

**Haunting Temporalities: Creolisation and Black Women's Subjectivities in the Diasporic**

**Science Fiction of Nalo Hopkinson**

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This thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English, the Department of English, University of the Western Cape

Date submitted for examination: 11 November 2016

Names of supervisors: Dr Alannah Birch and Prof Marika Flockemann

## Keywords

Diasporic science fiction, temporal entanglement, creolisation, black women's subjectivities, modernity, slow violence, technology, empire, slavery, Nalo Hopkinson

## Abstract

This study examines temporal entanglement in three novels by Jamaican-born author Nalo Hopkinson. The novels are: *Brown Girl in the Ring* (1998), *Midnight Robber* (2000), and *The Salt Roads* (2004). The study pays particular attention to Hopkinson's use of narrative temporalities, which are shaped by creolisation. I argue that Hopkinson creatively theorises black women's subjectivities in relation to (post)colonial politics of domination. Specifically, creolised temporalities are presented as a response to predatory Western modernity. Her innovative diasporic science fiction displays common preoccupations associated with Caribbean women writers, such as belonging and exile, and the continued violence enacted by the legacy of colonialism and slavery. A central emphasis of the study is an analysis of how Hopkinson not only employs a past gaze, as the majority of both Caribbean and postcolonial writing does to recover the subaltern subject, but also how she uses the future to reclaim and reconstruct a sense of selfhood and agency, specifically with regards to black women. Linked to the future is her engagement with notions of technological and social betterment and progress as exemplified by her emphasis on the use of technology as a tool of empire. By writing science fiction, Hopkinson is able to delve into the nebulous nexus of technology, empire, slavery, capitalism and modernity. And, by employing a temporality shaped by creolisation, she is able to collapse discrete historical time-frames, tracing obscured connections between the nodes of this nexus from its beginnings on the plantation, the birthplace of creolisation and, as some have argued, of modernity itself.

## Declaration

I declare that *Haunting Temporalities: Creolisation and Black Women's Subjectivities in the Diasporic Science Fiction of Nalo Hopkinson* is my own work, that it has not been submitted for any degree or examination in any other university, and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by complete references.

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## Acknowledgements

I want to thank my supervisors, Miki and Lannie, without whom I would not have been able to complete this thesis. Their expertise, encouragement and hard work have been invaluable. I am grateful for the departmental research leave I received and the DVC-sponsored teaching relief that gave me time to focus on my thesis. I also want to thank my ever-patient husband, Peter, who kept me grounded and supported me throughout.





*For Jenaire who one day would have written her own doctoral thesis*



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## Introduction

[M]odern life begins with slavery. . . . [I]n terms of confronting the problems of where the world is now, black women had to deal with post-modern problems in the nineteenth century and earlier. These things had to be addressed by black people a long time ago: certain kinds of dissolution, the loss of and the need to reconstruct certain kinds of stability. Certain kinds of madness, deliberately going mad in order, as one of the characters says in [Beloved], “in order not to lose your mind.” These strategies for survival made the truly modern person. They’re a response to predatory western phenomena. You can call it an ideology and an economy, what it is is a pathology. Slavery broke the world in half, it broke it in every way. It broke Europe. It made them into something else, it made them slave masters, it made them crazy. You can’t do that for hundreds of years and it not take a toll. They had to dehumanize, not just the slaves but themselves. They have had to reconstruct everything in order to make that system appear true. . . .

– Toni Morrison (cited in Gilroy 221)

In *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993), Paul Gilroy uses this statement by Toni Morrison to reveal the connections between slavery and modernity and to support his argument that “blacks . . . [were] the first truly modern people, handling in the nineteenth century dilemmas and difficulties which would only become the substance of everyday life in Europe a century later” (221). He uses the image of the ship as an organising symbol for his project and for the traumatic Atlantic crossing and its equally destructive destination for the enslaved Africans. “The image of the ship—a living, micro-cultural, micro-political system in motion—is especially important for historical [reasons] . . .” (4). But, considering Morrison’s statement, the plantation system serves as a more compelling and powerful signifier of “the historical experience of colonialism and slavery in the Caribbean” than “Gilroy’s metaphor of the Black Atlantic’s Middle Passage as a ship” (Balutanski and Sourieau 5). The plantation signifies not only the inception of Western modernity, but it is also the place of origin of creolisation. Therefore, creolisation is an Afro-Caribbean reaction to the oppressive forces of Western modernity.

Creolisation, like Romanticism, is a response to modernity, but both have very specific contexts. There is a racial and diasporic specificity to creolisation which is still ongoing because the oppressive forces<sup>1</sup> to which it responded are, though mutated, still present. Here I follow Lorna Burns's definition where she states that:

Rather than arguing that creolization displays a 'historical specificity' unique to the Caribbean or Caribbean colonization . . . [it] has been theorized as a concept that is contingent to the specificities of the given historical context in which it occurs. In this way, creolization may be specific to the particular historical experience of colonialism in the Caribbean, but its principles may also be extended to other areas without diluting the historical specificity of its Caribbean form. (*Creolizing the Canon* 10)

In *Poetics of Relation* (1997), Édouard Glissant uses the plantation as a metaphor to connect modernity and slavery: "Within this universe of domination and oppression. . . on the margins of every dynamic, the tendencies of our modernity begin to be detectable" (65). Glissant's idea of modernity encompasses racialised labour, economic and political power relations and structures, but it can be extended to also refer to the development of modern science and technology as related to the plantation. In a doctoral thesis entitled "Enlightened Institutions: Science, Plantations, and Slavery in the English Atlantic, 1626-1700," Eric Otremba examines how "Enlightenment ideas on reason, order, and progress . . . [influenced] the simultaneous expansion of slave-based work regimes," and vice versa (iii). He goes on to explain that the discourse of the natural sciences (particularly in England) shared common roots with slavery and the Enlightenment and these 'roots' were plain to see in the "dual categories of knowing and dominating" that were part of an ethos which "advocated using new discoveries and innovations

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<sup>1</sup> These oppressive forces include exploitative capitalism, racialised political structures and Eurocentric notions of science and technology.

to streamline artisanal industries and to more thoroughly organize English labor routines, all for the sake of national plenty and profit” (iii).<sup>2</sup> Thus, Caribbean plantations were understood as an “example of th[e] period’s strivings towards moral, natural, and economic improvement—hallmarks of early Enlightenment thought” (iii). Members of the British Royal Society, who were “experimental philosophy’s reformers and natural scientists portrayed the sugar plantation as a modern innovation *par excellence*, and the equivalent to other recent marvels such as gunpowder and the magnetic compass” (30).

The plantation as a modern innovation was not only connected to science and technology, but also to capitalism. The Caribbean was crucial to the formation of commercial capitalism because of the impact of the slave trade on other kinds of trades: “It was in the Caribbean vortex of the Atlantic Basin that . . . international capitalism took its early cultural and social identity” (Beckles 785). Guy Emerson Mount sums up the connection between commercial capitalism and slavery in that the former is a consumptive enterprise and the latter “a site that produced consumer goods for the metropole” (n. pag.). It was commercial capitalism which made the development of industrial capitalism possible in the shift from the eighteenth to nineteenth century (Williams 210). Therefore, the plantation and how it functioned as a node connecting capitalism, science and technology was “a modern system” in which the slaves were “from the very start liv[ing] a life that was in its essence a modern life” (James 392), a life that was characterised by alienation and fracturing social, political and economic pressures. The linkages between slavery, modernity and creolisation are foregrounded by Nalo Hopkinson, a Jamaican-born writer whose novels, *Brown Girl in the Ring* (1998), *Midnight Robber* (2000) and *The Salt*

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<sup>2</sup> Hilary Beckles notes that “. . . John Locke, doyen of Enlightenment writers on civic freedom and human liberty, own[ed] slaves and invest[ed] in Caribbean plantations [in the Bahamas]” (779).

*Roads* (2004) are the subject of this project. In the third novel, *The Salt Roads*, she stages a return to the plantation: A “return to the point of entanglement, from which we forcefully turned away” (Glissant, “Reversion and Diversion” 26). The return is made more poignant because she arrives at it from the far-future in *Midnight Robber*, and from the near-future in *Brown Girl in the Ring*. The entanglement referred to here is not only that of the colonised with the coloniser, but also of modernity and slavery, past, present and future; underscoring the significance of this return.

Although my primary focus will be on the intersectional operations of temporality and creolisation in Hopkinson’s fiction, it is also important to consider how notions of temporality are interwoven in her work as a (postcolonial) diasporic woman writer, predominantly in relation to the multiple female subjectivities and generational linkages one encounters in the novels. Of particular interest is how creolisation manifests itself as subject, but also as an aesthetic and textual strategy. One can recognise this strategy in how she brings together diasporic themes and science fictional genre conventions, a creolisation which draws one’s attention to the debates around science fiction and how certain systems of knowledge (and those who control them) are championed in the genre while others are negated. The tensions between Western and non-Western systems of knowledge are central to all three novels and these replicate the way in which women writers of colour are represented,<sup>3</sup> and, too often, excluded in the genre. It also draws attention to how entwined science, technology and Western conceptions of modernity are.

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<sup>3</sup> ‘People of colour’ is a term commonly used in science fiction discourse. Using such a term:

. . . immediately raises the question of . . . who is outside the mainstream, and more importantly, what the mainstream is. In today’s publishing world, it tends to be about people who are not on the axis of privilege. . . . (Tan n. pag.)

‘People of colour’ and the comparable term ‘global South’ both collapse difference, but they also attempt to avoid exclusion and as such are used in a strategic sense to oppose the white, male centeredness of science fiction and fantasy. Throughout this study, I will adhere to whichever term (people of colour or black people) used by the authors I respond to or quote.

The first chapter will provide a theoretical framework for these issues and themes connected to and by temporality and creolisation, but this introductory section provides some context for how the two function together in Hopkinson's writing.

Even though she writes science fiction, Hopkinson employs thematic elements that will be familiar to any reader of diasporic women's fiction. There is a preoccupation with the significance of place in her writing that centres on belonging, exile and the link between mothers and motherlands (Rosenberg 61). Caribbean women writers address similar themes to those that concern male writers: "the pain and shame of slavery, colonialism and immigration;" but they also include a more explicit focus on "gender . . . sexuality . . . relationships . . . [and] myth and folklore," all coloured by a female perspective (Rosalind McLymont cited in Reynolds 26). Diasporic writers also explore what Marlene Nourbese Phillips calls the "psychic wounds" inflicted "on Caribbean people as a consequence of the colonial experience and the adverse impact of this destructive legacy on the relationship between the sexes" (Nourbese Phillips and Elizabeth Nunez cited in Reynolds 26). In an effort to work through these wounds in a way that avoids a narrative of victimisation, the work of many Caribbean women writers has a distinct spiritual component that often serves a redemptive function to heal communal traumas or repressed wounds, so that they do not "congeal . . . in the collective unconscious, and [erupt] into . . . nemesis" (Wilson Harris cited in Engman 106).

Viewed in the larger context of diasporic women writers, Hopkinson both contributes to and expands the genre through her genre-transgressing fiction. Carole Boyce Davies's concept of creative theorising encapsulates how Hopkinson engages with multiple female subjectivities in the context of (post)colonialism, placing her fiction, like that of many other women of colour, "solidly in . . . theoretical explorations of colonial discourses and female subjectivity" (Boyce

Davies 59; 60). The manner in which she addresses this troubled subjectivity is strategic in the sense that she acknowledges how women of colour were victimised, but she moves beyond that to emphasise their strength and achieve a sense of healing and a way to look to the future. Her skilful rendering of the reality of women's lives in her novels shows how multi-faceted the oppression of women of colour is, and has been since the time of slavery because even then they had to respond to experiences of dissolution, loss and instability stemming from modernity (Toni Morrison cited in Gilroy 221). Using creative and subversive strategies, they have been able not only to cope with, but also to resist those oppressions and to recover and reclaim a sense of self. For instance, Wilson Harris, Caribbean author and critic, "has written that the project of identity-creation that characterizes his work is driven by the need to 'promote an involvement with the past that is equally an involvement with the present, even as the present becomes a threshold into the future'" (cited in K.O.S. Campbell 6). One can identify a similar impulse in Hopkinson's work although she incorporates a much more overt focus on the future by virtue of writing science fiction. She employs different temporal spaces to create narratives that "expose various chauvinisms (sexual, racial and cultural) [and these narratives] are enriched by a historical consciousness that shapes the depiction of enslavement both in the real past and in imaginary pasts and futures . . ." (Crossley 14).

Entwined with female subjectivity in a Caribbean context is the idea of the 'great mother' or the negative 'mammy' figure with which diasporic women writers engage with. Boyce Davies argues that the selflessness of the 'mammy' figure "is positioned against or along with a series of deliberate self-constructions by Black women. Motherhood and/or mothering thus become central and defining tropes in Black female reconstruction" (135). This engagement with ideas surrounding motherhood is evident in all three of the novels selected here, and noteworthy when



viewed together with the other discursive strategies Hopkinson employs to (re)construct female subjectivity in the novels. Associated with motherhood in the novels is the idea of belonging, but therefore also exile as ideas of motherhood and motherland are entangled with one another, a thematic aspect especially prominent in *Midnight Robber* where another planet is colonised by Caribbean space travellers.<sup>4</sup> Boyce Davies argues that:

[The] decentering of home and exile advances the critique of labelling, place, origin, home/lands. It is a recognition that because of their history, Black women themselves have to redefine the contours of what identity, location, writing, theory and time mean, and thus redefine themselves against Empire constructs. (Boyce Davies 96)

This speaks to the way the female subjectivities Hopkinson (re)constructs in her novels are thus composed of interrelated issues of motherhood and place which must all be addressed in order to productively respond to the continued violence of colonialism and slavery.

A related diasporic theme evident in Hopkinson's work is how crucial creole language<sup>5</sup> is to her attempt to "revalorize and reposition [Caribbean] cosmologies and epistemologies" (Pyne-Timothy 103). *Midnight Robber* begins with a song by David Findlay called "Stolen" which opens with the line "I stole the torturer's tongue." In an interview, Hopkinson shares that he wrote the song while she was still writing the novel after they discussed what she was trying to do with language in the story (Nelson 102). Dorsía Smith argues that a writer's choice of language, especially for those who "embrace Caribbean forms of expression which do not conform to Europeanized literary standards" can embody both resistance and subversion (143).

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<sup>4</sup> When considering this thematic thread it is important to note that Hopkinson herself was born in Jamaica and subsequently lived in Guyana, Trinidad, and briefly in America before her family moved to Toronto Canada when she was sixteen in order for her then ill father to receive medical treatment. Hopkinson has lived in California since 2011.

<sup>5</sup> It is significant that her use of nation language is most prominent in *Midnight Robber*, the novel that takes place furthest away from the event of slavery while *The Salt Roads*, the closest one, has few examples of nation language.

She refers to Louise Bennet's particular use of non-standard English, or nation language, which Bennet calls "a means of linguistic self-determination." Bennet uses it in such a way as to have "transformed the value of [it] as an artistic and cultural expression and to have brought attention to the fusion of linguistic freedom and social commentary," even though (or perhaps because) her work was initially dismissed by many because of the association of nation language with illiteracy and inferiority (143; 144; 145). Therefore, Hopkinson's use of creole language demonstrates just how central creolisation is to her work.

Creolisation is at the heart of how Hopkinson uses language and depicts temporality in her work and also in how she draws science fiction and fantasy together. Glissant explicates the nature of the Caribbean by comparing it to the Mediterranean which is "an inner sea surrounded by lands, a sea that concentrates." The Caribbean in contrast is "a sea that explodes the scattered lands into an arc. A sea that diffracts" (Glissant, *Poetics* 33). Thus the geography of the Caribbean is representative of creolisation which is ". . . not merely an encounter, a shock (in Segalen's sense) a *métissage*,<sup>6</sup> but a new and original dimension allowing each person to be there and elsewhere, rooted and open, lost in the mountains and free beneath the sea, in harmony and in errantry" (34). Describing it as a "new and original dimension" underscores the centrality of creativity in creolisation. The "poetics of relation" proposed by Glissant "celebrates the right to borrow or absorb selected components of the 'other' without relinquishing one's own dimensions" (Balutanski and Sourieau 7). Glissant is not the originator of the concept of creolisation, Kathleen Balutanski and Marie-Agnès Sourieau point out that Kamau Braithwaite had already identified the importance of creolisation in relation to the Caribbean "some twenty years before discussions about creolization by Glissant, Bernabe, Confiante, Chamoiseau, and

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<sup>6</sup> He defines *métissage* as "the meeting and synthesis of two differences" while creolisation is "a limitless *métissage*, its elements diffracted and its consequences unforeseeable" (Glissant, *Poetics* 34).

Benítez-Rojo” in the eighties and nineties (5). Creolisation has often been used in ways that are synonymous with hybridity, but it is different because it is the creation of something completely new, often marked by contradiction, and not just an amalgamation of two things. Because of the complex interplay of culture and language, contradictions occur frequently, and to be two (often opposing) things at once is not necessarily problematic. Burns writes that while many theorists depict creolisation as a process, Antonio Benítez-Rojo argues that it “ultimately resists even the notion of process where that term is taken to signal a progressive evolution.” To him, it is not a linear movement, but “a broken series of recurrences, of happenings, whose only law is change” (cited in “Beyond the Colonized and the Colonizer” 152). Both Glissant and Benítez-Rojo’s definitions of creolisation focus on its disruptiveness, its fractal and unpredictable nature which resists binaries, and fixed subjectivities.

Creolisation means that the response to oppressive violence is not to fracture or break apart, but instead to respond creatively and create fractals out of broken cultural patterns. In mathematical terms, fractals are when a part bears a resemblance to the whole, but on a different scale. Examples in nature are a nautilus, a pine cone or a snowflake, where the overall shape or pattern is repeated on a progressively smaller scale (Eglish n. pag.). Hopkinson explains her understanding of the concept as a pattern that is broken or disrupted, but which, instead of collapsing, incorporates the break which is then repeated. The Middle Passage caused a violent rupture between enslaved Africans and their communities of origin which resulted in “diasporic African cultures reinvent[ing] and reform[ing] themselves on the other side of the Atlantic slave routes.” Their broken cultural patterns were “rewoven” into new ones (Hopkinson and Due 400), thus illustrating the operation of fractals in historical consciousness. Creolisation is a creative response to violence and trauma, and consequently a testament to “a painful pattern of

confrontations and ruptures among racial groups and of considerable mutations of personal and cultural identity” (Balutanski and Sourieau 5). It is never fixed, but always flexible in order to respond to and survive a hostile environment.

The creolised epistemes in the novels bring together non-Western and Western ways of knowing. This strategy obscures the distinctions between spirituality, folkloric or indigenous knowledge, and science and technology thereby showing that one is not superior to the other,<sup>7</sup> but also demonstrating how closely related religion, science and technology were during colonisation. During early colonial expansion, science and technology were not measures of European superiority, instead “the most decisive distinction between [Europeans] and the people they encountered [overseas] was religious” and their “most valued truths were religious, not scientific” (Adas 31). To paraphrase Michael Adas, before machines became the measure of men, religion fulfilled that function and continued to do so even when science and technology overtook it as measures of distinction (31). It is thus subversive to present a non-Western system of knowledge as being equal to the measures of modernity, religion, science and technology, as identified by Adas. Such a subversion is not achieved through a simplistic comparison, but by creating a new creolised episteme that draws on both systems. Furthermore, creolised systems highlight that religion and science were not as separate as contemporary thought would have them be. Adas provides an example from 1830 when a Baptist missionary, William Carey “bluntly dismissed the suggestion of some American donors that the funds they had recently sent in support of his school be spent only for religious and educational purposes.” He quotes Carey as writing:

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<sup>7</sup> It is interesting to note that Hopkinson views magic and science as the same thing in the sense that both are an “effort [to impose] your will upon . . . the world” (cited in Okorafor, “A Traveling Female Spirit” 38).

“I have never heard anything more illiberal. Pray can youth be trained for the Christian ministry without science? Do you in America train up youths for it without any knowledge of science?” (cited in Adas 206)

Like David Livingstone, Carey believed that “scientific learning was the ‘handmaiden’ of religion” (206). Indeed, “Catholic missionaries sought to ‘yoke science to the chariot of Christian truth,’” believing that “teaching African youths astronomy was a most effective way of demonstrating the ‘power and majesty of God’” (Abbé Boilat cited in Adas 206).<sup>8</sup> Therefore, by questioning the privileging of Western ways of knowing, whether religious and scientific, Hopkinson subverts the grand narratives of progress and liberation tied to science and technology, *and* Christianity.

When exploring how modernity and slavery are interconnected in terms of science and technology, one must consider how important the Caribbean was to the formation of modern science. James Delbourgo and Nicholas Dew use the eminent German natural philosopher Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz’s definition of science as epigraph to the introduction to *Science and Empire in the Atlantic World* (2008), a collection of essays focused on the role of the Atlantic in the formation of science as we now know it.<sup>9</sup> “The entire body of the sciences can be thought of as being like the ocean, which is everywhere continuous and without division, even though men have conceived parts for it, and give them names according to their convenience” (3). Delbourgo and Dew use this definition to introduce a less Euro-centric conceptualisation of science, one

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<sup>8</sup> Science and religion were not only cooperatively linked in an ideological sense, but also in practical ways. Jesuit missionaries, with their “[corporate structured] network of correspondents . . . were one of the best organized collectives for the long-distance circulation of early modern knowledge.” Their efficiency meant that “[s]tate-sponsored scientific institutions” like the Royal British Society tried to emulate their organisation and discipline (Delbourgo and Dew 13).

<sup>9</sup> Several essays in the book also look at intersections between commercial capitalism and science through such topics as oceanic trade routes and the lucrative science of botany.

which rejects “European science . . . as the engine of ‘modernization’ and ‘development’ for the entire world.” Instead, it is viewed as “an intricate latticework of intersecting itineraries and competing agencies” (10). Since the three novels’ plots span several centuries, the terms science and technology cannot be understood to be static or stable categories of meaning and I will be using them to refer to a collection of practices that include modern science, but also its earlier incarnations: “natural science, natural philosophy, and experimental philosophy” (Otremba 4). Loosely defined, science refers to “endeavors that are aimed at gaining a knowledge of the natural environment” while technology are “efforts to exercise a ‘working control’ over that environment” (Adas 5). But, by the end of the nineteenth century the two “had become ‘mirror-image twins’: one oriented to experiment, theory, and knowing; the other to application, design and doing, but both joined in a systematic endeavor to uncover the secrets and harness the energies of the natural world” (142). The aspiration to mastery over nature became a foundational aspect of “scientific discovery and technological advancement [and] was one of the most critical gauges of human achievement.” By the end of the Industrial Revolution “the degree to which a culture was able to control its environment was often decisive in determining its rank on the scale of savagery and civilization” (Adas 214; 215), thus affirming the primitiveness of the African.

Much like science and technology, the term modernity also has different definitions and starting points depending on the context of its use. I will be using the term to describe the time period roughly stretching from the seventeenth to twentieth century, but also to denote a way of thinking associated with the European Enlightenment (and the attendant developments in scientific thinking) which includes ideas about progress, innovation, rationality and empiricism. Crucially, modernity cannot be considered without the institution of slavery which existed within

it: slavery “was much more than a system of labor management. It was also a property regime, a social and cultural generator, a legal category, and an ideological touchstone that often drove national politics” (Mount n. pag.). By writing science fiction, a genre preoccupied with science and technology, Hopkinson is able to constructively delve into the submerged intersections and dependencies between modernity, science, technology, and industry and capitalism.

Hopkinson transgresses boundaries of genre by creolising not only science and spirituality, but also elements of science fiction and fantasy. I have chosen to refer exclusively to her work as science fiction to emphasise how the genre allows her to engage with the future and with technology as a tool of empire, but some critics label it as speculative fiction in order to be more inclusive towards the folkloric and fantastical elements in her writing. While she herself is in general wary of genre labels she provides a productive definition of science fiction and fantasy as:

... a set of literatures that examine the effects on the humans and human societies of the fact that we are toolmakers. We are always trying to control or improve our environments. Those tools may be tangible (such as machines) or intangible (such as laws, mores, belief-systems). Science fiction and fantasy tells us stories about our lives with our creations. (cited in Nelson 98)

She finds both genres useful in terms of how they allow her to deal with the legacy of colonialism, and specifically slavery, which she calls “a huge cancer in the collective consciousness of African people all over the diaspora.” Furthermore, she states that she can experiment with the effects of “that cancerous blot, to shrink it by setting [her] worlds far in the future (science fiction) or to metonymize it so that [she] can explore the paradigms it [has] created (fantasy)” (cited in Rutledge “Speaking in Tongues” 592). Therefore, her use of science

fiction and fantasy is deliberate because it allows her to “examine and explore socioeconomically configured ethnoracial power imbalances” that are connected to a legacy of colonialism and slavery (Hopkinson, *Planet Midnight* 42).

While postcolonial studies features seminal contributions from a diversity of voices, including those writing from the margins, there is a distinct lack of these voices in science fiction. In the introduction to *So Long Been Dreaming: Postcolonial Science Fiction and Fantasy*, Hopkinson argues that “[t]o be a person of colour writing science fiction is to be under suspicion of having internalized one’s colonization” (7). Her sentiment reflects how inextricably connected science fiction is with the perception of technology as a tool of empire, and highlights why it is important for postcolonial authors to engage with the genre in order to interrogate and subvert that association. Although there are several well-known African-American science fiction authors such as Octavia Butler, Tananarive Due, N.K. Jemisin, Nnedi Okorafor, Andrea Hairston, Steven Barnes and Samuel R. Delany to name but a few, they still remain a relative minority in the larger scope of the genre. Casting the net a little further to include writers from the Caribbean, the dearth of current authors engaging with science fiction becomes even more apparent with Nalo Hopkinson, Karen Lord and Tobias S. Buckell currently being the only three well-known Anglophone writers. The particular motivation behind focusing on Hopkinson’s work is to examine how her use of temporal entanglement is shaped by creolisation, and how she uses creolisation in terms of language, indigenous knowledge, spirituality and folklore within science fiction, with a specific emphasis on how these realms of knowledge impact on the lives of women of colour.



The three novels chosen for this study can be likened to the writing of two of science fiction's seminal female authors, Ursula le Guin and Octavia Butler. Hopkinson's concern with grand narratives of history and the role of (oral) storytelling in preserving personal histories can, for example, be seen in le Guin's *The Telling* (2000). In the novel, the people of Aka preserve their history and traditions through the sacred act of "the Telling" in the face of suppression and violence from a corporatist government which seeks a blank slate on which to build their oppressive regime. Hopkinson's questioning of the cost of violent resistance can also be seen in *The Word for World is Forest* (1972), in which le Guin explores the cost at which freedom comes when it depends on violence. The story, set in the Hainish universe, takes place on the planet of Athshe which has been claimed as a Terran colony and subsequently exploited for its wood, and its inhabitants are enslaved to perform hard labour. The Athsheans are pacifists whose world view is built on "dream time" where to dream something makes it real, thus becoming part of "world time." After his wife is raped and murdered, the Athshean, Selver, dreams of war, sharing it with his people who then rid their planet of the Terran colonisers through extremely violent resistance. They regain their freedom, but at the cost of war becoming part of their "dream time." This violent invasion of what is in part their collective subconscious recalls the enduring trauma of slavery and the mark it has left on the psyche, spirituality and creativity of the descendants of the enslaved, a theme recognisable in all three of Hopkinson's novels. Moreover, like Dana in Octavia Butler's novel *Kindred* (1979), who travels to the Maryland plantation where one of her ancestors was enslaved, Hopkinson makes an explicit return to the time of slavery to trace its echoing trauma from past to present, foregrounding how survival can be an act of opposition. In the *Xenogenesis* trilogy (now known as *Lilith's Brood*, 1987-1989) and the novella *Survivor* (1978), Butler portrays encounters between humans and aliens to delve

into how profoundly colonisation affects both coloniser and colonised,<sup>10</sup> an exploration that is prominent in Hopkinson's writing too. This theme also fits with Toni Morrison's description of slavery as a pathology, or disease, which dehumanises oppressor *and* oppressed (Gilroy 221). The ways in which Hopkinson uses science fiction seems to be both thought-experiment and an act of bearing witness to trauma, working through complex and entangled webs of being, power and oppression.

There has been a considerable amount of critical engagement with Hopkinson's work, a large proportion of which has been devoted to discussing her work with regards to genre. Critics focus exclusively on either *Midnight Robber* or *Brown Girl in the Ring* and to date few have considered the connection between the aforementioned novels and *The Salt Roads*. Gordon Collier consciously excludes it from his analysis as it does not fit into his definition of science fiction and although Gregory Rutledge offers a comprehensive and critical review of the novel, he views it as a departure from her science fiction and fantasy roots ("Review" 2). My analysis aims to show why it is productive to view all three novels together and also why it is important to consider *The Salt Roads* as science fiction. To demonstrate the temporal thread Hopkinson establishes in the three novels, the chapters will not unfold in the chronological order in which the books were published, but instead follow the stories from the future, backwards into the past. *Midnight Robber* takes place in the far-future on a different planet, *Brown Girl in the Ring* takes place in a very near-future (or possibly on an alternative universe) that is quite familiar when compared to our present, and *The Salt Roads* returns to the source of many of the issues which her Caribbean space-travellers, who colonise Toussaint in *Midnight Robber*, still grapple with. Writing about the role of historical memory in "the formation of collective identities in

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<sup>10</sup> In *Survivor* the humans (ineffectually) attempt to colonise the aliens, while in *Lilith's Brood*, the humans are the ones who are colonised.

contemporary Spain,” José Colmeiro observes that the use of tropes of haunting and ghosts are symptomatic of the “spectrality of the repressed collective past” (18). While he is writing about a different context and traumatic event (the Spanish Civil War) his statement that the “suppressed past appears to return in spectral form to haunt the present in [art]” remains relevant (31). Suzanna Engman argues that “[g]hosts in Caribbean literature exemplify how the Caribbean reaches outward, backward, and forward in time and space, connecting with the other Americas through the shared experience of the forced contact of cultures” (102). One could argue that the nation language, folklore, indigenous knowledge and spirituality employed by Hopkinson to connect different temporalities in all three novels serve a similar function: collectively, these elements serve as “a metaphor of community, memory, hope, and imagination” that emphasises the “healing power of imaginative creol[isation]” (103). Her distinctive creolisation of Caribbean folklore, spirituality and Western technology and science portrays folklore and spiritual/magical systems of knowledge as more intuitive and holistic than Western systems of knowledge. Through this representation she is able to challenge “Pro-Western ideologues of ‘progress’ and ‘civilization’ [who] have derided ritualistic practices of African origin as proof of the Caribbean folk’s inability to embrace ‘modernity’ . . .” (Fernández Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert 9). An example of this kind of challenge is one of Hopkinson’s short stories, “Greedy Choke Puppy.” In the story, the protagonist Jacky is working towards completing a postgraduate degree with a thesis entitled “Magic in the Real: the Role of Folklore in Everyday Caribbean Life.” Her thesis attempts to rationalise Caribbean folklore tales and beliefs using, amongst other things, psychoanalysis. In the story, the reality described by folklore is real while the Western system of knowledge is ultimately shown to be superstition when it is revealed that Jacky herself is a *soucouyant*, a female vampire in Caribbean folklore who feeds on newborn babies.

It is noteworthy that Hopkinson elects to use the future as setting in two of the selected novels. Uppinder Mehan, her co-editor for *So Long Been Dreaming*, argues that postcolonial authors should write science fiction because “[i]f we do not imagine our futures, postcolonial peoples risk being condemned to be spoken about and for again” (“Conclusion,” *So Long Been Dreaming* 270). Her choice of temporal setting becomes even more significant when one considers that the majority of postcolonial studies almost exclusively look to the past and how it relates to current relations of domination. Given that “future-directed notions of progress, betterment and modernity have been and remain . . . [fundamental] to colonial ontology,” Andrew Baldwin argues, that it is thus crucial to examine the ways in which the future is invoked in articulations of subjectivity in order to challenge “racist [and oppressive] social imaginaries” (172; 180; 181). In *Midnight Robber* and *Brown Girl in the Ring*, the future is intimately connected to the past through specific use of nation language, Caribbean folklore, spirituality and the thematic thread of slavery that runs through all three novels. Hopkinson explicitly returns to the past in *The Salt Roads*, a novel which arguably fits more comfortably than the other two novels into what is conventionally seen as Caribbean women’s writing, a literature that addresses the troubled subjectivity of both those who were enslaved and their descendants.

The influence of creolisation can be seen in the representation of temporality in the three novels: fixed meanings and discrete time periods are resisted, time is decidedly non-linear, recurrences are frequent, but not identical, and entanglement or imbrication characterises its depiction throughout. The notion of temporality exemplified in the three novels reflects the concept (shared by Mbembe, Morrison, Gilroy and Glissant) of “the ‘post colony’ as an entanglement of temporalities, affiliations, and incompletions” (Baker 7). This ‘post colony’ has been shaped by:

. . . the duality suggested by Young; that the colonial era effected, on the one hand, the globalisation of culture and economics, imposing a singular or universal concept of history and mankind, and on the other, it caused radical fragmentation and dislocation.

(Burns, *Creolizing the Canon* 16)

Creolisation is a response to both of these effects: it resists master narratives of language, culture, history and identity, but it also transforms fragments and fractures into productive fractals. In *The Repeating Island* (1996), Benítez-Rojo argues that the Caribbean identity is characterised by “plurality, fluidity, and syncretism.” It is “. . . the natural and indispensable realm of marine currents, of waves, of folds, and double-folds, of fluidity and sinuosity. It is . . . a continual flow of paradoxes; it is a feed-back machine with asymmetrical workings . . .” (cited in Smith, Tagirova and Engman 1). His definition provides a succinct description of the creolised nature of the Caribbean, one that is shaped both by the influences of colonialism, and opposition to and subversion of those influences. Hopkinson reflects this sentiment when she states that “in my hands massa’s tools<sup>11</sup> don’t dismantle massa’s house—and in fact, I don’t want to destroy it as much as I want to undertake massive renovations—then build me a house of my own” (Hopkinson, “Introduction” *So Long Been Dreaming*, 8). To achieve this creolised ‘renovation’ and creation of something different, Hopkinson’s use of temporality is indispensable.

Non-linear depictions of time are important because one of the key ways European colonisers distinguished themselves from those they conquered and oppressed was centred on perceptions of time. “. . . [C]alendar inaccuracies and the need to regulate monastic routines had led medieval scholars and artisans to take a strong interest in the measurement of time” and this earlier development coupled with the later refinement of mechanical clocks and the structured

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<sup>11</sup> Her statement refers to the one made by Audre Lorde that “massa’s tools will never dismantle massa’s house” (Hopkinson, “Introduction,” *So Long Been Dreaming*, 7).

time required by industrial textile production and commerce, meant that Europeans “had undergone [a] profound reorientation of time perception . . .” (Adas 60-61).

For European travelers, settlers, and missionaries, time-keeping devices were . . . tangible links to the more “advanced” societies they had left behind in order to brave the dangers and discomforts of “savage Africa.” Robert Moffat, David Livingstone's co-worker, captured this association vividly when he wrote in his journal soon after arriving in Matabeleland, “Today we have unpacked our clock and we seemed a little more civilized.” (245-246)

Therefore, the lack of accurate time measuring devices they observed in, for example, African societies became another way for Europeans to affirm the sense of their own superiority, which is questioned by the non-linear time in Hopkinson’s fiction.

Temporal entanglement is apparent in the selected novels and this thematic feature can be related to Achille Mbembe’s proposition that postcolonialism is an age that is made up of multiple overlaying and interpenetrating *dureés* that together form a complex of “interlocking . . . presents, pasts, and futures that retain their depth of other presents, pasts and futures, each age bearing, altering and maintaining the previous ones” (14). The temporal thread that runs through the three novels exemplifies how the entwined *dureés* Mbembe describes influence one another. The two narratives set in imagined futures draw on elements of the past, weaving them together with the present as influenced by both the past and the virtuality of the future without diminishing any of the *dureés*, while in *The Salt Roads*, the narrative set in the past, includes several different temporal settings. Connected to temporal entanglement is slow violence, a concept introduced by Rob Nixon in *Slow Violence: Environmentalism of the Poor* (2011), to elucidate the connection between postcolonialism and environmentalism. He describes the

‘invisible’ and continuing effects of colonialism that are wrought on both the individual and environment as “a violence of delayed destructions that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all . . .” (2). While he uses the term specifically in the context of postcolonial environmentalism, it is an immensely useful concept in relation to Hopkinson’s particular use of temporality. This is because it includes not only what Rutledge terms psychological colonisation (“Review” 3), but also the material effects the individual experiences as a result of the continued legacy of colonialism and slavery.

I aim to analyse how, in Carole Boyce Davies’ terms, Hopkinson contributes to and expands the canon of diasporic women writers by creatively theorising the subjectivity of women of colour and politics of domination (59) in the three novels. The over-arching aim is to analyse how she subverts and resists the pervasive legacy of colonialism and slavery, and the slow violence it enacts, through her use of creolisation and temporal entanglement. I will examine her return to the past to recover the subaltern subject and address the slow violence inflicted by colonialism and slavery and also how she uses science fiction to overtly address the future to critique notions of betterment and progress as embodied in science and technology as tools of empire. Additionally, I will also examine how she uses the future to creatively theorise current structures of domination and especially their effects on female subjectivities as they relate to women of colour in the diaspora. These female subjectivities will be primarily examined in terms of common themes in diasporic women’s writing such as questions of belonging and exile in connection to labour and land, and motherhood and its connection to motherland(s). Furthermore, I will also look at relationships (platonic and romantic) between women in the novels, but also gender relations, and how the personal is political. Hopkinson’s use of creolisation will be examined in relation to: her innovative combination of science fiction,



fantasy and Caribbean literary themes, her subversive use of nation language as revalorisation, and lastly, the creole of Caribbean folklore, spirituality and Western technology that she employs to subvert Western notions of science and technology and to rehabilitate indigenous knowledge.

Science and technology (and their connection to industry) can simultaneously be read as an expression, tool and driver of modernity and they are conventionally positioned in opposition to people of colour. They embody a teleological drive towards progress which envisions the future as a space that completely leaves the past behind. Adhering to this Western representation of science and technology risks the obfuscation of the connections between these fundamentally ‘modern’ endeavours and slavery. I will examine how Hopkinson exposes these connections in her science fiction, thereby enabling her to reposition people, specifically women of colour, in relation to science and technology, but also to demonstrate how enmeshed science and technology are in the nexus of modernity, capitalism and slavery. It is thus important that Hopkinson is writing science fiction and not another kind of speculative fiction because it allows her to foreground how science and technology figure into this nexus and how they, and industrialisation, amplify the pressures of modernity.

The first chapter will establish the theoretical framework for the chapters to follow, covering the main concepts of temporality and creolisation, but also the science fiction and diasporic aspects of the novels. Connected to all of these is the female subjectivity at the centre of Hopkinson’s fiction which will be contextualised by examining how the fiction of women writers of colour has been theorised. I will then follow the temporal thread backwards in time from *Midnight Robber*, to *Brown Girl in the Ring* and finally to *The Salt Roads*. Emerging from the key discourses covered in the first chapter, the other three chapters will be roughly organised around three different temporalities: firstly, a teleological, linear and Western one pertaining to



technology and science fiction; secondly, a diasporic temporality concerned with creolisation and features of diasporic fiction; and thirdly, a generational temporality centred on the experiences and subjectivities of women of colour.

In reviewing Shona Jackson's *Creole Indigeneity* and Andrew Canessa's *Intimate Indigeneities*, Christa Olson writes that land and labour are central to both authors' understanding of indigeneity and belonging in the Caribbean and these two concepts are formulated as being socially constructed instead of being based on inherited or biological statuses (333). Summarising Jackson's book, Olson writes that the "exploration of labor and land, indigeneity and Creole subjectivity . . . calls attention to the enduring power of colonial narratives even in anti- and postcolonial contexts" (337). This persistent colonial narrative shapes the future depicted in the subject of the second chapter, *Midnight Robber*. In the novel, the Marryshevites<sup>12</sup> construct their identity as a people around their ownership of Toussaint,<sup>13</sup> ownership gained through a replication of colonial practices their ancestors had to endure. They romanticise their colonial enterprise as *marronage* and themselves as heroic maroons, establishing their own out-of-reach space (Lahens 160), through the use of technology they own and control. Through the protagonist Tan-Tan's experience, one sees what a woman of colour's place in this future, recurrent colonial narrative may be.

The third chapter on *Brown Girl in the Ring*, tells the story of three generations of Hunter women living in a dystopic Toronto which is exceedingly hostile to immigrants, where they must employ creative, creolised spiritual strategies to maintain a sense of self, at the risk of going mad. This madness follows Morrison's definition of "deliberately going mad in order . . . 'not to

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<sup>12</sup> The Marryshevites are named after the corporation which funded the endeavour, which in turn is a reference to T.A. Marryshow who was central to Grenada's fight for independence (E.D. Smith 46).

<sup>13</sup> Named for Toussaint L'Ouverture, the leader of the Haitian revolution.

lose your mind” in the face of “predatory western phenomena” (cited in Gilroy 221). The main character, Ti-Jeanne, must reconnect with her Caribbean heritage in order to access the imaginative spiritual resources brought into being, through creolisation, during slavery by the women (and men) who came before her and who also had to contend with “predatory western phenomena.” The subject of the fourth chapter, *The Salt Roads*, returns to this time of slavery, but also connects it to other temporalities to emphasise to what extent modernity was inseparable from slavery, and continues to be. Using the spiritual guide, or *lwa*, Ezili<sup>14</sup> to connect several women of colour, Hopkinson bears witness to their individual experiences, demonstrating that the personal and the political cannot be separated. By creolising features of diasporic fiction with those of science fiction, Hopkinson is able to creatively theorise women of colour’s subjectivities, telescoping disparate temporalities and exposing the intimacy between modernity, slavery, capitalism and science and technology.



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<sup>14</sup> Ezili is a Haitian *lwa* (spirit guide) also associated with mother goddesses such as Mami Wata (Yoruba) and Yemajá (Santería). Yemajá is seen “as the mother of all living things as well as the owner of the waters” (Oswald 36).

## Chapter 1

### **Returning to the Point of Entanglement: Creolisation and Interlaced Temporalities in Nalo Hopkinson's Fiction**

We must return to the point from which we started. Diversion is not a useful ploy unless it is nourished by reversion: not a return to the longing for origins, to some immutable state of being, but a return to the point of entanglement, from which we forcefully turned away; that is where we must ultimately put to work the forces of creolization, or perish.

– Édouard Glissant (“Reversion and Diversion” 1981)

Édouard Glissant, Paul Gilroy, and Toni Morrison share a concern with black people's relation to and place within modernity, and there is also commonality between their responses to the pressures of that modernity. As noted in the introduction, Glissant focuses on creolisation as a creative response to a modernity which can be traced back to slavery and the plantation. Gilroy's explication of a black Atlantic counterculture aims to rectify the purposeful omission and invisibility of black people in Western modernity, and Morrison uses her fiction to creatively theorise the trauma caused by the rupture of slavery (and modernity), specifically as experienced by black women. My focus is on how Nalo Hopkinson's science fiction disrupts Western modernity's relentless march towards “moral, material, and scientific progress” (Otremba 20), by taking her reader back to the point of entanglement, the plantation. Her choice of genre is essential to how she addresses the nexus of modernity, capitalism and slavery, because it extends the tangled knot of intersections and influences to include science and technology.

Slavery is often seen as a pre-modern institution which became untenable as ideas about freedom and individual rights, championed in the European Enlightenment, gained critical momentum. Such a view reduces it to a mere labour system instead of recognising that it was “part of a political campaign to differentiate the European culturally from the rest of humanity and to establish representations of a self-serving pecking order for the enforcement of ‘otherness’ upon colonized peoples” (Beckles 779). Its ideological function, by definition, excluded

colonised peoples from the Enlightenment objectives of “liberty, justice, and freedom” (779), and simultaneously demonstrates how crucial slavery was to the development of Enlightenment thinking. In similar fashion, without Atlantic slavery and its role “in the colonial complex there would have been no 18th-century English Industrial Revolutions” (786), which, in part, facilitated the shift from commercial to industrial capitalism. This ‘new’ capitalism did not signal a break with the old system, but instead “slavery was infused into every nook and cranny of modern capitalism” (Mount n. pag.). Just like the mutual influences and stimuli between slavery, modernity and capitalism, the development of technology also owes much to the slave trade. One example of this is how shipbuilding in England had to develop at pace to keep up with the demands of ‘cargo’ shipped from Africa: “Vessels of a particular type were constructed for the slave trade, combining capacity with speed in an effort to reduce mortality” (Williams 58). Another is how it “was the capital accumulated from the West Indian trade that financed James Watt and the steam engine” (102), and these are only two instances amongst many which show how the trade in people and things in the Atlantic stimulated and drove forward technological innovations and scientific thought (Otremba 26).

Recognising the Caribbean islands in the Atlantic as an important convergence of and stimulus point for modernity, capitalism and technological development in turn means that one must consider slaves as the first to experience, and respond to, the modern condition rather than retaining its definition as a European phenomenon. Their response to the affliction of modernity necessitated a search for something beyond their physical and psychological oppression, motivated by greed and facilitated by the science and technology used against them. Alienated and robbed of a sense of community or belonging, slaves responded to this enforced modernity with creolisation, an attempt to rebuild a sense of self that could withstand its far-reaching

effects. In a statement addressing the relations between capitalism and slavery, but which can be extended to include modernity and technology, Eric Williams writes that:

The ideas built on these interests continue long after [they] have been destroyed and work their old mischief, which is all the more mischievous because the interests to which they corresponded no longer exist. (211)

Teasing out associations between nodes of the aforementioned nexus, Hopkinson exposes their enduring oppressive power, mutated but uninterrupted by the passage of time, as well as their consequences particularly for women of colour. The strands of this nexus will be addressed in all of the chapters and, where appropriate, connections between them will be made, but the analysis of their entanglement will culminate in the final chapter on *The Salt Roads*, the novel in which Hopkinson stages the most overt return to the plantation.

The theoretical framework laid out in this chapter serves to provide context for the analysis of the three novels to follow and it is structured around four central concepts: temporality, the science fiction context, concepts of diaspora and creolisation, and finally, female subjectivities and how they are creatively theorised in the writing of women of colour. The theoretical underpinning of temporality in Hopkinson's work will be discussed first because making indistinct separations between past, present and future is one of the most discernible aspects of Hopkinson's work. She employs shifting temporalities to show how technology and science have been utilised as tools of empire, to expose the slow violence of colonialism and slavery, and to bear witness to the experiences of women of colour in both colonial and postcolonial contexts. Due to the multifaceted nature of Hopkinson's fiction, the discourses I draw from will necessarily be multi-disciplinary, straddling several different fields of research, in order to respond comprehensively to the nuances of her writing and to explicate productive

alliances between seemingly divergent elements in the novels. The range of disciplinary and theoretical fields relevant to the novels include postcolonial and diasporic studies, African American literature, as well as feminist and speculative and science fiction studies. In addition, I will also draw on cultural anthropology, Caribbean and French philosophy, and historical studies of politics, economics, science and technology, and modernity.

In *Binding Cultures: Black Women Writers in Africa and the Diaspora* (1992), Gay Willentz introduces the concept of “‘generational continuity’—the passing on of cultural values and personal history—as traditionally a woman’s domain” (xiii). This idea is unmistakably connected to temporality and can be applied to science fiction written by women of colour, who simultaneously look “back and forwards in their novels, reflect[ing] a construct of time . . . [as] patterns of recurrence that represent inseparability among the past, present, and future” (Grayson 3). The significance of time is clearly reflected in both diasporic<sup>15</sup> and science fiction contexts and it has particular prominence in Hopkinson’s writing where the two come together. The way in which she utilises temporality accords with Achille Mbembe’s rejection of linear time, a “simple sequence in which each moment effaces, annuls and replaces those that preceded it . . .” (16). His negation of linear time is not novel, and it is addressed by several scholars examining various African cultures in *Time in the Black Experience* (1994). In a chapter of this book, Omari Kokole notes that both Luganda and Lingala make use of the same word, in a different tense, to refer to yesterday and tomorrow: *dda* in Luganda and *lobi* in Lingala (51). To him, this suggests that “the past has not really been left behind and . . . the future itself is a reincarnation of the past” (51). Furthermore, his comparative analysis of Lingala and Kiswahili reveals that “[t]he past, the present and the future [a]re inextricably intertwined in a cyclical relationship” (50). As evidence

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<sup>15</sup> This centrality of time can also be observed in much of African American women’s fiction, such as that of Toni Morrison.

for this claim, he explains that in Kiswahili the word for the past, *zamani*, can also mean “time,” “moment,” or “epoch” but acknowledges that traditionally, “the future was often less clear and least understood” (50). Kokole’s assertions correspond with Mbembe’s interlocked *dureés* which emphasise how connected temporal spaces are and they highlight the impossibility of clear divisions between past, present and future. And, while African and diasporic time are not equivalent,<sup>16</sup> one can see some similarities in how Hopkinson portrays time in her work, the main difference being the extent to which the future is foregrounded. Diasporic time “marks linguistic patterns, ritual processes” and oral traditions which, for diasporic peoples, retain links to a time “when their time was not a commodity,” and furthermore it is also “intricately tied to concepts of being in . . . new world cultures” (McKoy Smith 209; 221). Diasporic time does not reify “enslavement and the formative experience of the Middle Passage” but instead seeks “to confirm postcolonial subjects as sculptors of the . . . ‘diasporic imaginary’” (Jobson 11).<sup>17</sup> Hopkinson does not try to recover or reconstruct ‘the homeland’; her depiction of diaspora “posit[s] temporality, rather than geography, as the connective tissue of contemporary diasporic formations” (16).

In “The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages: Race Studies, Modernity, and the Middle Ages,” Geraldine Heng examines the importance of temporality in race studies and theory. She argues that canonical race theory presents the idea of racial formation as a unique feature of modern time precisely because the idea of linear time predominates: “[R]ace theory is

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<sup>16</sup> Bonnie Barthold suggests that diasporic time represents “temporal fluxes based upon the collision of African cyclical time with Western linear time” (cited in McKoy Smith 208).

<sup>17</sup> Brian Keith Axel posits that the diaspora is not “a community of individuals dispersed from a homeland” but should instead be understood “as a globally mobile category of identification”; and thus diaspora is “a *process* productive of disparate temporalities (anteriorities, presents, futurities), displacements, and subjects” (27, italics in original).

predicated on an unexamined narrative of temporality . . . that reifies modernity as *telos* and origin . . .” (Heng 262). She goes on to reason that:

[F]or the West, modernity is an account of self-origin – how the West became the unique, vigorous . . . and exceptional entity that it is, bearing a legacy . . . of superiority. . . . The dominance of a linear model of temporality deeply invested in marking rupture and radical discontinuity thus eschews alternate views: a view of history, for instance, as the field of dynamic oscillation between ruptures and re-inscriptions, or historical time as a matrix in which overlapping repetitions-with-change can occur, or an understanding that historical events may result from the action of multiple temporalities that are enfolded or co-extant within a particular historical moment. (263; 264)

Precisely because markers of modernity are ascribed to the West and associated with whiteness, people of colour are presumed to be the opposite, encumbered by “a developmental narrative whose trajectory positions [them] as always catching up” (264). Hopkinson’s use of non-linear time and multi-faceted temporality unsettles such narratives and complicates claims of superiority tied to the radical rupture of Western modernity from everything that came before. Modernity does not only invoke time, but also location as shown by the “exclusion of the Caribbean from the imagined time-space of Western modernity” (Mimi Sheller cited in Jobson 23). Gilroy addresses this exclusion when he argues that by bringing to the fore the links between slavery (and its aftermath) and modernity, one is “required to consider a historical relationship in which dependency and antagonism are intimately associated” and that one should not attempt to separate Black Atlantic and Western cultural forms, but instead attempt to understand “their complex interpenetration” (48). Therefore, “[a]t its essence . . . temporality functions . . . as a



discourse, enacting a racialized and spatialized continuum of relative primitivism and modernity” (Jobson 23).

Overlapping temporal spaces are easily recognisable in Hopkinson’s novels, subtly in the near-future setting of *Brown Girl in the Ring*, but more overtly in *Midnight Robber* where the past plays out, in an altered way, on a different planet in the future, while in *The Salt Roads* the *lwa* Ezili connects several women across time. No temporal space takes precedence over another: the future is an important space in which to contest subjectivities that are legacies of slavery and colonialism, but it is never divested of its connection to the past, or indeed the present which is interrogated through imagined futures. These futures are important because if people of colour “can imagine [their] futures, imagine—among other things—cultures in which [they are not] alienated, then [they] can begin to see [their] way clear to creating them” (Hopkinson cited in Rutledge, “Speaking in Tongues” 593). The futuristic elements of Hopkinson’s work are less concerned with progress and technological advancement aligned with a linear, Western, concept of time, than with how temporal spaces intersect and affect another. As Paule Marshall, herself a diasporic author, puts it:

An oppressed people cannot overcome their oppressor and take control of their lives until they have a clear and truthful picture of all that has gone before, until they begin to use their history creatively. This knowledge of one’s culture, one’s history, serves as an ideological underpinning for the political, social and economic battles they must wage. It is the base upon which they must build. (cited in Willentz 115)

In order to conceptualise the future in a meaningful manner, the past is as important as the future in science fiction. Hopkinson uses a variety of historical figures and occurrences to make imagined futures constructive and not escapist. Incorporating a model of non-linear time disrupts

the erroneous assumption, stemming from Western notions of time, which equates the future with progress, and posits that the present is better than the past and the future even more so.

In Hopkinson's novels, a thought-provoking intersection occurs between temporality, labour and capitalism, as related to slavery and colonialism. For instance, in *Report from Planet Midnight*, Hopkinson states that:

[O]ne of the things that science fiction and fantasy do is to imaginatively address the core problem of who does the work [because it] wrestle[s] with the current and historical class inequities we maintain in order to have people to do the work. Especially in North America, class differences have historically become so entrenched that they are characterised as or conflated with cultural or racial differences. (42; 43)

This statement reflects how labour and class are configured in her work: firstly, in *The Salt Roads*, the colonial expansion is bankrolled by slavery and she depicts the emergence of current social and economic inequalities. Secondly, in *Brown Girl in the Ring*, the lawsuit by the Temagami Indians against the province of Ontario to regain the land taken from their ancestors, and the subsequent international trade embargoes on Ontario timber, bankrupts the federal government. The resulting economic collapse and uprising by the disenfranchised see the middle and upper class fleeing to the suburbs, taking their business and employment opportunities with them to where they can find cheaper labour and more economic security, abandoning the inner city to the poor (chiefly amongst them Caribbean immigrants). Thirdly, in *Midnight Robber*, the Caribbean colonisers of Toussaint outsource virtually all hard labour to an Artificial Intelligence (AI) created to enjoy work because “back break ain’t for people” (MR 8). On New Half-Way Tree,<sup>18</sup> the newly exiled humans must toil ceaselessly to survive, slave plantations exist and the

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<sup>18</sup> Named after a neighbourhood in Kingston, Jamaica.

more established humans attempt to outsource most of the hard labour to the native inhabitants, the douen. What Hopkinson succeeds in doing in these novels is very similar to what Walter Mosley achieves in *Futureland* (2000), a collection of connected short stories set in a highly stratified society.

[Mosley,] by likening corporate practices of neo-slavery to . . . chattel slavery, reveals the resilient and historically variable processes of racialization that legitimize capitalist exploitation of certain populations. . . . [thereby] [h]ighlighting the instrumentality of race to capitalist social stratification [and] bypass[ing] misguided arguments about the relative causal primacy of race or class. . . .” (Dubey, “The Future of Race” 23; 24)

The importance of the underlying question of “who does the work” in Hopkinson’s fiction is striking because it reflects on the colonial enterprise and slavery, as well as other forms of coerced labour, in order to reveal the close ties between capitalism, slavery and colonialism.<sup>19</sup>

In “Time and Labor in Colonial Africa: The Case of Kenya and Malawi,” Alamin Mazrui and Lupenga Mphande explore how colonists in Africa achieved their objective of creating a willing workforce—through coercion and force—to serve as proletariat of the capitalist system they were attempting to spread (97), much like the literal automatons programmed to enjoy labour in *Midnight Robber*. Two stages were involved in the creation of a wage labour force:

The first stage involves the destruction of the African land tenure system and mass expropriation of communal land. This gave rise to a growing body of the landless, people alienated from their primary means of production. The second stage was to get the

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<sup>19</sup> Gilroy refers to slavery as “capitalism with its clothes off” (15).

