

Marinette Grimbeek

## Girls Making Families: Agential Assemblage in Nnedi Okorafor's Speculative Fiction

A girl or young woman facing new or dangerous challenges without the support of a family is a recurring motif in the multiple award-winning speculative fiction by Naijamerican (Nigerian American) author Nnedi Okorafor. Her work is distinctly and unapologetically Afrocentric and refuses to conform to generic expectations. Here, science and magic exuberantly coexist, and although important non-English words or ideas are usually explained, the Western reader is not necessarily accommodated through the choice of setting, plot, or character names. The author herself prefers the descriptor *Africanfuturism* to the more established *Afrofuturism* – and similarly *Africanjujuism* to fantasy – precisely because her fiction “is specifically and more directly rooted in African culture, history, mythology and point-of-view as it then branches into the Black Diaspora, and it does not privilege or center the West” – something she argues Afrofuturism inevitably does.<sup>1</sup>

Although the future African cultures depicted by Okorafor are highly sophisticated, they often remain steeped in tradition, both to the benefit and detriment of the various protagonists; family ties, genealogies and tribal allegiances are frequently shown to be key to individual identities in Okorafor's fiction. At the start of *Binti* (2015), for example, the eponymous sixteen-year-old protagonist is the first member of the Himba tribe to be admitted to the intergalactic Oomza University. Against her family's wishes, she leaves home in the dead of night to travel there by an organic Miri spaceship. During the journey, the ship is violently attacked by the alien jellyfish-like Meduse and she is the only surviving passenger. Binti's *edan*,

an obsolete and otherwise useless technological object, enables her to resist the Meduse attack and communicate with them. On landing, she negotiates the safe return of the Meduse chief's stinger, captured in a war and kept as a museum specimen by the university, thus laying the foundation for renewed peace between the Meduse and humanity. Binti undergoes a partial physical transformation as her tribal braids morph into blue Meduse-like tentacles. Okwa, one of the Meduse, decides to stay at the university, and by the end of the trilogy, after an eventful journey back to Binti's homeland and their subsequent return to Oomza, both Okwu and the Miri spaceship New Fish are bound to Binti. As a doctor explains to her: "You're paired with New Fish and Okwu, each of whom has a family. Your family is bigger than any Himba girl's ever was."<sup>2</sup> Binti thus not only re-establishes the bonds with her human family, including with a previously ostracised branch, but also forms a new family that includes nonhumans.

This chapter examines the kinmaking strategies of four of Okorafor's protagonists to show how they form such cross-culture and cross-species kinships. To some extent, all the texts under discussion here could be classified as coming-of-age stories, in which *assembled families* complement and often replace *biological families*. Binti, Onyesonwu (*Who Fears Death*, 2010), Phoenix (*The Book of Phoenix*, 2015) and Fatima/Sankofa (*Remote Control*, 2021) all create new families ranging beyond biological reproduction or kinship ties. These protagonists tend to "Make Kin, Not Babies" – to borrow Donna Haraway's controversial maxim – using what may be described as strategies of assemblage.<sup>3</sup>

In reading the family constellations that Okorafor's young protagonists pursue and enter into as assemblages, it is important to bear in mind that *agency* is at the literal root of the notion of *agencement*, rendered *assemblage* in Brian Massumi's translation of *A Thousand Plateaus*.<sup>4</sup> Some critics, like John Phillips, have indeed called for a return to the original French term, precisely because the colloquial use of *assemblage* tends to obscure its philosophical sense of *arrangement* and reduces the concept to a description of a collection of constituent parts rather than focusing on "their connection, which implies the production of a sense that exceeds them and of which, transformed, they now form parts."<sup>5</sup> Here I primarily draw on Ian Buchanan's usage of assemblage to describe "the productive intersection of a form of content (actions, bodies and things) and a form of expression (affects, words and ideas)."<sup>6</sup> Issues of agency – power and choice – are thus at the heart of the concept of assemblage. Moreover, according to Deleuze

and Guattari, “all assemblages are assemblages of desire.”<sup>7</sup> As Buchanan explains, the properties of an assemblage are not the result of its constituent materials. On the contrary, desire “selects materials and gives them the properties that they have in the assemblage.”<sup>8</sup> In foregrounding desire, assemblages are thus inherently utopian in the sense articulated by Ruth Levitas, who regards “the *desire* for a better way of being” as the essential utopian ingredient.<sup>9</sup> Focusing on kinship through assemblage therefore facilitates a reading of Okorafor’s fiction that foregrounds desire, utopian impulses, and nonreproductive means of kinmaking.

The conception of family in Okorafor’s fiction is neither static nor normative. While traditions are inherited and passed on to new generations, the power of tradition is time and again shown to lie in its ability to adapt to new technological, climatic, or cultural realities. Okorafor’s protagonists tend to reinvent traditional conceptions of families and create new family constellations through assemblage. These may include members of different human tribes, or even extraterrestrial, engineered or magical nonhuman creatures – assemblages that are driven by the desire to find new ways of being in the world and relating to others. These protagonists have to reinterpret traditions in order to survive and thrive. Individual agency is thus contingent on the ability to simultaneously work within tradition *and* transform it to meet current needs.

Desires, and their manifestation in assemblages, can be identified at multiple levels of the texts under discussion. Much of this chapter stays at the intradiegetic level, detailing how girls and young women create new families through assemblage. First, the discussion turns to agential assemblage through naming and storytelling in *Who Fears Death* and the Binti Trilogy, perhaps the most unequivocally utopian of the texts under consideration. However, despite tending to be the vehicle of utopian desires regarding kinmaking and agency in Okorafor’s Africanfuturist fiction, assemblage should not be valorised as necessarily benevolent. This point is illustrated through a reflection on the role of assemblage in death and dying in *The Book of Phoenix and Remote Control*. Despite their sometimes dire settings, Okorafor’s novels repeatedly articulate utopian desires for change in family norms, as well as in interpersonal and interspecies relations. The assembled families populating her texts are thus both vehicles of individual agency *and* utopian expressions of malleable traditions in an ecologically fragile world fraught with racial tension. By extension, assemblage thus seems central to Okorafor’s utopian Africanfuturist impetus. The chapter

therefore concludes with a brief reflection on the role of narration in Okorafor's agential assemblages.

