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Black Female Objecthood, Sexuality, and Necropolitics in Afrofuturism:
An Examination of Nnedi Okorafor's *Who Fears Death*

Nnedi Okorafor's gripping afrofuturist text *Who Fears Death* presents a multi-faceted way of viewing objectification of the body, particularly through the lens of race and sexuality. Okorafor creates a post-apocalyptic African setting in which people are divided into hierarchical racial groups. The treatment of these groups, particularly the Ewu people, based solely on race exemplifies the objectification of black bodies as seen in the times of slavery, abolitionism, and beyond. Additionally, the author presents complicated views of black female sexuality by incorporating scenes of actualized and attempted rape, female circumcision, and pleasurable, consensual sex. By examining the experiences of the female characters in the novel, specifically the protagonist, Onyesonwu, in relationship to black female objectification, several tensions are exposed. In light of literary criticism on the afrofuturism genre and the theory of necropolitics, Onyesonwu represents hundreds of years of racial and sexual objectification while at the same time, she symbolizes a future possibility for black women to obtain agency. In this way, the novel incorporates the "what was *and* what if" aspects of afrofuturism that Alondra Nelson writes on in "Introduction: Future Texts." Thus, as an afrofuturist text, *Who Fears Death* utilizes elements of the past, present, and future in discussing black female racial and sexual objectification and ultimately demonstrates the potential for a future society in which black women are able to overcome these constraints and become sovereign, fully realized subjects.

Okorafor's novel first provides a striking presentation of the body as object through the concept of race. In the setting in which the novel takes place, race is divided into three main

categories. The Nuru are the lightest skinned and most powerful racial group. The Okeke are dark-skinned and are powerfully oppressed by the Nuru through acts of genocide and sexual violence. The most ill-treated and commonly despised racial group is called the Ewu. Ewu people are sand-colored with light eyes and freckles and are produced mainly from violent situations in which Nuru men rape Okeke women. Because of this, Ewu people are thought to be sub-human, violent, drains on society. Their skin color acts as an objectifying marker for the rest of their lives and prevents them from having any subjectivity. Any individualism or interiority is overshadowed simply due to the color of their skin. For instance, in Onyesonwu's first-person narrative voice, she tells the reader, "I was trouble from the moment I was conceived. I was a black stain. A poison" (14). The word choice here points to the blatant objectification of the Ewu people. Due to the color of her skin, Onyesonwu is thought of as an object or thing rather than a subjective person. This is powerfully evident through the way in which people of other races react to her. For example, in a flashback, Onyesonwu is depicted as an infant strapped to her mother's back, being taken through a marketplace. As the townspeople notice the mother and child, they shout "*Ewu* carrier!" and "*Ewu* child!" at them (29). Afterward, the townspeople throw stones at them and Onyesonwu is struck in the head. The violence in this scene demonstrates the deeply-entrenched objectification of Ewu people in the novel. The fact that Onyesonwu is a helpless infant does not protect her from the effects of her skin color. Interestingly, Okorafor italicizes the word *Ewu* throughout the novel. This stylistic choice makes the word stand out as being different and separate from everything else in the narrative, just as the Ewu people are treated as "others" and oppressed solely on the basis of their race.

Racial objectification is a long-standing phenomenon that goes back hundreds of years and is most notably discussed in the case of slavery. Slavery created a system in which white

slave owners bought and sold black slaves in order to help run their homes, businesses, and plantations. In her article “Objectification,” Martha Nussbaum defines slavery as a “form of ownership” that “entails a denial of autonomy, and it also entails the use of the slave as a mere tool of the purposes of the owner.” She goes on to write that, “Once one treats a human being as a thing one may buy or sell, one is ipso facto treating that human being as a tool of one’s own purposes” (264). As emphasized in this thought-provoking piece, the enslaved condition automatically objectifies the slave in that the slave is treated as a literal tool for the slave owner’s use. Black slaves were treated as property or things, and thus they were not able to claim agency for themselves in the way white slave owners were. This form of power structures, separation, and objectification based on race parallels the way in which race functions in Okorafor’s novel. While all black people were treated as objects in the historical time of slavery regardless of how light or dark their skin was, *Who Fears Death* utilizes this same systemic issue in the portrayal of the Ewu people in particular. In this way, Okorafor incorporates the past experience of slavery in her post-apocalyptic treatment of racial objectification.

