

## Fate and Destiny in Nnedi Okorafor's *Who Fears Death*

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### Abstract

This article reads at how Nnedi Okorafor's novel *Who Fears Death* (2010) rewrites the traditional narrative, cultural events progressing with time as development, offering a vision of current and prospective African identity that is not simply based on colonial history, after an apocalypse, Africa suffered with. Okorafor's imaginative use of intertextuality and subversion of "sovereign narratives" works to construct an alternative model of identity, according to the study. The novel is set in a post-apocalyptic Africa where one tribe, the Nuru, enslaves and oppresses another, the Okeke. Onyesonwu, a strong and determined heroine, sets out to rewrite the "Great Book" to strip her father, the despotic sorcerer Diab, of his powers. The novel tackles dictatorship through dictation, the influence of epistemic theories on culture and belonging, and tackling the problem of despotism and resistance in the content. The rewriting of the Great Book, which embodies the gripping storyline of oppression, makes room for a new narrative to emerge. Okorafor undermines linear notions of development within the story's structure by locating herself intertextually in a piece of research that crosses time, geography, and genre barriers along with the injustice and inequality females face. As a result, identity arises from a dynamic structure rather than from the accumulation of history.

Keywords: Nnedi Okorafor, *Who Fears Death*, Post-Apocalyptic Literature

### Overview

Apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic literature is science fiction genres centred on a future where the world as we know is nearing its end. Although some describe the end of past civilizations that no longer exist, post-apocalyptic books almost usually take a longer time horizon. The post-apocalyptic environment appears to be complete chaos, and it is often exceedingly difficult to survive. It's also when cyberpunk emerges, bringing in a golden era for the style and mode of living. Post-apocalyptic novels are stories in which the underlying situations are the primary priority of the plot. Post-apocalyptic fiction might take place in the present or the future. The narrative can take place soon after a traumatic

event or years later. Technology in a post-apocalyptic tale could never be seen before, or it could be utterly absent. Characters in this kind of fiction may have no recollection of what life was like before it had been ruined. They might have developed a mythology about the world before the apocalypse (Pitetti, 2017).

The plot could be about taking steps to prevent an apocalypse, dealing with the impact and ramifications of the event, or just being post-apocalyptic, taking place after the event. The period may be immediately after the disaster, focusing on the mentality of people who survived and maintained humankind alive and united as one, or much later, typically incorporating the mythologization before society. Post-apocalyptic novels are frequently set in a non-technological futuristic world or in which just a few shards of culture and technology persist.

Thrill, excitement, and escape storylines are common in post-apocalyptic fiction. The main characters either work alone or in groupings. These 'fighters' often have extraordinary survival skills and learn how to navigate this new reality. Adults are rarely present in apocalyptic stories, as they are in most teen fiction. Instead, adults are often wicked antagonists or the person the hero seeks to find and protect if they are present (Wolf-Meyer, 2004).

This is dystopian fantasy at its finest, beautifully written. Okorafor blends future fantasy with the rhythm and feel of African storytelling, expertly examining racism, feminism, and cultural identity questions. Okorafor is a superb storyteller who masterfully weaves current history, mythology, history, sophisticated technology, and civilization towards something unique and exciting that must not be neglected (Burnett, 2015).

### **Post-nuclear-holocaust Africa**

Sudan, Africa's largest country, is bleak with blazing sun and vast deserts. It's also an odd location for a novel about optimism and charm. "*Who Fears Death*," by Nnedi Okorafor, is a horrific future novel bearable thanks to lyrical prose, beautiful vision, and the tragic portrayal of a little girl who bears the load of the known universe on her shoulders (Suinyuy, 2021). The apocalypse has become so "after" that we never learn, and it doesn't exist, what events led to the downfall of the world as we know it, with a nearly unending stretch of desert and a smattering of damaged technology in its place.

Nnedi Okorafor's novel *Who Fears Death*, published in 2010, is a post-apocalyptic scientific fantasy novel set in a future Sudan. One section of post-nuclear holocaust Africa is plagued by genocide. A post-apocalyptic novel is set through which the world has already ended, and characters are attempting to survive and start afresh. The event that brought the world to an end may have been anything from a war to a plague to natural or artificial disasters. The Nuru's aggressors have chosen to eliminate the Okeke by the Great Book. When the sole survivor of a massacred Okeke village is brutally raped, she manages

to flee, going deeper into the desert. She gives birth to a baby girl with sand-coloured hair and complexion, and she immediately recognizes that her daughter is odd. Onyesonwu, which means "*Who Fears Death?*" in an ancient African vernacular, is the name she gives her daughter (Kotecki, 2020).