### Remaking Families by Rewriting History in *Who Fears Death*

The protagonist of *Who Fears Death*, Okorafor's first novel for adults, is twenty-year-old Onyesonwu (often shortened to Onye). Most of the novel tells her life story as it is transcribed by an unknown chronicler over the two days during which she awaits her execution. The future Africa in which the novel is set is technologically advanced yet torn apart by tribal war: the Nuru believe they have the right to enslave the Okeke, as "is written in the Great Book."<sup>10</sup> Onye is the product of genocidal rape and is therefore *Ewu* (meaning 'born of pain').<sup>11</sup> By weaponising reproduction, the Nuru seek to destroy the very fabric of Okeke families and communities. All *Ewu* children have a peculiar look: since their skins have neither the dark-brown tone of the Okeke nor the yellow-brown tone of the Nuru, they look "more like desert spirits."<sup>12</sup> Further, as their bodies are marked by their violent origins, they are generally shunned by both the Okeke and the Nuru.

The name *Onyesonwu* means 'Who fears death?' and the defiance her mother expresses in naming her so seems to confer some additional agency on the girl.<sup>13</sup> At the start of the novel, we are told that six-year-old Onye "chose" Fadil, a blacksmith, as her mother's new partner, thereby creating a loving nuclear family where before there was none.<sup>14</sup> Due to Fadil's acceptance of Onye, she and her mother are at least tolerated by the Okeke community. Throughout the novel, Onye refers to Fadil, who loves her like his own child, as *Papa*, while she feels nothing but hatred for her biological father. However, the happy family purposefully assembled by Onye only lasts around a decade, and on the day of her adoptive father's funeral Onye's life changes. In her grief she manages to revive him for a moment before the spell is broken by Aro, the town sorcerer. Onye is now not just *Ewu*, but also a dangerous wielder of magic, and her position in the town becomes even more precarious.

Onye exhibits a great desire to forge a family of her own, thus carving out a place in society for herself and her mother. Yet her agency is circumscribed, not only by her appearance, gender, and age, but also by her inherited magical powers and seemingly inescapable destiny. As the chronicler remarks, Onye could not escape her fate, because "she was like a character

locked in a story.”<sup>15</sup> Stories, which are in themselves assemblages open to rearrangement and change, as is made clear in the novel, also appear to have their own desires and agency.

Onye’s magical abilities allow her to transform into a bird. When this first happens at the age of eleven, she finds the experience frightening. It is thus significant that another family-like constellation is forged shortly after the incident between the four Okeke girls who together undergo the Eleventh Rite, the circumcision of all eleven-year-old girls on the first day of the rainy season, thus marking the start of their transition from girlhood to womanhood. Onye defies her parents’ wishes by taking part in the ceremony, but the four girls remain bound to each other and form a relationship more akin to that of close siblings than friends. Later, Onye uses her magical powers to reverse the girls’ circumcisions.<sup>16</sup> Like Onye’s assembled nuclear family, the Eleventh Rite assemblage is fragile and temporary, in that two of these girls later die in order to protect Onye. In this sense, her assertion of agency also determines their fate.

Despite being *Ewu* – and a girl – Onye eventually convinces Aro to take her on as an apprentice sorceress. The next family assemblage she forms includes Mwita, an *Ewu* boy who is also a sorcerer’s apprentice. As Onye hones her magical powers, she sees visions of the continuing violence in the West against the Okeke, largely instigated by her biological father, a powerful Nuru sorcerer. Determined to defeat him and rewrite the Great Book that dooms the Okeke to subjugation by the Nuru, Onye and her company set out West across the desert. This extension of the Eleventh-Rite assemblage includes Mwita (later her lover) and one of the one of the girls’ boyfriends. Eventually, the remainder of their group join the nomadic Red People who travel around in their own magical sandstorm and form a new spiritual alliance. Yet another type of assemblage is forged involving Onye, Mwita and the two local sorcerers based on their joint desire to protect Onye so that she can rewrite the Great Book. However, during an intense magical experience in the desert Onye dies:

Every part of me that was me. My tall *Ewu* body. My short temper. My impulsive mind. My memories. My past. My future. My death. My life. My spirit. My fate. My failure. All of me was destroyed. I was dead, broken, scattered, and absorbed. It was a thousand times worse than when I first changed into a bird. I remember nothing because I was nothing.<sup>17</sup>

Seven days later she returns from the dead after “being put back together,

bit by bit” partly through the efforts of Mwita and the two sorcerers and partly by a force she calls the Creator, or “It Who Cannot Be Touched.”<sup>18</sup> Significantly, Onye refers to her resurrection in terms of assemblage, albeit in the colloquial sense: “As It *reassembled* me, It arranged me in a new order. An order that made more sense. I remember the moment the last piece of me was returned.”<sup>19</sup> Immediately on her resurrection she launches a spiritual attack on her biological father, which fails, so that her life must again be saved by one of the sorcerers. Mwita dies while trying to kill her biological father and her final ally, Luyu (one of the Eleventh Rite girls), also sacrifices her life to give Onye the chance to change the course of history and the Okeke’s present and future by rewriting the Great Book.

Nevertheless, Onye cannot escape her own execution and her and Mwita’s unborn child dies with her. As the narrator remarks, “Onyesonwu did die, for something must be written before it can be *rewritten*.”<sup>20</sup> Appropriately, the storylines multiply here. The next, and final, chapter of the novel – labelled ‘Chapter 1’ – is entitled ‘Rewritten’ and presents an alternative ending. In this version Onye escapes from her cell and, inhabiting the body of the mythical *Kponyungo*, a giant flying lizard, she and the child inside her fly off to a green land where she hopes to reunite with Mwita.<sup>21</sup> Unbeknown to Onye, scenes on the ground indicate that relations between the Nuru and the Okeke have in fact changed – her rewriting of the Great Book has had the desired effect. As Miriam Pahl argues, by rejecting a linear understanding of time in the novel, Okorafor “in effect rescales the importance of the grand narrative that is represented by written history” since Onye’s act of rewriting the Great Book reduces it to “*one* aspect of a rich archive” rather than the determining narrative.<sup>22</sup>

Onye, a self-described “bricoleur [. . .] who used what she had to do what she had to do” in her magic, reassembles herself in the bodies of the animals she becomes and displays remarkable agency throughout by creating new families and alliances through human assemblages.<sup>23</sup> These agential family assemblages find expression in unlikely relationships and bodies, although their primary content is the desire for change by rewriting the narrative governing the fate of the Okeke. The outcome of the novel is hopeful yet uncertain. It seems unlikely that Onye will be reunited with her friends who sacrificed themselves for her cause, because “fate [is] cold and brittle.”<sup>24</sup> However, by conceiving a child of their own, Onye and Mwita reconfigure the possibilities of familyhood even before rewriting the Great Book, since

a child born of two *Ewu* parents is a completely new phenomenon. In the alternate narrative, Onye flies towards a utopian, non-traditional variation of the nuclear family at the end of the novel.

