AN AFROFUTURIST READING OF RIVERS SOLOMON'S *THE DEEP* AND *AN UNKINDNESS OF GHOSTS*

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Candidate of **<u>Master of Philosophy</u>** at the National University of Modern Languages do hereby declare that the thesis **An Afrofuturist Reading of Rivers Solomon's *The Deep and An Unkindness of Ghosts*** submitted by me in partial fulfillment of MPhil degree, is my original work, and has not been submitted or published earlier. I also solemnly declare that it shall not, in future, be submitted by me for obtaining any other degree from this or any other university or institution.

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ABSTRACT

Title: An Afrofuturist Reading of Rivers Solomon's *The Deep* and *An Unkindness of Ghosts*

This study investigates Afrofuturism's foundational principles through an analysis of Rivers Solomon's novels *The Deep* and *An Unkindness of Ghosts*. The research employs two key conceptual models: from Isiah Lavender's *Afrofuturism Rising: The Literary Prehistory of a Movement*, which presents a vision of an emancipated African future, highlighting concepts like Pocketed Universe, Black Networked Consciousness, and Trans-Historical Feedback Loop. The second model, drawn from Kodwo Eshun's essay "Further Considerations on Afrofuturism," critiques Afrofuturism's conventional historical and political frameworks, proposing a more complex and dynamic understanding of its roots. By creating a nexus of these models, they were applied to Solomon's works in order to examine how they subvert dominant narratives of Black empowerment and futurity. The research centers around three main questions: the reasons behind the subversion of an emancipated African future, whether the novels offer a pessimistic or optimistic outlook, and how traces of colonization and slavery persist within African futures. Through the analysis, it becomes evident that Solomon's novels resist the optimism typically associated with Afrofuturism, instead illustrating the enduring impact of oppression as presented by Afropessimism. The novels demonstrate that, whether centuries after the transatlantic slave trade or within the confines of a dystopian future, the effects of colonization and slavery continue to shape the lives of African-descended peoples, suggesting that the dream of liberation remains largely unfulfilled.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

DEDICATION

To my parents and siblings, who made compromises in letting me achieve my goals

To my teachers, who believed in me and made me capable of acquiring the degree

To my husband, who gave me support and encouragement to complete my degree

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The current research investigates whether Rivers Solomon's novels *The Deep* (2019) and *An Unkindness of Ghosts* (2017) affirm or counter the Afrofuturist ideologies. The study examines the selected texts through Isiah Lavender's conceptual framework of Afrofuturism, presented in his work *Afrofuturism Rising: The Literary Pre-history of a Movement.* In order to support the framework, Kodwo Eshun's theory has been used from his article, "Further Considerations of Afrofuturism".

Afrofuturism is a cultural and literary movement that integrates elements of science fiction, history, and traditions from the African diaspora, providing a reimagined perspective to examine Black experiences throughout history. It combines aspects of science fiction, speculative fiction, historical context, and African diasporic traditions to confront issues of oppression, resilience, and liberation. Rivers Solomon's novels, *The Deep* and *An Unkindness of Ghosts*, engage with the core principles of Afrofuturism while also challenging its established norms. These narratives explore themes of trauma, slavery and colonization within speculative settings, presenting intricate stories that question the often romanticized ideas of futurity and community linked to Afrofuturism. This thesis investigates whether Solomon's works support or challenge Afrofuturist theory. By analyzing the tensions between Solomon's stories and Afrofuturist concepts, this study adds to wider conversations regarding the genre's evolving nature.

Afropessimism, in contrast to Afrofuturism's liberated worlds, highlights the ongoing structural violence and racism faced by Black people. Since this thesis examines similar themes of systemic oppression and struggle, a brief overview of Afropessimism and its implications has been included to contextualize the analysis.

1.1 History of Speculative Fiction

Speculative fiction is a branch of literature and can be defined as "literature of the fantastic, using unrealistic elements to explore hypothetical scenarios or bring aspects of the reader's world into sharp relief" (Hennessey 10). It helps to imagine different scenarios and ways to address unequal power dynamics. It also assists in confronting the

potential consequences of perpetuating these inequalities, by exploring imaginative scenarios and reflecting on human nature and societal structures. This genre transcends the boundaries of reality and offers multiple themes related to, "dystopia, paranormal romance, urban fantasy, zombies, steampunk, magic realism, gothic, slipstream, horror, and so on" (Philip & Kaur 1). Although speculative fiction is popular for its capability to imagine new realities, sometimes it also arises critical thinking, providing insights into the human condition and realities of life. As Hennessey, in his article, "History and Speculative Fiction" (2023) states, "the fantastic elements form a crucial part of the plot…making it perhaps a more serious (though not always less fun) type of fiction" (10). Therefore, this genre offers a new sort of imagination and critical thinking among readers.

The roots of speculative fiction trace back to the ancient world, when people had their stories for explaining the phenomenon that went beyond the natural world. Some critics also believe that it has its origin in Greek stories, but contemporary speculative fiction is devoted to the efforts of Robert Heinlein who suggested this term in the year 1947, in his article "On the Writing of Speculative Fiction". According to him, "there are at least two principal ways to write speculative fiction--write about people or write about gadgets" but he focuses more on human issues than the technological ones, as it describes the world that people desire to live in (Heinlein 1). Speculative fiction does not merely describe the future, rather it has the potential to provide alternatives for the present also. However, the futures created by speculative fiction will be either considered desirable by society or undesirable as genres like these "allow history to be rewritten or ignored" (Dubey 779).

Speculative fiction contains different subcategories and branches, each addressing different types of fiction. For example, Alternate History is the branch of speculative fiction under which assumptions are provided regarding what could have happened, if the outcome of a certain historical event has been different. Writers like Kim Stanley Robinson and Philip K. Dick have worked in this genre. Similarly, post-apocalyptic fiction deals with a time when the world has ended and there are no more signs of human life. Writers like Cormac McCarthy, Richard Matheson, and Suzanne Collins have written fiction in this genre. The most famous subcategory of speculative fiction is

science fiction which deals with the impact of technology on human lives. Many writers across the world have produced works of fiction under this genre.

Among the different writers of the world, Black writers emerged to be speculative fiction writers because it allowed them to have a space, where they could imagine new possibilities, social structures, and technologies for them. Such works, "address social concerns and anxieties arising from imperialism and racism" (Hunte 78). For example, the publication of *Dark Matter: A Century of Speculative Fiction from the African Diaspora* (2000) by Sheree Renée Thomas is important as it signals the presence of Afrodiasporic speculative fiction in the 20th century. Bacon in his article, "Trends in Black Speculative Fiction" (2021) states that after its publication, Black speculative fiction keeps on becoming popular, "as a powerful conversation in genre fiction, and increasingly tackles precolonial, colonial, and postcolonial themes about identity and culture" (7). The book refers to 3 early American African texts; Martin Delany's *Blake* or *The Huts of America* (1859-1861), Sutton E. Grigg's *Imperium in Imperio* (1899), and Pauline Elizabeth Hopkin's *Of One Blood* or *The Hidden Self* (1902) that utilized speculative fiction to improve the lives of Black people. Then the sequel of this book*, Dark Matter: Reading the Bones* (2004) offers narratives related to, "alternate realities, first contact with aliens, post-apocalyptic events, fabulist encounters, the supernatural, robots and posthuman bodies" (Hunte 78). To bring Afro-diasporic speculative fiction into the limelight, a new branch named "Afrofuturism" emerged under the sub-category of speculative fiction.

Afrofuturism deals with the speculative fiction produced by African Diasporas to present an alternative future for them. Afrofuturism has gained popularity in terms of arts, music, and literature, as it holds the "potential to bring the Afrodiasporic experience to life in new ways" (Yaszek 47). This genre breaks from the multiple aspects of the history of slavery and invents new ways to introduce the concept of slavery by presenting a bright and hopeful future for Black people, having equal opportunities and freedom. Afrofuturists present scenarios in their writings where Black people have achieved milestones, gotten recognition, and overcame the shackles of slavery. As Joni Boyd Acuff in his article, "Afrofuturism: Reimagining Art Curricula for Black Existence" (2020) mentions that it aims at proposing alternate versions of histories which,

"reconsider the role of Black people in Western society in the past and imagine alternative roles in the future" (13).

1.2 Development of Afrofuturism

Afrofuturism, an aesthetic and cultural movement, came about in the latter part of the 20th century as a reaction to the historical, and ongoing marginalization of African and African-descended communities. It encompasses a fusion of science fiction, historical fiction, speculative fantasy, and Afrocentricity, all of which offer new interpretations of the past and future of the African diaspora. The historical aspect of Afrofuturism is deeply intertwined with the transatlantic slave trade, colonialism, and the subsequent quests for freedom and identity in a world shaped by racial oppression. By drawing from African traditions, mythology, and cosmology, Afrofuturism aims to recover a history that has been misrepresented or erased by Western narratives. It "engages in more explicit explorations that reimagine contemporary or historical Black experience in futuristic environments" (Johnson & Samirah 6).

Afrofuturism as a theoretical concept and analytical lens was introduced by Mark Dery in his essay "Black to the Future" in 1994. According to him, it "treats African American themes" and introduces "African American concerns in the context of twentieth-century technoculture" (Dery 180). Emerging as a hope for the Black people to have a world beyond the physical and mental oppression of the Whites, it is reflected in arts, literature, and music produced by African Diasporas. This concept is depicted in the works of Octavia Butler, Janelle Monae, and Sun Ra. It diverts our attention towards the positive side of the survival of Trans-Atlantic Slaves and how they survived and emerged as successful figures. Initially, critics have located and traced Afrofuturism back to the 1970s jazz music movement and Sun Ra has been considered as the pioneer figure of Afrofuturism in music. Although the formal term "Afrofuturism" was introduced by Dery, later Sun Ra's music reflected a Black person whose homeland was the planet Saturn and thus it put a light upon the science fiction development of the Blacks and the capability of portraying Blacks in the alien world too.

Later, Afrofuturism was incorporated into arts and literature. In arts, painters like James Marshall, Robert Pruitt, and Hebru Bantley incorporated the images of Black

people in their paintings to present Black as a color representing something common and not something to be discriminated. They presented Blacks as superheroes and portrayed the interactions between Africans and Americans to end all sorts of racism. The pioneer figure of Afrofuturism in terms of literature is Octavia Butler, who represented the Black women as being strong figures, with the capability to imagine brighter futures. Her novels depict African women surviving the dystopian worlds of Whites and achieving milestones in their journeys.

Putting the African heritage into prominence, the writings of Afrofuturism are an effort to make Black people get recognition in literature. In terms of science fiction, these writings are related to Black people living in outer space or possessing technological developments that have usually been associated with the Whites. The common themes are related to overcoming the "otherness" of the Black people, reclamation of their history and culture, overcoming their negative image and culture, and imagining new futures that would overcome the narratives of colonization and slavery. Through this, Black people are also able to spread awareness to the people about their long history of suffering and abandonment. Thus, these writers tend to create a utopian world free from the colonization of the White races.

Afrofuturism also addresses modern-day concerns regarding racial inequality and social justice, imagining futures in which black individuals play a central role in the advancement of technology, science, and society. This exploration of hypothetical futures is inherently political, as it challenges the current realities of systemic racism and economic inequality. Through speculative fiction, the Afrofuturist authors criticize the existing state of affairs and propose alternative methods of structuring society, based on principles of fairness, justice, and collective empowerment. As Baas in his article, "Travel Beyond Stars: Trauma and Future in Mojisola Adebayo's STARS" (2021) mentions, "Afrofuturist concerns into the everyday experiences of marginalized groups who face discrimination and exclusion, irrespective of whether their marginalization is based on culture, gender, or age" (95). Therefore, the theory has a role in addressing issues related to the past as well as the present. However, since the term only considers the experiences of African Diasporas and was developed by a White American, it is

criticized by writers like Nnedi Okarafor, who introduced the term "Africanfuturism", as a way to highlight the experiences of Black people.

Isiah Lavender and Kodwo Eshun, prominent contributors to Afrofuturist theory, have critically shaped its theoretical foundations. This thesis draws on their work, selecting them as key theorists to frame the analysis. The following section outlines their major contributions to the field.

1.3 Afrofuturism: Isiah Lavender & Kodwo Eshun:

Isiah Lavender III is a reputable scholar and professor, who focuses on Afrofuturism, science fiction, and African American literature. He blends literature, cultural studies, and critical race theory in his work. Lavender is a well-known voice in discussing how speculative fiction reflects and shapes Black experiences. He has significantly contributed to the study of Afrofuturism and Black speculative literature through several important publications. His books, such as *Race in American Science Fiction* (2011), *Black and Brown Planets: The Politics of Race in Science Fiction* (2014), and *Afrofuturism Rising: The Literary Pre-history of a Movement* (2019), have sparked interest in Black science fiction.

Lavender's work on Afrofuturism focuses on how Black speculative fiction can reimagine Black identity and experiences in different histories and futures. He sees Afrofuturism not just as a genre but as a strong way to critique society and reflect culture. Lavender believes that science fiction and speculative literature provide a special space to address the painful history of slavery, colonialism, and racism. These narratives highlight both the struggles of Black life and the possibilities for freedom, empowerment, and renewal. He argues that Afrofuturism gives Black writers a chance to challenge mainstream stories that often leave out or silence Black voices. Through Afrofuturism, Black writers can explore "what if" scenarios about Black life and imagine new futures while asserting their voices in spaces that have not always welcomed them.

In *Afrofuturism Rising: The Literary Pre-history of a Movement*, Lavender looks at the history of Afrofuturism. This book highlights works by Black authors who used speculative fiction to question societal limits and envision new possibilities for Black existence. Lavender argues that Afrofuturism isn't new; it has roots in a rich Black

literary tradition that includes authors like W. E. B. Du Bois and George Schuyler. Through careful analysis, Lavender shows how these early writings anticipated themes found in modern Afrofuturism, like reclaiming identity, dealing with oppression, and imagining futures where Black people succeed. *Afrofuturism Rising* provides a solid framework and historical background, showing Afrofuturism as a lively and evolving idea with deep roots in Black literature. This book has established Lavender as a key figure in Afrofuturism studies, helping readers and scholars appreciate the powerful role of speculative literature in shaping Black identity and experiences.

Lavender and Eshun have both made important contributions to the discussion on Afrofuturism, each bringing a unique perspective that enhances the overall conversation. This thesis aims to combine their ideas by using Lavender's historical and textual analysis alongside Eshun's critiques. Together, their theories create a solid framework for examining how Afrofuturism connects the past, present, and future. This connection offers a valuable way to explore Black identity and culture.

Kodwo Eshun is a British-Ghanian writer and theorist, who is considered to be one of the important figures of the science fiction writing and in producing the discourse around Afrofuturism. He was born in London in 1967, to Ghanaian parents and studied BA Hons in English Literature from Oxford University. After that, he received a degree of MA Hons in Romanticism and Modernism from Southampton University. Currently, he teaches MA in Aural and Visual Cultures at Goldsmiths College, University of London. Among his achievements, he won the Best Journalist Award at the First International Techno Congress in Berlin and was a judge on the Digital Music Jury at Prix Ars Electronica, Linz, and the International Short Film Festival in Oberhausen.

His extensive work related to Afrofuturism makes him to be a critic as well as one of the proponents of the theory. One of his contributions to the field of science fiction and Afrofuturism is the production of "The Otolith Group", which is an artistic collection based in London and was founded by Eshun and Anjalika Sagar, an Indian and Jamaican artist in 2002. The purpose of this group is to explore and produce the work of speculative fiction, by proposing alternative ways to understand the world. The group usually addresses the issues related to colonialism, diaspora, and migration and includes

all forms of art, such as film, video, and writing. In 2010, the group was nominated for the Turner Prize which added to its reputation.

In terms of literature, his book *More Brilliant than the Sun: Adventures in Sonic Fiction* (1998) counts as his major contribution to the field of Afrofuturism. In this book, he discusses how the musicians, such as Sun Ra, Alice Coltrane, and Lee Perry have used music as a form of speculative fiction to imagine alternative realities and futures for Black people. He addresses, "the ways in which writing on black music usually contextualizes it through emphasizing its basis in the lived experience of communities" (Brennan 56-57). Thus, he gives the idea about how "sonic fiction" can be used as a medium for reshaping identities, history, and future possibilities.

Another major contribution by Eshun, in the field of Afrofuturism is the publication of his essay "Further Considerations on Afrofuturism" (2003) which delves into the concept of Afrofuturism as a dynamic and complex mode of cultural expression. In this article, he highlights Afrofuturism's role in reimagining African diasporic futures, centered on Black experiences and perspectives within technological and scientific discourse. It explores how "black artists, musicians, critics, and writers have made it to the future, in moments where any future was made difficult for them to imagine" (Eshun 294). Eshun creates links between the work of artists, musicians, and writers, such as Sun Ra, George Clinton, and Octavia Butler, who use Afrofuturism to create new myths and histories that challenge dominant narratives. Along with it, Eshun also discusses criticisms of Afrofuturism in his essay, recognizing the concerns that it may idealize the future at the expense of addressing current material conditions. He emphasizes that the Black people have gone through the "real conditions of existential homelessness, alienation, dislocation and dehumanization" and these traumas continue to be a part of their experiences (Eshun 288).