"There" is post-apocalyptic Africa, a war-torn country devastated by genocide. The guide is Onyesonwu, a tough and relentless young girl who translates literally to the book's title. Her tale recounts her journey, conveyed in a simple but fascinating style. Onyesonwu's life changes dramatically when she gets the capacity to transform into animals and even raise the dead. However, she is an Ewu-born through the rape of her Okeke mother by someone from the conquering Nuru tribe.

Onyesonwu is raised by a mysterious and traditional shaman and realizes her unique destiny: to stop her people's genocide. Nature, tradition, history, real love, the spiritual mysteries of her culture – and, eventually, death itself – will all be part of her path to achieve her destiny. However, in order to perfect her magical skills, Onyesonwu must now overcome discrimination directed at her because of her birth and gender.

However, time is running out because the Nuru forces are closing in on her homeland—and a great magician is plotting her assassination. In a post-apocalyptic Africa, in addition to magical powers and spirits, the main characters tackle some very serious, very real concerns, such as weaponized rape, child soldiers, and female genital mutilation.

These subjects aren't blown out of proportion; rather, they're woven into the brutal reality of the Seven Rivers Kingdom's universe. Nnedi doesn't shy away from depicting the characters' messed-up ideas of these themes, such as the mistreatment of Okeke rape survivors, who are shunned because they are "ruined" (Bryce, 2019).

### **Race War between Nuru and Okeke People**

*Who Fears Death*, by Nnedi Okorafor, is a breakthrough novel that does not defamiliarize the reader with its setting. Although the novel's universe is imaginary and mystical, it does not retreat from massive societal injustices, hierarchies, and restrictions. Instead, this novel employs fantasy as a tool to break down clear structural inequalities rather than employing magical elements as a walk for systems of injustice.

Its genre interaction is diverse. The scenario is a post-apocalyptic future Africa, yet magic connects it to fiction. The heroes' traversal of a brutal environment becomes intimately connected to the combat and consequences of a war drama. Using race and fiction, this article would first outline the formation of Okorafor's races. Then it'll look at how the novel's cruel colonial power relationships become the novel's stakes and what that means for true solutions to structural injustice (Rahn, 2019).

From the complexity of the storytelling to how the novel and its black protagonist deal with the fantasy genre, this examination will continue in the form of *Who Fears Death*.

Each element tells a broader story. This work interacts with numerous layers of genre tropes and socioeconomic systems to build a complicated and quite hopeful, new sort of truth. As the story is set in post-apocalyptic Africa, their inhabitants are divided into two groups. One is Nuru, and the other is the Okeke people. They have different skin colours, but they also have different social statuses. A creation narrative is used in the novel to explain this.

Ani created the universe and rested before making sunshine in this narrative. The Okeke emerged from the waterways while sleeping and spread across the region for decades. They ate and proliferated, bent and twisted the ground, and took and transformed the creatures. Ani was frightened when she awoke to find herself producing sunshine. She reached the stars and drew the sun down to the Nuru's homeland. The Okeke was bound to be the Nuru's slavery from then on. Most of what the Okeke produced was destroyed, but some of it remained, primarily technology such as computers.

Nuru and Okeke have different appearances, which is also addressed in the mythology and noted right at the tale's start: 'Okeke' is a word that signifies 'made ones.' Because the Okeke people were created before the day, their skin is the hue of the night. They have already been doing so. The Nuru arrived later after a lot had happened. Their skin is the shade of something like the sun because they originated from the stars.

The African slave trade and the prejudice that fueled it are both paralleled in the book. This racism was based on "as such analytical and cultural 'proof,' the foundation of a new sort of 'scientific prejudice,'" according to the research. The inequality between the Nuru and the Okeke is a theme that runs all through the narrative. The fight between the Nuru and the Okeke might be interpreted as a reflection on the black society's history of enslavement and systemic racism. The novel also contains various womanist notions.

The Ewu are the heirs of hybrid Okeke and Nuru people; because the clans are at odds, sexual encounter between clans is usually the consequence of rape. Furthermore, these rapes are ideologically driven: Nuru soldiers purposefully rape Okeke women to clean the tribe out and stir dissatisfaction.

"We'll never know exactly why we are, what we are, and so on.

So all you can do is follow your path to the wilderness, and then you continue along because that's what must be."