Although many die to allow Onye to fulfil her destiny, it seems significant that they choose to do so for the common good of their people. The assemblages they enter are agential and utopian. Whereas the Nuru sought to write the Okeke out of history through rape and massacre, Onye (with the help of her assembled allies) not only reinserts the Okeke into history by rewriting the narrative, but also holds out the utopian possibility of *Ewu* families existing on an equal footing with those of the Nuru and Okeke.

### The Binti Trilogy as a Story of a New Name

As in *Who Fears Death*, one of the main themes of the Binti Trilogy (2015–18) is intertribal strife, in this case between the dominant Khoush and the subjected Himba. Further, there is longstanding hostility and war between the belligerent Khoush and the alien Meduse. Tribal conflict on Earth is thus paralleled by a galactic interspecies conflict. Like her father, Binti is a “master harmonizer” and destined to succeed him in his trade.<sup>25</sup> Yet, as briefly outlined at the start of this chapter, Binti asserts her agency by defying her family to become the first Himba to attend Oomza University. Much like Onyesonwu, Binti is marked as Other by her appearance: she follows the custom of all Himba women and covers her entire body with *otjize*, a mixture of red clay and oil. Himba women literally cover their bodies with their home soil, and Binti’s ancestral home is aptly called the Root because it is built on an old root of an Undying tree.<sup>26</sup>

Through her harmonising power, Binti prevents a new war between the Meduse and Oomza, thereby becoming “family through battle” with the Meduse.<sup>27</sup> Her kinship with the Meduse is made corporeal: her braids are transformed into tentacles that resonate in communication with Okwu’s tentacles. A bond with Okwu necessarily translates into a bond with all the Meduse, and by becoming part of the Meduse family she also gains limited access to their hive mind via Okwu. Nonetheless, when her hair changes into tentacles, Binti is no longer able to braid it into her “family’s code pattern” as she used to.<sup>28</sup> Hair has great cultural significance and is an important motif in Okorafor’s work, and this new assemblage fundamentally changes her while erasing some of the outward signs of her family history and traditions.<sup>29</sup>

Okwu, too, is marked by his contact with Binti. When the Meduse first attack the spaceship one of its tentacles shrivels up after coming into contact with Binti's *edan*. Later, the withered tentacle is healed almost completely by the application of *otjize*, although it remains a different colour than the rest.<sup>30</sup> Both Binti and Okwu thus bear the physical marks of their interspecies encounter. Entering into family assemblages always has consequences, precisely because they partially transform their constituent parts. Importantly, though, neither chooses to bear this outward sign of their bond; it is simply foisted on them.<sup>31</sup> The desire at the core of this assemblage thus gives its parts the necessarily properties, although the assemblage itself is neither governed by Binti nor Okwu. Even though the relationship between them is maintained by mutual choice and consent, and arises as a conscious, agential effort to make a connection, their physical transformations are not optional.

To Binti, her name, like the *otjize* she wears, speaks of her Himba roots and ancestry. Knowing her name equates to knowing herself, and she is in the habit of reciting her full name like a mantra to stave off panic. In a trance-like state she has a strange experience related to her name, which is repeated several times later in the trilogy, as she makes peace with her new family and individual identities:

“Who are you?” a voice asked. It spoke in the dialect of my family and it came from everywhere.

“Binti Ekeopara Zuzu Dambu Kaipka of Namib, that is my name,” I said.

Pause.

I waited.

“There’s more,” the voice said.

“That’s all,” I said, irritated. “That’s my name.”

“No.”

The flash of anger that spurted through me was a surprise. Then it was welcome. I *knew* my own name.<sup>32</sup>

Binti's physical changes mark her outsiderhood acutely: “For a moment, I was two people—a Himba girl who knew her history very very well and a Himba girl who'd left Earth and become part-Meduse in space. The dissonance left me breathless.”<sup>33</sup>

Later in the trilogy, the mysterious Night Masquerade (which also makes a fleeting appearance in *Who Fears Death*) materialises outside Binti's window. This nightmarish figure, “a tall mass of dried sticks, raffia, and leaves with a wooden face dominated by a large tooth-filled mouth and bul-

bous black eyes”, also exudes smoke and a strong smell.<sup>34</sup> Traditionally, the Night Masquerade can only be seen by boys and men, and the fact that it appears to Binti again marks her as Other. In the final novella of the trilogy we learn that “its appearance signified the approach of a big change” and it is “the personification of revolution.”<sup>35</sup> Contrary to belief, though, the Night Masquerade is not entirely magical but rather a spiritual costume worn by a member of a secret society of elders who appears to community members with messages from the elders.<sup>36</sup> The Night Masquerade can thus be read as an assemblage with the appearance of a raffia-decked scarecrow conveying the elders’ desires to individual members of their community. It is also an instrument of subtle control.

On the same night as the Night Masquerade first appears to Binti the despised Desert People arrive to take her away. Whereas the Khoush treat the Himba with contempt, the Himba in turn disdain the Desert People as primitive due to their darker skin and lack of *otjize*, and also mistake their telepathic communication for a genetic neurological disorder.<sup>37</sup> As Binti’s mother refuses to let her leave with them, her paternal grandmother, who is one of the Desert People, is the first to articulate Binti’s new family ties to the Meduse in human terms, saying: “We’ll take your daughter, our daughter, into the desert”, before adding to Okwu, “Your *daughter*, too.”<sup>38</sup> In the final part of the trilogy, the Desert People instead refer to Okwu as Binti’s “partner”.<sup>39</sup> However uncertain they are about the exact nature of the unprecedented relationship between them, the Desert People definitely recognise Okwu as part of Binti’s family.

Whilst in the desert Binti learns that the Desert People are really called the Enyi Zinariya after the Zinariya, aliens who passed Earth on their way to Oomza long before the rest of humanity had mobile phones. Her grandmother explains that the aliens gave them advanced biological communication technology to keep in touch after their departure, which was passed on to their offspring via DNA.<sup>40</sup> Binti thus realises that she and all her siblings also carry alien DNA, yet tries to reassert her identity and retain her sense of self by thinking: “I am Himba, even if my hair has become *okuoko* [tentacled] because of my actions and even if I have Enyi Zinariya blood. Even if my DNA is alien.”<sup>41</sup> During their journey, Binti befriends a Desert Boy of her own age, Mwinyi, who like her is a master harmoniser and arranges safe passage for the group by negotiating with the dangerous animals they encounter. At the end of the second novella, they receive a telepathic message from Binti’s father saying that the Khoush have attacked and perhaps

killed Okwu and set fire to the Root. The Meduse are on their way and it looks as if the full-scale war that Binti so narrowly averted when she landed with Okwu may still claim the lives of most of her biological and assembled family. So, whereas the first volume of the trilogy ends positively with Binti finding her feet at university, the second novella ends in the anticipation of disaster.