An additional way in which black bodies were historically objectified was in the case of freak shows and exhibits. It was typical for slaves and even free black people to be put on display for paying audiences. One such case is of Sarah Bartman, otherwise known as the “Hottentot Venus.” In the article “Reclaiming the Body of the ‘Hottentot,’” author Priscilla Netto writes that Bartman, a black, colonized woman, was “exhibited as a ‘freak’ and a ‘savage monstrosity’ around Europe due to the protuberant size of her buttocks and her ‘apron’” (150). In this way, her body was literally turned into an object – something for audiences to gawk and point at. She had no individual voice or autonomy in this situation. Rather, she was reduced to the confines of her own body and the “colonial gaze” (149). The horrific objectification of her

body was not restricted to her lifetime. Even after her death, Bartman's body was dissected, examined, and put on display. Through this objectifying process, Netto writes, "Sarah Bartman became a stereotype of Black female primitivism." This contributed "to the then European colonial belief that Africans were closer to the order of animals than to humankind" (150). In this way, Bartman was stripped of any interiority or subjectivity. The dissection and medical examination process furthered the objectification of her body and pushed it to an even more invasive, startling degree. Also, by placing her dissected remains in a museum in Paris for spectators to gaze upon for over 150 years, Bartman was never able to retain any humanity or agency. Both in life and death, she was treated as a sub-human object for the visual consumption of masses of people due to her race and body.

Displaying black bodies in exhibits and other forms of public gatherings continued into times of abolitionism. In her article "Reification and Resistance: The Rhetoric of Black Womanhood at the Columbian Exposition, 1893," Laura Behling first describes a common practice at abolitionist meetings. She writes, "...no abolitionist meeting was complete without a Black speaker or a Black exhibit (a fugitive slave)' who would turn his or her back to the audience and display the wounds and scars of slavery" (173). In this case, their race and experience as a slave permanently marked them as a spectacle for others to look at and visually examine. The objectification of their bodies did not end even after they were no longer slaves. It was something from which they could never escape, just as Onyesonwu and Ewu people in Okorafor's novel are not able to shed their tan-colored skin and break the bonds of racial objectification.

Behling furthers her discussion of objectification of the body and focuses it specifically on black women. She asserts, "Black women's subjectivity, the sense of themselves as

autonomous individuals, relied on defining themselves by what they were not. They were not white, a social status that carried validity, nor were they men, a sexual status that proved even more powerful...Black women occupied a zone of objecthood simply because there was no place else in which they could exist” (174). Here Behling makes the interesting point that black women in particular were forced into being objects due to their precarious situation in society. Both race and gender combined to put them in the position of permanent objectification. The concept of gendered objectification is evident in other historical accounts of exhibits as well.

Perhaps one of the most startling and strange historical stories of an objectifying exhibit is one brought out in Uri McMillan’s book *Embodied Avatars: Genealogies of Black Feminist Art and Performance*. McMillan details a touring exhibit in the 1830s of “a putative ancient negress, staged as ‘Joice Heth, George Washington’s nursemaid’” (24). As was seen in all of these types of events, “the freak shows privileged ‘objectification, exaggerated corporeality or physical pliancy, and the body-made spectacle’” (50). Although the exhibit was a complete lie, audiences were drawn to the woman’s body and the mysticism of her supposed 161-year-old life. Once again, a black body was utilized by a white person (P.T. Barnum in this case) in order to draw crowds and money. While the woman’s blackness was obviously a large reason for her position in the show, her gender also had a profound impact. McMillan writes that black female bodies were “‘not off-limits, untouchable, or unseeable’” (26). Black women were essentially objectified on two separate counts. These factors caused them to be displayed as objects throughout their entire lives, not just in the cases of these freak shows. They were permanently stripped of subjectivity and agency and confined to their bodies based on race and sex. As is seen in the cases of Sarah Bartman the “Hottentot Venus,” the fugitive slaves in abolitionist meetings, and the portrayal of Joice Heth, the objectification of black people, particularly women, was

pervasive in the eras of slavery and abolitionism. Okorafor uses the Ewu people, predominantly Onyesonwu, to demonstrate and connect with these past forms of bodily objectification. Additionally, she brings sexual objectification into conversation through several complex treatments of it throughout the novel.