Therefore, Eshun has made significant and diverse contributions to the Afrofuturism field. In his role as a theorist, he has established a strong intellectual groundwork for comprehending the movement, while also questioning its assumptions and highlighting its limitations. His work prompts us to critically analyze the future, challenge the narratives that influence our perceptions of race and technology, and

conceive new avenues for freedom and self-determination. Eshun's impact on Afrofuturism is unquestionable, and his concepts will continue to have a lasting influence as the movement progresses in the future.

As a counter to Afrofuturism, Afropessimism focuses on the deep-rooted issues of anti-Blackness in today's society. While Afrofuturism imagines positive futures and new realities for Black people, Afropessimism argues that the ongoing dehumanization of Black individuals is a key part of the world's social structure and cannot be fully avoided or changed. This creates a debate: Can Afrofuturism's hopeful stories coexist with Afropessimism's focus on unavoidable violence? Therefore, the thesis argues whether Solomon's novels fall under the category of Afrofuturism or Afropessimism. The following section provides a brief introduction to Afropessimism.

1.4 Afropessimism

Afropessimism is a theory that looks at the ongoing problems of anti-Blackness and structural oppression rooted in the history of slavery and its aftermath. These ideas go back to the transatlantic slave trade, the establishment of slavery as an institution, and the continued systemic disadvantage of Black people. These historical events form the basis of Afropessimist thought, showing how anti-Blackness is a lasting part of modern society. The Afropessimists assert that "black lives are still subject to the principles of slavery" and can be killed by anyone, without that, "act of killing being considered either a homicide or a sacrilege" (Urena 113). Moreover, this movement gained recognition due to these massive killings that ruled out the chances of a hopeful and better future for Black people

Afropessimism has its roots in the transatlantic slave trade that began in the 15th century and continued into the 19th century. According to Huggins, "Afro-Pessimism focuses on the event of transatlantic slavery [that] was and is the disaster" (vi). During this period, millions of Africans were forcibly removed from their homelands and transported to the Americas under brutal conditions. The transatlantic slave was not just a sequence of isolated acts of violence but a system of oppression that stripped Black individuals of their humanity and turned their bodies into commodities. This process of dehumanization is a central concept in Afropessimism, which posits that "Black people

are objects or targets for sadistic anti-Black violence" (O'Donnell 31). The commodification and dehumanization of Black people continue to shape their experiences, as they are often perceived as inherently different and less than human.

The dehumanization of Black people and slavery is crucial in understanding the concept of Afropessimism as it developed a hierarchy under which they are categorized as "others". In this regard, most pessimists agree that it was Orlando Patterson's concept of "Slavery and Social Death" (1982) that fired the starting signal for its development as it is known nowadays" (Urena 113). He defines "social death" as, "natal alienation, generalized dishonor, and violent domination" (Gordon et al. 15). The notion characterizes the state of enslaved Africans who were deprived of their social roles and prevented from establishing family connections or being acknowledged as individuals. This concept highlights the notion that slavery was not only a form of labor subjugation but also a complete attack on the human dignity of Black individuals.

In literature, theorists such as Frank B. Wilderson III, Jared Sexton, and Saidiya Hartman are noted to be the famous theorists of Afropessimism. Extending upon the idea of Patterson, these theorists worked on the three basic ideas of social death and Afropessimism and that includes, natal alienation, gratuitous violence, and social dishonor. Sexton defines natal alienation as the ways through which, "slavery severed Africans' ties to their family" and gratuitous violence as the "structural violence" that Whites use to practice slavery on Blacks (Ray et al. 150). Similarly, according to Wilderson, the world is divided into 2 categories, the "Humans" or the White people and physically "dead" people who are Blacks or Slaves. This variation defines a Black person as someone who is not "a body, but flesh, not a human subject, but a sentient being", and who is prone to, "gratuitous violence, accumulation, fungibility, and terror" (Weier 423). Hartman's historical and literary work, such as "Scenes of Subjection," explores the lived experiences of enslaved and freed Black people, highlighting the ongoing legacies of slavery in contemporary forms of racial violence and exclusion.

Afropessimism can be located in several novels produced by different authors. In these novels the common themes related to slavery, colonization, racism, and systematic oppression are present. One of the works that contains the elements of Afropessimism

includes, "The Sellout" (2015) by Paul Beatty. In this novel, Beatty employs satire to discuss the absurdities and long-rooted effects of racial inequality. By delving into the ongoing struggles that Black people face due to systematic oppression, the novel talks about the tragic dimensions of living in America as a Black. Similar themes can be explored in "Homegoing", a work published by Yaa Gyasi. This novel explores the legacies of slavery, colonization, and racism across generations through the depiction of two half-sisters and their descendants across the period of 300 hundred years, one of which is sold in slavery and the other remains in Africa. The novel shows how the trauma of slavery affects multiple generations and how these legacies still shape the lives of Black people.

Therefore, Afropessimism is deeply rooted in the transatlantic slave trade and the continued systemic oppression of Black people. Through these historical events, Afropessimists assert that "the world of White Masters and Black Slaves is the world we have inherited and the world we live in today" (Poll 100). By looking at the ongoing legacies of slavery and the persistent conditions of social death and structural violence, Afropessimism argues that the liberation of Black people requires a fundamental transformation of the social and political order. Hence, Afropessimism is a critical lens for understanding the importance of ongoing struggles and historical trauma in the lives of Black people. The theory helps reflect on Black people's fight for racial justice and dismantle the oppression. However, it is criticized by some critics who believe that "Afropessimism is the consistently negative view that Africa is incapable of progressing" (Evans & Glenn 14-15). They think that the theory rejects the achievements of Black people and is considered to be "so very negative" for the people who believe "that things are getting better" for Black people (Urena 117).

To demonstrate the ideas presented by Eshun and Lavender in their models and to analyze the implications of Afrofuturism and Afropessimism, the novels of Rivers Solomon were selected.

1.5 Biography of the Selected Writer

Rivers Solomon was born in 1989, on Turtle Island and grew up in different places like California, Indiana, Texas, and New York. Although they[1] belong to the United States, they currently reside in England, with their family. Solomon has a BA in Comparative Studies in Race and Ethnicity from Stanford University in California and an MFA in Fiction Writing from the Michener Center for Writers at the University of Texas at Austin.

Being famous for their science and speculative fiction, they received several awards for their contribution to the field of diasporic science fiction. In 2018, they won the "Community of Literary Magazines" and "Presses' Firecracker Award" in Fiction for their novel, *An Unkindness of Ghosts*. In 2020 their novel, *The Deep,* was honored with the "Lambda Literary Award". Moreover, *Sorrowland* is another novel that was published in May 2021 and won the "Otherwise Award". Aside from receiving these awards, they got shortlisted for several other awards, such as the "Stonewall Honor List".

Solomon is also a refugee from the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. By using, "gothic and fantastic conventions", Solomon discusses the issues and trauma experienced by refugees, including the feeling of homelessness and the pain of living on the margins (Lindsay 285). For example, their novel *Sorrowland* depicts a character named Vern and her journey to escape from the brutality of a secret government and this escape has been made parallel to the escape of Black people from slavery. During her journey, Vern faces multiple instances of homelessness, where she has to take her twins from places to places, to achieve a sustainable life for herself as well as her children. Therefore, Solomon as refugee from the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade has devoted their writings to bringing the issues of Africans into focus.

Moreover, their works focus on themes of identity, oppression, and resistance, showing how history influences their stories. Their novels deeply examine how the past shapes the present, especially through the lenses of colonialism and slavery. To understand the meanings in *The Deep* and *An Unkindness of Ghosts*, it is important to

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[1] The pronoun "they" is used for the writer because they identify as non-binary and queer.

place these stories within the wider context of colonization and the transatlantic slave trade. The next section will look at the historical background of colonization and slavery, providing the context needed to understand how Solomon critiques, reclaims, and redefines these stories in their work.

1.6 Unveiling the Past: Colonial History and Shackles of Slavery

The colonization of Africa resulted from the Industrial Revolution when the need for a labor force increased in America and the Africans became the required manpower for them. From the 1800s to the 1900s, the "investment of the accumulated capital and the need for Raw materials led to the colonization of Africa" (Ocheni & Nwankwo 46). When the Europeans entered the shores of Africa, they pretended to be the well-wishers and saviors of Africans but instead, they destroyed their sovereignty. Along with the economy, they took away control of territories of Africa and began to exploit their resources. They used different strategies to maintain their power and control over Africa, such as forced labor, taxation, payment of low wages, and domination.

As a result of this colonization, the Africans lost contact with their heritage, technology, and traditions. As the Western people tried to educate the people, they provided them with an education that was of their interest and that helped them increase their production. Similarly, the economic development of Africa ceased due to colonization because the Europeans only extracted the raw materials from Africans and did not let them work in the sector of manufacture. Thus, everything worked in the interest of the Whites. The prevailing economic system, which was based upon the principles of Europeans, also integrated a sense of class consciousness in Africans. Moving away from the clan system, they got divided into different classes, "including comprador bourgeoisie, petty bourgeoisie, proletariat, and the peasant" (Ocheni & Nwankwo 3).

The most important factor that had an impact on the lives of the Africans, because of colonization was slavery. According to Sowle, "Slavery was a way of life, a human institution designed to relegate an inferior minority of the population to permanent subjection" (237). Slavery was divided into different parts of Africa and prevailed in different forms but the roots of the selected author as well as the characters of the

selected novels trace back to the Transatlantic Slave Trade that occurred between the 16th to 18th centuries. This oceanic trade was initiated by the Portuguese, in which the Africans were exchanged as slaves with other commodities and goods and the tradition kept on going for centuries. The act of such trade became the basis of the dispersal of Africans throughout countries like Europe, America, and Britain, creating a large number of African Diasporas. According to a report, in the 18th and 19th centuries, almost 5 million enslaved Africans came to America, because of the transportation of the slaves. These slaves were, "captured, transported, and fashioned into slaves in the English slave trade" (Morgan 785). As a result, these slaves faced some extremely miserable and brutal conditions.

In the Transatlantic Slave Trade, not only did Whites export the Africans to exchange them for commodities, but also the Africans started making other African captives and started selling them to the merchants to make money. These slaves were then, exported in the slave's ships, which had a small number of Africans boarded on them initially but with time, the demand for more slaves increased. Since the number of slaves on a single ship kept on increasing, their misery kept on increasing. Firstly, they went through sanitary issues as they were forced to sleep and live on their urine and feces. This led to the spread of several diseases among these slaves, which resulted in the death of a great number of Africans. Secondly, to mark the ownership of a particular slave, the Europeans would mark their flesh with a hot iron so that it may indicate to whom a certain slave belongs. Similarly, the captors "grossly injured, maimed, tortured, and otherwise killed the African slaves to force them to submit", which became a cause of extreme depression among other slaves, causing psychological illness along with physical illnesses (Esq 900). Moreover, pregnant slaves were taken as a greater commodity, as these unborn children would add to their number of slaves in the future. Therefore, this slave trade was a part of the traumatic conditions that the Africans went through.

The slavery abolition act was officially passed in the year 1865 under the 13th Amendment. The Vice President of the Confederacy declared that "Slavery is abolished…Let everyone who has slaves do the best he can with them, working to their future interest" (Sowle 240). The purpose of this declaration was to provide complete

freedom for Africans from the shackles of the Whites, but it left some long-lasting effects on the lives of Africans. The impact that was left on Africa included "weak and fragmented political structures", "ethnic stratification" and a generation of "a culture of mistrust" under which the people have their ancestry roots in slavery are not much trusted (Bertocchi 5). Although abolition was a practice of prevention from the conventions of slavery, it is still considered to be present in the blood of Africans and they are still treated in the same manner. The legacies of slavery still lie in the contemporary era as it "did not reduce or weaken the norms, values, and ideals of slavery systems that existed before the colonial order" (Lecocq & Hahonou 187).

1.7 Thesis Statement

Afrofuturism envisions a liberated African future by imagining worlds free from the historical burdens of colonization and slavery, often offering an optimistic outlook. However, the selected works, *The Deep* (2019) and *An Unkindness of Ghosts* (2017), deviate from this ideal, portraying futures still deeply affected by the enduring traumas of colonization and slavery. This research critically examines these texts through Isiah Lavender's model of Afrofuturism while incorporating the lens of Afropessimism, which challenges the possibility of fully transcending systemic anti-Blackness. By engaging both perspectives, this study explores how the selected works confront the dominant narrative of an emancipated African future and offer nuanced visions that oscillate between hope and despair, highlighting the complexities of reimagining Black existence in speculative realms.

1.8 Research Questions

1. How do the selected works represent the traces of colonization and slavery in African's[2] envisioned future?

2. In what ways do the selected works challenge the dominant narratives of an emancipated African future?

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[2] The term "African" in this context pertains to the historical setting of the Atlantic Slave Trade and is not directed towards any specific geographical region. Solomon, the author, has not specified a particular location but has instead crafted novels that address the overall impact of the slave trade.

3. Do the selected works present a predominantly optimistic or pessimistic vision of Africa's future, and what factors shape this outlook?

1.9 Structure of the Study

In the first chapter, I introduced all the key concepts and the main purpose of the research. It contains the significance of the research, the problem statement, and the research questions. In the second chapter, all the available literature on the selected works as well as the theory was reviewed, which led to the formation of the research gap. The third chapter discussed the research methods, methodology and conceptual framework of the study, along with the description of the reason for the selection of the methodology. In Chapter four, I conducted a detailed analysis of both works separately, based on the conceptual framework generated. Chapter five discussed the results formed from the study along with the conclusion of the study.

1.10 Delimitation

The research delimited itself and focused on themes related to slavery, colonization, racism, violence, and traumatic past instead of focusing on other themes that the novels offered such as intergenerational trauma, the role of history in shaping identities, or Queer theory.

1.11 Significance of the Study

This research contributes to African studies by examining the future of descendants of slaves in literature. It emphasizes that, even in the future, these individuals face challenges such as lack of rights, insufficient resources, and societal abandonment. While historical narratives often focus on the hardships of enslaved individuals, their descendants' conditions are often neglected. The study highlights that despite the introduction of terms like Afrofuturism, to recognize science fiction by African diasporic writers, some authors fail to present a promising future. This research specifically aims to spotlight one such writer who addresses this perceived weakness in Afrofuturism, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the portrayal of African descendants in speculative literature.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The following section provides a literature review of the selected novels as well as the theoretical perspectives used in the research. Since Afrofuturism has a connection with speculative fiction, that is why firstly, I intended to provide a review on the work done on Solomon's novels and then on the multiple researches conducted regarding speculative fiction. The review led to finding the research gap and how the current study managed to add new knowledge to the existing one.

2.1 Exploration into the Realms of Speculative Fiction

In this section of literature review, the focus was on the exploration of distinctive experiences of the marginalized strata of society, within the realm of speculative fiction. Since this research was specifically based on an author who is African American, the aim was to highlight the works of authors who belong to the same ethnicity and to delve into their narrative building and characters related to speculative fiction. This analysis of the literature contributed to and assisted in a better understanding of the themes and concerns of the speculative fiction produced by Black people.

With regards to speculative fiction, one of the research projects was conducted by Sheree Thomas who introduced a collection of short stories called, *Dark Matter: A Century of Speculative Fiction from the African Diaspora* published in 2000. The collection is based upon the experiences of Africans, both ancestors and descendants in America and the themes that are the focus of the collection include themes of slavery, poverty, homelessness, and racism. The stories are imaginative as well as entertaining and depict the Black people's liberation by including the elements of magical realism. For example, the story, "Black No More" portrays the invention of a machine by an African American that can turn the Black race into a White race. Thus, this book is again an attempt to introduce alternative futures for Africans.

Joy-Ann Sanchez Taylor while discussing speculative fiction in his dissertation *Science Fiction/Fantasy and the Representation of Ethnic Futurity* (2014) focuses on the authors that are inventing new ways to blur the racial discrimination between Blacks and

Whites and challenge the long-existing binaries between colonizers and colonized. He believes that speculative fiction can build such spaces and races that will allow "fluid representations of racial and ethnic identifications" (Taylor 10). The study includes the works of different authors who have faced colonization in the US and have examined the effects of colonization on people. Through this, the authors can construct a "decolonized society" and how the people will gain their lost cultural values as well as recover from the negative effects of colonization (Taylor 146). Thus, Taylor believes all this can be done through the help of speculative fiction and that is why it is an important field of study.

In another research, Joshua Yu Burnett in his research article, "The Great Change and the Great Book: Nnedi Okorafor's Postcolonial, Post-Apocalyptic Africa and the Promise of Black Speculative Fiction" (2015) emphasizes Nalo Hopkinson's belief that postcolonial writers should engage with speculative fiction. She believes that the "postcolonial people must engage with, and not just critique or attack, these genres", calling Black people speculative fiction (Burnett 135). The social orders created by neocolonialism, racism, and imperialism need to be deconstructed. Burnett in this regard gives the examples of different works produced by Okorafor, in which she creates a free world for Africans, without the oppression and hegemonic powers of the West. These notions contradict my research as Solomon's novels portray characters that are still haunted by Western hegemonic powers.

