

Faculté de philosophie, arts et lettres

**From Nigerian Culture to Science
Fiction: Afrofuturism,
Posthumanism and African Folklore
in Nnedi Okorafor and Tade
Thompson**

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Introduction: Science Fiction today

Though it has long been an important genre of popular literature, science fiction has significantly developed in the last decades, multiplying the variations of its original themes. This led to the emergence of a number of subgenres that have progressively parted from the original understanding of the genre, to gain a new self-reliance. Indeed, contemporary issues, such as urban development, environmental concerns and technological progress have caused both a renaissance of the science fiction genre and its diversification. One important development of the genre, as observed by scholars such as Oulimata Gueye analyzing the noteworthy release of Neill Blomkamp's feature film *District 9* (2009), is that the science fiction community has taken an interest in the African continent, whose literary production of the genre seems to have increased since the beginning of the twenty-first century (Gueye, 55). The rising importance of the science fictional literary production of authors of African origins is, therefore, a fecund field of study for the contemporary analysis of the evolution of the genre.

This paper aims to formulate a comparative analysis of two authors whose Nigerian origin seems to be at the core of their fictions and their esthetics: Nnedi Okorafor, a prolific American writer of Igbo origin, and Tade Thompson, a Yoruba-born British writer and psychiatrist. These are two acclaimed writers, seeing that Okorafor received the prestigious Hugo Award in 2016 while Thompson received the no less important Arthur C. Clarke Award in 2019. The selected corpus of study for this analysis will focus on the works by these writers that seem to be the most deeply rooted in the contemporary Nigerian urban context. Thus, we will focus extensively on Okorafor's novel *Lagoon*, set in contemporary Nigeria and whose very name shows the importance given to the economic capital Lagos, as well as Tade Thompson's *Rosewater* and its sequels (*The Rosewater Insurrection* and *The Rosewater Redemption*), set in a near-future fictional city in Nigeria. Those two authors have drawn the attention of literary scholars too, but this paper intends to be the first to compare them in detail. As we will see, the comparison of their work reveals similarities and differences that shed a powerful light on this important African trend in contemporary science fiction.

In order to present the different perspectives that this comparative analysis will cover, I will briefly summarize the main plot of the relevant works, as the similarities and divergences in the novels were key for the choice of the corpus. *Lagoon* is the story of an alien invasion that initially

plummets the city of Lagos into chaos, but ends up transforming society in a utopian fashion, bringing humans and extraterrestrials together. The plot follows three Nigerian protagonists, Adaora the marine biologist, Agu the soldier and Anthony the rapper, as they encounter the alien ambassador Ayodele, who they try to protect so she can deliver her message of peace to the people and president of Nigeria. *Rosewater*, on the other hand, tells the story of a very different alien invasion. An alien appeared in the Nigerian desert, around which the city of Rosewater was built as the alien seemed to provide multiple benefits to the city. The plot, set in the year 2066, follows the investigation of the protagonist Kaaro as he discovers that the alien is not a miracle but poses a real threat to humanity, being the forerunner of an alien invasion that has the ambition of ending all forms of human life. Therefore, in the second volume of the trilogy (*The Rosewater Insurrection*) begins a quest to save humankind from this genocidal alien invasion, which will be achieved successively in the third volume, *The Rosewater Redemption*. This comparative analysis will explore three main points: a reflection on the literary genres, the nonhuman and the folkloric material.

In comparing these two sets of texts, I will first examine the different literary genres that manifest in those novels. Even if our reflection started from an interest in science fiction, we will soon observe that this sole label becomes insufficient to categorize the corpus. In the first chapter, we will see how the contemporary esthetic of afrofuturism (or africanfuturism) best describes Okorafor's and Thompson's fictions. Indeed, both novels are complex texts in terms of genre categorization, a fact made clear from the integration of several subgenres of science fiction but also from the influence of different genres and tonalities, such as postcolonial writing and urban fiction.

The common theme of the alien invasion will encourage us to analyze in the second chapter of this research the manifestations of this nonhuman figure and its impact on the human species, in the light of the contemporary paradigms of posthumanism and transhumanism. But the alien is not the only nonhuman figure that seems to have a profound impact on humans as a species. In order to analyze the influence on humankind of those different nonhuman figures, Ursula Heise's insights will serve as a guiding principle as we will follow the different turns in posthuman history that she analyzes and that will be relevant in our research.

As the African origin of these novels was decisive in the selection of this corpus, the third and last chapter will be dedicated to the analysis of the African folkloric elements in the novels. Indeed, both Okorafor and Thompson extensively reference their Nigerian legacy by including many African folkloric features in the novels. We will see how Okorafor celebrates this folklore by expanding and enriching it, offering an actualization of this tradition to the contemporary context of Nigeria. We will then see how Thompson seems to demystify the folklore and chooses to substitute it with another form of transcendence.

Chapter 1. Afrofuturism, genres and postcrisis fiction

The first question that arises with the selection of this corpus of study concerns the ambiguous genre status of the novels. When asked about his own work, Tade Thompson himself, author of the *Wormwood* trilogy that starts with the novel *Rosewater*, anticipates the apparent confusion regarding his novels: “Rosewater is an alien invasion narrative set in Nigeria [...] It’s a different kind of invasion story in that it’s not military science fiction. It’s part espionage, part cyberpunk, part character exploration and all Nigerian.” (Tade Thompson Interview, *The Illustrated Page*). Therefore, a wide range of entry points appears regarding an analysis of the literary genres in this corpus. We will see in detail how *Rosewater* and *Lagoon* mobilize distinctive features from different SF subgenres, such as cyberpunk (anarchy, cyberspace, body implants, *etc.*) or climate fiction, and how the authors blend them together. Likewise, the aforementioned backdrop of the earth invasion, while being the most science fictional trope imaginable, seems to be focused not on the relationship with the invader but rather encourages introspection about humanity as a species and its relationship with its environment. In this sense, my hypothesis will be that the traditional literary categories do not exhaust the novels and that a broader perspective is needed in order to contextualize our corpus in a more nuanced way. This is what this first chapter of the analysis will intend to demonstrate. I will explore the possibilities of the afrofuturist esthetic and its impact on this corpus, as well as the current trend in novels of African origins for the postcrisis fiction genres. I intend to demonstrate how those different genres, subgenres and esthetics are manifested in the novels of Okorafor and Thompson, and how their blending contributes to two elaborate narratives that offer a new vision of the science fiction legacy.

In the light of this generic confusion due to the multiplication and diversification of the literary subgenres in the corpus, it seems relevant to distance our analysis from the very idea of categorization and labeling, to be more focused on interpreting such a blending and its results in the fiction.

The common and probably most remarkable feature between the novels of Okorafor and Thompson is the Nigerian setting, noticeable before the narrative of the alien invasion manifests itself. Nnedi Okorafor’s *Lagoon* opens indeed with a preamble where the words of two citizens of the city of Lagos (fictional or real, the reader does not know at this stage) are reproduced, in terms that immediately announce the true subject of the novel. Thus, a protestor declares “Lagos is no

man's land. Nobody owns Lagos, we all own Lagos. Lagos will never be destroyed!" (Okorafor, vii), while an American woman declares "Lagos, the city where nothing works yet everything happens" (Okorafor, vii). Following those testimonies, Okorafor then devotes another page of her foreword to what appears to be the main protagonist and focus point of the novel:

"Welcome to Lagos, Nigeria. The city takes its name from the Portuguese word for «Lagoon». The Portuguese first landed on Lagos Island in the year 1472. Apparently, they could not come up with a more creative name. Nor did they think to ask one of the natives for suggestions. And so the world turns, masked by millions of names, guises, and shifting stories. It's been a beautiful thing to watch." (Okorafor, ix)

Therefore, even from the incipit, the reader is encouraged to consider Lagos, the largest city and economic capital of Nigeria, as an important focal point in the novel. The question of the generic categorization of the novel that we could strive to search for seems to fade in favor of the subject, the city of Lagos, as the incipit announces. While the attention later shifts to focus more on the alien invasion, the extraterrestrial impact on the city of Lagos, especially as exemplified in the chaotic riots, continues to be an important part of the narrative throughout the novel. Therefore, the importance given to Lagos contributes to its affiliation with the genre of urban fiction. Indeed, Okorafor depicts the city in all its complexity, and her characters spread from the drug addict prostitute to the priest. In *Lagoon*, Okorafor uses the bay of Bar Beach as a representative sample of the city's complexity and diversity:

In many ways, Bar Beach was a perfect sample of Nigerian society. It was a place of mixing. The ocean mixed with the land and the wealthy mixed with the poor. Bar Beach attracted drug dealers, squatters, various accents and languages, seagulls, garbage, biting flies, tourists, all kind of religious zealots, hawkers, prostitutes, johns, water-loving children and their careless parents. The beachside bars and small restaurants were the most popular hangout spots. (Okorafor, 7).

The urban fiction label contributes to the depiction of Lagos as more than a simple setting for the narrative but rather shows it as a place of mixing, already foreshadowing the utopian resolution of the alien invasion (as will be later discussed). Moreover, we can already see in this depiction of Lagos as a place where "the ocean mixed with the land" a portentous sign of environmental considerations that will be later developed in this analysis.

Furthermore, from the beginning of the novel, the postcolonial ambition, as well as the subject, announces itself. The critique of the so-called European settlers that forced a new name to an already occupied land without consultation with the local population is determining, and its place at the very beginning of the text sets the tone for the rest of the novel. Those two elements

combined (the focus on Lagos and postcolonialism) allow us to bring an interesting perspective to the analysis: the concept of afrofuturism.

Afrofuturism was first theorized in the late twentieth century as a “speculative fiction that treats African-American themes and addresses African-American concerns in the context of 20th century technoculture — and, more generally, African-American signification that appropriates images of technology and a prosthetically enhanced future” (Dery, in Bould, 182). This cultural, scientific and historical philosophy was then extended to the entire African Diaspora across the world, a systematic attempt to explore the possibilities of the future from the perspective of African identities. The movement encompasses areas of society as wide as arts, history, politics and science.

In the field of literary studies, afrofuturism is frequently associated with the science fiction genre, a favorable ground for experimentations and reflections regarding the conceivable worlds. This association has led to the reductive qualification of afrofuturism as the simple meeting of science fiction and African cultures. In this chapter, we will see how it would be reductive to categorize afrofuturism as a subgenre of science fiction and how we will try to shift the paradigm by considering science fiction as one of the forms of expression the afrofuturism esthetic can assume. Thus, once this esthetic cleared of the restriction that is the usual science fiction label, we will observe the many literary possibilities of afrofuturism, in order to make it closer to its ambition of being a lens through which it is possible to observe the world in its entirety, more than a mere subgenre of science fiction. We will see how Nnedi Okorafor and Tade Thompson, by multiplying the manifestations of many literary genres and their tropes, allows for a point of view of Nigerian society and its future, a view that, under the cover of a scenario of alien invasion, develops a deeper reflection on the nature of humankind, its relationship with its environment or technology, while rethinking fundamentally Africa’s position in the world. This blending of genres that we observed previously can therefore be seen as an affirmation of an afrofuturist esthetic shared by both authors, even if their practical application of this esthetic varies, as will be discussed extensively in our analysis.

We will therefore take an interest in the different literary genres that appear in one way or another in the texts, but not with the intent to categorize the corpus as belonging to one genre or the other, but on the contrary to show how this apparent blending and confusion of genres contributes to the plurality of the presented afrofuturist worlds. To do so, we will identify different

manifestations of tropes that are traditionally relevant to different genres or subgenres, as well as focus on the way Okorafor and Thompson distort those features from their traditional form to analyze how those reinterpretations contribute to the afrofuturist aesthetic. This label allows to group different features of these books, which would usually be classified differently (mainly as science fiction and postcolonial fiction).

1. Science fiction and second contact narrative

The main feature of the novels that can immediately be likened to the science fiction genre is without a doubt the trope of the alien invasion, which is at the core of both fictions. While *Lagoon* introduces this disruptive element to the reader at the same time as its characters — the protagonists being the first witnesses of this alien arrival in the bay of Bar Beach, which opens the novel —, *Rosewater* shows a different, more subtle approach, where the readers discover a Nigerian society in a not-so-distant future that is progressively revealed to be different and strange (due notably to the abrupt apparition of technological implants or even the existence of people with telepathic abilities) upon revealing the existence, self-evident for the characters, of an extraterrestrial biodome, around which the city of Rosewater was built and the plot will revolve. This narrative choice of presenting an exotic world works notably with the intertwining of two plots at two different times: the main plot happening in the year 2066 and the 2055 parallel sub-plot relating, as in *Lagoon*, the alien's arrival in Nigeria.

As the novel develops and the investigation of Kaaro, the protagonist of *Rosewater*, advances, it is progressively unveiled to the reader that the arrival of the alien Wormwood in the Nigerian desert is not a case of extraterrestrial first contact, but rather a second one: Wormwood crashed from the stars in the heart of London — a fact that foreshadows the postcolonial perspective of the novel — in 2012, before vanishing under the Earth's crust to resurface in the Nigerian desert in 2055, an event that constitutes the parallel sub-plot. We can already question Thompson's choice of second contact narrative, as the fictional canon of the alien invasion, real science fiction trope as presented notably in *The War of the Worlds* (1898), is well-named "First contact fiction". In order to interrogate Thompson's second contact fiction, the works of Matthew Omelsky and Hugh O'Connell bring a determining perspective regarding the afrofuturist reach in Tade Thompson's and Nnedi Okorafor's fictions. Those essays will allow us a theoretical digression to focus on the contemporary trends of "climate fiction" and "post-capital fiction".

2. The postcrisis fictions: climate and capital

In his article “After the End Times: Postcrisis African Science Fiction”, Matthew Omelsky observes in contemporary African science fiction novels a trend for the fictions concerned with “life after the dual crisis of ecology and capital”, a trend that Omelsky qualifies and categorizes as postcrisis fiction. This perspective encourages us to explore *Lagoon* and *Rosewater* as narratives of both climate and capital fiction, two categories that will help us analyze the dual crisis noted by Omelsky, of which the concept of postcrisis fiction is the result.

2.1. Climate fiction

The term climate fiction (or cli-fi) refers to fictions centered around the contemporary consequences related to global warming (as exemplified by Margaret Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake* [2003]). It appears immediately relevant when reading *Lagoon*, whose first paragraph is centered on a swordfish, the first effective witness of the extraterrestrials’ arrival in Lagos, that is criticizing of the human’s oil drilling in the bay:

She is angry. She will succeed and then they will leave for good. They brought the stench of dryness, then they brought the noise and made the world bleed black ooze that left poison rainbows on the water’s surface. She often sees these rainbows whenever she leaps over the water to touch the sun. Inhaling them stings and burns her gills. The ones that bring the rainbows are burrowing and building creatures from the land and no one can do anything about them. (Okorafor, 3)

This extract, including for its position as the opening scene of Okorafor’s novel, illustrates the ecological considerations of the authors and the critique of the oil exploitation, that leads several scholars such as Melody Jue to categorize *Lagoon* as a “petrofiction” (Jue, 2017), using the term established in 1992 by Amitav Ghosh and that is relevant in the perspective of climate fiction. The destruction of the marine ecosystem in the bay of Lagos shown in *Lagoon* is sufficient to categorize this novel as relevant for the climate fiction label, as expressed in the reception of the speech Okorafor links with the animal at the end of the novel: “I spoke to a giant swordfish [...] It spoke like a member of that group Greenpeace” (Okorafor, 262). The association of the swordfish’s message with a group that is actively fighting for the protection of the environment and against global warming contributes to the climate fiction label. In *Rosewater*, Thompson develops the same message, notably in the alien’s capacity to solve climate issues: “If we could befriend [the alien] [...] it could help us clean up the environment. We, Nigeria, can be the first nation to engage it.” (Thompson, *Rosewater*, 313). Here, more than the observation of the environmental crisis

appears an optimistic message regarding the possible resolution, and under African leadership to boot, of the climate crisis, which contributes to an extremely clear afrofuturist message — Africa can be at the front row of the fight for the protection of the environment — in the exact continuity of the very core philosophy of afrofuturism, that intends to consider Africa as a possible leader of a global governance.

