

## WHICH FUTURE EXACTLY? JUSTICE AND SUSTAINABILITY IN AFROFUTURIST LITERATURE AND MODERN GREEK SPECULATIVE FICTION

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### **Abstract**

*This paper will examine how justice and sustainability are portrayed in Afrofuturist literature and Greek science fiction. Greek speculative literature, often engages with themes shaped by Western experiences and contemporary national issues like economic instability and technological dilemmas as also addressing environmental problems. Afrofuturism, conversely, regularly imagines technologically advanced societies free of racial inequalities promoting ecological harmony. However, despite their different cultural and historical contexts, both genres demonstrate concerns on social and environmental issues as well as the search for a fairer and more sustainable world.*

*By using a comparative approach the paper examines four representative examples, two of Afrofuturist and two of Greek science fiction, portraying dystopian and utopian futures in order to reveal the universality of these issues emphasizing on social justice, environmental balance and collective identity. The analysis unveils the beneficial role of literature as a cultural product that can inspire social change. The study of such works can thus contribute meaningfully to the reconstruction of our world highlighting the role of human values as a foremost priority over a technocratic world.*

**Key words:** justice, Greek science fiction, Afrofuturism, future, sustainability

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

In Lewis Carroll's *Alice's adventures in Wonderland*, (1869) little Alice trying to find her way through the wondrous world she fell into, crosses paths with a Cheshire Cat and in her confusion, poses the following question: *-Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here? -That depends a good deal on where you want to get to.* Cat replies. Then Alice adds: *-I don't much care where [...] so long as I get "somewhere"* (Carroll, 1869, p.89). On our journey on this Earth, we all need a sense of direction. Especially in today's world, where technological progress has permeated our lives and social and economic inequalities are intense, finding a direction that could alleviate these problems is crucial.

This reality has led international bodies and organizations to investigate the concept of justice in the age of globalization. At the same time, the pursuit of eliminating inequalities at environmental, economic, and more broadly social levels remains an active demand for ensuring the sustainability of the planet (*The Sustainable Development Goals Report, 2025*; Pikalo et al., 2022; *Addressing justice and sustainable development –UN environment programme, 2019*; *European environment agency, Analysis and Data, Delivering justice in sustainability transitions, 2024*; *United Nations Development Programme, n.d.*). Contemporary discussions within international organizations treat justice and sustainability as

unified objectives, emphasizing the intergenerational dimension and developing appropriate strategies towards this direction. In the same time this inseparable connection between justice and sustainability as a moral responsibility shared by all, depends on the decisions made today (*The Sustainable Development Goals Report*, 2025; Pikalo et al., 2022; *Addressing justice and sustainable development –UN environment programme*, 2019; *European environment agency, Analysis and Data, Delivering justice in sustainability transitions*, 2024; *United Nations Development Programme*, n.d.).

However, as these practices do not always succeed in incorporating historical or social injustices and past errors, imagination emerges as a means of giving us a new direction and offering a more radical and immediate solution. Within this realm, human beings are able to find space for the realization of their desires and to interpret life around them in alternative ways, challenging dominant narratives and claiming a space of hope or constructing of a more free and sustainable society (see also: Womack, 2013; Zipes, 2009; Sandner (Ed.), 2004). In particular, speculative literature—utopias and dystopias, as well as science fiction, with their distinctive characteristics—provides an outlet for addressing both social and environmental problems by projecting either an improved or a deteriorated form of life that differs from the one we currently experience (Imarisha, 2015; Fitting, 2010; Vieira, 2010; Bhatia, 2022; Sargent, 1994; Stableford, 2010; Hotston, 2022; Otto, 2019). These realms expose the shortcomings of the social sphere, offering critical perspectives on issues such as environmental pollution, overpopulation, and more explicitly political concerns, including justice (Imarisha, 2015; Fitting, 2010; Vieira, 2010; Bhatia, 2022; Sargent, 1994; Stableford, 2010; Hotston, 2022; Otto, 2019), thereby expanding the range of solutions that may be proposed for frequently emerging social problems or historico-political failures that continue to persist in the world today.

