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Afrofuturist Women of the Water : Mami Wata, Sirens, Predators, Deities, Metamorphosis, and Survival



Gina Wisker

Women of the water play several roles in African-originated mythology and folklore, and latterly in Afrofuturism. They draw their energies from the beautiful seductive female water deity Mami Wata, who brings possibilities of wealth and longevity to those who engage with her, offering her gifts (although sometimes she responds with the opposite of positive experiences). They also draw their mixed energies from mermaids who, like the sirens of Greek mythology, appear in international folklore as dangerously seductive creatures born perhaps of the imagination, loneliness, and desperation of those long at sea.

These women of the water also have other roles in African and African American women's horror, the contemporary Gothic, and in Afrofuturism, which recalls and recreates magical histories, sometimes as a warning and sometimes to recuperate the damaged negative past, turning stories of enslavement into ones of agency and freedom.

While Tananarive Due notes, "I needed to address my fear that I would not be respected if I wrote about the supernatural" (2002), it is arguably through the supernatural and fantasy that we can interpret behaviours and events, and only then imagine otherwise.

Afrofuturism

In the "outro" to *Octavia's Brood* (Brown and Imarisha, 2015), Adrienne Maree Brown outlines a dynamic, forward-looking message of statutes or tools: one recognizing the power of science fiction, the other of agency in working to take forward different representations and actualized modes of being. They characterize afrofuturist work as challenging, visionary fiction, which:

explores current social issues through the lens of sci-fi; is conscious of identity and intersecting identities; centers those who have been marginalised; is aware of power inequalities; is realistic and hard but hopeful; shows change from the bottom up rather than the top down; highlights that change is collective; and is not neutral – its purpose is social change and societal transformation. The stories we tell can either reflect the society we are part of or transform it. If we want to bring new worlds into existence, then we need to challenge the narratives that uphold power dynamics and patterns. We call upon science fiction, fantasy, horror, magical realism, myth, and everything in between as we create and teach visionary fiction. (Brown and Imarisha, 2015, 279)

Others argue for the power of science fiction and Afrofuturism in creating alternative histories and futures (Bould, 2014, 2015; Csicsery-Ronay, 2012). Their emphasis is on values, imaginative

expression, and action, stressing the social justice work that these related forms of writing should engage with. The figure of Mami Wata and those of merpeople are used to explore historical, lingering and contemporary social issues as both a warning or an imaginative celebratory way forward.

Mami Wata

Mami Wata ('mother water') the water spirit, is seductive, rewarding, worshipped, and dangerous. At once beautiful, protective, seductive and dangerous, Mami Wata is celebrated throughout much of Africa and the African Atlantic and is believed to have overseas origins in both European-originated mermaids and Hindu gods. She "is often portrayed as a mermaid, a snake charmer or a combination of both ... She is not only sexy, jealous and beguiling but exists in the plural as part of a school of African water spirits" ("Who is Mami Wata?").

Wikipedia elaborates on her seductive activities abducting travellers, who then benefit financially and through enhancements to their looks through their interaction with her. Because of this, they and others return and leave her capital goods. She is persuasive and possibly ruthless, and seems to have much of the illusory promise accorded to mermaids as traditions tell "of the spirit abducting her followers or random people whilst they are swimming or boating. She brings them to her paradisiacal realm, which may be underwater, in the spirit world, or both. She might keep them there if she allows them to leave, they return home wealthier, and in dry clothing. These returnees often grow wealthier, more attractive, and more easygoing after the encounter" (Wikipedia).

There are many stories of river travellers coming across her grooming herself (like mermaids combing their hair) while admiring herself in a mirror. She will usually dive into the water, leave her possessions behind to be stolen by the traveller, then appear to the thief in his dreams demanding the return of her goods. She next demands he be sexually faithful to her and, if he agrees, he obtains riches. She has groups of worshippers but also prefers to interact with individuals, and has priests and mediums dedicated to her in Africa, the Americas, and in the Caribbean. Mami Wata is a powerful, lovely woman who seeks beautiful gifts "of delicious food and drink, alcohol, fragrant objects (such as pomade, powder, incense, and soap), and expensive goods like jewellery" (Wikipedia). Nowadays, she likes designer jewelry and Coca Cola. The picture painted is of a manipulative goddess who rewards her followers with money and looks. Finally, we are told she wants her followers to be healthy, wealthy, and her men faithful.