Through scenes of rape, attempted rape, and female circumcision, Okorafor first presents the female body as an object and female sexuality as something that needs to be controlled or limited. In one of the most graphic scenes in the novel, a group of Okeke women, including Onyesonwu's mother, are raped by Nuru men. This act of sexual violence is a strong and powerful example of sexual objectification. Right away women are portrayed as sexual objects for the taking rather than subjective free agents. This is further portrayed later in the novel when Onyesonwu ends up in a town in which Ewu women are made to be sex workers. As a group of men attempt to sexually assault her, she notices no one comes to her aid even though she cries out for help. Bystanders simply watch the incident take place. Onyesonwu narrates, "In this lovely town of art and culture, people did nothing when an Ewu woman was dragged into a dark alley and raped. *This is what happened to my mother, I thought. And Bintu. And countless other Okeke women. Women. The walking dead*" (221). This passage points to the deeply-entrenched notions of women and sex in this post-apocalyptic world. Sexual assault on women is so commonplace that no amount of education or culture changes the way in which women are treated. Due to Onyesonwu's position as an Ewu woman she is immediately denigrated to the position of sexual object. She is thought of as a sexual tool for use by men and not a person with power, agency, or interiority. Also, by referencing Ewu, Okeke, and all women in general, Okorafor highlights the crux of the issue. Sexual objectification goes beyond race and involves all women. Just as black people in times of slavery were reduced to objects due to their skin

color, all women are reduced to sexual objects due to their gender in the novel. In this way, Okorafor furthers this idea of the body as object and shows how women in general are sexually objectified.

Another way Okorafor powerfully includes sexual objectification in the novel is through a ritual that takes place in the town of Jwahir called the Eleventh Year Rite. In this ritual, girls who are eleven years old are circumcised. By removing their clitoris, they are considered clean and acceptable to society. However, the removal of this flesh prevents them from feeling any sexual pleasure. In fact, a juju is placed on them during the circumcision which causes the girls to feel intense pain anytime they are aroused. The only way the juju is lifted is through marriage. Several layers of objectification are present through this ritual. First, the girls are immediately reduced to objectified bodies through the act of the circumcision itself. Cutting them and removing a piece of their body in this way, under the thinking that it will somehow improve or cleanse them, causes the issue to become all about their physical bodies rather than who they are as subjective people. Additionally, this procedure causes their sexuality to become something that is limited and controlled. In a conversation with her male partner Mwita, Onyesonwu says, “...we’ve been raised to feel that it’s wrong to open our legs, even when we want to. We weren’t brought up to be free as...as you were” (289). The pain the girls feel when they are aroused causes them to feel that their sexual desires are wrong. While men are allowed to pursue their desires and act on them, the girls and women in this society are extremely constrained and limited. The circumcision causes their sexuality to be something that is controlled and monitored by community, rather than something that each individual girl can express freely. Also, the fact that the juju is only lifted when they get married to a man creates a troubling power dynamic in which the institution of marriage and men stand in control over a woman’s sexual subjectivity.

At one point Luyu, one of Onyesonwu's friends, says that they are, "...tricked into thinking [their] husbands are gods" (86). Due to this situation, female sexuality is only something that can be explored and enjoyed within the confines of a certain set of boundaries. This makes it so women never truly have complete authority over their own sexuality.

The article "Searching for Climax: Black Erotic Lives in Slavery and Freedom" explores this idea of female sexuality, first in the context of slavery. Authors Jessica Maria Johnson and Treva B. Lindsey discuss how the system of slavery presented a way of life in which sexual violence was made routine. They write, "Serial rape of enslaved black women by slave owners/masters and forced sexual activity of all kinds, from breeding to coerced intimacy, was deeply embedded in the institutionalization of white supremacy and domination, and has become central to how we imagine the period of slavery" (173). This dynamic of master and slave strongly relates to the relationship between women and men in Okorafor's novel. Just as Onyesonwu and the other female character's sexuality is under the control of community and men, black female slaves had no say in whether or not they would engage in sexual contact with their masters. Additionally, similar to how Nuru men rape Okeke women in order to produce a societally enslaved group of people (the Ewu), slave masters would sexually assault female slaves in order to produce more slaves to use as objectified bodies and tools in the future. This caused enslaved women to become "violated products" (179). Through the rape of enslaved women by slave masters, black female bodies were used as objects for pleasure and use by men. This effectively took subjective sexuality out of the hands of black women entirely and caused it to become a product that was under the authority of the slave masters. While *Who Fears Death* is set in a future world, it is clear the structure of master and slave in the past is something that transcends time and is integrated in Okorafor's Afrofuturist text.