In both narratives (*Lagoon* and *Rosewater*), these excerpts clearly illustrate that the environmental issue is integrated into the scenario as an urgent problem that should be addressed. And in both cases, the solution seems to come not from humankind but the extraterrestrials. The aforementioned extract shows that in *Rosewater*, it is solely on the alien behalf that a solution to climate change is conceivable, which is a very pessimistic message. But the actual resolution of this same crisis ends up being diametrically different: in *Rosewater Insurrection*, the second volume of Thompson's trilogy, the alien that was first presented as a savior of humankind, inexplicably granting benedictions, healing and even generating electricity that is used to power the city, is later revealed to be a forerunner for an alien invasion that has the purpose of transferring the consciousness of the alien people (referred to as "Homians") in the humans' dead bodies, replacing the human population. When he confronts an emissary of this invading race, Kaaro himself is confronted with the harsh reality of the human's attitude concerning their environment and the way they treat the planet: "«You're asking me to help the extinction of my race.» - «You humans are doing a good job of extinguishing each other already [...]. Shall I talk about hydrocarbon waste products? Shall I talk about surface water contamination? Nuclear waste? Stop me when we get to a world-ending scenario that impresses you enough» (Thompson, *Insurrection*, 321-322). It is hard to imagine a clearer message regarding the current destruction of the environment, and in this scenario, the aliens decide to simply wipe the human race from the face of the planet in order to restore the environment's balance. In *Lagoon*, Okorafor uses a similar discourse regarding the negative human impact on the environment, but she takes the opposite direction from Thompson in the alien's attitude. Towards the end of the novel, in the address of the Nigerian president to the people, it is made clear that the aliens intend to collaborate with the humans, as equals, in order to jointly find a solution to the problems: 'There are others amongst us in Lagos. They intend to stay. And I am happy about it. They have new technology, they have fresh ideas that we can combine with our own.' (Okorafor, 277-278). Here, in the climate crisis, the extraterrestrials bring the solution but not at the cost of the human species but rather in symbiosis with it. We will come back on this major difference between the two novels, but we can already establish the relevance of the

climate fiction label to categorize this corpus, in the observation of a true crisis (as identified by Omelsky) and in the proposal of a solution, the climate fiction meeting here the science fiction in the understanding of the genre, in the perspective that an alien entity offers a solution to the climate crisis on Earth.

This quotation can also illustrate the concept of second contact narrative and postcolonialism. Indeed, contrary to the colonization that led to the imposition of a foreign culture and way of life on the indigenous people (as we saw in the incipit of Okorafor's novel in the denomination of the city of Lagos), here, the Nigerian president overcomes this hierarchy and shows a unique postcolonial attitude: the ideas from another culture will be combined with the ideas of the indigenous people, who have a better understanding of the area and the lifestyle. Therefore, the second contact narrative allows for a new dialogue that did not exist before during the European invasion of the continent. It is also how Africa can fulfill an important role in the resolution of the contemporary crisis that Afrofuturism advocates for: it is no longer doable to adopt an occidental way of thinking to solve climate issues or social injustices. The subgenre of climate fiction is therefore related to the Afrofuturism movement as expressed by Okorafor in their common denunciation of environmental misconduct and the necessity to solve the climate crisis for a better world. Therefore, we understand how those two esthetics, focused on the future, take into ample consideration the climatic debate, and Okorafor's fiction that is imbued with environmental warnings, contributes in this sense to these two genres and one of their common goals.

2.2. Post-capital fiction

Once established that the two novels are well conceptualized under the climate fiction label, we will focus on the second perspective raised by the concept of Postcrisis fiction, which is no longer focused on the environment but, according to the term used by Omelsky, of capital. Even though our corpus is much less focused on economic issues than on environmental ones, it is interesting to note that the reflection on the position of Nigeria (treated in the corpus in close relationship with Lagos or the fictional city of Rosewater) is approached on an economical level in a perspective that can be linked with the notion of postcrisis. This perspective will allow to define the corpus as overtly belonging to the postcrisis fiction on both the environmental and the economical dimensions. I will show how this postcrisis label is key for the understanding of the

second contact narrative observed in both authors, a narrative that is deeply rooted in a postcolonial attitude that the novels expand to an afrofuturist reach.

Lagos has long had a reputation as a chaotic city with a high crime rate, an opinion that Okorafor qualifies as “African chaos” (Okorafor, 214). But it seems that a new form of economical stability can emerge from this seemingly chaotic state, a state that would help overcome this crisis, according to Esthie Hugo. In her article that she dedicates to Okorafor’s vision of Lagos in *Lagoon*, Hugo identifies that from the so-called chaos in the city, a desire to benefit from this chaos can emerge, and in doing so it is possible to overcome this stage of the crisis: “Lagos, which is well-known for both its law-lessness [...] and for the ability of its citizens to invent ways of benefiting from this very lack of order.” (Hugo, 54). Okorafor illustrates this capacity to adapt to a seemingly unfavorable economic situation in a scene where the protagonists, stuck in a traffic jam, observe the street vendors’ frenzy and the way they show up to the drivers: ‘a girl carrying a tray of peeled oranges was going from car to car ... the girl wasn’t the only hawker trying to make some money from the chaos. Women and girls had emerged selling all sorts of foodstuffs’ (Okorafor, 189). We can observe in this brief extract both the observation of a non-functional economic system that leads to a crisis (perfectly symbolized by this extraordinary huge traffic jam, symbolically working as an urban metaphor of the incapacity to act and of stagnation) but also the solution to this crisis, original but functional, that allows the people to develop a new way of commerce and consumption. With this simple detail, we can analyze (as does Hugo) the manifestation of a postcrisis perspective in this afrofuturist context.

Another manifestation of this subtext of the crisis of the actual economic, capitalistic system, common to both *Rosewater* and *Lagoon*, is the diversification of the references to the infamous “419” scammers. This type of Nigerian internet fraud is the embodiment of the flaws of this economic system that is exploited with impunity. It is significant to see how they are manifested in *Lagoon*, when one of those scammers is being confronted, during the riots, to the manifestation of a figure from the Igbo pantheon, Papa Legba. We will extensively analyze the manifestation of a mythical figure in the last chapter of this essay, but we can already observe that the solution that this scene, related to both folklore and science fiction, brings to the problem, closely associated with the notion of capital, that is the 419 scammers: at the end of the novel, when peace between humans and aliens has been announced, the scammer is driven by Legba inside the computer network in a cybercafé: “They went into the computer. Does that make sense? [...] After

several minutes, I got up and walked over to the computer [...] I wasn't surprised to find all the emails and my contacts erased. And I was glad." (Okorafor, 201). Okorafor's novel can once again be analyzed as a post-capital fiction in this perspective, where the actual crisis has passed. Legba's intervention makes a clean break with the hacker's misdemeanors and gives him a fresh start: "this woke me up. The coming of Ijele. I am not being melodramatic and I am not crazy. And I am not out of danger. But I will never practice fraud again. Never. I swear." (Okorafor, 200). Once more, Okorafor shows the observation of the crisis and the supernatural intervention offers a change in the human behavior: after acting to restore environmental issues, the fictions focus on economical problems, exemplified here by the new economic model of the traffic jam vendors and the end of massive economic frauds, providing restoration of this other component of the postcrisis fiction.

3. Postcrisis fiction and second contact narrative

Building upon the works of Matthew Omelsky on contemporary African postcrisis fiction, Hugh O'Connell offers a historical and anthropological explanation for this trend. According to him, contemporary African authors are prone to this kind of fiction because they consider the disaster that was the European colonialism, both slavery and the contemporary economical domination of the continent, to be the first major crisis that Africa has endured. Starting from this affirmation, every fiction of a catastrophe is perceived as a fiction of a second catastrophe, or apocalypse, and O'Connell formulates that in our contemporary world, the second apocalypse, which is not limited this time to Africa but encompasses the entire planet, is the era of the anthropocene. Climate and post-capitalist fiction are therefore assimilated to the category of second contact narrative, or fiction of a second catastrophe. The double digression with the twin concepts of climate fiction and post-capitalist fiction allows us to link our corpus with the tendencies observed by Omelsky as well as expanding them with what we are about to observe in Okorafor's novel. This theoretical digression with the concept of postcrisis fiction is indeed an important key to understand the narrative choice — more explicit in Thompson's but also present, as we are about to see, in Okorafor's novel — of a fiction of the second alien contact and its interpretation regarding the afrofuturist contextualization. The second contact narrative manifests itself in the fictionalization of an apocalypse, as explained by Hugh O'Connell.

This perspective formulated by O'Connell of a second apocalypse allows us to understand Tade Thompson's choice of a second alien contact as resulting from a postcolonial and afrofuturist

perspective: the arrival of an extraterrestrial that came to colonize the planet, to the eyes of an author of African origin, can only be seen as a second invasion. In *Rosewater*, the attitude of Oyin Da, one of the protagonist, against the authorities confirms this idea in a very explicit manner: “We have more experience than any Western country in dealing with First Contact. What do you think we experienced when your people carved up Africa in the Berlin Conference? You arrived with a different intelligence, a different civilization, and you raped us. But we’re still here” (Thompson, *Rosewater*; 314). Thus, Thompson’s choice of a second contact narrative is not trivial but on the contrary contributes to an afrofuturist dimension in his novel, a dimension in which, from an African point of view, the alien invasion echoes the abusive colonization by the Europeans, and the resilience that the African people and continent have historically shown. The affirmation “We have more experience than any Western country”, in this perspective, contributes to the afrofuturist ideal of Africa taking a more important role in the future direction of the world.

The afrofuturist esthetic acts in the novels of our corpus as a link between postcolonialism, a new way of rethinking the past and its impact on the present, and science fiction, a vision of the future. In this perspective, it would be reductive to try to categorize Okorafor’s and Thompson’s novels as representative of the postcolonial fiction or even science fiction, the afrofuturist label allowing to link those two notions while at the same time contextualizing the corpus in terms of a contemporary African esthetic that is booming.

We have considered *Rosewater* in the perspective of the second contact narrative, a narrative that is inherently close to the symbolic reach of the afrofuturist esthetic, but it is interesting to observe how Okorafor deals with this issue of second apocalypse. To do so, O’Connell’s article about *Rosewater* indirectly shines a new light on the answer that Okorafor’s works bring to the debate. O’Connell aims to analyze how this second apocalyptic episode can be treated and which place is left to hope. Considering the anthropocene era as the most common apocalyptic perspective in contemporary literature — the apparition of climate fiction as a fully-fledged literary genre illustrates it perfectly — O’Connell quotes Donna Haraway and affirms that the anthropocene is different from previous apocalyptic perspectives for the fact that “The anthropocene is without telos or mythic salvation” (O’Connell, 112), i.e. the anthropocene would differ from other apocalyptic perspectives from the assumption that it does not lead towards a purposeful end, and that no good would come from it. We will see now how *Rosewater* and *Lagoon* take a position regarding this affirmation of the lack of finality of the anthropocene crisis.

4. The anthropocene apocalypse: between messianic salvation and utopianism

Let us focus first on Okorafor. Firstly, it seems necessary to recall that as we saw, *Lagoon* offers a solution to the anthropocene crisis, admittedly coming from a fictional source (the aliens) but it is still in this perspective that Okorafor's fiction works, as proven by this excerpt that sums up the discussion between the alien ambassadors and the Nigerian president: "All the offshore drilling facilities would be destroyed by the people of the water. Even in the delta, all was lost. Oil could no longer be a commodity at all. «But we have something better to give you all,» the Elders had said. Their technology" (Okorafor, 273). Contrary to what was the thesis of both O'Connell and Haraway, Okorafor's fiction seems to offer a solution to the anthropocene apocalypse, a salvation that takes on the form of a supernatural solution brought by extraterrestrials that accept to share their technology with humankind in a symbiotic relationship. But to fully appreciate Okorafor's fiction, it is particularly interesting to observe that contrary to O'Connell's view ("the anthropocene is without telos or mythic salvation"), the apocalypse that is striking Lagos not only comes with a salvation but what is more is the fact that this salvation is messianic, as we are about to see. Nnedi Okorafor takes the opposite direction than (according to O'Connell) Tade Thompson — on which we will focus later — mostly around the figure that we will analyze here as highly messianic of Ayodele, the alien ambassador.

As the three protagonists are trying to bring Ayodele, alien emissary, to the president of Nigeria so she can state her case, the party is attacked and Ayodele is beaten by soldiers. Adaora, rushing to save her, tries to prevent her partners from hurting the attackers, stating "No killing! They don't know what they are doing, they don't know what she is, they are confused" (Okorafor, 267). By quoting this famous line by Jesus Christ during the crucifixion but by shifting its origin not from the divine envoy but from a witness, we could understand that Adaora perceives the alien ambassador as a messianic figure, one that came to save humankind. In both cases, humanity can no longer conceive the messianic quality of the envoy, and "don't know what they are doing" when they attack the one that came to save them and expunge their sins and show them another way, a change: "You people need help on the outside but also within [...] I will go within." (Okorafor, 268). Thus, the messianic message of Ayodele is indeed aimed at gathering humankind ("We come to bring you together and refuel your future [...] Your land is full of a fuel that is tearing you apart [...] We do not seek your oil or your other resources [...] We are here to nurture your

world” [Okorafor, 113]) but it adds to the biblical message an ecological perspective, rendered evident in the aforementioned extract.

Therefore, how can we analyze the seemingly contradictory harmonious resolution, both utopian and ecological, to the anthropocene crisis as shown in *Lagoon*? Because the messianic message (*they don't know what they are doing*) is not formulated by the savior (Ayodele) but by her apostle Adaora, we can observe that the message has fulfilled its mission and has succeeded in convincing the people. In *Lagoon*, different scenes contribute to what can be seen as a preaching perspective, considering the importance and the necessity of the relaying of the alien's message, to reach the end of the anthropocene: The message delivered by Ayodele is passed on to the three main protagonists (Adaora, Agu and Anthony), then to the Nigerian president, then finally to the people of Nigeria. All the action of the novel is driven by this need to allow people to convince or be convinced, and this didactic logic leads to a successful resolution — the novel ends shortly after the president has had the possibility to talk to the people of Nigeria, last link in a chain of people that needs to be convinced — illustrating the possibility to succeed in transmitting a postcrisis, post-anthropocene message, and to foresee a better life economically, ecologically as well as humanly (“People of Lagos, especially, look at your neighbor. See his race, tribe, or his alien blood. And call him brother. We have much work to do as a family”[Okorafor, 278]). The novel shows a positive end to the apocalypse that is the anthropocene, with extraterrestrial help.

The symbiosis is here complete, human and alien calling each other “brother”. It seems permitted to see an optimism that Okorafor manifests, in the capacity to overcome the anthropocene and in her conviction in the afrofuturist message, to see Africa as a guide for the next step after the crisis. Naturally, this fictional resolution is still unknown, a fact that Okorafor brilliantly integrates into her story by hiding the message that the aliens are preaching to the human ambassadors, which chapter is reduced to four brief lines: “Adaora, Agu and Anthony met with the Elders. There were eight of them. And that is all that Adaora, Agu and Anthony will ever remember about that thirty minutes of their lives” (Okorafor, 260). Because maybe in this context of social, ecological and economical crisis, the role of the fiction writer is not to find the solution but rather to encourage it by showing that an alternative, even fictional, supernatural or secret, to the contemporary problems is conceivable and could lead to better times? Thus, we could consider that if Nnedi Okorafor turns her back on the idea of a weak and non-messianic utopianism, it is in an afrofuturist optimistic approach of a solution to the apocalypse in which we are currently living. This optimism is visible

in the turn of the alien invasion: whereas the invasion of *Rosewater* is perceived as beneficial before taking a turn for the worse that leads to the extinction of an entire species, the invasion in *Lagoon* first brings chaos in Lagos before a change for the better with the peaceful collaboration and the symbiotic relationship between the two species. This paradigm contributes to Okorafor's optimism in the human ability to overcome the anthropocene.

In *Rosewater* now, the utopianism is at the heart of the thesis defended by O'Connell in his article, guided by the question "But what of those sf futures that are not necessarily world-saving, at least in the strong utopian sense that we are accustomed to? What if their utopianism is predicated on a world-ending?" (O'Connell, 111). According to him, *Rosewater*, by showing a fiction that multiplies the figures of loss — loss of objects, of people, of entire countries such as the United States of America and even to the ongoing disappearance of humankind at the core of the novel — offers in fact the loss of the future and the reassuring structures. Therefore, even if the degree of confidence in the capacity to overcome and find an answer to the crisis of the anthropocene varies in our corpus, the message stays the same: a future, even though different from the one we were aiming towards, remains conceivable as long as it abandons what causes the environmental and capitalistic issues. Moreover, this future needs to build on the African tradition of dealing with those apocalyptic issues as the continent and its people have done in the past. Finally, this future needs to keep an openness towards the very possibility of the end of this crisis, as *Lagoon* makes the choice of a utopian solution to those issues.