In the third novella, Binti and Mwinyi, who are now in love, return to the Root on camelback and find that the Khoush have also burned down other Himba homes. Binti's biological family is presumed dead, but Okwu lives and has been joined by some of the Meduse spoiling for war with the Khoush. War between the Himba and the Khoush also appears increasingly unavoidable. The Himba elders, and Binti herself, blame Binti's leaving home for the impending war.<sup>42</sup> Despite lacking the appropriate seniority and authority, Binti calls an urgent meeting of the Himba to establish peace between the Khoush and the Meduse and thereby save the Himba from destruction. On the arrival of the Khoush commander and troops, Binti introduces herself as "Binti Ekeopara Zuzu Dambu Kaipka *Meduse Enyi Zinariya* of Osemba, master harmonizer."<sup>43</sup> She now identifies herself as Meduse *and* as one of the Desert People, while also specifying her hometown. Her extended name reflects her multiple new family relationships through complex genetic heritage (a type of biologic assemblage), as well as the existing ties to her family and previously established kinship with Okwu.

When the Himba elders fail to arrive for the negotiations, Binti stands between the Meduse and Khoush armies assembled in front of the Root to "incite the deep culture of the Himba" with the explanation that "[t]he Himba Council members were to do this, but I think they're afraid. I think they're hiding. I'm not. And I'm *a collective within myself*, so I can."<sup>44</sup> It would thus seem that Binti has not only entered into family assemblages through birth, choice or happenstance, but that she has also become a type of assemblage herself. Here the governing desires are clearly to avert war, protect and unite all the various peoples she holds kinship with, and reconceptualise the relations between them.

Binti speaks directly to the Meduse chief and the Khoush king and they agree to maintain the peace. Yet when the armies begin to depart someone opens fire (to the horror of both leaders) and a battle starts. Binti is caught in the crossfire and dies. After her death, Mwinyi manages to open the Undying Root beneath the family house and her family is discovered

safe and well: “when the Root had been attacked and set aflame, something had made it react as *one of the family*. It enclosed and protected” them.<sup>45</sup> Their family thus includes supernatural plants as well as Himba and Desert People, although Binti, the primary assembler of the trilogy, is dead.

Binti’s remains are prepared for the funeral according to Himba customs and placed on top of the Night Masquerade costume, because she “was change, she was revolution, she was heroism. She was more Night Masquerade than anyone had ever been.”<sup>46</sup> The new-born child of the Miri spaceship, New Fish, is sent to take Binti’s body to the Rings of Saturn, where she had wanted to journey next. Okwu and Mwinyi are also on board and the body is placed directly on New Fish’s flesh floor, in its breathing chamber, a room filled with plants. Days later, when Mwinyi wants to take a last look at Binti’s face before jettisoning the body, Binti is alive. Her missing limbs have regrown from the Miri’s microbes, making her “more Miri 12 than human”; she can feel and understand the voice of the ship in her new body – a connection New Fish refers to as “our union”.<sup>47</sup> Likewise, New Fish has absorbed some of Binti and is able to communicate with her and Mwinyi in the telepathic manner of the Desert People. The link to New Fish has a further component: they have to remain in each other’s physical proximity. When Binti is again asked her name during another trance-like experience – which she now realises is communication with her alien Zinariya ancestors – she gives her old name before correcting herself, saying “My name is Binti Ekeopara Zuzu Dambu Kaipka *Meduse Enyi Zinariya New Fish* of Namib.”<sup>48</sup>

The novella ends with their return to Oomza University, where Mwinyi also stays on to study. During a medical examination, Binti is asked whether she wants children. Replying in the affirmative, to her surprise the doctor suggests making Okwu the birth parent: “if you were to have a baby, it would have your *okuoko* because Meduse DNA is strong. It bullies its way into all offspring.”<sup>49</sup> Binti’s family assemblages are thus inscribed in her body and will be inherited by their children. Her new, extended name tells the story of these new kinship relations: she is Himba but also carries the DNA of the Zinariya passed on by the Desert People; she is part Meduse and part Miri ship and in the future will become Mwinyi’s lover and co-parent with Okwu *at the same time*. In the new full form of her name Binti recognises both tradition and her multiple genetic past, while simultaneously transforming and extending the tradition to include new family permutations.

## Deadly Assemblages

*The Book of Phoenix*, the prequel to *Who Fears Death*, takes the form of a series of nested narratives. The main embedded narrative is the story of Phoenix herself, while the frame narrative is set long before the present of *Who Fears Death*, albeit in the same world, and tells of an old Okeke man named Sunuteel finding some obsolete technological devices in a cave. Somehow, a recording is transferred to his own device, but he can only understand the portion in English, a now almost extinct language, which is spoken in a “soft breathy” woman’s voice: “‘There is no book about me,’ the voice said. ‘Well, not yet. No matter. I shall create it myself; it’s better that way. To tell my tale, I will use the old African tools of story: Spoken words.’”<sup>50</sup> The novel ends with Sunuteel’s writing of the Great Book “as the story of The Okeke and Why They are Cursed”:

Now it was a time for stories that were truer than the truth, stories that spoke to the soul.

Sunuteel did not specifically set out to solidify the Okeke as slave and the Nuru as superior through powerful literature, but what is in one’s heart comes out in one’s stories. Even when he or she’s retelling someone else’s story. Sunuteel was old. He’d lived for a long time understanding his ancestors as slaves.<sup>51</sup>

As Phoenix herself notes in the internal narrative, “Africans like to tell stories, and stories travel and germinate. And sometimes, stories evolve into trouble.”<sup>52</sup> By changing the story told by Phoenix and assembling a new history from the fragments he discovers, Sunuteel not only changes an account of the past but also shapes future relations between Okeke and Nuru, which are again rewritten by Onyesonwu in *Who Fears Death*. Assemblages, whether of families or stories, are dynamic and becoming yet never final.

