ...because what, what that's doin' is, is givin' visibility [to] [inaudible
143:20] that are, uh, traditionally suppressed in the West.
15

16Kimberly Williams: Okay.
17

18Iheoma Nwachukwu: And so, and so, you know, and, uh, so that's one beneficial, um, aspect
19of, of Afrofuturism.
20

21Kimberly Williams: [Inaudible 3:32].
22

23Iheoma Nwachukwu: A-, a-, and that's basically my, um, relationship with it.
24

25Kimberly Williams: [Inaudible 3:36]. And I know in your, in your work, there's so much
26around, around ghosts and, and, and haunting. [throat clearing] [3:44]
27Can you describe that particular, that particular conduit, um, in your
28work and why not, perhaps, you know, I don't know, vampires or
29behemoths or...?
30

31Iheoma Nwachukwu: Of course. I mean, I'm African and Nigerian. And I grew up in that
32culture where, uh, I mean, a, a, a witch could be a vampire.
33

34Kimberly Williams: Hm. Okay. [Inaudible 4:06].
35

36Iheoma Nwachukwu: Right?
37

38Kimberly Williams: Yeah.
39

40Iheoma Nwachukwu: Because, you know, witches – uh, I w-, I wanna talk about witches, I, I
41mean, like in real terms. Your neighbor could be a witch back in
42Nigeria and then, you know, someone could say that person livin' over
43there is losin' a lotta blood 'cause a witch is suckin' that person's blood.
44

45Kimberly Williams: Oh.
46

1Iheoma Nwachukwu: And in that way, witch could be a vampire.
2

3Kimberly Williams: Yes.
4

5Iheoma Nwachukwu: Right. And so that's, you know, as far as culturally, uh, and, um, w-,
6 within the cosmology of my world as a Nigerian, that's my relationship
7 with vampires.
8

9Kimberly Williams: Okay.
10

11Iheoma Nwachukwu: Right.
12

13Kimberly Williams: Okay.
14

15Iheoma Nwachukwu: And, of course, belief in the supernatural and the belief in ghosts, uh,
16 that's something that's also part a my cos-, [inaudible 4:44] cosmology
17 as, [throat clearing] as an Igbo Nigerian...
18

19Kimberly Williams: Okay.
20

21Iheoma Nwachukwu: ...um, which is why – uh, that's what I grew up with. A-, and that's
22 what I write about. And so even though I'm doin' literary fiction...
23

24Kimberly Williams: Yeah.
25

26Iheoma Nwachukwu: ...that aspect of my culture has to be part of that fiction.
27

28Kimberly Williams: Okay.
29

30Iheoma Nwachukwu: You know, 'cause that's how I express myself in the world. H-, that's
31 how I find myself in the world.
32

33Kimberly Williams: Okay.
34

35Iheoma Nwachukwu: Uh, uh, for, for it to be authentic fiction from my point a view, that has
36 to be a part of, um, the component of makin' the world of fiction that I
37 create.
38

39Kimberly Williams: Okay. Okay. [Inaudible 5:22]. Um. Thank you for that. That really
40 like thorough and very culturally enriching response. Yes. [5:31] So
41 with that, um...
42

43Iheoma Nwachukwu: [Inaudible 5:31].
44

45Kimberly Williams: ...how do you define Afrofuturism?
46

1Iheoma Nwachukwu: Afrofuturism, I mean, just beyond bein', bein' in the [section 5:38] of
2 African culture...
3
4Kimberly Williams: Mm-hm.
5
6Iheoma Nwachukwu: ...and science, um, like I said, I feel like it's a vector for, you know, the
7 dissemination of African culture...
8
9Kimberly Williams: Hm.
10
11Iheoma Nwachukwu: ...and, um, the creation of a Black utopia.
12
13Kimberly Williams: Hm.
14
15Iheoma Nwachukwu: I feel like any story where, um, [inaudible 5:55] doin' poverty porn...
16
17Kimberly Williams: Mm-hm.
18
19Iheoma Nwachukwu: ...you know, when we're talkin' about Africa where...
20
21Kimberly Williams: Mm-hm.
22
23Iheoma Nwachukwu: ...where Africans are seen as hav-, as occupyin' a place in the world that
24 is equivalent to other people...
25
26Kimberly Williams: Mm-hm.
27
28Iheoma Nwachukwu: ...that's Afrofuturism. Um. [tsk] A-, and I go back [always 6:14] to
29 when I was growing up and I was watchin', you know, the Star Trek
30 movies, you know, and like and I loved those movies. Th-, they're great
31 movies. Uh. A-, and I just I loved this idea of bein' in the future and
32 seein' what, what – you know, even though I might not have believed
33 that's what the future might look like.
34
35Kimberly Williams: Mm-hm.
36
37Iheoma Nwachukwu: But it was really invigorating and stimulating to see that sort a future.
38 But I just couldn't find myself in that future...
39
40Kimberly Williams: Hm.
41
42Iheoma Nwachukwu: ...because of a lot of, you know, White people.
43
44Kimberly Williams: Hm.
45