Perhaps Thompson's fiction gives a bigger responsibility to humankind, by elaborating a fiction where, contrary to *Lagoon*, humans have to actively fight for a resolution of the conflict to keep a place in the future — the Earth being able to survive the annihilation of the human. No matter what, the writer's common message of a resolution to the anthropocene contributes actively to a new hope in the afrofuturism as a way of ending the anthropocene apocalypse. As it is not for Africa a first but a second contact, the continent has the knowledge required for dealing with an invasion, and Africa can be effective at the front row for the resolution of the contemporary crisis, as presented in climate and post-capital fiction.

To end this first chapter, we observed that the choice of the highly SF trope of the alien invasion is in close relationship with the afrofuturist perspective and esthetic. The paradigm of the alien invasion echoing the colonization of Africa is extremely fecund and allows to root a

contemporary message in a well-established literary tradition. Even though Okorafor and Thompson show divergent attitudes regarding the utopianism of the solution to the crisis that is the anthropocene — Okorafor is choosing a messianic salvation while Thompson prefers a fiction of a conflict that forces humankind to fight for its future —, it is necessary to observe the common message to these two novels, message driven by a profound belief in the capacity of Africa to be the leader for a resolution to the actual crisis.

Chapter 2: Figures of the nonhuman and posthumanism

In the previous chapter, we were able to see how the figure of the extraterrestrial was used in our corpus as a driving force for the resolution of a crisis. In both fictions, we can see that the aliens encourage a dynamic of gathering and unification of humankind: either by offering an alliance that results in a symbiotic relationship, bringing humankind together and united to the aliens as we saw in *Lagoon*, or on the contrary by unifying humanity against the aliens, who therefore act as a common enemy against whom it is necessary to form a unified front, as we saw in *Rosewater*. Those modalities which, although different, serve the common purpose of bringing humankind together have been analyzed by Ursula Heise in her paper “The Posthuman Turn: Rewriting Species in Recent American Literature”. In this article, Heise offers to analyze the three key “moments” of nonhuman figures that she identifies in the history of science fiction — alien, cyborg and animal — and our analysis of the narrative roles fulfilled by the alien in both *Lagoon* and *Rosewater* seems to confirm her theory. We are going to see how Heise’s interpretation of the figure of the alien is not without ties with the afrofuturist significance that has been our guideline in our analysis of the corpus. Next, we will focus on other nonhuman figures that Heise brings to light — cyborgs and animals — in order to analyze the roles of those figures in the works of Okorafor and Thompson.

1. Alien, from the nonhuman towards the posthuman

After having considered the figure of the alien in its relationship with the change in society and as a catalyst of a crisis linked with the anthropocene in the first chapter of our study, we are now going to take an interest in this same figure in its relationship with humanity as a species, in order to analyze how this nonhuman figure helps rethink the human, his characteristics and his limitations. To do so, we will consider the three functions of the alien figures as analyzed by Ursula Heise, who looks at the alien as a common threat, then as an allegory of the human pre-existing disparity, then finally as the initiator of an evolutionary leap.

1.1. Catalyst of an intra-species unification

The first of the three distinct narrative functions of the figure of the alien as a nonhuman entity is probably the most obvious and the one that manifests in the clearest way in our corpus:

“the arrival of aliens constitutes a real or perceived threat for all inhabitants of Earth that forces people to put aside their differences and recognize their common humanity in the face of the extra-planetary other” (Heise, 456). But the most significant consequence of this gathering of humankind, that surpasses the problem of the invader and that allows to think about humanity, is the one Heise exposes next: “the alien presence offers an opportunity for the emergence of a global consciousness and in some cases even of international governance [...] Aliens thereby initiate benign forms of globalization, universalism, and cosmopolitanism in which the affirmation of differences is itself relegated to an older, pre-technological age.” (Heise, *Posthuman*, 456). Even though Heise situates the alien moment from the 1950s to the 1970s, it is surprising to notice how her analysis is in tune with the contemporary perspectives of the afrofuturism as manifested in *Lagoon* and *Rosewater*, as those fictions actualize the figure of the alien to serve an afrofuturist narrative. Indeed, these “benign forms of globalization” echo the possibilities that the postcrisis fiction allows to escape the crisis, most notably the one of the anthropocene, and to allow to think about a new future. Therefore, the afrofuturism is perfectly in tune with this function of the alien moment, by allowing to see Africa as a driving force of the global development after the contact with the alien, a nonhuman entity, had abrogated the distinctions between humans, as well as to think of Africa of perhaps not a leader of this “international governance” but at least in the front seat, in the same way as other nations, a position the African continent has historically never occupied until then. Once again, the fiction of an alien invasion is a fertile ground of experimentation for the development of an afrofuturist esthetic, by its capacity to turn the geopolitical chessboard upside down and to offer, as a reaction against an alien invasion, a global governance that is not fragmented as we see nowadays but on the contrary unified, where Africa is not relegated to a subordinate position but fulfills a significantly important role, in the writings of Okorafor and Thompson, for the direction of humankind.

In order to see how the aliens gather humanity in a unified entity against a common threat, it is interesting to observe how the writers render this division of humankind explicit, in a way that highlights the significance of a nonhuman manifestation (alien, in this scenario) in the resolution of this internal conflict. It is therefore necessary to observe how Okorafor depicts the absolute deconstruction of the ties between humans before building those ties again thanks to the help of the extraterrestrials. In *Lagoon*, the riots that ravage Lagos after the apparition of the aliens are doubtlessly an exemplary expression of those divergences between humans, a symbol that first divides, rendering impossible a possibility of universalism by affirming the differences: “To step

into this nightmare was to step into the unknown. He'd seen such chaos before, when he was sent north during fresh riots between Christians and Muslims. He'd learned the hard way that he could never trust people during such times. Anyone could get swept in to the mob's violent mentality at any moment" (Okorafor, 144).

Okorafor explicitly renders this sentiment of an impossible resolution: after having contacted the authorities, Adaora and Agu, two of the three main protagonists, are arrested and taken by force by the military, which leads to the expression of despair and of loss of faith in humanity to be expressed by Adaora: "Why did we think the man would behave rationally? When had the Nigerian government and military done anything for its people? They were all about covering their asses and stuffing their own pocket" (Okorafor, 89). This subversive speech highlights, more than fear in the military, a feeling that even the political authorities devoted to peace and harmony are incapable of bringing people together. Even though this affirmation ends up (as we will see) in the afrofuturist resolution where Nigeria takes the lead for a new and better future, Lagos is depicted by Okorafor as the optimal and ideal place for an alien invasion, precisely due to its capacity to fall into chaos: "Adaora was beginning to see why Ayodele's people had chosen the city of Lagos. If they'd landed in New York, Tokyo or London, the governments of these places would have quickly swooped in to hide, isolate and study the aliens. Here in Lagos, there was no such order" (Okorafor, 64). Choosing Lagos as the setting for her novel is not guided by a blind optimism in the city's capacity to be the leading head of a worldwide cultural revolution but quite the contrary works in this narrative for its capacity to fall into chaos. Therefore, the city of Lagos becomes the place where crystallizes the fragmentation of humankind and although it becomes later on in the novel the place of reunification and harmonization between both humankind as a whole but also humankind and alien, it is as this stage of the novel the place where humanity is most divided, to the point that the city itself is perceived as the incarnation of this division: "Agu understood that they were angry at Lagos, angry at Nigeria, angry at the world. The alien invasion was just an excuse to let it all out" [Okorafor, 173])

Okorafor signals this moment of extreme tension when human cohabitation is no longer possible not only through a collective destruction and mayhem (expressed by the riot) but also on a personal and individual scale, even intimate, embodied by the confrontation between Adaora and her husband, confrontation that is about to become violent: "The way things were going at the moment, *something* had to give. Something had to *intervene*. And something was about

to” (Okorafor, 107). Significantly, this situation can only find its resolution with the intervention of an extraterrestrial individual: “Adaora felt relief. She knew exactly what was happening [...] « Ayodele », she whispered. « Thank god »” (Okorafor, 107). Okorafor strengthens the fracture between humans by narrating an intense conflict not only on the scale of a society (Lagos) but also on the most familiar and intimate scale there is. The second novel of Tade Thompson’s trilogy, *The Rosewater Insurrection*, develops this same dual fracture. Indeed, the divergence of attitudes regarding the alien matter leads to several armed confrontations, that opposes the pro-aliens and the anti-aliens. This fracture affects, such as it does in *Lagoon*, Nigerian society as a whole (the country’s governance being opposed to the independent city of Rosewater on the issue) but also on the more intimate scale of human interactions, as seen in the polarized differences in the attitudes of the protagonists concerning the aliens.

At this stage of the novels, humankind is tearing itself apart on every level, and this setting is favorable for an intervention external from humanity, that is shown to be fundamentally unable to inhabit with its fellow members. Indeed this deconstruction, this apparent chaos, where it seems impossible for humans to coexist with humans, in a moment where the differences inside our very own species are exacerbated, is but a first step that is followed by a resolution, an understanding when humans, under an alien’s impulse foreshadowed by Heise’s theory, abolish their differences. The transitional moment between these two contradictory states, discordance and harmony, manifests itself in *Lagoon* through different scenes of sacrifices. The most remarkable is certainly the one that happens on the Benin-Lagos expressway, a highway where a murderous monster, the “Bone Collector”, manifests itself and is about to slaughter several humans. However, this abomination is convinced by an alien under a human appearance to leave them be in exchange for the alien’s own life. A witness of the scene, a purebred human so to speak, declares “Never in my entire life had I witnessed such a selfless act. She was not from earth. Yet still. I thought of Nigeria’s worst diseases - pervasive corruption and unsafe roads [...] she and her people were indeed agents of change [...] I watched it take her [...] And when it was done, I heard the relieved sigh of millions of ghosts. (Okorafor, 208). The transition from chaos to peace is therefore initiated, and it is clear in this chapter that the aliens have come to Earth not only to cure the afflictions of Nigeria but also the ones of humanity that is tearing itself apart in a chaos of which the riot is only a manifestation. The representation of this sacrifice allows the beginning of the transition from chaos to harmony, by showing the people of Lagos that the aliens are not coming to Earth as invaders but as saviors.

1.2. Negation of an inter-species difference

Where Okorafor's message goes even further than Heise's analysis lies in the fact that the apparition of a nonhuman figure (the alien) not only generates a harmonization between the humans but also between humankind and aliens. Indeed, the alien figure as observed by Heise in the middle of the 20th century, although acting for a change of the human nature and the unification of humankind, seems to be mostly considered as an enemy to vanquish. I will try to demonstrate that the fictions of Okorafor and Thompson enrich this perspective by presenting the alien, although seen as a threat, as capable of a dialogue with the human species, and that the two species are able to reach a pacifist understanding, thus negating their differences. This perspective is frequent in fictions that depict a society in a much-advanced future, where a long and shared history between the races has had time to thrive (a typical feature of the space opera subgenre), but the novels of Okorafor and Thompson offer the same paradigm already in the first moments of the contact with the alien race. Therefore, in this chapter I will offer an extension to Heise's argument with a fourth function of the alien figure as seen in *Lagoon* and *Rosewater*: the negation of an inter-species difference.

This paradigm first manifests itself in the appearance that the aliens choose to assume. At the end of *Lagoon*'s first act, when the aliens emerge from the bay of Bar Beach under the gaze of Agu the soldier, this is not under the appearance of monstrous entities but under a human form, what is more a representative sample of the population of Lagos:

he saw shapes in the water [...] they grew, rising out of the waves, coalescing into recognizable shapes. Human shapes. They were people, hundreds of people, walking straight out of the ocean onto Bar Beach [...] Some of them were dressed in various types of traditional garb, some in military attire, some in police uniforms, others in westernized civilian clothes. Most of them were African, a small few Asian, one white [...] All of them could pass for Lagosians. (Okorafor, 116).

Let's notice here that the first adjective used by Agu to characterize the aliens is "recognizable", instantly blurring the line between aliens and the humans of which they choose to assume the form, only to be qualified of "human shape" then "people". The assimilation with the humans is here immediate due to the chosen vocabulary. Contrary to other fictions where it is frequent to see aliens assuming human shape in order to fool humankind, *Lagoon* shows us a real and peaceful acclimatization, as Ayodele declares when she tries to preventively correct an error in humankind's perception of their arrival: "You all will call us aliens. We are guests who wish to become

citizens” (Okorafor, 111), disproving immediately the difference between the two species (substituting “alien” with “guest”), which results in the symbiotic understanding between humans and aliens that we saw previously. In this sense, Okorafor mobilizes the alien as a nonhuman figure not only to gather the humans in a peaceful society, exemplified in the resolution of the riots, able to unify itself, as Heise describes, but also as an abrogation of the limits between the human and the alien.

Another particularly significant example of this blending of species manifests itself at the end of the novel, when Ayodele, shortly before her “death” having declared ‘You people need help on the outside but also within [...] I will go within’ (Okorafor, 268) is taken by a craving for food that is echoed in all the inhabitants of Lagos right after her death that is marked by a mysterious transformation:

“In the space where Ayodele had laid a white mist swirled [...] It had the faint tomatoey scent of ... garden eggs [...] Adaora was overcome with a craving for garden eggs [...] instinctively, she knew that this fog was rolling like a great wave over all of Lagos. She could almost see it in her mind. And everyone was inhaling it. Everyone in Lagos was craving garden eggs. Ayodele. What had she done? [...] Ayodele was gone. Ayodele was here. «Lagos will never be the same» (Okorafor, 269-270).

In these proceedings, it becomes apparent that Ayodele’s consciousness has propagated to the inhabitants of Lagos (the desire for garden eggs being only the indicator of the propagation), and with it the citizens of the city are permanently changed (“Lagos will never be the same”), as a part of the alien ambassador lives now inside of them (“Ayodele was here”). Here we are reaching the core of the influence of the aliens towards humankind in *Lagoon*: the aliens are altering the humans, modifying and transforming them in something that goes beyond their previous condition of existence. A consequence of this change is seen in the shift in the attitude of the president of Nigeria: “Ever since Ayodele had dissipated, he’d been feeling strange. Not only did he crave raw garden eggs but he felt so calm, as if all that had happened was something he could understand” (Okorafor, 273). This quote is crucial in this novel and determining for the purpose of our analysis: taking place between the dissipation of Ayodele and the president’s address to the people of Nigeria, it is very symbolic to render explicitly the fact that it is the influence of Ayodele that allows the president to fathom, to “understand” what is happening in Lagos and thus to deliver his message of peace and harmony with the extra-planetary visitors to the people of his country. Therefore, more than their speech, it is by the fusion of aliens (Ayodele’s influence on the minds after her death) with humanity that allows them to finally unify and be able to perceive the peace

message of the extraterrestrials as fathomable and achievable, as the president notices (even without the knowledge of it; Okorafor shows us with a classical example of dramatic irony) in the aforementioned extract. The inhabitants of Lagos have become more than human, they now possess in them a nonhuman part that enables them to abolish their difference and to consider a new and positive future.

