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AN AFRICENTRIC READING PROTOCOL:
THE SPECULATIVE FICTION OF OCTAVIA BUTLER AND TANANARIVE DUE

by

TONJA LAWRENCE

DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Graduate School

of Wayne State University,

Detroit, Michigan

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for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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MAJOR: COMMUNICATION

Approved by:

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Advisor   Date

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DEDICATION

To my children, Taliesin and Taevon,
who have sacrificed so much on my journey of self-discovery.
I have learned so much from you;
and without that knowledge, I could never have come this far.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am deeply grateful for the direction of my dissertation director, help from my friends, and support from my children and extended family.

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This dissertation would never have begun without the love of learning that my mother, Etta, instilled in me. It is my deepest pleasure to thank my mother, my two sisters Jorell and Paula, my nephew Gabriel, and my two sons. Without the support of my family this victory would not have been possible.

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PREFACE

õHarmony, the determining mode of African worldview, finds expression in almost all aspects of African American worldview.ö (Nilgun Anadolu Okur, 1993, p. 100)

õí   African American drama presents three objectives: a sense of community, a useful purpose, and spiritual involvement.ö (Nilgun Anadolu Okur, 1993, p. 106)

community self

soul   body

õIt is difficult to get a man to understand something when his job depends on not understanding it.ö (Upton Sinclair, U.S. novelist and socialist politician, 1878-1968)

CHAPTER 1 "INTRODUCTION"

Whenever I visited my grandmother and grandfather, they took great pains to return to the countryside of Alabama for religious services and to visit the home I was born in. Segregation was legally over by the time my childhood was in full swing, but the remnants were still there in the faded signs and the demeanor of the adults around me. In those visits there were hints of a different reality, a history that I had yet to discover: one that included the names *Kush* and *Tia*. Later, when I was researching Afrocentricity, these family names popped back into my memory; after all, *Kush* is the name of an ancient African state that is often called *Nubia*; and *Tia* is a variation of the word *Tongan*, or *princess*, in ancient Egyptian (Kmt) (Dixon, 1964; Monges, 1993; Nobles, 1996). Both names are marked by history and somehow travelled from the continent of Africa to North Americaô remaining as symbols of continuity to a land I have never visited. Like those names, the ideas and cultural traits of Western Africa have been adopted by and adapted to European cultures to which Africans were transplanted during the trans-Atlantic slave trade.

Critics have argued that African Americans and other Africans throughout the Diaspora have very little real connection to Africans in Africa and the cultures there; however, it is not the actual ties between continental Africans and those in the Diaspora that are most important, but the belief that these ties exist. It is also true that residual effects of a culture of origin connect people who share a common ancestry across the globe, through family stories, myths, and social narratives (Hilliard, 1992; Sefa Dei, 1994). So too, Africans in the Diaspora have adapted and passed on to their descendants such important cultural artifacts as head wraps, food preparation methods, rhythms, and lyric formations; and these artifacts arguably form the basis from which Mulauna Karenga adapted African principles into a national African American holiday:

Kwanzaa (Burgess, 1994; Myers, 1987; Ogunleye, 1997; Sefa Dei, 1994). Adapting to the social and cultural communities in which Africans found themselves has included using all available forms of communication to instill and maintain African referents in written media as well.

Africentric rhetoric does not draw from random materials to construct a persuasive argument based on conjecture; instead, it draws from cultural artifacts that Africans in the Diaspora share in diverse forms across the globe in order to resist colonialism. Africentric rhetoric seeks to persuade the reader/listener/observer to pay attention to the story of Diasporic Africans, and to find social, political, and cultural relevance along a continuum of possible interpretations. It is a circular structure of rhetorical interrogation that does not include a clear directive from the author to view the life choices of characters as absolute. Unlike the structures of traditional Western narratives, Africentric rhetoric avoids essentialism even within its foundation, using instead tentative or impermanent judgments about charactersø actions; to make concrete judgments about such behavior or action would in itself be an act of colonialism within this purview. Afrocentric rhetoric developed to explain how Africans in the Diaspora attempt to connect with other Africans and with the larger society to express their own subjective experience and view of history and contemporary culture. The search for freedom; the coherent conflicts that lead to social and cultural disenfranchisement; the longing of urban and continental Africans for recognition of their history and current political, social, and economic contributions; and the notion that words can kill or redeem: all these are integral parts of any Afrocentric conversation.

Africentric authors promote the recognition of African history, contributions, and presence in the cultural, political, and economic development of humanity. The exigencies of global disenfranchisement of African peoples produced a desire for self-knowledge that garnered

not only social but literary revolutions in the Caribbean, Europe, South America, Africa, and the United States. These literary revolutions sought to define African ancestry as a positive and pervasive presence in each of these societies. In centering novels on the African experience of the Maafa, Africentric authors communicate the journeys and experiences of Africans throughout the Diaspora from a particular perspective, writing new stories in which characters respond to cultural dominance with acts of resistance. These stories re-create African myths and African American legends, and they teach and reify the importance of cultural narratives and ethnic connections.

As an African American scholar and avid reader of African American literature, I have always taken an interest in its narrative structures and use of symbolic tropes: material that in some way reflects my interest in cultural phenomena that communicate the diverse ways in which language impacts the world. Rhetoric, which has traditionally concerned itself with public address in the study of persuasive speech acts, has evolved to examine not only oral public address, but also written, visual, and other performative acts in media and popular entertainment. Rhetorical analysis of ideological viewpoints, whether political, social, or cultural, can be mapped through persuasive language in written texts, including fiction (Booth, 1961; Paris, 1968; Rader, 1979; Scholes, 1969).

From a rhetorical perspective, one genre of African American fiction that negotiates the Diaspora and its challenges in especially intriguing ways is Africentric speculative fiction (ASF). ASF creates a literary world that reflects the mingling of peoples as a natural occurrence: a world in which ethnically and culturally diverse individuals intersect and cohabit within a social system that maintains an increasingly complex cross-cultural population. This hybridization of ethnic and cultural heritage in ASF creates more difference but also offers the opportunity for more

growth and acceptance of diversity. ASF makes use of narrative formats, including metanarratives, to explore hybridity as a cultural, racial, historical, and gender-based phenomenon. As a hybrid genre, ASF has been used to challenge and redefine womanhood, motherhood, and fatherhood through mythological and historical pasts that consider the impact of slavery and patriarchy on Africans in the Diaspora (Agusti, 2005a; Hampton & Brooks, 2003; Mitchell, 2001; Osherow, 2000; Sands, 2003). ASF is a malleable art form that embraces worlds in which multiple subpopulations share the same national origins but different social, cultural, and/or ethnic backgrounds, with each group having its own center and margins, and all groups coexisting in a time and space similar to our own (J. Bell, 1984; Hunter & Davis, 1992; Phillips, 2002; Rutledge & Hopkinson, 1999). In ASF, main characters embody the ideal African persona and community built upon the social and cultural accomplishments of continental Africans and Africans in the Diaspora, as well as an African history that predates the appearance of Western nations as colonial powersô a theoretical concept discussed in Chapter 4 (Abarry, 1990; July, 1964; Littlejohn-Blake & Darling, 1993; Rushdy, 1994). Unlike traditional science fiction or Western speculative fiction, ASF does not characterize or embody the alien Other with green skin or reptilian scales; rather, it presents race, poverty, disenfranchisement, and the fear of perceived differences as human concerns.

ASF is an increasingly popular genre, carving out its own niche in the trade paperbacks. In fact, ASF short stories have begun to be anthologized as sites of discursive evolution, combining the genres of science fiction, mainstream fiction, horror, fantasy, and mythology (Bawarshi, 2000). Such speculative fiction anthologies as *The Songs Became the Stories: The Music in African-American Fiction 1970–2005* (Cataliotti, 2007), *Dark Matter: A Century of Speculative Fiction from the African Diaspora* (S. R. Thomas, 2000), *Dark Matter: Reading the*

Bones (S. R. Thomas, 2004), and *So Long Been Dreaming* (Hopkinson, 2004), which incorporate diverse stories of Africans in the Diaspora by such authors as Octavia Butler, Tananarive Due, W. E. B. DuBois, Amiri Baraka, Samuel Delany, and Walter Mosley, have increased the readership of African American literature and made it available to a wider audience (Jarrett, 2006; Jarrett & Kilgore, 2008; Worley & Perry, 1998).

All the short stories included in these anthologies make use of an Afrocentric perspective to map differences and interrogate static cultural, racial, social, and gender issues that are informed by and linked to social ascendancy (Asante, 1983; R. L. Jackson, 2003b; Mazama, 2001; Peterson, 1993). The term *Afrocentric* is used here to indicate North Americanócentered scholarship, and *Africentric* is used to indicate multi-Diasporic scholarship that includes African, Caribbean, Canadian, and various other forms of African-influenced research foci. Yet, when I began surveying the scholarship on ASF, I was surprised to discover that the Africentric orientation of these and other ASF works was completely overlooked in the literature. As I will discuss in Chapter 4 below, Africentric speculative fiction uses symbols and cultural markers to create meaningful examinations of fictive worlds that parallel contemporary society; but ASF, as a genre, has largely escaped the attention of the academy. The literature offered no systematic way to account for the African aspects of these novels: In short, there was no existing Africentric reading protocol.

This dissertation aims to remedy this serious impediment to our understanding of ASF. In what follows, I will develop an Africentric reading protocol based on a critical appraisal and selective synthesis of the various scholarly perspectives on Afrocentrism. I will then demonstrate the utility of this reading protocol by applying it to two prominent writers in the Africentric speculative fiction genre: Octavia Butler and Tananarive Due.

I chose to analyze the works of these two female writers for three reasons. First, ASF explores the margins not only of racial inequity, but also of gender and social inequality. In ASF, African American women characters from rural and urban communities deal with racial tension and intolerance, poverty, and displacement on multiple levels. African American women authors, in particular, construct characters who emphasize social balance and gender equity; and their novels incorporate male protagonists in ways that convey a simultaneously ascetic and womanist worldview. Indeed, women ASF authors often consciously write from a womanist perspective, indicating that the function of women's voices is to empower the human endeavor to be whole and healthy members of a global society (A. Walker, 1983). A common theme in ASF is characters' performance of rituals that build up communities through collaborative efforts centered on women as the conduits of change and teachers of heritage. This theme reflects an African-centered perspective adapted from the remnants of a shared past, whether remembered or imagined. As such, the stories of women, the carriers of history in the African American family, continue to play a key role in the iteration of acculturation, the role of community and family, and the importance of history from an African-centered view for Africans in the Diaspora.

A second reason for choosing women authors was to see whether feminist or Africentric thought informed character formation. For example, each of the two women writers examined here centers the action of her novels on a female character who re-presents the journey and influence of Harriet Tubman. Although not an overt configuration, the presence of Tubman as ancestor connects the two series and is demonstrative of cultural markers and symbols of Africana referents that can be easily seen.

Finally, the strength of Butler's and Due's series is evident in the size and diversity of their global audience. These two authors' books have sold a total of more than two million copies on Amazon.com alone in the United States (Butler: 2,777,798; Due: 2,918,485); and the novels are held in libraries all over the globe, according to WorldCat.org, extending their influence through borrowing and word of mouth. Butler's work has been translated into German, French, Czech, Finnish, Spanish, Polish, Dutch, Hebrew, and Portuguese; and Due's novels have been translated into French, German, Polish, and Spanish. Due was highly influenced by Butler and is now often referenced as the "new Butler," a relationship notably seen in the foreword of the last of the *African Immortals Series*, having maintained a strong literary and familial relationship with Butler prior to her death; in fact, the last novel in the Due's *African Immortals* series is dedicated to Butler.

I selected Butler in particular because she is internationally known as the first recognized African American female science fiction author. Upon her death, Fulbright noted in memoriam that "Octavia Butler had the rare ability to simultaneously address social issues through science fiction writing and explore African American history in a way no one else has" (Fulbright, 2006). Butler is the only science fiction writer who ever received a MacArthur Foundation genius grant, awarded in 1995; she was the recipient of eight additional national and international awards for her science fiction writings from 1970 to 2006 (Allen, 2009; Hampton, 2006; Potts & Butler, 1996). In addition to books, series, and articles, Butler's works have been cited in numerous academic journals. Because of her long history of authoring African-centered science fiction texts that interrogate issues of race, social relationships, and history, her work is situated as both a relevant and a necessary focus for examining the rhetorical tools used in her writings, as well as the salience of Africentricity as a tool for examining her work. I will analyze

the two books in Butler's *Parable* series: *Parable of the Sower* and the *Parable of the Talents*. These two novels represent a decade, the 1990s, in which Butler created a contemporary society that contains referents to the slave narrative within an expanding Africentric genre.

Tananarive Due, on the other hand, has blended horror into the ASF genre, while still making use of the slave narrative and its historical and contemporary connections as the main components of her works. Due's work appears in the *2000 Year's Best SF 6* and the *Year's Best Science Fiction 17th Annual Collection*. She has taught at the Hurston-Wright Foundation's Writer's Week at Howard University, the Clarion Science Fiction and Fantasy Writer's Workshop at Michigan State University, the University of Miami, and Cleveland State University's Imagination conference ("About Tananarive Due," n.d.). I will analyze the three novels of Due's *African Immortals* series, which spans the decade from 1997 through 2008. Each novel represents an evolving tale that revisits the role of Harriet Tubman as an iconic figure, connecting the traditional slave narrative to an Africentric description of resistance.

Despite their intriguing differences, Butler's *Parable* series and Due's novels take their place as ASF from a womanist and Africentric perspective, building upon the works of Ann Petry, Jessie Redmond Fauset, Nella Larsen, Julia Collins, Harriet Wilson, and Charlotte Taussig; they continue the conversation both inside and outside of the academy about African American life for the marginalized Other represented as woman and Black.

I would like to note that in postulating a reading protocol that directs attention to African-centered polyphonic novels, I do not intend to replace one system of representation with an alternative hegemony. Inclusion does not necessitate the exclusion of traditional rhetorical analysis positions. The artistic form of ASF complicates the communication of difference, however, creating a world where alternative realities displace hegemonic relationships by their

very existence (Awkward, 1988; McLaren, 1998; Stillman, 2003). It is incumbent, then, that this analysis of Butler and Due be concerned with the textual systems by which the structure and function of each work creates a space in which to examine the displacement of dominant ideologies. And, rhetorically, the most notable pattern of consistency in ASF is an Africentric perspective, which conveys a culturally specific worldview that is adapted to revisit and reify the utility of cultural narratives.

In what follows, I will approach ASF through three distinct yet connected means of examination, three literature bases. In Chapter 2, I review the literature on fiction as rhetorical; that is, as a means of influencing its audiences. This is a perspective that undergirds all that comes after. In Chapter 3, I turn to the scholarship on traditional African American narrative, its general themes, and the impact of the Black Arts Movement on the development of alternative forms of writing, reading, and interpreting Africentric novels. In Chapter 4, I trace the academic conversation about Afrocentrism as a preparation for developing the Africentric reading protocol that appears at the end of that chapter. In Chapters 5 and 6, I apply this reading protocol to the works of Butler and Due, respectively. Finally, in Chapter 7 I summarize the results of the analyses, discuss the significance of the endeavor, and point to some avenues of future research.

CHAPTER 2 "TRADITIONAL EXAMINATIONS OF FICTION, SCIENCE FICTION, AND NARRATIVE"

Fiction

The literal definition of *fiction* as *creative imaginings written to entertain an audience* is not representative of all fictive writings. Novels as discourse are formal communications of ideas and thoughts that reflect the political and social systems from which an author builds fictive worlds (Bialostosky, 1985; Grant-Davie, 1997; Killham, 1968; Morreall, 1994; Park, 1982). Rhetoricians have long examined novels for insight into their persuasive nature (Baker, 1973; Booth, 1961, 1968; Brock, 1991; Peel, 2002; Perry, 1896; Rath, 1997). As an instrumental use of language, novels involve human agents who intend to initiate conversation about their books and the subject matter therein obtained as a primary function of literary discourse (Gallaway, 1940; Perry, 1896). Rhetoricians have considered not only the persuasive effect of fiction but also its transactional qualities, examining and discussing fiction as a method of altering our perceptions of reality or broadening our views about the world we live in (Paris, 1968; Scharbach, 1972). Written language is viewed as concrete oration that designates the author as speechmaker and omniscient narrator, translating fiction into Aristotelian proofs of oration. More recent research has examined didactic interactions and the role of cathartic response in motivating audience receptivity, the generative effect of literature, and narratology and genre as discourse (O. Butler, Mehaffy, & Keating, 2001; Herman, 1999; Kearns, 1999; Lester, 2010; Malmgren, 1991; Morson, 1991; Onega Jaén & García Landa, 1996; Phelan, 1996; Prince, 2008; Spencer, 2006).

Neo-Aristotelian rhetorical analysis treats fiction according to a linear model of communication, in which an author instructs readers toward a definite conclusion (Booth, 1961, 1968; Gallaway, 1940; Perry, 1896). Aldridge (1972) asserted that academicians needed to develop not only a common language for understanding analysis, but also a set of critical

principles for examining fiction, similar to those used in analyzing poetic prose. For Aldridge, fiction and poetry should be approached from two different positions. The textual analysis of poetry, according to Aldridge, is examined to uncover the use of language and its underlying structure in comparison to similar formalist pieces. Fiction, from Aldridge's point of view, should be approached as a narrative social relationship and political exigency. It was not until later that the analysis of fiction novels began to include considerations of how literary works are constructed on didactic principles designed to express meanings, as well as to represent human activity through a production of cathartic responses that engage the imagination (Bradbury, 1967; Rader, 1979).

Baker (1973) saw neo-Aristotelian rhetorical analysis as a way to fragment rhetorical analysis from a more discursively significant role: namely, to focus on fiction as a form of communicative discussion to uncover or explain a truth. Fiction, as a tool of mediation, could thereby change or alter the perception of truth, and its impact on its readership could be considered using a multiperspectival critical assessment (Bialostosky, 1985; Kenkel, 1969; Stover, 1973; Tucker, 1974). By the end of the 20th century, rhetorical analysis of fiction more closely reflected the complexities of readers and the subjective worlds novels represent (Duncan, 1996; Friedman, 1995; Gates, 1994, 1999; G. E. Hale, 1998; Kennedy, 1998). Incorporating Bakhtin's dialogic poetics, serious approaches to literature now treat language and style, historical and implied author/reader, as well as objectivity and technique of the work under examination as key factors of fiction, and identifying these factors is an important goal of rhetorical analysis (Bialostosky, 1985; D. J. Hale, 1994; Morson, 1991; Peterson, 1993; Phelan, 1996).

Booth (1961) stressed the importance of the author's ability to persuade or affect readers as substitute speechmaker and omniscient narrator. The style in which the message is delivered is most effective on a particular audience and is crafted with language its target audience understands. The assumption Booth articulated was that any well-presented message in a novel is, or should be, translatable across all differences *within* a society; however, he did not consider class, racial, ethnic, or historical differences that impact our understanding of the world. Fiction, according to Booth (1968), uses artistic proofs to present characters who must make a moral choice to maintain, instill, reiterate, or correct social actions for the greater good. For Booth, authors use their knowledge of ethos, pathos, and logos to construct a strongly persuasive textual link that reinforces normative, socially constructed Eurocentric values.

Mediated contexts: history and the rhetorical situation

Moving from a classical perspective to modernity, the study of fiction concentrates on an expanding definition of fiction and its relationship to the field of communication as a complex narratology with multiple meanings. Scholes (1969) introduces the concept of "history" as the primary lens through which to examine how writers use fiction to influence a particular reading, interpretation, and understanding of a novel based on experiential relationships. Fiction as a mass-market commodity is available to nonhomogeneous audiences who interpret the same reading material on the basis of diverse cultural, social, and economic circumstances (Baker, 1973; Rader, 1979; Scholes, 1969). The rhetoric of fiction thus becomes a process of psychological enfranchisement that uses complex symbols to change how the audience sees itself beyond the pages of the narrative (Aldridge, 1972; Rader, 1979). Rader (1979), an admirer of the Chicago School of Criticism, posits that fiction uses psychologically grafted language structures, such as familiar settings, contemporary diction, or culturally adapted experiences that reflect the

lives of the readership, to entrap readers. These traps take readers on a sympathetic journey that subtly influences the way they understand the novel through their own subjective history and social position.

Bitzer (1968), a contemporary of Booth and a rhetorical theorist, moved beyond neo-Aristotelian structures, categorical modes, and even didactic functions present between author and audience. Bitzer believed rhetorical criticism was stuck on examining formal aspects of the novel rather than the rhetorical action that produces the novel and gives the messages it contains a persuasive impact (Bitzer, 1968; C. R. Smith & Lybarger, 1996). For Bitzer, the question was not how a novel's structure replicates ethos, logos, and pathos; but what situation arose to compel an author to write specific works, and what rhetorical situation the works attempted to address. Bitzer's key contention was that the novel itself is õa mode of action and not an instrument of reflectionö (Bitzer, 1968, p. 4; Malinowski, 1952). Like Scholes's, Bitzer's framework changed the focus of contemporary literary analysis to consider the novel as rhetorical discourse that marks an *exigence*: the perceived urgency to address a defect or obstacle within the society that produces the work. Bitzer's work looked beyond authorial intent to consider the ways in which societal obstacles affect and constrain an audience's access to knowledge and a writer's ability to address the crises present in rhetorical situations through a generative communication medium. (Garret & Xiao, 1993; Grant-Davie, 1997; C. R. Smith & Lybarger, 1996). For Bitzer, exigence also reflected an urgency by which both author and audience can act as change agents within the constraints of a rhetorical situation, to address or redress real-world problems or concerns in an open system of communication. Bitzer's situational model showed that perceptions of reality can be relayed effectively in written discourse.

