

Magical Realism and Memory Work as Resistance to a Colonial Apocalypse in Afrofuturistic Literature

A Case Study of Tomi Adeyemi's *Children of Blood and Bone*

Shari U. Egbuchulem

ABSTRACT

This paper draws on a decolonial intersectional feminist lens to discuss the importance of Afrofuturism – specifically Afrofuturistic literature as a way of organising resistance in a colonial apocalypse or colonial continuum. In particular, the paper mobilizes the contention of Marimba Ani (2024) that the precolonial African individual and group identities – expressed through art, literature, spiritual and magic beliefs and customs can support Black people as they navigate this postcolonial apocalypse into a future imagined by and for them. In exploring the importance of Afrofuturistic literature in navigating the present continuum and reimagining the future, Tomi Adeyemi's fantasy novel, *Children of Blood and Bone* is centred here. I explore Adeyemi's use of memory work as a creative means of resistance that mobilizes themes of apocalypse and identity to bridge Africa's past and present, and to reimagine a decolonial future. Through art and literature, supernatural Indigenous African worldviews may serve as a coping mechanism in an apocalyptic world, as well as act as a transitional medium in recreating Black futures.

Research Article

KEYWORDS

afrofuturism, magic, colonial(ism), memory work, apocalypse

In the beginning, Orisha was a land where the rare and sacred *Maji* thrived. Each of the ten clans was gifted by the gods above and given a different power over the land. There were *Maji* who could control water, and others who commanded fire. There were *Maji* with the power to read minds, *Maji* who could even peer through time.

— Adeyemi, 2018, 10

Introduction

Tomi Adeyemi's novel, *Children of Blood and Bone* depicts an imaginary, apocalyptic, and fantastic world, narrating the repression of the magic of Black people and how this oppression is resisted. The main protagonist – Zelig – takes the reader on an eventful adventure to revive the magic of her people's land, Orisha, in which she and others resist imposed colonial identities, narratives, and dominance through memory, storytelling, and magical traditions. In this envisioned future, the oppressed people of the present are neither simply victims nor survivors, but co-creators of redemption. They are individuals who have succeeded in tempering their own harsh reality by mobilizing ideals constructed from their knowledge of the past.

In the first pages, Adeyemi invites us to imagine a world that bridges lived experiences of magic, memory, and resistance across the past, present, and future. The story begins with Zelig's recollection of the death of her mother and the oppressed *Maji*'s resistance to erasure. Zelig's mother was murdered by the *Kosidan*, a group of people who had invaded and enforced a colonial, monarchic rule over the magical city of Orisha, the homeland of the *Maji*. The *Maji* were an Indigenous, spiritual people who possessed magical powers. Although not every *Maji* had the powers of magic and the ability to wield it, they all possessed an innate potential to do magic; a *Maji* that possessed and actualized magical powers was visually identifiable by their white hair. The *Kosidan* worked to obliterate the *Maji*'s Orishan spirituality and magic as a way of asserting *Kosidan* dominance over the *Maji* people. Adeyemi depicts how the *Maji* secretly resisted *Kosidan* rule, through the maintenance of an active yet secret *Maji* School led by Mama Agba, a *mamalawo* (an elderly woman with magical powers) who taught Orisha magic and memory to Zelig (2018, 10).

Through Mama Agba, Adeyemi shows the centrality of storytelling both as a preservation of memory of precolonial magic and as a form of resistance. In telling the story of the *Maji* before the *Kosidan* invasion, Mama Agba performs an oral tradition of storytelling frequently practiced within many African groups and passed across generations, that seeks to preserve collective identity, knowledge. To tell the story, Mama Agba does the memory work of re-collecting Orisha's past—a past largely shaped by Yoruba ontology and spirituality. Thus, to create Orisha, Adeyemi had to undergo a process of memory work to recall a past she had not directly witnessed by revisiting precolonial African history, particularly Yoruba history, culture, and legends. Given the perniciousness of the colonial legacy's impact on the identities of postcolonial African nations, the novel's use of memory work is central to re-building, re-imagining, re-asserting, and reinforcing individual and collective Yoruba identity.