1.3. Lagos-centrism and the affirmation of an afrofuturism to defend

The contextualization of our corpus as afrofuturist gives us matter to think about the fact that in Okorafor's novel, only the citizens of Lagos have been touched by this change, and not the rest of the world (as we see in *Rosewater*). The answer, obvious after our analysis in the first chapter of the afrofuturist esthetic, to see the will to define Lagos, the economical capital of Nigeria and one of Africa's largest cities, at the front row of global world governance would be tempting, but that would be accounting for the acceptance by the rest of the world of this plan, because the end of *Lagoon* warns the reader against such a naive trust in the will of other countries to follow the example of Lagos. The last chapter of the novel gives a voice to the secret narrator of the story, the mythological and pan-African (taken from Igbo folklore, in this particular case) figure of Udide, the story-weaving spider god. Okorafor describes this mythological figure as the soul of Lagos and Nigeria, the one weaving all the stories that interconnect there, and the final speech of Udide, very last lines of the novel, is rich in significance:

And now the world sees what is happening inside of Lagos and her waters. What is that sweet taste I feel with my feet? It is patriotism, loyalty. Not to the country of Nigeria but to the city of Lagos. Finally. Maybe it will flow and spread like a flood of clean water. [...] But there is a problem. Other people in other parts of the world — they see what is happening here. And they fear it. They are agreed. Lagos is a cancer. They wish to cut the cancer out before it spreads [...] They will burn it away before it spreads. I will not let them. For the first time since the birth of Lagos, my glorious city, I will pause in my storytelling. I will leave my web. I become part of the story. I will join my people (Okorafor, 292)

Several elements must be underlined here. First, the fact that Okorafor intersperses the speech with the expression of a Nigerian patriotic sentiment, notably with the word “Finally” illustrates perfectly the fact that never before Lagos, and by extension Nigeria and even Africa as a whole, has been considered in the prospect of a global consideration. We can interpret this “finally” as the expression of a consideration finally gained, as a victory for the afrofuturist project, and the fact that Udide, the avatar of the soul of Lagos and Nigeria, “become[s] part of the story” illustrates this will to take an active and autonomous part in the world. But here, at the end of the novel, the tone

Okorafor gives to her narrator is drastically more pessimist, and the term that Udide puts in the mouth of the “other people” (expression showing a difference), “cancer”, shows us the extreme polarization between Nigeria and the rest of the world. Thus, Okorafor’s choice of only creating a change in the mentalities limited to Nigeria is symbolically powerful: Lagos is depicted as a utopian enclave for the fact that she transcended the problems of humanity thanks to the intervention of an alien race, but it is on the brink of being attacked by the rest of the world (“They wish to cut the cancer out before it spreads [...] They will burn it away before it spreads”), and Nigeria will have to fight (“I will not let them”) to affirm its place. By limiting the propagation of the alien’s message and influence on mentalities to the sole territory of Lagos rather than the whole world, Okorafor affirms that Nigeria can become a beacon for a better future but that this position and privilege will not come on a silver platter, but that Nigeria, and by extension the African continent, will have like Udide to actively open to the world, “leave my web”, in order to “become part of the story”. The afrofuturist message is claimed by Okorafor, but it is not evident and it will have to be fiercely defended to thrive.

1.4. Beyond human: posthumanism

This paradigm of a transformation and surpassing the limits of humankind opens the door to a new and extremely productive dimension for our analysis of the corpus: posthumanism, in its understanding, frequently associated with science fiction studies, of a state beyond humanity as one understands it due to its shaping by both technological and biological sources. We have introduced this concept in our analysis of the corpus by observing how in *Lagoon* this evolution of the human species leads not only to the abolition of internal conflict but also how it renders possible a symbiotic understanding with another people, blurring definitely the boundaries between human and alien that become indivisible. As the analysis mostly focused on *Lagoon* led us to the perspectives of posthumanism, let us focus now on how Tade Thompson takes into account this paradigm in *Rosewater*.

In his trilogy, Thompson frequently mobilizes the posthuman perspective of a passing of the human species towards a new stage of its evolution, but he takes the opposite view of Okorafor by considering this next step that is the posthuman not as the solution of the conflict but on the contrary as a disruptive element in the fiction. In order to understand this change of paradigm, it seems advised to offer a deeper presentation of the setting of the novel as the one presented in the

introduction. *Rosewater* immerses the reader in a future (2066) further than the one we see in *Lagoon*, where he finds himself confronted with several technological advances that are considered normal by the protagonists: bionic implants, androids, ... Amongst these exotic features, the xenosphere is probably the most intriguing: it is a virtual space — genuine cyberspace, feature having contributed to the novel's categorization as of the cyberpunk genre — which a few individuals only, the “sensitives” can access in order to slip into a projection of other people's minds. Kaaro, the protagonist, is one of these sensitive, investigating the sudden vanishing and death of his likes. As the novel progresses, the reader learns progressively that this xenosphere is not a technological feature but one of the symptoms of the presence of the extraterrestrial entity named “Wormwood” in the center of the city of Rosewater, an alien biodome that releases in the atmosphere a form of microscopic alien cells, the “xenofoms” (“alien fungi-like filaments and neurotransmitters” [Thompson, *Rosewater*, 76]), that, when interconnected, create the cyberspace that is the xenosphere, to which only the individuals sensitive to their presence have access.

Where the posthumanism manifests itself in *Rosewater* is in the fact that the xenofom cells do not just connect living beings in an interconnected and shared web of information, but they also integrate themselves progressively in the metabolism of all the individuals on the planet, multiplying in order to replace human cells with extraterrestrial ones.

This revelation immediately takes in Kaaro's terms a posthuman turn: “I am not the same [...] I don't know what my healing has cost me. How many native cells have the xenofoms driven out? Ten, fifteen per cent? How human am I?” (Thompson, *Rosewater*, 358). This reflection is perfectly in tune with posthumanist theories and interrogations: to what extent are we still really human? Kaaro, as well as the rest of humankind (contrary to Okorafor, this phenomenon is not limited to the city of Lagos), have crossed the stage traditionally called humankind in a way that can be quantifiable in percentage. Unlike *Lagoon*, the tonality of this change in *Rosewater* is completely negative and even apocalyptic, as stated by Kaaro: “I know that rather than healing I am seeding these people with their own destruction. I am a Typhoid Mary, a Patient Zero, a Pale Rider” (Thompson, *Rosewater*, 358). Kaaro unwillingly acts in the fiction as an anti-Ayodele, he is the one bringing change but this change is bound to doom humankind, and the contrast with the role of Ayodele in *Lagoon* — “he spoke of being healed by Ayodele” (Okorafor, 278) — is unequivocal, the term “heal” being actively repudiated by Kaaro in the aforementioned quote. Even though contrary to *Lagoon*, the tonality of the novel and the alien invasion depicted changes drastically to

formulate not a utopian scenario but an apocalyptic one (as we saw in the previous chapter), we can observe the similarity in the manifestation of an evolutionary leap in humankind under the influence of extraterrestrial entities in both narratives, that therefore are worth analyzing as posthumanist novels in their ambition of representing humanity as a species that has exceeded her limits.

However, a contrast between the two novels, determining for our research, appears in the last lines of Thompson's novel, which allows us to apprehend a major distinction between the two fictions regarding the attitudes to adopt in the face of the posthumanist modifications that the aliens are in both cases the source. In this sense, the final page of *Rosewater* shows a paradigm totally different from the ending of *Lagoon*:

Silently, inexorably [...] the invasion continues. Humanity dies one cell at a time. I don't know what will happen when we all become full xeno, but it's like [...] that asteroid that will collide with the Earth and wipe us out. We all think we'll be dead and gone by the time the carnage begins. The alien in me says that is delusional thinking. For this disaster we will all be present. For this we will all have front row seats (Thompson, *Rosewater*, 390)

This ending allows us to understand the major difference in the attitude regarding posthumanism, a difference that becomes lucid for the simple reason that whereas in *Lagoon* we witness a required posthumanism, vital to the resolution of the crisis, as a mandatory push to help put humankind in the right direction, *Rosewater*, on the contrary notices a deadly posthumanism — confirmed by the lexical choices in the quotation above — and the fact that Thompson compares humankind to the crisis of the anthropocene (“it's like climate change”), when for Okorafor the posthumanist resolution of her novel was the answer to this same crisis (as we saw in the first chapter), constitutes the core of the divergence between the novels of our corpus. It is extremely interesting to see how the same narrative feature dealt with the same modalities can lead to two diametrically conflicting messages.

To conclude our analysis of the figure of the alien as a nonhuman entity in our corpus, we can turn back to Heise's article, and in doing so we can observe that the evolution from human to posthuman under a nonhuman influence that we witnessed correspond to the third function of the alien moment as defined by Heise as the alien's capacity to be a “catalysts of an evolutionary leap that ultimately propels humans into a different species identity” (Heise, *Posthuman*, 458). And indeed, that is what we have observed in our corpus; the evolutionary leap that Okorafor narrates is a capacity for harmony as well as intra- and interspecies symbiosis, whereas the same evolutionary leap in Thompson's narrative is mortifying and although a few humans develop supernatural powers

that can be likened to an evolutionary leap, the posthumanism does not manifest itself as the next step in human evolution but rather as the last one before its total annihilation. This divergence in the tone is not unusual, and the two fictions exemplify two attitudes on the spectrum of possibilities that posthumanism can cover, between deadly vision or on the contrary favorable towards the development of life, in an apparent contradiction that was foreseen by Heise:

the alien therefore traces the limits of the human in different and sometimes contradictory ways [...]: by forcing humans to acknowledge their shared species identity. by highlighting differences between humans but also pointing to ways of overcoming disparities, and by imagining evolutionary leaps that transform humans into posthumans merged into new social and political structures. (Heise, *Posthuman*, 458)

The corpus reuses the narrative figure of the extraterrestrial in order to explore the posthumanist possibilities that are intrinsically inherent to this figure. Okorafor and Thompson reclaim this classical trope of science fiction and use it to use its possibilities in the context of postcrisis fiction and the evolution of the human species in a typically African context.

2. Cyborg, android, and virtual avatar

In pursuit of the exploration of our corpus according to the three posthuman moments as formulated by Ursula Heise, we are going now to move away from the figure of the alien in order to look at what Heise identified as the second moment that follows the extraterrestrial: the cyborg, a hybrid between human (or at least, organic being) and machine. We will see how the cyborg as represented in *Rosewater* — indeed, it is mostly found there in our corpus, as it is mostly absent from *Lagoon* — allows us to explore the limits of the definition of humanity as a species and what this other nonhuman figure brings in the debate.

In her article *The Posthuman Turn*, Heise defines the narrative function of the cyborg with its capacity to “ask anew the old question of whether a sufficiently sophisticated machine is ontologically different from a human” (Heise, *Posthuman*, 459). Building notably on the works of Donna Haraway, her analysis of the cyborg is closely linked with the appearance in the 1980s of the cyberpunk, a subgenre of science fiction marked by the multiplication and the importance of “innovative information, communication, transportation, and medical technologies that were transforming the human body in unprecedentedly intimate ways” (Heise, *Posthuman*, 459). It is mainly under this label and the cyberpunk legacy that we will focus on the figure of the cyborg in the trilogy written by Tade Thompson that, as we saw, claims himself the cyberpunk affiliation of

his novel to the cyberpunk genre. We will first analyze the different manifestations of the cyborgs (but also androids, another figure that will show relevance in our study) in the novel, to then focus on the relationship that links the figures of the alien and the cyborg, profoundly close in this fiction that as we saw earlier mixes tropes from different genres related to science fiction. Finally, we will analyze the protagonist of the trilogy, Kaaro, as an embodiment of the cyborg symbolic as established by the cyberpunk genre.

2.1. Cyberpunk manifestations in *Rosewater*

We must first observe the different manifestations of figures associated with the cyborg figure in *Rosewater* in order to analyze them. The first assessment is that contrary to *Lagoon*, Tade Thompson's trilogy multiplies heavily those manifestations, and that the reader, upon reading the novels, progressively uncover a world where technology has invaded not only the traditional sectors of society associated with technology but also and most notably the human body.

2.1.1. "Improved" humans

Only on the second page of the novel does Kaaro encounter colleagues that "wear tank tops and t-shirts and metal in their hair. They have phone implants." (Thompson, *Rosewater*, 2). Already, we can notice that the association between these implants and common items of clothing establishes, from the beginning of the novel, the banality of the presence of bio-mechanical implants. But the following scene introduces a new disruptive element of this triviality: "[Bola, Kaaro's coworker] handing me a slip of paper with the address. Her look of disdain tells me if I had the proper implant we would not need to kill trees" (Thompson, *Rosewater*, 6). In the same fashion, Kaaro receives next a message from his employer arousing the same questions: "Call now. And get a phone implant. This is prehistoric" (Thompson, *Rosewater*, 8). Those two remarks coming from two different individuals underline the signs of a paradigm of interest in the posthuman reach of the novel: the protagonist is considered abnormal on account of his lack of implants, Thompson offering here the opposite stance as the issues risen by the contemporary debates on posthuman questions, debate where it is more frequent to hear criticized the presence of human implants rather than its absence. Those two extracts may seem trivial but carry a lot of signification in our research question, particularly the choice of the term "prehistoric": the opposition against implants is qualified as a former state in history (pre-historic), and this helps us formulate a hypothesis on the

futuristic world depicted in *Rosewater*, the absence of technological modification on an individual's body is considered as belonging to a past state of humanity, and the epoch's norm is no longer the absence but the presence of modifications — that we will therefore qualify of improvement, as it seems understood in the future depicted in *Rosewater* — inside the human body. This first chapter informs us that the human, as understood by the reader, unmodified (at least willingly) by technology is considered an archaic stage in human evolution, delving into a reality where posthumanism is the norm and human as we know it is an outdated concept.

As the technological enhancement viscerally integrated to the human body seem, in the aforementioned extracts, not only admitted but also normalized by the population, a previous event in the novel still shows a consciousness of the human body and its functions as something not to be meddled with or altered by the population, and the novel seems to tell us that ethical considerations have not vanished entirely:

There is a loud, but peaceful protest on the street in front of me. About thirty or thirty-five people protest ectogenesis. This has been an ongoing international debate. The science of an ex-vivo uterus-artificial womb has existed for a while [...]. Two weeks ago, one of the mayor's aides leaked a document on Nimbus that revealed a plan to harvest «Fertilisation Products» from abortion clinics in order to test ectogenesis in humans. So instead of terminating the pregnancy they would move the fertilised egg from the human and implant in a machine. Part of the plan was to «destroy» the fetus once it reaches the age of viability, having proved the concept. It's interesting to me that despite being the one to orchestrate this, nobody sees Jack Jaques as a bad person. (Thompson, *Rosewater*, 202)

It seems necessary to transcribe this extract in its entirety in order to render the feeling of cold indifference with which Kaaro describes, by using the technical terms but put in quotation marks — showing if not the disapproval the doubt — the process that is mentioned, which is the recovery of aborted embryos in order to artificially pursue the gestation. It is obvious that this ethical consideration is relevant within the domain of post humanism, the reproduction being probably one of the most visceral functions of the human body, and the possibility of substituting an artificial machine to an organic organ raises questions that echo the posthuman notion of the limits of the human body and its “improvement” by technological advances.

But more than the relevance of the posthuman relevance raised by this ethic debate, it is particularly interesting, in the light of the apparent disdain of the un-altered human body and the trivialization of implants that we witnessed in Kaaro's exchanges with his colleagues, to observe that posthumanism still raises in the futuristic world of *Rosewater* deontological questions like the one we see in our contemporary world. The extract above about the ectogenesis informs us that

technological modifications are certainly banalized but that they have not vanished and that they still raise debates in society (“This has been an ongoing international debate”) to the point of producing “loud” protests in *Rosewater*. Since then the question related to posthumanism raised here is one of the limits between what is accepted and what is not yet: if our contemporary society refuses the idea of biotechnological implants that are not mandatory for the health of the recipient but that *Rosewater*’s society accepts it to the point of normalizing it, is this very society destined to accept in a near-future what for its present time still raises debates on a national level? This protest allows us to conceptualize posthumanism as a field of study that is not fixed, and that will forever be relevant no matter what the technological stage the society reaches. The question of the definition of the human and its limitation is therefore still ongoing and is systematically reassessed, no matter what the posthuman stage and the limits between the norm and the immoral is. This excerpt of *Rosewater* ensures the renewal of this debate and assures the impossibility of ever reaching the end and the resolution of posthumanism issues.