Morreall (1994) embraced Bitzer's idea of the rhetorical situation to investigate the traditional role of Booth's artificial author. Morreall's exploration of the omniscient narrator raised a number of questions about the validity of looking at fiction as a simple recitation of style and narrator intent. Indeed, in the end, Morreall acquiesced in a less scientific and more affective rendering of fiction, stating that "such things as interior monologue, and spatial and temporal adverbs referring to the characters' here and now, are unique to fiction" (p. 434) and act as a contemporary approach to address rhetorical situations that arise out of a dynamic and complex society. As the idea that rhetoric as a study seeks to understand the presence of rhetorical situations gained ground, a dialogic critique of the rhetorical situation began to look at multiperspectival and didactic interactions between and around not only message content, but message interpretation by a responsive audience. The idea of neo-Aristotelian rhetorical analysis, with the author as authoritative voice, was now replaced by an evolving understanding that words take on diverse meanings when they reach nonhomogeneous audiences.

Narratology and genre

Phelan (1996) focused on narrative itself as rhetoric. Relying heavily on Burke (Brock, 1991) and Booth (1961, 1968), Phelan updated their terminology with his own, defining *rhetoric* as the process by which elements of narrative interact through authorial agency, textual phenomena, and reader response, which co-influence one another discursively. As in Phelan's earlier works (1987, 1989), the focus remained on mimetic cohesion to explore voice as a narrative element that locates ideology within a text.

Like Richards (1949) and Burke (Brock, 1991), Phelan (1996) recognized the arbitrary assignments of names and objects, seeing that authors often disconnect the names of objects and assign new variants, enabling readers to realign prior symbols with a new awareness of social,

political, racial, and gender ideations. Phelan's critical analysis of *Beloved* (Morrison, 1987) recognized the author's use of polyphony and diverse character personifications to influence reader responses (p. 776). Phelan proposed that standard academic interpretations of Morrison's work often did not consider how voice is used to bridge the gap between style and character, nor the interrelatedness that the author and reader engage in when coding and decoding meanings inherent in any work of fiction (pp. 177–178). Phelan (1998) later revisited *Beloved* and considered the narrative strategies and narrative progression devices Morrison uses to contextualize the relationship between the implied author and the assumed audience, but he failed to look at alternative understandings of the text outside of a privileged social and ethnic stance.

Whereas Phelan is highly regarded for continuing and expanding the traditional rhetorical analysis of fiction, Bawarshi (2000) examined the rhetoric of fiction as an ever-expanding, growing, and continuous means of tracking the symbolic, transactional, social, and strategic maneuvers of fiction through the study of genres. Bawarshi, a scholar of rhetoric and compositional studies, provided a comprehensive examination of the role and function of genre as a democratizing influence in discursive practices. He characterized genre as a sociorhetorical act that functions as a generative power, helping to shape and enable our social actions by embedding into the text elements of culture and social systems that reconstitute rhetorical situations. Genre in fiction, according to Bawarshi, is analogous to schema in the study of persuasion, a branching off of the model first put forth by Bitzer (1968). Thus, genre stabilizes and enables interpretation of cultural attitudes that, in turn, allow readers to shape socially and discursively recognized mimetic rhetorical situations. In sum, genre in fiction provides the instrument whereby social and discursive situations are reproduced.

Fisher (1989) makes clear that his theoretical construct, the narrative paradigm, is a general approach to discourse based on the idea that rationality provides the background from which rhetoricians can build a method of interpreting spoken and written texts. For Fisher, storytelling is a way the speaker or writer uses persuasive methods to infer or imply positionality toward ideas, histories, and even cultures (Kearns, 2001; K. G. Roberts, 2004). Indeed, Fisher stresses that argumentation undergirds the coherence and fidelity of stories that all humans create and share to ensure that their ideas, histories, and cultures remain present (McClure, 2009). Fisher, however, states very clearly that it is the application of rhetorical analysis that provides the method and means of understanding how the language of storytellers connects meaning and context, to recreate or educate the reader about the subject and subject matter within each tale.

As a field vitally concerned with how language and other communicative acts impact or promote action, rhetorical analysis should call attention to hegemonic views toward nondominant society members, their subjective viewpoints, and the art they create. Yet, Eurocentric rhetorical analysis has historically maintained a focus on traditional novels written by White males and a few White females. An alternative critical analysis of African American texts by African American critics was present as early as the period immediately following the Emancipation Proclamation. Novels written from the perspectives of African Americans about their own social, cultural, and economic realities, however, were relegated to the shadows not only of mainstream society, but of the academy as well (Jarrett, 2006; Mitchell, 1994; Wintz, 1996b).

Science fiction

As with fiction in general, rhetorical analysis of science fiction often reiterates dominant social ideologies from a Eurocentric perspective, leaving out non-White characters unless they are alien invaders or mutated humanoids (K. J. Anderson et al., 2000; Brantlinger, 1980; "A

dialogue: Samuel Delany and Joanna Russ on science fiction," 1984). Several studies were conducted prior to the 21st century on the utility of science fiction and its persuasive function, but without any consideration of gender, culture, or ethnicity as elements worthy of analysis. For example, Bailey (1942) looks at the novel *Symzonia*, a utopian subterranean Earth society of White people who exemplify purity in all facets of their existence; Peckham (1950) examined science fiction and the folklore of flying saucers; and Shaftel (1953) analyzed popular science fiction short stories and novels to assess the incidence of sadism, fantasy, and pornography as popular science fiction tropes.

Science fiction, a form of escape reading, finds its etiology in 1920s and 1930s space opera: popular adventure tales based on interplanetary travel or prophecy that entertained the interest of White male adolescents (Derleth, 1952). By the 1950s, science fiction writers had become more concerned with matters of philosophy, sociology, psychoanalysis, and ethnography, creating formulaic plots dealing primarily with the atom bomb, the fall of totalitarian regimes, and the corrupt nature of dictatorships (Derleth, 1952). As part of the American science fiction genre, White men, as the sole pioneers of space travel, combined ancient legends with science-centered visions of the future, while reinforcing Eurocentric notions of power and dominance in new frontiers (Derleth, 1952; Hirsch, 1992; Kenkel, 1969; Stover, 1973; Tucker, 1974). Research on the function of science fiction reflected its presumed readership, with little attention given to women authors or writers of color (Daniels & Bowen, 2003; Hobby, 2000; Peel, 2002; S. R. Thomas, 2000; Yaszek, 2004). Female authors as well as African American authors brought to science fiction a different perspective from that of traditional writers, complicating how not only readers but also academics understood the social constraints of a perceptually more complex society.

African American novels and their treatment

Although much of the work completed by rhetoricians in the 20th century is generalizable to all fiction novels, research on the theory and structure of novels continues to place more emphasis and resources on examinations of Western-centered texts. It was not until the 1970s that fiction written by African American authors gained attention outside of historically Black colleges. William Wells Brown's *Clotel* (1853), James Weldon Johnson's *Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912), Claude McKay's *Home to Harlem* (1928), Chester Himes's *If He Hollers Let Him Go* (1945), and Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952) gained enough momentum to be studied in predominantly White colleges and universities. Works by African American women authors, such as *Quicksand* and *Passing* by Nella Larsen (Larsen & McDowell, 1986), *Iola Leroy* by Frances Ellen Watkins Harper (Harper & Garrigues, 1892), *Jubilee* by Margaret Walker (Alexander, 1966; M. Walker, 1966), *There is Confusion* (Fauset, 1924) and *Plum Bun* (Fauset, 1929) by Jessie Redmond Fauset, and *Our Nig* (Wilson, 1859) by Harriet Wilson also gained notice beginning in the 1970s. Although African American magazines and periodicals provided an avenue for discussing the works of Black writers, those works enjoyed limited consideration outside of their own community.

As outlined in Wintz (1996b) and Worley and Perry (1998), African American critics emphasized the author's ability, regardless of gender, to convey persuasive messages or cultural contexts within a community of intellectuals: messages about the duality of the African condition in the Americas, dealing with a "duplicitous slippage of stable meaning" to remind readers of the social and political movements that influenced what it meant to be a part of the African Diaspora (D. J. Hale, 1994; Peterson, 1993). Fiction in the African American community, like all fiction, amplifies and mirrors elements of actual lived experiences, one of the primary goals of historical

novels (Bunch-Lyons, 2000; Yaszek, 2003). Fiction that allows for the revision as well as the review of history can begin conversations not only about past events but also about future potentialities.

African American women and the rhetoric of speculative fiction

Thus, African American writers of science fiction adopted the term *speculative fiction* as a means of signifying cultural, racial, spiritual, and gender orientation differences from traditional science fiction ("A dialogue: Samuel Delany and Joanna Russ on science fiction," 1984; Rutledge & Hopkinson, 1999; Salvaggio, 1984). This self-definition reflects the multipluralistic and synchronistic standpoint of an alternative voice that mirrors the idea of a polyphonic textuality and an Africentric perspective (Asante, 1980). Nalo Hopkinson asserts that, although õscience fiction has always been a subversive literature,ö the term *speculative fiction* describes the inclusion of elements of science fiction, dark fantasy, horror, and magic realism (Rutledge & Hopkinson, 1999). A key component of *speculative fiction* as a more appropriate term is its connection to the slave experience, which corresponds to African-centered philosophical and rhetorical standpoints. Hopkinson proclaims that speculative fiction provides a unique space from which to address the impact of African domination throughout the Diaspora; to resist, revisit, or rewrite the past to bolster and realign contemporary African self-definitions globally . Metanarratives in Africentric literature focus on the idea of genetic and social fusion as a basic representation of Africana existence. This idea of fusion is clearly seen in the writings of ASF, which uses hybridity to examine the past and comment on possible futures.

Speculative fiction, according to Yaszek (2003), allows an author õto explore how such revisions might lead to new and more egalitarian futures, as a generative outgrowth of African American historical fiction and science fiction; continuing the tradition of interrogating race,

gender, and history, through an African-centered standpointö (p. 1058). Therefore, an alternate form of reading and interpreting such novels appears to be in order, to gain some insight into the methods African American speculative fiction authors use to revise and reiterate the important elements of their cultureøs history and contemporary concerns in its own voice (Quinlan, 1994). ASF is an Africentric perspective that communicates resistance to racial, gender, cultural, and ethnic essentialism. Building from a unique historical viewpoint, ASF facilitates an ongoing interpretation and reinterpretation of the American slave narrative. ASF novels reinforce and generate a comprehensive, shared, and communally constructed standpoint of womanhood. By identifying the presence of polyphonic language codes in character identities, one can trace an Africentric philosophy in these novels through links to historical African American literature, criticism, and myths. The arts of listening, observing, adapting, and reacting to messages are unique cultural artifacts that traditional rhetorical analysis often ignores, but these artifacts are keys to understanding and interpreting novels based on non-Western philosophies and cultural norms. Yet ASF, like African American historical fiction, continues to be of interest as a subject of study only because of its relationship with traditional novels.

Of course, like other forms of communication that occur outside of the Western center, ASF and African American literature have their own center and referents. Instead of being considered as important turning points for African American culture, communication, and social systems, African Amercian novels and their evolution are most often discussed in journals geared toward African American scholars, a segregation marker that continues to marginalize the study of African American communication and culture even within rhetorical studies because it treats African American communication as an aberration outside the norm of American communication patterns (Nantambu, 1998). It is this gap, in which African American novels

continue to be viewed as too narrowly focused on slavery and its impact in relation to traditional novels, that appears in examinations of ASF and that invites a closer investigation into ASF through a different lens.

ASF differs from both traditional science fiction and fantasy. Science fiction has traditionally been viewed as based on characters exploring real scientific possibilities, as well as socially constructed normative and logical behaviors, when challenging social problems within a society *in extremis* (Brantlinger, 1980). Fantasy writing, on the other hand, usually forgoes science-based tropes, building characters who employ or are affected by magic, often including spiritual divination or telepathy, or shape-shifting creatures who have a combination of these attributes.

It is within this purview that metafiction, rather than fiction, provides a more useful starting point for an examination of ASF. Metafiction, as a construct, approaches African American literature through an inductive inquiry of the genre as an oppositional text (Jablon, 1997). According to Jablon, metafiction incorporates Africentric elements of silence and speech, metaphor, vernacular, free indirect discourse, and foregrounding not only as self-contemplation and self-reflexivity of the characters, but also as a means of including readers through their own subjective narrative (Collins, Andrews, & Kachun, 2006). By including multiple African peoples, divorced from specific African cultures, religions, and histories, Jablon (1997) argues, African American oratory and writing replaced this triad with metaconsciousness through shared experiences of domination and growth, using disambiguation, most recently, in the forms of novels (pp. 6-7). It would be more appropriate to consider ASF as a genre that provides the possibility to describe an alternative view to character actions, rather than merely as oppositional texts.

Although speculative fiction often employs science and pseudoscience as a potential catalyst of human destruction, these tropes are not typically the primary questions under examination. Instead, speculative fiction uses science and pseudoscience to interrogate social and political issues that create a circular relationship between human existence, the metaphysical world, and motivating relational factors. It is the unknown consequences and unspoken realities that are of interest. Speculative fiction endeavors to expand humansø understanding of human actions, personal prejudices, and the global impact of individual and collective actions beyond the borders of personal comfort.

Speculative fiction is õa coherent deformation of Realityö (C. Johnson, 1984, p. 2) that uses language to create a fusion or mixture that coalesces õin the moment of cultural exchangeö (Hutnyk, 2005, p. 80) by capturing elements of rupture from traditional science fiction texts. According to Hutnyk, hybridity is a crucial premise of cultural criticism, serving as an evocative word that signifies identity formation as a component of the Africentric schema. Hybridity as a signifier of identity formation is a product of Anglo-Eurocentric nationhood, thriving upon the accumulation of divergent experiences African Americans encounter as beneficiaries of social, cultural, and ethnic domination (Hutnyk, 2005). G. Hampton (2006) and Phillips (2002) agree, stating that speculative fiction often utilizes narratives written on bodies through extrapolation, as well as metanarratives and secular apocalyptic traditions, to make use of hybridity in myriad ways. The notion of hybridity is used to form cultural, racial, and gender alternatives through an Africentric storytelling lens, often combining metanarratives and secular apocalyptic folklore.

Phillips (2002) classifies metanarratives as a means of imparting õpsychological force and ethical direction to human agencyö (p. 301), and secular apocalyptic tradition as a means to emphasize social upheaval and explain the logic and power from which change occurs in human

history. In speculative fiction, these ideas are also used to highlight the effects of hybridization and transformation in racial, political, social, and gendered systems of being. Phillips's examination of the function of speculative fiction in creating alternative worlds, as well as research on African American women science fiction writers (Hampton & Brooks, 2003), maps out the utility of speculative fiction and its use of hybridity in restructuring the science fiction genre: Science fiction is repositioned to correspond to an Africentric and therefore multipluralistic standpoint, with hybridization engendering the construction of a polyphonic voice that reflects the experiences of Africans throughout the Diaspora.

Speculative fiction as a hybrid genre has been used to challenge and redefine womanhood, motherhood, fatherhood, and mythological and historical pasts of patriarchy and slavery, as well as gender and racial inequity across cultures (Agusti, 2005b; Higginbotham, 1992; Mitchell, 2001; Osherow, 2000). In speculative fiction, unlike traditional science fiction, there is an "awareness of embodied otherness" (Sands, 2003, p. 1). This awareness, according to Mitchell (2001), gives speculative fiction an "opportunity to explore possible collaborative solutions for contemporary race-related problems" by using hybridity in its texts (p. 71). Hybridity in African American womanist speculative fiction is often revisionist, Mitchell asserts, building upon and expanding epic myths, then restructuring those myths to replace superhuman characters with personalities that are prone to mimetic human foibles.

An Africentric view of speculative fiction "obliges the subject to come to terms with ever-widening possibilities of human identity" (Phillips, 2002, p. 309) through the suspension of disbelief that all readers and audiences are subject to when entrapped by works of fiction (J. M. Walker, 1978). The differences inherent in speculative fiction are concerned with the obsession of surplus, the burden of excessive role presumption, and Other-oriented trait definition, from

which African American women writers transform language use by focusing on emancipatory or liberatory storytelling and myth revision (Mitchell, 2001). The *surplus*, a term used by Habermas to explain an economic and social system of inequity, places the margins of production as an important element in understanding wealth and power striation in local and global socioeconomic systems (Frankel, 1974; Habermas, 1975). In this analysis, the importance of surplus also speaks to the undervalued communication systems of Diasporic Africans. Instead of economic wealth, for the purpose of this project, *surplus* is used to indicate the underexamined margins of African-centered speculative fiction. It is from outside the margins of science fiction texts, Osherow (2000) maintains, that speculative fiction introduces õfigures that challenge traditional literary representations of womenö (p. 28) on the basis of race and often age, making use of the surplus of science fiction, fantasy, horror, and history in re-visioning the experiences of Africans in the Diaspora to destroy the underlying focus of ethnicity, culture, and gender as identifiers that signify Other as a viable category.

In her examination of Africentric speculative fiction writers, Osherow (2000) finds that õrevisionist writing of female science fiction authors, highlight womenøs potential to thwart the historical limitations imposed upon female characters; and upon themselves [sic]ö (p. 81). When coupled with Africentricity, science fiction as speculative fiction serves to revise myths long held about racialized Others, reconstructing previously acquired schemas regarding perceptions of African American women in historical and contemporary contexts (Osherow, 2000, p. 77). Not only does the use of speculative fiction to address marginalized racial Others coincide with Afrocentricity and the wider idea of Africentric thought; it also helps situate the sociopolitical and historical role of African American women in a broader milieu (C. S. Anderson, 2006; Bunch-Lyons, 2000; Govan, 1986; Hampton & Brooks, 2003).

In essence, speculative fiction allows African American women, as authors, to go beyond the patterns of traditional and Western-centered science fiction. By foraging in the margins, these authors are able to uncover multiple margins beyond binary relationships, decentering a Western-centered reading and understanding of speculative fiction novels (J. Bell, 1984; Rowell & Delany, 2000). This dilution of a center radically alters and reclaims womanhood and manhood in a historically relevant, future-oriented extrapolation of circumstances; a feature of persuasive argumentation in African American novels to promote inclusive, multifaceted relationships (Asante, 1983; J. Bell, 1984; Cobb, 1997; Hampton, 2006; Hood, 2005; R. L. Jackson & Richardson, 2003; Kenan, 1991). Speculative fictionøs importance to the study of rhetoric rests in its use of marginality, and the utility and vigor with which it has used rhetorical elements to represent the past in the present and the present in the past through an alternative approach to communicating intense social concerns in a narrative format.

Cultural cohesion

S. C. Brown (1992) asserts that a õconscious appropriation of meaningö (p. 219) when analyzing and interpreting non-Anglo-centered novels enhances or empowers the rhetorical process. One could argue that this view is a reformation of hegemonic elitism. Conscious appropriation without understanding the subtexts of a symbol may detract from or marginalize the meaning of that symbol to reinforce social or historical subjugation. It is easy to see that, as Brown (1992) contends, I.A. Richardsøs attention to context for a purpose, the importance of textual meaning, and the interrelatedness of õwriter, reader, and textö are all vital to a discourse analysis of fiction (p. 220). Richards, according to Brown, requires the rhetorician to see how meaning is shaped rhetorically by focusing on the charactersø thought processes as written, as well as the authorøs placement of rhetorical elements, presented in texts as speculative

instruments (pp. 220ó221). This toolbox of rhetorical instruments, speculative instruments, allows the writer to direct and guide the reader through contextual meanings that are embedded within a text as part of a persuasive argument (p. 222).

Sands (2003) writes that speculative fiction creates a standpoint õwhich is one of contingency, perspectivism, and positionality, often in the service of a social dream or dream of action in the world held by the rhetorö (p. 4). In this case, an Afrocentric or acentric stance in speculative fiction rewrites social relations to combat the racial, gender, and class-based oppression that Agusti (2005a) contends is inculcated into a community through the process of relating, õin order to downplay the legal fictions of gender and race which distort the growth of a community and its individualsö (p. 354). Instead, Samuel Delany and Nalo Hopkinson (õA dialogue,ö 1984), Octavia E. Butler (O. Butler et al., 2001), and Tananarive Due (Hood, 2005) envision speculative fiction as a genre that has been recognized as outside of traditional literary texts in that it utilizes the surplus of traditional science fiction and European universalist writings to generate balance in the understanding of race, gender, and social relations. Delany ("A dialogue: Samuel Delany and Joanna Russ on science fiction," 1984; Rowell & Delany, 2000; Rutledge, 2000; S. R. Thomas, 2000) states that speculative fiction writing represents the way in which marginalized populations have acclimated within closed social systems:

> [T]his is what people in a marginal social position have been doing constantly, appropriating what is marginal in the rest of cultural productioní .Science fiction is a naturalí .Itøs very fruitful if you want to present the concerns of any marginalized group, because you are doing it in a world where things are different..í when you realize that there are lots and lots of subpopulations, each within its own center and margin, it still has some validity. ("A dialogue: Samuel Delany and Joanna Russ on science fiction," 1984, pp. 29-30)

In this way, African-centered speculative fiction, often seen as a subversive literature in the same way as science fiction, adds a layer of disambiguation to reflect the African experience

in the Diaspora. Speculative fiction as African-centered science fiction is thus written in a context and language created by authors who share a literary standpoint in order to adapt, change, and embrace diversity as part of a larger cultural narrative (Stillman, 2003). African American women science fiction and speculative fiction writers have extrapolated on these traditional tropes or disambiguations to include alternative worlds, invisibility, and encounters with the alien Other to estrange readers from dominant understandings of American history and to re-present the influence of African American life on national and international society (Derleth, 1952; Yaszek, 2003).

