The Posthuman in Contemporary Black African Diasporic Science Fiction

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Abstract

My thesis investigates narrative theorisations of the posthuman in fictions by three Black African diasporic science fiction writers: Nalo Hopkinson's *Brown Girl in the Ring* (1998) and *Midnight Robber* (2000); Nnedi Okorafor's *Binti* trilogy (*Binti*, 2015, *Binti: Home*, 2017 and *Binti: The Night Masquerade*, 2018); and Anthony Joseph's *The African Origins of UFOs* (2008). I outline how these six texts contribute to and, importantly, disrupt critical posthumanism's reconfiguration of liberal humanism's conception of 'the human'. In dialogue with Black feminist scholarship by those such as Zakiyyah Iman Jackson, Katherine McKittrick, Christina Sharpe and Sylvia Wynter, the thesis explores how fictional narratives can be employed to denaturalise the hegemonic conception of Western Man, which continues to rest on the ontological negation of Black life. I describe the three writers discussed as continuing and extending a legacy of work by Black scholars and artists who, positioned as abject within Western modernity, have always disrupted the epistemic tenets of Man. I also situate these texts within scholarship on the 'new animism' (Laack, 2020) in order to highlight how tenets of African and African diasporic epistemologies and cultures exist as possible alternative genealogies for critical posthumanist discourses, which can disrupt the Euro-Western and white-centric tendencies that currently dominate the discipline. Hopkinson, Okorafor and Joseph's writing, as well as the Black intellectual tradition drawn on throughout the thesis, inhabit 'demonic grounds' (Wynter, 1989; McKittrick, 2006) within critical posthumanism: absent presences that disrupt and transform tenets of the disciplines' prevailing scholarship, ultimately reshaping conceptions of the posthuman.

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Introduction: Disrupting the Critical Posthumanist Archive

I.   The Critical Posthumanist Archive

This thesis argues that Black African diasporic science fiction produces narrative theorisations of the posthuman that engage with, and contribute to, contemporary reconfigurations of liberal humanism's conception of 'the human'. At the same time, these texts extend and, importantly, disrupt critical posthumanist discourses by centring issues of race and racialisation, as well as by drawing on antecedent posthumanist knowledges rarely acknowledged within the discipline. Through the dual process of denaturalising the foundationally anti-Black humanist subject and imagining alternative frameworks for being human, these texts draw from and contribute to the work of Black scholars and artists, who, constructed as foundationally abject, have always disrupted the narrow terms of Western modernity. This project by no means produces a survey of contemporary Black African diasporic science fiction, neither does it approach a comprehensive discussion of Black literary texts that experiment with what it is to be human. Rather, it analyses fictions by three writers, Nalo Hopkinson, Nnedi Okorafor and Anthony Joseph, which represent examples of narratives informed by the insights of Black perspectives that explore conceptions of the posthuman.

Further, each of these writers' imagined narrative worlds are informed by African and African diasporic spiritual traditions. I demonstrate throughout this thesis that such knowledges, described as primitive by colonial discourses that privilege a Eurocentric model of scientific rationality, are adopted by these three writers as onto-epistemological tools employed in the imagination of the posthuman. As I will outline in Chapter One, the posthuman turn in critical theory has a near-exclusive reliance on European poststructuralist thinkers, subsequently eliding various epistemes and cultures that anticipated critical posthumanist concepts. I follow Juanita Sundberg by acknowledging that, while critical posthumanism provides the conceptual tools for dismantling colonial dualisms, the discipline is rooted in Eurocentric thinking.[1] As such, posthumanist scholars potentially erase the many 'epistemic traditions' that never posited 'dualist ontologies of nature/culture.'[2] By drawing on

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[1] Juanita Sundberg, 'Decolonizing Posthumanist Geographies', *Cultural Geographies*, 21.1 (2013), 33–47 (p. 35).

[2] Sundberg, p. 35.

African and African diasporic epistemologies and cultures, while at the same time centring the experiences of Black subjects living in what Christina Sharpe terms the 'wake' of slavery and colonialism – that is, ongoing effects of Black subjugation – Hopkinson, Okorafor and Joseph contribute to a critical posthumanist discourse for decolonial praxis.[3]

This thesis analyses six texts: Hopkinson's *Brown Girl in the Ring* (1998) and *Midnight Robber* (2000); Okorafor's *Binti* trilogy (*Binti* (2015), *Binti Home* (2017) and *Binti: The Night Masquerade* (2018)); and Joseph's *The African Origins of UFOs* (2008). Each of these share two central facets that led to their being included in the present study. First, each reimagines the posthuman from the situated perspective of Black being. These fictions are attendant to the abjection of blackness within the coloniality of being and, as such, avoid the rearticulation of white liberal subjectivity that occurs in various cultural formations of the posthuman. In exploring what it is to be human beyond Western Man, they extend a legacy of Black cultures and scholarship that has always disrupted this figure. Second, through their engagement with African and African diasporic spiritual traditions, Hopkinson, Okorafor and Joseph produce works of animist realism, a concept that I outline fully in the following chapter. Saliently, these texts draw on non-dualistic cultures and epistemologies to imagine cosmological worlds that inform the depiction of the posthuman figures that populate the narratives.

Through an analysis of its chosen texts, one purpose of this thesis is to unveil an alternative intellectual archive, or, more precisely, to expand the archive of critical posthumanist thought. In referring to archival work, I am thinking of the archive here in terms defined by Sara Ahmed. In her discussion of the act of documenting sexism – the production of a sexism archive – archival work becomes a possible mode of resistance:

> Our sexism archive is full. Our archive is stuffed. Our archive includes not only the documents of sexism; the fragments that combine to record an upheaval. The archive makes the document into a verb: to document is to refuse to agree to something, to refuse to stay silent about something. Bodies are part of this archive; voices too. Our archive is an archive of rebellion. It testifies to a struggle. To struggle for an existence

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[3] Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), pp. 1–24.

is to transform an existence.[4]

To attend to the ways in which critical posthumanism contributes to the erasure of various non-dualistic bodies of thought, as well as the actual bodies of those who live such ontologies both within academia and beyond, is to produce an archive that challenges academic posthumanism's latent Eurocentrism. It is an act of documentation that refuses to perpetuate the silences that arise from posthumanist writing that remains within the 'orbit of Eurocentred epistemologies and ontologies'.[5] As alluded to above, my aim here is not to erase the important, potentially decolonial and anti-racist, scholarship of critical posthumanism, but rather to avoid the calcification of its terms. I envisage the further development of the discipline through a non-hierarchical practice of knowledge production, such as that articulated by Isabelle Stengers in an essay that challenges the privileging of 'empirical' Science within Western thought:

> Instead of the hierarchical figure of a tree, with Science as its trunk, what we call progress would perhaps have had the allure of what Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari called a rhizome, connecting heterogeneous practices, concerns, and ways of giving meaning to the inhabitants of this earth, with none being privileged and any being liable to connect with any other.

> One might object by calling this a figure of anarchy. Yes—but an ecological anarchy, because while connections *may* be produced between any parts of a rhizome, they also *must* be produced. They are events, linkages—like symbiosis. They are what is and will remain heterogeneous.[6]

As I will outline below, such symbiotic processes of knowledge production are continuous with the kinds of subjectivities articulated within critical posthumanism. This thesis is committed to the development of posthumanist knowledge in such terms, as an emerging

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[4] Sara Ahmed, 'Introduction: Sexism - A Problem With A Name', *New Formations*, 86 (2015), 1–13 (p. 13).
[5] Sundberg, p. 35.
[6] Isabelle Stengers, 'Reclaiming Animism', *E-Flux*, 2012 <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/36/61245/reclaiming-animism/> [accessed 1 August 2020]. Emphasis in original. Stengers is attempting to reclaim animism beyond its description within colonial discourses. She does not argue for the veracity of animist cultures within the terms of empirical Science, but rather situates animism within a rhizomatic model of knowledge production.

assemblage of heterogeneous components. In this sense, the Black posthumanism that is explored in this thesis is not positioned external to existing scholarship, but rather deterritorialises the discipline's current tendency for white-, Euro-, and US-exceptionalism.

Critical posthumanism developed from anti-humanist discourses, such as those within poststructuralism and feminist theory, and works to retheorise subjectivity in the context of a contemporary milieu in which claims of human exceptionalism have become increasingly untenable. In Stefan Herbrechter's terms, critical posthumanism is an emerging set of discourses 'which negotiate[…] the pressing contemporary question of what it is to be human under the conditions of globalization, technoscience, late capitalism and climate change.'[7] He continues to acknowledge that the prefix 'post-' signifies a movement '*beyond*' humanism, while, at the same time, refusing a linear model of human progress that would posit the posthuman as a development in humanity's teleological timeline.[8] In this sense, posthuman thought avoids both reactionary fears of a transgression of human 'nature' through posthuman technologies, as well as uncritical venerations of the potential of such technologies to propel humanity towards transhumanist futures. Despite the seeming oppositionality between these two extremes, each ultimately remains wedded to liberal humanist subjectivity.[9] To be explicit then, within this thesis critical posthumanism is defined as an emerging set of discourses that aim to rearticulate what it is to be human beyond the narrow and, importantly, racialised frames of Western modernity; it does not aim to describe a new subject, but to develop frameworks for analysing the kind of embodied and embedded subjectivities that have always been, yet which appear more overt in the present milieu.[10] This definition is key, for it facilitates the present study's desire to situate the insights of posthumanism within a wider (and at times preceding) milieu of concepts of what it is to be human, many of which never assimilated to the narrow terms of Western Man. In this sense,

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[7] Stefan Herbrechter, 'Critical Posthumanism', in *Posthuman Glossary*, ed. by Rosi Braidotti and Maria Hlavajova (London: Bloomsbury Publishing PLC, 2018), pp. 94–96 (p. 94).

[8] Herbrechter, p. 94. Emphasis added.

[9] The technophilic view is epitomised by Francis Fukuyama, whose treatise against a posthuman future centres on his belief in the need to maintain a neoliberal understanding of a universal human nature. See Francis Fukuyama, *Our Posthuman Future* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2002). In transhumanist discourse, uses of the term 'posthuman', such as by Nick Bostrom, generally refer to what comes after the human following an uncritical embrace of technological enhancement. See Nick Bostrom, 'Why I Want to Be Posthuman When I Grow Up', in *Medical Enhancement and Posthumanity*, ed. by Ruth Chadwick and Bert Gordijn (Dordrecht: Springer, 2008), pp. 107–36. As Sherryl Vint shows, transhumanist ideology 'has its roots in both liberal humanism and Cartesian mind/body duality.' Sherryl Vint, *Bodies of Tomorrow: Technology, Subjectivity and Science Fiction* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), p. 180.

[10] As Hayles famously wrote, 'we have always been posthuman.' N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999), p. 291.

to refer to critical posthumanist discourses as emerging is not to emphasise their apparent 'newness'. As I have noted above, a central contention of this thesis is that several insights provided by the discipline rearticulate tenets of African and African diasporic epistemes, as well as those provided by Black artists and scholars.

One area in which critical posthumanism reiterates alternative knowledges is through its disruption of Western philosophy's immanence-transcendence binary. Liberal humanism constructed such a dualism to support claims of human exceptionalism, positing humanity's unique capacity for rational thought as that which enabled the transcendence from, and therefore domination over, the natural world. In *Becoming Human: Matter and Meaning in an Antiblack World* (2020), Zakiyyah Iman Jackson explains the 'religio-philosophical' basis for the racialisation of such a hierarchical binary. Black African people, allegedly unable to attain the transcendence from immanence achieved by white Western cultures, were animalised – a foundational element in the construction of the so-called transcendent rationality of white Man:

> Ultimately, Hegel concluded, "the African" is *eternally* an "animal man" because Africans are trapped *within* immanence, or immediate experience, and are, therefore, unable to achieve transcendence or apprehend transcendental knowledge. In this, Hegel co-constitutes human-animal, nature-culture, and immanence-transcendence dualisms *within* the imaginary of global raciality.[11]

The immanence-transcendence binary worked not only to justify the subjugation of Black humanity, but also devalued various epistemologies that never separated knowledge production from its milieu. As such, any attempt by critical posthumanists to challenge the privileging of transcendence within Western modernity is limited without an engagement with how antiblackness was integral to the devaluation of immanence, as well as with the 'non-transcendental' epistemologies that were rendered primitive within Hegel's dialectic. To outline this limitation, I will briefly explain how the disruption of the immanence-transcendence binary is central to Braidotti's conception of the posthuman, before indicating

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[11] Zakiyyah Iman Jackson, *Becoming Human: Matter and Meaning in an Antiblack World* (New York: New York University Press, 2020), p. 89. Emphasis in original.

how such writing, if considered alone, risks rearticulating colonial knowledge practices through its privileging of solely Western philosophies of immanence.

Braidotti describes the 'posthuman condition' as a convergence phenomenon between post-humanism, the movement beyond humanist discourse, and post-anthropocentrism, the disruption of species hierarchy.[12] Accordingly, by drawing on the radical immanence of a neo-Spinozist and Deleuzian Western feminist tradition, she posits the posthuman subject as an embodied and embedded entity that is contingently produced as a multiplicitous assemblage. Such a philosophy of radical immanence articulates the non-teleological becoming of subjectivity within the monistic force of 'Life'.[13] This is not a holistic model of sameness, but rather a contention that all matter is engaged in ongoing processes of differentiation that produce multiplicity and specificity. Encapsulated within Deleuze and Guattari's maxim 'PLURALISM = MONISM',[14] theories of immanence posit fundamental interrelation, while avoiding the pitfall of universalism that fails to attend to the heterogeneous, situated experiences of various humans, as well as nonhuman others.[15]

Relevant for this thesis is how the immanence of all matter renders knowledge production a transversal process contingent on situated relations. Braidotti's radical immanence declares untenable master narratives that are replaced by the 'the multiple perspectives generated by embodied and embedded middle grounds'.[16] This situated and relational condition of knowledge is contingent on Braidotti's concept of posthuman subjectivity: 'we are all part of nature, even though academic philosophy continues to claim transcendental grounds for human consciousness'.[17] Here, Braidotti highlights how her theory of posthuman knowledge challenges the positioning of transcendence over immanence, which was central to the Western human exceptionalism and which rested on the conception of white Man's alleged unique aptitude for objective rational thought.

My contention is that theories of decentralised and rhizomatic forms of knowledge production can be turned towards critical posthumanism as a means of challenging its defining Eurocentrism. If critical posthumanist discourses rest largely on Western

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[12] Rosi Braidotti, *Posthuman Knowledge* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2019), pp. 1–5.

[13] Braidotti, *The Posthuman* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2014), p. 60.

[14] Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. by Brian Massumi (London: The Athlone Press, 1996), p. 2.

[15] Braidotti succinctly articulates this unity without homogenisation: 'we-are-(all)-in-this-together-but-we-are-not-the-same' Braidotti, *Posthuman Knowledge*, p. 54.

[16] Braidotti, *Posthuman Knowledge*, p. 52.

[17] Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, p. 66.

philosophies of immanence, as Braidotti's does, they threaten to reinsert Western thinking as universal even as they attempt to challenge such practices within humanism. My meta-theoretical critique here stresses that this is a contention well understood by some critical posthumanists, who do not posit their own exceptionalism. Braidotti herself draws a transversal link between the 'embodied and embedded empiricism at work in feminist theory', which represents the primary source for her theoretical insights, and the 'situated perspectives' or 'non-Western perspectivism' of critical race and postcolonial theory.[18] Her 'politics of locations or of radical immanence' leads to a call for the decolonisation of the issues facing global humanity today, in particular when taking into account the unequal attribution of vulnerability to the threats facing humanity.[19]

I am encouraged by such immanent renderings of the subject of knowledge production to expand the archive of critical posthumanism through analyses of my chosen texts. Each of the writers discussed in this thesis produces cosmological worlds that situate posthuman figures as becoming within more than human environments.[20] In so doing, they engage in theorisations of subjectivity that challenge the colonial notion of a transcendent Western subject, rather than arguing for the assimilation of Black subjects into this hegemonic category. In this sense, they enter into dialogue with Braidotti and further critical posthumanists, forging a discursive assemblage which brings to light the potential displacement of Man through an engagement with tenets of African and African diasporic cultures. The fictions discussed in this thesis therefore reveal the decolonial and anti-racist potential of critical posthumanism, while subverting the tendency to present these discourses as tools bestowed by a former colonial centre. I employ analyses of Black African diasporic science fiction in the vital process of preventing critical posthumanists from, however unwillingly, reinserting white Western-centrism. As Jennifer Adams and Matthew Weinstein write: 'We [Western academics] need to look to how other knowledge systems have described concepts of being human before we can lay claim to this notion of posthumanism, especially as academics embedded in this colonial system of knowledge and therefore

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[18] Braidotti, *Posthuman Knowledge*, pp. 48–49. The concept of non-Western perspectivism derives from anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro. See Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, 'The Relative Native', trans. by Julia Sauma and Martin Holbraad, *Hau: Journal of Ethnographic Theory*, 3.3 (2013), 473–502.
[19] Braidotti, *Posthuman Knowledge*, p. 49.
[20] The term 'more than human' is used here in the same way as by María Puig de la Bellacasa: 'it speaks in one breath of nonhumans and other than humans such as things, objects, other animals, living beings, organisms, physical forces, spiritual entities, and humans.' María Puig de la Bellacasa, *Matters of Care: Speculative Ethics in More Than Human Worlds* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), p. 1.

logics.'[21] It is a transversal contention across this thesis that Hopkinson, Okorafor and Joseph provide aesthetic guides for facilitating such a process.

Through their projections of Black people into the future, each of the writers discussed in this thesis enter into dialogue with conversations surrounding Afrofuturism. At its simplest, Afrofuturism is described by Ingrid LaFleur as 'a way of imagining possible futures through a black cultural lens', subsequently subverting the colonial association of futurity and progress with whiteness.[22] At the same time, Afrofuturist works are not solely forward-looking, but rather aim to disrupt the coloniality of the present and past through the projection of Black cultures and people into the future, producing what Kodwo Eshun has termed a 'counterfuture' which 'returns to pre-programme the present.'[23] In other words, Afrofuturists understand that the past and present are not fixed but are instead open to transformation in part through their feedback loop relationship with the future. By engaging the disruptive potential of such feedback loops, Afrofuturist texts often disrupt the pre-eminence of Western Man within the hegemonic order of things. In this way, Afrofuturism is a potent corollary to posthumanist disruptions of the liberal humanist subject. As my focus in this thesis concerns how Hopkinson, Okorafor and Joseph disrupt the critical posthumanist archive, I do not extensively engage with theories of Afrofuturism; however, the rejection of the proposed ubiquity of the liberal humanist subject and the coinciding colonial ideologies of progress – a concept that I discuss at length in Chapter One – is a shared facet of Afrofuturism and this project's chosen texts. Accordingly, comments on Afrofuturism appear throughout the thesis.

The increased discussions concerning Afrofuturism are partly the result of a growing number of Black writers and artists producing science fiction. My decision to engage with just three writers in this project, then, is derived in part from the spatial limitations of a PhD thesis, leading me to focus on what I have determined are texts that perform the dual process of reimagining the posthuman from situated Black perspectives and disrupting the

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[21] Jennifer D. Adams and Matthew Weinstein, 'Sylvia Wynter: Science Studies and Posthumanism as Praxes of Being Human', *Sage*, 20.3 (2019), 235–50 (p. 243).

[22] Ytasha Womack, *Afrofuturism: The World of Black Sci-Fi and Fantasy Culture* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2013), p. 9. It is important to note that Afrofuturism has been criticised for its US-centrism, most notably for this thesis from Okorafor. Okorafor is explicit that she does not write Afrofuturism, but rather *African*futurism, the latter of which is 'more directly rooted in African culture, history, mythology and point-of-view as it them branches into the Black Diaspora and it does not privilege or center the West.' Nnedi Okorafor, 'Nnedi's Wahala Zone Blog', *Africanfuturism Defined*, 2019 <http://nnedi.blogspot.com/> [accessed 28 March 2020].

[23] Kodwo Eshun, 'Further Considerations of Afrofuturism', *CR: The New Centennial Review*, 3.2 (2003), 287–302 (p. 290).

posthumanist archive by expanding its critical frames. However, Hopkinson, Okorafor and Joseph are, of course, not the only Black science fiction writers who are engaging in questions of the posthuman. Under the broad umbrella of Black African and African diasporic science fiction there are a host of other writers whose works enter into dialogue with posthumanist discourses through their engagement with Black life and cosmologies. Writers such as P. Djeli Clark, Milton J. Davis, Dilman Dila, Minister Faust, Karen Lord, Tade Thompson, Tochi Onyebuchi, Masande Ntshanga, Wole Talabi and Nisi Shawl. That this list is not exhaustive is evident from the proliferation of names that appear within many collections of African and Caribbean science fiction: the *Afro SF* series; *Afrofuture(s)*; *Dark Matter: A Century of Speculative Fiction from the African Diaspora*; *Dominion: An Anthology of Speculative Fiction from Africa and the African Diaspora*; *Imagine 500: Speculative Fiction from Africa*; *Lagos 2060*; *New Worlds Old Ways: Speculative Tales from the Caribbean*; *Omenana to Infinity*; *So Long Been Dreaming: Postcolonial Visions of the Future*; and *Terra Incognita: New Speculative Stories from Africa*. An important aspect of this list is that science fiction is not solely a diasporic phenomenon, with texts written by those living in the continent representing a vibrant aspect of the genre not discussed in this project.[24] As Moradewun Adejunmobi outlines, African writing has always already been engaged in processes of cognitive estrangement, as well as with emerging technoscience. The effect is that many tenets of science fiction can be found in numerous African texts.[25] The proliferation of science fiction across the continent represents a cache of potential avenues of further study for those interested in literary explorations of the posthuman.

II.   Decolonising Critical Posthumanism

I am arguing for a decolonisation of critical posthumanism, one that acknowledges the need for the discipline to further break from the antiblackness of liberal humanist thought. The universalisation of Western Man occurred within a hegemonic order that privileged the so-called transcendent reason of Western epistemologies. Recognising the entanglement of the humanist subject and the coloniality of knowing is vital for dismantling the former for, as

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[24] Ian Macdonald's project on African science fiction's engagements with technoscience is a good example of a study that approaches these concerns. MacDonald, pp. 1-43.

[25] Moradewun Adejunmobi, 'Introduction: African Science Fiction', *Cambridge Journal of Postcolonial Literary Inquiry*, 3.3 (2016), 265–72 (pp. 267–68).

Wynter notes, '[t]o study "Man" or "Humanity" is […] to study a narrativization that has been produced with the very instruments (or) categories that we study with'.[26] That is, Western discourses were the means through which prevailing myths of humanity were constructed. Decolonial thought posits the necessity for what Walter Mignolo describes as processes of 'epistemic de-linking', or '*epistemic disobedience*' from Western thought, for 'there is no way out of the coloniality of power from within Western (Greek and Latin) categories of thought'.[27] In part, the texts in this thesis refigure the posthuman through the terms of African and African diasporic spiritual traditions, breaking the hegemony of Western thinking within critical posthumanism and encouraging the discipline to engage in epistemic de-linking. However, I want to distance this thesis from the potentially dualistic or oppositional mode of thinking that is espoused by Mignolo, that which runs counter to the rhizomatic assemblage of knowledge production fitting for embodied and embedded subjects. I consider Black disruptions of the human as 'demonic', rather than necessarily oppositional, influences. As I explain in Chapter One, the demonic is neither outside nor wholly destructive, but rather represents the disruptive presence of liminal perspectives that encourage the transformation of discursive systems.

This thesis is therefore situated at the intersections of critical posthumanist, critical race and decolonial theory. The relationship between this scholarship is potentially fraught.

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[26] Sylvia Wynter and Katherine McKittrick, 'Unparalleled Catastrophe for Our Species? Or, to Give Humanness a Different Future: Conversations', in *Sylvia Wynter: On Being Human as Praxis*, ed. by Katherine McKittrick (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), pp. 9–89 (p. 27).

[27] Walter D. Mignolo, 'Epistemic Disobedience and the Decolonial Option: A Manifesto', *Transmodernity: Journal of Peripheral Cultural Production of the Luso-Hispanic World*, 1.2 (2011), 44–64 (p. 45). Emphasis in original. While I am drawing on Mignolo's writing on the decolonial in this project's exploration of how Black African diasporic writers disrupt the critical posthumanist archive, it is important for me to note that decolonial studies emerged from distinctly Latin American contexts and knowledge systems, introduced, as Sandra Harding writes, by 'a network of scholars focused on charting the nature and consequences of causal connections between the first appearances of modernity in Europe and Spanish and Portuguese colonialism in the Americas beginning in 1492.' Sandra Harding, 'Latin American Decolonial Studies: Feminist Issues', *Feminist Studies*, 43.3 (2017), 624–36 (p. 624). While there is not space in this thesis to provide a full genealogy of decolonial studies, I acknowledge its development from Latin America in part because the situated position of decolonial thinkers is intrinsic to the concept of epistemic disobedience. Mignolo writes of the 'geo- and body-politics of knowing', rendering the notion of epistemic disobedience as a delinking from the 'illusion of zero point epistemology'; that is, from the concept of objectivity or a detached subject of knowledge, which had constructed the so-called universality of Western thought. Walter D. Mignolo, 'Epistemic Disobedience, Independent Thought and Decolonial Freedom', *Theory, Culture & Society*, 26.7–8 (2009), 159–81 (p. 160). Additionally, Mignolo is explicit that decolonial studies is distinct from postcolonialism, for the latter, he argues, is focussed on the 'project of scholarly transformation within the academy' and does not consist of the project of de-linking, which is termed, following Anibal Quijano, the '*programmatic*.' Walter D. Mignolo, 'DELINKING: The Rhetoric of Modernity, the Logic of Coloniality and the Grammar of de-Coloniality', *Cultural Studies*, 21.2–3 (2007), 449–514 (p. 452). Emphasis in original. For more on the genealogy of decolonial studies, see *Globalization and the Decolonial Option*, ed. by Walter D. Mignolo and Arturo Escobar (London: Routledge, 2015). For a discussion of the relationship between decolonial and postcolonial studies, see Gurminder K Bhambra, 'Postcolonial and Decolonial Dialogues', *Postcolonial Studies*, 17.2 (2014), 115–21.

On the one hand, as I have outlined throughout this introduction, the posthuman turn is guilty of privileging white, Euro-Western genealogies and erasing alternative theoretical traditions that address similar concerns. On the other, there are those who question moves to 'post-' the human, describing them as a means of extending the subjugation of those constructed as Man's ontological others. As Michalinos Zembylas explains: 'when certain people have never been treated as humans—as a result of ongoing colonial practices—post-human approaches advocating a move away from humanism might be seen as an alibi for further denial of humanity to these same people.'[28]

Throughout the writing of this thesis, these tensions between critical posthumanism, critical race and decolonial theory coalesced into a pressing set of concerns that have been prevalent in my thinking, particularly because of my position as a white male academic engaging with Black writing. These concerns centre on the following questions: is it appropriate or productive to label the explorations of what it is to be human within the texts in this thesis as manifestations of the posthuman? If, as I will argue, both African and African diasporic cosmologies, as well as the insights of Black artists and thinkers, pre-empt many of those within critical posthumanism, then why continue with that label? Ultimately, am I guilty of erasing the revolutionary potential of Black artists' and scholars' works by incorporating them into a Western set of discourses? While these questions are far from being completely resolved in this thesis, I want to dwell briefly here on my ongoing use of critical posthumanist terminology, in spite of my drawing on Black cultures and scholarship in order to develop critical posthumanism beyond its usual theoretical frames and sets of concerns.[29]

One salient reason for continuing adoption of the terms of critical posthumanism is their growing ubiquity within academic discourse. There are an increasing number of journals, conferences, book series and publications specifically focussed on what is becoming known as the Critical PostHumanities.[30] As I have stressed throughout this thesis, my intention is to bring these discourses further into dialogue with the insights of Black writers in order to prevent a reiteration of the coloniality of knowing within posthumanist discourses. Such coloniality materialises in critical posthumanism, and critical theory more generally, through provincialising the insights of Black scholars as having solely ethnocentric relevance.

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[28] Michalinos Zembylas, 'The Entanglement of Decolonial and Posthuman Perspectives: Tensions and Implications for Curriculum and Pedagogy in Higher Education', *Parallax*, 24.3 (2018), 254–67 (p. 255).
[29] As with Jackson, my work engages with critical posthumanism and related discourses 'to critically build on these fields' insights, *not* to replicate them.' Jackson, *Becoming Human*, p. 17. Emphasis in original.
[30] For Critical PostHumanities, see Braidotti, *Posthuman Knowledge*, pp. 100–121.

Weheliye outlines such peripheralisation of Black thinking in critical theory, writing of a 'tendency in which theoretical formulations by white European thinkers are granted a conceptual carte blanche, while those uttered from the purview of minority discourse that speak to the same questions are almost exclusively relegated to the jurisdiction of ethnographic locality.'[31] Black studies speaks to some of the same questions as critical posthumanism. My persistent engagement with the terms of critical posthumanism is intended to prevent the universalisation of white perspectives.

There is an emerging body of scholarship that has been engaged in widening the scope of critical posthumanism through an engagement with Black artists and thinkers. Some of this writing has been directly aimed at disrupting the genealogy of critical posthumanist discourses, highlighting the legacies of anti-colonial and Black radical thinkers, such as Aimé Césaire, Édouard Glissant, Frantz Fanon, Leopold Senghor, Hortense Spillers and Wynter, as well as anti-colonial, anti-slavery and Maroon practices, as antecedent disruptions of Humanist Man. Cristin Ellis's *Antebellum Posthuman: Race and Materiality in the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (2018) outlines anti-slavery discourses' challenge to hegemonic conceptions of 'the human'. She writes that the 'ideological struggle over slavery in antebellum America was one that contested not just the constituency of humanity (who qualifies?) but also the meaning of "the human" as such.'[32] Ellis therefore argues that anti-slavery movements of the antebellum South not only argued for the assimilation of Black life into the realms of 'the human', but also disrupted hegemonic conceptions of humanity. Zimitry Erasmus makes a similar point, writing that posthumanist thought is 'neither the first to think "the human" anew nor is it the first to critique euromodernity's bifurcation of human and animal life which produces the figure of 'Man' as master of the physical world and measure of all things human.'[33] Wynter is Erasmus's guide to making this claim, though she argues that Wynter's work is 'counter-' rather than 'post-humanist'. Erasmus rejects the prefix 'post-' in part because of the claim made by posthumanists that their scholarship represents the 'second generation of critical theory',[34] which has come after the poststructuralist and antihumanist theories of the twentieth century. This posited genealogy of

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[31] Jackson, *Becoming Human*, p. 6.

[32] Cristin Ellis, *Antebellum Posthuman: Race and Materiality in the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2018), p. 1.

[33] Zimitri Erasmus, 'Sylvia Wynter's Theory of the Human: Counter-, Not Post-Humanist', *Theory, Culture & Society*, 37.6 (2020), 47–65 (p. 57).

[34] Erasmus, p. 56. Erasmus is citing the preface to the *Posthuman Glossary*. See Braidotti, 'Series Preface', in *Posthuman Glossary*, ed. by Rosi Braidotti, and Maria Hlavajova (London: Bloomsbury Publishing PLC, 2018), p. xiii.

posthumanist thought, she argues, 'does not account for radical epistemologies that emerged from plantation and domestic slavery, anti-colonial struggles, and scholarly engagements with these histories.'[35] In his discussion of the 'racialized body', David Marriot points to just such a radical epistemology when describing Fanon's 'posthumanistic account of the human.'[36] Racialised bodies are also central to Sami Schalk's contribution to Black feminist and disability studies in *Bodyminds Reimagined (Dis)ability, Race and Gender in Black Women's Speculative Fiction* (2018). Schalk explores the entanglements of disability, race and gender through a non-Cartesian framework for the 'enmeshment of the mind and body'.[37] All of these works represent a growing collection of demonic disruptions to the critical posthumanist archive.

Further writing has specifically aimed at centring analyses of race within critical posthumanist scholarship. The starting point for several of these works is the suspicion of some critical race scholars that attempts to 'post-' the human – at a time when Black people are still fighting against the ontological negation of Black life – represents a means of shifting the goal posts of Black exclusion. In education studies, Zembylas, whom I referenced above, acknowledges both the overlaps and tensions between critical posthumanism and decolonial theory, weaving together a discussion of Wynter and Braidotti in an attempt to prevent the re-emergence of a humanistic Higher Education, which he reads as one possible outcome of a solely posthumanist approach to critical pedagogies. In 'Affect/Race (blackness)', Colin Patrick Ashley and Michelle Billies reject the tendency within affect theory to 'avoid[…] race in its attempts to transcend it', instead 'mapping affective blackness by traveling through and with a trajectory of thought from black studies.'[38] Their work reveals how posthumanist scholarship can be altered and refined through an engagement with race and the insights of critical race scholarship. The development of posthumanist scholarship is the topic of a conversation between Bessie Dernikos, Daniel Ferguson, and Marjorie Siegel, which situates their engagement with posthumanist thought alongside calls from African-American and Latinx researchers to 'humanise' posthumanist methodologies. As with Zembylas, these three writers acknowledge ongoing tensions between posthumanist and race scholarship, and

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[35] Erasmus, p. 56.

[36] David Marriott, 'The Racialized Body', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Body and Literature*, ed. by David Hillman and Ulrika Maude (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 163–76 (p. 163).

[37] Sami Schalk, *Bodyminds Reimagined: (Dis)Ability, Race, and Gender in Black Women's Speculative Fiction* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), p. 5.

[38] Colin Patrick Ashley and Michelle Billies, 'Affect/Race (Blackness)', *Athenea Digital*, 20.2 (2019), 1–16 (pp. 3–4).

consider the 'ethical responsibilities of doing and teaching qualitative inquiry through a posthumanist lens'.[39] Their conversation begins with a contention that has also been central to this project, namely, that 'a wide range of scholarship, including critical race and postcolonial theories, contributes to understandings of posthumanisms.'[40] The scholarship that I have outlined here is far from an exhaustive list of the increasing amount of work done at the intersections of critical posthumanist, decolonial and race scholarship. Moreover, such writers do not, nor do they attempt to, solve the ongoing tensions between these areas of thought. However, each represents a commitment to engaging with the critical potential that lies in further dialogue between heterogeneous approaches to displacing Man as the ontological and epistemological ground for knowledge production.

One text engaged in disrupting the critical posthumanist canon that helped to shaped my thinking at the beginning of this thesis is Matthew Taylor's *Universes Without Us: Posthuman Cosmologies in American Literature* (2013). Taylor outlines how diasporic cosmologies drawn from 'African traditional religions' anticipate several of the boundary blurring theories of critical posthumanists, therefore locating antecedent critical posthumanist thinking within African diasporic spiritual traditions.[41] Perhaps the most overt study of Black artists' engagements with the posthuman is found in Kristen Lillvis's *Posthuman Blackness and the Black Imagination* (2017). Here, Lillvis focuses on the 'multiple temporalities' of Black subjectivities: the constellation of past, present and future – consistent with the nonlinear 'becoming' of the Deleuze and Guattarian posthuman subject – present in Black female imaginations.[42] The artists that Lillvis discusses, ranging from Toni Morrison to Janelle Monae, 'demonstrate that the boundary crossings that exist in posthuman cultures enable black subjects to make connections to diasporic histories and futures in the present.'[43]

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[39] Bessie P. Dernikos, Daniel E. Ferguson, and Marjorie Siegel, 'The Possibilities for "Humanizing" Posthumanist Inquiries: An Intra-Active Conversation', *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies*, 20.5 (2020), 434–77 (p. 435).

[40] Dernikos, Ferguson, and Siegel, p. 436. Kodwo Eshun and Justin Adams Burton's works are examples of such contributions to critical posthumanism by engaging with both the Black Radical Tradition and Black music. As Weheliye explains, Eshun's study of African-American music disrupts the human, ultimately challenging the privileging of visual over aural media within cyber theory in order to expand the purview of posthuman cultural formations. Weheliye, 'Feenin', p. 21; Eshun, *More Brilliant than the Sun: Adventures in Sonic Fiction* (London: Quartet Books, 1998). Similarly, Burton's work analyses the ways in which rap music employs 'sonic blackness' to queer conceptions of what it is to be human. Justin Adams Burton, *Posthuman Rap* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

[41] Matthew A. Taylor, *Universes Without Us: Posthuman Cosmologies in American Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), pp. 85–166. Taylor's work is discussed further in the following chapter.

[42] Kristen Lillvis, *Posthuman Blackness and the Black Female Imagination* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2017), pp. 3–4.

[43] Lillvis, p. 9.

Both Taylor's and Lillvis's texts are useful examples of the attempts to avoid the reiteration of white liberal subjectivity within conceptions of the posthuman. Alexander Weheliye levels this critique at N. Katherine Hayles, whose cybernetic posthuman, drawn from the 'literal and virtual whiteness of cyber theory', as well as from solely white (and largely male) science fiction narratives, engenders a conception of the subject as 'little more than the white liberal subject in techno-informational disguise.'[44] Following this statement, Weheliye explores the disruption of the human within 'Afro-diasporic politico-cultural formations', in particular the work of musician Kodwo Eshun, whose study of African-American music and its adoption of various contemporary technologies cements him as the 'foremost theorist of a black posthumanity.'[45]

Weheliye continues this engagement with Black explorations of what it is to be human in *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics and Black Feminist Theories of the Human* (2014). In this book, he champions the work of Black feminist scholars for 'the radical reconstruction and decolonization of what it means to be human.'[46] Weheliye avoids referring to his writing as posthumanist, while he also provides several critiques of critical posthumanism.[47] However, the book's analysis of 'racializing assemblages' describes the contemporary conditions of what it is to be human in a way that coheres with tenets of posthumanism, while also focussing on the function of race:

> I construe race, racialization, and racial identities as ongoing sets of political relations that require, through constant perpetuation via institutions, discourses, practices, desires, infrastructures, languages, technologies, sciences, economies, dreams and cultural artifacts, the barring of non-white subjects from the category of the human as it is performed in the modern west.[48]

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[44] Alexander G. Weheliye, '"Feenin": Posthuman Voices in Contemporary Black Popular Music', *Social Text*, 20.2 (2002), 21–47 (p. 23).
[45] Weheliye, 'Feenin', p. 21.
[46] Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics and Black Feminist Theories of the Human* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), p. 4.
[47] For example, he writes that '[m]uch post-1960s critical theorizing [of anti- and posthumanists] either assumes that black subjects have been fully assimilated into the human qua Man or continues to relegate the thought of nonwhite subjects to the ground of ethnographic specificity.' Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus*, p. 11.
[48] Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus*, p. 3.

Weheliye engages with a similar set of concerns to posthuman thought, yet he centres the ongoing function of racializing assemblages. The inherent entanglement of racialisation and hegemonic constructions of 'the human' is also central to Jackson's *Becoming Human*, which I have discussed above. Jackson explains that Black people were not excluded from realm of 'the human', but were instead constructed as an animalised form of humanity, subsequently positioned at the boundary of the human-animal distinction.[49] In this context, she argues, Black artists do not aim for inclusion into the category of 'the human', for they are always already present within this discourse through their foundational abjection:

> African diasporic cultural production does not coalesce into a unified tradition that merely seeks inclusion into liberal humanist conceptions of "the human" but, rather, frequently alters the meaning and significance of being (human) and engages in imagination practices of worlding from the perspective of a history of blackness's bestialisation and thingification; the process of imagining black people as an empty vessel with the violent imposition of colonial myths and racial hierarchy.[50]

This passage is key for it outlines a central contention of *Becoming Human* that is also central to this thesis: that 'African diasporic cultural production' experiments with what it is to be human from the perspective of Black subjugation. Through my brief introduction to the emerging field of Black posthumanist scholarship, I acknowledge an emerging body of writing that disrupts the critical posthumanist archive, scholarship that this thesis intends to contribute to.

III.   Black Studies, Black Science Fiction and Animism

In Chapter One, I set out the theoretical strains salient for this thesis based around three central discussions: Black studies; Black Science Fiction; and animism. One theme running throughout the chapter is the importance of narrative for deconstructing the liberal humanist subject. I begin by outlining Sylvia Wynter's delineation of the human as a nature-culture

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[49] Jackson, *Becoming Human*, pp. 2–3. As discussed above, this animalisation of Black subjects rested on the constructed binary between immanence and transcendence.
[50] Jackson, *Becoming Human*, p. 1.

entity – a hybrid '*bios* and *mythoi*' figure or *homo narrans* in her terms.[51] Within the onto-epistemology of Western discourse, the narrow codes of humanity that reify white Western Man are naturalised through biocentric perspectives that elide the discursive aspects of their own construction. Pre-empting processual models of the posthuman, Wynter describes the human as a praxis that is performatively constructed through the implementation of the discursive codes pertaining to what it is to be human. Wynter's work coheres with a wider Black studies project of defamiliarising concepts of the human by presenting the figure as an object of knowledge, thus dismantling liberal humanism's naturalised codes of being. As such, I note how critical posthumanism's desire to move beyond liberal humanism, and the forms of subjectivity that it posits, is a continuation of ongoing deconstructions of the subject within Black scholarship and art. As both within and liminal to critical posthumanism, I describe Wynter's work, as well as the fictions in this thesis, as having 'demonic' influences on the discipline.

In this first chapter, I also outline how Hopkinson, Okorafor and Joseph denaturalise the humanist subject by adopting the vantage point provided by the science fiction genre, which allows external perspectives from which to view the conditions of the present. By extrapolating elements of the present into imaginations of the future, the three writers discussed here challenge the biocentric narratives of Man by unveiling the discursive elements of its construction. More specifically, the texts analysed in this thesis support the Black studies project by dismantling hegemonic ideologies of progress that reify white Western culture as the pinnacle of human development. Singular models of human progress acted as justifications for the colonisation of the globe by the 'more developed' European colonial nations. As Wynter has shown, these ideas continue to circulate in contemporary discourses on global development; so-called third world subjects are positioned at a primordial state of human progress, situated within a constricting teleology of always aspiring to, yet never able to attain, the position of white Western Man.[52] As I explain in Chapter One, John Rieder has shown that colonial narratives of 'human progress' circulate throughout nineteenth-century science fiction, which makes the genre both an effect, and a proponent, of such models of development. Hopkinson, Okorafor and Joseph engage with and displace these tenets of science fiction. Rather than simply calling for the assimilation of

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[51] Wynter and McKittrick, p. 23.
[52] Sylvia Wynter, 'Is "Development" a Purely Empirical Concept or Also Teleological?: A Perspective from "We the Underdeveloped"', in *Prospects for Recovery and Sustainable Development in Africa*, ed. by Aguibou Y. Yansané (Greenwood Press: Westport, 1996), pp. 303–20.

Black cultures into pre-existing models of development, they reimagine the human as emerging within nonlinear and nonteleological models of posthuman becoming.

Finally in Chapter One, I outline how such posthumanist models of becoming are informed by the imagination of animist worlds. Animism here is invoked not as an essentialised metaphysics under which disparate cosmologies from the African continent and its diaspora can easily be collated, but rather in the terms consistent with the 'new animism', which Graham Harvey describes as 'an elastic and embracing term for a mode of religious consciousness.'[53] This consciousness attends to the relationality of the cosmos and contributes to the production of texts which 'explore and experiment with ways of engaging with a larger-than-human world', while also providing 'accessible entries into the creative thought-and life-world that is animism.'[54] Through their imagined cosmological and science fictional worlds, Hopkinson, Okorafor and Joseph perform narrative theorisations of non-anthropocentric, relational subjectivities that render untenable (neo)colonial binaries and development narratives. In so doing, they posit alternative ways of relating to the world that can cultivate fresh praxes for being human.

Across Chapters Two to Four, I analyse six texts that produce explorations of the posthuman within more than human worlds. While the animist realism of these texts precludes their anthropocentrism, each contains elements of bildungsroman – the quintessential literary form of individual human development. Okorafor's *Binti* trilogy and Hopkinson's *Brown Girl* and *Midnight Robber* appear as conventional bildungsroman through their depiction of the development of young Black girls into maturity, although each importantly disrupts elements of the genre. Joseph's *African Origins* represents a further transgression of the form by depicting the development of a collective – though importantly non-essentialised – consciousness of a transgenerational Caribbean community. Notions of development are therefore embedded within these narratives; however, such development is situated and nonlinear, informed by being embodied and embedded within more than human worlds.[55] As such, the texts continue that which both Ralph Austen and Jose Santiago Fernandez Vazquez describe as postcolonial literature's subversion of the bildungsroman

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[53] Graham Harvey, 'Animist Realism in Indigenous Novels and Other Literature', in *The Handbook to Contemporary Animism*, ed. by Graham Harvey (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), pp. 454–67 (p. 457).
[54] Harvey, 'Introduction', in *The Handbook of Contemporary Animism*, pp. 1–12 (p. 3).
[55] As Ralph Austen notes, bildungsroman is the literary form for novels of development. Ralph A. Austen, 'Struggling with the African Bildungsroman', *Research in African Literatures*, 46.3 (2015), 214–31 (p. 215).

gene.[56] As Austen explains, the European bildungsroman is quintessentially the text of 'individual' development that on the surface appears inimical both to the more 'collectivist' models of development seen within African literature, as well as, I add, within critical posthumanism.[57] Such collectivism, he notes, is not the result of an essence or tendency for collective thinking within colonised cultures, but rather a reflection of the historical realities of postcolonial societies.[58] Vazquez echoes such work, arguing that postcolonial bildungsromane engage with elements of the genre as a means of deconstruction: 'There is no intrinsic connection between a given form and the meaning we attach to this form. […] The arbitrariness of the sign opens the possibility of subverting the "normality" of the West, thus challenging the imperial ideologies from the inside.'[59] The texts in thesis perform an entangled postcolonial and posthumanist deconstruction of bildungsroman, engaging elements of the form while displacing the colonial and liberal humanist ideologies embedded within it.