Africans to accept the capitalist notion of ‘labor as a commodity’ and to pressure them to sell it to the new owners of the means of production, the colonial class. (97)

In order to maximise profit, productivity first has to be maximised and it is here where the significance of time in connection to labour emerges: “the value of a commodity is seen in terms of the labor time put into its production” (98). In other words, African notions of time as cyclical or as overlapping ages, where the same word denotes both yesterday and tomorrow, were antithetical to Western, capitalist notions of time which binds it to productivity and progress. Therefore, in order to create a willing workforce, “the precapitalist conception of time, in which labor responded to the rhythm of nature” had to be destroyed and capitalist time had to be instilled in which “the body was now required to respond to the tick of the clock” (98).<sup>20</sup> In this regard, Hopkinson’s use of temporal entanglement is subversive because it resists colonial/capitalist notions of linear time where time can be “gained, saved, or lost” (100). Whereas Mazrui and Mphande address time and labour in an African context, Hanchard writes about the subject in a Caribbean context. He states that “[f]or slaves, time management was an imposition of the slave master’s construction of temporality divided along the axis of the master-slave relationship” and that “[t]heoretically, no time belonged solely to the slave” (254; 256). Within the parameters of capitalist, linear time, the past is negligible as it is ‘lost’ in terms of productivity and the future dominates because it is the domain of deadlines and projected profit and progress. The way in which Hopkinson uses future spaces in her novels to imagine alternatives and to engage with current inequalities opposes such a capitalist conception of time.

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<sup>20</sup> Using examples from Kenya and Malawi, Mazrui and Mphande argue that time was organic in precolonial time as it was tied to nature and seasons with no set work day, and where freedom from work was as important as hard work. They provide the vagrancy laws in Kenya as an example of an intense campaign to create an ideal workforce (100; 102).

Hopkinson's use of time is not only subversive in connection to labour, but also with regards to the supernatural, especially in *Brown Girl in the Ring* and *The Salt Roads* where the spirit world plays an integral role.<sup>21</sup> Mazrui and Mphande argue that in order to create a willing workforce, it was not only necessary to disconnect time from nature, but also to "abandon the idea that supernatural time was mutable, that supernatural forces can, in fact, intervene to make today different from yesterday" and that "[i]t is against this background that we can understand the relentless colonial struggle against 'magic and witchcraft'" (109). In the Caribbean, obeah and Vodoun served similarly subversive purposes and were sometimes wielded in acts of opposition, as in the example of Nanny, one of the Maroon leaders in Jamaica in the 1730s.<sup>22</sup> The Maroons required "their leaders to possess [a] profound understanding of the supernatural" and the specific system of belief they practiced was obeah, although they referred to it as 'science' (M.C. Campbell 176). Nanny was greatly admired for her skill in 'science' and this nomenclature is significant in the context of this study as science and technology, and magical or spiritual systems of knowledge are portrayed as being equal in Hopkinson's fiction (Davis Rogan 90). Bearing this in mind, Hopkinson's foregrounding of temporal entanglement is productive in more than one way: she establishes a model of non-linear time in the novels, one which resists binding time to productivity and profit, and instead embraces the supernatural and spiritual worlds as avenues through which her characters can resist the slow violence of colonialism and slavery.

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<sup>21</sup> In *Midnight Robber*, the spiritual aspect of the narrative is more subtle than in the other two novels, but it is embodied in the AI house *eshu*, the narrator of the story. Eshu is another name for Legba, the trickster god of the Yoruba, who acts as messenger between the gods and humans. In the novel, each house has an *eshu* who acts as both the head servant and a direct connection to Granny Nanny.

<sup>22</sup> In *The Maroons of Jamaica 1655-1796: A History of Resistance, Collaboration & Betrayal* (1990), Mavis Campbell posits that the figure we now know as Nanny was likely the amalgamation of several women, and not a single person (176).

In *Slow Violence: Environmentalism of the Poor*, Nixon examines the consequences of the echoing effects of colonialism. The book opens with a quote from a confidential World Bank memo (dated December 1991), in which the then head, Lawrence Summers, writes that he “think[s] the economic logic behind dumping a load of toxic waste in the lowest-wage country is impeccable” and asks the addressee: “[S]houldn’t the World Bank be encouraging more migration of the dirty industries to the Least Developed Countries?” (1). This “impeccable logic” is motivated by profit: if companies do not have to pay penalties for pollution in their own countries or spend money on costly, but safe, waste disposal then profits increase while the human cost in the “Least Developed Countries” is not factored into the equation at all. Nixon argues that this “slow-motion toxicity” challenges conventional assumptions about violence whereas if Summers had advocated an armed invasion of Africa it would have been perceived as “an imperial invasion” (3). While he applies his theory of slow violence primarily to an environmental context, it can be expanded to include other forms of slow violence inflicted by the reverberating effects of colonialism. Nixon identifies the major challenge of slow violence as representational because authors have to “devise arresting stories, images, and symbols adequate to the pervasive but elusive violence of delayed effects” (3). Using various temporal spaces which encompass not only the past and present, but also the future, a vital space to consider in relation to slow violence, Hopkinson goes some way to meet this challenge because her fiction “give[s] figurative shape to formless threats whose fatal repercussions are dispersed across space and time” (10).

It is not only for its ability to foreground slow violence and to focus on the future that the genre of science fiction is such a useful one at our present moment in history. Charles R. Saunders argues that postcolonial authors should engage with science fiction because it “serves as the mythology of our technological culture” (404), referring to the pervasive and intimate influence technology has on our everyday lives. Therefore, the engagement of postcolonial authors with science fiction is valuable because it enables them to engage critically with the temporal horizon of the future and the white androcentric coding of technology, but also because the genre reflects on the effects of our current immersion in technology. When discussing science fiction written by a diasporic woman writer, one must consider the experience of people of colour in the science fiction community. These experiences range from the bigotry, racism and exclusion experienced by amongst others Hopkinson and fellow author N.K. Jemisin, to coordinated efforts to exclude women and people of colour from the Hugo Awards ballots in 2015 and 2016, and to the comparative lack of academic engagement with the genre. There are multiple barriers for people of colour when it comes to the genre: science fiction is seen as escapism and not connected to the everyday challenges faced by people of colour, the historical construction of science and technology cast people of colour (and women) as primitive or antithetical to technology and progress which in turn projects the future as a white, male-owned space. Because of these obstacles, much of the science fiction written by people of colour attempts to subvert or deconstruct a master narrative of history which marginalises them.

Hopkinson has been very vocal about how often the voices and experiences of people of colour are discounted or written out of mainstream science fiction. In other words, she challenges the “privileging of the visible” (Nixon 15). In *Report from Planet Midnight*, she relates her experience of racism in the science fiction and fantasy community as the guest author at the

International Conference of the Fantastic in the Arts in 2009 in Florida. She lists many examples in the speech she made at the conference, but the one most relevant to the three texts chosen for this study is that the original cover for *Midnight Robber* accurately depicts a brown-skinned girl with “Black African features” whereas the Italian translation of the novel shows the protagonist as a “blue-skinned young woman with European features and straight hair” (34; 35).<sup>23</sup> In a more recent literary context there is the bigotry that speculative fiction author N.K. Jemisin faced after “calling for a reconciliation in the [science fiction and fantasy] genre[s]” in 2013, in her Guest of Honour speech at the Ninth Continuum Convention in Australia (Jemisin, “Wiscon 39” n. pag.). After the speech she was called a “half savage” on the Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America’s official Twitter feed and although the individual responsible was later expelled from the organisation, Jemisin calls his slur “the inciting incident” which led to her receiving numerous death and rape threats for daring to address the issue of racism and exclusionary practices in speculative fiction.<sup>24</sup> In a post about the incident on her official website she describes the bigotry in the genre as violence, and states that:

[Science fiction and fantasy are] dedicated to the exploration of the future and myth and history. Dreams, if you want to frame it that way. Yet the enforced SWM [straight white male] dominance of th[e] genre means that the dreams of whole groups of people have been obliterated from the Zeitgeist. (n. pag.)

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<sup>23</sup> Another example is the Russian cover of Lauren Beukes’s novel *Zoo City* (2011), which shows the black South-African protagonist Zinzi December as a white woman with dreadlocked hair.

<sup>24</sup> The person who made these comments about Jemisin is Vox Day, a conservative writer known for his racist and misogynistic views. His exact accusation was that Jemisin is “an educated, but ignorant half-savage, with little more understanding of what it took to build a new literature [of science fiction] . . . than an illiterate Igbotu tribesman has of how to build a jet engine. . . .”. He argued that a society of “NK Jemisins” (black women) would be unable to construct and maintain an advanced civilization without white men. Moreover, he views Jemisin’s call for diversity in SF/F is “tantamount to a call for its decline into irrelevance” (Day n. pag.).



Although the genre has become more diversified in recent years,<sup>25</sup> the organised backlash from white male science fiction fans and authors has been apparent in the 2015 nominations<sup>26</sup> for the Hugo Awards presented by the World Science Fiction Society. The awards have been seen as “a reflection of who gets recognition for writing science fiction and fantasy” and the nominees have been mostly white men except for a period in the mid-nineties and over the past five years. This trend “send[s] a message about whose work is going to be considered valuable” (Anders n. pag.).

In 2014, several people of colour and young women won awards. In response a campaign called Sad Puppies (and their more extreme wing, the Rabid Puppies, all supporters of Vox Day) was started in order to ensure that their chosen nominees dominate as many categories as possible in 2015 (Anders n. pag.). The men responsible for the campaign felt “that a ‘rarefied, insular’ group of writers were promoting their agenda by nominating works by women and people of color” (Trendacosta n. pag.). Many in the science fiction and fantasy fandom were outraged by the Sad Puppies’ nominations<sup>27</sup> and most members of the organisation voted “No Award” in the categories stacked with only Sad Puppies’ nominees while authors who were nominated without their consent by the group declined their nominations (Trendacosta n. pag.). In 2016, their campaign has been more subtle and they have chosen well-known authors (such as Neal Stephenson and Neil Gaiman) for their slate in the big categories such as best film, best

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<sup>25</sup> *Strange Horizons*, an online speculative fiction magazine, compiles annual statistics about diversity in the genre. They look at reviews of science fiction and fantasy in order to look at the distribution of race and gender in both the authors reviewed and the reviewers themselves. Their 2014 findings for sixteen publications are as follows: the overall percentage of books by “women or non-binary people” was 35.6% and for books by people of colour the overall percentage was 5.4%. With regards to the reviewers, the average percentage of women reviewers was 36.1% and no overall percentage for people of colour is provided since seven out of the sixteen publications still had no people of colour reviewing books (Harrison n. pag.). The 2015 statistics for 18 publications show that although there has been some improvement, “overall 9 out of 10 books reviewed are by white writers, and 6 out of 10 books reviewed are written by men. A similar disparity is seen in the demographics of reviewers” (Duchamp n. pag.).

<sup>26</sup> Hugo Award nominees are voted for by fans who purchase “a supporting membership at Worldcon” (Anders n. pag.).

<sup>27</sup> Sad Puppies’ nominees includes an author published by “Patriarchy Press” (Anders n. pag.).

novel and best graphic novel, so that they can claim a victory if those nominees win (n. pag.). In the less well-known categories however: “They completely took over Best Short Story, Best Related Work, Best Graphic Story, Best Professional Artist, Best Fanzine, and Best Fancast. In Best Semiprozine, Best Fan Writer, Best Fan Artist, and Best New Writer, only *one* option isn’t from their slates” (n. pag.).<sup>28</sup> While six of their nominees won, only two “came from categories that were entirely dominated by Rabid Puppy picks” and there were only two “No Award” categories as opposed to last year’s five (Elderkin n. pag.). The science fiction and fantasy community’s response to the Puppies’ bullying has been unambiguous: despite the Puppies’ best efforts, women writers, editors and artists “took home seven individual awards” this year and three of those were women of colour, including N.K. Jemisin for best novel (n. pag.). While these wins are good news for diversity in science fiction and fantasy, the Puppies’ continued efforts still highlight the problem of ongoing racism and sexism in the genre. Their campaigns demonstrate how real the erasure and silencing of women of colour are in the science fiction and fantasy community, a reality which extends to the academic sphere as well.

In the introduction to *The Black Imagination: Science Fiction, Futurism and the Speculative* (2011), the editors Sandra Jackson and Julie Moody-Freeman, provide a comprehensive list of academic science fiction and fantasy texts from 1987-2010 which include only scant references to authors of colour, or only include one chapter, usually focusing on either Octavia Butler or Samuel R. Delany (5). A defense of this exclusionary practice might be that there are so few science fiction authors of colour or that they are a relatively recent addition to the genre and therefore little has been written about their work. Shereé R. Thomas's two edited anthologies: *Dark Matter: A Century of Speculative Fiction from the African Diaspora* (2000),

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<sup>28</sup> In contrast to the Hugos, the 2016 Nebula Awards have been dominated by women with the winners of four out of the five categories being women, including two women of colour, Nnedi Okorafor and Alyssa Wong (Liptak n. pag.).

and *Dark Matter: Reading the Bones* (2005), “challenge this belief and demonstrate that Black writers produced what we call proto-science fiction works as well as contemporary literature” (Jackson and Moody-Freeman 4). Examples of early contributors include: Charles W. Chesnutt's “The Goopered Grapevine” (1887), W.E.B. Du Bois's “The Comet” (1920) and *Dark Princess* (1928), and George Schuyler's *Black No More* (1931) (4). But, because authors who submitted stories to pulp science fiction magazines in the twenties and thirties tended to use initials rather than first names and pseudonyms were common practice, it is impossible to gauge exactly how many authors of colour contributed to the genre at that time. Even when authors of colour are recognised, grudgingly in some cases, as contributing members of the science fiction community, some critics will still attempt to undermine their legitimacy.

Writing about *Midnight Robber*, Gordon Collier describes Hopkinson as a “gifted *bricoleuse* who gathers sci-fi elements and achieves cohesion not via sci-fi vision but via a Caribbean ethnocultural dynamic” (453). His description suggests that she is not an authentic science fiction author in her own right, but rather that she draws on the expertise or knowledge of others. Furthermore, he implies that somehow a “Caribbean ethnocultural dynamic” is at odds with cohesion achieved through a ‘purely’ science fiction vision. The latter point is supported by his argument that the idea of a planet with an alter ego is not “exploited in futuristic terms. . . . but in terms of its potential for accepting and absorbing a purely Caribbean overlay” (Collier 453). The disturbing effect of ignoring or undermining contributions by science fiction authors of colour, or not including any people of colour in stories about the future, is a very literal erasure. Hopkinson states that although she loves science fiction and fantasy by white authors “at a certain point, [she] began to long to see other cultures, other aesthetics, other histories, realities, and bodies represented . . . as well” (*Planet Midnight* 71). Furthermore, she observes that science

fiction and fantasy in the West are “still predominately written by white people for white people. At some metaphorical level, the message [she] get[s] is that white people are humans and people of color are aliens. . . . It does [not] feel like a deliberate exclusion of other voices—more like a systematic deafness . . . (Hopkinson cited in Grayson 3).

By choosing her subject material in such a conscious manner and narrating her characters’ different experiences of slow violence she challenges “the privileging of the visible” in science fiction and “perceptual habits that downplay the damage slow violence inflicts” (Nixon 15).<sup>29</sup> Electing to tell the stories of women of colour bears witness to their varied experiences which Nixon maintains are “more likely to be buried, particularly [because they are] relayed by people whose witnessing authority is culturally discounted” (16). The overt focus on the temporal aspect of slow violence foregrounds not only unseen violence but also draws attention to “imperceptible change whereby violence is decoupled from its original causes by the workings of time” (11). In other words, the foregrounding of temporality emphasises not only the material, social and psychic wounds inflicted by the slow violence of colonialism and slavery, but also how those complex effects intersect with one another and continue to reverberate as they are institutionalised through capitalism and class differences which have become conflated with race.

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<sup>29</sup> In the context of *Slow Violence*, Nixon’s “privileging the visible” refers to how pollution and destruction of the environment in the ‘first world’ receives more exposure and attention worldwide while such events, even greater in magnitude, in ‘third world’ countries are ignored. Hopkinson’s use of “systematic deafness” refers to the refusal or inability of white members of the science fiction and fantasy community to acknowledge the invisibility and erasure of people of colour in the genre while the experiences of white people remain the most visible because of their privilege.

In addition to the lack of diversity and the science fiction community's aversion, and sometimes outright refusal, to acknowledge or engage with discrimination, harassment and exclusion of people of colour, there is a complex of inter-linked deterrents. Madhu Dubey addresses these by primarily using Mark Dery's seminal "Black to the Future: Interviews with Samuel R. Delany, Greg Tate and Tricia Rose" (1994). Firstly, in these interviews Delany explains that "the futuristic imagination has historically been 'so impoverished' among African American writers 'because, until fairly recently, as a people [they] were systematically forbidden any images of [their] past'" (cited in Dubey, "The Future of Race" 15). It is plausible that the reason why the past features so prominently in science fiction by African American and Caribbean authors is exactly because of what Delany calls the "massive cultural destruction" caused by slavery (15) and that the emphasis on the past is in some ways a recovery or re-inscription of history. This re-inscription of history reveals how what is viewed as historical 'fact' is shaped to serve the present by providing 'evidence' for the historical precedent of the status quo.

Secondly, Dubey outlines Walter Mosley's argument that African American authors have been deterred from thinking about the future because they have been motivated "by their own desire to document the crimes of America" and by "the white literary establishment's desire for Blacks to write about being black in a white world, a limitation imposed upon a limitation" (cited in Dubey, "The Future of Race" 16). Mosley's first point is echoed, in a different context, in a blogpost by author Nnedi Okorafor, entitled "Is Africa Ready for Science Fiction?" in which she writes that "science fiction is . . . perceived as not being real literature" because it seems too much like an escape from reality altogether and too disconnected from everyday life. Additionally, that there are more pressing issues that need to be addressed and only stories that

explore “everyday realities are considered relevant . . .” (Tchidi Chikere cited in Okorafor n. pag.). These kinds of sentiments are often expressed by those unfamiliar with the genre, since an intrinsic feature of science fiction is to critique the present through imagined futures. Related to Mosley’s second point is the fact that books by people of colour are often grouped together in libraries and book shops not because of genre or commonly shared themes, but simply because all of the authors are black. In a blogpost, N.K. Jemisin responds to a fan who found her speculative fiction novel, *The Hundred Thousand Kingdoms* (2010), in the African American section of a library despite that fact that the novel, set in a fantasy world on a planet unlike earth, has no black characters. Jemisin describes the African American section of today as “*mostly just a constricted, homogenizing ghetto*” (“Don’t Put My Book in the African American Section” n. pag., italics in original). Segregated book sections based on authors’ race means that, for example, readers who enjoy science fiction and fantasy might not actually encounter books relevant to their interests, which in turn leads to less exposure for writers of colour and reinforces the stereotype that people of colour do not read or write science fiction and fantasy.

Thirdly, a point related to notions of Western time, is the perception that the “unreal estate of the future [is] owned by technocrats, futurologists, [and] streamliners” who have been “white to a man” (Mark Dery cited in Dubey, “The Future of Race” 17). In science fiction, the implicit associations between the future, progress, whiteness and technology are, in Samuel R. Delany’s words, “. . . like a placard on the door saying, ‘Boys Club! Girls, keep out. Blacks and Hispanics and the poor in general, go away!’” (cited in Dubey, “The Future of Race” 17). Partly, what science fiction writers of colour do is to dismantle the historical construction, facilitated by omission and misrepresentation, of people of colour as primitive and ‘other’ to notions of progress or advancement which are embedded in the fields of science and technology. When

viewed in this context, the centrality of the past and history in science fiction by authors of colour is easily understood because the emphasis allows writers like Hopkinson to reconstruct past and present marginalising narratives about technology and people of colour's relation to it. In the context of science fiction, people of colour and women are both cast as 'other' in relation to technology, which means that *women* of colour are in a doubly marginalised position.

Evelyn Fox Keller suggests that women writing science fiction should “question the very social construction of science as a masculinist category antithetical to women” (cited in Dubey, “Becoming Animal” 32). One can extend her suggestion to include writers who attempt to dismantle science (and science fiction) as a ‘white’ category hostile to people of colour. Dubey, focusing on Octavia Butler’s work, argues that in order to achieve both these goals, some writers extend “definitions of science [fiction so] as to include bodies of knowledge such as herbal medicine, midwifery, or magic, which have been dismissed as unscientific because of their association with women [of colour]” (32). Alternative systems of knowledge such as spirituality and magic are prominent in Hopkinson’s work, especially in *The Salt Roads*, where they are coupled with pragmatism, thereby portraying spirituality as an ordinary part of life, on equal footing with reason and practicality, and not an inferior episteme. Blending “those two worlds together [is] enhancing, not limiting” and works towards recuperating discredited knowledge (Toni Morrison cited in Braxton 300).

Spirituality plays a crucial role not only in some science fiction by authors of colour, but also in the writing of diasporic women writers. Marie-Elena John, an Antiguan writer, underscores its significance as follows:



[M]uch of our writing has a spirit-centered component and a sense of trying to uncover our past through this exploration, which sometimes involves looking to what's left of African spirituality in Caribbean culture. And part of what we often explore within this same sense of being 'fractured,' more and more these days, is the additional component of immigration to North America. (cited in Reynolds 27)

*The Salt Roads* features Ezili, an Afro-Caribbean spiritual being brought to life by three slave women and the spirit of a stillborn child in Saint Domingue. At odds with the colonial power in their new environment, Ezili anchors the women, provides them with a point of reference outside of this colonial power by which to define themselves. In *Midnight Robber*, the house *eshu*<sup>30</sup> fulfils an almost parental role to Tan-Tan. Cut off from Granny Nanny's artificial intelligence web on New Half-Way Tree, Tan-Tan learns about the douen's belief system and how intricately tied their spirituality is to the land and their ability to produce beautiful and expertly-crafted goods, furniture and tools. Character growth and plot in *Brown Girl in the Ring* depends on spirituality: in Toronto, Ti-Jeanne lacks a sense of belonging which intensifies the importance of spirituality as a way of achieving wholeness. The spiritual system in *Brown Girl in the Ring* is syncretic as it greatly resembles Vodoun, but it is further creolised with other belief systems prevalent in the immigrant community. One sees this creolisation taking shape in *The Salt Roads* where Mer and the other slaves are forced to attend church in public, but still hold to their own beliefs in private. An important aspect of the spirituality portrayed in both novels is spirit possession which Cooper identifies as a locus of *repossession*:

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<sup>30</sup> The *eshus*, named after Legba the *lwa* of the crossroads between the living and the dead, form part of Granny Nanny's artificial intelligence (A.I.) web and like their namesake, they connect two different worlds: the human and A.I. worlds.



[R]ecuperation of identity is accomplished by reappropriating devalued folk wisdom—that body of subterranean knowledge that is often associated with the silenced language of women and the ‘primitiveness’ of orally transmitted knowledge. ‘Discredited knowledge’ in Toni Morrison’s words. . . . (65)<sup>31</sup>

In addition to revalorising knowledge, spirituality in Hopkinson’s work “recover[s] ancestral consciousness” and “travers[es] the borders of time, space, culture, and the body (through possession)” (Engman 103). In *The Salt Roads*, all of the main female characters act as conduits for Ezili while in *Brown Girl in the Ring*, Ti-Jeanne and her grandmother both act as vessels for Papa Legba. It is only with his, and other Afro-Caribbean *lwas*’ help that Ti-Jeanne is able to defeat her grandfather Rudy.

For Joanne Braxton, a crucial part of spirituality in black women’s writing is a maternal ancestral figure who lends a “benevolent, instructive and protective presence” and who “passes on her feminine wisdom for the good of the ‘tribe,’ and the survival of all Black people, especially those in the African diaspora created by the Atlantic slave trade” (Braxton 300). In *Midnight Robber*, it is Granny Nanny’s Web, but also Benta, the douen mother who accepts Tan-Tan into her house and protects her as if she were one of her own children. In *Brown Girl in the Ring*, it is Gros-Jeanne who takes care not only of Ti-Jeanne, but also the community at large. And, in *The Salt Roads* it is Ezili, but also Mer who looks after the well-being of her fellow slaves. These characters facilitate a sense of belonging, enabled in most cases by alternative systems of knowledge. Moreover, science fiction which incorporates such alternative systems

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<sup>31</sup> The importance of the connection between black women and language, the oral tradition, and generational memory will be expanded upon in the next chapter.

often prominently features the past or employs non-linear representations of time to equally subversive ends.

In *Scraps of the Untainted Sky: Science Fiction, Utopia* (2000), Tom Moylan interprets Fredric Jameson's "Progress versus Utopia: Or, Can We Imagine the Future?" as arguing that science fiction allows readers to understand the present as history (26), which in turn makes possible the examination of the role of history and memory, both collective and individual. This is a relevant idea when one considers critical dystopia, a subgenre of science fiction in which both *Midnight Robber* and *Brown Girl in the Ring* fit comfortably. Raffaella Baccolini defines critical dystopia as a combination of utopia and dystopia and notes that the prominence of history is a key feature of the genre (116). In *Midnight Robber*, Toussaint at first seems like a utopia until the reader is introduced to New Half-Way Tree, a second version of the same planet, separated by the dimension-veil. The society on the second planet is a dystopic one for the humans exiled there, one without which the 'utopia' of Toussaint would not be possible. In *Brown Girl in the Ring*, the outer suburbs of Toronto are utopian spaces for the rich while The Ring, where the poor are confined, is a dystopic space. Baccolini argues that in critical dystopias, "history is central and necessary for the development of resistance and the maintenance of hope" and that this "promote[s] historical consciousness" (116). In *Midnight Robber* and *Brown Girl in the Ring*, the protagonists have to, in a sense, recover a history from which they have been cut off. Tan-Tan's house *eshu* relates a very selective history to her, omitting not just parts of her ancestors' history on earth, but also an account of the early days of the colonisation of Toussaint. In *Brown Girl in the Ring*, Ti-Jeanne discovers her own family's history as she comes to terms with her spiritual seer power (of which she was initially unaware) partly because of the absence

of her mother who was driven mad by the same ability. Both Tan-Tan and Ti-Jeanne must relive the past, albeit in altered ways, in order to move on.

To Jean Pfaelzer, the shift to the past in a critical dystopia represents “a ‘historical collapse,’ almost ‘a regression’ to a previous time” (cited in Baccolini 115). Pfaelzer’s choice of words betrays an underlying assumption that movement across time implies progress, and that a ‘return’ to the past will necessarily involve a ‘regression.’ Baccolini, however, points out that a “dystopia shows how our present may negatively evolve, while by showing a regression of our present it also suggests that history may not be progressive” (115). This statement likewise reflects a linear concept of time: one that moves either from a “worse” set of historical conditions to “better” ones or vice versa. A shift to the past in a critical dystopia should be viewed as a recovery or a critique “of the history shaping the society of the dystopian writer,” a critique that is focused on the control of the narration of history (115). Hopkinson’s return to the past in *The Salt Roads*, when viewed together with the two stories set in the future, is significant as it both contests and revises a ‘master narrative’ of history which serves the status quo. The Party slogan in Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, “[w]ho controls the past . . . [c]ontrols the future: who controls the present controls the past” (32), encapsulates the fundamental role of the past in science fiction, a centrality the genre shares with diasporic and African American literature.

In her discussion about the importance of history in critical dystopia, Baccolini invokes Ernst Bloch’s utopian ideas about memory which differentiates between “[a]namnesis (recollection) [and] anagnorisis (recognition)” (Vincent Geoghegan cited in Baccolini 118). For Bloch, recognition is the more complex process that enables the creation of new knowledge while recollection, the conservative process, implies that “all knowledge lies in the past” (cited in Baccolini 118). Tan-Tan and Ti-Jeanne both employ the process of recognition in their

interactions with their pasts while Mer (in *The Salt Roads*), has been cut off from her past in Africa and must negotiate this loss in a completely new reality on Saint Domingue by creating the *lwa* Ezili who is able to travel across time and space. These characters, through recognition, are able to disrupt the hegemonic discourse which has “managed to erase historical memory so that it is almost impossible to see what is going on around us was not always the same” (Tom Moylan cited in Baccolini 118). Hopkinson’s use of temporality in her fiction demonstrates that “a society that is incapable of recollection, recognition, and remembrance is without hope for the future, as it shows no concern for the often silenced histories” (Baccolini 119). In *Midnight Robber*, Toussaint is replete with historical references and its citizens even celebrate their ancestors from earth every year at carnival, but their interaction with the past seems to be recollection rather than recognition. Tan-Tan is able to access a lot of historical information through her house *eshu*, but its version of history is extremely selective, a prime example being the erasure of the douen genocide which made the human settlement on Toussaint possible (*MR* 33). This selectiveness constitutes the master narrative the people of Toussaint have created about themselves: that of intrepid colonisers who left the oppression of earth behind and who founded their new colony on principles of righteousness and liberty.

Baccolini argues that by excising ‘inconvenient’ parts of history which contradict the master narrative, a “sanitized version of history [is created] and thus extend[s] injustice into the future and foreclose[s] the possibility for change” (119). When Tan-Tan, like others who are exiled, travels to New Half-Way Tree, she is cut off from Granny Nanny’s Web and her memory banks. This rift means that Tan-Tan is forced to move from recollection to recognition in her interaction with the past. By reliving the past in an altered form, particularly through her bond with the oppressed indigenous douen, she is in a position to forge a different relationship to the

suppressed brutalities of the past, which implies a different relationship to the future. Her connection to the douen who were eradicated to make way for human settlement, affirms their existence and only by moving from recollection to recognition does a different future become possible. Following a similar line of argument to that of Baccolini's, Maria Varsam also suggests that the past is central to critical dystopias. In her article, "Concrete Dystopia: Slavery and Its Others" she examines commonalities between dystopian fiction and slave narratives because they are both concerned with "freedom, inequality, and the nature of domination" (210). Her comparative study is applicable to Hopkinson's work particularly because her fiction displays a "commitment to social critique," a characteristic that Varsam identifies in both dystopian fiction and slave narratives (211). Varsam provides Ashraf H.A. Rushdy's definition of neo-slave or palimpsest narratives in which "[s]lavery is depicted as having an ongoing effect in the present for current relations between the descendants of masters and their slaves" (218). Octavia Butler's *Kindred* (1979) illustrates this type of narrative because it "exemplifies the flexibility of slavery as a system of domination able to manifest itself in many forms, irrespective of time and place" (219). Hopkinson's portrayal of the future in both *Midnight Robber* and *Brown Girl in the Ring*, and her use of the figure of Jeanne Duvall to represent what the future holds for women like Mer and Tipingee in *The Salt Roads*, stress the ways in which the "[p]sychic effects of a system of domination and violent hierarchy [is] unlimited by time or space [and is] merely different in terms of degree of severity" (220). In other words, what Varsam is describing is slow violence.

Jane Donawerth proposes that women's science fiction of the nineties frequently employed a "nonlinear, fragmented . . . form that is often modelled on the slave narrative" (cited in Baccolini 126). Drawing on this point, Baccolini argues that, like slave narratives, critical dystopias employ the "recovery of history . . . and individual and collective memory [as]

instrumental tools of resistance of the (often female) protagonists of sf women writers' recent dystopias" (130). She only considers this recovery of history and memory as important in terms of gender, and neglects the intersection between gender and race, which is ironic since she bases her point on a connection between science fiction and slave narratives.<sup>32</sup> Her point about history, however, remains pertinent to the connection between science fiction and slave narratives, as well as diasporic fiction. She postulates that, in order to resist a master narrative of history which serves the status quo, "individual [recognition of history] becomes the first, necessary step for a collective action" and that the creation of a culture of memory, "one that moves from the individual to the social and collective . . . is part of a social project of hope" (130). Hope is a word one encounters regularly in theoretical material concerning science fiction and diasporic writing as both demonstrate a yearning for social change.

Diasporic and science fiction share a focus on the past in the form of history and memory, and both are concerned with what may be termed a state of in-betweenness. This in-betweenness is not only related to temporality, but also to belonging. Ryan Cecil Jobson proposes that diasporic culture is not concerned with geography or essentialist notions of home and belonging, but is instead a way of thinking, a form of consciousness (16). Hopkinson's fiction exemplifies this as it draws attention to how diaspora works and her engagement with the past is not built around a desire to return home or to validate a 'motherland.'<sup>33</sup> Instead, she debunks essentialist notions of both time and subjectivity that are tied to a geographical 'home' and bears witness to journey(s), past dislocations, and their consequences. In analysing the in-

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<sup>32</sup> *Dark Horizons*, the book in which this chapter by Baccolini is published, is on the list of texts compiled by Jackson and Moody-Freeman (in *The Black Imagination*) which illustrates how exclusionary science fiction criticism is in terms of race. Out of twelve chapters, only two are focused on works by authors of colour and both are about Octavia Butler's work.

<sup>33</sup> While the Caribbean is immensely important to Hopkinson, she states that it is only one part of who she is and that she identifies as both a Caribbean and Canadian author (Hopkinson, "FAQs" n. pag.).

betweenness which pervades her writing, ambiguities become even more significant, especially when considering literary representations of creolisation which are prevalent in Caribbean and diasporic fiction. While moments of hopefulness and optimism are evident in Hopkinson's work, the possibility of social change is not assured. Ambiguity notwithstanding, elements of hope and revision go hand-in-hand, not only in Hopkinson's work, but also in that of other diasporic women writers. Elizabeth Nunez argues that Caribbean women writers are "experimenting with new literary forms and structures, rewriting stories from the Western canon to set the record straight about the lives of Caribbean characters, uncovering past histories of class, race, ethnic, color, gender and sexual exploitation, and offering hope in the possibilities for women" (cited in Reynolds 26). Hope in Caribbean women's writing can be understood as being connected to creolisation, arguably the most pervasive feature of virtually all Caribbean fiction. Wilson Harris, the eminent Guyanese writer, has written that "[c]apacities for genuine change" are only possible through "cross-cultural imaginations" (cited in Balutanski and Sourieau 8). Creolisation entails not a straight-forward exchange between cultures but instead "the right to borrow or absorb selected components of the 'other' without relinquishing one's own dimensions: it's an interplay of mutual mutations" (8).

The work of Richard D.E. Burton, alongside that of Glissant, is central to my exploration of the place of creolisation in Hopkinson's work. In *Afro-Creole: Power, Opposition, and Play in the Caribbean* (1997), Burton argues that creole culture in the Caribbean is not neo-African, nor simply an imitation of European culture, but a new culture of its own and that "slaves are said to have drawn on *all* the cultural resources available to create a cultural system that could not be other than 'highly syncretistic'" but significantly, creolisation is a multilateral process which means that both the empowered and disempowered cultures are changed (Sidney Mintz



and Richard Price cited in Burton 4). An example of multilateral creolisation in Hopkinson's novels comes from *Brown Girl in the Ring* when Gros-Jeanne's heart is transplanted into Premier Uttley, who develops Graft Versus Host Disease where cells from the donor organ attack the immune system of the new host. This battle takes place not only on a cellular level, but also on a spiritual one which Uttley describes as the dream world she lived in for the two weeks it took for her body and the new heart to reconcile.

*She had realised that she was being invaded in some way, taken over. The heart's rhythm felt wrong, not her own. . . . Bit by bit, she was losing the ability to control her own body. The heart was taking it over. . . . Unable to move, unable to save herself, she had felt her brain cells being given up one by one. Then blackness. Nothing.*

*And then she was aware again. Her dream body and brain were hers once more, but with a difference. The heart—her heart—was dancing joyfully between her ribs. When she looked down at herself, she could see the blood moving through her body to its beat. In every artery, in every vein, every capillary: two distinct streams, intertwined. . . . She was healed, a new woman now. (BG 236-237, italics in original)*

Through this process, Uttley and Gros-Jeanne become something completely new, made up of aspects of both individuals. Gros-Jeanne's 'invasion' of Uttley's body is forceful, but not destructive. Together the two distinct "streams" create something new and "the heart" becomes the new woman's heart. The ending of the novel portrays creolisation as a troubled process with far-reaching consequences, but ultimately one which can lead to positive change. Uttley's literal change of heart also causes a figurative one and she decides that the platform for her campaign to remain Premier will hinge on the rejuvenation of Toronto, a strategy that will benefit the citizens of the Ring. The struggle between Mami's heart and Uttley's body is a metaphor for creolisation



and how it is not a straightforward ‘blending process,’ but rather one of contention between different racial, cultural and social groups. It is “at the same time cultural loss. . . . retention and reinterpretation, cultural imitation and borrowing, and . . . creation” (Burton 5; 6).

In his exploration of creolisation, Burton makes a meaningful distinction between resistance and opposition, one drawn from the work of Michel de Certeau. In de Certeau’s terms resistance is “those forms of contestation of a given system that are conducted from *outside* that system” while opposition is “those forms of contestation of a given system that are conducted from *within* that system” (6, italics in original). Building on this distinction, Burton argues that “cultural opposition in the Caribbean [is] double-edged to the extent that [a creole] culture cannot, by dint of its very creoleness, get entirely outside the dominant system to *resist* it . . . and so tends unconsciously to reproduce its underlying structures even as it consciously challenges its visible dominance” (7; 8, italics in original). *Midnight Robber* is the most explicit example of how this process of opposition works: the Marrayshvites travel to another planet, but in the act of colonisation they solidify many of the same inequalities and systems of domination on New Half-Way Tree that their ancestors in the Caribbean struggled against, even establishing slave plantations. In Burton’s words: “Power manipulated is power accepted, however reluctantly, and even consolidated by the manipulator’s success” (60).

Even though Burton’s work is useful, it fails, finally, to forward an intersectional analysis in terms of gender. He acknowledges its complexity, refers to it, very briefly, throughout the book, but it is clear that it was not a major consideration because his focus is on aspects of West Indian (the term he uses to refer to Jamaicans), male culture. He refers to West Indian women as often being “as oppositional to West Indian men’s to the dominant ‘white’ power structures” (11). Notwithstanding, in his introduction he states that he sees “current shifts in gender relations

as potentially the most dynamic force” in the Caribbean (12). In his conclusion he concedes that the aspects of West Indian culture he discussed such as Carnival and masquerades might appear as reactionary compensations for “the state of chronic disempowerment to which . . . most West Indians have been condemned.” Moreover:

[T]here is scarcely one cultural form discussed in [this] book that is not at the same time a revolt against things as they are and a form of adjustment to them, scarcely one that is not at one level complicit with the structures it challenges, scarcely one that, even as it rebels against one form of domination—that of slaves by their masters, of the colonized by the colonizers—does not contain within itself the seeds of another form of domination, most notably that of women by men. . . . (264)

While his own analysis does not explore gendered identity in depth, Burton concludes that women are the most fruitful avenue of sustained resistance. “If the growing cultural and educational strength of women can be translated into concrete social, economic, and political power . . . it would strike at the very core of the structures and values inherited from slavery and colonialism that still bind the Caribbean . . . and prevent the society . . . from attaining full human maturity” (267). His conclusion is ironic for a book that focuses so intensively on Jamaican male culture and it can also be read as suggesting that the mere presence of women in positions of political authority could alter patriarchal ideologies of the state and nation. In the end, he only considers women in relation to men, thereby demonstrating the importance of writers like Hopkinson’s focus on the experiences of Caribbean women and their descendants

Burton concentrates virtually exclusively on issues of creolisation, but he also addresses the equally significant concept of *marronage*. The processes of creolisation and *marronage* fundamentally shaped the character of the Caribbean and they might seem irreconcilable because “. . . creolization consisted of the gathering of scattered elements and the creation of a new coherence . . . [while] marooning, on the other hand, was an attempt . . . to create in an out-of-reach, wild space, a counterculture, opposed to that of the plantation” (Lahens 160). In fact, the two are inseparable because the effect of *marronage* “was to impose, in a more radical [direct and violent] way, another form of cultural coherence,” as creolisation did through “an indirect, insidious confrontation and a search for integration” (160). Both processes suffer from internal contradictions: creolisation because it operates within the dominant system and *marronage* because many Maroons had to cooperate with that system in order to maintain their independence, a cooperation which often came at the cost of those who were still enslaved on plantations, and, as Burton points out, “it left the slave system intact” (48).

In Mavis C. Campbell’s *The Maroons of Jamaica 1655-1796: A History of Resistance, Collaboration & Betrayal* (1988), she explores the treaties the Maroon communities made with the colonial government. Whether the Maroon leaders understood the full impact of these treaties is, as she shows, debateable. However, the treaty with Cudjoe specifies that Maroons were obliged to “take, kill, suppress, or destroy” rebels while the treaty with Quao went even further by stating that they “were required to be ready ‘on all commands’ the governor might institute for the destruction of rebel hideouts or for the return of runaways” (138). The Maroons never fought under military command of the colonial powers, but after these treaties were signed the frequency of rebellions on plantation went down dramatically.

‘Some trifling disturbances happened, and some plots were detected, but they came to nothing; and indeed the seeds of rebellion were in great measure rendered abortive, by the activity of the Maroons, who scouted the woods, and apprehended all straggling and vagabond slaves from time to time deserted from their owners.’ (planter historian Edward Long cited in M.C. Campbell 153-154)

The price of the Maroons’ freedom was the continued enslavement of those individuals still on the plantations and this problematic freedom is portrayed, in an altered manner, on Toussaint and New Half-Way Tree in *Midnight Robber*. The Caribbean space travellers can be seen as Maroons who want to establish their own “out-of-reach, wild space” but their freedom is at the cost of the douen who are wiped out on Toussaint and subjugated on New Half-Way Tree.<sup>34</sup> In *The Salt Roads*, Mer has a deep mistrust of Makandal, a Maroon, who brings the wrath of the master down on the slaves when he sabotages the running of the plantation and attempts to poison those in the big house; however, the other slaves believe that Makandal will bring them their freedom. In the end Makandal is executed and, although she has an opportunity to join a Maroon community, Mer decides to stay at the plantation because the slaves there need her knowledge of healing and midwifery. After deciding to stay, Mer and her lover Tipingee, in their old age, are the ones who assist in the birth of Dédée Bazile, a partially mythological slave woman who purportedly fought by Jean-Jacques Dessalines’ side and who is seen as a heroine of the Haitian revolution.

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<sup>34</sup> As with the historical Maroons, the Marraysevites do not attempt to dismantle or fight the oppressive system on earth, but instead merely remove themselves from it.

Heroic women from Caribbean histories feature prominently in Hopkinson's fiction, most notably the Maroon leader, Nanny, briefly mentioned earlier in the chapter in connection to her profound supernatural powers. The extent of her influence in the 1730s is evident from the fact that her community, Nannytown, was named after her (M.C. Campbell 176). She is remembered as a great warrior and "her community was one of the most aggressive against the slave masters," and there is "suggestive evidence that she was against signing treaties with [the British]" (177), unlike most of the other Maroon leaders. Campbell addresses the ambiguity surrounding the Maroons' cooperation with the British, who betrayed them in the end, as follows: "Our modern minds have difficulties in permitting us to comprehend or accept the fact that the Maroons, who fought so courageously for their freedom, could in turn be a major stumbling block to others who also wished to wrest freedom from the slavocracy" (250). She argues that the Maroon movement "did not really provide an agenda, any sustained organization . . . and perhaps, most important, an ideology" (250), which was further complicated by the fact that part of the coherence established in Maroon communities stemmed from the majority of individuals being Akan.

[T]he Africans who were transported to the New World did not constitute a culture bloc. They encompassed a multiplicity of ethnicities, from different parts of the continent of Africa, with distinct linguistic affinities. Each ethnic group viewed itself as exclusive—as a "nation"—despite certain commonalities. The notion of a pan-African solidarity was alien to their contemporary way of thinking. . . . And to the extent that most of the Maroon leadership was in the hands of the Akan-speaking group, this made for even greater exclusivity. (251)

In the field studies in the late nineteen eighties which contributed to the publication of *Maroons of Jamaica*, Mavis Campbell and her colleagues found “no strong sense of cooperation or even of empathy among them. Indeed, in some cases “the leaders displayed indifference to the other groups” (252). This is by no means empirical evidence, but it remains relevant when considering how the humans in *Midnight Robber*, much like the original Maroons, are completely unconcerned with the well-being of the indigenous douen. Their primary concern is with securing their *own* land beyond the control of oppressive powers. In the cases of both the Maroons and the Marryshevites, their partially successful escape from oppression plays a central role in how they define themselves, much as enslavement defines those excluded from their spaces.

Finding, or making, a space in which self-definition and creation is possible in a hostile environment is a prevalent feature of black women writers’ fiction. By writing about black women’s experiences and lives under slavery, the point of interest is how their subjectivities were formed under such conditions. Examining the formation of black female subjectivities under slavery aids in understanding how the continued slow violence of slavery still exerts influence today, and how future spaces can be moulded to make other possibilities available. To this end, the emphasis is on the multiplicity, fluidity and flexibility of subjectivity, and on avoiding essentialising notions of identity. Arlene Keizer’s *Black Subjects: Identity Formation in the Contemporary Narrative of Slavery* (2004) has been indispensable in reading Hopkinson’s work. Keizer begins her book by stating that “[s]lavery haunts contemporary African-American and Afro-Caribbean literature” and that “black writers in the United States and the Anglophone Caribbean are intervening in a theoretical debate about identity in the African diaspora through representations of slavery.” Furthermore, “these literary works themselves theorize about the

nature and formation of black subjects, under the slave system and in the present by utilizing slave characters and the condition of slavery as focal points” (1). One can find common ground between how she labels fiction that explores this self-creation as “fictionalized theories” to Boyce Davies’s concept of creative theorising, a process Boyce Davies identifies mainly in the writing of black women, and describes as contributing to contemporary theoretical explorations of colonial discourses and female subjectivities (Boyce Davies 59). However, Keizer does offer a rejuvenated look at specifically *contemporary* slave narratives and while she is careful to state that she does not intend to look at black women exclusively, her theory is applicable to female subjectivities as they are theorised in Hopkinson’s novels.

Keizer does not analyse any of Hopkinson’s novels, but they can be described as “fictionalized theories,” particularly in the way that she portrays opposition by referencing Maroon societies and the Haitian Revolution (8), in both *Midnight Robber* and *The Salt Roads*. Even more significantly, Hopkinson’s work demonstrates:

. . . how fraught with difficulty resistance is and has been. In fact, one of the signal characteristics of these works is their problematization of resistance. These texts never question the need to struggle against a system that has consistently subjugated people of African descent, but the means through which such resistance can be carried out are closely examined and the contradictions inherent in certain modes of resistance are evaluated. . . .

In general, contemporary African-American and Caribbean writers have begun to treat resistance as a variety of strategies that come with their own problems, rather than as a straightforward solution. (9)

De Certeau's term 'opposition' would be a more appropriate term here since it is clear that Keizer is referring to contestation from within a system rather than from without. Writing about black subjectivity, she argues that the Anglophone Caribbean "continue[s] to labor within the cultural, social, and economic spheres of colonial powers, old and new" and that "the recognition of continuing oppression that has deep roots in history is responsible, in large part, for a resurgence of interest in the ways in which black subjectivities were formed in response to the clear and brutal oppression of slavery" (10). In other words, depictions of slavery are not used just to protest against oppression, but instead they are used to "explore the process of self-creation under extremely oppressive conditions" (11). She also contends that "the mediation on the past in the contemporary narrative of slavery is . . . an attempt to theorize and shape the future" (16), a preoccupation clearly identifiable in Hopkinson's work and one closely connected to hope, as it pertains to possible change.

The possibility of changes in subjectivity, hinges on an acceptance of fluidity or indeterminacy. In *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993), Paul Gilroy emphasises throughout that the "very desire to be centred" should be called into question and what is of interest is the "flows, exchanges, and in-between elements" (190). More recent diasporic scholarship suggests that diaspora:

. . . is not represented only as a demographic, a geographic place, or primarily through history, memory, or even trauma. It is cohered through sensation, vibrations, echoes, speed, feedback loops, and recursive folds and feelings, coalescing through corporealities, affectivities, and . . . multiple and contingent temporalities not through an identity but an assemblage. (Jasbir Puar cited in Jobson 16)



Here again there is common ground between a science fiction and diasporic literature. In *Alien Constructions: Science Fiction and Feminist Thought* (2006), Patricia Melzer states that feminist science fiction represents multiplicity, flexibility and fluid selves as positives instead of portraying them as fragmentation or incoherent selves (Melzer 16). This is a sentiment shared in critical writing about Caribbean women's fiction and it is underscored by the fact that she also explicitly refers to Boyce Davies' migratory subjects (related to creative theorising) which speaks to "issues of geographical (and social/political) displacements, and their effect on identity formation" (18). For Melzer, revalorisation can only occur when differences are embraced as "persistent components of subjectivity" and when subjectivity is "a continuous negotiation of conflicting experiences more than . . . a final product" (18). Speaking about her short story "A Habit of Waste," Hopkinson details some of the critiques she received at a writing retreat about the depiction of her protagonist. In the story, the protagonist, the daughter of first-generation Trinidadian immigrants to Canada, takes advantage of a new technology to exchange her voluptuous black body for a thin white one.

Some people said that I had to decide what my protagonist's problem was. Was it internalized racism, or female body image problems, or the problems that the child of immigrants face when she tries to adapt to a new culture? They felt I had to choose one, that my story would lack focus if I didn't. But the themes were all interrelated; it wouldn't have made sense to me artificially to disentangle them. (cited in Rutledge, "Speaking in Tongues" 592)

Hopkinson acknowledges the complexity of subjectivity, as well as the importance of intersectionality when it comes to the oppression and marginalisation of black women and how it affects their sense of self. Acknowledging of intersectionality is crucial in order to "overcome

the limitations imposed by assumptions of internal identity (homogeneity) and the repression of internal differences (heterogeneity) in racial and gendered readings of works by black women writers” (Henderson 17). Mae G. Henderson calls a reading approach which acknowledges intersectionality as the “simultaneity of discourse” (inspired by Barbara Smith), a mode of reading which is intent on stressing “complex representations of black women writers” and avoiding a reductive conceptualisation of ‘otherness’ (17). Henderson contends that by foregrounding intersectionality, writers achieve “the self-inscription of black womanhood” which entails “disruption, rereading and rewriting the conventional and canonical stories, as well as revising conventional generic forms that convey these stories” (31). It can be argued that Hopkinson is engaged with this process in writing science fiction.

All three of Hopkinson’s novels revise notions of motherhood as an aspect of black female subjectivity. As noted in the introduction, motherhood is a contentious subject in Caribbean women’s writing which often confronts the “historical construction of the Black woman as the ‘great mother’, negatively embedded in the ‘mammy’ figure of Euro-American imagination” (Boyce Davies 135). In *Midnight Robber*, Ione is at best a neglectful mother who leaves mothering up to the AI minder and Nursie while Tan-Tan’s stepmother Janisette is unable or unwilling to protect Tan-Tan from Antonio, and after his death tries to kill Tan-Tan to avenge him. Tan-Tan’s feelings toward her own baby are complicated by the fact that he is a product of rape and incest. While pregnant, she is still trying to come to terms with the fact that she killed her father for raping her. The most conventional model of motherhood in Tan-Tan’s life is Benta, the douen woman, who accepts and protects Tan-Tan as her own. In *Brown Girl in the Ring*, Ti-Jeanne is more often than not resentful or indifferent towards Baby, and her own mother is absent nearly up until Gros-Jeanne’s death. Gros-Jeanne raises Ti-Jeanne and while they clearly

love one another their relationship is by no means an easy one. To an extent Gros-Jeanne tries to atone for the ways in which she alienated her daughter Mi-Jeanne through her relationship with her grand-daughter. In *The Salt Roads*, Mer's child is long dead, but she 'mothers' her fellow slaves and helps raise Ti-Bois, a young slave boy. In one of the other story streams in the novel, Jeanne adopts her ex-lover Jeanette's daughter and Ezili is mother to all of the Ginen.<sup>35</sup> Alcena Davis Rogan proposes that "the black woman's relationship to her self and her family must be constantly reevaluated . . . as a relation degraded by the legacy of her slavery-era status as the literal site of the reproduction of white-owned property" which continues to "haunt black women, although [it] manifest[s] . . . in different ways" (75; 76). None of the representations of motherhood in any of the three novels is one-dimensional; they all present the reader with nuanced perspectives and do not necessarily pose one kind of motherhood as more valid than another.

Laura De Abruna posits that "the alienation of the mother becomes a metaphor for the . . . alienation from the mother culture . . ." (258). The question one must confront then is which culture is the "mother culture"? Here Tan-Tan's fraught relationship with Ione and Ti-Jeanne's non-existent one with Mi-Jeanne become particularly relevant: Tan-Tan's most meaningful connection to a motherly figure is with Benta who belongs to a species analogous to the indigenous Caribs while Ti-Jeanne's strongest connection is to her grandmother, not her mother. One could argue that Gros-Jeanne represents the Caribbean while Mi-Jeanne, neglectful, and even violent, represents Canada, but at the end of the novel Gros-Jeanne is dead and Mi-Jeanne and Ti-Jeanne's relationship is on the mend. The question of 'motherland' becomes even more

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<sup>35</sup> Ginen is the name Mer and the other slaves identify themselves by, but it is also used to refer to the spiritual realm in which the *lwas* and gods dwell. Using Ginen as a moniker indicates the slaves' West African origins as it was used to refer to West Africa during the time of slavery.

troubled with each dislocation, as seen with Tan-Tan: her ancestors were taken as slaves from Africa to the Caribbean, much later they travelled from earth and colonised Toussaint, her birth place, from where she travels to New Half-Way Tree. This representation of ‘home’ is in keeping with notions of a “diasporic imaginary” (Jobson 11), which does not hold it as a place of return. In *The Salt Roads*, Ezili, decisively Afro-Caribbean, is spiritual ‘mother’ to all of the Ginen and even has a connection, through Thais, to those enslaved before the Middle Passage. Bonds, or lack of them, between mothers, daughters and grandmothers are central in all three novels, as are the relationships between friends, like Tan-Tan and Abitefa, and lovers, like Mer and Tipingee, and Jeanne and Lisette. “[R]epeatedly there emerges a sense of sisterly solidarity with mother figures whose strengths and frailties assume new significance for daughters now faced with the challenge of raising children and/or achieving artistic recognition in an environment hostile to the[m]” (Rhonda Cobham cited in de Abruna 259). In the novels, relationships with other women are sources of strength to the protagonists and often they play a crucial role in the survival of the main character even if all the relationships cannot necessarily be described as easy or enriching.

Ideas surrounding mothers and motherlands are also striking when one considers that “[c]olonised nations have frequently been represented by Europeans as ‘female’ requiring paternal governance by the dominant power. Later, this mythologised femaleness of the nation culture was perpetuated in the works of male writers who created stereotypes of women” (Nasta xiii). In the description of the colonisation of Toussaint in *Midnight Robber*, the land is represented in feminine terms: “[T]he Marryshow Corporation sink them Earth Engine Number 127 down into it like God entering he woman; plunging into the womb of soil to impregnate the planet with the seed [of nanomites from the Granny Nanny Web]” (*MR* 2). Susheila Nasta

reasons that even though some of the stereotypes used by male diasporic writers, such as female goddesses, were “powerful symbolic forces, repositories of culture and creativity, they were essentially silent and silenced by the structures surrounding them.” Thus, when more women became published they faced a twofold problem: not only did they have to make “visible the varied experience of women” but they also had to combat prevailing attitudes towards women that originated in colonial *and* anti-colonial writing (xiv).

One such writer is Paule Marshall, whose novel *Brown Girl, Brownstones* (1959) is particularly relevant to Hopkinson’s work.<sup>36</sup> Marshall and Hopkinson are both diasporic writers: Marshall, of Barbadian descent, grew up and still lives in New York; and Hopkinson, born in Jamaica, has lived there and in Guyana, Trinidad, Canada, and presently in California. Hopkinson is most often categorised as a science fiction author, and the majority of the critical response to her work treats her purely as such, but she also makes a valuable contribution to the canon of diasporic women writers. Marshall and Hopkinson’s work has much in common such as motifs of journeys, ancestral female figures and themes such as exile, belonging and motherhood and *Brown Girl, Brownstones* is also relevant because of how it addresses technology. The following passages are representative of the novel’s time,<sup>37</sup> but they are still thought-provoking when viewed in the context of people of colour engaging with technology in diasporic fiction. The protagonist of the novel, Selina, is the daughter of Bajan immigrants living in New York. Her mother works in a factory which manufactures shells for WWII, and when she goes to see her, Selina is awed by what she sees on the factory floor.

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<sup>36</sup> I will also be using *Praisesong for the Widow* (1983), in Chapter 2.

<sup>37</sup> The novel was published in 1959 and is concerned with the time leading up to and during WWII.