Summary

Sparshott (1967) and the manipulation of memories to create mimetic cohesiveness; Paris (1968) and the author as an always-present interpreter; Scharbach (1972) and fiction as a form of communication for uncovering or explaining a truth; Phelan (1996) and the importance of voice in the creation of mimetic cohesion; and Bawarshi (2000) and the author's cultural identity as discursively present perception of social and cultural hierarchies: all these approaches help set the stage for a move away from Western-centered rhetorical analysis for all novels. A less static, non-Western-based ideological stance would include considerations of race, ethnicity, or gender as facets of how the audience is addressed and conceptualized. A prime example to consider is Phelan's two-part analysis of *Beloved*, a well-thought-out and comprehensive treatment of the novel from a Western-centered reading protocol.

Booth's (1961, 1968) work did lead other researchers to consider fiction as rhetorical, but did so in ever-expanding frameworks, creating methodologies that have produced new ways to view and examine works of fiction. Booth's stance, however, ignores that the audience itself, as individual readers, brings its own subjective understanding of any given novel's intention with it.

It is only from confined spaces within a subset of society that homogeneity can lend credence to the use and effectiveness in novels of persuasive arguments based on universal morality. Thus, Booth's work can be reasonably applied only to works of fiction produced by White, educated men who traffic in the same social and cultural circles that an author, as narrator, shares with a predesignated audience. The idea that Booth posits— that writing itself occurs within a situated, symbolic, transactional, social, and strategic setting— highlights the need for considering and examining novels along a continuum that may in fact be less linear than the one rhetoricians have traditionally traversed.

In reading and interpreting African American novels, one must remember that the body of the African was used as an object of utility (Blount, 1992; Stevens, 1992). In many ways, the novels and art forms of African Americans continue to wrestle not only with the legacy of slavery, but with oppression as a living, breathing entity that takes the shape of diverse symbols in contemporary America. Even Phelan's (1996) analysis does not provide adequate attention to African American cultural codes embedded in *Beloved*, missing key markers of fragmentation in relaying history and presence.

For example, in discussing the significance of the four horsemen that come to take Sethe and her children, Phelan (1996) does not mention the spiritual element that speaks in Morrison's narrative of the apocalypse ensconced in this coded text; the very destruction of humanity represented in the novel eludes Phelan's analysis because traditional examinations defer to dominant social norms and expectations when formulating responses to discordant cultural images. Sethe's actions are not cruel but redemptive, denying the slaver the very object s/he seeks to destroy, another tool to make impotent the life of the African and her/his community. The four horsemen represent the conquest of freedom (the sheriff); the war between living as a

slave and trying for freedom (the slave); the starvation of Sethe's children through the violation of taking her milk (the nephew); and, finally, the presence of death in the form of the schoolteacher, who brings with him the embodiment of the idea that words can kill. They bring hunger and death, as well as attributing animalism to human beings.

Phelan (1996, pp. 3-4) fails to recognize that slavery in any form, even in a place like Sweethome, is not and cannot be seen as benevolent; in essence, Phelan traces an Africentric ideology within the text without recognizing it or connecting it to deeper issues of belief and culture. The use of disambiguation to tell the story without overtly stating an ethical stance through the use of induction is a truism in Africentric storytelling. African American Vernacular English and the construction of Beloved as the trickster speak of her actions as both overt and covert messages that can only be understood when one is fully versed in African religious and/or spiritual subtexts. The importance of community in the telling of the tale provides clues not only to overt actions, but to messages meant to have greater meaning to a subset of the novel's readers. Phelan's Western-centered logic suggests that in killing the infant Beloved, Sethe "has committed a subhuman action" (p. 6). That the very act Sethe takes is duly noted in the history of captured African women, who killed their infants during the Middle Passage, suggests that it was instead an act of love. To prevent their children from becoming slaves in a foreign land or starving during the Middle Passage, African women sacrificed the most precious of the slave ship passengers, to stop them from becoming the Other. By placing the onus on Sethe's overt action, Phelan pays little attention to the covert meaning or symbols behind the act: that she sought her children's freedom at any cost.

Thus, like traditional forms of fiction and their analysis, cultural fiction should be assessed with the idea that codes and meanings might take on alternative meanings. These

meanings enrich the text in ways that are not considered within long-established academic research modalities. A different approach should be contemplated to mine the text of African American fiction. It is with this idea in mind that I propose an Africentric reading protocol that provides a more detailed analysis of African American literature and, more specifically, ASF as a genre that is written at the margins of this cultural art form.

CHAPTER 3 "AFRICAN-CENTERED COMMUNICATION, RESEARCH, AND VIEWPOINTS"

Afrological studies

The concept of an African American communication paradigm is part of Africological studies, a field begun at Temple University under Molefi Asante (1980), who had studied and written on historical and contemporary aspects of African American studies since the mid-1960s (Asante, 1983; Cobb, 1997; Verharen, 2002; Winters, 1994). Asante built upon the works of his intellectual predecessors, as outlined later in this chapter; yet the groundwork for Afrocentricity as a rhetorical approach to the social, political, religious, and discursive practices of Africans in the Diaspora had taken root as early as the 1800s. In America, the move toward an emergent connection to Africa can be seen in the Black Arts Movement (BAM). BAM, an outgrowth of postóCivil War life for African Americans, created an evolving sense of self for the descendants of slaves by offering the concrete avenue for recording and protecting cultural knowledge through written media and oral performance, as well as physical and visual art produced by African Americans (Gladney, 1995; Neal, 1968; Reed, 1970; D. L. Smith, 1991; L. Thomas, 1995). Pan-Africanism, back-to-Africa movements, and Négritude all contributed to the ascendancy of a recognized, cohesive African-centered communication system through an interrogation of blackness (Fishkin, 1995; Gates, 1983; Geertsema, 2004; hooks, 1995; McPherson & Shelby, 2004).

Awkward (1988), in an analysis of race, gender, and the politics of reading, explored how blackness or the acknowledgment of African heritage directs, influences, or dictates the process of interpretation (p. 5). Noting that enacting an Afrocentric critical reading is best undertaken within an interpretive community that conveys a shared consciousness, Awkward maintained that to analyze Afrocentric texts, the researcher should have the ability to decode signifying

structures within the African American Vernacular Englishóspeaking community. For Afrocentric researchers, an African-centered understanding of communicative events, including written texts, is key in deciphering and interpreting African Americanóauthored texts (Asante, 1991, 2006; R. L. Jackson & Richardson, 2003). Gates (1983, p. 692) shared this conclusion, noting that signifying structures operate as intertextual revisions because they revise narratives through key tropes and rhetorical strategies from discursive forms that came before them.

Gatesøs (1983) emphasis on imaginary and symbolic counternarratives that resist the devaluation of decolonizing discourse (p. 463) has become an important referent in rhetorical analysis of Africentric literature. Imaginary texts, according to Gates, present colonized bodies as the echo of negative attributes, relaying not facts but acceptable stereotypes of racialized groups that are generated by the majority. Symbolic texts mediate racialization by allowing the narratives of subjective groups to indicate their own intersubjectivity, heterogeneity, and particularity. In essence, African Americans as well as other nondominant groups can signify those symbols and artifacts that are important to their own cultural narratives, without the contamination of bias from dominant society members. It is from this space that an African American migration legend forms, becoming the basis from which a cultural narrative emerges, one that combines the stories and myths of Africans both on the continent and throughout the Diaspora (Charters, 2009; Whitten & Torres, 1998).

McLaren (1998), in his examination of the work of African author Ngugi wa Thiongøo, stated that the relationship between literary craft and sociopolitical issues can be clearly seen in African-centered texts: literature that corresponds to Africentric views of the African Diaspora, that ties the authorøs creative process with her/his understanding of an assumed audience that shares a common contextual understanding of verbal and written expressions. McLaren quotes

Ngugi wa Thiongøo: õThe very act of repositioning audience suggests a new axis of literary production coincide cultural pluralism coincide multiculturalismô and restates the problem as õone understanding all the voices coming from what is essentially a plurality of center all over the worldö (p. 393).

It is true that õno one has ever been one thingö (George J. Sefa Dei, 1998, p. 204); thus, basing racial identity on simple biological inference becomes problematic. We are all ethnic and cultural hybrids, the lines of which are not always evident or known (Appiah, 1998). It is because of this diffusion of origins that Appiah (1998) stressed the importance of analyzing shared communication patterns, which relay history and group identity through oral and written language. Thus, tracing the elements of Afrocentric paradigms in the stories and writings of cultural representatives can reveal generally held cultural narratives, perceived realities, and shared experiences that serve as self-definitions of a people (Okpewho, 1981).

According to Sefa Dei (1998), true critical analysis only becomes possible when dissimilar cultures become aware of imposing their own hierarchies on Others; only then does it become clear how African American and other indigenous cultures are silenced. So, although critical examination of Africentric novels began immediately following the Emancipation Proclamation, it was without the benefit of critical discourse analysis to consider the influence of Africentric consciousness. This consciousness was just the beginning of a journey toward reclaiming an African history that existed outside of the confines of European history, all while grappling with the strictures of racism (Rath, 1997). Novels about social, cultural, and economic realities written from the perspectives of African Americans were considered through the lens of Eurocentric discourse analysis. This is understandable, because no other medium of analysis was available to the newly freed at that time. To explore how a discursive Afrocentric application can

better communicate the role and function of culture in narrative analysis is one purpose of the alternative reading protocol offered in this dissertation.

A founding principle of Afrocentricity is that Western nations deny or neglect the social, political, economic, and historical contributions of Africans (Asante, 1980). These contributions include the symbols, rituals, and signs that have psychological significance for Africans (Gates, 1983). Although the importance of African influence in music and art can be clearly seen in museums all over America, African culture and belief systems continue to be devalued when viewed as part of a culture and not as entertainment (Rath, 1997; George J. Sefa Dei, 1998). Just as all Western ideological frameworks cannot be discarded, Afrocentric ideological frameworks must also be viewed as a constructive culturally derived ideology. Afrocentrism as an ideological and philosophical framework takes both radical and more nuanced forms; it seeks to transmit both the cultural and historical legacies of a people (Verharen, 1995). All humankind is descended from the continent of Africa, where Kmt, or ancient Egypt, and Nubia played significant roles in the formation of institutions of higher learning as well as art, history, and religion. But to mention that Black Africans contributed to and/or inhabited Kmt as valuable citizens is often considered a stretch of Afrocentric ideation, although Egypt is part of the continent of Africa; and to some degree affects the belief that such a place actually ever existed. In such an environment of institutionalized disbelief, bias is hard to work around (Foster, 1974; Nobles, 1996). It is no wonder that Africentric stories and communication systems are difficult to decipher; in the eyes of dominant academic ideology, it must seem that they are built upon ideas and circumstances that are ephemeral and incomplete ideations of pseudocultural narratives and a nonexistent past.

Acentric devices

Yet Africentric rhetoric is not drawn from random materials to construct persuasive arguments based on conjecture; instead, it draws from cultural artifacts that Africans in the Diaspora share in diverse forms across the globe. Africentric rhetoric developed to explain how Africans in the Diaspora attempt to connect with other Africans and with the larger world to express their own subjective experiences and views of history and contemporary society (Hilliard, 1992; Mazrui, 1994; Myers, 1987). The search for freedom; the conflicts that lead to social and cultural disenfranchisement; the longing of urban and continental Africans for recognition of their history and current political, social, and economic contributions; and the notion that words can kill or redeemô all these elements are integral parts of any Africentric discourse. Africentric rhetoric seeks to persuade its audience to pay attention to the stories of Diasporic Africans to understand social, political, and cultural connections along a continuum of possible interpretations. Like African-centered rhetoric, Africentric novels maintain a circular structure of addressing character presentation. The author does not lead the audience to view the life choices of characters as absolute. Unlike the structures of traditional western novels, Africentric novels avoid essentialism, because a clear directive or implication of õgoodö or õbadö actions for characters would in itself be an act of colonialism, attempting to confine or obliterate the possibility of change.

Africentric authors promote the recognition of African history, contributions, and presence in the cultural, political, and economic development of humanity. The global disenfranchisement of African peoples produced a desire for self-knowledge that fueled not only social revolutions, but literary revolutions in the Caribbean, Europe, South America, Africa, and the United States to define African ancestry as a positive and pervasive presence in each society.

In centering novels on the African experience of the Maafa, Africentric authors communicate the journeys and experiences of Africans throughout the Diaspora from a particular perspective, writing new stories in which characters respond through acts of resistance to cultural dominance. These stories recreate African myths and Africentric legends, and they teach and reify the importance of cultural narratives and ethnic connections (J. V. Jackson & Cothran, 2003; Myers, 1987; Ogunleye, 1997).

Hybrid norms

It should not be surprising that, like African American linguistic hybridization, social hybridism and cultural complexities occur naturally in the worlds and character portrayals in Africentric literature (Campbell, 1986; Hutnyk, 2005; Lester, 2010; Vint, 2005). Focusing on hybridity in Africentric speculative fiction, then, represents the cultural exchange found in ASF, allowing contemporary African American women authors of the late 20th and early 21st centuries õthe opportunity for radical revision and reclamationö of African American history (Osherow, 2000, p. 72; R. Roberts, 1993, p. 40). Indeed, Africentric literature itself has a long history of creating multiple layers of information through the use of disambiguation, signifyinø a different meaning to words in texts, by usurping the õprocess of meaning-creation and its representationö (Gates, 1988, p. 47).

ASF novels have continued the oral ritual of signifyinø in written narrative, as well as passing on history and African connections in the Diaspora. Novels by Octavia E. Butler and Tananarive Due combine elements of traditional fiction, science fiction, and fantasy from an African-centered perspective. ASF as a genre enables these authors to go beyond traditional fiction, science fiction, or fantasy texts to show the importance of culture, social constraints, and situational context, as well as the authorøs perception of a shared, historical experience. In this

way, African American women authors assume a natural role in creating an Africentric approach to Western literary design, including elements of African, Caribbean, and African American history in the construction of unique cultural tales (Avant-Mier & Hasian, 2002; Bawarshi, 2000; Feracho, 2000).

ASF explores the margins not only of racial inequity, but also of gender and social inequality. As discussed in the following chapter, African American novels find their etiology in the later part of the 19th century. Using the concept of racial hybridity to challenge dominant ideas displaces traditional definitions of Black/White role assumptions. Through the use of symbols and myths gleaned from Africa, African American writers signify co-occurring differences from traditional Western-centered novels and the culture that rendered them supreme. AFS authors explore the margins of social and cultural communities through character depiction, placing both their male and female protagonists in specific locations, times, and circumstances. Butler and Due, the authors selected for this analysis, use ASF to realign and promote cultural cohesion in their novels by maintaining cultural legends, fostering the revision of ethnic myths, and reinvigorating historical narratives to reify cultural traditions.

Symbolic processes

Carey's (1989) ritual model of communication underscores the symbolic process by which readers and observers of media texts create, maintain, repair, and transform reality through representations of shared beliefs (Wintz, 1996a). Shared beliefs connote myths and culturally based ideologies, providing models for interpreting current experiences based on real and/or imagined narratives of a community (White, Piper, Nelson, Kemp, & Muhammad, 2001). Myths and ideologies provide an interior road map of experience by which we engage the world. The treatment of myth in ASF illuminates a battle between hegemonic and alternative ideologies,

beginning a new conversation about rhetorical elements that comprised multiple voices and points of view.

To propose a reading protocol that directs attention to African-centered polyphonic novels is not to replace one system of representation with another. Inclusion does not necessitate excluding traditional rhetorical analysis of Africentric discourse. The artistic form of ASF complicates the communication of difference, however, creating a world where alternative realities displace hegemonic relationships by their very existence (Awkward, 1988; McLaren, 1998; Stillman, 2003). It is incumbent, then, that this analysis of Butler and Due be concerned with the textual systems by which the structure and function of each work creates a space from which to examine the displacement of dominant ideologies. I contend that ASF conveys a culturally specific worldview that revisits and reifies cultural narratives; and that it does so by connecting the experiences of Diasporic Africans through symbolic language that contextualizes the meaning of history by explicating differences along cultural, ethnic, and social lines. There are differences between Diasporic and continental Africans, but the two groups share the common experiences of economic, political, and social colonialism that have been documented in academic and literary discourse.

By examining ASF from an Africentric perspective, we can understand that these novels are written within a context and a language that not only signify a shared literary standpoint, but also underscore sociohistorical elements transmitted from one generation of authors to another (Jennings, 2002). Like African American novels that preceded ASF, African-centered literary works craft language that is used to adapt, change, and embrace diversity as part of a larger cultural narrative (Cobb, 1997; Stillman, 2003; Verharen, 2002; Winters, 1994). In the following chapters, I provide a more thorough discussion of the history and impact of African American

literature on ASF. But it is helpful to mention that, instead of focusing on authorial narrative as the primary (and often the only) way to analyze fiction, African American researchers often focus on disambiguation and the relationship between the author as New Age griot and the reader, with good reason. African American literary traditions and contemporary novels approach audience members as empathic and participatory spectators. A reciprocal relationship, not authorial intent, is the active event that gives the work meaning; actions are layered, and each character can play the role of trickster (Gates, 1983; Jennings, 2002). The trickster is a common trope for African and African American storytellers (Gates, 1983). Using the trickster, Africentric novels operate along a circular continuum. Morson (1991) and Peterson (1993) respectively identify the ways in which class, race, and social disparities are represented through interlocking sets of character representations. For Peterson, it is the preservation of self-defined realities of cultural, ethnic, and gendered positions in Africentric discourse that enables the formation and continuation of metanarratives that become fully operational only when seen as a circular/cyclical narrative movement (Morson, 1991; Peterson, 1993).

An Africentric perspective permits the consideration of how language is used to keep cultural legends and myths alive in contemporary revisions of the slave narrative (Ogunleye, 1997). According to Redmond (1976), African American literature by both male and female authors has concerned itself with the dynamics of language, phonology, religion, and individual and group identity within a racial and social fusion in the Americas. By focusing on historical moments, such as the journeys of Harriet Tubman, African American authors have adapted known history in fiction, taking historical truths and interweaving them into contemporary metanarratives by not only reciting that past but revising the substance of acts of resistance to new forms of perceived oppression (Okafor, 1991; Zabel, 2004).

Anthologies and dissemination

Speculative fiction has begun to be anthologized as the site of discursive evolution, combining the genres of science fiction, fiction, horror, fantasy, and mythology (Bawarshi, 2000). Like traditional anthologies of African American literature, such as *The New Negro: Voices of the Harlem Renaissance* (Locke, 1997; Locke & Reiss, 1925), *Black Fire, An Anthology of Afro-American Writings* (Baraka & Neal, 1968), *The New Negro: Readings on Race, Representation, and African American Culture, 1892–1938* (Gates & Jarrett, 2007), and *Classic Fiction of the Harlem Renaissance* (Andrews, 1994), speculative fiction anthologies increase the readership of African American literature by making it available to a wider audience (Jarrett, 2006; Worley & Perry, 1998).

ASF anthologies that incorporate diverse stories of Africans in the Diaspora include *The Songs Became the Stories: The Music in African-American Fiction 1970–2005* (Cataliotti, 2007), *Dark Matter: A Century of Speculative Fiction from the African Diaspora* (S. R. Thomas, 2000), *Dark Matter: Reading the Bones* (S. R. Thomas, 2004), and *So Long Been Dreaming* (Hopkinson, 2004). These anthologies include ASF by Butler, Due, W. E. B. DuBois, Amiri Baraka, Samuel Delany, and Walter Mosley, among others. All the short stories included in these anthologies make use of an acentric Afrocentric perspective. An acentric perspective in understanding Afrocentric paradigms is the idea that cultural considerations are important to understanding the action and reaction to any mediated text. As such, the acentric caveat pays tribute to the idea that any discourse is marked by the experiences and viewpoints of people who are acculturated within it. An Afrocentric perspective, then, can map differences and interrogate static cultural, racial, social, and gender positions that are formed by and linked to social

ascendancy within a social system (Asante, 1983; R. L. Jackson, 2003b; Mazama, 2001; Peterson, 1993).

Africentric theory and concepts

õEmancipate, enfranchise, and educateö ~ Henry Highland Garnett

Africans throughout the Diaspora gain a historical rootedness through a self-defined African-centered history, research focus, and communication system (Cobb, 1997; Winters, 1994). The act of physical enslavement lasted for 200 years, and its impact can be seen in the continual development of African American literature. This response to the African scattering, or Diaspora, is an act of resistance to a total loss of language and religious practices by re-establishing connections to Africa. Thus, Afrocentric or African-centered theoretical constructs and philosophies argue for the recognition of traditional African history, religious practices, and community formations that existed prior to and in spite of colonization. This is African history as it occurred throughout the Diaspora in the formation of an Africentric perspective toward the social, political, academic, and literary movements of the 19th and 20th centuries.

The move toward identifying and communicating an African-centered persona and self-identity for Africans in America started in the 1800s. Literary and political dissension erupted between two groups in America, each struggling with a liminal identity that bordered on the margins of society: Should African Americans separate or integrate? What did it mean to be free and Black in America? Emigration, Black Nationalism, the Harlem Renaissance, and the Black Power movement arose from these questions of identity and belongingness. Cross-pollination with other African peoples throughout the Diaspora helped to build a cohesive foundation of cultural connectedness and ethnic identity beyond borders. But first, African Americans had to travel outside of the United States to plant the seeds of their own salvation.

An Africentric perspective promotes the recognition of African peoplesø culture, political, and economic influence, as well as their social presence in the history and development of contemporary society as relayed through the prism of African-centered recall. Although õAfrocentricityö (Asante, 1980, 1983) is the term most often associated with Afrological research, the term õAfricentricö is used here to include the global attempt to connect and recognize the contributions of Africans in America and throughout the Diaspora. Afrocentrism, like Africentric discourse, places Africans and their descendents in their own centers of language and culture, changing Black bodies from objects endowed with traits that reflect the desires and concerns of dominant society members to subjects who reveal their humanity and worth to the larger society (J. H. Clarke, 1960; Fuss, 1994; Henriksen, 1975; Winters, 1994).