The present article aims to explore aspects of justice and sustainability in four literary works from the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries: two from Afrofuturist literature and two from Greek science fiction, which is here regarded as a subgenre of speculative literature<sup>1</sup>. Specifically, *Parable of the Sower* (2014) by Octavia Butler and *Ιστορίες από ένα περασμένο μέλλον* [*Stories from a Distant Future*] (2023a) by Μιχάλης Μακρόπουλος [Michalis Makropoulos] focus on the concepts of justice and sustainability, placing particular emphasis on the management of environmental and social issues. Similarly, *The Deep* (2019) by Rivers Solomon and *Επιστροφή στο Λίκνο* [*Return to the Cradle*] (2023) by Ιωσήφ Μανίκης [Iosif Manikis], examine these concepts with particular attention to the issues of collective memory and identity. By adopting a comparative close reading of the selected texts, prioritizing textual analysis rather than relying on a theoretical framework, the paper investigates how these works, as examples of Afrofuturist and Greek science fiction exemplify the diverse strategies and creative practices through which speculative fiction addresses the issues of justice, sustainability.

## **2. JUSTICE AND SUSTAINABILITY IN AFROFUTURIST LITERATURE AND GREEK SCIENCEFICTION**

The interaction between the Greek experience and the African American experience (as articulated through Afrofuturism), as well as Greek science fiction, is to a great extent shaped

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<sup>1</sup> As the distinction between *speculative fiction* and *science fiction* does not constitute the primary focus of the present article, it suffices to note that there is extensive discussion in the international scholarly literature regarding these terms. It is worth noting that the boundaries between them are not rigid, and the distinction is not absolute. For further discussion, see indicatively: Canavan & Link (2019); Oziewicz (2017, March 29); Latham (Ed.) (2014); Suvin (1972, 1979), Mancuso (10 August, 2016).

by their historical pasts and traditions, a past marked by subjugation and oppression, acknowledging the fundamental importance of equality, the pursuit of democratic freedoms and the respect for nature (see indicatively: Mawere & Mubaya, 2016; Santas & Anagnostopoulos (Eds.), 2018). Such cultural exchanges showcase the unique characteristics of different traditions and their contributions to global efforts for justice and sustainability beyond national boundaries.

Afrofuturist literature constitutes a form of expression of Afrofuturism, a term introduced by Dery (1994) in the 1990s, which has continued to develop rapidly up to the present day (Yaszek, 2013). It aims at the creation of a more just and hopeful future for the Afrodiasporic community through science fiction and technology, while foregrounding African culture in order to reconstruct and challenge the darker aspects of history—namely, the history of slavery, colonialism, and *white supremacy* (Dery, 1994; Womack, 2013; Lavender III, 2019; Yaszek, 2013; Yaszek, 2006; Carter, 2022; Eshun, 2003). This approach, extending across various art forms such as music, painting, cinema, and literature, seeks to overturn stereotypes surrounding Black identity while also projecting a more positive image of Africa (see also Elia, 2014; Tosaya, 2018; Womack, 2013; Eshun, 2003). Through Afrofuturism, an effort to redefine the present and to heal the traumas of the past is an absolute priority (Yaszek, 2013; Womack, 2013; Lavender III, 2019).

The sustainable and just future for the black race remains an enduring demand. From the plantations and the slavery period to present-day movements advocating for the human rights of Black people, such as *Black Lives Matter*, today's American cities, bearing the traumatic histories, the defeats and victories of the Black people (Hood, 2020), still reveal ongoing inequalities. Beyond the creation of new worlds, Afrofuturism seeks dignified conditions for marginalized communities and inclusive participation in sustainable environments that are not shaped by racial or colonial constraints (*Building the Future*, 2024; Dearing, 2024). The creativity fostered by Afrofuturism is expressed through projects such as those by Michelle Mlati for example, which are oriented toward the design of spaces in which the Black community can live under conditions of equality and inclusion, free from racial discrimination (Latief, 2019; *Building the Future*, 2024; Omotalade, 2023). With the aim of repositioning the Black community at the center rather than at the margins, the equitable distribution of energy, the restoration of ecological imbalances, and the struggle against environmental racism and imperialism are central to its demands (Omotalade, 2023; Schell, 2024).