Timidly she pushed open a heavy metal door and almost slammed it back in fright as an enraged bellow tore past her. She was drowned suddenly in a deluge of noise. . . . welling up like a seething volcano to the point of eruption, only to veer off at the climax and start again. Th[e] . . . machine-force was ugly, yet it had grandeur. It was a new creative force, the heart of another, larger, form of life that had submerged all others, and the roar was its heartbeat—not the ordered systole and diastole of the human heart but a frenetic lifebeat all its own. (98-99)

Selina is awed by and feels inconsequential in the face of the machine which is likened to a force of nature (volcano) and described as a life form with a “frenetic lifebeat” which seems to suggest the rapid pace of technological development, enforced by how it “had submerged” all other life forms. This description is quite prophetic in terms of how all-encompassing technology has become in the everyday lives of many. While it is imposing and clearly frightens Selina, one can also recognise its potential in the description of it as a “creative force” that has “grandeur” despite its ugliness. This is very similar to how Hopkinson treats technology in her novels: as a power to contend with which could prove either useful or destructive, depending on who is wielding it. The contrast between the machinery and the workers is also telling:

The workers, white and colored, clustered and scurried around the machine-mass, trying, it seemed, to stave off the destruction it threatened. They had built it but, ironically, it had overreached them, so that now they were only small insignificant shapes against its overwhelming complexity. Their movements mimicked its mechanical gestures. They pulled levers, turned wheels, scooped up the metal droppings of the machines as if somewhere in that huge building someone controlled their every motion by pushing a button. And no one talked. Like the men loading the trailer trucks in the streets, they

performed a pantomime role in a drama in which only the machines had a voice. . . .  
 Fleetingly she saw herself in relation to the machine-force: a thin dark girl in galoshes  
 without any power with words, and the boldness that had brought her here collapsed. (99)

The workers are insignificant in comparison to the machinery and they seem to have no autonomy: their movements mimic the machinery's and they are silenced while "only the machines had a voice." It is certainly noteworthy that the workers are both white and "colored," but overall the passage is ominous and reads like a warning of the destructive potential technology holds for everyone, but especially for young Selina who sees herself as powerless in the face of its power. Her position seemingly reflects the particularly troublesome one women of colour occupy in relation to technology, a position Hopkinson both elucidates and subverts in her novels. The one person who is not overshadowed is the other 'force of nature' in Selina's life, her mother Silla, a contentious but undeniably powerful figure, who is equal to the might of the machinery, and not overpowered by it like the other workers or Selina.

Silla worked at an old-fashioned lathe. . . . Like the others, her movements were attuned to the mechanical rhythms of the machine-mass. . . . Watching her, Selina felt the familiar grudging affection seep under her amazement. Only the mother's own formidable force could match that of the machines; only the mother could remain indifferent to the brutal noise. (99-100)

Silla seems to be not in competition with the machinery, but in tune with it and attuned to its potential. On their way home from the factory Silla tells Selina that: "I read someplace that this is the machine age and it's the God truth. You got to learn to run these machines to live. But some these Bajan here still don't understand that—that Suggie and yuh father and them so that still ain't got a penny to their name . . ." (103). She recognises how she needs to adapt to survive the

hostility of America and she also understands technology's intimate connections to both capitalism and power, an understanding which makes her more successful, in terms of material wealth, than many other Caribbean immigrants in their community.

Selina is profoundly affected by her visit to the factory and later in the novel when she is in the school lunchroom she compares the mass of noisy "sweated young bodies" around her to the machinery in the factory:

The air was raw with the smell of sweated young bodies, and their shrill voices, strafing the air in almost visible white streaks, spoke of life bursting full yet, at the same time, pleaded for something or someone to give that life form before it destroyed them. The sound always recalled to her the machines at the factory. Its theme was the same one of impending ruin. The machine-race pervaded them, it seemed—was shaping them—and they could not help but echo it. (151)

While this passage too reads as a warning against technology, it also reveals Selina's belief that it is able to shape people: a force beyond their control, they echo *it*. Additionally, the passage foreshadows what happens to Selina's father, Deighton, when his arm is crushed by machinery when he too starts working at the factory. Silla maintains it happened because he only ever half-learns anything.

"They startup some new machine and he ask to work on it without knowing what it gave and the arm got caught. The nerve gone, they say. Crush so."

Selina barely heard, for her own blood thudded loud as another voice in her ears. The sound became the machines roaring at the factory, and she saw him, a slim figure with an ascetic's face standing amid that giant complex of pistons and power, shuddering inside each time the steam jettisoned up and the machines stamped down. (155)



The contrasting relationship that Selina's parents have to technology signifies their relative success in adapting to and assimilating into life in America: successfully in Silla's case and unsuccessfully in Deighton's. Deighton is no match for the power of technology as he refuses to learn about or understand it and he pays for his ignorance with his arm. The descriptions of technology in Marshall's novel do not depict it only as something to be used against people of colour, but also as something they can use to their own ends, like the Marryshevites in *Midnight Robber*. Similar to Gros-Jeanne in *Brown Girl in the Ring*, Silla is not rendered powerless by technology, but instead makes it work to her advantage. For Gros-Jeanne, the exploitation of technology takes place only in spiritual form. The key difference between the two is that Silla accepts technology as yet another obstacle to be neutralised in her quest for belonging in America, while Gros-Jeanne subverts technology, and makes it her own, by combining diasporic spirituality with modern medicine.

By foregrounding the experience of women of colour and representing alternative perspectives on motherhood and motherlands in these three novels, Hopkinson is able to examine and deconstruct female subjectivities influenced by slavery and colonialism. This forms part of the process of creative theorising which takes place within the novels. As a woman of colour writing science fiction, she engages with how technology has been used to perpetuate myths of Western superiority. She also questions whose stories are valued and worth telling. Although her work is often classified only as science fiction, she makes a valuable contribution to diasporic women's writing in how she portrays creolisation and the ambiguity of both it and *marronage* in terms of opposition and resistance to systems of power. The time span of the novels demonstrates how shackled together the past, present and future are, and how the present, and therefore the future too, is shaped to maintain racist and exclusionary systems of power. She uses

temporal entanglement to question Western constructions of linear time, and simultaneously draws her reader's attention to the slow violence enacted by slavery and colonialism, and the crucial role of the past in imagining alternative futures. She is able to do this by returning to the point of entanglement, as expressed by Glissant. Notably, Glissant specifies that the forces of creolisation should facilitate this return, a crucial point in relation to the divergence between *Midnight Robber*, the subject of the next chapter, and *Brown Girl in the Ring*.

According to Glissant, root identity is founded in a vision which harkens back to a creation myth from the distant past and it "is sanctified by the hidden violence of a filiation that strictly follows from this founding episode," a violence which enforces a claim to legitimacy of ownership of a land (*Poetics* 143-144). His explanation of root identity can be applied directly to the construction of group identity of the Marryshevites in *Midnight Robber* since their sense of self is inseparable from the conquest of Toussaint, which was made theirs through the genocide of the native douen. The fact that their identity depends on colonial violence makes past oppressions inescapable and prevents them from breaking the bonds that tie them to the colonial enterprise. In contrast, the way identity is conceived in the immigrant community of the Burn in *Brown Girl in the Ring* conforms to Glissant's definition of relation identity. This kind of identity is connected to "the conscious and contradictory experience of contacts among cultures" with no claim to legitimacy or entitlement. Instead, it "circulate[s], newly extended" because it is "produced in the chaotic network of Relation and not in the hidden violence of filiation" (144). Thus, in juxtaposing root and relation identity Hopkinson shows that the Marryshevites, by reifying creolisation in their culture and technology, rendered it fixed and powerless. They rob it of its transformative power and in the process stunt their own development by keeping it mired in colonial violence, whereas it remains active and adaptive in the Burn. In the Burn, the

immigrant community rely on creolisation for survival because they are trapped, surrounded on all sides by an exploitative system. In contrast, the Marrayshévites, despite their creolised origins, have become the oppressive hegemonic group, whose comfortable existence is supported by a master narrative that depends on the suppression of the contradictions at the heart of creolisation. The single story they create about their identity is facilitated by violence, technology, their possession of the land and their rejection of hard labour, and in order to legitimise this story, they cling to a root identity that stands in opposition to the dynamism of creolisation.



## Chapter 2

### “Back-break ain’t for humans”: Root Identity, Land and Labour in *Midnight Robber*

What does a fiction about mastery of self and other through technology become in the hands of writers who have cause to be wary of that mastery? What does a fiction which talks about colonizing other races and spaces become when written by people who’ve recently—as the history of the world goes—experienced that colonization?

– Nalo Hopkinson (cited in Anatol 113)

*Midnight Robber* is the most futuristic of the three works chosen for this study. It bears witness to the slow violence of colonialism and slavery by showing the ways in which the persistent master-slave dynamic is still present in the relationships between the inhabitants of two futuristic planets, thus exposing its enduring impact on the humanity of both coloniser and colonised. The colonial project in the novel is represented by two elements in the novel: labour, a loaded concept in the diasporic context, and *marronage*, which describes the search for a land to claim as one’s own. As noted in the introduction and the previous chapter, land and labour are central to understanding indigeneity and belonging in the Caribbean, but *marronage* is ultimately ambiguous, caught between resistance and opposition. This ambiguity pervades the story and its characters, resulting in a pervasive condition of in-betweenness, presenting no absolute truths and embracing contradiction and irony as foundational features. In this chapter, I will pay particular attention to the depiction of the effects and after-effects of colonialism as portrayed through historical references and figures, but also in the relationship between the human and non-human characters in the novel. In turn, these relationships, which speculate on the nature of humanity, are defined by the connections Hopkinson makes between the future, the present, and the past through the engagement within the novel with both memory and history.

In the fictional historical background to *Midnight Robber*, a group of Caribbean descendants, unsatisfied with the status quo on Earth, have travelled to different “Nation Worlds” which they colonise. The novel begins on one such planet, named Toussaint. The group refer to themselves as Marryshevites, named after the calypsonian scientist<sup>38</sup> Marryshow who helped create the tonal quantum computer, Granny Nanny (also called Granny Nansi), which made both the journey to and the colonisation of Toussaint possible. The utopian Toussaint, where virtually all hard labour is performed by artificial intelligence, is presided over and protected by Granny Nanny and her A.I. servants, the *eshus*. Toussaint is able to maintain its social equilibrium because it exiles those who violently threaten its status quo to New Half-Way Tree, its parallel or twin planet, separated from it by the dimension veil. It is possible that Hopkinson chose this specific terminology as a reference to W.E.B. du Bois’s metaphor of the veil, the separation between black and white Americans which “depict[s] a two-dimensional pattern of estrangement that shaped the lives of black Americans in the age of Jim Crow” (Blight and Gooding-Williams 11). Du Bois’s veil is like the one between the two planets which influences the lives of both the privileged Marryshevites on Toussaint, and the exiled individuals on New Half-Way Tree who measure themselves by all that they lost in their exile.

Both planets were populated by the native douen, but they were killed off on Toussaint by Granny Nanny to make safe the Marryshevites’ new land, and on New Half-Way Tree they serve as labour force for the exiled humans. Whereas nature has been replaced by organic matter infused with Granny’s nanomites on Toussaint, it thrives on New Half-Way Tree. The Marryshevites possess the technology to send people to New Half-Way Tree, but the journey is

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<sup>38</sup> The moniker ‘calypsonian scientist’ refers to the importance of music and sound in Marryshow’s programming of Granny Nanny. Calypso is a Caribbean music form that has its origins in Trinidad and Tobago and the performer may be referred to as a calypsonian, a storyteller role similar to a griot. The genre displays “rhythmic, lyrical, and African-based religious tenets” (Toussaint 137). Thus, Hopkinson overtly links Granny Nanny’s technology to Africa and its diaspora.

one-way because Granny Nanny's nanomites have, up until the last part of the story, been unable to communicate with her through the dimension veil. The protagonist, Tan-Tan makes this journey with her father, Antonio, who effectively kidnaps her from her home on Toussaint. Growing up on New Half-Way Tree, Tan-Tan has to contend with sexual abuse from her father and verbal abuse from her step-mother Janisette. On her sixteenth birthday, when Antonio rapes her again, Tan-Tan kills him and flees the human village with the help of Chichibud, a douen man. While at the douen settlement, Tan-Tan gets to know his wife Benta and his daughter Abitefa and she learns about the douen way of life which is heavily influenced by their spiritual guide Papa Bois,<sup>39</sup> for whom the sanctity of life is paramount.

This chapter is divided into three broad temporal spheres moving from teleological, to diasporic, to generational time to emphasise how temporalities exert influence on one another, but also to demonstrate how they overlap. For example, technology as a tool of empire, as discussed in the teleological section, provides context for the discussion about historical references in the diasporic section while the examination of storytelling in the diasporic section lays the foundation for the discussion of Tan-Tan's fragmented subjectivity in the section on generational time. The first part of the chapter is primarily concerned with technology as a tool of empire and how it is addressed through four related aspects of the novel: the oppositions between Toussaint and New Half-Way Tree and between Granny Nanny and Papa Bois, the relationship between the douen and humans, and both species' relationship to their environment. Before commencing with these discussions, however, it is useful to draw attention to the historical background which informs much of the characterisation and setting in the story

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<sup>39</sup> The figure of Papa Bois appears in Haitian Vodoun, and in Trinidad and Tobago, and St. Lucia folklore. In Vodoun, "Grand Bois" is the *lwa* of creation, an "elemental, nature-oriented" spiritual guide (Oswald 25). In the aforementioned folklore, he appears in stories such as "Papa Bois Saves a Deer" in which he is portrayed as a "benevolent character, a defender of animals" (Pradel 147).

because it reveals how connections between temporal strands are sustained. The historical figures and experiences of the Middle Passage are connected to the future through the names Hopkinson chooses for her characters and settings. For instance, the diasporic technology in the forms of the computer named after the maroon leader Granny Nanny and the Black Star Line II spaceship, named after Marcus Garvey's original venture, which transports the Marryshevites to Toussaint. All of these historical overlays function to create meaning and amplify the importance of Tan-Tan's journeys in the novel.

Eric Smith reads the culture of Toussaint as being "superficially aswarm with historical references" which at first glance "connotes an obsessive historical awareness" but the reader soon discovers that "these figures are bereft of any but the most tangential and memorial historical significance" (46). Smith lists several examples of what are to him empty references to history. Firstly, the Jonkanoo hats, made to look like spaceships, pay tribute to the ship that transported them to Toussaint, the name of which pays homage to Garvey's original Black Star Line instead of the Middle Passage. Secondly, the corporation from which the colonists take their name is named after T.A. Marryshow who played an important role in Grenada's fight for independence. Thirdly, the naming of Granny Nanny's Web co-opts and makes banal the "iconic leader of the Jamaican Maroons" (47). Divesting these historical figures of most of their symbolic meaning is necessary in order for them to function as utopian figureheads in Toussaint's sanitised history. Its society achieves an apparently unambiguous withdrawal from history, despite the plethora of historical references, and thus falls victim to "historical Disneyfication," resulting in these superficial associations being "disempowered as an effective means of imagining otherwise" (47; 48). Instead, the meaningful critical engagement with both

the history of the earth that the colonisers attempt to escape and their own history of colonising Toussaint, occurs on New Half-Way Tree where the suppressed history erupts.

Before elaborating on the engagement with history on New Half-Way Tree, it is important to look at how the Marryshevites construct their narrative: just because the historical references are superficial does not mean that the *choice* of figures is empty of meaning. According to Stuart Hall, “[i]dentities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past” (394). The historical figures with whom the Marryshevites choose to associate themselves all feed into their grand narrative. Even though Toussaint and the other Nation Worlds were colonised two hundred years before Tan-Tan’s story takes place (*MR* 18), the reader learns virtually nothing about those two centuries or the time just before the Marryshevites left earth.<sup>40</sup> Instead, most of what one learns centres on what to the Marryshevites is ancient history: people and happenings from the slavery-era and the twentieth century Caribbean. Marryshow,<sup>41</sup> Garvey, Toussaint and Granny Nanny justify the Marryshevites’ ‘heroic’ project to secure their own land and freedom because all of the figures symbolise the worthiness of their mission. Therefore, the colonial violence perpetrated against the environment and native inhabitants of Toussaint is rationalised with reference to the oppression of the Marryshevites’ ancestors.

The first central figure in the Marryshevites’ construction of their identity is Marcus Garvey, a Jamaican journalist who supported Black Nationalism and Pan-African movements and founded the Universal Negro Improvement Association and African Communities League. Garveyism “was concerned with the fundamental principle of correcting falsifications of the

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<sup>40</sup> The only information provided about those two periods is that the pedicab runner community is fifty years old and Maka (a pedicab runner) describes how Granny Nanny was invented back on earth (*MR* 10; 51).

<sup>41</sup> Marryshow will be discussed later in this section as part of the discussion on Granny Nanny and language.



place of the African which is at the base of the intellectual culture of Europe” (H. Campbell 167). It is curious that most critics, such as Alisa Braithwaite, Ingrid Thaler and Gordon Collier, only discuss Garvey in connection to the Black Star Line, and not in relation to his overall project: he was not only concerned with the idea of unity or an ultimate motherland, but also with the role of technology. According to Horace Campbell:

Ideas of human nature and the philosophical views of the European Renaissance (called Enlightenment) were linked to ideas of white superiority, and these views set the intellectual climate which brutally deleted the role played by Africans in the contributions to science, culture, and religion. (172)

Campbell suggests that “[a]t the ideological level, Garveyism confronted the falsification of African history, challenging black intellectuals to break with the Euro-centric conceptions of human development” (184). The Marrayshévites’ freedom is secured by their creolised technology which represents a response to this falsified history. However, in the end the revisionist use of technology to address racist understandings about the development and use of science and technology is undermined by the colonial endeavour of the Marrayshévites, who in turn wield their technology against the native douen.

The second integral historical figure to the Marrayshévites is L’Ouverture Toussaint, the namesake of the planet the Marrayshévites call home. Although there is more to him as a Marrayshévite symbol, Thaler only refers to Toussaint’s violence and complicity with the colonial system (106).<sup>42</sup> However, on the planet of Toussaint in *Midnight Robber*, the violence of colonial history has been suppressed. The more fitting legacy of Toussaint, for their purposes, would be

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<sup>42</sup> Toussaint is credited with being the architect of Haiti’s independence, but he never envisioned it as being separate from the French Empire, but rather only wanted to ensure that slavery would never be reinstated (James 254).

that of the hero—albeit a tragic one, doomed to fail despite his lofty aspirations—as depicted in C.L.R. James’s *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L’Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (1989). James persuasively describes Toussaint as courageous and brave, a man who was always loyal to his people, despite appearances to the contrary, and who did what was necessary to secure the freedom of those he ruled so forcibly. James described him as an astute and strategic political actor, commenting that, “Toussaint in his twelve years of politics, national and international, made only one serious mistake,<sup>43</sup> the one which ended his career. Strategic necessities he always saw early, and never hesitated in carrying out whatever policies they demanded” (223). Toussaint’s single-mindedness is emphasised: to him, like the Marraysevites, the end justified the means as long as it secured sovereignty. Despite his questionable tactics, Toussaint remained above all concerned with freedom. In the Constitution he wrote for the freed Saint Domingue, “he authorised the slave trade because the island needed people to cultivate it. [But] [w]hen the Africans landed . . . they would be free men” (James 265). A dream he cherished was to sail to Africa with “arms, ammunition and a thousand of his best soldiers, and there conquering vast tracts of country, [put] an end to the slave-trade . . . making millions of blacks ‘free and French,’ as his Constitution had made the blacks of San Domingo” (James 265).<sup>44</sup> His dream has the seed of colonial enterprise: despite its honourable goal, he planned to not only sail to a foreign land and enforce his will on it, much like the Marraysevites, but also to turn the inhabitants of that land into French subjects. While the Marraysevites like to romanticise

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<sup>43</sup> The mistake James refers to is that Toussaint wanted to believe that France would not re-institute slavery, but allow Saint Domingue to be a part of the French Republic. “He had a profound conviction that the French could never restore slavery in [Saint Domingue] and he falsely believed that, once the means of defending liberty for all were safeguarded, no sacrifice was too great to make the French see reason” (364).

<sup>44</sup> By the time Toussaint was fifty-five, he had already sent “millions of francs” to America in order to finance this mission as soon as it became feasible (James 265).

themselves as a maroon community they are colonialists, an identity at odds with how they conceive of themselves.

James defends Toussaint's forced labour policy and military rule as means to an end:

Plantations and cultivation had been destroyed far and wide. For nearly ten years the population, corrupt enough before, had been trained in bloodshed and soaked in violence. Bands of marauders roamed the countryside. The only disciplined force was the army, and Toussaint instituted a military dictatorship. The ultimate guarantee of freedom was the prosperity of agriculture. This was Toussaint's slogan. (James 242)

Toussaint clearly distinguished between enslavement and working hard for a noble purpose—a distinction the Marryshevites do not make since the two seem conflated in their rejection of hard labour. The Marryshevites' almost obsessional devotion to autonomy over their own time reflects an awareness of a history in which their ancestors had no freedom to construct “individual and collective temporality that existed autonomously” from their masters (Hanchard 255), because they had to perform forced hard labour. The work they had to do occupied most of their “labouring time” and as such, their lives were so wholly affected by their work regimen that labour became inseparable from life and “the two appeared to be one and the same” (254). Virtually all of the Marryshevites seem unable to recoup hard labour from this equation and because “the labor and violent exploitation that built and sustained [Toussaint] have been so effectively repressed from cultural consciousness that to be a labourer is to be something other than human” (E.D. Smith 59). On both planets it is only ‘non-people’ who perform hard, physical labour: on Toussaint it is the *eshus* and Granny Nanny's nanomites and the pedicab runner community who are looked down upon, while on New Half-Way Tree it is the exiles who

do not see themselves as people anymore—precisely because they have to perform hard labour—and the ‘subhuman’ douen who work for the humans.

The third, and last figure, is the Maroon leader Granny Nanny, namesake of the Marryshevites’ quantum computer. As established in the previous chapter, she was so influential and respected that she lent her name to her community’s settlement, Nannytown.

The Maroons are a people with a dramatic history forged out of constant warfare, hardships, and cruelty, and the accepted leader must prove strength, cunning, ability to command and to hold the community together, and, naturally, skill in warfare. (M.C. Campbell 176)

Therefore, the naming of the original community serves as proof of Nanny’s power much like Hopkinson’s homage. Despite being troubled by its function as a tool of empire, Granny Nanny’s music-based technology remains an interesting thought-experiment of how the oppression of a people and their search for freedom can shape the technology they wield. Granny Nanny, leader, warrior and wielder of ‘science’ is a most apt inspiration. The A.I. Granny Nanny is first and foremost concerned with the safety and freedom of her people, much like the Jamaican Maroon leader would have been. Some critics read Granny Nanny’s Web (The Grande Nanotech Sentient Interface) as a benevolent overlord: citizens essentially do not have any privacy, but it is also said to be “designed to be flexible, to tolerate a variety of human expression, even dissension. So long as it didn’t upset the balance of the whole” (*MR* 10). An example of this is the pedicab runner community who do not have “earbugs” and who only use “headblind” machines that are not connected to the Web.<sup>45</sup> The Granny Nansi’s Web is also a reference to Anansi, the trickster

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<sup>45</sup> When a baby is born on Toussaint, nanomites are injected into its ear and these form a node, called an earbug, which can communicate with Granny. The term “headblind” is used to refer to objects and technology that are not part of the Granny Nanny system. An example of headblind technology in the novel is handmade paper.

figure, an association which further deepens the ambiguity pervading its portrayal in the novel, especially in relation to the ending of the novel where Granny's *eshu* is able to reach across the dimension veil and 'colonise' New Half-Way Tree through Tan-Tan's son Tubman.

According to Hopkinson, she created the creolised quantum computer, Granny Nanny to claim and valorise creoleness and to "imagine how a Caribbean culture might metonymize technological progress if it was in our hands" (cited in Glave 149). She purposely wanted to imagine something outside of:

"... [our] current metaphors for technology and social behaviours and systems which are largely derived from Greco-Roman mythology. We call our spaceships Apollo and our complexes Oedipus. We talk about cyberspace. So the language we use shapes not only the names of tech but also the types of tech we create." (149)

Therefore, she speculates not only about the metaphors Caribbean people would create for the technologies that they had made, but also how they would think about those technologies (149). It might be that Hopkinson's intention was to subvert white androcentric notions of technology, but also to valorise alternative, diasporic systems of knowledge, but these intentions are undermined, seemingly purposely so, by the fact that the creolised technology is yoked to a colonial project. While technology is not inherently incompatible with the goals of people of colour, the Marrishevites' use of it shows that the act of colonisation itself exerts a negative influence. Therefore, their actions should not invite unequivocal moral condemnation because as previously colonised and oppressed people these Caribbean descendants treat the douen (and one another on New Half-Way Tree) in much the same way as European colonisers treated their ancestors. Instead, their actions should be read as a condemnation of colonialism and its far-reaching, insidious effect on both colonised and coloniser. By emphasising Granny Nanny's dual

character as diasporic technology and a tool of empire, Hopkinson effects a sense of ambiguity throughout the novel.

Thaler postulates that “[t]he novel uses ambiguity to articulate the ‘two-sidedness’ of concepts, histories, tropes, and signs, thereby bringing together two meanings and suggesting their interrelations” (101)—and one could add, their contradictions—which represent the complexity of diaspora. Her use of ambiguity follows Jonathan Culler’s definition of indeterminacy as “the impossibility or unjustifiability of choosing one meaning over another,” but also Stanley Fish’s focus on the “equal availability of [two] interpretations” to the reader (both cited in Thaler 10). This “simultaneity” of meaning is a defining characteristic of the novel and it stems from the interrogation of the coloniser’s *and* colonised’s experience of colonialism. Despite this acknowledgement, Thaler argues that the novel’s closure provides “a moment in which ambiguities may be resolved” (102). For Thaler, “[d]espite its doubts and hesitations, the novel subscribes to the science fiction dream that technology enables a ‘better’ future” (127), but this only applies to the humans in the novel. Granny Nanny’s arrival on New Half-Way Tree is made possible through Tubman, Tan-Tan’s son whose tissue is infused with Nanny’s nanomites in-utero.<sup>46</sup> Thaler’s statement, adhering to a Western notion of technological progress, is exclusionary and fails to consider what the extension of Granny Nanny’s reach to the other planet portends for the *douen*, the aliens who were so easily killed off on Toussaint for the ‘betterment’ of the colonists’ future.

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<sup>46</sup> The nanomites migrate from Tan-Tan’s defunct earbug to her womb while she is pregnant. These tiny machines are usually unable to maintain their connection to Granny Nanny due to the separation enforced by the dimension-veil between the two planets, but in Tubman’s case they are able to fulfil their function by fusing with his foetal issue, thereby re-establishing the link to Granny Nanny.

Relevant here are some common concerns between *Midnight Robber* and Octavia Butler's fiction. Butler too is concerned not only with both sides of the colonial enterprise, but also the question of what it means to be human. This is evident especially in the *Xenogenesis* series (now known as *Lilith's Brood*), but also in the *Patternist* series, most notably in *Survivor* (1978). The novel chronicles the experience of the Missionaries who, oppressed on earth, travel to another planet where they attempt to colonise the native species, whom they view as primitive and subhuman, in order to construct their "promised land" (Melzer 58). The most obvious parallel between the two novels is the colonisation of another planet and species by a group who were themselves oppressed. Another key aspect of Butler's novel, however, is the recreation of myths and "the rejection of Christian salvation myths that are a part of Western ideology" as survival strategy (Melzer 54). While the Missionaries operate within a religious framework, the Marryshevites who travel to Toussaint are operating within a technological one. Therefore, in an effort to distinguish themselves from that which they are leaving behind, the recreation and rejection of myths centre around technology and are embodied in the folkloric, quantum computer, Granny Nanny. They reject Western constructs of technology by infusing it with diasporic folklore and mythology which manifests "through . . . [the Marryshevites'] structures, names, and figures," (54), just like in Butler's *Survivor*. Through these "interventions into colonial consciousness . . . complex models of agency" are created (54). Hopkinson employs a similar strategy in that her colonists' group identity is defined by their rejection of hard labour, enabled by the technology they control, which in turn facilitates an egalitarian society.

The Marryshevites' equality is signalled by the fact that they call one another Compère and most live by the principle that “back-break ain't for humans” (MR 8). The other defining aspect of their identity is based on their construction of themselves as maroons, led by a futuristic Granny Nanny. This is evident in the abundant diasporic tributes and references to maroon figures, but also from the omission of any references to the violence committed to facilitate the colonisation of Toussaint. To own their land, with no opposition or competition, these space maroons must have a *tabula rasa* on which to build their new society. In other words, they cannot consider “integrating themselves into an existing ecosphere” (Thaler 116). Instead, they remake the environment of Toussaint in order to make it theirs, to secure the success of their separatist project away from a world where technology, as a tool of empire, was used to keep them in a subjugated position.

The success of Toussaint depends heavily on its citizens' ability to suppress any evidence of the colonial violence that made their utopian society possible. This suppression is apparent even in something as seemingly innocuous as the self-generating Garden on the planet. The garden motif is one which appears in all three novels and although it is used to different ends in each case, all three representations are related to how the garden is perceived and portrayed as a colonial or anti-colonial space in Caribbean and diasporic fiction. For instance, *Beka Lamb* (1989), by Zee Edgell is about a Belizean girl whose troubled coming of age mirrors her country's struggle for independence. At the beginning of the novel, Beka's parents are trying to mould their daughter into a respectable young lady instead of the wildling who failed her first year at the Catholic secondary school and who tells lies so often that her mother gives her a book to write them down in as stories instead. Symbolically, in the first pages, her father cuts down the overgrown bougainvillea in their garden which Beka planted. Her unkempt (native) plant is



contrasted with her mother's (foreign) rose bushes. When there was a drought a couple of years earlier, Lilla (Beka's mother) and Granny Ivy (Beka's paternal grandmother) "exchanged words because Granny Ivy felt that Lilla had no business 'going on so bad over rose bush when people out district watching corn and yams shrivel under the sun'" (Edgell 9). Even in a serious drought Lilla refuses to stop tending her roses and year after year she "continued to struggle . . . in her attempt to cultivate roses like those she saw in magazines which arrived in the colony three months late from England" (9).<sup>47</sup> The colonial association of the roses and the carefully tended garden is clear. Additionally, Jamaica Kincaid, in *My Garden Book* (1999), describes the garden as "an exercise in memory . . . a way of getting to a past that is my own (the Caribbean Sea) and the past as it is indirectly related to me (the conquest of Mexico and its surroundings)" (8). Therefore, while the garden is a space related to colonial conquest, it can also effect its subversion.

Rob Nixon argues that, in the (post)colonial context, the space of the garden signifies the amnesia of the self-contained English pastoral at the centre of which "lies the idea of the nation as garden idyll, where neither labor nor violence intrudes" (245; 248). According to Nixon, postcolonial pastoral writing brings the history of colonial garden spaces to the fore (245). He reads V.S. Naipaul's autobiographical novel *Enigma of Arrival* (1987) as written in this mode. In the novel, the immigrant perspective means that his experience exceeds the amnesiac space of the all-English pastoral, and the manor garden in Wiltshire is countered by the Trinidadian plantation to which his Indian grandparents were indentured. Thus, the narrator "views his environment through the double prism of postcolonial pastoral: behind the wealth and

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<sup>47</sup> At the end of the novel, following the hurricane in which the rest of the garden was destroyed, the bougainvillea begins to sprout again, symbolising the flourishing once more of rich indigenous life, and Lilla decides to abandon her roses and to rather plant indigenous flowers and plants (Edgell 162-163).

tranquillity of an English idyll he remembers the painful, dystopian shadow garden of the trans-Atlantic plantation that helped make the idyll possible” (246). In light of Nixon’s argument, the artificial, programmable, Granny Nanny-controlled Garden on Toussaint becomes significant, especially in contrast to both the wildly fertile nature presided over by Papa Bois and the human-run plantations on New Half-Way Tree. The fecundity of New Half-Way Tree acts to amplify its absence on Toussaint.

Near the beginning of the novel, when arriving home from work, Antonio’s mood is soured by the (justified) suspicion that his wife Ione is cuckolding him that he:

. . . couldn’t take no pleasure in his big, stoosh home, oui? He didn’t even self notice the tasteful mandala of rock that his Garden had built around the flag pole near the entrance when he first took office. The pale pink rockstone quarried from Shak-Shak Bay didn’t give him no joy. The sound of the Cockpit County flag cracking in the light breeze didn’t satisfy him. His eye passed right over the spouting fountain with the lilies floating in it and the statue of Mami Wata in the middle, arching her proud back to hold her split fishtail in her own two hands. . . . Is the first time he didn’t notice the perfection of his grounds: every tree healthy, every blade of grass green and fat and juicy. (MR 12-13)

This description of the tasteful, perfect, but above all *controlled* Garden evokes the self-contained English garden. The flag represents the success of the Marryshevite separatist project and the Mami Wata statue the diasporic mythology they valorise. The Marryshevites, like colonisers on earth, view nature as something to own, and contain, not something to live with in harmony. Like the natives, it must be subdued. The subjugation is utterly comprehensive on Toussaint where the artificial Garden, infused with nanomites, can be programmed to grow items (20). What is left, genetically, of the indigenous fauna like mako jumbies (large reptilian birds

named for the stilt dancers who take part in Carnival), has been modified to provide domesticated livestock to feed the Marryshevites (32). Their Garden attempts to exclude and erase the genocide of the douen and indigenous fauna and flora on Toussaint, perpetrated to ostensibly make the planet habitable for the human colonisers. In this way, the untamed, uncontrollable nature on New Half-Way Tree, populated by all the species wiped out on Toussaint, can be read as a “shadow [planet], a corrective to the spatial amnesia of a self-contained” Toussaintian pastoral (Nixon 248), presided over by Granny Nanny.

The co-existence of the seemingly utopian Toussaint and the dystopian New Half-Way Tree (for the exiled humans) exhibits the simultaneity of the past and the present. In Jean Pfaelzer’s terms, there is no regression to a previous time in this critical dystopia (cited in Baccolini 115); instead the two planets exist in parallel in the same space and time, only separated by the dimension veil. This co-existence makes it clear how the past is never really gone, but continually exerts influence on the present, and therefore also the future. The ‘past’ shown through New Half-Way Tree demonstrates how Toussaint became what it is: not just because of the history and memory of their ancestors’ oppression which the Marryshevites retain, but its own erased history of violence and domination. The douen’s continued existence on New Half-Way Tree revises the master narrative of Toussaint promulgated by the *eshus*. As a critical dystopia, the novel is concerned with the nature of domination and how it affects the colonised, the douen, and the colonisers, the Marryshevites. Therefore, New Half-Way Tree “both contains and preserves the occluded historical content of Toussaint, which, on the prison world, is most emphatically *what hurts*. New Half-Way Tree might thus be said to function as the political unconscious of Toussaint” (E.D. Smith 52-53, italics in original). Significantly, it is not just that the novel can be read as bearing witness to “the horrors of the past the colonists have left behind”

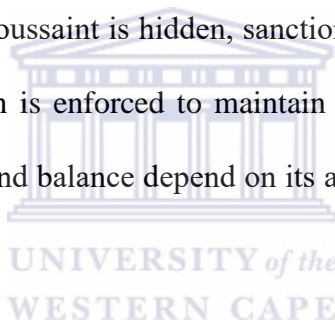
(Bill Clemente cited in E.D. Smith 53), but even more so it focuses on the psychic effects of colonialism on the Caribbean colonists and how their actions come back to haunt them on New Half-Way Tree. Langer describes the setting of the novel as “a version of Caribbean history” transferred onto another dimension “and worked through there. Additionally, the “colonists on Toussaint are replicating the colonization and genocide of their own ancestors” and as a result of this replication “colonialism is expanded outside of the exclusive domain of the historical colonial powers, and portrayed as an independently destructive force *no matter who* its perpetrator is” (Langer 60; 66, italics in original). The displacement of the colonial narrative of genocide onto the douen and other life-forms on Toussaint and the imposition of the slave narrative onto some of the exiled humans who work on sugar cane plantations in Begorrat<sup>48</sup> shows how the Marryshevites’ “attempt to run from history rather than learn from it” is unsuccessful (67).

Toussaint and New Half-Way Tree are together “a thing and the shadow of that thing . . . in almost the same place” (MR 2). In the opening pages the dichotomy is set up to reflect that “. . . where Toussaint civilized, New Half-Way Tree does be rough” (2). Thaler argues that the narrator describing New Half-Way Tree as the “dub version” of Toussaint suggests that it “is characterized by its lack of technology” since a dub version originally referred to “the B-side of a Reggae record, which features the A-side’s song’s bass and drums without the vocals” (103). New Half-Way Tree is seen by the Marryshevites as primitive and less civilised than Toussaint not only because of the presence of the douen and their supposed lack of technology, but also because the exiled humans are viewed as un-civilised because of their inability to control their anger. One-Eye, the sheriff of Junjuh, the settlement where Tan-Tan and Antonio live on New

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<sup>48</sup> Begorrat is “named after a prominent slave-plantation owner in Trinidad in the early 1800s” (Langer 67).

Half-Way Tree, explains to Tan-Tan that: “Most of we get send here because anger get the better of we too often. Almost any other crime the Grande Nansi Web could see coming and prevent, but Granny Nanny can’t foresee the unpremeditated, seen?” (MR 126-127). New Half-Way Tree is the “planet of the lost people” and “the place of the restless people” (2), those who were exiled to a life of hard labour because they did not fit with what Granny Nanny deems acceptable. While this sentence might seem kinder than a death or lengthy prison sentence, one of the defining features of Toussaintian society is that humans do not perform hard labour; therefore, to condemn someone to a life of hard labour is to brand them a non-person. As Aislin, the doctor in Junjuh, says “We not people no more. We is exiles. Is work hard or dead” (135). The only violence ‘allowed’ on the utopic Toussaint is hidden, sanctioned violence to ‘protect’ its citizens from outside threats and expulsion is enforced to maintain the balance determined by Granny Nanny. Toussaint’s self-isolation and balance depend on its ability to send those who do not ‘fit’ away.



The people on New Half-Way Tree are defined by their exile, by what they are no longer a part of, but also by the other kinds of violence cast out and denied by its utopic twin and projected onto it. “[T]he submerged or repressed history of Toussaint is revealed in the alternate dimension of New Half-Way Tree, where Tan-Tan ‘sees the violence [it] hides’” (Bill Clemente cited in E.D. Smith 52). Smith argues that Tan-Tan is only able to “reconsider . . . the authoritative narratives she has been told and the values they both manifest and obscure” (54), without the presence of the *eshu* enforcing a very specific version of history. It is only when the exiled are on New Half-Way Tree that they can fully realise “the social totality . . . the deep connections” between the two planets because the dimension-veil prevents those on Toussaint from coming to this realisation (54). The violent non-conformists seem to be on an inevitable

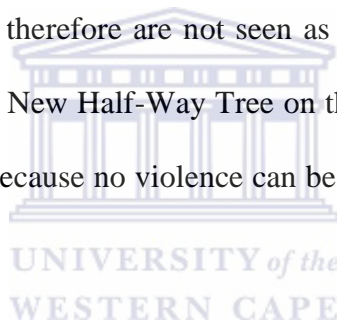
trajectory of violence in their relationship not just with one another, but even more so with the douen who were summarily executed on Toussaint. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that some of the first complex metal work on New Half-Way Tree results not in technology that would make their lives easier, but in a gun and a tank, both objects that can be put to work to enforce colonial power through violence. On Toussaint, this violence is purposely submerged in their past, but Granny Nanny remains as the authoritative system that ensures the well-being of the Marryshevites.

The omnipresence of Granny Nanny's technology exemplifies its authority, one vacillating between benevolence and a 'Big Sister' nanny state.

The tools, the machines, the buildings, even the earth itself on Toussaint and all the Nation Worlds had been seeded with nanomites—Granny Nanny's hands and her body. Nanomites had run the nation ships. The Nation Worlds were one enormous data-gathering system that exchanged information constantly through the Grande Nanotech Sentient Interface: Granny Nansi's Web. They kept the Nation Worlds protected, guided and guarded its people. (*MR 10*)

Here the immense power of Granny Nanny is apparent: she presides over Toussaint and other Nation Worlds, constantly collecting information not only from the environment, but also from the people. Jilliana Enteen proposes that Nanny uses this information to “ensure harmony, security, health and freedom from outside oppression for the planet's occupants” (271), but this ignores Nanny's function as colonial technology that has already eliminated perceived threats such as the douen. The Marryshevites, in their privileged and powerful position as coloniser, are not in danger from anyone.

The knowledge that Granny Nanny is always watching,<sup>49</sup> even though “[she] only cho[o]se[s] to reveal information that she judge[s] would infringe on public safety” (*MR* 50), modifies the behaviour of the Marryshevites who might have acted otherwise in a myriad of situations had they been unobserved. The knowledge that he is observed leads Antonio to seek out a poison to slow Quashee (his wife’s lover) during their duel from the runners whose houses are “headblind” spaces where Nanny Granny’s nanomites are not present. Would he have been so brash knowing that Nanny could observe what he was doing?<sup>50</sup> While Nanny’s system is flexible, it does not allow anything that may threaten the integrity of the system. In other words, the runners do not seek to dismantle Granny Nanny’s web, they withdraw themselves from it, but do not challenge its existence and therefore are not seen as a serious threat.<sup>51</sup> Non-conformists like the violent offenders exiled to New Half-Way Tree on the other hand pose a threat because of their unpredictability, but also because no violence can be permitted in the scrubbed narrative Toussaint creates for itself.



Giselle Anatol, in analysing maternal themes in the novel, sees Nanny as “mother-of-the-people” but acknowledges that this is not necessarily a straightforward or completely positive concept. She proposes that positive readings of Granny Nanny simply as a positive and protective influence “must be tempered . . . by considerations of the legacy of colonialism in the Caribbean” (114). To further this argument she refers to Frantz Fanon who emphasises the “incongruity between the benevolent Mother—the figure openly perpetuated in colonial society and prevalent in the conscious minds of colonialism’s participants—and the negatively charged

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<sup>49</sup> In this regard, Granny Nanny is akin to an all-seeing deity.

<sup>50</sup> In Junjuh, One-Eye tells Tan-Tan and Antonio: “No nanoweb to mind you, but no-one to scrutinize you either” (*MR* 128).

<sup>51</sup> Here the parallel can be seen with both maroons and the Marryshevites who leave systems of inequality without changing them.

Mother Country, the harsh figure associated with the oppression of the colonized” (114). Therefore, Granny Nanny’s role as motherly caretaker and protector of Caribbean descendants is in contrast to her violent relations toward the *douen* not only because she embodies technology as a tool of empire, but also because the idea of motherhood in a Caribbean context is complicated and often contradictory. Thaler maintains that Granny Nanny is “imagined to enact . . . the maternal caring associated with Mother Nature” (111). It is difficult to trace this purported link between Granny Nanny and Mother Nature since there is no *nature* on Toussaint: everything has been hybridised with Nanny’s nanomites to such an extent that it is possible to program a garden to produce an object, much like a 3-D printer. Instead, the entity closest to our conceptualisation of Mother Nature in the novel is Papa Bois on New Half-Way Tree. While neither figure seems to be religious in nature, both seem to be spiritual and central to their respective communities. On Toussaint, during Jonkanoo, Marryshevites “give thanks to Granny Nanny for the Leaving Times, for her care, for life in this land, free from downpression and botheration.” While on New Half-Way Tree, Chichibud, a *douen* man who saves Tan-Tan and Antonio when they first arrive on New Half-Way Tree, makes Tan-Tan swear to Papa Bois that she will keep their settlement secret when he hides her after she kills Antonio (*MR* 18; 174). On Toussaint, nature is something that has been conquered and is controlled in every way, turning it into an extension of their technology. On New Half-Way Tree, nature is abundant, exuberant, but also potentially dangerous, especially to the exiled humans who are unfamiliar with the species of plants and animals.



Papa Bois is at the centre of the douen way of life and when Tan-Tan arrives on New Half-Way Tree, Chichibud immediately starts teaching her how to survive. ““Every noise you hear in the bush means something. Bush Poopa [“Father Bush, master of the forest”] don’t like ignorance” (MR 103; 104). Papa Bois may be read as a male analogy for Mother Nature, but he is also an embodied reality to the douen. Each community lives in a daddy tree, an enormous plant that provides them with food, housing and ablutions, all from one central organism that lives in symbiosis with others, including the douen. “Their culture is harmoniously integrated into nature” (Dubey, “Becoming Animal” 43). To a contemporary reader, the douen’s ‘green technology’ and how their settlements have almost no negative impact on the environment is advanced, especially compared to the environmental destruction enacted on Toussaint.

Langer defines indigenous scientific practices in tune with the natural environment and aimed at sustainability as standing in contrast to more invasive and destructive Western practices (130). When Chichibud welcomes Tan-Tan to his community he tells her: ““You in a Papa Bois, the daddy tree that does feed we and give we shelter. Every douen nation have it own daddy tree”” (MR 179). Although the daddy tree is definitely paternal, it is “invest[ed] with both male and female properties” (Dubey, “Becoming Animal” 42). When Tan-Tan is living with the douen, it is hard for her to adjust to such a completely different kind of life, but Papa Bois, the daddy tree, provides a soothing and protective paternal influence directly contrasted to the threat Antonio posed to Tan-Tan. Dubey suggests that Tan-Tan’s flight from the human world is motivated by a “sense of alienation from patriarchal human society” where she has experienced sexual abuse and violence (41). Furthermore, she argues that Tan-Tan’s time with the douen shows her that “such violence is not organic to nature” and that the douen throw “into bold relief the savagery of human sexual and reproductive behaviour” (42). When she has a nightmare

about Antonio she wakes up in Chichibud's house thinking to herself: "Is which world she living in; this daddy tree, or the nightmare daddy world?" (*MR* 213).

Papa Bois represents the douen's cultural philosophy which stipulates the utmost respect for nature and life. Near the beginning of the novel Chichibud has to kill a mako jumbie in self-defense because of Antonio's foolishness, but he makes sure that every part of the giant bird is put to use, ensuring that its death was not wasted: "Too besides, you musn't waste the gifts Bush Poopa does send you" (*MR* 115). Years later, when Tan-Tan kills Antonio, Chichibud tells her that, "[w]hen you take one life, you must give back two" (*MR* 174). Tan-Tan interprets this as a curse, a debt she will strive to repay for the rest of her life, but what Chichibud means is that she must take care of herself and her unborn child, to respect the life that remains. The sanctity of life seems to be at least part of the reason why the douen help the exiled humans who arrive on New Half-Way Tree. Their respect for life is in contrast to the humans who had a planet-wide ecosystem eliminated for their 'safety.' Their altruism is shown to offer an alternative to the humans' predilection for violence. The humans' violence stems from their colonial aims and does not imply that they are somehow innately less virtuous than the douen.

After Antonio's death, Janisette, Tan-Tan's stepmother, enlists Gladys and Michael (the blacksmith couple from Junjuh) to find Tan-Tan. When they do so at the daddy tree, they kill two of the douen: Benta's sister and Kret, a douen man. In retaliation, Tan-Tan shoots at Janisette, but Chichibud dives at her so that she misses. After this, Chichibud aims the gun at Michael, and Gladys begs him to spare his life: "And if I beg allyou same way not to kill my people, what you woulda say?" (*MR* 272). Even after everything that happens, Chichibud will not take a life and when Tan-Tan tells Benta that they should fight the humans she replies: "We could fight, yes, but allyou tallpeople mad like hell. I think plenty of we would dead in that fight,

and allyou would win” (*MR* 274). The douen come to the conclusion that their very different ways of life will never be compatible and therefore they destroy all trace of their daddy tree and travel across the sea to get away from the humans. Chichibud tells Tan-Tan: ““Doux-doux, I sorry too bad it come to this. Maybe your people and mine not meant to walk together, oui”” (*MR* 283). Their approach to remove themselves means that they refuse to “battle with the oppressor on his terms because doing so would keep the sense of self and conditions of living within the parameters of the colonizer’s worldview” (Melzer 55). Their resistance is not romanticised since it is made “clear that the process of colonization always entails a price” (59); in this case, the loss of their daddy tree and probable continued persecution by the humans.<sup>52</sup>

The violence the humans bring to New Half-Way Tree extends to how the balance of the planet’s ecosphere is threatened by the alien fauna and flora such as manicou rats, bamboo, sugar cane, passionfruit and even Jamaican mahogany trees that the Marryshevites bring with them, just like European colonisers did in the Caribbean. “So much Earth-type flora the exiles had invaded this world with already” (*MR* 100; 103; 216). Also at odds with their environment is the technology humans choose to develop on New Half-Way Tree, their “killing things” (283). When Abitefa (Chichibud and Benta’s daughter) allows Tan-Tan to find the douen foundry, Chichibud explains that they, “. . . see how allyou does act, even towards your own, and we preparing weself” because of the threat the humans pose. “Guns. Bombs. Cars. Aeroplanes. Them is all the words I learn from tallpeople. Tan-Tan, if douen don’t learn tallpeople tricks, oonuh will use them ‘pon we” (230; 231). At the climax of the novel when Janisette finds Tan-Tan in the town of Sweet Pone, she arrives in a newly made tank:

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<sup>52</sup> The douen had been relatively safe until this point, but the humans have become established enough so that all of their time is not consumed with survival, which means increased exploration of the planet and more danger for the douen (*MR* 276).

The bullet-shaped tank was sleek as a cat. Its metal body had been buffed to a reflective shine. . . . Nothing on all of New Half-Way Tree looked like it. It advanced slowly on her, thrumming low in its belly, oiled treads whispering over the dust of the town square. Sunlight bounced needles of light off its mirrored hide. Its headlights tracked back and forth as they searched, searched for her. (318)

The tank is a predatory, invasive presence, and an ominous foreshadowing of what might await the douen when this colonial technology will inevitably be aimed at them. The douen are portrayed as “compassionate and generous creatures who, in marked contrast to the human beings presented in the novel, are endowed with a strong sense of respect and responsibility towards other living beings” thereby “indicting . . . the monstrous savagery of the civilized human society” (Dubey, “Becoming Animal” 44).<sup>53</sup> The douen’s harmonious relationships with one another, humans and the environment can be read as a condemnation of colonial violence towards and disregard of nature, and the impact of technology in service of the colonial project.

From the perspective of the douen, the humans’ unthinking destruction and view of nature as something to be owned and dominated is primitive. Conversely, from the humans’ standpoint, the douen are primitive because they lack a technology similar to humans’ and because they are a different species. The douen’s reptilian otherness is all that the humans can see. For example, Chichibud tells Tan-Tan: “‘If Abitefa only set foot in tallpeople lands, she dead. Is so allyou does do anything that frighten you’” (*MR* 231). Thaler argues that “[t]he douen’s peaceful and non-aggressive social structure brings to mind the Indian Arawak” who were native to the Caribbean islands prior to European colonisation. The Arawak were described as “peaceful, gentle, hospitable, friendly and harmonious” (Jan Rogozinski cited in Thaler 119),

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<sup>53</sup> Dubey’s choice of words evokes Walter Benjamin’s statement that “[t]here is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism” (Benjamin 256).

and they only started resisting Spanish colonisation after their enslavement (118). Like the douen, their society was characterised by equality between the sexes and a respect for the elders of the community (118). The differences between the humans and the douen:

. . . become paradigmatic of a cluster of polarities—between culture and nature, civilization and savagery, science and magic—that have historically served to consolidate . . . assumed superiority over those constituted as . . . others. Like slaves and colonized natives, the *douen* are situated within a developmental narrative that sanctions their material oppression by defining them as the very antithesis of modernity. . . . justify[ing] their repressive control. . . . (Dubey, “Becoming Animal” 43, italics in original)

The douen are expected to call the humans “Master” or “Boss” and this terminology draws an analogous relationship between the douen and the servile *eshus* on Toussaint: one programmed to serve and one who serves, seemingly to avoid violent confrontation. When Chichibud calls One-Eye “Boss” Tan-Tan tells him:

“He not your boss, Chichibud.” She repeated her lesson exactly as Nanny had sung it to them in crêche: “*Shipmates all have the same status. Nobody higher than a next somebody.* You must call he ‘Compère,’” she explained to the *douen*.

The men burst out laughing, even Daddy. “Pickney-child,” said Claude, “is a human that?” . . .

“No,” Tan-Tan replied doubtfully.

“So how he could call we Compère?”

“I don’t know.” She felt stupid. (*MR* 121, italics in original)

“Shipmate”<sup>54</sup> implies that only those who made the journey from earth are viewed as equals and it encapsulates the very narrow view the Marryshevites have of equality. For all intents and purposes, the douen are as inhuman to them as the A.I. *eshus* on Toussaint.

The humans constantly describe the douen in inferior terms such as referring to them as children. When first arriving in Junjuh, Tan-Tan is puzzled at the tone One-Eye uses when speaking to Chichibud: “The man spoke to Chichibud the way adults spoke to her” and later One-Eye tells Antonio: ““You have to watch them all the time. . . . [t]hem like children.’ Chichibud said nothing” (*MR* 120; 128). For Tan-Tan’s ninth birthday, Chichibud gives her a plant as gift which Tan-Tan describes as follows: “A simple gift, but [she] had come to understand over the years that douen were simple people; Aislin had told her so. They did everything with their hands and never thought to advance themselves further” (139). The unequal power distribution is extended to the douen’s name and the language in which they communicate with the humans. In Trinidad and Tobago folklore, douen are “children who’d died before they had their naming ceremonies” (93), in other words non-people. And the language they speak is ““Anglopatwa, Francopatwa, Hispanopatwa, and Papiomento. Right? We learn all oonuh speech, for oonuh don’t learn we own”” (95). Most humans cannot tell them apart and even Tan-Tan admits that she would not know Chichibud from the other douen men if it were not for the scar on his leg (183).

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<sup>54</sup> Shipmate is the term slaves used to refer to those who were on the same ship as them during the Atlantic crossing. This bond was viewed by some as just as strong, or even stronger, than familial bonds which were often broken by the slave trade.

Right from the outset, Antonio tries to trick Chichibud, whom he sees as a naïve native. The following exchange happens just after Tan-Tan and Antonio arrive on New Half-Way Tree when they arrange a trade to be led safely to Junjuh by the douen man. Antonio offers a fairly worthless item, his pen, for safe passage to which Chichibud replies: ““Country booky come to town you think I is? Used to sweet we long time ago, when oonuh tallpeople give we pen and bead necklace. Something more useful, mister”” (MR 93). When they arrive safely in Junjuh, One-Eye and Claude laugh at the douen’s idea of “trail-debt,” as something both quaint and unreasonable.

“Chichibud, you thieving bastard, you!” One-Eye said. “I bet you you make these two give you something before you bring them here.”

Chichibud cast his eyes down at his feet and mumbled, “Is so trade does go. If people ain’t share their talent and gifts with each other, the world go fall apart.”

One-Eye laughed and turned to Antonio. “Superstitious. Is so douen people stay.” (121)

One-Eye’s use of “stay” implies that they will never progress, in other words, “cultural difference . . . is predicated not only across space but also across time. The colonial ideology of progress includes the drive for *technological* progress, and figures time as linear, with technologically progressive societies pushing forward and leaving others behind” (Langer 130, italics in original). To the humans, New Half-Way Tree and its indigenes, bereft of technology, can only ever be primitive.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> When Antonio calls Chichibud a beast, he replies, ““Beast that could talk and know it own mind. Oonuh tallpeople quick to name what is people and what is beast”” (MR 92).

Even in their exiled state, the humans retain their position of power in relation to the *douen*. Instead of openly revealing their skill at woodwork, weaving and technologies which they swiftly learned from the humans, Chichibud at first tells Tan-Tan that his wife's weaving is magic. "With every thread she weave . . . she weave a magic to give warmth to who wear the cloth" (MR 96). For years she had believed him, but by the time she is a teenager "she knew. . . . [i]t wasn't magic, it was craft and cunning" (153). The *douen*, recognising the imbalance, use the humans' prejudice in order to protect themselves by "encourage[ing] the customary linkage of magic with women and natives in order to protect *douen* culture; [because] as long as the colonizers perceive *douens* as innocent of technology, *douen* culture can thrive behind the screen of primitivism" (Dubey, "Becoming Animal" 45, italics in original). That not even Tan-Tan acknowledges their intelligence, but instead views them as "cunning," like animals, shows both the strength of the humans' prejudice and the success of the *douen*'s strategy: even when the humans find out their craft is not magic, they still do not acknowledge their skill or intelligence.<sup>56</sup>

The *douen* are seen as primitive servants, but they are actually much better at manufacturing items than humans. When Aislin tries to be kind to a new arrival by letting him make some shelves for her, Tan-Tan tells her that she "should have ask one of the *douen*-them to build them for you, Auntie Aislin. You know how them good with their hands" (MR 144). Not only are the *douen* skilled craftsmen, they also have impressive medicinal knowledge far superior to the humans'. For example, Aislin's daughter Quamina (Tan-Tan's half sister) suffered brain damage because Aislin went through the dimension veil while pregnant with her,

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<sup>56</sup> The *douen* see technology that does not depend on labour as magical. Chichibud tells Antonio "Where you come from, you could hire people to carry you where you goin. You could go fast in magic carriage with nobody to pull it. Here, tallpeople have only your own two feet to carry you" (MR 101).



but the douen medicine is able to help her slowly become more of the person she would have been without suffering through the shift as a foetus. “Quamina had gained even more sense in these years. Aislin had told Tan-Tan that the douen medicine was still working on her, growing her up very slowly” (138). It is telling that douen technology is a mixture between acquired skill and knowledge, and biological capability like their sonar, echolocation and chemistry. The overlap between artificial and natural reflects the douen’s approach to technology as something that must be in harmony with nature, not in opposition with it.