Such a powerful novel calls for an equally powerful analytic lens. By incorporating the work of Marimba Ani (2024), this paper draws on a decolonial intersectional feminist lens to discuss the importance of Afrofuturism—specifically Afrofuturistic literature as a way of organising resistance in an apocalyptic/colonial continuum. In particular, I mobilize Ani's declaration that the precolonial African individual and group identities—shaped through

art, literature, spiritual and magical beliefs, and customs—can support African people as they navigate from a current postcolonial apocalypse into a future imagined by and for them. Exploring the importance of magic in Afrofuturistic literature, this paper examines Adeyemi's fantasy novel to highlight the power of this link between Africa's past, present, and future. To do so, I explore Adeyemi's use of memory work as a creative means of resistance, in which she mobilized themes of apocalypse and identity to bridge Africa's past and present, and to reimagine a decolonial future. Within art, literature, and everyday resistance, supernatural Indigenous and post-colonial African beliefs may not only serve as a coping mechanism in an apocalyptic world, but may also act as a transitionary medium in recreating Africa's future. However, this raises the question: What is Afrofuturistic literature? To explain this, it is important to first analyse the concept of Afrofuturism.

Afrofuturist Bridging of Past and Present

Afrofuturism as a term has no universal definition. Rell (2020) and Wallace and Schwartz (2022, 5) explain that the term Afrofuturism was invented by Mark Dery in 1994. As a phenomenon, resistance can be traced as far back as the enslaved people from Africa, who dreamed of a future society free from bondage, in which they were reconnected with Africa and unaffected by white supremacy (2020). Ytasha Womack (2013, 9) defines Afrofuturism as an “intersection of imagination, technology, the future and liberation.” Belinda Wallace and Jesse Schwartz describe it as a remediation of memory and a prompt for the conversations that encourage positive change with “elements of science fiction, historical fiction, speculative fiction, fantasy, Afrocentricity and magical realism with non-Western beliefs” (2022, 2–4). They echo DeWitt Douglas Kilgore's (2020) definition of Afrofuturism as a cultural ideology that influences our thoughts of the past and the future—especially through inviting us to recognise and appreciate the significance of Black histories and perspectives—and depicts how comprehending the past may have a positive effect on our reimagined futures. This definition portrays Afrofuturistic art and literature as a forward-thinking action, as well as a theory and praxis that helps with understanding Black history and culture, past and present. An understanding of Black history enables the creation of a futuristic space-time in which Black people may experience a different present, one where the autonomy of both the individual and the collective self is exercised (Wallace and Schwartz, 2022, 3). In this way, Afrofuturism becomes a mechanism for imagining and enacting transformative realities and experiences. Through art, literature, film, and performance, Black people of African heritage who seek to create alternate liberatory futures that incorporate the speculative and the peculiar participate in Afrofuturism. Such peculiarities include science fiction, technology, and fantasy genres.

While Afrofuturism is not confined strictly to magic or mysticism, Ani (2024) frames Afrofuturism's reconnection to Africa not only as a return to the land, but also as a reconnection to the magic within the people, irrespective of geographic location. Ani's analysis centres the experiences of enslaved Africans taken from the continent and their ongoing encounters with white supremacy, oppression, and exploitation. However, Afrofuturism can be taken up by Africans on and from the continent who have experienced—and continue to experience—colonialism, severance from spirituality, and the erosion of cultural and Indigenous belief systems and worldviews (“Reverberations,” 32). Africans in Africa, whose histories have been corrupted by colonialism and its lingering effects and legacies, may also use Afrofuturism to reconnect with their precolonial identities in order to reimagine the future of Africa. In other words, recollecting Africa's history may itself be Afrofuturist.

One key part of Afrofuturistic expressions is the expectation that people of African heritage would once again wholly own their narratives and identities by reconnecting with African worldviews and philosophies—a reconnection to concepts and systems of government, economics, education, and community original to the African people—and reconnecting with African people, even when separated from the motherland and from each other (Ani, “Reverberations,” 4). Ani argues that the reconnection happens through the revival of the Circle of Connectedness (a conscious unity among Black people in organising resistance to colonial dominance and imposition) (“Reverberations,” 26), the space in which magic resides, a circle that was broken by the colonizers when they snatched Indigenous African bodies from the continent and imposed their worldview on the African people on the continent and outside of it (“Reverberations,” 6–7). As a movement, Afrofuturism maintains this Circle through a shared vision among Afro creatives to reimagine a future in which lost aspects of African culture and spirituality are rediscovered and reincorporated into a way of life.