In order to go further in the reflection of the mechanical influence on the human body than the assessment of its trivialization, another extract particularly meaningful allows us to add a psychological dimension to the cyborg figure in *Rosewater*:

‘What percentage of your cells has been replaced by the xenofoms?’ ‘Sixteen’ ‘That much?’ ‘Yes, but by body weight I’m twenty-nine percent machine. That doesn’t make me part of the robot uprising that has been predicted but will never come to pass [...] We are all part machine, Kaaro. Your phone is a polymer under the skin of your hand. You have a locator chip in your head’ ‘What do you have?’ ‘No apathy [...] I have micro-electrodes to regulate my mood (Thompson, *Rosewater*, 376)

Let us analyze this exchange between Kaaro and the rebel Oyin Da, opposed to the Nigerian government, in two steps. First, the beginning of this discussion confirms our impressions regarding the normalization of the mechanical augmentations on the human body. Indeed, the affirmation “We are all part machine” unilaterally settles the posthumanist debate: In the future depicted in *Rosewater*, the human stage as the reader knows it is completely over, humankind having changed — for better or for worse, the novels show only the assessment of this change and not a moral judgment — dramatically and irrevocably in the posthuman era, where the cyborg is no longer perceived as a nonhuman figure of alterity but as the norm that has replaced humanity, one percentage of his body at a time. In her article, Heise analyzes cyborgs as a figure of the otherness regarding the augmented humans, but Thompson chooses to abrogate this difference, assimilating the cyborg and humankind once and for all, to the point that upon reading the novel, we no longer

know which term to choose to refer to the common people: should we talk of them as humans, and consider that human is now a synonym of cyborg, or is it relevant to describe the population of *Rosewater* as cyborgs, even though they have become the norm? The assimilation in the novel of those two figures, the total rupture of the boundary between human and nonhuman raises major questions regarding the very definition of what it is to be human.

Let us now return briefly to the figure of the alien to notice that the substitution of human cells with xenofoms is now presented as part of everyday life, and its impact on the human, even though it is at the core of the problematic of the alien invasion in Thompson's trilogy, also ends up being somehow banalized. Thus, in *Rosewater's* sequel, *Rosewater Insurrection*, can we see the same resignation to this process of humankind's erasure: "I think the xenofoms are embedded fundamentally. They are a part of what it means to be human now." (Thompson, *Insurrection*, 34). Here we can observe the affirmed verbalization of the same shift in the posthuman paradigm that we saw with bio-mechanical: the human is purely and simply redefined as having evolved towards a new stage in its development, a stage that amalgamates cells that are organic, mechanical and even alien. More than a reconciliation between human and cyborg, we see that the alien is, as it was in *Lagoon*, part of this posthuman stage of humankind.

This paradigm of negation of difference between human and cyborg is explored to its most surprising limits by Tade Thompson, who implements in his fiction a group of individuals that voluntarily adopt a robotic behavior with a finality that is the same as posthumanism:

The man beside me is of the Machinery and he sits stock-still, like an automaton [...] The Machinery are a bunch of fuckwits who believe that the human body is best conceptualised as a machine, and that if behaviour is stripped down to only what is functional, a higher form of humanity will emerge. This means actions that lead to the fulfillment of their basic needs only. Disease is a malfunction. You can see where this goes (Thompson, *Rosewater*, 203)

The critique that Kaaro formulates could not be clearer ("a bunch of fuckwits"), and this goes to show, if that was still necessary, just as the protest against ectogenesis we observed earlier, that even though the frontier between human and cyborg has been definitely revoked, the line that separates humans and machines lingers in the mind of at least a part of the population, a part that include the protagonist Kaaro. This helps us refine our interpretation of the cyborg by showing that even though the augmented human is now the new norm and is no longer considered a nonhuman state (as we saw earlier), the human still exists and continues to oppose the machine. However, even if the line exists still, the novel shows a unified group with a shared ideology that, even though still

marginalized, is sufficient to spark off a form of apprehensiveness, as we see in Kaaro's conclusion "You can see where this goes", that does not hesitate in denouncing, in a diverted way, the possible downward spiral of such an ideology. Kaaro's affirmation seems to point at the idea that certain individuals are opposed to this ideology, which from the posthuman point of view is very significant: a form of humanity, notably with its weaknesses and flaws, is seen as stage of human to protect, as shown by the critic of the Machinery. This is accompanied by a moral subtext in Kaaro's intervention, implying that a society getting rid of its sick individuals (that it perceives as a weakness) is the downward slide towards issues that Thompson leaves to our imagination ("You can see where this goes").

2.1.2. Humanized machines

After having seen how Thompson uses human figures that are brought closer to machines with technological advances, let us focus now on the opposite paradigm: machines that are getting more human. Indeed, *Rosewater* shows us not only cyber-humans as we observed, but also androids, artificial creatures developed to resemble humans. A first event in the novel confronts us to the question of the android through a scene where it seems permitted to doubt about the nature of the individual Kaaro encounters: "I move to leave but the soldiers block me. I look into the eyes of one of them and there is nothing there. No love, no hate, just bland, unfeeling obedience. He is a flesh robot, not human at all" (Thompson, *Rosewater*, 70). This description is particularly interesting to analyze in light of Kaaro's psychic ability to read people's mind, the phrasing "I look into the eyes of one of them and there is nothing there" brings the doubt: is it the figuratively and metaphorical meaning of looking through someone's eyes to speculate about his feelings and thoughts, or is it the literal use where Kaaro scans the person's mind and discovers that it is not a human being? Thompson does not lift the ambiguity and uses terms that can be interpreted in both figurative or literal sense, which leads to the consequence, determining in our posthumanist analysis, that it is not possible to determine with certainty the nature of this individual: it could be a human with a neutral, dehumanized¹ behavior that is qualified as the one of a robot in order to criticize this lack of humanity, or it could be an android acting in a robotic and purely mechanical manner. This encounter in the novel with a possibly robotic individual brings to light, through the choice of terms, the question that is at the heart of the very concept of the android: what

¹ Let us note here that the term dehumanized takes a particular meaning in our research question, the term reduces humanity to its capacity to feel emotions, yet the question of the android throws this notion off balance.

distinguishes the robot from the human when the robot has become sufficiently human, or, in this example, what distinguishes the human from the robot if this human acts in a way devoid of feelings and in a dehumanized (this term is not to be used lightly) manner. The words used by Thompson, “flesh robot”, sums up this ambivalence. Moreover, as the human body is enhanced, we must note that the humanity or the lack of it relies in this excerpt not on the body but on the emotion of the individual (“No love, no hate, just bland, unfeeling obedience”). The two aspects of the human, body and mind, are therefore considered together to define the humanity of a given individual.

An intertextual allusion particularly meaningful when discussing the theme of androids and its closeness with the human is the one Thompson does to one of the most important novel of the cyberpunk genre, Philip K. Dick’s *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*: “All the while my head is in the xenosphere, scanning for observers. There are none, and even the Gujarat-bot dreams of electric sheep” (Thompson, *Rosewater*, 137). Even though this hint seems anecdotal, its apparition confirms the relevance of the debate that we are focusing on, which is to determine at what point a sufficiently developed robot could be assimilated to a human being, this interrogation being at the center of Dick’s novel which the title, referenced by Thompson, is just another way of formulating: the dreams falling under the domain of the psyche, an affirmative answer to the question raised by the title of K. Dick’s novel would lead towards an abolition of the differences between humans and robots, and that is indeed in this sense that *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* and its cinematographic adaptation by Ridley Scott leads to, the replicant manifesting its² humanity at the very moment when the Blade Runner realizes that his behavior has become closer to the obedient automaton than the one of a free-willed individual. The simple reference Philip K. Dick’s novel may seem trivial but it allows, in a single sentence, to bring the debate that was raised in 1968 to date and to make *Rosewater* part of a legacy and debate older than half a century regarding the question of the limits between human and machine.

This thematic reaches its climax at the very end of Thompson’s trilogy through the character of Lora, the mayor of Rosewater’s assistance that is an android without knowing it (not unlike *Blade Runner*). This leads to the completion of the interrogation of the humanity of androids at the end of the novel when the mayor rushes to save his assistant: “He tries to tamp down the thought that tries to emerge from the depths; *she is only a machine*. No. He bursts into the chamber and is

² or “his”?

confused for a second. She isn't..." (Thompson, *Redemption*, 356). This extract shows that the limit between human and nonhuman has been crossed and that the feelings, as Dick's novel and its adaptation let us believe, of the android regarding humans but also the opposite, attain the abolish this difference. In this reflection in the mayor's mind, we see crystallized the fracture of the boundary between human and nonhuman that has gradually shown in these novels.

We will end this analysis of the human coming closer to the machine and vice-versa with the identification in Thompson's novel of the manifestation of a hybrid life form that seems to be at the exact middle between organic and mechanic life, the cyber-hawk. The security system of the town of *Rosewater* seems to rely heavily on birds that are half-animal and half-machine, observing the citizens from the skies like drones — which is not without referencing the consideration of the cyberpunk genre for the topic of surveillance and mass control in large cities —: "There are dead hawks on the ground here and there. They both bleed and show exposed, damaged machinery" (Thompson, *Rosewater*, 337). This assessment, which puts on the same level the blood and the mechanical parts offers the overview of those two figures, and the novel does not settle whether the cyber-hawks are cyborg birds or avian androids. Even though this perfect hybrid between flesh and metal is not related to the topic of posthumanism, it is still interesting in a perspective where the boundaries between human and nonhuman figures are blurred because it involves animals as well as machines.

2.2. Between science fiction and cyberpunk: a cyber-invasion

Let us now take a step back from the figures of the cyborgs, androids or hybrids such as we observed and analyzed previously in order to focus on Thompson's trilogy in its entirety. As we saw, the particularity of the extraterrestrial invasion in those novels is the fact that it diverts greatly from the usual and canonical conflict with a cosmic scale and takes the form of a silent and sleeper invasion, as Kaaro observes in his last lines of the first novel: "Silently, inexorably [...] the invasion continues. Humanity dies one cell at a time" (Thompson, *Rosewater*, 287). The extraterrestrials use the xenofoms, alien cells, to progressively substitute (as we analyzed) human cells with nonhuman cells, pushing humankind to a new stage in its posthumanist evolution that doesn't have the human for finality but the nonhuman, the objective of the invaders is not, as in *Lagoon*, to orient humans towards a utopian society but rather to reach the end and the extinction of humankind, as announced without embellishment by the alien emissary Molara: "We want your

home, Kaaro. Your planet [...] Is *homo sapiens* useful for anything, or will it be a nuisance? [...] The Earth is ours. We no longer need you” (Thompson, *Rosewater*, 330).

In the analysis of the functions of the figure of the cyborg, the originality of this alien invasion is particularly interesting in the sense that although it is a trope, as we saw in the first chapter, closely associated with the science fiction genre, the form that this invasion takes in Thompson’s novel is not so much associated with science fiction but more with cyberpunk, whose specific features have been analyzed by Bruce Sterling in the preface for the cyberpunk anthology *Mirrorshades*, that Ursula Heise qualifies as the genre’s manifesto and that she quotes in her article *The Posthuman Turn*:

Certain central themes spring up repeatedly in cyberpunk, The theme of body invasion: prosthetic limbs, implanted circuitry, cosmetic surgery, genetic alteration. The even more powerful theme of mind invasion: brain-computer interfaces, artificial intelligence, neurochemistry — techniques radically redefining the nature of humanity, the nature of the self (Sterling, in Heise, *Posthuman*, 460)

Therefore, cyberpunk is not limited in *Rosewater* as one of the different genres from which Thompson draws, but it substitutes the science fiction trope of the alien invasion, that the writer adapts to his own taste: the invasion is strictly speaking cyberpunk because it takes the form of a body invasion and even (as we will see) of a mind invasion, in a fiction that, “redefine[s] the nature of humanity” in a profound manner.

Therefore, the codes of the cyberpunk genres take a step back from the sole figure of the cyborg to take the lead of the fiction in its entirety and become the motor of the novel. Subsequently, what becomes of the conclusion and resolution of this invasion? Let us analyze the outcome of the plot, at the very end of the third and last novel of Thompson’s trilogy, *Rosewater Redemption*: Kaaro, whose body has been destroyed, achieves thanks to his inherent connection with the xenosphere, to incorporate (dare we say “download”?) his consciousness in a dead body reanimated by the xenofoms to be used as a repository (dare we say “hardware”?) for the consciousness of an alien invader. After succeeding in reaching out to his acolytes that are still fighting against the alien invasion, the group formulates a plan to put an end to it:

You’re going to write a virus. We’re going to find a way to insert it into the professor’s brainoid. We take the brainoid to Rosewater, in a dead body. They reanimate it and infuse it with an alien consciousness. Only the pathway will carry a little surprise. Because entanglement works both ways. Our virus hitches a ride to Home’s moon. You infect one server, you infect them all. Boom (Thompson, *Redemption*, 325-326)

And so they do, sending Kaaro's consciousness to carry the virus on the extraterrestrial servers light-years away, wiping them purely of existence and ending the threat of the invasion and annihilation of humankind. It is crucial to observe that this resolution of an alien invasion that takes the appearance of a cyberpunk invasion ends in the same manner in close relationship with the codes of the genre, indeed what would be more cyberpunk than an augmented human downloading through cyberspace a deadly virus?

In the cyberpunk logic of data traffic, the enemy itself is reduced to its manifestation in the cyberspace: "They are not really alive [...] They are not even ghosts. They are data, stored because of faulty philosophy, bodies long gone" (Thompson, *Redemption*, 326). What is more, the answer to this affirmation is opposed to the decision of annihilating the alien/data by showing humankind in the same perspective: "We are all data, Femi [...] You may be wet data in a moist medium, but you're data all the same. Like me. Like them" (Thompson, *Redemption*, 326). This interaction is crucial because more than claiming the solution to the alien invasion as belonging to the cyberpunk genre, it is a new reflection on the nature of the human that appears here, perfectly in tune with the cyberpunk conceptualization of the human body reduced to a product and the mind seen as data ("We are all data"), the two being interchangeable and modifiable. More than a simple tonality, the cyberpunk as expressed in *Rosewater* offers an answer to the question of humankind and its relationship with nonhuman figures as we saw them. The conceptualization of human and alien alike as data in the cyberspace that is the xenosphere is determining in the debate of the definition of humankind and its difference with the nonhuman figure of the alien, reducing them to a virtual concept, to transferable data and tragically, erasable data, as is the case with both the entirety of the alien race and Kaaro himself: "He activates the self-destruct sequences on the surviving servers, and Kaaro simply is no more" (Thompson, *Redemption*, 363). The cyberpunk conceptualization of the human as data modifies the paradigm of the very human existence, that is no longer understandable in progressive logic, from birth to death, but rather in an opposite logic of the existence and non-existence ("simply is no more"). Thus, the protagonist of the novel becomes the first individual of this fiction not to die as traditionally understood by the concept of human, instead he vanishes, he stops being, and the way Thompson formulates this end strips humankind of its usual end, destabilizing once more the very concept of humankind.

As we can see, the manifestation of the figure of the cyborgs allows us to put in perspective the concept of the human itself, particularly when it is put in tension with the opposite figure of the

android. In *Rosewater*, the paradigm of the cyborg is doubled: the human is enhanced not-only by the machine but also with alien organisms, leading to an ontological confusion regarding the boundaries between human and nonhuman. Like the alien, the machine acts as a nonhuman element giving a powerful posthuman impulse in this novel that keeps raising the question “what does it mean to be human”, a question that the multiplication of nonhuman figures brings to the core of the narrative but that the novel does not answer.

2.3. Kaaro or the fission of the self

Let us conclude our posthumanist analysis of the nonhuman figures linked with the tropes of the cyberpunk — having progressed from the cyborg to the android and the hybrid to reach the deconstruction in the cyberspace of the body that conceptualizes the human as a virtual data — to take a step back and focus not on the human species in its totality but by analyzing the protagonist, Kaaro, in detail. Heise analyzes the possibilities that the enhancement we observed previously bring on individuals and the self:

What the various modes of technological self-enhancement as well as the realm of virtuality offer is the possibility, even for a single individual, to live more than one life, assume more than one identity, and belong to various and contradictory communities. In typical post-modernist manner, this fracturing of community and self is not usually rejected as a “flaw” in the self (as Jameson interprets it, wrongly in my view) but celebrated as a transformation into a new mode of human existence. (Heise, *Posthuman*, 461)

On multiple occasions in *Rosewater*, Kaaro appears indeed as a fractured individual, on the verge of different worlds; for having stolen in his youth, he is exiled from his community and his family to the point that he refuses to use his father’s name, which is not only an individual but also community connection, marking this “fracturing of community” observed by Heise. But what is probably the most powerful symbol of Kaaro’s fractures is his condition of “sensitive”, especially in the moments where he involuntarily oscillates, even from the beginning of the novel, between the physical world and the xenosphere: “I have a brief involuntary connection to the xenosphere” (Thompson, *Rosewater*, 7), “I am in the xenosphere-asleep and in the xenosphere” (Thompson, *Rosewater*, 23) or again “the colours swirl and shift and it is hard to tell which is reality and which is xenosphere (Thompson, *Rosewater*, 126). Maybe this belonging to “contradictory communities” and this “fission of the self”, in Heise’s terms, is best exemplified by Thompson that presents a Kaaro in total loss of bearings and identity during an incursion in the xenosphere: “Am I Ace of Chuck? Ego integrity check. [...] They we are meant to stay within our cities [...] They throw you us we out of portal seven [...] I come back to myself” (Thompson,

Rosewater, 373-374). In this extract, we observe a total confusion in the pronouns used by Kaaro, showing a profound fracture of his identity, or identities, that he can no longer reconcile. This rupture of the self is crucial because, as announced by Heise, it re-conceptualizes the human, whose condition evolves to end in a “new mode of human existence”. This observation serves our posthumanist analysis of *Rosewater*, that introduces through the xenosphere the rupture of the human as an individual entity, that is no longer to be considered as unified but quite the opposite fractured, which Kaaro embodies perfectly on many levels.