1Iheoma Nwachukwu: And so as a child and you're, and you're growin' up as a child and
2 you're askin' yourself i-, it, it appears that the future has no place for
3 me.
4

5Kimberly Williams: [Inaudible 6:52].
6

7Iheoma Nwachukwu: A-, and you see it's really important for a Black child growing up
8 anywhere in the world to be able to see themselves in the future to feel
9 like they have a voice in the future.
10

11Kimberly Williams: Mm-hm.
12

13Iheoma Nwachukwu: To feel like they have a voice in the world.
14

15Kimberly Williams: Yes.
16

17Iheoma Nwachukwu: Right. Um. And so that, that, that became problematic for me. In, in
18 Lacanian, um, psychology, there's the idea that from the ages of 6 to 18
19 months, a child recognizes themselves in the mirror.
20

21Kimberly Williams: Hm.
22

23Iheoma Nwachukwu: A-, and when that happens, a child, they, they're able to accept
24 themselves as an object that, um, that can exist outside of themselves.
25

26Kimberly Williams: Hm.
27

28Iheoma Nwachukwu: And from, from that, um, stage, the idea of the ideal is built...
29

30Kimberly Williams: Hm.
31

32Iheoma Nwachukwu: ...'cause s-, so that when a child watches like an, uh, like *Superman*,
33 they – that's the ideal. And so they, they [inaudible 7:47], so instead of
34 seein' Superman, they're seein' themselves as Superman. So when they
35 watch like a commercial, um, and they see someone with white teeth and
36 with a great body, they put themselves in the position a that person.
37

38Kimberly Williams: Hm.
39

40Iheoma Nwachukwu: Right. Now, if a, a Black child in the world is watchin' all of these
41 movies about superheroes and seein'...
42

43Kimberly Williams: Hm.
44

45Iheoma Nwachukwu: ...all the White people, i-, i-, i-, [inaudible 8:12], it, it, it starts to affect
46 the confidence of a child growin' up. Right. And so, so it's really

1 important, um, that – and Afrofuturism comes and, and it's tryin' to get
2 a place at the table.
3
4 Kimberly Williams: Hm.
5
6 Iheoma Nwachukwu: A-, and that's what like *Black Panther* does. You know, like...
7
8 Kimberly Williams: Hm.
9
10 Iheoma Nwachukwu: ...seein' – I mean, a movie like – say a show like *Luke Cage*...
11
12 Kimberly Williams: Mm-hm.
13
14 Iheoma Nwachukwu: ...uh, uh, and *Black Panth-*, *Black Panther*, seein' a Black superhero,
15 it's...
16
17 Kimberly Williams: Yeah.
18
19 Iheoma Nwachukwu: ...such an important thing for a child, uh, which is why, um, we wanna
20 see more movies like that.
21
22 Kimberly Williams: Yes.
23
24 Iheoma Nwachukwu: Wanna see more [inaudible 8:45] like that. We, we need more, um,
25 support for, for stuff like that.
26
27 Kimberly Williams: Mm-hm.
28
29 Iheoma Nwachukwu: W-, we need, you know, money pumped in. Let's have this elaborate
30 discussion about, about our lives.
31
32 Kimberly Williams: Hm.
33
34 Iheoma Nwachukwu: You know?
35
36 Kimberly Williams: Mm-hm.
37
38 Iheoma Nwachukwu: And of course, there's a lot of Afrofuturist art. And when you look at
39 that, it's so beautiful when you see...
40
41 Kimberly Williams: Hm.
42
43 Iheoma Nwachukwu: ...all of, you know, um, all of that, that art comin' out. And I wanted to
44 also mention watchin' *Doctor Who* as a child. I love *Doctor Who*. You
45 know, um, and I s-, I ha-, *Doctor Who* is really very [funny 9:15].
46

1Kimberly Williams: Mm-hm.
2

3Iheoma Nwachukwu: Right. And I had the same problem with *Doctor Who* and the problem
4was that I just didn't see myself in that future.
5

6Kimberly Williams: Hm.
7

8Iheoma Nwachukwu: Even as much as I loved that future, I just – I wasn't there.
9