In particular, Schell (2024) makes some more interesting remarks regarding Afrofuturist position on sustainability and responses to the climate crisis with notable clarity, emphasizing that a return to the past and a harmonious reconciliation with ancestral values stands in opposition to harmful practices that affect the entire ecosystem (Schell, 2024). As he notes, the emphasis placed on learning from the mistakes committed in the past, can help prevent future catastrophic consequences as well as the acceptance of the fact that humans are part of nature should lead to deeper mutual understanding beyond racist behaviors, a condition that constitutes a prerequisite for equitable and sustainable coexistence (Schell, 2024).

The Afrofuturist understanding of sustainability is not solely environmental or racial but also technological. Thus, Afrofuturism, as a collective project advocating equal access to technology and rejecting the racialized *digital divide* narrative (Nelson, 2002, p. 6), envisions a future more closely linked to the questioning of dominant Western power structures. It maintains that technological developments should be understood as outcomes of cultural inventiveness (Schell, 2024) rather than merely as products of speculation, oriented not toward domination over nature but toward harmonious coexistence with it (Schell, 2024). As seen in the film *Black Panther*, the fictional *Wakanda* is portrayed as an advanced technological country located somewhere in Africa, rich in resources and culture, and inhabited by courageous heroes (Googler, 2018).

Despite lacking the coherence of Afrofuturism as a cultural and social movement Greek science fiction, engages also with themes of justice and sustainability in an analogous way. Grounded in the long tradition and experience of ancient Greek culture, Greek speculative thought with its origins in Lucian's *True History* (2nd century AD) continues to constitute a stable foundation of Greek literature throughout the twentieth century and beyond, emerging from Greece's historical and political developments, including struggles for democracy and equality, the World Wars, the dictatorship and the linguistic dispute surrounding the transition from *Katharevousa* to *Demotic Greek* (Pastourmatzi, 1999b; Nikolaidou, 2022a; Λάζος, 1989).

From the early twentieth century onwards, works of Greek science fiction by authors such as D. Voutyras and P. Pikros refer to utopian journeys into space and to societies of equality and freedom, while simultaneously offering sharp criticism of the capitalist and authoritarian structures of the society of their time (Pastourmatzi, 1999b; Σταθάτος, 2025). From the 1970's onwards, the genre began to spread more widely (Καλαντζής, 2022; Nikolaidou, 2022b; Λάζος, 1989), and ecological concerns were increasingly present, including environmental pollution, nuclear energy, and overpopulation, issues that preoccupied humanity more broadly during those decades, as well as reflections on technological achievements and the role of human identity or reservations regarding technological intervention (Λάζος, 1989; Μπέσσα, 2024). Nevertheless in light of historical traumas, Greek science fiction—especially in its early stages—focused on themes of loneliness and alienation (Nikolaidou, 2022a) and in contrast to Afrofuturism, it has tended to be more cautious, engaging primarily with the negative aspects of technology, with a tendency to project darker visions of social and environmental conditions (Nikolaidou, 2022a). Thus, economic crisis, refugees, and criticism of capitalist and authoritarian practices—often articulated through dystopian narratives—come to dominate, with perhaps the exception of younger writers, placing emphasis on solidarity and the hope of achieving a more just society (Nikolaidou, 2022a).

Although Afrofuturism constitutes a genre in continuous development and of central interest to the African American diaspora, Greek science fiction displays two defining characteristics. For many years, it functioned as marginal literature—often labeled *paraliterature*—with little but nonetheless significant publishing efforts (see also Σταθάτος, 2021; Λάζος, 1989; Καλαντζής, 2022; Σταθάτος, 2025; Pastourmatzi, 1999a), while adopting a hybrid identity derived largely from influences and imitations of English and American science fiction (Σταθάτος, 2025; Nikolaidou, 2022b; Nikolaidou & Pseftakis, 2022; Nikolaidou, 2022a; Λιθαρής, 2003). As a result, issues related to social change and sustainability are often linked to foreign models, since the genre has maintained a continuous relationship with Anglophone and American science fiction and its market leading to the extensive imitation of linguistic or cultural patterns, as well as the incorporation of social concerns or other historical pathologies such as colonialism which although not entirely its own, are nevertheless transmitted through it (Σταθάτος, 2025; Nikolaidou, 2022b; Nikolaidou & Pseftakis, 2022; Nikolaidou, 2022a; Λιθαρής, 2003).