After a Nuru man, the protagonist violently raped her Okeke mother, Onyesonwu is of Nuru and Okeke descent. Ewu is the name given to a child born of both races who are thought to be evil by nature because they are born under violent conditions and are thus considered misfits and troublemakers. Onye and her mother live as nomads in the desert for the first few years of her life until settling in the town of Jwahir. It is far from the Nuru's ravaging and hunting of Okekes who refuse to be reduced to enslaved people in the West.

According to the story, the Ewu is the epitome of rage, angry individuals whose

whole presence is a menace. Onye is enraged, but readers soon learn that the biggest danger she has to the Okeke community where she gets older is that she serves as a continual recall of the Nuru's intended genocide, their use of rape as a weapon, and the horrifying events taking place in the West. Onyesonwu is followed as she realizes her creation, acquires her mystical powers, and ultimately embarks on a mission to encounter her birth father. He is both a brutal Nuru general and a formidable sorcerer intent on killing her (Death, 2022).

### **Fantasy in *Who Fears Death***

One of the most startling, scary, incredibly fascinating, and wonderful all-around novels is *Who Fears Death*. Nnedi Okorafor was born in the United States, but her Nigerian blood flows deep in her art, infusing it with fantasy, magic, and actual African truth. Many people should read *Who Fears Death* since it is a crucial book.

Fantasy is a form of literature in which mystical and extraordinary aspects that do not exist in reality are featured. Although some authors, like Nnedi, use a genuine setting with fantasy aspects, many others build completely fictional realms according to their own fundamental rules and logic and populations of fictional ethnicities and monsters. Fantasy is a hypothetical genre unrelated to realism or scientific consensus (Drab, 2021).

Titans, terrible creatures, and sorcery have long been a narrative component, as evidenced found in ancient myths, mythology, and religious literature throughout the world. However, fantasy as a work of literature is much newer than its forebears. It varies from them because its writers are well-known and because they and their viewers recognize that the works seem to be hypothetical. Following a time of noble tales whose fanciful aspects were still somewhat realistic, modern fantasy emerged in the nineteenth century (Okorafor, 2009).

Fantasy is distinguished from other forms by its disconnection from reality. Stories may address the real-life human condition, and they're doing it through underlying themes such as magic (the lack of which can play a significant role in stories); assumptions of a "selected one" or eventual demise; antiquity mythologies from across the world and the establishment of completely new realms, cultures, and lifeforms. Whereas all literature takes creativity, fantasy is a sanctuary for those who desire to stretch each other to its extremes.

Onyesonwu's Ewu ancestors endow her with extraordinary abilities, and most of the novel revolves around her journeying to various spots and practising her remarkable magical abilities. However, because Ewu is frequently birthed due to violence, society expects them to grow up to be aggressive. Mwitā, a young Ewu man whom Onyesonwu infatuated with, advises Onyesonwu to not fall into her violent impulses. Still, Onyesonwu uses violence to solve most of the problems in the novel. For example, her town's magician instructor declines to train her since she's a girl. She can only persuade him to alter his

mind is to bashing him up and charging him to acknowledge her magical abilities.

"To be something out of the ordinary meant you had to serve the ordinary." They hated you if you refused... Even when you served the common people, they often hated you."

The way it causes her father to focus his powers on control and devastation in the name of maintaining order rather than creativity and miracles, and the way it prevents her village's young boys and girls from raising kids and confronting sexual conventions together. For both those who suffer and those who obtain power in that exchange, the idea of bringing interesting concepts into the world is unstable. Men, too, must benefit from a world made whole in *Who Fears Death*, even if the great mystical properties don't cure their minds of emancipation.

Onyesonwu's journey is about more than just the hardship of her environment. It's also a narrative about women discovering their courage about themselves and their connections. It's about a secret soul where devils known as masquerades roam the earth, dragons soar through the sky, and clans control dust storms. It's also a starting-to-come narrative, with Onyesonwu attempting to define her spiritual and mythical personas. And the book's essential strength is its capacity to transport readers to realms that are gloomy, mythical, harsh, and magnificent at the same time (Dowdall, 2013).

It is an essential book to read and review. The idea is to explore the opinion that there are some special events in the context of review that may be allowing the reader to have a better opinion of the unflinching facts and figures. The professional support is in the gender dynamics as well. The idea has a high flow with the support to professionally employ the unconventional genre modification in the review. Ewa is a mature persona growing up with specific themes and opinions. The idea is to promote the support and plan better opinions in support of the major emphasis for the fantasies in the promising approaches.