Adeyemi’s Afrofuturist novel takes on the task of reinvigorating magical aspects of Yoruba culture. She creates a world wherein magical powers and mysticism both exist and have been forbidden. *Kosidan* colonizers fear that the exercise of such powers by its owners would liberate them from perpetual enslavement. In creating a reality in which lions fly in the skies and psychokinesis is an effective power gifted upon a people—and manifesting through the body of work—Adeyemi draws on the history and Yoruba origin accounts to lend credence to her storytelling. She describes her work as “... an adventure, but also an allegory for the modern Black experience” (*The Tonight Show*). In a nuanced way, she highlights the issues faced by Black people in the present through fantasy fiction. In doing so, she visits the past to recreate and bring it to the apocalyptic present, in order to redefine visions of a Black future—bringing the import of memory work once more to the fore.

Apocalypse and Reinvigorating Precolonial Identities

Recollecting African Spirituality

Magic and spirituality are the foundation upon which African worldviews are built, and they are essential to *Children of Blood and Bone*. For example, the Igbo—an ethnic group in the southeastern region of postcolonial Nigeria—believe in the dual nature of existence. If one thing exists in one form, another form of the same thing must exist, and each form that exists does so in polarity. Therefore, an individual is both spiritual and corporeal; unseen and seen.¹ In the same way, Yoruba ontology explains that the nature of an entity is the result of the relationship between two planes of existence: the supernatural/spiritual and the natural/physical (Aina, 2). Within the interconnectedness of the seen and unseen—the relationship between the spiritual and the physical—magic exists. Consequently, this interconnectedness inspires the movement of Afrofuturistic magical realism to interrupt the colonial continuum and reveal the possibility of an other outside of the present norm. By weaving precolonial ethnocultural worldviews of the individual as well as the group into fantasy, the future is imbued

¹ Based on oral traditions of this ethnic group to which I belong, this ideology is captured in the Igbo word *chineke* (chi na eke and chi n’eke). The word *chi* connotes the unseen side of a visible form. The life force within the corporeal (vessel). The spiritual side of the material/corporeal self. An other of a self. *Eke* carries a dual meaning: it is both creator and creation. *Chineke*, thus, means two things at the same time: the unseen force and the seen force (in tandem), as well as the unseen force that creates. All is both creator and creation at the same time.

with a revival of the magic that lies within an individual or a group of people within a shared belief system.

Ani (2024, 34) describes this spirituality as the base upon which the African intellect is built; the expression of their innate spirit—as enacted through ritual drama and oral traditions—is vital to existence. Afrofuturism is an extended expression of this spirit. It is an antithesis; a counter-act to the colonial status quo/continuum; a rebellion of the individual and collective spirit against external domination and oppression of the magic that lies within (personally and as a movement, culturally) and resistance to external narratives of Africa's identity and predictions of its future. Afrofuturistic creatives draw from memory work—which I define here as the recollection of a past not directly witnessed—to revive and maintain the collective African spirit in apocalypse. But what is apocalypse in the African experience?

Apocalypse and the Colonial Continuum

According to Catherine Cornum (2022), the term “apocalypse” in futurism defines a catastrophic period of decolonisation, not unlike the biblical description of the end of the world in the book of Revelations. In other words, it represents the end of a world as perceived by a group of people, race, or tribe. It is a corruption of something original—a corruption of an identity. Ani (2024, 20–26) suggests that the driving force of the African apocalypse has been the broader imposition of European control around the world and the establishment of colonial systems that place white people in power and privilege globally. It consists of haunting and destruction, commemorating this destruction, and is viewed as the beginning of the liberation of its victims. In this context, apocalypse describes the present collapse in which the existing system that upholds the colonial continuum falls apart.

Children of Blood and Bone interrupts this apocalypse through fantasy. In this, Adeyemi is able to challenge the continuous oppression of Black people while creating an alternative future. In doing so, the act and process of imagining and writing becomes both disruptive to the narrative of both the author and Black people at large as simply being an oppressed group, and transformative because it presents a different future, which is reflected in the unfolding of the book's plotline. In the novel, Zelie and those around her work to revive the magic that the ruling class sought to eradicate.