10Kimberly Williams: Yeah.
11

12Iheoma Nwachukwu: But so, so that, you know, growin' up, y-, a-, and this happens at a
13subconscious level for a child growing up. Y-, y-, whoever you see as
14Doctor Who becomes the ideal. And that's what you associate with
15what you wanna be like. And so...
16

17Kimberly Williams: Hm.
18

19Iheoma Nwachukwu: ...your role models are not people who look like you...
20

21Kimberly Williams: Mm-hm.
22

23Iheoma Nwachukwu: ...but people who do not look like you. And you, you [inaudible 9:49] –
24so you – basically it's like you're bein' programmed.
25

26Kimberly Williams: Hm.
27

28Iheoma Nwachukwu: And so you're lookin' up to, in this situation, White people.
29

30Kimberly Williams: Hm.
31

32Iheoma Nwachukwu: Right. And so hopefully Afrofuturism can, you know, entrench its
33position, um, in the West, which is the epicenter of literary production
34and, and, and so – and that can help create, um, a new narrative about,
35uh, Africans, people of African extraction...
36

37Kimberly Williams: Hm.
38

39Iheoma Nwachukwu: ...a-, and, and African culture.
40

41Kimberly Williams: Hm.
42

43Iheoma Nwachukwu: And make it important. You know, make it like a tangible thing.
44

45Kimberly Williams: That's wonderful. That's wonderful. Y-, you already touched on in
46your, your talking about the, um, the significance and the influence of,

1 of course, Wakanda Forever with the *Black Panther* film. [10:35] Can
2 you describe your, your feelings and your thoughts about, um, that film
3 and that film and your work?
4

5Iheoma Nwachukwu: First, I mean, I have kids. And, you know, and it's important for my
6 kids. And last November, I went to my kids' school and on the wall, I
7 saw, um, a drawing of a pharaoh, a pharaoh's queen, and there was a
8 sphinx and they were all Black.
9

10Kimberly Williams: Hm. [laughter]
11

12Iheoma Nwachukwu: And seein' that, I was...

13

14Kimberly Williams: [Inaudible 11:03].
15

16Iheoma Nwachukwu: ...I took a picture of it and I posted it on Twitter. I'm like this is so
17 important.
18

19Kimberly Williams: Absolutely.
20

21Iheoma Nwachukwu: You know? 'Cause they're seein' depictions of Africans every time in
22 Hollywood and they're White.
23

24Kimberly Williams: Yeah. That's true.
25

26Iheoma Nwachukwu: You know? Of course, you sort of go back to the 25th Dynasty in, in
27 Egypt and how, I mean, the t-, the 25th Dynasty were, you know, people
28 who were black skinned.
29

30Kimberly Williams: [Inaudible 11:29].
31

32Iheoma Nwachukwu: A-, and when you go to the museum in Egypt, they skip the 25th
33 Dynasty.
34

35Kimberly Williams: Mm-hm.
36

37Iheoma Nwachukwu: Right. A-, a-, a-, and so that's a erasure and it's somethin' that we
38 continue as Black people to grapple with.
39

40Kimberly Williams: Mm-hm.
41

42Iheoma Nwachukwu: And Haiti has taught us that it is those who are, um – [tsk] who have –
43 who are in charge of the tools of makin' history that make history and
44 det-, determine the narrative...
45

46Kimberly Williams: Hm.

1
2Iheoma Nwachukwu: ...that we live with then as human beings. Right. And so what
3Afrofuturism does, of course, is to allow us to take charge of, you know,
4the means of producin' history.
5
6Kimberly Williams: Hm.
7
8Iheoma Nwachukwu: So back to your question about watchin', um, *Black Panther*. It's, it was
9great. I mean, some of it, some of it was – it referred to like [the Quran]
10and Nigeria, you know, and you're like oh, yeah, I know that. And just
11seein' Black people in the position of power, seein' the creation of this
12Black utopia was like euphoric...
13
14Kimberly Williams: Hm.
15
16Iheoma Nwachukwu: ...you know...
17
18Kimberly Williams: Hm.
19
20Iheoma Nwachukwu: ...for me just watchin' it. You know. And so, I mean, you're watchin'
21people flyin' around [like 12:29] Superman, like Superman and you're
22like that guy looks like me. I can fly.
23
24Kimberly Williams: Hm.
25
26Iheoma Nwachukwu: And the, and the kids are watchin' it. And, you know, my kids are like,
27you know, 4 and 6 and, uh, they're at that stage where, you know,
28they're makin' their own impressions of the world.
29
30Kimberly Williams: Mm-hm.
31
32Iheoma Nwachukwu: And so it's important for them...
33
34Kimberly Williams: Mm-hm.
35
36Iheoma Nwachukwu: ...at a point to, to see, you know, people like them flyin' around. So,
37you know, for me, it, it was, you know, it was great just, just watchin'
38that movie. And, and cathartic too, you know. Um. I-, it, it feel like,
39you know, this is, this is something you've always wished for and to see
40it happening in your lifetime is really great. And so it's effect on my
41work, um, I, I mean, my, my writing is basically, uh, m-, all my stories
42are set in Nigeria. You know. Um. Uh. W-, what it does is, I mean,
43w-, every time we have a, a story about Black people, you know, bein'
44pushed forward, th-, th-, what happens is that all the stories about Black
45[boys 13:34] are beginning to gain some kinda prominence.
46