Marlene D. Allen worked on speculative fiction produced by three writers: Pauline E. Hopkins, Octavia E. Butler, and Tananarive Due in her research article "Kindred Spirits: The Speculative Fictions of Pauline E. Hopkins, Octavia E. Butler, and Tananarive Due" (2017). The researcher says that all these writers present different settings and different plots, but they have one thing in common - that is the presentation of innovative futures for Africans. These innovative futures are proposed through the usage of elements like gothic conventions. The gothic conventions are past-oriented but since Afrofuturism depicts "past-future visions" therefore the combination of the two is possible (Allen 96). Similarly, the writers of speculative fiction create imaginary worlds with their own rules and regulations. Solomon has also created such a world, but it is not utopian like the world of most Afrofuturists, rather it is dystopian.

Ricardo Guthrie in his article, "The Uses of Genre and the Classification of Speculative Fiction" (2019) debates that the superheroes that emerged out of the African culture were also a reaction to colonial oppression and it was an effort to provide alternatives for life after slavery. Its example is evident in *Black Panther* with the world of Wakanda, which is a fantasy world of a possible African future. The purpose of the movie was "to counter the traumatic, enduring colonialism/enslavement narratives and to confront them through an Afro-Diasporic reckoning" (Guthrie 19). It aims to depict that the future world of Africans can be depicted beyond the dilemmas portrayed by slave narratives and colonialism. On the contrary, the current research depicts how the Africans are still trapped by the vicious circle of colonialism

As a criticism of speculative fiction, Ethony, E. Thomas in her research "Toward a Theory of the Dark Fantastic: The Role of Racial Difference in Young Adult Speculative Fiction and Media" (2018) states that speculative fiction provides features related to fantasy, imagination and science fiction that led towards new possibilities in future. These possibilities are limitless and open doors to new existences. The works of writers like Okorafor and Jemisin also divert our attention towards creating new mythologies for Africans. However, when people of color such as Africans try to attain such pathways into the future, they discover that the doors are "barred" as the texts fail to provide "liberatory spaces" for Blacks (Thomas 1). Their images related to fantasy are interrupted and abolished due to the violence and discrimination that they go through. Thomas believes that to reinforce the idea of liberation and new possibilities for Africans, the stories of White subjugation should be portrayed in the same manner that they are depicted about Blacks.

Doseline Kiguru discusses the short story collection *Imagine Africa 500* in the research article, "Speculative Fiction and African Urban Futures: Reading *Imagine Africa 500*" (2021) which takes place 500 years from the present day. The stories focus on different futures presented by Africans and produced by different writers. According to Kiguru, the writers of these short stories deliberately blur the "lines between reality and fantasy and magic and imagined technology" (98). In all of the short stories the setting depicts a post-apocalyptic world, and it is an effort to put Africa's continent into focus. Through the stories, the authors try to divert the attention of the people towards the over-

population in the urban places of Africa and the alarming conditions of climate due to it. Thus, the focus of the research is ecocriticism, and it provides the possible dangers of the future in Africa. Similarly, in my research, I am going to highlight the grim future that Africans experience, even after centuries have passed.

Stephanie Fawell worked on the institution of slavery and how it was reconsidered by writers like Toni Morrison and Octavia Butler in her dissertation, *Beyond Realism: Reading the Ongoing Wounds of Enslavement* (2021). In these novels, the writers challenged the stereotypical assumptions related to Africans by putting their heritage into focus. Through these novels, Fawell highlights some of the "silenced and injurious realities" that Black Americans faced in the past and are still facing, along with the "strategies of resilience and healing" that Africans developed in response to this oppression (25). Due to this oppression, the characters in the novel develop issues like self-identity as their autonomy has been taken from them because of colonization. Thus, Fawell through these works, tries to emphasize the traumatic pasts that overshadow the future.

Therefore, Speculative Fiction in terms of Africans emerged as a reaction to the phases of colonization and oppression that they went through. Through speculative fiction, the Africans tried to bring fantastical and magical elements in their works, to open new pathways for the Black people. Much of the emergence of speculative fiction owes to the efforts of writers such as Octavia Butler, Nnedi Okorafor, and Samuel R. Delany in the 20th century. These writers tried to address important themes like slavery, poverty, homelessness, and racism within the margins of speculative fiction. By presenting the ideal settings, the authors of speculative fiction also tried to blur all the discriminatory boundaries between colonizers and colonized. Moreover, the modern trends of speculative fiction that the African writers have tried to incorporate in their writings include magical realism, gothic conventions, issues with identity, and its reconstruction and reclamation of history.

2.2 Afrofuturism: Illuminating New Horizons in Speculative Fiction

Afrofuturism emerged as a distinctive field of literature, to make the fictional works of Africans, more recognizable and their approach more expansive. Through this

field, the Africans including all the artists, musicians, and writers were able to collectively raise their voices for the misrepresentation of the Black people and their rights. Moreover, it was a movement that allowed Black people to reimagine their history and build their futures, free from the conventions of oppression. Therefore, keeping this significance in view, the following section of the literature review is based on the works of different writers in the field of Afrofuturism.

The major contribution to the field of Afrofuturism was made by the famous movie *Black Panther*. This movie was able to create a spark in the lives of Africans as it proposed a promising future for them. In this regard, multiple researchers conducted their research on the movie to relate the movie's implication with Afrofuturism. Myron T. Strong and K. Sean Chaplin present an article named, "Afrofuturism and Black Panther" (2019) on it. According to them, Afrofuturism has provided an "undeniable expansion of Blackness" as it has succeeded in giving the stage to African science fiction (Strong & Chaplin 58). *Black Panther* was an attempt to represent Africa without the conventions of colonization, violence, and all the ills that are associated with Africa, thereby providing a promising future possible for Africa. The science fictional elements crossed the boundaries of time and space, "merging both ancestral history and future possibility" (Strong & Chaplin 59).

Extending the notion of a promising future, Karen Ritzenhoff and Renee White present a volume Afrofuturism in Black Panther: Gender, Identity, and the Re-Making of Blackness (2021). According to them, *Black Panther* paved the way for the African supernatural narratives as it was the "first Black superhero" (Ritzenhoff & White 3). Before the production of this movie, the superheroes were associated with Whites only, making it a part of racist ideology. Thus, according to them, Afrofuturism can, "see beyond the known worlds" of Whites and bring the issues of Blacks into focus (Ritzenhoff & White 4). Similarly, Dann J. Broyld, in the article "The Underground Railroad as Afrofuturism: Enslaved Blacks Who Imagined a Future and Used Technology to Reach the 'Outer Spaces of Slavery'" (2019) emphasizes the importance of the Underground Railroads in the movie. These railroads were able to uncover all the tactics that required the African slaves to liberate themselves from slavery. The series depicts the characters having a complete liberation from slavery and their capacity "to

travel at will, to be educated, and to advance well beyond their present state" (Broyld 173).

Emphasizing the positive implications of Afrofuturism, many writers produced more fiction that highlighted how it could be employed to bring a better future for Black people. After the production of these works, different researchers conducted research to locate Afrofuturism across texts. One of these researches was conducted by Lisa Yaszek who employs Afrofuturism to break the label of the Black failure that is attached to Africa in her article, "An Afrofuturist Reading of Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man" (2005). According to Yaszek, the main purpose of Afrofuturism lies in two basic things; firstly, it is an attempt to break the "dystopian futures" of Africa and secondly, it includes the creation of those fantastical movies that will bring African science fiction into the light (301).

Similarly, Shaden Nasser also used Afrofuturism to explore new beginnings for Africans in the article "Reimagining African Identity through Afrofuturism: A reading of Nnedi Okorafor's Binti (2015)" (2021). Nasser believes that Afrofuturists address those themes related to Africans that "have been otherwise neglected in the Western futurist canon" (166). Another researcher, Susana M Morris researched Butler's novel *Fledging* in the article "Black Girls Are from the Future: Afrofuturist Feminism in Octavia E. Butler's Fledgling" (2012). The research is based on the Feminist Afrofuturism and Black feminism. Morris debates the idea of the representation of vampires in science fiction by Black authors as they are represented in the dominant culture of Whites. Although vampires are a part of Western culture, "Butler's rhetorical questions and subsequent answers reject the notion that speculative fiction is a "Whites only" enterprise" (Morris 14). Comparing it to the current research, Solomon on the other hand did not provide such a hopeful future for African descendants as described by Butler.

Dan Hassler-Forest published a book Janelle Monáe's "Dirty Computer" (2022) to analyze the theme of Afrofuturism in the novel Dirty Computer by Monae, which was initially an album but was converted into a book by the author. The novel contains a combination of science-fictional and speculative worlds without the constraints of racism and that is why it is placed under the category of Afrofuturism. According to Forest, the

writer can pave the way for a better life with a different identity, while remaining in the realm of Black culture. By reverting to the example of *Black Panther*, Forest utilizes Afrofuturism to provide alternative futures for Black feminists and to overcome racial prejudice.

However, some researchers presented a criticism towards Afrofuturism. Anthony Dwayne Boynton in his article, "August Wilson, Afrofuturism, & Gem of the Ocean" (2018) focuses on the interconnection between history and the Black speculative imagination, specifically dystopian fiction. In this regard, he explores The *Gem of the Ocean* (2003) from the lens of a dystopian play, which is set in a capitalist police state. The play takes place in a dystopian setting and is covered by an autonomous body of the government, along with economic and state violence. Wilson presents Pittsburgh as a dystopia for Black people with the persistence of slavery and a "nightmarish atmosphere created by anti-Black violence and hegemony" (Boynton 378). Through this, Wilson tries to emphasize the inclusion of Black writers and artists, among other artists. Boynton's study is similar to the existing study as it brings the issue of slavery into the 20th century.

In an essay, "Black Female Objecthood, Sexuality, and Necropolitics in Afrofuturism: An Examination of Nnedi Okorafor's Who Fears Death" (2018), Hayley Rathburn worked on Okorafor's novel *Who Fears Death* to locate principles of Afrofuturism in the novel. The novel depicts a post-apocalyptic society, which is hierarchal, and the people are divided into different groups based on their race and skin color. Through this, Okorafor emphasizes the "objectification of Black bodies as seen in the times of slavery, abolitionism, and beyond" (Rathburn 2). Specifically, Rathburn discusses the objectification of women and how they go through physical and sexual violence and the ways through which they manage to overcome this violence, and this is where the hopeful impulse of Afrofuturism comes in. The women in the novel can break all the constraints put on them and become sovereign beings. Thus, the research proposes Afrofuturism's ability to bring new futures for women.

On the contrary, Imogen Bagnall in his dissertation Afrofuturism and Generational Trauma in N. K. Jemisin's *Broken Earth Trilogy* (2019-2021) explored the effects of generational trauma and the general effects caused by systematic oppression,

through Jemisin's novel. *The Broken Earth Trilogy* is similar to Solomon's novel, *An Unkindness of Ghosts* as it depicts a parallel between two groups, one is the oppressor, and the other is being oppressed. However, unlike Solomon's novel, the novel at the end shows that "liberation from cyclical collective trauma can be imagined for oppressed groups through the Afrofuturist aesthetic mode" (Bagnall 47). The female characters of the novel can end the tyranny and conquer their imaginary world, free of oppressive notions. Bagnall at the end proposes when it becomes impossible to overcome the traumatic history, Afrofuturism provides us with tools that can help us imagine new possibilities and futures.

Therefore, initially, the approach of Afrofuturism was limited as it only included writers that were of African American descent but later it started including writers from other regions like Nigeria, Jamaica, etc. Through its emergence, it tried to break the label of Black failure as well as the dystopian future that was attached to the Blacks. The highly recognized work that is devoted to the field of Afrofuturism is *Black Panther*. Through the kingdom of Wakanda, this movie depicts freedom from the shackles of slavery and colonization as well as has managed to create a space for Africans in the wider field of the supernatural. Thus, through Afrofuturism, African speculative fiction has gained recognition.

2.3 Echoes of Despair: A Study of Afro-Pessimism

In contrast to Afrofuturism, Afropessimism emerged as a theory that challenged the optimistic narratives of liberation. The following section of the literature review offers insight into the Afro-pessimist thought. It intends to explore how the theory is being utilized to analyze modern science fiction as well as the reasons due to which some researchers are criticizing it.

The thesis "Beyond Mourning: Afro-pessimism in Contemporary African American Science Fiction" (2018) discusses the themes and underpinnings of Afro-pessimism that prevail within modern African-American Science Fiction. The study explores the effects of racism, oppression, and inherited pessimism in the Black community of America. By taking Afro-pessimism as the theoretical framework, the study engages with three contemporary works that are *Citizen: An American Lyric*

(2014), *Between the World and Me* (2015), and *Get Out* (2017). According to Huggins, "these texts construct narratives which insist that readers engage with the pain of racial embodiment" and also demand a future for Blacks, which is not overshadowed by their context of racism and pain. Therefore, this thesis highlights the racial subjugation portrayed in modern science fictional African American texts and shows how historical contexts influence and shape these narratives.

The research article, "Ontology, Experience, and Social Death: On Frank Wilderson's Afropessimism" (2020) by O'Donnell provides a detailed discussion of Frank B. Wilderson III's *Afro-pessimism* (2017). He describes that along with other scholars like Hortense Spillers, Saidiyah Hartman, and Jared Sexton, Wilderson is credited with developing the notion of Afrofuturism, even coining the term. According to him, the main argument presented by Wilderson is that Black people occupy the space of Slaves due to which they are the victims of social death. Moreover, Wilderson in his book claims that Black people are not 'subjects', rather "Black bodies are simultaneously sites for the fulfillment of non-Blacks' political and erotic desires and the mass of flesh upon which ghastly spectacles of violence are enacted" (O'Donnell 32). Wilderson has also added his personal life experiences that serve as the strengths of the theoretical underpinnings of the theory. However, O'Donnell critiques and aims at re-evaluating and re-constructing the claims presented by Wilderson. His critique is mostly surrounded by Wilderson's implications of viewing Blackness as "Slaveness". He believes that such a claim can distort the diverse experiences of Black individuals and disrupt the social order. He says, "The book's theoretical claims are undermotivated, oversold, and almost certainly false" because these claims are extreme and require substantiality, but the book fails to provide them (O'Donnell 32). Therefore, while acknowledging Wilderson's effort in presenting the theory, he also invites readers toward its criticism.

Ryan Poll's article "Lynn Nottage's Theatre of Genocide: Ruined, Rape, and Afropessimism" (2020) indulges into the interplay between Lynn Nottage's play *Ruined* (2008) and Afro-pessimist theory by Wilderson. He states, "Nottage is a dialectical thinker, and *Ruined* dramatizes the connections between various forms of violence, which, in dominant, Western discourses, are ideologically positioned as separate and distinct" (Poll 82). It describes the firsthand experiences of women, whose bodies have

undergone genocide. To record these experiences, Nottage and her collaborator went to a refugee camp in Uganda, where they interviewed 30 Congolese women who were the survivors of the genocide. Through this, Nottage has pointed towards the issue of Black genocide and how it is a global issue, by relating it to the concept of Wilderson's "Slaveness'. Indeed, by using a parrot as a symbol that speaks non-comprehensible language, she explains the challenges of delivering stories of survivors and how their voices are rendered by colonial capitalism. Therefore, Nottage marks the Black genocide not only as a historical event but also as a continuous structure that prevails within the modern capitalist world. In this regard, Poll states "Afropessimists argue that the modern world posits Blacks as outside the Human, a structural positioning evidenced by the Black genocide that undergirds and enables modernity" (100).

The book, "The Future is Black: Afropessimism, Fugitivity, and Black Hope in Education" (2020) edited by Carl Grant, Ashley Woodson, and Micheal Dumas, provides a critical lens for understanding the challenges faced by Black students in educational institutions. The author believes that even after liberation, enslavement, and Blackness have remained connected. In this regard, this book provides an insight into how educational institutions practice racial inequalities and how Black students cope with these hostile environments. The major factor that the book discusses is the notion of fugitivity which includes the strategies of resistance and survival employed by Black individuals to face the oppression. The authors state that in this regard, Black students create fugitive learning spaces often outside the oppressive school structures. This gives them the strength and ability to survive the notion of anti-Blackness. Therefore, the book attempts to critique the educational systems through Afro-pessimism, emphasizing the importance of hope and resistance. It invites educators to reform their practices to eradicate racial injustices.