The Black Renaissance connected Africans on an international scale, and Afrocentricity is one of the outcomes. The political and cultural literature of the times reflects a turning point in the way African Americans and other Diasporic Africans saw themselves. Looking at African American emigration and the budding development of Black Nationalism before the Civil War, as well as the role of Edward Wilmot Blydenøs pan-African pursuits in the late 1800s, allows a more nuanced view of Garveyøs Black Nationalism and Back-to-Africa movement in the mid-20th century. The role of three simultaneous cultural, political, and literary movements in North America, Cuba, and the Francophone Caribbean contributed to the development of co-ownership in the formation of a Diasporic African identity. The co-occurring movements provided a basis for more grounded and inclusive research into African-derived commonalities in cultural and ethnic developments that could not have occurred by chance. And lastly, the culmination of African history in the construction of Afrocentricity and other Afrological paradigms provides a

viable means of reading and interpreting oral and written communication authored within that cultural space.

Before the Renaissance

In 1820, emigration to Africa and the Caribbean became the most talked-about solution to ending slavery and assuring equality for newly freed slaves and free Blacks: separation through repatriation to Africa (Barnes, 2004; H. H. Bell, 1959, 1966). The Society for the Colonization of Free People of Color of America, later known as the American Colonization Society (ACS), founded the country of Liberia for the primary purpose of encouraging the emigration of free southern Blacks. Liberia was granted autonomy in 1847, becoming the only African country designed by African Americans for African Americansô approximately 13,000 ex-slaves and free Blacks relocated to Liberia prior to the Civil War (Barnes, 2004). Although the ACS was originally founded by southern White men, moving to Liberia was one way that African Americans could return to the land of their origin.

Henry Highland Garnet, a less widely known contemporary and rival of Frederick Douglass, took a rhetorical stance to preach the gospel of Black militancy and fostered the era of Black Nationalism in the 1850s (H. H. Bell, 1966; Shiffrin, 1971; Winkelman, 2007). Garnet was known for fiery speeches that advanced the redemption of Africans in America by any means necessary: õRacism and exploitation are evil enough to require violent resistance on moral grounds, evil enough to die fighting againstö (Shiffrin, 1971, p. 54). Garnetøs Black Nationalism embraced pride in all things African and encouraged a belief that the Negro was inherently superior in intelligence, creativity, and adaptability (H. H. Bell, 1966, p. 100). Further, Garnet espoused the belief that Black Nationalism was not a purely secular endeavor, but contained within its very foundation the idea of religious responsibility to African descendants. Corporeal

and spiritual freedom were intertwined, and one type of salvation could not be present without the other (H. H. Bell, 1966). The best way to create the conditions under which Garnet's vision could be realized was to provide an opportunity for Africans to join in building a Negro nation separate from White Western influence (H. H. Bell, 1959, 1966; Shiffrin, 1971).

During his lifetime, Garnet promoted a vision for Africans in America to reunite and celebrate their origins while fighting for the right to exist in a hostile land. In 1865, Garnet— ex-slave, abolitionist, and orator— took the floor in the House Chamber, the first African American to do so. He left the audience these words to ponder when considering the plight of slaves and disenfranchised free Blacks: "Emancipate, Enfranchise, and Educate" ("The first African American to speak in the House Chamber," n.d.). In 1866, Garnet was there to witness the signing of the Civil Rights Act of 1866, which prohibited discrimination on the basis of race or previous condition of slavery; a precursor to the 14th Amendment. Garnet died as ambassador to Liberia in 1882, and was buried and at rest in a Negro nation.

Between 1855 and 1888, Edward Wilmot Blyden, the Liberian statesman and educator, became a powerful voice of the separatist movement. His work would produce the Blyden Society, a North American pan-African association that had a profound influence on the politics and literature of African Americans for decades. Blyden, a Sierra Leone Creole and Americo-Liberian, academically and politically promoted an African identity. Blyden proposed the theoretical and philosophical viewpoint adopted by many African scholars of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and is often cited as the father of pan-Africanism (July, 1964). Blyden's African persona was based on a self-identified value system built on social and cultural accomplishments, as well as an African history apart from that of Western nations. Blyden believed that the only way to ensure that Africans were able to live up to their fullest potential

was through separate and sovereign social and cultural spaces. These spaces, according to Blyden, allowed African peoples to develop and direct a more harmonious natural and spiritual life (Gordon & Anderson, 1999; July, 1964).

Blyden wrote extensively about African traditions that cultivated cooperative socialism, strong family solidarity, the communal ownership of land and resources, and a fully democratic system of government as basic cultural markers (Henriksen, 1975, p. 289; July, 1964, p. 78). The value of African authenticity could be fully realized only if Africans were to embrace these tenets without the interference of Western nations (Henriksen, 1975; July, 1964). Blyden traveled widely and spread pan-Africanism in every Diasporic port he visited. Eventually he would travel to the United States, speaking about the need for American Blacks to move back to Africa. According to Henriksen (1975), Blyden toured the United States from 1872 to 1890, making twelve visits that set the stage for West African and Caribbean pan-Africanism to take root in America.

The influence of Blyden and Garnet can be seen in the back-to-Africa movement of the early 20th century and the founding of an academic pursuit of Afrocentric research and scholarship. In 1917, Marcus Garvey moved to Harlem and began the United Negro Improvement Association. Garvey's idea was to organize African Americans toward building a united African nation and repatriating American Blacks "Back to Africa." Garvey leaned heavily on the basic premises of Black Nationalism and Blyden's "Africa for the Africans" (1872), adding two key modifications: Black economic self-sufficiency and the call to free all of Africa from colonial rule (Okonkwo, 1980). Two years later, not only would the politics of African Americans shape society, but African American literature would begin to reflect a different view of blackness— one not directly tied to human bondage. Urban African Americans began to

discuss a changing culture and a reorientation of what it meant to be Black in and outside of North America. On January 1, 1916, Carter G. Woodson founded the *Journal of Negro History* to create a record and preserve the efforts of Africans in America not only to recover a sense of personal worth, but to foster educational awareness of their own history inside and outside the confines of the North American continent (Goggin, 1985; Logan, 1945; Wesley, 1951, 1998; Winston, 1975; Woodson, 1916). The connection of Diasporic Africans moved beyond purely political rhetoric and discussions of slavery and freedom to embrace a more global view of African personhood, which spread in the academic and literary circles of Black intelligentsia.

Négritude in France and the Caribbean, Negrismo/Negrista in Cuba, and the Harlem Renaissance in New York and beyond were movements geared toward decolonizing the continent of Africa and persons of African descent in the Diaspora. The idea of an African persona or Black identity was now built on a recognition of hybridity, both cultural and genetic, as a basic component in the neo-African persona founded upon a shared past and heritage. Edward Wilmot Blyden, W. E. B. DuBois, John G. Jackson, Aimé Césaire, John Henrik Clarke, and Frantz Fanon each contributed to the making of an African-centered philosophy that gave birth to Africana studies, Afrocentricity, and other Afrological areas of study. African-centered philosophical, political, social, and academic pursuits sought to address the questions of liminal identity: Where do the descendants of Africa, where does Africa, fit into the global strata of human development? And why is there resistance to Africans learning about their past and regaining their own center?

Négritude: Francophone and continental anticolonialism

Aimé Césaire wrote about the synthesis of African and European culture and the effect of cultural dualism on identity formation, the key concern of Négritude (Decraene, 1983). Négritude, a social and political movement of the 1930s, promoted solidarity in recognizing a common Black identity to resist the influence of French colonialism. Léopold Sédar Senghor, Léon Damas, and Césaire formed an association that lobbied against the political and intellectual hegemony of Western society. Senghor went on to become the president of Senegal, Damas became a respected academician and lecturer, and Césaire continued to examine identity formation and cultural influence.

Césaire, in search of his own African identity, saw the nature of traditional African society as reflective of spiritual and corporeal interdependence. He also wrote of the Sankofa, a õrecurring bird of libertyö that symbolizes the history of African peoples in an ongoing cycle of death and rebirth (Robinson, 1987). In Césaireøs Négritude, spirituals comment on and communicate the situation of slavery for Africans in the Diaspora and represent a powerful use of music across cultures (Irele, 1965). According to Césaire, an increase in messianic movements and a resurgence of traditional African religions seek to capture lost legacies of African knowledge and history. These indirect forms of resistance are a direct result of Négritudeøs vitality as a response to changes in African culture because of Western occupation (Irele, 1965, pp. 322-323). Indeed, messages of rebirth are apparent in the scholarship, the political writings, and the works of fiction of the mid-20th century that examine Diasporic African concerns in terms of developing a more authentic African self.

Frantz Fanon, Senghor, and Damas saw a global, collective experience of cultural and social domination of Africans on the continent and throughout the Diaspora from Western

influence. Fanon saw cultural and historical elements similar to those Césaire observed, but he rejected the idea of recapturing lost history, offering instead his more radical concept of revolutionary decolonization. Fanon proposed four levels of self-analysis: psychological, societal, political, and cultural rebirth. These were to be achieved by strengthening Africa and Africans from within their own physical and emotional borders, ultimately by taking back their language and subjective cultural markers (Neal, 1968). Fanonøs levels addressed what he termed õfragmentationö of the African persona, community, and social relationships because colonialism denies the existence of independent Black people as a basic premise of European universalism (Fuss, 1994; Mota-Lopes, 2007). Fanonøs work was highly influenced by his time as a psychiatrist working in Algeria with Africans who appeared to suffer from emotional and psychological difficulties in acculturating toward European universalism. According to Fanon, the loss of control occurred through a loss of language and community, an inability to speak for and about their reality (Fuss, 1994). So, if people do not possess the power to speak about who they are, or to use symbols that indicate cultural truths, religious beliefs, or narratives, how can they exist? And how can Africans communicate their humanity if European universalism refuses to see the value of African existence? These questions occupied the minds and literature not only of Francophone and continental Africans, but of those in the Caribbean and South America as well.

Negrismo/Negrista

In Cuba during the 1920s and 1930s, Negrismo or Negrista, an Afro-Cuban literary movement, constructed a discourse that recognized the African origins and cultural remnants of Africa in the language, art, and music of Cuba (DeCosta, 1976; Feracho, 2000; Jacobs, 1988). Vital to Negrismo was what Feracho calls a õ(re) creation of identity,ö which is only possible if

there is a õcreation of a discourse that is able to explore the interaction of self and space and of the multiple forces that engage one another in continuous struggles of powerö (p. 52). In Cuba, Negrismo considered the presence of Africa in the daily lives of Cubans as well as its impact on the formation of Cuban social, religious, political, and artistic arrangements. Afro-Cubans created a discourse from which the power to speak about and for themselves, through literature and poetry, also structured a means to self-identify as part of a greater Diaspora. Negrismo, as a social and political movement, used language and symbols of African origin. Thematic and contextual structures of literature and poetry of that time appear to correspond with African American poetry and literature written during the same period (DeCosta, 1976; Feracho, 2000; Jacobs, 1988).

DeCosta (1976), the first African American doctoral recipient at John Hopkins University and an avid researcher into languages and their origins, analyzed the basic elements of Afro-Cuban poetry, its characteristics and thematic parallels to Afro-American poetry of the 1930s. DeCosta found a õlarge number of Africanisms (words of African origin)ö (pp. 75-76) that are part of the language in Cuba, from *marimba*, the large wooden percussion instrument reminiscent of the xylophone, and the *botiga*, an African guitar, to the *rumba*, religious figures, and mythologies. According to DeCosta, õin Cuba African folktales of Yoruba origin continue to be passed down one generation to the next as part of an oral literatureö (p. 76). This oral literature is õimportant to any consideration of Afro-Hispanic poetryö as an African-influenced medium to such a degree that DeCosta contends õone must know something of African culture and the history of African people in the New Worldö to fully grasp the cultural context of its meanings (pp. 76-77).

Oral literature, word play, and improvisation are elements that appear to be important to multiple groups of Diasporic Africans (DeCosta, 1976; Jacobs, 1988). Religious figures, rituals, and African mythology continue to make use of Yoruban Orishas, particularly the trope of the trickster (DeCosta, 1976; Feracho, 2000). The trickster illustrates the virtue of accepting õthe many-sidedness of self and society and the understanding of what appears to be a hypocritical maintenance of multiple selvesö as a moral choice but also as õa realistic adaptation to social conditionsö (Jacobs, 1988, p. 26). For Afro-Hispanic poets, õAfrica symbolized freedomö and an undeniable connection to the realities and limitations of Africans in North America and the West Indies (DeCosta, 1976, pp. 77, 84); a connection that continues to play a vital role in embracing African ancestry and the process of (re)formulating identity (Feracho, 2000, p. 51).

Renaissance: Harlem and beyond

One of the first and most enduring challenges to problems of liminal identity (an identity formed in the periphery of an alternative dominant social system) among African Americans was voiced by W. E. B. DuBois (Rath, 1997). DuBoisøs Afrocentric pragmatism sought to challenge the assumed superiority of Western reading and writing from a Eurocentric understanding of literature and its linear formulation of action and thought as found in traditional novels (Rath, 1997). According to DuBois, African Americans represent a plurality of subjective personhood, meaning a liminal identity that not only recognizes the position of African American marginality in the larger social system but uses that information to encode the blueprint of an Afrocentric perspective based largely on the work begun by Blyden and his followers. The representation of African-centered rhetorical structures that DuBois posited was already a part of the literature and history of Africans because of Blyden, Garnet, and others who signified cultural markers along a

continuum of diverse representations in the Diaspora. The difference lay in its uniquely American appeal.

DuBois focused on the importance of historicity in the United States, the context of racial discord and the level of personal acculturation to Africanisms outside of the dominant social system. Interpreting *race* as a social construct indicative of power or the lack thereof, DuBois asserted that while seeing and observing social, political, and cultural surroundings, African Americans are afforded the opportunity to clearly see their own subjectivity through the eyes of the oppressor within a state of *double consciousness*. DuBois's *songs of sorrow*, based on the journey of free Africans to slaves to free persons of color, represent the stories that are fleshed out in the communication of an African consciousness in novels, poetry, music, and dance created by African American artists in the margins of each respective discipline of Western society. In *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), DuBois compiles a list of 10 master songs (referring to key songs influenced by the African presence in America) and the exigency song (a necessary vocalization that reminds the captured that s/he was born in freedom and surrounded in acceptance) that began with the "voice of exile," a chanting of unknown and unremembered African origin whose voice and rhythm bespoke the loss of people and place upon arrival on foreign soil; like the tribes and languages of origin, the words are unknown. It is the remnant of the *songs of sorrow* that allows African Americans the political and social will to speak about the observed disparities hidden behind the veil of hegemony: most notably, to move from African to Afro-American to what DuBois terms "Negro music," a hybrid of African and Eurocentric musical forms. Yet DuBois does not seek to replace European influence, history, or structures with African elements, but to make a way for African Americans to be understood as a distinct and important element of American consciousness, just as his last foray into music hybridization

recognized that all music in America would someday be influenced by the Africans it once enslaved.

DuBois's philosophy promoted the concept that "it is wrong to consider African Americans as if their heritage is merely European or as if their entire African heritage has been obliterated" (Hilliard, 1992, p. 19). Like most American Afrocentric theorists, both DuBois and Hilliard resisted the idea of full integration of African Americans into the dominant culture, fearing that integration would actually mean denigration of the African persona in favor of a return to post–Civil War endeavors to homogenize cultural Others into dominant ideological and social frameworks. Thus, accepting African Americans as vitally important members of the larger society would once again depend upon removing culture and history from the context of their experience. Integration, according to DuBois's Afrocentric philosophy, would pose the greatest threat to the existence of an African American community (Verharen, 2002). DuBois wanted to aid in changing the condition of African Americans to that of full citizens who could determine their own economic, political, and social relationships through a re-emergence of Blyden's African persona throughout the diverse groups of Africans in the Diaspora (Contee, 1969).

Alain Locke, a younger contemporary of DuBois and a student of Franz Boas, would attempt to make cultural relativism work in favor of building support for intellectual equity across racial backgrounds. Locke's vision was to promote a sympathetic understanding of African Americans as the intellectual and cultural equals of their oppressors (Rampersad, 2002). Like Zora Neal Hurston, Locke was a student of Franz Boas's ethnographic work on racial equality. Boas's work on race influenced not only Locke but also DuBois's espousal of pan-Africanism (Lewis, 2001). Locke and DuBois both studied in Germany and researched the

anticolonial movements in Europe and the Caribbean; both wrote seminal works that continue to influence the study of African American culture today: Locke's *The New Negro* and DuBois's *The Souls of Black Folk.*

In 1925, Alain Locke published *The New Negro* (Locke & Reiss, 1925), an anthology of African American authors of the day. In this book, Locke presented a theory of cultural relativism, which stated that beliefs, rituals, and social relationships should be understood in terms of their own cultural norms (Locke, 1946). Locke suggests that understanding not only African American culture, but also the culture of the oppressor, could lead to significant shifts in behavior for both. He does not explore the outcome of cross-cultural acceptance in depth, but his expectation seems to have been that the dominant and nondominant groups would somehow reconcile their differences by seeing the Other within themselves: a hybridized self that is mapped and located in symbiosis. Locke's supposition gives too much power to the already empowered; those on the margins would of course have less leverage to effect change in the acceptance of their cultural differences. Still, Locke's work signifies a move toward thinking in terms of hybrid associations across cultural and ethnic lines of perceived difference.

It is this search for synthesis and assimilation that continues in the literary and political thought of Césaire and Fanon, who both moved toward defining an African aesthetic and declaring a goal of decolonization (Fuss, 1994; Geertsema, 2004). This was an important move because before Césaire and Senghor, African American scholars thought of ways to separate or isolate cultural narratives and art from the influence of their European counterparts. Now they would talk about intracultural integration: an acceptance of the African within that was not predicated on European values and belief systems nor on the destruction of Western influence as a prerequisite for finding value in the works of Africans throughout the Diaspora. Cultural

synthesis and the emergence of cultural relativity were a way to examine markers of African influence. Recognizing African religion and history in resisting Western essentialization was a pivotal function of a new resistance literature that would look through the eyes of Diasporic Africans, within their own communities, to explain an alternative view of contemporary social, economic, and political actions.

Black poetics

The Black Arts Movement sought to answer this question of identity and speech by approaching the question of õwhose vision of the world is finally more meaningful? And whose truth shall we express?ö as African Americans (Neal, 1968). Beyond these questions lay a deeper concern: Who speaks for Africans in the Diaspora and on the continent, and from what perspective? The key question here was: Should an Afrocentric philosophy be a reactive response to European universalism or a move toward decolonizing the social construct of race in all facets of society, not only on the continent of Africa but throughout the Diaspora? Either option opens the door to the construction of an Afrocentric paradigm to address the communication of African cultural influences among a diverse populace.

In 1973, Hendersonøs introduction to Black poetics outlined rhetorical devices in the music and literature of African American poets, musicians, and authors. *Understanding the New Black Poetry: Black Speech and Black Music as Poetic References* begins with a detailed examination of African American music and literature for content and arrangement (Henderson, 1973). Three distinct schools of thought for African American literature emerge, along with three main categoriesô theme, structure, and saturationô to show the contextual nature of reading and interpreting African American literature.

According to Henderson (1973), the Early Formal years of African American literature found poets and writers concerned with the abolition of slavery and often writing in dialect in the style of White writersø caricatures of Blacks at the time. African American writers who gained some popularity adopted European universalist canons of literature, imitating the style of the Romantics, sanitized of all cultural and racial references (Henderson, 1973). During the Harlem Renaissance, African American writers were able to finally write realistic depictions of Black peopleô who were divorced of the shame and stigma of being Black or surviving in America (Henderson, 1973, pp. 14-15). Instead, these writers focused on õgroup solidarity and collective effortö to promote nationalism and internationalism among members of the African Diaspora, a part of the Black Renaissance discussed in the previous chapter (Henderson, 1973, p. 15). Yet, it was the Black Power Movement that Henderson identifies as the creative force that allowed an Afrocentric perspective to gain not only a national but an international following.

During the Black Power Movement, according to Henderson, a realignment to solidarity within the African American community began to move away from an enmeshed Civil Rights and antiwar rhetoric of the 1960s (Henderson, 1973, p. 17). The late 1960s witnessed a revival of national and international political awareness about common problems that affect Africans around the world; liberation began to take on a global meaning to once again address colonialism and the importance of history and displacement (Henderson, 1973, p. 19). Writers during this period took note and returned to more traditional modes of communicating blackness, including oral folklore transferred to written narratives to bring contextual meaning to works of fiction. A õconcern with the spiritualö and with mythic Black figures such as Stagolee and the trickster served as means to bolster self-esteem and awareness of African elements in America through novels, short stories, and music (Henderson, 1973, pp. 17-23).

Henderson made it clear that the *theme* of African American poetics can only be understood through an awareness of the social, political, and historical role of the author's race, gender, sexuality, and cultural orientation (Henderson, 1973, p. 10). The overarching subject that African American authors explore, however, is liberation and the raising of African historical consciousness or relevance through literary dissemination (Henderson, 1973; Turner & Asante, 2002). For Henderson, the *structure* of African American poetics is based on traditional Black sermons, oral folktales, and spirituals that are articulated through metaphysical imagery to allow an affective or didactic interaction with the reader (Henderson, 1973, pp. 31-41). *Saturation*, meanwhile, refers to the communication of blackness in a given situation, created by the author, to provide a sense of fidelity to the liberation and promotion of collective interests (Henderson, 1973, p. 62). This promotion of collective interests is apparent in the inclusion of Sterling Brown's five elements of Black Renaissance poetry: (1) a discovery of Africa as a source of race pride; (2) a use of Negro heroes and heroic episodes from American history; (3) propaganda of protest; (4) a treatment of the Negro masses frequently of the folk, less often of the workers with more understanding and less apology; (5) franker and deeper self-revelation (Henderson, 1973, p. 24). By including Brown's five elements, Henderson provides the basis for defining a new goal for African-centered scholarship: to continue to map the rhetorical structures of African-centered texts based on a cultural praxis that exists alongside European universalist canons of language and literature.