The story Phoenix tells is also set in the future, although long before Sunuteel’s present. In brief, Phoenix is a speciMen, an engineered organism with the physical features of an African woman but designed to be a weapon by the LifeGen corporation. She is literally a genetic assemblage born of scientific desire (as well as greed) and is

nothing but the result of a slurry of African DNA and cells. They constructed the sperm and the egg with materials of over ten Africans, all from the West African nations of Nigeria, Ghana, Senegal, and Benin. Then they combined all that with DNA from Lucy the Mitochondrial Eve, the ten-

year-old Ethiopian girl who carried the complete genetic blueprint of the human race.<sup>53</sup>

Like many other speciMen, she is held captive in LifeGen Tower 7 in New York, where the corporation conducts experiments and continues its bioengineering endeavours. Her development has been accelerated – at the age of three she looks about forty and has a vast amount of knowledge because she is able to read incredibly quickly and has an almost infinite supply of reading material.

Phoenix thinks that she was named after the city in Arizona, but we later learn that her human birthmother gave her the name. In this novel, as in the Binti Trilogy, “[n]ames are powerful. They have a way of becoming destiny.”<sup>54</sup> It is therefore appropriate that Phoenix later learns that she can die, be reborn and fly like her mythical namesake. While Phoenix was purposefully assembled and designed to be used as a weapon by LifeGen, this assemblage in turn has unintended desires and capacities, in that Phoenix both invokes and resembles the mythical creature. She escapes from the tower and is later instrumental in the escape of thousands of other speciMen from the corporation’s other facilities.

Assembled families are central to *The Book of Phoenix* as well. Her first allies are other speciMen: Saeed, whom she loves, and Mmuo, who can pass through any object or structure and thus cannot be kept captive in the tower. Later, Saeed and Mmuo, as well as the enormous, winged man she releases when trying to escape, help Phoenix to attack the other towers and free speciMen. This assemblage of assembled creatures forms a family of sorts, but Phoenix also forges connections to others. While attempting to escape Phoenix is killed by the guards in the lobby of the tower and starts burning. The Backbone that forms the basis of the tower starts “shrugging off the building that was its shackle” and Phoenix is mere “ashes being scattered by vines and roots” when the tower falls.<sup>55</sup> Yet, true to her name, Phoenix is reborn seven days later in the ruins with her memories intact, now also sporting wings.

In the ruins of the tower Phoenix is presented with an extraterrestrial seed, which eventually leads her to Ghana, where she buries it beneath a shea tree. The seed (incidentally a narrator of one of novel’s nested narratives) seems to exist in symbiosis with the trees, and Phoenix thus brings great prosperity to the town in the form of an abundant shea harvest. Due to her wings, the townspeople call Phoenix *Okore*, meaning ‘Eagle’ in Twi. They build her a house and she becomes part of the community. Here, Phoenix

falls in love with Kofi, the local doctor, but is tracked down by LifeGen. Kofi is shot, and to relieve his pain Phoenix bursts into flames, consuming everything around her, and dies again. After her rebirth she surrenders in order to spare the town and as she is driven away she thinks of the townspeople as “the only family” she has known.<sup>56</sup>

In another allusion to the Middle Passage, Phoenix refuses to travel by ship back to Tower 6 in Miami. Instead, she is injected with a tracking device and allowed to follow the ship by flying to her “false home” in America.<sup>57</sup> On the way she is again joined by the winged man she had released from Tower 7, who had also flown with her for part of her journey to Africa. This time he speaks, addressing her as “Phoenix of the Okore” and telling her, in an apparent Star Wars allusion, that he is her father.<sup>58</sup> Phoenix regards this as a joke, although it seems likely that he does form part of her genetic makeup. The winged man tells Phoenix that she is able to “slip through time and space” in a way that she can control.<sup>59</sup> This knowledge gives her incredible agency and allows her to escape capture and repeatedly attack LifeGen, after which she is reunited with Mmuo and Saeed.

Much like *Who Fears Death*, the novel is picaresque. Here I only refer to two further significant episodes, namely Phoenix’s reunion with her birth mother and Phoenix’s death. After perusing LifeGen records, Phoenix learns that her mother, Vera Takeisha Thomas, is African American and is being held at a correctional facility. By slipping, Phoenix visits her mother who is weak and frail, despite only being twenty-eight. According to the files Phoenix had read, she had caused her mother’s cancer during pregnancy by exposing her to the radiation she exudes, as well as her “own strange blood mingling with hers.”<sup>60</sup> Her mother was already dying, but by choosing to hold Phoenix’s hand during the visit she effectively commits suicide. While Binti’s strange assemblies frighten her, they also give her immense joy. She can experience flight through her connection with New Fish, communicate telepathically thanks to her Desert ancestry and communicate with Okwu through her tentacles. However, Phoenix regards herself as “the villain in the story. Haven’t you figured it out yet? Nothing good can come from unnatural bonding and creation. Only violence.”<sup>61</sup>

Phoenix thus regards herself as a monstrous assemblage, leaving death in her wake.<sup>62</sup> When her “brother” Mmuo is killed in a LifeGen attack, Phoenix embraces her power to kill.<sup>63</sup> She slips and burns “like a sun” over New York and becomes so hot that the “waters below the buildings boil and steam.”<sup>64</sup> She wreaks apocalyptic global havoc and dies one last time as she

kills the seven investors in LifeGen who had tried to achieve immortality through bioengineering and exploitation:

Phoenix Okore blew across the earth. She burned the cities. Turned the oceans to steam. She was the reaper come to reap what was sown. Wherever those seven men lived. Let them die. Let everything die. Let that which had been written all be rewritten.<sup>65</sup>

In yet another version of the Middle Passage, Saeed walks to Africa across the dried-up Atlantic and extracts Phoenix's memories – those that eventually become the book of Phoenix – from a feather he had kept. The first words he hears also contain Phoenix's description of herself and present a Binti-like catalogue of epithets detailing her origins and roles: "The Phoenix Okore, SpeciMen, Beacon, Slave, Rogue, Fugitive, Rebel, Saeed's Love, Mmuo's Sister, Villain."<sup>66</sup> Whereas Binti started with an already complex history, Phoenix starts as a blank slate and puzzles together her own history and the histories of others as the narrative progresses. She assembles her own past. Like Onye, Phoenix repeatedly loses the families she assembles, although she does retain their stories. Her narrative is repeatedly punctuated by the life stories of her new family members (e.g. the alien seed, Kofi, the winged man, Saeed, Mmuo, and Vera), with each one in turn tending to emphasise the histories of their birth families.