Despite the challenges it continues to face, contemporary Greek science fiction appears to be finding a balance between preserving its cultural heritage and aligning itself with the international scene of speculative literature, while at the same time engaging with its own national sociopolitical issues and articulating concerns of inclusion (Nikolaidou, 2022b; Nikolaidou & Pseftakis, 2022). A central concern for writers of speculative fiction in Greece today is the concept of justice in the era of Greece's migratory and economic crisis after 2010, writing about class inequalities in future alternative societies, with an emphasis on inclusion, and equality in society as collective demands (see also Christou, 2022; Kanari, 2022). As a crossroads of cultures and a European country, Greece produces future-oriented narratives

inspired by its own contemporary socioeconomic problems, such as the refugee crisis, racism and migration, poverty, the limits and possibilities of biotechnology, and broader social inequalities, often envisioning Athens in a future era (Kanari, 2022; Αρβανίτης (Ed.), 2017; Nikolaidou & Pseftakis, 2022). The same applies to works such as that of Νίκος Ξένιος, [Nikos Xenios] entitled *Αλλοτεκοίτη, Εκεί που χάθηκε η βλάστηση* [*Allotekoiti, Where Vegetation Was Lost*] (2023), which constitute an allegory of the contemporary era exposing the consequences of the environmental crisis, including desertification of mutated ecosystems as a result of profit and capitalist interests. Others such as those Ν. Φερεντίνο, [N. Ferentinos] (see: *Μηνύματα από τα Ηλύσια πεδία* [*Messages from the Elysian Fields*], 2021), as well as in the works of Μ. Μανωλιός [M. Manolios] (see: *Αγέννητοι Αδελφοί*, [*Unborn Brothers*], 2014) pose metaphysical and existential questions concerning human life, as well as the issue of artificial intelligence and the relationship between justice and moral consciousness.

This search for its originality gives an optimistic outlook that science fiction in Greece will have the potential to further evolve as a genre, increasingly addressing the country's social and political problems in the future (Nikolaidou, 2022b). Moreover, Σταθάτος [Stathatos] (2025) claims that signs of recovery are evident today, emphasizing the important role that Greek science fiction plays on environmental, technological and social crises seeking to avoid stigmatization a "low" or non-canonical literature (Σταθάτος, 2025).

### **3. NATURE, SOCIETY AND COSMOS: ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL DIMENSIONS OF JUSTICE AND SUSTAINABILITY IN "PARABLE OF THE SOWER" AND "STORIES FROM A DISTANT FUTURE"**

*Parable of the Sower* (2014), the first book in Octavia Butler's (1947-2006) duology, stands as one of the most characteristic works of Afrofuturist literature (García, 2024; Ruffin, 2005; Choudhury, & Mukherjee, 2023), particularly revealing regarding issues of social justice and the search for sustainable practices in a collapsing world. As an author of *neo-slave narratives*, she focuses broadly on the social injustices endured both by the Black race and other minorities (García, 2024; Guerrero, 2021; Kouhestani, 2015). The story follows a young Black teenager, Lauren Olamina, the daughter of a pastor priest, who, through her diary, keeps notes of life in a dystopian California 2024 in the walled city of Robledo, where hyper-industrialization as well as the dissolution of social values are common place (Butler, 2014; Manuel, 2004).

As a person born with hyperempathy, (Butler, 2014, p.37) the ability to intensely feel the emotions of others, she is troubled by this decay and unfairness as the city of Robledo is on the brink of collapse, plagued by economic and racial inequalities and criminality (Butler, 2014): *Even in Robledo, most of the street poor—squatters, winos, junkies, homeless people in general—are dangerous. They're desperate or crazy or both.[...]. They carry untreated diseases and festering wounds.* (Butler, 2014, p. 18). In this dystopia, Butler will show the need to confront the irrationalities of the present and its contradictory character, as the only solution for overcoming it, criticizing capitalist and racist ideologies of the postmodern world (Miller, 1998; Phillips, 2002). Lauren will resist to this catastrophe envisioning a new belief system called *Earthseed*, which would not share in the decomposition of the Western world (Dunning, 2020). The new religion will have *change* as its focus aiming at creating a society that employs critical thinking and projecting the ethical interdependence of humanity and the future: *All that you touch,/You Change./All that you Change,/Changes you./The only lasting truth/Is Change./God/Is Change.* (Butler, 2014, pp. 95-96). Her crucial message is that this

religion must find its roots in the stars, showing us that escaping Earth and expanding to other worlds is what will constitute the beginning of a more just and sustainable society and will act as a counterweight to the present chaotic condition, opening up to new places like the stars where the healing of social wounds (Guerrero, 2021; Stillman, 2003).