Afrocentricity

Asante, a recipient of the Douglas Ehninger Award for Rhetorical Scholarship (2002), expanded on the work begun by Blyden, Diop, and DuBois to show how adopting an alternative reading and understanding of African-centered communication shows that African-centered

communication styles are not aberrant but normative to African cultural experience: a co-equal communication system adhering to its own natural development (Turner & Asante, 2002). Asante provided the basic and formative ideas of Afrocentricity as a mode of communication continuity for African American citizenry (Asante, 1980, 1983, 1987, 1991, 2006). He noted the unique role of verbal interactions and of the context under which communicative acts occur in African American communication communities: namely, through the use of *nommo* and *bantu*. *Nommo*, the spoken word or productive word, is used by human agents or *bantu* to harness õthe power of transformationö through orature (Asante, 1980, 1987). For Asante, it is *nommo* that serves as the conduit to understanding African American culture and communication.

For Asante (1980), the power of *nommo* in messianism can be seen in the rhetorical strategies of African American communication. Asante defined *messianism* as the conveyance of prophetic visions by African American leaders for (1) Black salvation and (2) world salvation in Afrocentric rhetoric (p. 19). Noting that the emergence of messianic messages õhas always been predicated upon the power of the spoken wordö relayed via leaders who rarely have attained formal education or advanced degrees (p. 17), Asante showed that *nommo* and *bantu* rely on vocal brilliance and the ability of the speaker to move her/his audience through an understanding of cultural communication patterns. These patterns of communication correspond to elements of Daniel and Smithermanøs (1976) previous work on communication in the African American community. In the Afrocentric communication paradigm, time or timing is a relational and participatory event, according to their work. This is an important key to understanding how discourse relays effective messages through temporal relativity and the importance of call and response, or antiphony, in important speech acts. Timing in the art of antiphony highlights the

need for the speaker to understand and decode audience response on a spiritual and corporeal level and for the audience to reciprocate the same awareness.

Asante (1980) was radical, vigorous in his desire that Afrocentrism be constructed in the same way across cultures by all scholars and researchers. Asante's work presupposed the model of the transplanted Other: the essentializing notion that only African elements should be recognized as playing a vital role in development and redemption of colonized Black bodies. Although Asante did not credit the works of Blyden, Woodson, Césaire, Fanon, Locke, or DuBois, clearly his work was influenced by the groundbreaking research of these scholars.

Asante (1980), however, sanitized the fact that Africans from Liberia or the Caribbean actually contributed to the development of Afrocentricity and its growth in the Diaspora; Liberia, as a country founded by former American slaves, is most confounding for his conclusion. This purist stance negates the experiences of African descendants who have become acculturated with other forms of ethnic and cultural awareness by reverse cultural exclusion of anything other than African. There is no pure African who has not experienced colonization in some way, so any approach to decoding African elements and practices must also consider the influence of other cultures. Looking at Africentric developments globally allows consideration of the record of Diasporic culture, the varying ways that community is thought of and written about, the manner in which democracy as a concept is enacted within cultural communities, and the roles of women in continuing Africentric practices. Failure to consider the global villages of Diasporic Africans leads to a very one-sided view of what an Africentric perspective is all about.

Mazama (2001), a contemporary of Asante, identified three main concerns of Afrocentricity: (1) to cultivate a consciousness of victory as opposed to oppression, (2) to recognize that all people are entitled to practice and celebrate their own culture, and (3) to

identify and combat cultural and racial bias in research (pp. 389-390). Mazama articulated the connection to linguistic referents of African American emotional and political history, to an expansion of word meanings, which signify differences between word usage and association within a community (p. 392). For Mazama, the Afrocentric paradigm is composed of õconsensual beliefs of a self-contained communityö and also õpresupposes an integrated community of practitionersö who speak and understand their own communicative acts (p. 391).

The goal of Afrocentricity, according to Mazama (2001), is to center African experiences within an African-centered reality and perspective, naturalized in the same way that European universalism is normalized in all facets of society. For Mazama, Afrocentrically produced knowledge must reflect the primary relationship between the physical and spiritual, the rational and suprarational; as he states, õAfrocentric methodology must generate knowledge that will free and empowerö Africans in the Diaspora to think well of themselves and their own connections to the world around them (p. 399). For an adherent of Asanteøs Afrocentricity, such as Mazama, the problem becomes the absolute negation of European influence; a form of African-centered purity that displaces the influence of Others by whom Diasporic Africans, by their very definition, must be influenced.

Despite the ongoing argument that African Americans and other Africans throughout the Diaspora have very little real connection to Africans in Africa and the cultures there (Adeleke, 1998; Conyers, 2004; Hooker, 1974; J. V. Jackson & Cothran, 2003; Nantambu, 1998; Warren, 1990), it is not the actual ties between continental Africans and those in the Diaspora that are most important, but the belief that these ties exist (Dove, 1998; Hilliard, 1992; Okafor, 1991; Owusu-Frempong, 2005; Oyebade, 1990; Rath, 1997; Sefa Dei, 1994; George J. Sefa Dei, 1998; Turner & Asante, 2002). Residual effects of a culture of origin connect people who share a

common ancestry across the globe, through family stories, myths, and social narratives (C. Brown, 2003; Campbell, 1986; Hollis, 1987; Nagel, 1994; Welsh & Asante, 1981). So too, Africans in the Diaspora have adapted and passed on to their descendants such important cultural artifacts as head wraps, food preparation, and rhythm and lyric formations; and these artifacts arguably form the basis from which Karenga (1977) adapted African principles into a national African American holidayô Kwanzaa (Karenga, 1977; Myers, 1987; Warren, 1990). In written media as well, Africans have used all available forms of communication to instill and maintain African elements while adapting to the social and cultural communities in which they found themselves.

Summary

African Americans in the mid- to latter part of the 20th century began the process of synthesis, by developing discursive practices based on the political, cultural, and literary movements begun by Africans in the 1800s. Garnetøs Black Nationalism, Blydenøs pan-African rhetoric, Négritude, Negrismo, and the Harlem Renaissance all focused on recognizing a common identity of Africanity. Although these movements focused on the experience of slavery or occupation, as well as racial, cultural, religious, and linguistic domination, they culminated not only in the creation of a space for forming a global Africanity, but the recognition of hybridity as part of Diasporic identity. By taking back language and religious practices, cultural and historical connections, African Americans could embrace a metaphysical and emotional return to Africa through the celebration and recognition of African influences, not only in everyday life but in the act of communicating itself.

CHAPTER 4 "AN AFRICENTRIC READING PROTOCOL"

The objective of this Africentric reading protocol is to build upon previous research by Asante, DuBois, Locke, Blyden, Daniel and Smitherman, and Mazama by conducting a close reading of Africentric speculative fiction as a contemporary genre that combines elements of traditional African American literature, alternative fictions, and West African culture to explore trans-Atlantic relationships among Africans in the Diaspora and on the Continent (Aldon, 2003; Blyden & Fyfe, 1967; R. L. Jackson, 2003a; R. L. Jackson & Richardson, 2003; Logan & Winston, 1982; Mazama, 2001). The broader implications of this reading protocol can be adapted to examine the written discourse of African-influenced ethnic groups outside of North America. Each element under examination was chosen to consider ASF as part of a global metanarrative that moves the conversation toward an understanding of how Africentric literature treats historicity, social position, cultural adaptation and preservation, and communication of ethnic identity in ways that include West African origins. This reading protocol addresses the intentional merging of Diasporic and West African mythos as part of an ongoing concern with identity and place that continues to be a part of contemporary literary genres. It also addresses a significant characteristic of Africentric literature that previous researchers have not included: the use of West African spirituality and symbols, most notably Ibo and Yoruba referents, to communicate interethnic belonging.

For traditional African-centered research, thematic considerations focus on the African person and the history of African peoples to promote positive and empowering images of survival; a research paradigm that moves from disempowerment to empowerment. But of course, if the focus is on survival, the discourse can only interrogate the relationship among Africans in the Diaspora as a reversal toward a Eurocentric Other, which creates the potential for Africentric

research to appear biased. Unlike previous reading methods, this protocol addresses the way in which African American women authors design ASF characters intraculturally, as both Diasporic Africans and Continental Africans.

This protocol examines Africentric discourse by noting referents within written narratives that build from an African foundation and cultural heritage. Africentric literature, as indicated in the previous chapter, recognizes that metaphysical spirituality is a basic belief, and that Afrologists understand curvilinear relationships between the living and nonliving as a form of ancestor worship and acknowledgment. Therefore, the shared recognition of a collective consciousness in the form of spiritual tales, or cognitions that õrememberö and often mirror the events of bondage, must be considered an important marker signifying the connection between traditional and contemporary Africentric novels.

Elements and artifacts of Africentric writing

The Africentric reading protocol used in this textual analysis focuses on the communication of culture through patterns of spiritual and secular communities. It identifies seven Africentric elements that correspond to culturally specific rhetorical strategies, and explores their use in two ASF series published from 1993 to 2008. These seven elements were chosen after careful consideration and review of previous research; together, they represent a concise analytical tool for exploring select elements of Africentric discourse. This protocol, based on the works of Afrologists as outlined in the literature review (Chapters 2 and 3; see Table 1), refines previous research to consider Africentric speculative fiction as a genre that builds upon traditional African American literature to form resistance literature into the 21st century.

Table 1

Afrocentricity: Samples from the Literature Review Used to Synthesize Protocol Elements

Africentric Reading Protocol Element	Samples from the Literature Review
A shared metanarrative	Epic memory (Oliver, 1988, p. 51) Mythology an adaptation (Oliver, 1988, p. 52) õHegemonic centrism, regardless of its sources, is unacceptableö (Bekerie, 1994, p. 137) õA foundation for group unity and identityö (Hilliard, 1992, p. 20) õGroup cohesion is rooted in shared cultureö (Hilliard, 1992, p. 20) DuBoisøs Afrocentric philosophy of history (Rath, 1997, p. 462) West Africa (Rath, 1997, p. 466) Sorrow songs (Rath, 1997, pp. 489-495) õAll black people of African descent share a common experience, struggle, and originö (Sefa Dei, 1994, p. 4) Philosophical assumptions (Myers, 1987, p. 74) Art and life reflect history and contemporary experience (Okur, 1993, pp. 100-101)
History and remembrance	Vocal communication and ancestral oral traditions (Oliver, 1988, p. 51) õAfrican peoples are active, primary, and central agents in the making of their historiesö (Bekerie, 1994, p. 131) õworldviews, knowledge views, value viewsö (Hilliard, 1992, p. 20) õHistory and culture are ongoing creative processes that arise out of any groupøs struggle to surviveö (Hilliard, 1992, p. 20) õhistorically forged asset of African American consciousnessö is the ability to negotiate multiple subject meanings (Rath, 1997, p. 463) õAfrican indigenous cultural values, traditions, mythology, and history may be understood as a body of knowledge dealing with the social world, and ...Afrocentricity is an alternative, nonexclusionary, and nonhegemonic system of knowledge informed by African peoplesø histories and experiencesö (Sefa Dei, 1994, p. 4) Ancestors are part of ongoing community (Myers, 1987, p. 76) Unity of the whole of experience (Okur, 1993, p. 100)
Metaphysical relationships	Individualsørelationship with the universe (Oliver, 1988, p. 52) õThe source of philosophyö (Hilliard, 1992, p. 20) Soul (Rath, 1997, pp. 470-477) Veneration of ancestors (Sefa Dei, 1994, p. 14) Worldview concerned with õmetaphysical rather than purely physical interrelationshipsö (Myers, 1987, p. 74) õthe nature of reality is believed to be at once spiritual and materialö (Myers, 1987, p. 74) Relationship between spiritual world and corporeal world (Sefa Dei, 1994, p. 13) Soul and body (Okur, 1993, pp. 98-99)

Africentric Reading Protocol Element	Samples from the Literature Review
Africanisms	õStructural codes of lyrical quality, voice, and indirectionö (Oliver, 1998, p. 51)
	õspeaking circuitouslyö (Oliver, 1998, p. 52)
	Distinct cultural markers create meaning for diverse African cultures (Bekerie, 1994, p. 138)
	õit is wrong to consider African Americans as if their heritage is merely European or as if all their African heritage has been obliteratedö (Hilliard, 1992, p. 19)
	Veilô Dahomeans and West African lore signified the appearance of a caul at birth as a sign of õmultiple consciousness and second sightö (Rath, 1997, pp. 484- 488)
	õ...can be found in black folklore, music, child-raring practices, religion, language, family structures, as well as in African generosity or hospitality and respect for the aged among African peoples in North Americaö (Sefa Dei, 1994, p. 8)
	Circular vs. linear (Okur, 1993, pp. 102-103)
	õdominance of circle and circular formsö (Okur, 1993, p. 104)
Cooperative socialism	Sudicism/personal harmony within õin the midst of othersö (Oliver, 1988, p. 52)
	Afrocentric praxis: Kwanzaa
	Economy of culture through centeredness
	õA basis for independenceö (Hilliard, 1992, p. 21)
	õA basis for creativityö (Hilliard, 1992, p. 21)
	Values of õhuman coexistence, group solidarity, mutuality, collective work, and responsibilityö (Sefa Dei, 1994, p. 20)
	õDiunital (union of opposites)ö (Myers, 1987, p. 74)
	Soul/body/community self (Okur, 1993, p. 105)
Decolonization	Worldview, not primarily Western worldview (Oliver, 1998, p. 50)
	õdispossession or displacement cannot be limited only to physical realitiesö (Bekerie, 1994, p. 143)
	Originality, diversity and creativity are expected to occur (Bekerie, 1994, p. 137)
	õA source of resistance to alien dominationö (Hilliard, 1992, p. 20)
	õhistorical events, not biological race, determined what was Africanö (Rath, 1997, p. 466)
	Consciousnessô African and American (Rath, 1997, pp. 477-484)
	Afrocentric pedagogy (Sefa Dei, 1994, pp. 16-21) to meet cultural expectations based on õAfrican social world and environmentö (Sefa Dei, 1994, p. 17)
Gendered relativity	Heroes and heroines (Oliver, 1988, p. 52)
	Gender bias is not a natural circumstance (Bekerie, 1994, p. 137)
	Women, economic and social equality (Sefa Dei, 1994, p. 15)

Although Africentric research in North America has explored the use of metanarrative in African-centered novels in the areas of communication media when made into film or included in documentaries, there has been less focus on the idea of a global Africentric metanarrative that has become possible through the use of technology and the sharing of Diasporic narratives. The power of narratives and metanarratives, from an Africentric perspective, is an effective tool of persuasion that cites history and an understanding of myth and marginality that are not included in traditional Western fiction and nonfiction (Mitchell, 2001; Sands, 2003). These metanarratives are found in the folktales and religious iconography shared by diverse Diasporic African groups around the world, which will be discussed further in the following chapters.

Similarly, this protocol differs from previous research in the inclusion of history as one of its key elements, considering African history and its influence on African American authors who have included Continental African history as a generative foundation upon which to build their novels. The idea of remembrance manifests itself as a recharacterization of an ancestor. This ancestor personifies the idealized response to oppression, living through difficulty while helping others to learn, grow, adapt and change their circumstances. The figure that represents history and remembrance revilatizes the narrative and appears to provide a reason to continue to resist and recover from day-to-day as well as life-altering changes, enacting a tie to a human form that embodies a spiritual resiliency.

Metaphysical relationships between deceased ancestors and õlivingö characters often inhabit or possess characters within the narrative, guiding the main charactersø actions. The worship and recognition of the ancestors has a strong and recurrent theme in African-American literature and folktales, and is often used as important cultural or contextual knowledge; this

knowledge is most often not readily recognizable because displaced communities or persons were not allowed access because of their social and political isolation. The extent to which the role of the ancestors informs the novelsø narrative structure is important to connecting this trope with traditional novel arrangement. Africentric literature, as indicated in the previous chapter, recognizes that metaphysical spirituality is a basic belief that involves curvilinear relationships between the living and nonliving, and is understood by Afrologists as a form of ancestor worship and acknowledgment to reinforce cultural narratives and spiritual beliefs.

The use of Africanisms is also included as an important element for understanding the communication of identity and place as constituted by African American authors to signify cultural cohesion. Prior research focused on Africanisms as surplus, or as an opportunity to explore African spirituality. By including Africanisms as a key element, I propose that a closer look at these devices may uncover a deeper connection to self-efficacious presentations of neo-blackness.

The use of cooperative socialism in the formation of fictive kin networks in Africentric literature must be included in any reading protocol that considers culturally based written discourse. As outlined below, the structure of African American communities, in literature and thought, revolves around the notion of self-sustaining community organization as a means of survival. Therefore, its use as a trope in narrative fiction indicates a continued concern with self-sufficiency and ways in which a community can find financial and social emancipation.

Previous research shares a focus on decolonization as an important component of resistance literature for African American authors who wish to influence their audience toward acceptance of diversity. Similar to the works of Blyden, Dubois, and Garnet discussed in the previous chapter, contemporary African American literature continues to write narratives that

include a representation of colonialism and its antithesis as a method of cultural solidarity. By discussing problems such as social, economic, and/or ethnic marginalization, Africentric novels continue to encode messages of resistance against perceived oppressors. Finally, when looking at Africentric literature, it is important to consider gender and its treatment, because normative behavior is based on culturally prescribed expectations and may not reflect the gender roles of the dominant society. As discussed below, a womanist and Africentric perspective, as seen in literary works of fiction, often follows a contextual rather than a gendered assignment of power in didactic relationships, which presents a united front against disempowerment based on race or gender.

Methodology

Africentric novels, as a form of mass communication (Booth, 1961, 1968; Gallaway, 1940; Henderson, 1973; Perry, 1896), serve as reminders of an African past and a shared metanarrative of ethnic and racial enslavement, much as the Greek tragedies remind us of Western-centered myths, legends, and history by using culturally specific language and historical references as a normative standard. Looking for the religious, cultural, community, and linguistic practices in novels written by African American authors reorients the messages and meanings to communicate a central Africanity to hybrid personas. To understand the rhetorical importance of African-centered novels in the interrogation of place, circumstance, and social adaptation, Henderson's (1973) poetics of Black speech locates an African-centered approach as fundamental to interpreting novels by African American authors. Like Henderson's approach, this reading protocol does not dwell on Eurocentric comparisons but instead focuses on intercultural meanings and relationships within the African American and Diasporic African experience.

Discussion

Origin, diversity, and creativity are the tools that make possible the survival of a people (Bekerie, 1994). A critical Africentric reading perspective must address the importance of a worldview or perspective that values all community members, that struggles to create wholeness from spiritual and corporeal chaos, and that recognizes the importance of personal and cultural history in the making of reality (Burgess, 1994; Franklin, 1947; Ogunleye, 1997; Verharen, 1995). In addition, it must be sensitive to ways in which the social organization of the main characters reconstructs or strengthens family ties in both natural and fictive kin social relationships (Franklin, 1947). And, because communication of the metaphysical is an important Africological construct, it must take into account how African and/or Diasporic myths, legends, and stories are used in African-centered novels to bring understanding to the workings of the world (Myers, 1987; Ogunleye, 1997).

As outlined previously, from the extensive scholarship of over one hundred years of African-centered research, I have assembled the following seven elements as the most important for an understanding of Africentric discourse as an intracultural method of maintaining and communicating identity, proposing and creating Diasporic connections as well as cultural cohesion: (1) **a shared metanarrative** of bondage and survival that centers on shared cultural and historical connections of Africans in the Diaspora; (2) **history and remembrance**, which appear in the guise of spiritual tales and/or cognitions within a curvilinear plot; (3) **metaphysical relationship** with ancestors, who often inhabit or possess characters within the narrative, guiding the main charactersø actions; (4) **Africanisms,** such as Diasporic myths, legends, stories, and religious symbols, that can be either spiritual or nonspiritual symbols the author uses to communicate identity; (5) the idea of **cooperative socialism**, which, like the earliest Afrologists,

I have included as an element in all Africentric discourse regarding family and community structures; 6) **decolonization**, the transformation from oppression to liberation, represented in Africentric discourse in a manner that attacks oppression from historical, contemporary, and future-oriented locales; and (7) **gendered relativity** and the function of mothering, elements included here because their treatment in the literature has been limited, and because understanding how African-centered authors present family and community provides insight into how Africentric discourse uses fe/male relationships as a positive element to counter gendered essentialism.

Africentric novels are not just an American literary form. Africans throughout the Diaspora have engaged in communicating a particular perspective that incorporates the country in which they have been acculturated: Caribbean, Dutch, German, English, and French. But all Africentric novels tend to follow heavily in the shadow of West African cultural traditions and symbols. This is not surprising because the main route of the slave trade centered on the peoples who lived in the region of West Africa. Understanding novels written from an Africentric perspective allows the exploration of common strategies and story lines used by writers to continue the oral and written traditions of Africans in the Diaspora's past, while expanding the influence of cultural narratives beyond the African American community.