However, she's not represented as only seductive; she is also seen as dangerous and is blamed for all sorts of misfortune. In Cameroon, for example, Mami Wata is blamed for causing a strong undertow that kills swimmers. This will become important when we look at Tananarive Due's "The Lake" (2013). Mami Wata is a complex figure to read, at once beautiful and rewarding but also controlling, dangerous and mean. The figures of merpeople who appear in and carry the imaginative dark or liberating messages of several fantastic texts by African American women writers can be seen to grow from this powerful, energetic figure of Mami Wata as it is based in

West African lore. However, while Mami Wata appears as seductive, dangerous, materialistic, just as traditionally are sirens and mermaids, and is developed in this fashion by some African American women's work, Afrofuturist writing takes both Mami Wata and the mermaid into new waters, rewriting negative histories, and reconfiguring both as powerful figures of female freedom.

Mami Wata appears in a range of African and African American writing, so in Nnedi Okorafor's 2014 speculative fiction novel, *Lagoon*, an alien spaceship appears beneath the waters of Lagos Lagoon and the new arrivals cause transformations in the natural and human world. When the first alien ambassador sets foot on Bar Beach in human female form, then disappears into the sea, a local boy compares her to Mami Wata. Later, an antagonist interprets another alien in female form as Mami Wata and surrenders to her seduction, accompanying her into the sea to be transformed.

Mami Wata also appears in Nnedi Okorafor's *Akata Warrior* (2017).

She has been understood also as La Sirène, a Haitian siren figure like the ancient Greek sirens who tried to lure Odysseus onto the rocks to perish. Water dominates Haitian life, and there are many religious beliefs based on it. In Haitian lore, the Lord of the Water is Agwé (see Hopkinson's Agway the merchild, in *The New Moon's Arms*, 2007) and his consort is la Sirène, portrayed as a beautiful woman with a fish's tail, holding a mirror that acts as a portal between our mundane world and the mystical realm. Because she lives at the border (between the ordinary and the magical, between the world of land and the world of the ocean), la Sirène is the keeper of occult wisdom. She has a beautiful voice, is known as the Queen of the Choir, and owns a golden trumpet (anyone discovering it will live a life of wealth). While her image brings good luck particularly for sailors, and is frequently used on homes, on ships, and at lottery drawings, she is also demanding, and if people don't worship her reverently or they fail to pay their debts, she uses her physical and vocal beauty to lure them to an early grave. She is also reported to kidnap babies to raise them in her underwater lair.

La Sirène, whose number is 7 and whose bird is the dove, is a great ally and a terrifying enemy worshipped in Vodou ceremonies. She sounds as materialistic as Mami Wata, as her favourite offerings are cigarettes, seashells, desserts, and perfume. As a figure, la Sirène goes beyond mere reportings of mermaids, deepening the lore behind them and standing out as one of the most comprehensive and well recorded images of a mermaid. Annie in Tananarive Due's short story "The Lake" (2013), herself half French, resembles Mami Wata and also the legendary Haitian figure of la Sirène.

Mermaids, or more generally merpeople, are variously represented as the Other, alluring because different, free and powerful, of the water but also meant to be trapped, kept as trophies, deprived of freedom, kept for the use of others and displayed like sea creatures in some form of artificial ocean. This model of dichotomous representation lies behind the tales of their dangerous allure, their containment as objects for observation, and finally their metaphorical use as figures of transformation and empowerment, an imaginative movement forward through

rewriting a negative past and creating a free, transformed future. They are fascinating and diverse in themselves but are also used by writers to engage with issues of rewriting troubled histories of enslavement and dehumanization, so while some tales are more interested in the seductive side of Mami Wata or mermaids, others combine this with both exposure of the dark past and of slavery, imprisonment, and then move on to express the vitality and power of escape, self-actualization, rewriting the damaged past, speculating for a positive future through Afrofuturism.

The Water Phoenix Bola Ogun

Mermaids, Mami Wata, and la Sirène are linked with transformations (not always for the best) and latterly with Afrofuturism's rich focus on rewriting the damaged past, imagining a positive diverse future through escape into alternative modes of being. In "The Water Phoenix," being imprisoned for others' entertainment almost costs the mermaid her life. The film "The Water Phoenix" (2017), written, directed and starring herself as this dazzling sea creature, is a triumph for Bola Ogun, who expressed great frustration on trying to get films made as a marginalized person, as herself—a first generation Nigerian-American filmmaker. She turned to crowdfunding to get some of the funds needed for this short film to be completed and uploaded to Vimeo (by 2019), where in 2019 she reported 750,000 views. The synopsis begins: "When an imprisoned mermaid is betrayed by her caretaker, she must find a way to escape the aquarium alone." It is actually her lover, rather than caretaker, who not only betrays her, but sells her out to an unscrupulous oceanarium owner. But it is ultimately a tale of escape and empowerment as are those by Nalo Hopkinson, which follow.