Okorafor's novella *Remote Control* (2021) is connected to *The Book of Phoenix* through the mysterious seed that Phoenix leaves in Ghana. While *Remote Control* is set after Phoenix buries the seed, the narrative seems to play out before the apocalyptic events recounted in *The Book of Phoenix*. Like Phoenix, the young protagonist Fatima becomes an instrument of death after holding a glowing green object in her hands so that her skin seems to absorb the light. A year later, a "fox who'd escaped from the zoo" moves into the family's shea tree and Fatima starts to spend more time there in order to be close to the strange animal, an Other, non-indigenous species.<sup>67</sup> The fox is with her when the soil below the tree suddenly opens and a root presents her with a lidded wooden box containing a seed, which she immediately recognises as the object she had held in her hand the night of the meteor shower. This appears to be the seed that Phoenix buried. When Fatima handles the seed warmth spreads throughout her body. She inhales the "green mist" and the smell it emits and her malaria vanishes, never to return.<sup>68</sup> Later, when she is bothered by mosquitoes, she protects herself by glowing "faintly green-yellow" and they all die.<sup>69</sup>

Despite such quirky fairy tale-like elements, the novella is disturbing. At the age of seven, Fatima orphans herself by accidentally killing all her immediate family and most of the people in her hometown when she is hit by a car and the pain releases the mysterious power she had absorbed from the seed. As a child unfamiliar with death, she first assumes that everyone has just fallen asleep. However, it soon becomes clear that they are all dead and, still at the scene of the accident, Fatima forgets her name:

It left her as a butterfly leaves a flower. She felt it go. It wasn't instant, just a gradual disappearance. Her name. She couldn't remember her name. She whimpered, fighting to recall it. Nothing. "Home, home, mommy, the tree," she whispered. "Fenuku's dirty room. Papa's cigarettes. Papa wanted his favorite cigarettes." Still nothing. No name.<sup>70</sup>

In its place, she takes the first name that comes to mind, that of the Sankofa bird her brother Fenuku had carved from wood – a carving she picks up in his room and drops, breaking the bird “just as she'd broken her family and her entire hometown.”<sup>71</sup> *Sankofa*, an important concept in Black Studies, literally means ‘go back to fetch it’ in the Ghanaian language Akan, and “refers to the process of going back to the past in order to build for the future.”<sup>72</sup> The mythical bird is popularly depicted as walking forwards while craning its neck backwards over its back with an egg – or seed, as explicitly suggested in *Remote Control* – in its beak.<sup>73</sup> Like her namesake bird, Sankofa seems to inhabit a different, mythical plane than those around her, yet her deadly powers have real consequences. Moreover, the structure of the novella is also reflected in the figure of the Sankofa bird: the reader starts to follow the teenage Sankofa to the end of the journey as she recounts the events that brought her to this point.

As Sankofa is a potential danger to all living things and her very touch disables all the technology she encounters, she is nicknamed ‘Remote Control’ and myths and rumours spread about her. Sankofa becomes known as, and even refers to herself as “The Adopted Daughter of Death.”<sup>74</sup> She is unable to stay in any one place for very long. The only constancy is the presence of the fox, although it is neither a pet nor a proper companion in that it comes and goes at will. Like Sankofa, the foreign animal seems to exist in a slightly different reality and is unaffected by the death she emanates. Sankofa seems to have the ability to communicate with other animals. At the beginning of the novella, she greets a spider that appears “to acknowledge and greet her back.”<sup>75</sup> She also speaks “words of love to the birds, liz-

ards, grasshoppers and spiders who were certainly listening”; a circulating rumour indicates that “when she cried, spiders, crickets and grasshoppers would sing to soothe her.”<sup>76</sup> While these animals certainly provide some companionship, such bonds are fleeting.

Sankofa later learns to control and direct her killing power and becomes a kind of peripatetic euthaniser who survives on the hospitality of frightened well-wishers. When she moves in with Alhaja in RoboTown after saving her electronics shop from robbers, they naturally become a family: “No questions, no demands. It was so nice. She and Alhaja never discussed it. They never planned for it. It just happened.”<sup>77</sup> Although this may seem to be an assemblage of happenstance, rather than an agential assemblage, it should be noted that both Alhaja and Sankofa *choose* to become each other’s family. As a result of her youth, Sankofa seems even more vulnerable than the protagonists already discussed and for the most part remains alone due to her terrible killing power. Dan Friedman has described the novella as the author’s bleakest work to date, because “Sankofa has almost no agency over her power”:

In her previous work, Okorafor championed magic, science, and the ability of young African women to embrace change. Until now, her protagonists have bounced back from multiple setbacks, absorbed elements of the cultures they have met, and driven onward to change society for the better. There’s no such optimism in *Remote Control*, where the protagonist brings only death.<sup>78</sup>

While Friedman’s observation is accurate, I would argue that the novella does retain some utopian potential.

Sankofa eventually returns to her hometown. Her assumed name is therefore highly appropriate, in that she literally returns to her abandoned childhood home, and as she does so she recovers her lost memories and her birthname. At the end of the novella, she reburies the seed from which she gained her powers beneath the shea tree where it shines “like a galaxy of green stars” with the seeds underneath the other trees.<sup>79</sup> Afraid that Life-Gen might harvest the seeds and develop “[i]nternational corporate-level remote control”, Sankofa activates her mysterious light.<sup>80</sup> The seeds respond by glowing brighter and Sankofa also increases her brightness: “Then some more. Then even brighter. And this time, *she did it on purpose*.”<sup>81</sup> She now has agency and control, as well as a connection to all the other seeds. As these are the final sentences of the novella, it is uncertain whether Sankofa

proceeds to further destruction or simply destroys the seeds to prevent them falling into LifeGen's hands. Although her power is terrible, she learns how to harness the deathly assemblage to relieve individual suffering, but only after losing her family by orphaning herself.

## Conclusion: Narrated Family Assemblages and Relating to Others

In Okorafor's acclaimed first contact novel, *Lagoon* (2014), the alien Ayo-dele remarks: "Human beings have a hard time relating to that which does not resemble them. It's your greatest flaw."<sup>82</sup> Accepting otherness, and even including Others (whether of different races, species, or planets) as kin is a central ingredient of the assembled families populating Okorafor's oeuvre. As Dustin Crowley notes, "statements of solidarity within humanity are often productively complicated in Okorafor's fiction, not only calling into question who counts as 'us,' but also who counts as the 'other.'" <sup>83</sup> Okorafor's young protagonists change their life stories and the stories of their communities by extending the bond of kinship to Others and by entering into assemblages that break traditional family moulds. Haraway too insists on the utopian potential held by making kin of Others: "Kin making is making persons, not necessarily as individuals or as humans", noting that "making kin and making kind (as category, care, relatives without ties by birth, lateral relatives, lots of other echoes) stretch the imagination and *can change the story*."<sup>84</sup> By recognising Others as potential kin, these protagonists also redefine themselves.