The paper "Exploring Afro-pessimism and Black Nihilism in the Works of Ta-Nehisi Coates" (2021) delves into the complex relationship between Black Nihilism and Afro-pessimism as portrayed in Ta-Nehisi's writing. It presents how Coates's work offers themes related to racial despair and hope. One of his memoirs *Between the World and Me* (2015), provides an in-depth discussion of the violence that Black bodies experience from, "pull overs, beatings, arrests, and murders; to less conspicuous expressions of

racism, such as legal disenfranchisement, or redlining" (Urena 112). Through his works, Coates rejects superficial optimism and depicts the complexities of Black life in America. The basis on which his work is highly criticized is the factor of hopelessness that prevails in his works. However, Urena believes that "Coates's repudiation of hope must not be confused with his denying black people a futurity", rather he aims at pointing towards the limitation of this hope due to the Black struggles that still exist. Therefore, his claims align with the principles presented by Afro-pessimism that Black suffering is a permanent condition that cannot be changed and cannot be alleviated by social reforms. He suggests, "instead of longing for the better…black people have to cling to the present; to the things that are already here which might, in the end, paraphrasing Cornel West, give meaning to struggle" (Urena 127).

Taking the theory's criticism into consideration, the article titled "Of Criminals and Clients: African Culture and Afro-Pessimism in a Globalized World" (2000) by Deborah Fahy Bryceson talks about culture and historical reasons behind the development gap between Sub-Saharan Africa and the Western world. Bryceson states, "As Asian and Latin American nations outgrow their 'third world' status through production and trade expansion, Sub-Saharan Africa has increasingly 'fallen behind' the rest of the world" (2). To present this argument, the author analyzes two major works, "The Criminalization of the State in Africa" (1999) by Bayart, Ellis, and Hibou, and "Africa Works" (1999) by Chabal and Daloz. The books allow an insight, "to interpret African societies against what are considered universal norms and standards" (Bryceson 2). The authors argue that African leaders use political power to benefit themselves, a behavior they believe is based on cultural traditions in Africa. However, Bryceson believes that European culture has always been dominant in the African states, "first, through the superimposition of the colonial state…more latterly, through the imposition of western donor conditionality and full exposure of African modes of livelihood to the world market" (19). Afro-pessimists perpetuate Western cultural dominance by portraying African societies as fundamentally flawed and in need of conforming to Western standards. This viewpoint fails to consider the impactful environmental and historical influences on African societies and disregards African cultures' resilient and evolving nature.

Similarly, in the article, "TIA—This is Africa': Afropessimism in Twenty-First-Century Narrative Film" (2014), Martha Evans and Ian Glenn explore how contemporary depictions of Africa in film continue to perpetuate a persistently unfavorable perspective, often referred to as Afropessimism. In this regard, the authors analyze five major movies; Hotel Rwanda (2004), The Constant Gardener (2005), The Interpreter (2005), Blood Diamond (2006), and The Last King of Scotland (2006). According to Evans & Glenn, "Afro-pessimism is the consistently negative view that Africa is incapable of progressing, economically, socially, or politically" and thus these movies also adopt this notion and provide a bleak image of the continent (pp. 14-15). Afro-pessimism is evident through the usage of themes like violence, despair, and corruption in the movies. The authors believe that these movies again reinforce the stereotypical idea of Africa as "other" and Whites as dominant, marginalizing Africans, which denies the possible solutions for them. Therefore, the authors aim to shed light upon the consequences and limitations of Afro-pessimism and propose reevaluating African stories.

2.4 A Journey through Rivers Solomon's Literary Landscape

Since Solomon's novels are recent publications, a few researchers researched them. Talking about the research conducted on *An Unkindness of Ghosts* includes Regina D. Hamilton's dissertation *Speculative Aesthetics: Time, Space, and the Black Subject in 20th and 21st Century African American Literature* (2019) where she discusses how speculative fiction is trying to disconnect people from the afterlives of slavery. She believes that the writers in this regard are trying to present a world of fascination that will exist after the demolition of the Earth. However, in this world of fascination, there are not any presences of stories related to enslavement that will help the generations to understand the history related to enslavement. History is demolished along with the demolition of Earth. The characters such as in *An Unkindness of Ghosts* only receive, "bits and pieces" of information related to how their ancestors suffered (Hamilton 141). Thus, such kind of speculative fiction presents the struggle of the characters to connect with their past, due to which they are unaware of how the realities of American slavery might continue to affect the societal structure of the contemporary world.

Kiara L. Davis in her dissertation, *Sites of Humanism: Intimate Encounters within Black Feminist Geographies* (2020) also analyzed the novel, *An Unkindness of Ghosts* by Rivers Solomon, from the lens of Wynter's Homo Narrans and Autopoietic theory. The purpose of this theory is to, "reenact Humanism's conceptions of Man through narration" (Davis 49). This research is an attempt to enforce the significance of the novel in representing a new and alternative world. The argument of the research begins with the concept of "Man" given by Wynter, according to which a man is classified into two groups, "as the naturally selected (European) and the naturally dysselected (Black, native, etc.)" (Davis 46). This creates socio-economic differences and racism in society. This racism and class system is also seen in the initial pages of Solomon's novel, where the lower decks are appointed for Black people whereas the upper decks are for White people. Moreover, through the connection with their past, Solomon tried to depict the way Blacks are always considered as "subaltern spatialities" (Davis 55). However, Davis believes that through this novel, Solomon tried to break all the previous conventions of the racism associated with Blacks by presenting their ability to overcome the oppression and by presenting alternate ways of living.

Megen de Bruin-Mole in his article "Salvaging Utopia: Lessons for (and from) the Left in Rivers Solomon's *An Unkindness of Ghosts* (2017), *The Deep* (2019), and *Sorrowland* (2021)" (2021) tries to present the utopian world depicted by Solomon in their novels, rather than the dystopian one. He uses the theoretical framework of Black Utopia Studies and Salvage-Marxism and invites readers towards the perspective of how "utopia is expressed and salvaged in the work of Rivers Solomon" (Mole 1). According to him, Black Utopians believe that life does not end with death; rather it still exists on the other side where we live after death. In other words, the apocalyptic and dystopian settings are not the end of the world; rather there are the other ways through which the present can be changed. Solomon in their novels attempted to move from dystopia to utopia by considering the "possibilities opened up by the salvage of the past" (Mole 4). This research contradicts the current research in two ways; firstly, the theoretical framework is different because the current research employed Lavender's model of Afrofuturism and Eshun's subversion model. Secondly, I did not represent the utopian

world of Solomon's novels, rather I shed light upon the way they are suffering in the future worlds of the novel.

Victoria Haynes in her dissertation, *From Page to Place: Speculative Fiction, Future-Spaced Making, and Community Formation in Theory and Practice* (2022) conducted research on Rivers Solomon's novel *An Unkindness of Ghosts* along with Johnson's novel *Smoketown,* to depict how the climate fiction produced by Black and Queer authors can become a source of providing better and alternative futures for the Blacks. In this thesis, the author focuses on some major themes of climate fiction including community formation and solidarity and the development of relationships between humans and non-humans. Climate fiction is a genre that attempts to present the impact of environmental changes on the masses through imaginative texts along with the construction of those worlds, which will help in overcoming these climatic crises. According to Haynes, such speculative fiction provides an opportunity, "to confront the oppressive conditions of the present" (1). The novels by Solomon and Johnson present such stories that allow a world to be built for the queer as well as people of color, that are not included in much of the popular narratives of the past. Initially, the novels depict landscapes that are still tied to the past and are under the influence of the hierarchal system of race but later it shows how the protagonists manage to overcome these systems. Thus, according to the researcher, the novels, and "show an ability to dream beyond and overcome oppressive circumstances" (Haynes 75).

Similarly, some researchers worked on Solomon's novel *The Deep.* Emphasizing the point of view regarding the role of history in shaping the personality of an individual, Betsy Nies wrote a research article, "Mer-Beings among Us: Three Contemporary Novels" (2021) in which she describes how this point of view was introduced by regaining the representation of Mer-beings in the contemporary literature, including *The Deep*. Nies believes that through this, the writer does not only describe the desire of the characters to meet their ancestors by living in the memories, but it is also a form of "ecological and political commentary" that presents a commentary on human's failure to look after each other (Nies 93). Moreover, this novel also portrays a protest against the long history of oppression and colonization suffered by the Africans. After the presentation of such viewpoints, Solomon then moves towards describing the role of

memory in shaping the personality and how the connection with the past makes them able to know about their ancestry. It is a presentation "of a fantastic world with alternating narrative viewpoints" (Nies 93).

Jessica Tapley in her thesis, *The Memory of Mythmaking: Transgenerational Trauma and Disability as a Collective Experience in Afrofuturist Storytelling* (2021) locates the idea of Afrofuturism in novels of several authors including Butler, Morrison, and Solomon's *The Deep*. In her thesis, she emphasizes the importance of history concerning identity and a person's survival. According to her, this history is preserved at the cost of many hardships including intergenerational trauma but since it is a part of collective memory and gives a sense of community, it becomes essential for an individual. In other words, she presents a connection between intergenerational trauma and Afrofuturism as the survival of the characters in the novel, according to her, "depends on the management of their collective trauma through the work of the historian" (Tapley 11). On the contrary, the current research presented the other side of history that overshadows the lives of the individual and becomes traumatic for a person.

By applying Afrofuturism in Solomon's novel, *The Deep,* in the article, "Artistic Telephone; The Significance of Afrofuturism in Rivers Solomon's *The Deep*" (2022), Freya Juul Jenson presents the idea of how someone's past helps them in shaping their future as history is "an important part of the identity" (Jenson 26). He emphasizes that the protagonist aimed to build a better future for the creatures that lived around her that would "inspire societal change" (Jenson 25). This societal change according to him can be generated from the violent past of the slaves that they experienced during the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. In comparison, the current research attempted to produce the idea that the wishful experience of memories would not create a societal change; rather it would increase the miseries of the Africans. Jenson concludes that the novel can provide an alternative future for Africans and agrees with the idea of Afrofuturism in the novel whereas the current research negated it.

Elizabeth DeLoughrey in her research article, "Kinship in the Abyss: Submerging with *The Deep*" (2022) discusses the significance of the fluidity of the oceans and how non-human sea creatures connect with their ancestors in the underwater life of *The Deep*

by Rivers Solomon. According to her, the oceans are a source of connection with the kin who lived before and the novel is a sort of allegory that portrays a reconnection, "of the burden of a traumatic cultural history with one's obligations, desires, and responsibilities to self and kindred" (DeLoughrey 2). Moreover, DeLoughrey believes that water is also a source of, "communication between the different deep-sea-dwelling human-descended fish who communicate through vibration, song, touch, dance, words, and electrical current" (Solomon 7). Thus, this research paper attempts to emphasize the whole setting created by Solomon in their novel and how it becomes a network of connections with the ancestors and the other wajinru.

The focus of the thesis was to highlight the context of colonization and slavery still embedded into the future of Africans. Therefore, the following section provides a detailed overview about the history of slavery and colonization.

2.5 Research Gap

The existing literature on Afrofuturism mostly focuses on its positive view of African lives. It looks at future possibilities that reclaim and rethink the history of the African diaspora. Scholars often highlight the uplifting stories in Afrofuturist works, which celebrate strength, creativity, and freedom. However, the field has not fully examined different viewpoints from some authors who do not see a hopeful future for people of African descent. This important aspect—where the imagined realities of Afrofuturism reveal ongoing struggles and deep-rooted inequalities—has not been fully explored. This thesis fills this gap by analyzing the works of Rivers Solomon, which question the usual positive narratives of Afrofuturism. It looks at how these texts show the lasting impacts of colonization and slavery on possible futures for Africans, thereby adhering to the principles of Afropessimism. By offering a critical view of Afrofuturism's limitations, this research aims to deepen the understanding of the genre's complexity.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The following section of the research is based on the theoretical underpinnings that were used for the analysis of the selected works. In this regard, I have selected the theory of Afrofuturism proposed by Lavender and Eshun. The framework aims to create a nexus of two theories, as doing so will establish a more nuanced and integrated understanding of the subject matter. Instead of viewing the two theories as opposing or mutually exclusive, I intend to explore how they can complement and enrich each other, ultimately leading to a more comprehensive framework that captures the complexities of the phenomenon under study.

For this study, I selected Isiah Lavender's model from his book, *Afrofuturism Rising: The Literary Prehistory of a Movement* in which Lavender discusses Afrofuturism and its relationship to science fiction. Lavender defines Afrofuturism as "a set of race-inflected reading protocols designed to investigate the optimism and anxieties framing the future imaginings of black people" (Lavender 2). His theory explores the intersection of African diaspora culture, technology, and the future by emphasizing the importance of centering African and African diaspora perspectives in imagining and shaping the future. His insightful work highlights the transformative potential of Afrofuturism in shaping a future characterized by openness and equity. This vision of the future not only honors the spirit of African and African diaspora cultures but also embraces technological innovation and progress.

Lavender suggests exploring the scope of Afrofuturism, which has a literary lineage that extends far beyond Dery's recognition. He achieves this by analyzing works from the 18th to the 20th centuries that emphasize the African American enslavement experience. Lavender argues that seemingly non-Afrofuturist texts, such as Henry Bibb's autobiography (1848), are actually Afrofuturistic, incorporating "science-fictional language" and "hope impulses." He further contends that hope impulses motivated former slaves to use pocket universes, trickster technologies, and skin technologies to discreetly transport and conceal their bodies' en-route to freedom.

To demonstrate the idea about Afrofuturism, Lavender first discusses the idea of Black Networked Consciousness that "make[s] possible, the hope that black people wish to experience from a painful past in building black futures" through "communal memories and traditions" (Lavender 7). The aim is not to make them escape the pain and reality but rather to confront it as the means to get themselves free from it forever. Secondly, Lavender proposes the concept of a Pocketed Universe for imagining of a free world in the future within Afrofuturistic texts. According to him, "pocket universe, whether natural or artificial, exists within the boundaries of another universe—a space within a space governed by its own rules" (Lavender 88). These spaces can thus allow the Black people to achieve their rights, to live without the fear of colonization and slavery, to create their destiny outside the typical historical narratives, and to produce counter-narratives to the colonial ones that exist as the dominant ones.

Another term that Lavender introduces in his book is the Hyperreal Violence Loop. Under this key term, Lavender categorizes slave narratives, which are based upon the brutal conditions faced by a group of human beings due to their skin color. According to him:

> Fugitive slave accounts go beyond reality because their authors demonstrate the materiality of black bodies and various ways to control them, thus creating a hyperreality. Hyperreality, as described by Jean Baudrillard, represents "models of a real without origin or reality" …The unreality, the outlandishness, the implausibility of it feel science fictional in that readers cannot tell where reality ends and fiction begins. (Lavender 11)

The Hyperreal Violence Loop within Afrofuturism, then according to Lavender enables the creation of "new realities" by introducing "different futures". More specifically, when these realities are related to slavery, the imagining of alternate futures and alternate histories – speculative fictions as it were – is one of the multiple ways through which the dominant interpretive lens regarding the interpretation of slave narratives can be changed.

In fact, according to Lavender, the tendency of changing the approach to slave narratives is not a new one. Rather, he claims that Black people have always "generated their power…spawning and maintaining an Afrofuturist aesthetic" (Lavender 80).

Related to this is the sense of freedom that Lavender encodes in his theory. The tendency of Afrofuturism is to both "literally and figuratively decode the dreams of Black freedom in a country built on slave labor" (25). One of the main factors that contributed to attaining this freedom was the increase in the literacy rate of Africans, which helped them imagine a new future and stand on their own. African writers can now present their counter-narratives of slavery as they are "recontextualizing the past in a way that changes the present and the future" (Lavender 36).

By presenting such ideas, Lavender aims to generate a hopeful impulse among the Africans, and to demonstrate this impulse; he uses the concept of a "transhistorical feedback loop". According to him, all slave narratives have some commonalities in them including, "their hope of achieving a future freedom and their courage exhibited in attempting to attain it" (Lavender 80). The slaves imagined a better future in the past and Afrofuturism provided them with the possibility to achieve it. Thus, it is an attempt to change the existing realities to create new realities. Having further discussion on the works of Afrofuturism in the twenty-first century, Lavender concludes that the purpose of Afrofuturism is to expand the space of the theory. The Western narratives have retarded the growth and evolution of Africa's civilization and Afrofuturism helps in reshaping these narratives.

Adding to Lavender's liberated world for Africans and presentation of alternative realities, Kodwo Eshun's concept of Afrofuturism also offers a compelling glimpse into a future where African diaspora communities take back control and create new narratives of progress and technology. Eshun's exploration of the influence of music, art, and speculative fiction, in shaping Afrofuturist visions, has significantly pushed the boundaries of science fiction and futurism. However, some critics highlight the complexity of Eshun's writing, as his works present an intriguing blend of engagement with Afrofuturism's roots and a certain tension with traditional historical and political frameworks. This complexity provides a chance to look into some of the limitations that the theory holds. In this regard, Brennan says:

> What is interesting and sometimes problematic about Eshun's writing is that
> while it obviously has an acute awareness of Afrofuturism's historical backdrop,

there are many passages which demonstrate hostility toward historical and political thinking. (61)

While Eshun's work is valuable in showcasing the creative and imaginative potential of Afrofuturism, it's important to also consider the broader social, political, and economic factors that influence marginalized communities and how these factors intersect with the future portrayed in Afrofuturist thinking. This is a crucial aspect because some texts portray these factors being dominant, making it unattainable to achieve the alternative world proposed by Afrofuturists.