The possibility of such a translation of Western colonial discourses is one salient reason why I continue to use terms such as the posthuman, despite the Western-centrism of critical posthumanism that I noted above. By acknowledging the ongoing coloniality of critical posthumanist discourses, I view the texts in this thesis as engaging in praxes of cultural hybridity: 'the reinterpretation and revision of a previous colonial textuality'.[60] My aim here is to forge further dialogue between elements of Black writing and critical posthumanism in order to awaken the latter to a wider set of discourses, including antecedent posthumanist epistemologies. As Vazquez writes:

> the totalizing monologue which characterizes Western imperialism can be contested
> most effectively by making the coloniser participate in a dialogue about European
> culture. This dialogic process contributes to denaturalize Western traditions,
> emphasizing the artificiality of European constructs and, therefore, questioning the

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[56] Jose Santiago Fernandez Vazquez, 'Subverting the Bildungsroman in Postcolonial Fiction: Romesh Gunesekera's Reef', *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 36.1 (1997), 30–38; Austen.
[57] Austen, pp. 215–16.
[58] Austen, pp. 216–17.
[59] Vazquez, pp. 30–31.
[60] Vazquez, p. 30; Vazquez adopts Homi Bhabha's notion of cultural hybridity in outlining the role of postcolonial bildungsroman as a disruption of 'colonial textuality'. See Homi K. Bhabha, 'Postcolonial Criticism', in *Redrawing the Boundaries: The Transformation of English and American Studies*, ed. by Stephen Greenblatt and Giles Gunn (New York: MLA, 1992), pp. 437–65.

right to impose them to other nations and peoples.[61]

Posthumanist bildungsroman that explore the development of Black posthuman figures through embodied and embedded processes of becoming challenge the *re*naturalisation of Western discourses within critical posthumanism. They bring critical posthumanist scholars, those who may posit solely European genealogies for posthuman thought, to the table of wider debates concerning what it is to be human. By encouraging aspects of such a dialogue, I aim to disrupt critical posthumanist discourses through a deterritorialisation of its knowledge production practices.

In Chapter Two, 'Indigenization as Cultural Resistance in Nalo Hopkinson's *Brown Girl in the Ring* and *Midnight Robber*', I outline how Hopkinson imagines future worlds permeated with various aspects of Afro-Caribbean cultures, from the pantheon of Caribbean spirits in *Brown Girl* to Carnival performances and mythical Caribbean creatures in *Midnight Robber*. In each, Afro-Caribbean epistemologies inform the depiction of the human as embodied and embedded within more than human worlds. Both *Brown Girl* and *Midnight Robber* depict Caribbean communities that remain in the throes of juridico-political and epistemic structures of antiblackness. Initially, members of both communities envisage their liberation through an assimilation into Western society, one that is achieved through engaging in behaviours dictated by liberal humanist conceptions of humanity. Such actions, effects of ongoing ideologies of progress that are discussed at length in Chapter One, represent a limited form of liberation and a maintenance of anti-Black, neocolonial structures. Through her two female protagonists – Ti-Jeanne and Tan-Tan – Hopkinson eventually explores alternative means of cultural resistance that draw on a history of the 'indigenization' of African cultures within the Caribbean; that is, the ways by which slaves practiced African-descended spiritual practices within the region.[62] As Ti-Jeanne and Tan-Tan navigate precarious environments, they further embrace aspects of their Afro-Caribbean heritage. They become conscious of their embeddedness within more than human environments, subsequently indigenizing alternative modes of being in the world beyond that of Man.

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[61] Vazquez, p. 31.

[62] Wynter's concept of 'indigenization' is outlined fully in Chapter Two. As I am drawing on Wynter's use of the term, I adopt the US spelling of indigenization throughout the thesis. For an introduction, see Wynter, 'Jonkonnu in Jamaica: Towards an Interpretation of Folk Dance as a Cultural Process', *Jamaica Journal*, 4.2 (1970), 34–48; Carole Boyce Davies, 'From Masquerade to *Maskarade*: Caribbean Cultural Resistance and the Rehumanizing Project', in *Sylvia Wynter: On Being Human as Praxis*, pp. 203–26.

Through the personal development of her two protagonists, Hopkinson disrupts Western narratives of progress and imagines the ongoing emergence of posthuman subjects through nonteleological models of situated becoming.

In Chapter Three, 'African Fractals and Posthuman Kinship in Nnedi Okorafor's *Binti* trilogy', I outline how in the *Binti* novellas Okorafor engages in a mythopoiesis that draws on various fractal cosmologies in cultures from across the African continent, as well as on the science of chaos theory as the interdisciplinary study of complexity.[63] Okorafor imagines a univocal force of mathematics, known as a current, which is immanent to all life. Through non-anthropocentric connections within this singular force, the eponymous Binti – facilitated by her ability to produce harmony within the chaotic flows of mathematical current – engages in acts of kin-making through intersubjective entanglements. The non-deterministic unfolding of fractal shapes informs Okorafor's explorations of a nonteleological model of posthuman becoming through embodied and embedded relations. Throughout the series, Okorafor speculates on the possibility of maintaining cultural heritage in the context of such random unfolding. I outline how the balance between pattern and randomness, order and chaos, within fractal cosmologies and complex systems informs the representation of a processual and, ultimately, Afropolitan model of culture always already engaged in nonlinear development through networks of entanglements. As I will show, Okorafor's novellas facilitate the disruption of the critical posthumanist archive by imagining the posthuman through an engagement with ideas underpinning both African epistemes and the science of chaos.

The thesis' final chapter, 'Recursive Origins and Distributed Cognitive Assemblages in Anthony Joseph's *African Origins of UFOs*', outlines the development of a collective consciousness for an ancestral community within Joseph's novel. In *African Origins*, Joseph depicts the 'origins' of a Trinidadian community as consisting of events in the past, present and future. The various influences on *African Origins* are extremely wide-ranging and the novel represents the kinds of heterogenous assemblage that I have argued is integral to posthuman knowledge production. Such influences include the following: contemporary models of embodied cognition that are often drawn on in critical posthumanist scholarship; Trinidadian mas festivals; possession rituals for the Trinidadian Orisha religion; Aimé Césaire's seminal *Notebook of a Return to My Native Land* (1939), in particular the

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[63] Ron Eglash, *African Fractals: Modern Computing and Indigenous Design* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2005).

foundational role of the landscape in the emergence of a Caribbean subjectivity explored in this epic poem; the Black Arts Movement; and the concept of *ase* in Yoruba and Yoruba-descended religions. This last element is particularly key to the chapter's argument. *Ase* is a univocal forces that originated with the supreme being of Yoruba mythology, Olódùmarè. This force unites all things in the universe, while also being the source of the cosmos' dynamism. At the same time, as Marta Morena Vega explains, *ase* is the creative force behind Yoruba art, a force that provides a link across a 'global black aesthetic.'[64] Joseph explores *ase* in all its complexity, depicting it as a univocal force uniting a transgenerational Trinidadian community across time and space, as well as the generative force behind the novel itself. As a text infused with *ase*, *African Origins* is not solely representational but also affective, itself becoming an active agent in the emergence of a Trinidadian collective consciousness. In various ways, the force of *ase* can be brought into dialogue with Braidotti's theory of radical immanence. Joseph explores posthuman subjectivities in a novel that blends various facets of critical posthumanism, such as embodied models of cognition, with African diasporic cultures and spiritualities. Also, the novel reflects many of the ideas seen in Chapters Two and Three. For example, it is structured as a fractal – as a system consisting of sub-systems – a key element in Okorafor's mythopoiesis. Ultimately, Joseph depicts the nonlinear emergence of a collective consciousness across time and space that is facilitated by embodied and embedded processes.

This final chapter represents a coming together of the ideas that inform this thesis' central argument, namely, that Black African diasporic science fiction provides narrative theorisations of the posthuman that centre Black experiences and epistemologies to expand the critical posthumanist archive. By bringing into dialogue elements of critical posthumanism, such as contemporary cognitive science and the nonlinear dynamics of fractals, with various facets of Black cultures and knowledges, Joseph's text is emblematic of the non-dialectical challenge to critical posthumanism through rhizomatic forms of knowledge production that I espouse in this thesis. Joseph, Hopkinson and Okorafor all disrupt the self-narrated timeline of critical posthumanist discourse, one that draws a linear trajectory from European theories of immanence and poststructuralism to critical posthumanist theories of the subject.

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[64] Marta Moreno Vega, 'The Ancestral Sacred Creative Impulse of Africa and the African Diaspora: Ase, the Nexus of the Black Global Aesthetic', *Lenox Avenue: A Journal of Interarts Inquiry*, 5 (1999), 45–57 (p. 55).

In the conclusion, I reflect on the various global events that represent the conditions under which the final year of this project was completed: the Covid-19 pandemic; the murder of George Floyd and Black Lives Matter protests; and the ongoing climate crisis. I do so to further reflect on the vital importance of engagements with the intersection between critical posthumanism and Black/critical race studies. The potentially productive, though always tense, relationship between these vast bodies of writing enables the possibility of reimagining the human beyond its colonial and anti-Black frames towards affirmative posthuman futures. It is a central contention of this project that literary works are a key element in this process. If, as both Wynter and Braidotti outline, the human is a praxis, 'which envisions the human as verb, as alterable, as relational', then the critical and creative frames through which we reimagine this figure inform the very subjects we are capable of becoming.[65]

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[65] Katherine McKittrick, 'Yours in the Intellectual Struggle: Sylvia Wynter and the Realization of the Living', in *Syvlia Wynter: On Being Human as Praxis*, pp. 1–9 (pp. 7–8).

Chapter One: Critical Posthumanism's Demonic Grounds

I.   Introduction

In *Universes Without Us*, Matthew Taylor examines African-American writing from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries which draws on an 'African diasporic spiritual tradition' in its exploration of posthumanist conceptions of life and being.[66] He argues that both Charles Chesnutt's conjure tales and the anthropological work of Zora Neale Hurston draw on cosmologies which posit an egalitarian relational ontology for human and nonhuman entities that pre-empt contemporary critical posthumanist scholarship. These cosmologies work to disrupt the colonial equation of 'the human' with white, European Man by dismantling the edifice of hierarchical categorisation. Taylor therefore unveils a potential genealogy of critical posthumanism not commonly posited within the discipline, which tends to present European and largely white antihumanist and poststructuralist thinkers as its theoretical forebearers. Taylor's alternative genealogy is one which this thesis seeks to expand and develop in its focus on Black African diasporic science fiction.

The imagined worlds of Nalo Hopkinson, Nnedi Okorafor and Anthony Joseph are informed by various non-dualistic epistemologies. The novels and novellas discussed in this thesis provide narrative theorisations of the subject, disrupting the archive of critical posthumanism by drawing on antecedent posthumanist knowledges within Black epistemic traditions. These three writers contribute to a legacy of Black art and scholarship, which dismantles liberal humanism's concept of 'the human' by exploring alternative ways of being in the world. As Alexander Weheliye notes, Black discourse, produced by those 'denied access to the position of humanity', has always taken a 'different, catachrestic, conceptualisation[…] of the "human".'[67] It is in part the foundational abjection of Black people within Western modernity that facilitates these experiments with other ways of being human. Black subjects, in particular Black women, inhabit what Wynter terms 'demonic grounds', positions both within and on the fringes of the hegemonic episteme. Such a positioning enables perspectives from 'outside of our present governing system of meaning',

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[66] Taylor, p. 85.
[67] Weheliye, 'Feenin', p. 26.

which, on the one hand, unveil the epistemological conditions of the present and, on the other, facilitate imagining the human beyond the terms articulated within this system.[68]

Black studies analyses the inherent relationship between the construction of racial hierarchies and conceptions of the human within the episteme instituted alongside colonialism and the slave trade. By drawing on a long tradition of Black and decolonial scholarship which confronts the fallacy of universality in Western ethnocentric conceptions of humanity, Sylvia Wynter's demonic perspective outlines the nature-culture, processual ontology of being human: '*humanness*', she writes, 'is no longer a noun. *Being human is a praxis.*'[69] By rendering the human in processual terms, Wynter's writing coheres with certain tenets of critical posthumanism; however, her work is almost completely absent from the discipline. I acknowledge Wynter as an important posthumanist scholar, subsequently interpreting her work as itself a demonic presence within critical posthumanism, one which disrupts its vestigial Eurocentrism and transforms several of its contentions.

Through an engagement with the insights of Wynter, Weheliye, Katherine McKittrick, Christina Sharpe, Zakiyyah Iman Jackson and others, this thesis aims to bring critical posthumanism into conversation with Black scholarship. Such a project faces the initial challenge of circumventing what Shannon Winnubst explains are the two disciplines' 'different historical coordinates, which manifest distinct ontologies operative in the two projects.'[70] Critical posthumanism most commonly sites the genesis of the West's conception of 'the human' within 'the European Enlightenment era of seventeenth-century rationalism and eighteenth century liberalism', while, alternatively, '[d]ecolonial theories of racialization […] generally assume one, if not both, of two geohistorical coordinates: fifteenth-century European colonialism and/or nineteenth-century chattel slavery, especially in the United States.'[71] The differences between these two phenomena notwithstanding, the central distinction to be made between critical posthumanism and decolonial/race studies is that, in the latter, hierarchies of race are not one of a series of by-products of an essentialised categorisation of the subject, but rather the abjection of blackness has been fundamental to the ontological condition of 'humanness'. In the first section of this chapter, I outline

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[68] Wynter, 'Afterword: "Beyond Miranda's Meanings: Un/Silencing the 'Demonic Ground' of Caliban's 'Woman'"', in *Out of the Kumbla: Caribbean Women and Literature*, ed. by Carole Boyce Davies and Elaine Savoury Fido (New Jersey: Africa World Press, 1989), pp. 355–72 (p. 356).
[69] Wynter and McKittrick, p. 23. Emphasis in original.
[70] Shannon Winnubst, 'Decolonial Critique', in *Posthuman Glossary*, ed. by Rosi Braidotti and Maria Hlavajova (London: Bloomsbury Publishing PLC, 2018), pp. 97–99 (p. 98).
[71] Winnubst, p. 98.

Wynter's decolonial scholarship and her archaeology of the entanglement of antiblackness and the construction of 'the human', before positioning this work as a potentially disruptive demonic force within critical posthumanism.

One effect of Wynter's description of the human-as-praxis is the denaturalisation of the Western model of 'the human' and the hierarchies upon which this figure is founded. By rendering humanity as the central focus of Black studies, as its object of knowledge, Wynter reveals the praxes through which subjectivity is formed as a function of narratives; narratives which, within the hegemonic order of Western modernity, continue to promote the universality of white Western Man.[72] In the second section of this chapter, I draw on John Rieder's study of colonialism and the emergence of science fiction in order to acknowledge how the history of science fiction is intimately tied to colonial narrative, in particular, colonial narratives of development.[73] Models of development situate humanity within a linear teleology of progress, which reifies the European subject and 'his' culture as the most evolved form of being and acting human, subsequently rendering those from the African continent as representative of a less-developed stage of humanity. Black science fiction texts both employ and disrupt (neo)colonial narratives of progress and challenge the institution of hegemonic codes of being. The novels and novellas analysed in this thesis provide a defamiliarised perspective through which these ideologies of progress are revealed to be performative narratives, rather than *de jure* representations of how the world 'is'. In this way, Black science fiction presents a potent corollary to the Black studies project of producing the epistemological conditions of the present, and the models of humanity that emerge within such conditions, as objects of knowledge.

Hopkinson, Okorafor and Joseph employ science fiction's defamiliarisation effects alongside an engagement with Black African and diasporic cosmologies to reimagine the human and to expand the frames of critical posthumanist thought. In the final section of this chapter, I describe the six texts analysed in this thesis as works of animist realism. As noted in the introduction, I do not aim to homogenise the disparate cultures and epistemologies that inform the narrative worlds imagined by my three chosen writers. Rather, the 'elastic and embracing term' is employed in its most malleable sense to refer to texts that explore more than human worlds. By not extracting the human from the world within which they are

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[72] My description of the human as an object of knowledge is drawn from Weheliye. A full explanation of this contention is given below. See Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus*, p. 8.

[73] John Rieder, *Colonialism and the Emergence of Science Fiction* (Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 2012).

embedded, the writers disrupt the teleology of Man's transcendence from nature. In this way, they address the ongoing elision of knowledges from beyond the West within posthumanism, disrupting the discipline's critical archive to engender the mutation of posthumanist thinking.[74]

II.   Sylvia Wynter: Man as an 'Object of Knowledge'

Wynter's Archaeology of Western Man

In 'Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom', Wynter outlines her archaeology of the hegemonic Western episteme within which an ethnocentric conception of being, that which she terms 'Man', has been imposed as a 'supracultural' and therefore so-called universal model of humanity.[75] She continues to posit what has been the most transversal thesis across her large body of work: 'the greatest task facing humanity is to dismantle the overrepresentation of Man as a model of what it is to be human.'[76] Weheliye, discussing the work of Wynter in tandem with that of Hortense Spillers, notes the centrality of 'the human' to Black feminist study:

> Wynter and Spillers configure Black studies as an intellectual endeavor, even though acutely attuned to its institutional quirks, whose principal goal is to disrupt the governing conception of humanity as synonymous with Western Man, while also supplying the analytic tools for thinking the deeply gendered and sexualized

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[74] As such, the thesis can be read as a response to the following question posed by Jackson: 'Is it possible that the very subjects central to posthumanist inquiry—the binarisms of human/animal, nature/culture, animate/inanimate, organic/inorganic—find their relief outside of the epistemological locus of the West.' Jackson, 'Animal: New Directions in the Theorization of Race and Posthumanism', *Feminist Studies*, 39.3 (2013), 669–85 (p. 673).

[75] Wynter, 'Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation - An Argument', *CR: The New Centennial Review*, 3.3 (2003), 257–337 (p. 288).

[76] Wynter provides a useful overview of her central argument in 'Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom': 'The argument proposes that the struggle of our new millennium will be one between the ongoing imperative of securing the well-being of our present ethnoclass (i.e., Western bourgeois) conception of the human, Man, which overrepresents itself as if it were the human itself, and that of securing the well-being, and therefore the full cognitive and behavioral autonomy, of the human species itself/ourselves. Because of this overrepresentation, which is defined in the first part of the title as the Coloniality of Being/ Power/Truth/Freedom, any attempt to unsettle the coloniality of power will call for the unsettling of this overrepresentation.' Wynter, 'Unsettling the Coloniality', p. 260.

provenances of racializing assemblages.[77]

Both Wynter and Spillers are explicit that their aim is to develop the tools required to analyse the material and discursive legitimation of a racialised humanity. The unsettling of the 'overrepresentation' of Man within Western modernity is central to Black intellectual thought, which aims to relativise this figure as one that emerges within a culturally specific episteme masquerading as a universal. Weheliye writes that the 'greatest contribution to critical thinking of Black studies — and critical ethnic studies more generally – is the transformation of the human into a heuristic model and not an ontological fait accompli'.[78] Black studies renders Man an object of knowledge, denaturalising this figure by revealing it as a construction of material-discursive processes. The human as the thing-in-itself is disarticulated from Man as an object of knowledge. At the same time, as Weheliye explains, real Black people are distinguished from blackness as it has been constructed as the conditional Other to whiteness. The biological concept of race is supplanted by an acknowledgment of processes of racialisation: 'insisting on Black studies as a mode of knowledge production provides the conditions of possibility for viewing race as a set of articulated political relations or assemblages, and not a biological or cultural descriptor.'[79] Defining an object of knowledge is thus a process of bringing to consciousness the epistemological foundations for objects which have been taken as things-in-themselves.

Herein lies one of the most potent facets of Wynter's thinking. Within her work, 'it is the human – as different genres of the human – that materialises as the object of knowledge in the conceptual mirror of Black studies.'[80] As a result, Wynter makes a distinction between real humans and the figure of Man constructed within the ethnospecific order of knowledge of Western modernity. The 'map', the culturally specific figure of Man, is disarticulated from the 'territory' or the 'real' object – the 'human-in-itself'.[81] Wynter posits two processes of secularisation through which the figure of Man in its most current manifestation was erected as the answer to the question of what is it to be human; the first of which ranged 'from the

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[77] Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus*, p. 6.
[78] Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus*, p. 8.
[79] Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus*, p. 19.
[80] Wynter's description of the 'genres' of humanity refers to conceptions of humanity as productions of epistemological histories. Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus*, p. 21.
[81] Wynter, 'No Humans Involved: An Open Letter to My Colleagues', *Knowledge on Trial*, 1.1 (1994), 42–73 (p. 49).

Renaissance to the eighteenth century' and 'the second from then on to today'.[82] This secularisation of Man rested first on a binary between rationality/irrationality – with European Man emblematic of the 'Rational self' and with a continuum of people of colour and 'beasts' as irrational Others. Then, through a perverse application to physiognomy of the Darwinian revolution in the biological sciences, this theory of Man was supplemented by a biocentric perspective that delineated those that were 'naturally' selected/eugenic and the dysselected/dysgenic, less-than-human Others.[83] Wynter details how the figure of Eurocentric Man rose equiprimordially to, and indeed facilitated, the 'juridico-political structures' of the slave trade and imperialism, as well as their racist afterlives in what Howard Winant terms the 'racial longue durée'.[84] The development of a hierarchical continuum of human life, resting on constructed racial difference, is fundamental to the foundation and sustenance of Western epistemology.[85]

By taking the human as an object of knowledge, Wynter disrupts biocentric discourses that naturalise Man. The narratives within Western modernity that define the human in Darwinian terms are auto-erasing. In Walter Mignolo's words, the 'Human is […] the product of a particular epistemology, yet it appears to be (and is accepted as) a naturally independent entity existing in the world.'[86] Once more, the map is mistaken for the territory. Black studies subsequently becomes a means of unveiling the distinction between Man and humanity, revealing the former to be constructed within Western modernity, which is itself an ethnospecific order of knowledge that has been universalised through Man's 'ontologically absolute self-description'.[87]

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[82] Wynter, 'Unsettling the Coloniality', p. 264.

[83] Wynter, 'Unsettling the Coloniality', pp. 257–83; Preceding these secularisation processes was, as Wynter notes, the 'Scholastic order of knowledge,' which produced an 'ostensibly divinely ordained caste organizing principle'. Wynter, 'No Humans Involved: An Open Letter to My Colleagues', p. 53. With the secularisation of such an order of knowledge, which culminated in the biocentric conception of what it is to be human, so-called nature takes the place of the divine. The effect is that the apparent hierarchy of being on Earth remains 'extra-humanly' mandated, but by natural forces rather than divine ones. Wynter, 'Afterword', p. 357. Denise Ferreira de Silva succinctly summarises Wynter's work on the coloniality of being as 'two moves of naturalization – the secularization of rationality and the representation of the human through workings of natural selection respectively – [which] would position Man in such a way as to disavow other, coexisting modes of being.' Denise Ferreira Da Silva, 'Before *Man*: Sylvia Wynter's Rewriting of the Modern Episteme', in *Human as Praxis*, pp. 90–105 (p. 91).

[84] Howard Winant, qtd. in Wynter, 'Unsettling the Coloniality', p. 263; Howard Winant, *Racial Conditions: Politics, Theory, Comparisons* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002); On the equiprimordiality of Man and slavery/imperialism, see Wynter, 'Beyond the Categories of the Master Conception: The Counterdoctrine of the Jamesian Poiesis', in *C.L.R. James's Caribbean*, ed. by Paget Henry and Paul Buhle (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1992), pp. 63–91 (pp. 62–67).

[85] Mignolo, 'Sylvia Wynter: What Does It Mean to Be Human?', in *Human as Praxis*, pp. 106–23 (p. 108).

[86] Mignolo, 'Sylvia Wynter: What Does It Mean to Be Human?', p. 108.

[87] Wynter, 'Unsettling the Coloniality', p. 263.

By denaturalising Man, Wynter's decolonial scholarship emphasises the role of narratives in the construction of conceptions of humanity. The human, she argues, is '*homo narrans*' a figure whose '*mythos*', the stories it tells about its origins and itself, have ontological effects.[88] Wynter is here combining decolonial and Black scholarship with contemporary cognitive science in order to outline the process through which a conscious experience of what it is to be 'human' emerges through the entanglement of cognitive structures and discursive forces. In particular, her description of the human as *homo narrans* derives from her engagement with Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela's concept of autopoiesis. The cognitive model of autopoiesis – auto (self) and poiesis (organising) – was first outlined in *Autopoiesis and Cognition: The Realization of the Living* (1987) and describes the mind as fragmented, as a series of systems within systems, a network of feedback loops. Autopoiesis is taken up by critical posthumanists in part because it precludes the possibility of a pre-ordained, centrally controlled mind, which represents the foundation of liberal humanist subjectivity. Instead, the mind is a network of processes. A subjective sense of self or consciousness is neither synonymous with, nor primordial to, cognition, but rather emerges spontaneously through the interaction of locally acting autopoietic processes within the mind.[89] In this model of cognition, consciousness, that which was central to the human-exceptionalism of liberal humanist thought, becomes devalued.[90] In Hayles's terms, autopoietic cognition reveals consciousness to be an '*epiphenomenon*', an 'evolutionary upstart' that has masqueraded itself as the total sum of cognition.[91]

Autopoiesis teaches that the world as it is experienced within consciousness is in part the result of internal cognitive processes. Cognition does not consist of the representation of an external world within the mind, but is instead defined as a relational process through which an experience of the world comes into being through the interaction of internal, self-organising cognitive processes and an external environment. The mind does not experience the world as it is, but rather, the cognising subject perceives an 'image of the world' that

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[88] Wynter and McKittrick, pp. 25, 65.

[89] The emergence of consciousness through cognitive structures is discussed at length in Chapter Four of this thesis.

[90] Kate Soper's useful definition of humanism lists consciousness as a core tenet of the humanist tradition. Kate Soper, qtd. in Lars Schmeink, *Biopunk Dystopias: Genetic Engineering, Society and Science Fiction* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2016), p. 29.

[91] Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, pp. 2–3.

emerges through a relational entanglement of the mind and that which is external to it.[92] In other words, the world as it exists for the conscious subject is the result of the idiosyncrasies of that species' cognitive structure.

Wynter combines autopoietic models of cognition with a legacy of antihumanist and decolonial Black scholarship in order to highlight how humanity's autopoietic cognition is affected by narratives. The world as it is perceived by *homo narrans* emerges as a result of the entanglement of cognitive structures and discursive forces. Specifically, autopoietic cognition is the neurobiological mechanism through which hegemonic narratives of what it is to be human come to have ontological, even if discursively inscribed, effects. The self of self-organising therefore includes humanity's auto-narration. The stories we tell ourselves about what it is to be human are performative through their becoming neurobiologically implemented within consciousness through the recursive autopoietic structure of the brain.

This nature-culture model of humanity is the central facet of what Wynter, building on Frantz Fanon's concept of sociogeny, terms the sociogenic principle.[93] The sociogenic principle describes the human as a hybrid phenomenon whose '*bios*', the autopoietic structure of the brain, produces the implementing function of humanity's discursive statements of what it is to be human, its '*mythos*'. This *bios/mythoi* hybridity is explained by Wynter through separating what she terms humanity's 'first' and 'second set of instructions':

> […] the study of nature […] will now be specifically a study of the *implementing bios* agency of the human brain. Here the "first set of instructions" (genetic codes) and the "second set of instructions" (nongenetic codes) emerge; the study of the Word in this light is the study of an *agency* that functions according to the laws of nature and its genetically programmed "first set of instructions" (biological genetic codes) whose role *in this bios/mythoi* hybrid context is to *neurochemically implement* the "second set of

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[92] Mignolo, 'Sylvia Wynter: What Does It Mean to Be Human?', p. 121.

[93] The concept of sociogeny defines how humanity's conscious experience of self is in part produced through sociological processes. These processes, Fanon argues, were vital in the development of the human species. As he writes in *Black Skins, White Masks* that '[b]eside phylogeny and ontogeny, there stands sociogeny.' Fanon, qtd. in Wynter and McKittrick, p. 53; Original in Frantz Fanon, *Black Skins, White Masks*, trans. by Charles Lam Markmann (London: Pluto Press, 2017), p. 4.

instructions" (nongenetically chartered origin stories and myths).[94]

The role of our biological first set of instructions is to neurochemically entrench the second set of instructions – the 'nongenetic' descriptive statements humanity makes of itself. This is what Wynter describes as the '*autopoiesis of being hybridly human*'.[95] The human, in this schema, is *homo narrans*, a storytelling figure whose origin stories are biologically enacted. If the map is the figure of Man that is taken *as if* it is the human, Wynter's sociogenic principle aims at outlining the territory – the real of the human as a hybrid *bios/mythoi* figure. This is the hybrid form of humanity that leads Wynter to determine that the human is a praxis. Hegemonic origin stories of humanity are biologically (neurochemically) implemented, a process which reflexively proliferates further corresponding origin stories and, at the same time, encourages various behaviours that reinforce the notion that Man is the proper way of being for humanity.[96] In this way, the reification of Man-as-human is a self-replicating Ouroboros that becomes further entrenched with each reflexive twist. What Wynter uncovers, then, are the cognitive processes through which Man comes to be viewed as isomorphic to the human and, in so doing, begins the process of destabilising this figure – of unveiling the distinction between the real object and the object of knowledge.

The sociogenic principle also outlines the complexity of the task of challenging the pre-eminence of Man, for it reveals the ways in which Black subjects' own conscious experience of self is partly conditioned by Western modernity and its racialised conception of humanity. The *bios/mythoi* structure of *homo narrans* is the function through which a particular experience of the world becomes embedded within consciousness, which subsequently shapes the 'inner eyes' through which one views the world.[97] Through the autopoietic inscription of Man, Wynter argues, Black subjects come to view themselves through the terms of an order of knowledge that describes non-white bodies as Other to the

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[94] Wynter and McKittrick, pp. 26–27. Emphases in original.
[95] Wynter and McKittrick, p. 27. Emphasis in original.
[96] A literary example of such a conscription of behaviours is outlined below in the brief discussion of Nalo Hopkinson's *Brown Girl in the Ring* (1998).
[97] Wynter takes the concept of 'inner eyes' from Ralph Ellison's novel *The Invisible Man* (1952). Wynter, 'On How We Mistook the Map for the Territory, and Re-Imprisoned Ourselves in the Unbearable Wrongness of Being, of Desetre: Black Studies Toward the Human Project', in *Not Only the Master's Tools: African-American Studies in Theory and Practice*, ed. by Lewis R. Gordon and Jane Anna Gordon (London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 107–72 (p. 146).

human.[98] That is, Black subjects' conscious experience of self emerges within a hegemonic episteme that renders them abject, resulting in an internalised negrophobia and the experience of being on both sides of the selected/dysselected, eugenic/dysgenic binary. This is the source of what Fanon describes as the Black subject being 'given two frames of reference within which he has had to place himself.'[99] These frames are the source of a dual consciousness that is defined by the paradoxical experience of both 'being; and *désêtre* – a term used by Aimé Césaire to describe "dysbeing" or non-being'.[100]

This is of course not to suggest that within the racial long durée the response to antiblackness by those figured as Man's dysgenic Other has been one of acquiescence. For example, Wynter argues that the potency of the 1960's Black Arts, Studies and Power movements lay in their allowing a generation of Black people to view their blackness from an alternative vantage point to governing US perspectives.[101] Yet, Wynter's analysis of the sociogenic emergence of *désêtre* uncovers processes of inscription through which antiblackness emerges within consciousness.[102] Saidiya Hartman expresses the painful psychic dexterity required to resist this inscription: 'as a Black intellectual living in this culture, I think that there is a struggle to maintain one's sanity in a context in which your consciousness is at war with the given.'[103] Wynter articulates the problem as follows: 'the dilemma is how […] we can be enabled to free ourselves from our subordination to the one culture, the one descriptive statement that is the condition of us being in the mode of being that we are'.[104]

The *demonic perspectives* of Black science fiction represent one means of addressing the 'subordination to the one culture' outlined by Wynter. The function of demonic

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[98] Wynter acknowledges that this is the process described first by W.E.B. DuBois by his concept of 'double consciousness' and then by Frantz Fanon in his description of 'black skins/white masks'. Wynter and McKittrick, p. 48; see W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Fanon.

[99] Fanon, p. 83.

[100] 'Césaire […] uses the poetically powerful term *désêtre*, which translates, in English, as the neologism *dysbeing: symbolic death* as out of place with respect to being human.' Wynter and McKittrick, p. 60. Emphasis in original.

[101] This is the 'exoticization' of Western epistemology outlined by Black Arts Movement poet Amiri Baraka. See Wynter, 'Map for the Territory', p. 120.

[102] In *How To Be An Antiracist* (2019), Ibram X. Kendi provides a detailed personal description of his internalisation of racist tropes. His work represents one manifestation of the internalised negrophobia that Wynter describes emerging through the institution of the narrative of Man-as-human within consciousness. Ibram X. Kendi, *How To Be An Antiracist* (London: Penguin, 2019).

[103] Saidiya V. Hartman and Frank B. Wilderson III, 'The Position of the Unthought', *Qui Parle*, 13.2 (2003), 183–201 (p. 196).

[104] Wynter, 'Unsettling the Coloniality', p. 295.

perspectives is outlined by Wynter in her discussion of how the concept of 'development' is employed as a 'world system' that reifies Western culture as the most developed form of human progress.[105] Within colonial modernity, the concept of development 'is a culture-systemic *telos* that orients the collective ensemble of behaviours, by means of which our present single and Westernised world system is brought into being as a specific "form of life."'[106] Narratives of development render the West exceptional, subsequently placing other nations within an aspirational teleology that 'orients' the behaviours of these nations and their people towards becoming-Western, thus solidifying Man as the proper mode of being human.[107] By thinking in terms of systems, Wynter's question can be rephrased as follows: how can the system be disrupted to allow alternative behavioural pathways and ways of being in the world to emerge? What is required, Wynter shows, are demonic perspectives drawn from epistemes beyond those of Western modernity, which inject otherness or randomness into the self-replicating system to produce changes that displace linear teleology. The etymology of the word demonic, McKittrick explains, is a disruptive force, a 'non-deterministic schema' that is 'hinged on uncertainty and non-linearity.'[108] The 'demonic model' disrupts the teleology of Western modernity and 'makes possible a different unfolding, one that does not replace or override or remain subordinate to the vantage point of "Man" but instead parallels his constitution and his master narratives of humanness.'[109] The demonic is not external to the prevailing system, but rather inhabits it, possessing it, leading to radical change. The fictions of Hopkinson, Okorafor and Joseph provide just such demonic perspectives that work to disrupt the self-replicating system of Western modernity. These three writers draw from a rich 'source of an alternative system of meanings' to those of colonial discourses, subsequently disrupting singular and teleological models of human development.[110] This paves the way for decolonising the prevailing mythos that informs the emergence of a conscious experience of what it is to be, subsequently enabling a reimagination of 'the human' beyond Man.

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[105] Wynter, 'Development', pp. 303–20.
[106] Wynter, 'Development' , pp. 299–300.
[107] These models of development and their relation to the history of science fiction are discussed at length below.
[108] McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), p. xxiv.
[109] McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds*, p. xxiv.
[110] Wynter, 'Afterword', p. 360.

Towards a Black Posthumanism

Wynter's contention that the human is a praxis, developed in part through her engagement with contemporary cognitive science, is one primary example of the potential commonalities between her writing and critical posthumanism.[111] However, her work is noticeably different from much posthumanist scholarship owing to its analysis of the foundational abjection of Black subjects in the construction of 'the human' within Western modernity. Despite potential similarities, references to Wynter, as well as the wider tradition of Black scholarship, are noticeably absent from critical posthumanist discourses, which is particularly surprising when considering, as Jackson does, that she draws on 'many of posthumanism's critical concepts, including autopoiesis', as demonstrated above, as well as 'artificial intelligence and cybernetics.'[112] Jackson has written of the absence of critical race and decolonial scholarship within posthumanist discourses, outlining how the discipline contributes to the erasure of decolonial legacies by positing a new universal genealogy that begins with European poststructuralism:

> I worry that to suggest a seamless, patrilineal link between poststructuralist criticism and posthumanist theory could potentially display a Eurocentric tendency to erase the parallel genealogies of thought that have anticipated, constituted, and disrupted these fields' categories of analysis. For instance, fifteen years before Foucault's publication of *The Order of Things*, Aimé Césaire, in *Discourse on Colonialism*, set before us an urgent task: How might we resignify and revalue humanity such that it breaks with the imperialist ontology and metaphysical essentialism of Enlightenment man? Césaire's groundbreaking critique was hastened by a wave of decolonial resistance that arguably provided the historical conditions of possibility for Foucault's subsequent

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[111] The description of the human-as-praxis is central to Braidotti's concept of the posthuman. For her, the posthuman subject is similarly 'a praxis (a grounded shared project), not a doxa (a common sense belief).' Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, p. 92.

[112] Jackson, 'Animal', p. 673; One notable exception which does consider Wynter as a valuable scholar for posthumanism is that by Adams and Weinstein.

analysis.[113]

Jackson not only posits decolonial thinking as a parallel genealogy to critical posthumanism, but also outlines how decolonial scholars forged the milieu in which Eurocentric posthumanism's foundations, such as Foucault's work, became thinkable.[114] As theorists attempt to imagine subjectivity beyond the terms of liberal humanism and its histories of exclusion, they potentially work to re-inscribe the systemic telos of colonial development through their 'ongoing investment in Europe as standard-bearer of "Reason" and "Culture".'[115]

The latent Eurocentrism of critical posthumanism is evident in Ivan Callus, Stefan Herbrechter and Manuela Rossini's introduction to a special issue of the *European Journal of English Studies* on 'European posthumanism'. Here, the writers outline a genealogy of critical posthumanist thought that posits a trajectory from twentieth century thinking to contemporary posthumanist conceptions of the subject. While it is possible to follow the logic of Callus, Herbrechter and Rossini in their discussion of the European origins of critical posthumanism as it is largely articulated within academia, their argument ultimately reproduces Western modernity's elision of alternative knowledges. This is demonstrated in the following long quotation:

> Posthumanism […] responds to a relatively straightforward imperative to think
> beyond humanism, anthropomorphism and anthropocentrism. As such, it engages in
> modes of thought that have been deemed to be foreign, perverse, paradoxical or
> simply out of bounds by humanist patterns of thought. In this sense, posthumanism
> positions itself as coming 'after' humanism, whether this refers to beginnings in
> ancient Greece or Rome, the European Renaissance, the Enlightenment and/or
> nineteenth-century science. It sees itself as opposed to some or all of humanism's
> values. With a quality of being the 'Anglo-American' theory du jour, it has conquered
> Anglo-American academia as well as US- and UK-based publishing houses and

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[113] 'Animal', p. 670. Wynter makes a similar point in regards to W.E.B. DuBois and Fanon, who pre-empted the questions posed by Foucault and set out to explore how to overcome a consciousness determined by a hegemonic order of knowledge. Wynter and McKittrick, p. 50.
[114] Weheliye highlights the role of decolonial practices in the emergence of European poststructuralism, citing the Algerian war as a prime influence on poststructuralist thinkers. Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus*, p. 9.
[115] Jackson, 'Animal', p. 673.

journals. It did so before more "sceptical" continental European critics took any notice. Dominated by figures such as Donna Haraway, N. Katherine Hayles, Cary Wolfe, Neil Badmington, Elaine L. Graham and Bruce Clarke, posthumanist thought has however developed through a prolonged engagement with "European" philosophical traditions and with canons that have been shaped by the well-known and widely translated work of (proto-posthumanist) figures such as Adorno, Derrida, Deleuze, Foucault, Lacan, Cixous, Irigaray, Lyotard, Wiener, Latour, Stiegler and Luhmann. While then Europe was going nowhere without posthumanism, posthumanism could not have got anywhere without Europe. Thus Europe and posthumanism are in synch, coextensive and co-identifiable.[116]

The writers describe posthumanism's emergence from 'modes of thought' which, though alien to humanism, nevertheless remain firmly within white '"European" philosophical traditions'. There is an irony in describing critical posthumanism as a discipline that arises from thought that is 'foreign' and 'out of bounds by humanist patterns', whilst at the same time eliding the various systems of knowledge rendered primitive through colonisation. At the same time, European philosophy is presented as self-correcting. While Europe produced humanism and the essentialised and exclusionary category of 'the human', this tradition also contained within it the means of its own displacement.[117] I do not mean to argue that Callus, Herbrechter and Rossini are incorrect, per se. The 'proto-posthumanist' thinkers they list do represent transgressions of the humanist tradition. At the same time, the claim that posthumanism is 'coextensive and co-identifiable' with Europe *alone* displays an ongoing belief in the exceptionality of European thinking, which ultimately facilitates the erasure of bodies of thought emerging from elsewhere.

A trace of the violence of colonialism and slavery is present in the language used by Callus, Herbrechter and Rossini. Their claim that the Anglo-American academy was

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[116] Ivan Callus, Stefan Herbrechter, and Manuela Rossini, 'Introduction: Dis/Locating Posthumanism in European Literary and Critical Traditions', *European Journal of English Studies*, 18.2 (2014), 103–20 (p. 112).
[117] There is a comparison to be made here between critical posthumanists' description of European philosophy's self-correcting tendency and what Priyamvada Gopal outlines as the pre-eminent narrative of Empire within colonising nations. Gopal writes, '[w]hen it comes to critiques of imperial activity, there has been a tendency to privilege empire as a "self-correcting device" rather than one that was forced to respond not just to "enlightened opinion" in Britain but to the enslaved and colonized who asserted themselves.' In Callus, Herbrechter and Rossini's terms, posthumanism emerges through a similar self-correcting process within European thinking which elides various dissenting analysis within the colonies. Priyamvada Gopal, *Insurgent Empire: Anticolonial Resistance and British Dissent* (London: Verso, 2020), p. 11.

'conquered' by European posthumanism rearticulates imperial language and exists as a linguistic sign pointing towards what Zoe Todd, with her focus on Native American and First Nation epistemologies, describes as critical posthumanism's systemic erasure of indigenous knowledges and people of colour.[118] The language of the three writers suggests the existence of a contest, a level playing field in which equal consideration has been given to various bodies of thought and which has resulted in European poststructuralism and antihumanist traditions proving themselves the most intellectually viable. Eurocentrism therefore presents itself as a necessary result of the superiority of European thinkers, rather than as a function of ongoing systemic structures perpetuated by the 'European academy's *continued, collective* reticence to address its own racist and colonial roots'.[119] The pre-eminence of European thinking as articulated by Callus, Herbrechter and Rossini represents a re-iteration of a teleological mode of development that privileges Western discourse.

The privileging of Europe within critical posthumanist thought has been present since the discipline's inception in the final decade of the twentieth century. In *Chaos Bound* (1990), a work that lays several foundations for her study of posthumanism a decade later, Hayles describes an emerging episteme of cultural postmodernism constituted by the confluences between non-linear dynamics in the science of chaos, poststructuralism and contemporary literary studies. This episteme, she argues, began the disruption of the concept of 'the human' within Western perspectives by encouraging the 'realization that what has always been thought of as the essential, unvarying components of human experience are not natural facts of life but social constructions.'[120] Cultural postmodernism instituted concepts of nonlinearity and complexity, which disrupt claims of objectivity leading to a series of processes through which 'the human', as it has been understood in Western modernity, becomes denatured, thus paving the way for the posthuman.[121] Here, Hayles is silent on the insights of decolonial and race scholars, whose critiques of the universal figure of Man long pre-date the episteme that she outlines. More specifically, Wynter's explanation in 1989 of how the demonic insights of Black women potentially lead to *systemic disruption* – a result of the disruptive force of liminal thinking to a discursive system – can be aptly placed within the 'cultural matrix' of

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[118] See Zoe Todd, 'An Indigenous Feminist's Take On The Ontological Turn: "Ontology" Is Just Another Word For Colonialism', *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 29.1 (2016), 4–22.

[119] Todd, p. 10. Emphasis in original.

[120] Hayles, *Chaos Bound: Orderly Disorder in Contemporary Literature and Science* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), p. 265.

[121] Hayles explains denaturing simply: 'To denature something is to deprive it of its natural qualities.' She specifies that the denaturing of the human is a function of three interlinking denaturing process: of language; of context; and of time. Hayles, *Chaos Bound*, pp. 265–66.

complexity and chaos that Hayles describes as the foundational conditions of the posthuman.[122]

Yet, both Wynter's work and the tradition of Black scholarship from which she draws are largely absent in writing on the posthuman. Hayles's points of reference are almost exclusively white, and frequently male, representing the process through which an exclusionary archive of critical posthumanism develops.[123] As a result, Wynter's thinking itself represents a demonic ground position *within* critical posthumanism: a demonic possession that disrupts the reiteration of certain tenets of Eurocentrism within the discipline. Wynter's demonic relationship to posthumanist scholarship is captured by Adams and Weinstein:

> In situating the human as a political praxis of the powerful, Wynter can be read as being, to borrow Paul Gilroy's phrasing, "in but not of" the posthuman turn. She speaks to the issues of technoscience and posthumanism but from the standpoint of the colonized for whom the academic project of posthumanism can be seen as risking/depriving/sharing with the oppressed the humanity that those scholars presume.[124]

Wynter's insights are contemporaneous and resonate with critical posthumanism, while at the same time they challenge the reiteration of white and European exceptionalism within the discipline. The absence of her work, as well as her decolonial forebearers, from critical posthumanism leads to the failure of the discipline to attend to the foundational role hierarchical racialisation plays in the construction of the subject. At the same time, what Weheliye describes as the complicated engagement of Afro-diasporic thinking with the question of what it is to be human is also largely ignored by posthuman scholars.[125] Black scholarship and cultural productions have always inhabited a demonic ground position and

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[122] Hayles, *Chaos Bound*, p. 4.
[123] Weheliye makes a similar point in regards to Hayles's later book *How We Became Posthuman*. See Weheliye, 'Feenin'.
[124] The contention that Wynter is '"in but not of" the posthuman turn' recalls Gilroy's analysis of DuBois's concept of double consciousness and the African-American's position within modernity. Gilroy argues that African-American consciousness is both situated within modernity and, through the extraneous definition of African-Americans, as its constitutive outside. Adams and Weinstein, p. 235.
[125] See Weheliye, 'Feenin', pp. 26–27.

have consistently challenged the naturalisation of Man, which Hayles argued only began with the onset of cultural postmodernism.