Zelie's struggle is symbolic for the recollection of the past, reminding us in the present of who we used to be, who we are—irrespective of the present narrative—and who we could be outside of the apocalypse. It is a strategy deployed to resist the complete annihilation of an ethno-cultural identity. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Frantz Fanon (1961, 249), explained that colonialism pressures the colonised to constantly pose the question to themselves, “who am I?” because colonialism extends beyond the physical to the psychic dimensions of the human self. Although Adeyemi's work is primarily centred on Yoruba resilience in—and a reimagining of a future outside of—the colonial continuum, its thematic undertones of coloniality, oppression, exploitation, and resistance apply to the struggles of Black people on the African continent and in the diaspora, reflecting the recurring use of Afrofuturism, and specifically Afrofuturistic magical realism, as a decolonising movement that counters the status quo.

Reconnecting to precolonial identities and postcolonial futurities through magical realism

Indeed, Adeyemi's book activates the modalities of magical realism towards these ends. Wendy Faris (2002, 103) has explained that magical realism is sometimes perceived as

“narrative primitivism because it spotlights the myths, legends and ancient cultures and narratively expresses them within occurrences and images that are illogical, therefore becoming irrelevant to the reality they intend to depict.” Faris (179), also quotes Toni Morrison’s position on magical realism as subtracting from her experience, maintaining that Morrison’s use of enchantment was simply derived from the perceived reality of her experience and those of the Black people she knew. Abdul JanMohamed (274) argues that magical realism in African literature functions as a retreat into an otherworldly reality to circumvent the reality of colonial oppression, a fantasy world where issues are resolved by the intervention of the supernatural. JanMohamed posits that such literature draws awareness to the confusion of the colonized, who seemingly lack control over their destinies, and also queries the system causing this absence of control. Still, it would be unfair to reduce magical realism to escapism, to claim that magical realism detracts from the experience of the colonised or that it trivialises the experience of the colonised. Arguably, it provides a way out of the linear trajectory of colonised thought: an “other” away outside of the colonial continuum, a reconnection to and reengagement of the spiritual when the physical/material malfunctions. It is fantasy and magic, activated in response to the oppression of logic.

Scholars such as Eva Davenport (2020, 2), however, take a more practical approach to defining magical realism. Davenport explains that in periods of uncertainty, the creative arts become a means of understanding the human condition. Davenport describes magical realism as a “literary technique that intricately weaves stark realism with fantastic and dreamlike features, enabling the reader to experience elements of mysticism while staying simultaneously grounded in ordinary reality” (2). Thus, because mysticism is a recurring primary theme in African spirituality, magical realism has become a crucial element of Afrofuturistic literature, because it i) intentionally defies Western colonial reasoning as a universally established worldview in its narrative, and ii) involves doing the memory work to remember a time past when an oppressed group of people possessed magic (figuratively and/or literally, based on individual beliefs). As Davenport further explains, magical realism is a juxtaposition of two seemingly incompatible occurrences in order to create “tension, mystery and innovation” (2). The dual nature of magical realism, as well as its capacity to “juggle, compare and contrast” multiple explanations of reality at the same time makes it instrumental to the disruption of the pervasive master narrative of Western ideology in the postcolonial discourse of cultural traditions (3), such as those practiced among the Yoruba. Writers outside of the Yoruba ethnic groups in Nigeria, such as Ben Okri (1991; 1993; 1998) and Nnedi Okoroafor (2010) also employ magical realism as a coping and/or transformative mechanism in a colonial continuum. According to Gabrielle Schwab (2007, 15), magic realism allows us to understand that the stories of the past are stories of the present. Cornum (2022, 2) adds to this by stating that “the past is always-already in the present, as is the future.” The experiences of our ancestors haunt us now, resulting in an apocalyptic or dystopian present. Therefore, magical realism can be seen as the construction of the bridge that connects the past with the present and future.