1Kimberly Williams: Hm. [Inaudible 13:37].
2
3Iheoma Nwachukwu: So you see that trickle-down effect.
4
5Kimberly Williams: Hm.
6
7Iheoma Nwachukwu: Right. And so you have more – you feel like someone is, is finally
8listenin’.
9
10Kimberly Williams: Okay.
11
12Iheoma Nwachukwu: And so you wanna push yourself out there ‘cause you know it’s like now
13we’re findin’ our voice, you know, so great things m-, better things,
14might happen out there ‘cause, you know, when you push your work out
15there, you don’t know who – how anyone reacts to it. You know?
16
17Kimberly Williams: [Inaudible 13:59].
18
19Iheoma Nwachukwu: Uh. I was havin’ a talk with Bill yesterday and he was tellin’ me how he
20had found my story. And he’s, he’s like people [online 14:06] were
21sayin’ have you read this story in [Jungle Gym 14:08]. And, you know,
22[inaudible 14:10] I don’t even know [this guy 14:11] and this story was
23published a long time ago.
24
25Kimberly Williams: Yes.
26
27Iheoma Nwachukwu: Right. And so yes, it’s, i-, it makes ya think that more people are
28beginning to listen and perhaps we will gain prominence with [this
2914:26], um, [censuring of our 14:27] story, you know...
30
31Kimberly Williams: Mm-hm.
32
33Iheoma Nwachukwu: ...in, in, in, you know, in the West, you know.
34
35Kimberly Williams: Yeah.
36
37Iheoma Nwachukwu: And hopefully throughout the world.
38
39Kimberly Williams: Okay. [Inaudible 14:35]. And just as, you know, Afrofuturism has, um –
40it’s really sort of like became so public with, you know, with *Black*
41*Panther*. Um. [14:47] From your perspective, what does Afrofuturism
42offer society at the moment? What does it offer for critique or, or
43liberation or, or opportunity?
44
45Iheoma Nwachukwu: [sighing] I mean, it’s, it’s another way of experiencing the world, you
46know, ‘cause, you know, one might be right to say that before this time,

1 there's like this one way of lookin' at the world, which is, you know,
2 through Hollywood or, or other, um, [tsk] avenues of...
3
4 Kimberly Williams: Hm.
5
6 Iheoma Nwachukwu: ...expression that are not controlled by Black people. So, so...
7
8 Kimberly Williams: Mm-hm.
9
10 Iheoma Nwachukwu: ...it offers a way to highlight just the fact that, you know, a, a Black
11 utopia is possible.
12
13 Kimberly Williams: Hm.
14
15 Iheoma Nwachukwu: And you see how it galvanized a lotta people when *Black Panther* came
16 out. A lotta people, you know – people wearin', um, um, but like
17 African clothes and went to the cinema. And they spent a lotta money
18 and it showed...
19
20 Kimberly Williams: Mm-hm.
21
22 Iheoma Nwachukwu: ...that if you make a movie and they're all Black people and it's great,
23 people are gonna go out and watch it regardless of whether they're
24 Black or White.
25
26 Kimberly Williams: Mm-hm.
27
28 Iheoma Nwachukwu: You know, uh, people are gonna make money.
29
30 Kimberly Williams: Mm-hm.
31
32 Iheoma Nwachukwu: So that, you know, the color of your skin doesn't real-, really, you know,
33 capitalism as a system doesn't really care...
34
35 Kimberly Williams: Hm.
36
37 Iheoma Nwachukwu: ...whether, you know, you're Black or White. I mean, the, the, um, [tsk]
38 the, the, the thinkin' before was that if you ma-, if you have only Black
39 people in a movie, no one's gonna go out and watch it. You know, it's
40 gonna tank...
41
42 Kimberly Williams: Hm.
43
44 Iheoma Nwachukwu: ...at the box office. You know, [inaudible 16:14] White people [there
45 16:17], you know...
46