The inclusion of Black studies and artistic perspectives within critical posthumanism is not only a means to diversification and decolonise the discipline but can also transform various conceptions of the posthuman. Weheliye, for example, takes up Hayles's call to 'contest what the posthuman means' before its terms become calcified, turning this comment against Hayles herself to question the whiteness of her cybernetic posthuman.[126] In the context of Weheliye's critique, the posthuman is rearticulated not as a break from the white liberal subject, but rather a continuation of already ongoing experiments with subjectivity within Black studies and cultures. Through an engagement with Black science fiction, this thesis follows Weheliye's contention that 'any consideration of the posthuman should contemplate the status of humanity from the vantage point of the' nullified 'humanity' of the Black subject.[127]

As will be explained fully in the following section, this thesis contends that several Black science fiction texts provide explorations of the posthuman. Octavia Butler's corpus is a prime example of such writing. I use her work here in order to outline engagements with the posthuman that do not elide issues of race and which result in complex narratives exploring multispecies entanglements within relations of bondage. Butler's short story 'Bloodchild' is set in a future in which a community of humans have fled Earth for fear of being enslaved, only to now find themselves beholden to the alien race T'Gatoi, who use the humans as surrogates to carry their young. The humans, known as terrans, are brought into wider kin groups with members of the T'Gatoi and live in complicated relationships with their alien captors as both family and chattel, beloved partners and reproductive machines. The story exists as a navigation of survival in which liberal humanist models of autonomy are untenable. The narrative concerns the young terran Gan, raised in full knowledge of his future surrogacy for the children of his parent/partner/captor T'Gatoi, who must navigate his entrapped position to make the only apparent choice that he has: suicide or submission. Gan's choices are undoubtedly limited, yet the narrative contains negotiations between human and alien which result in shifting relations. Butler explores what agency and subjectivity might look like in a reciprocal relationship between terran and T'Gatoi, albeit one that certainly remains imbalanced. The story depicts experiments in posthuman relations and shifting

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[126] Weheliye, 'Feenin', p. 23.
[127] Weheliye, 'Feenin', p. 26.

subjectivities in the context of ongoing uneven relations of power. In his critique of Hayles's cybernetic posthuman, Weheliye argues that, as a function of her reliance on white male narrative, the transition to the 'heterogeneous agents comprising the posthuman state of being' appears possible only for those who are first, or at least perceive themselves as, 'free from the will of others' – a luxury not afforded to Black lives.[128] Butler's 'Bloodchild' explores complex posthuman relationships that do not begin from a position of freedom. It is a story which draws instead on 'cultural and political formations in which the history of subjectivity is necessarily yoked to the will—and/or the whips and chains—of others.'[129] This is not to say that it is wholly pessimistic; indeed, the story ends ambivalently, with Gan accepting T'Gatoi's eggs in a moment of reciprocal care.[130] 'Bloodchild' is a pertinent example of literary explorations of a Black posthuman subjectivity that do not hinge on the abandonment of a fallacious liberal humanist model of 'the human', an identity position never comfortably inhabited by Black lives.

Butler's work represents what an imagination of the posthuman that centres the ongoing ontological negation of Black life might look like. In *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (2016), Christina Sharpe engages with the work of Black 'artists, poets, writers, and thinkers', who are conscious of the afterlives of slavery, the 'ongoing process of subjection and resistance', that shapes contemporary Black humanity.[131] In her concept of the Trans*Atlantic, she employs the asterisk to graphically signify the absent-presence of Black being, aesthetics and scholarship from enslavement to the modern day. 'The asterisk after a word', she writes, 'functions as the wildcard, and I am thinking the trans* in that way; as a means to mark how the slave and the Black occupy what Saidiya Hartman calls the "position of the unthought"'.[132] This asterisk is employed to 'hold the place open for thinking', to open a creative, aesthetic and theoretical space for Black people living in the wake of slavery, in what Sharpe terms the 'residence time of the wake', to identify the ways in which they shape and are shaped by contemporary structures and conceptions of being.[133] This thesis, by engaging with the demonic grounds of Black science fiction, attends to the asterisked absence

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[128] Weheliye, 'Feenin', pp. 23–24.
[129] Weheliye, 'Feenin', p. 24.
[130] Octavia Butler, 'Bloodchild', in *Bloodchild and Other Stories* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2005), pp. 1–32 (p. 29).
[131] Sharpe, p. 20.
[132] Sharpe, p. 30.
[133] Sharpe's notion of the residence time of the wake is drawn from the oceanographical term for the time it takes for 'a substance to enter the ocean then leave the ocean'. Residence time stands for the ongoing presence of slavery in the nonlinear temporality of the wake. It is the time of Black being within that reality. Sharpe, p. 41.

of Black people in the archive of posthuman scholarship.[134] Sharpe writes that '[t]o encounter people of African descent in the wake both materially and as a problem for thought is to encounter that * in the grand narrative of history'.[135] By addressing the asterisk of Black life in critical posthumanism, I explain how demonic texts represent 'wake work', which disrupts the ongoing abjection of blackness and the absence of Black scholars and artists within the discipline. These texts centre the lives and insights of Black subjects to displace the coloniality of being and imagine the posthuman beyond the limitations of its Eurocentric heritage.[136]

III.   Black Science Fiction and Unsettling the Coloniality of Development

Science Fiction and Ideologies of Progress

Science fiction studies has long posited the genre's ability to provide a displaced vantage point from which to view the conditions of the present. Inaugural science fiction scholar Darko Suvin developed the concept of a science fictional '"novum" (novelty, innovation) validated by cognitive logic.'[137] The novum is an innovation which displaces the text from the present and yet remains veridical within the epistemological tenets of that present.[138] 'Of course', Dustin Crowley writes, 'the novum and the estrangement do not sever the connection with our social reality entirely, but reflect it back to us from an alternative, often disruptive perspective.'[139] Frederic Jameson describes this ongoing connection to 'social reality' as a productive failure of the science fiction imagination. Writers are unable to imagine futures

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[134] The focus of this thesis therefore enters into dialogue with comments made recently by Jackson. The 'fields of biopolitics, posthumanism, new materialism, and animal studies […] position blackness in the space of the unthought and therefore are not *sufficient* grounds for theorizing blackness.' Jackson, *Becoming Human*, p. 17. Emphasis in original.

[135] Sharpe, p. 33.

[136] Sharpe, p. 33. Emphasis in original.

[137] Darko Suvin, *Metamorphosis of Science Fiction* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), p. 63.

[138] Suvin's concept of a universal 'cognitive logic' rests on an allegiance to Western scientific rationality and is disrupted by Hopkinson, Okorafor and Joseph's cosmological worlds. Each of these writers present realities that are informed by what Grace Dillon terms 'indigenous scientific literacies' and therefore disrupt the universality of Western science, which Suvin argues structures a shared cognitive logic. Indigenous scientific literacies is a 'concept referring to those practices used by indigenous native peoples to manipulate the natural environment in order to improve existence in areas including medicine, agriculture, and sustainability. The term stands in contrast to more invasive (and potentially destructive) western scientific method.' Grace Dillon, qtd. in Jessica Langer, *Postcolonialism and Science Fiction* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 130.

[139] Dustin Crowley, 'Binti's R/Evolutionary Cosmopolitan Ecologies', *Cambridge Journal of Postcolonial Literary Enquiry*, 6.2 (2019), 237–56 (p. 240).

beyond the epistemological conditions of the present, an effect of 'the systemic, cultural, and ideological closure of which we are all in one way or another prisoners.'[140] Yet, as a result of this limitation, a study of the genre becomes a process of uncovering the traces of a political unconscious which informs psychic closure.[141] For Jameson, science fiction does not imagine alternatives, but rather enables a reflection on the present by 'transforming our own present into the determinate past of something yet to come.'[142] It is in part this defamiliarising aspect of science fiction that determines its potential companion function to that of Black studies. Science fiction produces the present as an object of knowledge and, in so doing, potentially *denaturalises* the reflexive assumptions of that world and the conceptions of humanity that emerge within it.

Hopkinson, Okorafor and Joseph each provide a vantage point from which to view, but also importantly to disrupt, ongoing colonial models of development. As discussed briefly above, colonial narratives of progress situate Western culture at the apex of humanity's linear evolution. In *Colonialism and the Emergence of Science Fiction* (2008), Rieder argues that the origins of science fiction in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries are intertwined with colonial discourses, particularly with notions of development and what Rieder terms the anachronistic encounter. European colonial powers described their interactions with other civilisations as acts of time travel during which the colonisers engaged with primordial versions of humanity. As Rieder notes, '[t]he way colonialism made space into time gave the globe a geography not just of climates and cultures but of stages of human development that could confront and evaluate one another.'[143] The globe became the location of different stages of human evolution within which colonised nations came to inhabit what Anne McClintock terms 'anachronistic space'.[144] Ian MacDonald succinctly outlines the relationship between these narratives of development and science fiction:

> To move "forward," to "progress," countries must develop: in other words, be
> coopted into the sphere of global finance, debt, lending, and consumerism. Hence, the

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[140] Frederic Jameson, 'Progress versus Utopia; Or, Can We Imagine The Future?', *Science Fiction Studies*, 9.2 (1982), 147–58 (p. 153).
[141] Jameson, p. 148.
[142] Jameson, p. 152.
[143] Rieder, p. 5.
[144] Anne McClintock, qtd. in Langer, p. 129. Rieder gives the examples of science fiction's 'lost-race motif' and the depiction of encounters with technologically advanced aliens, which replay the colonial encounter of temporally separated societies. Rieder, p. 22.

conflation of these terms continues to agglutinate: progress, development, modernity, civilization, capitalism and technoscience all become interlocking elements of a single hegemonic diktat, with sf representing one of the central literary genres both initiating and surfing the tide of its dissemination.[145]

Science fiction is, therefore, both an effect and agent of colonial ideologies of singular political, economic and cultural progress. Rieder is explicit that his analysis does not lead to the conclusion that 'colonialism is science fiction's hidden truth', but rather that 'science fiction exposes something that colonialism imposes', that is, a prevailing 'ideology of progress.'[146] Science fiction's estrangement facilitates a perspective from which to view the colonial concept of progress, that which differentially situates the colonisers and the colonised along a teleological timeline.

Alondra Nelson provides a powerful example of how ideologies of progress continue to circulate throughout society. Discussing the apparent contradiction between 'Africanness' and futurity, Nelson describes a 2002 South African magazine advertisement for the new Land Rover Freelander, which, in a notable coincidence, depicts a Himba woman – an ethnic group living in modern day Namibia – from which Okorafor's titular protagonist Binti also hails. The advertisement depicts the new car speeding away from the woman dressed 'in traditional attire', drawing on the apparent antithesis between the woman's 'primitive' culture and the innovation of the 'futuristic' vehicle: 'In this single image, we are presented with a visual metaphor for the ostensible oppositionality of race (primitive past) and technology (modern future)'.[147] Nelson reveals how colonial narratives of African primitiveness and development are embedded within cultures and are easily recalled within a single image, in this case for the purpose of selling more cars. In particular, the advert represents what Jackson has outlined as how the '"black female body" has been an essential figure in the unfurling of the object, the thing, matter and the animal in ontological discourses of western philosophy and science'.[148] The activity of the car as it speeds towards the future juxtaposes with the passivity of the woman, literally left behind, whose culturally-specific appearance is

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[145] MacDonald, pp. 20–21.
[146] Rieder, pp. 15, 30. MacDonald also refers to these comments by Rieder in MacDonald, p. 21.
[147] Alondra Nelson, 'Introduction: Future Texts', *Social Text*, 20.2 (2002), 1–15 (p. 5).
[148] Jackson, *Becoming Human*, p. 85.

meant to emphasise her 'feminine primitiveness'.[149] She is the inactive object employed to emphasise the agency of the target of the advertisement: the car's prospective new owner.

Science fiction is one of the forms of representation that reveals ideologies of progress and the coinciding reification of Man, models of development that are drawn on in the advert described by Nelson. If being human is a praxis, as Wynter shows us, then this notion of progress encourages behaviours which entrench the figure of Western Man as the proper way of being in the world. In phenomenological terms, Sara Ahmed describes this process as becoming 'oriented towards' certain objects, where those objects are not only physical objects, but rather objects of 'thought, feeling and judgement', of 'aims, aspirations and objectives'.[150] This is a feedback loop process through which the institution of certain modes of acting further entrench those orientations as guides to 'proper' behaviours. The institution of Man as the model of how to be human produces orientations towards certain objects, actions which, in turn, further entrench within consciousness that figure as what it is to be human.

Of the texts analysed in this thesis, Hopkinson's *Brown Girl* provides the most overt depiction of the orientation of Black subjects living within the racial long durée. The novel's protagonist Ti-Jeanne, a poor, third-generation Caribbean immigrant living in a near-future downtown Toronto devastated by economic collapse, hopes to flee to the suburbs leaving behind her grandmother and the Caribbean-derived spiritualism that informs her grandmother's medical practice. The separation of the inner city from the suburbs restages the temporal disjunct espoused by colonial discourse. The predominantly white population of the suburbs is not only geographically separated, but also considered a 'more developed' form of human civilisation compared to the neglected immigrant communities of the downtown. At the novel's opening, Ti-Jeanne aspires to the so-called developed way of being represented by suburban society. *Brown Girl* depicts how the naturalisation of a certain way of being – here represented by the predominantly white inhabitants of the suburbs – leads to the filtering out of alternative modalities of life: in this case, the Afro-Caribbean spirituality and communalism of Ti-Jeanne's grandmother. The novel does not encourage a critique of the desire for economic stability of a young Black girl, but rather highlights the feedback loop processes through which narratives of development inform and are sustained through the

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[149] Nelson, p. 5.
[150] Ahmed, 'Orientations: Toward a Queer Phenomenology', *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 12.4 (2006), 543–74 (p. 56).

capture of desire and the implementation of orientations. The possibility of survival is, for Ti-Jeanne, equated with embracing the 'modernity' represented by the white culture of Toronto. The novel therefore explores how teleological narratives of development engender praxes of being which emerge through the sociogenic institution of Man. As Jackson notes, Ti-Jeanne is committed to 'the forces of Will and Reason' through which 'all phenomena can presumably be explained within the terms of Western (scientific) rationality.'[151] Accordingly, she initially rejects her grandmother's teaching and attempts to flee downtown in order to relieve herself of her increasing visions of Caribbean deities, experiences which she fears threaten the self-directed autonomy that she hopes to cultivate. Her actions are informed by ideologies of progress that describe a temporal disjunction in cultural encounters. Through this brief introduction to Hopkinson's novel, I aim to highlight how Black science fiction texts defamiliarise the present, enabling perspectives that unveil how colonial narratives of development continue to inform understandings of what it is to be human.

Nonlinear Teleology and Posthuman Becoming

Hopkinson, Okorafor and Joseph unveil ideologies of progress that inform praxes of being, while they also provide the tools for imagining beyond such narrow ideological frames. The three writers imagine posthumanist models of nonlinear becoming conditional on embodied entanglements with human and more than human others, dismantling the sociogenic imposition of Man to facilitate alternative praxes of being. To do so first requires disrupting the biocentric discourses of Man. As discussed above, posited within the terms of scientific empiricism, Western discourse elides the presence of its own *mythoi* so that Man's dominance appears extra-humanly mandated: '[humans are] a biomutationally evolved hybrid species – storytellers who now storytelling invent themselves as purely biological.'[152] In order to break from this biocentricity, Wynter proposes what Césaire termed a 'science of the Word', which acknowledges the 'great silence of [natural] scientific thought'; those aspects of scientific study which have been submerged and ignored in biocentric conceptions of 'the human.'[153] The value of a science of the Word lies in its being a study that is conscious of the role of discursive factors for the autopoietically hybrid *homo narrans*. As such, in a similar

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[151] Jackson, *Becoming Human*, pp. 108–9.
[152] Wynter and McKittrick, p. 11.
[153] Aimé Césaire, qtd. in Wynter and McKittrick, p. 64.

sense to science fiction, this science of the Word 'enable[s…] an external (demonic ground) perspective on the always already storytellingly chartered/encoded discursive formations/aesthetic fields, as well as of, co-relatedly, our systems of knowledge.'[154] A science of the Word is that which examines the sociogenic emergence of, in particular, a racialised phenomenological reality of humanity as beings in the world. It is a science that uncovers the mythos that inform humanity's reflexive acceptance of what constitutes the human, thus producing the possibility of reshaping those conceptions.

Black science fiction texts are useful aesthetic guides for a science of the Word. Butler's *Xenogenesis* trilogy (*Dawn* (1987), *Adulthood Rites* (1988) and *Imago* (1989)) contains quintessential examples of novels that work to dismantle the coloniality of being through a provincialisation of Western conceptions of development. The series opens with humanity on the brink of a self-induced extinction following nuclear war. Butler draws on the cold war anxiety that technological advancements – developments akin to those central to colonial and science fictional discourses of progress – will bring about the end of humanity. At the critical moment in *Dawn*, the remaining humans are saved by an alien race called the Oankali, whose assistance comes with a significant condition. One meaning of the word Oankali is 'gene traders' and their ontology requires that they enter into cross-species trades in order to prevent genetic entropy.[155] Humanity's survival subsequently rests on their becoming genetically spliced into alien-human hybrids. Through a first-contact story, Butler's novel reiterates the anachronistic colonial encounter, but does so with a displacement of its central premise. Here, it is all of humanity, who, faced with the Oankali's technological superiority, are placed in the position of the underdeveloped. It is they who will become different through their engagements with an invading civilisation. More specifically, it is various tenets of Western scientific rationality that the Oankali deem must be phased out in the trade. To the aliens, humanity is fatally flawed by the devastating combination of intelligence and a preference for hierarchical thinking – a combination which has led to humanity developing and using nuclear weapons. The Oankali hope that, through the genetic trade, they will help humanity to 'progress'. By positioning humanity at the brink of a fundamental change, Butler produces what Pramod Nayar describes as a 'wholly new narrative […] of origins', one that emphasises 'symbiogenesis', rather than linear

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[154] Wynter and McKittrick, p. 32.
[155] Butler, 'Dawn', in *Lilith's Brood* (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2007), pp. 1–248 (p. 41).

teleology.[156] By reiterating the terms of the colonial encounter with a difference, the novels provide a perspective from which to view the violence of Western narratives of development and to denaturalise them as culturally specific mythoi sociogenically inscribed. The point is not to impose a new teleology as such – an Oankali model of development for a human one – but rather to employ the estrangement of science fiction to 'exoticize' colonial and neocolonial development narratives.[157]

A science of the Word and the displacement of teleological models of progress facilitate the possibility of imagining posthuman conceptions of the human as praxis. One central aspect of critical posthumanism lies in the attempt to displace what Braidotti describes as 'the classical idea of Man as the rational subject teleologically ordained with rational progress towards perfectibility.'[158] Butler's *Xenogenesis* engages in depictions of the posthuman through its decentring of the human in a narrative of species mixing and posthuman biology. Both participants in the genetic trade, human and Oankali, undergo transformations to their genetics, as well as subsequent processes of 'deracination' and 'socialisation' through which they learn to cohabit with other species and form what Nayar terms a new posthuman 'biological citizenship'.[159] These processes of transformation displace the humanist contention of Man's self-directed linear development in which Man is not only humanity's apex, but also, as the pre-eminent rational subject, the sole agent of humanity's singular evolution.[160] The *Xenogenesis* novels posit something different: 'connection not sovereignty, species mixing rather than species autonomy.'[161] They figure a critical posthumanist account of development which is not pre-ordained, nor linear and self-

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[156] Pramod K. Nayar, *Posthumanism* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2014), p. 130; Symbiogenesis is concept derived from Lynn Margulis's biological concept of endosymbiosis, which, as Laurel Bollinger explains, posits 'that cellular evolution occurs through symbiotic incorporation of bacterial communities, suggesting that cooperation, not competition, provides the fundamental engine of biological change.' For a further succinct description of symbiogenesis, along with a discussion of Butler's engagement with the term, see Laurel Bollinger, 'Symbiogenesis, Selfhood, and Science Fiction', *Science Fiction Studies*, 37.1 (2010), 34–53.

[157] My use of the term 'exoticization' is drawn from Wynter's adoption of 'Leroi Jones/Amiri Baraka's implicit proposal that Western thought (and therefore the cultural framework of this thought) need to be exoticized – that is, viewed "from another landscape" by its Western, and indeed in our case, Westernized, bearer subjects.' Wynter, 'Map for the Territory', pp. 111–12. Emphasis in original.

[158] Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, p. 13.

[159] Nayar, p. 127.

[160] Lars Schmeink notes that within Western humanism the centrality of the human informs and is informed by a narrative of the autonomous, human subject 'as a rational being, in control of its own progress and given free agency in its actions.' Anthropocentrism figures Man as in total control of his development: 'It is this uniquely human view of the world that connects humanism not just to science, but to progress and the project of modernity: industrialization, capitalism, sociology, and politics. The concepts *humanism* and *modernity* seem intertwined and remain ideologically central to our times.' Schmeink, p. 4. Emphasis in original.

[161] Nayar, p. 133.

directed, but rather intersubjective and non-anthropocentric. Being posthuman is a shared, multi-species praxis.

The fictions of Hopkinson, Okorafor and Joseph continue Butler's explorations of the posthuman from the situated perspective of Black subjects. Each text combines the blurring of species and bodily boundaries with the imagination of humanity's nonlinear emergence in order to disrupt colonial progress narratives and to provide theorisations of multi-species, intersubjective development. They do not attempt to impose a new or decolonised singular teleology for the human, but rather invoke a further aspect of the demonic by disrupting all notions of linearity: 'the demonic invites a slightly difference conceptual pathway […] and acts to identify a system (social, geographic, technological) that can only unfold and produce an outcome if uncertainty, or (dis)organization, or something supernaturally demonic, is integral to the methodology.'[162] As demonic texts, they have a liminal position within colonial modernity and are subsequently able to provide exit routes from the various systemic closures which Jameson argues limits the science fiction imagination. That is, they not only provide a vantage point from which to view the epistemological conditions of the present, but their imaginations, shaped by alternative epistemologies, avoid being trapped by them. It is this which facilitates the possibility of imagining Black posthuman futures.

IV.   Animist Realism and the (Black) Posthuman

Referring to emerging scholarship on the 'new animism', I describe the texts discussed in this thesis as works of animist realism. Animist realist texts are those in which an animist worldview shapes narrative reality.[163] Adopting the concept of animism to loosely collate the disparate cosmological worlds within the texts in this thesis is not an essentialising move, a reference to what Harry Garuba terms a 'natural immutable, collective instinct of a people'.[164] Rather, I use animism as it is described by Harvey as a fluid term referring to an internally differentiated religious consciousness. The three writers discussed throughout this thesis imagine worlds through the lens of such a consciousness, details of which I explore below. Their fictional imaginations are informed by epistemological legacies beyond that of

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[162] McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds*, p. xxiv.
[163] Isabel Laack provides a valuable introduction to the new animism. Isabel Laack, 'The New Animism and Its Challenges to the Study of Religion', *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion*, 32 (2020), 115–47.
[164] Harry Garuba, 'Explorations in Animist Materialism: Notes on Reading/Writing African Literature, Culture, and Society', *Public Culture*, 15.2 (2003), 261–85 (p. 266).

Western modernity, representing demonic, non-linear models for the development of posthuman subjectivities.

The new animism attempts to disarticulate the anthropological study of animist cultures from its colonial roots. As Isabel Laack notes, new animist scholars reject two earlier premises of Western understandings of animism: 'the evolutionary paradigm and the spiritual/material dichotomy.'[165] The former refers to the positioning of animism as a 'pre-scientific explanation of the world'.[166] Akin to epistemological development narratives discussed throughout this chapter, the evolutionary paradigm describes animist cultures as representative of primitive stages of human development. The latter, while not as overtly dismissive, describes animism as the belief in 'immaterial living spirits animating dead matter', a misunderstanding of animism that arises from the 'projecti[on of] the particular ontology of material science on Indigenous understandings not sharing this belief.'[167] Western studies' description of animism as the spiritual animation of dead matter fails to acknowledge the animist contention of the aliveness and personhood of all objects and entities. Spirits do not animate dead matter, rather, all matter and spirits are understood as ontologically equivalent persons. The new animism derives from various shifts in scholarship, from the challenge to objectivity and the emergence of recursive anthropology, to an active engagement with the interactions and negotiations of insider indigenous practitioners and scholars with outsider perspectives. A full discussion of these complex developments is beyond the scope of this chapter.[168] In describing the texts in this thesis as works of animist realism, I am adopting the term in its more contemporary, non-metaphysical guise as a mode of religious consciousness, that which Garuba terms an 'animist unconscious', which informs the realities of the fictions I discuss.[169]

In his introduction to *The Handbook of Contemporary Animism* (2014), Harvey explains that the new animism generally 'points to scholarly and popular efforts to understand what activates, energizes and motivates the ways in which lives are lived – either

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[165] These two contentions were first introduced by Edward B. Tylor's nineteenth century study. Laack, p. 119.
[166] Laack, p. 119.
[167] Laack, p. 119.
[168] Nurit Bird-David is commonly touted as one of the first to begin the shifts in perspective leading to the new animism. Nurit Bird-David, '"Animism" Revisited: Personhood, Environment, and Relational Epistemology', *Current Anthropology*, 40 (1999), 67–92. On the entanglement of insider and outside perspectives, see Laack, pp. 125–27. For an example of recursive anthropology, see Viveiros de Castro's study of 'indigenous perspectivism' provides a pertinent example. Viveiros de Castro, pp. 473-502.
[169] Garuba, p. 266.

as individuals or with others.'[170] While the ideas collated under the new animism are disparate, they cohere in their examination of the fundamental relationality of the cosmos and the practice of ensuring affirmative relations between humans and that which A. Irving Hallowell terms '*other-than-human-persons*.'[171] Animism is therefore a pragmatic and non-anthropocentric process of 're-imagin[ing] and redirect[ing] human participation in the larger-than-human, multi-species community.'[172] This definition highlights that animist perspectives 'direct attention towards the continuous interrelation of all beings or of matter itself.'[173] Subjectivity is not a characteristic of humanity alone but is attributed to all entities, human and nonhuman, organic and inorganic, and is itself conditional on relations: 'According to scholars from the new animism, the key to understanding non-naturalistic worldviews is the idea of relationality, which defines human persons primarily through their relations with other entities rather than through their individual, cognitive or emotional identity'.[174] The writers in this thesis explore what it is to be human within worlds where all entities are immanently situated within boundary blurring relations. Subsequently, the figure of Man is disrupted through engagements with a notion of the 'individual' as dependent on co-habitation with other humans, nonhuman animals, aliens, technologies and objects. This decentring of the human renders untenable humanist notions of humanity's autonomously directed development and imagines instead the demonic unfolding of relational posthuman becomings.

Animist realism also disrupts ideologies of progress through the blending of spiritual knowledge and contemporary science. Jessica Langer writes that 'Western science and the discourse of progress […] have been wielded as weapons by colonizers both literally and figuratively, and have not overlaid but have often destroyed, and always inhibited, indigenous narrative.'[175] Indeed, the original description of animism as a 'pre-scientific' mode of thought rendered animist cultures as evidence of a primordial stage of development. Animist realist texts do not attempt to subvert the hierarchy of science and animism, but rather, in Garuba's words, they 'subvert[…] the authority of Western science by reinscribing the authority of

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[170] Graham Harvey, 'Introduction', p. 6.
[171] A. Irving Hallowell, qtd. in Laack, p. 121. A. Irving Hallowell, 'Ojibwa Ontology, Behavior, and World View', in *Culture in History: Essays in Honor of Paul Radin*, ed. by Stanley Diamond (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960), pp. 19–52.
[172] Graham Harvey, 'Introduction', p. 2.
[173] Graham Harvey, 'Introduction', p. 6.
[174] Laack, p. 122.
[175] Langer, p. 129.

magic within the interstices of the rational/secular/modern'.[176] Western scientific rationality is not dismissed but rather incorporated into the terms of a fluctuating religious consciousness. This perspective disrupts the ubiquity of Western science. 'Science' is disarticulated from its loaded meaning as solely Western scientific rationality and opened to the critical insights of indigenous thought, that which Grace Dillon terms 'indigenous scientific literacies'.[177]

The following list of non-exhaustive examples from texts discussed in this thesis, which are expanded on in the coming chapters, illustrates their blending of the spiritual with various facets of contemporary science. Throughout Hopkinson's *Brown Girl*, the porosity of the boundaries between the material and spirit worlds, as well as the incorporation of the other within through processes consistent with Haitian Vodou possession, informs a posthumanist collapse of self-other distinctions. *Midnight Robber* aligns contemporary artificial intelligence technologies with Afro-Caribbean mythological creatures to reimagine non-hierarchical relationships between humanity and technology. In the *Binti* series, Okorafor combines a mythopoiesis based on African fractal cosmologies with the dynamic world described within chaos theory and complexity. Humans in these novellas are situated within animating more than human worlds and are, as a result, open to the stochastic variation intrinsic to a dynamic cosmos consistent with both animism and complex systems. Finally, in *African Origins*, the collective consciousness of an ancestral community emerges within the text as an effect of the novel's synthesis between recursive models of embodied cognition and a temporal nonlinearity common to animist thought: the contention of the 'fluidity of the present' combined with the demand to 'listen to the calls of kin, ancestors, other-than-humans and the world itself.'[178] Through these various examples of animist blending, the terms of the anachronistic encounter – the colonial description of engagements with Man's 'other' as time-travelling escapades to different points during Man's linear evolution – are disrupted.

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[176] Garuba, p. 271.

[177] See Grace L. Dillon, 'Indigenous Scientific Literacies in Nalo Hopkinson's Ceremonial Worlds', *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*, 18.1 (2007), 23–41; In her study of postcolonialism and science fiction, Langer also outlines the blending of Western and indigenous knowledges within postcolonial science fiction texts: 'It seems to me that rejection of the Western scientific method is not necessary in order to include indigenous scientific literacies. Just as postcolonialism refers not to nativism and the drive for purity of culture, but rather to a process of emergence from colonialism and negotiation of postcolonial identity, so might the "science" in postcolonial science fiction refer to a similar process of simultaneous recuperation of indigenous scientific literacy and incorporation of those elements of Western science that prove beneficial.' Langer, p. 130.

[178] Harvey refers to Witi Ihimaera's *The Whale Rider* (1987) in his discussing of ancestors. Graham Harvey, 'Animist Realism in Indigenous Novels and Other Literature', p. 464.

All of the fictions in this thesis rewrite colonial development narratives through a reorganisation of animacy – the linguistic separation of the animate and inanimate – which facilitates a reimagining of what can count as an active agent. In *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering and Queer Affect* (2012), Mel Chen traces animacies within interweaving representational practices of animalisation, racialisation and sexualisation. '*Animacies*', they write, 'interrogates how the fragile division between animate and inanimate – that is, beyond human and animal – is relentlessly produced and policed and maps important political consequences of that distinction.'[179] Chen acknowledges the production of an 'animacy hierarchy' projected onto a system of value that valorises 'the human' by attributing animacy to the 'realm of the (rationalized) subject.'[180] Through processes such as those outlined by Jackson – the bestialisation of blackness as a result of the projection of irrationality onto Black subjects – animacies also produce a racialised biopolitical ordering of human value. Racialisation and animalisation are sutured through the construction of an animacy hierarchy of rationality and agency, a process which maps onto colonial notions of progress in which the 'primitive' are rendered non-animate subjects.[181]

Chen's *Animacies* not only traces animacy hierarchies but also outlines the dual processes through which animacies queer distinctions made between the animate and inanimate. On the one hand, the inherent contradiction within language's 'biopolitical logics' fails to uphold its own distinctions between 'human and inhuman, live and dead'.[182] On the other, the agency of matter transcends the distinctions made in animist hierarchies. As Jackson puts it in her review of *Animacies*, 'matter itself is fundamentally irreverent to prevailing hierarchies.'[183] Jackson continues to make the claim that, despite Chen not referring to animism specifically, their work ultimately 'provokes the subterranean topic of animism', a comment which highlights animist perspectives as demonic grounds in the deconstruction of animist hierarchies.[184] Most importantly for this thesis, *Animacies* provides

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[179] Mel Y. Chen, *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering and Queer Affect* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), pp. 2–3.
[180] Chen, p. 44.
[181] 'Certain kinds of animality are racialized not through nature's or modernity's melancholy but through another temporalized map: that of pseudo-Darwinian evolutionary discourses tied to colonialist strategy and pedagogy that superimposed phylogenetic maps onto synchronic human racial typologies, yielding simplistic promulgating equations of "primitive" peoples with prehuman stages of evolution.' Chen, pp. 101–2.
[182] Chen, p. 9.
[183] Jackson, 'Animal', p. 680.
[184] Jackson, 'Animal', p. 680.

insights into how the dismantling of animacy hierarchies and the anthropocentric attribution of agency can work to displace racialised biopolitics.

Animist realism affords the writers in this thesis a narrative means of challenging animist hierarchies both through the reattribution of agency to nonhuman others, as well as the extension of human agency beyond the bounds of the 'autonomous' subject. In doing so, the three writers enter into dialogue with affect theory's reimagination of what counts as agency, namely the conception of agency as a thing's capacity to affect and be affected.[185] The cosmological worlds of Hopkinson, Okorafor and Joseph position humanity within a multi-species community and depict processes of becoming-with an array of nonhuman others, including, for example, aliens and technologies in *Binti* and *Midnight Robber*; the pantheon of Caribbean deities in *Brown Girl*; and the Caribbean landscape in *African Origins*. Agency is not only attributed to nonhuman entities through their capacity to affect humanity, but human agency itself is dispersed beyond the bounds of the individual. These narratives conjure a posthumanist conception of agency by highlighting how the human is affected – animated – by a wealth of human and nonhuman forces.

By reimagining the subject through the tenets of an animist consciousness, Hopkinson, Okorafor and Joseph disrupt the Eurocentrism within the critical posthumanism archive by documenting proto-posthumanist thinking within animist cultures. My contention in this thesis is that such epistemological tenets, articulated within fiction, produce significant conceptual tools that can be productively taken up by critical posthumanists. Importantly, this is not a claim for the inherent superiority of animism over the European traditions from which critical posthumanism has typically drawn, but rather a call for further productive dialogue. My aim in this thesis is not to dismiss the insights of critical posthumanism, but rather to expand its archive. One way of conceptualising this relationship is through the animist process of incorporation and assimilation through which tenets of critical posthumanism blend with features of animist cultures as they are embedded within the imagined worlds of the texts discussed through this project.

It will be useful for me to explicitly outline the connections between the various threads running throughout this chapter. Wynter's sociogenic principle defines the 'real' of the human as a hybrid, *bios* and *mythoi* entity. For the human as *homo narrans*, hegemonic

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[185] Chen provides the example of Jane Bennett's *Vibrant Matter* (2009), which outlines this redefinition of agency. Chen, p. 7; Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: The Political Ecology of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

narratives of what it is to be human are inscribed within consciousness. Within colonial modernity, biocentric narratives posit Man as a universal model of humanity, while simultaneously obscuring the discursive aspects of that figure's construction. Through both their demonic positioning within the hegemonic episteme and the displaced vantage point of science fiction, the writers in this thesis reveal the governing epistemological and ontological conditions of the present. Particularly, they reveal ideologies of progress which continue to posit Man as the most developed form of being human. Through animist realism, these texts not only reveal but also displace this conception of Man, escaping the psychic closure that Jameson argues limits the imagination of science fiction writers. That is, through the demonic ground of an animist unconscious, it is possible to construct alternative mythoi of being human, which enable the emergence of a conscious experience of what it is to be beyond the realms of Man. Each text produces what Braidotti describes as 'conceptual personae, for a subject formation [that] takes place in-between nature/technology; male/female; black/white; local/global; present/past – in the spaces that flow and connect the binaries.'[186] The texts engage in such posthuman imaginations, but do so while maintaining a genealogical link to epistemological heritages of Black African people and cultures.

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[186] Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, p. 164.

Chapter Two: Indigenization as Cultural Resistance in Nalo Hopkinson's *Brown Girl in the Ring* and *Midnight Robber*

I.   Introduction

In this chapter, I outline how two of Nalo Hopkinson's novels, *Brown Girl in the Ring* and *Midnight Robber*, explore the limitations of achieving a postcolonial freedom that ultimately perpetuates colonial epistemologies. Both novels depict Caribbean communities living in the context of racializing assemblages that continue to 'bar[…] non-white subjects from the category of the human as it is performed in the modern west.'[187] Hopkinson depicts attempts by Caribbean people to resist their ontological negation through assimilating into the position of Man. In so doing, the categorical frame of the human may be widened to include Black subjects, yet the racist tenets of this figure are maintained. Outlining his manifesto for decolonial praxes, Mignolo writes that '[u]nder the rules of the epistemic canon, and according to its racial mandates, if you have been classified in / as difference, then you are required to submit and assimilate to the canon or remain outside.'[188] Hopkinson explores how following either of these two requirements – assimilation or exclusion – amounts to the maintenance of the racialised epistemology of colonialism. As her two female protagonists in *Brown Girl* and *Midnight Robber* – Ti-Jeanne and Tan-Tan respectively – navigate the socio-political and discursive structures of antiblackness within which they are situated, Hopkinson unveils an alternative mode of resistance to that of the binary outlined by Mignolo: indigenization.

The concept of indigenization as I employ it here is derived from the idiosyncratic use of the term by Sylvia Wynter. Wynter defines indigenization as a form of cultural resistance present across the Caribbean during slavery. Enslaved Africans performed cultural practices in lands they were forcibly transported to by way of the Middle Passage. Such performances were informed by the contention of an intimate connection between human and land, thus facilitating a relationship between the enslaved and their new environment. Indigenization

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[187] I quoted Weheliye's description of racializing assemblages in Chapter One: 'I construe race, racialization, and racial identities as ongoing sets of political relations that require, through constant perpetuation via institutions, discourses, practices, desires, infrastructures, languages, technologies, sciences, economies, dreams and cultural artifacts, the barring of non-white subjects from the category of the human as it is performed in the modern west.' Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus*, p. 3.

[188] Mignolo, 'Sylvia Wynter: What Does It Mean to Be Human?', p. 106.

therefore describes the becoming-indigenous of African people within the Caribbean through cultural praxes that forged a foundational relationship with the landscape. In provision spaces – lands away from the plantations that the enslaved could till for their own resources – African-descended people indigenied knowledge systems that represented a 'paradox and contradiction' to the epistemic *doxa* of the plantation owners.[189] As Carole Boyce Davies writes, 'Africans [within the Caribbean] had created a cultural resistance that can also be identified as indigenous in that it was harmonized with the land.'[190] By procuring relationships to the landscape through indigenizing practices, African people and their descendants in the Caribbean embedded alternative conceptions of being to that of the hegemonic culture of the plantation owners.

Through processes of indigenization, both Ti-Jeanne and Tan-Tan practice cultural modes of resistance to the racializing assemblages that universalise white Man as a model for what it is to be human. Such praxes reveal the ineluctability of Black resistance. As Alexander Weheliye writes, 'racializing assemblages of subjection […] can never annihilate the lines of flight, freedom dreams, practices of liberation, and the possibilities of other worlds.'[191] Through Ti-Jeanne learning to 'serve the spirits' that populate the near-future Toronto in *Brown Girl* and Tan-Tan's playing Trinidadian mas in *Midnight Robber*, Hopkinson's two protagonists perform indigenizing practices that disrupt the anti-Black structures and epistemologies of their respective societies. Significantly, as demonic practices, these forms of resistance to Man are not oppositional. As David Ross Fryer explains, 'oppositional thinking remains caught up in the very system it claims to challenge.'[192] Antihumanism, he continues, engages in such reactionary thinking through its rendering of the human as a purely 'social, cultural, and linguistic construction.'[193] Posthumanism, however, maintains 'antihumanism's suspicion of too-easily-found universals', while continuing to search for 'the real in which all humanity takes part but that

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[189] Wynter, 'Jonkonnu in Jamaica: Towards an Interpretation of Folk Dance as a Cultural Process', *Jamaica Journal*, 4.2 (1970), 34–48 (p. 36); Carole Boyce Davies describes the necessity of culture as a resistant force in the Caribbean owing to its history of genocide and slavery: 'the Caribbean […] demands some sort of understanding of culture either as oppositional or as resistance, and further as transformational if we are to recoup any identities beyond the ones imposed'. Carole Boyce Davies, *Black Women, Writing and Identity: Migrations of the Subject* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 12.

[190] Davies, 'From Masquerade to *Maskarade*', p. 206.

[191] Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus*, p. 2.

[192] David Ross Fryer, 'On the Possibilities of Posthumanism, or How to Think Queerly in an Antiblack World', in *Not Only the Master's Tools: African-American Studies in Theory and Practice*, ed. by Lewis R. Gordon and Jane Anna Gordon (London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 227–42 (p. 236).

[193] Fryer, p. 236.

which is beyond any singular manifestation or understanding of the human.'[194] Through indigenizing practices, Ti-Jeanne and Tan-Tan form a relationship to the land, subsequently acting in ways that are conscious of their embeddedness within more than human worlds. Therefore, neither novel explores an alternative or oppositional figure to Man, but rather explores the *possibilities* of becoming through actions informed by a consciousness of humanity's non-anthropocentric entanglements. Afro-Caribbean epistemologies therefore become the means through which both protagonists experiment with posthuman ways of being. Within both novels, Hopkinson fractures the Euro-Western academy's trajectory from poststructuralism to posthumanism by providing a foundation for imagining the posthuman through antecedent knowledge systems. The novels root – indigenise – a decolonial posthumanism imagined through Afro-Caribbean cultures and knowledges.

II. *Homo Oeconomicus*'s Others: Inner City Life in *Brown Girl in the Ring*

Obeah Magic and Extractivism

The events of *Brown Girl* take place in a near future Toronto where an economic crash has led the wealthy (and predominantly white) population to flee to the suburbs 'leaving the rotten core to decay'.[195] Neglected by the Ontario government, the inner city, known as the Burn, has become a hub for largely immigrant communities surviving despite the lack of infrastructure.[196] The protagonist Ti-Jeanne, a young third-generation Caribbean woman, lives in the Burn with her family: her grandmother Mami Gros-Jeanne, who uses both her medical training as a nurse and her religious knowledge to be one who serves the spirits[197] in order to act as a healer and community leader; her mother Mi-Jeanne, who begins the novel suffering from amnesia and wanders around the inner city unrecognised as 'Crazy Betty'; her child Baby; and her once-lover and Baby's father, Tony. Also living in the Burn is Ti-

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[194] Fryer, p. 237.

[195] Nalo Hopkinson, *Brown Girl in the Ring* (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2012), p. 4. All in-text citations from this edition.

[196] Hopkinson names the inner city the Burn in an allusion to New York's Bronx neighbourhood. See Elena Clemente Bustamante, 'Fragments and Crossroads in Nalo Hopkinson's Brown Girl in the Ring', *Spaces of Utopia: An Electronic Journal*, 4.1 (2007), 11–30 (pp. 17–18).

[197] The practice of 'serving the spirits' is the general name given by Gros-Jeanne for her spiritual practice (*Brown Girl*, p. 219).

Jeanne's grandfather Rudy, the ruthless leader of a gang called the 'posse', which maintains a violent control over the Burn.

Through this dualistic geography between the suburbs and the inner city, *Brown Girl* depicts the processes through which racial, sexual and economic inequities are produced and perpetuated through the reification of what Wynter describes as the most contemporary manifestation of Man: *homo oeconomicus*, a figure 'who practices, indeed normalizes, accumulation in the name of (economic) freedom'.[198] With this model of what it is to be human, '[c]apital is thus projected as the indispensable, empirical, and metaphysical source of all human life'.[199] Material wealth is aligned with rationality, which has the effect, as Weheliye explains, of naturalising 'economic inequities, white supremacy, genocide, economic exploitation, gendered subjugation, colonialism, "natural selection," and concepts such as the free market'.[200] In Hopkinson's imagined future Toronto, the distinction between the 'rational' economic success stories and their 'irrational' others is reflected both through its spatial division and the governing perspectives of who can and cannot inhabit certain spaces.[201] That is, the suburbs are rendered the natural location of the largely white inhabitants, who have been 'bio-evolutionarily selected for economic growth and material redemption'.[202] The communities living in the inner city are subsequently rendered the naturally dysselected others. Arguing against attempts to rejuvenate the Burn, the chief advisor to the Premier of Ontario describes downtown Toronto as a 'rat hole, complete with rats (*Brown Girl*, p. 240). The economic disparity between the Burn and the suburbs is here rendered as the result of the inherent failures of the inhabitants, their animalised humanity, rather than the structural inequalities of the city.[203]

While the Premier's chief advisor blames the dilapidated conditions of the Burn on the inhabitants, the economic downtown of Toronto is in fact caused by extractivist[204]

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[198] Wynter and McKittrick, p. 10.
[199] Wynter and McKittrick, p. 10.
[200] Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus*, p. 25.
[201] McKittrick writes that '[i]f prevailing geographic distributions are racially, sexually, and economically hierarchical, these hierarchies are naturalised by repetitively spatializing "difference"'. McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds*, p. xv.
[202] Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus*, p. 20; Wynter, '"Development"', p. 307.
[203] Aligning with Jackson's discussion of the animalisation of blackness throughout Jackson, *Becoming Human*.
[204] Leanne Simpson defines 'extractivism', as the 'extraction of natural wealth from the ground and into the market'. She continues to outline the entanglement of extractivism and capitalism: 'Extraction and assimilation [into the capitalist system] go together. Colonialism and capitalism are based on extracting and assimilating. My land is seen as a resource. My relatives in the plant and animal worlds are seen as resources. My culture and knowledge is a resource. My body is a resource and my children are a resource because they are the potential to

practices of the Ontario government. This is shown through a series of newspaper headlines:

> TEMAGAMI INDIANS TAKE ONTARIO TO COURT: AMNESTY
> INTERNATIONAL FUNDS TEME-AUGAMI ANISHNABAI LAND CLAIM […]
>
> JOBS LEAVE TORONTO: 7 LARGEST EMPLOYERS RELOCATE, SAY
> TORONTO'S NOT SAFE […]
>
> TEMAGAMI NATIVES WIN LAWSUIT: TRADE EMBARGO LIFTED, TOO
> LATE FOR TORONTO? (*Brown Girl*, pp. 11-2)

The Ontario government's attempt to plunder Temagami land for financial gain repeats the history of this community, as well as general settler practices across contemporary Canada.[205] Making such practices the cause of Toronto's economic downturn, Hopkinson presents a counter-discourse to that of the official government of Ontario. It is an extractivist relationship to the environment – the proper mode of acting for *homo oeconomicus* – that triggers the economic collapse of inner city Toronto, rather than the naturalised economic failures of the Burn's inhabitants.