Also, behind this search for new worlds these *post-apocalyptic geographies* (Guerrero, 2021, p. 42) as a more just and balanced choice, Butler hides the search for a new identity, free from constraints of religious and racial violence. Her work alludes also to the years of slavery while demonstrating the author's anarchic approach to building worlds outside the global, Eurocentric system (Guerrero, 2021; Dunning, 2020; Moreno, 2020). Furthermore, Butler condemns uncritical adherence to faith drawing inspiration from the relationship of African Americans with the Bible opposing the Eurocentric God of the whites who considered Black people sinners (Manuel, 2004; Choudhury & Mukherjee, 2023; Kouhestani, 2015).

On the journey to realize her vision, Lauren will begin a trip North with a few companions, and during her journey, she will help and care for people, thus showing that Acorn, the destination, is also the root of her religion's philosophy (see also: Butler, 2014, p.669). This religion, based on solidarity, the transcendence of social stereotypes, and the necessity of human action, emphasizes community's resilience in order to achieve transformation in the face of the social failures of the present (Phillips, 2002; Miller, 1998; Guerrero, 2021) but also symbolizes the collective journey towards a more optimistic future through our inevitable connection to the laws of the universe: *We are all Godseed, but no more or less so than any other aspect of the universe, Godseed is all there is—all that Changes. Earthseed is all that spreads Earthlife to new earths.* (Butler, 2014, pp. 68-69)

Basically, the future Butler proposes is based on the belief that it is not so much about something renewing and different, but rather about reshaping what already exists as adaptation seems to be the sustainable solution to the dead-end (Manuel, 2024; Dunning, 2020). She expresses both the refusal to submit to a faith that serves injustice and the will for adaptation and resilience in order to survive, offering the community a safer existence (García, 2024; Manuel, 2004; Choudhury & Mukherjee, 2023).

In this hope for a more just and consequently sustainable reality, social impasses also drive the stories of Μιχάλης Μακρόπουλος [Michalis Markopoulos] (1965-) in *Ιστορίες από ένα περασμένο μέλλον* [*Stories from a Distant Future*] (2023a), in which social and political decline is equally intense, and with the ease of fiction, the stories move between different temporal boundaries (Αθανασέλος, 2023; Δημητριάδου, 2023). The future here reflects the dystopian present. The writer himself confirms that: *Just as I don't believe there is "historical" fiction, I also don't believe there is "futuristic" fiction. Whatever is written in an era, in one way or another, reflects its era* (Μακρόπουλος, 2023b, paras 3). Also Περαντωνάκης [Perantonakis] (2023) remarks that: *Our Earth, [...]would nostalgically yearn for today's reality as a lost utopia, not ideal but certainly better than its projection.* (Περαντωνάκης, 2023, para. 3). Therefore, the future, as Λιναρδάκη [Linardaki] (2023) says, reflects present failures emphasizing that the stories aim to convey a lesson of humanity, encouraging awareness to promote change in the world (Λιναρδάκη, 2023). In general, writer's concerns, as expressed in other works like *The Sea* (Μακρόπουλος, 2020), which fall within the genre of climate fiction (Αθανασοπούλου, 2025) depict post-apocalyptic landscapes where the consequences of the environmental crisis, produced by governmental oligarchy, are highlighted, while simultaneously projecting the value of human bonds (Pfefferkorn, 2024; Μακρόπουλος, 2023a; Κουρούπη, 2024; Αθανασοπούλου, 2025). In

*Ιστορίες από ένα περασμένο μέλλον [Stories from a Distant Future]* (2023a), technology plays a dominant role as people, amidst the decline, find refuge in it, while the stories are set in a future time where human existence experiences a continuous dead-end, far from any notion of happiness, with technological progress bringing not only advancement but also regression (Αθανασοπούλου, 2025; Περαντωνάκης, 2023).