Aptly, Sandra Lindow remarks that in Okorafor's young-adult fiction the "protagonists do not embark on their journeys seeking treasure, but when they return, the treasure they have found is themselves."<sup>85</sup> Similarly, the kinmaking through assemblage in which her young protagonists engage may be regarded as a type of self-actualisation. Of the four protagonists discussed here, Binti is the only one who deliberately rejects an established family position to assert her individuality and further her own development as a scholar. Although this endangers her life and the lives of her birth family, the greater community emerges stronger as a result of Binti's choices. Not only are the bonds with her birth family reinforced, but kinship is also extended to nonhumans through the bonds with New Fish and Okwu. The other three protagonists discussed all repeatedly try – and fail and try again – to assemble families to replace the ones they have lost or never knew.

Yet even the deadly assemblages of Phoenix and Sankofa retain the utopian potential to rewrite received narratives on kinship, family, reproduction *and* death, while Onye completely changes the story of her people.

While some characters have more agency than others in assembling new families, time and again Okorafor highlights the centrality of storytelling to kinmaking. These assemblages have components – human, alien, animal, etc. – but are always also *narrated*, and storytelling always presupposes some agency on the part of the teller. Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing points out: “Assemblages are open-ended gatherings. They allow us to ask about communal effects without assuming them. They allow us potential histories in the making.”<sup>86</sup> The figure of the assemblage is therefore both an apt way of describing relations in Okorafor’s novels, but also provides a way of thinking about the work done by speculative fiction more generally. Like Onye, Okorafor is a bricoleur and her picaresque fiction may be regarded as utopian narrative assemblages that are formed to highlight alternatives to Western conceptions of being in the world, making kin, and relating to Others.

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- <sup>1</sup> Okorafor, Africanfuturism Defined, *Nnedi's Wahala Zone Blog*. 19 October 2019 (Accessed 31 July 2021), n.p.
- <sup>2</sup> Okorafor, *Binti: The Night Masquerade*. New York: Tom Doherty Associates, 2018, p. 194.
- <sup>3</sup> Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016, pp. 5–6. Haraway's slogan as well as the subsequent volume *Making Kin Not Population* (Clarke & Haraway (eds). Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2018) have understandably attracted criticism for their focus on the role of overpopulation in environmental crises, particularly given the historical connections between population discourses and eugenics, colonialism, and racism. Although a more detailed discussion of these critiques falls beyond the scope of this chapter, salient examples may be found in Dow & Lamoreaux, 'Situating Kinmaking and the Population 'Problem''. *Environmental Humanities*. Vol. 12, no 2, 2020, p. 478; Sasser, *On Infertile Ground: Population Control and Women's Rights in the Era of Climate Change*. New York: New York University Press, 2018, p. 150; and Subramaniam, 'Overpopulation' Is Not the Problem. *Public Books*. 27 November 2018 (Accessed 4 March 2022), n.p.
- <sup>4</sup> Deleuze & Guattari, *Mille plateaux*. Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1980, p. 10; Deleuze & Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987, p. 4.
- <sup>5</sup> Phillips, *Agencement/Assemblage Theory, Culture & Society*. Vol. 23, no 2–3, 2006, p. 108
- <sup>6</sup> Buchanan, Assemblage Theory and Its Discontents, *Deleuze Studies*. Vol. 9, no 3, 2015, p. 390.
- <sup>7</sup> Deleuze & Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*. p. 399.
- <sup>8</sup> Buchanan, *Assemblage Theory and Method: An Introduction and Guide*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021, p. 56. Buchanan presents an extended critique of what he regards as the (mis)use of the concept by theorists like Jane Bennett and Manuel Delanda, precisely because of their disregard of desire in favour of focusing on the constituent parts of assemblages.
- <sup>9</sup> Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia*. Oxford: Peter Lang, 2010 [1990], p. 221; my emphasis.
- <sup>10</sup> Okorafor, *Who Fears Death*. New York: DAW Books, 2010, p. 17.
- <sup>11</sup> Okorafor, *Who Fears Death*. p. 32.
- <sup>12</sup> Okorafor, *Who Fears Death*. p. 26.
- <sup>13</sup> Okorafor, *Who Fears Death*. p. 6.
- <sup>14</sup> Okorafor, *Who Fears Death*. p. 7.
- <sup>15</sup> Okorafor, *Who Fears Death*. p. 411.
- <sup>16</sup> Although a discussion of the representation of female genital mutilation (FGM) in the novel is outside the scope of this analysis, it should be noted that Okorafor “takes a strongly postcolonial and feminist view . . . at once championing African cultures and critiquing their gender roles and certain other cultural practices” (Burnett, *The Great Change and the Great Book: Nnedi Okorafor's Postcolonial, Post-Apocalyptic Africa and the Promise of Black Speculative Fiction*. *Research in African Literatures*, Vol. 46, no 4, 2015, p. 135). Lisa Dowdall discusses Okorafor's treatment of FGM as an example of critical dystopia (The Utopian Fantastic in Nnedi Okorafor's *Who Fears Death*. *Paradoxa: Studies in World Literature*. Vol. 25, 2013, p. 174), while Julia Hoydis similarly argues that the novel “acknowledges female oppression and, at the same time, affirms women's abilities to liberate themselves and others” (A Darker Shade of Justice: Violence, Liberation, and Afrofuturist Fantasy in Nnedi Okorafor's *Who Fears Death*. *Postcolonial Justice*, Bartels, Eckstein, Waller & Wiemann (eds). Leiden: Brill/Rodopi, p. 188).
- <sup>17</sup> Okorafor, *Who Fears Death*. p. 316.