Doing Memory Work: Remembering a Trauma-filled Past

Remembering a complex past

Creative temporality abounds in Afrofuturism work. Afrofuturistic filmmaker Jean Pierre Bekolo (2023, 379) explains that Africa is both the past and the present. It is the past because nostalgia for a precolonial existence—a time before the colonisation of the continent, when it

was good² and raw—lingers. Africa of the present is characterised by colonial narratives of the continent's dark and apocalyptic qualities. Bekolo describes such apocalyptic realities as being plagued by “migration, drought, hunger, war, epidemics, coups, massacres” (379), alongside predictions of a continued darkness, sickness, and death in Africa's future. Furthermore, our inability to imagine a world outside of the present experience makes a prison of the present. And Bekolo (380) posits that, in the case of Africa, this prison is the state in which the colonisers “left” the continent and people.

Bekolo (2023) also provides an important suggestion for the future: that Africa's problems require African solutions. Therefore, the onus falls on Africans to reimagine the future of the continent. Mobilising toward this future, Bekolo calls on creatives to consider Afrofuturism as the continent's movement to reimagine its future—something he accomplishes through his cinematic films (384). This reimagination may serve as both a coping mechanism in the apocalyptic present and a resistance to a colonial continuum.

From Bekolo's argument we may glean how critical the past is to understanding the present; that one must grasp what existed before the apocalypse. The euphoria of a past to which we bear indirect witness through oral storytelling and oral traditions passed down through generations becomes the source from which Afrofuturist creatives generate Indigenous identities for their work. As stated above, I define the creative recollection of this indirectly witnessed past as memory work. Of course, some authors caution against dwelling in the past. Schwab, for instance, argues that concentrating on traumatic history may create the illusion that we are liberated from issues in the present because we tend to ignore current violences as we obsess over the past (2007, 6). However, when the violence of the present is as a result of lingering or institutionalised legacies of the past, one may have no choice but to “go back” to where it all started in order to identify the state of things prior to its corruption and implement this knowledge toward a better future. When this return to a “before” times is accomplished in the mind, it is called memory work.

Memory Work in Adeyemi

Adeyemi's own story of memory work became central to her research and writing for her novel. Her research into Yoruba precolonial legends and belief systems of the supernatural allowed her to deploy an Afrocentric lens to an African problem: she offers a story of the Yoruba, told through a Yoruba-centric lens. In Adeyemi's book, Orisha is a city haunted by its past. Zelie is one of the many *Maji*—which the colonisers derogatorily call “maggots”—living with the trauma of this past. This setting is reflective of Africa's present-day haunting from its colonial past. These hauntings exist in the form of colonial legacies and agencies that have been absorbed into the culture. Memory work within the frame of African apocalypse allows us to grapple with the past's haunting while also living with the violence of the present (Schwab, 2007, 2). As Bekolo (379) argues, the past is a present continuum; or, stated otherwise, the past is the present. Thus, the colonial past is a trauma-filled present.

Toni Morrison (1984, 385) defines memory itself as a deliberate act of remembering—not an act that seeks to discover the exact state of the past, but one focused on the way it appeared and the reason for that particular appearance. Such remembering begins the creative process, and therefore deserves respect, regardless of the size of what is remembered. According to Morrison, memory work is significant for two reasons: because it is the beginning of the

² In the sense that it had original systems that worked for the people because they governed themselves. Not to be mistaken for the idealization of past African social life and structures.

creative process, and because of her distrust of the representations of Black people and cultures by non-Black people in literature and sociology (386).

In a similar argument, Esther Ohito (2023) suggests that memory work may serve as a Black feminist research method that reveals and interprets suppressed autobiographical memories that trigger heavy emotions. According to Ohito, each person is an end-product of both individual and collective memories and geographical histories. For this reason, memory has an effect on the present, possessing the power to initiate continuity of life by fusing the present experience with past meaning, a continuum of its colonial past. Ani states: “we used the memory of our Ancestral self to reconnect with a ‘world view’ (the Reality; the Truth) that we were free, self-determining and Sovereign” (“Reverberations,” 27). In other words, memory work goes beyond a recollection of past, instead creating a reconnection to the past that informs living Africans of their worthiness and identity in the present.