In these narratives, religious and technological critiques prevail. In the short story *Ishmael* (Μακρόπουλος, 2023a, pp. 141-187), traditional God is absent while the people of a forgotten province, lacking technical knowledge, deify an old, derelict wind turbine, portraying the results of a non-sustainable society due to technological decline: *a fallen, broken God with its wings that had rolled down the hill[...] the God of plastic things, of beast-humans.* (Μακρόπουλος, 2023a, p. 174; Αθανασοπούλου, 2025). In another titled *The Earth with Two Moons* (Μακρόπουλος, 2023, pp. 119-134), economic decline, resource scarcity and overpopulation dominate: *On Earth, life was unbearable. In every corner, people were starving and giving birth. The more their hunger, the more children they gave birth to* (Μακρόπουλος, 2023a, p. 119). In such a condition, the social elite relocates to the Moon (a female-led) and Ηώ [Eos] (male-led) respectively, colonies where reproduction is carried out via artificial wombs (Μακρόπουλος, 2023a, pp. 119, 127). The plot of *The Planet with Two Suns* (Μακρόπουλος, 2023a, pp. 67-83) deals with the indictment of capitalist excess, environmental exploitation, and social injustice. In the future, planet *Kepler-1812b* produces *ballardium* ore, used by the wealthy on earth for medical purposes and time travel, and *kefe*, a drug more accessible to the poor (Μακρόπουλος, 2023a, pp. 67-69, 72-73). Access to the new resources only enhances the age-old problems of social inequality and uneven access to health care (Μακρόπουλος, 2023a, pp. 119-120). The pair eventually moves there where people work under harsh conditions in the *dry, hot air* (Μακρόπουλος, 2023a, p. 76), until the man dies and the girl wanders off into the inhospitable planet (Μακρόπουλος, 2023a, p. 83).

In *The Photographer* (Μακρόπουλος, 2023a, pp. 85-107), the story portrays a world where ecological destruction has serious social consequences. Unable to restore the natural world to its previous state, society's response is to attempt to create a virtual reality through which it hopes to provide the illusion of justice and sustainability (Μακρόπουλος, 2023a, pp. 85-107). In the story, the protagonist's job, established by a special committee, is to create more acceptable virtual representations of a crumbling world as an *unrealist* (Μακρόπουλος, 2023a, p. 86): *A temporary healing in the reality of ruins [...] a world that doesn't exist but is the one we'd like to have existed.* (Μακρόπουλος, 2023a, pp. 85, 86). His actions range from *resurrecting a starving polar bear that was rummaging through garbage* (Μακρόπουλος, 2023a, p. 87) to *restoring the image of the sunken Solomon Islands* (Μακρόπουλος, 2023a, p. 93). In this universe, where social structures like schools and hospitals have collapsed, the attempt to post real photos of destruction is considered a crime, pursued by the *unliners* (Μακρόπουλος, 2023a, pp. 85-107, 99). The story emphasizes the cost of confronting the systemic decline as Lene, a girl with anorexia, dares to upload illegal photos that capture reality as it is, but the story ends with her dying, while the protagonist, having fallen in love with her, secretly uploaded unreal images portraying her as a healthy person (Μακρόπουλος, 2023a, pp. 106-107, 95).

The fundamental question posed by these works is, in essence, the aftermath of a world in dissolution and collapse, particularly how humans will find their balance, and what role justice plays in such a fragile world. Butler creates, ex nihilo, a new, hopeful status where creative adaptation and community support are the guarantees for a just and sustainable

coexistence. On the other hand, Μακρόπουλος [Makropoulos], while showing the importance of human relationships as a transformative factor for a more sustainable society, focuses on the futile attempt of humanity to escape the conditions that imprison them, as in this post-apocalyptic world, justice is unattainable while the lack of sustainability has led to social and environmental decay.