Following this notion, the theoretical framework of Kodwo Eshun's Afrofuturism presents a critical perspective on the theory, highlighting its purported weaknesses. Along with other works produced by Eshun, his critique is outlined in his research paper "Further Considerations on Afrofuturism," published in 2003. Eshun challenges the Afrofuturist theory, arguing that it distorts the present and conceals the historical sufferings of the Black people. He emphasizes that Afrofuturism, characterized by its reliance on science and speculative fiction, "rewrites history and denies plausibility", which can be related to Lavender's concept of hyperreal violence loop, when he talks about the exaggerated form of violence, present in historical texts (Eshun 291). Science fiction, as understood through Samuel R. Delany's words, is "a significant distortion of the present" (Eshun 290). The purpose and effect of science fiction and Afrofuturism:

> … is not to question the reality of slavery, but to defamiliarize it through a temporal switchback that reroutes its implications through postwar social fiction, cultural fantasy, and modern science fiction, all of which begin to seem like elaborate ways of concealing and admitting trauma. (Eshun 300)

Therefore, his theoretical framework of Afrofuturism offers a critical perspective that challenges the theory's portrayal of an idealized future, highlighting its potential to conceal the traumatic historical experiences of Africans. According to him, Afrofuturism "adopts a cruel, despotic, amoral attitude towards the human species", by concealing the traumatic past of Africans and the forms of agony they went through (Eshun 00[-005]).

Adding to the critique of Afrofuturism, Eshun's arguments are backed up in one of his interviews conducted by Christoph Cox in the year 2014. The interview is based

upon one of the movie productions named, *Hydra Decapita* that was produced by Otiloth Group in 2010. In this interview, Eshun argues that Afrofuturism can have aggressive or exploitative aspects. It should not be seen as inherently good or moral, rather he believes that this movement has some aspects which cannot be overlooked and can be contentious or problematic. In this regard he says:

> I'm just uneasy when Afrofuturist's becomes so celebratory. It's like, "What are you celebrating, for Christ's sake?" There's actually nothing to celebrate. They should be full of more seething discontent…It's not even dystopian. It's kind of autocratic, an autocratic desire to rewrite language and therefore code systems and symbol systems. (10)

Furthermore, moving on with his arguments, Eshun demonstrates his desire for the confrontation between Afrofuturism and Afropessimism in the following words:

> And then Afro-Pessimism's struggles with negation and its preference for the ontological, I find all those really, really compelling. And my wish is that both those forces put pressure on Afrofuturism and kind of break it up and disassemble it so that it reforms in unrecognizable shapes. (9)

Therefore, Eshun's work on Afrofuturism is a thought-provoking celebration of the movement, highlighting its potential to empower and inspire. However, as opposed to Lavender, it also offers a critical examination of certain aspects where the theory may fall short. In his analysis, Eshun points out the limitations of Afrofuturism in addressing certain social and cultural issues, suggesting that the movement may not fully capture the complexities of the African diasporic experience, and the Blacks may still experience "hybridity and dislocation" (Brennan 62). By acknowledging these limitations, Eshun's work encourages a more nuanced and inclusive approach to Afrofuturism, one that recognizes and embraces the diversity of voices within the movement.

Afro-pessimism is a framework that explores how society views Blackness. It argues that Blackness is often seen as outside humanity, leading to ongoing social death, alienation, and violence. Scholars like Frank B. Wilderson III emphasize that this dehumanization is not just a result of history, such as slavery, but a key part of how the modern world was built. Wilderson states, "slavery does not simply precede modernity; it

founds it" (Wilderson 18). This means that the impact of slavery still affects Black people today, making suffering and loss central to their identity. Afro-pessimism challenges usual ideas about racial justice, suggesting that society cannot change to include Black life because it was built on excluding it.

Furthermore, Afro-pessimism argues that anti-Black violence is a basic part of social order rather than a rare occurrence. Jared Sexton highlights this by saying, "the absence of Blackness is what secures the presence of civil society" (Sexton 39). Afro-pessimism helps us understand how stories about exclusion and suffering, especially in cultural works, reveal and challenge the violence that built modern society. This framework is especially important for discussing new ways of thinking about Black identity, as seen in Rivers Solomon's writings, where Afro-pessimism questions traditional ideas in Afrofuturism.

Theorists like Saidiya Hartman builds on the idea of Afropessimism by looking at how the legacy of slavery still affects Black lives today. She introduces the term "the afterlife of property" to show that Black bodies are viewed as commodities and are often denied full personhood in social and legal settings. She writes, "Slavery's archive is not a closed book," pointing out that the effects of slavery linger in current systems of control, punishment, and marginalization (Hartman 12).

Similarly, Hortense Spillers contributes to this discussion by examining the damage caused by the transatlantic slave trade and its lasting impact on Black identity. She describes the "theory of flesh," explaining how the Black body is treated as a mere object, stripped of its agency and subjected to violence. Spillers states, "the flesh carries the marks of history, violence, and dispossession," reinforcing Afro-pessimism's view that the Black body is controlled and exploited (Spillers 67).

Afro-pessimism argues that anti-Black violence is not unusual or random but is a part of social order. Jared Sexton emphasizes this when he says, "the absence of Blackness is what secures the presence of civil society" (Sexton 39). By highlighting these ideas, Afro-pessimism helps us understand how stories of exclusion and suffering in culture challenge the violence that underpins modern society. This perspective is particularly relevant to discussions about changing traditional views of Blackness, as seen

in Rivers Solomon's works, where Afro-pessimistic themes push the boundaries of Afrofuturism.

3.1 Key Terms from Lavender's Theory

A. Black Networked Consciousness: It is defined as a communal web through which Africans deliberately "wish" to experience a painful history, to devise new futures for them.

B. Pocketed Universe: A pocketed universe is a space created by Africans, within an existing space that can be either natural or artificial and is governed by their own rules without any implications of colonization and slavery.

C. Hyperreal Violence Loop: Under this category, the Afrofuturists aim to break the repeated patterns of violence and oppression that make the sufferings of Africans seem unreal**.**

D. Trans-Historical Feedback Loop: Trans-historical feedback loop can be defined as the "hope" of achieving future freedom for Africans and their courage in attempting to attain it.

3.2 Key Terms from Eshun's Model

A. Fantasizing History: It is defined as Afrofuturism's capability of "reordering chronology and fantasizing history" (Eshun 299). According to Eshun, the aim of this "temporal switchback" is not to question the history of slavery rather to "defamiliarize" it, which is done through modern science fiction and fantasy (Eshun 300).

B. Extraterritoriality: Eshun uses this term, in order to define the, "everyday implications of forcibly imposed dislocation" on the Black Atlantic subjects (298). According to him, it assist in re-evaluating things and presenting new ideas, through embracing the idea of space and distance.

C. Failure of Reparation: Eshun highlights Morrison's statement that the African subjects who experienced, "capture, theft, abduction, mutilation, and slavery were the first moderns" and the "ongoing disputes over reparation indicate that these traumas

continue to shape the contemporary era" (Eshun 288). Therefore, this aspect of modernity ought to be included into the field of future.

D. Anticipatory Designs: According to Eshun, **"**Afrofuturism is concerned with the possibilities for intervention within the dimension of the predictive, the projected, the proleptic, the envisioned, the virtual, the anticipatory and the future conditional" (293). The aim of the research is to look whether these anticipatory designs are successful and fulfill the purpose of brighter future or not.

3.3 Key terms from Afropessimism

A. Afropessimist Ontology: Afropessimist ontology argues that the world is built on the violent exclusion of Blackness, making it impossible to reimagine futures. Wilderson (2010) states that "Blackness is positioned as a condition of ontological death, not as a category of political grievance", which means that liberation efforts are constrained by structural anti-Blackness in society (58).

B: The Afterlife of slavery: In contrast to the pocketed universe, Hartman (2007) argues that The Afterlife of Slavery ensures "the racialized social death of slavery extends into the present, structuring all Black life" (6), and Wilderson (2010) supports this argument by asserting that "anti-Blackness is foundational to the structure of the world" (58).

C: Gratuitous Violence: In contrast to Hyperreal Violence Loop, Afropessimism's concept of Gratuitous Violence posits that violence against Black people is "foundational to the construction of Blackness" (Wilderson, 37). Wilderson emphasizes that "Black suffering is rendered incoherent" as it exists as a structural necessity, independent of transgressions (38). This perspective fundamentally conflicts with the Afrofuturist goal of breaking this cycle.

D: **Social Death:** In contrast to Trans-Historical Feedback Loop, Wilderson (2010) presents the concept of Social Death, asserting that "Blackness is defined by a structural condition of exclusion from social and political life" (8) and that "the hope for freedom is foreclosed by the very logic of anti-Blackness" (20).

3.4 Method of Analysis

By creating a nexus of the theory, I intended to present 2 different point of views of the same theory that is Afrofuturism. The purpose was to delve into the broader aspects of the theory and to examine its notions from all aspects. Through this, firstly I have included Lavender's principles of the theory, who considers it as a potential to present alternative futures by recontextualizing the past and building new imaginings for Blacks. Secondly, the conceptual framework discussed Eshun's perspective of the theory who acknowledges its basic notions and the way it assists in creating new narratives of science and technology. However, at the same time, he also looks deeper into the shortcomings of the theory, considering it not too much celebratory and show hostility towards some of its principles. Then, he also proposes to use Afropessimism as a tool to disassemble it and create something new out of it. In this regard, Afropessimism relates to my research as some of the themes like, slavery and colonization relate to the themes of the novels that I have selected. Therefore, for the analysis, I have applied the theoretical framework obtained from Lavender's and Eshun's model, through the key terms extracted from their theories as well as I have tried to present how some of the instances of the novels relate to Afropessimism.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS

This chapter of the thesis contains the analysis of Rivers Solomon's *The Deep* and *An Unkindness of Ghosts* in the light of Lavender's and Eshun's model related to Afrofuturism as well as Afropessimism. The analysis debated and provided evidence regarding the subversion of the Afrofuturist's ideology. Afrofuturism is a sub-branch of speculative fiction that focuses on providing alternative futures for Black people, without the implications of colonization and slavery. It provides the hope impulse that is needed to overcome the obstacles in the way of Africa's freedom and future life. Most of the previous research discusses the positive side of Afrofuturism by portraying how Black people have achieved their dreams in their future lives. However, the other side of the theory that is the failure of Afrofuturism to provide a successful future for Africans is not addressed, where the Africans go through the same miserable conditions. Therefore, taking this point of view, the study analyzed Solomon's selected works and depicted Afrofuturism's failure.

4.1 Rationale for Selection of Texts

The novels produced by Solomon are based on different themes related to history, memory, gender, race, psychological issues, and violence. They discuss the traumatic conditions through which refugees go as well as the issues of diaspora in their novels. Through their novels, we can see their rage towards the injustices practiced against Africans and their urge to be free from colonial practices. Therefore, Solomon creates speculative worlds of Africans that follow narratives years beyond. In these novels, Solomon tries to shine a light upon the ongoing issues of Africans and the important aspects of their lives that should not be ignored. Since these worlds are related to Africans, their novels can be placed under the category of Afrofuturism, as the aim of Afrofuturists is also to depict the future world of Africans. As my study is based on Afrofuturism, I selected two of the major speculative fiction produced by Solomon; *The Deep* (2019) and *An Unkindness of Ghosts* (2017).

4.2 Overview of the Selected Texts

The Deep by Solomon was published in the year 2019. It takes place in the Atlantic after a period of 600 years, where the descendants of the Africans have made an underwater society and live on their own. Their clan is known as "wajinru" and they introduce themselves in the novel as "Our mothers were pregnant two-legs thrown overboard while crossing the ocean on slave ships" (Solomon 22). The wajinru live deep into the Black waters, in contrast to the clear crystal water present on the upper side of the sea. They live in miserable conditions as they are kept ignorant of the ways of life and are devoid of basic resources to the extent that their identities are transformed into strange sea creatures instead of normal human beings. Yetu is the protagonist of the novel, who is a historian and has a responsibility to keep their history alive, by sharing it with the rest of wajinru. The memories are related to the death of their ancestors and the brutal conditions that they went through and that is why they bring trauma to the wajinru. To overcome the trauma, Yetu travels to land and meets Oori, who is another main character of the novel and an African land dweller who is going through the same trauma that Yetu is going through. All of Oori's clan is dead, and she is the only one left among them. However, towards the end of the novel, Yetu again chooses to go back to the deep, instead of living a free life on land, as she is unfamiliar with life on land.

An Unkindness of Ghosts is a novel published in 2017 and takes place 300 years in the future in a ship named *Matilda*, which is long abandoned and has not managed to reach the earth for centuries. The ship contains a completely artificial environment, with an artificial sun called the Baby Sun and the Field Decks, where the African people work. It is divided into different decks, ranging from letter A to letter Z and all the upper decks belong to the White people whereas all the lower decks belong to the Blacks. Each deck has its tradition, language, and ways of living but the whole *Matilda* is governed by a Sovereign. Moreover, along with the other differences, the decks differ in terms of resources as the upper decks enjoy the resources of life, but the lower decks are devoid of even small resources like heat and freedom. The lower decks are responsible for doing all the labor work and are not allowed to do other jobs and live under certain restrictions. They still live as colonized strata as they are governed by the White people and the

Lieutenant and are a victim of the violence posed against them by the Sovereign. The protagonist of the novel is Aster, who is a very expert surgeon but does not get recognized due to her race. The whole story of the novel revolves around her and her effort to find the mystery behind her mother's death, who committed suicide 25 years ago. Along with her, the other characters include Theo, who is also the son of a White man, and a Black woman named Aint Melusine, which is revealed later in the novel that Theo was taken away from his mother because of his White skin color. Aint Melusine is also a caretaker of Aster and Giselle and other abandoned children of *Matilda*. The novel reveals the struggles of Africans against White people and how their futures are overshadowed by the traces of slavery and colonization. Toward the end of the novel, Aster poses a rebellion and becomes successful in it, but the writer does not put any light upon the events that follow it, and it remains a mystery whether the Africans managed to acquire freedom and break the shackles of slavery and colonization or not. The novel ends with the bloodshed and violence that followed the rebellion along with Aster's escape. The proper conclusion is not provided.

4.3 Analysis of the Selected Texts

Both novels describe the miseries and never-changing conditions of the Africans, even in a future beyond centuries. Looking at all these factors, Lavender's theory was used to analyze the notions presented by him in Afrofuturism and how those notions are subverted in Solomon's works. Hence, this section provides an analysis of the novels in light of conceptual framework created.

4.3.1 Black Networked Consciousness/Fantasizing History/Afropessimist Ontology:

Lavender, in his theory, proposed the idea of Black Networked Consciousness when he talks about the role of history in the African's lives. According to him the Africans, "wish[3] to experience from a painful past in building Black futures" (Lavender 7). The idea is that after linking the past with the present and future, the Africans want to gather these memories, experience them again, and after the confrontation, get

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[3] In his model, Lavender tries to create a streak according to which the Africans want to re-experience the memories and traditions of their community to generate a hope for their futures. The term "wish" here signifies their intentional urge to re-live those past experiences, which again comes under speculative fiction, out of which Afrofuturism emerged.

completely free from them. However, Solomon proposes that the Africans do not want to relive the past experiences and confront the history; rather they want to get rid of it completely due to the painful history that disturbs their mental peace and creates chaos in their future lives. For the characters in the novel, "remembering the past" was a "painful process" as all the memories were associated with the brutalities that Africans had to face (Solomon 10). The memories were traumatic and when the characters tried to remember the past, they felt as if they would die from those memories.

In *The Deep,* Yetu is the historian of the clan, and her job is to keep all the memories alive by remembering them and reliving them. She has to carry all the burden of the memories. Solomon describes that "A historian's role was to carry the memories so other wajinru wouldn't have to" (9). Describing the memories that she experiences, Solomon says:

> Worse, the Remembrance might subsume her. Reliving that much of the History at once—it might kill her in the state she was in. She couldn't shake the feeling that it already had, that it had been poisoning her for the two decades she'd been the historian. (Solomon 18).

During the events of the novel, the clan experiences the memories through an artificial environment of electrical impulses called a "womb". The writer states that during this, "Shrieks and sobs erupted throughout the womb as they saw their brethren, sistren, and siblings gobbled alive by massive white sharks" (Solomon 27). The word "white" here denotes how the Blacks are still under the rule of Whites. Eshun in this regard says that the Afrofuturists have a "drive to rewrite reality" and that is why they try to fantasize history (292). Boynton is a critic who proposes a similar idea that the attempt of the writers to rewrite the history of the Africans is like denying them "the rewards of…spiritual labors" and becoming the "cultural custodians" of their art, literature, and their lives (375).