Within a short period of time Gladys and Michael, the blacksmith couple in Junjuh “were in fierce competition with the douen, oui; many of the things they could make from iron, the douen people made better from wood” (MR 152). Chichibud’s response to Gladys’s complaint that the douen are ungrateful is to say: ““Yes, oonuh tallpeople show we plenty of new ways, and we does learn fast”” (153). His wry tone reflects the douen’s recognition of the dangers iron-made tools pose to them, and thus they secretly start learning metal work in their own foundry in the forest.<sup>57</sup> On New Half-Way Tree, not being responsive to your environment equals death so while the humans interpret their eagerness to learn ‘superior’ technologies as an acknowledgement of humans’ supremacy, it is instead the douen’s nuanced reaction to changes in their environment. Their stance on technology is very different from the humans’ who, in true colonial fashion, view it as a tool to be used in colonial expansion, as seen in the gun, car and tank Gladys and Michael build. To the humans, technology is also a mark of their power and authority: to have dominion over nature is to be powerful and civilised, to live in harmony with it is perceived to be primitive. Therefore, in terms of teleological time and technology, the two opposing cultures can be summed up by their respective ‘higher powers’: On the one hand,

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<sup>57</sup> Before the humans’ arrival, the douen do not work with metal because it requires fire, a dangerous hazard for their living home, the daddy tree.

Granny Nanny represents the culmination of human technology that annihilates a whole planet's environment to replace it with a controlled, colonised version of itself; Papa Bois, on the other hand, serves as spiritual guide, both a way of life and an abode, whose philosophy places the sanctity of life above all else, showing how douen technology enhances rather than opposes nature.

Although the novel engages with teleological time mostly in relation to technology, diasporic time and its associated thematic elements are still central to the narrative. Near the beginning of the story, the town is abuzz with gossip about Antonio's attempts to win back Ione and "[t]he old people who had seen everything in their lives happen two and three and four times would just shake their heads and mutter, 'He going to run aground, just like a Garvey ship'" (*MR* 45-46). This particular quote alludes to both an African, cyclical notion of time and to a time and place when/where that time collides with Western notions of time. Garvey's failed undertaking to foster pan-Africanism becomes an example of such a conflict. The novel, set on a far-off planet, focuses not on issues of geography, and "home" but rather on temporality "as the connective tissue of . . . diasporic formations" (Jobson 16). The story follows Tan-Tan on a series of dislocations and journeys, characteristic of diaspora, and the effects of these on her subjectivity. Langer proposes that "[a] constant in the literature of diaspora is the echo of the past that does not die: it cannot be shaken off by advances in technology . . . nor can it be swept beneath the waves, even if everything else is." The Marryshevites on both planets "simultaneously escape and reinscribe their own histories of colonization and oppression" (80) as they continue to haunt them. The following section will examine how Hopkinson addresses the diasporic past in relation to labour, journeys, and ideas around belonging and exile, and finally, the oral tradition, storytelling and language.

While a corporation is responsible for the invention and manufacture of Granny Nanny, the spaceships and all other associated technology, it is not portrayed as an impersonal, exploitative conglomerate. Rather, the whole mission seems to be motivated by ideology, not money. Historically, corporations were the “progenitors of many colonial endeavours” (Langer 66), motivated by profit. There are two possible explanations for this. Firstly, assuming the story operates within a capitalist system, the Marryshevites who travelled to Toussaint were all wealthy enough to pay considerable fees for passage. This would mean that they were a homogenous group in terms of class which would also provide alternative reasons for their attitude towards hard labour as something intended for “non-people” and why there is such a “Disneyfication” of their history. References to the past become less of a tribute to a rich history and more of a propaganda campaign to legitimise their decision to withdraw from earth. This explanation also justifies the scorched earth policy which leads to the wholesale destruction of Toussaint’s original environment because any resistance or obstructions stemming from the native inhabitants, fauna or flora would equal less profit. Even all the information-gathering, which the Marryshevites accept as price for their freedom, could be used to make profit in a myriad of ways, especially since Granny Nanny connects all the Nation Worlds colonised by the Marryshow Corporation, presumably also to the mother corporation back on earth. However, if one assumes that the economy in the novel is undergirded by a capitalist framework, one finds it to be incongruent with Granny Nanny’s longevity and her ability to produce her own nanomites. These nanomites perform hard labour which upsets the wage-production connection that capitalism is predicated on. Moreover, there is no mass-production of commodities by humans, which is instead handled by the nanomites while human labour is specialised and skilled.

The second explanation operates on the assumption that the story unfolds within a post-capitalist framework, an assumption that fits better with the world-building in the novel, especially since Hopkinson wanted to imagine a world where diasporic people control their own technology which would necessarily influence the economic system. In an article entitled “The End of Capitalism has Begun” (2015), Paul Mason argues that the post-capitalist age has already arrived (co-existing with capitalism at the moment) chiefly because of the way in which access to information has changed thanks to the internet. In a free market economy, information and inventions are governed by intellectual property rights to protect profits (n. pag.). This principle of enforcing intellectual property rights leads to the underutilisation of information,<sup>58</sup> but increasingly we are moving towards the *full* utilisation of information which “cannot tolerate the free market or absolute property rights” in the way that our “current digital giants are designed to prevent the abundance of information” (n. pag.). This is recognisable, for example, in the music and film industries’ efforts to control streaming services and ‘piracy’ in order to protect their profit margins in an age where “information goods are freely replicable” and where “[o]nce a thing is made, it can be copied/pasted infinitely” (n. pag.). This means that while there is still a production cost, the “cost of reproduction will fall towards zero. Therefore, if the normal price mechanism of capitalism prevails over time, its price will fall towards zero, too” (n. pag.). Thus, at the moment, “alongside the world of monopolised information . . . created by corporations and governments, a different dynamic is growing up around information: information as a social good, free at the point of use, incapable of being owned or exploited or priced” (n. pag.).

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<sup>58</sup> “In 1962, Kenneth Arrow, the guru of mainstream economics, said that in a free market economy the purpose of inventing things is to create intellectual property rights. He noted: ‘precisely to the extent that it is successful there is an underutilisation of information’” (Mason n. pag.).

Mason goes on to say that economists are trying to “build a framework to understand the dynamics of an economy based in abundant, socially-held information,” but that Karl Marx had already considered this issue in 1858 in an almost science-fictional thought-experiment entitled “The Fragment on Machines.” Marx imagined an “economy in which the main role of machines is to produce, and the main role of people is to supervise them. . . . [I]n such an economy, the main productive force would be information” (n. pag.). In this post-capitalist system, knowledge becomes more important than the making and running of machines, and “once knowledge becomes a productive force in its own right, outweighing the actual labour spent creating a machine, the big question becomes not one of ‘wages versus profits’ but who controls what Marx called the ‘power of knowledge’” (n. pag.). In this description, one can recognise Granny Nanny’s Web, in Marx’s terms both a “general intellect” and an “ideal machine” (n. pag.).

Nanny is a quantum computer which, after its initial production, lasts for a very long time, can create its own nanomites which perform the labour to both produce goods (through the programmable Garden amongst other things), and will keep the Marryshevites’ environment stable and safe. The *eshus* serve as a connection between the humans and Granny Nanny, facilitating a social network of knowledge to which everyone has equal access. Because of Granny Nanny, the production process falters and reduces “the price, profit and labour costs of everything else it touche[s]” (n. pag.). Ultimately, Marx reasons that a system such as Granny Nanny’s would “blow capitalism sky high” (n. pag.). Mason’s argument about the trajectory of our current economic system, suggests that the ongoing information age could usher in machines and technology such as Granny Nanny and her nanomites which in turn would establish a true post-capitalist time. This would make the novel’s engagement with labour and capitalism even more innovative than at first glance. Not only does it portray a technology controlled by

diasporic peoples and utilised to facilitate a project of freedom, but it also breaks away from the present capitalist system which still contains structures biased against people of colour. Granny Nanny's Web, her nanomites and *eshus* make a capitalist system untenable. At the same time the Granny Nanny system facilitates the Marryshevites' attitude towards hard physical labour because it is not a necessary part of their economic system.

The pedicab runner community is a particularly interesting aspect of the novel because their ancestors were part of a programmer clan who helped write Granny Nanny's code (*MR* 52). In other words, the descendants of the very architects of the structure which makes it possible for the Marryshevites to reject hard physical labour are the ones who withdraw from it, questioning one of its foundational principles. They are described as:

[A] new sect, about fifty years old. They lived in group households and claimed it was their religious right to use only headblind tools. People laughed at them, called them a ridiculous pappyshow. Why do hard labour when Marryshow had made that forever unnecessary? (10)

The disdain shown towards the runners is exemplified by Antonio's interaction with Beata, whose cab he takes from his office to his home at the beginning of the novel. Beata confronts Antonio about exorbitant taxes the pedicab runners have to pay (7). After trying to placate her with what Tan-Tan later calls his insincere "speechifying" (118), he admits that it "[i]s a labour tax. For the way allyou insist on using people when an a.i. could run a cab like this. You know how it does bother citizens to see allyou doing manual labour so. Back-break ain't for people" (8). To Beata, her labour is meaningful in the way it connects her with and makes her aware of her own bodily existence: "Pedicab runners, we know how much we weight we could pull, how many kilometres we done travel" (8). In her community, physical labour adds meaning to life.

This attitude is reflected in Tan-Tan's minder, Nursie, telling her about how she used to train to duel when she was young while they are watching the stick fighting dancers practice for the *Jour Ouvert* duels taking place on the first day of carnival:

“The yard big so like a sugar cane field, but pack down flat all over; just dirt, no pavement. . . . It have three kinds of [duels]: stick fight, bare hand and machète: Your own labour, you understand? Body and mind working together to defeat an enemy, like old-time days. Woi, Nanny. A laying on of hands. Don't mind people who tell you labour nasty. Some kinds is a blessing for true, a sacrament.” (35)

Her choice of words first evokes the physicality of slave labour with the reference to a sugar cane field, but she specifies that it is different from that. The description emphasises the worth of labour, not in terms of profit, but in terms of physical and psychological well-being, gained through being in harmony with oneself. Not only is it identified as a ritual by the use of the word “sacrament” but also as “a laying on of hands.” This is a restorative practice:

. . . of using hands in a symbolic act of blessing, healing, and ordination. By its very act it appears to bestow some gift. . . . Others see the practice as central to the African concept that the body and spirit are one. “Thus sensuality is essential to the process of healing and rebirth of the spirit.” (Barbara Christian cited in Gabbin 247)

By rejecting *all* physical labour out of hand, the majority of Marryshevites have diminished this link between the body and the spirit, thus diminishing their well-being. It is fitting then, that Tan-Tan, who has to recuperate her sense of self after the series of exiles she experiences and the abuse she suffers at the hands of her father, *does* find meaning in physical labour.

When she is still a child, her approach to playing is described as follows: “Tan-Tan used to play so hard, it come in like work . . .” (*MR* 17). And, while walking with Abitefa in the forest near the end of the novel, she luxuriates in how strong she has become: “. . . [I]t felt good to exercise her body. Adult exiles to New Half-Way Tree often never came into the full satisfaction of feeling their muscles work to move the world around them” (298). The exiled humans who are unable to shift their way of thinking away from the ideology of Toussaint, which is only possible because of Granny Nanny’s presence, either do not survive on New Half-Way Tree or they end up as indentured labourers, slaves in all but name. When Tan-Tan seeks out a human settlement in search for supplies while on the run, she comes across Begorrat, a sugar cane plantation where people are beaten if they refuse to work or work too slowly. The woman Tan-Tan talks to is bound with a ball-and-chain and explains that she takes every opportunity to urinate on the sugar cane as a small act of sabotage because as she sees it: “. . . [E]veryone one me kill is one less me have to cut, seen?” (285). Tan-Tan cannot comprehend why the young woman calls the overseer “Boss” or how she ended up working on the plantation. The young woman explains it to her as follows:

“From I get send to this New Half-Way Tree, me never could learn all you have to do to survive without Nanny, oui? This way, me chop little piece of cane, and mind what Boss say, and me get shelter for me head and food for me body. Some of we saving up we earnings until we could do better, but me ain’t able to fight up myself more than so. . . . [T]his place is my best chance for a stable life.” (285-286)

Clinging to the Marryshevite belief that to perform hard labour is to be a non-person, individuals like the young woman are unable to adapt and cannot rebuild a sense of self or purpose, instead they labour without meaning. Partly, what saves Tan-Tan on New Half-Way Tree is her



flexibility but also her recognition of the worth of labour. Tan-Tan's attitude towards physical labour is markedly different from that of Ione and Antonio. While watching some people practice for the duels, Ione exclaims, "Lord have mercy. . . . What make anybody want to labour so?" (*MR* 40). Shortly after their arrival on New Half-Way Tree, Tan-Tan dwells on Antonio's promise that Ione would eventually join them there: "This place ain't go suit Mummy so good, oui; with no Nursie and no seamstress and no eshu, and all kind of wild animal only looking to make a meal on your bones" (117). She rightly surmises that Ione would not be able to adapt to life on New Half-Way Tree in a way that would allow her to thrive. Antonio, in addition to his other faults, is exceedingly lazy. The arm he broke upon arrival on New Half-Way Tree causes him pain for which Aislin gives him a tea which reduces inflammation, but she also advises that Tan-Tan should:

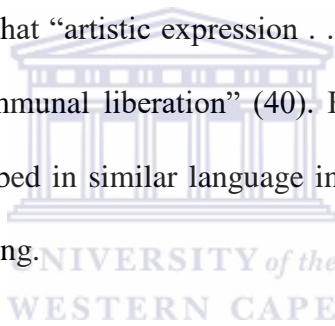
"[T]ell he, he must work he joints so them wouldn't stiffen up. Now he stop working in the fields, he should be digging in the garden with Chichibud, or making something with he hands. It go do he good."

"Thanks, Doctor Lin. I go tell he, but you know how he does stay." (147)

Ione and Antonio's laziness, decadence and outright rejection of hard labour seems to indicate some spiritual lack which amplifies the harmful effect they have on their daughter.

While the conditions on New Half-Way Tree force a reluctant change in attitude towards hard labour in the majority of the exiles, what the two planets have in common is their celebration of skilled crafts such as tailoring, cooking, and art. When Annie the seamstress offers to make Ione a new blouse, Ione tells her that "[she] would be honoured to wear [her] creation" (*MR* 34). On Toussaint, Finbar and Philomise's artistry in creating costumes and the float for carnival is so well-respected and valued that they have special dispensation to "lock out data

from the spider web till they done” in order to keep the theme a secret (38). On New Half-Way Tree, the talented artisans such as the blacksmith couple Gladys and Michael, and Melonhead and his father who are tailors, are crucial not just to the survival of the humans there, but for any possibility of them thriving. The novel reclaims hard physical labour, through the pedicab runners on Toussaint, and through the Marryshevites who find meaning in hard work on New Half-Way Tree, but who also value skilled, artisanal work. Skilled labour *and* physical labour that has a purpose, a personal investment, is meaningful, redemptive and fulfilling.<sup>59</sup> This is contrary to Gilroy’s argument that for blacks in the West “social self-creation through labour is not the centre-piece of emancipatory hopes” because “work signifies only servitude, misery and subordination” (40). He proposes that “artistic expression . . . becomes the means towards both individual self-fashioning and communal liberation” (40). However, in this diasporic context, artistry and hard labour are described in similar language in the novel, thereby suggesting that both can be meaningful and enriching.



As a diasporic theme, labour features prominently in the novel, but there are also other equally central diasporic themes associated with ships, journeys and concepts of belonging and exile. In the novel, journeys are “spaces of ambivalence, due to the contrast between the historical context of the forced diaspora of slavery; the colonists’ voluntary, even joyous, diaspora on Toussaint; and the further exilic diaspora of those on New Half-Way Tree” (Langer 67). However, the attempt at “over-writing the narrative of the Middle Passage” (67), is not entirely successful and we see overt echoes of it in Tan-Tan’s journey to New Half-Way Tree when Antonio kidnaps her. The Black Star Line II attempts to erase both the trauma of the

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<sup>59</sup> One could speculate that part of the reason why the douen are portrayed as somehow ‘inherently’ better than humans is because of their attitude towards work as an integral part of a meaningful life which can sometimes be its own reward.

Middle Passage and the failure of Garvey's original venture. When Ben, the gardener, gives Tan-Tan the Black Star Line II Jonkanoo hat he had the self-generating Garden make for her, he reminds her and Nursie about the Middle Passage.

“Long time, that hat woulda be make in the shape of a sea ship, not a rocket ship, and them black people inside woulda been lying pack-up head to toe in they own shit, with chains round them ankles. Let the child remember how black people made this crossing as free people this time.”<sup>60</sup> (*MR 21*)

The memory of the Middle Passage is used as a short-hand reference to what the Marryshevites left behind, but also to emphasise that their journey to Toussaint was self-determined. After Ben's comment, Tan-Tan recalls the nightmares she had after “Crêche teacher had sung them that same tale” (*MR 21*). To people whose identity is built on their sovereignty, who have done all they can to make themselves and their world into something different than the earth they left behind, losing control over their self-determination is truly a nightmare. When Antonio and Tan-Tan are on their way to the shift tower that will take them to New Half-Way Tree, he cryptically explains to her why he is going to use Maka's nannytunes to program the tower to take them there: “Freedom is the thing, eh? Is freedom me don't want to lose'.” To which Tan-Tan responds by asking where they are going and Antonio tells her, “To freedom child. We going where nobody could tell we what to do. Maka says he will come after, and what the two of we could do in that world, with all we know” (71). While Antonio would in all likelihood have been exiled to New Half-Way Tree by Nanny and the council for Quashee's murder anyway, he wants to take charge of his life by controlling the journey. This way, he does not have to go

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<sup>60</sup> Burton explains that the original Jonkanoo hats imitated the Great House because it was the ultimate expression of power in plantation society (81); therefore, the hat as ship is significant because it is the emblem of the greatest power in the Marryshevites' lives, their diasporic technology.

through the indignity of a trial or facing the judgement and gossip of the people of Cockpit County and his self-determination remains intact.<sup>61</sup>

Before they enter the pod, Antonio explains the dimensional shifts to Tan-Tan and tells her that they will be going to a “next Toussaint, one we can’t come back from again” (*MR* 72). In diasporic fashion, their journey is clearly one-way and ‘home’ no longer exists for the exiled. The description of the shift-waves they go through on the way to New Half-Way Tree includes Tan-Tan first feeling herself turning into a manicoou rat, but after that veil passes Antonio tells her:

“We going to a good place.” But under his breath he started to sing.

*Captain, Captain, put me ashore,*

*I don’t want to go any more,*

*Itanami gwine drowned me,*

*Itanami gwine bust me belly,*

*Itanami is too much for me.*



“That one is a old sailor song,” he mumbled, almost as though he wasn’t talking to Tan-Tan, but just to hear his own voice. “Itanami was a river rapids. People in ships would go through it like we going through dimension veils. Itanami break up plenty vessels, but them long ago people never see power like this half-way tree.”

They were trapped in a confining space, being taken away from home like the long time ago Africans. Tan-Tan’s nightmare had come to life. (74-75, italics in original)

The passage recalls their ancestors’ journey from Africa to the Caribbean, highlighting the diasporic time in which the novel operates. Additionally, this depiction evokes Paule Marshall’s

<sup>61</sup> His words also illustrate his misconceptions of New Half-Way Tree where he think his status as mayor and Marryshevite will elevate him above everyone else in almost god-like fashion.

portrayal of the widow Avey's journey from Grenada to Caricou in *Praisesong for the Widow*.<sup>62</sup>

After Avey becomes sick, the old women lead her to the deck-house where:

[Her] . . . mind lifted momentarily and she became dimly conscious. She was alone in the deck-house. That much she was certain of. Yet she had the impression as her mind flickered on briefly of other bodies lying crowded in with her in the hot, airless dark. A multitude it felt like lay packed around her in the filth and stench of themselves, just as she was. Their moan, rising and falling with each rise and plunge of the schooner, enlarged upon the one filling her head. Their suffering—the depth of it, the weight of it in the cramped space—made hers of no consequence. (209)

Avey's journey, like Tan-Tan's, becomes intertwined with the original Middle Passage and her psychic discomfort becomes physical in her case as she becomes violently ill.

When Tan-Tan arrives on New Half-Way Tree, everything seems 'wrong' to her:

The air was too cold, and it had a funny smell, like old bones. The light coming through the trees was red, not yellow. Even the trees-them looked wrong. . . . This wasn't her home. This ugly place couldn't be anybody's home. (MR 76)

The moment of arrival marks the realisation for Tan-Tan that her idea of 'home' no longer exists and something had irrevocably changed within her: "She and Antonio didn't look no different, but Tan-Tan could feel the change the shift tower had made inside her . . ." (77). Despite the sense of exile weighing heavily on Tan-Tan, she soon acclimatises to the new world: within her first few days there the air already smells better to her and where Chichibud's "snarly, snouty grin," would have frightened her the day before now "she was coming to like how his face

<sup>62</sup> A key difference between the two journeys is that Avey has the support of the old women onboard: "[The old women] held her. Hedging her around with their bodies—one stout and solid, the other lean, almost fleshless but with a wiry strength—they tried cushioning her as much as possible from the repeated shocks of the turbulence" (Marshall "Praisesong" 205). In contrast, Tan-Tan only has her self-involved father who offers little comfort to his frightened daughter.

looked” (117). Everything is strange to her, but Tan-Tan immediately displays her adaptability, in stark contrast to Antonio’s unwillingness to learn anything about his new environment.<sup>63</sup>

It is not just the alien life on New Half-Way Tree that is unfamiliar to her; the human settlement of Junjuh is unlike anything Tan-Tan is used to on Toussaint. “Everybody looked old and callous. Tan-Tan had never seen so much hard labour and so many tired faces. . . . Things looked mostly neat and clean, but Junjuh had a weariness to it” (*MR* 124). Though she is able to settle down to a certain degree in Junjuh, mostly due to her resilience and flexibility, she longs for a different life, one unmarked by Antonio’s abuse. Her dream is to go and live in Sweet Pone with her friend Melonhead. Antonio’s final rape of Tan-Tan on her sixteenth birthday, for which she then kills him, shuts down these plans for the future and she is once again an exile.<sup>64</sup> Fearing retributive justice from Sheriff One-Eye and Janisette, she flees with Chichibud to his daddy tree. While living with the douen, her sense of unbelonging grows unbearable and she thinks to herself that “[s]he just wanted to be somewhere safe, somewhere familiar, where people looked and spoke like her and she could stand to eat the food. She crouched on the ground like that for a while, remembering when she was a girl-pickney and she’d had a home” (217-218). Her feeling of unbelonging is symbolised by her struggles to adapt in the forest, an environment that is often overtly hostile to her. In one scene she gets lost and in another she unwittingly collects poisonous mushrooms for a meal.

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<sup>63</sup> When Antonio endangers them all on the way to Junjuh, Chichibud tells him, “Mister . . . best I leave you for Bush Poopa to take in truth. She go survive better without you” (*MR* 118). It turns out that Chichibud’s words are true in more than one way since Antonio is the one who sexually abuses and rapes Tan-Tan. Antonio’s carelessness in the bush is symptomatic of the same self-involvement which allows him to feel entitled to make use of Tan-Tan as a substitute for Ione.

<sup>64</sup> When they are on Benta’s back, flying out of town “Tan-Tan closed her eyes. The bumpy, jolting ride in the confined dark . . . a memory nearly a decade old rose in Tan-Tan’s mind (*MR* 171).

Despite feeling discouraged by her ineptitude, Tan-Tan's adaptability triumphs. When she has to find Abitefa on her own, she uses the smell of the matches Abitefa used to light her lantern to locate her (224). She is able to read the cues from her environment, demonstrating how she is becoming more at home in the forest. Tan-Tan's will to survive is stronger than any estrangement she feels and she adapts so well that the first human woman she sees when she ventures into a human settlement looks alien to her: "She felt her own body beginning to remember that it was human not douen . . ." (239). Furthermore, when Janisette first finds Tan-Tan and tries to shoot her, Tan-Tan runs into the forest and is able to make it back to the daddy tree where she thinks to herself that she is home (264). Unfortunately, just as she finds her feet, she is once again exiled, this time with Abitefa, for unknowingly leading Janisette and the others to the daddy tree.<sup>65</sup> The series of exiles Tan-Tan experiences complicates her sense of belonging to such an extent that she does not feel like she belongs in either the human or the douen world. After Janisette finds Tan-Tan again, this time in Babylon A-Fall, she escapes and hikes "back to Abitefa and the safety of the bush. She couldn't make a home in tallpeople lands" (288). Here she refers to humans by the term the douen use to describe them, summarising her alienation from her own species, an alienation which underscores her fractured sense of self.

Tan-Tan uses storytelling and performance, both connected to the oral tradition, to rebuild her sense of self. Even while she is still a small child, not only does Tan-Tan love hearing stories from her *eshu*, she also has a talent for making up her own stories (*MR* 17), a skill that becomes vital to her survival later in life. There are several levels of storytelling which co-exist

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<sup>65</sup> Her error in judgement springs from her lingering need to be around humans (she risked a trip to a human settlement because she was lonely) which, in turn, leads to the destruction of Chichibud's daddy tree and the resulting self-imposed exile of his whole community, who flee across the sea to protect themselves.



in the novel. The main narrator is Tan-Tan's house *eshu*<sup>66</sup> who tells the story of her life to her unborn son Tubman (289), and who also interjects the main story with three Anansi stories about her. Tan-Tan is the focaliser for large swathes of the third-person narrative, and the culmination of her story is facilitated through her carnival alter-ego, the Robber Queen who weaves a tale of resilience. In a cathartic performance near the end of the novel Tan-Tan/the Robber Queen performs in front of "a receptive crowd and jubilantly 'gyrating' her rounded, pregnant body on a public stage, reconstructs an imaginative remembrance of an aspect of West African and Caribbean spirituality that celebrates the relationship between words, power, and the female body" (Boyle 186). Without this powerful act of storytelling, Tan-Tan's subjectivity would have remained fractured: her recovery of a coherent sense of self is made possible through the power of words, or "word science" as she refers to it (*MR* 320). She is able to take her 'broken' story and reweave it into a new whole. Boyle draws a constructive parallel between Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987), and *Midnight Robber*. In *Beloved*, a "testimony to abuse and violence . . . is not left to a single discourse but shared amongst [the characters] and the readers themselves in a collective act of telling" (Boyle 187). These kinds of textual strategies involving "dialogue, form and grammar" are often found in black women's writing.<sup>67</sup> They signal "a cooperative dissolution of the narrative voice, the character's voice, and the textual structure" in order to "speak to the presence of an audience, returning [the] audience to the community of tellers for whom the oral text was originally prepared" (Karla Holloway cited in Boyle 187).

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<sup>66</sup> Eshu, also known as Esu, Elegba, and Legba, is "the Yoruba trickster deity, the deliverer of messages to and from the spirit world in West African religions who can be in all places at once," a figure who is also a "master weaver" (Enteen 273).

<sup>67</sup> Boyle lists Ntozake Shange's *Sassafrass, Cypress and Indigo* (1982) and Ama Ata Aidoo's *Our Sister Killjoy* (1966), as examples to illustrate her point (187).



By modelling the narrative on how a story would be told in the oral tradition, Hopkinson presents the reader with multiplicities which embody Tan-Tan's subjectivity. These shifts are shown not only in the three-way split in Tan-Tan's psyche, but also in the three folktales interwoven with the main narrative: the first one refracts Tan-Tan's first exile, the second her abusive relationship with her father and the crippling guilt and self-hatred that spring from it, and the third one her second exile in the bush with the douen.<sup>68</sup> In turn, these tales refer to the ones told about the mythical Tan-Tan, the Midnight Robber, in the human settlements on New Half-Way Tree following her vigilante acts to help other people.

What a thing those Tan-Tan stories had become, oui. Canto and Cariso, crick-crack Anansi back; they had grown out of her and had become more than her. . . . Anansi the Trickster himself couldn't have woven webs of lies so fine, she kept trying to discern truths about herself in the Tan-Tan tales, she couldn't help it. People loved them so, there must be something to them, ain't? Something hard, solid thing other people could see in her; something she could hear and know about herself and hold in her heart. (*MR* 299)

Tan-Tan searches for herself in these stories precisely because her subjectivity had become so fractured from exile and abuse that, in a sense, she has to rebuild herself through story, culminating in the Robber Queen's speech in Sweet Pone. The centrality of diasporic storytelling in a science fictional setting replete with advanced technology can be read as suggesting that the celebration of technology and art are indistinguishable: "Indigenous traditions of folktale, oral storytelling and poetry are different, but no less effective and no less important, ways of finding the same essential truths" (Langer 152). By showing that these are equal, women of colour

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<sup>68</sup> "The possibility of a 'next side' to the hegemonic narrative is precisely the function of the folktales, which collectively define a kind of supplement that stubbornly exceeds the structural bonds of the novel . . ." (E.D. Smith 56).

reclaim their own stories “in a context in which storytelling becomes part of a larger project of self-revalidation” (Busia 196). Storytelling and performance help Tan-Tan confront aspects of her life which are painful and destructive; through them she is able to come to know herself, to examine “the tapestry of her life, to piece together again those parts that were becoming unravelled” (197).

The use of language within the novel is intricately connected not only to Tan-Tan’s story, but also to the Marryshevites’. Helen Pyne-Timothy argues that the use of creole language assists in “the creation and recreation of an identity” (103). The Marryshevites’ identity as maroon nation is undeniably tied to their creole language.

To speak in the hacked language is not just to speak in an accent or a creole; to say the words is an act of referencing history and claiming space. The people of the Nation Worlds . . . have done that, have left Earth to a place where they can make their own society. Their speech, written and spoken, reflects the reasons they've made that journey. (Hopkinson “Code Sliding” n. pag.)

Additionally, their journey from earth is made possible by Granny Nanny who would not exist without her operating language, created by Marryshow, a scientist who was part of the team responsible for her programming.

When Maka, a pedicab runner, explains to Antonio how the runners are able to use nannysong to get around Nanny's surveillance, he reveals that her operating language is an argot of the original language the programmers used to create her.<sup>69</sup>

Them days there, the programmers and them had write she protocols in Eleggua,<sup>70</sup> seen — the code them invent to write programmes to create artificial intelligence?" [. . .] [S]omething start to go wrong. It get to where the programmers would ask Nanny a question, and she would spew back mako blocks of pure gibberish. Them think say the quantum brain get corrupt. Them prepare to wipe it and start over." (MR 51)

Before the programmers could commence the wipe, Marryshow ran her messages through a sound filter, converting the messages to sound instead of text. Using the filter, Marryshow was able to understand the song which Nanny had to develop because her processes, operating in all dimensions instead of just four, had become too complex for textual communication (51). In other words, music is demonstrated to be superior to words, a power relation aligned with the Marryshevites' diasporic identity.

Along with Granny Nanny's language, Hopkinson uses Trinidadian and Jamaican creole for dialogue, a combination which results in ". . . three modes of address: a more or less standard English for the narrative; one type of vernacular that [i]s the mode of 'pay attention'; and another that signalled opposition" (Hopkinson cited in Glave 150). With regards to signalling opposition, she draws on "Rastafarian 'dread talk'" which:

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<sup>69</sup> In turn, the nannysong the humans use to interact with her system is itself a more simplified version of her operating language because it is too complex for them to comprehend. The pedicab runners have more power than other Marryshevites because they are more fluent in nannysong, again emphasising the power of language.

<sup>70</sup> Eleggua is an Orisha in Santeria, and like Eshu, he is associated with crossroads. Both Eshu and Eleggua are known tricksters and gatekeepers of communication to the other Orishas (Brown 370).

. . . reveal[s] the rotten roots of some of our ideas: words such as ‘shitstem’ for ‘system,’ for example, or ‘downpress’ for ‘oppress.’ That kind of subversion and re-invention of the language causes the listener to pay attention, to examine the thing which the word identifies and to think about what that thing really signifies [which is] a strategy very familiar to a science fiction writer. (cited in Glave 150)

An example of code-switching between the modes of address can be found in Antonio’s conversation with Beata. The pedicab runners have a “habit of verbal resistance” (150), signalled by the use of Jamaican creole,<sup>71</sup> while Antonio mostly uses Trinidadian creole, but individual characters also switch between creoles “so that reaction and emotions are revealed through language” (Enteen 267). Hopkinson’s use of creole language, inter-weaving folklore with science fiction, shows how the past comes to bear on the future by emphasising not only history, in the form of historical figures, but also memory, in the form of journeys and feelings of belonging and exile. The diasporic space created in the novel is not geographically bound, but rather temporal in nature, an aspect which is also foregrounded by the representation of female subjectivity in the novel.

The third time sphere in the novel, and the one which overlaps the most with the diasporic aspects of the novel, is generational and female, and it focuses on multiple female subject positions with “contradictory . . . and often painful experiences” which create “spaces of disjunction that carry the potential for resistance,” albeit a problematized potential (Melzer 67). For most of the novel, Tan-Tan is defined both by her experience of exile and the sexual abuse she suffers, and these experiences contribute to her fragmentary state of being. The story of her journey to self-healing is a “fictionalized theory” about the formation of black female

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<sup>71</sup> The douen, despite their overt pacifism, exhibit opposition to the humans’ oppression in their speech which resembles Jamaican creole with terms such as “allyou” and “oonuh”.

subjectivity under colonisation, but also its continued legacy (Keizer 1). Enteen argues that Hopkinson's use of gender "interrupts or dismantles the cultural mythologies that place women as secondary, or subordinate, or altogether silent" (271). She bases her argument on representations of gender in the novel, and particularly on the feminised quantum computer, Granny Nanny. On Toussaint, the pedi-cab runner Beata has her z'amie wives and husband, on New Half-Way Tree Claude is in a romantic relationship with both One-Eye and Aislin, and Melonhead offers to be in an open relationship with Tan-Tan when he proposes that they move to Sweet Pone. But despite these progressive relationship arrangements, Ione is the one who bears the brunt of public judgement in Cockpit County even though Antonio was also unfaithful, even getting Aislin pregnant. Aislin's mother, Nursie, blames her daughter for her own exile. "Aislin shoulda had more sense than to get mix up in Antonio business. I just grateful your daddy see fit to make this lonely old woman part of the household afterwards" (MR 19). Another example of how gender relations are not much different from our present is that Pappy's sexual abuse of young girls was possible on Toussaint even with Granny Nanny's surveillance and he is exiled to New Half-Way Tree for being a paedophile (150). Later in the novel, it is made clear that Janisette was aware that Antonio was abusing Tan-Tan, but blamed her, the victim, for his actions (277). When Antonio decides to challenge Quashee to a duel, it is because he feels his 'honour' is tied to Ione and in order to recover his reputation he must challenge the man who has horned him.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Burton explains that the male-centered culture of reputation in Jamaica "subverts the *official values* of colonial society but also mimics the *actual behaviour* of white men in slave and colonial society" (168, italics in original). Antonio's behaviour demonstrates a projection of this misogynistic male culture into a future diasporic space.

In contrast, the douen have a much more equal society in terms of gender. In many of the human settlements women occupy inferior position to men, like Tan-Tan and Janisette who are both abused by Antonio, but douen women are respected and perhaps even slightly more elevated than douen men in their society. This is represented by the fact that young women develop the ability to fly during puberty while the male douen lose their wings (*MR* 184). Dubey calls this development a “model of delightful and liberating female maturation very different from Tan-Tan’s entry into puberty, marked by rape” (“Becoming Animal” 42). Tan-Tan is “hypersexualised by nearly every man she encounters, a process that culminates in incestuous rape” but her entry into the douen’s world “allows [her] to exist as [a] desexualised being” thereby allowing her the space to “heal herself from sexual violence” (41). The ultimate example of patriarchy’s continued existence is Antonio’s abuse and rape of Tan-Tan, which brings together the political and the personal (*Anatol* 113). On a personal level, the reader witnesses the violence done to Tan-Tan when she is forced to act as a stand-in for her mother to whom Antonio can never return. While they are travelling to New Half-Way Tree Antonio holds Tan-Tan close and tells her:

“Whatever happens, you is my little girl, you hear? My doux-doux darling, come in just like Ione when she was a sweet little thing. Don’t care where we go, you is always my little Ione. Antonio buried his head against Tan-Tan’s shoulder, a heavy weight. (*MR* 75)

Her abuse is undeniably personal and intimate in nature, but also allegorical of the colonial power invested in Antonio. When Tan-Tan tells Abitefa who her child’s father is she exclaims, ““He was forever trying to *plant* me, like I was his soil to harvest”” (260). Tan-Tan is the newly conquered land, to be tamed, owned and moulded in the shape of the mother(land) to attest to and feed the patriarchal, colonial power. Therefore, her recuperation of her self-worth and

identity is personal, but also representative of larger power relations. Her alignment with the disempowered half of the colonial equation, the *douen*, means that Tan-Tan seems to be a “part of the colonizing culture [but] she rejects the Hegelian ‘master’ identity” and she “refuses to objectify the aliens the way the self-righteous humans do” (Melzer 58; 63). Her liminality represents her disempowered position, but it also allows for critical reflection and an expression of creativity, which would have been impossible otherwise (Schomburg-Schreff 370).

The tempestuous relationship between Antonio and Ione shape Tan-Tan from the moment she is born. The two are unfaithful to one another and inflicting emotional pain on each other becomes almost a game to them. When Ione feels that she is losing Antonio’s attention, she gets pregnant.

So that is the piece of comess that Tan-Tan had been born into. Two people who loved each other fiercely but had forgotten how to do it without some quarrel between them. Ione and Antonio thought say is baby they were making oui, but they were really only creating one more thing to quarrel over. (MR 46)

Tan-Tan becomes a pawn in their relationship, but to Antonio she is also a version of Ione he can still control: “Someone who would listen to him, look up to him. Like Ione when she’d been a green young woman” (6). She is a new beginning, full of potential for a different relationship where he is the one with all the power. Unlike the wilful fiery Ione, Tan-Tan is “his one pureness” (13). When Antonio kidnaps Tan-Tan and the possibility of ever seeing Ione is eliminated, she *becomes* Ione to him, and her conjugal duties as wife fall to Tan-Tan. To him, she is both the ‘home’ he will never be able to return to and the wife he will never see again. On her ninth birthday (the first time he rapes her), Antonio gives her Ione’s wedding ring and calls her ““Tan-Tan, my wife, my home, everything”” (139). This moment is the catalyst for the

fractures in Tan-Tan's subjectivity, as it gives rise to the figures of bad Tan-Tan<sup>73</sup> and the Robber Queen.

Daddy's hands were hurting, even though his mouth smiled at her like the old Daddy, the one from before the shift tower took them. Daddy was two daddies. She felt her own self split in two to try and understand to accommodate them both.

Nothing bad ever happen to Tan-Tan the Robber Queen. Nothing can hurt she. (140)

In response to this split, part of Tan-Tan becomes the Robber Queen who helps her protect herself from what Antonio does to her, helping her maintain a sense of agency in a situation where she feels powerless.

When Tan-Tan kills Antonio on her sixteenth birthday, she displaces the act onto the Robber Queen, partly to disassociate herself from what happens, but also because she does not believe she possesses the strength to do it herself. It is as if the knife Janisette had Gladys and Michael make for her birthday completes the Midnight Robber by endowing her with a phallic object which can counter Antonio's poisonous authority: "It must have been the Robber Queen, the outlaw woman, who quick like a snake got the knife braced at her breastbone just as Antonio slammed his heavy body right onto the blade" (*MR* 168). The Robber Queen allows Tan-Tan to re-write her story thus far, with the help of the folktales people create around her vigilante acts. By helping others who are similarly disempowered and marginalised, she is able to help herself heal and deal with the trauma she has experienced. The Robber Queen brings the personal and public together: Tan-Tan cannot heal until the hidden act of incest is made public, laid open for all to witness.

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<sup>73</sup> Bad Tan-Tan is the part of her that insists that she is worthless because of Antonio's abuse.



As a carnival figure, Tan-Tan's Robber Queen is shaped by the different meanings of carnival on Toussaint and New Half-Way Tree. In the novel, carnival is a celebration of a national identity, rather than a sign of opposition to the status quo; it expresses a shared heritage. On New Half-Way Tree, however, it is also a celebration of survival and life, and offers time off from work which brings people together in ways it cannot on Toussaint. By adopting a carnival figure as alter-ego, Tan-Tan extends the space of creativity and play which carnival represents, thereby opening up a space for her to work through not only her trauma, but also to help others. In Chigger Bite, Tan-Tan stops a woman from beating her son (Aloysius), a tableau which reminds her of Antonio's abuse. "Is like a spirit take her. A vengeance had come upon her, it was shining out from her eyes strong as justice" (*MR* 244). Tan-Tan takes the switch from the woman and hits her with it, telling her: "'Me tell you, don't hurt your son no more. Me will know. Me. Tan-Tan, the Robber Queen.' She was back in her body. The somebody had gone" (246). After helping Aloysius, Tan-Tan feels different and bad Tan-Tan is silenced (256), at least for a while, by the deeds of the Robber Queen. Helping others who are disempowered in the human settlements,<sup>74</sup> in whose situation she recognises herself, enables her to work through her own trauma and empowers her to regain a sense of control over her life. By becoming the Robber Queen, she becomes the author of her own life story.

The stories which start spreading from Chigger Bite to other settlements portray Tan-Tan as an avenging spirit, or a hero "like Nanny or Anacaona of old, come to succour the massive-them, the masses that the Nation Worlds had dumped out here behind God's back" (*MR* 256). The Robber Queen is not only a source of hope to Tan-Tan, but also to the other

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<sup>74</sup> One example is when Tan-Tan exposes a crooked bar-keep who had been cheating his customers.

disempowered humans on New Half-Way Tree whose exile weighs heavily on them.<sup>75</sup> The Robber Queen acts as maternal figure to the people of New Half-Way Tree much like Nanny does on Toussaint. The comparison is apt because the Robber Queen's presence, like that of Granny Nanny, is not only a protective one but it also modifies people's behaviour because of perceived surveillance. "Because her presence is always a surprise, the threat of Tan-Tan's arrival begins to regulate the behaviors of New Half-Way Tree's populations . . ." (Feshkens 148-149). While one could argue that the Robber Queen fulfils a maternal role in a figurative sense, giving birth to Tubman means that Tan-Tan becomes a mother of a new nation in a much more literal sense because of his unique connection to Granny Nanny (across the dimension veil) through the nanomites which have become one with his body.

Motherhood is multi-faceted in the novel: Granny Nanny's over-bearing (s)mothering, Ione's neglectfulness, Janisette's jealousy and anger, Benta's nurturing presence and finally Tan-Tan's own contentious experience of her impending motherhood represents its range of implications. Tan-Tan's struggle to come to terms with motherhood is primarily influenced by the fact that her child is a product of incestuous rape, but also, to a lesser degree, by her own experience of mothers. Neither Ione nor Janisette provide Tan-Tan with a stable, positive maternal influence. This role falls to Nursie on Toussaint and Benta, Chichibud's wife, who cares for Tan-Tan as if she were one of her own (*MR* 183). Anatol argues that Hopkinson's emphasis on the positive influence of "other-mothers" dissolves the "irrevocable connection" between the subject and their place of birth as motherland (112). For Tan-Tan to reconcile herself with the impending arrival of her child and her new role as mother, she must first work through Tubman's incestuous origin: "Because Tan-Tan is impregnated by her father at the age

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<sup>75</sup> The fact that Tan-Tan starts to see little girls playing at Robber Queen in the settlements shows the symbolic power of the figure of a female "outlaw" who exposes injustice (*MR* 58).

of sixteen, she cannot view pregnancy and childbirth as anything but monstrous aberrations” (Dubey, “Becoming Animal” 42). Near the beginning of her pregnancy, she calls the foetus monstrous, and turns to Abitefa for comfort (*MR* 233). Tan-Tan feels powerless, at the mercy of an unwanted development in her body.

Erin Feshkens argues that her body “emerges . . . as a site of contestation, addressing the history of sexualised violence that women’s bodies undergo as subjects of colonizing [and patriarchal powers] . . . and imagining the ways in which those bodies can capture agency and meaning-making for themselves” (146). She further argues that Tan-Tan consciously decides to keep the baby which “signifies an attempt to reclaim authority over her body’s autonomy in a way that has particular implications in a novel so interested in the laboring body and the body that labors” (146). Tan-Tan’s decision to keep the baby, does not seem as firm as Feshkens suggests, and the reader cannot easily locate the moment at which she decides to keep the child. Instead her unwillingness to engage with the fact that she is pregnant seems to be the reason why she does not abort it. Additionally, the douen’s sanctity of life means that they do not condone abortion and when Tan-Tan tells Abitefa that she wants an abortion, Abitefa is adamant that it is not possible. Therefore, *practically* Tan-Tan does not have the means to end her pregnancy while living in exile with the douen in the forest, and venturing into any of the human settlements to find a doctor who could possibly provide the necessary herbs would draw unwanted attention to her. Keeping the child seems less of a firm decision and more of a deferment, which turns into a situation where abortion is no longer a viable option. Despite this, very close to his birth, Tan-Tan does claim ownership of her child, disavowing Antonio’s parentage. In their final confrontation, Janisette asks Tan-Tan, ““Is who pickney that filling up your belly, murderess?”” to which Tan-Tan thinks in reply: “Whose? She’d carried the monster all this way. The damned

pickney was hers” (*MR* 320). Reconciling herself to its imminent birth, she claims the baby as hers. In naming the little boy Tubman, after Harrier Tubman the slavery abolitionist who led many slaves to freedom, Tan-Tan seems to express her wish that her son be different than his father, the coloniser. The complexity of Tan-Tan’s roles as daughter and mother must be read in the diasporic context in which women writers challenge motherhood as “dictated by slavery” but they also “write against notions of motherhood perpetuated by the imperial ‘mother country’ discourse *and* the ensuing utopian motherland ideology . . . proposed by members of various independence and nationalist movements” (Anatol 111). Therefore, Tan-Tan’s experience of motherhood, made public through the Robber Queen’s speech at the end of the novel, shows how the personal or “affective dimension” is “inseparable from the political dimension” in the diasporic context (Caroline Rody cited in Anatol 121).

His birth is undeniably significant, but the climax of the novel occurs not with Tubman’s birth in the final pages, but with the earlier public confrontation between Tan-Tan and Janisette in front of the crowd gathered for carnival in Sweet Pone. In this part of the novel, the Robber Queen dominates and, according to Tan-Tan, she is simply the horse, the vessel or conduit to be possessed by another entity such as in Vodoun or Santería. Ignoring the jeers from the crowd, the Robber Queen refuses to be silenced.

“Not wo-man; I name Tan-Tan, a ‘T’ and a ‘AN’; is the AN-acaona, Taino redeemer; the AN-nie Christmas, keel boat steamer; the Yaa As-AN-tewa; Ashanti warrior queen’ the N-AN-ny, Maroon Granny; meaning Nana, mother, caretaker to a nation. You won’t confound these people with your massive fib-ulation!” And Tan-Tan the Midnight Robber stood tall, guns crossed at her chest. Let her opponent match that. (*MR* 320)

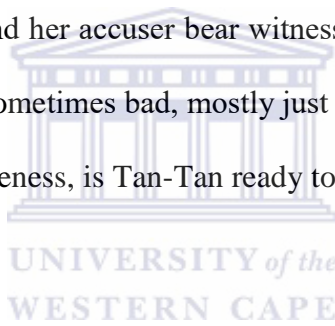
The rhythms of her speech resemble those of dub poetry, which is related to the dread talk Hopkinson uses as a marker of opposition in her characters' speech. Because Tan-Tan's audience, due to their Caribbean heritage, is familiar with dub poetry's focus on social justice she is able to convey her own social justice concerns through the cadences of language. Her aim is to have her side of the story heard and Antonio's misconduct to be laid bare to all, and the very act of telling endows her with agency. The Robber Queen invokes powerful historical figures, "all of whom were women revolutionaries fighting oppression" (Boyle 187).<sup>76</sup>

Elizabeth Boyle argues that by appealing to "this protective and inspirational community of ancestor/goddess figures at the moment of her own crisis . . . Tan-Tan is setting out her own heritage as . . . warrior [and] mother" (188). To her, Tan-Tan's position as part of this community of "powerful, female 'tellers'" (which includes the Robber Queen), enables her to tell her story. The oral qualities of the story allow "the novel to reflect its community—to remember 'women's ways of knowing as well as ways of framing that knowledge in language'" (Karla Holloway cited in Boyle 188). When Tan-Tan tells her audience that she is the Robber Queen, they don't believe her, calling her performance a pappyshow. The power of words invigorates the exhausted Tan-Tan who is determined to "tell the real story" to show the gathered crowd that she is not just a mythical figure but that she is "'real as you'" (*MR* 320). The crowd continues to heckle her until the Robber Queen reveals that "[i]s she father who fuck she" (323). Bringing the private into the public finally grasps and holds the attention of the crowd who are shocked at words "too nasty to be a Carnival mako" (323).

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<sup>76</sup> Anacaona was a legendary Taíno queen "claimed by both Haitians and people of the Dominican Republic" (Boyle 187). Annie Christmas is a character from African-American folklore. She was an exceptionally strong black woman who captained her own boat on the Mississippi (Miller n. pag.). Yaa Asantewa was "Queen Mother of Ejisu" who urged the Asante (in present-day Ghana) to resist the British attempts to colonise the Gold Coast, she subsequently "led her people in the . . . Anglo-Asante wae, known as the War of the Golden Stool" (Boyle 187).

The Robber Queen tells the story as if their (hers and Tan-Tan's) lives depend on it, this story which "had to sing as her own soul, oui?" (MR 324). When she is at the cusp of narrating Antonio's death she hesitates: "Rough with emotion, her cracked voice came out in two registers simultaneously, Tan-Tan the Robber Queen the good and the bad . . ." (325). Reliving, in public, the moment at which the split in her psyche occurred finally brings the fragments of her self together again. Tan-Tan does not have to rely on the Robber Queen to be her voice anymore; no longer merely a vessel, she once again becomes a speaking subject. The guilt that has been such a heavy burden dissipates as she tells Janisette that what she had done was self defense. After confronting Janisette, "Tan-Tan knew her body to be hers again . . ." and following the cathartic speech, having the whole crowd and her accuser bear witness to her experience, she stands "just being Tan-Tan, sometimes good, sometimes bad, mostly just getting by like everyone else" (325; 326). Only once she achieves wholeness, is Tan-Tan ready to give birth to the son she has finally claimed as hers.



Eshu, the narrator, explains that Tubman is different from other Marryshevites in that his connection to Granny Nanny is not dependent on an earbug because his link to her is present even before birth. Granny Nanny instructed the nanomites from Tan-Tan's defunct earbug to migrate into the foetal tissue in her womb "[t]o alter you as you grow so all of you could *feel* nannysong. . . . [Y]our whole body is a one living connection with the Grande Anansi Nanotech Interface" (MR 328). As soon as he is born, Tubman is already capable of producing nannysong. While some critics such as Boyle view Tubman as a messianic figure, I am more aligned with Eric Smith who recognises that his birth will perforate the dimension veil (66).<sup>77</sup> Boyle views

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<sup>77</sup> Langer also dwells on the ambiguity of Tubman's name by pointing out that it is either ironic, since he can be seen as the first colonial agent of Granny Nanny's on New Half-Way Tree, or aspirational and hopeful on the part of his mother (69), who understands the adversity the douen face better than any other human.

Harriet Tubman's Underground Railroad as a precursor of the presence of Granny Nanny's web on New Half-Way Tree, which will lead the exiles back to freedom (190). Her argument neglects to consider the plight of the douen or, as Smith does, what exactly the perforation of the dimension veil holds for the Marryshevites on Toussaint where their self-contained utopic space depends on the ability to expel anyone who threatens the balance. Granny Nanny's arrival on New Half-Way Tree, through Tubman, cannot be anything other than ominous to the douen who were killed off completely on Toussaint by a system calibrated to ensure the safety and well-being of *only* the Marryshevites, at all costs. Smith proposes that "Tubman's . . . promise lies in his potential to redress the historical amnesia of the home-world of Toussaint" (66), but it is not clear what the consequences of that redress will be either for the Marryshevites or the douen. Dissolution of the divide between the two planets might not change how the Marryshevites perceive and perpetuate their grand narrative; the history and present of New Half-Way Tree might just be absorbed and moulded to fit the existing master narrative. This seems especially likely if one considers how stubbornly the exiles cling to their sense of superiority, how they view themselves as non-people because of their exiled status and how many of them yearn only to be under the protection of Nanny again.<sup>78</sup> If Nanny does not stray from her prime directive, the douen on New Half-Way Tree will suffer the same fate to those killed on Toussaint. The douen who recognise the power of the humans' "killing things" realise that their only option for survival is withdrawal from the human settlements, but it will not keep them safe for long because the humans had already started exploring the planet. The only aspect of Tubman's birth which suggests that he might be an advocate for the douen is the presence of Abitefa at his birth

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<sup>78</sup> Despite Nanny's absence, the humans on New Half-Way Tree had made a lot of progress in building a new cohesive society. For example, in Sweet Pone there is a Palaver House, a solar-powered library, a strong sense of community and no exploitative labour conditions (*MR* 304). Ignoring the fate of the douen for a moment, the humans on New Half-Way Tree seem more than capable of functioning without Granny Nanny.



and Tan-Tan's connection to the douen, but ultimately the novel's ending is ambiguous and open-ended. Even the comments of the *eshu*, the trickster narrator, which identifies him as "the human bridge from slavery to freedom" (Hopkinson *Midnight* 329), might simply imply that the freedom from hard labour that was established on Toussaint will be extended to New Half Way-Tree.

Ultimately, the narrative does not escape contemporary configurations of power and oppression as determined by the legacy of colonisation. The Marryshevites are able to establish their own out-of-reach space where racial oppression does not exist, but the colonisation which makes their *marronage* possible affects their fundamental identity as a group and their technology and how they use it, as seen in their treatment of the douen on both planets. While the ending is ambiguous, the far-future temporality of the story appears to be restricted not just by the act of colonisation, but, reading it more pessimistically, because it is a projected future of our present as evidenced in the development of a post-capitalist society on Toussaint which makes Granny Nanny possible in the first place. The cognitive estrangement of the different planet, the Granny Nanny Web and other futuristic features of the novel only serve to amplify the insidious effects of colonisation and slavery. The humans on New Half-Way Tree might follow the same trajectory of those on Toussaint in relation to the douen, simply at a slower pace, but with the arrival of Granny Nanny through Tubman that trajectory might speed up radically. Perhaps, if the separation remained, the exiles, finally freed from a technology which yoked them to a colonial project, might have continued co-existing with the douen in a power-relationship where they occupy the position of the coloniser, inverting the power dynamics which led to their flight from earth in the first place. Possibly, the forced confrontation with their own violent colonial past on Toussaint, as evidenced by the existence of the douen on New Half-Way Tree, would have



eventually lead to a future, distanced from colonial enterprise, which would have been different from Toussaint's. All of this is pure speculation, but these possibilities collapse once Granny Nanny arrives through Tubman because her focus is on making sure that the Marryshevites thrive, a focus that excludes the douen.