- <sup>18</sup> Okorafor, *Who Fears Death*. p. 316.
- <sup>19</sup> Okorafor, *Who Fears Death*. p. 317; my emphasis.
- <sup>20</sup> Okorafor, *Who Fears Death*. p. 415.
- <sup>21</sup> Okorafor, *Who Fears Death*. p. 418.
- <sup>22</sup> Pahl, Time, Progress, and Multidirectionality in Nnedi Okorafor's *Who Fears Death*. *Research in African Literatures*. Vol. 49, no 3, 2018, p. 220; my emphasis.
- <sup>23</sup> Okorafor, *Who Fears Death*. p. 221.
- <sup>24</sup> Okorafor, *Who Fears Death*. p. 419.
- <sup>25</sup> Okorafor, *Binti*. New York: Tom Doherty Associates, 2015, p. 29.
- <sup>26</sup> Okorafor, *Binti: The Night Masquerade*. p. 55.
- <sup>27</sup> Okorafor, *Binti*, p. 90
- <sup>28</sup> Okorafor, *Binti*. p. 87.
- <sup>29</sup> Cf. Burger, Math and Magic: Nnedi Okorafor's *Binti* Trilogy and Its Challenge to the Dominance of Western Science in Science Fiction. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*. Vol. 37, no 4, 2020, pp. 364–77; Marotta, Nnedi Okorafor's Afrofuturism and the Motif of Hair, *Journal of Science Fiction*. Vol. 2, no 2, 2018, pp. 10–12.
- <sup>30</sup> Okorafor, *Binti*. p. 70.
- <sup>31</sup> Okorafor, *Binti: The Night Masquerade*. p. 48.
- <sup>32</sup> Okorafor, *Binti: Home*. New York: Tom Doherty Associates, 2017, p. 9.
- <sup>33</sup> Okorafor, *Binti: Home*. p. 52.
- <sup>34</sup> Okorafor, *Binti: Home*. p. 89.
- <sup>35</sup> Okorafor, *Binti: The Night Masquerade*. p. 56.
- <sup>36</sup> Okorafor, *Binti: The Night Masquerade*. pp. 124–25.
- <sup>37</sup> Okorafor, *Binti: Home*. p. 129.
- <sup>38</sup> Okorafor, *Binti: Home*. pp. 97–98; my emphasis.
- <sup>39</sup> Okorafor, *Binti: The Night Masquerade*. p. 44.
- <sup>40</sup> Okorafor, *Binti: Home*. pp. 129–30.
- <sup>41</sup> Okorafor, *Binti: Home*. p. 130.
- <sup>42</sup> Okorafor, *Binti: The Night Masquerade*. p. 66; 69.
- <sup>43</sup> Okorafor, *Binti: The Night Masquerade*. p. 92; my emphasis.
- <sup>44</sup> Okorafor, *Binti: The Night Masquerade*. p. 116; my emphasis.
- <sup>45</sup> Okorafor, *Binti: The Night Masquerade*. p. 134; my emphasis.
- <sup>46</sup> Okorafor, *Binti: The Night Masquerade*. p. 137.
- <sup>47</sup> Okorafor, *Binti: The Night Masquerade*. p. 158; 151.
- <sup>48</sup> Okorafor, *Binti: The Night Masquerade*. p. 169; my emphasis.
- <sup>49</sup> Okorafor, *Binti: The Night Masquerade*. p. 192.
- <sup>50</sup> Okorafor, *The Book of Phoenix*. New York: DAW Books, 2015, p. 7.
- <sup>51</sup> Okorafor, *The Book of Phoenix*. p. 270.
- <sup>52</sup> Okorafor, *The Book of Phoenix*. p. 106.
- <sup>53</sup> Okorafor, *The Book of Phoenix*. p. 174.
- <sup>54</sup> Okorafor, *The Book of Phoenix*. p. 55.

- <sup>55</sup> Okorafor, *The Book of Phoenix*. p. 39.
- <sup>56</sup> Okorafor, *The Book of Phoenix*. p. 106.
- <sup>57</sup> Okorafor, *The Book of Phoenix*. p. 110.
- <sup>58</sup> Okorafor, *The Book of Phoenix*. p. 112.
- <sup>59</sup> Okorafor, *The Book of Phoenix*. p. 114.
- <sup>60</sup> Okorafor, *The Book of Phoenix*. p. 244.
- <sup>61</sup> Okorafor, *The Book of Phoenix*. p. 101.
- <sup>62</sup> For a more detailed discussion of the intersection between monstrosity and kinship in the novel, see Grimbeck, Monstrous Kin in N. K. Jemisin's Broken Earth Trilogy and Nnedi Okorafor's *Book of Phoenix*. *Kinship in the Fiction of N. K. Jemisin: Relations of Power and Resistance*, Åstrom & Bonnevier (eds). Lanham: Lexington Books, 2023, pp 177–96.
- <sup>63</sup> Okorafor, *The Book of Phoenix*. p. 225.
- <sup>64</sup> Okorafor, *The Book of Phoenix*. pp. 256–57.
- <sup>65</sup> Okorafor, *The Book of Phoenix*. p. 260.
- <sup>66</sup> Okorafor, *The Book of Phoenix*. p. 262.
- <sup>67</sup> Okorafor, *Remote Control*. New York: Tom Doherty Associates, 2021, pp. 30–31.
- <sup>68</sup> Okorafor, *Remote Control*. p. 33.
- <sup>69</sup> Okorafor, *Remote Control*. p. 61.
- <sup>70</sup> Okorafor, *Remote Control*. p. 55.
- <sup>71</sup> Okorafor, *Remote Control*. p. 56.
- <sup>72</sup> Gammage, Sankofa. *Encyclopedia of Black Studies*, Asante & Mazama (eds). Thousand Oaks: SAGE, 2005, p. 425. See for example Christel N. Temple on the African Diaspora's adoption of Sankofa as a practice in "reconstituting the fragmented cultural past" (The Emergence of Sankofa Practice in the United States: A Modern History. *Journal of Black Studies*. Vol. 41, no 1, 2010, p. 128.).
- <sup>73</sup> Okorafor, *Remote Control*. p. 29.
- <sup>74</sup> E.g., Okorafor, *Remote Control*. p. 77.
- <sup>75</sup> Okorafor, *Remote Control*. p. 10.
- <sup>76</sup> Okorafor, *Remote Control*. p. 139; 148.
- <sup>77</sup> Okorafor, *Remote Control*. p. 101.
- <sup>78</sup> Friedman, The Death of the Future: On Nnedi Okorafor's 'Remote Control'. *Los Angeles Review of Books*. 23 January 2021 (Accessed 10 September 2021), n.p.
- <sup>79</sup> Okorafor, *Remote Control*. p. 159.
- <sup>80</sup> Okorafor, *Remote Control*. p. 159.
- <sup>81</sup> Okorafor, *Remote Control*. p. 159; my emphasis.
- <sup>82</sup> Okorafor, *Lagoon*. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2014, p. 67.
- <sup>83</sup> Crowley, Cosmos and Polis, Space and Place in Nnedi Okorafor's SF. *Science Fiction Studies*. Vol. 46, no 2, 2019, p. 272.
- <sup>84</sup> Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, p. 103; my emphasis.
- <sup>85</sup> Lindow, Nnedi Okorafor: Exploring the Empire of Girls' Moral Development. *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*. Vol. 28, no 1, 2017, p. 64.
- <sup>86</sup> Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015, pp. 22–23.

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