Moreover, there are multiple instances within *The Deep* that depict the traumatic history and the effects of slavery and colonization on the future lives of Africans, in a setting that takes place 600 years in the future. Afro-pessimists also focuses on the trans-Atlantic slave trade which they believe is still an on-going disaster for Africans. These

arguments are based on the "long history of violently enforced white supremacy as slavery's still unfolding aftermaths" (Huggins vi). Similarly, Urena talks about a philosopher named Achille Mbembe who in his essay, Critique of Black Reason (2017) discusses how trans-Atlantic slave trade turned into the exploitation, "dissolving human beings into things, objects, and merchandise" (114). In the novel, the characters are overshadowed and overburdened by memories of the past whose pregnant mothers were thrown into the ocean, from the ships that carried the slaves. According to Solomon, the wajinru are "descendants of the people not on the top of the ship, but on the bottom, thrown overboard" (Solomon 41). The wajinru remember the images of the "floating bodies" of their mothers, "deaths" and how the homes of their ancestors got destroyed (Solomon 26). Adding further to the imagery of the cruel past, Solomon adds how Yetu remembers "fire and bombs" and "images of thrashing" (48).

Lavender believes that the Black networked consciousness lets the Africans generate hope and desire for "life, liberty, and knowledge" (7). The past is a source of strength for the Africans and gives them a reason for building the future. However, Eshun believes that these futurological implications are looked at with "suspicion, wariness, and hostility" as they tend to defamiliarize the people with the important aspects of history (289). As per Solomon's depiction of the future and its implications, the past does not provide any sort of liberty but rather keeps them trapped in the vicious circle of trauma. The wajinru wanted to avoid confrontation with the memories as they would make them weep because, "History was not an imagining, not just stored electrical pulses. They were people who'd lived. Who'd breathed and wept and loved and lost" (Solomon 18). Expanding the impact of these previous historical events on the characters of the novel, Solomon presents different incidents. As mentioned earlier, Yetu is the historian of the clan, and she shared the memories with the people through electrical pulses. In one of the instances, when this act happens, the wajinru could be seen experiencing the pain of their two-legged ancestors.

> The moment the wajinru understood how related they were to the two-legs, the remembering changed...They were all now one of the floating dead bodies. Their lives recently extinguished, some spark still remained, brains starved for oxygen but pressing on. The wajinru felt the deadness like it was their own. (28)

This portrays how the trauma enters the characters directly and that is why it becomes painful for them. Moreover, due to the extremely distressing memories, the wajinru couldn't control themselves and wanted to kill themselves for their ancestors as they could not distinguish between past and present. Therefore:

> Yetu saved them from wanting to die, pulling them out of the remembering when they were on the verge of breaking out of the womb to go to the sharks the same way she had. They still had far to go. There were still so many stories to tell. (Solomon 28).

Similarly, the characters of *An Unkindness of Ghosts* are also overburdened by the past and the memories that haunt them. The history in this novel is related to the exploration of the characters for the reason why they were abandoned by their families and are left in the hierarchal system of *Matilda*, due to which they remain in a never-ending circle of digging out their ancestry. The main character of this novel is Aster, whose mother committed suicide 25 years ago on the day she was born, and Aster was left, "in a closet to die" (Solomon 37). Till that day, she was raised by one of the caretakers named Melusine and she kept on searching for the cause of her mother's suicide. Aster's memories "wrapped its rope around her neck until she couldn't breathe" (Solomon 206). Whenever she thinks about them, the hair on her neck stands up and the skin on her arms "turns to gooseflesh" (Solomon 81). They follow her wherever she goes in the *Matilda*. However, according to her, the "memories could not be unmemoried", rather they can only be shuffled to avoid any sort of encounter with them (Solomon 206). According to Solomon, "That was all one could do with the past—be satisfied with half-answers, take the rest on faith" (Solomon 214). Solomon says it because, during Aster's journey of exploration of the cause of her mother's death, she could only get half shreds of evidence and truths, and the rest could not be known. As a result of this, all that was left with Aster were the "taunts…, and the past swooping in, an unkindness of ghosts" (Solomon 210).

Another character who is also overshadowed by the past in the novel is Aster's caretaker, Aint Melusine. The reason for her traumatic past starts with the event when her son was taken away by the White people due to his white skin color, which brings the

factor of racism in the novel. They considered him to be one of them and that is why they did not leave him with his mother, as they believed Melusine was incapable of looking after such a white child. Melusine in the novel explains the incident in the following words, with a memory of his son:

> I had a son once. They took him away. Sometimes I think I might have let him eat from my breast because he had that sort of handsome face most babies lack…I am glad most nights they robbed him from me when they saw he was white as a lamb and could pass because I would be a bad mother. I am not always so good with children. (Solomon 172)

At several places in the novel, Melsuine is seen craving for his child and looking after him as a mother but due to the fear of the Sovereign, she is incapable of doing it. According to her, "I've witnessed my fair share of unspeakable loss" (Solomon 191). However, due to this deprivation, she raises several children, who were abandoned by their parents and Aster is one of them. During Aster's journey of finding out the cause of her mother's suicide, Melusine mentions that the past is something that refuses to be forgotten, "Ghosts is smells, stains, scars. Everything is ruins. Everything is a clue. It wants you to know its story. Ancestors are everywhere if you are looking." (Solomon 45). Therefore, the characters are haunted by the ghosts of their ancestors and their memories wherever they go. Bagnall in this regard says that the memories become problematic when the "ancestral history" is related to trauma and an "investigation" into that past can "re-traumatise the following generations" (9). This notion can highly be observed in the characters of Solomon when they face trauma due to their history.

The racist ideology is also portrayed by Solomon in *The Deep* as they talk about the Black people destroyed by the White people, no matter what their identity is. This ideology is a part of White people's culture as they have attached a "mysterious unknowability of darkness" due to which they captured the Africans as slaves and considered them not "fully human" (Thomas 2). The identity in the novel can be distinguished in two ways; firstly, the identity of the wajinru is portrayed as living in the sea and being converted into a sea creature. Secondly, the destruction of the identity of the Africans living on land is portrayed through the encounter of the Africans in the sea,

named Yetu, and the Africans living on land, named Oori. Through their depiction, Solomon tries to portray that both of them live in a miserable condition. Like Yetu's ancestors were killed during the slave trade, Oori, who "had dark skin…and scars and markings cut into her face", was the last one to survive among her whole Oshuben tribe (Solomon 58). Both of the African women were living for 600 years in pain and misery and that is the portrayal of their conditions in the world beyond slavery.

Furthermore, Lavender says that memories and history are capable of building a future from "stolen past and destroyed cultures" (39). Eshun is of the opinion that the alternative future provided by the Afrofuturists tries to "hide the present in all its unhappiness" due to which Afrofuturism should not be considered as something grand or celebratory (290). Rather it should be disregarded as it disturbs the intensity of past events and tries to reorder the chronology of history. Lavender's notion is subverted in the novel when instead of building a future from the destroyed past, the characters like Yetu want to get away with them as this traumatic past "stifles" their ability "to create new iterations of the future" (Boynton 375). Calling this forceful relationship of wajinru with history a "cursed" relationship, she tries to search for the end of history to save her people from the burden of the past (Solomon 97). Yetu and the wajinru lost everything including their "knowledge, rituals, prayers, family" and to bring back all these things Yetu wanted to take her people away from the memories so that they may start living their lives, away from the traces of the past (Solomon 100).

The notion of the present and the incapability of building the future from the destroyed past is also portrayed in *An Unkindness of Ghosts* because, in the future world, some Whites still do not consider Africans as their equivalents due to their background and consider them as the major cause of "hesitation, spectacle, and violence" (Thomas 4). This is evident through the fact that due to their race and ancestry; the Africans are not allowed to flourish and progress in their areas of expertise as White supremacy has played a major role in "distorting, and even retarding, the evolution and progress of Africa's innumerable cultures" (Lavender 188). One such example is present in the novel, through the portrayal of Aster's character. Aster is a surgeon, with some extraordinary skills and is capable of solving all kinds of health-related mysteries but she is not respected and given a proper status because she is Black. Instead of being appreciated by

other people, she is criticized and is referred to by multiple derogatory terms, such as "worse: simple, dumb, defective, half-witted dog" (Solomon 18). She is a victim of daily humiliation by the Lieutenant. At several places in the novel, she gets captured by the inspectors and is physically tortured. Moreover, as she is not accepted as a surgeon by the White masses, she is made to wear the low-deck uniform. Lavender proposes that Afrofuturism makes "White persons conscious of the societal sicknesses of race and racism" but this claim is completely subverted in the novel as the characters are haunted by the act of racism (28).

This is evident in the novel when to abolish the race of Africans, the White people removed the uterus of several characters. When the doctors examined Aster's reproductive tract and realized that she was capable of producing offspring, they got her uterus removed, and "all that remained of her womb was a ghost" (Solomon 34). Similarly, Naveed is another character who "was with child, and ill" (Solomon 117). But the Blacks in *Matilda* are not allowed to produce offspring and that is why, Naveed and her sister Haneefa call Aster, "To terminate…The fetus." (Solomon 119). Continuing this notion, the people of the low deck are also not made to live for a longer period of life. The African women who worked in the *Matilda* were not allowed to live a life after the age of forty and the oldest among them were Maud at the age of 39 and Jo at the age of 44. As a result of all of these circumstances, instead of building a future from their past, they want to get away from the past and their painful memories. Aster feels so good when she gets a glimpse of an escape from her ancestor's memories, "to be away from the chill of Q deck and the hoarfrost of the Ancestor's whispers" (Solomon 83). The link of their past with their present lets the Sovereignty charge its power over the Africans and their suffering will go on. So, they wish to escape from painful past experiences.

Therefore, Lavender's claim about Black networked consciousness and the willingness of Black people to relive their past is subverted through the novels because the post-memory of these Africans creates a "haunted condition" for them (Hamilton 140). Eshun believes that by history, the Afrofuturists are trying to hide the traumatic conditions that the Black people underwent, and all these claims can be depicted through Solomon's novels. In the novels, history cannot be seen as a fantasy as the characters suffer due to it and they undergo traumatic conditions. They look for ways through which

they can completely save themselves from the memories. Moreover, their past cannot assist them in shaping their future because the past is filled with painful memories, and it does not give them any sort of strength or hope for their future. Rather their issues related to "prejudice and discrimination" persist because Bagnall proposes that like the memories, these notions are also passed from generation to generation (2). Even after centuries beyond, the Africans have failed to build a better and hopeful future for themselves because:

> Trauma and oppression work cyclically, as each generation of oppressors infects the next with notions of prejudice and discrimination, and each generation of the oppressed are re-traumatised by the collective memory of the past. Trauma cannot be confined to or healed by one generation or one specific circumstance. (Bagnall 2)

4.3.2 Pocketed Universe/ Extraterritoriality/The Afterlife of slavery

Under a pocketed universe, Afrofuturists imagine the lives of Black people in new ways. According to Lavender, the purpose was to create such free spaces for Africans, where they would be free to exercise their power and authority without any restrictions and where they would be free from the implications of colonization and slavery. Through these spaces, the "Black agency" is seen as a "new horizon of possibility" (Lavender 63). However, Eshun argues that these universes are imaginary stations that are constructed by Afrofuturists and they have no link with reality. The Afrofuturists are trying to have a "utopian formulation…for a nonexistent institution" (Eshun 293). This is evident through multiple instances in the novel. The wajinru create their own free space, far away from the world, under the sea but they do not live an ideal life because they are abandoned and are ignorant of the ways of life. Moreover, they are devoid of many necessities of life. Lavender's purpose is to imagine "Black worlds and identities differently" through these universes but the novel fails to portray a different world (8). Since these imaginary stations are related to the fantasy and speculation towards free worlds for Black people, Thomas believes that when the people of color try to pursue these "passageways", it seems that the "doors are barred" (1).

Starting with the prevailing living conditions of the wajinru, they live deep in the sea that has blackwater in comparison to the grayish blue and clear water that is present on the upper side of the sea. Along with the blackwater, they live in a place that is dark and colorless because there is never light in the deep. The sea is dark to such an extent that when they go to the shallow side of the water, the light "stabs" their eyes, and "blinds" them (Solomon 31). The houses of this clan are made of remains of, "mud, carnage, ship wreckage, and plants harvested from more shallow seawater". (Solomon 39). The wajinru are unable to keep track of the time as they do not have the resources to measure time. They do not have enough resources to be able to eat as in one of the instances when asked, Yetu did not even remember the last time she ate something. Solomon describes the lack of resources in the following words:

> Babies of all kinds are always wanting more: more touch, more food, more answers, more kindness, more world, more sea, more newness, more knowledge…Another fish-child might've died, but we are so hungry that we swim to shallow, unsafe depths where we know food is plentiful. Without the pod to coordinate hunts, and too small to catch anything big, we feast on trout. It is not enough. We are so big now. We go shallower, to where the light stabs our eyes, blinds us. (Solomon 31)

Even after the years pass rapidly, they remain at the same size due to malnutrition. Moreover, they do not have any sense of religion, which is the basic thing that shapes the life of a person, as they do not know about the concept of God. In the novel, Solomon talks about a character named Amaba, who calls the concept of religion "nonsense" and says "Her only god was Yetu herself. Her only religion, the History" (Solomon 69). Similarly, in another incident, the wajinru encounters a woman from the land, and their discussion with the woman related to god portrays how they are unaware of the concept of god.

> "You did not come from a god," she says. We don't think she means this cruelly, but it bothers us still. We know a god is a special thing.

> "Could you be our god?" we ask, words hoarse and croaky.

> "I am too small to be a god," she says.

"Why do gods have to be big?" we ask.

"I do not wish to talk about this anymore," she says. (Solomon 34)

Solomon also describes the miserable living conditions of Africans through *An Unkindness of Ghosts*. Since the ship is divided into two decks, the upper and the lower decks, all the resources are reserved for the upper deckers and the lower deckers are devoid of everything. For example, there are multiple descriptions of recreational spaces that are present for the Whites, "The salon is where the rich women go to drink coffee and tea, to eat biscuits and lemon cake, and talk about important matters like why this and why that, but did you ever imagine such and such?" (Solomon 170). Similarly, they lack resources related to electricity and heat which leads to excessive sickness due to the extremely cold temperature of *Matilda*.

For example, in one of the instances, a character named Mabel gets sick among the lower deckers, as the heat gets turned off by the Sovereignty and Mabel gets "worse and worse" (Solomon 42). Keeping in view, Giselle, another fellow of Mabel utters, "The Sovereignty's God. Guards are God. So unless you think one of them is going to fix it, you're calling on the wrong folk. They ain't gonna turn it back on" (Solomon 42). This shows how the people from upper decks act as gods and devoid them of the basic resources. In one of the instances where Aster gets severely injured, she rests and sleeps in the Field Decks to have some heat.

Hopefully I'll get some rest tonight. The cold and the pain have made sound sleep quite impossible the last several nights, but I have work to do in the fields…I might get permission from the overseer to stay the night. The heat should help soften the joints. (Solomon 78)

Moreover, they do not have proper systems for the treatment of their illnesses as Aster steals the medicines from the upper deckers to make the people of lower deckers survive. Solomon describes the way Aster put her life at risk to acquire medicines for the people of the lower deck as:

She knew basic medicine craft: how to suture a wound, set a bone, prevent infection with special creams. She knew which medicines she had to steal from

upperdeck dispensaries for which ailments, how to make medicine from crops grown in the Field Decks, and how to grow medicinal plants in vents and ducts where guards couldn't see. (Solomon 63)

This portrays how the Blacks are still under the rule of Whites and that is why for the characters like Giselle, *Matilda* is a "shit", and everything there smells like decay and stink (Solomon 23).

Furthermore, Lavender, under the debate of the pocketed universe, also talks about the fact that it is a struggle of the Africans "for inclusion within the human species" (6). This indicates that the Afrofuturists try to make a space for the Black people within the larger group of society, so they may be considered normal human beings. Due to the racist ideology that was a part of the history; the Afrofuturists try to make the recognition of the Black people's identity. However, in the novel, the characters are identity-less, live in a condition where they are deprived of their recognition, and there "is a tension between representing Black identities and the inability to do" (Fawell 13). Eshun in this regard says that such efforts are an attempt to "founding a structure" for Africa's future "where there isn't one" (293). He provides a concept of "extraterrestriality" to explain such a "forcibly imposed dislocation" among Africans and how they have evolved over history (Eshun 298). The term encompasses the Black people's struggle of gaining identity and recognition from slaves to African Americans. The idea utilizes the concept of space and distance to reflect on how Black people survive, "within the high-pressure zone of perpetual racial hostility" (Eshun 299).

In the novel, the idea of identity is similar to the one which is provided by Afropessimists, where they believe that the "Black subjects find themselves constantly surrounded by reminders of systemic racism's suppression of black life" (Huggins v). It is evident in several places of the novel, when either the wajinru depict them as identity-less or they are seen mimicking the style of the land dwellers, to have recognition. When history enters them, they feel like they do not have names and their identity goes away. For example, in one such incident, when Yetu asks one of the wajinru about its name, it states, "I have no name. I am nothing. I am sunk!" (Solomon 24). Due to the ignorant and

isolated life they live, they lose the sense of the animals or the things that exist in the world as well as the "sense of north, south, east, and west" (Solomon 47).