1Kimberly Williams: Mm-hm.
2

3Iheoma Nwachukwu: ...as like the lead cast, you know, you're not gonna make a lotta money.
4 But of course...
5

6Kimberly Williams: Mm-hm.
7

8Iheoma Nwachukwu: ...you know, it p-, *Black Panther* prove, uh, uh, proved that that's not a
9 case.
10

11Kimberly Williams: Mm-hm.
12

13Iheoma Nwachukwu: Um, so yes, so, so that's basically, um, what I feel, you know, the *Black*,
14 *Black Panther*, the movies, what it did, you know, by, you know, it's
15 exis-, existence itself.
16

17Kimberly Williams: Mm-hm.
18

19Iheoma Nwachukwu: I forget the other parts of your question.
20

21Kimberly Williams: [16:45] Oh, so what does Afrofuturism like offer like, you know,
22 critiques or and liberation opportunities? So you have touched
23 [inaudible 16:52].
24

25Iheoma Nwachukwu: [sighing] Afro liberation, I mean, I wanna say some that there is, there's
26 a criticism of Afrofuturism in Africa...
27

28Kimberly Williams: Hm.
29

30Iheoma Nwachukwu: ...by certain writers who believe that Afrofuturism only caters to the
31 African American narrative.
32

33Kimberly Williams: Hm.
34

35Iheoma Nwachukwu: And though – uh, and, I mean, as a, as a writer in South Africa who's
36 sayin' that, um, that though she lives in this place and she has her own
37 local problems and that Afrofuturism isn't gonna come and save her.
38

39Kimberly Williams: Hm. Okay.
40

41Iheoma Nwachukwu: Right. You know, uh, that h-, her story isn't centered, you know, in the
42 Afrofuturism...
43

44Kimberly Williams: Mm-hm.
45

1Iheoma Nwachukwu: ...push. And of course, you know, like in the U.S., Afrofuturism i-, is a
2 way to empower Black people.
3
4Kimberly Williams: Mm-hm.
5
6Iheoma Nwachukwu: It's empowerin' Black people [inaudible 17:41]. *Black Panther* did
7 seem to empower Black people. Uh, and while that writer in South
8 Africa might have, uh, like s-, her grievances might be, um, you know,
9 legitimate...
10
11Kimberly Williams: Mm-hm.
12
13Iheoma Nwachukwu: ...uh, m-, my counter to that is that a-, anywhere, any story that makes a
14 Black person look good, all this trickles down. Right. 'Cause, you
15 know, it always trickles down in, in, in different ways.
16
17Kimberly Williams: Yes.
18
19Iheoma Nwachukwu: You know. Um. And so and I was, I was, I mean, I was thinkin' about
20 this like a couple days ago about like how Afrofuturism can be used for
21 liberation.
22
23Kimberly Williams: Mm-hm.
24
25Iheoma Nwachukwu: Even i-, [sighin] like for instance sayin' Nigeria where we have a
26 dictator right now as, as a president. Uh. I-, if a, if, if an artist makes art
27 usin' that president's face on, say, I don't know, um, [sighing] and I'm,
28 I'm not presc-, prescribin' this but like on like a horse's body as a way
29 to talk about what sort of person that president is...
30
31Kimberly Williams: Mm-hm.
32
33Iheoma Nwachukwu: ...that, that, that leads to, you know, d-, it adds to the conversation about
34 what's happenin' in that country.
35
36Kimberly Williams: Mm-hm.
37
38Iheoma Nwachukwu: And so that's a way in which Afrofuturism can, you know, help for
39 those in – for those of us in Africa, help get us outta the problems or, or
40 spark a debate about the state of our affairs, you know, instead of, you
41 know – that's just – I mean, 'cause Afrofutur-, Afrofuturism has many,
42 um, [tracks 19:17].
43
44Kimberly Williams: Mm-hm.
45

1Iheoma Nwachukwu: You know, so th-, so [inaudible 19:20], you know, i-, in music, we have
2 that. Y-, you know, we have it in, uh, in, in, in literature.
3

4Kimberly Williams: Mm-hm.
5

6Iheoma Nwachukwu: Art could be, uh, the form of expression 'cause that person was sayin'
7 that thing was writer.
8