CHAPTER 5 "OCTAVIA E. BUTLER'S *PARABLE* SERIESö

> The day she and Harry use their knives, I hope they kill. If they donøt, I might have to. To escape the pain. And what will they think of that?
>
> They deserve to know that Iøm a sharer. For their own safety, they should know. But Iøve never told anyone. Sharing is a weakness, a shameful secret. A person who knows what I am can hurt me, betray me, disable me with little effort.
>
> I canøt tell. Not yet. Iøll have to soon. I know, but not yet. Weøre together, the three of us, but weøre not a unit yet. Harry and I donøt know Zahra very well, nor she us. And none of us know what will happen when we are challenged. A racist challenge might force us apart. I want to trust these people. I like themí theyøre all I have left. But I need more time to decide, itøs no small thing to commit yourself to other people. (O. E. Butler, 1995, p. 158)

> A collar, my brother was saying, makes you turn traitor against your kind, against your freedom, against yourselfí . No one could go through what he has gone through and not change somehow. (O. E. Butler, 1998, p. 143)

Octavia Butler wrote *Parable of the Sower* in 1993 and *Parable of the Talents* and 1998.

A writer whose work spans thirty years, Butler was first published in 1976, at the very end of the

Black Arts Movement (BAM). As the first recognized African American female author of

science fiction, Butler (along with myriad other African American authors) undoubtedly was

indebted to BAM for opening the way to write in new genres about the centrality of African

American presence in the United States. Although Butlerøs series comprises only two books

separated by five years, both novels represent similar concerns with identity, displacement, and

recovery. The first of the two books, *Parable of the Sower* (1993), begins in the year 2024 in

Robelo, California, where three of the main charactersô Lauren Oya Olamina, Harry Balter, and

Zahra Mossô live in a walled neighborhood. The Earth itself has undergone significant change,

and the ecological damage has created a drought in most of the southern United States. Society is

now broken up into three tiers of people: the super-wealthy business owners; those who live in

walled neighborhoods; and those who live without sheltering walls and are subject to the dangers

of drug-addicted pyromaniacs. Police and fire services are no longer supported by taxation, but

must be purchased by individual citizens, who recognize that the court system provides no guarantee of justice. In this environment, financial security is scarce, and jobs are almost nonexistent. The world has devolved into debt slavery and increased racialization. Butler presents us with a third-world United States.

The protagonist, Lauren Oya Olamina, has a genetic psychological condition, hyperempathy syndrome. She shares the experience of pain or pleasure when she sees or hears the act that brings about the emotive response— an impulse she learns to resist as she, Harry, and Zahra escape from Robelo when their community is overrun by pyromaniacs. All three lose their families of origin in the fire that consumes their neighborhood. Forced to flee, the trio moves northward in search of water and safety. Along the way, Gloria and Travis Douglas, as well as Taylor Bankole, join the small group. Olamina and Bankole fall in love. She provides the group with the new spirituality; he, with the means for self-sufficiency by allowing the newly begun Earthseed community to settle on land he owns in northern California.

Parable of the Talents (1998) traces the formation of a more inclusive society. Religious, educational, racial, and sexual freedoms are now the norm. The transformation of America and the world is narrated from the perspective of Olamina's adult daughter, Asha Verre. Like the first book of the *Parable* series, this novel is structured in the form of a journal. In its pages the reader learns that the community founded by Olamina and her thirteen followers (Acorn) falls to the attack of religious extremists. Olamina's husband is killed, and her infant daughter, Larkin Beryl Ifa Olamina Bankole, is stolen from her. Olamina and the survivors of the attack are placed in slave collars and used in the same way that Olamina's brother Marcus describes in the first novel: The women are assaulted sexually and, along with the men, are forced to work their own land for the benefit of their captors; their children are placed in foster and adoptive care to be

raised by religiously acceptable families. Larkin Beryl Ifa Olamina Bankole is taken to be raised by a family of Christian extremists, who later rename her Asha Verre. Olamina and the parents who survived the attack search to find Ifa/Asha and the other missing children, with little success. Asha, however, finds Olamina after she has become an adult. She finds that, although she looks the mirror image of her mother, she shares none of Olamina's values and beliefs. They are forever separated, fully knowing one another because of a shared history of bondage and separation, understood from two different viewpoints. By the end of the novel, the Earthseed community has become a global movement that educates impoverished youth in exchange for their assistance in finding a way to populate other planets. Asha never reconciles with her mother, Olamina; she simply watches along with the rest of the world as her mother's body is transported, along with human and terrestrial life forms, to another planet as Earthseed. But before Butler's character Olamina escapes the limitations of the Earth, she frees herself and her people from a contemporary redefinition of slavery, and creates a movement that counters homelessness and a national disconnect through the re-establishment of community based empowerment initiatives.

A shared metanarrative

Slavery in the world of Butler's *Parable* series is based on economic difference that also includes racial and religious bias. Butler's main character, Olamina, clearly communicates the idea that excessive wealth accumulation occurs at the expense of education and well-being for the majority of the planet's population. For Butler, the overarching explanation appears clear: Marginalized human populations have been and will continue to be used as disposable resources for those who are empowered by social systems that reward individual gains, as opposed to collective efforts. For example, *Parable of the Sower* begins to speak about the power of

corporate greed and financial anarchy in America. To counter this metanarrative, Butler identifies its alleged flaws, offers a revival of the one-room schoolhouse as remedy, and warns that a reaction against corporate and political symbiosis can be a catalyst of change that may require a time of greater turmoil.

Building from the idea of a resurgent, contemporary slavery centered on economic and political connections, Butler presents a metanarrative that sees these strictures as a means of limiting the ability of oppressed segments of the population to overcome structural barriers to success. Butler's mid-21st-century world has returned to a stratified system in which owners (corporations, government officials, and the wealthy) are able to subjugate working-class and impoverished human beings at will. This system is made possible by a lack of education and the erosion of infrastructure as the government has become more invested in securing the rights of corporations than those of its citizens. For example, Olamina, her siblings, and all the neighborhood children were homeschooled, because going outside of the neighborhood was too dangerous. In essence, Olamina learns and later teaches in a one-room schoolhouse, the living room of her family's home. Butler's return to a familiar idea, the one-room schoolhouse, mimics what for many in her generation was a common experience in rural communities well into the mid-20th century. After the neighborhood is destroyed, even the minimal comforts and security that Olamina, Harry, and Zahra share are no longer available; and each must come to terms with the loss of safety and the very real possibility of enslavement.

Butler invites the reader to look to the past to reclaim a sense of self and identity that would enable her characters to move beyond prescribed social functions. By doing so, not only do the characters reclaim themselves, but the reader is shown that all human suffering is connected (Antiri, 1974; Kandé & Karaganis, 1998; Temple, 2006). As escapees, Olamina and

her new fictive kin relations are homeless. Butler positions Olamina's response to homelessness and slavery to embrace the nature of Sankofa, looking back on her past experiences and those of her ancestors to understand that oppression is a tool to trap and enslave the mind. Later, in *Parable of the Talents*, Olamina finds herself once again without stable housing, and Butler reintroduces an element of cognitive dissonance for the reader: the idea that hard work and effort mean nothing in a social setting that cannot recognize the value of the hands to complete the work. Not only does Butler write the idea of homelessness as part of the narrative; she also inscribes the problematic of the collar placed upon a sharer. In the following excerpt, Olamina learns of the psychological impact of collars through her brother Marcus, whom she bought from a slaver:

> ôThese are the rules: Once you've got a collar on, you can't run. Get a certain distance from the control unit and the collar chokes you. I mean it gives you so much pain that you can't keep going. You pass out if you try. We called that getting choked. Touch the control unit and the collar chokes you. It won't work for you anyway. It's got a fingerprint lock. And if the fingers trying to use it are wrong or are dead, it chokes you and stays on choke until someone with the right living fingers turns it off. Or until you die.ö (O. E. Butler, 1998, p. 120)

But Olamina does not react in the same manner; instead, she creates chaos and retains a deep sense of self and purposeô a difference that will be discussed later in this analysis. The revision of the traditional slave narrative in both novels, however, is unmistakable.

As in the traditional African American slave narrative, Olamina's trio must escape oppression and traverse a country where elemental circumstances parallel those of former slaves who embarked on a journey from the postôCivil War South. It is analogous to another system of oppression that Olamina finds herself fighting against as well, when she and the members of the Acorn community are captured by members of the Church of Christian America, Jarret's Crusaders. This fictional church is a symbol of religious rigidity and essentialist dogma,

demanding puritanical lifestyles and devotion to their leader, the Reverend Andrew Steele Jarret.

Butler's warning is clear: Looking back without remembering allows oppression to continue to

reconstitute itself from any segment of society (Agusti, 2005a; O. Butler et al., 2001; Daniel &

Smitherman, 1976):

> Jarret insists on being a throwback to some earlier, "simpler" time. Now does not suit
> him. Religious tolerance does not suit him. The current state of the country does not suit
> him. He wants to take us all back to some magical time when everyone believed in the
> same God, worshipped him in the same way, and understood that their safety depended
> on completing the same religious rituals and stomping anyone who was different. (O. E.
> Butler, 1998, p. 23)

Here Butler asserts that true bondage is a state of mind: a standpoint from which her

metanarratives use elements of American slavery and resistance literatures to educate and

persuade her audience to adapt their perception of her speculative narrative. This speaks to a

wider understanding of the importance Butler gives to diffusing essentialism in defining who

belongs to a marginalized group: In other words, race itself is not the only reason for

discrimination and objectification. Ethnicity and culture are also constructed as important assets

of the diverse community that Acorn becomes, reflecting Butler's recognition of the hybridity

inherent in human interactions across ethnic and cultural lines (Hostetler, 1990; Hutchinson,

1997; Nagel, 1994; Osherow, 2000; Schrager, 1996).

History and remembrance

Like slaves sold during the Maafa, the youngest children are lost forever in the chasm of

a culture very different from the one in which they were born. Although there is a clear line in

which Butler refers to African American disenfranchisement, the series also traces the formation

of a more inclusive society. Religious, educational, racial, and sexual freedom transforms most

of the globe to a less damaged social network. In this way, Butler creates a metanarrative that

goes beyond the social construction of race to the collective consciousness of human interelatedness.

Butler uses history and remembrance, common themes in African American literature, to express the danger of unsympathetic actions sanctioned by government policy. It is in understanding her own history that Olamina finds an important means to help others connect what appear to be abstract concepts in the form of Earthseed. Remembrance names, ties to Continental African cultures, and the application of Africentric community action all play a vital role in Butler's uncovering and reassertion of African-based connections.

One way that Butler signifies history as a referent is by describing how Bankole and Olamina are marked by the trans-Atlantic slave trade and the racial strife of 1960s, and why it is important for them to continue this tradition in naming their child. Lauren Oya Olamina, Bankole, and Larkin Beryl Ifa Olamina Bankole/Ashe Verre are descended from African slaves, and each bears a Yoruba remembrance name. In naming Olamina's daughter, Larkin Beryl Ifa Olamina Bankole, Butler imparts to the reader multiple clues about the importance of naming by continuing the example of Olamina's and Bankole's foreparents. Ifa, a Yoruba "personal name," connects Larkin to the movement of the 1960s to find and remain connected to Africa (Akinyemi, 2005; O. E. Butler, 1998, p. 188). *Ife* is a Yoruba symbol of power, meaning *love*; and of course the names Olamina and Bankole are used effectively in constructing an African persona with a purpose: Larkin as a character translates as love, wealth, and the building of a new structure.

Butler's use of complex symbols through a layering of names creates continuity between the past and present by way of African heritage. Like the surnames Olamina and Bankole, Ife, the word and the name, is tied to the Yoruba language, taking on added religious meaning as the

birthplace of creation and the traditional home of the spiritual leader of the Yoruba (K. M. Clarke, 2007; Law, 1973). In the naming of Larkin, Butler shows a strong attachment to traditional Yoruba naming ceremonies for the newly born, reiterating the importance of names as symbols of power: names that speak into being the expectations not only of the parents but of the community in which a child is reared (Akinyemi, 2005; O. E. Butler, 1998, p. 190). Larkin's names indicate a cultural awareness of not only the traditions but also the religious practices of the Yoruba that continue to be present in multiple facets of the African Diaspora (Akinyemi, 2005, p. 115).

Metaphysical relationships/ancestors

Butler moves from Africentric theory to Africentric praxis by making the main character a continual referent to Harriet Tubman and, by proxy, to the biblical Moses. Olamina, like the Moses of the Old Testament, believes herself to be slow of speech, lacking in nuance and elegance to persuade her audience to prepare for a changing world— a belief that Harriet Tubman herself allegedly voiced in preparation for her first journey on the Underground Railroad as written by Butler (1995, p. 69). Olamina's fear of speaking about Earthseed and the power of *nommo* to produce effects through an agent/character/writer, or *bantu*, who speaks it into being is disambiguous, meaning that she is not afraid to speak the words but afraid of the power of her words to change the focus of the world. Instead, Butler's characterization of Olamina can be viewed as a means to highlight the significance of the speech act that Butler herself engages in with her audience: that of a griot who tells the story of a new myth. Olamina is the *bantu* who gives Earthseed direction and purpose, a reconstruction of resistance reminiscent of slaves who acquired the means to transform their lives, using language to educate and liberate their minds, while educating themselves under the cover of servitude. Olamina sees no difference between

corporeal acts of living and the shaping of the spiritual self, an Africentric trope that is often employed to imply the presence and influence of the ancestors.

Butler connects the act of speaking with power, a power that directs the actions of corporeal and noncorporeal existence. She then creates associations between these two spheres that assert the connections between the living and nonliving as natural elements within all human communities. Butler makes her readers see that speaking, acting, and adapting to culture, as a living product, have a connotative meaning as part of a Diasporic identity. It is through the visage of the ancestor that Butler clarifies this idea by citing parallel identifiers between Olamina and Harriet Tubman as the biblical Moses. Yet the heart of Butler's Earthseed is best understood through the rites she presents to the reader to show the importance of the ancestors to the living as part of an Africentric concern with remembrance.

For example, Olamina explains to Bankole her desire to remember the dead, Butler's incorporation of birth, renewal, and metaphysical connections between the living and nonliving. "I would like to give them a grove of oak trees," I said. Trees are better than stone—life commemorating life" (1995, p. 293).

> So today we remembered the friends and family members we've lost. We spoke our individual memories and quoted Bible passages, Earthseed verses, and bits of songs and poems that were favorites of the living or the dead. Then we buried our dead and we planted oak trees. (1995, p. 295)

The structure of Acorn itself is meant to show not only the importance of sharing ownership in protecting natural resources, but the value of remembering our collective dead, not as a personal and societal loss but as an ongoing connection between the past, present, and future. Butler's Earthseed intones:

> "We give our dead
> To the orchards
> And the groves.

> We give our dead
> To life.
> Death
> Is a great Change ó
> Is lifeøs greatest Change.
> We honor our dead.
> As we mix their essence with the earth,
> We remember them,
> And within us,
> They live.ö (1998, pp. 63-64)

Burial rituals are seen not only as an integral part of the community, but also as the welcoming of a child (1998, pp. 71-72). During the õwelcoming ceremony,ö each member passes the family and touches the new baby. The community recites the promise of connection, and the family becomes part of a larger fictive kin group; in this way, the child gains a new aunt and uncle who will care for the child if the parents are no longer living: a reiteration of binding spiritual connections with corporeal acts of embracing one another within a shared community. By advocating for a wider understanding of kin networks, Butler begins the process whereby African-derived acts within the *Parable* series are more easily recognized.

Africanisms

Harriet Tubman spoke to god; Olamina speaks to herself and asks her community to shape g-d, much like traditional religions found in previous research on West African religious systems (Barber, 1981). Like conventional African American narratives, Butler makes use of familiar illustrations found in religious texts. Where Butlerøs speculative fiction diverges from these texts is in its use of Earthseed as a philosophy that promotes an organic and interconnected metaphysicality that is removed from Christian signifiers. G-d neither takes action nor cares for human concerns; as in traditional Igbo religion, it is the individualøs attention to g-d or the actions the individual focuses on that change her or his circumstances (Ubah, 1982).

Butler's use of Igbo referents broadens the narrative to connect Olamina not only to Oya but to the Igbo legend of Atagbusi, the shape-shifter who used her ability to protect her village; and the use of a nut (Acorn) to signify group affiliation, welcome, and hospitality connects the narrative to West African traditions (Kenan, 1991; Lovejoy, 1980; Uchendu, 1964). Oya, the Yoruba goddess who governs the winds of change, is the primeval mother of chaos for multiple ethnic communities in West Africa. Oya's powers include cutting through stagnation to make way for new growth, a role that Olamina embraces in her desire to awaken the people around her to their own reality (O. E. Butler, 1995, pp. 50-53). Oya is Sankofa, a looking backward and bringing forward of those lessons that Butler finds important. The use of acorns and acorn bread is similar to the function of kola nuts in traditional and historical Igbo societies, and the use of Earthseed verses to teach community members and bind them to a new spiritual and social awareness is similar to the use of proverb verses to teach children in Igbo social systems (Penfield & Duru, 1988; Uchendu, 1964)

The adaptation of West African symbols of power and spirituality, as well as the first-fruits celebrations, serve to the center the narrative. For example, Earthseed as a community and later as a global movement is grounded on the Nguzo Saba. The Nguzo Saba are the principles of Kwanzaa, an African American celebration created by Dr. Maulana Karenga in 1966 and based on traditional African year-end harvest gatherings (Alison, 2000; Flores-Peña & Evanchuk, 1997; Pleck, 2001). These principles— Umoja (unity), Kujichagulia (self-determination), Ujima (collective work and responsibility), Ujamaa (cooperative economics), Nia (purpose), Kuumba (creativity), and Imani (faith)— are central to the construction of Butler's Earthseed philosophy and community. Butler's use of these principles shows a clear connection to the social movements of the 1960s and, more importantly, reflects an awareness of African contributions to

African American identity actualization. Butler connects the Nguzo Saba to Olamina's narrative as a secondary move toward Africentric praxis, moving Olamina's action from theory to practice; and its principles are themselves derived from first-fruits celebrations of West African origin.

Earthseed is a belief system that, at its core, applies a high level of spirituality to the ethics of living in a world where human life has become devalued. Butler takes the opportunity of explaining its rites and rituals as teachable moments, to remind the reader of past human indignities, and warn us against the slow erosion of valued traditions and our own humanity (1995, p. 295; 1998, p. 63).

Here again we can see the traces of Africa displayed during the height of Diasporic Africans' international call to reconnect to their ancestors; the epitome of Sankofa. Yoruba replacement names that Bankole's father and Olamina's grandfather adopted in the 1960s signify a personal identification with the African persona as part of the basic structure of Butler's characters:

> Our last names were an instant bond between us. We're both descended from men who assumed African surnames back during the 1960s. His father and my grandfather had had their names legally changed, and both had chosen Yoruba replacement names. (1995, p. 206)

In order to create the circumstances from which Olamina's metaphysical belief system can grow, Butler creates the character Bankole, whose name means "help me build my house"; it is on Bankole's land that Acorn is begun. Without Bankole, who offers balance to Olamina's character, Butler would not be able to effectively present the idea of cooperative socialism to oppose the anarchic world in which the characters reside.

Cooperative socialism as a tool of decolonization

For Butler, the fundamental value of community is inescapable. Faith, creativity, and unity are the basic rules of the community whose goal is total equality. Through Olamina, Butler enfleshes Acorn, a shared community based upon harmony with nature and respect for innate cultural, racial, sexual, and learning differences. Inherent in Butler's Earthseed is the idea that to show your true self is the greatest fear that humans face, and to speak of differences is to risk being rejected. Butler pays tribute to West African oral traditions that have been handed down to Diasporic Africans; one such tradition is that we as human beings use the spoken or productive word to transform the world we live in. According to an Africentric perspective, words and the sharing of knowledge that they impart can change the way others see us and affect relationships in profound ways. For example, when Olamina decides to share her reality, she takes a huge risk because she must give up the illusion of individualism. But it is the communication of her own limitations that gives her the power and credibility to teach others.

Olamina demonstrates the value of community by acting a part: what Mazama refers to as a consciousness of victory as opposed to oppression (Mazama, 2002). Earthseed recognizes that all people are entitled to practice, celebrate, and even create their own culture (Appiah, 1998; Asante, 1983; Mazama, 2002; McLaren, 1998; Okur, 1993; Sefa Dei, 1994). The creation of Acorn itself is an act of resistance. The root of demise for humanity, Butler posits, is hyperindividualism and corporate greed. Butler's construction of Acorn Gatherings is an example of how an Africentric community organization can aid in the collective enjoyment of a more authentic life: to be accepted and to accept difference, learning from community members and passing on knowledge and skills through active community involvement.

The weekly Gatherings at Acorn are re-enactments of Kwanzaa as a constant first-fruits celebration, and thus an overt reconfiguration of living the African persona. The primary purpose of these weekly meetings is to practice the Nguzo Saba, the seven principles of Kwanzaa: Umoja, Kujichagulia, Ujima, Ujamaa, Nia, Kuumba, and Imani. Umoja, the unity of family and community, is evidenced by the rituals of birth and death. Earthseed verses are read and discussed, and their interpretations are accepted through open debate, in essence allowing the community to define itself by practicing self-determination, or Kujichagulia. At Gatherings, Olamina states that the community only eats õwhat weøve raised and prepared,ö in recognition of the communityøs labor and creativity (O. E. Butler, 1998, p. 80).

The conditions of sharing power and influence in the group must benefit not only the individual but the entire community, whose collective work and responsibility for the welfare of all is reflective of Ujima (O. E. Butler, 1998, pp. 29-31, 81). Additionally, each member of Acorn must acquire a trade and then teach it to someone else. Each member must learn to read and write in at least two languages to ensure that each works toward not only self-improvement but also the improvement of the community at large, Kuumba. And finally, Gatherings are held to teach and instruct the young and newcomers in the philosophy of Earthseed, to instill faith in a growing social and spiritual movement, Imani. In this way, Butler makes use of African symbols that reach back to re-remember the importance of Africa and its descendents in the building of America. The self or individual is valued as a vital part of the whole community, a basic tenet of Africentric ideology.