Solomon, to emphasize further this idea has drawn a comparison between the Africans living in the sea and land dwellers, to show how the Africans are still considered ignorant and uneducated beings. In one of the instances, a pregnant land dweller enters the sea and gets involved in a conversation with the wajinru. After the interaction, wajinru observes that the differences between the people of the land and between them cannot be overcome because, "We live in the water, she on the sand. We sleep alone below the surface. She sleeps on the beach" (Solomon 35). The difference is present in the form of the way of living between both of them. Moreover, the wajinru try to copy the lives of the land dwellers and try to become like them when they discover their ships and start following them, then remembering their routes and then trying to learn their accents and language. They can be seen learning things from the surface-dwellers. Due to the new information related to language and other things that are provided by the land dwellers, the wajinru start feeling inferior. The wajinru say, "We do not speak how she speaks, deep and smooth. Our voice is a raspy, clicky mess" (Solomon 34). Moreover, after learning the things the wajinru believe, "Now we have a name for being alone. A name for being anxious. For searching. For fear. For denial. For ugliness. For beauty. For wanting something and someone" (Solomon 34). This shows how the Blacks can explore and learn new things but they lack opportunities and are kept ignorant.

The theme of African's wish to merge into the larger group of Whites is also present in *An Unkindness of Ghosts* when the characters feel a sense of homelessness, as they are not accepted by the Whites. Keeping this in view, Thomas believes that due to this reason, the dreaming worlds cannot be imagined by Africans as the existing worlds have already failed to provide them with "liberatory spaces" (1). The characters of the novel long for a family life within a space that still contains traces of colonization. For example, Aster and Giselle were like sisters to each other:

They were sisters, in spirit if not in blood, and blood if not in spirit…Aster liked to think of Giselle as her sister, her twin. She pretended they once inhabited the

same womb. Hot and warm and pressed together inside their mother. A single zygote halved. (Solomon 137)

However, towards the end of the novel, the only person whom Aster finds to be her family gets killed by the Lieutenant, which is an indication of the complete abolishment of her family life and home. Aster describes how she died, "I wish she wasn't dead, but the amount of blood loss she sustained as a result of a knife wound to her lower abdomen made dying an inevitability. May her soul finally be at peace" (Solomon 258). Flick is presented as one of the oppressed children in the novel, who is introduced in the initial pages of the novel. She has a gangrenous foot due to which she had to undergo an amputation. However, even in this condition, she is unable to get proper care, as a result of which she says:

Why would we care about such a thing when already nothing is how it should be on this cursed ship? Should won't make it so you don't got to cut off my foot, will it? It sure won't turn the heat back on, or kill the man who thought to turn it off in the first place. Should disappeared three hundred years ago when our old home went gone. (Solomon 10).

In addition, the theme of loss of identity also prevails in *An Unkindness of Ghosts*, where either the characters imitate the styles of the Whites, or their identity has been taken away from them. Aster learns the language of the upper deckers to merge with them "through disparate reading material and tutors" (Solomon 27). The women who do the cooking for the upper deckers are labeled as "Woman One and Woman Two and Woman Three" instead of being addressed by their names, which indicates the loss of their identities (Solomon 51). Moreover, the identity of the characters like Aster also comes under question, when she disguises herself as a man whenever she enters the upper or middle decks. The reason for this disguise is that since the lower deckers were not allowed to enter the upper deck, they had to find secret ways to enter them. For example, in one of the instances, Aster goes on a mission to enter L deck, to meet a man named Seamus for solving the death of her mother's mystery. To enter the deck:

Aster decided she'd exploit her new boyish facade one more time to sneak in to meet him. It wasn't necessary, but she liked to do it, to pretend she was a man. It

wasn't the boy part that attracted her. It was the lying part. It was becoming

someone else. (Solomon 205)

As a result of this disguise, Aster undergoes abuse by other men, "You're a child. You don't belong here. I don't work side by side with babies. It's an insult, you simpering cunt" which implies the way men of upper deckers treat other people (Solomon 207).

Similarly, in another incident, Aster goes to E deck with Theo to the coronation ceremony of the new Sovereign, disguised as a boy. This is evident when one of the guests named Villem asks Aster about her name and when she replies, he says, "Aster? What a peculiar name for a boy" (Solomon 163). Furthermore, the confusion in the identity formation is also visible when Aster says, "I am a boy and a girl and a witch all wrapped into one very strange, flimsy, indecisive body. Do you think my body couldn't decide what it wanted to be?" (Solomon 233) Thus, the characters are not free to recognize their individuality in the future worlds of Africans. They are treated as "property or things" and that is why are unable to claim any kind of agency for themselves like the White people can do (Rathburn 3).

Apart from the miserable living conditions, the loss of their identity, and the feeling of homelessness, the wajinru do not live freely in their self-created spaces. They are still overshadowed by the traces of colonization, which again shows that Lavendar's claim that the Black people will, "live free in the free world" of pocketed universes has been subverted (88). He believes that these spaces are the source of independence, but the novel fails to portray such independence. The wajinru in the novel state that the invaders "left us in peace for some time, but they are back now, with weapons" (Solomon 91). It resulted in an attack by the invaders, with bomb explosions and the loss of many lives including the children. The wajinru get attacked by them at a time when they did not even know and have not seen anything like a bomb. As one of the wajinru says:

Basha. Please. I don't want to die, and I could not bear it if you died. Or my

amaba, or any of my pod. My siblings. I have never seen or felt anything like

that—what did you call it?—bomb, in my entire life. We are not ready. We must

prepare. We must do something. I've never been this scared of anything.

(Solomon 90)

Due to their lack of knowledge and unavailability of weapons, the attacks resulted in immense life loss. Thus, according to Eshun, the designs presented by Afrofuturists are "anticipatory" and do not have any concrete reality (294). Rather they are the idealized systems that hide the suffering of the Africans and how they are treated in the afterlife of colonization. Afropessimists also emphasize on this idea of continuous violence when they present that the Black people are source of the, "fulfillment of non- Blacks' political and erotic desires" and the subjects upon which, "ghastly spectacles of violence are enacted" (O'Donnell 32).

Similarly, the traces of colonization are very much prominent in this novel. This is evident through the many instances of the novel, where the upper deckers deliberately devoid the lower deckers from having resources. In contrast to the lower decks, they enjoy and live a better life. For example, all the labor work of the Field Decks is assigned to the lower deckers whereas the upper deckers, "enjoyed strolling the more comely of the Field Decks before the morning shift workers came" (Solomon 85). The lower deck people were assigned tasks like:

> The task of shoveling waste into the funnels to be processed into usable materials was an indignity generally reserved for low-deck men, though it was a big job, and some middeckers had to do it too. Everything in the ship emptied here, the toilets, uneaten food. Fat pipes fed their contents into large cylinders, emptied by the workers into processing churns. Everything down here was like a furnace, hot and stinking. (Solomon 205)

Similarly, in another incident, the guard "beat his baton against the wall, herding the fifty women assigned to cut sugarcane into a short, wide corridor" (Solomon 55). This shows the way these people are treated like animals. Moreover, the people of the lower decks used the stolen fabrics and ailments of the upper decks, due to the lack of provision of goods to them, "Giselle had sewn the clothes out of fabric stolen from the wardrobes of upper deckers, using her thumb as a dress form" (Solomon 23). In addition to the lack of resources, the lower decks also suffer from several unexpected attacks from the guards if any worker from the lower decks skips their work shift or comes out of their rooms at an unspecified time. The attacks are made to the extent that it has become a familiar thing

for the characters, "The metal clink of a guard undoing his belt buckle, the swoosh as he tore it from the loops…the loud smack of leather against skin" (Solomon 39-40). Therefore, this is an indication that the future worlds of Africans are not free, as proposed by Lavender, as they have not been provided with the resources that they would need to have, a "transition from institutional enslavement to participating in the economy and culture" (Fawell 14).

4.3.3 Hyperreal Violence Loop/ Failure of Reparation/Gratuitous Violence

The hyperreal violence loop, according to Lavender, is created by the writers when they depict the violence faced by Black people to the extent that things start to seem unreal. Lavender believes that "fugitive slave accounts" transcend reality because their authors demonstrate the "materiality of Black bodies…thus creating a hyperreality" (11). He argues that these repeated patterns should be disrupted in favor of new futures and realities, focusing on and starting from the slave narratives. Eshun is of the opinion that the breakage of such patterns indicates the "unethical dereliction of duty" (289). By doing this the Afrofuturists try to deny the reality and create a distortion of the prevailing conditions of the Black people. Fawell also emphasizes the same point that the lives of Africans cannot be investigated without explaining the "physical sites of violence and rupture" that they have gone through because it defines their miseries and extreme conditions (24). Such notions are present in the novel, from which it is evident that the violence loop cannot be broken as the Black people are going through the same conditions of violence and abandonment. In the novel, violence is experienced through history and the trauma associated with the past. The characters in the novel re-experience the brutal conditions that their ancestors went through.

During the slave trade, those Africans who were sick or old were thrown into the sea where they had to undergo "ship quarantine" and got "abandoned in the Atlantic Ocean for fear of possible contamination" (Mustakeem 301). Mustakeem in his research discusses the slave trade and specifically the condition of the slave ships in detail, through the experience of a Black woman. The study emphasizes how the captains of the ships treated the outbreak of the diseases and how the slaves were treated as commodities for life and death. Eshun marks these events when he talks about the ships that landed

long ago and had "laid waste whole societies, abducted and genetically altered swathes of citizenry" (300). Solomon describes such an event also in *The Deep* where the wajinru saw, "a ship cast all of its cargo into the deep, the enslaved having been taken by some sickness", which explains that even after 600 years in future, the Africans are experiencing the same context of slave trade as their ancestors experienced centuries before (Solomon 44). Similarly, in another incident, Yetu discovers a comb among other memories of their foremothers, which again indicates towards the pregnant slave women who were thrown overboard and whose descendants these wajinru are:

> In one of the rememberings, there was still hair caught in a comb belonging to the foremother. Salt water had washed any hair strands from the tines of Yetu's new comb, and now she could only imagine how the bonds of black keratin had once choked the carved ivory. (Solomon 20)

Furthermore, the wajinru explains the situation of another bunch of people in the deep, whom they find among the sunken ships and describe them in the following words:

> There are surface dwellers in the bottoms of these ships whose language we understand, whose words are the same ones Waj had used. They are suffering and scared. They have been robbed from their homes, stolen from their families. Their lives are no longer their own. They belong to the two-legs on the decks of the ships. (Solomon 41)

This is again proof of the two-legged ancestry of the wajinru and the way their ancestors suffered. Moreover, among the events of the novels, the wajinru get attacked in the deep. The wajinru describes the attack, "There's a thunderous roar that near deafens us…Screams call us from the distance. The deep smells like burnt things" (Solomon 92). Yet remembers a similar scene from the memories, where she sees "three bodies and then they burst from the inside into thousands and thousands of little, incomplete bodies" (Solomon 68). Due to these conditions, the wajinru believe, "It is not long before our sprawling city is gone. All traces of dwellings, ash" (Solomon 93). As the colonizers attack and kill the people in the deep, the wajinru fear that the colonizers will not stop their attacks until their whole clan goes extinct.

In contradiction to the ideas generated by Solomon, Lavender calls Afrofuturism and its ability to break the repeated patterns of violence "a revolutionary power" (7). According to him, there is a need to look beyond history and hope for an alternative future for the Black people and this can be done when the cycle of these repetitive patterns is broken. Thus, Lavender believes that these patterns are needless and useless as they make history imaginary and exaggerated. However, Bagnall is another critic who believes, "the traumatic effects of colonialism and slavery are still felt today" and that is why we cannot ignore the historical context of colonization and slavery (2).

Lavender's notion of breaking the repeated patterns of violence is very much contradicted in Solomon's novel, *An Unkindness of Ghosts* when we experience multiple instances of violence faced by the Africans in the novel. For example, while working in the fields, the women have to perform their tasks around an artificially created Sun. In one of the instances, the Sun rotates in another direction as a result of which many women get injured, including Aster, "Aster looked around. She wasn't the only one who'd gotten hit…One rake had made its way into a woman's ankle, another into a woman's chest. That wound might be fatal" (Solomon 57). Similarly, when the people try to escape their assigned cabins, at a time other than which they are allowed to leave them, they are severely punished. In one of the instances, when Giselle and Aster attempted to leave their rooms, "They both got the cane, six lashes against the bum, four across the back" as a punishment (Solomon 129). This is an indication that Africans are not free in their spaces. Similarly, the lower deckers ought to chase a headcount when they were either called to work or to go back to their cabins to sleep. If someone among them misses the headcount, it would result in an immense amount of violence by the guards. Following this event, Aster misses a headcount and as a result:

> They barked orders at each other she couldn't make out and pushed her along the passageway. She landed against a wall, palms out, wrist twisting upon impact. Her fingers spread out before her like five rivers on a map, ending abruptly, leading nowhere. There was no stopping it, this violent requisitioning of her person, and she let them drag her up several decks to the interrogation room. She opened her eyes and colored dots appeared in her vision. In her periphery, she swore she saw Death curtsy. Guards rarely got so violent that women died, but it

seemed they were experts at toeing that line, making you think, *This is it.*
(Solomon 146)

Due to the unsafe environment of Matilda, Giselle says:

Can't trust nowhere else on this ship. I swear, even the walls are alive. Every time
I think I've found a good spot, an abandoned closet, there's things lurking just
round the way. Guards, mostly. They got a special eye on me. It's something in
my blood they smell. (Solomon 21)

Towards the end of the novel, when Aster tries to pose a rebellion against
sovereignty but the mutiny leads to the "massacre of hundreds, their limp bodies lying
across *Matilda*'s corridor" (Solomon 214). Therefore, even if the Africans try to look for
an escape, they fail as the rebellion is followed by immense violence. The idea related to
the Black people being the subject of White people's violence is also presented by a critic
named Thomas, when he says, "The Dark Other is subject to textual violence, which
often results in character death" (6). The example of violence leading to death is
presented in the novel by Solomon, through Flick's character. Due to the false
accusations, Flick first undergoes violence:

They made them walk on their still-healing little leg, blood coming through the
bandages, their wails so loud that at that moment Aster knew gods weren't real
because if they were, they'd end this now. All of humankind. A snap of the
fingers (Solomon 185).

Then Solomon further describes the incident from Aster's eyes, "She watched
silently as a doctor slid a needle into Flick's arm. She watched silently as Flick died"
(Solomon 186).

Thus, when Lavender presents his suggestion of breaking the patterns of violence
faced by the Africans, it is evident how these patterns still overshadow the lives of the
Africans. Solomon's novel reflects this notion that even in a world that is present after
600 years, the Africans are going through the same patterns of violence, where they are
attacked by the colonizers, leaving their families apart and homes destroyed. If these
patterns are broken, then the important aspect of the history of Africans would be ignored

as these traumatic conditions still shape their lives. The novels indeed support the idea presented by Afropessimists that the Black people are still undergoing traces of slavery and violence and these are the people, "who can be killed by anyone without that act of killing being considered either a homicide or a sacrilege" (Urena 113). They believe that the White supremacy will never end as the, white spectators, "secretly enjoy these performances of Black pain and white mastery" (Poll 89).

Solomon through characters like Oori presents this idea, where the people lost everything including their homes and clans.

> Yetu kept her ears open for any sign of where Oori's homeland was, but no one knew. All anyone said about the matter was that the place Oori was from wasn't really a homeland anymore because a homeland needed a people. Without a people, it was just a patch of earth. (Solomon 84)

There is no place where the wajinru can go and escape from the painful past as well as the future, due to which Yetu in the novel mentions, "All I have are these ugly rememberings" (Solomon 67). The same feeling related to the absence of a homeland and homely life is evident in *An Unkindness of Ghosts* also when Flick says, "Quarry[4] is not my home. I am homeless. We are all homeless. We are the very definition of homeless. We are vagrants in Lieutenant's kingdom" (Solomon 191). Therefore, Lavender's claim about the Hyperreal Violence Loop is subverted by Solomon in favor of Eshun's failure of reparation because, in both of the novels, the characters are still undergoing extreme phases of violence. Therefore, we cannot ignore this factor of Black's life, by calling it an exaggerated form of violence.

4.3.4 Trans-Historical Feedback/ Anticipatory Designs/Social Death

Lavender places Africans' desire for liberty and the hope impulse for a better life under the category of trans-historical feedback loop. According to him, there are multiple instances in history, where the Black people imagined and hoped for a better life for their future and Afrofuturism helps in understanding the "Black utopian impulse" and "to create counter-narratives" (Lavender 84). The future generations draw strength and

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[4] In the novel, in most of the places the decks have been represented with letters A-Z. However in some places, the names of the decks have been mentioned by Solomon and Quarry is the name of Q deck.

power from the past and this lets them imagine and hope for a better future. However, Eshun calls such hopeful and promising desires "interpellation" because on the whole, these anticipatory designs might look promising but at the same time they can be illusory (293). In this regard, Eshun believes that Afrofuturists can expose the exploitative nature of the corporations that propose these designs. Since the traumatic conditions still shape the lives of the Black people, the Afrofuturists fail to achieve the bright future that they imagine achieving. In the novel, the characters are trapped in the vicious circle of the traumatic past and then suffer from the same miseries which their ancestors went through. The miseries that are attached to their ancestors are present to such an extent that in several places, the wajinru feel as if they are the ancestors themselves and the pain becomes unbearable for them. During one of the remembering, Solomon states, "arrested by the images, they were paralyzed. Through Yetu's machinations, the wajinru experienced the rememberings like they were living out their own memories. They were the ancestors" (26).