But memory work is not always a replay of past personal experience. It can also be the act of recalling what one has learned or observed. Schwab (2007, 11) explores her relationship with the Holocaust, which came not from personal experience in the period, but from the knowledge gleaned from her teenage years in high school. Ani (2024) explains that this process of remembering/recalling is done through “gene memory,” the concept that the body remembers, and that what is remembered is passed down through generations biologically. Thus, gene memory allows descendants to witness the past indirectly, and in this way, Africans display cultural resistance in the colonial apocalypse (Ani, “Reverberations,” 27–28).

Schwab (2024, 13) describes this remembering of a past not directly experienced as post-memory, a term she borrowed from Hirsch. Where Ani (2024) argues that such unwitnessed memories are a part of the genetic composition of African people, Schwab describes post-memory as constructed as memory itself (14). It includes recounted stories and memories of first-hand experiences passed down to the descendants of those directly involved, meaning that descendants have to use whatever tools or means available to piece together a history they did not witness. While this may include ephemera, it may also include grief, silence, anger, a lack of hope, and inherited mood swings (Schwab, 14). In writing *Children of Blood and Bone*, Adeyemi confessed to experiencing some of these emotions—particularly grief, tears, and rage. She also credits her mother, whom she consulted on the oral history of the Yoruba culture, spiritual beliefs, and language translation, for helping to craft the setting of the book. Memory work is thus key to Adeyemi’s approach to magical realism, and a central part of Afrofuturist creativity.

Reanimating Africa’s Pasts and Presents

Slavery and deities

Adeyemi’s Afrofuturist storytelling enables the reanimation of African pasts within Black diasporic presents, as her incorporation of Yoruba deities, spiritual practices, and geography transforms histories shaped by slavery and colonial violence into living, resistant imaginaries. Inspiration for *Children of Blood and Bone* came to Adeyemi (2018) at a store in Brazil, where she first encountered the Orisha. Orisha are lifeforces symbolised as deities in Yoruba traditional ontology. The Yoruba are the second-largest ethnic group situated in present-day southwest Nigeria, which is home to over 250 ethnic groups. Aribidesi Usman and Toyin Falola (2019) report that an estimated 1.12 million Yoruba were enslaved and exported to the Americas, beginning in the later part of the sixteenth century. In the process, these Orisha

deities were exported out of the region through the transatlantic slave trade, and spread into the Americas—especially Brazil, Haiti, and Cuba—between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries (Mitchell 1988). Despite the horrors of slavery and the physical distancing of a people from their origins, the Yoruba traditional religion thrived among the slaves as a way of staying connected to their roots and spiritual beliefs. However, slaves were brought to the Americas from different ethnicities in West Africa, and because each ethnicity had its own traditional form of spiritual worship, enslaved people created an intermix of their beliefs to create new versions of African spirituality. For example, in Brazil, where Adeyemi was first introduced to the Orisha (or Orishas) and where the highest population of Nigerians out of Nigeria can be found (BBC What's New; Adeyemi 2018), Yoruba spirituality evolved into the Macumba. Adeyemi's choice to name the setting of her story Orisha is a portrayal of the magic and power that is, in reality, the Orisha. In other words, this fictional land in West Africa is a land filled with magic that was suppressed by an evil monarchy, a recapturing of precolonial and colonial Yoruba society—a past to which Adeyemi bore no direct witness.

Adeyemi's positionality is critical to this creative process. As Shwab (2007) emphasises, (quoting Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub), “art inscribes (art bears witness to) what we do not yet know of our lived historical relation to events of our time” (7). Schwab further explains that making trauma accessible requires the establishment of a form that interprets “into language or symbolic expression” a historic occurrence we are unaware is imprinted as nothing but a “trace on the affective and corporeal levels” (8). Therefore, art and literature act as transformational objects by bestowing symbolism upon this unconscious knowledge, converting its status and making it easy for other people to access. It is imperative to note here that Adeyemi herself is of Yoruba heritage, and therefore was fascinated by this piece of historical knowledge of which she had been unaware. Hence, in this encounter, she began the memory work required for her book. In recreating these experiences that she may not have lived, but nonetheless felt connected to, Adeyemi dug into the geographical, cultural, and religious history of her people. Adeyemi spun the stereotype of Africa as a jungle into a romanticised fantasy, where animals such as lions—referred to as “lionaires” in the book—are ridden by her characters as a means of transportation. Each village and community in the story was named after real locations in Nigeria that have existed for centuries. For example, in the book, the city of Ilorin, Zelié's hometown, is, in reality, the administrative capital of the multiethnic state of Kwara in Southwest Nigeria. Ibeji, the desert city in which Zelié and her companions discovered a large population of mistreated slaves who were forced to fight each other at the coliseum with the false promise of eternal life, is the preferred alias for the town of Igbo-Ora in the state of Oyo (2018). Also, the town of Jimeta, which Adeyemi describes as dangerous and lawless in her book, can be found in the modern-day state of Adamawa.