Following the abandonment of the Burn by the Ontario government, extractivist practices continue in the guise of Rudy and his exploitative gang. Rudy's violent control over the downtown area is achieved through his knowledge of the Caribbean spirits, the *loa*, who frequently traverse the binary between the spirit and the material world to play an active role in the novel's events.[206] Rudy performs 'obeah' magic in order to achieve perpetual youth by

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grow, maintain, and uphold the extraction-assimilation system.' Leanne Simpson, 'Dancing the World into Being: A Conversation with Idle No More's Leanne Simpson', *YES! Magazine*, 2013 <https://www.yesmagazine.org/social-justice/2013/03/06/dancing-the-world-into-being-a-conversation-with-idle-no-more-leanne-simpson> [accessed 2 February 2021].

[205] It is important not to place First Nation communities and the Canadian government in dualistic opposition in regards to the use of land resources. Invoking the dispute in this way potentially represents indigenous communities in Canada as atavistically holistic. Whilst First Nation epistemologies often narrate a close relationship with the natural world, land disputes often also concern lack of economic benefits indigenous communities gain from the extraction of natural resources. See for example, Brenda L. Parlee, 'Avoiding the Resource Curse: Indigenous Communities and Canada's Oil Sands', *World Development*, 74 (2015), 425–36.

[206] Jackson discusses *Brown Girl* in *Becoming Human*. She argues that Hopkinson challenges the 'nullification' of the 'black female figure' within prevailing Western epistemologies by embedding [Afro-Caribbean] 'myth' within 'realism' in order to reveal the ways in which anti-Black codes of being are always already informed by 'enabling myths' that are nonetheless presented as empirical facts: 'In using myth to counter the myths of history and of scientific fact, the novel reveals that myth often shrouds 'fact' and claims to objective reality and, for this very reason, myth—or more precisely, a nonrepresentationalist mode of reason or onto-epistemology— may hold the potential to unsettle hegemonic modes of racist reality and their constituent myths.' Jackson,

draining the lives of several of the Burn's homeless children. To do so, he has trapped the spirit of his daughter – Ti-Jeanne's mother Mi-Jeanne – in a calabash bowl, turning her into a malevolent spirit, a 'duppy', which he then feeds the blood of the homeless children to steal their youth for himself. Through Rudy's extraction of biological resources from the Burn's inhabitants, Hopkinson aligns what Anna Bedford describes as the 'hyper-individualism' of Rudy's obeah practice with the extractivist practices of the Ontario government.[207] By using his powers for life extension, financial gain and power over the Burn, Rudy exists as an 'obeah-wielding' (*Brown Girl*, p. 127) *homo oeconomicus*.

Through the representation of Rudy's obeah, Hopkinson avoids presenting Afro-Caribbean spiritual practice as an inherently positive force. The term obeah that is used to describe Rudy's manipulation of the spirits is difficult to define and does not refer to a singular set of practices. As such, it is impossible to distinguish obeah from other forms of worship originating in the Caribbean. However, in *Brown Girl*, the term's use is largely consistent with that in Jamaica, where, as Ennis Edmonds and Michelle Gonzalez note, practitioners of obeah are notable for being 'guided more by desire for personal gain than by concern for the welfare and well-being of the community.'[208] In *The Cultural Politics of Obeah* (2015), Diana Paton describes obeah as 'practices involving ritual attempts to manipulate a world of spiritual power'.[209] She argues that by the end of the twentieth century, as a result of the devaluation of African-derived spiritual practices within Western epistemologies, representations of obeah from across the Caribbean tended to depict the practice as either comic or malignant. In both cases, Paton writes, obeah practice was 'discursively linked to manipulation, domination, and fraud'.[210] The more comic representations showed obeah practitioners as charlatans falsely claiming powers over the spirits to extract money from members of the community. Depicting supposedly superstitious

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Becoming Human, p. 91. Jackson's essay was published after the writing of this chapter, but her ideas have been forefront in my mind during its revisions.

[207] Anna Bedford, 'Ecofeminist, Post-Colonial, and Anti-Capitalist Possibilities in Nalo Hopkinson's Brown Girl in the Ring', in *Ecofeminism in Dialogue*, ed. by Douglas A. Vakoch and Sam Mickey (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2017), pp. 15–30 (p. 19).

[208] Obeah is a term used for individually-oriented spiritual practice across the Caribbean. Edmonds and Gonzalez provide a useful discussion of the difference between obeah and Myalism in Jamaica – the place of Hopkinson's birth. Both practices exist 'in the same complex of religious ideas and practices', yet the former is concerned with interventions for individual benefit, whilst the latter desires improvements for the community.' Ennis B. Edmonds and Michelle A. Gonzalez, *Caribbean Religious History: An Introduction* (London: New York University Press, 2010), pp. 122–26.

[209] Diana Paton, *The Cultural Politics of Obeah: Religion, Colonialism and Modernity in the Caribbean World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 2.

[210] Paton, p. 312.

villagers being tricked by an obeah man, such representations were informed by Western scientific perspectives in which obeah was considered irrational and unscientific. In alternative representations of obeah as a malignant force, whilst still self-oriented, practitioners drew power from the spirits, a skill they manipulated for their own material gain. *Brown Girl* concurs with this latter representation of obeah. Rudy as an obeah man is undoubtedly self-interested, but he is no charlatan. His spiritual powers facilitate his domination over the Burn.

Rudy's self-interested obeah is explicitly tied to the history of 'Indigenism' (not to be confused with Wynter's indigenization) in Haiti. Indigenism refers to the renewed interest in Haitian culture that originally arose as a means of defiance against the United States' occupation of the nation from 1915 to 1934. As Kaiama L. Glover discusses, this movement was ultimately tainted by the rise of 'Indigenist intellectual and ethnologist François "Papa Doc" Duvalier', who 'pervert[ed] Haiti's popular culture to his own ends and ultimately established himself as the Vodou-empowered embodiment of the state.'[211] Through his control over the Burn, produced through his knowledge of the spirits, Rudy is a figure similar to the 'Vodou-empowered' François Duvalier. As Gros-Jeanne notes, Rudy 'take the knowledge [of serving the spirits] and twist it' (*Brown Girl*, p. 122) to maintain his brutal rule. The association of Rudy with the violent rule of Duvalier is evident in his treatment of his servant Melba, who, as Rebecca Romdhani notes, exists as a 'living zombie'.[212] Through obeah, Rudy has stripped Melba of all '*volition*' (*Brown Girl*, p. 28, emphasis in original), rendering her a figure akin to the zombie within Haitian Vodou: 'a thingified non-person reduced to its productive capacity. A partially resuscitated corpse that has been extracted from the tomb by an evil sorcerer […] and then maintained indefinitely' in the interstices between life and death.[213] Glover explains how Haitian artist and writer Franketiénne adopted the Vodou zombie as a metaphor for the effect of the 'Duvaliers' body-and-soul fracturing dictatorships.'[214] As well as his actual zombification of Melba, the control that Rudy has over

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[211] As Glover explains, the Spiralism movement, which will be discussed further below, developed within the context of the brutal Duvalier dictatorships – first François and then his son Jean-Claude. Kaiama L. Glover, *Haiti Unbound: A Spiralist Challenge to the Postcolonial Canon* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2010), pp. 56–57.
[212] Rebecca Romdhani, 'Zombies Go to Toronto: Zombifying Shame in Nalo Hopkinson's Brown Girl in the Ring', *Research in African Literatures*, 46.4 (2015), 72–89 (p. 85).
[213] Glover, *Haiti Unbound*, p. 59.
[214] Glover, *Haiti Unbound*, p. 58.

the Burn renders those living there powerless, metaphorically zombifying them. Rudy is not only a generalised obeah-man but is also a figure akin to Duvalier.

Rudy's self-interested obeah practice, through which he reduces the inhabitants of the Burn to resources for him to exploit, renders him an agent of the ongoing precarity of life in the inner city. As Bedford writes, Rudy's subjugation of Melba is akin to 'the exploitation of labor (especially non-white and female) under capitalism'.[215] Not only does Rudy exploit Melba's labour, but his eventual murder of his zombified servant reduces her to a solely biological resource. Rudy kills Melba in order to send a warning to Tony, who has attempted to flee the Burn in order to escape working for the posse. To scare Tony into submission, Rudy forces him to watch as he flays Melba alive. This act is filtered through Tony's perspective, which, as a result of his medical training, reflexively reduces Melba's body to a list of medical descriptions: 'anterior tibialis of the lower leg; the long bulge of the rectus femoris muscle of the thigh; external obliques covering the stomach region; flap of the platysma myoides muscle layered over chin and clavicle; sterno-cleido mastoid just visible behind the ear' (*Brown Girl*, p. 136). Here, Melba is reduced from body to flesh, to what Hortense Spillers terms the 'zero degree of social conceptualization'.[216] Her flesh becomes a biological resource for Rudy, employed to force Tony to follow his will.

Through Rudy, then, Hopkinson aligns the biocapitalist exploitation of the marginalised poor with obeah practice.[217] This link is most overtly made in the novel's prologue, in which a government official visits Rudy and employs him to save the life of the ailing Premier of Ontario, Uttley, who requires a heart donation to survive. Willing to obtain the heart by unscrupulous means, Rudy's flaying of Melba is intended to force Tony to find a suitable donor amongst the Burn's poor inhabitants and to murder them so that the heart can be harvested. The prologue sets off a chain of events that ends with Tony murdering Gros-Jeanne and stealing her heart after he discovers that she is a suitable donor for Premier Uttley. The vast sum of money that Rudy receives for obtaining the heart is akin to what Rosi Braidotti terms a 'perverse form of the posthuman' as Gros-Jeanne is subsumed into the 'opportunistic political economy of bio-genetic capitalism' within which human matter is

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[215] Bedford, p. 23.
[216] Hortense J. Spillers, 'Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book', *Diacritics*, 17.2 (1987), 64–81 (p. 68).
[217] See Kaushik Sunder Rajan, *Biocapital: The Constitution of Postgenomic Life* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).

reduced to a 'commodity for trade and profit.'[218] Through the prologue, Hopkinson explicitly draws a link between the zombifying effects of Rudy's individualistic obeah practice and extractivism, for the scene sets up a narrative of biocapitalist exploitation of the inhabitants of the Burn, as well as being reminiscent of the consultation of an obeah man by those hoping to pay the practitioner to manipulate the spirits on their behalf.[219] It is therefore Rudy's obeah that allows him to lay claim to the identity of a 'materially selected' *homo oeconomicus*.

Ti-Jeanne's Afrophobia: The Aspiration Towards Life in the Suburbs

At the beginning of the novel, Ti-Jeanne lives in the Burn with her grandmother, Mami Gros-Jeanne. Fearful of the threat to her life posed by the precarious conditions of the Burn, Ti-Jeanne initially shuns her grandmother's spiritual practice in the hopes of cultivating an individual freedom represented by life in the suburbs. As Romdhani argues, 'Western ideologies of individualism seem desirable' to Ti-Jeanne because 'she mistakenly believes that rejecting her African heritage and assimilating into white Canadian culture is the means through which she can assert her autonomy and selfhood.'[220] Ti-Jeanne's aspirational whiteness, as a route to *individual* freedom and selfhood, is threatened by an increasing number of visions of Afro-Caribbean mythological creatures, as well as possessions by the *loa*. Through Ti-Jeanne's reaction to one particularly troubling vision, her desire for individual freedom is linked to the internalisation of anti-Black colonial ideologies. Ti-Jeanne is visited by a Soucouyant, a vampiric figure within Caribbean mythology that drains the blood of its victims, which appears and attempts to 'drink the blood' (*Brown Girl*, p. 44) of Ti-Jeanne's child, Baby. Before it can attack, however, another Caribbean figure, the Jab-Jab, appears to save Ti-Jeanne and her child. Mythology dictates that the Soucouyant must count rice before committing murder, so the Jab-Jab throws rice onto the floor to delay the assault. As the spirit counts the rice, morning dawns and Ti-Jeanne throws open the curtains to destroy the Soucouyant with sunlight. Ti-Jeanne is troubled by the vision and discusses its

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[218] Braidotti, *The Posthuman* pp. 6, 61. As McCormack argues, the non-white citizens of the Burn are precluded from the category of the subject and, as such, they are reduced to bodies sublimated to the flow of biological capital. Donna McCormack, 'Living with Others inside the Self: Decolonising Transplantation, Selfhood and the Body Politic in Nalo Hopkinson's Brown Girl in the Ring', *Medical Humanities*, 42 (2016), 252–58 (pp. 254–55).
[219] This practice is described in Edmonds and Gonzalez, p. 124.
[220] Romdhani, p. 73.

implications with her grandmother:

> Gros-Jeanne walked her over to the single bed, sat down with her, and listened while Ti-Jeanne gulped out the story of what she'd seen. "Gros-Jeanne, this ain't the first time I see something like this. I going mad like Mummy, ain't it?" […]
>
> "Two-three time? Child, why you never tell me what was goin' on with you?"
>
> Sullenly Ti-Jeanne replied "What I was to tell you, Gros-Jeanne? I don't want to know nothing 'bout obeah, oui."
>
> Gros-Jeanne shook a finger in front of Ti-Jeanne's face. "Girl child, you know better than to call it obeah. Stupidness." (*Brown Girl*, p. 47)

Ti-Jeanne pathologises her visions as a sign of madness; they are an affliction that threatens the autonomous personhood that she aspires to. As such, Ti-Jeanne confuses all spiritual practice, even her grandmother's community-oriented religion, with Rudy's brand of obeah. Through this reaction, Ti-Jeanne exposes her internalisation of hegemonic Western perspectives. Paton outlines how much of the Western discourse around obeah – which does not always highlight the difference between obeah and other spiritual practices in the Caribbean – reifies the term as 'Africa's symbolic manifestation in the Caribbean, as a sign of the poor, the black, the uncivilised, the non-modern'.[221] This equivocation of 'Africa', and by association blackness, with primitiveness induces what poet Kei Miller terms 'Afrophobia' and leads to a conception of modernity inextricable from whiteness.[222] Adhering to Afrophobic perspectives, Ti-Jeanne believes she can only achieve personhood through disavowing all spiritual practices, subsequently facilitating her transcendence to the suburbs, the location of the 'civilised', 'white' and 'developed' form of being.

Ti-Jeanne's rejection of her heritage therefore represents her internalisation of ideologies that devalue blackness. Wynter explains that, in the colonial French Caribbean, the imposition of Man as a universal model for what it is to be human meant that to act in a way associated with blackness was to cease to exist, to remain in the 'non-space being of Man's

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[221] Paton, p. 315.
[222] Kei Miller, 'The Banning of the Drums; or "How to Be a Good Nigger in Jamaica" | Under the Saltire Flag', 2013 <https://underthesaltireflag.com/2014/07/13/the-banning-of-the-drums-or-how-to-be-a-good-nigger-in-jamaica/> [accessed 17 January 2019].

other'.[223] For colonial subjects, Wynter explains, such ontological negation was likened to the total loss of agency akin to the 'threat of zombification for the Vodunist'.[224] Colonial education therefore constructed an aspirational class of colonised subjects aiming to become 'developed' through behaviours associated with whiteness, a process that, they believed, would enable them to avoid the absence of personhood likened to becoming a zombie. In *Brown Girl*, Ti-Jeanne similarly fears the 'powerlessness'[225] of becoming a zombie that results from her practising Black cultures. As the spirits continue to impose themselves on Ti-Jeanne's life, she is forced to accept teaching from her grandmother, but only as a means of achieving the individual personhood that she desires: 'I need to know who is all these spirit names you does call all the time, and what it is does happen to me when I black out.' *And how to make all of it go away*, she thought' (*Brown Girl*, p. 125, emphasis in original). She hopes to engage with the spirits, '[j]ust long enough to find out how to control her dreams, keep the spirits out of her head. Then she'd be free.' (*Brown Girl*, p. 105). Depicting Ti-Jeanne's equation of freedom with individual autonomy, Hopkinson recalls the psychic colonisation of subjects in the French Caribbean, as described by Wynter, through which engaging in Black cultural practices represents remaining in the non-space of Man's ontological others.

Romdhani indicates a central irony in Ti-Jeanne's fear of zombification through her engagement with the *loa*, writing that Ti-Jeanne's dismissal of her 'African heritage'[226] – as an attempt to cultivate individual autonomy – itself ironically leads to zombification.[227] That is, Ti-Jeanne is zombified by the colonisation of her mind, her internalisation of codes of being that devalue Black cultures. An effect of this phenomenon is that Ti-Jeanne fails to see a further message indicated by the vision of the Soucouyant, one that highlights the possibility of an alternative mode of freedom that is attained not by aspiring to individual freedom by rejecting the *loa* but rather through gaining further spiritual knowledge. What Ti-Jeanne does not realise following her vision of the Soucouyant is that it is actually the mythical Jab-Jab and its knowledge of the Soucouyant's weakness to sunlight that saves her

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[223] Sylvia Wynter, 'Towards the Sociogenic Principle: Fanon, The Puzzle of Conscious Experience, of "Identity" and What It's Like to Be "Black"', in *National Identities and Sociopolitical Changes in Latin America*, ed. by Mercedes Durán-Cogan and Antonio Gómez-Moriana (London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 30–66 (p. 34).
[224] Wynter, 'Towards the Sociogenic Principle: Fanon, The Puzzle of Conscious Experience, of "Identity" and What It's Like to Be "Black"', p. 34.
[225] Romdhani, p. 77.
[226] Romdhani, p. 73.
[227] Romdhani, p. 77.

and Baby. Romdhani argues that Ti-Jeanne must 'read' the dream from a different perspective to that of 'western epistemologies and cosmologies' in order to understand that it is knowledge of the spirits, rather than a disconnection from the spirit world, that provides the means of survival.[228] In Wynter's theoretical terms, she must view the dream through a different lens than the 'inner eyes' that are informed by epistemic antiblackness.[229] By viewing the vision of the Soucouyant differently, Ti-Jeanne can locate the key to gaining the power to defeat Rudy, preventing the zombification that may come at his hands, as well as the zombification that arises through an assimilation to colonial ideologies. Rudy is likened to the Soucouyant through his vampirism, his draining of the blood of the homeless children to prolong his own life. At the novel's end, Ti-Jeanne has a final showdown with Rudy during which the Jab-Jab appears once more. The figure encourages Ti-Jeanne to use her spiritual knowledge to call on the *loa* and to defeat her grandfather. The scene with the Soucouyant therefore adumbrates this battle with Rudy. While Ti-Jeanne's desire for autonomy leads her to reject her heritage, the vision highlights that it is knowledge of the spirits that can provide her with the agency to overcome her grandfather. Afro-Caribbean spiritualities are therefore presented as that which counters the white ideologies that Rudy represents.

III. Dis-Identification from Man through the Indigenization of a Spiralist Imaginary

The Defeat of Rudy and Spiralism

In her grandmother Gros-Jeanne, Ti-Jeanne already has a guide to cultivating relationships with the *loa*. In direct contrast to Rudy, Gros-Jeanne uses both her knowledge of the spirits and her medical training as a nurse to act as a healer for the inhabitants of the Burn. As Rachel Stein comments, just '[a]s Gros-Jeanne serves the spirits, she also serves the community: offering healing to bodies and souls, preserving life, and modelling the ways that cultural heritage might be adapted to provide life-sustaining alternatives to Toronto's urban crisis.'[230] Gros-Jeanne indigenises a hybrid body of knowledge that circumvents the official neglect of the inner city's inhabitants. In Sharpe's theoretical terms, Gros-Jeanne

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[228] Romdhani, p. 82.

[229] Wynter is here drawing on the concept of 'inner eyes' introduced in Ralph Ellison's *The Invisible Man* (1952). Wynter, 'No Humans Involved: An Open Letter to My Colleagues', p. 44.

[230] Rachel Stein, 'Bodily Invasions: Gene Trading and Organ Theft in Octavia Butler and Nalo Hopkinson's Speculative Fiction', in *New Perspectives on Environmental Justice: Gender, Sexuality, and Activism*, ed. by Rachel Stein (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2004), pp. 209–24 (p. 217).

'reimagine[s] and transform[s] spaces for and practices of an ethics of care (as in repair, maintenance, attention), an ethics of seeing, and of being in the wake of consciousness.'[231] Gros-Jeanne's ethics of care is overtly displayed when she attends to the broken leg of one of the Burn's many homeless children, those that Rudy kills in order to achieve perpetual youth, while simultaneously feeding the rest of the young girl's companions (*Brown Girl*, pp. 60-71). Gros-Jeanne figures modes of survival for the inhabitants of the Burn through acts of care grounded in her community-oriented spiritual practice.

Analysing the novel through an ecocritical lens, Bedford describes Gros-Jeanne's practice as deriving from her ethical understanding of the subject as a 'self-in-relation', one that emerges through its entanglements with other members of the community, the *loa* and the environment.[232] Her acts of care and worship rest on the contention that the human is fundamentally a relational entity. Such a worldview is espoused within Spiralism, a literary and philosophical movement developed in Haiti by Frankétienne, Jean-Claude Fignolé and René Philoctète. Zara Brook Zweifel outlines how Spiralism describes the world in chaotic, non-linear, and dynamic interrelation, 'offer[ing] a valuable imaginary in which human existence unfolds in an intimate union with the natural world, and where the consciousness of interrelation takes center stage'.[233] Such an interrelation is most overtly depicted in *Brown Girl* during scenes of Vodou possession. After Tony decides to flee the Burn rather than carry out Rudy's demands for him to steal a heart from one of its inhabitants, he entreats Gros-Jeanne's help. Gros-Jeanne performs a Vodou possession ceremony and succeeds in turning Tony and Ti-Jeanne invisible so that they can evade Rudy's guards. The attempt is thwarted, however, after Rudy performs obeah magic to reveal the pair. During the possession ceremony, Gros-Jeanne's body is altered, taking on the form of Papa Osain, the healer deity who is her spirit father: 'She seemed even older than her years, one eye scarred shut, her voice raspy. . . . One sleeve of Mami's dress flopped empty, and only one foot showed beneath the hem of her dress. One arm was missing and one leg!' (*Brown Girl*, p. 97). Possession produces a blurring of the self-other distinction as Gros-Jeanne's body holds within it the spirit of Papa Osain. Later, after Ti-Jeanne and Tony are captured by members of the posse during the failed attempt to escape the Burn, Ti-Jeanne is possessed by the 'Prince

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[231] Sharpe, pp. 130–31.
[232] Bedford, p. 23.
[233] Glover, *Haiti Unbound*, p. 60; Aara Brook Zweifel, 'Spiralist Interconnection and Environmental Consciousness in Caribbean Literature' (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Oregan, 2016), p. 3 <https://scholarsbank.uoregon.edu/xmlui/bitstream/handle/1794/20511/Zweifel_oregon_0171A_11599.pdf?sequence=1> [accessed 4 June 2019].

of Cemetery' (*Brown Girl*, p. 117). Consistent with Vodou practice, the possession produces a relational embodiment in which 'the two identities merge, blurring the distinction between god and human'.[234] Ti-Jeanne's body is altered and, as 'Ti-Jeanne/Prince of Cemetery' (*Brown Girl*, p. 117), she gains the physical strength to defeat Rudy's henchman and escape.

Ti-Jeanne's defeat of members of the posse foreshadows her final showdown with her grandfather, whom she meets in the CN (Canadian National) Tower where Rudy has made his office. This scene, I argue, represents Ti-Jeanne's final dis-identification from Man – an end to her aspiration to assimilate into the figure of *homo oeconomicus* – through *the indigenization of a Spiralist imaginary*. Meeting Rudy in the tower, Ti-Jeanne smashes the calabash bowl in which her mother's spirit has been trapped, breaking the magic that has kept Rudy young. In response, Rudy attempts to trap Ti-Jeanne's spirit in a process that requires her zombification, which Rudy terms 'indoctrination' (*Brown Girl*, p. 212). For the obeah magic to work, Ti-Jeanne must accept Rudy's control over her. Rudy heavily sedates his granddaughter in order to make her more susceptible to his silver-tongued offer of 'freedom':

> You nah see the power I did give Mi-Jeanne? Knife couldn't cut she, heart couldn't hurt she. She coulda go wherever she want, nobody to stop she […] she didn't want the pains of the body no more […] And, granddaughter […] if you hadn't break she bowl, she woulda never dead. (*Brown Girl*, p. 215)

Rudy's paradoxical offer of freedom-through-coercion recalls Ti-Jeanne's earlier desire to attain freedom through an adherence to Western epistemic systems. The CN Tower in which the indoctrination process takes place is, as Romdhani notes, both an emblem of Canadian capitalism, as well as of the needles that are used to inject the highly addictive drug Buff sold by Rudy and his posse.[235] As such, Rudy's attempt to entrap his granddaughter is also symbolic of her own identification with *homo oeconomicus* as the hegemonic form of being. It is significant that Ti-Jeanne must assent to Rudy's indoctrination (she must say yes four times for the obeah to work), as this mimics the mechanism by which a subject becomes restricted through their own identification with a dominant mode of being.

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[234] Sarah Wood, '"Serving the Spirits": Emergent Identities in Nalo Hopkinson's Brown Girl in the Ring', *Extrapolation*, 46.3 (2005), 315–26 (p. 321).
[235] Romdhani, p. 79.

Ti-Jeanne does not accept Rudy's offer, and her eventual defeat of her grandfather symbolically highlights indigenization as a means of resistance to the psychic capture that the indoctrination process represents. As Ti-Jeanne is initially convinced by Rudy's words, she begins to be zombified. Her spirit is separated from her body and exists between the material and the spirit world. While previously Ti-Jeanne had feared engaging with the *loa*, it is by inhabiting this liminal space that she overcomes her grandfather.[236] Ti-Jeanne is once again visited by the Jab-Jab, who inspires her to imagine the CN Tower as the *poteau-mitan*, the centre pole that, in Vodou possession rituals, acts as a ladder connecting the spirit to the human world:[237]

> Ti-Jeanne thought of the centre pole of the palais [Vodou temple], reaching up into the air and down to the ground. She thought of the building she was in. The CN Tower. And she understood what it was: 1,815 feet of the tallest centre pole in the world. Her duppy body almost laughed in silent *kya-kya*, a jokey Jab-Jab laugh. 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. A Jab-Jab type of joke, oui'. (*Brown Girl*, p. 221)

By using the CN Tower as a *poteau-mitan*, Ti-Jeanne calls on the *loa*, who arrive and kill Rudy and his posse. Vodou's *poteau-mitan*, which has a spiral conch shell shape carved into it, is evidence of the influence of Vodou on Spiralism.[238] Rather than accept her indoctrination, Ti-Jeanne transforms the CN Tower, a symbol of capitalism, into the *poteau-mitan* replete with spiral decoration. Her victory over Rudy therefore signals the

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[236] The paradoxical agency that Ti-Jeanne develops as she begins to be indoctrinated by Rudy is a further element of the Spiralist zombie in the novel. As Glover writes: 'The zombie is a creature whose being is fundamentally rooted in a paradigm-subverting dialectic. In problematizing a distinction as fundamental as that which separates life from death, the zombie necessarily undermines all other structural binaries of the worlds it traverses […] the zombie exposes the limits of any rationalist metaphysical order and fully embraces destabilising uncertainty. Physically present but absent of soul, inspiring of pity yet devoid of emotion, effectively subjugated but smoldering with the potential for rebellion, the zombie personifies the state of centrifugal-centripetal tension that characterises the spiral.' Glover, *Haiti Unbound*, pp. 60–61.

[237] Edmonds and Gonzalez explain the significance of the centre pole to Vodou: 'At the centre of the *peristil* [the sacred space of the Vodou temple] is the *poto-mitan*, the center post, which is the symbolic nexus of sky, earth, and the underworld and the conduit through which the *lwa* [*loa*] enter the *peristil* to the [sic] take possession or "ride their horses"'. Edmonds and Gonzalez, p. 110.

[238] 'The spiral's form evokes that of the conch shell, symbolic artifact of the Haitian Revolution, and decorates the full vertical length of the potomitan, the wooden post positioned at the center of every Haitian Vodou temple and around which all ceremonies revolve.' Glover, 'Insularity & Internationalism: An Interview with Kaiama L. Glover', *The Public Archive*, 2013 <https://thepublicarchive.com/?p=3881>.

indigenization of a Spiralist worldview within Toronto as a means of cultural resistance to the epistemological hegemony symbolised by the Tower.

Ti-Jeanne rejects her grandfather's offer of freedom, instead gaining agency through further engagement with her relationship with the *loa*. This reconnection of Ti-Jeanne with her Afro-Caribbean heritage is conceptualised within the symbolic history of Caribbean women's writing. Caroline Rody highlights a trope in Caribbean women's literature in which the loss of a 'primordial, collective memory […] tends to gather around a figure we might call the *mother-of-forgetting*.'[239] Following the enforced alienation from an African homeland, Caribbean writing adopts maternal symbols to express a disconnection between young Caribbean descendants and a primordial home: 'Caribbean . . . literature tends to reflect a . . . sense of dispossession, even homelessness, and historyless-ness as well. The figure of the mother-of-forgetting precisely embodies this historyless condition'.[240] Ti-Jeanne's dislocation from her cultural heritage is symbolised by just such a figure of forgetting. Following the trapping of her spirit within a calabash bowl by Rudy, the body of Ti-Jeanne's mother wanders the Burn in a state of amnesia and goes by the pejorative name 'Crazy Betty'. As both absent mother and literally without memories, Mi-Jeanne/Crazy Betty is an overt figure of the mother-of-forgetting. After Ti-Jeanne breaks Rudy's calabash bowl, Mi-Jeanne's spirit returns to her body and she regains her memory and returns to her daughter.

Potentially, this reconnection with the symbolic 'mother-of-forgetting' symbolises a return to an imagined 'Caribbean' identity. It seems, then, that Ti-Jeanne dis-identifies with a hegemonic form of identity symbolised by the CN Tower and symbolically reconnects with an inherent Caribbeanness.[241] The process of indigenization that I have argued is present in the text certainly does lead to an empowering reconnection with a cultural heritage. Ultimately, however, *Brown Girl*'s narrative refuses to depict the fallacy of an uncomplicated return to an essential way of being, while neither does it posit African-derived, Caribbean cultures as inherently positive. The presence of Rudy, a figure who recalls Duvalier's manipulation of Haitian Vodou for his own imperial ends, prevents this reading. Instead, the novel follows the Spiralist metaphor of the Haitian zombie, which affirms a 'commitment to

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[239] Caroline Rody, *The Daughter's Return: African-American and Caribbean Women's Fictions of History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 109.
[240] Rody, p. 110.
[241] Rody, p. 124.

Haiti's popular culture' whilst avoiding the essentialising move that was brutally utilised during the Duvaliers' dictatorships.[242]

The culmination of Ti-Jeanne's narrative gestures towards the kinds of freedom she can hope to cultivate in the wake of Rudy's defeat. The final events of the novel occur during Gros-Jeanne's funeral, which takes place in the 'Toronto Crematorial Chapel' that Gros-Jeanne had repurposed as a 'palais' (*Brown Girl*, p. 86), the temple used for possession ceremonies. During the funeral, Ti-Jeanne meets Tony outside of the palais and he praises her for facing Rudy: 'I don't think I could have done that. I don't know how a person learns to be so strong' (*Brown Girl*, p. 246). Before Ti-Jeanne can answer, ceremonial drumming in the building behind becomes louder 'reach[ing] a new intensity' (*Brown Girl*, p. 246). As Craig Keener notes, drumming is central to calling on *loa* in Vodou possession rituals.[243] This is seen earlier in the novel when Gros-Jeanne performs the possession ceremony that turns Tony and Ti-Jeanne invisible, throughout which she 'beat[s] out a rhythm' (*Brown Girl*, p. 92) on a drum. Saliently, drumming is that which opens the space between the spirit and material worlds, facilitating relations between humanity and the *loa*. As Tony questions how Ti-Jeanne mustered the strength to defeat Rudy, the drums impose an answer. Ti-Jeanne and the reader are reminded that her strength is derived from an engagement of her relationship with the *loa* through ritual practice. As Papa Legba tells her after her defeat of Rudy: 'you hold eight of the Oldest Ones in your head one time' (*Brown Girl*, p. 229). The displacement of Ti-Jeanne's agency through possession by the *loa* gives Ti-Jeanne the power to defeat Rudy and does not result, as she once feared, in the loss of self that comes with zombification. On the morning of the funeral, Ti-Jeanne is seen caring for members of the Burn, therefore taking up the role of her grandmother. Realising that the volume of cases is a trick by Papa Legba, she calls out to the spirit: "I go do this [heal Burn's inhabitants] 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" (*Brown Girl*, p. 244). Ti-Jeanne maintains her agency by refusing to simply replace her grandmother and to serve the spirits in the same way that Gros-Jeanne did, yet she now understands that cultivating relations with the *loa* does not make her a powerless zombie, as she once feared.

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[242] The essentialisation of Haitian Indigenism is also avoided by the Spiralist balance between the local and global. Glover writes, 'the spiral's perfect balanced maintenance of the centrifugal and centripetal offers a neat allegory of the tension between insular boundedness and global intention that marks their work.' Glover, 'Insularity & Internationalism'.

[243] Craig S. Keener, 'Spirit Possession as a Cross-Cultural Experience', *Bulletin for Biblical Research*, 20.2 (2010), 215–36 (p. 222).

Embodying Hybridity: Heart Transplantation, Chimerism and Vodou Possession

Alongside the narrative of Ti-Jeanne's indigenization of a Spiralist imaginary through her defeat of Rudy is the transplantation of Gros-Jeanne's heart into the Premier of Ontario, Uttley. Here, Hopkinson extends her engagement with Spiralism by interweaving medical discourse and Haitian Vodou in order to imagine a Spiralist model of posthuman embodiment.[244] By exploring the embodied contingency between recipient and donor in transplantation through the cultural lens of Vodou, *Brown Girl* pre-empts Margrit Shildrick's new materialist discussion of the bioscientific phenomenon of chimerism. During the transplant of Gros-Jeanne's heart, the surgeon, Dr. Wright, explicitly refers to chimerism:

> Uttley had already received a portion of her donor's bone marrow. Uttley's leucocytes had not attacked the donor marrow; that was a good sign. When Wright transplanted the heart, white blood cells from Uttley's bone marrow should migrate smoothly into the foreign organ, and vice-versa, a chimerism that would trick her immune system into accepting the foreign organ so that body and heart could coexist peacefully. (*Brown Girl*, p. 167)

Chimerism – a word derived from Greek mythology – denotes the presence of cells with an alternate genetic structure to the dominant number in a supposedly singular body. The introduction of a donor's bone marrow into the body of a transplant recipient is a technique known as an allograft, which uses chimerism to prepare the recipient to receive the donated organ.[245] Through the pre-transplant introduction of stem cells into the recipient's body,

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[244] In her brilliant essay on transplantation in *Brown Girl*, McCormack argues that Caribbean epistemologies in the novel posit a subject-formation contingent on the relationality – and, specifically, the inherent vulnerability – between self and other: 'Yoruba based Caribbean Myalism gives space to a fantasy world where embodied selfhood is always intertwined with others and where each person is always responsible for others.' McCormack, p. 252. While McCormack rightly highlights Myalism as an influence on the depiction of Gros-Jeanne's practice, the specific representation of possession in the novel is more consistent with Haitian Vodou. The description of those possessed as a 'horse' ridden by the spirits, for example, is specific to Vodou. Maya Deren, *Divine Horseman: The Living Gods of Haiti* (New York: McPherson & Company, 1970), p. 89.

[245] Shildrick notes that 'chimerism might solve the problem of rejection [of transplanted organs] by keeping the immunogenetic effects of the two different populations of cells in balance […] pre-treatment recipients should be given "hematopoietic" (stem) cells derived from the donor bone marrow, infused directly into the peripheral blood, which would obviate the need for highly toxic programs of immunosuppression.' Margrit Shildrick, 'Chimerism and Immunitas: The Emergence of a Posthumanist Biophilosophy', in *Resisting Biopolitics: Philosophical, Political, and Performative Strategies*, ed. by S. E. Wilmer and Audrone Zukauskaite (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), pp. 95–108 (p. 99).

chimerism 'trick[s]' (*Brown Girl*, p. 167) (in White's words) the immune system – made up of Human Leucocyte Antigens – into not attacking foreign cells. For Shildrick, chimerism challenges the prevailing discourse of immunology – which is a 'science of self/non-self-discrimination' – by providing a bioscientific conception of the self as 'already shot through with otherness.'[246] Shildrick challenges immunological discourse's common adherence to a liberal humanist conception of the rigidly delineated self by using the phenomenon of chimerism as a springboard to speculate on 'posthumanist biophilosophy,' which develops the quintessentially posthuman 'Deleuzian conception of assemblage as an accurate model for organic life'.[247] *Brown Girl* similarly imagines the ramifications of the posthuman blurring of self and other indicated by chimerism. However, Hopkinson's guide is not Deleuze, but rather Vodou – specifically, the cohabitation of two entities in one body during Vodou possession. In White's description of allografting as the means to 'trick' the immune system, the surgeon unknowingly invokes the *loa* Papa Legba, who is the first to be called on in all possession rituals in order to allow transference between the spirit and the human world.[248]

Alessandra Benedicty-Kokken describes 'possession as a representational form that helps negotiate feelings of "displacement and desubjectification."'[249] Possession, in this sense, is akin to Édouard Glissant's '*poetics of location*', whereby the body is understood as a Glissantian 'signifier waiting to receive its meaning from a relational experience that depends on location.'[250] The body-as-signifier is, Benedicty-Kokken argues, a fluid, creolising 'domicile' that, like the possessed body containing human and *loa* in one space, acts as a vehicle for the 'complementary and contradictory' union of cultures that is integral to Haitian

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[246] Immunology science, Shildrick writes, has been reluctant at best to come to a similar conclusion to her own: '[t]hat the occurrence of chimerism within a supposedly single body presents a serious challenge to one of the fundamental *doxa* of Western medicine and specifically contests the definitive principle of the immune system might seem self-evident, yet in the face of a sociocultural imaginary that insists on clear boundaries between self and other, the authorized discourse, of the clinic at least, remains largely unchanged, stressing the importance of securing immunity and assuring us all of our continuing essential singularity.' Shildrick, 'Chimerism', p. 95.

[247] Shildrick, 'Chimerism', p. 96.

[248] Earlier in the novel, Gros-Jeanne demonstrates the first process in Vodou ritual of calling on Legba (*Brown Girl*, p. 91). The process is also described by Margarite Fernandez Olmos and Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert. Margarite Fernandez Olmos and Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert, *Creole Religions of the Caribbean: An Introduction from Vodou and Santería to Obeah and Espiritismo*, Second Edition (New York: New York University Press, 2011), p. 125.

[249] Alessandra Benedicty-Kokken, *Spirit Possession in French, Haitian, and Vodou Thought: An Intellectual History* (London: Lexington Books, 2015), p. 34.

[250] Benedicty-Kokken, p. 36. Emphasis in original.

life and religious practice.[251] In the context of the rupture caused by Caribbean people's enforced alienation from the African continent, the possessed body exists as a site of both postcolonial healing and resistance to essentialised conceptions of race and identity. In *Brown Girl*, possession similarly invokes multiplicity; however, the body is understood not as a linguistic signifier determined by cultural contact, but rather the site of Spiralist or posthuman relationality. In the novel, as it is for those who practice Vodou, possession is not representational, but is instead an *actual physical event* in which human and *loa* coexist in a 'single' body. Chimerism, while challenging a Western sociocultural imaginary of individuals as rigidly delineated, is rendered in *Brown Girl* as continuous with the presence of otherness in *loa* possession. By equating Haitian spiritual possession with the transfer of human material from one body to another, Hopkinson's text represents what Frankétienne describes as the scientific and Spiralist blurring of the material and the spiritual, that which fundamentally runs counter to Cartesian metaphysics – 'our most basic philosophical conceptions.'[252] Uttley's body is indeed a powerful domicile, to use Benedicty-Kokken's term, but rather than a signifier awaiting inscription, the body is a fluctuating material contact zone in a posthuman composition of self and other.

Brown Girl imagines embodied relationality between recipient and donor that runs counter to the way immunology discourse posits a self against a distinct non-self. Immediately following the heart transplantation, Uttley experiences 'Graft Versus Host Disease' (*Brown Girl*, p. 236), a scenario in which cells from the transplanted organ, in this case Gros-Jeanne's heart, attack the recipient's immune system. The novel narrates the experience through Uttley's dreams:

> *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. Uttley became alarmed, had tried talking*

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[251] Benedicty-Kokken, p. 36. Haitian Vodou is in its very nature a syncretic religion. It is African-derived and yet it has developed through the integration of aspects of, for example, Catholicism. Cultural intermixing is integral to its very practice. Brown gives the example of a song sung at a Vodou ritual that 'calls on the people assembled […] to let go of the notion of an ideal way of serving the spirits located in the past, and to accept the rapid change and disparate mixing of their current situations.' Karen McCarthy Brown, *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), p. 207.

[252] 'It is obvious that the new scientific discoveries have changed drastically the traditional notions of materialism and spiritualism […]. There is no potential barrier nor essential difference between the spiritual and the material.' Mohamed B. Taleb-Khyar, 'Frankétienne', *The Johns Hopkins University Press*, 15.2 (1992), 385–92 (p. 390).

to the alien organ [...] "This is my body. You can't take it away from me." But the
creeping numbness spread up her neck. She was now completely paralyzed. All she
could do was wait for it to reach her brain. She had known that when that happened,
she would no longer be herself. [...] And then she was aware again. Her dream body
and brain were hers once more, but with a difference [...] In every artery, every vein,
every capillary: two distinct streams, intertwined. (*Brown Girl*, p. 237, emphasis in
original)

Initially, Uttley registers the influence of Gros-Jeanne's heart in her body as an attack. She is
'invaded' and 'taken over' by a rhythm that is 'not her own'. Her fear that she is losing
control recalls Ti-Jeanne's initial reactions to her possessions, to the fear of a loss of bodily
autonomy. As McCormack notes, Uttley's words are also equivalent to 'the rhetoric of
immune therapy in transplantation [that] is steeped in a socio-political imaginary of
aggressive coexistence, where parts fight for their survival and immune systems battle a
raging war to ensure the recipient valiantly lives on.'[253] In submitting to the influence of
Gros-Jeanne's heart, however, Uttley does not experience a loss of self. Instead, in a
description that brings to mind the spiralling double-helix, Uttley and Gros-Jeanne are, like
two streams, 'intertwined' and yet 'distinct'. As with chimerism, there is neither
homogenisation nor a fundamental self/non-self split. Dr. White's unintentional reference to
the trickster Papa Legba is apt, for, as Gates Jr. argues, Esu-Elegbara (Papa Legba in Yoruba)
'is a figure of doubled duality, of *unreconciled opposite, living in harmony.*'[254] With
chimerism, survival for the transplant recipient requires becoming more than one by allowing
the possibility of two cells with different HLAs—that is, 'unreconciled opposites'—to go on
'living in harmony'.[255] The two-in-one model may be alien to 'classical culture', as Shildrick
explains, but it is consistent both with the mythology of Papa Legba and the embodied
experience of possession, during which human and *loa* coexist within one body.[256] *Brown
Girl* depicts such a coexistence when Ti-Jeanne is possessed by Papa Osain. The relationship

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[253] McCormack, p. 255.
[254] Henry Louis Gates Jr., *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African American Literary Criticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 30. Emphasis added.
[255] In this sense, chimerism and the experience of transplantation gives Shildrick a microbiological basis for her career-long philosophical critique of Cartesian duality. See for example, Shildrick, 'Posthumanism and the Monstrous Body', *Body & Society*, 2.1 (1996), 1–15; Shildrick, 'The Body Which Is Not One: Dealing with Differences', *Body & Society*, 5.2–3 (1999), 77–92; Shildrick, '"Why Should Our Bodies End at the Skin?": Embodiment, Boundaries, and Somatechnics', *Hypatia*, 30.1 (2015), 13–29.
[256] Shildrick, 'Chimerism', p. 101.

between human and *loa* is one of mutual coexistence: 'She was holding Osain in her head, but it was as though he were cradling her consciousness in his hands, allowing her to remain simultaneously with him' (*Brown Girl*, pp. 223-4). Papa Osain exists with Ti-Jeanne in her body. The two are not assimilated into one being, but rather exist together within a single space.

The copresence of both participants in the transplant scenario informs an ethics of relationality that disrupts the divided cartography of Toronto. On waking up following her surgery, Uttley announces plans to rejuvenate downtown Toronto by giving small loans to entrepreneurial members of Gros-Jeanne's community. Whereas previous attempts to improve the Burn had 'tried it by providing incentives to big business to move back in and take over,' Uttley's new plan is to provide financial aid and therefore agency to the Burn's inhabitants: 'We're going to offer interest-free loans to small enterprises that are already there, give them perks if they fix up the real estate they're squatting on' (*Brown Girl*, p. 239). On being questioned on her new policies, Uttley reveals the source of her new 'social conscience' by chiding her advisor with Gros-Jeanne's idiosyncratic rebuke, 'Stupidness' (*Brown Girl*, p. 239). McCormack argues that 'Hopkinson's reconfiguration of visceral co-constitutive relationality changes the body politic, demanding that the Premier share resources with those in Downtown Toronto.'[257] Before her death, Gros-Jeanne had acted as a healer for the city, guided by the healing spirit Papa Osain. Through the Gros-Jeanne/Papa Osain indwelling of Uttley, the former's worldview informs the creation of policies that will begin to heal the Burn by empowering those who already live there.

Congruent with both the ongoing distinction between self and foreign cells in chimerism and between human and *loa* in possession, Uttley has not wholly assimilated to Gros-Jeanne's character. Instead, the two distinctly coexist within a single body. Uttley, for example, is still first and foremost a politician who admires her advisor's 'craftiness' (*Brown Girl*, p. 238). What has changed is that now she reorients the advisor's political nous to benefit all of Toronto's inhabitants—including those in the Burn. Uttley's actions are not altruistic gestures on behalf of the former colonisers but are, as Uttley describes, 'enlightened

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[257] McCormack, p. 253.

self-interest' (*Brown Girl*, p. 241).[258] Rehabilitating the Burn strengthens Uttley's own political position and improves the circumstances for all of Toronto's citizens.