Tananarive Due and Nalo Hopkinson

Both Tananarive Due and Nalo Hopkinson reinvigorate these powerful, sometimes alluring and freeing but sometimes dangerous female water figures, Mami Wata, La Sirene, merpeople and mermaids in their work. Tananarive Due, named after the French for Antananarivo, the capital of Madagascar, was born in Tallahassee, Florida, the oldest of three daughters of civil rights activist Patricia Stephens Due and civil rights lawyer John D. Due, Jr. Due gained a B.S. in journalism from Northwestern University's Medill School of Journalism and an M.A. in English literature, focusing on Nigerian literature at the University of Leeds, UK.

In Tananarive Due's *Ghost Summer* (2013), in the haunted and magical context of Gracetown, Florida, all are warned to stay away from the lake in summer since in its waters lurks a dark energy, a legacy from the town's history of slavery. All the tales center around the lake, but two in particular focus on dangerous water creatures/people. In "Free Jim's Mine," for example, a collusive freed slave mine owner transforms into a terrifying underground river creature to try and prevent the escape of his two young enslaved relatives. In "The Lake," Tananarive Due lets loose her predatory mermaid. Annie seems to transform into Mami Wata.

Gracetown, the small town in *Ghost Summer*, perhaps (ironically) named after Elvis's home or Paul Simon's song, is a central location charged with the ghosts of slavery, plantation brutality,

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localized pain, and death, all of which act as a microcosm for a broader cultural history of inequality, brutality, and suffering, both publicly and privately suppressed. Water is central to *Ghost Summer* and Gracetown, with its dark histories and its dubious transformative powers. Summer visitors are told to stay away from the lake, but it invades their day and night lives. The water is alive, stirring uneasily with its deadly past. Most of the community histories are those of slavery and its legacies (Wisker, 2019). The traumatic past of the town leaks out from the lake, out from the earth, burrowing through lost tunnels and up the mineshaft of Free Jim's mine, taking the form of demonic creatures, bodily invasion, or re-enacting historical slave escapes played out in ghostly sight and sound. The geography of a haunted past infuses the lives of those who live there and all who visit family in the summer, at the most dangerous time.

This is a collection of ghost stories and, in *Democracy's Discontent* (1996), Michael J. Sandel emphasises the social justice function of ghost stories, commenting on the power of storying our condition that, "Political community depends on the narratives by which people make sense of their condition, and interpret the common life they share" (350). Ghost stories return the undead in order to expose and preferably right historic, suppressed wrongs. Those wrongs of an enslaved past are central to *Ghost Summer*. Gracetown's lands, barns, houses and especially its constantly disturbed and disturbing lake are variously upset by property development and unthinking visitors. Also disturbed are complacencies and suppressed histories, revealing dark secrets, exposing historical cover ups, and enabling the marginalised and silent to have a voice. The hidden, violent past is exposed in these stories, which are largely set in the 21st century, with some during slavery ("Free Jim's Mine") that are engaged, political, driven by social justice and the unquiet brutal past of slavery. This small town is in the middle of a drained swamp, where boundaries exist between land now owned by African Americans and that owned by the McCormacks, the descendants of Scottish slave owners who, themselves immigrants, benefitted historically from forcibly imported, transported slaves. Both lake and swamp invade and trouble the lives of generations of children and adults. Swamp leeches invade babies who become suddenly well-behaved, bodies of escaping slaves are dug up on farmland. The older generation keep the secrets:

I wasn't going to say anything to you kids – but there's bodies buried over on that land across the street, out beyond Tobacco Road. McCormack's land.... the university folks say they were black.'

It was the coolest thing Grandma had ever said. (67)

Children and pre-teens spending family holiday summers round the lake in Gracetown become sensitive to the past. They sense and somehow invite back those neighbours and relatives, children long dead, enabling their stories to be disinterred.