9Kimberly Williams: Mm-hm.
10

11Iheoma Nwachukwu: Yeah. So yeah.
12

13Kimberly Williams: [Inaudible 19:34]. Thank you. Thank you for that thorough answer.
14 [19:37] And, you know, with that, [inaudible 19:40] even further, where
15 do you see [clicking] the relationship, the link between Afrofuturism and
16 Zora Neale Hurston?
17

18Iheoma Nwachukwu: You know, uh, [sighing] when I was a, a master student at, um, UT – I
19 did, I did my master at UT at the Michener Center for Writers. I took a
20 class called the, um, [tsk] Haiti and American Imagination and, you
21 know...
22

23Kimberly Williams: Hm.
24

25Iheoma Nwachukwu: ...and learned about, you know, when she went to Haiti and that
26 ethnogra-, ethnography, uh, where she, you know, studied the people by
27 becomin' part of the people.
28

29Kimberly Williams: Mm-hm.
30

31Iheoma Nwachukwu: Right. And so there's somethin' adventurous about her spirit.
32

33Kimberly Williams: Hm.
34

35Iheoma Nwachukwu: A-, and, and there's like a – there's a boldness about her. And so there's
36 a boldness about Afrofuturism, uh, which is part of the spirit of Zora.
37

38Kimberly Williams: Mm-hm.
39

40Iheoma Nwachukwu: Just going out. Um. There's no one's gonna do it for us. We are gonna
41 need to shine a light on, on ourselves.
42

43Kimberly Williams: Hm.
44

45Iheoma Nwachukwu: You know. A-, and the idea of immersing yourself in a culture to study
46 that culture, you know, bein' part of the voodoo practices in Haiti.

1
2Kimberly Williams: Mm-hm.
3
4Iheoma Nwachukwu: [Not 20:45] just, you know, separating yourself from the people the way
5 that maybe f-, other people would separate themselves...
6
7Kimberly Williams: Yeah.
8
9Iheoma Nwachukwu: ...you know, to study them. But bein' part of that process itself...
10
11Kimberly Williams: Mm-hm.
12
13Iheoma Nwachukwu: ...that's somethin' that's unique to Afrofuturism 'cause, you know,
14 we're immersin' ourselves in our own culture. And, and, and in order to
15 navigate this world and, and shine a light on ourselves in order to change
16 the narrative about, you know, Black people and Black culture...
17
18Kimberly Williams: Hm.
19
20Iheoma Nwachukwu: ...you know, and Black works.
21
22Kimberly Williams: [Inaudible 21:18]. [21:19] And do you think the Zora Neale Hurston
23 Festival engagement with Afrofuturism continues Hurston's legacy?
24
25Iheoma Nwachukwu: I think it does. E-, e-, especially, of course, because, um, because of the,
26 the fact o-, of the, um, of Afrofuturism bein' a b-, a bold vehicle to
27 explore, um, our place in the world.
28
29Kimberly Williams: Mm-hm.
30
31Iheoma Nwachukwu: Because the thing is as Black people in America, as Black people around
32 the world, they're yearnin' for a place in the world.
33
34Kimberly Williams: Hm.
35
36Iheoma Nwachukwu: Right. And so, uh, that continues her, her legacy 'cause basically she
37 was [trying 21:56]. In order to find her place in the world, she had to
38 interact with Black people in other places...
39
40Kimberly Williams: Hm.
41
42Iheoma Nwachukwu: ...to shine a light...
43
44Kimberly Williams: Mm-hm.
45

1Iheoma Nwachukwu: ...in order to understand who she was so, so she could find her place in
2 America.
3
4Kimberly Williams: Hm. Mm-hm.
5
6Iheoma Nwachukwu: Right, and so, so she was yearnin' and Afrofuturism is basically Black
7 people yearnin' to find themselves.
8
9Kimberly Williams: Hm.
10
11Iheoma Nwachukwu: Right. And so, and so that's why I think, you know, that, that
12 conversation, that relationship, will continue 'cause basically we are
13 interested in the same things.
14
15Kimberly Williams: Hm. [Inaudible 22:28]. [22:29] And what do you think contemporary
16 Afrofuturist can learn from Zora Neale Hurston and other early, um,
17 scholars, related scholars?
18
19Iheoma Nwachukwu: I would say, uh, it would be that in order for you to get from one place,
20 like a place of weakness to a place of strength...
21
22Kimberly Williams: Mm-hm.
23
24Iheoma Nwachukwu: ...you do have to, um, make some sacrifices.
25
26Kimberly Williams: Hm.
27
28Iheoma Nwachukwu: And I think s-, um, a-, a-, and I mean for, for us as writers, we do have
29 to understand that we're gonna take some heat.
30
31Kimberly Williams: Yeah.
32
33Iheoma Nwachukwu: Right. And, uh, we're gonna sacrifice a lotta things. And so lookin'
34 forward...
35
36Kimberly Williams: Mm-hm.
37
38Iheoma Nwachukwu: ...you must say – we must say to ourselves in order for us to have a f-, a
39 better future, we need to do this thing and so sometimes, uh, things are
40 gonna be bad.
41
42Kimberly Williams: Hm.
43
44Iheoma Nwachukwu: You know. But hopefully we'll be in a better place in the future. And
45 that's, you know, that – the idea that it's, it's not – what we're doin'