It seems obvious that this concept of fracture of the self is especially dear to Tade Thompson, a trained psychiatrist, and his creation of the xenosphere is a fecund field for the experimentation and exploration of this rupture, that he qualifies as inherently human: “What’s relevant is when I look into someone I see these shifting selves as blurred boundaries of the mental image” (Thompson, *Rosewater*, 127). The xenosphere is a powerful and meaningful narrative device, a cyberspace that illustrates the “possibility [...] [to] assume more than one identity” in the fact that Kaaro³ assumes another form that Thompson qualifies, as Heise, of an avatar: “my avatar’s a gryphon. It isn’t cuddly. Both the eagle and the lion part are pretty predatory. They like to kill and eat things. I absorb the avatar into myself and « digest » it” (Thompson, *Rosewater*, 310). As announced by Heise in the above citation, the multiplication of the human consciousness in the cyberpunk allows “for a single individual to live more than one life”, and that is precisely what Kaaro does, dating Aminat in the real world while at the same time, his avatar is seeing another avatar in the xenosphere. This division is not anecdotal, and Kaaro reflects on his double life: “Is what I do with Molar cheating? Does being in a relationship mean she owns my mind as well as the fidelity of my body?” (Thompson, *Rosewater*, 244). This discourse illustrates the cyberpunk fracture of the human perfectly, the concept of cyberspace changes this paradigm in the human, by dividing not only Kaaro’s body but also but duplicating, through the distinction between Kaaro’s personality and the one of his gryphon avatar, his very spirit. What is more is that the xenosphere allows showing narratively this fracture of the human. This virtual space allows Thompson to explore the human psyche and what is important in our posthumanist analysis, the fracture of the human, which deconstructs the human species, becomes another species entirely, characterized by this fracture, a “new mode of existence” (Heise, *Posthuman*, 461) that goes beyond the concept of human as we understand it.

³ We will not analyze here the xenosphere from a psychoanalytic perspective, that would be the subject for another paper that would certainly reveal to be fecund

3. Animal, example to follow

We will neglect a bit *Rosewater* to analyze the manifestations of the third nonhuman figures as identified by Heise, the animal, that we will mostly encounter in *Lagoon*. We saw it in the first chapter, Okorafor's novel focuses extensively on environmental issues that are at the core of her fiction, and that is precisely in this context of ecological awareness that Heise identifies the rise of the animal question: "Environmental crises, including the current rapid loss of animal and plant species around the world, have attracted increased attention to questions of species extinction and survival" (Heise, *Posthuman*, 462).

3.1. Lagoon's swordfish, defender of the environment

It is important to notice that from the beginning of the novel, Okorafor shows the destructive impact of humankind on the natural and animal environment, the novel opening on a swordfish attempting to slay an oil tanker that "made the world bleed black ooze that left poison rainbows on the water's surface [...] inhaling them stings and burns her gills" (Okorafor, 3). From the start, the reader encounters an environmental disaster that leads to the death of many animals, to the point of making the swordfish astonished that some survived: "so some small ones *have* survived" (Okorafor, 4). We had the opportunity in the first chapter to analyze extensively the importance of this thematic in Okorafor's work that is linked to the climate fiction in an afrofuturistic perspective, but this extract is interesting in this chapter regarding the impact of nonhuman figures on the human because Okorafor observes this disaster not from a human perspective but from an animal one, to the point of making the swordfish the first point of focus of her novel, the first voice that immediately expresses a discontentment: "She is angry. She will succeed and then they will leave for good" (Okorafor, 3). The fact that the swordfish's thoughts are only expressed in the third person contributes to the distance between this message and the attitude of humankind. From this first chapter, the contrast is clearly established between the destructive human and the environment-saving animal, and this choice of a nonhuman figure as the focus confirms the afrofuturist message in *Lagoon*.

As we saw previously, it is only under the alien influence that the crisis, including the environmental one, ends in the novel with a positive closure, the people of Lagos (symbolized by the president of Nigeria), having received a part of the alien Ayodele, is being transformed and

becomes able to act for a complete restoration of the city and the country. However, it is interesting to observe that at the beginning of the novel, no exterior impulse is required to the swordfish to oppose the deterioration of the environment, the animal acting not under an obligation but by conviction: “no one can do anything about them. Except her. She’s done it before and they stopped for many moons. They went away. She is doing it again” (Okorafor, 3). This opposition creates an interesting contrast between humans and animal on the level of the ecological consciousness, that appears to be innate in the animal on the contrary of the human, who in this novel requires to reach the next stage in its evolution as a species that can be therefore qualified as posthumanist, in order to act against the catastrophe he is himself creating. Okorafor’s fiction presents the animal to show a contrast that reinforces the notion the humankind, in its actual stage of evolution, does not have an awareness sufficient to preserve its environment, and the fact that the reaction only occurs after this posthumanist leap is indicative of the critique that the author formulates about the contemporary management of the environmental crisis. In other words, the nonhuman figure of the animal is mobilized not to highlight but quite the opposite to devalue on a moral scale the concept of human as presented at the beginning of the novel and that unfortunately echoes our current situation regarding climate change. Contrarily to the nonhuman figures previously observed, the swordfish acts in a critical way towards humankind, at the same time it highlights the necessity of the evolutionary leap of the human species and its progression from its actual state towards a new one, considered posthuman in this novel, that would render possible a positive ecological reaction.

The animal is therefore considered ahead of humankind regarding the environment. But what would happen if the animal was itself the subject of an evolutionary leap? Okorafor explores this possibility in *Lagoon*, where the aliens enhance not only humans but also animals, notably the swordfish that is being offered a transformation by the extraterrestrials:

She’s always loved her smooth, grey-blue skin but now it’s impenetrable [...] Her sword-like spear is longer and so sharp at the tip that it sings. They made her eyes like the blackest stone and she can see deep into the ocean and high into the sky. And when she wants to, she can make spikes of cartilage jut out along her spine as if she is some ancestral creature from the deepest ocean caves of old. The last thing she requests is to be three times her size and twice her weight. They make it so. Now she is no longer a great swordfish. She is a monster (Okorafor, 6)

This extract explicates the ontological change that the animal undergoes, “she is no longer a great swordfish”. Just as the humans, the aliens modify the animal species to the point of rendering the term “animal” obsolete and make way for something else (“She is a monster”), that allows us to qualify Okorafor’s approach not only as posthumanist (in the science fictional sense of going further than human) but also in terms of post-animalism. Let us also notice that the transformation

of the swordfish isn't decreed upon it, contrary to the humans, but it is the animal which requested it ("the last thing she requests"). Subtly, this extract implies that humans are not ready to spontaneously change their attitude regarding environmental issues, the motivation behind the change is not theirs. By contrast, the fact that the fish can formulate this choice, associated with the fact that it acts spontaneously in favor of the environment, establishes once more the superiority of the animal, even not altered by the aliens, over the human, that suffers the posthumanist leap rather than chooses it. The manifestation of the fish reinforces not only the critique of humankind's actions but it also highlights the necessity of its change for the next, posthuman, stage of its evolution.

The match between the animal and the ecologically aware attitude that we just saw thus echoes the climate fiction categorization of the novel, one of the manifestations of postcrisis fiction we identified in the first chapter as determining in Afrofuturist fictions. The Afrofuturist perspective brings us another element useful to understand the usage that Okorafor does of the nonhuman figure of the swordfish, still related to its relationship with its environment but this time in a more local perspective. Let us observe which relationship Okorafor develops between the fish and its immediate surroundings, the bay of Lagos: "She is the largest predator in these waters. *Her* waters. Even when she migrates, this particular place remains hers. Everyone knows it. She was not born here but after all her migrations, she is happiest here. She suspects that this is the birthplace of one of those who created her" (Okorafor, 3). In our research of Afrofuturist manifestations in the novel that previously occupied us, the animal manifests itself in a postcolonial attitude in its relationship with its environment, a perspective that shows in the position of this chapter in the novel, exactly following the incipit that denounces the Portuguese colon's attitude of the bay of Lagos. This proximity with the incipit seems to authorize us to analyze this extract in a postcolonial perspective: the swordfish is not native to the bay in which he established his home but it still claims it as its own ("this particular place remains hers. Everyone knows it"), to the detriment of the local and indigenous population ("She is the largest predator in these waters").

By analyzing this extract as a colonial metaphor, the protective attitude of the swordfish towards the deterioration of its environment only deepens the difference between human and animal that we just saw. The colonial past of Nigeria is frequently criticized as the source of the actual situation of Nigeria and its defective economical model, relying on oil and therefore opposed to an ecological attitude ("the waters are all dirty and dead because of the oil companies" [Okorafor,

68]). Therefore, the reaction of the swordfish appears as postcolonial because the fish is shown as foreign to the water he chose to inhabit, but this occupation is different from the attitude of the humans precisely for its protective attitude regarding the environment: “no one can do anything about [the ones who bring the pollution]. Except her. [...] She’s done it before [...] She is doing it again” (Okorafor, 10). By manifesting a form of colonialism that doesn’t act to the expense of the ecosystems but quite the opposite to its preservation, Okorafor pursues her postcolonial denunciation that she started in the incipit of her novel (“Apparently, [the Portuguese] could not come up with a more creative name. Nor did they think to ask one of the natives for suggestions” [Okorafor, ix]). The swordfish can be seen as a different kind of colonial figure, one that establishes a symbiotic relationship with its new environment, that it is ready to protect, unlike humans that exploit and damage it. Once more, the nonhuman figure of the swordfish contributes to the divergence between human and animal, a divergence that manifests to the expense of the depiction of humankind.

Thus, the first nonhuman figure encountered in *Lagoon* actively contributes to the conceptualization of human as a species and allows Okorafor to highlight its defects by bringing to light not only the disasters of the environmental management but also the negative consequences of colonialism. The animal acts as an example and nonhuman model that Okorafor gives as a guideline for humanity to follow, in the double perspective of post-climate and post-colonial struggles that are characteristics of the afrofuturist esthetic the author develops in *Lagoon*.

3.2. Pets and androids in *Rosewater*

In this sub-chapter, we will continue to analyze the nonhuman figures as identified by Ursula Heise in “The Posthuman Turn” but we will see how another of her paper, “The Android and The Animal” helps to better understand the animal representation in *Rosewater*.

The figure of the animal is far less represented in *Rosewater* than the android we previously encountered. Besides the perfect hybrid of the cyber-hawk drones we discussed earlier, there is one relevant feature that articulates the two figures of the android and the animal according to the concept of pet. In *Rosewater*, Kaaro is occasionally encountered accompanied in the street by a stray dog, that he named Yaro, that seems to have elected him as his owner to the point of defending Kaaro against a pack of wild dogs, a confrontation that left Yaro wounded. However, Kaaro does

not seem to be affected by the dog's wound, even when he is informed of the gravity of its condition ("Ahmed says something about the dog being dead in a week" [Thompson, *Rosewater*, 204]), and he leaves the dog to its fate. Later on, the stray condition worsens, but Kaaro's attitude remains unchanged: "He catches my scent and follows for a few steps, but I am busy and he is held back by his wound, which is teeming with maggots. I have no food to give him so I speed up" (Thompson, *Rosewater*, 278). Kaaro's reaction is surprising and may seem inhuman, but it would be without taking into account the development and the transition that occurs shortly before the novel's end. When Kaaro still ignores the dog, he is unaware of the alien invasion that is happening silently, and it is only at the end of the novel, after he decided to save humanity of its rash fate by the extraterrestrials, that his attitude towards to dog changes for the better: "I'll come back for him shortly [...] I'll get him fixed up with a vet" (Thompson, *Rosewater*; 380).

This change of attitude regarding a dog may seem trivial, that is why another article by Ursula Heise, "The Android and the Animal", brings to light an interesting perspective that helps us understand this relationship between Kaaro and the dog in our research of the redefinition of humankind under nonhuman figures. In her article, Heise analyzes two figures of androids or robots that are accompanied by a pet, and she reaches the conclusion that "technologically enhanced human's ability to bond with the animal serves as a touchstone of humanity." (Heise, *The Android*, 509). Thus, the evolution in Kaaro's attitude — keeping in mind that we analyzed the protagonist as a technologically and extraterrestrially enhanced human comparable in *Rosewater* to the figure of the cyborg — is revealing of his humanity. After he decided to defend humankind against the alien menace, it is particularly symbolic to notice that Kaaro defends its very own humanity, as analyzed by Heise, by sheltering a wounded animal. The fact that this change occurs after the awareness of the alien threat shows an evolution in Kaaro, a disillusioned antihero close to the stereotypical figure of the hard-boiled detective from the Noir genre, that discovers his own will to defend his species from annihilation, and his newly found humanity is symbolized by the attitude he shows towards the nonhuman and fragile figure of the animal, that acts, as noted by Heise, as a "touchstone of humanity". This theory seems to be confirmed at the very end of the trilogy, when Kaaro is about to destroy the alien race through his sacrifice, when his last thoughts are guided towards his dog: "He should concentrate, but any time he tries, his thoughts disintegrate. He had a dog called Yaro and hopes it will be looked after. Can't think of Aminat. Won't" (Thompson, *Redemption*, 362). While he has reached the end of his existence and that his thoughts are vanishing, the resurgence of Yaro in his mind can be seen as the salvation of humanity: the

disillusioned individual that despised a stray dog that defended him and considered him his own just gave his life to save humankind, and his last thought meant for his dog lets itself seen as the final claim of his newly found humanity, that Yaro symbolizes.

3.3. Who Fears Death: animal and African fugitivity

Apart from the strictly nonhuman figure of the swordfish, *Lagoon* stages different animal figures through the process of metamorphosis. Although it is not technically speaking animals or nonhuman figures, several characters in the novel experience a transformation towards a hybrid shape or an animal metamorphosis. This evolution towards an animal, a figure of otherness, allows the development of a reflection about humankind. We will see how one of those metamorphosis acts in *Lagoon* as a disruptive element of the concept of humanity and its spiritual dimension: the transformation of Ayodele abandoning her human body for the one of a monkey. We will consider the work of Joshua Bennett on “black experiences” as it provides a capital insight to understand the dichotomy between humans and animals in Okorafor’s work.

To better understand this motive in *Lagoon*, let us do a brief expansion of our research corpus to consider an important motif in Okorafor’s esthetic, probably best exemplified in her most renowned novel, *Who Fears Death*. This novel depicts a post-apocalyptic world where civilization has been rebuild in towns and villages isolated from each other in an arid and hostile environment. The protagonist, Onyesonwu, was born in the desert where she grew up but she sees herself obligated to leave it to follow her mother in a small town where they hope to thrive. Onyesonwu, born of the rape of her mother by a member of a rival tribe and therefore having the typical skin tone and hair color of the people of her background, incarnates in every way the ambivalence between the civilized world she cannot make her own on account of her skin color and the desert she cannot leave, only place where she feels safe.