Free Jim's Mine

One tale concerns two young escaped slaves, who hide overnight in Jim, a relative's, mine, but in the dark night waters of the mine, this historically collusive relative transforms into a monstrous frog to try and hunt them down. Jim warns the runaways of their unlikely success:

“It always goes wrong, girl,” Uncle Jim said. “Don’t get it into your heads that you’ll both make it up to North Carolina – and then what? Philadelphia? You’re fools if you think this ends well. You never should’ve come. Think of the last words you want to say to each other, and be sure to say ‘em quick. You won’t both survive the night.” (P.140) Of course he knows the reason why but at least warns them about the water creature which will find and finish them off “As a boy,” he said quietly, “I heard stories about Walasi. A giant frog. My mother told me, her mother told her, her mother’s mother, through time. To the beginning.” (142)

At night, the two young people have no choice other than to hide in the flooded mine, but as it gets later, they are not alone.

Ripples fluttered in the lamplight. Then a frothy splashing showered them. Lottie screamed, but did not close her eyes. She wanted to see the thing. A silhouette sharpened in the water, like giant fingers stretching or a black claw. Her hands flew to cover her eyes, but she forced her fingers open to peek through. The creature churned the water, tossing its massive body. A shiny bulging black eye as large as her open palm broke the water’s plane, nestled by brown-green skin. Lottie screamed.

The creature flipped, its eye gone. (143)

They lash out at the massive creature and survive the night, however, and when Free Jim reappears in the morning and reaches for Lottie, “his two gold rings flared like droplets from the sun. His pinkie finger, a bloodied crust, was freshly sliced away” (146). Jim is clearly free because of his collusion with those who would recapture escaped slaves, and perhaps his transformation into the violent, disgusting Walasi is a curse upon him for that collusion. Whatever the real story, the two survive the water creature’s attack and continue their escape.

“The Lake” is a Mami Wata Tale

Abbie, the lithe, attractive teacher with an unexplained dark past takes a job in Gracetown. The other staff question her about her origins but she is reticent, aware this is an intrusive exploration both about being Black and her speaking French (she has Haitian origins). But also we begin to consider, perhaps, that there are problematic stories in her background. The visiting children and everybody in Gracetown knows that it is dangerous to swim in the lake, but no one mentions why. Although warned about swimming in the lake, Abbie takes to it like a fish to water, initially barely noticing how she can stay under for longer, how her feet are becoming webbed as her body becomes stronger and more muscular. She spends longer and longer in the water

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after work, and while questioning her adaptation to her new habitat, primarily feels empowered, pleased, and invested.

She did not hesitate. She did not wade. She dove like an eel, swimming with an eel's ease.
Am I truly awake, or is this a dream?

Her eyes adjusted to the lack of light, bringing instant focus. She had never seen the true murky depths of her lake, so much like the swamp of her dreams. Were they one and the same? Her ribs' itching turned to a welcome massage, and she felt long slits yawn open across her skin, beneath each rib. Warm water flooded her, nursing her; her nose, throat and mouth were a useless, distant memory. Why hadn't it ever occurred to her to breathe the water before? (20-21)

As Abbie adapts, she is responding to a drive within her, a recognition of a different self, a different place where she came from, a place where she is one with the water. As she transforms into a creature part human part mercreature, part Sirene or Mami Wata, so she frees up her instincts to hunt as well as to seduce. An alligator is her first prey: "An alligator's curiosity brought the beast close enough to study her, but it recognized its mistake and tried to thrash away. But too late" (20-21).

Her friendly relationships with her teenage boy students who come over to help with rebuilding the house become more inappropriate, sinister, yet not quite fully seductive until they become her prey. While the boys fix things Abbie takes another lake swim, allowing free rein to her developing watery self, freeing it from the moral restraints of the land world, becoming something else:

As the water massaged her gills, Abbie released her thoughts and concerns about the frivolous world beyond the water. She needed to feed, that was all. She planned to leave the boys to their bickering and swim farther out, where the fish were hiding.

But something large and pale caught her eye above her.

Jack, she realized dimly. Jack had changed his mind, swimming near the surface, his ample belly like a full moon, jiggling with his breaststroke.