The atmosphere of *Midnight Robber* makes the reader feel that they are “dwelling in any number of places at once and in a score of different time frames” (Marshall “Praisesong” 232). The orality of the narrative emphasises the overlapping of temporal spaces, but the one constant is the force exerted on humans and douen alike by the history of colonialism. In an oscillatory movement throughout the novel, hegemonic power is challenged, imitated and accepted: rebellion against “one form of domination,” that of people of colour by white people, contains “within itself the seeds of another form of domination” (Burton 263): that of the douen by humans, but also stubbornly still the domination of women by men. Despite their romantic vision of themselves as maroons, rebels and pioneers, the Marryshevites' actions follow a very old, colonial, blue-print, one founded in a root identity tied to ownership of land and freedom from hard labour. Ultimately, as rulers of Toussaint, they “are heirs of those who conquered before them” (Benjamin 256). References to carnival and “elevating the heroes of the counterculture into heroes of the nation . . . divest[s] them of the radicalism they possessed” (Burton 264), and heroic figures such as Granny Nanny, Garvey, Toussaint and even Marryshow are absorbed into a new colonial hegemony no less violent or destructive than the old. Defusing the potency of such figures does not “render future disruptions” impossible but it “suggests that such disruption, when it occurs, will be dealt with relatively easily by the structures of power” (264). Despite this, the spirit of opposition which characterises the novel keeps the hope that things *could* be different alive. Meaning is portrayed as “multiple, competing, and contradictory” (Enteen 270)

and there is no single truth, a fact which not only reflects the complexity of the effects of colonisation on the colonised and coloniser, but also the difficulties inherent in opposition rather than resistance. In the next chapter, I will discuss *Brown Girl in the Ring*, a text in which Hopkinson is similarly occupied with the reverberating effects of colonialism, but where she explicitly focalises such concerns (in a Canadian setting) through the tensions between Western and indigenous systems of knowledge.



### Chapter 3

#### Serving the Spirits: Relation Identity and Diasporic Spirituality in *Brown Girl in the Ring*

There is no solid ground beneath us; we shift constantly to stay in one place.

– Nalo Hopkinson (cited in Rutledge, “Speaking in Tongues” 599)

While *Midnight Robber* demonstrates the dangers of a society that defines itself according to a static cultural identity, *Brown Girl in the Ring* shows the dynamism and power of creolisation by emphasising the connection between individual experiences and questions of power in larger political contexts. The setting of the novel is in a future Toronto and the diasporic legacy of creolisation, brought into focus by questions of spirituality, is much more strongly foregrounded than in *Midnight Robber*. Because the story is located in Canada, it arguably serves as a more effective example of the different operations of the open, ever-changing flexibility of creolisation than if the story had been set in the Caribbean. Examples of this flexibility include the creolisation of traditional medicine and Western science and the creolised spiritual belief system portrayed in the novel. Spirituality thus becomes a temporal link between geographic spaces, diasporic communities and different worldviews. As with *Midnight Robber*, the slow violence of colonialism features prominently, yet subtly reveals how creolisation is entwined with violence, both physical and psychological.

Unlike *Midnight Robber*, in which the only reference to a spiritual dimension is in the naming of the *eshus* who connect the humans to Granny Nanny, the Caribbean undercurrent in *Brown Girl in the Ring* is overtly spiritual. In fact, spirituality as portrayed in the novel embodies “[t]he coercion and resistance, acculturation and appropriation that typify the Caribbean experience” (Fernández Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert 3). In this novel, though, the spiritual dimension reflects not only the Caribbean experience, but more specifically the experience of Caribbean immigrants in Canada. The story takes place in a dystopian Toronto where the city

centre, now called the Burn—named for Sherbourne Street which marks the boundary between the centre and the suburbs—has been abandoned by the government. The decision to withdraw the police force and all governmental support is made after a series of riots caused by the bankruptcy of the city. The bankruptcy in turn was caused by a lawsuit brought against the government by the Temagami Indians. The Temagami claimed ownership of profitable logging land and the lawsuit led to international embargoes on pine logged there. After the riots, the city centre was left to the poor, made up in large part by Caribbean immigrants.

The narrative is built around three generations of the Hunter women: Ti-Jeanne, her mother Mi-Jeanne, and grandmother Gros-Jeanne. Ti-Jeanne, a young mother, has to defeat her estranged grandfather, Rudy, who uses Caribbean magic and a drug called buff to control the Burn. He commissions Tony, the father of Ti-Jeanne's child and one of his underlings, to kill Gros-Jeanne in order to procure the human heart he had promised the Toronto Premier, Uttley, for the life-saving transplant she needs. His exploitation of the Hunter women started years earlier, when he separated his daughter Mi-Jeanne's spirit and body through magic. He uses his control over her spirit to stay young, to control his underlings, to defeat his enemies, and finally, to command her to kill her own daughter who is trying to bring his immoral use of diasporic spirituality to an end. Gros-Jeanne, before her death, is an important figure in the Burn as she provides her own creolised medical care, combining Western medicine and Caribbean herbal knowledge, to the community. She also heads a diverse congregation who practices an Afro-Caribbean derived religion. While her relationship with Ti-Jeanne is antagonistic at times, their relationship remains central to the narrative.

The naming of the Hunter family pays homage (with his blessing) to Derek Walcott's play *Ti-Jean and His Brothers* (Salvini 184). In the play, the brothers must battle the devil, "an allegorical instantiation of colonialist forces."

[Ti-Jean's eventual] victory over the devil depends on the fact that he alone has mastered both the discourse of the white Western philosophical and intellectual traditions that inspire the devil's attempt to colonize the minds and bodies of his brothers, as well as the discourse of Afro-Caribbean culture's folkloric resistances to colonization. (Davis Rogan 89)

In Hopkinson's novel, Ti-Jeanne must negotiate between her Canadian geography and Caribbean heritage to secure a path to survival by mastering both. Her precarious position for most of the novel is reflected in the title which refers to "a Caribbean ring-game song in which children challenge the little girl at the centre of the circle to invent a dance-move which the other girls must copy. She then selects her best imitator, who takes her place in the middle" (Collier 445). Ti-Jeanne's survival depends almost wholly on her inventiveness and ability to creolise the Western and Caribbean spheres which dominate her life. Her state of in-betweenness is mirrored in the "dualities and fragmentations" in the novel where, for example, Uttley's diseased heart echoes the 'corrupted' core of Toronto (Bustamante 14). Much like *Midnight Robber* there is no authoritative perspective but instead "a multitude of points of view" (14), which deny any impulse to simplify the reality of Ti-Jeanne and the other people living in the Burn.

As with the preceding chapter, this one will also be organised according to teleological, diasporic and generational temporalities. In the first section, technology in the novel will be discussed as it is reflected in the contrast between indigenous knowledge and Western medicine and how they come together in Mami's (Gross-Jeanne's) methods of healing. Also in this section

is a discussion pertaining to the divide between rich and poor in Hopkinson's Toronto and how the city's colonial history still exerts influence on the future described in the novel. Like *Midnight Robber's* focus on slow violence, *Brown Girl in the Ring* features reiterations of colonial paradigms, coupled with more productive responses to them, in the form of creolised spirituality. Again, the intimacy between the trauma and suffering caused by colonial violence and the creative, dynamic and fruitful forces of creolisation is emphasised: creolisation, "engender[s] new modes of thinking, of acting, of feeling, of imagining, of dancing, of praying, of working within the dynamic social body" (René Depestre cited in Balutanski and Sourieau 7). For example, creolisation exhibits tension, contradictions, but also reciprocities between the legacies of different experiences, Western and Caribbean, which weave their way into psychological, mythological and technological knowledges. That this process is ongoing is evident in Hopkinson's portrayal of the role of diasporic spirituality in a future Toronto, a city defined in part by its large immigrant community. Here one can witness an interplay between foreign signifiers and local codes, an interplay which produces "phenomena of reflection, refraction and decomposition" (Antonio Benítez-Rojo cited in Balutanski and Sourieau 7). In other words, creolisation is an "unceasing . . . transformation of political, religious, social, and cultural elements constantly acting upon one another . . ." (Balutanski and Sourieau 21).

The diasporic section focuses on the centrality of creolisation in the novel, primarily analysing the Afro-Caribbean spirituality that Mami Gros-Jeanne lives by, and which she calls "serving the spirits." Mami's spiritual father is Osain, the healing spirit and one of, "[t]he African powers. . . . The spirits. The loas. The orishas. The oldest ancestors. . . . Them is the ones

who does carry we prayers to God Father,<sup>79</sup> for he too busy to listen to every single one of we on earth talking to he all the time” (BG 126). Like her grandmother, Ti-Jeanne also has a spirit guide, but hers is Legbara, the spirit who presides over the passage between the living and the dead. I will discuss his significance in relation to Ti-Jeanne as well as Hopkinson’s emphasis on the interconnectedness between the body and the spirit in the novel. This discussion will provide context for the final section, which explores the generational or female temporal sphere which is concerned with the familial relationships in the novel and the related question of Ti-Jeanne’s subjectivity. Before commencing with the three main sections, I will explore how Hopkinson uses geographical locations in the city to reinforce the omni-present theme of creolisation.

The way in which Hopkinson uses specific locations and buildings in the novel demonstrates the syncretism of the immigrant community of the Burn. This community lives between two worlds, connected to both, but also alienated from both, to different degrees. The collapse of the city begins with a “postcolonial conflict—the fight over the land by the Temagami Indians, the original settlers of the area” (Bustamante 16). This conflict sets the scene for a story that is, in part, about creating a sense of belonging in a hostile space, and is also about the impossibility of returning ‘home.’ The Temagami were dispossessed of their land and given a reserve on Bear Island. In the novel, they successfully sue the Canadian government and are granted a land stewardship because the international sanctions against pine logged on their ancestral lands were having a devastating effect on the Canadian economy (BG 38). Thus, their claim only succeeds because of the economic implications for Canada, particularly for the province of Ontario and the city of Toronto: economic ends trump social justice. Geartner argues that the novel “amplifies what Warren Cariou identifies as a ‘widespread and perhaps growing

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<sup>79</sup> Mami is not referencing the Christian God here: both Vodoun and Santería have one single god (male-identified) who communicates to humans through the *lwas* or *orishas*.

anxiety suffered by [European] settlers regarding the legitimacy of their claims to belonging on what they call “their” land” (n. pag.) Their sense of belonging is predicated on branding the Temagami’s claim as illegitimate, but also on denying immigrants legitimate citizenship.

Hopkinson admits to using Toronto as a setting for the novel because she was living there at the time of writing. She wrote the novel so swiftly that she needed a familiar landscape to work with so as not to hinder her creative process (Bustamante 13). It is her familiarity with the city which lends depth to the portrayal of its geography and her choice of locations and buildings. Ti-Jeanne lives with her grandmother in the Simpson house located on the Riverdale farm, a historic working farm where the way of life and farming techniques of European settlers are demonstrated for visitors. In the future Toronto of the story, the ‘sham’ farm has been turned into an authentic productive space with an important function to the community because it houses Mami’s healing services.

Riverdale Farm had been a city-owned recreation space, a working farm constructed to resemble one that had been on those lands in the nineteenth century. Torontonians used to be able to come and watch the “farmers” milk the cows and collect eggs from the chickens. The Simpson House wasn’t a real house at all, just a facade that the Parks Department had built to resemble the original farmhouse. (*BG* 34)

Mami had turned one of the rooms where staff used to teach spinning and weaving to visitors into her examining room and the two washrooms had been transformed into a cold-storage room and ventilated kitchen by her followers (34-35). Her alterations to an architectural tribute to the colonial enterprise breathes life into the Simpson House and through her creolised healing practice she brings her own history to bear on the present. Mami and her worshippers hold their ceremonies and rituals in the nearby Toronto Crematorium Chapel which stands at the entrance



of the Necropolis (86). The chapel, which Mami and her followers turn into their *palais*,<sup>80</sup> their place of worship, was built by Henry Langley who is primarily recognised for his design of churches in Toronto. This site is thus emblematic of Western Christianity, itself a cornerstone of European colonialism.

Another important space with regards to the community of the Burn is Allan Gardens' botanical park and conservatory founded in 1858. Botany, the search for "green gold," encompassed "expertise in bioprospecting, plant identification, transport, and acclimatization . . . [and] worked hand-in-hand with European colonial expansion" (Schiebinger 7). In the eighteenth century, botanists were "'agents of empire' . . . the vanguard and in some cases the 'instruments' of European order" (David Mackay cited in Schiebinger 11). Botanical gardens were "experimental stations for agriculture and way stations for plant acclimatization for domestic and global trade, rare medicaments, and cash crops" and they "followed the contours of empire, and . . . often served its needs" (11). In *My Garden Book*, Kincaid writes specifically about the significance of the botanical garden in that it:

. . . reinforced for me how powerful were the people who had conquered me: they could bring me to the botany of the world they owned. It wouldn't at all surprise me to learn that in Malaysia (or somewhere) was a botanical garden with no plants native to that place. (120)

Kincaid's interest in the connection between the garden, the sciences, and colonial exploitation is further shown in her reaction to a section in the *Oxford Companion of Gardens* about George Clifford, an eighteenth-century Anglo-Dutch banker who built and maintained the vast

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<sup>80</sup> *Palais* is the name given to a Vodoun temple.

glasshouse, populated with plants from all over the world, which enabled Linnaeus to “invent modern plant nomenclature.”<sup>81</sup>

The plants in [Clifford’s] glasshouse could only have come to him through—and I quote from *Oxford Companion to Gardens*—“the influence of the world trade being developed by maritime powers such as the Netherlands and Great Britain.” . . . “[T]rade being developed,” leaving out the nature of the trade being developed: trade in people and the things that they possessed, plants, animals, and so on. . . . I do not mind the glasshouse: I do not mind the botanical garden. . . . I only mind the absence of this acknowledgment: that perhaps every good thing that stands before us comes at a great cost to someone else.

(115)

Her response sums up the price that was paid by people of colour for progress in science and in technology, a price that is often purposely glossed over or minimized, as she notes. Her anecdote also encapsulates how botanical gardens acted as both extensions of and monuments to colonial might. Richard Drayton’s *Nature’s Government* (2000), superficially a history of the Kew Royal Botanical Gardens, examines “how the natural sciences became included in an ideology of ‘Improvement’” (cited in Nixon 246). In other words, his book foregrounds to what degree “the garden” and the natural sciences were part of colonial expansion and Western, colonial ideas of progress. In the book he draws Kew, instead of a self-contained English space, as a “part of an extraordinary network of imperial gardens (stretching from St. Vincent to South Africa, Ceylon, Australia, and beyond) that became implicated in entangled global developments of botanical knowledge, but also in economic power, political policy, and imperial administration” (246).

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<sup>81</sup> Londa Schiebinger states that Linnaeus’s “taxonomic innovations” were “first developed as a kind of shorthand to aid several of his economic botanical projects.” Furthermore, he also believed that “the purpose of natural history was to render service to the state” and that the study of nature could build national wealth (Schiebinger 6). Thus his views on botany demonstrate how intertwined colonial and capitalist aims were with the natural sciences.

Allan Gardens, the imperial garden in the novel, instead of being a monument to colonial power and influence, becomes an important source of food for the people of the Burn, and aids their survival. Paula and Pavel, the Russian butcher and grocer couple claim the park and greenhouse: the meat they sell comes from wild game in the park and their vegetables are grown in the greenhouse, both important resources, particularly in winter when fresh vegetables are scarce (*BG* 13). It is also the only source of sour sop, a tropical plant from which Mami brews a mild sedative tea (14). Thus, an overt connection is made between this creolised space and the Caribbean. A garden that's primary function was aesthetic and monumental in nature becomes practical, echoing the creolisation of space one sees in both the Simpson House and the Toronto Crematorium Chapel.<sup>82</sup> These spaces are turned into something altogether new through the meeting of two different worlds.

[C]reolization is distinguished by its ability to affect singular forms that remain specific to the elements which engender it—the social, historical, and geographical contexts specific to the site of its articulation—but which, nevertheless, exceeds the limitations of the ‘original’ components. (Burns iii)

The creolisation of space (and spirituality) in the novel is a response to colonial and postcolonial contexts, past and present. Although the origins of creolisation lie in the plantation, it is “still at work in our megalopolises, from Mexico City to Miami, from Los Angeles to Caracas . . . where the inferno of cement slums is merely an extension of the inferno of the sugarcane or cotton fields” (Glissant, “Creolization and the Making of the Americas,” 274). Creolisation still has meaning because the conditions of slavery on the plantation pre-empted, or foreshadowed (in

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<sup>82</sup> In the novel, Hopkinson notes that Langley was buried in the Necropolis and that Mami puts flowers on his grave to thank him for the use of the chapel (86), emphasising that she acknowledges the importance of *all* history, not just her own.

Gilroy's words), the modern condition and also continue to be relevant because colonial power relations persist, albeit in altered forms.

The culmination of the spatial creolisation can be seen in the CN (Canadian National) Tower where the climax of the novel takes place when Ti-Jeanne confronts and defeats her grandfather with the help of the *lwas*. The phallic tower serves as Rudy's headquarters and symbolises his appropriation of the power it represents,<sup>83</sup> before Ti-Jeanne herself takes over its (creolised) power to destroy him. The tower was built by the Canadian National railways to improve telecommunications hindered by the rapid development of skyscrapers in the city, and from 1974 to 2010 it was the tallest building in the world ("CN Tower" n. pag.).<sup>84</sup> While its primary function was to facilitate communication it ultimately became a testament to modern engineering. In the novel however, the tower is not simply a beacon of the triumph of Western technology and engineering, it is also the 'centre pole' of the city, like the *potomitan* (centre pole) of a Vodoun temple, which connects the realms of the living and dead, the physical and spiritual, thus acting as a spiritual conduit.

For like the spirit tree that the centre pole symbolized, the CN Tower dug roots deep into the ground where the dead lived and pushed high into the heavens where the oldest ancestors lived. The tower was their ladder into this world. (BG 221)

Therefore, in the novel, the tower becomes a syncretic space, symbolising Western technology, but also acting as a spiritual channel connecting different realms and temporalities: technology is

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<sup>83</sup> On the first page of the novel Rudy is introduced in his CN Tower office, wearing a tailor-fitted wool suit and lounging in a plush upholstered chair "the colour of mahogany" (BG 1). Later, when he calls Tony in so he can order him to procure a human heart, the same chair is described as "a leather executive's chair" behind a "huge, highly polished oak desk" (27). These descriptions encapsulate Rudy's wealth which stands in contrast to the situation of the people of the Burn, wealth which comes at the expense of the community's well-being.

<sup>84</sup> The tower is now "owned and operated by federal crown corporation Canada Lands Company" ("CN Tower" *World Federation of Great Towers* n. pag.). Thus, tangibly it represents not only the Railroad and the Canadian government, but also the telecommunications sector, all associated with Western industry and wealth.

associated with the future while alternative systems of knowledge, like the spiritual system in the novel, are intimately linked to the past in the form of the Oldest Ones. It is only once she realises the tower's dual function, representative of her complex position as a Caribbean immigrant in Toronto, that Ti-Jeanne is able to connect to the *lwas* in a meaningful way to help her defeat Rudy.

Writing about critical responses to *Brown Girl in the Ring*, Laura Salvini notes that many critics celebrate the Caribbean aspects of the novel, but that “its scientific references are often treated as less central to the text” and that these readings belittle “the role minorities can play in contributing to [science fiction]” (180). It is telling that the systems of knowledge in the novel, Western medicine and Afro-Caribbean spirituality and folkloric medicine, are creolised because “the colonialist worldview itself contained an inherent contradiction: it lionized the scientific method and its results—particularly in terms of race . . . at the same time as it imposed on indigenous peoples its own patently unscientific system of spirituality, Christianity” (Langer 127). In light of this, Ti-Jeanne and Mami's creolised healing practice and Afro-Caribbean faith are not only part of a creative survival strategy, but they also demonstrate that the Western and Afro-Caribbean systems of knowledge are equal. The “creative dimension of creolization—its infinite openness, its resilient dynamics, its fluidity” (Balutanski and Sourieau 4), provide Ti-Jeanne and Mami with resources unavailable to non-diasporic peoples. Their creolised healing practice also binds together spirituality and science (Langer 128), while Western scientific knowledge more often than not tries to deny the link. It is crucial to note that their creolised forms of knowledge do *not* reject Western scientific knowledge or methods. In other words, the way that alternative systems of knowledge are portrayed in the novel does not signify “scientific ignorance—itsself an assumption caught up in colonialist assumptions about indigenous

ignorance and intellectual unsophistication—but rather a different way of understanding, a different cultural logic” (128). This cultural logic emphasises acknowledging the past and the importance and need to maintain cultural memory, manifested in this case through the *lwás*, who have travelled with Ti-Jeanne and her family and ancestors from Africa, to the Caribbean and now to Canada.

At the beginning of the novel, Ti-Jeanne is unmoored from not only her own familial and cultural history, but seemingly from history at large. She does not know what happened to her absent mother, she is ignorant of the implications of her spiritual-seer ability (shared with her mother) and instead thinks she is going mad. Furthermore, she is unaware that Rudy is her grandfather and she only learns about Caribbean healing to placate Mami. Her response to the librarian’s display which spells out what happened to the city is to think to herself: “All of that was old-time story. Who cared any more?” (BG 12). To Ti-Jeanne, history has nothing to do with the present, a misconception she is soon disabused of by her grandmother who teaches her about healing, her family and her gift. Despite knowing how much the community depends on her grandmother’s knowledge of both healing and Western medicine, Ti-Jeanne has little faith in her practice.

Ti-Jeanne didn’t place too much stock in Mami’s bush doctor remedies. Sometimes herbs lost their potency, stored through Toronto’s long, bitter winters. And they had to guess at dosages. . . . Ti-Jeanne would have preferred to rely on commercial drugs. . . . [She] didn’t understand why Mami insisted on trying to teach her all that old-time nonsense.

(36)

She dismisses her grandmother’s healing both because she views it as inferior to Western medicine, tellingly referring to it as “bush doctor remedies,” but also because it is “old-time

nonsense” and belongs to the past in her estimation. Even when she drops off the librarian’s ointment Mami made, she includes Vitamin B tablets and an anti-inflammatory cream in the package because she expects Mami’s ointment not to work. Although Ti-Jeanne’s complete lack of faith is misplaced, Mami’s remedies are not fool proof, mostly because her ingredients are not compatible with the Canadian weather, indicative of a deeper discordance between their Caribbean heritage and the Canadian geography which they have to negotiate. Mami, aware of the obstacles her location poses to her capacity to practice her craft to the best of her abilities, addresses these through supplementing—not replacing, like Ti-Jeanne—her healing with the knowledge she gained from her nursing training and any books she can acquire. The payment for the librarian’s ointment is “an encyclopedia of medical symptoms, two gardening books and the real find: *Caribbean Wild Plants and Their Uses*” (12). The strength of Mami’s healing is her ability to synthesise two very different systems which demonstrates her ability to successfully negotiate the tensions between her heritage and the Canadian city that is her home now. She also gets help from her friends Romni Jenny and Frank Greyeyes who “were teaching her about northern herbs. In time, she’d have a more complete arsenal” (141). Monica Coleman argues that Mami “understands that life as a member of an immigrant community necessitates being conversant . . . in both Caribbean and Canadian culture” (3), to which I would add that she also recognises that she has to be conversant in other immigrant cultures which form part of the culturally diverse Toronto. This recognition is evident in her friendship with Romni Jenny and Frank Greyeyes and her willingness to learn from them.

Mami's creolised healing practice is communally-orientated; she does not turn away anyone who needs help, not even the street kids who cannot pay or trade anything for her treatment. This is in contrast to the rapacious presence of the Angel of Mercy hospital in the city. After Tony kills Gros-Jeanne, he immediately calls the ambulance men, colloquially known as Vultures, to collect her heart. They arrive "wearing hooded, floor-length bulletproofs in Angel of Mercy black. Two of the men had Glock's" (BG 151). Their uniforms are meant to protect them and their paying customers: "The price for established medical care was so high that only the desperately ill would call for help. If you saw a Vulture making a house call, it meant that someone was near death" (8). Their services are only available to the rich or the desperate willing to gamble all on a last chance at life and the hospital's concern is with its bottom line, not with healthcare. When Baines, the hospital representative, needs a heart for the Premier, he contacts Rudy knowing that the lives of the people living in the Burn are dispensable, making them fair prey to the highest bidder in search of organs. When a confused Ti-Jeanne tries to reason with the impersonal facades of the Vultures not to take Mami's body away, one turns to her to deliver a prepared speech:

"Angel of Mercy Hospital offers its condolences for your loss and thanks you and your family for making this life-giving donation of your loved one's biomaterial. Your address has been entered into the hospital's data banks and you will be compensated for your donation. Good Day." (153)

Mami is dehumanised, reduced to biomaterial for which Ti-Jeanne will be compensated: to them Mami's death is simply a transaction that has been completed. Immigrant bodies become commodities in the story, ironically, for apparently humanitarian reasons. Safe porcine-to-human transplantation technology has been perfected, but Premier Uttley insists on a human transplant



in order to boost her ratings. Uttley's logic is that the "porcine organ farms are immoral. You know the line: human organ transplant should be about people helping people, not about preying on helpless creatures . . ." (3). Thus, the lives of animals are valued more than the lives of the people in the Burn. When Baines and Rudy negotiate the specifics of their transaction, Rudy suggests they use a street child as 'donor,' but Baines feel they are unsuitable because of potential health issues. In response to Baines' refusal, Rudy thinks to himself: "Pity. No one would have noticed a few more of the rats going missing" (7). Later in the novel, Constantine, Uttley's advisor, refers to all of the people living in the Burn as "rats," demonstrating how they are stripped of their humanity because they are poor and predominantly people of colour and/or immigrants who are not officially recognised as citizens of the Canadian state.

Mami's influence, which stands in opposition to the Angel of Mercy Hospital and Rudy, does not end with her death. Her heart, transplanted into Premier Uttley, retains some of her spiritual being which transforms the Premier into someone more compassionate. When Uttley wakes up after her transplant she undertakes to make economic renewal of the Burn the platform on which she will run for re-election.<sup>85</sup> This transformation is only possible because of a trauma, Mami's death, which precedes it (Langer 127). The movement from trauma to renewal and the possibility for hope through creolisation reflects "the negotiation of postcolonial identity" (130). Shortly after the transplant, Uttley addresses her new heart, telling it to still its erratic beating: "*Stop that. You're here to help me. Just settle down and do your job*" (236, italics in original).

Before the transformation is complete, Uttley does not view the heart as part of her, but instead

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<sup>85</sup> Her plan for the rejuvenation of Toronto deviates from previous attempts which provided "incentives for big business to move back in and take over." Instead, she plans to "offer interest-free loans to small enterprises that are already there, give them perks if they fix up real estate they're squatting on" (BG 239-240). In other words, the aim is not to allow predatory capitalism to prevail in the Burn again, but to rather foster the alternative economic system in operation in the Burn, which foregrounds community.

sees it as simply there to fulfil a specific, pre-determined function, much in the same way that immigrants are treated, since their labour is the only valued aspect of their presence in another country. But, if one views Uttley as the embodiment of the Canadian nation-state, then the transplant of an ‘alien’ organ literally and figuratively fortifies the body of the nation state (Neal Baker cited in Salvini 189). Therefore, instead of casting immigrants in a negative light, they are portrayed as being vital to the well-being of Canada, countering the narratives about immigrants shaped by colonialism.

Colonialism helped implant a focus on race within historical-political discourses that related to the legitimacy of state. It contributed to a concern with the threat of degeneracy through which racist practices became inscribed within mechanisms of the state, both at home and in the colonies, by which people of other races or perceived to be a risk to the health of the dominant race might be expelled, excluded or, as with Nazism, subjected to genocide. (Schirato, Danaher and Webb 100)

In this context, Hopkinson’s portrayal of immigrants and diasporic peoples in Toronto becomes even more significant when one considers the antagonism and reciprocity involved in the process of creolisation.

Madeleine Davis Rogan proposes that “. . . the Premier’s request for a heart procured from within the Burn concretizes both the heartlessness of capitalist political and economic interests *and* the sense in which the life of the inner city is constantly threatened by the invisible power structures that contain it” (90, italics in the original). The divide between the Burn and the surrounding suburbs is clearly demarcated by not only immigrant-status, but also by the connected race and class differences. The original decision to withdraw from the city centre was an economic one: its bankruptcy meant the city could not afford to pay for the police force or

maintain the city centre. Those who stayed “were the ones who couldn’t or wouldn’t leave. The street people. The poor people. The ones who didn’t see the writing on the wall, or who were too stubborn to give up their homes” (*BG* 4). The exploitative capitalist system might have withdrawn from the city, but its presence remains in the form of the Paramount Eaton shopping centre, a crumbling, “block-long ‘elite’ megamall complete with coded security fence. If your biocode wasn’t in the mall’s data banks, you got an electronic jolt rather than admittance. The crowds flowed past the structure at a respectful distance” (178). The decaying mall stands as a symbol of the exclusionary ethos which undergirds capitalism and which still exerts an influence on the Burn. Although the mall is defunct, the Strip, the street where all the nightclubs are located, is still very much active:

If you didn’t look too closely, you could believe that the Strip was the same as it had been before the Riots. . . . [It] was fuelled by outcity money. It was where people from the ’burbs came to feel decadent. With enough money, you could get a taste of the city without ever setting foot on its streets. (176)

To the people from the Suburbs, coming to a sanctioned entertainment space in the Burn affirms their superiority and provides them with a sense of (artificial) danger as they enter the city centre so unlike the outskirts of the city. With them comes their money which still means power even in a place where, out of necessity, trade has mostly supplanted monetary exchange.

After the withdrawal of the government, those who are left behind adopt an economic system based mostly on trade (*BG* 10; 42), one which fosters a sense of community instead of division or competition. Following Mami’s death, and after she has defeated Rudy, Ti-Jeanne walks home through the local marketplace and everyone she encounters has a gift for her to pay tribute to Mami. “The clamour of people was deafening. Despite her fatigue, though, Ti-Jeanne

edged her way happily through the crowd. She had a yearning to lose herself in this noisy throng of people going about the business of staying alive” (230). The sense of belonging she experiences invigorates her. The marketplace is not just a place where goods are exchanged, but also a vital cultural and communal hub which connects people. The closeness of the community is again exemplified in the final chapter of the book when Mami’s patients also contribute what they can: “. . . the gifts that were pouring in from Mami’s past patients meant that Ti-Jeanne had not had to use too much of her winter stores” (*BG* 243). Part of the immigrant community’s unity is because they have all had to create a new home, but also because the Burn is closed in on virtually all sides by the suburbs which, as soon as the Riots started, “raised roadblocks at their borders to keep Toronto out.” And, in the twelve years following the Riots, they have rebuffed “repeated efforts to reclaim and rebuild the core . . . [because of] fear[s] of vandalism and violence” (4). It is likely that the isolation and shared burden of survival factor into the sense of community in the Burn for those who support one another instead of turning to predatory criminal activities like Rudy and his posse.

However, the isolation also causes fear of the world outside of the Burn. Near the beginning of the novel when Tony tells Ti-Jeanne that he wants to leave the Burn to get away from the posse, she thinks to herself that, “[s]ometimes it was hard to believe that there was even still a world outside” (*BG* 23). Later, when Tony tries to convince her to leave with him she has to admit to herself that the thought of the suburbs scared her.

She knew it was safer. She knew that there were hospitals and corner stores and movie theatres, but all she could imagine were broad streets with cars zipping by too fast to see who was in them, and people huddled in their houses except for jumping into their cars to drive to and from work. (111)

Although the “barren ’burbs” (113), are superior in material terms, they lack the meaningful connections between people one finds in the Burn, focusing instead “on an individualism [influenced by the capitalist system] that causes uneasiness in Ti-Jeanne” (Bustamante 18). With regards to the diasporic elements of the novel, community fulfils a central function to foster belonging and communal empowerment. In the Burn, individualism is not feasible—unless one participates in criminal activities—but rather survival depends on cooperation and compassion.

The diasporic aspects of the novel are intricately related not only to the legacies of the Middle Passage, but also to the history, shared by Ti-Jeanne and her family, of Caribbean immigration to Canada. Thus, spirituality in the novel becomes a way to preserve the connection between Ti-Jeanne and her family, to both Africa and the Caribbean as they bring the African powers of the *lwas*, the Oldest Ones, with them. This connection is not only cultural, but also familial, helping to “bridge the gap between generations, to reconnect spiritually with the self, and to claim the liberating (rather than destructive) aspects of one’s history” (Simpson 112). Serving the spirits, a philosophy and an alternative system of knowledge, provides them with an important survival resource in their current space, and a way to promote community with fellow immigrants, as is evident in the central role Mami plays in the Burn community. The Hunter family’s spirituality is an embodied one which emphasises the connection between body and spirit, unlike the magic Rudy practices. His magic depends on a dualist worldview in which the central tenet is to separate the body and spirit, as can be seen in the way in which he severed Mi-Jeanne’s spirit from her body so that he can control it. It is also important to note that the spiritual system in the novel is not simply obeah, nor Vodoun, or Santería. Instead, it is a syncretism of all three, another degree of creolisation which addresses the added tensions of not

only being Caribbean, but also an immigrant in Canada.<sup>86</sup> As Legbara explains to Ti-Jeanne near the end of the novel: “. . . [A]nybody who try to live good, who try to help people who need it, who try to have respect for life, and age, and those who go before, them all doing the same thing: serving the spirits” (BG 219). Thus, this spiritual function forges and maintains connections between self and community. Mami’s congregation is a heterogeneous group and when Ti-Jeanne observes one of their gatherings, she “could hear them speaking. Mostly Caribbean English, but some spoke Spanish and others the African-rhymed French of the French Caribbean islands” (BG 87). The inclusivity of the group can be likened to the importance of the family in Santería where “a spiritual kinship binds the members of the group, who . . . are of all races . . .” (Miguel Barnet cited in Fernández Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert 5). The diversity of the Caribbean members is augmented by the presence of white people and individuals from other immigrant groups (Romni Jenny), but also indigenous groups (Frank Greyeyes). Thus, in the Burn, serving the spirits preserves a communal identity.

Diasporan religions (a term coined by Joseph Murphy), are “[p]owerful repositories of inner strength and cultural affirmation” (Fernández Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert 3). Common elements among these religions can be traced to a shared Western and/or central African heritage, but “their most characteristic trait is their dynamism” (Fernández Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert 3): their malleability and responsiveness to circumstances that enable believers to effectively respond to adversity. Mami’s position as a Caribbean immigrant in Toronto means

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<sup>86</sup> According to Glissant:

[O]ne of the most dramatic consequences of interdependence concerns the hazards of emigration. When identity is determined by a root, the emigrant is condemned (especially in the second generation) to being split and flattened. Usually an outcast in the place he has newly set anchor, he is forced into impossible attempts to reconcile his former and his present belonging. (*Poetics* 143)

Thus, Mami and Ti-Jeanne do not attempt to reconstruct ‘home’ and the static identity associated with it in Canada, but rather respond creatively by furthering the process of creolisation.

that she has to adapt to yet another set of adverse circumstances and her response to these is to incorporate ways of knowing from other immigrant communities. Romni Jenny taught Mami how to read Tarot cards, which she uses to help clarify a vision of Ti-Jeanne's. When Ti-Jeanne asks Mami why she had never seen the tarot deck, Mami replies:

“I used to hide it from you when I was seeing with them. I don't really know why, doux-doux. From since slavery days, we people get in the habit of hiding we business from we own children even, in case a child open he mouth and tell somebody story and get them in trouble. Secrecy was survival, oui? Is a hard habit to break.” (BG 50)

Her explanation creates a link between Tarot reading, a Romanian tradition, and Caribbean indigenous knowledge, thereby focusing on the similarities between two marginalised groups (the Romanian and Caribbean immigrants) who both use alternative knowledges and demonstrating how adept she is at using what is available to her. Using a technique taught to her by a Romanian immigrant, she includes another marginalised group and makes serving the spirits even more of a communal endeavour.

Mami's response to Ti-Jeanne's question also reflects how diasporan religions were outlawed in the Caribbean, as was the case, for example, for obeah in Jamaica in 1787. The law stated that “[a]ny slave who shall pretend to any supernatural power, in order to affect the health or lives of others, or promote the purposes of rebellion shall upon conviction thereof suffer death, or such punishment as the Court shall think proper to direct” (Margarite Fernández Olmos cited in Coleman 3). Such extreme measures seem to indicate how potentially subversive Western authorities perceived diasporan religions to be. Mami's cards are Caribbean in character with depictions of men and women in carnival costumes:

The words “Masque Queen” were on one card. The Masque Queen’s costume was a gown of blue and silver sequins with a cloak that dragged behind. Jutting up from the dragging fabric was a city with castles and towers, also in blue and silver. The cloak formed a float that loomed high over the Masque Queen’s head. She clutched a large book in one hand and a wand in the other. (*BG* 51)

The Masque Queen card encapsulates the creolisation of a diasporan religion with a Romanian immigrant one. The city which emerges from her cloak signifies the urban space which must be negotiated through a combination of traditional modes of knowledge (the book) and alternative ones (the wand).

An aspect of the spiritual philosophy Mami follows is an explicit acknowledgement of the importance of not prioritising the physical world over the spiritual one. To do so is to invite madness, as one can see in the example of Mi-Jeanne. Madness is a common trope in Caribbean writing, and it is often a symptom of a deep and abiding sense of unbelonging, an acute feeling for Mi-Jeanne who could not reconcile her Caribbean heritage with her existence in Canada. As stated before, in Morrison’s words, going mad may be a survival strategy that is a response to “predatory western phenomena” (Gilroy 221), but in Mi-Jeanne’s case she is threatened not only by her Western environment, but also the diasporic patriarchal figure in her life, Rudy. In the final confrontation between Ti-Jeanne and Rudy, he reveals to her that he was able to imprison Mi-Jeanne’s spirit—condemning her body to wander the streets as “Crazy Betty”—by promising her that she would not be able to feel any physical pain anymore (*BG* 215). The toll of the separation can be seen in Mi-Jeanne’s tormented “duppy” or spirit but also in her body, as Crazy Betty, who looked about the same age as her mother “but nowhere near as healthy. Her body was stooped and frail, her hair dull, matted into clumps” (144). After capturing Mi-Jeanne’s daughter,



Rudy drugs Ti-Jeanne with a combination of buff, the drug he sells in the Burn, and “Haitian medicine” to make her compliant, which, according to him, is the first step towards creating a zombie (211). Ti-Jeanne is tempted by his offer of an ethereal existence because she would not have to “tear herself in three to satisfy Tony, and Baby, and Mami” and she would be free of her body which was nothing “but an aching weight dragging her back to the pain of her life” (215; 216). To Ti-Jeanne, her physical existence only connotes pain and difficulties which she wishes to be rid of. This separation is antithetical to Mami’s diasporan spiritual system which emphasises the interconnectedness not just between physical and spiritual spheres, but also the spiritual and the communal.

Another prominent characteristic of diasporan religions is the shared “promotion of a ritualized union of the people with the spirit world, in the reciprocity of the link between the spirits and the community” (Fernández Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert 3). Mami’s actions in the novel suggest that ‘community’ does not only mean humans, but also animals. She has an innate ability to “soothe wild things,” she eats almost no meat and when she did it was only old or sick animals: “She would ask them if they were ready to go, and Ti-Jeanne could swear that she had seen egg-bound hens and lame horses stagger gratefully towards the knife” (*BG* 64; 65). Mami’s respect for living beings is comprehensive, not selective and intimates the connection between the spiritual and physical worlds. Joseph M. Murphy explains that:

Diasporan ceremonies are . . . services *for* the spirit, actions of sacrifice and praise to please the spirit. And they are services *of* the spirit, actions undertaken by the spirits to inspire the congregation. Thus the reciprocity of diasporan spirituality is affirmed: service to the spirit is service to the community; and service to the community is service to the spirit. (cited in Fernández Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert 3, italics in original)

Rudy's use of Afro-Caribbean spiritual knowledge lacks the reciprocity that Murphy views as being key to diasporan religions. Mami and Ti-Jeanne's use of the spirits is respectful: no request is made without an offering and self-serving demands are not made at all. Mami uses her spiritual knowledge to bring the community together, to heal and to create a space where the connection between body and spirit is valued instead of valuing Burn residents only for their "bio-material."

Ti-Jeanne and Mami's productive state of in-betweenness brings to mind Gilroy's argument that the experience of Caribbean people bestows on them a privileged vantage point:

What was initially felt to be a curse—the curse of homelessness or the curse of enforced exile—gets repossessed. It becomes affirmed and is reconstructed as the basis of a privileged standpoint from which certain useful and critical perceptions about the modern world become more likely. (Gilroy 111)

This vantage point, shaped by racial subjugation, enables Caribbean peoples to respond in creative and productive ways to "successive displacements, migrations, and journeys (forced and otherwise) which have come to constitute [Caribbean] cultures' special conditions of existence" (111). Therefore, Ti-Jeanne and Mami are able to negotiate the dystopic Toronto in the novel precisely because of their experience as Caribbean peoples who migrated to Canada. Their critical awareness of their liminality denies a root identity and instead channels their attention to creative and innovative, creolised, responses to their environment.

While Mami's spiritual father, Osain, is connected to healing, Ti-Jeanne's, Legbara, is the deity of the crossroads, but also of communication, speech and understanding. These characteristics are key to Ti-Jeanne's role as cultural translator (Salvini 185), situated between Caribbean and Canadian cultures where her "survival depends on the ability to revise, adapt, and

deploy disparate cultural epistemologies . . .” (Davis Rogan 88). With reference to the cultural diversity of Toronto, Hopkinson states that its citizens are “the people who have more than one place or identity or culture that’s home and [they are] struggling to find modes of expression that convey how [they have] had to become polyglot, not only in multiple lexicons but also in multiple identities” (cited in Rutledge “Speaking in Tongues” 599). In the novel, the ‘first translation’ Ti-Jeanne must attempt is unscrambling the visions which plague her. These intensify into a state of spirit possession in which she becomes a conduit, a ‘horse,’ for Legbara’s presence in the physical world. Carolyn Cooper argues that:

Spirit possession, that ecstatic moment of displacement central to the religious practices of Africans in the diaspora, literally embodies the transmission of cultural values across the Middle Passage. As metaphor spirit possession doubly signifies both the dislocation and rearticulation of Afro-centric culture in the Americas. . . . (64)

Possession creates a direct link between Ti-Jeanne and the Oldest Ones. It also emphasises how she is twice-removed from places that were ‘home’ and must now forge a new space of belonging. Like the religion it is a part of, possession emphasises community because the ‘horse’ cannot remember what happens when possessed and thus needs someone else to witness (and interpret) the *lwa*’s communication. For example, when Osain possesses Mami he tells Tony: “Don’t touch me. So long you ain’t use your hands to heal. Don’t touch me. You not my son any more.” And, “Farmer must know when to grow, and when to prune. You is a branch I woulda chop off one time!” (BG 96-97; 99). These comments foreshadow Tony’s role in Mami’s death, but because Mi-Jeanne is a novice interpreter this information is not adequately conveyed to Mami who could have translated the cryptic words into more useful information. When possessed, the Hunter women have access to knowledge which aids them in the fight

against Rudy, and the possession also affirms the positive and powerful aspects of their Caribbean heritage. Legbara steps in when Ti-Jeanne needs him, not only for information, but also protection. When Tony and Ti-Jeanne are attacked by Rudy's henchmen and Tony's flight from the Burn is foiled, Legbara possesses Ti-Jeanne and neutralises Rudy's henchmen so that Ti-Jeanne can safely escape (117-118).

As the novel progresses, Legbara emerges as a positive force in Ti-Jeanne's life, but at first, the visions which are his legacy are simply disturbing. This is because part of her gift is the ability to see how people are going to die because Legbara is the 'Prince of Cemetery.' "Never the peaceful deaths. Ti-Jeanne hated the visions" (*BG* 9). The visions seem to have always been a part of Ti-Jeanne's life, but they had grown much stronger after the birth of Baby, Ti-Jeanne's son (*BG* 19), which is suggestive of the connection between motherhood and mother country. They are also unsettling because the visions transgress the boundary between the spiritual and physical worlds, making Ti-Jeanne aware of the spiritual sphere she has been trying to ignore by refusing to participate in any of Mami's rituals. After visiting the librarian to drop off his ointment and collect the books which serve as payment, Ti-Jeanne has a vision where "[s]he appeared to be in a green tropical meadow. A narrow dirt path ran through it, disappearing in the distance as the road curved gently downward. The scent of frangipani blossoms wafted by on a gentle breeze" (17-18). While in this other space, she sees Legbara (although she does not know it is him at this point) wearing an African mask and looking like a devil. When she returns wholly to the physical world "Ti-Jeanne felt the gears slipping between the two worlds" (19). The vision forces Ti-Jeanne to acknowledge her Caribbean (the tropical meadow) and African connections (the mask), while the smell of the frangipani blossoms block out the urban space for the duration of her vision.

Legbara appears to Ti-Jeanne again not too long after this encounter to help fight off a *soucouyant* (vampire), who tries to drink Baby's blood.<sup>87</sup> His protective presence intensifies as the novel progresses and climaxes in Ti-Jeanne's final confrontation with Rudy. Ignoring the *lwas* is perilous as the reader sees in the example of Mi-Jeanne who falls prey to Rudy's magic, but also Mami, who to a degree lost the connection to her spiritual father, Osain. During the ceremony where Mami appeals to the *lwas* to help hide Tony so he can escape the Burn, Osain possesses Mami and reveals that he is angry because she will not act against Rudy, her ex-husband even though he has told her to. Through Mami, he tells Tony and Ti-Jeanne to:

“Tell Gros-Jeanne is past time for she to do my work. Is too late for she and for the middle one, but maybe the end one go win through. Ti-Jeanne, she have to help you to get Rudy dead bowl and burn it. It is the only way to stop he from catching shadows in it.” (BG 98)

By ignoring Osain, Mami had put herself at risk and ultimately dies at the behest of Rudy because she did not heed her spiritual father. Osain makes it clear that Ti-Jeanne is the one who will have to stop Rudy and he tells her how to do it. Without this valuable information, Ti-Jeanne would not have known how to break Rudy's power.

Another example of Ti-Jeanne as cultural translator, which occurs not only between Canadian and Caribbean cultures, but also Caribbean and immigrant cultures, is when she improvises the ritual to call on Legbara to help her infiltrate Rudy's headquarters. The only information Ti-Jeanne has about the ritual is what she learned from the single time she watched

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<sup>87</sup> This vision foreshadows the nature of Mi-Jeanne's duppy which is a vampire spirit who must feed on others' blood to stay alive. In the vision, Legbara teaches Ti-Jeanne that a *soucouyant* can be distracted by making it count multiple small objects, like rice in the vision, because it will be compelled to count them one by one (BG 45). In the final confrontation with Rudy, Ti-Jeanne is able to use her knowledge of this compulsion to buy time to destroy Rudy's dead bowl (which imprisons Mi-Jeanne's spirit) when he commands Mi-Jeanne's duppy to devour Ti-Jeanne (203).

Mami call on Papa Osain. Mami's ritual consists of careful and considered actions, such as creating designs in cornmeal on the floor, spraying the effigy of Eshu with rum from her mouth, and presenting a cigar, bowl of candies, cooked potatoes and three bundles of herbs as offerings, and killing a hen as sacrifice (*BG* 89-90). She also recites specific appeals and then commences the drumming to open the way between the spiritual and physical worlds (90-91). Relying on this information and her instincts, Ti-Jeanne thanks the young street child—killed by Rudy and his henchman—for the use of his blood, and traces the image of eshu on the floor. To the image she adds peppermints and a cigarette as offerings and then appeals to Legbara for help:

“Papa Legbara,” she whispered, feeling foolish, “I going to try and end the work that Mami and Mi-Jeanne couldn't finish. I going to try and stop Rudy.” She knew that by calling the spirit “Papa,” she was acknowledging a bond between them. Strangely, that felt safe and right, not the imposition on her that she had thought it would be.<sup>88</sup> (195)

Ti-Jeanne's makeshift ritual is a loose interpretation of Mami's, assembled with what is available to her. The essence of the ritual is present even if all of the gestures are not precise. In this way, Ti-Jeanne is similar to Mami who has adapted to her Caribbean geography by using Canadian herbs in her healing. The visions and possessions frighten her in the beginning of the novel because they are both strange and representative of a Caribbean connection she wants to deny, but by the end of the novel this has changed. In one of the final scenes of the novel Legbara communicates with Ti-Jeanne through Harold, Mami's goat, by making him sneeze “*Eshu!*” and letting his bones be visible through his flesh. “Another vision, a joke from her spirit father. She laughed” (244). Legbara's presence becomes a comforting and familiar one as the story progresses even if Ti-Jeanne is still cautious about learning about serving the spirits.

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<sup>88</sup> In contrast, when Rudy calls Ti-Jeanne granddaughter it “sounded as obscene as a curse” (*BG* 214).

The novel implies, through the figure of Mi-Jeanne, that denying the links between past and present can lead to madness, or a state in which the self becomes internally divided. Mi-Jeanne attempts to liberate herself from history, both familial and cultural, by wishing to be freed from her seer gift and rejecting her spiritual guide. She is overwhelmed by her sense of unbelonging. Ti-Jeanne, too, initially resists her spiritual connections with the past, telling Mami that she does not want anything to do with “obeah,” and thus had not told her grandmother about her visions. Mami replies:

“Girl child, you know better than to call it obeah. Stupidness. Is a gift from God Father. Is a good thing, not a evil thing. But child, if you don’t learn how to use it, it will use you, just like it take your mother.” (BG 47)

Mi-Jeanne’s visions could have had a significant impact on the history of the Burn had she found a way to put them to use. Her visions of the Riots a week before they happened could have helped her family and community prepare for what was to come, but because she was unable to accept her seer abilities, and because she tried to suppress and deny them, they drove her mad. “Mi-Jeanne refused her mother’s help. She spat out all of Mami’s potions and screamed at her to stop her prayers” (48). Her ‘madness’ is caused by being cut off from her heritage, while her refusal to accept her abilities makes her vulnerable to Rudy’s exploitation. It is after these visions that she turns to Rudy to ‘free’ her spirit from her body, a process which intensifies her madness not only because it denies the past, but also the link between the physical and the spiritual. “Serving the spirits” underlines the “necessity not only for spirituality, but also for that spirituality to be used properly, as a balance both against amoral science *and* against amoral spirituality (in the form of Rudy)” (Langer 152, italics in original). Rudy demonstrates the perils of using the power of spirituality at the cost of the community, especially its women. The novel

portrays the creolisation in the Burn community as a positive force primarily in the hands of the Hunter women, who stand in opposition to Rudy. Spirituality for Mami, and her reluctant acolyte Ti-Jeanne, is a means through which to “live good” by helping others and opposing the Western, capitalist authority encircling them, while Rudy makes the spirits serve him (BG 219).

The final section of this chapter focuses on the generational features of the novel, and how Rudy figures within the family dynamic. Ti-Jeanne’s subjectivity will also be discussed as it is influenced by both her familial and cultural history and present, and her recent entry into motherhood. The reader is introduced to Rudy in the opening pages of the novel when he agrees to secure a human heart for Uttley’s transplant in return for a hefty payment, literally selling out the people of the Burn. He is shown to have little regard for human life, killing someone simply to make a scrying spell possible when he wants to locate Tony. When he tells Tony how he rose to power, he reveals that Mami left him because he beat her (BG 131), but before that she had taught him how to communicate with the *lwás*. He uses this knowledge to bend others to his will and enslave first the spirit of someone who had recently died, and then Mi-Jeanne’s spirit, to kill his enemies and keep him young. When he thinks about the Hunter women, “Gros-Jeanne’s brood” (200), in his words, it is with disdain and with no acknowledgment of the familial relationship: “*The women in that family been giving me trouble from so long*, Rudy thought” (172, italics in original). The only good woman to Rudy is one who is completely under his control, which can be seen in his wish to kill Mami and Ti-Jeanne who pose a threat to him, but also in his control over Mi-Jeanne and the zombie Melba.



When she was working as one of his underlings, Melba had stolen money from Rudy, a crime for which she is turned into a zombie. The punishment seems to be not only for the theft, but also for daring to oppose Rudy's authority and in retaliation he takes away her agency. "Whatever hold Rudy had on the woman had to be more than just buff addiction. Her will, her *volition*, seemed to be gone" (BG 27, italics in original). When Ti-Jeanne is restrained and Rudy administers buff and "Haiti medicine" to prepare her for the ritual which will allow him to take control over her spirit, he tells her that it is also the first stage of making a zombie. "Combine the paralysis and the suggestibility with the right kind of um, *indoctrination*, and the zombie go do anything me tell it. Sometimes me want little help 'round here, you understand? To keep the place clean and so'" (212, italics in original). His words reveal his gendered view of what a zombie is. When Melba becomes too rundown to be useful, Rudy flays her alive in front of Tony as an exhibit of his power and to make sure Tony obeys his orders. Rudy tells him that if he does not kill Mami and Ti-Jeanne and get Mami's heart, Mi-Jeanne's enslaved spirit will feed on both him and Ti-Jeanne. After flaying her, Rudy kills Melba to feed Mi-Jeanne's duppy (137-138). Langer proposes that *Brown Girl* "introduces a Foucauldian dynamic of the tortured [female] body as punishment and spectacle" (139). The body is directly tied to larger structures of power and politics: "[P]ower relations have an immediate hold upon it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs" (Foucault 173). Melba, like Mi-Jeanne, is a tool, not a person, to Rudy and after robbing her of her agency, "[he] strips her of her humanity, turning her into a 'living anatomy lesson'" (Langer 136). Ultimately, he is only concerned with the spiritual in terms of how he can use it to benefit himself in material ways.

Eric Smith, among other critics, attributes Rudy's exploitative and predatory ways to the fact that he works as an extension of the state and is therefore in essence a lackey of Uttley and the government (44). Such a reading minimises Rudy's role as the central antagonist of the novel who "stands head and shoulders above the Premier as the Ring's primary source of destruction" (Davis Rogan 94). Rudy represents both capitalist greed and the fraught gender relations diasporic women must negotiate. He fills the power void left by the government in the Burn and maintains his position of authority by dealing buff and intimidating and manipulating others. "Rudy, an ageless, physically powerful, and charismatic force, exemplifies patriarchy's particular power of manipulation and control over the family and the community" (94).<sup>89</sup> When Ti-Jeanne destroys the "dead bowl" in which Mi-Jeanne's spirit was trapped, he instantly ages and becomes weak. "Rudy screamed, fell to his knees. A network of wrinkles was stitching itself over his face. Swollen veins wormed their way over the backs of his hands, while the knuckles bunched like the knobs of ancient roots; he put his arthritic hands to his mouth, spat his teeth into them" (BG 204-205). Thus, once his control over his daughter is broken by his grand-daughter he becomes impotent and powerless. His power was dependent on the subjugation of women. The only way he could have restored his power was to enslave Ti-Jeanne in the same way he had done with Mi-Jeanne. Davis Rogan uses Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), to examine Rudy's relationship to the Hunter women.

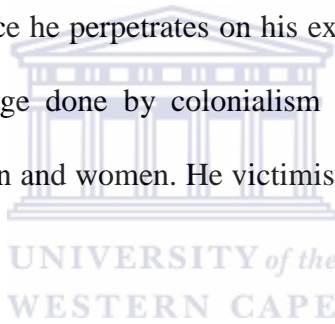
The colonized man will first manifest this aggressiveness which has been deposited in his bones against his own people. . . . The settler's world is a hostile world, which spurns the native, but at the same time it is a world of which he is envious. We have seen that the native never ceases to dream of putting himself in the place of the settler—not of

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<sup>89</sup> Davis Rogan also argues that the patriarchal influence means that "even sympathetic black men such as Tony become pawns in a game of power consolidation" (95).

becoming the settler but of substituting himself for the settler. This hostile world, ponderous and aggressive because it fends off the colonized masses with all the harshness it is capable of, represents not merely a hell from which the swiftest flight possible is desirable, but also a paradise close at hand which is guarded by terrible watchdogs. (cited in Davis Rogan 95)

Rudy has immense power within the Burn, but, as a Caribbean immigrant, he would not be able to wield the same kind of influence outside of this stateless space. His violent and exploitative actions, while his own, have their root in a colonial history of violence and in order to have the authority he does he must emulate that violence which stands in opposition to the communal good Mami prioritises. The violence he perpetrates on his ex-wife, daughter and grand-daughter is also symptomatic of the damage done by colonialism and slavery to the nuclear family structure and relations between men and women. He victimises women in his family to assert his power.



Mami stands in opposition to Rudy, both in her role in Ti-Jeanne's life and in relation to the Burn community. She is the one who teaches Ti-Jeanne about the healing properties of herbs and initiates her into serving the spirits. Despite her ultimately positive influence, their relationship is a troubled one and the tensions can be recognised early on. For example, when Ti-Jeanne correctly answers when Mami quizzes her on the properties of a Caribbean plant and its Canadian alternative, Mami's "grunt was the only acknowledgement she [got]. [Ti-Jeanne] swallowed her resentment" (*BG* 35). When Mami is rude to Tony, Ti-Jeanne confronts her and Mami's response is to tell her:

“This is my house! If I say go, both of all you go have to leave!” And there it was. Out in the open. Mami expected Ti-Jeanne to dance to her tune or find somewhere else to live.