Okorafor deals in depth with the dichotomy not only between the village and the desert but also between Onyesonwu and the civilization by giving her heroine the power to shape-shift and take the form of a vulture, a shape that she dons to flee from her condition and to go back to the desert of her origins: “as a vulture, the world was open to me” (Okorafor, *Who Fears Death*, 69). But more than a simple physical transformation and the possibility to escape to a saving nature, the metamorphosis comes with a change in the thoughts of the protagonist that allows Okorafor to

explore the difference between human and animal: “To remain a vulture for too long always left me feeling detached from what I could only define as being a human” (Okorafor, *Who Fears Death*, 87). This attitude of escapism is interesting to analyze in the light of the theoretical essay by Joshua Bennett, *Being Property Once Myself*. In this book, Bennett analyzes how different qualification associated with animals have been used to refer to African or African-American people, or “black experiences”, but he takes the opposite stance of the xenophobic discourse by observing how the comparison of African experiences and animal is not an insult but can be seen as a glorification. In the chapter *Rat*, Bennett observes how certain writers of African origins use the figure of the vermin and distort it of its traditional negative overtone and link it with black experiences, experiences marked by a constant struggle for survival and a life that must be resourceful, a “fugitive” life that characterizes the African lives. It is precisely this fugitivity that lies at the core of the novel *Who Fears Death*, Okorafor describing a heroine that can not blend with her world, always perceived as a vermin and whose condition that results from her skin tone makes her a social outcast: “People believe the Ewu-born eventually become violent” (Okorafor, *Who Fears Death*, 38), for whom the only alternative to a life of disdain seems to be the escape. In this paradigm, the human blends into a new form of life, a life under the sign of the escape in a situation where a positive end is inconceivable, escape that is symbolized by the figure of the animal, both in Bennet’s essay and Okorafor’s novel. The rat becomes a symbol of resilience: even though it is constantly hunted, this animal is resourceful and never abandons. In this positive conception of the figure of the rat, the comparison with the human inverts the paradigm of the pest and shines a new light on the condition of the people that were rejected by society. This resilience could be a new sign of afrofuturism: people of African origins, that have suffered the pejorative comparison with the animal (according to Bennett), invert the paradigm, and their resilience could be a new reason for the African continent, its people and its diaspora to be at the front row of global governance for the resolution of a crisis they have been dealing with for the longest time.

This analysis allows us to come back to *Lagoon* and to interpret the transformation of Ayodele. After having spent the day in a human body and having witnessed several scenes of violence, Ayodele, although previously admiring of the complexity and diversity of humankind (“In less than twenty-four hours, I have seen love, hate, greed, ambition and obsession amongst you [...] This is life. We love life” [Okorafor, 112]), witnesses a new burst of violence that makes her turn her back not only on the humans, refusing to speak to them from then on, but most of all on humanity, abandoning her human appearance for the body of a monkey: “Ayodele had changed

herself into this creature an hour ago because she'd decided that she no longer wanted to be a human being" (Okorafor, 152). Considering the thesis defended by Joshua Bennett, we can observe that Okorafor mobilizes a nonhuman appearance in order to make clear the moral devaluation of humankind of which Ayodele's behavior, abandoning the human form for an animal one, is just an indicator. After having placed her hope in the human ("This is life. We love life"), the deception is crystal clear and manifests itself in the refusal of the human body in favor of an animal one. In the same perspective as the swordfish in the opening chapter of the novel, the animal is here seen as a moral alternative that brings a contrast with the destructive human. It is extremely significant to see Okorafor establish a sort of moral axis in her fiction, an axis on which the animal is located more morally than human. Just as Onyesonwu needs to take her distance from civilization and an oppressing and violent world, Ayodele flees her human body to the benefit of an animal one, associated in both novels with a natural and moral renewal, qualities from which the human has strayed too much in Okorafor's novels.

This fugitivity we see in Okorafor's novels can be interpreted in the same way that is suggested by Joshua Bennett analysis in relationship with black experiences, and it is significant to see in both *Lagoon* and *Who Fears Death* that Okorafor assimilates this escapism from the human condition with the figure of the animal, that in Okorafor as well as Bennett is not devalued but on the contrary celebrated as an escape from a violent life, inherent, as Bennett theorizes, to the African condition but that Okorafor shows as inherent to humankind. Therefore, the two writers agreed regarding the inversion of the classical paradigm between human and animal: whereas Bennett chooses traditionally negative animal figure such as the vermin to celebrate the African experience, Okorafor celebrates the animal figure that is opposed to the moral degradation of humankind. Ayodele's transformation acts, just like the swordfish message, like a mirror that reflects humanity's mistakes, and the animal seems to be the guideline chosen by Bennett and Okorafor to help raise humanity.

Chapter 3: African folklore and the treatments of an original material

As we could glimpse on several occasions in the previous chapters of this analysis, we encountered many elements particularly original that manifests in both Okorafor's and Thompson's novels and that completely differ from traditional science fiction tropes from their integration in the African cultures of the authors' origins: the different manifestations of features from African folklores and mythologies. The presence of those different elements in both *Lagoon* and *Rosewater* constitutes one of the main reasons for the comparative analysis of this corpus of study. It is suitable now to see in detail how the authors mobilize and exploit those African folkloric elements in their own personal esthetic. To do so, I will analyze the texts separately to render explicit the distinct use of the folkloric features. Then, we will take a step back from our observations in the novels to analyze those elements in a broader perspective to formulate an interesting comparison between the two author's use of a common material.

1. *Lagoon*: updating and enrichment of folklore

Upon reading *Lagoon*, it is surprising to observe to which extent Okorafor mobilizes or references several figures from the Igbo culture that she originates from, with the three main protagonists of the novel. *Lagoon* starts as three individuals end up at the same time in the bay of Bar Beach where they are abducted by a mysterious force that drags them underwater. The three characters appear to be unrelated and fundamentally different: Adaora the marine biologist, Agu the fleeing soldier and Anthony the famous Ghanaian rapper. But as the novel progresses, it appears that these individuals are manifesting strange abilities and that these abilities predated the alien invasion: Agu discovered he had superhuman strength during his childhood while trying to protect another child, an attitude that would lead him to become a soldier to protect others (“When the boy finally stirred, Agu had decided [...] that he would become a soldier to protect the innocent” [Okorafor, 174]); Anthony, whose musical destiny comes from his gift to master what he refers to as “the rhythm”, a kind of energy that allows him to affect people, but that he can also physically manifest (“that which was building up within him, humming to the rhythm of the earth, burst. His uncles, aunts, cousins were all blown back [Okorafor, 164]); and finally Adaora, who “was born with webbed feet and hands [...] and my legs were joined together by flesh” (Okorafor, 257) and whose unexplainable attraction for water led her to become a marine biologist (“from the moment that my mother first took me to the ocean, I could swim. No one ever taught me. I

was...like a fish [Okorafor, 257]). Moreover, her affinity with water allows us to transform during the novel in a part-woman part-fish⁴ hybrid: “Her legs were no longer legs. This part of her body had become the body of a giant metallic blue fish” (Okorafor, 251). As the novel is wildly influenced by the science fiction genre, a typical science fiction trope could explain that phenomenon, as the powers of the protagonists resemble typical super-hero abilities. However, Okorafor chooses to root the powers of her protagonists in African folklores, powers that are progressively assimilated to several African folkloric figures.

Indeed, Adaora’s water-themed abilities are the source of many references to her being a “Marine witch” (“her husband avoided what he now called her «witch’s den» [Okorafor, 21]), a water spirit of witchcraft associated with the figure of Mami Wata, “the goddess of all marine witches” (Okorafor, 235). Agu and his super-human strength are frequently associated with the totemic figure of the leopard, a symbol of strength and protection in Igbo culture: “his father [a wrestler] was nicknamed Agu, which means leopard [...] Now it looked like more than just his father’s name had been passed to him” (Okorafor, 174). Finally, Anthony’s rhythm and his ability to affect the people that listen to him are clearly linked to the pan-African divinity of the story-weaving spider we have already encountered and that recognizes Anthony: “I know the one who wove [Anthony’s] rhythm. Anansi is my cousin. Anthony has always been within my reach” (Okorafor, 292). As we see, these characters have superhuman abilities that would, in a typical science fiction manner, be explained by a science fictional trope (such as the alien), which would be perfectly suited to the plot of the novel. However, Okorafor chooses for the origins of these supernatural elements not a technological or alien source but rather the more original Nigerian folklore. This originality is notably visible in the fact that the extraordinary abilities of the protagonists are thematically associated with animals (fish, leopard, spider), which links the supernatural with the science fiction features of the novel but rather with the animistic and totemic tradition of Nigerian culture, deeply rooted in natural and animal elements.

Let us open here a parenthesis to note that the character Agu, with his superhuman strength derived from the totemic figure of the leopard, resembles the character T’Challa and his alter ego Black Panther, king of the fictional African nation of Wakanda and hero with superhuman strength and dexterity from the Marvel comic books universe, that recently gained more popularity with the

⁴ Which is not without echoing our analysis in the second chapter of the animal figure in a posthuman perspective.

acclaimed movie adaptation by Ryan Coogler (*Black Panther*, 2018). This Black Panther phenomenon led to a wave of endorsement from the African American community. Okorafor having recently written a comic book centered on the character Shuri, the sister of the hero Black Panther, it seems relevant to keep in mind the influence of this heroic figure on *Lagoon*. Agu and T'Challa show some similarities, and the totemic figure of the big cat as the source of their supernatural abilities is certainly the most noteworthy. More than a mere resemblance between the two characters, it is interesting in the perspectives of our analysis to note the large amount of attention that the figure of the Black Panther has received in afrofuturist studies: the character has been analyzed as the first great afrofuturist hero, seeing that he is the king of an African nation that hides from the world stage but is technologically advanced and is ultimately ready to join the other great political powers in the world governance. The recent interest in the character of the Black Panther asks for developments that move beyond the scope of this research, but the proximity between Agu and the new afrofuturist flag bearer that the Black Panther has become contributes to the afrofuturist message of Okorafor's novel.

Other than the three protagonists of *Lagoon*, Okorafor presents other figures from Nigerian folklore that manifest at the same time as the alien invasion. Indeed, during the riots, a protagonist encounters an old man he identifies as the incarnation of a divinity: "Boy, did I have a story to tell my mother. Legba, the god of the crossroads was alive and well in the country of his origin" (Okorafor, 214). In the same manner, someone in the riots runs into what he first identifies as a masquerade ceremony, an individual wearing a costume to celebrate spiritual entities, but this masquerade appears to be more than a costume but the apparition of the god Ijele: "This was not some guys dressed up in an elaborate costume [...] this was the *real thing* [...] Holy shit, this was Ijele. The chief of all Masquerades, Igbo royalty" (Okorafor, 199). The third figure is Udide, the story-weaving great spider deity, that Okorafor highlights by making him the narrator of the novel: "I am Udide, the narrator, the story weaver, the Great Spider" (Okorafor, 228). Even though she is not the first writer to develop such an original and less common material in a work of fiction — considering for instance Neil Gaiman's novel *Anansi Boys* (2005) that uses the same figure of the great African spider — we see that Okorafor mobilizes a variety of figures that deeply root her fiction, contemporary and even futuristic with the apparition of the alien, in a tradition that is typically Nigerian. For instance, the spider figure of Udide is the Igbo "version" of the pan-African spider deity, and Okorafor insists on this distinction between African and Nigerian, explicitly differentiating Udide from the broader figure of Anansi, the same spider in different African

traditions (“Anansi is my cousin”). In the same manner, Ijele is not only “the chief of all Masquerades” but also “Igbo royalty”, Okorafor claiming once more not only her own Igbo origins but the specificity of Nigeria⁵. Contrary to other authors that develop such figures as an original material for their fictions, Okorafor draws on her folkloric background to deeply root her fiction in the Nigerian culture. This manifests in *Lagoon* with the fact that those three figures (Ijele, Legba and Udide) are not the center of the fiction, they are mostly onlookers in the story, briefly appearing on a few occasions to vanish immediately in the agitation of the city of Lagos, of which Udide is even said to be the incarnation. Therefore, even if they constitute an oddity to the reader, Okorafor only uses them as background elements, anchoring more deeply her fiction in the Nigerian culture, not only realistic but also folkloric.

But it is most remarkable to observe that the author not only mobilizes existing mythological figures, she also attempts to modernize them, by updating the context of their apparition. Thus, the figure of Legba, trickster god of communication, is doubled: apart from his apparition in person during the riot, Legba also appears in a way that is adapted to the contemporary Nigerian context, through the character of the 419 scammer we already encountered: “My code name was «Legba». It was perfect because Legba is the Yoruba trickster god of language, communication and the crossroads” (Okorafor, 195). Here, the scammer identifies himself as a contemporary version of the folkloric figure that is Legba, as if the modern incarnation of a Nigerian trickster spirit could only be a Nigerian scammer. The young man continues the analogy with the “god of language [and] communication”: “my passion was acting. I could imitate anything. Any voice [...] And not only could I impersonate anything in voice, I could do it in writing, too. So, that’s what I was doing in that cyber café [...] I was up to no fucking good” (Okorafor, 195). The logical conclusion that we see in this extract, the clear link of cause and consequence (being able to imitate and scamming people online) contributes to the understanding that in a contemporary world, this is how a trickster god would act. Another element that is interesting when studying the contemporary adaptation of these traditional elements is the fact that they express themselves, just as the protagonists, in pidgin English: Udide declaring “Na good good story. I go continue to listen, o” (Okorafor, 229). This linguistic choice shows clearly the will to present traditional elements in a contemporary context, and Okorafor offers a modern take on the different figures — Ijele, Legba and Udide — that she actualizes to make them correspond to the context of her novel and the Nigerian specificity we observed above.

⁵ the Igbo being an ethnic group originating only from Nigeria

The last folkloric figure that we will discuss in *Lagoon* differs from the others because it is a creation of the author. As many citizens are fleeing the riots in Lagos by taking the Lagos-Benin Expressway, a strange phenomenon occurs: “the road began shaking like a snake fighting a feisty rat [...] Not far from where the accident took place last year, the road was undulating [...] The road was rising up in a huge snake-like slab of concrete, the faded yellow stripes still in view” (Okorafor, 207). This “Bone Collector”, as it is called by the witnesses, is presented as the supernatural incarnation of the dangers of this expressway — where a lot of accidents and robberies occur in the real Nigeria — and becomes a mythological figure, to the same level as the previous three. Let us observe what one of the witnesses has to say in the novel: “I am not a Christian or a Muslim, or maybe I am both. But I also believe in the mysteries we can never understand, especially in my country. This thing was one of them” (Okorafor, 207). This excerpt is crucial in that it allows us to understand Okorafor’s attitude and the purpose of this creature in the novel. By associating this monster with the “mysteries we can never understand”, Okorafor contributes to the enrichment of the Nigerian folklore, and introduces amongst the existing pantheon a new mythological figure that allows to comprehend a new reality of society. This process comes within the scope of the ancient tradition that goes back to the origins of legends and myths of humankind: the storyteller of yore formulates a fiction that helps people to understand complex concepts, such as the seasons or the weather. In this novel, Okorafor acts in the same way as a contemporary storyteller, by allowing readers to conceptualize the danger that the dreadful Lagos-Benin Expressway represents for the people of Nigeria (“the deathtrap known as the Lagos-Benin Expressway [...] that highway is full of ghosts” [Okorafor, 189]) with a tangible form and even an identity. This treatment of the Expressway contributes to both the mythic reading of modern Nigeria and the identification by Okorafor of an important issue that needs to be dealt with. Just as she did with the environmental crisis, Okorafor brings the attention an important issues and, through the mythical process, makes those issues fathomable to the reader, which is the first step towards a resolution of those issues.

Okorafor puts her invention on the same level as the other folkloric figures and deities, thus integrating her character of the Bone Collector in the Nigerian folklore. This occurs in the novel with the filiation between the monster and Udide the great spider, who declares “The Bone Collector will always be one of my favorite children. Ijele is my cousin” (Okorafor, 291). Okorafor integrates her creation in Nigerian folklore that Udide incarnates by himself (“Lagos. Nigeria. I know it all because I created it all” [Okorafor, 291]), and therefore enriches it. This observation

allows us to fully understand Okorafor's use of Nigerian folklore. Indeed, we see that she actualizes several mythological elements, updating them to the contemporary Nigerian context (as we saw with the association between Legba the scammer and the trickster god of the same name). But what is more is that Okorafor actively contributes to enrich this folklore, by formulating new ways to apprehend new realities of contemporary Nigeria.