That was the first moment Abbie felt a surge of fear, because she finally understood what she'd been up to – what her new body had been preparing her for. Her feet betrayed her, their webs giving her speed as she propelled towards her giant meal. Water slid across her scales. (27)

Abbie might realize her metamorphosis into her true self, but she is powerless and probably unwilling to stop the trajectory as it brings her directly to her next meal, Jack. Ghosts, frogs, invasive swamp leeches, and transformed human/water creatures with anti-social appetites have something to tell the people in Gracetown, which is a liminal space, a crossroads of time, lives, and

spaces. The histories of brutal erasure of Indigenous and African American children at its core are now more widely known (McGreevy, 2021; Eligon, 2019) and have entered Tananarive Due's own family history:

This story and the previous one, "Summer", are a kind of odd prophecy: In 2013, I received a call from the Florida Attorney General's office informing me that my late mother, Patricia Stephens Due, had an uncle, Robert Stephens, who was probably among dozens of children buried on the grounds of the Dozier School for Boys, a reform school in Marianna, Florida, where boys were tortured and killed for generations. I had never heard of the Dozier School, buried children, Robert Stephens, my great-uncle who died there in 1937, aged fifteen. (127)

African American Gothic shocks and upsets any sense of settled history, of shared reality, exposing the deeply disturbing psychological insecurity of all that seems comfortably real. But while much of this revelation is disturbing, it is also potentially the start of a new healthy way forward. This rewriting, re-understanding, and reinterpreting is also part of a forward movement and a characteristic of Afrofuturism (Hopkinson and Mehan, 2004; Lavender and Yaszek, 2020; Delaney; Hopkinson and Mehan, 2004), that rewriting of the past and speculation into a positive future.

In Afrofuturism, history is reconceptualized, rewritten from a positive African American perspective and positive futures imagined (Wisker *Contemporary Women's Ghost Stories: Spectres, Revenants and Ghostly Returns*, 2022).

Nalo Hopkinson

Mami Wata also appears in Nalo Hopkinson's *The Salt Roads* (2003), while in her Afrofuturist *The New Moon's Arms* (2007), merpeople are part of a life-affirming celebratory metamorphosis, a positive re-telling of the horrific brutal drowning of transported enslaved people thrown overboard to die because they were sick or considered worthless, from the slave ship the Zhong, bound from Africa to the Caribbean. In this latter novel, middle-aged Chastity's/Calamity's reignited self-worth is aligned with her returned magical powers. Afrofuturism in this tale reclaims a magical positive reading as it also reaffirms a positive version of women's vital self worth: "you can't find something if you don't know you've lost it" (Hopkinson, *The New Moon's Arms*, 115). Nalo Hopkinson's Afrofuturist, speculative fictions explore experiences and worldviews as divisive, dangerous reminders of a troubled past, and simultaneously they also conjure up culturally intertwined, positive new futures. In *The New Moon's Arms*, Torontonion/Trinidadian/Jamaican Hopkinson uses strategies of the postcolonial/African diasporan literary Gothic and speculative fiction to explore some of the tensions and potential riches of the liminal spaces of identity, aging, and cultural hybridity. All of these comments highlight the role that writing has to speak truth to power, and offer ways forward. Speculative fictions—and particularly Afrofuturism—enable the critique, expose the illegitimate, biased representations, and construct and celebrate alternative voices and ways forward.

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The novel opens on middle-aged Calamity's father's funeral—a fellow mourner bursts her drawers, a brooch falls, it is reclaimed as Calamity's. The carnivalesque, bawdy comic causes a breach of order in the everyday and a breach in a constrained narrative. The moment is a liminal space, one of loss that also opens up the opportunity of a new energy, and most of all, the power of finding what was lost, re-thinking, reclaiming and revitalizing what was suppressed, and moving forward. This is a carnival version of the spirit of Afrofuturism—reclamation, new understandings, new life and vision, reimagining the past and the future.

Marvellously energetic and creative, *The New Moon's Arms* focuses on Calamity and the fictional Caribbean island of Dolorosse. Calamity, who befriends a merchild when herself a child, now rescues a boy from the sea, understanding his name to be Agway (for Agwe the Haitian sea god), and cares for him until he is healthy and ready to return to his parents. Not everyone knows, but Calamity knows that around the coast of Dolorosse are a community of merpeople and, as the island struggles with toxic waste in the waters, the overbuilding of hotels reducing the bat population, the sea and seabird damage for the desalination plant so they are threatened but also a part of a potential recuperation, parallel to Calamity's own recovery of her historical magical powers as a 'finder' and the magical return of her father's orchard—this is a rich novel of damaged histories and transformed lives, reimagined positive futures for Calamity for the merpeople, and for the island itself.