While Hopkinson infuses the discourses of chimerism and transplantation with that of Haitian Vodou in order to produce the potential of affirmative posthuman ethical relations, the narrative is conscious of the death of Gros-Jeanne as a condition of Uttley's change of heart. McCormack notes that whilst transplantation is the 'foundation for imagining a new politics […] the novel is cautious, as the possibility for change […] is achieved at the expense of yet another killing of a black woman.'[259] There is a tension between the theft of Gros-Jeanne's heart as both an act of bio-piracy and as that which produces the conditions for restructuring Toronto. *Brown Girl* brings to light the potential violence that posthuman biotechnologies such as organ transplantation may produce, thus making race, as well as gender and class, central in the posthuman issues the novel raises. The exploitation of Gros-Jeanne reveals the need for posthumanist scholars to remain vigilant against ongoing racial injustice in posthuman futures. This ambivalence of Spiralism is therefore present at the end of *Brown Girl*, which prevents any uncritical valorisation of posthuman interconnectivity.[260] Ongoing analysis of racial, sexual and class hierarchies in the context of critical posthumanist scholarship is vital, for the mutual vulnerability between self and other is disproportionally attributed.

Whilst posthuman embodiments potentially intensify violence against Black subjects, the ontological relationality of transplantation and chimerism, theorised through the lens of Haitian possession, informs a critical praxis of posthuman ethics that unsettles colonial and anti-Black socio-political structures. Uttley's description of her actions as 'enlightened self-interest' makes way for this reading. The novel depicts the two-in-one phenomenon of chimerism through the lens of Vodou – in particular what Margarite Fernandez Olmos and Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert call the 'reciprocity' between human and *loa* in Vodou possession.[261] The co-presence of Gros-Jeanne and Uttley within one body figures a radical relationality in which the constitutive boundaries between self and other collapse. With this

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[258] In her book *Posthuman Ethics* (2013), Patricia MacCormack describes a similar ethical relationship that is not based on the moral imperative to assist others, but rather on the obligation to be open to the other. As such, 'we do have an obligation, but it is never what we think it is, because the ethical event cannot be known in advance.' Patricia MacCormack, *Posthuman Ethics: Embodiment and Cultural Theory* (London: Routledge, 2012), p. 10.

[259] McCormack, pp. 256–57.

[260] 'The spaces of Spiralists' narratives are dialecticized, alternately immobilizing and liberating, degraded and filled with potential, real and marvellous. They reflect the sustained ambiguity of the zombie.' Glover, *Haiti Unbound*, p. 103.

[261] Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert, p. 135.

embodied relationality, an action benefitting the other is not an altruistic move encouraged by a moral imperative, but is instead an ethical act informed by a posthuman understanding that what one does for the other is simultaneously an act done for oneself. This perspective is consistent with the Vodou understanding of the worshiper as relationally implicated with other members of their spiritual 'family'. As Brown notes, the Vodou 'family is a single vast organism encompassing a group of the *vivan* [living beings], as well as their ancestors and their inherited spirits.'[262] The invocation of a single organism that has alterity within – human, *loa* and ancestor – informs an idea of obligation not based on an assimilative collectivity of like individuals, but rather on a fundamental interconnectivity. As with Butler's 'Bloodchild' discussed in Chapter One, such relations are not by default harmonious, but rather arise from embodied experiments in what subjects are capable of becoming. Through the reorientation of Uttley's political aims, Hopkinson explores the socio-political effects of embracing a Spiralist imaginary. Shildrick similarly gestures to the biopolitical ramifications of 'view[ing] the normal self as constitutively chimeric.'[263] In *Brown Girl*, the entanglement of Haitian Vodou with biomedicine both unsettles the individualist conception of Western Man and highlights the socio-political effects that may arise from an ethics of ontological relationality.

IV. Ideologies of Progress and Nature-Culture Dualism in *Midnight Robber*

Hopkinson's later novel *Midnight Robber* depicts a geography similar to the Burn/suburb binary in *Brown Girl*. Before the events of the novel, an intergalactic diaspora from across the Caribbean leave Earth and relocate to a distant planet they name Toussaint. The novel's events take place on this planet and on its twin, New Half-Way Tree. Described by the narrator as Toussaint's 'mirror planet', New Half-Way Tree is an exact double to Toussaint, but located in a different dimension:

> New Half-Way Tree, it look a little bit like this Toussaint planet where I living: same clouds in the high, high mountains; same sunny bays; same green, rich valleys. But where Toussaint is civilized, New Half-Way Tree does be rough. You know how a

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[262] Brown, 'Serving the Spirits: The Ritual Economy of Haitian Vodou', in *Sacred Arts of Haitian Vodou*, ed. by Donald J. Cosentino (California: UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History, 1998), pp. 205–26 (p. 206).
[263] Shildrick, 'Chimerism', p. 104.

thing and the shadow of that thing could be in almost the same place together? You know the way a shadow is a dark version of the real thing, the dub side? Well, New Half-Way Tree is a dub version of Toussaint, hanging like a ripe maami apple in one fold of a dimension veil.[264]

The narrator's descriptions of the two planets recall the distinction between the enlightened 'civilized' world and the 'Dark Continent' of the colonies. While New Half-Way Tree remains 'rough', Toussaint has been 'liberated' from its undeveloped state:

> New Half-Way Tree is how Toussaint planet did look before the 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 Granny Nanny. (*Midnight Robber*, p. 2)

The image of the corporate phallus impregnating the land with its 'seed' renders the cultivation of Toussaint as a violent act of colonisation. At the centre of this process is the Granny Nanny, an artificial intelligence created by the 'Marryshow' corporation that facilitated the liberation of this Caribbean community – now known as the Marryshevites – from Earth. This A.I. is an ambivalent figure in the novel. Named after Nanny, the leader of an eighteenth-century Maroon community of escaped slaves, Granny Nanny is celebrated by the Marryshevites for the 'Leaving Times', for enabling the escape from the 'downpression and botheration' (*Midnight Robber*, p. 18) that they experienced on Earth.[265] This coloniser/Maroon duality is, as Elizabeth Boyle notes, gendered, with Granny Nanny both the colonial 'seed' and 'the protective womb in which they [the Marryshevites] can develop.'[266] While undoubtedly Granny Nanny is an ambivalent figure, the settling of Toussaint is overtly described in colonial terms. It is the planet not the A.I that is the 'womb of soil', a nurturing land that is violently co-opted by Granny Nanny.

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[264] Hopkinson, *Midnight Robber* (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2012), p. 2. All in-text citations from this edition.

[265] Maroon communities, as Ennis Edmonds and Michelle Gonzalez note, 'were a constant threat to the stability of the colonial government and the plantation system.' Edmonds and Gonzalez, p. 113.

[266] Elizabeth Boyle, 'Vanishing Bodies: "race" and Technology in Nalo Hopkinson's Midnight Robber', *African Identities*, 7.2 (2009), 177–91 (p. 181).

By leaving Earth and terraforming Toussaint, the Marryshevites have liberated themselves from the kinds of structural inequalities present within *Brown Girl*, only to then become colonisers themselves. Their freedom therefore takes the form of their shift from a subordinate to a dominant position. This is displayed through their treatment of the douen, a bird-like species indigenous to Toussaint and New Half-Way Tree. On Toussaint, Granny Nanny has committed genocide of the douen to 'make Toussaint safe for people from the nation ships' (*Midnight Robber*, p. 33). When as a young girl Tan-Tan inquires for more information about the douen, she is told they are now categorised as 'Indigenous fauna, now extinct' (*Midnight Robber*, p. 33). Through the settling of Toussaint, the Marryshevites repeat what McKittrick has termed 'white masculine European mappings, explorations, conquests', that induce 'rational spatial colonization and domination: the profitable erasure and objectification of subaltern subjectivities, stories, and lands.'[267] This process is maintained on New Half-Way Tree where, largely untouched by Granny Nanny, human and douens co-exist in a relationship that echoes that between settler colonialists and indigenous populations. After Tan-Tan and her father are transported to New Half-Way Tree, they are met by a douen named Chichibud, who leads them to the human town of Junjuh that is to be their new home. In her first interaction with the human inhabitants of this town, Tan-Tan responds to Chichibud addressing the town sheriff as 'Boss' (*Midnight Robber*, p. 121) by repeating the lesson she has been taught since childhood: '*Shipmates all have the same status. Nobody higher than a next somebody.* You must call he 'Compére' (*Midnight Robber*, p. 121, emphasis in original). Met with laughter, Tan-Tan is promptly told by the older exiles that Compére is a term only reserved for humans. Chichibud, as douen, does not qualify. The egalitarian narrative of Granny Nanny which defines all humans (shipmates) as equals informs a human exceptionalism that disqualifies douen personhood. The Marryshevites posit a hierarchised ontological dualism between human and douen, civilised and savage, repeating the categorising practices of colonial discourse.

Across both Toussaint and New Half-Way Tree, epistemic tenets of colonial epistemologies repeat in various forms. Granny Nanny has provided a labour free society for the Marryshevites, which leads to the population's distaste for physical work. Only the pedicab drivers, who power their vehicles with their own bodies, perform any manual labour. As Antonio says to one of these drivers, such a supposedly antiquated form of work troubles the Marryshevites, who consider themselves as having transcended manual labour: 'You

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[267] McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds*, p. x.

know how it does bother citizens to see allyou doing manual labor so. Back-break ain't for people' (*Midnight Robber*, p. 8). In her comprehensive discussion of bodies in *Midnight Robber*, Erin Fehskens writes that the pedicab drivers unnerve the Marryshevites because they believe that they have 'freed themselves from their legacy of manual labour when they freed themselves from Earth.'[268] For the people of Toussaint, the physical labour of the pedicab drivers reminds them both of their enslavement, as well as, I add, of their being positioned in the 'less-developed' position within colonial narratives of progress. Antonio's privileging of transcendence from the body indicates the perpetuation of the transcendence-immanence binary discussed in Chapter One, alongside the various racialised dualisms that rest on this division. Discussing the writing of C. L. R. James, Wynter highlights the racialisation of a mind-body dualism, which manifests in a hierarchy between physical and mental labour. Caribbean people, though denied membership from the privileged position of the 'white race', could improve their social status through education or economic standing that allowed them to approach the orbit of white society. 'Ownership of "White-vale"', Wynter writes, 'paid dividends in the kinds of jobs that were reserved for whiteness regardless of merit; jobs that were logically equated with mental (head/reason) rather than with manual (body/instinct) labor.'[269] Whiteness became associated with the head (or mind) and reason, whilst blackness resides in the body and irrationality. Antonio's description of the pedicab drivers as 'blasted luddites' (*Midnight Robber*, p. 8) reaffirms the association of physical labour, and by association blackness, with a lack of progress. On Toussaint, the belief in the need to transcend manual labour – Antonio's contention that 'back-break ain't for people' – represents the maintenance of these anti-Black epistemologies in Marryshevite society.

This continuity between colonial modernity and Toussaint is gestured to by Hopkinson's inclusion of images that recall Middle Passage journeys. Prior to a Jonkanoo festival, a Carnival to celebrate the Marryshevites' freedom from Earth, Tan-Tan's gardener Ben gives her a hat in the shape of the space ship that the Marryshevites used to travel to Toussaint:

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[268] Erin M. Fehskens, 'The Matter of Bodies: Materiality on Nalo Hopkinson's Cybernetic Planet', *The Global South*, 4.2 (2010), 136–56 (p. 142).
[269] Wynter, 'Beyond the Categories', p. 69.

Long time, that hat woulda be make in the shape of a sea ship, not a rocket ship, and them 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 make this crossing as free people this time. (*Midnight Robber*, p. 21)

Evident in Ben's description of the treatment of African slaves, the Marryshevites' freedom from the material conditions of slavery is to be celebrated. Their escape from Earth, facilitated by the ambivalently named Granny Nanny, represents a form of liberation. Yet, by invoking what Sharpe terms the 'planned disaster' of the Middle Passage, Hopkinson highlights the presence of these journeys' 'long and ongoing effects' in Marryshevite society.[270] In her conception of Black life remaining in the wake of slavery and colonisation – of the ongoing subjugation of Black subjects – Sharpe writes of the re-emergence of the hold of the slave ship in contemporary society: 'The *hold* is the slave ship hold; is the hold of the so-called migrant ship; is the prison; is the womb that produces blackness.'[271] Black subjects remain held within a womb that produces their condition in the wake; that is, 'their non-status, their non/being-ness.'[272] In *Midnight Robber*, the ongoing effect of the slave ship's hold within Marryshevite society manifests on New Half-Way Tree, where Tan-Tan stumbles across a plantation and meets a slave wearing a ball and chain, signalling a haunting return of the chained slaves from Ben's history lesson. Warned by one of the slaves to avoid the plantation's boss, Tan-Tan thinks: 'Boss? That was a word for machine servants to use, not people' (*Midnight Robber*, p. 284). Tan-Tan's thoughts link the reappearance of indentured slavery with an attitude that considers the various machines on Toussaint, which range from android nurses to the A.I. implants called 'eshus', as human slaves.[273] At the same time, the reader recalls Chichibud's address of 'Boss' to the humans in Junjuh. Hopkinson aligns the Marryshevites' hierarchical positioning of humanity over the organic and technological

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[270] Sharpe, p. 26.
[271] Sharpe, p. 27. Emphasis in original.
[272] Sharpe, p. 74.
[273] Irene Morrison notes how the depiction of the eshu, which are ubiquitous A.I. implants in Marryshevite society, as humanity's slaves is consistent with a science fiction trope of presenting humanity and A.I. in master-slave relationships. Irene M. Morrison, 'Info-Topia: Postcolonial Cyberspace and Artificial Intelligence in TRON: Legacy and Nalo Hopkinson's Midnight Robber', *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 54.2 (2018), 161–73 (*Midnight Robber*, p. 170). While the Marryshevites believe in their total control of the machines, the naming of the A.I. eshu after the trickster deity gestures to the novel's disruption of such mastery. Despite being enslaved to humanity's will, the eshu constantly threaten trickster subversion. When Antonio is questioned by his eshu after leaving work early in an attempt to catch his wife having an affair, he notes the 'mocking smile' (*Midnight Robber*, p. 14) in the voice of the eshus that is otherwise presenting acquiescence.

persons with whom they cohabit with the re-emergence of indentured slavery – of the holding of Black subjects on plantations – in Marryshevite society.

Through such images of the hold, Hopkinson reveals that, while the Marryshevites have freed themselves from the ongoing subjugation of Black people on Earth, their new civilisation perpetuates tenets of colonial ideologies. Such ideologies were outlined by Sigmund Freud in *Civilisations and its Discontents* (1930). Here, Freud measures 'Man's' civilisation through the cultivation of powers of domination over nature, both the control of external nature and the restriction of an internalised animalistic instinct that poses a threat to the order civilisation brings.[274] Progress is here measured through the cultivation of Man's transcendence from nature. As Wynter outlines, the colonisation of the Caribbean, as well as the enslavement of both its indigenous populations and African slaves, contributed to the production of this concept of civilisation. In the construction of plantation lands, 'Western man had effected an economic transformation of nature by man as the very essence of culture.'[275] The colonisers' economic drives were informed by an ideology in which the 'Earth' came to be understood as 'Land', a resource under Man's control, erecting the conditions for the extractivist practices also seen in *Brown Girl*. Through the Marryshevites' violent cultivation of Toussaint, their treatment of the douen and their privileging of mental over physical labour, they maintain epistemic tenets of the plantation ideology within their new civilisation.

For the Marryshevites, it is their advanced technologised society, powered by Granny Nanny, that facilitates their transcendence from nature. As Antonio thinks of the pedicab drivers, '[w]hy do hard labour when Marryshow had made that forever unnecessary?' (*Midnight Robber*, p. 10).[276] Yet, while the Marryshevites have allegedly become masters over the natural world, this transcendence has come at the price of their own subjection to the control of Granny Nanny:

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[274] See Sigmund Freud, 'The Future of an Illusion', in *Civilization, Society and Religion: Group Psychology, Civilisation and Its Discontents and Other Works*, ed. by James Strachey, trans. by Albert Dickson (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1964), pp. 181–241.

[275] Davies, 'From Masquerade to *Maskarade*', p. 211. Emphasis added.

[276] The founder of the Marryshow corporation, who learnt to communicate with Granny Nanny and started the process of leaving Earth for Toussaint.

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 World 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. But a Marryshevite couldn't even self take a piss without the toilet analysing the chemical composition of the urine and logging the data in the health records. (*Midnight Robber*, p. 10)

Following their escape from Earth in a journey reminiscent of those on the Middle Passage, Granny Nanny has become a technological 'keeper […] of the hold'.[277] Through the Marryshevites' subjection to Granny Nanny's panoptic vision, Hopkinson indicates the limited freedoms available for Black subjects in civilisations based on racialised tenets of Western modernity. Indeed, in the Freudian model of civilisation, subjection to the kind of control employed by Granny Nanny is the logical result of civilisation. Freud measured human progress through Man's domination over nature, not only over the natural world but also over the instinctual drives, the id. However, as the human is by way of the id prone to act in a way contrary to civilised behaviour, Freud ironically locates Man's liberation from nature within their subjugation:[278]

It is just as impossible to do without control of the mass by a minority as it is to dispense with coercion in the work of the civilization. For masses are lazy and unintelligent; they have no love for instinctual renunciations […] It is only through the influence of individuals who can set an example and whom masses recognize as their leaders that they can be induced to perform the work and undergo the renunciations on which the existence of civilisation depends.[279]

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[277] Sharpe, p. 71.
[278] Freud's description of Man's natural desires as antithetical to civilisation echoes Thomas Hobbes's famous contention in *Leviathan* that a social contract is required to prevent 'the war of every man against man.' Thomas Hobbes, qtd. in Simone Bignall, 'The Collaborative Struggle for Excolonialism', *Settler Colonial Studies*, 4.4 (2014), 340–56 (p. 345).
[279] Freud, p. 186.

Civilisation is only possible through the coercive force of an individual who has 'risen to the height of mastering their own instinctual wishes' and is thus able to civilise an unruly mass of instinctual chaos.[280] As such, in Freudian terms, imperialism is the logical apotheosis of civilisation.[281] On Toussaint, it is Granny Nanny who takes the form of this totalitarian civilising figure. Under her control, the Marryshevites remain held within a womb that produces blackness as ontological negation despite their liberation from the material conditions of slavery and its afterlives.

V. Demonic Grounds: Indigenization as Cultural Resistance

Reimagining *The River*

The panoptic surveillance of Granny Nanny, the Marryshevites' desire for disembodiment and their ideology of human exceptionalism all indicate that Toussaint civilisation – though largely free from the material conditions of slavery – remains wedded to Western notions of progress that position transcendence/whiteness/rationality/mind above immanence/blackness/irrationality/body. Viewing their alleged mastery over technology as the source of their transcendence from the natural world, the Marryshevites conform to colonial models of progress discussed in Chapter One. To reiterate, MacDonald has described how colonial discourse narrated cultural encounters in temporal terms, whereby the 'civilised' colonisers would encounter a 'primitive' or 'primordial' form of being human. Accordingly, '[s]cience and technology became features particular to European epistemology, leaving the colonized peoples of the Global South with "culture": myth, religion, rites, and other "traditional" performance.'[282] Such tenets of colonial discourse persist within the Caribbean community on Toussaint; however, through the pedicab drivers

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[280] Freud, p. 186. The ubiquitous regulating father in Freud's oeuvre – the super-ego which informs the ego's restriction of the id – derives from a similar logic of totalitarian control over one's instinctual drives. Explaining the id and ego in these terms, Lyat Friedman writes that 'Freud's therapeutic mechanism is aimed at restricting the ids and placing them under the commanding harmony of the ego. It is a mechanism that uses a limiting force [the ego] by not allowing the drives to express themselves.' Lyat Friedman, 'Anti-Oedipus: The Work of Resistance', in *Deleuze and Psychoanalysis: Philosophical Essays on Deleuze's Debate with Psychoanalysis*, ed. by Leen De Bolle (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2010), pp. 83–102 (p. 97).

[281] An undercurrent to Freud's definition of civilisation is the naturalisation of the terms of the colonial encounter. European cultures, those that have allegedly developed control over nature, are justified in their subjugation of 'uncivilised' people across the globe.

[282] MacDonald, pp. 10–11.

and the douen, there are pockets of communities in *Midnight Robber* that displace the binary of technology and 'tradition'.

The pedicab drivers embrace manual labour and embodiment while living in 'headblind' houses away from the surveillance of Granny Nanny.[283] While they are able to avoid Granny Nanny's gaze, their freedom does not signal a rejection of technology, but rather is made possible by their superior knowledge of the A.I. The pedicab communities have learnt 'Nannysong' (*Midnight Robber*, p. 51), a tonal based form of code that they use to communicate with Granny Nanny: 'If you sing the right songs, so long as Nanny don't see no harm to life nor limb, she will lock out all but she overruling protocols for a little space' (*Midnight Robber*, p. 52). In Morrison's terms, the pedicab drivers 'hack sonically, in a way that stays true to the oral traditions of Caribbean creolization of English.'[284] Hopkinson displaces the association of colonial cultures and technology, as well as the binary between mind and body, as the overtly embodied pedicab drivers are shown to also be tech-savvy hackers descended from a 'programmer clan' (*Midnight Robber*, p. 52). The tonal code also disrupts a colonial privileging of written over oral forms, while linking the act of coding to Caribbean cultures, as is emphasised when Antonio discovers that the first human that learnt to speak Nannysong was a 'calypsonian' (*Midnight Robber*, p. 51). Importantly, the pedicab drivers' oral hacking facilitates a more egalitarian relationship with Granny Nanny based on communication, rather than total subservience. Through their knowledge of tonal code, the pedicab drivers represent a demonic presence; they exist within but also disrupt the epistemic tenets of the hegemonic Marryshevite culture on Toussaint.

The douen communities on New Half-Way Tree are similar demonic presences. While they project acquiescence to the human settlers on their planet, their resistance takes the form of keeping large elements of their culture unknown to humans.[285] Living in the boughs of a great tree, the douen eschew the Marryshevites' desire to transcend nature, while hiding their settlements and largely continuing to live as they had before the settlers arrived. At the same time, as Morrison outlines, through the douen, Hopkinson 'deliberately leaves

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[283] Headblind is a term used in the novel to denote machines that are out of the reach of Granny Nanny's vision.
[284] Morrison, p. 167.
[285] Such trickster behaviour from the douen recalls that described by Hartman, in which enslaved Black people – forced to perform obsequiousness to the master – would present a false acquiescence for their own gain: 'By virtue of such tactics, these performances were sometimes turned against their instrumental aims; at the same time, the reliance on masquerade, subterfuge, and indirection also obscured the small acts of resistance conducted by the enslaved.' Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery and Self-Making in Nineteenth Century America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 8.

behind the trope of the noble savage or the idea that they are a race who will passively vanish in their primitive state.'[286] The douen trade with the humans on New Half-Way Tree, gaining the materials and skills they would need to produce the 'Guns. Bombs. Cars. Aeroplanes' (*Midnight Robber*, p. 230) that they fear humanity will use against them. As with the pedicab drivers, the douen represent a nonbinary engagement with technology, both maintaining their culture and traditions while developing the technological skills they may need in order to survive.

Both the douen and the pedicab communities represent pockets of counter-cultural resistance to the hegemonic cultures of the Marryshevites. Importantly, theirs is a means of resistance to colonial binaries not through an assimilation to the figure of Man, but rather through demonic, decolonial dissent. Continuing her discussion of James's decolonial theory discussed above, and in what can be read as an almost direct rebuke to Freud, Wynter writes: '[I]t is not the world of nature that confronts man as an alien power to be overcome. *It is the alien power that he has already created*'.[287] The task for decolonisation is not to overcome nature in a teleological march towards human progress, but rather to dismantle the colonial discourse – that 'alien power' – which so narrowly defined humanity in the first place. Following the transfer of Antonio and Tan-Tan to New Half-Way Tree, Hopkinson explores the indigenization of elements of Afro-Caribbean cultures and epistemologies as a means of subverting the 'alien power' of colonial discourse, which I have argued has been perpetuated by the Marryshevites on Toussaint. Elements of colonised cultures that MacDonald explains were deemed primitive with the privileging of technology – '"culture": myth, religion, rites, and other "traditional" performance' – are employed as the basis for counter-cultural decolonial praxes that centre on a reimagination of human entanglements with more than human worlds.[288]

This decolonisation of the Marryshevites' engagement with technology and nature is especially pronounced in Hopkinson's reimagining of *The River*, a famous mas performance in 1983 that was curated by the legend of Trinidadian Carnival, Peter Minshall. Tan-Tan is introduced to *The River* as a child when she is shown clips of the mas after becoming

[286] Morrison, p. 167.
[287] Wynter, 'Beyond the Categories', p. 76. Emphasis added.
[288] MacDonald, pp. 10–11.

interested in Carnival performances from Earth.[289] Essentially, *The River* depicts a central conflict between technology and nature, represented by two Carnival characters: Mancrab and the Washerwoman. Mancrab is an assemblage of human performer and machinic, crab-like prosthetic extensions, while the Washerwoman is a feminised emblem of nature posited as the antithesis of the cyborg. Justin Haynes describes Mancrab as an extension of the ideals of eighteenth-century European Enlightenment; that is, Mancrab represents Man's apparent control over the machines they have created, combined with the subsequent hubris of machines enabling humanity's control over a feminised natural world.[290] Mancrab is in this sense a proto-Granny Nanny figure. His violent defeat of the Washerwoman was intended to signify a warning against the abandonment of an Afro-Caribbean way of being in favour of an assimilation to the cultures of the colonised, who, like the Marryshevites, manipulate technology to violently dominate the natural world. This dualism between Mancrab and the Washerwoman is further asserted in Minshall's companion novella to *The River*, *Callaloo an de Crab* (1984), in which Mancrab is depicted as lustful towards science: '[Mancrab] make love wid science like a maniac. He take science and rape science. He impregnate science wid enless hate an abomination.'[291] These actions result in the birth of a child, whom Minshall names Hiroshima to associate Mancrab's lust for science with the dropping of the atom bomb, an overt example of the violence that may arise from humanity's attempts to twist nature for their own solipsistic ends.[292]

Resting on a dualistic notion of Europe-as-technologised and Africa-as-natural, the mas performance recalls a common trope in early Caribbean literature, in which Africa is represented as 'a Mother violently violated by Europe.'[293] Freudian civilisation and

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[289] A video showing both Mancrab and the Washerwoman is available on YouTube. trinidesi, 'The Minshall Trilogy (pt 2 of 6)' [YouTube video], 13th April 2008
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CV2W8lItt0I&t=446s> [accessed 6th September 2018].

[290] Interestingly, Haynes argues that *The River* plays out a conflict between transhumanist and posthumanist perspectives. The article, however, is ultimately restricted in its success through an inversion of the definitions of transhumanism and posthumanism. Haynes uses posthumanism to denote a theoretical standpoint that reasserts human exceptionalism following technological additions to the body – a definition that, as I note in the introduction to this thesis, more accurately describes transhumanism. Haynes's contrarian definitions force him into some difficult manoeuvres. For example, he describes Robert Ranisch and Stefan Lorenz Sorgner's appropriate criticism of transhumanism's 'renewal of humanism' as 'posthumanism by another name.' Regardless of the confusion between the terms transhumanism and posthumanism in Haynes's essay, I understand *The River* performance as a more fundamental warning against Man's desire to dominate nature, rather than a performative rendering of transhumanism vs. posthumanism. Justin Haynes, 'Mancrab's Enlightenment: Posthuman Prosthetics and Performance in Peter Minshall's River and Callaloo an de Crab', *Caribbean Quarterly*, 63.2–3 (2017), 251–70 (pp. 252–54).

[291] Minshall, qtd. in Haynes, p. 261. Copies of *Callaloo* are rare. My knowledge of the novella's events are taken second-hand from Haynes.

[292] Haynes, p. 261.

[293] Rody, p. 111.

imperialism are once again linked. Mancrab's cyborg ontology was intended to represent Man's control of nature, including the colonisation of Africa and the Caribbean. By recalling this history, Minshall aimed to generate a visceral reaction, including fright, from his audience.[294] As with Trinidadian audiences on Earth, Tan-Tan is frightened when she is introduced to Mancrab, a fear that is ultimately tempered by a comment made by her eshu: 'Is so headblind machines used to stay […] Before people make Granny Nanny to rule the machines and give guidance' (*Midnight Robber*, p. 30). The eshu's words suggest that *The River*'s warning against the fetishisation of machines is no longer relevant to the Marryshevites, who now have Granny Nanny to lead them. Ironically, however, the eshu also reveals that by achieving this freedom the Marryshevites have themselves become those who purport to 'rule the machines' – a control which they have used to colonise Toussaint. The eshu's words therefore indicate that Minshall's warning against the fetishisation of machines, as that which enables dominance over the natural world, may still be relevant to the Marryshevites.

This warning becomes reality for Tan-Tan after she and Antonio travel to New Half-Way Tree. Antonio flees Toussaint – bringing with him Tan-Tan as a stowaway – while he is awaiting trial for killing his once-friend, Quashee, as revenge for his affair with Antonio's wife Ione. Shortly after arriving on the prison planet, Antonio rapes Tan-Tan, the first of several attacks that Tan-Tan later describes to Chichibud's daughter Abitefa after she discovers that she is pregnant: 'He rape me, Abitefa. He put this baby in me, like the one before. He was forever trying to *plant* me, like I was his soil to harvest' (*Midnight Robber*, p. 260, emphasis in original). Tan-Tan's description highlights Antonio's rape as akin to the violent cultivation of Toussaint by Granny Nanny. At the same time, his abuse recalls the violence of Mancrab, whose defeat of the Washerwoman, Haynes argues, is presented as a rape.[295] Antonio and Tan-Tan therefore come to represent Mancrab and the Washerwoman

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[294] Haynes describes the terror Trinidadians felt when watching Mancrab. Fear was certainly Minshall's aim, who described Mancrab as a mas version of Darth Vader. Haynes, p. 255; Peter Minshall, 'Masman/Artist', in *Carnival: Theory and Practice*, ed. by Christopher Innes, Annabel Rutherford, and Brigitte Bogar (New Jersey: Africa World Press, 2013), pp. 315–38 (p. 336).

[295] Haynes, p. 260. The Washerwoman, both an emblem of nature and carer for a host of villagers, is therefore a feminised figure of 'Mother Africa' raped and pillaged by imperial forces. In both Minshall's mas and his novella, the violent defeat of the Washerwoman by Mancrab acts as a warning against the abandonment of a more 'Caribbean' way of being, one that is in tune with a perceived 'Africanness', in favour of an assimilation to European identity.

respectively.[296] Antonio's imperial violence towards his daughter, I argue, represents an attempt to reassert the 'civilised' identity that he aspired to on Toussaint. Not supported by Granny Nanny, life on New Half-Way Tree requires the back-breaking labour that Antonio so despises. He fails to assimilate to the demands of the new planet, refusing to work and eventually becoming an alcoholic. Now inhabiting the 'uncivilised' geographic location of New Half-Way Tree, Antonio attempts to reassert his civility through the rape of his daughter, through the colonisation of her body. Here, Hopkinson highlights the endemic violence of civilised Man. Tan-Tan's body becomes the material and symbolic battleground for Antonio's attempt to maintain his imperial identity.

While *The River* depicts Mancrab's rape of a feminised emblem of nature, the Washerwoman, Hopkinson's rewriting of the conflict is not solely allegorical. Accordingly, the novel does not depict Tan-Tan as a passive figure, but rather highlights her attempts to survive and resist her father's persistent abuse. Importantly, it is through playing mas that Tan-Tan gains the strength to survive her father's attacks:

> She closed her mind to what bad Antonio was doing to her bad body. She watched at her new dolly on the pillow beside her. Its dress was up around its waist and she could see its thigh holster with the knife in it. She wasn't Tan-Tan, the bad Tan-Tan. She was Tan-Tan the Robber Queen, the terror of all Junjuh, the one who was born on a far-away planet, who travel to this place to rob the rich in their idleness and help the poor in their humility. She name Tan-Tan the Robber Queen, and strong men does tremble in their boots when she pass by. Nothing bad does ever happen to Tan-Tan the Robber Queen. Nothing can't hurt she. Not Blackheart Man, not nothing.
> (*Midnight Robber*, p. 140)

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[296] Hopkinson further links Tan-Tan with the Washerwoman through some nuanced associations between the two characters. When Tan-Tan is first introduced to the mas character of the Midnight Robber – the same time she is shown Minshall's performance – her eshu tells her about the Trinidadian Belle Starr, who, taking her name from a famous American outlaw, defied convention and portrayed the Robber King (a version of the Midnight Robber) character traditionally reserved for men (*Midnight Robber*, p. 29). Belle Starr's real name was Elise Rondon and was someone known by Minshall, who affectionately referred to her as a 'bélé queen all her life.' Richard Schechner, Milla C. Riggio, and Peter Minshall, 'Peter Minshall: A Voice to Add to the Song of the Universe: An Interview', *TDR*, 42.3 (1998), 170–93 (p. 171). Through a close analysis of *Callaloo*, Haynes deduces that Rondon was an inspiration for Minshall's Washerwoman. Haynes, p. 266. Both before and after her journey to New Half-Way Tree, Tan-Tan plays as the Midnight Robber, thus following in the footsteps of the 'Trini Belle Starr' (*Midnight Robber*, p. 29).

Imagining herself as the Midnight Robber – also known as the Robber King and thus the Robber Queen in Tan-Tan's female iteration of the character – to whom '[n]othing bad does ever happen', Tan-Tan is able to survive her father's abuse. Tan-Tan's survival through playing mas becomes overt resistance when, on her sixteenth birthday, she kills Antonio in self-defence:[297]

> It must have been the Robber Queen who pulled out the knife. Antonio raised up to shove into the person on the bed again. 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. (*Midnight Robber*, p. 168)

Mas emerged in the Caribbean as a form of cultural resistance to colonial hegemonies. Tan-Tan's murder of her father recalls this history when she performs as the Robber Queen to deal a mortal blow and end Antonio's imperial influence over her body.

Significantly, Tan-Tan's playing mas represents a means of counter-cultural resistance to the hegemonic colonial identity that Antonio is attempting to reassert through the rape of his daughter. When Tan-Tan is introduced to the Midnight Robber figure, she learns of his 'stream-of-consciousness speeches [which] always told of escaping horror of slavery and making their way into brigandry as a way of surviving the new and terrible white devils' land in which they'd found themselves' (*Midnight Robber*, p. 57). Such trickster speech is on display in the novel's final restaging of *The River*. Following her father's death, Tan-Tan is pursued by her stepmother, who wants to return her to Junjuh to answer for Antonio's murder. The pursuit culminates in a meeting in the town of Sweet Pone, where a now heavily pregnant Tan-Tan faces Janisette, who has driven a tank to the town to accost her step-daughter. Attempting to get revenge for Antonio's murder, while also sitting astride a tank, Janisette is both a proxy for Mancrab and herself an overt symbol of Mancrab's technophilia. During the encounter, which occurs during the Jonkanoo festival on Sweet Pone, Tan-Tan performs as the Robber Queen, telling Janisette and the onlooking crowd of

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[297] As Marshall writes, through Tan-Tan's female iteration of the Midnight Robber, Hopkinson 'steers' this character 'away from his traditional role as emblem of masculine potency.' Emily Zobel Marshall, 'Resistance through "Robber-Talk": Storytelling Strategies and the Carnival Trickster', *Caribbean Quarterly*, 62.2 (2016), 210–26 (p. 219).

her father's violence to gain their support and ultimately overcome her step-mother in a Calypso war of words.

Through this defeat of Mancrab by the Washerwoman, Hopkinson reimagines *The River* to depict mas as a means of subverting colonial discourse. As Teruyuki Tsuji argues, mas creates 'a "free zone" where the underprivileged plan the strategic reversal of […] the dominant cultural discourse.'[298] Tan-Tan's mas performance occurs during Jonkanoo, a descendant of Jonkonnu festivals in the Caribbean, which are themselves derived from the masquerade performances of West Africa. Jonkonnu was central to Wynter's creation of her concept of indigenization.[299] 'African religions', she writes, were used as a binding force in slave revolts' and, as such, 'Jonkonnu as the cultural manifestation of African religious belief, was therefore involved in this resistance.'[300] Performers during Jonkonnu festivals indigenised within the Caribbean epistemologies that challenged the colonial hegemony of the plantation system. '*Maskarade* (and, related, Jonkonnu)', Davies writes, 'offers a glimpse of knowledge system beyond the workings of epistemological normalcy (and Man).'[301] Through Jonkonnu, performers forged a connection with 'rhythm', a monistic cosmic force that runs through all of being:

> RHYTHM is the universal life force. On donning the mask, the dancer enters into this force, the god possesses him, and in a modern Jamaican cult term informed with the same meaning, the dancer "*delivers*" himself by patterning the steps of god, or ancestral spirit.[302]

With rhythm, the transcendence of Man from Land that was indicative both of the plantation ideology and a Freudian model of civilisation is rendered untenable. Tan-Tan's mas performance indigenises New Half-Way Tree, gesturing to a non-hierarchical conception of all being as interconnected through the flow of the monistic force of rhythm, which is, in Franco Monti's words 'the very essence of the universe, the hidden fluid that runs through all being – human, animal and vegetable – the magic point of contact of participation of men

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[298] Teruyuki Tsuji, 'The "Other Half": The Articulation of Carnival in Nineteenth-Century Trinidad', in *Carnival: Theory and Practice*, ed. by Christopher Innes, Annabel Rutherford, and Brigitte Bogar (New Jersey: Africa World Press, 2013), pp. 79–92 (p. 89).
[299] Wynter, 'Jonkonnu in Jamaica', p. 34.
[300] Wynter, 'Jonkonnu in Jamaica', p. 39.
[301] Davies, 'From Masquerade to *Maskarade*', pp. 219-20.
[302] Wynter, 'Jonkonnu in Jamaica', p. 38. Emphasis in original.

with nature.'[303] Rhythm is an immanent concept akin to the 'non-hierarchical ideology' of Spiralism discussed above, which acknowledges the quintessentially posthuman 'relational bio-interdependency of all forms of existence', therefore exposing imperial 'legacies of hierarchical domination and division as false constructions.'[304] Tan-Tan's mas performance not only enables her to challenge the Mancrab figure, but is also a process of indigenisation that connects her with the land and creates the possibility of dismantling ongoing colonial epistemologies within Marryshevite society.

Importantly, while the concept of rhythm highlights Man's entanglement with the natural world, the Washerwoman's defeat of Mancrab in *Midnight Robber* does not signal a rejection of technology, but rather a disruption of the epistemological normalcy of Man that dictates a hierarchical relationship between humanity and machines. The indigenization of rhythm through Tan-Tan's Carnival performance informs a reimagination of humanity's entanglement with both nature and technology towards a non-dualistic relationship akin to that of the pedicab drivers and the douen. Following her defeat of Janisette, Tan-Tan returns 'home' (*Midnight Robber*, p. 327) to the bush, and to her Douen friend Abitefa, to give birth. During Tan-Tan's labour, the reader learns that the novel's narrator is Tan-Tan's eshu – the A.I. implant from Toussaint – who, although unable to connect to Granny Nanny while on New Half-Way Tree, has remained dormant inside of her. When Tan-Tan became pregnant, the eshu's 'nanomites' entered the baby's 'growing tissue' (*Midnight Robber*, p. 328), facilitating communication between the machine and the foetus. As a result, the child is connected to Granny Nanny, his 'whole body is one living connection with the Grande Anansi Nanotech Interface' (*Midnight Robber*, p. 328). With Abitefa as birthing partner, Tan-Tan returns to nature to give birth to her cyborg child. The concept of rhythm, as the connection of 'men with nature' is here extended by Hopkinson to include the entanglement of humanity, nonhuman animal, nature and technology. Morrison argues that in *Midnight Robber* 'non-Western epistemologies' allow for the possibility of viewing the relationship between human and machine differently to the master-slave dialectics posited on Toussaint, ultimately 'enabl[ing] us to acknowledge the already-existing enmeshment between human and machine'.[305] The concept of rhythm, indigenised through mas performance, makes possible imagining beyond the racialised dualisms of Toussaint, to produce the conception of

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[303] Franco Monti, qtd. in Wynter, 'Jonkonnu in Jamaica', p. 38.
[304] Zweifel, p. 29.
[305] Morrison, p. 172.

a non-hierarchical, posthumanist relationship between humanity and machine.

Mas as Aspirational Wake Work

While Hopkinson's retelling of *The River* highlights the decolonial potential of indigenization, the abuse Tan-Tan suffers is not represented as solely allegorical. Rather, Hopkinson centres Tan-Tan's trauma to unveil the ongoing material violence against Black women which is required for the perpetuation of the Western 'civilised' subject. That Antonio's rape of his daughter is indicative of the violence against Black women that is integral to the maintenance of Man first becomes evident in Antonio's justification of his actions, which transform into an accusation of Tan-Tan's guilt:

> *Oh God, Tan-Tan, oh God, don't cry. I sorry. I won't do it again [...] Is just because I missing you mother, and you look so much like she. You see how I love you, girl? See what you make me do? Just like Ione. Just like your mother.* (*Midnight Robber*, p. 140, emphasis in original)

Blaming his rape of Tan-Tan on her resemblance to his wife Ione, Antonio projects sexuality onto his nine-year-old daughter as a means of justifying his violence. A central thread of Jackson's *Becoming Human* is to highlight the often 'overlooked […] centrality of gender, sexuality, and maternity in the *animalization* of blackness.'[306] In part, the colonial construction of the excessive sexuality of Black women stood as a marker of their incivility and animality, which metonymically came to stand as 'exemplary of African sexuality more generally'.[307] The abjection of Black female sexuality stood as a counterpoint to the Western subject's reason, subsequently reaffirming the hierarchical ordering of white and Black humanity through the rendering of the 'African' as evidence of the animal within the human: 'Liberal humanism's basic unit of analysis, "Man," produces an untenable dichotomy – "the human" verses "the animal," whereby the black(ened) female is posited as the abyss dividing organic life into "human" or "animal" based on wholly unsound metaphysical premises.'[308]

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[306] Jackson, *Becoming Human*, p. 4. Emphasis added.
[307] Jackson, *Becoming Human*, p. 7.
[308] Jackson, *Becoming Human*, p. 12.

In *Midnight Robber*, Tan-Tan's stepmother Janisette, attacking her for a pregnancy that results from Antonio's rapes, blames her animality: 'You leggobeast you!' (*Midnight Robber*, p. 145). Janisette's use of this particular piece of Jamaican slang highlights how Tan-Tan's perceived sexuality, a perception that is a result of her father's violence, is registered as evidence of her bestiality. When Tan-Tan tells Janisette of Antonio's sexual abuse, Janisette still repeats her accusations: 'I accuse you of looseness […] Of sluttery. Is you tempt Antonio with your leggobeast ways' (*Midnight Robber*, p. 323). Both Janisette and Antonio reiterate the imperial logic through which excessive sexuality is constructed as evidence of the Black female's liminal positioning at the limit of the human and the animal. 'The African's "failure" to achieve humanity', Jackson writes, 'has historically been thought to be rooted in "the body," in an insatiable appetite that made it impossible for the African to rise above "the body"'.[309] By first raping Tan-Tan and then accusing her of an excessive sexuality, Antonio reasserts the Toussaintian identity that was rooted in a proposed transcendence over the body. His violence, then, is *not an effect* of the abjection of Black women, but is rather the means of producing that abjection, Tan-Tan's animalistic humanity, as an essential condition of reasserting the alleged transcendent, civilised identity of Man.

By raping his daughter, Antonio fragments Tan-Tan's identity, forcing her to take up multiple kinship positions. When they first arrive on New Half-Way Tree, Antonio says to his daughter: 'You is all that leave to me now. You dear to me like daughter, like sister, like wife self' (*Midnight Robber*, p. 76). As all of daughter, sister, wife and mother, Tan-Tan simultaneously inhabits none of these positions. Antonio's violence produces what Jackson terms the enforced 'ontological plasticity' of the 'black(ened) subject': 'Plasticity is a praxis that seeks to define the essence of black(ened) thing as infinitely mutable, in antiblack, often paradoxical, sexuating terms as a means of hierarchically delineating sex/gender, reproduction, and states of being more generally.'[310] Ontological plasticity is Jackson's concept for the enforced fluidity of the enslaved 'black(ened)' subject, an abjection which is coterminous and indeed facilitates the formation of an alternative 'proper' way of being:

> My suggestion is that slavery, as an experimental mode, sought to define and explore the possibilities and limits of sex, gender, and re-production on the plantation and beyond in a manner distinct from but relational to the assumed proper subject of

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[309] Jackson, *Becoming Human*, p. 10.
[310] Jackson, *Becoming Human*, p. 11.

"civilization," and, in fact, enables hegemonic notions of sex/gender and reproduction such as "woman," "mother," and "female body".[311]

The proper, 'civilised' codes for being 'woman', 'mother' and for the 'female body' are retroactive constructions following the abject plasticisation of the 'black(ened) flesh'. Through Antonio's violence towards his daughter, Hopkinson restages *The River*; however, rather than adopting the Washerwoman as solely a feminised figure symbolic of Mother Africa, Hopkinson situates this violence within Tan-Tan's lived reality, as the violence against a Black woman that is essential to the circulation of European civilisation's governing codes of being.

The necessity of violence against Black women to the perpetuation of Western Man is subtly depicted in Tan-Tan's splitting of her father into a 'good' and 'bad' form. This split occurs during Antonio's first attack: 'Daddy's hands were hurting, even though his mouth smiled at her like the old Daddy, the one before the shift tower took them. Daddy was two daddies' (*Midnight Robber*, p. 140). The 'good' Antonio, who existed on Toussaint 'before the shift tower took them' to New Half-Way Tree, represents Antonio's 'civilised' identity whilst on that planet, while it is the 'bad' Antonio who   rapes Tan-Tan while on New Half-Way Tree. The doubling of Antonio into good and bad forms is not, I argue, the construction of a dual consciousness, but rather unveils the entanglement of the violence against the Black female body – Antonio's 'bad' actions – and the assertion of the 'good' identity that Antonio had on Toussaint. The haunting trace of the 'good' on Antonio's face during the first rape represents the mask of civilisation which rests upon ongoing anti-Black violence.