Due to the nature of this time period, Johnson and Lindsey write that the historical era of slavery was a time of “dehumanization and dispossession” that “messily complicates the meaning of consent, complicity, and agency for enslaved black people” (171). The troubling nature of rape in the context of the master and slave structure often overshadows the fact that enslaved women had sexual needs and desires. Johnson and Lindsey argue that enslaved black women should be reimagined in a way that opens them up to being erotic subjects with interiority rather than constantly being portrayed only as victims of a power dynamic. By reconfiguring the way in which black female slaves are depicted, it is possible to break these presuppositions and recognize black women as people with natural sexual needs. They go on to use several modern-day artistic examples to demonstrate the troubling effects of tying black female sexuality to slavery and not allowing women of color to be actualized, erotic subjects, even within the confines of the oppressive system of slavery.

In Johnson and Lindsey’s first modern-day example, they discuss a comedic video entitled “The Harriet Tubman Sex Tape” which depicts a fictional Tubman engaging in sex with a slaveowner. The film makes it clear that the Tubman figure is willingly engaging in this encounter and coming from a place of power and resistance. Reactions to the video were incredibly and overwhelmingly negative. The outrage in response to the video was due to the perception of who Tubman was amidst the notions of slavery and serial rape. Johnson and Lindsey write, “Tubman’s position as a sacred historical figure limits our ability to think about her as an erotic subject with desires and intimate needs situated in the profane” (175). While the video may miss the mark of good comedy, it sheds a light on this systemic issue of confining black female sexuality due to the discomfort and truth of what happened during the period of slavery. The deeply-entrenched dynamic of the master and slave makes it hard to allow room in

the public's consciousness for the notion of an interior sexuality enslaved black women possessed.

Another example the authors use to highlight this tension between black female sexuality and repression of it at the hands of memories of the past is a sculpture entitled the Sugar Sphinx by Kara Walker. The sculpture featured, "...a kerchief on her head...full lips, wide nose, and exposed breasts, buttocks, and labia..." (185). The reactions to the sculpture are most fascinating in that they ranged from disgust to actually engaging with the art by taking sexualized photos with it (mimicking fondling her breasts, licking her, etc.) Johnson and Lindsey assert that, "The ease with which the Sugar Sphinx becomes an object of desire, ridicule, and hyper-sexualization emphasizes the need for a new grammar of black female bodies" (186). What occurred with this exhibit was, in several ways, an extension of the objectification of black women's bodies that was seen in times of slavery. Rather than being able to study the piece and recognize the fact that enslaved women had erotic, natural desires, many people went straight to objectifying it and turning it into a sexual object for use by the spectator. Treating the sculpture this way recalls the violent and dehumanizing ways in which enslaved black women were treated. This lack of awareness that female slaves had sexual needs and desires, even within the confines of slavery, is evident in both cases of "The Harriet Tubman Sex Tape" and the Sugar Sphinx exhibit.

One example the authors use that does represent black female sexuality in times of slavery is a scene from the film *12 Years a Slave*. In contrast to the typical scenes of forced sexual violence as normally seen in films depicting slavery, this scene shows a black woman engaging in mutual masturbation with a man. Johnson and Lindsey analyze this scene by writing, "This filmic encounter with an enslaved black woman's interior life offers a point of departure for imagining the ambiguity of creating sexual lives and performing sexual acts that might fulfill

a desire for pleasurable sensation” (183). This scene is groundbreaking in that it portrays an enslaved black woman as a subjective person possessing sexual desires and actually acting on them. The woman is able to engage in sexual behaviors that people in all other walks of life are entitled to but that are normally not shown in regard to women in times of slavery. Thus, this scene stands as an example of a way in which black female sexual interiority can be represented, even within the setting of an objectifying time period or situation.