1 isn't, you know, a cushy, um, we're [inaudible 23:35] in a soft, cushy
2 place.
3
4 Kimberly Williams: Mm-hm.
5
6 Iheoma Nwachukwu: We're in a place where we're gonna have to make sacrifices.
7
8 Kimberly Williams: [Yeah 23:41].
9
10 Iheoma Nwachukwu: And we have to be bold and make the sacrifices, you know, in order to
11 move forward.
12
13 Kimberly Williams: [Inaudible 23:45]. Yes. [23:48] So I am [tsk] thinking about taking, um,
14 your course but I don't really know too much about Afrofuturism, so
15 what would be – what would – what sort of Afrofuturistic mixtape you
16 would give me that would include maybe like 3 to 5 really, um,
17 important sort of snapshots, uh, or artifacts of Afrofuturism that you
18 think would be just tremendous for a new beginning author, leader,
19 creator to get into? And it could be across music, art, um, you know, of
20 course texts.
21
22 Iheoma Nwachukwu: Okay, so basically, you know, um, I mean, I do mostly [literary 24:33]
23 fiction...
24
25 Kimberly Williams: Mm-hm.
26
27 Iheoma Nwachukwu: ...so this is like my mixtape for...
28
29 Kimberly Williams: Yes.
30
31 Iheoma Nwachukwu: ...you know...
32
33 Kimberly Williams: Yeah.
34
35 Iheoma Nwachukwu: ...what Afrofuturism is. Um. [tsk] I would say, um, let's see. Uh. I
36 would, I would say f-, uh, there's a m-, the musician called Fela, Fela
37 Kuti.
38
39 Kimberly Williams: Yeah.
40
41 Iheoma Nwachukwu: I would say Fela is like, you know, is, is a good jumpin' off point. Um.
42 There's a lot of art, too. I mean, I can't – I don't know names, uh, right
43 off the top of my head but like, you know, one could search for a lot of
44 this, a lot of these, a lot of artists who are doin' like incredible things.
45
46 Kimberly Williams: Yeah.

1
2Iheoma Nwachukwu: You know, um, just visually. Visual art.
3
4Kimberly Williams: Mm-hm.
5
6Iheoma Nwachukwu: There's a lot of that going on. Um. [tsk] Bill Cam-, Campbell's, all of,
7 all of his anthology are great, you know.
8
9Kimberly Williams: Yeah.
10
11Iheoma Nwachukwu: Um. [Inaudible 25:21] I would recommend [inaudible 25:22] a book, a
12 novel, titled *An Unkindness of Ghosts*...
13
14Kimberly Williams: Hm.
15
16Iheoma Nwachukwu: ...by Rivers Solomon.
17
18Kimberly Williams: Hm.
19
20Iheoma Nwachukwu: Um. [tsk] 'Cause, I mean, it's set in the future a-, and it's all, it's, I
21 mean, it clearly shows the intersection between, you know, just Black
22 people a-, and science.
23
24Kimberly Williams: Hm.
25
26Iheoma Nwachukwu: Um. [tsk] Let me see. [sighing] I'm tryin' to think of this, this, um,
27 musician. I forgot what, what her name is. She's, she's always in a lot
28 of Afrofuturist stuff. Um. [tsk] Um. God, I forget...
29
30Kimberly Williams: Janelle Monáe? Erykah Badu?
31
32Iheoma Nwachukwu: Yes. Yes, yes, yes.
33
34Kimberly Williams: Um.
35
36Iheoma Nwachukwu: Monáe.
37
38Kimberly Williams: Oh, Monáe. Okay.
39
40Iheoma Nwachukwu: Yes. [laughter] Yes. She's amazin'.
41
42Kimberly Williams: Yes.
43
44Iheoma Nwachukwu: She's amazin'. Uh.
45
46Kimberly Williams: Absolutely, yeah.