Gendered relativity

Whereas ambiguation is the use of symbols that represent more than one meaning, disambiguation in African American literature is used to reverse the ambiguity of symbols

through repeatedly aligning them with cultural connotations that have a limited meaning to the reader. One such instance is Butler's building from the African American narrative of Moses / Harriet Tubman. Butler changes Olamina's physical appearance from apparent female to male to start a journey from the south to the north in search of freedom, much as Harriet Tubman was forced to mask her gender to escape from slavery to freedom, and later to help others to safety (1995, p. 153). In order to make this journey, Olamina and the reader must be persuaded to embrace change and understand that changing one's viewpoint is often a necessary precondition to understanding the Other. By creating a pathway to understanding Butler's character Olamina, the reader is privy to her private thoughts on how to build and nurture a community.

In *Parable of the Sower* and *Parable of the Talents*, the self is seen as a changeable construct through the masking of gender and the development of a hybrid belief system that encourages learning new roles that negate Western fe/male social positions. Instead, fe/male relationships are seen not only as representing a balance of fe/male power but as necessary agents of change toward creating a better society. Because an Afrocentric perspective follows the relationship of all things as circular, there is room to consider how humans are connected in complex ways beyond the dichotomies of fe/male gender and sexual roles. For example, the fluidity of sexuality is explored in a discussion of subjective and situational character standpoint when Olamina discovers that she is attracted not only to men but also to women. Olamina explains to Nia, a woman she meets, that she must dress as a man when traveling for safety. Nia thinks Olamina is a man and shows her interest in having Olamina become intimate with her:

> "I can't get over it. I still feel... I still feel as though you were a man. I mean..."
> "It's all right."
> She sighed, put her head back and looked at me with a sad smile. "No it isn't."
> No, it wasn't but I went to her and hugged her and held her. Like Len, she needed to be
> hugged and held, needed to cry in someone's arms. She'd been alone far too long. To my

own surprise, I realized that under other circumstances, I might have taken her to bed. (O. E. Butler, 1998, p. 407)

Marcus, her brother, sees his own sexuality as antireligious because of his linear belief system, aligned with Western religious practices: õUncle Marc, on the other hand, had said without ever quite saying it that he preferred men sexually, but his church taught that homosexuality is a sin, and he chose to live by that doctrineö (O. E. Butler, 1998, p. 415)

To sum up, the thematic devices that correspond to an Africentric reading protocol include the structuring of a shared metanarrative; the metaphysical relationship with the ancestors, as evidenced by Olamina as metaphor to a revised Harriet Tubman narrative; the presence of Africanisms in the naming of Butlerøs major characters; and the use of Earthseed verses as a tool to teach children and adults the value of community and the nature of oppresive behaviors. Butlerøs African American protagonists are empowered to rebuild their society based on Africentric principles that focus on the benefits of cooperative socialism. This is seen in Butlerøs emphasis on group education and one-on-one instruction to foster a healthy concern for learning multiple skills of benefit to all, especially in the *Parable of the Sower,* where Acorn developed as a first colony (McLaren, 1998; Okur, 1993). Butler uses West African belief systems to structure the philosophy and actions of Earthseed through interconnecting metaphysical relationships in a redesign of Igbo myth, Yoruba spirituality, and the African American mythos of Harriet Tubman. The primary elements of Butlerøs *Parable* series are the concentration on community, resistance to oppression, and the influence of African elements on the identity formation of Diasporic Africans in America. To a lesser extent, Butler approaches the reconstruction of fe/male relationships to redefine gender-based roles throughout the narrative by constructing family units that reflect same-sex and opposite-sex couples in coequal partnerships.

Butler's *Parable* series shows a marked concern with presenting a shared metanarrative; history as remembrance; the recognition of a metaphysical relationship between the living, the not-yet-living, and the ancestors; and tracing actions through Igbo and West African symbolism. Earthseed, as a construct, models cooperative socialism as the best way to manage contemporary social and economic problems; the *Parable* series is written from the perspective of decolonization from oppressive policies, beliefs, and acts on multiple populations; and Butler challenges the designation of gender as a means to show or present effective power relations within the Africentric community in which she builds each novel.

Making use of the revised escape narrative to represent the joint history of bondage and survival in America, the author speaks/writes about the disenfranchisement of a whole segment of the population in the United States through religious extremism. To counter these oppressive actions, Butler depends on religious and secular ideas of liberation. Butler offers a different type of messiah and belief approach: to depend on the self as part of an enmeshed and healthy community. Butler iterates that in order for her characters to overcome physical oppression, resistance must first take the form of educating themselves not only about the world that they currently reside in, but in recognizing that physical and mental slavery has occurred many times in human history.

Conclusion

From a rhetorical standpoint, Butler attempts to influence readers to rethink their own subjugation. The lesson of the *Parable* series is salvation: to leave the earth and germinate among the stars; to become Other(s) who are free from species, gender, and racial bondage; to decolonize humanity from its subversiveness. It is a nonessentializing and nonprejudicial philosophical standpoint that fully embraces the idea that Africa is at the center of their world,

while also sharing their own cultural history and presentness. The novels convey the idea that Diasporic Africans have the ability to play a vital role in the positive development of all facets of life within any given society. Butler creates the means to iterate the experiences of social and psychological differences, earned through disenfranchisement, as a powerful tool of empathetic social change on a global level.

It is through the use and benefits of African-based community and principles of living that Butler proposes an available means to address not only social but ecological imbalance in a modern society (Appiah, 1998; Asante, 1983; Kornfeld & Leyden, 2005; Locke, 1928, 1946; Neal, 1968). Butler's *Parable* series links the past with contemporary social concerns and potential future outcomes, while reiterating the importance of remembrance. Butler presents the positive aspects of cooperative socialism to advance human development in the construction of both novels. Olamina's rise to the role of messiah at the end of the series can be seen as Butler's enactment of myth revision to empower a new generation of readers. Butler creates Olamina as a contemporary woman who, by her acts of survival and adaptation, changes the ways that people think, how they act, and what they choose to believe. The overarching theme that Butler presents is one of life with purpose.

CHAPTER 6 "TANANARIVE DUE'S *AFRICAN IMMORTALS* TRILOGY"

> Khaldun always walks with a torch, so he is visible from a distance. None of them can ever say with certainty from where he has come. His torchlight seems to appear at will in the night, traveling toward them in a flickering orange that paints the bearer's form against the walls in a monstrous shadow. He wears a splendid white robe that drags in the dirt. Dawit's heart quickens. Soon, Khaldun is close enough for them to see his face and the bushy black beard that hangs to his breastbone. He is a black African, not mixed with lighter bloods, though he has never told them which people are his. (Due, 1997, p. 60)

In the *African Immortals* series, the stories of Africa and Africans in the Diaspora form a natural center from which all characters identify an essential part of themselves and the world around them. Although most of the action takes place in North America, the beginning and the ending of the series establish Ethiopia and its history as the author's primary cultural referents throughout the narrative. Due's chronicle creates a circular narrative that examines the past in relation to the present, and the present in relation to the past. It is in the power of naming and recognition that Due proposes a culturally specific response to negative social and emotional conditions. To illuminate this culturally specific response, I will apply the Africentric reading protocol outlined in Chapter 4 to a close contextual analysis of Tananarive Due's *African Immortals* series: *My Soul to Keep* (1997), *The Living Blood* (2001), and *Blood Colony* (2008).

The first novel, *My Soul to Keep* (1997), is set in Miami, Florida, where Jessica Jacobs-Wolde and David (Dawit) Wolde live with their daughter, Kira. They are African American, but unbeknownst to Jessica, David is actually a member of a group of ageless African scholars that have existed for at least two thousand years. David (Dawit) Wolde, the symbolic, beloved son of ancient Aksum (Ethiopia), is an immortal whose vampiric existence extends only to his long life and addiction to learning. David's blood is charged with supercells, a fact that he neither recognizes nor understands because of his particular fascination with his own mental and emotional preservation. The tale of the vampire is known in many indigenous cultures; however,

Due's vampires are gifted with blood that transforms them not into creatures of the night, but into superhumans with amazing recuperative abilities because of the Lifeblood that courses in their veins. David, in accepting the gift of eternal life, agrees never to let the existence of his Life Brothers and their community be known to outsiders. David's love for Jessica, as well as his experiences of loss throughout the centuries, persuades him not only to tell Jessica about his Brothers, but to attempt to make her and their daughter into immortals as well. The child dies, but Jessica survives, giving birth to a daughter who is already immortal, whom they name Beatrice.

In the second novel, *The Living Blood* (2001), Beatrice undergoes a transition at the age of three, changing her name to Fana and beginning to put her hair into locks on her own. The significance of this event is made clear when Beatrice undergoes a symbolic death while bathing. Fana was born with self-awareness, and by the age of three had begun to travel in a water world where she could communicate with Khaldun in the spiritual realm. As Fana grows into her powers, she learns to control the domain of the sky, making rain and whipping wind; she also has the ability to affect the perception of time in the same way that Oya is said to rule. The ritualistic baptism signifies Beatrice's death to the world as she once knew it, as she awakens from the trance aware of herself and the power she can wield. Fana meets a young boy, Jared, while in trance. They are connected on a mystical plane that allows them to work in tandem to save themselves and their parents from unknown dangers. Jared, a child of the same age as Fana, has struggled with leukemia and is expected to succumb. He is Fana's positive focal point and frequent companion when they are both on a plane between life and death. But it is Fana who controls the narrative and outcome as "Hurricane Beatrice," a storm that forms off the coast of Florida and is controlled by Fana while she is in trance. During the hurricane, Fana is battling a

dark spiritual presence. This presence threatens the life of Jared and attempts to encourage Fana toward self-gratification at the expense of all others. She must learn to control her emotions and desires in order to save herself, Jared, and their families. This storm and its aftermath are the impetus for the third novel of the series. Fana, at the end of *The Living Blood*, exists in a deep trance, learning from Khaldun the importance of deep meditation. Khaldun prepares Fana to succeed him as teacher for a global community by teaching her the benefits of placing the well-being of her community above her own need for power and control.

In the last novel of the series, *Blood Colony* (2008), the formation of an American Colony centers on Fana, and as she progresses towards adulthood, the members of the Colony begin to pay attention to her in much the same way they once did to Khaldun. By the end of the series, *Blood Colony* traces Fanaøs growth and development; her words and actions become the center of an ongoing discussion about the precarious balance between her own powers and those of another formidable immortal, Michel. Michel, like Fana, was born to a woman who was transformed from human to immortal while pregnant, unbeknownst to all the Life Brothers. Khaldun, however, is aware of Micheløs existence, and he prepares Fana for their inevitable meeting.

Khaldun teaches Fana wisdom divination, to travel within a plane beyond physical consciousness, to connect with the spirit world. Fanaøs knowledge and understanding of how to use energies to affect human interaction increase as she becomes more powerful. Fanaøs parents and the Life Brothers begin to focus their attention toward Fana, which only gives her more power: a power she uses to clear her mind and remove all distractions to envision a world where the Life Blood that she carries, received through her mother in vitro, can transform the face of the planet. The Life Blood, as indicated above, contain supercells that impede aging and death;

through minute dosages, humans can be healed of most blood-borne illness. As Khaldun has prophesied, Fana marries Michel and brings the gift of the Blood/healing to all as part of their union.

A shared metanarrative

The names of characters, history, and acts of resistance take on added meaning that is apparent only when an Africentric reading protocol highlights Due's concentration on naming and power. Lalibela, the religious center of Ethiopia, is of mythic value in the novels as a symbol of heritage, education, culture, and strength; it is the only African nation that remained unoccupied by Western nations, developing a distinctively strong African religious and social system (Jaenen, 1956; Tibebu, 1996). With Lalibela, Due makes clear a competing metanarrative that illustrates the successful resistance to domination and spiritual essentializing, in a nation that flourished in large part because of its ability to adapt to the diversity inherent within its borders (Demoz, 1969; Shelemay, 1992; Tamrat, 1988). Thus, history and symbolism play a role in the naming of characters who find refuge in a historically powerful African nation. Due then layers the text with Africentric motilityô a name, Lalibela, being the first representation of underlying power. Lalibela's Africentric motility appears as an organic ability to move the narrative as it gathers energy to transform the readers' understanding of Africana culture as non-static and ever-evolving. This motility demands the recognition of hybridity, not to destroy the African persona, but to recognize the diversity of the African experience inside and outside the continent.

But first, Due recognizes the act of force, exerted as a tool of cultural and therefore identity dislocation, as the symbol for a deep-rooted subjugation that remains prevalent in the experiences of Diasporic and Continental Africans. Due's signification of rape throughout the series shows the effects of powerlessness and its fragmentation of personal and cultural efficacy.

By using Dawitøs character to reiterate historical disenfranchisement, Due highlights the perils of being African in America during the 19th century. Wondering what became of the Africans who had been taken to America during the trans-Atlantic slave system, Dawit journeys to America as a wealthy tourist to quell his curiosity. Instead of being stolen from the shores or byways of Africa, Dawit is captured on the banks of the Missouri in 1844 and sold into slavery for fifteen hundred dollars. Dawit experiences the lash, hearing for the first time the word õniggerö directed at him; its meaning, as chattel, forever changes the way he understands himself and the world he lives in. Dawit no longer searches for knowledge of the new world; he hungers for the community that he left behind, and he finds solace in Adele, a fellow slave, because she reminds him of Africa. Due writes: õDawit can no longer see the statuesque woman left for him, except the memory of her face. Despite her status, she is bitterly proud; her face is so hard, the beauty beneath is nearly masked. Nearly, but not quite. She is clearly Yoruba, a marvel!ö (1997, p. 134).

Dawit and Adele are lynched during the Civil War, when caught trying to escape from the plantation. Although Dawit recovers physically, he succumbs to madness, seeking to recover the parts of himself that he continues to lose in his American journey. Dawitøs experience of being taken by force is nonsexual in nature, but his emasculation renders him powerless to stop the brutality that happens to his wife and to himself.

This theme of force or psychological rape recurs, and is heightened by physical and emotional forms of brutality on the body of Jessicaøs grandmother. Due presents this element of Jessicaøs family history to remind the reader of the history of Africans in American, accepting that genetic purism was not possible, but that African traditions remain relevant in the way family and community are conceptualized within Africana culture:

> After her grandmotherøs funeral two months before, Jessica had been shocked when Bea told her that Grammy had been raped by her White employer in Quincy. Sheød gotten

pregnant, and Grandpa, a pastor, wouldnøt hear of an abortion, even if it had been legal. So, she had a sonô Beaøs brother, Jessicaøs Uncle Joe. Grammy and Bea were so light themselves that no one paid any attention to how fair-skinned the new child was, and Grandpa always claimed Joe as his. As far as Jessica knew, only the women in the family ever told the story, passing on a painful heirloom. (1997, pp. 99-100)

This tale of sexual degradation is passed on without disgrace, and the child, Joe, is accepted into the family and community without shame. This type of rape is one that postóCivil War African American communities accepted as a part of a larger metanarrative of survival. What differs in Dueøs telling of Grammyøs experience is that, unlike in many traditional African American narratives, there is no tragic mulatto; only an uncle who lives a good and fulfilling life.

The strength of Grammy to tell her story and pass it on to the women in the family reminds them that õthere is light, but only if you can see past the painö (Due, 1997, p. 100). This stance is not stoicism but functions, under the umbrella of a metanarrative, as a position of strength. Due positions Jessica to evolve from a recipient of history to a resource: When her grandmother dies, a ritual communication occurs after the burial as part of the rite of passage; this story is directed to Jessica. Due signifies the importance of ritual in the remembrance and passing on of the life story of Jessicaøs ancestressô one that is defined not by what happened to her body but by her response to her circumstances.

Finally, the last novel of the series, *Blood Colony* (2008), connects Fanaøs journey with traditional African American slave narratives, while placing African religious symbols and Christian dogma on equal footing. Jessica, a devout Christian, and Dawit, a devoutly spiritual man, see the Life Blood as different aspects of the divine. Jessica believes that Fana is a miracle and the blood a vehicle to bring physical and, eventually, spiritual salvation to the world. Jessica and David have acculturated Fana on the Harriet Tubman narrative, and the importance of resisting or running to survive oppression. On the opposing side, Michel has been raised by an

order of immortals inside the Catholic Church called Sanctus Cruor. They believe that Michel can be used to cleanse the world of all nonbelievers. Michel's life and learning are distinctly Eurocentric, although his mother, Teru, is Ethiopian. Teru's name, meaning "good" in Aramaic, is usually connected to another word to complete its meaning. Due signifies Michel's rejection of African culture and beliefs by Teru's silence as she remains "trapped inside her mind" in a trance induced by Michel (2008, p. 406). The blood, Jessica learns, has an ambiguous origin; but its directed use depends on the community that defines it, either as a means of salvation for all or as a tool of destruction for dogmatic principles. Its history, as well as the narratives of Due's characters, imbues the text with an awareness of origins and human foibles.

History and remembrance

Dawit Wolde is the beginning of the entire tale. Due begins with the point that Christ and Dawit are both sons of Africa, thereby firmly placing the importance of Africa and its culture in the foreground of the novel. Dawit's name changes twice in the narrative; *David* and *Seth* are also monikers for who and what Dawit symbolizes. He is an immortal whose lifespan encompasses Africa before the first colonial power took root, America's slave trade, and the approach of the 21st century. *Dawit* and *David* both mean "beloved," while *Seth* provides the transition to the Egyptian god who kills his own brother, Osiris.

This use of myth begins in Africa but ends in Dawit's confused self-portrayal, where we first understand his dissonance as an African person. Dawit

> remembered a conversation he'd had with his Life brothers years ago, smoking opium and feeling full of themselves, when they'd compared themselves to the Yoruba's immortal *Orisha*, the Spirits. You, Dawit, a brother told him, are Ogun: Iron Spirit, warrior, lonely self-exile. "Oh! I am afraid of Ogun," they'd chanted in Yoruba, laughing in a mock prayer. "His long hands can save his children from the abyss. Save me!" (Due, 1997, p. 39)

After Dawit loses his sense of self through the deaths of his wives and children throughout the centuries, he can no longer think of belonging to the *Orisha/orisa*, not even in jest or remembered camaraderie:

> No Dawit decided, he was not worthy of Ogun's name. Prometheus was a better mythological soul mate. He was in chains, his innards picked at by an eagle, watching with disdain as his flesh, again and again, grew back to be freshly destroyed. Always. Loss had found him again, its talons and beak riving his liver, his heart, his soul. He would forever be stripped, reborn, stripped. But reborn, Dawit wondered, as what? (p. 41)

Dawit's character symbolizes that which all Africans in the Diaspora seek to reclaim: a sense of self and a hope that their progeny will survive and remember their origins.

Due's use of African and Greek mythology, as in this quote, replays the war between Africa-centered and European universalized ideology. It is apparent that Due capitalizes on Dawit's nature, a nature that is not clear when we first begin the story. The deeper truth of his narrative does not revolve around playing the charlatan but communicates an important moral about life choices: that how you decide to see the world is reflective of your perceived power to direct events around you. For example, the language Dawit and his Life brothers use is Yoruba, and the story is one of happiness, pride, and hope when they satirically compare him to Ogun. Dawit's use of English to signify his emotional and metaphysical mortality when he speaks of his self-defined connection to Prometheus resonates with colonialism's damage to the African persona.

As for Fana, Due makes clear that in many aspects she is fashioned as a contemporary version of Harriet Tubman, to whom Due pays homage throughout *Blood Colony*. In emphasizing the importance of Harriet Tubman, the novel embraces the idea of looking to the ancestors not simply as a reflective activity, but as a vital recognition of their worth to the community. In this way, an Africentric reading of Tubman's inclusion reveals a form of ancestor

worship whereby Fana can see herself acting for the greater good because her spiritual ancestor had the strength to do so, long before Fana was born. Harriet Tubman is the agency that allows Fana to leave a protective environment to protect the fledgling Railroad that distributes Glow:

> Fana stared at the photograph of Harriet Tubman that had been taken in the 1800s. Grim-faced Tubman was resolute in a formal dress, her head wrapped in a scarf, fighting her way into history. Tubman had run and led others to freedom. Sometimes running was the answer. (p. 75)

> Harriet Tubman's words, the conductor of the Underground Railroad. Scholars said the words were a fiction created by one of Tubman's biographers, but Fana knew they captured Tubman's spirit. Fana clasped her friend's unsteady hand, finishing the quotation: "If you want to taste freedom, keep going." We'll be free Caitlin. We'll free the world."
>   Her only answer was another quiet sob in the dark.
>   Fana was afraid too. Sometimes dreams and premonitions guided her, but she didn't know what would happen to Caitlin's father. She didn't know what the Life Brothers would do once they realized she was gone. And now she would have to spend all of her days in hiding, always expecting to be found. (p. 78)

Tubman's layered inclusion in *Blood Colony* shows the importance of African American history and influence in narratives that serve not only as entertainment but also as reminders of specific cultural history.

Likewise, Fana's world in *Blood Colony* is structured to fit the known records of how plantations were centered around a "Big House" surrounded by smaller dwellings, and the land that surrounds the Colony is patrolled by men who control the access to and from the five acres the Colony comprises. Due's Underground Railroad is reminiscent of the original one: conductors' identities are known to few, and way stations to house conductors and those on the run are hidden behind false walls and friendly community faces. Fana has no public record, having been born at home and raised by her family in a protective community— but she has begun her travels without identification. Members of her community travel and interact with the outside world while maintaining false papers that allow them to travel the globe. Travel

documents and identification cards are counterfeited by skilled artisans within the Brotherhood, signifying another tie that Due uses to remind the reader that such skill and deception were used during the 19th century by slaves to cross national and international boundaries in search of freedom.