#### 4. NAVIGATING JUST AND SUSTAINABLE FUTURES: COLLECTIVE MEMORY AND IDENTITY IN “THE DEEP” AND “RETURN TO THE CRADLE”

In the work *The Deep* (Solomon, 2019) by queer writer Rivers Solomon<sup>2</sup> (1989-), with Daveed Diggs, William Hutson, and Jonathan Snipes<sup>3</sup>, is a novella where sustainability and justice are intertwined with collective memory and the acceptance of past trauma. The work, another example of Afrofuturist literature, echoes the traumatic historical event of the transatlantic slave trade and the broader context of slavery, when pregnant Black women were thrown overboard and murdered at sea while their descendants survive as mermaids known as wajinru in an underwater city. This future emerging from a painful past is in line with wider Afrofuturist perspectives of a hopeful tomorrow and quest for the equitable and harmonious living of black populations. The novel deals with central issues concerning Black history, such as that of the trauma of the Transatlantic revisited through the lens of counter-memories, projecting the voices of the oppressed and enabling both the confrontation of historical trauma and the envisioning of healing (Kannan, 2022; Dawn & Alan, 2025; Er, 2023; Jenson, 2022; Calvo-Pascual, 2024). For wajinru, life beneath the surface of the ocean becomes crucial for their survival. Even though as Solomon emphasizes, this ocean city is utopian, a space where there are no misfortunes, inequalities, economic hardship, nor properties depriving the financially weak of housing rights (Solomon, Nov. 2019) legacy of suffering still torments this world. The Ocean presented as a transitional space between individual identity and collective memory, the space of transition from death to rebirth represents a sense of belonging, but also a space where Black and queer identity emerges (Dawn & Alan, 2025; Xausa, 2025; Er, 2023; Patrizi, 2023; DeLoughrey, 2022).

Inside this watery landscape, the society of the wajinru is one of forgetfulness: *Their memories faded after weeks or months—if not through wajinru biological predisposition for forgetfulness, then through sheer force of will.* (Solomon, 2019, pp.15-16) and this inability to remember perpetuates injustice making the wajinru society powerless to heal itself (Solomon, 2019, p.22). The historian, Yetu, keeps wajinru’s memories alive, bringing them back in the annual ceremony of “Remembrance” making sure that the past is neither forgotten or erased (Solomon, 2019, pp.19-22). As Dawn & Alan (2025) emphasize, Solomon, through the non-human and hermaphroditic form of Yetu, projects a polyphonic dimension onto the historical perspective, while negating the Western separation between life and death, incorporating the

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<sup>2</sup> The designation fae/faer is the most appropriate for the queer Rivers Solomon, as she herself states on her website (Solomon, n.d.).

<sup>3</sup>The work, and especially the idea of an underwater society and beings that originated from the transatlantic slave trade, comes from the creations of the electronic music group *Drexciya* and their album “The Quest” (1997), and later from the hip hop band *clipping* (2017), consisting of Daveed Diggs, William Hutson, and Jonathan Snipes. See also: *Drexciya* - 01 Intro (2021)

wajinru who exist in a continuum of life-death (Dawn & Alan, 2025, p. 7). Within that frame the work highlights the restoration of the traumatic past and collective memory as the only means of shaping a more just and sustainable future but also the difficulty of such an endeavor without personal cost. Yetu, unable to bear the weight of all the memories and torn between her personal desires and the responsibility she has to her community, faces a serious existential crisis (Solomon, 2019, pp. 14,22, 56-57, 71-72). Deciding to travel to the surface in order to confront her own experiences and memories she meets Oori, a *two-leg*, whose lack of traumatic past helps Yetu's emotional healing and leads to the restoration of her own justice too (Solomon, 2019, ch. 5, pp. 110-158): "*I know who I am now. All I knew before was who they were, who they wanted me to be,*" said Yetu. "*And it was killing me. It did kill me. I wasn't Yetu. I was just a shell for their whims.*" (Solomon, 2019, pp. 157-158). Nevertheless, the memories and concern for the wajinru feel like a storm of waves, forcing her to return to them and face her demons (Solomon, 2019, ch.9). Having overcome her loneliness, she finds meaning in reconnecting with her community as this appears to be a more balanced choice: *Could it really be that there was a version of the world where everything would be eradicated? Gone?[...] If it was a choice between the History and emptiness, maybe Yetu wanted the History.* (Solomon, 2019, pp. 206, 237-238).