(57)

Although the exchange is heated, Mami almost instantly regrets her words and asks Ti-Jeanne to stay because she does not want to lose her granddaughter the way she lost her daughter.

“Don’t get vex and leave. Is just so your mother did leave me, in anger. I ain’t see her from that day to this. Stay nuh, Ti-Jeanne?” (58)

Mami is portrayed as a beneficial presence in Ti-Jeanne’s life and in the community at large, but her character is still flawed as seen in the conflicts between her and her daughter and granddaughter. Their relationships are not idealised, but instead reflect not only the tensions between different generations, but also symbolise Ti-Jeanne and Mi-Jeanne’s difficulties with accepting their Caribbean heritage as something positive. Just before she leaves to help Tony to get out of the suburbs Ti-Jeanne thinks to herself that “[s]he had to come back to Mami. Just long enough to find out how to control the dream, keep the spirits out of her head. Then she’d be free” (105). Before she knows the power of the *lwas* and how much the unification of the physical and spiritual worlds will mean to her, freedom means keeping the spirits away and not having to live with Mami whose life is completely entwined with the spiritual sphere.

What brings the three generations together is Ti-Jeanne’s son, Baby. Shortly before Tony kills Mami, the three women are together in Mami’s kitchen.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Rudy commands Mi-Jeanne’s spirit to follow Tony to the Hunter household to make sure that he gets Mami’s heart and kills Ti-Jeanne. This command makes it possible for Mi-Jeanne to use the little influence she still has on her physical body to steer it towards Simpson House so that “Crazy Betty” gets there just before Tony arrives to kill Mami. Her plan was to use her body to voice a warning, to save both women, but she is only able to warn Ti-Jeanne after Mami is dead.

Ti-Jeanne put Baby in her mother's arms but didn't let him go. Mi-Jeanne's cracked, trembling hands moved automatically to support Baby's head and his back. She had been, after all, a mother. Mami watched the two women cradling the baby and managed a small smile. Her granddaughter was learning how to reach out a healing hand to others, despite her own cares. She would make a good seer woman. (147)

Thus, despite all the conflict and tensions between the different generations of Hunter women, motherhood brings them together in a kitchen, decidedly feminine space. Acceptance of the 'mother' culture brings with it acceptance of the mother(s) and they are able to enjoy a short reunion before Rudy's actions tear them apart again.<sup>91</sup>

Ti-Jeanne's experience of motherhood is as complex as Mami's and Mi-Jeanne's. When she started showing, she did not tell Tony that Baby was his child because "[s]omething had made her want to keep the little person she was growing all to herself. It would be the one human being who was totally dependent on her and would never leave her" (BG 24-25). Ti-Jeanne loves Baby, but she is easily annoyed when he cries, so much so that on more than one occasion she shakes him, hoping to silence his crying because "[h]er mother and grandmother had raised her with the strap; it was what she knew of discipline" (33). The harsh physical discipline that mars the relationships between the Hunter women is symptomatic of the insidious violence which originated in the colonial violence done to slave families. When Mi-Jeanne and her mother get to know each other better at the end of the novel when they are living together, she tells her daughter how she used to resent her.

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<sup>91</sup> Mi-Jeanne warns her daughter of Tony's intention to kill her too, but she still has to follow Rudy's command that she is to kill both Tony and her daughter if he fails, or only him if he succeeds. Mi-Jeanne is able to explain all of this to Ti-Jeanne before Tony shoots "Crazy Betty" in the chest, leaving her for dead when her spirit separates from its physical body to attack him. Ti-Jeanne reasons with her mother's duppy by convincing her that although she has to obey Rudy, she does not have to do so right away, giving Ti-Jeanne time to get to Rudy's headquarters to try and stop him.

When Daddy find out I was making baby,” Mi-Jeanne had told her, “is like he cut me dead. I used to be he doux-doux darling, he little girl, but not after that. And after you born, you eat up my whole life. It was ‘baby need this, baby need that.’ I couldn’t take it. I sorry to admit it to you, Ti-Jeanne, but I couldn’t take it.”

Shame made Ti-Jeanne’s face hot. It bit too close to the bone. She knew what her mother had been feeling. (242)

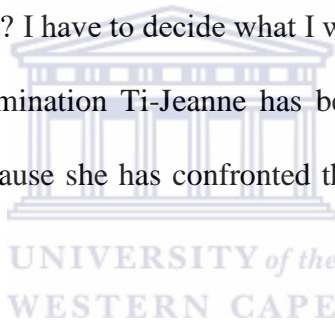
Mi-Jeanne’s words reflect a reasonably common experience of feeling consumed by the duties of motherhood, which she had to shoulder alone since Ti-Jeanne’s father was absent. It also reflects the negative influence Rudy had on the relationship with her daughter. His relationship with Mi-Jeanne was loving until she was no longer unequivocally *his*: her pregnancy signalled his inability to continue to infantilise her as his “little girl” and that another man could ‘lay claim to her.’ This conflict is passed on into the relationship between Ti-Jeanne and her mother, amplifying Ti-Jeanne’s struggle for belonging.

When the reader first meets Ti-Jeanne she is a young woman who seemingly does not feel comfortable with any part of her self: struggling to become accustomed to motherhood, unsure about whether she wants a relationship with Tony, she also wants to be more independent but still needs her grandmother’s help and guidance. Negotiating young adulthood becomes even more complicated because she lives in the Burn where there are many challenges to survival. As the story advances and Ti-Jeanne learns how to interpret her visions, becoming more receptive to her Caribbean heritage and reuniting with her mother, she becomes more self-possessed precisely because her personal and cultural history is no longer suppressed. When she is fighting Rudy at the end of the novel she tells herself “[n]ot to think, not to think. Instinct alone. [She] had been using the words as a mantra ever since she had set out for Rudy’s this night” (BG 209,

italics in original). Her increased confidence, not only in her abilities, but also in her place in the world, means that she has the self-assurance to rely on her intuition. At the climax of the novel, Ti-Jeanne has to make the pivotal decision whether to allow Rudy to separate her spirit from her body. Drugged and emotionally manipulated, she gets very close to giving in to his seductive offer to free her from physical and emotional pain. Legbara appears to her and explains the crucial difference between Mami and Rudy: that Mami served the spirits while Rudy made them serve him (218). After Legbara provides her with guidance, she comes to a realisation:

Rudy cared nothing for love or loss. What would she be if she became his creature? Hesitantly she said to the Jab-Jab [Legbara], “I can’t keep giving my will into other people hands no more, ain’t? I have to decide what I want to do for myself.” (220)

The moment marks the self-determination Ti-Jeanne has been striving towards for the whole novel and it becomes possible because she has confronted the single biggest source of strife in her familial history.



Using a combination of Legbara’s guidance and her grandmother’s knowledge, Ti-Jeanne realises the CN Tower’s function as centre pole, “the bridge between worlds” (BG 221). Because she had almost agreed to Rudy’s bargain, she “was halfway into Guinea Land [the spirit world] herself.”

She could call the spirits to help her. She wouldn’t have to call very loudly.

What were the names Mami had told her? “Shango!” she called in her mind. “Ogun! Osain!” Her flesh body moved its lips slightly, trying through the paralyzing effect of the drug to form the same words. “Shakpana, Emanjah! Oshun, Oya! And Papa Legbara, my *Eshu!* Come down, come down and help your daughter.”

With a flash of instinct, she knew that the call to the heavens should be mirrored by a call to the earth. (221)

Ti-Jeanne unites all the spheres of existence by summoning help from the land of the dead and the spiritual world. She calls her mother (not knowing that she is still alive), her grandmother and everyone Rudy has killed, and asks them to come to the physical world. Ti-Jeanne's call is answered with the arrival of all of the *lwas*. After Osain heals her, Legbara arrives last, ushering in the spirits of all the people Rudy has killed (including Mami). Rudy tries to escape, but Legbara tells him:

“No, master,” said Legbara. “You ain’t going nowhere. You try to give me all these deaths in exchange for your own, but I refuse the deal. I give them all back to you.”

Rudy screamed as the weight of every murder he had done fell on him. (226)

This climax provides the only logical—in terms of Mami's world-view—conclusion to Rudy's self-serving use of spiritual knowledge, but it also functions to consolidate Ti-Jeanne's power in the mind of the reader. When Osain offers to extend his healing possession because Ti-Jeanne's “[b]ody get better, but spirit still bust-up, I think’,” Ti-Jeanne replies by saying, “Is okay, Papa Osain, thank you. . . . I think you start the healing good already. I could do the rest myself” (228). Ti-Jeanne is not intimidated by Osain and neither does she feel compelled to obey him, instead she firmly makes a decision for herself. When, in self-deprecating fashion, Ti-Jeanne tells Legbara that Rudy's defeat was all his doing he replies:

“Well, is you call all my duppy to come do your bidding. And child, you do a thing I never see nobody do before. For a few minutes there, you hold eight of the Oldest Ones in your head one time.” (229)



There are many reasons why Ti-Jeanne might be described as ‘weak’ in conventional terms: her gender, her race, her fragmented family, her status as a single mother, immigrant and resident of the Burn. But, none of these are detrimental to her strength because of her connectedness to a creolised system of spirituality and her own ability to improvise and create anew. Every part of her subjectivity is supported and enhanced by her connection to the Oldest Ones, her aptitude at cultural translation and her creolising inventiveness which are all related to her Caribbean heritage.

After killing Rudy and righting the spiritual balance in the Burn, Ti-Jeanne returns to Simpson house and continues her grandmother’s healing practice with the help of Mi-Jeanne. During the period of Mami’s nine-night wake, Ti-Jeanne is overwhelmed by people seeking treatment and after a string of patients she realises that it is Legbara sending the sick people to keep her occupied. She tells him that: ““I go do this for a while, but I ain’t Mami. I ain’t know what I want to do with myself yet, but I can’t be she”” (BG 244). She is respectful towards her spiritual guide, but at the same time she affirms her self-possession facilitated by the fact that she has embraced her cultural legacy and confronted her personal history. Ti-Jeanne has only been able to get to this point by resolving her “uneasiness towards her multiple, overlapping identities by welcoming her [creolised] self” (Salvini 186), through translation and invention. “By valorizing the strengths and abilities available to a single, black, inner-city-dwelling mother, Hopkinson strongly suggests that it may well be the present-day ‘survivor,’ as Audre Lorde puts it, who will be best equipped to survive in the future” (Davis Rogan 95). Ti-Jeanne’s single biggest strength is her adaptability, “the gift of her ancestors” to paraphrase Maya Angelou (“Still I Rise”), the ability to creolise that which oppresses you, to not only make it a part of you,

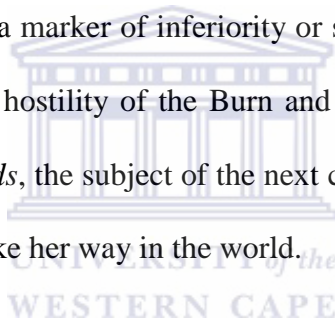
but to inject yourself into it as well, in the same way as Mami's spiritual essence creolises the heartless Uttley.

Arlene Keizer argues that, in Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved*, "the racial-caste system of American slavery operates by dismembering, both figuratively and literally, the body and spirit of the slave" (23). One sees the same disarticulating processes at work in *Brown Girl*, most prominently in Mami and Melba, and the resistance to these processes is spiritual in both novels. Keeping the past alive "in memory through ritual observances" (23), and focusing on an alternate space, the spiritual world, enables the possibility of a different, more empowering, subjectivity. This subjectivity overtly binds the physical and spiritual together and stands in opposition to the one prescribed by the oppressive system. Keizer also argues that "[i]t is through improvisation . . . that the characters in *Beloved* psychically integrate themselves in the face of the white-supremacist, capitalist system that threatens to pull them apart" (23). Without her guide Legbara and the creolised spiritual system her grandmother initiates her into, Ti-Jeanne's body and spirit would have been separated by Rudy who represents both the influence of the white-supremacist, capitalist system in the Burn and the violence colonised women have had to face at the hands of colonised men. Rudy's defeat is the definitive evidence of the power of Ti-Jeanne's creative improvisation. As a member of a diasporic community she "define[s] [herself] specifically in *opposition* to the nation state in which [she] live[s] against the grain, creating turbulations in the fabric of the nation that are both *of* the nation and *not of it*, simultaneously foreign and native in both directions" (Langer 57, italics in original). The simultaneity of foreign and native is encapsulated by her creolising, improvisational practices, a form of "self-fashioning" (Keizer 23), which are expressions of Caribbean-immigrant selfhood and agency.

With no solid ground under her feet, Ti-Jeanne's adaptability and inventiveness allow her to grow from a young woman, adrift and unanchored from personal and cultural history into a self-assured one at the end of the novel. Successfully challenging the authority of the predatory Western hospital which represents technology in the service of empire and defeating her spiritually and morally corrupt grandfather she is victorious on two different but related fronts. Initiated into the service of the spirits, Ti-Jeanne learns the importance of maintaining the integral links between the physical, spiritual and communal spheres and the dangers of elevating one of these over the others, or conversely, denying one completely, the way Uttley disregards the spiritual, or Mi-Jeanne discards the physical, and Rudy denies the communal. At the same time, serving the spirits fortifies her connections to the past and the reader is reminded of the interlocking nature of different temporalities. As postcolonial science fiction, *Brown Girl in the Ring* presents indigenous and "other colonized systems of knowledge" as being just as valid, if not more scientifically sound, than Western scientific thought while also demonstrating how harmful Western scientific thought can be to "societies and cultures whose own worldviews are built on a different basis entirely" (Langer 130-131). In the novel, spirituality and alternative frames of knowledge operate strategically in that they embody temporal shifts that draw together temporal spaces of the past, present and future that are conventionally seen as discrete.

Mami and Ti-Jeanne's synthesis of oppositional systems of knowledge show how productive and regenerative such a creolisation can be, but also that "indigenous, colonized and postcolonial scientific literacies" do not exist only in the past and that they indeed have a place in the future (Langer 152). The oscillation between the cultural and familial past and the present, set in a future Toronto, trace the mutual influence between the different temporalities. Langer's point is also pertinent to Toni Morrison's observation that black women have had to deal with

‘modern’ problems from before the nineteenth century (Gilroy 221). Morrison’s words reflect how black people, particularly women, living under the forces of European colonialism and slavery have had to deal with challenges most Western people have only had to face in our current time of late capitalism and accelerated globalisation, particularly challenges to autonomy and self-determination. Slaves and their descendents attempted to remedy the cultural and personal fracture of the Middle Passage through, amongst other things, a spirituality that stressed the interconnectedness between the physical, the spiritual and the communal. Ti-Jeanne, as a grandchild of a Caribbean immigrant, finds solace and strength in spiritual resources extracted from her past in a future Toronto marred by the consequences of colonial exploitation. Rather than her Caribbean heritage being a marker of inferiority or simply a reminder of slavery, it is a valuable resource to negotiate the hostility of the Burn and the predatory Canadian state at its borders. Like Mer in *The Salt Roads*, the subject of the next chapter, Ti-Jeanne draws on cultural spiritual reserves of strength to make her way in the world.



## Chapter 4

### Sugar and Salt: Creolisation at the Crossroads of “forgetting and remembering” in *The Salt Roads*

Music is our witness, and our ally. The beat is the confession which recognises, changes and conquers time. Then, history becomes a garment we can wear and share, and not a cloak in which to hide; and time becomes a friend.

– James Baldwin (cited in Gilroy 203)

The title of *The Salt Roads* reflects the ways in which the novel is grounded in the diasporan sensibility and cosmology typical of Caribbean women’s fiction. It invokes the Caribbean expression, ‘sucking salt’ which means to endure hardship, which is counterposed to the sweetness of the sugar cane fields on the plantation. It also conjures the crossroads of creolisation, “of forgetting and remembering,” where an elusive past must be re-imagined in relation to an uncertain future (Balutanski and Sourieau 9). In the novel Hopkinson seeks out the source, the poisonous well-spring of the reverberations of oppression and hardship one finds in the futures depicted in *Brown Girl in the Ring* and *Midnight Robber*.

The main character of the novel, the Vodoun *lwa* Ezili, connects three mortal women of colour who all have different experiences of enslavement. The narrative jumps between Ezili, Mer in mid eighteenth-century Saint Domingue,<sup>92</sup> Jeanne Duvall in nineteenth-century Paris, and Thais in fourth-century Egypt. Ezili is brought into existence in Saint Domingue by the prayer, chanting and singing of three slave women, Mer, Tipingee and Georgine, and the spirit of Georgine’s stillborn son that they are burying by the riverside. But Ezili has also always existed as a fractal of various African goddesses. This temporal paradox is crucial to how Hopkinson employs temporality in the novel: a fluid movement, moving backwards and forwards by unseen

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<sup>92</sup> Saint Domingue was also known as the Pearl of the Antilles, France’s most profitable colony, and later after the successful slave revolt and independence, Haiti. The historical Makandal, the maroon leader, was executed in 1758 for his plot to poison all the white people on the island and in the novel his execution occurs near the end of Mer’s timeline. Thus, one can assume that Mer’s story takes place around or more likely after 1750.

currents, aligning with Kamau Brathwaite's notion of tidalectics which foregrounds the importance of the sea to Caribbean people. Ezili uses the salt roads, the waterways in the Ginen's minds, to travel through time to her people:<sup>93</sup> "When *lwa* come to visit their 'children,' whether in a formal, public ceremony or in private times of dream or individual communion, they come by way of the *chemin de l'eau*, or water road" (Dayan, "Voice of the Gods" 17). While fractals evoke hard, edged surfaces, the waterways are fluid, alternately soothing and tumultuous, and these contradictions embody the tensions which spring from creolisation itself and the violence at its centre. Ezili's nature and the structure of the novel are fragmented and tangled, with the breaks between chapters both fracturing and binding the over-arching narrative together in a fashion similar to diasporic music such as jazz, breakbeat and rap.

The novel opens with a "BEAT. . . ." and then a pause before the story commences. Hopkinson consciously employs a fragmentary pattern in the structure of the novel by separating chapters with "bits of music/song/rhythm/pattern" which are "reassemble[d] by the end into a chant . . . [which] reference[s] African musical stylings that do that: jazz, breakbeat, and so on" (Hopkinson and Due 400).<sup>94</sup> The fragmentation is not just about fracturing or breaking apart, but also about creating *fractals*. As noted in the introduction, a fractal is a part which resembles the whole on a different scale. Fractals can be observed everywhere in nature, for example, in the structure of some plants' leaves where the main shape is repeated in progressively smaller form (Eglash n. pag.). Cyberneticist Ron Eglash, studying ethnomathematics (the relationship between culture and mathematics), observed intentional, man-made fractals in Zambian villages where

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<sup>93</sup> "Ginen" is the name Ezili uses to refer to her followers and also the name the slaves in Saint Domingue in Mer's time use to refer to themselves. Ginen refers to Guinea in West Africa, referencing their lost home, and it is also the word used to denote the spiritual world (under the waters) of Vodoun where the *lwas* dwell (Dayan, "Voice of the Gods" 17).

<sup>94</sup> The print version of *The Salt Roads* includes an interview with Hopkinson conducted by Tananarive Due in which she talks about the thematic underpinnings of the novel.

mathematical and social patterns align: the largest pattern is the village itself, repeated in smaller form by the compounds of the different families, then the chief's compound where each wife's house is a smaller fractal and where the innermost, smallest fractal is for the spirits, the ancestors. The smallest fractal, the spiritual one, is at the centre: its influence spreads out and can be observed in the others, but they can also be recognised in it. When asked about the rhythm she created in the novel, Hopkinson refers to her understanding of fractals which "can have broken or disrupted patterns in their elements that also get repeated" and she links this natural phenomenon to African diasporic design which often: . . . [B]reaks an existing pattern, then makes a pattern of the broken pattern. Kenta cloth does this, as do the musical genres of scratching, jazz, and breakbeat (Hopkinson and Due 400). Thus, turning to creative and responsive fracturing, through creolisation, the enslaved were able to survive not only physically, but also culturally and spiritually, as can be seen particularly in Vodoun where aspects of more than one African spiritual system is brought together with Catholicism which "reassembled the bits, changed, but into new wholes" (400). The almost oral structure of the novel recalls diasporic music which bears witness and, in James Baldwin's estimation, makes it possible to question master narratives of history. This is in accord with Hopkinson's use of science fiction to "reconsider whose stories deserve to be told, whose narratives shape the future . . ." (Hopkinson cited in Sanders n. pag.).

In the moments preceding Ezili's birth, Tipingee digs the grave for Georgine's stillborn son while she chants the story of "The Singing Tortoise," a Haitian folklore tale (Courlander 70). At the same time, Georgine talks about her surrogate mother Calliope and her death by drowning, appealing to her to take care of her dead son, while Mer is praying to Lasirèn (a version of Ezili) to take them all away from slavery (*TSR* 36-37). Each woman's words, whether

spoken, thought or sung, make an appeal for freedom, for release from hardship. What unites the three appeals is the protest against captivity and death, but paradoxically also love and release;<sup>95</sup> it is out of this paradox, the stillborn child's burial—a beginning which is also an end—that Ezili is born. She describes her birth as follows:

I'm born from song and prayer. A small life, never begun, lends me its unused vitality.  
I'm born from mourning and sorrow and three women's tearful voices. I'm born from countless journeys chained tight in the bellies of ships. Born from hope vibrant and hope destroyed. Born of bitter experience. Born of wishing for better. I'm born. (40)

Significantly, it is the death of another (potential) child which helps Ezili reunite with her other fractals, including the Egyptian goddess Hathor. In one of the other two temporal strands of the novel, Ezili steers the pregnant slave-prostitute Thais<sup>96</sup> from Alexandria to Aelia Capitolina (Jerusalem) where she senses the other spiritual beings and goddesses who are fractals of her and of whom she is a fractal. As they arrive Thais miscarries and Ezili:

. . . [tears] loose from Thais, as the little dot of cells tears away from her too. I'm tumbling, no control. That would have been a child, that thing growing in Thais. As I am a child in this spirit world. I don't learn fast enough. It didn't learn fast enough how to stick in Thais's belly. (303)

Here Ezili bemoans her inability to help her people, the Ginen, because she has not yet learned how to control her movements in the aether world. She is not depicted as an all-powerful

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<sup>95</sup> In "The Singing Tortoise" the titular character and the farmer who captures him narrowly escape death by virtue of the tortoise's magical singing ability and his compassion when he saves the farmer from execution (Courlander 71).

<sup>96</sup> Thais leaves for the journey not knowing that she is pregnant by a sailor client and she only realises that she was pregnant when she miscarries at the church in Jerusalem.



goddess, but instead as an imperfect spiritual being who does what she can through almost imperceptible nudges to influence people to help those who pray to her.

In the pivotal scene where Ezili meets the other parts of herself she remarks: “I had met myself, had learned that I must fracture in order to fight” (*TSR* 322). Hopkinson explains that there are many different iterations of the *lwa*:

. . . some ‘bigger’ and better known than others. *The Salt Roads* is about three aspects of Ezili: Ezili Frèda, the coquette; Ezili Danto, the ancient in mourning; Ezili Red-Eye, the deity enraged. But as Ezili discovers her selves, she realizes that she is everywhere, in small versions and large, and that each of her selves echoes the others and is connected to them. (Hopkinson and Due 401)

This fractured nature, the not-quite repetition recalls diasporic music in an overt fashion. The chapter breaks are brought together into a chant in the moment when Ezili unites with the other female deities (*TSR* 305-307), showing that some unity exists despite the fissures. Reflecting the fractal nature of the deities, the chant itself is not a perfect assemblage of all the chapter-breaks since it is altered in a subtle way. The deities are fractals of themselves, but the mortal women they connect are also fractals of the spiritual beings.

They are a sour slave woman who knows hope is dead, holding a baby’s head as its mother pushes it out of her womb. They are a vain girl with soft, black hair, dancing on a Greek sailor’s prick. They are a ginger-haired woman, drunk on smoke and sex and staring in to a pot of piss. And more than these, and more. (304)

In addition to this reference to Mer, Thais and Jeanne, Ezili mentions many other women whom she inhabits and connects across time: the warrior queen Nzingha of N’gola and her sisters Kfinju and Mukumbu who hold off the Portuguese occupation of their land, the free coloured

women of Port-au-Prince who march in defiance of oppressive laws, Rosa Parks, and the queer women of colour who fought at Stonewall (306; 310; 311). With the exception of Ezili, the common thread which connects them all is oppressive violence, both personal and structural, which results in some form of fracture in their subjectivities and “the constant fragmentation and differing of the self [is] enacted by Ezili inhabiting bodies in diverse contexts . . . enabl[ing] alliances among the disenfranchised across time and space, race, gender [and] sexuality” (Marinkova 191).

The structure of the novel draws together the lives of different women of colour and their experiences prompt the reader to consider the question of “*what it means* to be political and *how* one can be political in a climate of disillusionment with available ideologemes” (Marinkova 184, italics in original). In her chapter, “Revolutionizing Pleasure in Writing: Subversive Desire and Micropolitical Affects in Nalo Hopkinson’s *The Salt Roads*” (2012), Milena Marinkova analyses the novel through a Deleuzian lens. She focuses on micropolitics which foreground the combined effects of multiple forces which exert influence over subjectivity. A micropolitical act is “a creative and affect-driven intervention into power relations that resist containment within conventional (macro)political structures,” defined as an “institutionalised version of politics on a macro level” (183). Her reading has been particularly useful in analysing the connected female characters and the Ezili who binds them together; it also connects to Keizer’s notion of self creation under oppressive conditions (11), and the role that creolisation plays in that creation. The “stability of imagining oneself as whole” was only available to white people during slavery, and creolisation is in part a strategy to deal with the splitting of the self, a reaction to the “physical, mental, and spiritual onslaught perpetrated by white-supremacist ideology” (29). As

emphasised earlier, in considering the concept of creolisation, one must look back to the plantation where its origins can be located.

The plantation is a microcosm of the larger system of slavery and it is the violent origin of creolisation, as identified by Glissant, Benítez-Rojo and Brathwaite (Burns 4).

[T]he certainty about creolisation is that it inevitably refers to the plantation . . . [which] repeats itself endlessly in the different states of creolisation that comes out here and there in language and music, dance and literature, food and theater. (Benítez-Rojo 56)

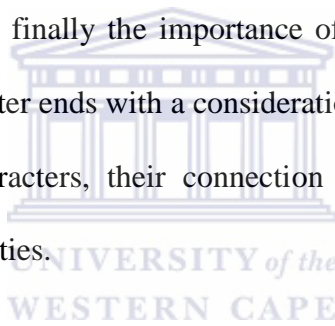
Fundamentally, the novel is about the violence of slavery which was the catalyst for creolisation, and therefore it is crucial that Mer's story is set on a plantation in Saint Domingue. The successful slave revolt in Saint Domingue was (and remains) an important symbol in the Caribbean:<sup>97</sup> a place where the move from opposition to resistance was successful, a move that came at a great cost because of the violence it necessitated. Saint Domingue demonstrates "the complicity of civilization and brutality . . . emphasizing that the order of authority on which the slave plantation relied cannot be undone without recourse to the counter-violence of the oppressed" (Gilroy 63). By choosing to depict not the rebellion itself, but the period leading up to it, Hopkinson makes the reader aware of some of the conditions that made it possible, particularly the role women played which has been mostly neglected in favour of a focus on male-driven resistance and violence.

This chapter's structure, like the others, is informed by teleological, diasporic and generational temporalities, but first I will discuss the act of bearing witness, the recurring motif of the garden, and the symbolic significance of food in the novel in order to lay the groundwork for the sections to follow. Thereafter, I will evaluate the master-slave dynamic and how control

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<sup>97</sup> This importance is also clear in *Midnight Robber* where the new planet colonised by the Marrayshvites is named for Toussaint L'Ouverture, the leader of the slave rebellion.

is enacted on the body in a way similar to how it is depicted in *Brown Girl in the Ring*. Additionally, in this part of the chapter, I will discuss the influence of Edgar Allan Poe, via Charles Baudelaire, on Jules Verne's science fiction and why it is important to examine the novel's science fictional attributes which have been largely ignored by critics. Related to this is the depiction of indigenous technology (medicinal knowledge and practice) as equal to Western knowledge and technology. The discussion of the diasporic elements of the novel will include an analysis of Hopkinson's representation of temporality in the novel partly through the metaphor of (salt) water as a key element of the symbolic structure of the narrative. Also addressed is the significance of Africa to the slaves on Saint Domingue, the linkages between the spiritual and physical spheres of existence, and finally the importance of Makandal, his *Iwa Ogu* and their relation to Mer and Ezili. The chapter ends with a consideration of the generational aspects of the novel relating to the female characters, their connection to Ezili, and how motherhood is portrayed in the different temporalities.



A succinct yet all-encompassing plot summary of the novel is not feasible because the storyline is sprawled across several centuries and moves between the different members of the main cast of characters. Therefore, I will only highlight the most prominent features of the plot in order to provide a frame of reference for the analysis to follow. While Ezili travels through time and the spiritual aether, the three women she is bound to are anchored in their own times. Thais (also called Meritet by her friends and Pretty Pearl by her customers), the half Nubian, half-Greek slave hails from the earliest time in the novel, 345 C.E., and works as a prostitute in a brothel in Alexandria. Together with her friend Judah who is also a prostitute, she absconds to Jerusalem, then known by its Roman name, Aelia Capitolina. Her narrative, which is introduced about halfway into the novel, details how she became “the dusky saint” of Egypt. Thais's story

line serves to underscore the long history of slavery and its commodification of human bodies. Mer's narrative shares these thematic elements with Thais's, but her story takes place in the colony of Saint Domingue, in the mid to late eighteenth century. In turn, Mer's story overlaps and intersects with Jeanne's in nineteenth century Paris.

Mer is a healer and respected elder amongst the slaves on a plantation that exemplifies the harsh conditions that slaves, in particular the slave women, endured on the island. Her spirituality and her relationships with her lover Tipingee, and antagonist-turned-friend Georgine, provide her with much-needed resources to face the dehumanising treatment she is subjected to. The combination of her staunch pragmatism<sup>98</sup> and her steadfast belief in Lasirèn (the name she gives to the aspect of Ezili who communicates with her) embodies what Morrison calls the "acceptance of the supernatural and a profound rootedness in the real world . . . with neither taking precedence over the other." To Morrison, this way of thinking:

. . . is indicative of the cosmology, the way in which Black people looked at the world. We are a very practical people, very down to earth, even shrewd people. But within that practicality we also accepted what I suppose could be called superstition and magic, which is another way of Knowing things. (cited in Braxton 300)

Mer's practicality helps her survive, and in turn helps the other slaves endure, while her spirituality is an immense resource which gives meaning to her life. In contrast, Jeanne (also known as Lemer and by her dancer/escort name Prosper), cares little or spirituality and is concerned only with practicality, but it is she, not Mer, who is the mortal vessel to whom Ezili is bound for the majority of the novel. Hopkinson acknowledges Angela Carter's "The Black Venus" as part of the inspiration for imagining the life of Charles Baudelaire's real life mistress,

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<sup>98</sup> When Makandal is executed, Mer thinks to herself: "I wanted to believe that Makandal flew away, but my wishes can't fly freely so. They're rooted to the ground like me, who eats salt" (*TSR* 349).

Jeanne Duval, of whom there is so little known (TSR 394).<sup>99</sup> Her story centres on her financial struggles as a woman of colour in the Parisian metropole of the nineteenth-century and her tumultuous relationship with Charles Baudelaire. Her narrative is haunted by the not-too-distant spectre of slavery and interwoven with the same thematic elements as Mer's and Thais's, but with the additional context of a burgeoning industrial modernity built on the backs of black slaves and their labour.

*The Salt Roads* demonstrates how powerful the act of bearing witness can be when it is authentic and unflinching. The violence done to black bodies in the novel is seen primarily through Mer's eyes, eyes she wants to avert from the horror, but which she keeps open to witness. When Milo, a slave, boasts about the success of Makandal's plot to poison the white people on the island, another slave informs the *backra* (whites, also referred to as the *blans*). To make an example of him, Simenon the plantation owner flays him alive in front of a captive audience.

That afternoon, he made us all to gather round and watch. Milo he made to be tied to stakes in the ground to scream out his life while Master Simenon peeled the skin from his twitching body with a knife. Peeled away all the skin, leaving the white fat glistening, quivering. "You want to be white?" the master shouted over Milo's howling as he cut his ears off. I had heard about this blanching of black people before. Mama, please you make

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<sup>99</sup> In the preface to Baudelaire's *Intimate Journals* (1938), Christopher Isherwood describes Baudelaire and Jeanne's relationship as follows:

Shy men of extreme sensibility are the born victims of the prostitute. Baudelaire's mulatto mistress, Jeanne Duval, was a beautiful, indolent animal. She squandered his money and slept with his friends. The biographers usually condemn her; most unjustly. Few of us would really enjoy a love-affair with a genius. Jeanne had to endure Baudelaire's moods and listen to his poems; she understood neither. But, in some mysterious manner, these two human beings needed each other. They stayed together, on and off, for twenty years. Baudelaire always loved and pitied her, and tried to help her. Hideous, diseased, she limps out of his history on crutches and disappears. (viii)

me dead before I ever see it again. Three hours it took Milo's spirit to flee his body, back to Guinée. (*TSR* 62)

Milo's crime was to take pride in the covert black opposition in the colony. A 'crime' that was reported by a fellow slave because in the power hierarchy of the plantation a slave can only gain a poor imitation of the master's power by appealing to that power.

To be black in the context of the plantation is, by definition, to have no right to pride because the lives of black people are only valued as commodities and for the labour that can be extracted from them. The symbolic violence of dehumanising black people is made literal and physical in this scene. The torture Milo suffers at the hands of Simenon shows how his crime "had to be 'written,' so to speak, on his body. Punishment, in this sense, is a way of performing the "nature of the power of the [plantation owner] and the consequences of opposing it" (Shirato, Danaher and Webb 86). The impossibility of Milo ever achieving the power that 'whiteness' would confer on him is symbolised by his death in the process of his 'blanching.' While forced to watch the brutalisation of his body, Mer calls out to Lasirèn to never make her witness such horror again. Her only refuge from his physical debasement is her belief in Lasirèn and that Milo will be able to return to their ancestral home in spiritual form. This scene is mirrored by Mer watching powerlessly with other slaves when Makandal is burned alive, executed for his plot against the *backra*. While they are preparing the pyre, Mer thinks to herself, "Oh, let me not see this" (*TSR* 348). This time though she is not alone: "Tipi reached a hand to me. Then Patrice<sup>100</sup> did. I went and stood with them, holding their hands, but facing out from them so that I could see Makandal. I had to bear witness" (348). She overtly acknowledges the importance of being a

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<sup>100</sup> Patrice is Tipingee's husband who recently returned from *marronage*. He tells her that she motivated his return, but the truth is that Makandal convinced him to return to help him gain the support of the slaves for his planned uprising against the whites.

witness, to not avert her eyes, but to face an act so repulsive that “even some of the [white people] watching . . . were weeping by the time it was done” (349). Milo’s torture and Makandal’s execution are incidents which lend credence to W.E.B. Du Bois’s emphasis on “the importance of ritual brutality in structuring modern, civilised life . . .” (cited in Gilroy 119).

As established in the previous chapter, on the plantation, the relationship between master and slave was premised on violence and the dismemberment of the body and spirit of the slave (Keizer 23). Boisvert notes that on Saint Domingue, recaptured runaways had one ear nailed to a post, a practice condoned by the *Code Noir*. Slaves who had to be punished for disobedience were whipped, spread-eagled with their hands and feet tied to posts in the ground: “Enslaved men and women alike were subjected to this kind of brutal treatment. According to C.L.R. James, even the “pregnant woman was not spared her ‘four-post.’ A hole was dug in the earth to accommodate the unborn child” (cited in Boisvert 62). The violence served to mould each slave “into a docile subject who is amenable to being manipulated into habits of industriousness that suit the economic and social interests” of the colonial powers (Schirato, Danaher and Webb 80).

The relationship between master and slave is summed up in the climactic scene which takes place on Christmas day in the great house when the Catholic priest, some of the white overseers and a group of slaves arrive in the room where Simenon and the other white plantation owners are gathered. They enter the house to appeal to Simenon to be merciful in his punishment of Patrice who has returned from marronage.<sup>101</sup> The masters’ control, enforced through violence, becomes internalised, such as when Patrice and Tipingee consciously modulate their reactions

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<sup>101</sup> In keeping with the motif of consumption, the group of *backra* in the great house are eating a sweet mango dessert (a fruit picked and prepared by slaves on Simenon’s plantation) while making a life-changing decision about Patrice’s future.



after the book-keeper<sup>102</sup> ‘jokes’ with Patrice about losing his ears before they enter the great house.

Patrice never said a word to the book-keeper. . . . If he responded, the book-keeper might imagine that a slave dared to make sport with him. Better they think you sullen than insolent. Heart aching with fretfulness, Tipingee squeezed Patrice’s hand, but said nothing either. Too many blans around. (TSR 79)

Father León makes intercession for Patrice with Simenon, appealing to his Christian character to convince him to pardon Patrice by telling him that Christ forgave the sinners in the temple to which Simenon replies: “I am not so holy, Father. . . . There’s no profit in it . . .” (TSR 86). ‘Civilisation’ through religion is often upheld as a justification for slavery, but Simenon does not even pretend that his goals are about anything but profit.

A more subtle testimony to the dehumanizing treatment of slaves on Saint Domingue plantations is related to the recurring motif of the garden in Hopkinson’s fiction. Many plantation owners on Saint Domingue contravened Louis XIV’s *Code Noir*, “a decree issued in 1685 to be followed by masters and slaves” by implementing the Dutch system “where slaves were largely responsible for producing their own food” (Boisvert 63). Because the rations provided to slaves were so nutritionally deficient, especially for the physical labour they were expected to perform, they had to tend their own gardens to supplement their diets. These had to be maintained during the little ‘personal’ time the slaves were permitted and everything that was planted and cared for had an important nutritional or medicinal function. In the novel, when the slaves are mandated to attend a Catholic Church service every Sunday, only a few show up to attend the first one. Mer

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<sup>102</sup> The book-keeper is one of the white people on the plantation who interacts with the slaves the most. He works under the manager, but above the drivers (Burton 257).

explains to the priest that he should have it in the late morning instead to allow everyone to tend to their gardens properly because “[i]t’s the only good food we have to eat, and our only day free from Master’s work to see that our food grows well” (*TSR* 175). Very little land was left over for the cultivation of food crops because profit deemed that virtually all available land was to be used for exportable goods (Boisvert 63). Consequently, slaves had to be content with having almost no time and land to grow and maintain gardens that were their main sources of nutritional food, especially in times of famine in the eighteenth century when imported rations were not distributed to slaves at all (63).

The central contrast with regards to the garden space in the novel is between the decorative rose bushes planted along the edge of the footpath leading to the great house and the functional gardens of the slaves. In *My Garden Book*, Jamaica Kincaid observes that a person’s responses to gardens will depend on where they are from. To illustrate her point, she quotes from Tsitsi Dangaremba’s *Nervous Conditions* (1988). The kind of gardening Tambu, the protagonist, knows at her homestead is concerned with sustenance and survival, but when she goes to live with her uncle and his family at the missionary school she sees cheerful, brightly coloured cannalilies “planted for joy,” and declares that she “too could think of planting things for merrier reasons than the chore of keeping breath in the body . . .” (cited in Kincaid 115). Kincaid argues that Tambu’s ancestors must surely have cultivated plants for “the sheer joy of seeing them all by themselves” but then asks: “At what moment was this idea lost? At what moment does such ordinary, everyday beauty become a luxury?” (117). Hopkinson’s portrayal of gardens in the novel seems to answer this question, at least partly. When Tipingee sees the rose bushes, it is their scent more than their sight that arrests her: “That smell of flowers; that the world should have such sweetness in it! The only flowers in Tipingee’s life were the scratchy yellow blossoms

of her pumpkins” (*TSR* 79). The superfluity of the rose bushes is further emphasised in a conversation between Mer and Ti-Bois, a young slave boy. He tells her that Tipingee’s daughter, Marie-Claire, who works in the great house, told him about the rose bushes and that for a long time he did not believe her because he could not imagine ““that anybody would grow plants that bear no food, just flowers . . .”” (139). In his quest to puzzle out this anomaly, he sneaks into the great house’s garden and pulls one of the rose bushes out of the ground to see if it has edible roots. Still not believing Marie-Claire’s fantastical tale of a purely decorative plant he resorted to eating one of the flowers which ““tasted like the way the perfume smelt that that lady was wearing. The white lady [Simenon’s fiancé] with the fan”” (140). In the world in which Ti-Bois grows up as a slave, only things that have a commodified, measurable function and value are important. His understanding of his world highlights the linkages between commodity culture and plantation slavery and how the emergence of ‘modern’ life is recognisable on the plantation. The fragrant taste of the rose petals recalls the decadent presence of Simenon’s fiancé, who through the eyes of a seven-year-old slave boy, has no function other than to prove Simenon’s power and wealth, wealth which depends on the labour he can extract from his slaves. In the process, the slaves themselves are not only commodities testifying to his wealth, but they are also a kind of sustenance which feeds it.

Saint Domingue was not only France’s most profitable colony in the Atlantic but the most profitable of any colony in the Atlantic in the eighteenth-century. “Without a constant supply of slave bodies, the social and economic systems of the colony” as well as those of the mother country would have been in jeopardy (Weaver 97). The wealth Saint Domingue contributed to the French empire strengthened and sustained it. In his seminal book *Capitalism*

*and Slavery* (1966), Eric Williams quotes French politician and historian Gaston Martin who writes that:

There was not a single great ship owner at Nantes who, between 1714 and 1789, did not buy and sell slaves; . . . [I]t is almost certain that none would have become what he was if he had not sold slaves. In this lies the essential importance of the slave trade: on its success or failure depended the progress or ruin of all the others (cited in Williams 209).

Thus, to simplify the equation, slaves *were* currency, nourishing the French empire through their labour.<sup>103</sup> The “slaves themselves were the idealized embodiment of not only capital but also labor and consumer products in a capitalist economy” and the European consumers, buying sugar and coffee, became part of “a transatlantic trade network that tied the daily nourishment that they put in their bodies directly to the institution of slavery and the slaves that suffered to produce it” (Mount n. pag.).

Hopkinson creates a complicated symbolic fabric which depends particularly on the connections between Mer’s and Jeanne’s temporalities to enforce the connections between consumption, money and black bodies, particularly black women’s bodies.<sup>104</sup> The first time these connections are made overt in Jeanne’s time is when she purposely meets with Lisette (her friend and lover) at the same restaurant where Charles is meeting his mother so she can see the woman who controls his income and who disapproves of his liaison with Jeanne because she is a woman of colour. His mother starts a conversation, loud enough for Jeanne and Lisette to

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<sup>103</sup> In this context it is fitting that Makandal’s plan centred on poisoning the food and water of the white people in the colony by enlisting the help of the kitchen and house slaves who were responsible for preparing meals. This part of the plot also fits with Hopkinson’s emphasis on the impact of the colonial enterprise on both colonised and coloniser since the project of slavery, which fed the empire, also poisoned the psyche of the coloniser.

<sup>104</sup> For example, while Ezili ‘rides’ Jeanne, she learns that “. . . her and her kin are your [Charles and other white, French people’s] spices, your honey scent; she knows that you and your class have made them so” (*TSR* 58). Linking to the idea of black bodies as sustenance is the fact that, Achille, the black man Jeanne falls in love with near the end of her life, makes an excellent living as a restaurateur in Paris, feeding a primarily white clientele who do not know that the owner is black.

overhear, about “blackberries” (referring to Jeanne). She describes the fruit as bearing only briefly, having an “almost vulgar tartness,” telling Charles that if he eats too much of it he will spoil his taste for “more genteel fruit,” and finally, that they make a “dreadful dark stain” on one’s fingers: “you’d think that black mark will never come out” (*TSR* 54).

Charles’s mother, none too subtly, tells her son that Jeanne is below him and “vulgar” purely because of her skin colour, a “black mark” on his reputation, and revealingly, she does so by comparing her to food. Ezili continues to foreground the connections between black bodies as commodities, food and money when she observes Charles and Jeanne interacting shortly after the restaurant visit. Addressing her thoughts to Charles, she muses that his mother:

. . . would name [Jeanne] monstrous it seems, not beautiful. Your mother would think the ginger woman’s pale brown skin too near the colour of dirt. Is that so bad, then? “Dirt” seems to be a kind of food. Food brings life. . . . Your mama would be mortified to know that any gentleman can have the pleasure of the ginger woman’s voice on the stage, the sight of her beauty, perhaps even in a private assignation, if he can afford it. (*TSR* 56)

In this short passage, Jeanne’s status as commodity and sustenance is underlined. The “ginger” woman whose company can be bought, whose dusky colouring makes her both unclean in a physical and spiritual sense, is inferior to or beneath Charles because she is forced to commodify herself in order to survive.<sup>105</sup> In contrast to what she imagines Charles’s mother’s thoughts to be, Ezili sees value in Jeanne’s associations with “dirt” and “food” instead of diminishing her worth because of those connotations.

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<sup>105</sup> On a walk in Paris, Jeanne describes Baudelaire, the poet so dissatisfied with modernity, in a way which makes his role as consumer obvious. In a description which recalls his poem “Le Soleil,” Jeanne observes that: “It was all sport to him. He stalked through the Paris streets, always looking, looking. Eating up what he saw. We were all just food for his eyes, his pen. Fodder for making stories with” (*TSR* 182).

Continuing her observations, Ezili watches Charles play with Jeanne's hair:

She remembers how deeply you inhaled, how you breathed as you might the needful air the scents of that place—the Indies?—from her hair; remainders of things that had lived once; cinnamon and nutmeg and oil of cacao.<sup>106</sup> Sweet perfumes, her mind tells me; not bitter. She wishes she could bind you to her with that hair; you and your money. “Money” seems to also be a kind of food, and the woman wants for it often. Goes hungry for lack of it. (*TSR* 57)<sup>107</sup>

Charles reduces Jeanne to a sexualised object that connotes the foreign, exotic spaces of Africa and the West Indies<sup>108</sup> and, in an equally reductive fashion, the majority of Jeanne's affection for Charles comes from a place of practicality. He likes her for her spirit, “[s]aid hot country women always had more fire,” but in Hopkinson's formulation of Jeanne, not only is *she* born in France, but so is her mother (51). There is no historical clarity as to where the real-life Jeanne was born, but by making her and her mother's place of birth France, Hopkinson emphasises the multifarious intersections between not only class, race and gender, but also nationality, and therefore, belonging. Jeanne's subjectivity is “traversed by numerous identitarian allegiances (racial, linguistic, political, gender, class, religious and sexual” (Marinkova 190). In highlighting these intersections, the novel as a whole bears witness to the experiences of women of colour which have been over-simplified or, more often, erased completely from the master narratives of history. And, by tracing linkages between black bodies as commodities, sustenance and wealth,

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<sup>106</sup> This particular passage draws from Baudelaire's poem “La Chevelure” (“Head of Hair”) which was about Jeanne Duval. In this poem he calls her hair an “ebony sea” smelling of “. . . oil of coconut, of musk and tar” (Aggeler translation, *Les Fleurs du Mal* 79).

<sup>107</sup> Later in the novel, Ezili states that “I know what money is now, and I had been correct in my first apprehension; in some ways, it *is* food” (*TSR* 151-152, italics in original).

<sup>108</sup> In more than one way, Jeanne's relationships with Lisette and Achille counter Baudelaire's commodification of her.

Hopkinson emphasises the brutality enmeshed with modernity and capitalism: Slavery “fuell[ed] capitalism’s industrial march but also its expanding culture of unbridled consumption” (Mount n. pag.). Thus, modernity, capitalism, slavery and also science and technology form a dense nexus bonded to the Enlightenment.

In his thesis about the Enlightenment, science and slavery, Eric Otremba cites numerous scholarly works from 1975 to 2010 that he collectively labels as Atlantic science studies which analyse the strands connecting Dutch, Portugese, British and French slavery in the Atlantic to the developing sciences in Europe (26). This kind of research subscribes to the constructivist view of science which “focuses on broader social and cultural cues when explaining the evolution of scientific ideas” but also stresses that such external forces have an active role in creating and shaping scientific thought and knowledge (24). “[W]orks in Atlantic science emphasize not only the inclusion of Atlantic spaces such as Africa and the Caribbean, but assert that these places took active roles in helping to form early modern science within European imperials centers” (26-27). Using such an approach “shows how plantations were once integral to notions of Enlightenment and modernity . . . [and how they] contributed to shaping modernity as we know it” (28). The analysis which follows serves to clarify the importance of considering the novel as science fiction because the genre encapsulates the linkages between modernity, ‘progress,’ industry and science and technology. The minor plot line involving Charles Baudelaire’s interactions with a young Jules Verne functions to foreground the connections between not only technology and modernity, but also slavery. This discussion in turn contextualises the examination of how Hopkinson portrays Afro-Caribbean versus Western medicinal knowledge and practice in the novel by underscoring the influence of spirituality and communal responsibility in relation to technology. Returning to the time of slavery offers “a means to



restage confrontations between rational, scientific, and enlightened Euro-American thought and the supposedly primitive outlook of prehistorical, cultureless, and bestial African slaves” (Gilroy 204).

In Paris, Jeanne witnesses two brief meetings between Baudelaire and Verne, both at salons.<sup>109</sup> The first time, Baudelaire tells Verne to read Edgar Allan Poe because he is “a visionary” and offers him a copy of his French translation of Poe’s short story “Mesmeric Revelation” (1844), which details a conversation between a doctor and his mesmerised patient (TSR 191-92). In the second encounter, Verne tells Baudelaire how inspired he was by Poe (234). Hopkinson’s choice of this specific short story presents an intriguing intersection with her own novel. Poe’s story revolves around what was at the time of writing a new, sensationalist ‘science’ which Poe brings together with the supernatural or sacred since the patient and the doctor discuss the meaning of God and the afterlife. This overlap and interaction between science and spirituality is reflected in *The Salt Roads* as well, but in a different, distinctly diasporic way.

“Mesmeric Revelation” describes a kind of consciousness “that operate[s] beyond the opposition between logic and feeling” (Chu 5). Below is part of the explanation the patient, Mr. Vankirk, offers as to the effect of mesmerism on his thinking.

“I repeat, then, that I only half felt, and never intellectually believed. But latterly there has been a certain deepening of the feeling, until it has come so nearly to resemble the acquiescence of reason, that I find it difficult to distinguish between the two. I am enabled, too, plainly to trace this effect to the mesmeric influence.” (n. pag.)

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<sup>109</sup> When Charles introduces Jeanne to the young French playwright, Verne blushes and barely makes eye contact with Jeanne and then “fairly stumbled in his eagerness to get away” (TSR 192). It is clear that Jeanne’s presence makes Verne very uncomfortable, but the source of his discomfort is not made clear although his reaction recalls those of other Frenchmen who are flustered by Jeanne’s presumably sexualised presence as a “mulatto” woman.



The dialogue in the story is between the fully conscious doctor, and Mr. Vankirk who the reader thinks is merely in a mesmerised state. At the end of the story, however, it is revealed that he had passed away at some point during their conversation. Thus, the states of being in the story are not just about conscious and unconscious (or entranced), but also about being alive and dead. Mr. Vankirk, under the influence of mesmerism describes death as a painful metamorphosis and that the “ultimate life” (n. pag.) one passes over into is in the divine state of being which God occupies, a “higher spiritual level of reality” (Faivre 26). Mesmerism traverses boundaries between the material and spiritual worlds, and in the process also crosses boundaries between science and spirituality. Antoine Faivre describes the story as magical eloquence: “[T]hat is, discourses by magnetized people which contain accounts of visions, prophecies and revelations from worlds beyond, and thus reveal the mysteries of hidden things in the universe, even in the divine world” (33). Mesmerism, or animal magnetism, is not quite the same as hypnotism, although they are often confused. Mesmerism is about an unseen force in the universe which can be manipulated by a trained practitioner to heal physical ailments. This manipulation is of a “physical fluid similar to electricity which is presumed to pervade the universe” (Ketterer 206). Critics seem divided as to whether Poe actually believed in mesmerism or whether it was simply a convenient device to use in his story-telling. But, his interest in it and other pseudo-sciences of astrology and alchemy (206), demonstrate a desire, one the reader can recognise in *The Salt Roads* too, to bring together seemingly disparate realms (physical/divine and scientific/spiritual) and demonstrate their commonalities, and thereby also a belief in a spiritual existence.

In the novel, during their second meeting, Verne tells Baudelaire how much reading his translation of Poe's story had influenced Verne's own writing: "That man, that Poe; what a mind, what a vision!" (*TSR* 233). He gushes over the "marvel" Poe is and the "fantasms" he sees when he reads his work. Inspired by Poe, Verne abandons his efforts at writing realistic plays and starts writing science fiction instead (Hopkinson and Due 399). Hopkinson positions Verne as an influential figure, an important part of the history of science fiction (398), which makes his body of work relevant to reading *The Salt Roads* as part of that genre. A reading of Verne's *Voyages Extraordinaires* (1863-1905), shows that, while Verne was opposed to slavery,<sup>110</sup> he was not necessarily "an egalitarian" (Aberger 200; 201). Peter Aberger argues that:

[T]he humanity of blacks is a value merely in the abstract, and Jules Verne's abolitionist belief does not go as far as proclaiming an equality between whites and blacks. Thus he remains in the tradition of the eighteenth-century *philosophes*, who, while deploring slavery, did not consider blacks as the white man's equals. . . . (201)

To elucidate his argument, Aberger looks at the contrast between the depictions of Africans and black slaves in America in Verne's works. In Africa, black people are barbarians, some are even cannibals. In *Robur le Conquérant* (1886), "the installation of a new king is accompanied by the ritual slaughter of hundreds of black tribal prisoners . . . (201). These savages conform to the "'scientific' model of racial inferiority proposed by Gobinua" (Dine 185). The motivation behind such a portrayal of Africans is to justify the colonial project which would bring civilisation to Africa (Aberger 201). Complementing Aberger's reading is Philip Dine's contention that Verne's fiction acted as a "conduit for imperialist ideology" and functioned to promote colonial enterprise and expansion (184). To Verne, Africa "was as much *terra*

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<sup>110</sup> Aberger highlights examples of Verne's opposition to slavery in: *Nord contre Sud* (1887), *Un Capitaine de Quinze ans* (1878), and *L'Île Mystérieuse* (1874-85) (200).

*incognita*, to be peopled with Europeans and European fantasies, as the Earth's core or the moon" (184), a description that conveniently summarises the intimacy between colonialism and science fiction. In contrast to the Africans, black slaves in America are "humanized" thanks to their proximity to the influence of white people: thus, black people's humanity is defined in relation to white civilisation (Aberger 202). Aberger also posits that later in his life, Verne harboured doubts about the right to cultural imperialism, but still viewed the colonial system as "a historically necessary step on the road towards universal progress" (203-204).<sup>111</sup>

In a very different reading of Verne's work, Arthur B. Evans demonstrates how obvious a presence Charles Baudelaire is in Verne's fiction and that "[a]lthough traditionally categorized at opposite ends of the literary spectrum, echoes of Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs de Mal* can often be heard in Verne's texts" (173). For example: the flying machine in *Robur le Conquérant* is named after Baudelaire's poem "L'Albatros," there are connections between Baudelaire's poem "Le Voyage" and the "thematic scope of the *Voyages Extraordinaire*," and the opening lines of "L'Homme et la Mer" are reflected in Captain Nemo's "praises of the sea" in *Vingt Mille Lieues Sous les Mers* (173). He also proposes that Baudelaire's preoccupation with time, as seen in "L'Horloge," is mirrored in Verne's short story "Maître Zacharius," which is about a "Faustian Geneva clockmaker whose soul, bartered for fame and fortune, is consumed by a living incarnation of his handiwork" (174). In both texts, time is definitively linear, modern and destructive.

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<sup>111</sup> Timothy Unwin reads this pessimism in Verne's later novels in a slightly different way since he relates Verne's cynicism to scientific progress. He reads Verne's fiction as not necessarily being about futuristic progress, but about change in the nineteenth century:

[W]hile Jules Verne's novels clearly document a changing world, and while they give detailed descriptions of the technological changes that are occurring, it seems that they are futuristic only in so far as they foresee an era of conflict, anarchy, terrorism, or mass destruction. (Unwin 10).

Therefore, Verne recognises the destructive potential of technology when used in service of war and oppression, but fails to acknowledge how it was used to oppress black people in France's colonial enterprise.