Finally, the character Khaldun directly connects African history and religion, the tools and access from which he not only teaches but also learns to craft a strategy to prepare Fana for Michel. Khaldun is based on a historical figure; he mirrors Ibn Khaldun, a lawyer, historian, economist, philosopher, student, and teacher of social sciences (Boulakia, 1971; Goodman, 1972). Due uses Khaldun to move the narrative from the physical conflict between Fana's parents and the Life Brothers to a spiritual conflict between two immortals, Fana and Michel.

Metaphysical relationships/ancestors

Due begins with Dawit, the trickster. He changes roles three times in the series. In the first book, he is wounded and disaffected by his chosen life, bringing grief and destruction to every human family he begins. In the second novel, he is the outsider, watching and protecting from a distance, learning from his mistakes and those of his elders. In the third novel, he is the patient father and wise husband. In each incarnation, he teaches and directs the reader to listen to history, and thereby avoid the pitfalls of human existence. Like all appearances of the trickster in African American literature, Dawit's role is to teach through example, by playing multiple roles that transform the character from opposing points of view. Dawit's story presents the interdependence of the metaphysical and corporeal; he seeks mental and physical healing through trance, and finds that through self-reflection his view of himself and his Brotherhood changes.

Due combines messianic and apocalyptic tropes into Dawitøs narrative to introduce the leader of his Brotherhood, Khaldun. Through Khaldun, Due references ancient African religions and educational systems while simultaneously calling attention to certain West African spiritual belief systems (Boulakia, 1971; Dover, 1952; Goodman, 1972). As is true in many West African belief systems, it is the very attention to Khaldun that allows him to have power and influence over his followers. Due then articulates an alternative Apocrypha based on Yoruba beliefs and myths, one that manifests in the spiritual relationships between characters throughout the series. For example, Due creates a spiritual connection to Grammy (Jessicaøs mother); it is her strength and resilience that enable each of the seriesø female protagonists to create order out of chaos. Likewise, in Dawitøs tale and later in Fanaøs, the spirits of ancestors aid the living, protecting them and teaching them valuable life lessons as they learn of their own weaknesses while in trance states. While in trance, for example, Fana is able to speak to Khaldun across continents and to converse with spirits that walk between life and death. It is this ability that Due utilizes to construct a strong African American narrative traced with Yoruba mythology, a spiritual mythos that transforms Fana into a goddess.

Africanisms

In all three novels, Due revisits the lives of Africans prior to Western colonialism, and exposes the audience to the idea of metaphysical life as a continuation or connection to the ancestors: a notion that reflects West African deities and myth. For example, the reference to Obatala and Odudua (Due, 2008, p. 177) is a direct counternarrative to Hera and Zeus in the Greek pantheon (Nagel, 1994; Osherow, 2000; Welsh & Asante, 1981). Obatala is the chief god of the Yoruba, and Odudua is his wife and equal. As will be discussed below, such key players within the novel as Khaldun, Fana, and Michel are developed more fully in the last novel.

In many African social systems, religion and culture are intertwined to such an extent that neither is easily defined as a separate phenomenon. Referents to African religious symbols and belief patterns continue to present themselves in the transmission of ideas and customs that are embraced as widely understood practices. This is seen most readily in Due's use of Yoruba deities and spirituality to create the Life Brothers, Khaldun as a collaborative archetype, and Fana/Michel as humans who assume g-dlike ascendency.

The Yoruba pantheon is linked to the use of color in African American spirituality, as part of Due's ongoing linkage between West Africa and African Americans. White clothing, for example, signifies religious unity, the power and strength of women on First Sunday, and most especially the roles of mothers and women in the African American church as special prayer warriors who heal and foresee problems in the spiritual realm (D. R. Brown, 1979, p. 179). Likewise, Due's use of white clothing for Dawit's Life Brothers and for Fana appears to be in recognition of Olorun/Olodumare, õThe One clothed in white, Who dwells above,ö as the chief deity of Yoruba practitioners, in essence linking the spiritual world with the corporeal, much as the women in the African American church represent the same on mother's First Sunday. Similiarly, in Dawit's recounting of his mortal life, Khaldun approaches him and his friend Teferi enshrouded with mystery and clothed in a white robe.

Thus, while Khaldun is dressed in the color that represents Olodumare, his failure to completely inform his followers of his own origins indicates an awareness of dissonance in what Khaldun may represent or what he chooses to hide. By tracing the connection back to African customs and beliefs, Due decenters ideas of privilege in the Christian construction of African American religious practices, alluding to the possibility that spiritual beliefs of African origin remain a central part of African American identity. This counters an ongoing tendency to show

the õsuperiority of Christian salvation to traditional religionö by clothing Yoruba beliefs or African-derived worldviews in Christian garments that negate any other spiritual beliefs that may inform the actions of cultural others (Olup na, 1993).

It is belief that Due uses to show that devotion without perceptual awareness can lead to harm, both personally and communally. When Dawit describes Lalibela, it is through the eyes of a devotee. His attention as well as the attention of his 58 Life Brothers is focused on Khaldun and his teachings. Barber (1981) notes that in Yoruba, the orisa or gods are õmaintained and kept in existence by the attention of humansö; that is, their divinity is recognized, and it is this recognition that gives them power.

> õOur teacher is a bearded man named Khaldun, whose name means ‗Eternal.ø There are many among us who believe he is the closest thing our Earth has to a God. He gave us this Living Blood we share. He is, in a sense, my father, Jessica. That makes him yours. And Lalibela is our home.ö (Due, 1997, p. 341)

Khaldun occupies the space of a divine being because he is thought to do so. When Jessica asks about the Blood being stolen from the body of Jesus, Dawit describes his belief that Khaldunøs tale of how the Blood came to be in his possession is a story or fable meant to inspire or gain adherents, rather than a certain truth:

> õKhaldun told a story about the Blood, yes,ö Dawit said. õKhaldun told us many stories. Worship on the cross was another Life Brother, no different than any of us. Under other circumstances, the Gospels might have been written about Fana. Or me. Or you. Khaldun is a wonderous being, Jessica, but not all of his stories are true. Why shouldnøt I assume the Blood was Khaldunøs all along?ö (Due, 2008, p. 71)

As Dawit and his brothers begin to focus more on Fana and less on the divinity of Khaldun, Khaldun recedes to the background, turning over the future of the Life Blood and its use to Fana. By birthright, Fana is a Shango initiate with the ability to heal in her blood. Due reconfigures the goddess Nut by also endowing Fana with the ability to affect the perception of time. Fanaøs role is as coruler, setting the terms of her marriage contract much as women rulers

in ancient Egypt did. The marriage of Fana and Michel takes on added meaning when seen in parallel with the Yoruba deities: Fana acting as sky goddess and Michel as Ogun, the god of steel.

Decolonization

Oppression in the *African Immortals* series develops from ethnic and cultural exclusion but continues into oppression through health disparities and poverty. In *Blood Colony,* Due writes into existence a world where the effect of disease and poverty in North America begins to rival the need for healthcare access in Africa. In the 2015 proposed in *Blood Colony*, there is no universal healthcare or easy access to health in North America, Canada, or Mexico. Additionally, any child born in a hospital or who has attended school has been registered as a citizen with the United States government in response to 9/11, and failure to be registered is grounds for deportation or imprisonment.

In *Living Blood*, Fana becomes a signifier for Oya, the g_ddess of chaos who can control the actions of humans by her power. HIV, leukemia, and sickle-cell anemia, most of which are more common in African populations in the Diaspora and on the Continent, are treated and often eradicated by using small injections of Life Blood given by Jessica at a clinic in Africa. Later, in response to socially and politically structured inequalities in the Americas, Fana and her friend Caitlin begin a system to distribute a weakened serum of Fana⌀s blood, a substance called õGlow,ö on an Underground Railroad.

In this series Due writes about the need to resolve inequality not only on a national level but globally, by restructuring resources so as to combat social, medical, and religious oppression; she warns that restricting access to needed resources can create an inhospitable world for all who live in it. Like that of her predecessors, Due⌀s writing reflects an ongoing concern with removing

obstacles to equality beyond the African community and recognizing global connections in the effects of perpetuating the unequal access of marginalized peoples to treatment. The idea of equality is shown throughout the series, notably in balancing community development with sustainability and cooperation with family unity. Due ends the series with the formation of a new family unit, which once again centers on a rite of passage: Fana's coming of age.

Gendered relativity and cooperative socialism

Creating fictive Africentric societies in North America and envisioning a fictive community in Lalibela, Ethiopia, as a model of cooperative social, political, and economic endeavors, each novel in the *African Immortals* series builds upon the idea of community that exists beyond the corporeal. Jessica and Dawit are polar opposites, having come together though born centuries apart; each returns to Africa in search of answers and salvation from the city of Lalibela and its spiritual leader, Khaldun. Their daughter Fana and her eventual mate, Michel, share a similar background, bridging time and continents to find that both are children of Ethiopia. Due's narrative directs attention to a loss of identity, tracing broken lines of cultural, spiritual, and community origins as the driving force behind the deterioration of Diasporic communities and the countries in which they reside. It is a reconnection with Africa, Due suggests, that allows cultural regeneration and recovery of community, and fosters stability for Africans in the Diaspora and on the Continent.

Jessica's story illustrates this process. She initially embraces the idea of African American cultural artifacts as negative connotations of the self; she does not think beyond herself as an individual and sees no value in others who share her community. Due uses this bifurcation of social identity to illuminate the formation and re-education of Africentric consciousness through Jessica's emergent African persona. Although Jessica's narrative speaks of education,

the true signifiers that Due locates are perceived social class, Africentric dissonance, and ethnic acculturation. Jessica envisions her sister Alexø's performance of blackness as a veil she wears to project a socially acceptable façade that aligns her with lower-class or working-class African Americans, a group to which Jessica does not feel she belongs. Thinking of Alexø's ease of code switching and adaptation as aberrant behavior allows Jessica to ignore her relationship to other African Americans outside her normative Western self by pretending that any connection to them is artificial. Jessica sees Alex as assuming a role instead of accepting herself and the community she feels a part of; for Jessica, true adaptation is assimilation into all facets of Western society. It is not until she meets Dawit, a person of African descent, that she begins to learn that within the Diaspora, Africans exist at all levels of society, while at the same time accepting their cultural heritage.

In the end, Jessica seeks to expand her understanding of life beyond her previous mental and creative limitations, including her identification with self and community. Like Dawit, Jessica undergoes a change of attitude and perspective by coming to realize her connection to Africa, not as an academic notion but as a personal journey that teaches her the benefits of cooperative socialism and community responsibility. Returning to Africa allows Jessica to heal emotionally and spiritually, empowering her to become a meaningful contributor to the global village. This focus of energy lies not in what Western society defines as success or wealth but in Jessicaø's return to her roots.

Due changes the direction of the series in *Living Blood* and further removes it from the simple didactic relationship in *Blood Colony*. Jared and Fana, through a metaphysical connection, heal the broken relationship between Jessica and Dawit. Through their bond, a new community develops in America, where Life Brothers and those newly gifted begin to carefully

heal illnesses around the globe. Later, in *Blood Colony*, the mating game between Fana and Michel brings together traditional West African spiritual beliefs with a version of Christianity to begin a global healing that expands beyond the corporeal and around the globe.

Due is careful to structure the narrative of Fana's role as that of coruler, empowered to set the terms of her marriage contract and the conditions of partnership and equality that Fana expects from Michel. The marriage of Fana and Michel takes on added meaning when seen in parallel with the Yoruba deities, Fana acting as sky goddess and Michel as Ogun, the god of steel. Not only Fana's relationship to powerful contemporary women, but also her own inherent priestly and spiritual power forces Michel to accept her terms, even as she denies his desire to fully possess her. Michel, in turn, begins to place his value as a man toward understanding the importance of his own accountability, as well as his ability to contribute to the spiritual renewal and physical healing of the human family.

Conclusion

As the application of the reading protocol has made clear, Due concentrates most of her authorial energy on the spiritual connections with West African religion. The metanarrative that is shared by African Americans and Continental Africans in her series indicates the bond of slavery, separation, and cultural dissonance from exposure to non-African political and religious systems. Due pays particular attention to the history of African peoples, as evidenced in her use of Khaldun as the archtype of learning and wisdom through his characterization as both Ibn Khaldun and potential spiritual savior. Although not much attention is given to clearly differentiating between myth and spirituality, the impact of metaphysical relations is woven throughout each novel in the series.

Fana and the Life Brothers are clearly defined as spiritual adepts who operate more often than not in a world that exists between life and death. In fact, Fana is taught by Khaldun while in trance, exploring the histories of Africa and the ancient world while on a metaphysical journey with her instructor. Attention to the seven major aspects of the reading protocol highlights how Due effectively produces an Africentric series by returning to traditional beliefs as the best way to develop characters and plot. Notably, the use of Aficanisms is symbolized in the foods that are prepared, the clothing worn by colony members, the wearing of natural hair by the men and women of the colony, and the communal aspects of their social and economic system. It is through this use of cooperative socialism that Due creates the foundation of her series as a continuation of traditional African American resistance literatures. The *African Immortals* series is meant not only to entertain but to inform and motivate action in her audience. Due structures the final relationship paradigm, between Fana and Michel, as a power relationship that can only function as a positive force while in equilibrium. Fana as a woman and Michel as a man offer no indication of power or efficacy in leadership because of their gender; Due completes this part of her series as an open-ended question about the ability of two individuals from different cultural backgrounds to come together to solve social problems that affect a global society.

CHAPTER 7 "CONCLUDING THOUGHTS"

This dissertation has created an Africentric reading method and applied it to two African-centered speculative fiction series. Although both authors have stated that they ground themselves in an African-centered narrative structure, until now, their work has been categorized primarily as dystopian or utopian literature. As such, Africentric speculative fiction has been interpreted through traditional modes of analysis. By contrast, an Africentric reading protocol emphasizes the African structures within the narratives, paying close attention to how each author makes use of referents of African origin to iterate cultural heritage and empower a positive sense of identity within Diasporic African communities.

Thus, the Africentric reading protocol proposed in Chapter 4, when applied to Octavia Butler's *Parable* series and Tananarive Due's *African Immortals* series, revealed a shared metanarrative of bondage and survival, of cultural and historical connections between Africans in the Diaspora and Continental Africans. Thematic content for the *Parable* series and the *African Immortals* series includes history and remembrance through the passing on of spiritual tales, as an ongoing connection between multiple generations, in a curvilinear plot. A collective consciousness appears in the form of spiritual anecdotes, or awareness that evokes images of physical, emotional, and economic oppression.

As the Africentric reading protocol revealed, Africanisms pervade both series. For instance, the functions of both Olamina and Fana correspond to those of Oya, the goddess of chaos found in the complementary iconography of West Africa. But a traditional textual analysis would not have emphasized or, perhaps, not even have remarked on Butler's insertion of Igbo symbols, as well as the Nguzo Saba, to create a complex narrative. The same applies to the

intricate interconnections in Due⌀s multilayered reconstruction of Yoruba deities in the *African Immortals* series.

Using the Africentric reading protocol also enabled me to focus on cultural markers within the texts that did not correspond to the ideas of oppression, belongingness, or African American gender relationships foregrounded in the previous Western analyses. Instead of voices of disenfranchisement, each writer presented an alternative view that identified the strengths of African and African American communities and families. This reading protocol illuminated how Butler and Due wrote from a perspective of gender neutrality in assigning both power to effect social change and physical strength. Of course, both Olamina in the *Parable* series and Fana in the *African Immortals* series were empowered to bring change to the fictive worlds written into existence by African American women authors. This protocol is thus able to show the presence of African American men and women as copartners in loving, healthy, equitable relationships within working communities. These communities, according to this reading protocol, derive their strength from Igbo and Yoruba belief systems.

Because this reading protocol considered how decolonization can occur outside of the borders of nationalism, the role of Butler⌀s and Due⌀s protagonists could be seen as serving as conduits to correct hyperindividualism, as is found in each narrative sample examined. This is not a rallying cry against Eurocentric or Western forms of cultural presence, but a standpoint that recognizes differing cultural or group norms as they coexist in complex social systems. Due and Butler position the language and context of generative actions as cooperative socialism, based not on Marxist ideology but on an African-centered awareness of community norms and family arrangements structured within the African American memory and social system.

Finally, and perhaps most notably, both Octavia Butler and Tananarive Due reference Harriet Tubman as a historical and even mythological figure upon whom they model their key protagonists. In the *Parable* series, Olamina possesses characteristics similar to the physical description of Harriet Tubman and, like Tubman, even changes her outward appearance from female to male to hide her identity from potential dangers on her trek from southern to northern California. In the *African Immortals* series, Fana builds and travels an Underground Railroad, replete with falsified papers and way stations hidden within unsuspecting communities. This reading protocol highlighted this Diasporic design that remained consistent between the two series.

One of the key areas of interest that arose through the process of refining this Africentric reading protocol was the two authorsø use of Gothic elements to present questions about power and survival through symbiosis. Both Due and Butler provided examples of symbiosis between dominant and non-dominant individuals within a given social system. This idea of the symbolic sharing of bodies began to take on more complex meaning when considered in relation to historical social and political inequalities in which African Americans learned to survive. Although this element is not used to examine non-speculative fiction material in this analysis, it does appear to be a factor that needs further investigation. It does raise questions about the way adaptation and symbiosis support and complement each other in a perceived hostile environment. Although there was not sufficient space to investigate this unexpected pattern within each narrative, this element may be further developed as part of an expanded Africentric reading protocol that can be used to examine the communication of identity and the forms of adaptation as constructed in a wider variety of cultural depictions.

The application of my Africentric reading protocol has illuminated previously unnoted aspects of these two series; the next step would be to apply it to speculative fiction novels by other African American women writers. The next step that follows needs to consider the works of African American *male* speculative fiction writers, to examine the degree to which these authors signify a more equitable role for women and men. It would be worthwhile to apply this reading protocol to Afro-Caribbean, Afro-European, and Continental African speculative fiction to assess its effectiveness in locating similar patterns within diverse narrative beginnings. And a further move would be to use it to analyze works beyond speculative fiction.

This reading protocol presents but one possible model of an African-centered analytical paradigm. As of the writing of this project, there has not been a culturally specific reading protocol that considers these seven elements. Earlier academic approaches outlined many types of Afrocentric communication tools, yet no comprehensive reading protocol appeared to be assigned. Regional African-centered analyses, segmented by country of origin, seemed to be written in such a way as to ensure that Africana authors and their communities could not be restricted to labeling by others outside of their cultural communities. This decentering of narrative critique has also hindered the ability to clearly define and categorize specific cultural markers. However, the Africentric reading protocol presented here was designed to locate and identify African elements embedded in the narrative structure of contemporary novels. This protocol serves as a model for analyzing culturally specific markers and literatures that contain elements not normally considered in traditional rhetorical analysis. It pays close attention to narrative elements and tropes that can be linked to Africana history, spirituality, and myths, tracing these elements through a close analysis of character structure and the use of self-identified cultural markers by each writer as narrator. This Africentric reading protocol takes into

consideration over one hundred years of Afrological pedagogy, research, social and political movements, and academic practice and foci, not only for African American rhetoric in North America, but also for multiple African and Diasporic African histories. It was my intention that this reading protocol could be adapted to examine a wider variety of oral, written, and performative acts of communication; that it could be used as a stepping stone in creating a means of examining African-influenced works across cultures, to begin the process of assessing the presence of a global metanarrative in the African Diaspora. A more global application of this Africentric reading protocol would enable communication scholars to look at how Diasporic African communities attempt to assert their identity and recover their histories as interconnected narratives that remain present in contemporary literature and mediated texts.

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ABSTRACT

AN AFRICENTRIC READING PROTOCOL:
THE SPECULATIVE FICTION OF OCTAVIA BUTLER AND TANANARIVE DUE

by

TONJA LAWRENCE

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Advisor: Dr. Mary Garrett

Major: Communication

Degree: Doctor of Philosophy

This examination of Africentric speculative fiction (ASF) applies an Africentric reading protocol to selected works of Octavia E. Butler and Tananarive Due. Butler's *Parable* series and Due's *African Immortals* series are examined using seven elements of Africentric narrative specific to cultural speculative fiction. Finally, I discuss the implications of using an Africentric reading protocol as an example of cultural analysis that can be adapted to the textual analysis of culturally specific works of fiction.

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT

Life experiences have taught me to adapt to new circumstances and to expect surprises along the way. I have been fortunate to have been gifted with teachers, professors, and family who have nurtured my growth, one step at a time. The encouragement that I received served as a buffer to the rigors of life's obstacles, but also taught me that my experiences were not necessarily unique. It was this view that allowed me to think about context and circumstance as indicators of action. Taking this idea of mediated action, I set out to look at the way individuals spoke about and recorded their own reality. I can see now that this way of seeing the world enabled me to embrace the idea that people, as individuals and group members, have their own way of making sense of the world we all share.

Working with diverse populations in a variety of learning situations for over 20 years fueled my desire to increase cultural and cross-cultural awareness toward positive interactions. Each new group of people that I was introduced to, through work and later through academia, gave me a deeper appreciation of difference and its expression. Making every effort to learn more about how language is used to create meaning, make or maintain power, and create or relay culture energized my attention to communication as a generative phenomenon that is as dynamic as the humans who engage in its procedures on a daily basis.

My positive obsession with learning inevitably moved me toward a life of teaching and research. Taking with me the expectations of family, teachers, and professors, I strive to keep myself entertained through learning as an ongoing process, not the end of a project. I know that I will continue to enjoy a life of learning. My goal is to continue to add to the discipline of communication, to increase my personal expertise, and to teach my students to love learning as an organic and natural process that they can take with them outside the walls of academia.