Okorafor utilizes these complicated issues in her integration of female sexuality in the novel by incorporating the confining elements of the past while also opening up female characters to a sexual interiority. As is seen in the discussion of the instances of rape, attempted rape, and female circumcision, female sexuality is something that is controlled and taken out of the hands of women, just as it was in the time of slavery. When female characters actually do try to freely explore their sexuality, they are often met with pushback or resistance of some kind. For instance, Diti, one of Onyesonwu’s friends, says, “Men always think that when a woman enjoys herself, she must be a prostitute” (241). In this post-apocalyptic society, female sexuality is still incredibly limited. In this case, anytime a woman expresses some amount of sexuality, she is thought to be a sex worker. Evidently the expression of sexual desire is uncommon from women who aren’t prostitutes because of the societal constraints put on it. In contrast, Okorafor allows Onyesonwu and her mother to both break their physical objecthood in different ways and exert agency, thus opening up a physical and sexual interiority for female characters.

As the novel progresses, the reader learns that Onyesonwu’s mother is a magical sorceress. Interestingly, after she is sexually assaulted and impregnated, she uses these powers to maneuver things within her body in order to birth a female. This demonstrates that even within a situation in which control of her own body is seemingly taken entirely away from her, she is still

able to demonstrate agency and have enough power over her body to give birth to the specific gender she wants. In this way, Okorafor allows for a female character to break the objectifying restraints put on women in this society. This idea is most strikingly represented in a scene in which Onyesonwu uses her powers as an Eshu to grow her own clitoris back so that she can enjoy sex with her partner Mwita without having to marry him. She says, “That tiny piece of flesh made all the difference. Growing it back hadn’t been hard and it pleased me that for once in my life obtaining something of importance was easy” (140). By using her powers in this way and physically overcoming the circumcision she went through as a young girl, Onyesonwu takes control over her own body and sexuality. She no longer must feel pain due to the outside force that inflicted these rules and confines on her in the first place. Also, through engaging in consensual, pleasurable sex outside of the marriage arrangement, she is able to depart from the societal limitations placed on women and partake in sex in the ways men can. The fact that she is able to grow her clitoris back easily further demonstrates her power over the situation. It is not an exhaustive process through which she must struggle. Rather, it is something she does with ease which reinforces this portrayal of her as a strong, subjective agent who is able to overcome her own objectification. Later in the novel, Onyesonwu also uses her powers to help her friends grow their clitorises back as well so that all the girls from the initial circumcision scene are finally able to partake in and enjoy sex. Through these various aspects of female sexuality in *Who Fears Death*, Okorafor incorporates elements of black female sexual objectification, as seen in the period of slavery, while also demonstrating ways in which women are able to overcome this and exercise agency.

The concept of racial and sexual objectification in times of slavery and beyond is made more complicated in light of the article “Necropolitics” by J.A. Mbembe and Libby Meintjes and

Onyesonwu's character in particular. In their theory of necropolitics, the authors first outline the elements that make up the slave condition. According to the authors, the slave condition is defined by "loss of a 'home,' loss of rights over his or her body, and loss of political status." These components combine to create a form of "death-in-life" (21). In several ways, Onyesonwu embodies this slave/death-in-life condition. At the beginning of the novel, she and her mother are nomads wandering the desert. When they eventually settle in the town of Jwahir, Onyesonwu is never entirely accepted due to her race as an Ewu, and never has a true home or political voice. Rather, she is always treated as the abnormal outcast. Additionally, she has no rights over her body as everyone identifies her either by her race or sex rather than her subjective person. Seemingly, Onyesonwu represents this walking dead, slave condition entirely in that through her position as an Ewu woman she does not have control over her own life. This parallels the descriptions of slavery, particularly regarding enslaved women, presented in the "Searching for Climax article" in that in both cases, women do not possess subjectivity and are thus in a condition of death-in-life. However, by examining the theory of necropolitics in conjunction with the conclusion of the novel, it is clear that Onyesonwu stands as an example of a black woman who is able to break the bonds of her race and sex entirely.

In the "Necropolitics" article, Mbembe and Meintjes introduce the concept of the "sovereign agent." The sovereign agent is described as someone with the power to decide who lives and who dies. This enhances the line of thinking of female sexuality and objectification as discussed in the "Searching for Climax" article in that the notion of the sovereign agent moves past the conversation of the body as object or sexual agency and encompasses the totality of life and death itself. At the end of the novel, Onyesonwu moves beyond taking control over her own

sexuality and body and becomes a sovereign agent by having the power to kill men, create a child within herself and other women, and ultimately overcome her destiny to die as a sacrifice.