1
2Iheoma Nwachukwu: Yeah. I think sh-, she, she's a good example and what she does, you
3 know, uh, she does music but also when you look at the set, [inaudible
4 26:24] watch her videos, just visually what's she's...
5
6Kimberly Williams: Hm.
7
8Iheoma Nwachukwu: ...doin'.
9
10Kimberly Williams: Mm-hm.
11
12Iheoma Nwachukwu: So like...
13
14Kimberly Williams: [Inaudible 26:29].
15
16Iheoma Nwachukwu: ...[inaudible 26:30] although it's, it's, it's, uh, it's music, it's also like,
17 um, film.
18
19Kimberly Williams: Mm-hm.
20
21Iheoma Nwachukwu: And she's doin' that all in one shot like, you know, um...
22
23Kimberly Williams: Yeah.
24
25Iheoma Nwachukwu: ...you know. She's doin' her music video, you see all of the futuristic
26 things she's doin', you know, and it's all Black people.
27
28Kimberly Williams: Yeah.
29
30Iheoma Nwachukwu: Right.
31
32Kimberly Williams: [Inaudible 26:49].
33
34Iheoma Nwachukwu: Um. [clicking] Yeah. Um. Who else? I would say – I mean, I, I think
35 *The Black Jacobins* by C.L.R. James is like a really...
36
37Kimberly Williams: Oh.
38
39Iheoma Nwachukwu: ...excellent...
40
41Kimberly Williams: Yeah.
42
43Iheoma Nwachukwu: ...book.
44
45Kimberly Williams: Yes.
46

1Iheoma Nwachukwu: You know. It's a, it's a g-, it's a good book 'cause [sniffing] like I said,
2 how I define Afrofuturism is basically just any work that shows Black
3 people in, in...
4

5Kimberly Williams: Mm-hm.
6

7Iheoma Nwachukwu: ...a good light.
8

9Kimberly Williams: Yes.
10

11Iheoma Nwachukwu: You know. And y-, you sort of understand, uh, the [inaudible 27:20] of
12 slavery and, and how, um, you know, Black people f-, really did fight to
13 emancipate themselves and of course in Haiti, they were successful.
14

15Kimberly Williams: Mm-hm.
16

17Iheoma Nwachukwu: And how that, that isn't always part of the conversation. Right.
18

19Kimberly Williams: Mm-hm.
20

21Iheoma Nwachukwu: And of course when you look at Haiti, for instance, you look at the
22 problems that Haiti's had and you understand how France, you know,
23 countries in Europe, the U.S....
24

25Kimberly Williams: Mm-hm.
26

27Iheoma Nwachukwu: ...were part of the problem, you know...
28

29Kimberly Williams: [Inaudible 27:47].
30

31Iheoma Nwachukwu: ...when, when, uh, the Black people em-, emancipated themselves.
32

33Kimberly Williams: Mm-hm.
34

35Iheoma Nwachukwu: Part of that tr-, you know, how they created that treaty [inaudible 27:55]
36 ...
37

38Kimberly Williams: Mm-hm.
39

40Iheoma Nwachukwu: ...that allowed, uh, Haiti to suffer. And, and that's, I mean, that, that
41 story doesn't get told enough. And so a lotta people don't know that's
42 why Haiti...
43

44Kimberly Williams: Mm-hm.
45

46Iheoma Nwachukwu: ...is where it is today.

1
2Kimberly Williams: Mm-hm.
3
4Iheoma Nwachukwu: And so, you know, anything that helps, it's...
5
6Kimberly Williams: [Inaudible 28:12].
7
8Iheoma Nwachukwu: ...useful.
9
10Kimberly Williams: [That's right 28:13]. Yes. Thank you. Thank you so much for your
11 time. That, that concludes our interview. [28:19] Do you have any other
12 last thoughts or comments?
13
14Iheoma Nwachukwu: [tsk] [sighing] [clicking] No.
15
16Kimberly Williams: No? [laughter]
17
18Iheoma Nwachukwu: No.
19
20Kimberly Williams: Thank you.
21
22Iheoma Nwachukwu: [Inaudible 28:30].
23
24Kimberly Williams: Thank you.
25
26Iheoma Nwachukwu: Well, thank you for havin' me.
27
28Kimberly Williams: Thank you [laughter] so much. Your work is stunning...
29
30Iheoma Nwachukwu: Thank you.
31
32Kimberly Williams: ...as well as your outfit.
33
34Iheoma Nwachukwu: Thank you.
35
36Kimberly Williams: Thank you. [siren] [clicking]
37
38Iheoma Nwachukwu: Thank you.
39
40
41/ad