The foundational source of the potential for a positive transformed future lies in remaining, rewriting, and re-understanding the past, and here Hopkinson (like Rivers Solomon after her), reimagines and reclaims a terrible dark and real moment in African American and Caribbean history. Historically, the transported slaves on the *Zhong* (1781), were brutalized, dehumanized, and thrown overboard (captains could claim compensation for those drowned at sea; the sick or damaged were, in monetary terms, considered worthless). During their crossing, instead of being brutalized further, the slaves on Hopkinson's imagined ship chose instead to jump in the sea, swimming free, transforming, seizing agency, and becoming merpeople. The merpeople represent a creative transformational response to an intolerable death. Their origins lie with those who escaped from the *Zhong*, morphing into hybrid survivors flourishing in the new medium of water:

The sailors would remove the dead and dying. The more that died the more space for the remaining. The dada-hair lady was heartsick at the relief she felt when another body was removed. The Igbo sailor described how they threw the dead bodies over the side, how large fish with sharp teeth were following the ship now, waiting for their next meal.

The young woman takes power: "We are leaving now!" she shouted in Igbo.

The people's arms flattened out into flexible flippers. The shackles lipped off their wrists. The two women who had been chained to her flopped away, free, but the dada-hair lady remained unchanged and shackled. The little boy in her arms was transforming, though. He lifted one hand and spread his fingers to investigate the webbing that now extended between them. Some of the people who had been forced back into the holds were making

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their way out, now that their shackles had slid off. The hips was so far tilted that they didn't have to climb; just clamber up the shallow incline that led to the hatch. The people's bodies grew thick and fat. Legs melted together. The little boy chuckled, a sound she'd not heard from him before this. The chuckle became a high-pitched call. The people's faces swelled and transformed: round heads with snouts. Big liquid eyes. (316)

Afrofuturism, as creative story-telling, has the power both to reimagine the damaged past positively, reclaiming power in doing so, and positively will the transformed future into being. Nalo Hopkinson's merpeople, descendants of the self-freed slaves, are part of the new magically enriched future on Dolorosse, where not only does the magical orchard return along with Calamity's powers as a finder, but there will be a united response against the damage done to creatures, water, and people to move towards a positively transformed future.

***The Deep* by Rivers Solomon (2018)**

In *The Deep*, brutally jettisoned slaves also transform into a form of merpeople: water-breathing descendants of African slave women tossed overboard who have built their own underwater society. While this is a short novel, it is a highly creative piece made up of different inputs and responses, some building over others or misheard – so that without indication of a single owner, it becomes a co-owned piece, developing creative voices in different forms. As a result, *The Deep* emerges as a joint creative enterprise between a network of people, some acknowledged at the end. It grew from the practice of 'artistic telephone' insofar as the way phrases are transformed when shared over time and space--a series of new interactions of telling of *The Deep*. These tellings were started as a game by the Detroit techno-electro duo of Drexciya-James Stenson and Gerald Donald, with their mainly instrumental music and many collaborators, from 'the Underground Resistance' and 'the Aquanauts' taking from the original mythology behind the world of the music and of the text. They further developed the spare elliptical world-building tactics of the story from Drexciya and first made *Splendor and Misery*, a 2016 concept album in which the 'The Deep' was defined as a song. Next, three people then wrote *The Deep*, avoiding first-person pronouns, and Rivers Solomon then continued the work, developing:

their misheard whisper to the chain, filling out our song's narrative with their particular concerns, politics, infatuations, and passions.' Rivers fixed on the refrain 'y'all remember' to avoid 'I' and created Yetu which focused the tale 'the immediate and visceral aim inherent in passing down past trauma'(The Deep p 160-161) There is also more music focusing on merpeople. (Drexciya)

Conclusion

These African American stories are ghost stories, some horror, all Afrofuturism, each a fluid blend of genres. Each takes from and evolves from tales of mythical historical water goddesses, sirens, mermaids, and merpeople, to expose terrible histories, inherited selfish cruelties and deadly threats, and, in some instances, to dig back into a reimagined history in order to push forward,

rewriting tales and histories of dehumanisation and death as positive, as escape, transformation, re-empowerment, and imagining forward into celebration of rich active diverse lives. In these contemporary tales, the figures of mermaids, mercreatures, and of Mami Wata, the African water deity, are reconfigured and revitalised to rewrite negative histories; explore potential, individual, community and sexual freedoms; and freedom from the terrible deadly oppressions of an enslaved past and, through the energies of Afrofuturism, create a magical, agentic, positive future.

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