After a violent encounter with her biological father in which her partner Mwita is killed, Onyesonwu takes drastic action with her powers as an Eshu and ends up causing several things to happen. First, just as her mother maneuvered things in her body in order to have a daughter, Onyesonwu manipulates her body in order to conceive a child. In reference to Mwita's sperm, she says, "He was still inside me. He was still alive. I felt them in me, swimming, wriggling. I was not at my moon's peak but I made it so. I moved my egg to meet what I could find of Mwita's life" (398). In this moment, Onyesonwu demonstrates that she is not only able to have control over her physical body, but she is able to have power over life itself as well. By taking matters into her own hands and physically causing herself to become pregnant, she exerts tremendous agency and shows she has authority over life outside her own. Interestingly, through this moment of conception, she also ends up killing every male in the town who is capable of impregnating a woman while also causing the nearby women in town to become pregnant. The juxtaposition of these two phenomena directly translates to the idea of the sovereign agent. In this incident Onyesonwu clearly proves she has enough power to control the forces of life and death. This power goes beyond her own life and body and encompasses hundreds of other lives, including her own child. In addition to having this control over life and death, by killing all the fertile men, Onyesonwu triumphs over the issues of sexual violence and masculine, enslaving constraints that have plagued her people and all women in this society. She herself has the authority to take and give life and therefore goes far beyond the initial limits placed on her.

Onyesonwu also demonstrates she is a sovereign agent by breaking her destiny as a mere sacrifice and exercising her power to live. On her journey, Onyesonwu learns she is fated to

sacrifice herself in order to end the genocide of her people and to rewrite the Great Book (a religious text that reinforces the sexual and racial objectification pervasive in this society). She sees in her future that she will be buried and stoned to death and seemingly has no way to change her fate. However, it is revealed to the reader she overcomes this permanent, destined death by shapeshifting and ultimately living. First, Onyesonwu is depicted as being killed which in turn causes the rewriting of the Great Book; but in the last chapter, it is made clear that she ultimately uses her magical gifts and lives in order to “live in the very world she helped remake” (416). Interestingly, in this section, the narrative voice changes to a third-person narrator. The reader is no longer allowed deep within Onyesonwu’s personal thoughts. In this way, Onyesonwu as a character takes complete control over how her journey ends in the novel. She is no longer able to be analyzed or scrutinized by any outside force. Regarding the final outcome of Onyesonwu’s life, this third-person narrator says, “No, she was not a sacrifice to be made for the good of men and women, Okeke and Nuru alike. She was Onyesonwu. She had rewritten the Great Book. All was done” (418). While she does achieve the things that were set out for her to accomplish by initially dying, Onyesonwu takes ultimate control over her own life by not permanently dying as a sacrifice for her people. Instead, she uses her powers and demonstrates her role as the sovereign agent by having control over her own eternal life, as well as the well-being and lives of all her people.

As an afrofuturist novel, *Who Fears Death* allows for contemplation about a future possibility for black women. Alena Rettova, author of the article “Sci-Fi and Afrofuturism in the Afrophone Novel: Writing the Future and the Possible in Swahili and in Shona,” explains that afrofuturist texts “write the possible and the future” and recontextualize the past and future “in a way that changes the present” (159-61). Onyesonwu stands as an example for what is possible

for black women. As a female member of the Ewu race, she overcomes the pervasive societal constraints and objectification put on her by becoming a strong and powerful sovereign agent who is in full control of her own life and destiny. Going beyond that, she demonstrates she has tremendous power over the life and death of others and in this way breaks the systems of oppression in which she was born. Therefore, Onyesonwu as a strong female protagonist in this Afrofuturist text represents the possibility for black women to break out of the racial and sexual objectification that limits them and become subjective agents.

Okorafor's remarkable novel combines elements of racial and sexual objectification as seen in times of slavery in a post-apocalyptic African world in which black female subjectivity and agency is made highly complicated. The novel clearly makes reference to the time of slavery and abolitionism wherein black bodies were treated as objects and tools through the incorporation of differentiated racial groups and the way in which they are treated, specifically the Ewu. Okorafor also highlights the issues presented in the "Searching for Climax" article by including situations in which women's sexuality is limited or repressed while also showing ways in which Onyesonwu and other female characters are able to enjoy and express their sexuality. Ultimately, Onyesonwu overcomes her slave like/death-in-life condition by becoming a sovereign agent and controlling death and life. In this way, *Who Fears Death* weaves in elements of the past, present, and future in order to demonstrate a possibility for black women to forever overcome the objectification of their race and sex.

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