Several instances in *The Deep* depict how this hopeful impulse fails to prevail among the wajinru due to the traumatic past. For example, Yetu in one of the instances mentions that she cannot get over the trauma of the "rain of bodies that descended here when two legs had been cast into the sea so many centuries ago" as those bodies were that of their ancestors (Solomon 15). Being a historian, Yetu remains in a battle with what her clan wanted, what the ancestors wanted, and what her desires were, and in the end, she never managed to fulfill her desires as she had to save the lives of her clan. Even when she kept on imagining alternative futures and a peaceful world for the wajinru, she was not able to attain it. According to her, she had spent many years of her life to obtain a stable future she says, "We are getting older and older, thinking more about what it is that makes a stable future when the world is so full of unpredictability" (Solomon 40). Therefore, the novel does not provide any alternative future and changing conditions for Africans. According to Fawell, "the obstacles of inaccessible and unequal education" and "racial prejudice" hinder the way "ideal transition" of Africans towards a better life (14). In this regard, Solomon explains the miseries and the unattained desires of the wajinru:

> And yet we, the maker of all this, want more and more and more…This vast city
> of ours must endure forever, which means it needs more reinforcements. Thicker

walls. More huts to home and protect the growing families. And more [5]zoti aleyu. Our population, roughly three hundred, is still too small to be considered robust. We remember the way our centuries-old pod was wiped out like a flash. When not properly fortified, a legacy is no more enduring than a wisp of plankton. (Solomon 39)

This indicates how the wajinru are still struggling and are finding ways to build a more stable future for them. Afropessimists like Warren also describes such an idea when he says that securing a future becomes unapproachable for Black people, "as the object they long for always remains an impossibility—they keep drawing closer to an end that ultimately does not exist" (Urena 123). Continuing this notion, Solomon in another instance, provides a description of how the wajinru survive during the attacks by the surface dwellers and how helpless they are during all of the chaos:

Injured now, we should have no choice but to obey the little zoti aleyu's request that we remain in the city we've made at the bottom of the ocean. We don't have time to nurse wounds, however. Every moment wasted is a moment toward our people's destruction. (Solomon 40)

In the same manner, Eshun's claim of calling the utopian formulation an interpellation is evident in *An Unkindness of Ghosts,* as the characters do not achieve an ideal world as proposed by the Afrofuturists. Lavender proposes that "Afrofuturism offers hope to a downtrodden race, hope for a variety of tomorrows" but this notion is not followed in the novel (196). An example of this scenario is presented by Solomon through Theo's character, who like Aster is an expert as a Surgeon, but he had spent a troubled childhood because his mother was a Black woman. Throughout the story, he lives a better life than Aster as he is allowed to go to the upper decks because the new Sovereign is his uncle but still he has to live in the lower decks. Moreover, due to the racism that prevails in the novel, Theo's father resigns from Sovereignty as he has a Black wife. In this regard, Theo says, "I was weak and didn't belong. The feared scandal of my birth—bastard child of a black woman—had already forced his resignation as

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[5] Zoti aleyu is the name that has been assigned by Solomon to the ancestry of wajinru.

sovereign" (Solomon 73). Due to the same reason, Theo's father, who was a White man, was very strict with him and mistreated him till his death:

> Sometimes I smile as I imagine his disappointment…What would Father think of my closely shaven face? My peculiar wardrobe? He would disown me, and that heartens me. I have done at least one good thing: become a person my father would hate. (Solomon 73)

The hope impulse proposed by Lavender can also be considered as an interpellation when we see limited resources and opportunities being provided to the characters in the novel. For example, although Aster has become a great Surgeon like Theo, but she had limited resources for her education. Solomon describes the way through which Aster acquired the education related to medicine:

> Aster's education in medical botany began in the Field Decks with the guidance of various Quarry Wing caretakers and elders, but it was only more advanced study that allowed her to craft medicines as expertly as she did now. She cobbled together a curriculum from healers, from discarded books, from medical journals on genetics and biochemistry. In the early days, Aint Melusine stole them for her. Working the upper decks as a nanny meant she could sneak her way to the Archives. (63)

This implies that even when the Blacks can learn more, they cannot do it because of their limited approach, and they are dependent on Whites even for education. Looking at it from the other way, even the Blacks are not allowed to teach the White children, as Aunt Melusine says as the Whites believe "A proper schoolmaster, a fine man, should be in charge of the boy's learning" (Solomon 170).

Besides that, Lavender claims that through Afrofuturism and the trans-historical feedback loop, Afrofuturists are capable of overcoming the legacies of slavery, such as "oppression, racism, prejudice, stereotypes, segregation, colorism, and violence" (8). However, the wajinru suffer from these legacies in the novel, when they are abandoned and live in a place away from the world. The characters in the novel adhere to Eshun's claim that the "future is…as hostile and as treacherous as the past" (290). In this regard, the wajinru see the developed and fascinating world of surface dwellers, full of

technologies, in contrast to their abandoned world full of darkness, down in the deep waters. For the same reason, they fail to fight back during the attacks:

> We consider abandoning reason when more die, as our restraint is nearly overwhelmed by the desire to fight back. Another batch of a hundred die in a blink. Then thrice that much in an assault on a small village on the seafloor. We wait to be numbed by it, for the grief to become so much that we no longer feel it. That point never arrives. Our numbers reduce, and the rage grows….We know we need to fight, but how? We have been humbled. (Solomon 93)

Furthermore, the land-dwellers are portrayed as more learned and established in contrast to wajinru, who learn everything from the surface dwellers including the meanings of, "sand, stone, trees, fire, hungry, hot, cold, sweat, sad" (Solomon 33). They try to copy the ways of life of surface dwellers and do not have any sense of living on their own, which indicates that they do not have any freedom of choice. This is evident in the novel, through an incident where wajinru interacts with one of the surface dwellers and says, "It's difficult to achieve at first, but after a time, we try to copy the land creature's noises and make them our own…After copying and copying her, we learn to make sounds with our throat and tongue" (Solomon 93). As the characters in the novel are portrayed as sea-living creatures, when Yetu comes on land, to have an escape from sea life, she is looked at strangely by the surface dwellers due to her identity. As Solomon states, "The surface dwellers were talking about her, asking what she was, wondering among themselves if they'd ever seen such a thing. One said that it didn't matter and argued that Yetu looked more or less like food, and that they should eat her" (49). This is again an indication of how the descendants of the slaves thrown aboard during the slave trade have turned into unrecognizable beings, due to which they have lost their identities. Due to the never-changing conditions of the wajinru, Solomon says:

> The future, too, was dark, if there was a future at all. The hurt that coursed through Yetu as she imagined a futureless world rivaled the pain of the rememberings. Could it really be that there was a version of the world where everything would be eradicated? Gone? (85)

Therefore, since the wajinru undergo a desolated life even after centuries beyond the colonization and slave trade, they do not have a hope to imagine a better future for themselves.

Likewise, Afrofuturism's claim of overcoming the legacies of slavery has also been subverted in *An Unkindness of Ghosts* as it portrays how Africans are being oppressed in the future worlds. Lavender claims that Afrofuturism can "demonstrate equivalence to Whites in thought and spirit if not body" (76). However, they are neither physically secure nor mentally in the future world. Along with the physical violence, the image and impression of the Black people do not improve in the eyes of the Whites, as the Lieutenant in one the instances, while talking about lower deck people, says, "None of them are harmless, Theo. They are animals, and if it weren't for us bending them into some kind of shape, they'd live in complete chaos and sin" (Solomon 75). This indicates that the Whites consider them as the mentors of the Blacks, and they think the Blacks can never survive without them. The Africans in the novel do not have an escape from this oppressive behavior of the Sovereignty. As Solomon says, "Aster understood now that kings don't die. Even when they do, they have sons, and those sons have sons, and so on…The Sovereignty is forever" (229).

Following the urge for the rebellion, Theo becomes successful in killing the sovereign towards the end of the novel. Solomon demonstrates it through this conversation between Theo and Aser:

"You killed Lieutenant," she said.

"I did."

"I wanted to be the one to do it. I wanted him to die by my doing."

"I know," he said. "But so did I." (256)

However, the rebellion took place after many incidents of violence and mass killings of Africans, "…what Aster noticed out of the corner of her eye: a different guard approaching, this one with a curved blade as big as an arm. He sliced it through Ajax's gut. The boy cried out, then fell. The guard sliced through him again. Ajax died" (Solomon 256). Moreover, the writer did not shed any light upon the events that occurred

after the rebellion, as Aster was the only character who managed to escape from *Matilda*. Therefore, the novel emphasizes the traces of colonization and slavery that are still present in the future world of Africans, but it is not able to depict what follows a rebellion and it ends with a mystery about whether the issues of the Black people are resolved or not. Keeping this in view, Thomas believes that "any artist or writer who wishes to write a decolonized fantastic face a nearly impossible task" and this can be observed in Solomon's novels (8).

Consequently, it is evident through the analysis conducted above that both the novels critique the notions presented by Afrofuturism when they depict the bleak future of Africans even after centuries and challenge Lavender's claim of a hopeful future through the Trans-Historical Feedback Loop. Instead of providing a hopeful and bright world for Africans, the novels portray a dark and gloomy future. In both of the novels, the Africans are devoid of the resources of life, and it is hard to survive for them. In the future places, they are still under the shackles of colonization of slavery, as they do not have any freedom and get attacked by the White people.

Moreover, both novels also indicate the instances of violence that are still being done on the Africans, which subverts Lavender's claim of the Hyperreal Violence Loop. Secondly, the novels portray the issues of identity when the character's identity is taken away from them. In *The Deep*, instead of being human, the characters turn into sea creatures and are ignorant of their ways of life. They imitate the land dwellers to become like them and learn everything from them. In *An Unkindness of Ghosts*, the identity is taken when the individuals are not referred to by their names and are not provided with a proper status even if they are capable of it.

The ending of both novels portrays the traces of the past. In *The Deep*, Yetu finds some peace by returning to the ocean and reclaiming her role as the historian of her people. However, her satisfaction comes from confronting the painful history of her ancestors. By holding onto their collective trauma, she shows that the past still influences the present, making true freedom seem impossible. Yetu's return to the deep does not mean she escapes her struggles but rather acknowledges her place in a continuous cycle of remembrance and pain. This connects to the idea of "social death" by Orlando

Patterson, which describes how Black lives are often marked by exclusion and loss of humanity.

In *An Unkindness of Ghosts*, Aster's journey away from the ship Matilda, carrying her mother's remains, symbolizes the strong hold of the past. Although Aster gains some physical freedom by leaving the ship, she also carries the burden of her ancestry. This symbolizes that the trauma and violence from slavery are not just past events; they are ongoing realities that shape Black lives today. Her mother's skeleton represents how, even in moments of freedom, the scars of oppression linger, challenging the idea of a truly free future.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

After conducting the analysis, it can be asserted that *The Deep* and *An Unkindness of Ghosts* by Rivers Solomon challenge key ideas in Afrofuturism. They mix hopeful visions of the future with a critical view influenced by Afropessimism. These stories explore dark themes related to historical trauma, systemic inequality, and the lasting effects of slavery and colonization. While Afrofuturism tries to imagine positive futures for African communities by reclaiming power, creating new worlds, and celebrating strength, Solomon's works go against this hopeful outlook. They show futures that still feel the impact of the past, questioning the idea of an optimistic African future.

The research can provide multiple aspects through which the notion of Afrofuturism is challenged/critiqued. The research can subvert the major concepts of Afrofuturism through multiple instances of the novel. For example, Lavender in his theory proposed that to build an alternative future, the Africans want to relive the past experiences, and by making them the base, can build a future for them. Whereas, through Solomon's novel, it can be discerned that the past experiences of Africans are painful and traumatic. If they try to relive those experiences, they are overpowered by extreme traumatic conditions, due to which they do not want to confront it, rather they want to get rid of them. Similarly, Afrofuturists like Lavender proposed the formulation of imaginary stations for Africans, which portray how they have managed to make free spaces for them, in which they are free to live and exercise their authority. However, through Solomon's novel, this aspect of Lavender's theory is subverted as the Africans are unable to acquire these spaces and are living in the same miseries. They are deprived of necessities, do not have enough resources for their survival, and are still undergoing issues of acceptance and identity.

In addition to this, Lavender claims that the historians and writers present the violence faced by Africans, to such an extent that things start seeming unreal. In this regard, he presents the violence faced by Africans as hyperreal. On the other hand, Solomon's novels depict the ongoing conditions of violence that the Africans are going

through, to the extent that the characters in the novel lose their lives. They are not able to overcome the violent conditions and the power of the White people. Finally, the biggest claim of Afrofuturists is to provide a better and hopeful future for Africans. However, through the novels, it is evident that this notion is also subverted, as the Africans are suffering from the same miseries and hardships.

Moreover, the traces of colonization and slavery are also prevalent in the novels. This can be observed when the people are still under the Sovereign rule and are made to obey the orders of Sovereignty at any cost. The characters of *An Unkindness of Ghosts* are not allowed to exercise their own will and if they try to move out of their reserved positions and spaces, they have to face brutal violence. The ship, on which the characters live, is still under the hierarchal system, where there is a division between upper deckers (Whites) and lower deckers (Blacks). All resources are allocated for the benefit of Whites, allowing them to enjoy various privileges, while Blacks lack even necessities. As slaves, the Africans have to do all the labor of the ship and follow the commands of the upper deckers. Similarly, in *The Deep,* although the wajinru create their world deep into the sea and far away from the world, they are still attacked by the White people, which again results in a large-scale massacre. The context of slavery is prominent in the novel, as the wajinru are the descendants of the slaves and through them, the legacy of slavery is highlighted by how ignorant the lives of slaves' descendants are in the future.

As a conclusion, *The Deep* and *An Unkindness of Ghosts* share a deeply pessimistic outlook in their exploration of the themes like trauma, violence, slavery and search for identity, deeply informed by the framework of Afropessimism. Both novels present a negative outlook on the future by demonstrating that structural inequalities rooted in race, gender, and class persist in causing harm. Characters struggle with the aftermath of violence, finding themselves stuck in patterns of pain that appear impossible to overcome, indicating a general sense of hopelessness in breaking free from historical and institutionalized oppression. The novels imply that regardless of how distant from the initial trauma, whether it's centuries following the transatlantic slave trade or in a distant future onboard a dystopian spaceship, the consequences of oppression persist, significantly influencing lives in a destructive manner.

In both novels, Solomon explores the challenges between Afrofuturism, which seeks liberation, and Afropessimism, which emphasizes ongoing systemic violence. The novels address issues like trauma, identity, and structural inequality. They question the common ideas about a free African future and instead show futures where past injustices still affect Black lives. These works critically examine modernity and its promises, urging readers to recognize how colonization and slavery continue to impact the present and future of people of African descent.

The research can contribute to the field of study as it sheds light upon the issues of slave descendants that were not taken into consideration by many of the previous researchers. It presented that even after centuries beyond, the descendants of the slaves are going through the same conventions related to racism, colonization, and violence that their ancestors have gone through. Their traumatic past and history still overshadow them and due to their link with enslavement, they are devoid of many opportunities. Moreover, the previous researchers did not present the other side of Afrofuturism which is its failure and subversion to present a hopeful future for Africans. Through this research, however, I was able to cover the research gap regarding how some works like that of Solomon subvert the concept of Afrofuturism, by presenting the dark future that they are witnessing. The living conditions for the Africans have not changed according to Solomon's novels and they do not have the freedom to live.

However, there are some research parameters that I was unable to cover due to the delimitations attached to the research. The foremost aspect of Solomon's novels that could be considered is the issue of Black Queer people in the speculative world of the writer and the rights that they have been deprived of. Secondly, I could not discuss the hyperreal setting and the ways through which the imaginative world of speculation is depicted by the writer. For example, the writer portrayed the artificial world of *Matilda* in *An Unkindness of Ghosts,* which is operated by an artificial Sun and fields. Thirdly, the research also could not cater to the themes related to homelessness, lack of belonging, and displacement in detail, which are important aspects of the novel as the characters widely suffer from these issues. Finally, due to limited time, I could not include any specific theorist related to Afropessimism and could only provide a general overview of the theory and how the implications of it match with my study.

5.1 Recommendations

Most of the previous researchers worked in favor of Afrofuturism and looked upon the pros of the theory. This research allows people to come towards the critical side of the theory and shed light on the flaws. The approach of the research is very limited because of the limited resources and time due to which only the work of one author was taken into consideration. However, the same deficiencies can be observed in the works of other writers. Moreover, the research managed to enforce the idea that taking the historical context of colonization and slavery is important, or else the real sufferings of the Africans will be concealed. Therefore, overall, the research invites criticism of the theory in its existing form.

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