As with Ti-Jeanne's adoption of Afrophobic perspectives in *Brown Girl*, evident in her Afrophobic rejection of her Afro-Caribbean heritage, Tan-Tan internalises her abjection at the hands of Antonio. This is revealed through Tan-Tan also splitting herself into good and bad forms. The bad Tan-Tan represents her fear of an excessive sexuality and, as a result, takes the form of an internalised voice which blames her for her father's advances and which frequently claims Tan-Tan's worthlessness: '*Who would care for mud in the street*' (*Midnight Robber*, p. 165); '*only good for dead*' (*Midnight Robber*, p. 193); '*You is a trial, you is a wicked crosses for people to bear*' (*Midnight Robber*, p. 215). The presence of 'bad' Tan-

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[311] Jackson, *Becoming Human*, p. 11.

Tan, induced by her father's imperial violence, is akin to a colonisation of her mind. That is, Tan-Tan's self-criticism is the result of her viewing herself through 'inner eyes' that are instituted through Antonio's abjection of her body. As a result of this internalised guilt, Tan-Tan is unable to speak of her father's violence, a silencing that begins during the first rape: '[s]hame filled her, clogged her mouth when she opened to call out to Janisette for help' (*Midnight Robber*, p. 140). The internalised shame that Tan-Tan feels prohibits speech. Even after she becomes pregnant and her best friend Melonhead is assumed to be the father, Tan-Tan is unable to speak the truth.

Tan-Tan's mas performance, during which she tells Janisette and the onlooking crowd of Antonio's abuse, represents a means of overcoming her shame through the act of speaking of her father's violence. Mas is presented as an act of imprecation against this violence, an example of what Sharpe terms 'wake work', of being both conscious of and figuring modes of survival within an ongoing climate of antiblackness. Sharpe writes of the 'archives of breathlessness' that document the persistence of practices which force breath from the Black body.[312] The image of Tan-Tan's mouth clogged by shame and her initial inability to speak of her father's violence positions such abuse within the ongoing 'exhaust[ion of] the lungs and the bodies of the enslaved'.[313] Tan-Tan's mas performance, as an act of survival through trickster speech, indicates one manifestation of 'what it takes, in the midst of the singularity, the virulent antiblackness everywhere, and always remotivated, to keep breath in the Black body.'[314] The term that Sharpe adopts for such 'wake work' is *aspiration*. Aspiration not in the terms outlined in the opening chapter of this thesis – aspiration in the sense of the desire to assimilate into 'proper' modes of being human. Rather, aspirational wake work explores the various routes through which Black people survive within the ongoing ecology of antiblackness:

> What is the word for keeping and putting breath back in the body? What is the word for how we must approach the archive of slavery (to "tell the story that cannot be told") and the histories and presents of violent extraction *in* slavery *and* incarceration;

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[312] This archive of breathlessness includes: the various forms of labour during slavery; the suffocation of refugees aboard cramped migrant boats or those who drown during crossings; the use of chokeholds by the police on African-Americans in the United States; and further examples of violence against Black subjects around the world. Sharpe, p. 109.

[313] Sharpe, p. 112.

[314] Sharpe, p. 109.

the calamities and catastrophes that sometimes answer to the names of occupation, colonialism, imperialism, tourism, militarism, or humanitarian aid and intervention? What are the words and forms for the ways we must continue to think and imagine laterally, across a series of relations in the hold, in multiple Black everydays of the wake? The words that I arrived at for such imagining and for keeping and putting breath back in the Black body in hostile weather is *aspiration* (and aspiration is violent and life-saving).[315]

Such wake work thus points to an alternative means of survival for Tan-Tan than that employed by the Marryshevites, who escape colonial legacies only so that they can take up the position of the colonisers. Rather than being aspirational towards a hegemonic mode of being, Tan-Tan tells of her violence, that 'story that cannot be told', a practice of aspiration 'as *audible breath* that accompanies or comprises a speech sound.'[316] Empowered by playing as the trickster Robber Queen, Tan-Tan attends to the asterisked abuse she suffers, that which keeps her in the hold of her father's violence through her silencing shame. In so doing, she finds a means of aspirational survival:

Then Tan-Tan knew her body to be hers again, felt her own mouth stretching, stretching open in amazement at the words that had come out of it. Is she, speaking truth; is truth! "*Sans humanité!"* she spat at Janisette – "no mercy!" – the traditional final phrase of the calypsonian who'd won the battle of wits and words. Tan-Tan gasped, put a hand up to her magical mouth. (*Midnight Robber*, pp. 325-6)

In victory, Tan-Tan's wide open mouth registers her strength in speaking the truth of her abjection. The dual meaning of aspiration here points to the mode of resistance that is imagined through mas, as an indigenization of anticolonial epistemologies. Tan-Tan does not herself become solely the 'good' Tan-Tan; that is, she does not fit within the 'proper' subject position dictated by colonial ideologies. Rather, she displaces colonial dualisms, 'just being Tan-Tan, sometimes good, sometimes bad, mostly just getting by like everyone else' (*Midnight Robber*, p. 326). Tan-Tan's open mouth at the end of her Jonkanoo performance

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[315] Sharpe, p. 113. Emphasis added.
[316] Sharpe, p. 109.

renders the act as aspirational in Sharpe's terms, as forging conditions for keeping breath into the reclaimed Black body.

Following the aspirational wake work of Tan-Tan's mas performance, she returns to the forest to give birth, naming her cyborg child Tubman, after Harriet Tubman. This naming highlights the birth as a symbol of resistance. Prior to the birth, Tan-Tan considers her pregnancy as a reminder of Antonio's ongoing presence and imminent return, describing the child as 'Antonio's duppy self haunting and hurting her from within' (*Midnight Robber*, p. 262). In her dreams, she is visited by apparitions of Antonio, who threaten that the birth of the child will herald his second coming (*Midnight Robber*, p. 259). With these threats of Antonio's return, Tan-Tan fears that her womb has become an incubator for future violence against her. Within the wake, Sharpe writes, Black maternity is 'dis/figure[d]' through the 'turn[ing] of the womb into a factory producing blackness as abjection […] with Black mothers […] ushering their children into their non/status, their non/being-ness.'[317] Tan-Tan's belief that giving birth to her child will herald the return of Antonio indicates her fear that her womb has been captured to perpetuate antiblackness, not through the birth of a child into non-being as Sharpe indicates, but rather through the return of her father and his imperial influence over her body. In this context, Tan-Tan could only imagine her ongoing survival through attempts to erase the influence of her father's violence. As she tells Abitefa: 'I tell you true, if I don't lost this baby, I go kill myself' (*Midnight Robber*, p. 236). Tan-Tan views her survival in dualistic terms. Either she erases the effects of her father's abuse, itself a form of silencing, or she will end her life. Tubman's eventual birth, however, signifies something else – a demonic disruption of the epistemic hierarchies that informed the violence. Here, the birth canal does not reproduce blackness as abjection, but rather signals the birth of a child, who, with his cyborg ontology, can disrupt colonial dualism. Tubman's posthuman subjectivity represents the possibility of an alternative mode of being in the world beyond that defined as Man.

As with the blurring of the self-other boundary in *Brown Girl*, the ontological relationality presented at the end of *Midnight Robber* is not inherently utopian. Tubman's reconnection with the eshu heralds his and Tan-Tan's reconnection with the ambivalent Granny Nanny, the A.I system which facilitated the Marryshevites' settling of Toussaint – an imperial practice which Tubman is now implicated in. However, Hopkinson's naming of the

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[317] Sharpe, p. 74.

baby overtly gestures to the potentially anti-colonial resistance of this relationship. The influence between Granny Nanny and Tubman is potentially not unidirectional. As Morrison notes, the hope at the end of *Midnight Robber* is that Tubman will be able to 'facilitate' communication between Toussaint and New Half-Way Tree.[318] Tubman's birth potentially 'signals a passage towards a better future for the exiled Caribbean people and mythical creatures of New Half-Way Tree and planet Toussaint; *he bridges the gap between the Old and New Worlds.*'[319] The connection between the two planets works to elide their proposed dualistic relationship and it is possible that the non-hierarchical concept of rhythm – indigenised on New Half-Way Tree – will inform changes to the Toussaint society. Rhythm enables a consciousness of humanity's entanglement with more than human communities, a contention at odds with the human exceptionalism at the heart of Marryshevite civilisation on Toussaint. The birth of Tubman at the end of *Midnight Robber*, like the practice of African-derived religions in the Caribbean, represents the possibility of the indigenization of Afro-Caribbean epistemologies that displaces the racialised tenets of Man by forging the possibility of non-hierarchical and posthuman interconnections within the monistic force of rhythm.

Conclusion

Decolonisation in *Brown Girl* and *Midnight Robber* is depicted as a dual process of unsettling the hegemony of a racialised conception of European Man, followed by explorations of the posthuman through the indigenization of Afro-Caribbean epistemologies. As noted, however, the societies imagined at the end of each novel are not Utopian. The trauma of painful events – Gros-Jeanne's murder and Antonio's rape of his daughter – are not made light of and the pain of both is acknowledged in its fullness. So too, whilst *Brown Girl* and *Midnight Robber* end with the *possibility* of more egalitarian futures – Uttley *plans* to improve the Burn, Tubman's link between Toussaint and New Half-Way Tree *begins* a conversation – these are at best beginnings of ongoing processes. This open-ended possibility, however, is itself disruptive of the teleological conception of naturalised Man in European modernity. The human is not on a singular journey towards modernisation, which within colonial ideologies of progress is narrated as a becoming-Western. Instead, the novels posit the posthuman

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[318] Morrison, p. 170.
[319] Marshall, p. 222. Emphasis added.

situated immanently within more than human environments, leading to connections that cannot be known in advance. The resulting indeterminacy, the impossibility of scripting what the posthuman is capable of becoming, is also a key element within Okorafor's *Binti* novellas, which I discuss in the next chapter.

Chapter Three: African Fractals and Posthuman Kinship in Nnedi Okorafor's *Binti* Trilogy

I.   Introduction

In the *Binti* novellas – *Binti*, *Binti: Home* and *Binti: The Night Masquerade* – Nnedi Okorafor imagines a universe connected by a monistic sea of mathematical information, which produces a current that flows through all matter in the universe. This univocal mathematics is the driving force of a fluid and interrelational world open to unpredictable variation. In this chapter, I outline how Okorafor's representation of a dynamic cosmos is informed by what Ron Eglash describes as the 'indigenous fractal geometry' within cultures from across the African continent, alongside the related field of chaos theory as the multidisciplinary study of complex systems.[320] I begin by describing the salient facets of chaos theory, fractals and complexity, before outlining how they are employed within Okorafor's novellas to explore embodied posthuman becoming and the creation of non-anthropocentric kinships.

Prior to the end of the twentieth century, Western epistemologies tended to describe 'chaos' as the absence of form, the antagonist of order.[321] At the turn of the century, as Hayles outlines in *Chaos Bound*, there emerged a 'contemporary episteme' – defined by the convergence of the science of chaos, poststructuralism and contemporary fiction[322] – within which chaos was re-evaluated 'not as an absence or void but as a positive force in its own right.'[323] Within the physical sciences, this revisioning of chaotic systems contains two intersecting though disparate strands: the study of the order beneath chaos and the study of what Ilya Prigogine and Isabelle Stengers describe as 'order out of chaos'.[324] The first attempts to uncover the deep structure that lies beneath the apparent random trajectory of

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[320] Eglash, p. 6.

[321] Hayles notes the suggestion made by Eugene Eoyang that chaos's negative valuation 'in the Western tradition may be partly due […] to the predominance of binary logic in the West. If order is good, chaos is bad because it is conceptualized as the opposite of order.' Hayles, 'Introduction: Complex Dynamics in Literature and Science', in *Chaos and Order: Complex Dynamics in Literature and Science*, ed. by N. Katherine Hayles (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), pp. 1–36 (p. 3).

[322] I discussed Hayles's description of this contemporary episteme in Chapter One. This episteme of 'cultural postmodernism', Hayles argues, is that which forged the conditions for imagining the posthuman. She also makes clear that there can be no easy equivalence between the three elements that she identifies as constituting cultural postmodernism: 'I am concerned with rifts as well as convergences, differences, and similarities. Yet the final impulse is to show both scientific and literary discourses are being distinctively shaped by a reevaluation of chaos. It is this vision that defines the contemporary episteme and differentiates it from the modernist era.' Hayles, *Chaos Bound*, pp. 177, 185.

[323] Hayles, *Chaos Bound*, p. 3.

[324] Ilya Prigogine and Isabelle Stengers, *Order Out of Chaos: Man's New Dialogue with Nature* (London: Fontana Paperbacks, 1985).

chaotic systems, which, while appearing to display completely random trajectories, are in fact underpinned by complex patterns. In the second, 'chaos' denotes the introduction of randomness or disorder into a system, which disrupts that system's self-replicating homeostasis. Chaos disrupts a system, potentially destroying it, but also creates the conditions through which a system may self-organise at a higher level of complexity. Here, chaos is not the absence of order but rather its progenitor.

In differing ways, both of these models are connected to the insights of fractal geometry. Fractal is a term coined by Benoit Mendelbrot to describe the complex shapes, near ubiquitous in nature, which display self-similarity at differing scales. A tree, for example, is a naturally occurring fractal as it contains self-similar patterns nested within themselves and which are visible regardless of the scale of observation. While fractals were once considered aberrations in the dominant model of Euclidean geometry, within the episteme discussed by Hayles, chaoticians realised that fractals were everywhere in the natural world.[325] In fact, the self-similarity of fractal shapes is key to deciphering the deep structure of physical systems, as their 'recursive symmetry' is formed through a process of iterative recursion.[326] Iterative recursion describes feedback loop processes, whereby the output of a function is reinserted as the input for the reiteration of that function. The subsequent output is then itself fed back and so on and so on. These recursive feedback loops produce the folds that constitute fractal shapes of patterns embedded within patterns. Studies of fractals therefore lead to a theory of universality that informs the concept of order beneath chaos, as exceedingly disparate chaotic systems can be grouped through their shared recursive symmetry.[327]

Iterative recursion and the resulting self-similarity are also the attributes of chaotic systems that produce their unpredictability. Classical physics, informed by linear Newtonian dynamics, describes a world that is ordered, regular and determinable. Nonlinear systems were viewed as aberrations, opposed to the ordered structure of the Newtonian universe. Eric Charles White explains, however, that with the growing recognition of the presence of chaotic systems throughout nature, there emerges a 'new view of nature' in which it is

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[325] Benoit Mendelbrot, *The Fractal Geometry of Nature* (New York: Macmillan Publishers, 1983).
[326] Hayles, *Chaos Bound*, p. 154.
[327] Describing the insights of Mitchell Feigenbaum, a key figure in chaos theory, Hayles writes that 'Feigenbaum attributed the universal element in chaotic systems to the fact that they were generated from iterative functions.' Hayles, *Chaos Bound*, p. 183.

understood that microscopic fluctuations lead to indeterminable macroscopic effects.[328] The world is not ordered in a linear predictable fashion, but is rather open to metamorphoses. 'Although change may destroy a system', White explains, 'at the critical moment of transformation matter may spontaneously self-organize itself into a more complex structure.'[329] It is the self-organisational structure of chaotic systems that is at the heart of the order out of chaos model. It informs a radical revisioning of the physical world away from the deterministic and linear systems of Newtonian dynamics towards an evolutionary cosmos informed by 'stochastic self-organization'.[330]

The possibility of self-organisation relies on a system's *complexity*. Complexity is a term given to systems that display negentropic behaviour through a balance between negative and positive feedback – order and disorder.[331] Solely positive feedback would lead to total chaos, a complete absence of pattern, whereas negative feedback produces only entropically driven self-replication. Levels of information in sound wavelengths demonstrate how complexity is used to describe a balance of order and disorder. Simple sounds, those with low levels of information, produce coherent patterns, such as sine waves, whereas sounds with high levels of information display complete randomness, such as static over the radio or white noise.[332] Hayles explains that while white noise technically has the most amount of information, its total lack of coherence, its chaotic absence of any pattern through the absence of negative feedback, means that it is generally taken as information's absence.[333] The most complex sounds are those that display pattern and randomness and that produce wavelengths that contain periodicity with variation. As Eglash explains, these complex wavelengths are fractal, displaying the characteristic iterative nesting – 'fluctuations within fluctuations within fluctuations'.[334] *Fractal shapes are therefore formed through the iterative unfolding of complex systems that contain a balance of positive and negative feedback, a balance which produces negentropic behaviour through the self-organising structure of complex systems.* This is what Stuart Kauffman calls 'order at the edge of chaos', whereby the evolution of systems into higher orders of complexity occurs when there is a 'balance between noise-

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[328] The possibility of microscopic variations leading to macroscopic effects is facilitated by fractal scaling. Changes at lower levels of the structure reverberate upscale to have wide-scale effects on the system. Eric Charles White, 'Negentropy, Noise and Emancipatory Thought', in *Chaos and Order*, pp. 263–77 (p. 263).
[329] White, pp. 263–64.
[330] White, p. 264.
[331] Reverse entropy.
[332] See Eglash, pp. 154–55.
[333] Hayles, *Chaos Bound*, p. 55.
[334] Eglash, pp. 152–61.

suppressing mechanisms – which would correspond to negative feedback – and the positive feedback of noise-amplifying loops.'[335] For Kauffman, order at the edge of chaos, 'the ability of complex systems to spontaneously self-organise', provides the basis for a model of life's emergence on Earth.[336]

Cosmological theories based on the combination of positive and negative feedback in living systems provide one of the most potent correlations that Eglash finds between fractal geometry and certain African knowledge systems. In *African Fractals*, Eglash outlines the five key attributes shared by fractals – recursion, scaling, self-similarity, infinity and fractal dimension[337] – and, while careful not to homogenise disparate cultures, uses these attributes to meticulously locate fractals in cultures from across the African continent before then evaluating them for their level of intentionality: from the unconscious creation of fractal shapes, through intentional creations without mathematical substance, to evidence of abstract, 'pure' mathematical thinking in certain 'African knowledge systems' that contain elements of fractal geometry.[338] Significantly, Eglash highlights how in various African cosmologies, the universe unfolds through a delicate balance between a trickster god, who brings chaos, and a god of order – a mechanism which pre-empts the balance of positive and negative feedback in self-organising systems:

> In the repertoire of dynamical concepts occurring in several African knowledge systems, there is recognition of the useful tension between equilibrium and disequilibrium, the dance between order and chance that results in self-organized complexity. And just as Stuart Kauffman has shown a bias toward order in evolution's "edge of chaos," the high god ensures that the trickster can only act sporadically, thus creating more power towards long-term order in these African cosmologies.[339]

Herein lies the source of my central contention in this chapter: In the *Binti* trilogy, Okorafor draws on the various cosmologies outlined in Eglash's work that ascribe a positive value to

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[335] Eglash, p. 170.
[336] Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, p. 241.
[337] Eglash, pp. 17–19.
[338] Eglash, pp. 4–6.
[339] Eglash, p. 170.

chaos as the generator of unpredictable, complex change.[340] These cosmologies are developed into a mythopoiesis for a fluid world that is informed by the univocal flow of mathematical information, which leads to the unfolding of life through a fractal balance of order and disorder; that is, through the self-organisation of life at the 'edge of chaos'. 'It's all mathematics', Binti herself realises, 'Life, the universe, everything.'[341]

The revaluation of chaos through African fractals within the *Binti* series represents a challenge to the Western-exceptionalism that was constructed by positioning Europe as the diametric opposite of Africa, figured as a site of absence. Achille Mbembe outlines how, in Western discourse, the African continent came to be associated with chaos, the absence of order, 'a bottomless abyss, where everything is *noise*, yawning gap, and primordial *chaos*.'[342] The alleged inferior immanence of African nations compared to the transcendent reason of Western cultures – a racialised binary I discussed in the introduction – produces Africa as a continent without reason or order. African nations are subsequently posited as underdeveloped and in need of salvation from their apparent disorder. The concept of chaos-as-absence is here employed to impose a global teleology that renders African nations as aspiring towards 'modernity' – constructed as Western – while at the same time ensuring that the people of the continent are always lacking, never quite there, always in the process of developing.

Through her story of a young African girl journeying through the universe, Okorafor disrupts this teleology by depicting the unpredictable development of her protagonist Binti. Binti is a member of a futuristic Himba community – an ethnic group who live in contemporary Namibia – and the narrative begins with her leaving her home in secret, defying her family's wishes by taking up a position at the interstellar Oomza University. The trilogy's subsequent events depict Binti's experiences as she travels the galaxy, forging relationships with human and nonhuman others, as well as her return home to a community suspicious of change and the outside world. Okorafor counters colonial development narratives by opening Binti to possible futures indeterminable in advance, thus situating her within what Jasbir Puar terms an 'anticipatory temporality, a modality which seeks to catch

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[340] The dynamic vision of the world that emerges in chaos theory is also pre-empted by Okorafor's Igbo culture. As Chinua Achebe notes, the 'Igbo culture says no condition is permanent. There is constant change in the world.' Chinua Achebe, *There Was a Country: A Personal History of Biafra* (London: Allen Lane, 2012), p. 56.
[341] Nnedi Okorafor, *Binti: The Night Masquerade* (New York: Tom Doherty Associates, 2018), p. 148. All in-text citations from this edition.
[342] Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), p. 3. Emphasis added.

hold of many futures, to invite futurity *even as it refuses to script it.*'[343] These anticipatory futures in the novellas are informed by African fractals and the productivity of chaos within knowledge systems from across the African continent.

In the three sections of this chapter that follow, I trace three key elements of the novellas, each of which are informed by Okorafor's engagement with fractal cosmologies and chaos theory: Binti's biological mutations; the building of non-anthropocentric kinship; and how communication between cultures produces complex system change. Weaved throughout these discussions is my contention that, at its core, the *Binti* series depicts a chaotic world that unfolds through a fractal balance of order and disorder in order to explore the possibility of locality and globality (and beyond) existing in tandem. By the end of *Night Masquerade*, Binti is a product of complex balance and her Himba culture remains a vital part of her self-identification. By depicting posthuman subject formations that develop from the ideas embedded in African fractals, Okorafor's novellas disrupt the temporality of critical posthumanism. Whereas Hayles argues that conceptions of the posthuman arise following the re-evaluation of chaos at the end of the twentieth century, Okorafor notes antecedent notions of chaos within various African cosmologies, which she adapts in her mythopoiesis of immanent fractal mathematics and posthumanist praxes of kin-making.

II. '*Dele had always seen things so simply* […]. *Even when they are infinitely complex*': Immanent Mathematics and Posthuman Embodiment

Biological Mutation: Complexity and Embodied Becoming

Everything in the *Binti* universe is connected through an immanent mathematics that manifests in the form of a univocal 'current'. Dustin Crowley describes this current as both metaphysical/spiritual and 'a physical force thoroughly imbricated with mathematics and technology.'[344] It is this force that informs a processual and non-anthropocentric world which unfolds through a process of self-organisation. In *Binti*, through a technique known as 'treeing', those with mathematical insights are able to perceive this fundamental force. On the

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[343] Jasbir Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), p. xix.

[344] Crowley, p. 243.

way to Oomza University, Binti delights in practicing treeing with her fellow students:

> they were girls who knew what I meant when I spoke of "treeing." We sat in my room […] and challenged each other to look out at the stars and imagine the most *complex* equation and then split it in half and then in half and again. When you do math fractals long enough, you kick yourself into treeing just enough to get lost in the shallow of the mathematical sea. None of us would have made it into the university if we couldn't tree, but it's not easy. We were the best and we pushed each other to get closer to "God".'[345]

Through treeing Binti grasps the fundamental deep structure of the universe. As I have outlined, chaoticians describe an order that lies beneath disparate complex systems and which indicates the presence of recursive processes in biological morphogenesis. It is through these processes that the folds of self-similar structures at differing scales form within fractal shapes. In the practice of treeing – so named after the fractal shape of trees – Binti essentially reverses this process. Repeatedly halving a complex equation, she unfolds the iterative folds that have formed through feedback loops. In so doing, Binti approaches the genesis of the universe, which takes the form of 'God'. God is here depicted as the *spiritual force that generated the self-organising processes that underpin the universe*. In *Home*, Binti describes just such a cosmology: 'In the stories of the Seven, life originated from the rich red clay that had soaked up rain. Microorganisms were *called into active being* when one of the Seven willed it and the others became interested in what would happen.'[346] Okorafor provides a spiritual cosmogony that began the chaotic unfolding of life. In Kauffman's theory of life emerging at the 'edge of chaos', life on Earth is generated through the self-organising processes of complex systems. In Binti's world, these processes were begun by one of the Seven, who instigated this dynamism by calling 'into active being' the microorganisms that then developed into conscious life. Treeing is a means of grasping this fundamental order that structures the universe.

In opposition to this unpredictable cosmos is the worldview of Binti's Himba community, who have a singular vision of life's trajectory. When Binti first hears of her

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[345] Okorafor, *Binti* (New York: Tom Doherty Associates, 2015), p. 22. All in-text citations from this edition.
[346] Okorafor, *Binti: Home* (New York: Tom Doherty Associates, 2017), p. 155. All in-text citations from this edition. Emphasis added.

acceptance into Oomza University, her friend Dele, ever the voice of tradition, tells her, 'You cannot go […]. We're Himba. God has already chosen our paths' (*Binti*, p. 29). While Binti is conflicted over transgressing against this divinely informed path, she ultimately realises that, in fact, her actions are congruent with the structure of the universe: '*Dele had always seen things so simply* […]. *Even when they are infinitely complex*' (*Home*, p. 150, emphasis in original). Dele's deterministic God is replaced by a model of complexity that opens Binti's future to further possibility. The development of chaos theory showed, as White explains, that '[p]hysical systems are not […] constrained to a single evolutionary path'. Instead, the 'deterministic unfolding of the universe has repeatedly been punctuated by catastrophic bifurcations, by chance swervings in unforeseeable directions. Nature, in more venerable parlance, is ruled by fortune.'[347] The cosmos as imagined by Okorafor, underpinned by fractal mathematics, is just so stochastically structured. It is not rigidly informed by a God who has determined linear 'paths', as Dele believes, but is instead open to the random variation of chaotic processes which were begun, but not controlled, by God.

Following her internal desire for exploration, Binti chooses to leave her homeland, named Osemba, and opens herself to possible futures which, in part, take the form of biological mutations. After Binti leaves her home in secret to journey to Oomza University, her space ship is intercepted by the Meduse, a jellyfish-like alien race, who attack the ship in response to the theft of their chief's 'stinger' – the Meduse's deadly biological weapon – and its subsequent display at the University. While all of her fellow passengers are killed in the attack, Binti is saved by her mysterious *edan*, an object she always carries with her and which is fatal for the Meduse to touch. Encamped in her room, Binti learns to communicate with the Meduse before – unbeknownst to her at first – her DNA is spliced with that of the aliens so that she can become their ally and negotiate with the Oomza University professors for the peaceful return of the chief's stolen stinger. Following the change to her DNA, Binti's hair is transformed into the Meduse's tentacles, known as *okuoko*. Citing Andrew Pickering, Crowley describes Binti's embodied entanglements as occurring in terms akin to cybernetics as 'feedback loops running from the environment through the human body and back again.'[348] These loops inform Binti's interrelational mutations by erasing the boundaries of Binti's embodied self and facilitating what Stacey Alaimo terms 'trans-corporeality'.[349] The

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[347] White, p. 263.
[348] Andrew Pickering, qtd. in Crowley, p. 244.
[349] Stacy Alaimo, *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self* (Indianapolis: Indianapolis University Press, 2010).

feedback loops that bring the external world into the dominion of the self are, in the *Binti* series, that which facilitates the introduction of randomness, of disorder – they are the generator of positive feedback that institutes morphological change. In Crowley's terms Binti's 'transformations engendered both biologically and technically reflect the posthuman understanding of the body as a kind of "information" that can be manipulated'.[350] Drawing on the work of Eugene Thacker, Crowley here describes how biotechnology transmutes the materiality of the body into informational (genetic) code which allows it to be manipulated. Materiality does not disappear and yet it becomes largely subordinate, 'effectively approached on the level of information' and, as such, it 'can be technically manipulated, controlled, and monitored through information technologies.'[351] The Meduse, through their ability to alter genetics, are like natural bioengineers. They introduce randomness into the pattern of Binti's genetic code leading to bodily change.

By describing Binti's transformations in terms of cybernetics and fractals, I run the risk of insinuating that Okorafor represents a fantasy of disembodiment, whereby the human is articulated as essentially information. The body, however, is not elided in the novellas and Binti's changes cannot be conceptualised without acknowledgment of her morphological fluctuations. Disembodied figurations of the posthuman arise through the emergence of information theory and cybernetics, which abstract the human to pure information, in part facilitating the transition to conceptions of the posthuman by allowing for humanity to be imagined as seamlessly merging with machines. This abstraction, Hayles argues, leads to a transition in the explanatory dialectics of subjectivity. Presence/absence, concepts which underpinned liberal humanist conceptions of the subject, are superseded by the informational dialectic of pattern/randomness. The erasure of presence/absence through an abstraction of the human-as-information, however, lays the seeds for disembodiment as materiality becomes subordinated as at best a storehouse for essential information – necessary but ultimately replaceable. Hayles turns to literary texts in order 'to demonstrate […] that abstract pattern can never fully capture the embodied actuality, unless it is as prolix and noisy as the body itself.'[352] Okorafor's narratives are attendant to the 'noisy' body in a way that prevents visions of disembodiment. Binti is constantly aware of the many physical mutations that she has undergone and, as a result, experiences ontological uncertainty right up until the end of

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[350] Crowley, pp. 251–52.
[351] Eugene Thacker, 'Data Made Flesh: Biotechnology and the Discourse of the Posthuman', *Cultural Critique*, 53 (2003), 72–97 (p. 89).
[352] Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, p. 22.

Night Masquerade in which she asks an Oomza University doctor 'am I still human?' (p. 191). This fear of a loss of an innate humanness echoes social conservatives such as Francis Fukuyama, for whom the biotech revolution represents a threat to a pre-ordained human nature.[353] For Binti, however, an African girl who belongs to a small, isolated community, her chaotic mutations recall a more potent form of loss that draws on the legacies of displacement through the slave trade, rather than Fukuyama's fear of the loss of a 'universal humanness'.

The change of Binti's hair into *okuoko* informs Binti's anxiety at the potential loss that she experiences following her mutation. Previously, Binti's hair is braided into a *code* which reflects her 'family's bloodline, culture, and history' (*Binti*, p. 23). In *African Fractals*, Eglash notes how recursivity in hair braiding patterns is a further example of fractal designs in the continent. As with Binti's, these hair designs are braided to have a deep social significance: 'Recursive hairstyles […] embed layers of social labour with each iteration, a way to invest physical adornment with social meaning.'[354] Social meaning is coded into hair in a process analogous to the embedding of self-similar folds in fractal shapes. For Binti, this social meaning is disrupted by the acquisition of the *okuoko*: 'There were ten of them [*okuoko*] and I could no longer braid them into my family's code pattern as I had done with my own hair' (*Binti*, p. 87). While Binti's hair is a code, a pattern, this pattern is not transformed by the mutation into *okuoko* but is in fact lost completely – the tentacles cannot be braided into any pattern. The explanatory dialectic of this mutation is not that of information – pattern/randomness – but rather *presence/*randomness.[355] That is, the loss of Binti's hair marks the change that an alteration of her genetic code makes on presence. In the context of the social significance of its braiding, the transformation of Binti's hair risks alienating her from her community. This is further emphasised by an earlier description of Binti's hair as '"ododo" because it grew wild and dense like ododo grass' (*Binti*, p. 11). The mutation of ododo into *okuoko* indicates her disconnection from the land of her birth. On

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[353] In *Our Posthuman Future*, Fukuyama writes, 'the most significant threat posed by contemporary biotechnology is the possibility that it will alter human nature and thereby move us into a 'posthuman' stage of history.' Fukuyama, p. 7. What Fukuyama views as human nature is that ethnocentric conception of Man as *homo oeconomicus* that I outlined in the previous chapter. In Justin Omar Johnston's words, Fukuyama's fears rest on the 'alignment of capitalist democracy and human nature.' Justin Omar Johnston, *Posthuman Capital and Biotechnology in Contemporary Novels* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), p. 10.
[354] Eglash, p. 113.
[355] Hayles discussed the interplay between pattern and randomness: 'Mutation testifies to the mark that randomness leaves upon presence. When a random event intervenes to affect an organism's genetic code, for example, this intervention changes the material form in which the organism will manifest in the world.' Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, p. 249.

learning of her new *okuoko*, Binti understands this potential loss: 'I stood there, in my strange body. If I hadn't been deep in meditation I would have screamed and screamed. I was so far from home' (*Binti*, p. 82). Here, embodiment forms an aspect of belonging that Binti feels she has lost. Her being 'so far from home' resonates spatially but also in terms of kinship, as Binti's mutations highlight the distance that now exists between herself and her community.

The narrative of Binti's transformation contains traces of the enforced deracination of African people during the slave trade. Her loss of a connection to her homeland is a feature of Afrofuturist writing. As Elizabeth Hamilton notes:

> In an Afrofuturist vision that stakes out black space in the future, black life is often obscured and simultaneously endangered. The obscurity is the result of the overdetermination of the past on black future spaces, namely the baggage of colonialism and apartheid, slavery and Jim Crow, and legacies of displacement.[356]

While it is Binti's own decision to leave her homeland, 'legacies of displacement' still haunt her narrative. As with the journey of a Caribbean community to Toussaint in *Midnight Robber*, images of the slave ship's hold repeat in *Binti*. Her becoming part-Meduse takes place when she is trapped on a ship echoing the experience of African slaves during the Middle Passage.[357] Accordingly, after the mutation of her hair, a return home may be denied to her. As a professor of Oomza Uni queries: 'what about your home? Will you ever return? […] I have studied your people […]. They don't like outsiders' (*Binti*, p. 80). Posthuman relations with nonhuman others are here figured as requiring the loss of one's home, a process of becoming strange. In *Posthumanism* (2014), Pramod Nayar analyses Octavia Butler's *Kindred* (1979) and the *Xenogenesis* trilogy, arguing that in each the protagonists lose 'their writing, their history, their memories and their skills' so that they can forge new

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[356] Elizabeth C. Hamilton, 'Afrofuturism and the Technologies of Survival', *African Arts*, 50.4 (2017), 18–23 (p. 18).

[357] Binti's displacement resonates with Paul Gilroy's writing on diasporic identities. Gilroy uses the image of the Middle Passages to describe a process of cultural mixing: 'ships were the living means by which the points within the Atlantic world were joined. […] They were mobile elements that stood for shifting spaces in between the fixed places that they connected.' Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London: Verso, 1993), p. 16. This joining of the Atlantic was of course far from egalitarian, but was engendered by the physical extrication of colonised bodies. Binti's becoming-Meduse echoes this enforced deracination.

posthuman interconnections.[358] Binti too experiences a mutation that may cause such a loss and, as such, Okorafor potentially erects an antagonistic relationship between indigenous being and posthuman becoming. As Binti thinks of her transformations in *Home*, '[e]verything comes with a sacrifice' (*Home*, p. 151).

Mutation through Recursion: Change and Consistency

While the threat of loss is certainly a feature of Binti's changes, Okorafor ultimately imagines her mutation as occurring recursively, which prevents a simple narrative of Binti's mutations leading to a total disconnection from her Himba self. When her DNA is spliced with that of the Meduse, Binti loses consciousness. On awakening, her first thoughts are of Osemba:

> Home. I smelled the earth at the border of the desert just before it rained, during Fertile Season. The place right behind the Root, where I dug up the clay I used for my *otjize* and chased the geckos who were too fragile to survive a mile away in the desert. I opened my eyes; I was on my bed in my room, naked except for my wrapped skirt. The rest of my body was smooth with a thick layer of *otjize*. I flared my nostrils and inhaled the smell of me. Home… (*Binti*, p. 66)

Binti wakes to the smell of the earth of Osemba that she uses to make her *otjize*. *Otjize* is a red paste Himba women apply to themselves, an embodied act which ties subjectivity to the land and extends it beyond the bounds of the individual. As Binti notes, 'Our ancestral land is life, move away from it and you diminish. We even cover our bodies with it. *Otjize* is red land' (*Binti*, p. 12-3). For Himba, life is inseparable from one's embeddedness within their environment. That Binti awakes after having her DNA spliced with that of the Meduse and immediately smells this land indicates her ongoing connection to Osemba. Her memory of the Fertile Season of her homeland refers to how her hybrid form has germinated from within this source of life, rather than a break from it. Her transformation is a feedback loop process in which Binti returns to the earth and is reborn. As with Kauffman's conception of the emergence of life at the edge of chaos, Binti's mutation is a border phenomenon that occurs at the edge of Binti's home – between the order of Osemba and the chaos of the desert. As

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[358] Nayar, pp. 128, 132.

such, Binti's mutation is imagined as a fractal balance of order and disorder, not as a new beginning but an emergence from and with the old – through negative and positive feedback.

As Binti travels the universe, she encounters two other forms of recursive rebirth. First is New Fish, the daughter of the cyborg spaceship that Binti travels in to get to Oomza University. New Fish's race, known as the Miri-12, have a long gestation period in which they become conscious before they are 'born'. As New Fish tells Binti: '*I have been talking to my mother for five Earth years […] A Miri 12 is "pregnant" when she is near her time to give birth. And birth is not the beginning for us; it's just a change*' (*Night Masquerade*, p. 159, emphasis in original). Both New Fish's birth and Binti's mutations are not beginnings, but rather '*just a change*', part of ongoing processes of becoming. Second, at the end of *Night Masquerade*, Binti meets a species whose being is defined by just such complexity:

> "We are…" And for a moment, I heard nothing. Then the sound of their name split and split like a fractal in my mind. It was like the practice of treeing embodied in one word. Their name was an equation too complex, too various and varied to mentally fix into place, let alone put into a language that I was capable of uttering […]
>
> "We're people of time and space. We move about experiencing, collecting, becoming more. This is the philosophy and culture of our equation." (pp. 170-171)

These are people of pure becoming, whose 'philosophy and culture' embodies the feedback loop process of treeing – the 'motor of fractal geometry'[359] – as the process of 'becoming more'.[360] In her description of the similarities between literary deconstruction and chaos theory, Hayles highlights recursive iteration as a key shared attribute. In the former, the process of re-reading displaces originary terms upon which 'foundational' differences within texts are grounded, thus revealing the absences at the heart of language. In the latter, accurately predicting complex systems' trajectories is impossible because the initial conditions, the originary state of the system, cannot be known to infinite precision. 'Iteration produces chaos', Hayles notes, 'because it magnifies and brings into view these initial

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[359] Eglash, p. 109.
[360] The Meduse have some similarities to the Oankali aliens of Octavia Butler's *Xenogenesis* trilogy. The Oankali survive through making genetic 'trades' with other species. Their procreation is doomed to entropic self-referentiality without the introduction of the new.

uncertainties.'[361] While different, the key similarity is that both deconstruction and chaos theory reveal the impossibility of grasping origins. The creatures that Binti meets at Saturn, informed by an infinitely complex equation, depict a form of being built not on origins but rather on processual emergence through recursive iterative processes.

Binti's mutations are depicted as occurring through recursive processes, indicating that they do not represent a loss of origins, but rather complex nonlinear becoming. Binti's mutations do not only occur as a result of changes to her genetics. In *Home*, Binti learns that she is a descendant of the Enyi Zinariya, an ethnic group that live in the desert outside of Osemba. As a result, she, as with all of the Enyi Zinariya, has within her bloodstream technological nanoids that allow instant communication to others within the community. These nanoids were a gift from an alien race known as the Zinariya with whom the community co-habited long before the series' events (and from whom the Enyi Zinariya get their name). To activate these nanoids that have been dormant within her, Binti engages in a ritual that, as with her becoming-Meduse, involves a chthonic recursive process:

> In the stories of the Seven, life originated from the rich red clay that had soaked up rain. Microorganisms were called into active being when one of the Seven willed it and the others became interested in what would happen. That clay was Mother, *otjize*. I was clay now. I was watching from afar, feeling nothing, but able to control […] And then, from that place waving with equations, the blue currents braiding around each other connecting around me, my body acted without command. […]
>
> I couldn't see it happening, but I could distantly sense it – my body was pulling from something, energy from the ground. From the earth, from deep. My body was touching the Mother, nudging her awake, and then telling her to come. *The Seven are great*, I thought. (*Home*, p. 155)

The ritual activation of the nanoids draws on the fractal cosmogony of the *Binti* universe that I discussed above. Microorganisms are called 'into active being' by the Seven representing the genesis of the self-organising dynamism of life. Binti draws on this same energy by returning to the clay that is 'Mother' and being reborn from the earth as a kind of womb,

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[361] Hayles, *Chaos Bound*, p. 183.

emerging as an activated cyborg figure. In her own words, these changes are part of her process of gathering – of building non-anthropocentric posthuman kinships: 'I was Himba, a master harmonizer. Then I was also Meduse, anger vibrating in my *okuoko*. Now I was Enyi Zinariya, of the Desert People gifted with alien technology. I was worlds' (*Home*, pp. 161-2). Binti's invocation of herself as 'worlds' speaks to her internalised complexity rendered in fractal terms. Binti is a multi-scalar assemblage, a figure whose identities are nested within themselves, akin to the iterative nesting of fractal shapes. Once more, Binti's mutations are not linear moves of development but rather complex processes of becoming.

Binti's trajectory in the novellas is tied to the figure of the Night Masquerade, a spirit that Binti first sees shortly before the ritual to activate the nanoids in her bloodstream. Okorafor describes the masquerades she remembers from her youth as '[p]hysical manifestations of the spirits and ancestors'.[362] The masquerade is thus a figure that blurs the boundary between the material and spirit worlds. Binti's existence as simultaneously Meduse/Himba/Enyi Zinariya is encoded with the categorical uncertainty of the spiritual apparition. The mythology of the Night Masquerade also contains balance of order and disorder. On the one hand, the spirit is said to only appear to 'heroes' of the Himba and, as such, its appearance to Binti solidifies her continuous position *within* the community, despite her mutations; on the other, the apparition of the masquerade is said to bring 'drastic change' (*Night Masquerade*, p. 126). The masquerade's apparition therefore entails both pattern and randomness or, in the language of systems, negative and positive feedback. Binti is reified as a hero of the Himba, while at the same time being ushered into the change that the masquerade heralds. As her grandmother explains: 'You saw the Night Masquerade […] That's no small thing. Why expect what you expect?' (*Home*, p. 141). The masquerade's appearance signals disruption, the imposition of noise as the onset of unpredictable change.

Binti's final mutation also occurs through a recursive process. In the novellas, the alien Meduse have a long-standing feud with the Khoush, a group who live in the land next to Osemba on Earth. In *Night Masquerade*, as the tensions between the Khoush and the Meduse rise, Binti attempts to forge a ceasefire that is only momentarily successful. Following the

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[362] Nnedi Okorafor, 'Never Unmask a Masquerade', *Nnedi's Wahala Zone Blog*, 2010 <http://nnedi.blogspot.co.uk/2010/07/never-unmask-masquerade.html> [accessed 16 May 2018]. Osita Okagbue corroborates Okorafor's comments on Igbo masquerade rituals' blurring of the material and spirit realms. He writes that 'while a clear distinction is made between spirit and matter […] Transference from one plane to another can easily be achieved through specific rites of transition [such as Igbo masking].' Osita Okagbue, *African Theatres and Performances* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), p. 17.

recommencement of hostilities, Binti is killed in a crossfire. Her friends place her body in the breathing chamber of the cyborg ship named New Fish and journey to space planning to make it her final resting place. During the journey, New Fish's microbes inhabit Binti's body and revive her, further altering her biological make-up: 'Again', Binti thinks, '*another connection*' (*Night Masquerade*, p. 151, emphasis in original). In his popular book, *I Contain Multitudes* (2016), Ed Yong outlines humanity's imbrication with a cacophony of non-self microbial entities, and Okorafor invokes this symbiosis of human and microbes in Binti's rebirth, a further process of recursive emergence that occurs through her making a connection with an alien other.[363] Binti enters a womb – New Fish's breathing chamber – and is given the breath of life which reanimates her body. This rebirth is therefore an iteration of the recursive processes through which she has previously become both part-Meduse and activated the technological nanoids inside her. Once again, this recursivity works as a means of imagining change without a severance from the past. As when Binti regained consciousness following her imbrication with Meduse DNA, her first thought is of '*Home*' (*Night Masquerade*, p. 140). Her changes do not signal the loss of past belonging, the trading of old connections for new ones, but are instead a process of gathering.

African fractals provide the imaginary through which Okorafor explores Binti's mutations as a process of iterative nesting. Eglash gives the mythology of the Dogon – an ethnic group found in modern day Mali – as an example of a recursive cosmology. The Dogon depict the origin of humanity through a threefold iteration process in which earlier inhabitants of the earth return to the ground and are reborn anew. The process is iterated three times until it 'bottoms out' and ends with the production of humanity.[364] Binti draws on this concept of iterative nesting to develop the concept of Binti's posthuman kinships. Throughout *Home* and *Night Masquerade*, as Binti undergoes her mutations, she begins to have visions of the species whose name embodies the fractal process of becoming – those whom she will finally meet on Saturn. In these visions, she is asked to identify herself and obstinately responds with the name she was given at birth – 'Binti Ekeopara Zuzu Dambu Kaipka of Namib' – and is angry when the aliens reject this name by telling her that '[t]here's

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[363] Ed Yong, *I Contain Multitudes: The Microbes Within Us and a Grander View of Life* (London: The Bodley Head, 2016).

[364] As a result of this tripartite organisation of the cosmos, Dogon design often contains examples of recursive nesting. In the most simple of examples, calabash pots are designed to be stacked with smaller pots nested inside larger ones, an organisation which is symbolic of the emergence of new beings from the old. Eglash, pp. 131–35.

more' (*Home*, p. 9). On finally meeting the species, however, Binti accepts her changes:

> Binti Ekeopara Zuzu Dambu Kaipka of Namib, that is my name," I blurted before I let myself think too hard about what is happening. "No," I said. "My name is Binti Ekeopara Zuzu Dambu Kaipka Meduse Enyi Zinariya New Fish of Namib. (*Night Masquerade*, p. 169)

Containing Meduse, Enyi Zinariya and New Fish, Binti's extended name embodies the iterative nesting of the Dogon and of fractals, pointing to the various non-anthropocentric kin she has made through her mutations, of which I will speak of further below. Throughout the novellas, Binti is open to ongoing transformations while at the same time remaining connected to her homeland and to the Himba. Her iterative nesting becomes analogous to the development of an internalised multiplicity. Here, Okorafor is drawing on a further aspect of fractals: the possibility of infinity within a bounded space. Fractal shapes contain within them the possibility of infinity because theoretically iterative nesting can be continued to infinitesimally small scales.[365] This seeming paradox provides an analogy for Okorafor's co-articulation of Binti's perpetual becoming as a multi-scalar assemblage and her ongoing connection to the Himba homeland.