### **Ethnicity in the Novel**

When a story is read with many references to a specific culture, that story is an example of an ethnic story. It's a story that shows a lot about a culture by telling about the challenges that a certain ethnic group has to undergo. Typically, they are written by minorities about their experiences. Ethnic literature provides a window into subcultures to the rest of the globe. Ethnic literature refers to writings that focus on the lives of members of a particular ethnic community. There aren't just ethnic characters in it. The work is incorporated into their homes and culture. It delves into the difficulties they meet, the struggles they experience, and the victories they attain (Garcia, 2021).

*Who Fears death* was nominated for the 2011 Nebula Award for Best Novel and the 2011 Locus Award for Best Fantasy Novel, in addition to winning the 2011 World Fantasy Award for Best Novel and the 2010 Carl Brandon Kindred Award. It also won the French Award for Best Foreign Novel. Onyesonwu is subjected to female genital mutilation (FGM) in a gruesome sequence in the novel, which she later learns may harm her magical abilities. According to Steven Barnes of the American Book Review, some have critiqued the scenario. Okorafor stated that she is proud of her Igbo heritage, but "culture is alive and fluid." It isn't built of stone, and it isn't absolute either.

The ethnic struggle and the bigotry surrounding it are at the heart of *Who Fears Death*. But, conversely, the daily racism that prevails in the seven rivers kingdom and the resulting ethnic warfare is present in the novel. The Kingdom, which exists in a future version of Darfur in Sudan—town, Daib's Durfa, is named after this—is predominantly occupied by the light-skinned Nuru, the dominating class, and the dark-skinned Nuru Okeke, who are the Nuru's subservient.

Women's genital mutilation is another aspect of the book. Many women in Africa and the Middle East are forced to undergo female circumcision. It's another technique for men to dominate women and take away their autonomy in the context of the book. Female genital mutilation makes the experience more pleasurable for the males who force it on them. Still, it also makes intercourse less pleasurable for women, demonstrating another manner in which men's needs are prioritized. FGM is performed on women from birth until they reach adolescence and beyond, usually by a traditional circumciser using a blade. Most girls are cut before the age of five in half of the nations for which national statistics are available. Different procedures are used depending on the country or ethnic group (Toubia, 2018).

“Oh, how our traditions limit and outcast those of us who aren't normal.”

Gender inequality attempts to restrict women's sexuality, and beliefs about innocence, humility, and elegance contribute to the tradition. It is mainly started and followed by women who saw it as a symbol of pride and worried that they would be socially excluded if their children and grandchildren were not cut. Recurrent infections, difficulties peeing and passing menstrual flow, chronic pain, the development of cysts, inability to get pregnant, issues during birthing, and deadly bleeding are all possible side effects depending on the surgery. No health advantages have been identified (Heisi et al., 2019).

### **Weapon of War and Mass Destruction**

Rape or other forms of sexual assault committed by combatants during the military confrontation, warfare, or military dictatorship are typically considered spoils of war;

however, the occurrence can occasionally have deeper sociocultural underpinnings, particularly in ethnic strife. Abduction and rape using weapons are manifestations of sexual violence committed during warfare. It is separated from sexual assault, sexual attacks, and murder conducted among military personnel as a war crime. Rape is commonly utilized as emotional terrorism to disgrace the opponent during conflict and war. Institutionalized sexual slavery, wartime sexual assault linked to specific battles or atrocities, and single or scattered acts of sexual brutality are all examples of wartime sexual violence (Danjibo and Akinkuotu, 2019).

*Who Fears death*, a novel by Nnedi Okorafor published in 2010, tackles the painful load of cultural demands for women to perpetuate biological, psychological, and societal standards. As a result, it makes them susceptible to the cultural and gender abuse recounted. Despite this, genocide between tribes continues to wreak havoc on the earth in one location of the novel. After years of enslaving them, the Nuru tribe has resolved to obey the Great Book and eliminate the Okeke tribe for good. An Okeke woman goes into the desert, intending to die after her town was destroyed and raped by an enemy commander.

On the other hand, there isn't a lot of fresh, intelligent literature available when searching for books on the broad topic of weapons of mass devastation. Instead, much of it is technical, explaining the dangers of chemical and biological warfare agents, as well as the prior use of such armaments. Books about nuclear weapons and nuclear disarmament and security, in general, are much more plentiful, owing to the curiosity with their enormously destructive potential. But not so much in the way of books about establishing a strategy to defeat adversaries who use biological and chemical weapons (Habibzadeh, 2018).

Sexual violence is indeed a weapon, a military tactic, a terrorizing instrument, a crime against humanity, and a powerful means for wiping out entire tribes and mass destruction. This weaponry is employed in regions where there is war and struggle, and the arena is made up of females and children's bodies. The evacuees are in excruciating emotional anguish. Yet, in most instances, the culprits will still not be made responsible or prosecuted, and the same happened in Nnedi Okorafor's *Who Fears Death*.