Divinities, too, draw directly from Yoruba realities, as Adeyemi incorporates names, terminologies, and roles from the ancient Yoruba religion that are still in practice in contemporary times, such as *mamalawo* and *Oya*. *Mamalawos* are female diviners who act as intercessors between humans and the deities. *Oya*, described by Adeyemi as the goddess with the power over death, is one of the many Orisha deities responsible for weather, thunderstorms, lightning, hurricanes, and tornadoes. She is the goddess of weather in Yoruba spiritual mythology, through which she grants life or death, depending on her mood. Mama Agba, the *Mamalawo* who ran the secret magic-training school that Zelié attended, also represents the wisdom of the elderly in Yoruba culture. The Yoruba believe that the elderly are bearers of a deep knowledge from their accumulated experiences—hence the common saying among African elders, “What an elder sees sitting down, a young one can never see, even if he climbs the highest mountain.”

While immense respect is given to elders by the young in numerous African cultures, in the Yoruba culture, this has always had a particular centrality. Despite these values, preserving ethnocultural ideologies and practices in a space where the colonial narrative of African identities persist remains challenging, as in the case of postcolonial Nigeria.

Resilience and Resistance: Magically Real Transformations in Afrofuturistic Storytelling

For Black women, Afrofuturist and magically real storytelling transforms resilience into a feminist practice of resistance through which new ways of dreaming, being, belonging, and becoming are made possible—a practice we witness in Adeyemi. An interview with Adeyemi's brother in which he reflected Adeyemi's strengths as a writer (Adeyemi 2018) offers some insights into the importance of storytelling. According to him, Adeyemi cleaved to the magic with which she was born. He explained that all children are born with magic, the belief of possibilities, and capacity to achieve anything they imagine or dream; however, most people gradually lose this belief as they age. To him, his sister embodied a resilience of spirit and a craving for an alternative possibility beyond her reality. This commitment to dreaming is realised through her storytelling.

In light of this, resilience can therefore be a form of resistance to the present narrative. It may be a rejection of the norms one is presented with and a demand for a different future. Adeyemi's own story of becoming a bestseller writer—whose novel was turned into a movie—is itself one such form of resistance to colonial narratives. In a BBC interview, Adeyemi explained that, as a child, she never imagined that it could be possible for her to be a successful writer because the celebrated authors she was exposed to in her childhood were all white. Race made it challenging for her to envision herself as a successful writer, because success was attributed with whiteness. Despite this, she did not stop herself from dreaming alternative realities, as she created a literary work that celebrated Blackness and her African heritage. Georgis (2020, 1) defines this type of resilience as not “a fight against something, but the desire for something otherwise.” In other words, dreaming was Adeyemi's way of dealing with the impact of a colonial and racialised trauma she did not witness directly (in terms of colonial histories), but the effects of which she had suffered. She would eventually realise this dream, impossible as it initially seemed to her.

Adeyemi's dream also manifests as a harnessing of Black feminism. Georgis (2020, 4) explains that the impulse to play and create (which she terms a queer affect because it is neither driven nor influenced by already established rules of life and living) is “insubordinate to rules, laws or knowledge” and while the goal of creation is life, insubordination could be a consequence, “disrupting the social environment”. Adeyemi chooses to celebrate Blackness in her work by making the book's heroes and protagonists primarily women. Through strong characters like Mama Agba, Zelig, Amari, interactions with Tzain, and the *mamalawos*, she depicts Black women as strong and independent-minded, capable of overcoming oppression through determination and action. For Adeyemi, while dreaming may have been an adaptive coping mechanism/a mental act of resilience, writing the book was a transformative resistance to the existing and normalised colonial narrative of her people.