III. Posthuman Kinship and Afropolitanism

Kin-Making: Connections Beyond Biology

Through Binti's self-renaming, the novellas highlight that biological mutations alone are in and of themselves insufficient in reimagining one's sense of community. What is also required are processes of making kin that extend beyond the biological. At the end of *Night Masquerade*, Binti is informed of her biological hybridity by an Oomza Uni doctor. Faced with her changes, Binti fears she has lost her humanity. Yet, she comes to accept her new body when her changes are are expressed in terms analogous to Himba kinship:

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[365] See Eglash, p. 12.

In your tribe a woman marries a man, and in doing so, married his family, correct? […] This is the path to respect among the Himba. […] So see it this way: You're paired with New Fish and Okwu, each of whom has a family. Your family is bigger than any Himba girl's ever was. […] And here you stand healthy and strong […] And strange, there is no person like you at this school. (*Night Masquerade*, pp. 193-4)

The doctor invokes Binti's biological changes in the terms of Himba marriage, pointing to a process of building kin as a means for Binti to come to terms with her posthuman mutations. Throughout the novellas, biological links do not define Binti's connections. As an example, Binti and her Meduse friend Okwu are able to communicate through their *okuoko* not only as a result of Binti's Meduse DNA but also because they are bonded through battle, a deeply significant aspect of Meduse culture. That is, they can communicate because they have undergone a process of becoming-kin that is not solely defined by their shared DNA: 'You are the first to join our family in this way for a long time' (*Binti*, p. 90), Okwu explains to Binti.[366] Okorafor depicts Binti's posthuman relations as consisting of more than solely biological connections, as they also involve deeply complex, though occasionally fractious, processes of what Donna Haraway terms '*sympoiesis*': 'making-with'.[367] To make-with is to build relations and kin in order to forge ways of living and surviving together. As she travels the galaxy, Binti develops posthuman alliances that represent non-anthropocentric praxes of kin-making.

Binti is at first resistant to the changes that arise from building such relationships. In *Home*, she finds that her becoming part-Meduse has introduced a new-found anger, which she initially registers as a negative difference. At each moment in which she feels this anger, an inner voice chides her for her lack of purity: 'My *okuoko* tickled […] Suddenly, I felt that anger again, and some part of me deep down firmly accused, "Unclean, Binti, you are unclean"' (*Home*, p. 18). Becoming aware of her *okuoko*, as well as her new anger, leads Binti to imagine herself as tainted, unclean, as if some previous integrity has been lost. She recognises the anger she feels as the imposition of noise, otherness, which potentially leads to chaos as an absence. To prevent this chaos, Binti at first desires to reassert her Himba identity

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[366] In the context of Native American communities, Kim TallBear has long been critical of the equivalences made between shared genetics and tribal belonging. Kim TallBear, *Native American DNA: Tribal Belonging and the False Promise of Genetic Science* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2013).

[367] Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), p. 5.

in order to erase the effect of her changes: 'I'd reapply my *otjize*. I'd take extra time to palm roll a thick layer onto my *okuoko* […] *I'm unclean because I left home,* I thought. *If I go home and complete my pilgrimage, I will be cleansed'* (*Home*, p. 20, emphasis added). Binti will cleanse herself by applying *otjize*, binding her life to Osemba. She hopes to soon complete her pilgrimage in order for her to become a 'whole woman […] a complete Himba woman' (*Home*, p. 132).

Binti is prevented from going on her pilgrimage and, as such, the narrative denies her attempt to return to an imagined whole identity. In the evening before she will depart with the other Himba women, she is accosted by the Enyi Zinariya, who take her on an alternative pilgrimage that leads to the activation of the alien Zinariya nanoids, which occurs through the ritual discussed above. The journey that she he hoped to make to erase the effects of her changes instead becomes one in which she builds further connections and undergoes subsequent change. Once again, however, the *otjize* provides Binti with an ongoing connection to the Himba source of life despite her changes: 'I applied my *otjize* and put on my pilgrimage clothes. The *otjize* would rub off onto my clothes making tonight the outfit's official event, not my pilgrimage, blessed on this day by my *otjize*. *So be it*, I thought' (*Home*, p. 92, emphasis added). Blessing her pilgrimage clothes before her journey to activate the nanoids, the *otjize* here brings this change within the terms of the maturation ritual of the Himba. Once more, Okorafor delicately balances change and consistency in Binti's development.

The *otjize* is a central aspect both of Binti's ongoing connection to the land of Osemba, which the Himba consider the source of life, and to her development of multiple sites of belonging. As a prime symbol for Binti's maintenance of a relationship with her community, having access to the *otjize* is a constant source of anxiety for her. At the end of the opening novella, having exhausted her supplies, she is forced to make a fresh batch from the clay on Oomza planet and worries what will happen if this *otjize* is not authentic: 'If I couldn't make the *otjize* here, then I'd have to … change' (*Binti*, p. 88). That Binti fears the onset of change despite the Meduse *okuoko* that has replaced her hair is undoubtedly ironic. The loss of the *otjize*, however, is symbolic of a fundamental separation between herself and her home. Ultimately, Binti's attempt to make fresh *otjize* is successful and *Binti* ends with her applying the new batch to her body. The Himba act that extends Binti's life into a trans-corporeal relationship with her environment is here repeated with a difference, forging for Binti an intimate connection with her new planet. From this point, Binti's new *otjize* becomes

a symbol for her ever-growing set of kinships. Before she goes on her pilgrimage with the Enyi Zinariya in *Home*, Binti applies the *otjize* and is unconcerned that it is made from clay other than that found in Osemba: 'I didn't pause on the knowledge that my current batch of *otjize* was made with clay from another planet' (*Home*, p. 81). The ritual activation of the nanoids is blessed with an *otjize* that symbolises her entanglement with multiple locations.

Developing multiple sites of belonging, Binti's journey throughout the series reflects Afropolitan narratives. Afropolitanism is an internally differentiated branch of cosmopolitan thinking from an African-situated perspective. In terms reminiscent of those used in critical posthumanist discourses, Mbembe describes Afropolitanism in part as the development of African nations through multidirectional feedback loops between the continent and the rest of the globe.[368] While Crowley focuses on cosmo- rather than Afropolitanism, his article outlines how, through the representation of nonhuman agency, the *Binti* series brings together ecological, postcolonial and animist concerns to depict non-anthropocentric, planetary and intergalactic relations.[369] It is the effects of these relations, such as her experience of Meduse anger, that Binti must realise are not deviations from a previous identity, but rather constituent effects of her always already ongoing transformations:

> *Nothing is wrong with me?* I thought. *Not unclean? It's just… a new part of me I need to learn to control?* I'd come all this way to go on my pilgrimage because I'd thought my body was trying to tell me something was wrong with it. I hadn't wanted to admit it to myself, but I'd thought I'd broken myself because of the choices I'd made, because of my actions, because I'd left home to go to Oomza Uni. Because of guilt. The relief I felt was so all encompassing that I wanted to lie down on the rug and just sleep. (*Home*, pp. 143-4)

Not only were her attempts to reverse her changes through her pilgrimage impossible, they were also unnecessary. Her changes are not a loss, they do not constitute loss of a 'primordial' or 'traditional' form of being, but are instead an aspect of the ongoing becoming of her posthuman, Afropolitan self.

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[368] Achille Mbembe and Sarah Balakrishnan, 'Pan-African Legacies, Afropolitan Futures', *Transition*, 120 (2016), 28–37.
[369] Crowley, p. 241.

Despite Binti's new understanding of her Afropolitan self, her community maintains a geographical determinism that informs a pre-ordained vision of life. To cite once more a telling comment from her friend Dele following her acceptance into Oomza Uni: 'You cannot go […] We're Himba. God has already chosen our paths' (*Binti*, p. 29). To be Himba is to follow a divine teleology. It is to maintain an intrinsic connection with the land by remaining within Osemba, to maintain what Crowley terms 'a sort of purity with regard to the people-place relationship'.[370] This spiritual and ecological onto-epistemology is a theodicy that represents the behaviour instituting codes which affirm a proper way of being for the Himba people. These are the codes which inform, in Wynter's terms, a 'sociogenically encoded order of consciousness', a conscious experience of what it is to be Himba that orients Himba people towards certain actions, those which are deemed the only rational modes of acting.[371] Binti's desire to leave Osemba is therefore deemed irrational and against the proper order of things. As her sister says to her: 'Stop chasing fame and be rational. You can't just leave and fly across the *galaxy*' (*Binti*, p. 29, emphasis in original). This concept of rationality is not the same as that posited within the Enlightenment tradition, which affirmed a nature-culture dualism, nor is it akin to that within the liberal humanist conception of possessive individualism.[372] Rather, it is a rationality that is sociogenically informed through the divine-ecological mythoi of the Himba. To be rational is to remain ontologically imbricated with the land through a rigid situatedness. To leave the land is to 'diminish', to be irrational, to sever one's connection to one's culture and become a 'pariah' (*Binti*, p. 9).

Binti's pariah status following her deviance from the expectations placed upon her reveals the terms through which the Himba understand themselves as a community, as a 'collective' (*Home*, p. 149). Acting according to the mandate of the Himba is the condition for being recognised as kin in a process analogous to that outlined by Wynter:

> This dynamic emerges, for example, in the "imagined communities" of our respective
> ethno-class nation-states: the genre-specific subjects of each such nation-state are
> enabled to subjectively experience themselves/ourselves in fictively eusocialized

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[370] Crowley, p. 247.

[371] Wynter and McKittrick, p. 35.

[372] Hayles discusses C. B. Macpherson's description of possessive individualism, which is a definition of 'human nature' as individual and owing nothing to society. Macpherson outlines that this so-called natural state of being was an a priori invention of a market society. Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, p. 3; Macpherson discusses possessive individualism in C. B. Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964).

terms [...] as inter-altruistic kin-recognizing member subjects of the same *referent-we* and its imagined community. As such, *kin-recognizing member subjects* law-likely and performatively enact themselves/ourselves as "good men and women" of their/our kind according to a nongenetically determined, origin-mythically chartered symbolically encoded and semantically enacted set of symbolic life/death instructions.[373]

While Wynter is referring specifically to the symbolic institution of communal feeling within nation states, the production of 'inter-altruistic kin-recognising members of the same referent-we' is analogous to the formation of the Himba community and their sociogenically induced 'good' and 'bad' actions. Binti's feeling of uncleanliness, discussed above, is the result of her unease at transgressing the reflexively instituted proper modes of acting by leaving Osemba and making-kin with the Meduse. To think of this in system terms, the mythoi of the Himba institutes a 'culture-systemic telos that orients the collective ensemble of behaviours', a telos that recursively replicates itself through the enactment of such behaviours by kin-recognising members of the Himba referent-we.[374] The entrenchment of such a telos occurs through the autopoietic, cognitively closed reiteration of a central mythoi. In turn, the Himba imagine the maintenance of this recursively instituted kin-group through the protection of cultural integrity through insularity. Interactions with the outside are kept to a minimum. Frequently, it is commented that the Himba prefer to travel inwards, exploring the depths of their own culture rather than interacting with the outside world. When Binti returns to Osemba in *Home*, the chief announces that 'now the community can contract back into itself like a self-protecting flower' (p. 69). The Himba narrate the survival of their community through homeostasis, through the self-replicating maintenance of a closed system and, as such, the threat of the outside represents the threat of chaotic disharmony.

Binti's 'irrational' actions, as her sister describes them, therefore represent a threat to the community not only because of their divergence from the behavioural pathways towards which Himba subjects are oriented, but also because her engagement with the universe beyond Osemba *threatens systemic disruption*. She is chastised for 'bringing the outside to the inside' (*Home*, p. 98), meanwhile her genetic mutations, literal evidence of the outside within, are described as what 'pollutes' her (*Night Masquerade*, p. 65). Binti threatens the

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[373] Wynter and McKittrick, p. 27. Emphasis in original.
[374] Wynter, "'Development'" , p. 299.

stasis of the recursive entrenchment of Himba's systemic closure. As Dele says to her 'You're too complex Binti, […]. That's why I stayed away. You're my best friend. You are. And I miss you. But, you're too complex. And look at you; you're even stranger now.' (*Home*, p. 79). Being at this point in the series part-human and part-Meduse, Binti is too complex in the sense that her return to Osemba threatens the imposition of noise into the closed system. As such, Dele marks her as strange. In Sara Ahmed's figuration of the stranger, the stranger is not that which is unidentifiable but rather that which is identified by being named as such – as an 'alien'. This is an othering process whereby the boundaries of the community and the self are erected through the delineation of that which is outside.[375] For Dele, Binti's complexity, her hybrid configuration, marks her as a stranger. She acts outside the kin-recognising performances of the Himba and risks the disruption of the community through the introduction of chaotic noise.

Binti's refusal to follow the divine trajectory of Himba life is even more keenly criticised by her community because of her role as a master harmonizer. In the novellas, a 'master harmonizer' is one who is able to produce a fractal balance within the chaotic sea of mathematics.[376] For the Himba, this ability is supposed to make her a natural peacekeeper. Accordingly, when she brings a perceived threat to the community, her sister criticises her by claiming that she brings '*dissonance*' (*Home*, p. 74, emphasis in original), a lack of harmony, the onset of disorder and chaos. Binti, as one who brings dissonance, threatens self-replicating pattern with randomness. Binti's sister's choice of the word 'dissonance', however, unintentionally subverts her criticism by gesturing to information theory's rendering of the positive disruption of systems. Herein lies the true potential of Binti's harmonising as that which may produce complex change for the Himba, rather than pure disorder. In information theory, the transmission of a message is always open to 'noise', to information that is not intended by the sender – that which Claude Shannon terms the 'equivocation.'[377] While the equivocation was initially taken to be that which disrupts a message's coherence, a change in perspective allowed for the equivocation to be conceptualised as a 'desirable' addition; that is, the 'equivocation in a message can sometimes lead the system to *reorganize itself at a higher level of complexity*.'[378] Essentially,

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[375] Ahmed refers to aliens in her introduction to the figuration of the stranger. Ahmed, *Strange Encounters : Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality* (New York: Routledge, 2000), pp. 1–18.
[376] The combination of the self-organisational structure of matter and the body extended beyond the bounds of the self is also central to Braidotti's critical posthuman subject. See Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, pp. 59–60.
[377] Hayles, *Chaos Bound*, pp. 55–56.
[378] Hayles, *Chaos Bound*, p. 56. Emphasis added.

this process describes the emergence of complex order through a fractal balance between pattern – intended information – and randomness – the equivocation. In being a master harmonizer, Binti brings dissonance only to induce a complex harmony – not the total chaos that her family fears.

Binti's ability to bring harmonising balance is gestured to by her fractal currents. These currents are described as being 'bright blue treelike branches that shifted in shape' (*Binti*, p. 41), fractal structures that indicate their complexity. Binti herself is explicit that such currents are the result of complex harmony: 'The blue current I'd conjured danced before me, the definition of harmony made from chaos' (*Binti*, p. 65). As in the cosmologies outlined by Eglash in *African Fractals*, in Binti's harmonising there is a balance between order and disorder, negative and positive feedback, that requires initial acts of dissonance.[379] Dele is correct, then, when he accuses Binti of being too complex, only not in the way he realises. Binti brings a dissonance that does not open the community to total chaos, but rather produces the conditions through which the behaviour instituting codes that inform the concept of Himba teleology can be disrupted. In this way, linearity and continuity are displaced, opening the community to possible futures. Binti's engagement with the outside disrupts the self-organising repetition of homeostasis and engenders an alternative process of *sympoiesis* – a becoming-with. Fractal complexity therefore informs an alternative praxis of being to the insularity and self-replication of the Himba, one that does not produce a binary between the local and the global – or, indeed, the intergalactic – but which facilitates a complex blend of fluid situatedness.

It is important to clarify at this point that the source of the novella's critique of the Himba is not their desire for cultural integrity as such, but rather their dogmatic insularity, which leaves no room for engagement with the outside world. In part, such an enclosed locality is the source of their own prejudice. The Himba hold a prejudiced view of the Enyi Zinariya, whom they dismiss as 'Desert people' (*Home*, p. 123), a view that Binti also expresses and which she must overcome. Later, when the Himba chief implies that Binti's Enyi Zinariya friend Mwinyi is a savage, Binti explains that such an opinion derives from an ignorance resulting from their insularity: 'He only knows the little we know here […] Forgive him for that' (*Night Masquerade*, p. 68). Crowley outlines that it is not the Himba's commitment to the local that is the source of their prejudice, but rather their failure to address

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[379] Eglash, pp. 175–76.

the cosmopolitical question of how disparate people may live together.[380] When Okwu's presence in Osemba reignites conflict between the Meduse and Khoush, for example, the Himba leaders renege on their promise to help Binti bring peace. Instead, they 'hope to simply avoid the conflict by retreating inward'; a tactic that ultimately fails when, '[d]espite their desire to be quarantined from the danger, much of the Himba village is destroyed'.[381] Their 'hyperlocal[ity]' ultimately 'limits the Himba's ability to understand and confront the larger forces and histories they inevitably become swept up in.'[382] The possibility of their increased engagement with such larger forces is gestured to at the end of *Night Masquerade*. The Himba leave the destroyed Osemba to travel with the Enyi Zinariya, a journey that will not sever their deep connection with tenets of Himba thought, but will instead disrupt their complete insularity. They begin a journey that will be akin to that of Binti's, in which intergalactic travel produces the possibility of forging kin, leading to system change.

Reclaiming Afropolitanism: Rural Africans in the Cosmos

The novellas further reflect Afropolitan concerns through their depiction of various African people and communities, who themselves continually mutate following a multidirectional flow of encounters. Afropolitanism itself is a somewhat controversial explanatory term that invites a range of critiques. Emma Dabiri levels several accusations at the movement: its commodification of African cultures; its emphasis of style over radical politics; its support of African 'progress' through 'Westernisation'; its tacit culpability in ongoing inequality by privileging the experience of wealthy 'Afropolitans'; and its universalising of this experience as the condition of being African.[383] Contemporary Afropolitanism is certainly open to commodification and Dabiri questions who benefits from the marketisation of a 'image of Africa' within Western nations.[384] Despite this, Afropolitanism as it is defined by Mbembe, 'in terms of movement, mobility, circulation', does not necessarily subsume African interests to capitalism, elide politics, or relegate the experience of rural Africans.[385] Afropolitanism

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[380] 'To say the Himba are not cosmopolitan, then, is not because they are entrenched in place or culturally static, but because they fail to engage the political aspect of such relations.' Crowley, p. 248.
[381] Crowley, p. 248.
[382] Crowley, p. 249.
[383] Emma Dabiri, 'Why I Am (Still) Not an Afropolitan', *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 28.1 (2016), 104–8.
[384] Dabiri, p. 105.
[385] Mbembe and Sarah Balakrishnan, 'Pan-African Legacies, Afropolitan Futures', *Transition*, 120 (2016), 28–37 (pp. 35-6).

instead stands for a mode of living always already underway in rural (as well as urban) areas of the continent. In Okorafor's novellas, Afropolitanism is explored through the Enyi Zinariya, who, dismissed as 'savages' and 'Desert people' (*Home*, p. 123), are the kind of rural community that detractors argue are ignored or supplanted by Afropolitan emphases on urban, multicultural experience. Yet, the Enyi Zinariya are themselves intergalactic Afropolitans. The salient event in their community's history is their chance encounter with the Zinariya aliens who gifted them the biological nanoids that remain in the blood of their descendants today. The Enyi Zinariya were greatly changed by this interaction; however, this process was not unidirectional – not, that is, an instance in which a rural African community is 'developed' by their interactions with a more 'advanced' outside.[386] As Binti herself notes, the encounter also '[m]ade the Zinariya more' (*Night Masquerade*, p. 168). Similarly, Binti's entanglement with the microbes of New Fish is a mutual process of change. As the Miri-12 cyborg ship explains to Binti: 'Your body is partially me […] And in turn, I am partially you' (*Night Masquerade*, p. 161). The changes that New Fish undergoes through her interaction with a young African girl are themselves novel. 'Most Miri 12s never do this', she tells Binti. 'We don't become more' (*Night Masquerade*, p. 157). Within the novellas, rural African people are depicted as active agents in an emerging and chaotic world.[387]

Throughout the series, Binti induces change to the cultures of those with whom she makes kin. In *Binti*, it is discovered that the *otjize* has healing properties for the Meduse. As they return to their home planet with some of Binti's homemade *otjize*, they too will become 'sons and daughters of the soil' (*Binti*, p. 47). Life for the Meduse also becomes trans-corporeally connected to the land of Osemba, which imbricates them within the kin-recognising terms of the Himba. Significantly, the transference of *otjize* becomes a potent symbol for the affirmative ethics that can emerge through kin-building processes of sympoiesis. Following the return of the Meduse chief's stinger, the point of reattachment

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[386] Dabiri makes this accusation against the kind of Afropolitanism introduced by Taiye Selasi, whereby 'African progress is measured by the extent to which it can reproduce a Western lifestyle, now without physically having to be in the West.' Dabiri, p. 106; For Selasi's Afropolitanism, see Taiye Selasi, 'Bye-Bye Babar | The LIP Magazine', *Bye-Bye Babar*, 2005 <http://thelip.robertsharp.co.uk/?p=76> [accessed 17 January 2020].
[387] Mbembe's argument that *all* Africans have always already been active agents of change *in* the world is central to his concept of Afropolitanism. 'Let's take the modern world. Africa has been a major platform and also an agent in the making of the modern world order. And in that sense, it seems to me that what it has become can hardly be understood outside of its entanglement with multiple elsewheres—an entanglement that has produced different outcomes, and not all of them are necessarily catastrophic. So my take in this is that these entanglements need to be the starting point of any epistemological proposition we want to make about this region of our planet.' Mbembe and Balakrishnan, p. 31.

shows 'a scar that would always remind it of what human beings of Oomza Uni had done to it for the sake of research and academics' (*Binti*, p. 84). Binti applies *otjize*, however, returning the tentacle 'to its full royal translucence' (*Binti*, p. 84). The transference of the *otjize* recognises the affirmative potential of a connection between Binti and chief, Himba and Meduse. The connection erases the trace of violence marked on the chief's flesh, indicating a relational, ontological ethics 'based on the praxis of constructing positivity, thus propelling new social conditions and relations into being, out of injury and pain.'[388] Instead of avoiding conflict, Binti harmonises intergalactic Afropolitan connections.

Afropolitanism in the novellas is therefore not a process through which the worldviews and cultures of rural Africans are subsumed into 'newer' forms that germinate within urban spaces – a process of 'detribalization'.[389] Rather, Okorafor depicts the fluidity of all cultures through multidirectional networks. The Enyi Zinariya disrupt linear temporalities of progress. The biological nanoids within their bodies are at once supremely advanced and centuries old. They also disrupt linear spatial movements by being alien technology that is now indigenous to the Enyi Zinariya. The Enyi Zinariya community is thus situated within the many binaries that Dabiri argues are erected by Afropolitanism – 'tribal' versus urban, old versus new, insular verses connected. As a result, they are situated within what Mbembe terms 'emerging time', a nonlinear temporality that consists of 'an *interlocking* of presents, pasts, and futures that retain their depths of other presents, pasts, and futures, each age bearing, altering, and maintaining the previous one.'[390] The activation of the Zinariya nanoids within Binti's body is therefore a ritual that places her within this emerging time, as well as connecting her to the multidirectional flows between the African continent, the planet and the galaxy which produced the Enyi Zinariya. Importantly, however, these flows also occur *within* the continent. Binti changes just as much as a result of her interaction with the Enyi Zinariya, a rural dwelling African community, as she does from her travels across the galaxy. Mbembe notes that Afropolitanism must concern itself with how 'the traffic between the urban and the rural has intensified, and risen to a point where the rural is in the urban and the urban is in the rural'.[391] Binti's multiplicity places this phenomenon on an intergalactic scale so that the rural is as much in the cosmos as the cosmos is in the rural.

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[388] Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, p. 129.
[389] Mbembe and Balakrishnan, p. 37.
[390] Mbembe, p. 16. Emphasis in original.
[391] Mbembe and Balakrishnan, p. 37.

Mbembe's Afropolitan description of African social formations emerging through fluid encounters is aimed at disrupting colonial narratives of progress, which posited African cultures as primordial stages in humanity's teleological development.[392] The entanglement of pasts, presents and futures instead opens African social formations to complexity – to a variety of trajectories which produce potential futures that cannot be predetermined. This stochastic rather than determined future is gestured to by Okorafor shortly after Binti's genetic code is spliced with that of the Meduse, but before she has become aware of this change:

> I noticed that my hair had grown about an inch since I'd left home. This was odd. I looked at the thick wiry new growth, admiring its dark brown color before pressing the *otjize* into it making it red. There was a tingling sensation on my scalp as I worked the *otjize* in and my head ached. I was exhausted. I held my *otjize*-covered hands to my nose and inhaled the scent of home. (*Binti*, p. 71)

The growth of Binti's hair and her tingling scalp are evidence of an already-present change in her genetics that points to a future change in her physiology – the growth of *okuoko* – that is currently beyond her consciousness. At the same time, the past exists as a similar absent-present through her application of the *otjize*, an act that both rearticulates her trans-corporeal entanglement with Osemba and highlights her distance from this location. The moment captures what Mbembe describes as 'the present *as experience of time*', a presence experienced as a series of absences: 'absence of those presences that are no longer so and that one remembers (the past), and the absence of those others that are yet to come and are anticipated (the future).'[393] Binti experiences a dual haunting of a present that is not past, as well as a future that has not arrived and yet is anticipated by her body through the tingling of her scalp. There is a possibility of a future that is beyond full comprehension, while there is no total erasure of the past. This moment captures what Puar terms an 'antecedent temporality', which 'highlights the ghosts of the future that we can already sniff, ghosts that are waiting for us, *that usher us into futurities*.'[394] For Puar, antecedent temporalities are rich in political potential, opening possible futures that cannot be easily predicted. The tingling of

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[392] Mbembe, p. 16.
[393] Mbembe, p. 16.
[394] Puar, p. xx.

Binti's scalp signifies an antecedent future, ushering her forward, without situating her change within a linear narrative of development.

IV. Communication and Cultural Negentropy

Binti-as-Parasite

As an Afropolitan out in the universe, Binti does not open only her own future to possibility, but also induces change to the cultures of the various human and nonhuman communities she meets throughout the novellas. In this sense, she is akin to Michel Serres's concept of the cultural parasite, who induces otherness or randomness in order to produce cultural change.[395] White describes the parasite in the vocabulary of complexity and the notion of order emerging out of chaos, subsequently arguing that the parasite is one who injects randomness into self-replicating systems of discourse. The parasite thus disrupts 'the routine exchange of messages' that destines communication to homeostasis, the 'antechamber of death'.[396] As a master harmonizer, Binti is able to communicate across perceived cultural and species difference, making kin and facilitating the emergence of newness through the disruption of the self-replication of cultural homeostasis.

Binti's interactions with various other cultures often result in the negentropic effects of the equivocation, of productive dissonance. At times throughout the novellas, Binti wonders about the extent of her friend Okwu's involvement in the murder of her companions on the ship to Oomza Uni in *Binti*. She comprehends this involvement only by recognising the influence she has had on him: 'I understood that when Okwu had participated in the killing, it had been bound by the strong Meduse thread of duty, culture, and, tradition… until my *otjize* showed it something outside of itself' (*Home*, p. 45). The 'strong Meduse thread of duty, culture, and tradition' is the Meduse rendering of the theodicy of the Himba, the behaviour-orienting codes that introduce kin-recognising behaviours amongst the group. To be Meduse is to act according to such duties. The *otjize* is an outside that disrupts the closed culture of the Meduse that had compelled Okwu to act in certain ways. Following his time with Binti, Okwu's connection to the Meduse and his strong sense of duty and tradition remain; however, he is no longer conditioned solely by those terms. When Binti is murdered

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[395] See White, p. 268.
[396] White, p. 268.

in the crossfire of the Meduse-Khoush war, for example, he stays with Binti's body rather than joining the Meduse in their ongoing space battle. In Mbembe's definition of Afropolitanism, the concept is defined as 'the presence of the elsewhere in the here', which, as I have noted above, involves Africa *in* the world, as well as the world in Africa.[397] Mbembe's words echo those of chaos theory, whereby outside noise disrupts systemic repetition resulting in the potential self-organisation of a system at a higher level of complexity. For Okwu and the Meduse, Binti is an outsider who brings otherness, randomness, to the once bounded Meduse culture. The *otjize* is the outside that alters that which is within, cultural dissonance as the precursor to change.

Okorafor ironically ties Binti's role as a parasite, as one who induces systemic change, to the revolutionary power of the Night Masquerade. In so doing, she further highlights how the novella's explorations of cultural negentropy refuse a binary between tradition and cultural transformation. Following Binti's death, her community identify her as a Night Masquerade figure:

> When Binti was ready, she was placed on top of the costume of the Night Masquerade […] both Chief Kapika and Dele felt it belonged to Binti now, anyway. Binti was change, she was revolution, she was heroism. She was more Night Masquerade than anyone had ever been. (*Night Masquerade*, p. 137)

While the Himba have consistently criticised her actions for threatening dissonance, in this moment they reify Binti as a masquerade and, in so doing, they acknowledge her potential for revolutionary change *within the cultural terms of the Himba.* Binti-as-masquerade is akin to the parasite, the 'personification of revolution' (*Night Masquerade*, p. 56), which induces the possibility of systemic cultural change. Binti brings productive dissonance to recursivity and, through her role as a harmoniser – her ability to '[h]armonize the Khoush, Meduse and the Himba […] and […] the Enyi Zinariya' (*Night Masquerade*, p. 81) – she facilitates complex mutations to cultural systems.

A key aspect of Binti's role as masquerade-cum-parasite is her ability to produce communication across difference. When Binti is encamped in her room during the Meduse

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[397] Mbembe qtd. in Balakrishnan, 'The Afropolitan Idea: New Perspectives on Cosmopolitanism in African Studies', *History Compass*, 15.2 (2017), 1–11 (p. 1).

attack on the ship to Oomza Uni she harmonises one of her fractal currents through her *edan*, which connects to the Meduse and allows her to communicate with them:[398]

> I looked at my cramped hands. From within it, from my *edan*, possibly the strongest current I had ever produced streamed in jagged connected bright blue branches. It slowly etched and lurched through the closed door, a line of connected bright blue treelike branches that shifted in shape but never broke their connection. The current was touching the Meduse. Connecting them to me. (*Binti*, p. 41)

Binti's *edan* is in part a communication device that she activates by calling a current, facilitating her conversation with the Meduse. It is through these means that Binti learns of the theft of the Meduse stinger and, eventually, how she is able to harmonise peace between the Meduse and the Oomza professors. Allowing her to communicate across difference, the *edan* enables Binti to act in the role of parasite by disrupting homeostasis. As White explains, with homeostasis, the 'system endlessly reiterates, endlessly ratifies itself. But such a system, however self-coherent or optimally efficient, is nevertheless doomed to entropic degradation. Like any closed system, it can only run down.'[399] Change is required for systemic maintenance. The fractal current that Binti calls through the *edan* facilitates communication and allows for what Shannon termed an equivocation between the Meduse and the professors in *Binti*. It imposes dissonance into the two previously closed systems in order to generate new meaning. After the Oomza professors agree to return the Chief's stinger, they offer Okwu the chance to become the first of the species to study with them. As well as this innovation to the University, the Meduse chief, delighted with the offer, states: 'For the first time in my own lifetime, I am learning something completely different outside of core belief' (*Binti*, p. 79). Communication between the professors and the Meduse thus facilitates the introduction of noise into the two systems and expands the sociogenic codes that constructs the consciousness through which the chief comprehends reality.

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[398] Okorafor's naming Binti's mysterious object an *edan* is significant. The object, Binti learns, is Zinariya technology that was left by the aliens before they vacated earth. A 'stellated cube' (*Home*, p. 108), the *edan* is itself made up of 'fractals of fine grooves and lines' (*Home*, p. 44.). As discussed above, fractal shapes emerge through the recursive iteration of complex systems, the motor of deterministic chaos. Fittingly, then, all that Binti knows about the *edan* is that she is 'working with the unpredictable' (*Home*, p. 11). Okorafor may have taken the name for the *edan* from the Yoruba *edan* sculptures, which, as Eglash notes, themselves have a fractal structure. Eglash, p. 112.

[399] White, pp. 267–68.

Communication is also a vital element in the history of the Enyi Zinariya. After Binti activates the nanoids in her body, she gains access to the 'Collective' (*Home*, p. 139), a storehouse for the ancestral memory of the community. Through these memories, Binti learns the story of first contact between the Enyi Zinariya and the Zinariya aliens, who first appeared to a young girl named Kande. It is Kande's willingness to communicate with the aliens that leads to the formation of the Enyi Zinariya as they are in the series. As the elders of Kande's community themselves note: 'let's be honest, what would we have done? Fled? Fainted? Tried to shoot them? But she learned to speak with them, gained their trust' (*Night Masquerade*, p. 18). Rather than treating the aliens as a threat, Kande, a proto-Binti figure, learns to communicate with them. In so doing, she produces a relationship with the aliens that alters the kin-recognising performative behaviours of her community. When the alien Zinariya arrive, Kande's community is strongly patriarchal. Her prospects are subordinated to those of her two younger brothers and she faces an unwanted arranged marriage. In Binti's present, however, the Enyi Zinariya community are matriarchal, perhaps as a result of Kande's role in making contact with the aliens. The Enyi Zinariya's culture is changed through the communication with the Zinariya. While randomness, an equivocation, 'may destroy one system, this destruction permits the emergence of another, potentially more complex system in its place.'[400] In the case of the Enyi Zinariya, Kande's willingness to communicate allows for the introduction of an equivocation which leads to the production of a Binti-like-harmony and subsequent evolution.

The Himba Deep Culture and The Concept of 'Home'

Okorafor shapes the reorganisation of systems into an Afropolitan conception of culture defined by flows and networks. This is most overtly realised in the concept of the Himba 'deep culture' (*Night Masquerade*, p. 116). When the Khoush-Meduse conflict comes to Osemba in *Night Masquerade*, Binti asks the Himba council of elders to call an *Okuruwo*, a ritual based around the 'sacred fire', which calls on the Himba deep culture to protect the community when under threat.[401] While deep culture is normally only called by a collection

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[400] White, p. 268.

[401] *Okuruwo* is the name for a holy fire that Himba people keep burning at all times. David Campion and Sandra Shields briefly discuss what they learn of the *Okuruwo* during their time spent with the Himba, writing that 'the holy fire was where the men talked to ancestors.' David Campion and Sandra Shields, *Where Fire Speaks: A Visit with the Himba* (London: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2002), p. 152.

of elders, after the Himba council renege on their promise to attend the *Okuruwo*, Binti realises that she constitutes a 'collective' (*Night Masquerade*, p. 116) herself and can therefore call on deep culture 'alone'. By harmonising a current and grabbing at its fractal lightning shape, Binti harnesses the power of deep culture and achieves the promise of peace between the Khoush and Meduse:

> ["]Meduse tradition is one of honor. Khoush tradition is one of respect. I am master harmonizer of the Osemba Himba." I raised my hands, the currents swirling into balls in both hands like blue suns. I held one toward [the Khoush king] Goldie. "The one who represents the Khoush." I held a hand toward the Meduse chief. "The one person who represents the Meduse." I steadied myself. I pulled from deep within me, from the earth beneath my feet, from what I could reach beyond the Earth above. Because I was a master harmonizer and my path was through mathematics, I took what came and felt it as math, and when I spoke, I breathed it out. "Please," I said, the words coming from my mouth cool in my throat, pouring over my tongue and lips. I was doing it; I was speaking the words to power. I was uttering deep culture. "End this," I said, my voice full and steady. "End this now." (*Night Masquerade*, p. 117)

By harmonising a current from within the univocal force of mathematics, Binti facilitates communication between the Meduse and the Khoush, which are nonetheless connected through their immanence to the mathematical sea. As between the Meduse and the Oomza professors in *Binti*, here, communication forges harmony where there may have been pure chaos: 'There's been terror and death and destruction, but I want to pull harmony out of that now' (*Night Masquerade*, p. 81). Himba deep culture is not a static tradition located in a singular origin and sedimented through history. Instead, it is defined by the complex entanglements which engender bifurcation points to cultural systems. Deep culture is therefore analogous to the deep structure of chaotic systems, a highly complex order beneath the apparent chaos of unpredictable trajectories. In this context, the Himba chief's earlier rejection of Binti now rings hollow: 'Your lineage here is dead and you've bonded with the savage other part of your bloodline… why shouldn't we simply run you out of Osemba?' (*Night Masquerade*, p. 80). The chief's notion of lineage is based on a concept of linearity that is at odds with the representation of deep culture as nonlinear flows of chaotic becoming.

Binti's mutations are not perversions, but rather effects of the process of the Himba deep culture itself.

Okorafor's representation of deep culture produces a radical revaluation of the notion of 'Home'. For the Himba, home is tied to Osemba, to a singular location to which all Himba can trace their roots. However, the chapter in which Binti taps into deep culture is called 'Homegoing'. If deep culture is itself the complex unfolding of nonlinear systems, then the process of going home is not a return to an originary location. Instead, home is conceptualised as a floating domicile that itself changes with the movement and flows of open communities. This is supported by further events in 'Homegoing'. At the end of the chapter, Binti is killed in the Meduse-Khoush crossfire. Throughout the novellas, death is not an end but rather a precursor to change. For example, Binti refers to the experience of having her DNA spliced with the Meduse as 'dying' (*Binti*, p. 66). Later, she explicitly highlights how symbolic death leads to change: 'drowning in the waters of death gave me new life. Not drowning in it, carried by it' (*Home*, p. 148). Following her literal death in 'Homegoing', Binti will eventually be reborn now paired with New Fish, the final iteration of her recursive posthuman mutations. Death-as-change is also hinted at by the Night Masquerade – ever the harbinger of change in the novellas – who says to Binti 'death is always news' (*Night Masquerade*, pp. 56-7), words which return to her just before her death at the close of 'Homegoing'. That Binti dies at the end of 'Homegoing' thus highlights that the process of going home is one and the same with death as a precursor to change. As with deep culture, to go home is to engage in sympoieitic processes with those with whom one has made kin. Homegoing, then, stands for an Afropolitan conception of people and societies informed by complexity:

> all humans participate in a complex order, rich in unexpected turns, meanders and changes of course, without this implying their necessary abolition in an absence of a centre. […] Fluctuations and indeterminacy do not necessarily amount to a lack of order. Every representation of an unstable world cannot automatically be subsumed under the heading of "chaos".[402]

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[402] Mbembe, p. 8.

The lack of a centre for cultures is not pure disorder or randomness, the absence of pattern, but rather affirms a notion of home that is defined as complex fluctuations.

Okorafor's rendering of death and rebirth as a recursive process of change once more situates negentropic mutation in fractal terms. I have argued that the sociogenically encoded conscious experience of what it is to be for a group of people that share a central mythos – that which determines that group's referent-we – experiences mutation through the process of making kin. That such negentropic change is represented as recursive processes of death and rebirth reflexively refers to Wynter's sociogenic principle. The human, as *homo narrans*, is not solely biocentric, but rather emerges through the biocultural entanglement of descriptive statements and neurobiological structures. Wynter outlines that, as such, humans are not 'primarily *born of the womb*', but rather 'we are both *initiated* and *reborn* as fictively instituted inter-altruistic kin-recognizing members of each such *symbolically re-encoded genre-specific referent-we*.'[403] Through each symbolic (and one actual) death and rebirth, Binti is reborn through her imbrication with fresh sociogenic codes that result from her entanglements with her expanded community of kin. The recursive entrenchment of a singular way of being and acting is disrupted through the introduction of noise, which facilitates the proliferation of alternative behavioural pathways. At the end of *Night Masquerade*, on hearing the extent of her changes, Binti states: 'I *like* who I am. I *love* my family. I wasn't running away from home. I don't *want* to change, to grow! Nothing… everything… I don't want all this… this weirdness. It's too heavy. I just want to *be*' (*Night Masquerade*, p. 193, emphasis in original). The concept of order out of chaos means that to '*be*', which Binti so covets, is, as Prigogine and Stengers argue, inseparable from becoming.[404] Complexity and the stochastic unfolding of nonlinear systems inform multiple praxes of being that render the posthuman in fluid terms. Binti's mutations are not a break either from her home or from being but rather a transformation of both through the networks and flows of non-unitary becoming. Homegoing gestures to a concept of being as ongoing processes of change, of symbolic death and rebirth, of fractal complexity through a balance between order and disorder.

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[403] Wynter and McKittrick, p. 34. Emphases in original.
[404] 'In our view, Being and Becoming are not to be opposed to one another: they express two aspects of the same reality.' Prigogine and Stengers, p. 310.

Conclusion

In 2019, Okorafor described the *Binti* novellas in recursive terms: 'African girl leaves home. African girl comes home. African girl becomes home.'[405] The three novellas make a feedback loop recalling the dynamics of complex systems. Encased within this fractal structure are infinite possibilities for Binti's becoming through kin-making, possibilities that do not replace her connection to cultural heritage. Towards the end of *Night Masquerade*, Okorafor provides a moment in which Binti is situated within Mbembe's concept of emerging time as the copresence of pasts and futures situated within the present. Binti sits in her room at Oomza Uni and applies *otjize* – made from Oomza planet clay – onto an arm which has been newly regrown by New Fish's microbes, the 'first time it had ever had *otjize* on it' (*Night Masquerade*, p. 202). Hanging in the room is the Night Masquerade costume, which is both central to Himba culture and which also heralds change. In this moment, Binti is surrounded both by her past and her potential future. Significantly, as she applies her *otjize* in a familiar routine, but on to a new body, she imagines the new astrolabe that she is going to build, which will be like 'no astrolabe any Himba has ever made' (*Night Masquerade*, p. 201). Astrolabes are ubiquitous devices made by the Himba and which contain information pertaining to one's 'entire life' (*Binti*, p. 13), as well as the 'forecasts' of one's 'future' (*Night Masquerade*, p. 42). When Binti realises in *Night Masquerade* that her astrolabe has stopped working because of her changes, she laments that she has now lost her 'entire identity' (p. 42). However, at the end of the series, with Binti comfortable in her multiplicity, she plans to make a new astrolabe, one that the reader imagines will speak to no single identity, nor contain hard predictions for her future. Instead, this astrolabe will express possible antecedent futures: affirmative possibilities that are induced through sympoieitic becoming and yet are, like the trajectory of chaotic systems, indeterminable in advance.

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[405] Nnedi Okorafor (@Nnedi, 13 January 2019), 'The Binti omnibus will be released February 5, 2019 (DAW Books). It includes a brand new Binti story called "Sacred Fire". African Girl leaves home. African girl comes homes. African girl becomes home. #InterstellarTravel #Africanfuturism (tweet) <https://twitter.com/nnedi/status/1084249163272019968> [accessed 14 January 2019].

Chapter Four: Non-Originary Origins and Distributed Cognitive Assemblages in Anthony Joseph's *The African Origins of UFOs*

I. Introduction

In a personal exploration of origins and identity, poet Dionne Brand describes an imaginary 'Door of No Return' that exists as a threshold through which Caribbean people's ancestors were forcibly transported by way of the Middle Passage:

> Having no name to call on was having no past; having no past pointed to the
> fissure between the past and the present. That fissure represented the Door of
> No Return: that place where our ancestors departed one world for another; the
> Old World for the New.[406]

Passing through the Door of No Return denies Caribbean people a site of origin – what Martinican poet and critic Édouard Glissant terms a 'cultural hinterland'.[407] Writing that 'too much has been made of origins', Brand produces a cartography of her identity by tracing its movement through her experiences, encounters, imaginings and writings.[408] In this process, Brand locates origins in the absence of origins: 'The journey', she writes, 'is the destination'.[409]

For Glissant, one primary task of the Caribbean artist is to creatively explore and produce what counts as history for communities that came together following the fissure between past and present described by Brand. Colonial discourses posit the concept of a 'single History', an empirical and linear path of development from an originary moment of genesis to the present.[410] Caribbean people however 'came together in the context of shock, contraction, painful negation, and explosive forces', a phenomenon that prevents even the pretence of a historical 'continuum'.[411] The passage through the Door of No Return denies

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[406] Dionne Brand, *A Map to the Door of No Return: Notes to Belonging* (Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2001), p. 5.
[407] Édouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*, trans. by J. Michael Dash (Charlottesville: University of Press Virginia, 1996), p. 103.
[408] Brand, p. 69.
[409] Brand, p. 203.
[410] Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, p. 66.
[411] Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, p. 62.

Caribbean people a history, producing an 'eras[ure] of the collective memory' that Glissant describes as creating the experience of 'nonhistory'.[412] In this context, Caribbean writers may produce a '*prophetic vision of the past*', a creative reconstruction of history.[413]

Anthony Joseph's science fiction novel *The African Origins of UFOs* (2008) is just such a reconstruction of origins and history. Joseph's inspiration for the novel was the story of Daaga, an African slave conscripted into the British West Indian Army stationed in Trinidad, who in 1837 set fire to his barracks and 'set off to walk back to Africa.'[414] Imagining that Daaga and his people fled Trinidad in a space ship, Joseph figures 'their journey as a metaphor for black people trying to find their roots.'[415] This search for roots, however, is not a backwards journey towards a point of singular origin. The novel opens in the year 3054 on a distant planet named Kunu Supia. Similar to the Marryshevites in Hopkinson's *Midnight Robber*, in this future, a largely Trinidadian community has fled to a distant planet following the flooding of its island home. Events take place in this future, as well as in present day Trinidad and in a mythological past Ïerè – the Meso-Indian name for Trinidad. Recalling the fractal cosmologies discussed in Chapter Three, the novel's structure is recursive. Beginning in the future, *African Origins* moves through a section set in the present followed by one set in the past. Joseph then iterates this process eight times to produce a novel of twenty four sections made up of eight sets of three distinct chapters each set in one of the three space-time locations. As in *Binti*, the novel disrupts notions of singular origins or linear development. The recursive structure of the text precludes the possibility that Daaga's search for roots will be a simple return to a site of an originary beginning. Drawing, at least implicitly, on Brand's Door of No Return, as well as on the homonym of roots and routes, Joseph locates the origins of a Black community within nonlinear processes.[416]

The novel's narrative frame determines its recursive structure. In the opening section set on Kunu Supia, an unnamed narrator takes the contraband drug 'Ceboletta X' that is

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[412] Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, p. 62.