In the political fantasy novel by ΙωσήφΜανίκης [Iosif Manikis], *Επιστροφή στο Λίκνο* [*Return to the Cradle*] (2023), we follow the journey of four cosmonauts from a suffering Earth, to the planet Λητώ [Leto] in 2060 with the spaceship *Αργώ*[*Argo*](Manikis, 2023). The discovery of the planet had filled humanity with hopes for an encounter with new life forms or the possibility of colonization (Μανίκης, 2023, pp. 78-81). However, the planet is inhospitable and the cosmonauts return to Earth after seventy years, only to find out that Earth has recovered with significant advancements in all sectors (Μανίκης, 2023). This just and sustainable condition has been achieved through a return to the roots, which constitutes a rebirth. It is this return that has brought ecological and social balance, as well as the restoration of historical and social injustices. Now Earth is trying to become *the bright home of all humanity, without distinctions and limitations* (Μανίκης, 2023, pp. 205-206) and the dream of a better world appears to have been fulfilled in the Cradle instead of a distant planet. Having expanded into new colonies inside the solar system such as the *Uranian State* composing an autonomous ecosystem, this utopia shows environmental flourishing in harmony with technology, with core values of communal ownership and respect for property (Μανίκης, 2023, pp. 207, see also ch.1, pp. 205-214, ch. 4, pp.226-232). Solutions to environmental issues are drastic, indicating a utopia in progress with clear optimistic future prospects (Μανίκης, 2023, ch. 2, pp. 245-256). On a political and social level, peace, the abolition of borders, and the elimination of state oversight over citizens have shaped a society of justice with *absolute freedom of thought and action* (p. 207). People are all equal, following the Enlightenment model, with an emphasis on diversity (Μανίκης, 2023, pp. 209-210) and participation in democratic processes (Μανίκης, 2023, pp. 210-211, ch.1, pp. 205-214).

Here, the issue of the return to the *Cradle*, which is Earth, constitutes the author's main concern, along with the anxiety about its future as well as its origin and evolutionary path (Μπρίκος, 2025). The changes occurring in various parts of Earth are given in detail, thus projecting the wealth of Greek cultural heritage, but also the explosion of natural wealth and beauty encountered in places like the Amazon, etc., a place ideally sustainable and just (Μανίκης, 2023, pp. 132-138; Ζηλιασκοπούλου, n.d.), emphasizing the image of a utopia

through the presentation of characters who symbolize real figures of world History and more broadly with political references but also in everyday moments (see also Μπρίκος, 2025; Ζηλιασκοπούλου, n.d.).

The book has existential and philosophical dimensions, raising questions about humanity's place in the Universe and the value of collectivity and our connection to the universe, while the issue of experience and memory, transferred to the inner world of the protagonists, transcend here, as in Solomon (2019), the concept of time and its linear perception (Αθάνατος, 2025). The cosmonauts recall their memory upon their return and, having come face to face with the past, they also seek a new beginning, while their connection to the universe projects the Global destiny as that element which knows no geographical boundaries (Αθάνατος, 2025). The author's message about the value of collectivity for achieving a better and more hopeful future (Αθάνατος, 2025) leads him to a novelistic synthesis that, as he poses questions, also answers them. As he himself says: *[the work] raises reflections and poses questions, with the main one being: Is utopia an unattainable dream or can it become practice, can it become eutopia, the good place, the feasible dream?* (Μανίκης, 2024).

In the societies of Solomon and Μανίκης [Manikis], justice is achieved through memory and the reclamation of the past. In Solomon's case, justice is identified with the recovery of history, of the forgotten past, while in Μανίκης [Manikis], it is achieved when humanity connects with its original homeland, its roots, thus rectifying its mistakes or injustices. This existential dimension of justice and the emphasis on collective identity as hope for its restoration are complemented by the idea of sustainability. In the case of *The Deep* (2019), remembering the past and confronting the trauma could help the submarine wajinru society to better survive in the future. Similarly, in Μανίκης [Manikis's] work, reuniting with the environment, nature, is what helps in the recovery of humanity and leads to a more sustainable future.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

The above analysis highlighted four forms of justice and sustainability in four corresponding literary works. Through the comparison of these concepts from two literary traditions which, even if they exhibit differences, present significant points of convergence, the importance of redefining values such as humanity, collectivity, and cultural identity is highlighted as solutions for a just and sustainable life, pointing out that that technology and science alone is not sufficient to resolve these issues. The study of such works can thus contribute meaningfully to the collective movement toward a more just and equitable future portraying fiction's role as a powerful tool for reflexion on ethical and ecological preoccupations. In that sense these narratives not only raise awareness of these notions but also invites us to imagine future where, perhaps, the *Wonderland* is no longer just a bad dream, as Alice experienced it, but a place we've managed to reach, *the place* as she would say, *we've finally arrived at*.

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