Resilience in Afrofuturist storytelling is not just about Black women reclaiming themselves: it offers opportunities to reimagine and recreate new relationships, accountability, and repair by resisting colonial violence. Adeyemi's story of the friendship between the characters Zelig and Amari does just that. Amari was *Kosidan*, the only daughter of the evil monarch

who ruled Orisha. At first, Amari was unaware of her father's use of violence against the *Maji*. Through her relationships with *Maji*, she began to understand her father's unjust behaviours. When she witnesses her father murder her friend, an enslaved *Maji* who served as her maid, Amari responds by seizing a scroll from her father that was key to the *Maji*'s freedom from enslavement, and flees the palace. When Amari and Zelig's paths cross, Zelig mistrusts Amari because of her traumatic memories of the violence her people had faced and whose daughter she was. However, as the two girls encountered obstacle after obstacle on the journey to the temple, Amari repeatedly proved her devotion—not just to Zelig, but to the search for truth and to right all that her bloodline had done wrong. Through their journey, Amari and Zelig forge a new and strong relationship in the process. Through Amari's story, Adeyemi gives space for accountability after apocalyptic colonial violence. Amari is shown as a perpetrator, a victim, and someone who can actively participate in the process of repair. Amari chooses to acknowledge the truth about her people's horrific actions, and actively works with Zelig to restore the glory of Orisha. This storyline offers the radical hope that it is indeed possible for the descendants of victims and perpetrators to work together in the present to correct the errors of the past. Adeyemi, through this, reaffirms Schwab's (2007) idea that action, not silence, particularly from descendants of perpetrators, is the way to deal with violent histories and to create a future of peaceful coexistence.

Conclusion

From the above analysis, we can see that the genre of magical realism in Afrofuturistic literature as a decolonising movement can and does play a doubly significant role: it serves as both a coping strategy in the present, and as a way of reimagining the future of Black people around the world. Although rooted in a Yoruba ethno-cultural worldview, Adeyemi's work represents the collective struggle of Black people and depicts how coping is itself a space of resistance and hope, as portrayed through creativity. Through *Children of Blood and Bones*, Adeyemi opened the door to both Afro-Indigenous writers and artists in the diaspora and back home in Africa to ongoing discussions of Indigeneity, serving as a bridge between Africans on the continent, and diasporic people of African heritage.

Both Bekolo (2024) and Ani (2024) also speak of the trap of the seemingly unending present, especially when it is characterised by forgetfulness of the past, despite continuous resistance to the disruption to Africa's self-autonomy and sacred circle since its onset. As Ani explains, Africa is more than a territorial location: it is also the innate spirit that resides within each individual, the magic that lives within its people, irrespective of separation. It is in the genes: it is in the cultural genes of Africans, and in this apocalypse, it expresses itself creatively through art and literature. To reimagine the future of Africa, therefore, it becomes imperative for Afro-creatives to access these cultural genes to engage in memory work—to remember and seek further knowledge of the nature and form of Africa's lost magic ("Reverberations," 30). Afrofuturism is an aspect of this reconnection to the innate spirit and lost magic. Ani (2024) argues that a fantasmic expression of the Afrofuture could allow for the revitalization of the Circle (the magic, narratives, worldviews, and identities of African people) that was fragmented by colonisers. Afrofuturism thus contributes to an organising movement that reinvigorates the Circle through a shared vision and unified action.

Afrofuturism continues to create multiple scenarios that provide options for Black people to realise a future of freedom, while navigating the present day-to-day challenges of living in the apocalypse. Memory work remains a relevant element of this re-creation. Ani (2024) and Bekolo (2024) explain that, based on African worldviews, imaginations of the future depend

on the recollections of the past in the present. This interdependent relationship between past, present, and future impacts an oppressed people's individual and collective visions of the future—impacts that are critical to any work that seeks to support the wellbeing of those of African heritage. As Wallace and Schwartz (2022, 2) drawing from the words of Alisha B. Wormsley (2018) affirm, “Afrofuturism dares to suggest that not only will Black people exist in the future, but that we will be makers and shapers of it too.”

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