### **Fate, Death and Destiny**

Whereas "destiny," which in fictional stories often functions as a character's inescapable goal, "fate" is frequently a negative consequence that a character is battling.

"Fate is fixed like brittle crystal in the dark."

The use of destiny to get a character where it might need them to be is one of the laziest motifs in some typical fantasy fiction. Events are happening in the life of the main character Onye in Nnedi Okorafor's *Who Fears Death* which leads her to her death; Onyesonwu's destiny is the most well-known common example.



The whole "destiny" narrative was an effort to create narrative pace in the series finale in the apparent lack of any fantastic character or traditional categories, a manner for the authors to have a character to a predefined finish without having to contend with much more hard challenges like encouragement or narrative framework. Furthermore, then obviously, depending on a term like "destiny" in this manner deprives what was once a protagonist of any idea of choice. Onyesonwu's decisions are irrelevant because whatever she does is now "destiny's" task (Bollus, 2018).

Nevertheless, the emphasis is on the horizon. Onyesonwu, the narrator, is ready to be burned at stake, and she's narrating how she ended up there. As readers, we're constantly invested in how the story's current events will lead to those outcomes, and as a result, we're dragged along to an ultimate demise. This was an unusual narrative tactic since, while it produced a feeling of panic and stress, it also resulted in a lack of suspense, since we could overlook anything that did not lead Onyesonwu to the execution chamber, regardless of what dire conditions she encountered. Like in the Great Book prophesied by the story's characters, everything that happened seemed to have already been written. Of course, every narrative we read has previously been written; otherwise, there would be no book; yet, that notion is not always there in the reading. However, in *Who Fears Death*, there was a sense of impending doom as the character's fate.

As tensions in her group increase, the story's last section begins. Her companions are dealing with the strains of life in the desert. They are overtaken by grief. They then encounter a Vah tribe, which aids them. Onyesonwu is strengthened by a woman from the Vah tribe who performs magic on her. Finally, Onyesonwu encounters the Nuru tribe members she intended to assassinate, but the story ends with her capture. Instead of evading the attempted execution, Onyesonwu turns into a Kponyungo and flees to the east in the final two chapters. The novel is a science fiction fantasy in which the protagonist is given magical abilities. It has a profound effect on the audience (Pahl, 2018).

The tale concludes with a reworking of the first chapter, in which Onyesonwu destroys her captors and flees, travelling off in search of those she had lost: her beloved, her friends, whom fate had cruelly taken from her before taking her life. But, if they died before the revision, could they still exist somewhere else, in a universe that isn't part of the *Who Fears Death*.

"You know how the story ends. He escaped and went on to become the greatest chief Suntown ever had. He never built a shrine or a temple, or even a shack in the name of Tia. In the Great Book, her name is never mentioned again. He never mused about her or even asked where she was buried. Tia was a virgin. She was beautiful. She was poor. And she was a girl. It was her duty to sacrifice her life for his."

### Conclusion

The post-apocalyptic world appears to be in full disorder, and survival is often difficult. Post-apocalyptic novels are stories in which the plot revolves around the underpinning circumstances. The setting for post-apocalyptic fiction might be either the present or the future. Okorafor weaves futuristic fantasy with the rhythm and feel of African narrative, deftly addressing racism, misogyny, and cultural identity. Okorafor is a brilliant writer who masterfully combines actual history, fantasy, cultural legacy, sophisticated technology, and humanity into anything distinct and fascinating that must not be underestimated. Because the plot takes place in post-apocalyptic Africa, the residents are split into two groups. Nuru and Okeke are two groups of people. They are not only of different skin colours but also of distinct social classes. To explain this, the author uses a creation narrative. The book compares and contrasts the African slave trade and the hatred that fostered it. According to the study, racism was founded on "as such analytical and cultural 'evidence,' the foundation of a new kind of 'scientific prejudice. *Who fears death* is a stunning, disturbing, wonderfully engaging, and all-around fantastic read? Sexual violence is a tool, a military technique eradicating entire tribes and causing catastrophic damage, which is another major concern presented in the novel. One of the sloppiest motifs in certain traditional fantasy novels is fate to get a character where they need to be. Of course, every story we read has been written before; otherwise, there would be no book; nevertheless, this isn't always the case when we're reading. On the other hand, in *Who Fears Death*, there was a sense of approaching disaster as the character's fate.

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