Baudelaire's concern with time is connected to his anxieties about modernity itself and the toll it exacts on the individual. In *The Salt Roads*, the connection between Jeanne, one of the main characters, and Charles Baudelaire transforms him into a minor figure in a story centred in the Caribbean, thus inverting the relations between centre and margin. It would be easy to reduce Baudelaire's appearance in the novel to a one-dimensional representative of modernity who stands in opposition to Jeanne and Ezili, but the poet was clearly ambivalent towards modernity and 'progress,' albeit in a very Euro-centric manner. In relation to Jeanne, he represents a convergence of privilege and because of the ways in which he oppresses Jeanne he cannot be read as an ally. Instead, he functions as a symbol of modernity's inherent contradictions and ambiguities. T.S. Eliot describes him as being "in some ways far in advance of the point of view of his own time, and yet [he] was [still] very much of it, [and] very largely partook of its limited merits, faults, and fashions." Baudelaire, having a sense of his time was "exposed to its follies as well as sensitive to its inventions . . ." ("Introduction" *Intimate Journals* xiii). Therefore, while he may be critical of modernity he was still a part of it.

Baudelaire refers to "Progress" as that which has "atrophied in us all that is spiritual" (*Intimate Journals* 20), making it clear that industrialisation and its attendant technological progress were in opposition to spirituality and harmony. Additionally, Christopher Isherwood states that:

In his lifetime, Baudelaire witnessed the dawn of the Steam Age—a false, gaslit dawn, loud with engines and advertisements, faithless, superstitious and blandly corrupt. Baudelaire foresees the future with dismay and denounces it. . . . [H]e writes: 'Theory of

the true civilization. It is not to be found in gas, or steam, or table-turning.’ (“Preface” *Intimate Journals* ix)<sup>112</sup>

To combat the spiritual corruption of modernity’s industrialisation and technological progress, Baudelaire turned to the occult as an antidote “to the fragmentation and transience of existence” but in the end:

[This turn was] marked by a fatal and quintessentially modern irony: . . . [it] may have offered the semblance of plenitude and happiness in [its] transcendence of daily existence, [but] . . . by definition . . . such feelings [were] out of reach in an eternally irretrievable past. (Leaver 139)

In modernity’s binary thinking, the material and spiritual remain irreconcilable, and the existence of the former precludes that of the latter. The search for a realm of existence that offers meaning to life was a reaction to “the increasingly fast-paced and impermanent nature of urban experience in mid nineteenth-century Paris . . .” (141). The new industries in the city required labour which meant a rapidly expanding population which “lacked an organic sense of community, resulting in an increase in people’s feelings of alienation and deracination” (141). Taken out of its context, Leaver’s statement about feelings of alienation and deracination could be applied to the experience of the slaves transported across the Atlantic to labour on plantations in the Caribbean. This is not intended to necessarily diminish what Benjamin, in “On some Motifs in Baudelaire” calls the shock of modernity as experienced by Baudelaire and his contemporaries (31), but to show that it is a mistake to view it as an original or distinct experience of modernity.

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<sup>112</sup> Here Isherwood seems to conflate a criticism of industry with technology in general.

The violence of modernity was not only enacted spiritually or psychologically for the enslaved, it was inscribed on their bodies; they were turned into literal commodities and treated as such. Baudelaire's appeal to the occult was a "means to bring back a sense of enchantment that had been utterly extinguished by capitalism and commodity culture . . . but mundane existence prevented such a sense from taking root in everyday life" (Leaver 148). For the slaves, it was not simply about regaining a sense of "enchantment" but about a pressing need to survive. Baudelaire's resort to the occult is not entirely novel either, but his appeal to the spiritual seems superficial when compared to Vodoun, the spiritual philosophy of life that was birthed on the plantation through the process of creolisation. "[Vodoun] is a philosophy, a way of life for the majority in Haiti that permeates and sustains their entire being and brings coherence where there might otherwise be chaos (Patrick Bellegarde-Smith cited in Michel, "Worlds Seen and Unseen" 282). As a worldview, it challenges binary thinking by emphasising connections between different people and their experiences, and it opposes European modernity's disavowal of its connections and debt to the Atlantic. Vodoun underscores how creolisation is ultimately a response to modernity. Through Baudelaire's presence in the novel, Hopkinson brings two experiences of modernity into focus, showing how they are similar, but emphasising the fundamental difference that is founded in race.

In answering Tananarive Due's question about the role of science fiction in the novel, Hopkinson explains that much of the novel, particularly the sections focused on Mer and Jeanne takes place in "the context of a Europe prospering from a technological boom and a drive to conquer and exploit as much of the physical world and the people in it as it could" and that it is precisely these circumstances that made Jules Verne's science fictional visions possible. In connection to Mer's time, she points out that:

[T]he most popular entertainments among the rich whites were mesmerism . . . and ballooning (also a new scientific technique). The same people who were trying to channel the dead in parlor games, or who were assembling on the beach to watch balloon lights, were being served by black slaves and had black slaves working their plantations. The same slaves who were compelled to serve were calling their own gods down to visit them in secret meetings at night and were inoculating their children against smallpox. . . . In other words, there isn't such a disjunct between the romantic and the scientific, between the spiritual and the technological. And the world that we are taught to think of as so refined was fuelled and supported by slave labor. That is the stuff of science fiction. (Hopkinson and Due 399-400)

Hopkinson draws the reader's attention to how two groups of people who are viewed in opposition to one another are, in fact, quite similar in that both possess technologies grounded in science, and spiritual practices that operate on faith alone. What sets them apart is that the enslaved's labour footed the bill for the progress in science and technology of the other, progress that is often framed in opposition to the supposed primitiveness of the slaves and their descendants. The subversion of binary thinking (stemming from Enlightenment thinking) is relevant because of the entitlement to domination that attends binaries of nature/culture, advanced/primitive. Hopkinson foregrounds the dependence of both modernity and progress on slavery, showing that, to paraphrase Joan Dayan, without the "shadows" of enslaved black bodies, the Enlightenment would not have been possible ("Amorous Bondage" 265).

Baudelaire, who influenced Verne and provided him with a translation of Poe's work, wrote extensively about both modernity and temporality, two central themes in Hopkinson's novel. In turn, Poe's Southern gothic, which influenced both Baudelaire and Verne, has a deep connection to slavery. In *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (1993), Toni Morrison wrote that "no early American writer is more important to the concept of American Africanism than Poe" (32). She defines American Africanism as the study of "the imaginative uses" of the "carefully invented . . . Africanist presence" in American literature (6). In "The Thousand-and-Second Tale of Scheherazade" (1845), Sinbad encounters a great monster in the desert, and the narrator describes the enslaved creatures (wearing collars reminiscent of slave collars) who ride on the monster's back as "man-animals" (Poe "Scheherazade" n. pag.). Emmy Stark Zitter states that "the confusion as to the creatures' species—Poe refers to them variously as man, animal, and vermin—attests to the conflicting views of blacks inherent in the contradictory ideologies of the South" (56). She further argues that the enslaved creatures who control the monster "and goad it to horrible deeds" are significant because: "The claim that the slaves control their masters, that the master has responsibilities to and for his slaves that enslave him as well, was commonly made by apologists for slavery . . ." (56).<sup>113</sup> In the novel, this particular perspective is evident in Simenon's exchange with Patrice when the latter returns from *marronage*. Just before his fiancé convinces him to grant Patrice clemency,<sup>114</sup> he launches into a speech which reveals much about how he perceives his role as master of the plantation. He asks Patrice what *marronage* was like, telling him that "[y]ou transported yourself free as any wild

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<sup>113</sup> To substantiate her argument, Stark Zitter explains that this kind of reasoning:

. . . would have special resonance for Poe, who had earlier on evidenced a more overt and personal anxiety concerning the power that the slave wields over the slave-owner. In a letter written to his foster father dated 1827, Poe accused Allan of allowing him "to be subjected to the whims & caprice, not only of your white family, but the complete authority of the black. . . ." (56)

<sup>114</sup> Ezili is able to possess Elizabeth, Simenon's fiancé, and makes sure that Patrice's punishment for running away (five lashes with the whip) is relatively light (*TSR* 91).



beast in that bush for a whole year, mocking your master” (TSR 89). It is clear that Patrice’s freedom is an affront to Simenon, but also that he views only the “wild beast” as truly free, as emerges from the rest of his speech.

“What was it like?” he whispered. “Was it glorious? No fretting about how many acres of cane harvested, or how many lazy wretches you need to buy to replace the ungrateful ones who’ve died on you? What was it like to be free? To dig in the soil with sticks for your food, or to hunt wild beasts of the bush for your meat?” (89)

In Simenon’s view, *he* is the one enslaved by the plantation, a point of view which conveniently overlooks not only the dehumanizing horrors of slavery itself, but also the issue of being disconnected or alienated from one’s labour.

In “Amorous Bondage: Poe, Ladies and Slaves,” Joan Dayan uses a pro-slavery review by Poe of James Kirke Paulding’s *Slavery in the United States*, published in 1836, to underscore how slavery impacted on Poe’s writing: “[F]or Poe the cultivation of romance and the facts of slavery are inextricably linked” (240).<sup>115</sup> In the review of Paulding’s defense of slavery, “Poe suggests that the enslaved want to be mastered, for they love—and this is the crucial word for Poe—to serve, to be subservient” (242). Dayan uses the review, and other textual evidence from Poe’s work, to show how intimately love and material possession are linked in his writing, and she extends the link to show the relations between romantic possession, “a reciprocal devouring of self and other” and slavery. She argues that the *Code Noir* turned black people into possessions, assets, thereby turning “a human into a thing” (251), a transmutation Hopkinson highlights in *The Salt Roads*. The central tenet of her argument is that Poe understood that “[t]he

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<sup>115</sup> Many Poe scholars dispute that he wrote the review and while Dayan uses the review more than once to frame her argument, she also offers other evidence for the link between Poe’s writing and slavery.

romance of the Americas . . . depends upon a sequence of subordinations, variously called love, care, or devotion. An entire history of violence, genocide and slavery, it could be argued, is hidden in Poe's apparently tame and visionary landscape sketch" (253).<sup>116</sup> While her argument is about the link between slavery and Poe's Southern gothic, it serves equally well to underscore how present but ignored slavery and the commodification of black bodies are in modernity. Moreover, her exposition of the fundamental role slavery plays in Poe's work adds to the significance of his presence in *The Salt Roads* through his influence on science fiction author Verne, especially since science fiction itself is so intertwined with empire and colonialism.

The pivotal scene where the Catholic priest and slaves enter the great house to plead for clemency for Patrice centres on what the great house stands for: exhibiting the wealth, and therefore power, of the plantation owner whose possessions include the black slaves. Walking down the hallway, Tipingee, a field slave who has never seen the inside of the great house, observes the finery on display and she cannot help but think of the labour that went into creating it. Specifically she dwells on the large lace curtains in front of the windows:

How many hours of toil to weave all that lace? Enough fabric to make dresses for her and Mer and Marie-Claire for the rest of their lives. White dresses. Or maybe the blans had machines to do that work for them. And an army of Ginen, doubtless, to work the machines" (*TSR* 81).<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Dayan summarises her argument as follows:

We need to reread Poe's romantic fictions as bound to the realities of race, keeping "every thing . . . within the limits of the accountable—of the real," as he urged in "The Philosophy of Composition." There is a logic to his excessive attention to blood, things dirtied, and bodies mutilated. Lurking in every effusion of ennobling love is the terror of literal dehumanization: not only the Burkean sublime or the Calvinist's rhetoric of sensation, but that most terrific conversion, the reduction of human into thing for the ends of capital. (252)

<sup>117</sup> The material wealth of the plantation owner and his family trickles down to the house slaves, setting them apart from their field counterparts and originating class divisions: "The Ginen from the great house stood a little way off, dressed in the master's and mistress's cast-off clothes. So fine, those clothes looked. Clean" (*TSR* 346).

Tellingly, not only does she indirectly refer to the Industrial Revolution which happened concurrently with and was partly financed by slavery for a long time (Williams 52), she also creates an overt link between slaves and machines (a common one in science fiction),<sup>118</sup> both of which fuelled modernity.

With regards to the Industrial Revolution, there are significant connections between Caribbean plantations and the rise of industrialised factories in Europe. For example, the plantation is where great advances in industrial technology were made, specifically with the sugar mill which:

. . . was probably Europe's largest industrial complex in the 16th and 17th centuries. Its deployment of state of the art production systems, energy and chemical technologies, and a disciplined labor force sets it apart as something altogether innovative and futuristic. (Beckles 778-79)

Secondly, a primary goal of labour improvement programs in Europe was to establish a “focused and controlled space” where the poor as a commodity could be marshalled and profited from. Such programs “were often developed with work routines and surveillance measures strikingly similar to those employed within Caribbean slave plantations” (Otremba 31). Tipingee’s

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<sup>118</sup> An example of this is Darryl A. Smith’s short story “The Pretended” (2000, published in the first *Dark Matter* anthology), which is about robots who were created, physically and psychologically, in the image of slaves, but who are so successful at the imitation that they are destroyed by their makers. On a train full of other robots who are also going to be destroyed, the protagonist Mnemosyne and her friend Diva Eve argue about whether they are human or not. Mnemosyne asks if the humans are getting rid of them because the robots remind them of what they did to black people during slavery and Diva Eve replies:

“What? Naw, girl. They aint got no regrets bout that. They jes miss pretendin black people aint people and now they know that they machines don’t help none. Fact, they been pretendin black aint people for so long, they accidently builded machines that reminded em that they jes pretending all along.  
 “Ha! It’s even worse, cause even they *machines* done turned out to be black *people*—real live black people. Oh Lord, have mercy! They can’t even pretend it right wid they own machines!” (363-64)

thoughts make explicit the connection between industrialised technology, capitalism and slavery and the place of the plantation in those systems. In Gilroy's words:

Plantation slavery was more than just a system of labour and a distinct mode of racial domination. Whether it encapsulates the inner essence of capitalism or was a vestigial, essentially precapitalist element in a dependent relationship to capitalism proper, it provided the foundations for a distinctive network of economic, social, and political relations. (Gilroy 54-55)

In a sense, much like fractals of African culture and spirituality are woven into their diasporic counter parts, slavery remains as a fractal in the capitalist system that followed it. Thus, it is clear that the plantation as both a physical place and as a symbol, is at the centre of not only creolisation but also enduring relations of power and oppression. As established earlier, Glissant argues that the plantation is a point of origin for the process of creolisation in a cultural, linguistic, religious and genetic sense (65). In the novel, the process of creolisation can be recognised in several aspects of Mer's world: the light-skinned slave Georgine who has a child with a white Frenchman, the creative synthesis of Catholicism with African belief systems and of course the creole language which "was born as a means of communication to be understood by the masters and slaves . . . [which] can be seen as the first example of Caribbean syncretic culture" (Conde 102).<sup>119</sup> While I have been focusing mostly on the positive attributes of creolisation, there is still a continuous (sometimes violent) confrontation within the process of what is valued and what is not: 'proper' French or English versus creole, and light-skinned

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<sup>119</sup> While the slaves are in the great house, just outside the room where the white plantation owners are gathered, Tipingee hears:

An explosion of mirth [coming] from that room of men; the deep, sure voices were full with assurance, with power. They spoke in arrogant France French, not the Saint Domingue French, and not the Kreyòl for the daily work of cutting cane and weeding and whispering to your fellows when the book-keeper was out of ear shot. (TSR 83)

versus dark-skinned people. Creolisation resists and undermines such dichotomies, validating what has been cast as inferior, but because of its violent origins, these tensions remain. For example, the emergence of the complicated colour caste system in Haiti (and other Caribbean islands) is shown in the marriage between Georgine and the white carpenter Pierre, but also between Marie-Claire, Tipingee's daughter who works as a house slave for Simenon, and the free-coloured man Philomise (who is richer than Simenon).<sup>120</sup> Their marriages demonstrate how light skin is privileged over black, a fact that is true not only in their time, but in Jeanne's time as well.

White privilege notwithstanding, there are complexities in Saint Domingue in the novel that cannot be reduced to a simple binary of black/white, or to mere racial differences: Philomise is a free-coloured man who is richer and owns more plantations than Simenon, a white Frenchman.<sup>121</sup> Simenon's whiteness (and his Frenchness) confers a certain social status on him despite being less wealthy, but Philomise has a much higher social standing than Georgine's white, French husband who is a poor carpenter. For instance, her husband is too poor to join the Christmas celebrations in the great house and he ends up attending the slave celebrations with Georgine (*TSR* 76). Of course, the women, black and white, are excluded from this hierarchy of power, although it is clear from Simenon's fiancé's ability to influence him that white women have much more power than black women. Social hierarchies in the novel, and in Caribbean slave societies, were not only affected by gender, race and class. As Boisvert argues "[r]eligion often underlay hierarchical demarcation" too (61). In the great house scene, The Father, wanting to appeal to Simenon's piety, asks the gathered crowd if they know the words to the hymn

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<sup>120</sup> Neither woman had a choice in their marriages, as both were arranged by Simenon who owned Georgine and Marie-Claire.

<sup>121</sup> While Mer admires Philomise because of his wealth, Makandal makes it clear to his followers that during the planned uprising they are to treat free coloureds like *backra* if they do not want to give up their property (*TSR* 113).

“Come, Divine Messiah” and addresses them as “heathens.” “By the look of disdain he directed at the whole bunch, it was clear that he included poor whites and black both in ‘heathen’” (80). In portraying such complexities, Hopkinson demonstrates that historical power relations between oppressed and oppressor are not only determined by race, even if it is the most important factors in said relations.

In two scenes that echo one another, the privilege of white over black is portrayed as understated yet profound. In the one set on the plantation, Mer silently compares herself to the light-skinned Georgine when she examines her to ascertain how her pregnancy is going.

The clean salt scent of Georgine’s body came up in my nose, mixed with sweet rosewater. Me, I smelled of sweat. Her thigh under my fingers was velvet smooth like my baby’s, long lost. My body was dry wood after years of work; the brand that had got infected and nearly killed me tunnelled a ropy knot on my thigh. Her yellow dress reflected the sun back in its own eye. My one frock was a colourless calico cut from a flour sack, washed a thousand times, that Tipingee had darned for me over and over again. . . . Georgine’s skin was steamed milk with a splash of high mountain coffee. Me, the colour of dirt in the canefields. (*TSR* 4)

Mer’s resentment is clear in this scene. She also condemns Georgine for not wanting to marry Philomise, calling her a whore who thinks that a coloured man is not good enough for her (26). Georgine’s skin privileges her: she used to be a house slave before her marriage unlike Mer who only knows the cane fields. Despite the advantages her lighter skin colour affords her, Georgine is still owned, only now by her carpenter husband (who beats her) instead of Simenon, and her lighter skin is likely courtesy of a violent and coerced sexual encounter her mother suffered.

Significantly, Mer's musings end with her comparing both herself *and* Georgine to produce that comes from slave labour (sugar and coffee).

The other scene is in Paris when Jeanne and Lisette improvise a scrying ritual to see who Lisette's one true love will be. Unbeknownst to them, the vision they see is actually of Achille, a black man,<sup>122</sup> whom Jeanne will eventually marry. When Lise sees him, she exclaims, "He was so foul, Lemer! . . . Black as the devil!" (TSR 22). While consoling a distraught Lisette, Jeanne—who, like Mer, keeps these comparisons to herself—thinks of her dark-skinned grandmother. "I said nothing, only thought of the soft creases of my grandmother's face. Once Grandmaman had given me molasses in a plate, and when I ran my fingers through it, it had left lines like those around her eyes and mouth. Sweet lines" (22). Like Mer, Jeanne connects black bodies with plantation produce, laboured over by slaves. These two scenes exemplify how value is assigned to lighter skin and how darker skin is devalued, not only between 'racial' groups, but also within a 'creolised' group and that such questions about value are not confined to the plantation, but reverberate in subtle and overt violence across time.

In terms of teleological time, the slaves, as commodities, do not own their own time which in the profit-motivated environment of the plantation is also viewed as a resource. When Patrice tells Tipingee about how it feels to be a maroon, he emphasises that you labour for *yourself*.

"You're tired when you settle down to sleep at night, just like here on the plantation, but you fall asleep thinking of all the things your labour will bring for you. Not for your master. For you." (372)

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<sup>122</sup> Achille is a friend of Jeanne's 'half-brother' Joël.



In this respect, as in many others, the maroon community is contrasted to the plantation. After Mer convinces the priest to hold his Catholic church service later on Sunday mornings, she thinks to herself that if he had made it in the evening, no one would have come because “[t]hat was when we spent time doing what we wished. Our only time” (176). As a slave whose time belongs to the master, she must carve out time for herself just like the other slaves when they have to *make* time to worship their gods and meet with one another, usually under the cover of darkness as when some of the slaves on Simenon’s plantation meet with Makandal (101). In fear of being discovered they sit and talk in absolute darkness, occupying a hidden time and space.

Technology, modernity, capitalism and slavery are thus all shown to be connected to a linear notion of temporality as a finite resource, particularly through the associations between Poe, Baudelaire and Verne and the contrast between Afro-Caribbean and Western medicine. The master-slave relationship as portrayed in the novel makes it clear that ownership over labour and time is a form of power. As the origin of creolisation, the plantation reveals the intricacies of power relations between oppressed and oppressor and the complexities of subjectivity. Except for these themes connected to a linear temporality, *The Salt Roads*, like the other two novels, features themes connected to diasporic time which informs the structure and plot of the narrative.

Hopkinson uses a diasporan sensibility to structure temporality in the novel, illustrated in the imagery in which time is associated with water. That the sea is a prominent motif in Caribbean literature can be seen, for example, in Derek Walcott’s poem “The Sea is History,” in Kamau Brathwaite’s concept of tidalectics, and in its constant presence in Zee Edgell’s novel *Beka Lamb* as a space of fear, joy and pain. For instance, when Beka hears of Toyocie’s death, “a tidal wave crashed in [her] brain and she was screaming and screaming. . .” (Edgell 158). The “salt roads” Ezili uses to travel signify the trauma and pain of slavery (in tears and blood), but



also the labour (sweat) of it. The “chancre”<sup>123</sup> of slavery blocks her freedom of movement in the waters of the spiritual world as well as her communication with the Ginen. As in *Brown Girl in the Ring*, the connection between the spiritual and physical realms plays an integral role in the story. Vodoun, the creolised spiritual system depicted in the novel, is central to the plot of the narrative, particularly in the conflict between Ezili and the male *Iwa* Ogu which is made corporeal in the struggle between Mer and Makandal who disagree about what must be done to help the Ginen. This multi-layered conflict embodies the troubled position of black women in opposition to colonial power.

In “Speculative Fictions of Slavery,” Madhu Dubey states that these kinds of fictions “attempt to know the past as something other or more than history” by breaking away from realism to discredit “the objective truth-telling claims of modern historiography” (780; 783). In order to make history’s influence on the present (and future) clear, Hopkinson collapses discrete temporalities through Ezili’s easy movements between different times, thereby giving voice to the oft-erased stories of women of colour from different moments in history and demonstrating the commonalities of their individual experiences. Ezili is able to “comprehend the truth of slavery” by abandoning “historical modes of knowing” (784), and instead relying on alternative, spiritual ways of knowing. Through the bodies of the cast of central women characters, the reader is transported to various times to bear witness to their different yet interwoven experiences, learning their truth by feeling rather than fact. In this way, Hopkinson draws back the veil hiding the “unspeakable things, unspoken” and allows the reader to witness the “unwritten” lives of not only slave women, but also their descendants living in Europe (Toni Morrison cited in Dubey 787). Thus, these marginalised voices of women of colour resonate

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<sup>123</sup> The word chancre may refer either to an infectious wound or to a tumorous growth, both of which are relevant to how Ezili perceives slavery and its effects on her people.

within and through Ezili, demonstrating the parallels between their lives, while the “different experiences of oppression and exploitation” of each woman is heard (Marinkova 193).

The way in which Hopkinson uses temporality is influenced, if not determined, by the process of creolisation. Time in the novel is likened to water, which creates a connection to the Middle Passage, but also emphasises its fluidity. Ezili describes how she moves through time in the spiritual realm as if she was “swim[ming] in time as in a stream” (*TSR* 119). The diasporan sensibility informing time in the novel resists linearity and instead underscores the concurrency of temporalities: for Ezili, there is “no progression in a straight line from earliest to latest. Time eddies. I am now then, now there, sometimes simultaneously” (42). Brathwaite’s notion of tidalectics foregrounds how the past is imprinted on the present and future by using the imagery of the sea which is a constant presence in the lives of those who live in the Caribbean and which symbolises the Middle Passage. His sister, Margaret Morgan, explains that tidalectics came from their experience of growing up by the sea in Jamaica and that it is a “way of interpreting our life and history as sea change, the ebb and flow of sea movement . . .” (169). When Tipingee is overwhelmed by her situation, “[e]verything . . . always breaking, everybody . . . always working,” she yearns to “sit by the clean, peaceful wash of the salt sea and pray to Aziri near her waters” (10-11).<sup>124</sup> Similarly, after a hard day of labour in the fields and being whipped for working too slowly, Mer walks into the sea: “Ai, it stung, the salt water. Burning cut on my back, tiny burning nicks on my arms from cane leaves. But the sweat and the dirt washed away” (63). In the end, the sea is both solace *and* pain.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Aziri is a fractal of Ezili and the Fon name of Oshun in the Yoruba culture, most likely named after Lake Azili in West Africa (Dayan, “A Women’s History of Haiti” 28).

<sup>125</sup> Marinkova also notes that salt connotes not only labour and death, but also “the sweat of pleasure in Mer’s love for Tipingee and the drops of self-abandon in Jeanne’s erotic dance for Baudelaire” (192). One could argue that

Salt water, and by extension salt, signals the break from home: Mamadou, a new Muslim slave is forced to eat salted pork (196), just like all slaves who are *seasoned* into slavery and while he eats, he weeps for the loss of his family and culture, the salt of his tears symbolising the loss, the break he is experiencing. When Tipingee reminisces about the stories her mother used to tell her, she thinks about “home” “where her name had been another name that she couldn’t remember now, for that name had drowned in the salt sea of the Middle Passage . . .” (89). But paradoxically, salt water also signals their only connection to home; Mer, named for the sea, communicates with Ezili through it and the “salt roads” that flow through the Ginen’s minds. The sea represents how all the people who “came to [the Caribbean] islands, became fused, smelted in the encounter of fire blood sun lust hate tyranny servitude . . . love” (Morgan 169). This description of tidalectics could be extended to creolisation and it also encapsulates the contradictions inherent in it, expressed in the novel: the salt waters of the sea marks both an end and a beginning, something new birthed by death and violence. In this way, creolisation is a mark of the slaves’ experience of modernity, a simultaneous cultural fragmentation and reformed unity (as also seen, in a European context, in Baudelaire’s poetry).

This violent origin cannot be washed away, but instead it is always lurking under the surface, haunting the collective subconscious.<sup>126</sup> Jeanne has a recurring dream about drowning because when she was young, a sailor told her about a Middle Passage journey during which

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Jeanne licking her lips and “sucking salt” after pleasuring Lisette (*TSR* 16) is a more appropriate example since Jeanne’s enjoyment of sex and the erotic appears to be deeper and more heartfelt when she is with Lisette than with Charles.

<sup>126</sup> The concept of intergenerational trauma has long been an accepted one, but recent (2013) evidence has been found that supports the idea that this kind of trauma is also passed down epigenetically (that is, affecting how genes are read by cells), on a cellular level from generation to generation. Studying Holocaust survivors and their descendants, Nathan Kellerman found that later generations “have been marked epigenetically with a chemical coating upon their chromosomes, which would represent a kind of biological memory of what the parents experienced” (33). The exact consequences of this biological memory are still being investigated, but it is crucial to note that it does not operate in exactly the same way as we understand conventional memory to work.

two-thirds of the “cargo” drowned. Ezili ruminates on the dream: “[The sailor] called them brutes; black men, children, and women who had been teachers patient or testy, ironsmiths careful or lazy, dyers, rulers good and bad, priests, guardians for their younger siblings, joyful dancers, fierce or timid lovers” (*TSR* 154). Her reflection accentuates the dehumanisation the enslaved suffered during the passage across the Atlantic. After Jeanne becomes Ezili’s vessel, the dream becomes about the *lwa*’s “salty birth,” one that Jeanne has “almost nightly” and which Ezili describes as being born in “drowning water, chained. Four it took to call me forth, three women calling out for their gods, and a dead child whose blood would never run warm in its veins” (153). Ezili’s birth is characterised by death and enslavement, a literal and figurative drowning. Thus, even as she acts as a spiritual resource for her followers, she herself is inextricably tied to slavery, a union that may be altered superficially but cannot be severed for her, the slaves or their descendants. Jeanne’s enslavement is not literal like Mer’s, but she is shackled nonetheless.

[Jeanne] had been drowning in the port of Nantes, in the whorehouse that is her mother’s occupation and her grandmother’s. A similar nightmare is driving me. I feel myself sometimes twisting in a foul swamp, its smell clotted and rank. I fight to break free of the slime. It catches in my hair and pulls me down deeper. (154)

It is noteworthy that Ezili likens Jeanne’s struggles to the act of drowning, and their shared nightmare makes it evident how the after-effects of slavery continue to be felt across time and geographical space. Jeanne’s sense of drowning is not confined to her past in Nantes or the memory of the sailor’s story, but continues, in altered form, in her present.

Charles's fortunes are by no means consistent, but when he is flush with money he buys Jeanne clothes and jewelry: "[S]he loves, but her love is bought, and Charles must pay" (156).

Jeanne revels in the lavish items, the silk dresses:

. . . watered as though they'd been retrieved from locked chests in sunken ships; gold that streams and flows around her neck and wrists in chains of liquid light. . . . [S]he soaks in it and it buoys her up when Charles is cruel; is it any wonder we both dream of drowning? (156).

Jeanne craves the luxury of wealth and the freedom that financial security will buy her, but Charles's money, and the expectations it buys bind her. Her relationship with Charles is premised on her being a "scandalous black feather" in his cap, the exotic prize whose ignorance he endures "for the sake of her beauty" (156),<sup>127</sup> and the inequality inherent in their relationship entraps her. Ezili's and Jeanne's shared trauma and confinement are expressed in their collective nightmares about drowning which evokes the Middle Passage, contracting several different temporalities together.

In connection to temporality, tidalectics refers to how:

[G]enerations overlap generations, and eras wash over tides on a stretch of beach. . . . Repetition, whether in the form of ancestor worship, or the poem histories of the griot, informs black ontologies more than does the Europeanist drive for perpetual innovation. . . . In a European framework, that past is something to be gotten over . . . in tidalectics, we do not improve upon the past, but are ourselves versions of the past. (Compton 17)

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<sup>127</sup> In one of his journals, Baudelaire provides a definition of stupidity which seems to refer to Jeanne:

Stupidity is often an ornament of beauty; it gives the eyes that mournful limpidity of dusky pools, and that oily calm of tropical seas. Stupidity always preserves beauty, it keeps away the wrinkles, it is the divine cosmetic which preserves our idols from the gnawings of thought which we must suffer, miserable scholars that we are. (*Intimate Journals* 66)

This description recalls the idea of repetition through fractals and haunting, a repetition that is never exactly the same, and it also stresses how temporalities are much closer than conventional thought would have them be as we “are ourselves versions of the past.” The other pertinent point in this passage is that this diasporan concept of time counters “the Europeanist drive for perpetual innovation” (Dubey, “Speculative Fictions of Slavery 791). In other words, there is no *telos*, no drive to ‘progress’ that virtually erases the past. Instead the fluid temporalities in the novel expose “gestures of simultaneous identification and dislocation . . . [and] reveal the persistence of the past in the present” (791). Thus, while Jeanne might not be enslaved in the same sense as Mer or Thais, she is still oppressed, and her story shows how “[t]he term *slavery* . . . mutates to refer to a range of abusive socioeconomic arrangements . . .” (798, italics in original). Binding together the three different women’s temporalities unveils the currents of influence between them. For example, by overtly linking Mer and Jeanne’s temporalities, and focusing on the experience of a woman of colour in France in the nineteenth century, Hopkinson prevents the European location of Paris from being “readily purged of any traces of the people without history whose degraded lives might raise awkward questions about the limits of . . . humanism” (Gilroy 44).

Slavery, the source of Ezili’s and the three women’s shared intergenerational and transcontinental trauma, fouls the spiritual realm. As Ezili comments, “There are other places I can go in the spherical world, but they all end up there, at the blockage. Its taste is foul. It reeks of grief and horror” (*TSR* 293). Despite her ability to move across temporalities and her influence on the material world, Ezili is initially completely powerless in the face of this chancre; she cannot break through it and, when she tries to, finds herself coated in it (293). Alone Ezili cannot fight the blight of slavery, but when she reunites with the other Ginen *lwás* she comes to a

realisation: “We change when change is needed. We are a little different in each place that the Ginen have come to rest, and any one of us is already many powers. No cancer can fell us all, no blight cover us completely” (387). This is an insight into the creative power inherent in fracturing as a response to trauma, but also in the formation of fractals: an ever-changing state of being which responds to a hostile environment in a flexible, if splintered, manner. Her assertion that “any one of [the *lwás*] is already many powers” refers to the spiritual beings of Africa, creating a link back across the Middle Passage to Africa.

In the novel, Africa is depicted as a source of strength for some, but it is not romanticised or idealised as ‘home’ as the impossibility of return is recognised. It is primarily used as a focal point in a spiritual sense since it is the place of origin of the creolised *lwás*, as one can see with the fractals of Ezili, but it is also a symbol of unity. An example of the latter is when Makandal gathers a group of slaves to convince them to join him in poisoning the *backra*. To unify them, he makes them repeat their African tribe names after him. “Patrice whispered the words, thought of his mother saying, ‘You are Ibo. Never forget.’ He’d never really known what the word meant. He’d been born in Saint Domingue” (*TSR* 105). Despite this distance, Patrice responds quite emotionally when he repeats “Ibo” a few times, and with the word singing through him, he starts to cry.

The hoarse whispers of the crowd grew intense. The words flew like darts through the air. . . . Again and again and again Makandal made them say it until it felt as though the whole hut was rocking with the words, would shake itself loose and fling itself into the air on the power of the words. . . . Patrice gasped. He was back in himself again, his head buzzing with the names the Ginen were no longer calling. The names that would stay in

his head now, always being murmured in his head. The words that would bubble their strength in his veins, Ibo, he was Ibo. And a man of the Ginen. An African. (105-106)

Makandal's strategy works because the exercise draws on the possibility (and memory for some) of a place of freedom. The fractured Ginen are unified through feelings of togetherness and belonging, through a sense of power instead of shared suffering and pain. While Makandal capitalises on the power of Africa in the imaginations of the slaves, Mer has a more pragmatic, non-idealised view. She longs for the place of her birth and thinks often of how it was better in several regards, but she also acknowledges that it was imperfect. She recalls how she was circumcised as a young girl in Dahomey and the pride she felt after the ritual. In the new world, she was repulsed by non-circumcised women, viewing them as ugly, but this changed as she practiced healing for longer and realised that uncut women suffered fewer complications and health problems related to the genital mutilation she had undergone (97). Mer becomes conscious of the shared patriarchal ideologies of Africa and the plantation in which black women are regarded as inferior. Thus, the power of Africa as a symbol of freedom and unity, and a source of spiritual reserves is acknowledged, but not idealised.

The spiritual realm in the novel serves to tie together the different temporalities, but it is never separated from the physical: the spiritual sphere provides a space outside of slavery and the plantation for Mer and Tipingee, away from physical and psychological oppression, but it is still intimately connected to them. The burgeoning Vodoun spirituality one sees on the plantation, apart from being a spiritual resource, also provides the slaves with opportunities to meet, for leaders of the resistance to emerge, and for a communal identity to form in which the



individual is never elevated above the community.<sup>128</sup> Like Mami in *Brown Girl in the Ring*, Mer states that she serves the spirits (*TSR* 69), and in so doing she ensures the well-being of the community, which then ensures the well-being of the individual. Vodoun “was born in the Dahomedan, Congolese, and Nigerian regions of West Africa and was filtered through Roman Catholic symbolism and liturgical traditions” in Saint Domingue (Fernández Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert 3). The two pantheons, are the “*Rada* pantheon (of Dahomean or Yoruban origin) and the *Petro* (Creole *lwas* originating principally in Haiti).” Despite this division, easy categorisation of the *lwas* is not always possible precisely “because of their ever-changing manifestations” (3, italics in original). As a spiritual system it is not “imposed from above; it is a . . . functional religion, embedded in its followers’ daily existence and in the struggle to make their life whole. As in African and many other non-Western traditions, there is complete unity of religion and life” (Michel, “Worlds Seen and Unseen” 282). Viewed together with the fact that for the Fon people in Dahomey, where Vodoun originates, the concept means “spirit” and “god” but also “image” (Dayan, “A Women’s History of Haiti” 18), it is apparent that it is both a spiritual system but also a representation of the practitioners’ world. Vodoun’s holistic approach makes clear the intimate connection between the spiritual and physical realms, especially when one considers that there is no concept such as Eden or Heaven in Vodoun: “[T]he afterlife may turn out to be as harsh as the present. Therefore survival in this lifetime and healing or the immediate well-being become an ongoing process that engages Vodoun adepts throughout their life” (Michel, “Worlds Seen and Unseen” 283). In other words, the physical realm is not to be neglected or ignored in favour of a promised paradise in the afterlife. Physical pleasures are as important as spirituality, but this perspective also means that the present gains precedence over

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<sup>128</sup> Community is of paramount importance to the slaves as evidenced in how they greet one another, the call being “honour” and the reply “respect.”

the past or some imagined future, an important temporal aspect to keep in mind when one considers the suffering of the women in the novel.

When Georgine goes to Mer to consult about her first pregnancy, she asks Mer if she is going to die, to which Mer replies: “‘You’ve ever seen an African live more than ten years once he sets foot on this island?’” (*TSR* 6). The harshness of their existence and their short life expectancy meant that the present is all they have; cut off from their past and with little hope of a better future, their temporal range shrinks. In a world virtually devoid of pleasure it becomes even more crucial to enjoy the few still available, even if they come at a great cost. When a fellow slave, Babette, is caught chewing some sugar cane to refresh herself, she is put in stocks for a whole night “with cane juice smeared over her naked body. Mosquitoes and ants had driven her nearly mad before [the book-keeper] loosed her and Mer could tend her swollen shut eyes and the itchy raised bites that covered her” (11). In this setting, a spiritual system that focuses so much on the joy and physicality of singing, drumming and dancing makes sense. On Christmas day, the slaves gather to have their own celebration and Tipingee watches Mer laughing with two other slaves dancing the kalenda together. “Mer didn’t laugh much. This one day each year, when the blans were feasting the birth of their god, they let the Ginen celebrate, let them have some little joy” (75).

Ezili too takes exceptional pleasure in the physicality of those she ‘rides.’ She is able to make her way “fully into the world” when Jeanne dances or listens to music. “Music is the key, it seems; flowing as rivers do, beating like the wash of her blood in her body” (116). Ezili is the one who is in control when Jeanne performs the dance which inspires Baudelaire’s poem “Le Serpente qui Dance” (“The Snake that Dances”).

Jeanne and I thump with our heels, toss our torso towards the earth, thrust back with our hips. We shake our shoulders. And still I offer our breasts, promise their juices to someone, something, not [Charles]. Oh. Let me be free. Free from this body and its overwhelming sense. Rushing life torrents. Air burning in through my nose, harsh yet needful. (124)

Riding Jeanne, Ezili makes her dance, taking pleasure in the sensual yet spiritual movements, but even though Jeanne's abandon gives the *lwa* more freedom, she simultaneously feels the claustrophobia of a physical existence. When she possesses Thais while she is with a client, Ezili revels in the carnal act, acknowledging that she only feels truly alive when the spiritual and physical are united, even though the physical sphere is more confining, especially in her ability to move between temporalities.<sup>129</sup> She "wriggle[s] with joy at life, at another adventure" and exclaims, "Ah glorious to be in a fit, strong body again" (265; 268). In Mer's world the celebration of physical joy and sensual pleasure is at odds with the Catholic faith the slaves are initiated into against their will. Mandated to attend Father León's church services, many do go to church, but they bring their own spirituality to bear with singing and dancing which greatly upsets Father León. To them, dancing is a natural extension of the sacred, "real thanks to the gods," whereas the priest sees this physical expression as animalistic and primitive. The priest tells his congregation: "I fear that they may be right who say that the African is as base as the monkeys in the trees, that he will never learn to truly love God" (368). This divide between the

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<sup>129</sup> While confined to the physical realm, time can only be perceived as linear, a limitation that can be countered by a connection to the spiritual, by tapping into "[t]he sea in the minds of the Ginen . . ." (*TSR* 66). Her ability to move freely through time is restricted when she occupies a human body or 'horse,' such as when she is tied to Jeanne's body: "I can no longer see everywhere and everywhen, but only in straight lines, in one direction; to dissolution" (46).

spiritual and physical is just one of the hostile aspects of Christianity that the slaves must bridge with Vodoun, their creolised spiritual system.<sup>130</sup>

When Georgine is in labour with her first child, Tipingee tells her that she must pray to Aziri for an easy birth. Georgine, who views herself as Christian and more ‘civilised’ than the field slaves threatens to tell the master that they “pray to demons” (TSR 26). Her threat makes clear the danger the slaves who worship their own spirits face if discovered.<sup>131</sup> Georgine insists that they should all pray to the Mother Mary together, but “Tipingee’s voice [was] sullen, only aping the words, really” (27). Initially, Mer and Tipingee view Father León’s Christianity as “backra magic” with Tipingee calling the sign of the cross “the sign of the crossroads,” blurring the lines between their spiritual system and Catholicism (77; 90). The priest argues that slaves should be mandated to attend his church services once a week on the grounds that attendance at services and acceptance of Christianity will make them meek “and ready to accept God’s saving grace” (88). His strategy of control relies on the “dispersal of disciplinary mechanisms” which occur throughout the social body and the goal is to produce “docile . . . bodies that can be utilized in work and regulated in terms of time and space” (Schirato, Danaher and Webb 82).

Mer’s attitude towards the priest and his god is unreceptive at first. When Patrice thanks the Father for interceding for him with Master Simenon, the Father tells him, ““God bless you”” to which Mer thinks, “*Yes, Master Léonard Simenon, she thought. Let your god bless you as He blesses us*” (TSR 92). It is clear that she associates the white people’s religion with their

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<sup>130</sup> The creolisation or negotiation of religious systems occurs not only between African and Western beliefs, but also between African beliefs. Tipi and Mer met on the ship where they had to learn each other’s languages and at the same time Mer, the elder, also taught Tipingee about Aziri, Ezili’s African precursor/fractal, to whom both prayed that they would not drown on the journey (TSR 26).

<sup>131</sup> The long-lasting effects of fear and danger of discovery can be seen in *Brown Girl in the Ring* when Mami explains to Ti-Jeanne why she had never shown her how to divine using the tarot cards.

inhumane actions and the institution of slavery, wishing the same “blessing” on Simenon as she and the other slaves had been suffering under. Even the location of the Catholic services is hostile to the slaves. The priest holds his services in the old curing house which is full of lizards and cockroaches and Mer makes a mental note to tell the slaves that they must bath in the river or sea afterwards so as to not get any diseases (174). Her hostility steadily seeps away as the novel progresses even though the conflict between the slaves’ belief system and slavery, and by association Christianity, continues. When Makandal is captured, Mer also prays to the “Lady on Father’s altar. So many gods. [I] [m]ust ask them all for help” (346). The pole used to secure Makandal for his execution is the centre pole, the one the slaves “raise up when [they] worship, the *poteaumitan*, the ladder for the gods” (347). While it is unlikely that the plantation owners know the function of the pole, the symbolic value of the pole being used for Makandal’s execution is evident. This antagonism does not disappear as Vodoun continues to take shape in the novel, but instead the slaves increasingly subvert aspects of Christianity to make something altogether new. Near the end of the novel, in her old age, Mer makes flags for Vodoun celebrations and ceremonies which depict:

Lasirèn, Ezili, Ogu, Kouzin, Aka. All the *lwas*. And the Lady too; Mother Mary. I paint her with thread onto bright flags. Because from all those Sunday mornings in Father’s nigger church, I’ve come to understand something: I know who that Lady is. She’s beautiful, the Lady. That much the blans understand. Father burns incense for her, for he knows she likes the sweet perfume of it. I must listen with more attention after this to what Father tells us of his gods. . . . Father calls her “Mary” but I know her real name. Ah, my Ezili Frèda, to see you in this place! (369-370)

Mer finds similarities between Mary and Ezili Frèda and indeed sees the Christian icon as another fractal of Ezili, embracing her, and creolising her with the female Afro-Caribbean deity. Mer's adaptation of Christianity into a completely new creolised form combined with African beliefs emphasises that "[i]n the crucible of the plantation—amid relationships based on European power and African powerlessness—the slaves' very survival depended on their ability to manipulate and resist their complete absorption into the core values of the plantation masters" (Fernández Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert 2). In doing so, they undermine the cultural consensus of the oppressive system by providing an "alternative frame of reference" (Ashis Nandy cited in Melzer 54).

Although the Saint Domingue thread of the novel largely focuses on Mer, Tipingee and Georgine, the interactions between Mer and Makandal are crucial to the plot and to Hopkinson's commentary on women's place in movements of resistance and opposition. The fictional Makandal is based on the real-life revolutionary who was, according to Hopkinson, "a powerful *houngan* . . . [Vodoun] priest, healer, botanist" (Hopkinson and Due 404). In order to explain how Makandal and his supporters were able to poison sealed barrels of water, Hopkinson uses the fact that some slaves brought a smallpox inoculation technique with them to the Caribbean (405).<sup>132</sup> She makes use of this historical fact to make the poisoning of the water barrels with needles plausible.<sup>133</sup> Makandal's power stems from his specialised knowledge<sup>134</sup> in combination with his magic and service to the *lwa* Ogu.

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<sup>132</sup> It is interesting to note that in the novel, Makandal learned this technique from a slave woman (*TSR* 108).

<sup>133</sup> Hopkinson comments that "[t]his kind of fictional speculation about scientific method (and I do think that what I'm describing is germ warfare), about how things might plausibly happen in the past or the future, is very much what science fiction does" (Hopkinson and Due 405).

Makandal's presence in the novel (along with the emergence of Vodoun) is indicative of the role of Vodoun in the successful slave rebellion on Saint Domingue. Margarite Fernández Olmos and Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert argue that the rebellion (and therefore also Haiti's independence) owes its success to the staunch belief slaves had in Makandal's magical abilities which were said to include the ability to shape-shift and predict the future. This belief was so strong that even after his execution, slaves refused to believe that he was really dead and the legend of his immortality spurred on slave resistance (8). In the novel, Makandal tells the Ginen that he will come back to them just before his executioners light the pyre, and as the pole collapses and he shouts one final time, one of the slaves cries out that she sees a *manmzèl* (an insect), fly away from the fire and they all embrace one another, celebrating his escape (*TSR* 348-349).<sup>135</sup> The fear the authorities had of *houngans* "and their knowledge of potential poisons . . . heighten[ed] tensions in the years leading to the Haitian Revolution" (Sowell 1580), not just because of the threat to white lives but also because of the hope they provided slaves, fostering rebellion by making the possibility of freedom seem attainable. Once Makandal's poison plot is well under way, Mer notes that "his name was spoken wherever a white died" (*TSR* 206).<sup>136</sup> Considering his importance as leader and symbol of resistance, it is important to examine the significance of his *lwa*, Ogu, and the relationship between Ogu and Ezili.

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<sup>134</sup> When Mer warns the other slaves that Hopping John might have been intentionally poisoned and not bitten by a centipede, she refers to this application of herbal knowledge to harm another as "ouanga" which means "bad science" (*TSR* 61).

<sup>135</sup> Mer is not sure whether Makandal was able to shapeshift and escape because his captors only gave him salted food, which would subdue the djinn part of him which made his magic possible (*TSR* 349).

<sup>136</sup> Several decades after Makandal's execution, the *houngan* Boukman sacrificed a wild boar to the *lwas* to mark his oath to fight for independence from the French slaveholders, "a connection between religion and political resistance that continues in the present day" (Fernández Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert 8).



In the novel, Ogu is acknowledged as Ezili's consort, demonstrating that they can complement one another. However, the 'version' or fractal of him which possesses Makandal is portrayed as a violent, unforgiving and one-dimensional masculine being. When Mer watches Makandal being possessed by Ogu she describes him as "a thing born in fire. Tempered. . . . Makandal wanted to clear us a path to freedom too, just like I wanted to do. We should chop that clear road together" (TSR 314). Burton explains that Ogu does not only embody "the martial spirit of Haitian resistance" but he is also a healer, "and if he inflicts suffering with his sword, he also suffers on his own account" (250). Because Ogu is capable of turning his violence "against the people in whose name he acts but also, in a final suicidal gesture, against himself . . . [he symbolises] all the ambiguities of power in action" (251). This description echoes Tipingee's words when she defends Makandal's poisoning of the *backra* even as her daughter is possibly dying from accidentally drinking water poisoned on Makandal's orders. "Makandal is our weapon, Mer,' Tipingee said. 'Sometimes the machete slips in your hand and cuts you. It's not the machete at fault then, it's your carelessness'" (TSR 201).

Mer's sense of her duty to her people means that she feels compelled to do whatever she can to ease the hardships of their lives in slavery, to provide medicinal and spiritual support to help them survive and endure and thus also prevent loss of lives because of overt violent resistance. She cannot agree with Makandal's campaign of death because of its cost to the slaves themselves, as when Makandal poisons Hopping John to prevent him from revealing their plot to the plantation owners. She tells Makandal that, "Each day I live is another day I can help my people" (TSR 67), which he sees as a betrayal to his cause, namely to secure the freedom of the slaves firstly by poison and then, when the whites are weakened, by force. He sees Mer's 'duty' as collusion with the *backra* and when she tells him that she lives to help her people, he replies:



“Help them do what they’re told. Ease their dying from over-work or starvation. Help them learn to be good slaves” (67). In the end, Mer and Makandal are unable to agree on how the power of the slave owners should be challenged. Their disagreement is mirrored in the *lwas* they serve, and Ezili describes Ogu as a power fighting her, distracting her while she tries to fight slavery (311). Their antagonism culminates in the scene where Ogu (through Makandal) takes away Mer’s capacity for speech, literally silencing her. This act “stands for the violence with which particular brands of anti-colonial practices aim to ‘right wrongs’. . . .” (Marinkova 192), the kind of anti-colonial practices that exclude women.

In the lead up to this violent act, Ezili wakes a sleeping Mer and guides her to the covert gathering of Ginen, dancing and celebrating in the night. Unbeknownst to her, the gathering is not just a celebration, but also a ceremony, led by Makandal, to call on Ogu to help them break their enslavement (*TSR* 316). Makandal’s call is successful and through him as conduit, the *lwa* asks the slaves to pledge that they will fight for their freedom (318). Mer witnesses Makandal summoning Ogu “the warmaker” whom he believes will lead them to freedom, and Ezili watches with her, examining the:

. . . streaming possibilities . . . the forked and branching channels of Makandal’s flow. A strong man, with vision. A fierce and necessary man. He can burn Saint Domingue clean and free like brush fire clears the bush for planting. But what is he doing here tonight? It was folly to come! He should bide his time, let his generals do his work. He can rout the slavekeepers, if only he keeps himself safe! But there he is, on backra land, doing the dance, the call for me. I can help him. I will be able to go into his head. I will make him go back to the bush, to safety. (318)

Ezili acknowledges the place that overt violence has in successful opposition, but also thinks that Makandal is taking too many risks, being too brash. When she tries to ride Makandal to influence his actions, Ogu blocks her and tells her that Makandal is his. The future possibilities that spring out of Makandal's actions, guided solely by Ogu, are all about iron, steel and fire, "souls of war, forged in conflagration" (319). The conflict between Mer/Ezili and Makandal/Ogu—symbolised as the opposition between water and fire—about the path the slaves should take to possible freedom foreshadows the legacy of violence that marks Haiti's history after independence.<sup>137</sup>

When Mer realises that the great house has been set on fire by Makandal's people, she calls on Ezili for help and her plea pulls the *lwa* from Makandal, where she was trying to oust Ogu, to her. The two humans, ridden by the *lwas*, bring the spiritual conflict into the physical realm. Ezili wants Mer to warn the sleeping slaves in the great house to save their lives and lead the white people away from the Ginen meeting, but Makandal/Ogu interprets this as treachery and orders the other slave to hold Mer down.

Ogu in Makandal's body used his good hand to draw my tongue out from my mouth. Then, smiling he used the arm that was not there<sup>138</sup> and sliced the spirit machete across my tongue. Pain exploded like light in my head. I tried to scream, but with no air in my chest, it came out a gurgle. (*TSR* 330)

Her actual tongue is intact, but her faculty of speech is severely damaged, turning her into "just a silent nègre woman" (346). Their conflict symbolises how violence and the silencing of women in the fight against slavery weakens the resistance: "With that axe slash, the river, the mighty rolling river that is one Ginen story crashes full tilt into a dam. Its waters boil and boil, angry;

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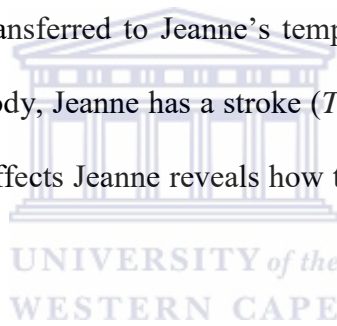
<sup>137</sup> Ogu "is said to represent Toussaint, Christophe, and Dessalines in their struggle against the French" (Burton 250).

<sup>138</sup> Makandal lost an arm in an accident.

and go nowhere” (331). Makandal/Ogu operate only with absolutes and advocating other forms of opposition is treason to them. Marinkova proposes that the confrontation between Mer/Ezili and Makandal/Ogu:

. . . dramatizes the bifurcated nature of colonial resistance. . . . Mer/Ezili’s desire ‘to save, to save’ (p. 327) and her subsequent mutilation by the warrior god is a reminder of the unpalatable aspects of the History-making on which Makandal/Ogu has embarked; rigidly identitarian and narrowly dogmatic, his oppositional political approach literally blocks Mer’s story-stream and thus taints the transformative potential of his revolution. (194)

The reverberation of this act is transferred to Jeanne’s temporality, and, as Mer’s pain throws Ezili out and back into Jeanne’s body, Jeanne has a stroke (*TSR* 332). The explicit way in which the violence done to Mer’s body affects Jeanne reveals how the past still impacts on the present, and thus also the future.



Marinkova suggests that Mer’s refusal to join Makandal’s cause is because “it risks perpetuating the inhumanity of the hegemonic macropolitical structure” (194). As evidence, she quotes from Mer’s last thoughts in the novel:

I think Makandal was right. There is a time to fight, fierce as a cornered dog, for your freedom. But I have not the heart for it. It is ugly in this world, and when the killing starts, the same stick will beat the black dog and the white. Mama, I pray I will be coming to you soon. (*TSR* 376-77)

Mer’s reflection highlights the troubled position of the enslaved and how the colonial enterprise and slavery binds both the people in power and those they seek to oppress in a system of violence. Commit no violence, and risk never attaining freedom or truly dismantling the

oppressive system; resort to violence, and its taint will remain on generations to come. This is especially true of the masculinist violence perpetrated in the novel where women are excluded from opposition and resistance movements unless they follow the orders of the male leaders. Mer/Ezili's cautious and fluid response which requires subtlety and an ability to adjust course depending on events is rejected in favour of the fire and outright violence of Ogu/Makandal's approach. Makandal's death by fire reflects the ways in which the violence unleashed in service of his resistance, in the end, does not distinguish between its victims.

The conflict between Ezili and Ogu is unresolved in Mer's time, but near the end of the novel Ezili describes reuniting with all of the Ginen *lwa*. The reunion takes place alongside Thais meeting with the monk Zosimus in the desert. She tells him that, while recovering in bed from her miscarriage at the church in Aelia Capitolina, that she kept thinking that she could hear whispering, but "it was too noisy in Capitolina" (TSR 384). Although she clearly tells Zosimus that it was *not* the Mother Mary speaking to her, he constructs Thais's story in biblical terms: he represents her as the sinner prostitute who is forgiven after paying penance by fasting in the desert. However, it becomes clear that the voices she has heard are those of the other *lwas* who had been trying to communicate with Ezili.

The scene opens with the cosmic egg of Yoruba mythology which signals both the creation of the world and the deities the Vodoun *lwas* are fractals of. Ezili's other aspects are there, as is: Dumballah the creator and serpent spirit and his wife Ayida; Papa Legba, *lwa* of the crossroads between the spiritual and material worlds; Papa Ghede, *lwa* of death and resurrection; Marasa, the divine twins; and, Sopona (alternatively known as Babalu or Sousson-Pannan), the *lwa* associated with disease, particularly small pox (TSR 385-87; Chatland n. pag.). Also present, is Ogu, the warrior *lwa* who has so far been Ezili's adversary.