2. *Rosewater*: remystification of folklore, alien and technology

At first sight, the African folklore is much less apparent in Tade Thompson's novels. Contrary to Okorafor, Thompson does not multiply supernatural figures in his trilogy and confines himself to the extraterrestrials as the only disruptive element to the eyes of the reader. But despite this focus, the mythological and folkloric elements are still present in this trilogy, but mostly in the minds of the characters: people strive to search in the Yoruba folklore an interpretation that would make sense of the events that are occurring. To illustrate this, let's look at what Kaaro says about ghosts: "Ghosts exist. I'm not saying that the spirits of the dead return to haunt the living. That's absurd. I am saying that the xenosphere contains some persistent patterns" (Thompson, *Rosewater*, 112). Two noteworthy elements are visible in this excerpt. The first is the emphasis on the judgment "That's absurd", that interrupts Kaaro's reflection and that seems to completely denigrate the traditional beliefs, preferring a more contemporary and technological explanation. Next, we see in this quote that Thompson mobilizes folkloric tropes that are not only Nigerian but universal that he demystifies and which he replaces with a justification that makes sense in his fiction suffused with science fictional and cyberpunk features. Thus, the theme of the ghost is extracted from African folklore and finds an actualization with the xenosphere, in a process that explains and rationalizes folkloric elements in terms appropriate to its science fictional narrative.

We will show how this demystifying treatment of folkloric figures contributes to Thompson's narrative, but we should first observe that the ghost is not an isolated element, and that Thompson applies this treatment to many other folkloric elements, such as the exorcism. Kaaro notes that an individual is "haunted" in the xenosphere by other people's avatars, and explains what he did to solve the problem: "«What did you do?» she asks. «A kind of exorcism»" (Thompson, *Rosewater*, 156). In the same way, the ritual of the exorcism is stripped of his religious context and finds a tangible explanation, no longer mystical but concrete, understandable as a consequence of the alien's creation of the xenosphere. The religious vocabulary remains, for it is still used by Kaaro

to explain his action. But there is a shift of the signification of the word to a non-religious, down-to-earth explanation. In the same way, Thompson mobilizes another folkloric element to rationalize it: the figure of the zombie, the undead that also happens to be a recurring theme in worldwide mythologies, also finds a justification through science fiction, as the xenofoms are reanimating corpses by giving them a semblance of life: “Seventeen dead, although the victims rose during that year’s Opening. They were... Destroyed two weeks later as they clearly were not themselves anymore” (Thompson, *Rosewater*, 12). Finally, we can observe that sensitive individuals such as Kaaro, who can access the xenosphere, are considered modern-day mediums, a term that once again links the folkloric element with science fiction: “Spiritualists, psychics, mediums, sensitives, clairvoyants, clairscientists, mystics, witches, necromancers, telepaths, empaths, shamans, aje, emere, iwin, occultists, diviners, psychomancers, mystics. These are some of the names you might have been called in the past” (Thompson, *Rosewater*, 74). This enumeration shows that Thompson not only demystifies then remystifies African folklore (“aje, emere, iwin”) but all the folkloric traditions in the world.

Therefore, Thompson uses different figures from folkloric traditions and formulates a justification in his fiction, almost exclusively linked with the existence of the extraterrestrials on Earth. But should we see in this choice a will to entirely demystify everything, where all the transcendental elements are brought down to the rational level by being explained by science fiction? Thompson seems to be willing to challenge the traditional and folkloric elements, but his process offers an alternative to these figures and a new form of transcendence: the aliens. Indeed, although Kaaro seems critical, as we saw, of the folkloric elements that he frequently associates with obscurantism (“Ghost [...] that’s absurd”), it is decisive to observe how Kaaro, presented as cynical, frequently reflects on aliens in religious and mystical terms. This perspective manifests itself in the novel as Kaaro declares “a part of me wonders if the gods are alien” (Thompson, *Rosewater*, 286-287). Thereafter, Kaaro meets the avatar of the alien Wormwood that he qualifies purely and simply in divine terms: “The god told me that back in ’55” (Thompson, *Rosewater*, 12) or even “I want to get inside the biodome. Is this praying? Am I praying to the space god? How did it come to this?” (Thompson, *Rosewater*, 139). There is no doubt left here concerning the assimilation of the alien to the divine.

Apart from the substitution of the folkloric tradition with the alien and their form of transcendence, another feature of the story is elevated to a superior and mystical status: technology.

Indeed, although more advanced technology is common in the future of *Rosewater*, Kaaro keeps being amazed by it and assimilates many technological elements to mysticism. For instance, a simple security camera is seen by Kaaro as extraordinary: “a security guard who sees us, even though we do not see him or his camera. This may as well be magic (Thompson, *Rosewater*, 6). And those assimilations between technology and magic are multiplied, concerning implants (“You zap yourself with your magic electrode and you don’t have apathy” [Thompson, *Rosewater*, 377]), a detail that allows us to clarify our observation in the last chapter concerning cyborgs, by adding the concept that an augmented human has, according to Kaaro, a part of magic inside him, which adds a mystical dimension to the transhumanism we observed. And in a world where technology is compared to magic, it seems logical to see that the ones who master it are themselves compared to magicians: “Bad Fish and his cohorts are post-hackers, survivalist entrepreneurs [...] He is the best of a group of blindingly intelligent tech wizards who ply their trade here, in the twilight” (Thompson, *Rosewater*, 194). Going even further than the typical cyberpunk paradigm, the hacker is elevated to a mystical status, and his designation as a wizard contributes to the development in *Rosewater* of a new form of mysticism, that is no longer anchored in the traditional folklore but that is open to new, technological realities.

Thus, *Rosewater* takes an interesting position regarding the treatment of African folklore. Contrary to Okorafor, who celebrates it by actualizing and enriching it from the contemporary context, Thompson chooses to deconstruct it by remystifying it, substituting a new form of transcendence with the figure of the extraterrestrials, which is seen in the novel as the source of all supernatural elements, even the ones originating from African folklore. Indeed, many folkloric features (ghosts, exorcisms, undead, ...) are shown in the fiction but they are devoid of the extraordinary quality and find an explanation in the presence of the aliens, as those elements are all a result of the appearance of alien organisms in the atmosphere. But then, we observe that the protagonist Kaaro associates the aliens with the divine, the fiction finding again a new form of transcendence. This new transcendence, which diverts from the traditional religious folklore, manifests itself in the mystical status that technology has acquired in the eyes of the protagonist.

3. Conclusion: animist materialism

In this third chapter, we could observe that the manifestations of folkloric elements in the two novels allow to bring a spiritual component to the novel. Whereas in the previous chapter, it

was seen that the authors put humankind on the same level as animals, technology and even the aliens, this third chapter highlighted that a spiritual dimension was also included in society of the same level as the nonhuman figures. Thus, the spiritual dimension finds in the two authors a concrete manifestation in the world, as folkloric elements that come to life (in Okorafor) or bestowed upon both technology of aliens (in Thompson). In both cases, the authors offer to think the society in a way that encompasses tangibly the spiritual components, which becomes an inherent part of society, to the same extent as the nonhuman figures previously analyzed. This mode of representation was analyzed by Harry Garuba (2003), who suggests the term “animist materialism” as a mode of conceptualization, “a representational strategy that involves giving the abstract or metaphysical a material realization” (Garuba, in Hugo, 53). As we see in *Rosewater*, the aliens are a material representation of a metaphysical concept, from their association with the divine. In the same manner, *Lagoon* offers manifestations of the folklore both spiritual and material, in the supernatural abilities of the protagonists as well as in the physical presence of divinities. Those are therefore tangible representations of abstract and mystical concepts that are shown in a society that can apprehend such concepts through this animistic conceptualization of the world.

Even though the two authors use different ways of dealing with the folkloric material, it is noteworthy to observe that they agree in this animist vision, as both offer a spiritual dimension on the same level as the nonhuman as we observed in the previous chapter. At the end of this analysis, we notice that society is no longer stratified or divided between human, animal, technology, alien and spiritual, but on the contrary that this new mode of representation (described as animist materialism) allows to show those different nonhuman elements on the same level and that both fictions integrate them into a new society.

Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to compare *Lagoon* and *Rosewater* to study their distinctive treatments of the same subject — an alien invasion set in Nigeria — in two important contemporary authors who have contributed to the rise of African-focused science fiction literature in recent years. The three fields of study that were selected — the genre categorization, the nonhuman figures and the African folkloric elements — turned out to be not only fecund points of entry in the novels, to apprehend the esthetic of the authors and the different perspectives common to their fictions, but also the starting point for the identification of the originality of the authors that I identified, an originality that deepens the perspectives of the three fields of research that each chapter of this analysis focused on.

In the first chapter of this analysis, we started from what appeared to be the obvious common point between the novels, the science fiction label⁶, which was decisive in the selection of the corpus for this study. The combination of the African perspective with the science fictional features in the novel allowed us to bring in the analysis the concept of afrofuturism, that better conceptualizes the intricacies of the novel. As an esthetic that aims to explore the future possibilities of the African continent and people of the African diaspora, afrofuturism was revealed to be a much more fecund categorization of our corpus that not only mobilizes science fictional tropes but that uses them to reflect in detail on the future possibilities of the African continent. Indeed, both Okorafor and Thompson underline in their novels the possibility for Nigeria, a country that keeps growing and developing, to be at the forefront of a near-future world, regarding issues as vast as climate change and societal revolution.

The works of Hugh O’Connell on contemporary African science fiction provided an important insight to understand that the narrative of the alien invasion distances itself from science fiction to the benefit of a postcolonial message that, as we observe, is manifested in the novels under the form of a narrative of a second contact. Indeed, the extraterrestrial invasion reflects in our corpus on the European colonization of Africa, and in remarkable postcolonial and afrofuturist manner, both Okorafor and Thompson use this metaphor of the African traumatic and apocalyptic past to show that the continent has the resources to be the one to deal with such an invasion and to

⁶ expressed by the critics, as is evident from the attribution of the Hugo and Arthur C. Clarke Awards, major distinctions in science fiction literature of English language.

assume greater significance in a worldwide governance. Africa's ability to deal with crises and the contemporary trend for African postcrisis novel allowed us to consider the subgenres of climate and post-capital fiction and their relevance in the analysis of our corpus. For their interest in dealing with environmental issues as well as in highlighting the need for a new economic model, both Okorafor's and Thompson's novels belong and contribute to these two subgenres — climate and post-capital fiction — and, in formulating the basis for a new guidance of the world, enrich the afrofuturist message with two practical concretizations of this esthetic. Finally, we saw that although both fictions deal with those issues, an interesting distinction between them is the attitude regarding the crisis encountered (incarnated by the aliens) and the possibility for a resolution: *Lagoon* offers a messianic salvation that leads to a utopian resolution of the crisis, while *Rosewater* chooses a more pessimistic approach, characterized by the perspective of loss that roots Thompson's fiction in a more pessimistic tradition regarding both the alien invasion and the anthropocene crisis, a crisis that humankind cannot, in both fictions, solve on their own and that requires an exterior intervention.

The focus of the second chapter was the central figure of the extraterrestrial. The alien figure was analyzed in its relationship with the human species, a relationship that lies at the heart of Okorafor's and Thompson's narratives. Following Ursula Heise's article "The Posthuman Turn", I demonstrated how the novels mobilize the figure of the alien as a catalyst for a unification of humankind against a common threat. We saw how the figure of the alien contributes to an important posthuman leap, altering humankind to a point where the novel no longer focuses primarily on the alien question but on the human one, interrogating the very nature of the species and asking what it means to be human, in two fictions where the extraterrestrial modifies both the body and the mind of the people, pushing humans towards the next step of their evolution. Then, I expanded Heise's argument by showing how both novels offer a new function to the alien figure in narratives of early contact: the abrogation of the difference between human and alien, that leads to a thriving inter-species relationship.

To further explore the paradigm of posthumanism in this corpus, I highlighted that the two other nonhuman figures analyzed by Heise — the cyborg and the animal — were also decisive in the novels of our corpus in their relationship with the human. The cyborg was crucial to Thompson's trilogy, as the novels draw extensively from the cyberpunk genre and its tropes, especially in the technological modification of the human body. Those enhancements are at the core

of *Rosewater* not only for the fact that implants are a common feature of this futuristic world, but more importantly because the originality of Thompson's alien invasion is that it differs from the traditional, military invasion of Earth. Instead, the alien cells are progressively replacing human ones, which leads to the debate regarding the nature of the human species when the body is "corrupted" with parts that are both technological and alien. The reverse figure of the cyborg, the android, is another interesting fictional device to further interrogate the very nature of humanity, as *Rosewater* follows the literary tradition of presenting robots so similar to humans that the difference between the two is blurred and leads to interesting posthuman reflections. We later analyzed how Thompson's interpretation of cyberspace in *Rosewater* — the xenosphere — contributes to this debate by showing a virtual space where people can live parallel lives with different identities (avatars), where the body is deconstructed and the mind is multiplied, and both aliens and humans are reduced to mere data. In this cyberspace as in the physical world, the protagonist Kaaro embodies the fracture of the self, important to the cyberpunk esthetic and that Thompson highlights in the reflection of the nature of the human species.

As technology is more important to *Rosewater*, biology is more central in *Lagoon*. Therefore, we analyzed in Okorafor's novel the last nonhuman figure of the animal. It was shown how Okorafor places the animals as the opposite of the humans, especially regarding environmental issues, by emphasizing the moral superiority of different animal figures (such as a swordfish and a monkey) over humankind's destructive attitude towards their environment. Those animal figures were also a narrative device at the service of a postcolonial message in the novel, that emphasizes the Europeans' ruthless exploitation of the African continent in contrast with the animal's attitude regarding an environment that it colonizes but respects and protects against harm, unlike humans. In *Rosewater*, the animal is less influential than it is in *Lagoon* but the presence of a pet (in the form of the stray dog Yaro) also contributes to the posthuman analysis as it constitutes an indicative marker of the "humanity" of the protagonist Kaaro, whose relationship with the dog reflects the shift in his attitude towards his fellow humans, that changes from insensitivity to a will to protect them. Thus, the attitude towards the animal acts as a moral marker of human behavior.

We concluded the analysis of the animal by considering another novel by Okorafor, *Who Fears Death*, for it contributes to the study of the relationship between animals and humans with the ability of its protagonist to turn into a vulture to escape an uninviting urban and human life. The argument of Joshua Bennett helped us consider the manifestations of animal figures in both *Who*

Fears Death and *Lagoon* as representative of a fugitive form of life, associated with “black experiences”, a concept that linked the figure of the nonhuman with the afrofuturist esthetic where the comparison of humans with animal figures is no longer used to disparage certain people as subhuman but rather to celebrate their tenacity.

The third and last chapter of our analysis focused on a key element for the selection of the corpus: the African setting and the mobilization of African folkloric elements in the fictions. We saw that from this same, original material, the two authors offer different interpretations and stances. Okorafor celebrates this material by drawing heavily from it and even enriching it, adapting the traditional folklore to the contemporary Nigerian context, notably with the inspiration behind the characters’ supernatural abilities but most explicitly with the concrete apparition of divinities in *Lagoon*. On the contrary, Thompson demystifies the same folkloric tradition with science fictional justifications, and remystifies his fiction with the new transcendencies that are bestowed upon both the aliens, regarded as gods, and technology, considered magical.

As was announced in the introduction of this thesis, science fiction as an entry point to these novels allowed us to considerably broaden the reach of our analysis, by considering the African background of *Lagoon* and *Rosewater* as a source of reflection that goes beyond science fiction, with the introduction of concepts such as afrofuturism, the analysis of nonhuman figures in their relationship with human as a species, and the use of a traditional African material common to the authors. Indeed, the African background, interest and focus of the two authors is key to understand how they each consider the three topics that we analyzed, seeing the importance given to afrofuturism, African folklore and nonhuman entities in this Nigerian setting. The comparison of the works of Okorafor and Thompson through these two fictions allowed us to highlight a number of common features and perspectives which, although highly insufficient to encompass the entire African science fictional literary production, give a better understanding of the esthetic of these two acclaimed writers. This analysis intends to render explicitly several common features and perspectives that it would be interesting to see applied to a broader and larger corpus for future researches. Especially, other novels and short-stories of Okorafor, such as *Who Fears Death* and *Kabu Kabu* could be analyzed regarding those same three fields of study, as they are deeply rooted in an African context and deal with issues similar to those we saw in *Lagoon*. Moreover, Okorafor’s comic book series on Shuri, the sister of the Black Panther, would surely bring a new light on afrofuturism and feminism, as it shifts the focus on an empowered female protagonist and uses the

specificities of the comic book medium. Indeed, a feminist reading of Okorafor's fictions would surely deepen our understanding of those contemporary issues in literature.

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