A thickly muscled man with a mad smile came running heavily into the circle. His selves brandished an axe; a machete; a sword. I matched his grin. “*Husband,*” I greeted him.

He laughed. “*Wife. You know us now?*” (TSR 387, italics in original)

Because Ezili can move through time like water and her temporal movements are not linear, one could read the event as possibly occurring in the future. If this event is still to happen, it creates a sense of hope for different realities than those described in the novel.<sup>139</sup> Ezili comes to the realisation that she is not alone in her fight against slavery: “*I can be water and anger and beauty and love, but there is also iron and fire, warfare and thunder and storm*” (387, italics in original). The *lwas*’ ever-changing state of being means that they can be responsive to events, instead of being rigid and authoritarian in the way that Ogu/Makandal was when the great house was set on fire. If Ezili and Ogu’s reconciliation in the spiritual world could be mirrored in the physical one, change could be possible and the cycle of violence could be broken.

As I have demonstrated, the diasporan aspects of the novel are influenced by the sea which effects a fluid temporality, bringing together the experiences of different women of colour across time and referencing the Middle Passage. The synchronicity of temporalities underscores the violence of slavery from which creolisation originates and which echoes through time as shared intergenerational trauma. While Vodoun offers an alternative frame of reference to the enslaved, the creolised spiritual system cannot completely escape its violent origins, especially since it has to continue to contest the hostilities of Christianity. One could describe Vodoun as “a repository for wisdom accumulated by a people who have lived through slavery, hunger, disease, repression, corruption, and violence—all in excess” (Karen Brown cited in Michel,

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<sup>139</sup> From Ezili’s perspective it could also have happened in the “past” because she does not perceive time in a linear way. However, she does make it clear that the physical realm is more bound by linearity which suggests that this scene could feasibly be read as happening in, what would be to humans, the future.

“Worlds Seen and Unseen” 282). Therefore, because it is representative of the cumulative experience of those who practice it, it reflects the ambiguities of power, as for example in the tensions between Ezili and Ogu who are both enemies and lovers. Because of the difficulties and hardships of being a slave and because the afterlife is not seen as a promised paradise, the physical sphere is just as important as the spiritual. The present becomes more important than any other temporality and pleasure in the sensual—dancing, singing, and sex—are all seen as natural expressions of the spiritual. This spirituality and philosophy of life embodies the creative response of the enslaved not only to fracture, but also to create fractals, to be flexible and responsive to their oppressive environment.

In addressing the aspects of the novel connected to a generational temporality, I will focus in more detail on the female characters in the novel by elaborating on how they are connected to Ezili and to one another. In examining the relations between the “unwritten” lives of Thais, Mer and Jeanne, I will also explore Hopkinson’s portrayal of motherhood and family since it is a common thematic thread in all three novels. Ezili is creator and muse, a divine but not all-powerful force who writes both her own story and guides and inspires the stories of the mortal women who are connected to her. Dayan describes Ezili as a *lwa* who “articulate[s] and embodies a memory of slavery, intimacy and revenge. She survives as the record of and habitation for women’s experiences in the New World” (“A Women’s History of Haiti” 11). Furthermore, Dayan suggests that being a horse or conduit for Ezili is more like “physical remembrance” than possession: “slavery is substantiated through time by a spirit that originated out of an experience of domination” (11). Therefore, this “physical remembrance” experienced by Mer, Jeanne and Thais collapses their temporalities to a degree, exposing connections that are usually blurred or obscured by the passage of time.

Ezili describes the connections between people as “joined tributaries of lives, watery webs that connect each one’s story to each” (*TSR* 213). To various degrees, the women in the novel embody attributes of Ezili’s different aspects. For example, Mer is like Ezili Dantor who protects women and children, and, like Ezili Frèda, Jeanne is the mulatto coquette, the “Black Venus” and “the tragic Mistress” (Dayan, *History, and the Gods* 58). Despite such identifications, none of the characters are reducible to one single aspect of Ezili; instead, taken together they demonstrate all of her often contradictory aspects which reflect the lives of Haitian women. Ezili, and other Vodoun *lwa*:

. . . preserve the histories ignored, denigrated, or exoticized by the standard, “imperial” histories. It was the survival of these customs and gods that provided continuity for the dispossessed. This continuum leapt across, or superseded the European-imposed periodicities of such categories as colonial and postcolonial. (Dayan, “A Women’s History of Haiti” 5)

When Ezili meets her many fractals at Aelia Capitolina, she reunites with two other aspects of herself, Frèda the coquette and the sorrowful Danto, and she identifies herself (at that particular moment) as Ezili Je-Wouj, Ezili Red-Eye “the termagant enraged, with the power of *millennia* of Ginen hopes. Lives, loves” (*TSR* 305 emphasis mine). Thus when Ezili speaks of her people, the Ginen, she refers to *all* people of colour who have been enslaved, and not only her Haitian followers. She, and her fractals fight “to destroy that cancerous trade in shiploads of African bodies that ever demands to be fed more sugar, more rum, more Nubian gold . . .” (305).

Nearer to the end of the novel, the shifts between Ezili and the three main characters happen faster, almost as if one narrative starts interrupting another, blending into one story with Ezili's voice becoming stronger and more prominent. These shifts of narrative voice and point of view signal "[m]oments of temporal simultaneity" (Dubey, "Speculative Fictions of Slavery" 790). At the same time, the shifts between the women form a pattern "of constant transformation . . . which enables multiple variations, contaminations and reverberations, even . . . amidst the suffocating contexts of slavery and exploitation" (Marinkova 191). Ezili's way is not the forcefulness of Ogu; instead she moves people through simple acts, 'small' ones that might seem invisible if viewed one at a time, but together have an accumulative effect. When Makandal is executed, Mer asks Ezili for forgiveness for not clearing the salt roads as she had requested. At that moment Ezili shares in Mer's feelings of failure and shame: "I didn't help her that night when Ogu cut her. I can't help them, any of them" (*TSR* 345). In her old age, when Mer thinks back to when Ezili told her to find a way to "fix" the salt roads in the minds of the Ginen that were drying up she still feels that she failed, but Ezili makes it clear that ". . . [she] act[s] in the world through such as [Mer]. Her every act of love, of healing, strikes a blow to the evil we fight" (306). In Deleuzian terms, these micropolitical acts, happening on such an intimate personal level instead of the broader political stage, challenge the oppressive regimes of slavery and patriarchy (191). Ezili is Erzulie-Dantor the mournful, "the pale and elegant Erzulie-Fréda [and also] the cold-hearted, savage Erzulie-gé-rouge, [and] she dramatizes a specific historiography of women's experience in Haiti and throughout the Caribbean" (Dayan, "A Women's History of Haiti" 6). Hopkinson uses her to connect women of colour in a much wider range, drawing the reader's attention to the similarities between their lives without erasing difference.



At first glance, the introduction of a half-Nubian, half-Greek character living in Egypt might seem at odds with the rest of the characters all connected to the Black Atlantic in one way or another, but an explicit link to ancient Egypt through Thais's story which is set in 345 C.E. elucidates an older history of slavery (*TSR* 143). Furthermore, Egypt has been an important symbol in both the African-American Civil Rights movement and the Afrofuturist movement in music and science fiction. Margaret Morgan, Kamau Brathwaite's sister, recounts how their mother:

. . . felt convinced that she was a reincarnation of an Ethiopian or Egyptian princess; so she read all she could about Egypt and Ethiopia and passed this on to us at night when she was sitting ironing. That is how we knew that the pharaohs were black while everybody else assumed they were white (as they were pictured in "the books"). . . . (169)

To Morgan, Egypt is part of a suppressed, alternative history of black people and their origins, one which had its origins in civilization rather than barbarism. Frederick Douglass visited Egypt in the late 1880s to gather "facts with which he could support his ethnological opinions" because Egypt provided evidence of "the greatness of pre-slave African cultures, like the enduring symbol that Egypt supplies for black creativity and civilization, which has had a special significance within black Atlantic responses to modernity" (Gilroy 60). Egypt does not function in quite this way in *The Salt Roads*: rather than proving the existence of "the greatness of pre-slave African cultures" it demonstrates the longstanding intimacy between colonialism (Roman in Thais's time) and slavery.

Fifteen-year old Thais is a slave and prostitute whose owner has promised to set her free when she is thirty (*TSR* 237). Her father was Greek and her mother Nubian and while she chooses to go by her Greek name for most of the time, she professes to feel both Greek and

Nubian while her friend Judah, who is both Greek and Jewish feels more Greek (296). Thais and Judah's hybrid cultural and ethnic heritage demonstrates the fluidity and intimacy between cultural groups borne from trade, but also colonialism and slavery. Although Hopkinson demonstrates similarities between Thais's time and Mer's through the association between Roman colonisation and slavery, she also foregrounds significant differences. Thais's life of slavery will be over once she has completed her term of thirty years and her enslavement is not premised on her race like Mer's: her parents sold her to Tausiris because they could not afford to take care of her (237).<sup>140</sup> Thus Hopkinson avoids drawing simplistic parallels between slavery in different eras and instead reveals the singular horror of the Atlantic slave trade.

Thais's storyline follows the way in which she becomes mythologised as the dusky Saint Mary of Egypt, the "patron saint of sailors and prostitutes" (*TSR* 391). The saint, as described in Catholic texts, was a reformed prostitute who abandoned her life of debauchery in order to atone for her sins and she paid her penance by living alone in the desert for forty years. A Christian monk, Zosimus, finds her and she tells him that she is able to hear the word of God. At her urging he agrees to return in a year's time to administer "the Blessed Sacrament." In the legend, when he arrives at the agreed-upon meeting point next to the river Jordan a year later, she appears on the opposite bank of the river, and after making the sign of the cross she walked across its waters to receive the Holy Communion. She asks him to meet her again in a year's time and when he arrives he finds "her corpse guarded by a lion, and miraculously uncorrupted. Scratched into the ground beside her was a note that she had died on the same night a year before

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<sup>140</sup> This is not to suggest that race is a negligible factor. Thais drily comments that Tausiris had known that her "full lips and high southern behind would fetch him a good price with the sailors" (*TSR* 237). In this way, Thais is objectified as a woman of colour in much the same way as Jeanne is centuries later.

that Zosimus had given her communion.” After burying her he returns to his monastery and tells them “the wondrous tale of Mary of Egypt” (390-391).

Hopkinson juxtaposes adapted extracts from Catholic texts about Saint Mary with Thais’s lived experience. She became fascinated with the saint because she is African (Hopkinson and Due 406), and in the novel, she tried to humanise her: Thais is very practical, returning to the tavern in Alexandria after her revelation in the desert, to work until she attains her freedom. This is in contrast to the Saint Mary described in Catholic texts who dies, never to sin again (Hopkinson and Due 406). Marinkova argues that the:

. . . reclamation of Thais’s narrative authority challenges . . . the Christian doctrine, equally implicated in the brutal exploitation of slaves as in the sexual and political oppression of women. *The Salt Roads*, therefore, attributes Thais’s past as a prostitute to the economic inequalities and patriarchal order in Alexandria rather than to some innate proclivity of hers. (195)<sup>141</sup>

Thais, or Meritet as she insists on being called at the end of the novel, miscarries when she arrive at the church in Aelia Capitolina and they subsequently stay in a cave in the desert outside the city where the Christian monk Zosimus discovers her and Judah. She tells him her story and his embellishments of her tale become the story of Saint Mary. In a rite of passage of sorts, Thais had fasted for days because she is trying to hear the “whisperings.” These voices that she is straining to hear are the same ones Ezili has been listening for and it is revealed that they are all of the other “Ginen powers,” the other *lwás*. Ezili joins her kindred deities, and their revelations to her about their identities are connected to Thais’s realisation that she is not to blame for the miscarriage. “I had done no wrong. My name is Meritet, and I had been pregnant, and I was no

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<sup>141</sup> By not attributing her occupation to “some innate proclivity,” Thais also resists hyper-sexualised depictions of women of colour.

longer. I could think that now, and be at peace with it” (*TSR* 387). With this realisation, she decides to bury the doll she had brought with her and chooses to be only Meritet, marking her entry into adulthood. As they are packing up their belongings, Judah asks Meritet how they are going to pay to travel to his uncle’s farm and she answers, pragmatically, ““The way we know best, Judah. On our backs”” (389). Thais’s real-life is contrasted with her supposed pious and divinely-inspired transformation into the dusky Saint Mary of Egypt. Despite being a slave and prostitute, Thais’s story is told with humour, irreverently questioning the patriarchal Christian story of the prostitute turned virtuous saint who dies and thus keeps her newfound virtue intact. Moreover, her experience demonstrates how long slavery has been a part of human civilisation, but also how distinct the Trans-Atlantic slave trade was in its brutality towards black people and how their commoditisation as “Nubian gold” was premised on their race.

Ezili says that Thais has “[n]o salt-pucker of bitterness in her” (*TSR* 265), but “salt” defines the lives of Mer and the other women in Saint Domingue. Although the story shifts to the perspectives of other characters on occasion, the main focaliser for this part of the story is Mer. Unlike Jeanne, who is also Lemer and Prosper; and Thais who is also Pretty Pearl and Meritet; Mer’s has a single name which connotes the body of water which brought her to Saint Domingue. An elder in the community of slaves, Mer serves the spirits by helping her people through the accumulation of a series of ‘small’ but significant deeds which enable them to survive. Tipingee describes Mer as “the hands of Papa God himself”:

“People talk but do nothing,” the Ginen people said. “Papa God doesn’t talk, but he does plenty,” Mer, her words remained in her head, but her actions went out into the world. There was healing in her hands. Release. (10)

When Georgine experiences difficulties with her first pregnancy, she immediately goes to Mer, not to the plantation surgeon. When Mer tells her what she needs to do to build up her strength, Mer thinks to herself that “[b]ack in my home, back in the kingdom of Dahomey, every Allada girl child and woman would know what to do if a woman wasn’t strong enough to carry her baby. Eat foods to strengthen the blood” (*TSR* 5). In other words, medicinal knowledge that will benefit the community is not commodified, exclusive or secretive, but instead widely shared. On more than one occasion Mer stresses the connections between community, spirituality and science, particularly when she compares herself to the plantation doctor who “didn’t know the herbs, the prayers. If I denied to help my people, then my spirit wouldn’t fly home” (63).

Mer takes her responsibility as healer and caretaker seriously, so seriously that when Tipingee’s husband Patrice offers to take both of them to stay with the Maroons, she refuses because of the responsibility she feels towards her people: she cannot choose her own personal freedom over the well-being of those who would still be living in slavery (373). Her experiences have made her profoundly cynical and when a slave dies, Mer rejoices that they will be freed from a life of misery on the plantation. When Hopping John dies, Mer cries and tells Tipingee, “Gods be praised, Tipingee! Another one has escaped” (14).

Two sources of real joy for Mer are her platonic relationship with Georgine and her romantic one with Tipingee. Despite their initial animosity, Georgine and Mer become friends. To thank Mer for helping her through her second pregnancy and delivering her healthy son, Georgine plaits Mer’s hair when she has a temporary falling out with Tipingee and, more importantly, she teaches Mer to write. “Her carpenter man has some of his letters, and he’s been teaching them to his boy. Georgine looks and pretends she doesn’t understand, then she practices in secret, afterwards, writing the letters in the dirt and wiping them out immediately afterwards”

(186-187). Reflecting on her time with Georgine, she thinks to herself: “Sometimes I hear myself laughing out loud for the pleasure of it. On Sundays, Georgine makes me beautiful, and we write together” (187). Their friendship becomes something of great value to Mer, but her longest and most meaningful relationship remains the romantic one with Tipingee. The narrative suggests that romantic relationships between women were not quite accepted but because:

Mer had earned her place among the Ginen as one of the elders. . . . [I]f she and Tipingee wanted to play *madivinèz* with each other like some young girls did while they were waiting for marriage, well, plenty of the Ginen felt life was too brief to fret about that. So long as Tipingee was doing her duty by her husband, most people swallowed their bile and left them be. (13)

Even Tipingee’s husband, Patrice, does not interfere in their relationship, even though it is clear that there is some tension between him and Mer when he returns from *marronage*. Mer and Tipingee’s relationship started even before their arrival on the island, and it changes as they get older: first, on the journey to Saint Domingue, they are shipmates, “sisters before Tipingee’s blood came; [and later] wives to each other later even when they had had husbands” (12). When Patrice offers to take them both with him on *marronage*, Tipingee decides to stay with Mer instead of going to live a life of freedom with her husband in the Maroon community. Their bond is a source of strength for both, offering reprieve from the hardship of everyday existence on the plantation.

After Tipingee decides to stay with Mer, their story jumps forward by several years. Marie Claire is married to Philomise (the free coloured man) and he had bought both Tipingee and Mer, giving them some semblance of freedom since Tipingee is technically his mother-in-law. “We were his, but he treated his wife’s mother and companion with what respect he could

muster for slave women. For the first time in our lives, we had some ease” (TSR 376). The two of them still practice their healing in the surrounding plantations, although Tipingee has to do most of the work because of Mer’s failing sight and mental faculties. In her old age, even after all of the slaves she has helped, she still feels that she had failed Ezili: “I had not discovered what she wished me to do” (376). Despite this declaration of failure, she goes on to say that she had taught Ti-Bois (the young slave boy she helped raise) all she knew about the *lwa* she calls Mami Wata or Lasirèn (fractals of Ezili), “. . . what her favourite foods are, and colours. How to sing the songs that honour her. Ti-Bois is a man now, they tell me. Perhaps he will find a way to clear the spirit road for Mami Wata” (376). By teaching Ti-Bois, she makes sure that their newly formed creolised culture is passed on to the next generation, providing continuity and a source of spiritual strength. While she might not have acted in an overtly revolutionary manner, Mer makes a difference in a micropolitical way. The novel deals with the “painful experiences” of slavery but it also depicts survival as a strategy of opposition.

The connection between Mer and Jeanne, facilitated by Ezili, is emphasised subtly in several instances and once in an overt way when Mer contemplates the nature of “the Lady,” the Catholic Virgin Mother, who is simultaneously also Ezili Frèda, one of Ezili’s forms.

One day in [the Catholic slave] church, when I looked at the Lady’s pale face, I understood something, a small something. They had it wrong, the blans. Seems they get everything wrong. The Lady’s gown should be pink and white, not blue and white. And her baby is a girl, not a boy. She’s pale, the Lady; a sang-melé.<sup>142</sup> (TSR 369)

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<sup>142</sup> Sang-melé means “mixed blood.” Ezili-Frèda is usually depicted as being light-skinned (Dayan, “A Women’s History of Haiti 28).

Mer describes Jeanne in her pink and white gown with Lisette's daughter whom Jeanne and Achille had adopted. This cross-reference where two time currents meet is another example of the subtle resonances between temporalities. It also serves as a connection between the "mixed-blood mistresses" of Saint Domingue (Dayan, "A Woman's History of Haiti" 9), and both the fictional (and real) Jeanne Duvall's position as Charles Baudelaire's mistress in nineteenth century France. Like the free women of colour in Haiti, Jeanne is "served, fed, honored, and adored, while excluded from marriage, threatened by poverty, and often abandoned" by a white man (9). Writing about Saint Domingue in 1629-1789, Pierre de Vassiere describes the relationship between these women and white men as encapsulating the "very strange familiarity" between those who called themselves masters and those who found themselves slaves" (cited in "A Woman's History of Haiti" 9). While Jeanne is not enslaved in a formal sense, she is bound to Charles, reliant on the money he gives her because her position as a woman of colour in the increasingly modern city of Paris limits her avenues to independence.

Jeanne's and Charles's relationship, as portrayed in the novel, seems to contain some true affection from both parties, but its essence comes down to a combination of dependency and exoticism. Charles complains about Jeanne's constant need for money, but he relishes the control it gives him over her. In one sexual encounter between them, Jeanne is exasperated by Charles's inexpert attempts at arousing her, despite the fact that she had "showed him a thousand times, with a touch or a sigh or an arching of [her] back" what he must do (*TSR* 166). He calls her a whore and a "black slattern," and asks what she and Lisette do when they are together:<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> Lisette and Jeanne's passionate sexual encounter in the scene near the beginning of the novel stands in stark contrast to those between her and Charles. The affection she feels for them also differs: "She loves Lise with a deep, helpless adoration. Charles she loves, when things are well between them, with a sly, mischievous air. When it is poorly with her and with him, her love is sullen, resentful" (*TSR* 156).



“Have you devoured her as you have me? Is this how the women of Africa love? Slut is it?”

What did I know of what African women did? I closed my legs against his hand, tried to still it that way, but still he shoved at me. So I lay back and let him take his pleasure. The wallpaper was peeling in the corner there, by the ceiling. Must tell Charles to have someone fix it. And I must get some more money from him. My mother needed new boots. (168)

Jeanne’s thoughts make explicit her sense of disconnection from being “African,” how she views herself as French (rightly so since it is her place of birth), despite the assumptions others make about her skin colour, but also how she must tolerate Charles’s sexual demands in order to survive precisely because she is a French woman of colour who has little to no social or economic power. Charles takes pains to remind Jeanne of her inferiority by correcting her “low-brow” French at every opportunity, corrections which makes her feel inadequate and self-conscious. She is also hyper-aware of her appearance and dress, painstakingly attempting to look like a “lady”: “Hair done. Now more packets of powdered chalk for my face, neck, and hands; yes, I looked more like a lady now” (52). Jeanne’s appearance affords her some meagre semblance of power in her relationship with Charles, as she has to use her sexuality to gain financial security.

Money had us both in thrall. “Oh, Charles, it’s all so dreary. [Your stepfather] controls your mama, your mama controls you . . .”

“She loves me. She wishes well for me.”

“. . . And you control me.” I pouted, crossed my arms, huffily over my bosom, well aware that the action made my titties swell. (73)

After Charles's mother takes his estate from him, only giving him a small allowance at intervals, Jeanne must support them both with her acting and dancing, which Charles looks down upon. "And him laughing at my acting. My small joy that I could still dance tasted sour in my mouth now" (172). Even though he is dependent on Jeanne's work as a performer, he still views it with disdain, so secure is he in his superiority as a white Frenchman.

The ups and downs of their fourteen-year long relationship finally come to an end when they have a violent fight during which Charles assaults Jeanne because his cat had gone missing after she had put it outside to keep it away from her dogs' food (*TSR* 219). They remain apart, but Charles provides for her financially and pays for the medical care she requires after she has a stroke due to the syphilis she contracted from him. "Almost a marriage I'd made; almost-white me. Best I could hope for. I think I did well. I think Grandmaman would be proud of me" (227). Jeanne clearly aligns with Charles in his opinion of the superiority of being white because being a black woman is to be seen as being of little worth. Charles stops giving Jeanne money when he finds her and Joël (who might or might not be her half-brother) engaged in a sexual act. His sense of ownership of her is so profound that he will not allow her to be with anyone else, especially not a black man. In this scene, Ezili interjects every few paragraphs, encouraging Jeanne to satisfy her sexual needs and her need to be desired because she knows that this act will sever Jeanne's emotional bond with Charles. Afterwards, Joël swindles Jeanne out of the last money Charles had given her and also sells all of her furniture while she is at the sanatorium for two weeks because of her ill health. When she gets back to her lodgings, she has to burn some of her gowns for warmth, a desperate but cathartic cleansing of her attachment to the material things Charles had bought for her (339). She falls asleep under the rest of the gowns and the next

morning Achille arrives to tell her that he reported Joël for the theft and he had come to help her (351).

“You can’t stay here, with no one to look out for you. Your poet man says he can’t help you any more. He’s beggared. I’m working in Paris now, Jeanne. The pay is good, and they give me an apartment. Come stay with me.” (353)

Jeanne’s ‘happy ending’ is not with Baudelaire, a white Frenchman; it is orchestrated by Ezili and made possible by Achille’s love for her. Ezili looks upon their relationship with approval commenting that, “You’re dancing well, my Jeanne. Dancing in the groove I’ve laid for you, dancing a new story to your life” (354). Jeanne blooms under Achille’s loving gaze despite the toll of her illness: “. . . I hold my aching head high when I walk in the streets. Sometimes I have flour on my chin instead of powdered chalk. Sometimes I have ink on my hands instead of gloves, but I am a woman of property, and I am loved” (355). Together, they are able to make a success of his restaurant, “[s]o long as he stays in the kitchen and cooks, the rich folk who come there to eat never know that the place is run by a black man’s hands. Or a mulatresse’s” (355). By Ezili’s account, Jeanne dies a happy woman, thanks to the path Ezili had set her on and when she dies, the *lwa* is set free (366).

As in the other novels, the portrayal of motherhood is not simple and surrogate mothers are more prevalent than biological ones. Georgine only remembers her surrogate mother Calliope, Mer spends a lot of time raising Ti-Bois when his mother is working in the fields, and Jeanne adopts Lise’s seven year-old daughter because her English fiancé feels that she is too much of a scandal (TSR 361). Jeanne’s strong bond with her mother and grandmother is a source of love, but she worries nearly constantly about having enough money to take care of them, a worry they both likely had when she was a child. In Thais’s time, motherhood is seen as a

hardship because of the financial burden children impose on slave mothers who have no support from the fathers of their children. Meritet's friend Cups already has two children and becomes pregnant again, leading the other women who work in the brothel to speculate about how she will make ends meet since the brothel owner already charges her additional room and board for her children (237). While discussing her pregnancy, Eleni "nodded towards the back of the baths, where the drains were. The bones of many newborn babies littered those drains" (237). Despite their dispassionate view of pregnancy and motherhood, the women affirm that they will help Cups look after the child (238), in the same way in which raising children is a communal rather than an individual endeavor on Mer's plantation. When Thais miscarries, Ezili is unaffected, seeing it as a blessing that a potential young girl was spared from slavery and Mer has much the same view. Motherhood is not devalued but neither is it romanticised. The women who are biological, surrogate or adopted mothers in the novel all care for their children as well as they can, but it is plainly acknowledged that having children can be an encumbrance to poor or enslaved single mothers who are also women of colour.

On the San Domingue plantations in the novel, the sometimes ambiguous attitude towards motherhood is shaped by the considerable risk of dying in labour, the high rate of infant death (often due to malnutrition), the maltreatment pregnant women suffered at the hands of the book-keeper because of their lowered productivity, and the fact that children could be taken away at any time because they legally belonged to the plantation owner. When Georgine's first child is stillborn, Mer reflects on how her view of birth and motherhood as cause for celebration in Africa had changed in the New World: "A woman had died chained to me on the slave ship. Blood and liquid shit had been gushing from her anus for days before. . . . The mess between Georgine's legs put me in mind of that death. It always did now, when I helped women birth.

Back home, birth had been a thing of joy” (*TSR* 28). Tipingee had borne six children: two died, three were sold as soon as they were weaned,<sup>144</sup> and eventually she only has her daughter Marie-Claire, whom Simenon sells to Philomise (25). After she finds out about the sale, she collapses with grief while cutting sugar cane, crying for the loss of the only child she had left. The book-keeper’s response is to tell her that: “I guess even a bitch may howl for her pups” and, “[y]our child has black wench’s blood. She’ll come to like the mating soon enough” (161). His comments encapsulate the shift in prevailing attitudes towards black slave women on Saint Domingue plantations from the first to the second half of the eighteenth century.

During the Seven Years War (1756-1763) between France and Britain, the slave trade was disrupted and “planters could no longer depend on new slaves from across the Atlantic” so they had to depend instead on the female slaves they already possessed as “breeding units” to produce more slaves (Weaver 97).<sup>145</sup> Before the disruption, children were “a serious economic drain” because of the lowered productivity of pregnant women and because they had to wait before the children could work (97). Consequently, motherhood, as in the other novels, is not idealised. The burden it places on enslaved and/or single women of colour is made clear, but this does not mean that motherhood is necessarily portrayed negatively. Instead, the communal effort of women raising children together and the importance of surrogate mothers is emphasised. Ezili, symbolic mother to the connected women, embodies the collective memory of the intergenerational trauma of slavery and in this way she preserves their “unwritten” stories. Her

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<sup>144</sup> Mer had also lost a child and her husband in the first twelve years she had been in Saint Domingue (*TSR* 13).

<sup>145</sup> Once Saint Domingue planters became dependent of slave women to act as “breeding units,” the blame for miscarriage, stillborns and infant deaths was squarely on the shoulders of black women and the combined influences of disease, poor sanitation, hard physical labour and poor nutrition were overlooked. Midwives were blamed for any infant deaths and one midwife had to wear “a rope collar with seventy knots, the number of children she was believed to have killed.” If a woman miscarried she and the midwife both had to wear an iron collar until she was pregnant again (Weaver 105).

birth is marked by captivity, but also by love, and through micropolitical actions on a personal, individual level she works to challenge the stain of slavery.

It has become clear how the novel is shaped by creolisation in structure and in the intertwined temporalities and lives of the characters. While each woman's story has some closure, the novel remains relatively open-ended, especially considering Ezili's continued struggle against slavery in all of its incarnations. One can read her reunion with the other Ginen *lwas* as an event that is yet to happen, but even with this hopeful interpretation the novel does not offer any definitive resolutions. However, the possibility of a different future is not foreclosed upon because Hopkinson's emphasis in the novel is:

. . . on process, experience and difference (rather than on a solution), on alternative yet historicized pasts and futures (rather than on a harmonious present and future predetermined by the past), [which] enables a negotiable but nonetheless situated understanding of history. . . . (Marinkova 188-189)

There is no satisfaction of an ultimate confrontation with and resolution of the far-reaching consequences of slavery because the return to the past, and the ways in which it is shown to relate to the present and the future, makes it clear such a simplistic resolution is implausible, if not impossible.

By re-inhabiting the enslaved (Toni Morrison cited in Keizer 22) and bringing Thais, Mer and Jeanne's temporalities so close together, Hopkinson draws the reader's attention to the intimacy between slavery and modernity and the extent to which slavery, the shadow of Enlightenment (to paraphrase Dayan), facilitated modernity. Hopkinson associates black bodies with food, both in that their labour is 'sustenance' for early European capitalist modernity, but also in that they are themselves regarded as commodities and currency. The labour of black

bodies financed both modernity and the development of modern science and technology, which in turn justify this exploitation by casting black people as primitive savages. The novel subverts such simplified binaries of civilised/primitive and it also demonstrates that:

“Within the Caribbean new mentalities and identities were created: a new people who represent a melange of European, African, Amerindian and Asian ancestry. Almost every major civilization in the world was brought to the Caribbean in order to sustain the conditions for colonial economic growth. The [Caribbean individual] therefore is a futuristic individual, linked to all major civilizations. They are the first products of the modern world system. . . .” (Beckles 786)

Thus, in this often violent meeting place of different cultures and religions, on the plantation, the ever-changing movement of creolisation is set in motion as a survival response which resists the fracturing pressures of modernity. The entangled temporalities brings to the fore the relations between slavery and modernity, capitalism and technological progress, especially in the links between Mer and Jeanne’s times, and through the associations between Edgar Allan Poe, Baudelaire, and Jules Verne. Hopkinson ensures that her reader does not lose sight of “the incomparable horrors of slavery and the transformative rupture of [subsequent] emancipation . . .” (Mount n. pag.).

Ezili’s fight has no clear end in sight because slavery’s echoes have mutated, became embedded in current oppressive systems of authority and governance, necessitating the continued creative, creolised responses from the descendants of the enslaved. One of these responses is the creolised spiritual system of Vodoun, but, as invaluable as it is, it cannot ‘save’ the women in the novel because the spiritual beings they create are as human and flawed as they are. As Hopkinson herself states, it is “[p]eople’s relationships to each other [which] both save and doom

them . . .” (Hopkinson and Due 404). Viewing the novel through a Deleuzian lens as Marinkova proposes, one can recognise that the micropolitics enacted by the women in the novel which “coupl[es] creativity and politics . . . is ultimately driven by ethology (the ability of a body to affect others and be affected by others)” (185). Similarly, writing about Paule Marshall’s fiction, Hortense Spillers notes that:

The agent . . . embodies the resolution of the metaphors of experience that surround her or him. Ontogeny here repeats phylogeny: the individual both makes and is made by the collective history. . . . In other words, the individual agent is both origin *and* end of a complex figuration progression. The characters embody, therefore, a noble synechdochic purpose because they are the part that speaks for the whole, just as the whole is configured in their partialness. (Hortense Spillers cited in Michel, “Women’s Moral and Spiritual Leadership” 65, italics in original)

Spillers’ reading of Marshall’s work can be applied to Hopkinson’s as well since she focuses on individual experiences and actions of women of colour who are “both origin *and* end of a complex figuration progression.” The concept of a part that speaks for the whole recalls fractals and the intimacy between the personal and the political.

The underlying process of creolisation highlights the many degrees of violence so intimately tied to it: the overt immediate kind and the more unseen slow violence on personal, and structural and institutionalised levels. Ezili, ‘mother’ to the connected women, preserves the shared memory of the trauma of slavery which spans generations and she keeps their stories alive. She exemplifies the value of micropolitical acts (often the only political acts available to enslaved women) on the personal level in challenging the corrosive effect of slavery on the self. Therefore, these acts which are predicated on survival and helping others survive become an



oppositional strategy which emphasises adaption rather than assimilation (Melzer 54). This adaption is firmly grounded in the flexible creation of fractals, retaining a sense of self, as opposed to fracturing, breaking under the weight of slavery and its horrors. Diasporic music is representative of the creative fractal repetition which characterises diasporic cultures. When the existing pattern of cultural and social life was broken by the Middle Passage, the enslaved weave a *new* pattern out of the broken one (Hopkinson and Due 400). The novel emulates this re-weaving in content and structure, and therefore recalls both oral stories and diasporic music which Baldwin argues makes it possible to question oppressive, exclusionary narratives of history by collapsing discrete temporalities. The narrative traces the threads which bind the women together, bearing witness to the lives of those devalued by enduring oppressive power structures and whose stories have routinely been erased. *The Salt Roads* is modelled on diasporic music and oral stories, passed down from generation to generation, fractals of a reconstituted whole, which have played such an integral role in the adaptable oppositional psychic and spiritual strategy of survival employed by the enslaved and their descendants in response to the trauma they have experienced in a continuous way. The novel demonstrates that the stories of women like Thais, Mer and Jeanne are not only worthy of being passed on, but that it is crucial that they are voiced and preserved in order to engage productively with the future, through the past.

## Conclusion

. . . [H]istory is made up of fragments and absences—what is left out is as significant as what is included.

– Alexander Alberro (4)

In his groundbreaking essay entitled “Black to the Future,” Mark Dery asks: “Can a community whose past has been deliberately rubbed out, and whose energies have subsequently been consumed by the search for legible traces of its history, imagine possible futures?” (8). Authors like Nalo Hopkinson have answered this question with resounding affirmation by producing science fiction that not only attempts to address the absences in history or demonstrate the simultaneity of temporalities, but which also uses the genre to reflect on the place of people of colour in the future. As noted in the introduction, scholars have shown that this kind of science fiction is not necessarily a new phenomenon. In 2015, a rediscovered, unpublished W.E.B. Du Bois short story, dating from between 1908 and 1910, was printed in the *PMLA*. The story, “The Princess Steel,” opens with an African American couple on honeymoon in New York where they see an advertisement for a demonstration of a “megascoppe.” Intrigued, they go to the address provided where they are surprised to find that the inventor, a sociologist, is also black and that the machine he created (part crystal globe), enables them to see a dimension and time that co-exists with their own. The sociologist, Prof. Johnson, possesses a collection of books, a “Great Chronicle” of history compiled by a Silent Brotherhood over a period of two hundred years which enabled his discovery of this other dimension. He explains that he has spent over two decades trying to plot the “Great Curve” but when he tried to “cast” its lines he was “continually hampered by curious counter-curves and shadows and crossings.” Puzzled, he hypothesised that this interference came from an “Over-life” co-existing with human time on earth:

“[A] life of Over-men, Super-men, not merely Captains of Industry but field marshalls of the *Zeit-geist* who today are guiding the world events and dominating the lives of men. It is a Life so near ourselves that we think it is ourselves, and yet so vast that we vaguely identify it with the universe.”<sup>146</sup> (Du Bois 823)

The repeated use of “great” in the passage indicates the comprehensiveness of the “Chronicle” and the scale of the imposed “Over-life.”<sup>147</sup> The Chronicle is posited as being more complete than any other, implying that it is not only the master narrative of history which supports the status quo, but also the purposeful absences Alberro refers to. It is only once he has this complete narrative that he is able to see the Over-life, the institutionalised, global structures of power where technology and industry serve the interests of those in power. Prof. Johnson’s crystal globe divines not only the future, but also apprehends the present and past, enabling him to recognise these structures stretching across temporalities, still intact from the time of colonialism and slavery, exerting influence on the individual, so near we think it to be ourselves, but also so vast as to seem universal.

The plot of the rest of the story focuses on the “Curve of Steel—the sum of all the facts and quantities and times and lives that go to make Steel, that skeleton of the Modern World”<sup>148</sup> where two knights (Over-men) agree to cooperate to kill “[t]he dark Queen of the Iron Isles—she that of old came out of Africa,” in order: “. . . to gain access to the daughter she has kept

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<sup>146</sup> While the over-arching analogy in the story is treated with a heavy-hand, Du Bois did state, in “Criteria of Negro Art” (1926), that “all art is propaganda and ever must be” (cited in Brown and Rusert 819).

<sup>147</sup> The Professor also refers to the Over-life as the “Great Near” which can only be seen with the megascope, as opposed to the Far Great (made perceivable by the telescope) and the Near Small (seen with the microscope) (Du Bois 823). Therefore, it embodies both the vastness seen through a telescope and the closeness of that perceived through a microscope.

<sup>148</sup> The Steel Curve is also described as the realm where one can “. . . behold the Spirit of the wonderful metal which is the centre of our modern life. . .” (Du Bois 823).

hidden” (Du Bois 824; 825). Through the megascope, installed at the top of a newly-built skyscraper, the husband and Professor are able to see the “Pit of Pittsburg” where “an allegorical origin-story of steelmaking that frames steel production within a narrative that critiques historical colonization and primitive accumulation” plays out (Greenway Carr n. pag.).<sup>149</sup> Sir Guess of Londonton wants the Princess herself while The Lord of the Golden Way wants her treasure, her hair made of steel. After defeating the queen, the greedy knight kills his counterpart who tries to protect the princess.<sup>150</sup> He creates a “‘mighty loom’ of mills that binds the Princess in ‘the imprisonment to which her spun hair held her as it stretched across the world’” (Du Bois 828). Britt Rusert (who co-authored the introduction to the story with Adrienne Brown) reads the story as an expression of Du Bois’s understanding of capitalism, global imperialism and “the social construction of technology” (Greenway Carr n. pag.; Brown and Rusert 820). On the one hand, the African Queen connotes the slave labour integral in establishing America’s position as a global power, and the resources bled from her continent which were used to strengthen Western nations. On the other hand, the Steel skeleton represents the industrial and technological struts supporting and holding up the “Modern World.” Professor Johnson’s black counter-technology allows him to recognise all of these usually hidden “curves” of power, to not just know the Over-life but to see it with his soul (Du Bois 823), enabling him to possibly respond to it constructively. It is therefore fitting that the Professor’s office and technological instrument are

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<sup>149</sup> The term “primitive accumulation” has its origins in Marx’s *Capital* where he writes that:

The discovery of gold and silver in America, the extirpation, enslavement and entombment in mines of the aboriginal population, the beginning of the conquest and looting of the East Indies, the turning of Africa into a warren for the commercial hunting of black-skins, signalled the rosy dawn of the era of capitalist production.

These “idyllic proceedings” are according to Marx “the chief momenta of primitive accumulation” (cited in Hudson n. pag.).

<sup>150</sup> The Over-men are described as knights, usually symbols of both the might and civility of the European world, but who are exposed in the story as being brutal and greedy. Even Sir Guess’s motivation behind protecting the Princess seems to be about taking possession of her, instead of treating her as an equal.

situated at the very top of a newly built skyscraper, subverting the symbolism of this urban monument to power, industry and ‘progress.’

The most problematic aspect of the story is the portrayal of the female characters.<sup>151</sup> The husband is the narrator while his wife is largely silent throughout the story. At the end it is revealed that she was unable to see this other dimension, and only saw a panoramic view of New York because the device was not “. . . tuned delicately enough for her” (Du Bois 829). And, the Princess, guileless and naïve falls in love with Sir Guess instantaneously and is subsequently paralyzed by grief at his death, enabling the Lord of the Golden Way to appropriate and exploit her “treasure” while she performs “mystic whisperings” in an attempt to bring her love back to life (828; 829).<sup>152</sup> In the story, her ‘magic,’ her alternative knowledge is portrayed as powerless. The Princess promises destruction and death on the day Sir Guess awakens, but her ineffectual attempts to resurrect him signal the unlikelihood of this event. Rusert argues that Du Bois’s portrayal of women in the story is intentional to demonstrate how technology is encoded by race and gender (Greenway Carr, n. p.), but this argument only applies to the representation of the Princess. It does not account for why the wife is unable to see the other dimension like the men.<sup>153</sup> The last thing they witness in the Curve of Steel is four robber knights getting ready to attack the Lord of the Golden Way, but they will never know the outcome because “. . . a day to the Over-World is a thousand years to us and even the megascope is a slave to Time” (Du Bois

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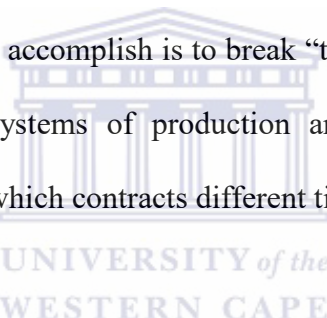
<sup>151</sup> The black Witch Knowal features briefly: Sir Guess captures her and in return for sparing her life, she promises that her husband the Ogre will tell him a great secret. The Ogre reveals the location of the monstrous, dark Queen of the Iron Isles, tells the knight about her hidden daughter and explains how to kill her (Du Bois 825).

<sup>152</sup> The sight of her breasts is so arresting that our narrator feels compelled to describe them twice: when “her bosom heaved” and when “[s]he gathered the silver of her hair around her, shading her lithe limbs and heaving breasts. . .” (Du Bois 828).

<sup>153</sup> The reader also never learns her name, although her husband’s name (Robert) is revealed at the end of the story.

829). Thus, Professor Johnson's black counter-technology remains both unavailable to black women, and contained within a linear temporality despite its ability to capture other dimensions. The story how the exploitative use of technology is used to 'bind' the disempowered. Du Bois's story confirms the long tradition of black science and speculative fiction that engage with technology as a tool of empire, and the entangled nature of capitalism, slavery and modernity.<sup>154</sup> But, it also demonstrates how black women have had to contend not only with racism, but also sexism, from black men, an intersection Hopkinson delves into in all three novels with the relationships between Antonio and Tan-Tan, Ti-Jeanne and her grandfather, and Jeanne and her 'half-brother' Joël.

What "Princess Steel" does accomplish is to break "the misguided association of slavery with antiquity and precapitalist systems of production and domination" (Gilroy 204). By employing a creolised temporality which contracts different times into simultaneity, Hopkinson's work shows how:


  
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Slavery did not function as a kind of archaic remnant, belonging to a previous age, which somehow capitalist modernity had not yet got around to abolishing for being insufficiently rational, or insufficiently modern. Far from it. It is exactly the most archaic social relations which are preserved in the modern system. The plantation in the Caribbean was at the advanced front of modern capitalism. (Stuart Hall cited in Schwarz 23)

In a book review entitled "The Racist Dawn of Capitalism: Unearthing the Economy of Bondage," published in the *Boston Review* of March this year, Peter James Hudson evaluates

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<sup>154</sup> In *The Black Atlantic*, Gilroy uses Schoolteacher in Morrison's *Beloved* as an example of this imbrication as he is "a slaveholder whose rational and scientific racism replaces the patrimonial and sentimental version of racial domination practices at 'Sweet Home' by his predecessor" (204).

four contemporary texts that are all concerned with the connections between slavery and capitalism. He opens the review by describing the French socialist Jean Jaurès's analysis of the French Revolution which ". . . drew a line connecting the profits from the slave trade to the growth of the industries and ideologies of capitalism," a link that is also made by C.L.R. James in *The Black Jacobins*. In his seminal text about the Haitian revolution, James quotes Jaurès's statement which "captur[es] the apparent historical contradiction through which African enslavement led to European freedom." For Jaurès it is a sad irony that "[t]he fortunes created at Bordeaux, at Nantes, by the slave-trade, gave to the bourgeoisie that pride which needed liberty and contributed to human emancipation" (cited in Hudson n. pag.).

Hudson also adds that James made a similar point about slavery in America in *A History of Negro Revolt* (1938), one that Du Bois also affirmed in "Black Reconstruction in America: An Essay Toward a History of the Part Which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America, 1860–1880" (published in 1935). In *Capitalism and Slavery* by James's protégé Eric Williams (later the first prime minister of Trinidad and Tobago), the author claims that "the abolition of slavery in the British Empire was a result of economic rationalizations—not humanitarianism and moral persuasion" and that ". . . the capital accumulation wrought from slavery" financed the development of "England's early industrial infrastructure" (n. pag.). These eminent black historians, chronicle the connections between slavery, capitalism and modernity, but their work takes place within the confinements of a discipline bound to a linear temporality and realism.

In “Speculative Fictions of Slavery,” Madhu Dubey refers to historian Hayden White’s assertion that in order to constitute history as a discipline, positivist methods for recovering facts had to be normalised and as such “historical studies had to subordinate the faculty of imagination” so as to retain its claim to realism (784). For marginalised groups, “the realist imperative that has characterized history since its inception as a discipline can only appear as the crowning element of the very ideology they wish to oppose” (784). Writers like Hopkinson, Butler, Morrison, Marshall and others, use fiction to foreshorten “the temporal distance between slavery and the present” (786), thus allowing them to escape the confines of realism and linear time. Hudson describes the work of writers like Morrison, as “incandescent letters [that] have burned through an archive of forgetting” (n. pag). In their introduction to *Science Fiction, Imperialism and the Third World: Essays on Postcolonial Literature and Film* (2010), Hoagland and Sarwal state that “[t]he rewriting/revisiting of history and the recovery of the subaltern subject, integral components to colonial studies, are mirrors of science fiction’s complex relationship with history and the haunting presence of aliens and others . . .” (10). The haunting presence of the past signals a collective failure to deal with the past, but such hauntings “can also offer the possibility of rectification, acknowledgement and reparation” (Colmeiro 31-31).

Authors like Hopkinson creatively theorise the connections between different temporalities and the subjectivities of women of colour. Notably, she does not only trace the nebulous associations between slavery and capitalism, or slavery and modernity, but connects them all to science and technology through the genre of science fiction; similar speculative fictions, such as magical realism, cannot make this connection because there is no overt engagement with science and technology. Additionally, science fiction also allows her to engage more constructively with the future as a virtual temporal space than other kinds of speculative



fictions which do not engage with ideas around ‘progress’ in such an overt manner. By writing science fiction Hopkinson questions and subverts the white androcentric nature of the genre by putting women of colour at the centre of her stories. This mode of writing also makes visible the “longue *durée* of capitalist conquest” more effectively than the disciplines of history or sociology (through writers like C.L. R. James and Eric Williams) could do, as they depend on a “presentist empiricism” (Brown and Rusert 820). In order to confront a “history that hurts” (Saidiya Hartman cited in Dubey, “Speculative Fictions of Slavery” 788), Hopkinson’s science fiction displays “an emotional and corporeal mode of knowing the past” which emphasises how it continues to haunt the present by rejecting linear and progressive temporality (Natasha Gordon and Hershini Bhana Young cited in Dubey 788). Moreover, the representation of temporality reflects the processes of creolisation, with its indeterminacies and contradictions.

Creolisation, as a reaction to modernity, is an “innovative means of fending off oppressive and dehumanizing values” (Fernández Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert 2), and it demonstrates how we are made and unmade by the connections between ourselves and others. In keeping with Glissant’s definition of creolisation, Hopkinson uses it as a “deliberate disruption of homogeneity” through an embrace of “the subversion and challenge of division and separation” (Robert Young cited in Ashcroft, Griffith and Tiffin 120). She describes the sensibility behind creolisation as “part enforced compliance, part defiance, and a whole lot of creativity” (Hopkinson cited in Nelson 102). When asked about her habit of transgressing boundaries in her fiction, she replied that because her work comes from a Caribbean context:

[F]usion fits very well; that’s how we survived. We can’t worship Shango on pain of death? Well, [what do you know]; he just became conflated with a Catholic saint. Got at

least four languages operating on [a] tiny island? Well, we'll just combine the four and call it Papiamentu. . . . (cited in Nelson 99)

Creolisation in her work is therefore about subversion *and* survival. It is a pervasive presence in all three novels and functions as a means to undermine and oppose the dominant culture and revalorise indigenous systems of knowledge and expression. In the words of Caribbean playwright, Derek Walcott, the challenge of opposition is not “. . . simply to invert the hegemonic discourse, but to radically alter the terrain of production of discourse and the relation of the subordinated to it” (K.O.S. Campbell 132), and Hopkinson employs creolisation to this end. Despite this, opposition movements are not romanticised in her fiction. As outlined in the introduction, she does not question the necessity of opposition, but at the same time she does not shy away from drawing her reader's attention to the inherent contradictions in such movements (Keizer 9). In the process of exploring these contradictions she simultaneously delves into “the process of self-creation” under oppressive conditions which women of colour engage with (11). Central to this process is creolisation which is “employed in models of linguistic, political and cultural integration” but it is also enabling “as an imaginative resource” (Burns, *Creolizing the Canon* 15).

Chapter Two and Three, on *Midnight Robber* and *Brown Girl in the Ring* respectively, are built around Glissant's two key concepts in *Poetics of Relation*; namely root and relation identity. *Midnight Robber* is concerned, in part, with the Marrayshévites' fixed construction of themselves as heroic maroons, and re-iterations of colonial relations of power and how colonial enterprise impacts on colonised and coloniser. In contrast, *Brown Girl in the Ring* is about a diasporan subjectivity which is responsive, through spirituality, to an environment hostile to immigrants. *The Salt Roads* goes back to the point of entanglement, creolisation's point of origin

as a reaction to modernity. Like Du Bois's short story, it elucidates the opaque, sometimes purposely obfuscated connections between slavery, modernity, capitalism and technology. In all three novels, it is clear that creolisation is not just about survival, but about thriving in an oppressive environment by building something new out of something broken. This is particularly evident in the role of music in the three texts (nannysong, drumming, chanting), a role that fits with Gilroy's contention that music is part of the Black Atlantic counterculture of modernity and Baldwin's statement that music "is our witness" (cited in Gilroy 203). Furthermore, one can trace the links between diasporic music and the oral tradition in how both affect the impact, structure and rhythm of the storytelling in all three novels.

Toni Morrison links the ambiguous endings of her novels, recognisable in Hopkinson's too, to the nature of oral storytelling. She refers specifically to *Tar Baby* (1981), where she purposely does not "shut the door" to different interpretations (cited in Davis 232). At the end of the novel, she presents the reader with the two choices available to Son but says that she "couldn't make the choice *for* him":

The reader had to figure that out for him—or herself and that is also part of ending stories. You don't end a story in the oral tradition—you can have the little message at the end, your little moral, but the ambiguity is deliberate because it doesn't end, it's an ongoing thing and the reader or the listener is in it and you have to THINK. . . . (232)

Both Morrison's and Hopkinson's fictions require the reader to be active and involved in the process of creative theorising.

Likewise, one can identify in both writers' work a concern with "the process by which we construct and deconstruct reality in order to be able to function in it. . . . [H]ow a people . . . absorb and reject information on a very personal level about something [slavery] that is undigestible and unabsorbable, completely" (Toni Morrison cited in Washington 235). In all three of Hopkinson's novels one can see how integral creolisation is to this construction and deconstruction of 'reality,' because it restores a sense of self and value to the oppressed. "Those people could not live without value. They had prices, but no value in the white world, so they made their own, and they decided what was valuable" (Morrison cited in Washington 235). This valorisation happens through diasporic spirituality, storytelling and music, and also community. In *Brown Girl in the Ring* and *The Salt Roads* in particular, the diasporic spiritual systems in place underscore how the individual cannot be separated from the community, and in fact, how all spheres of life (personal/political, spiritual/physical) are inseparable and are continually influencing on one another. This inseparability extends not only to temporalities, but also to geographical spaces: metropolitan Paris cannot be disconnected from the Caribbean in *The Salt Roads*; in *Midnight Robber* Toussaint and New Half-Way Tree remain connected despite the dimension veil and in *Brown Girl in the Ring* the Burn, however isolated it might seem, still functions as part of Toronto and through Mami's creolised spiritual system it is also still linked to the Caribbean. In all three texts Hopkinson continually stresses not just the impossibility of neat distinctions, but also how attempts to enforce them are counterproductive. Therefore, imposed binaries and other false oppositions (stemming from the Enlightenment) in service of oppressive systems of power are undermined.

The temporality in Hopkinson's fiction is connected to history and how it is used to "reconstruct the past in order to serve the interests of the present" (Shirato, Danaher and Webb 2). Hopkinson contests these kinds of self-serving histories which support a status quo of inequality and instead tells the stories of those whose experiences are never more than a footnote in a margin of the grand narratives of history. "Rather than seeing historical time unfolding in an orderly, continuous, linear manner in which various historical events can be conjoined . . . to form regular patterns . . . history [is] an ongoing struggle between different forces and forms of power" (Shirato, Danaher and Webb 4). Hopkinson's fiction highlights people whose lives and experiences are excluded from these "regular patterns," not just in history (*The Salt Roads*), but also those who are rarely envisioned to populate future spaces (*Midnight Robber* and *Brown Girl in the Ring*). By tracing the reverberations of the trauma inflicted by slavery from futuristic temporalities back to its source she exposes how the oppressions that sprung from it have become nearly invisible (partly) because of how history has been constructed as a single, progressive story divided into discrete periods. Another explanation for this invisibility is the disavowal of the connections between slavery and modernity. By providing alternative narratives, Hopkinson's fiction fits into Gilroy's Black Atlantic counterculture because it shows that slavery is internal to modernity and modern capitalism (Gilroy 204).

In "Beyond the Colonized and the Colonizer," Lorna Burns explains Deleuze's argument (drawing on Nietzsche) that literature is "an enterprise in health" and that because writers diagnose and show readers "how particular symptoms or forms of malaise come to be what they actually are, the affects and percepts of literature suggest alternative ways of becoming" (158). In order to expose the pathology of slavery in its fullest form, Hopkinson traces its path from the past to how it remains enmeshed in our 'modern' world in enduring structures of oppression and

how it will likely still have an effect in the future. But slavery is not a singular affliction; instead it forms one part of the insidious syndrome of modernity which is also comprised of capitalism, industry, and technology and science when it is wielded to further the interests of the former. Science fiction enables Hopkinson to address these inter-related concepts and structures, as well as to demonstrate *how* entangled they are by highlighting their cumulative repercussions for women of colour. In doing so, she underscores how essential technology was to the colonial enterprise, but she also exposes the active role that Atlantic slavery and the Caribbean played in the development of technology and industry usually exclusively associated with Europe. The plantation, “at the advanced front of modern capitalism” (Stuart Hall cited in Schwarz 23), is where creolisation originated as a response to the forces of modernity, to re-establish community and the value of individuals. Creolisation is founded in relation not root identity; it is characterised by contradictions; it is about connections, not distance. The diasporic temporality one finds in the three novels is shaped by it, questioning master narratives of history, addressing the absences. But, Hopkinson’s use of temporality is not only defined by redress, instead, it also looks to the future to clarify the slow violence of colonialism and slavery and to envision alternatives through thought experiment. At its heart, her fiction is about “placing black women center stage . . . and not as the all-knowing, infallible black matriarch but as a flawed here, triumphant there, mean, nice, complicated woman, and some of them win and some of them lose” (Toni Morrison cited in Davis 231).

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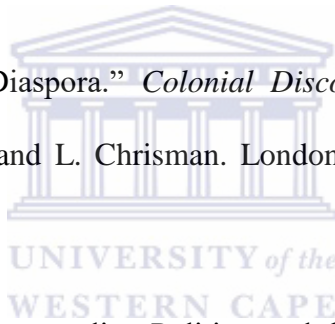
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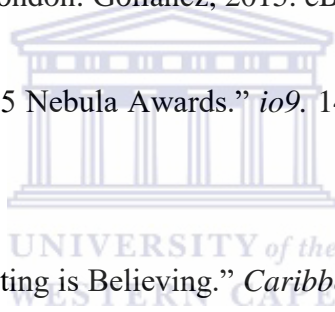
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