[413] Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, p. 64. Emphasis in original.

[414] Lauri Ramey highlights Daaga's story as Joseph's inspiration for *African Origins* in her introduction to the novel. Lauri Ramey, 'Introduction', in *The African Origins of UFOs* (Cambridge: Salt Publishing, 2006), pp. xi–xx.

[415] Anthony Joseph, qtd. in Ramey.

[416] The adoption of 'routes' as central to Caribbean and African-American subjectivity can be found in the work of Édouard Glissant, Stuart Hall, Paul Gilroy and others. See Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, trans. by Betsy Wing (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2010); Stuart Hall, 'Creolité and the Process of Creolization', in *Creolizing Europe: Legacies and Transformations*, ed. by Encarnacion Gutierrez Rodriguez and Shirley Anne Tate (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015), pp. 12–25; Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London: Verso, 1993).

'known to cause genetic flashbacks'.[417] The narrative events are subsequently 'spun from fragments of genetic memory' (*African Origins*, p. 34); they constitute a web of memories that is embedded within the narrator's body.[418] In this chapter, I argue that these memories of the past, present and future represent that community's 'origins', through which there emerges what Glissant terms a Caribbean 'collective consciousness' for the ancestral community.[419]

In his depiction of non-originary origins and the emergence of a collective consciousness, Joseph combines the insights of Caribbean art and scholarship with contemporary models of cognition that describe the experience of consciousness as an emergent phenomenon that arises from cognitive processes.[420] One contention in this chapter is that the interaction of fragmented ancestral memories within the textual space of *African Origins* constitutes a literary imagination of cognition. Each individual memory is one component that combines with other components to form a wider cognitive system. Here, I am once again drawing on Maturana and Varela's concept of autopoiesis, which I discussed in Chapter One. To recall, the theory of autopoiesis describes cognition as consisting of self-contained feedback loop processes within the mind. Varela, Evan Thompson and Eleanor Rosch conceive of the mind as a system consisting of sub-systems. A cognitive system is constituted by the networked interaction, described as the 'global coherence', of these locally acting, autopoietic systems.[421] As Thompson indicates, this is a relational model of cognition: 'part and whole are completely interdependent: an emergent whole is produced by a continuous interaction of its parts, but these parts cannot be characterised independently from the whole.'[422] I regard the recursive structure of *African Origins* as a *literary representation*

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[417] Anthony Joseph, *The African Origins of UFOS* (Cambridge: Salt Publishing, 2006), p. 8. All in-text citations from this edition.

[418] The concept of genetic memory enables Joseph's imagination of the narrator's body as a storehouse for ancestral memories. Despite memories being described as 'genetic', these ancestors are not restricted to biological family. Rather, Joseph imagines a wider set of ancestors based on community belonging.

[419] Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, pp. 62–63.

[420] Hayles describes emergence as 'the idea that the system will beget something that has not been previously planned.' Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, p. 11. As I explain below, consciousness is therefore not the totality of cognition, but rather one emergent product of the processes within a cognitive system.

[421] Francisco J. Varela, Evan Thompson and Eleanor Rosch, *The Embodied Mind: Cognitive Science and Human Experience* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1991), p. 88. For a full description of emergence, see Varela, Thompson and Rosch, pp. 85-100.

[422] Thompson, 'Life and Mind: From Autopoiesis to Neurophenomenology. A Tribute to Francisco Varela', *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences*, 3 (2004), 381–98 (p. 391). The operational closure of autopoietic systems – as systems where each constitutive part is produced and productive of each other part – is the definition of autonomy in autopoiesis: 'In an autonomous system, every constituent process is conditioned by some other process of the system; hence, if we analyse the enabling conditions for any constituent process of the system, we will always be led to other processes in the system.' Thompson and Mog Stapleton, 'Making Sense of Sense-Making: Reflections on Enactive and Extended Mind Theories', *Topoi*, 28 (2009), 23–30 (p. 24).

of autopoiesis as the recursive, feedback loop structure of the mind. Indeed, in her introduction to the novel, Lauri Ramey describes the text's organisation as 'systems within systems', a '*network* of parts rather than a vertical progression of events and actions'.[423] The flashbacks to the narrator's ancestral memories comprise a network of fragments that, like the sub-systems of the autopoietic mind, globally cohere. Analogous to the mind, the novel is a larger system constituted by sub-systems.

African Origins's autopoietic structure indicates that the novel represents the processes through which there emerges a collective consciousness for the narrator's transgenerational community. The concept of emergence is key here. Emergence in cognition is the phenomenon by which dynamic connections between feedback-loop processes produce something greater than the sum of their parts.[424] Autopoiesis as a model for cognition is taken up by critical posthumanist thinkers in part because it precludes the possibility of locating a stable self within cognitive structures. In Varela, Thompson and Rosch's words, 'the self or cognizing subject is fundamentally fragmented, divided, or nonunified.'[425] A conscious experience of self, or subjectivity, is an emergent effect of cognitive processes and, as such, it has no primordial origin.[426] Joseph draws on, but also importantly extends, these insights of cognitive science through his depiction of the emergence of a *collective* consciousness. Situated within Caribbean subjects' experience of nonhistory, Joseph shapes autopoietic models of cognition into an exploration of the emergence of a collective sense of self for the Trinidadian community in the novel; that is, he depicts the transgenerational processes through which a communal experience of self develops. This collective consciousness is not an essential communal identity, but is instead emergent, contingent on ancestral histories across time and space.

Significantly, each of the components of the novel's networked structure – the fragments of the narrator's memories – consist of depictions of embodied and embedded histories. Accordingly, I describe these memories as representing 'distributed cognitive

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[423] Ramey, pp. xv, xiv.
[424] Hayles follows the trajectory of cybernetics as it moves from homeostasis, through autopoiesis to virtuality, when 'self-organization began to be understood not merely as the (re)production of internal organization but as the "springboard to emergence", which is, simply put, the idea that the system will beget something that has not been previously planned.' Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, p. 11.
[425] Varela, Thompson, and Rosch, p. xvi.
[426] The contention that consciousness is emergent subverts the liberal humanist view of subjectivity. Hayles puts its bluntly: 'the posthuman view considers consciousness, regarded as the seat of human identity in the Western tradition […], as an epiphenomenon, as an evolutionary upstart trying to claim that it is the whole show when in actuality it is only a minor sideshow. Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, p. 3.

assemblages.'[427] Hayles produces this concept of distributed cognitive assemblages through her engagement with theories of the embodied mind. Models of embodied cognition developed beyond earlier autopoietic models, which tended to repeat a mind-body dualism through their focus on the 'closed' autopoietic processes of the mind. Hayles explains, however, that 'higher consciousness' is not the totality of cognition, but is instead 'enhanc[ed] and support[ed]' by 'the ways in which the embodied subject is embedded and immersed in environments that function as distributed cognitive systems'.[428] The emergent phenomenon of consciousness is also conditional on the embodied subject's entanglement with its environment. I argue, then, that the memories that constitute the components of *African Origins*'s wider cognitive structure depict histories of embodied and embedded being for an ancestral community; that is, each fragmented memory consists of distributed cognitive assemblages. The novel is obsessed with bodies and bodily movement: there are ecstatic scenes of dancing in jazz bars; bloody altercations between rivals – most graphically in the dangerous world of Kunu Supia; performances during mas festivals; possession ceremonies; and frequent references to the consumption of food. These memories from the past, present and future represent the configuration of distributed cognitive assemblages that agglutinate within the novel's wider structure to represent the processual origins for the transgenerational community's emergent collective consciousness.

That such a collectivity is emergent means that Joseph does not reify a singular Caribbean identity. I conceive of the novel as a posthuman origin story for an internally differentiated and perpetually differentiating transversal subjectivity. In *Posthuman Knowledge* (2019), Rosi Braidotti describes the emergence of collectives through the configuration of assemblages, rather than through shared attributes:

Posthuman subjectivity does not refer to "the people" as a unitary category, self-constituted as "we, the people". […] A people is rather a heterogeneous multiplicity that cannot coalesce into unity on pre-given grounds, such as the claims to ethnic purity that have become a defining feature of both historical and contemporary authoritarian, nationalist and nativist political regimes. A people […] is the result of praxis, a collective engagement to produce different assemblages. We are not one and

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[427] Hayles, *Unthought*, p. 2.
[428] Higher consciousness 'refers to thoughts and capabilities . . . such as rationality, the ability to formulate and manipulate abstract concepts, linguistic competencies, and so on'. Hayles, *Unthought*, p. 2.

the same, but we can interact together.[429]

African Origins is an aesthetic attempt to capture the complex praxes through which an assemblage of heterogeneous multiplicity is configured. Within the textual space of the novel, *a* people emerges through the networked interaction of distributed cognitive assemblages.

The following three sections of this chapter are each dedicated to analyses of the narrator's ancestral memories that are represented in the text. In the first of these, 'Distributed Cognitive Assemblages, *Ase* and Performance', I analyse various performances within *African Origins*, which I describe as distributed cognitive assemblages. These performances, which include a mas festival in Trinidad, a jazz performance on Kunu Supia and a possession ceremony in ancient Ïerè, are linked through their explicit or implicit engagement with an African spiritual legacy, in particular the Yoruba Orisa religion as it exists in a transmuted form in Trinidad.[430] The concept of *ase* – a univocal force in Yoruban mythology that derives from the supreme being Olódùmarè – is invoked by these performances, binding them across time and space. Through *ase*, Joseph extends cognitive science through reimagining the emergence of consciousness as a transgenerational process. Following this, in 'Extended Bodies: Memory Recollection and the Caribbean Environment', I focus on Joseph's depiction of embodied cognition, particularly focusing on the entanglement of the novel's ancestral community and the Trinidadian landscape. In this aspect, *African Origins* extends a tradition within Caribbean literature and thinking that centres the role of island landscapes in the development of a Caribbean identity.[431] Contingent becomings with the environment render the Caribbean landscape as a constituent component within the novel's distributed cognitive assemblages. I turn finally, in 'Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea: Metafiction and the Role of the Caribbean Artist in the Emergence of a Collective Consciousness', to an analysis of one

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[429] Braidotti, *Posthuman Knowledge*, p. 52. Underline in original.

[430] Several researchers have acknowledged the influence of the Yoruba religion on Trinidadian Orisha worship. See Funso Aiyejina and Rawle Gibbons, 'Orisa (Orisha) Tradition in Trinidad', *Caribbean Quarterly*, 45.4 (1999), 35–50; Frances Henry, *Reclaiming African Religions in Trinidad: The Socio-Political Legitimation of the Orisha and Spiritual Baptist Faiths* (Kingston: The University of West India Press, 2003).

[431] Both Césaire's 'Notebook of a Return to My Native Land' (1939), an undoubted influence on *African Origins*, and various works of Glissant place such an entanglement between person and environment at the centre of aesthetic figurations of a Caribbean consciousness in the wake of colonisation and the slave trade. Lorna Burns has an excellent essay that discusses the role of landscape in Caribbean literature and that makes frequent references to both Césaire and Glissant. I also draw variously on Césaire's writing and Glissant's *Caribbean Discourse* throughout the second section of this chapter. See Lorna Burns, 'Landscape and Genre in the Caribbean Canon: A Poetics of Place and Paradise', *Journal of West Indian Literature*, 17.1 (2008), 20–41; Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*; Aimé Césaire, *Notebook of a Return to My Native Land*, trans. by Mireille Rosello and Annie Pritchard (Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 1995).

of the ancient Ïerè sections of the novel, which is called 'Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea'.
Here, I outline Joseph's self-reflexive references to *African Origins* as itself an aesthetic work
which harnesses the creative power of *ase*. As such, the novel is not only a representation of
the non-originary origins of the ancestral community but is also an active agent in that
community's processual emergence.

In her introduction to *African Origins*, Lauri Ramey describes its structure as 'a
highly mathematical set of fractal forms.'[432] As discussed in Chapter Three, fractal geometry
deals with shapes that display self-similarity at differing scales. Identical patterns can be seen
within a fractal shape depending on the scale at which it is viewed. *African Origins* displays
just such a scaling. The novel depicts lived histories of embodied actions which form
distributed cognitive assemblages, functioning as systems, that connect to other memories,
other assemblages, to configure a larger system. This forms a multi-scalar assemblage of
cognitive systems embedded within larger cognitive systems. With this structure, the
collective consciousness that emerges within the novel is internally differentiated in the sense
that it is made up of specific yet interconnected embodied actions. It is also perpetually
differentiating, being open to further transformative processes. Encased within the novel's
fractal structure are the lived histories through which *a* people is formed. *African Origins*
represents the 'mind' of an ancestral community, one that is conceptualised 'not as a unified,
homogenous entity, not even as a collection of entities, but rather as a *disunified,
heterogeneous, collection of processes.*'[433] It is these processes that represent the non-
originary origins of an emerging collective consciousness.

II.   Distributed Cognitive Assemblages, *Ase* and Performance

Trinidadian Mas as Decolonial Performance

Marta Moreno Vega explains how for Larry Neal – one of the instigators of the Black Arts
Movement – 'mythology' provided the most transversal link running throughout the 'global
black aesthetic': the 'elusive power of spirits, ancestors, and African gods' forged an 'an
aesthetic bond between Africa and the New World.'[434] This 'power' coheres in the concept of

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[432] Ramey, p. xv.
[433] Varela, Thompson and Rosch, qtd. in Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, p. 157. Emphasis in Hayles.
[434] Vega, p. 55.

ase – a monistic force that is harnessed in ritual performance. As Margaret Thompson Drewal explains, 'Yoruba rituals are rooted in Yoruba concerns with *ase* – the power to bring things into existence, to make things happen. This is the real "work" of a ritual performer'.[435] Describing *ase* as 'the life force in all creation', Funso Aiyejina and Rawle Gibbons explain that in Yoruba mythology Olódùmarè breathed life into the cosmos.[436] As a result of this origination, *ase* is also termed '*life's breath*'.[437] In *African Origins*, the ancestral memories of the narrator are said to be housed within his 'secret under*lung*' (p. 37, emphasis added). In this obscure reference to memories housed within a lung, Joseph highlights that the memories that constitute the novel are themselves manifestations of the life's breath of Olódùmarè. The memories that emerge from the narrator's underlung are imbued with *ase* and therefore with affective power. Indeed, one definition of *ase* is '"*a coming to pass of an utterance*," a *logos proforicos*.'[438] The ancestral memories of *African Origins* arise from an underlung and are the *life's breath* through which a shared cognition unfolds.

In this section, I argue that Joseph depicts various performances as the configuration of distributed cognitive assemblages, which are also praxes harnessing the power of *ase* to forge a collective consciousness distributed throughout the African diaspora. Each of the performances represented in *African Origins* engages with the transformative energy of *ase*, linking these events across the novel's space-time locations, but also to a wider global Black aesthetic.[439] *Ase*, the 'power-to-make-things-happen', is the generative force within these assemblages that informs their resistance to colonial legacies.[440]

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[435] Margaret Thompson Drewal, *Yoruba Ritual: Performers, Play, Agency* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992), p. 27.

[436] Rowland Abiodun, 'Understanding Yoruba Art and Aesthetics: The Concept of Ase', *African Arts*, 27.3 (1994), 68-78+102-103 (p. 72).

[437] Vega, p. 47.

[438] This is one of the many definitions of *ase* given by Rowland Abiodun. The range of definitions highlights the slipperiness of the term's definition: the word *ase* is variously understood and translated as '"power", "authority", "command", "sceptre", the "vital force" in all living and non-living things; or "*a coming to pass of an utterance*," a *logos proforicos*.'[438] Abiodun, p. 72. Emphasis in original.

[439] While *ase* as a transformative energy that is present throughout the cosmos – that which ritual performance aims to harness – is perhaps the most common understanding of the term, it is undoubtedly a nebulous concept a full description of which is beyond the scope of this chapter. It is also important for me to be explicit in professing the limitations of my own understanding of *ase*, it being a concept at the heart of a spiritual practice which can only be understood through a lifetime of teaching and experience. Drewal makes a similar point in her study of Yoruba ritual, writing that *ase* is 'one of those concepts like "will" which philosophers write entire books about.' Drewal, p. xix. In my discussion of *ase* below, I aim to articulate the aspects of *ase* as they are manifested by Joseph in *African Origins*.

[440] Robert Farris Thompson, qtd. in Kela Nnarka Francis, 'The Spirituality of Carnival: Using Yoruba Cosmology to Read the Dragon Can't Dance', *International Journal of Art and Art History*, 3.1 (2015), 63–82 (p. 69).

In one section of the novel set in contemporary Trinidad, Joseph depicts a mas festival. Passages from this section are exemplary examples of Joseph's 'liquid text fiction', an idiosyncratic poetic-prose which assists in the presentation of the scene as the formation of an assemblage:[441]

> we comin' down! blowin' conch shell an' singing, anointing our bodies with liquid light like blue we blue, we red, we black, magenta, silver striped, satyr tailed – scars of white paint. powder smoke billow from sailor mas, calabash green, wild island gold. but some colours cannot be deciphered by the bare hearing eye. and the sound: brass wrestles wounds through asphalt, steelband jammin' like they bound to make a body make a body leap arcs of abandon, take days to come down. drums like cathedrals tumbling. hi-hats reeling sparks like cutlass lashing de road – hot so hot even thumb tacks moan. […]
>
> we as dense as wet gravel down henry, george and charlotte street, all the way down to the jetty in a cast surging kaleidoscope of blazing fire mas. (*African Origins*, pp. 46-7)

In Joseph's fragmented prose, the 'we' he describes is open and fluid and boundaries are blurred through the chaotic presentation of movement, music and colour. As the performance unfolds the text depicts the fluctuating entanglements of mas performance, rendering the dynamism of the scene in terms reminiscent of the formation of an assemblage: 'configurations' that 'are always in transition, constantly adding and dropping components and rearranging connections.'[442] This assemblage is not just a configuration of humans, but also includes the 'conch shell', the 'brass', the nebulous 'liquid light', the steelband drums and the 'hi-hats.' The drums in particular inform the ecstatic movement of 'abandon', becoming agents in the formation of an embodied assemblage, something that is captured in the metaphor of 'steelband drums jammin' like they bound to make a body make a body', suggesting the configuration of a body of people and things. In *The Embodied Mind*, Varela, Thompson and Rosch write that cognition is 'embodied action and so inextricably tied to histories that are lived'.[443] In other words, embodied actions are the lived histories through

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441 Joseph, qtd. in Ramey, p. xiii.
442 Hayles, *Unthought*, p. 2.
443 Varela, Thompson, and Rosch, p. 213.

which cognitive structures emerge, structures that are not restricted to the singular subject but are instead distributed throughout emergent and embodied cognitive assemblages. Joseph depicts the embodied actions of the mas performers constituting a distributed assemblage in which various elements of the environment become prosthetic to the body. This assemblage is referred to in the image of the Carnival performance as 'a vast and surging kaleidoscope of blazing fire mas'. A kaleidoscope has a fractal structure, it consists of colours within colours. The description of mas as a kaleidoscope indicates a multi-scalar fractal structure akin to that of distributed cognitive assemblages, as well as to the structure of the novel as a whole.

By presenting Trinidadian mas functioning as a cognitive system, Joseph highlights the decolonial potential of such cultural performance. The legacy of colonial rule in Trinidad is evident during the mas, which travels down 'henry, george, and charlotte street,' spaces bearing colonial names. This official cartography imposes symbolic routes as the names of British royals indicate identities to be aspired to. The performance, however, is an expression of alternative routes: 'the drummer knock claves and the horns leggo bop and the whole band ketch a vaps and start churn a revel rhythm/ congas run amok like footsteps of runaway slaves' (*African Origins*, p. 49). Through the sound of drums and horns that lead to movement likened to escaped slaves, Joseph invokes the legacy of the Maroons in the Caribbean. As discussed in Chapter Two, the Maroons were communities of liberated slaves, whose dwellings were locales for the survival of African cultures:

> There they [Maroon communities] retained African traditions, customs, folklore; later their settlement served as a place of escape for slaves from the plantations. Linking them together, across time and distance, was the Drum from Africa, and the Abeng or Horn, both of which were means of communication.[444]

The mas performance in *African Origins* adopts the language of the drums and the horns which produce a 'revel rhythm'. This description highlights the mas performance as a means of communicating across both time and space by manifesting a connection between the Carnival participants and their ancestors in the past, present and future. Sylvia Wynter

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[444] Wynter, 'Jonkonnu in Jamaica', p. 36. The practice and survival of elements of African cultures within Maroon dwellings is a key element of Wynter's concept of 'indigenization', which I discussed at length in Chapter Two.

explains that the 'rhythm' created in ritual performance is itself an expression of a univocal force – a force akin to *ase*, which I discussed further in Chapter Two – that is present from the onset of creation and which is called upon and inhabited during performance: 'RHYTHM is the universal life force. On donning the mask the dancer enters into this force, the god possesses him, and in a modern Jamaican cult term informed with the same meaning, the dancer "*delivers*" himself by patterning the steps of the god, or ancestral spirit'.[445] The mas in *African Origins* recalls the spiritual history of these performances: 'while our gods sleep we steal their masks and exhale completely, blow gauge/bathe in mud and dip in tart and warrior red, gargle hot rum and spit fire, pump biscuit tins slack with rhythm' (*African Origins*, p. 46).[446] The use of masks during the mas, along with the drums, horns and also the conch shell, allows participants to inhabit and engage the force of rhythm, forging a connection to their ancestral spirits and to the deities, known as the Orisha.[447] In the simile of 'drums like cathedral tumbling', rhythm is invoked as a decolonial force that challenges the colonial introduction of aspirational identities through the hegemonic imposition of the European coloniser's Christian religion.[448] As a means of communication across time and also between the human and spirit realms, the mas performance indigenises the deities and the ancestral spirits within the Caribbean so that they too become components of the mas performance's assemblage. In the context of the colonial imposition of aspirational identities, this assemblage facilitates the emergence of an alternative collective consciousness, which configures within the immanent force of rhythm.

By facilitating communication with the ancestral spirits and with the Orisha, the performances within *African Origins* maintain a connection to West African ritual. In *Myth, Literature and the African World* (1976), Wole Soyinka describes the interstitial space between the spirit and human realms as the 'fourth stage' of Yoruba ritual. This liminal space is a 'chthonic realm', a 'storehouse for creative and destructive essences', which the protagonist of ritual breaches in order to draw on the ambivalent force that resides there.[449] That force is *ase*, the life's breath derived from Olódùmarè. The masqueraders during mas

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[445] Wynter, 'Jonkonnu in Jamaica', p. 38. Emphasis in original.
[446] For the spiritual origins of mas and Carnival, see Francis.
[447] See Marcus L. Harvey, 'From the Sacred Sound of the Conch Shell to the Cemetery Dance: Reimagining an Africana Festival Created in a Southern Appalachian City', *Religions*, 8 (2017), 1–30.
[448] Nigerian writer Wole Soyinka explains how the possibility of transference between the human and material worlds in West African religions, from which the Trinidadian Orisha religion descended, represents a transgression against the 'cosmic Manichaeism' of Christianity. Wole Soyinka, *Myth, Literature and the African World* (Guernsey: The Guernsey Press Co. Ltd, 1992), p. 4.
[449] Soyinka, pp. 2–3.

breech the chthonic realm, 'steal' the masks of gods and 'exhale completely' (*African Origins*, p. 46) with a breath infused with this force. With a reference to the Cathedral dismantling power of the steelpan drums, *African Origins* highlights this performance as one that draws on the *ase* of the Orisha named Ogun. Through a meticulous analysis of drumming during Carnival, Francis makes a claim for Ogun, the deity of steel and iron, to be 'the patron Orisha of [steel] pan and [steel] pan men.'[450] Joseph further alludes to the presence of Ogun during the mas through his description of 'hi-hats reeling sparks like cutlass lashing de road' (*African Origins*, p. 47), a sword or cutlass being common items held by those possessed by the deity.[451] That it is specifically Ogun's *ase* that is invoked during the Carnival in *African Origins* is significant. Ogun, Soyinka explains, was the first of the gods to traverse that transitional space between the material and spirit worlds, carving a path through a once 'impassable barrier' that had grown between the two planes.[452] Infused with the *ase* of their companion deity Ogun, the steelpan drummers are themselves path clearers. They facilitate the passage from the material world, allowing participants to traverse the chthonic realm of creative essence and to forge a connection to ancestral spirits and to the gods across time and space.

Throughout the novel, performance as the ritual invocation of *ase* is a praxis that facilitates decolonial thought. In his conception of the conditions for decolonial thinking, which I discussed in the introduction, Mignolo refutes the possibility of subverting the 'coloniality of power from within Western (Greek and Latin) categories of thought'.[453] Practicing 'epistemic de-linking', or '*epistemic disobedience*', from these categories arises through situated perspectives from the 'colonial wound', an indelible symbolic mark inscribed on the body of the colonised.[454] Such perspectives are path-clearers, leading to the 'open[ing of] an-other space, the space of decolonial thinking'.[455] Mignolo's metaphor is a useful one for highlighting the decolonial power of the mas performance in *African Origins*. By calling on the path-clearing *ase* of Ogun, the deity who cleared a passage between the material and spirit words, performers also clear paths to 'an-other space' of thinking beyond

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[450] Francis, p. 71.
[451] Henry, p. 5.
[452] 'A long isolation from the world of men had created an impassable barrier which they [the gods] tried, but failed, to demolish. Ogun finally took over. Armed with the first technical instrument which he had forged from the ore of mountain-wombs, he cleared the primordial jungle, plunged through the abyss and called on others to follow.' Soyinka, p. 29.
[453] Mignolo, 'Epistemic Disobedience and the Decolonial Option: A Manifesto', p. 45.
[454] Mignolo, 'Epistemic Disobedience and the Decolonial Option', p. 44. Emphasis in original.
[455] Mignolo, 'Epistemic Disobedience and the Decolonial Option', p. 53.

'Western (Greek and Latin) categories of thought.' Infused with *ase*, the Carnival performances configure distributed cognitive assemblages through which there emerges a decolonised collective consciousness.

Synchronous Performances in the Past, Present and Future

The decolonial power of the mas performance connects with other performances throughout the narrator's ancestors' past, present and future. Owing to the recursive chronology of *African Origins*, scenes of performance in contemporary Trinidad occur synchronously with those in future, with the effect that the imagination of futures becomes integral to the novel's telling of the community's history:

> That naked island funk was steady lickin' hips with polyrhythmic thunderclaps! Does the Berta butt boogie? Do bump hips? Flip'n spin'n bop'n finger pop'n/subaquantum bass lines pumping pure people-riddim funk like snake rubber twisting in aluminium bucket, reverberating 'round the frolic house with a heavy heartbeat, causing black to buck and shiver –
>
> WOOEE! WOOEEE! –
>
> The very groove caused coons to stumble loose and slide on Saturnalian pomade until their conks collapsed. The sound possessed more swing than bachelor galvanised in hurricane, more sting than jab-jab whip, more bone than gravedigger boots and more soul than African trumpet bone. It was pure emotive speed that once improvised harmolodic funk to Buddy Bolden's punk jazz on the banks of Lake Pontchartrain, double bass still reverberating through space-time like long lost Afronauts on orbiting saxophones. And the solid sound did shook Spiritual Baptist shacks with rhythm, till the Sankey hymns they sung became cryptic mantras that slide like secrets through water (*African Origins*, p. 4).[456]

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[456] Joseph's novel has a unique typography. In reproducing quotes I have tried to remain as true as possible to how they appear in the text.

Joseph presents music and dance as a connective force running throughout the African diaspora. The 'pure emotive speed' and 'punk jazz' on Kunu Supia reverberates 'through space-time like long lost Afronauts on orbiting saxophones', from Buddy Bolden and the origins of jazz to the intergalactic diaspora on Kunu Supia. The invocation of 'polyrhythmic thunderclaps!' indicates the performers' engagement with the life force of rhythm, which connects this community to their ancestors and to the deities. By describing the scene's rhythm as 'thunderclaps', Joseph suggests that the performance calls upon Shango, the god of thunder in the Orisha religion. In his mythology, Shango was once a human who in death was raised to the pantheon of deities to become one who 'challenged the omniscience, omnipresence, and omnipotence of the gods', subsequently becoming an emblem for challenging authority.[457] With Shango called upon in the jazz bar on Kunu Supia, the deity becomes a constituent of the scene's assemblage and ultimately empowers the dancers to challenge colonial legacies: 'the solid sound did shook Spiritual Baptist shacks with rhythm, till the Sankey hymns they sung became cryptic mantras that slide like secrets through water.' The rhythm of the performance shakes 'Spiritual Baptist shacks', recalling the 'drums like cathedral tumbling' during the mas festival. Rhythm as a universal force of life, a concept descended from West African religions, shakes the foundations of Spiritual Baptism. Subsequently, 'Sankey hymns' – Christian revivalist songs from the nineteenth-century – are transformed through transgressive mimicry into 'cryptic mantras that slide like secrets through water.'[458] Clinton Hutton explains that through mimicry slaves 'perform[ed] the ontological transcript designed and written for Blackness by Whiteness as a cover or mask for […] its own sovereign script, its own freedom-making enterprise'.[459] Such a 'philosophy of praxis'[460] enables the defiant survival of African cultures, which 'slide like secrets through water' to be present in the Caribbean following the journey through the Door of No Return. As this praxis of mimicry is enacted in *African Origins*, however, Joseph also reverses the journey so that the secrets travel backwards from a future on Kunu Supia. As such, the decolonial power of the performance, that which is provided by Shango, travels multi-directionally through time to empower the community in the past, present and future. It is a

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[457] Noureini Tidjani-Serpos, 'The Postcolonial Condition: The Archeology of African Knowledge: From the Feat of Ogun and Sango to the Postcolonial Creativity of Obatala', *Research in African Literatures*, 27.1 (1996), 3–18 (pp. 8-9).

[458] The claim for the decolonial power of mimicry echoes points made by Homi Bhabha in his essay 'Of Mimicry and Man', Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (Oxon: Routledge Classics, 2004), p. 126.

[459] Clinton Hutton, 'The Creative Ethos of the African Diaspora: Performance Aesthetics and the Fight for Freedom and Identity', *Caribbean Quarterly*, 53.1/2 (2007), 127–49 (p. 129).

[460] Hutton, p. 130.

memory of what Kodwo Eshun terms a 'counterfuture' which returns to 'preprogramme the present'.[461]

Throughout *African Origins*, ritual performance is presented as a means of communication throughout the African diaspora. In one of the sections of the novel set in ancient Ĭerè, entitled 'the 'doption', Joseph depicts a possession ritual. The title of the section refers to the practice of doption, where performers use their voice to replicate the rhythm of the drums.[462] In the colonial Caribbean, the practice of doption developed following the banning of drumming. As Wynter notes, the 'proscription of the drum came about when it was realized that the drum rhythms were part of the unifying force of revolts.'[463] The use of drumming by Maroon communities and the practice of doption both represent subversions of the drum ban. The doption scene in *African Origins* depicts a practitioner, Sister Verso, becoming possessed by one of the deities: 'And with a voice that whistled like slivers of dried flesh on a branch she began to relay multiple pages of transcendent jazz – the metaphysics of another world' (p. 120). Through the use of doption, the ceremony clears a path to the spirit world and Sister Verso becomes possessed. She inhabits rhythm and is able to speak with *ase*, 'the metaphysics of another world'. This metaphysics of 'transcendent jazz', expressed through doption, forms a connective line running from this ceremonial possession, through the invocation of Ogun's *ase* during the mas festival, to the imagined future jazz performance on Kunu Supia.

Through the use of doption, 'the metaphysics of another world' spoken by Sister Verso is also an alternative metaphysics to that posited within the hegemonic colonial culture imposed within the Caribbean. Jamaican poet Kei Miller refers to the prohibition on drumming in the Caribbean as a 'banning of blackness'. Caribbean people were forced to abandon the 'language of the drums' for 'the civilised language of English, or French, or Spanish, or the language of violins and pianos.'[464] Such an education disconnects Caribbean people from their ancestors and the gods, while also reifying tenets of white Western culture. Both processes lead to the colonisation of the mind: '[o]n some deep level across the

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[461] Eshun, p. 290.
[462] Frances Henry explains doption: 'Worshippers make a special kind of sound called "doption", from the English "adopt". Instead of using the drum, which was prohibited, the Baptists developed a special sound, sometimes likened to a grunt, made with the tongue in the back of the throat. These drum sounds create several different rhythms. "Doption" can be used to accompany someone speaking or sermonizing, or it is interspersed in a person's own speech when praying out loud or testifying.' Henry, pp. 38–39.
[463] Wynter, 'Jonkonnu in Jamaica', p. 36.
[464] Miller.

Caribbean, we still believe that African religions are backward. We still believe that even though we're not white – not all of us – we can at least act white'.[465] In this context, the language of the drums that facilitates communication across the African diaspora is a powerful rejection of the imposition of whiteness. The drums facilitate the emergence of a Black identity by forging a connective history that exists despite the violent rupture of the journey through the Door of No Return. In one Kunu Supia section, Joseph describes a group named the 'post-earth negroes', who reject the term Black claiming that '**black** as a concept of being was only ever relevant on Earth and even then it was suspected as the mindset of a con that pat afros down and kept negroes terra bound to suffer' (*African Origins*, p. 37-8; bold in original). Yet, these people disconnect themselves not from an imposed identity but from their ancestors: 'Their ears would ring with trans-genetic texts and they wouldn't understand it. Drums would tumble with insecret textures and they wouldn't understand it' (*African Origins*, p. 38). The 'post-earth' community are unable to understand the language of the drums, losing the possibility of engaging in the transgenerational communication that permeates throughout *African Origins* multi-temporal chronology. The communication between the 'trans-genetic texts' of the novel forms an assemblage throughout an African diaspora leading to the emergence of a Black consciousness.

The potency of *ase* as a path-clearing decolonial power is further evident on Kunu Supia through the character of Joe Sambucas Nigra, an infamous dealer of a genetic contraband called 'melocyte oil' – a drug that can darken the skin of the lighter-skinned inhabitants to 'temper epidermis to the Supian firesky' (*African Origins*, p. 90). In various ways, Joe Sam is a figure associated with the path-clearing deity Ogun. When Ogun destroyed the 'impassable barrier' that separated the gods from humanity, he did so '[a]rmed with the first technical instrument which he forged from the ore of mountain-wombs'.[466] Joe Sam recalls this 'divinity of iron'[467] by wielding a 'wire bound cutlass', which, like Ogun's 'technical instrument', takes on mythical power: 'Ice in your ice Mr Joe, your blade like fire… from where that forge?' (*African Origins*, p. 93). Joe Sam's prowess with his blade also suggests that he is supported by Ogun, that 'patron of […] warriors.'[468] Finally, he, like Ogun, traverses dangerous lands – the treacherous 'Kilgode desert' – to retrieve his 'black/secret technology' (*African Origins*, p. 89), the contraband melanin.

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[465] Miller.
[466] Soyinka, pp. 28–29.
[467] Henry, p. 5.
[468] Baba Ifa Karade, qtd. in Francis, p. 71.

Joe's journey through the Kilgode desert and his acquisition of the melanin are manifestations of *ase* which disrupt colonial legacies within Kunu Supia's Caribbean diaspora. Wynter analyses the practice of skin-bleaching (whitening) as symptomatic of the 'normalization of corporeal features of Western Europeans' that arises through the reification of an ethnocentric conception of white Man as a model for symbolic life.[469] In this context, skin-whitening is considered a life-saving act. Elaine Marie Carbonell Laforteza examines skin-whitening as the means by which technologies of power become inscribed through embodied practices, leading her to describe the 'somatechnologies of skin-whitening' – the means by which colonial epistemologies of white supremacy (*techne*) become inscribed on the body (*soma*) through the application of products designed to lighten skin.[470] The act of skin-whitening is an embodied cognitive act that is both produced by, and further entrenches, a subjective sense of being as equivalent with whiteness. When marketing his contraband melanin, Joe is explicit that his skin-darkening wares represent a reversal of an imposed aspirational whiteness:

> An' if in four days that nose don't snap back wide, mammy must've rubbed it straight with coconut oil when you were a child, but never mind, just to squeeze a vial a' this bootlegged pineal oil should slap that nappy greng-greng wide open! *Like slavery never was*. (*African Origins*, p. 72, emphasis added)

Drawing on stereotypes of Black physiognomy, Joe Sam markets his wares as a counter to the skin-whitening effects of 'coconut oil'. By claiming that his melocyte oil will make it 'Like slavery never was', Joe highlights that the privileging of whiteness is an effect of colonial legacies. As Wynter notes, the origin stories privileging white Man began in a symbiotic and thus equiprimordial relationship with the onset of colonialism and the slave

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[469] Wynter and McKittrick, pp. 19–20.

[470] Laforteza's analysis is based in the Philippines. Elaine Marie Carbonell Laforteza, *The Somatechnics of Whiteness and Race: Colonialism and Mestiza Privilege* (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2015), pp. 11–12. Somatechnics has a variety of intersecting and yet distinct definitions. Neil Sullivan explains that the term was coined to describe the 'inextricability of soma and techne, of the body (as a culturally intelligible construct) and the techniques (dispositifs and hard technologies) in and through which corporealities are formed and transformed.' Nikki Sullivan, 'Somatechnics', *Transgender Studies Quarterly*, 1.1–2 (2014), 187–90 (p. 187). See also work by Shildrick, who uses somatechnics in her analysis of the assemblage of bodies and technologies. Shildrick, '"Why Should Our Bodies End at the Skin?": Embodiment, Boundaries, and Somatechnics'.

trade.[471] Joe Sam, as both an Ogun figure and as facilitator of skin-darkening, becomes an agent of decolonial praxes.

As well as representing various practices that engage the power of *ase*, *African Origins* is itself an aesthetic work that, through the drum-like rhythm of the novel's poetic prose, draws on this creative power. In fact, Joseph produced a companion album to the novel – *Leggo di Lion* – the lyrics of which consist of text from *African Origins*. In 'Extending Out to Brightness', a song named after the mas section of the novel, Joseph performs lyrics from the novel alongside drumming:

> wire frames support rabelaisian disguises, meticulous sequins and fetish figures of startling silver worn swinging with the hip shake/my chest gone tight as a warm drum, niggerman, make the snare pop! sweet calypso[472] man chanting till him heart bust an' big big arse rollin 'pon truch top. grind mama grind and shake the firmament – o gorm - no man can brace when the tempo
> . drop (*African Origins*, p. 48)

The rhythm of Joseph's words coincides with that of the drum. The performance recalls the practice of doption and embodies Glissant's assertation that in 'the pace of Creole speech, one can locate the embryonic rhythm of the drum.'[473] By infusing his writing and performance with the rhythm of the drum, Joseph draws on the *ase* of the patron deity of drumming, Ogun. In the figure whose 'chest gone tight as a warm drum', Joseph provides a self-referential image. The words that emerge from the drum-like chest are, like Joseph's oral performance, infused with the *ase* of Ogun that is derived from the primordial breath of Olódùmarè.

As a text which harnesses the power of *ase*, *African Origins* is, like the mas performance it depicts, an aesthetic practice with entangled spiritual and political power. As noted above, this aesthetic power also clears pathways for decolonial thinking. Through both the text's drum-rhythm and Joseph's actual performance of his poetic prose, *African Origins*

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[471] Wynter, 'Beyond the Categories', p. 65.

[472] While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to explore calypso music in full, its presence here also points to the influence of Yoruban aesthetics in contemporary Trinidad. See Henry, pp. 157–82.

[473] Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, p. 124.

mingles oral and written forms of expression. The 'transition from oral to written', Glissant argues, is 'considered in the context of Western civilisation as an inevitable evolution'; it is a transition that is 'seen as a promotion or transcendence.'[474] The privileging of written over oral forms in the Caribbean – a hierarchy imposed through colonial education – produces a dichotomy between a 'forced' and 'natural' or 'free' poetics. This binary rests primarily on a harmony (or lack thereof) between the form and content of any expression. A forced poetics arises when there is 'an opposition between the content to be expressed and the language suggested or imposed', which in the Caribbean occurs when a speech act against the enforced silence of the enslaved employs a solely written mode of expression, thereby accepting the colonial hierarchy of written over oral.[475] For the Caribbean subject as a descendent of slavery – one for whom, '[s]elf-expression is not only forbidden, but impossible to imagine' – the drive for self-expression is essential.[476] Drawing on the tradition of drumming in Yoruba-descended ritual practices in the Caribbean, Joseph is empowered through *ase* to produce a 'free' poetics that performs a 'complex reuniting of writing and speech', one which makes a 'contribution to the expression of a new man, liberated from the absolute demands of writing and in touch with a new audience of the spoken word.'[477]

Throughout the mas performance, the 'free' expression of *African Origins* represents embodied actions charged with *ase*, which together form distributed cognitive assemblages. Functioning as a network of systems, which connect within the recursive structure of the text, these assemblages facilitate the emergence of a shared collective sense of what it is to be for the ancestral community – one that is beyond ethnocentric Man. To return to a passage quoted above, Joseph describes the steelpan drums 'jammin' like they bound to make a body make a body leap arcs of abandon.' The music of the drums opens the chthonic realm so that the mas performers are enthused with *ase*. They leap 'arcs of abandon', embodied actions through which it becomes possible to think beyond colonial epistemologies. It is a performance which makes a body, an assemblage or a 'body' of people formed through the relational praxis of Carnival. *A* people, open-ended and constituted through immanent and transversal relations that extend beyond the material plane to include entanglements with ancestral spirits and the Orisha's.

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[474] Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse* pp. 121, 123.
[475] Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, p. 120.
[476] Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, p. 122.
[477] Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, p. 108.

III. Extended Bodies: Memory Recollection and the Caribbean Landscape

Immaterial Bodies, Enaction and Sense-Making

While the depictions of mas, the Jazz bar and the doption all provide overt examples of embodied histories that form distributed cognitive assemblages, the novel also contains memories of more quotidian events that contribute to the emergence of a collective consciousness for the ancestral community:

> : : arrive in the early evening. Red dusk shimmers in the /trees/light sparks mosaics of diamond. Climb down dirt into the village and the dogs begin to bark tantie selma at her kitchen window. when she sees me sends her laughter travelling first. then she comes, wiping her hands in her dress/brisk, her slipper slapping.
> *embrace her/her full body*. (*African Origins*, p. 9)

A simple moment depicting a person arriving in a village is presented through fragments of perceptions: the shimmer of 'Red dusk' in the tree; the laughter of tantie (aunt) selma; her embrace; the way she wipes her hands on her dress; the slap of her slipper; and the bark of the dogs. All of these perceptions are entwined like the present 'light' as a shining mosaic of sense-perception. Joseph foregrounds sense-perception to register an intersubjective embodiment that arises through affective connection. The extension of the body through affect forms what Lisa Blackman terms 'immaterial bodies' that do not end at the skin:

> Haptic, or affective, communication draws attention to what passes between bodies, which can be felt but perhaps not easily articulated. The more non-visual, haptic dimensions of the lived body distribute the idea of the lived body beyond the singular psychological subject to a more intersubjective and intercorporeal sense of embodiment.[478]

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[478] Lisa Blackman, *Immaterial Bodies: Affect, Embodiment, Mediation* (London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2012), p. 12.

The body is both distributed and processual, informed by material and immaterial affects. Subjectivity subsequently emerges through what Stacey Alaimo terms 'trans-corporeality', which I discussed in the previous chapter and which refers to the 'interchanges and connections between various bodily natures'.[479] The narrator's memories, which constitute *African Origins*, tell of sensuous moments in which bodies are entangled in webs of affective communication. As ancestral 'genetic memories', Joseph imagines the narrator's body containing the memory of these assemblages.

Through this depiction of sensuous moments in which characters' bodies are extended, Joseph locates the 'roots' of *African Origins*'s ancestral community within non-conscious, embodied processes which emerge through situated and ongoing lived histories of intercorporeal embodiment:

> even my father's bachelor shack is a ridge further up the mountain. when i hear his voice it is singing, and his boot spittin' dirt, coming up the track, bracing on his sister selma's pillar post/ already drunk from drinking at work
>
> > *embrace him…*
> >
> > *his whole self*
>
> his grin still charms seams cut in crimpelene
>
> > *.. with his arms strung down..*
>
> his neck still smells of tobacco and coal tar soap.
>
> his beard still drips with whisky, wild meat, raw egg.
>
> > *remove his cap and kiss his baldplate tenderly.* (*African Origins*, pp. 10-11)

While in this passage the reader is only given access to the rich sense-perceptions of the first-person figure, these sense-perceptions nevertheless extend beyond this figure's conscious awareness to include the affective flows between the two bodies. In the repetition between the above two quotations – the description of the '*embrace*' of an other's '*whole self*' – Joseph draws attention to the extension of the body towards the other. In her work on touch, Erin Manning writes that '[w]hen I reach out to touch you, I extend the space I have created between me and you. This extension carries my *sense perception* […] and can therefore also

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[479] Alaimo, p. 2.

be considered as prosthetic to my 'organic' matter-form.'[480] The extension of the body through the embrace is an extension of sense-perception that brings the other into the fluid domain of the embodied self.

African Origins's explicit focus on the sensory experiences of the narrator's ancestors is key to its exploration of the emergence of a transgenerational cognitive assemblage. Conscious of the limitation of autopoietic models of cognition, which posit a mind constituted by *operationally closed* processes, Varela, Thompson and Rosch produce an account of the entangled relationship of mind, body and milieu, which they describe as *enaction*.[481] Enaction describes cognition as emerging through the interplay between a living system's perceptual capacities and its neurological organisation as its body moves through an environment *with which it is intimately co-produced*. Neither mind nor the 'external' world can be said to pre-exist a mutually constitutive lived history of 'structural coupling':

> We propose the name enactive to emphasize the growing conviction that cognition is not the representation of a pregiven world by a pregiven mind but is rather the enactment of a world and a mind on the basis of a history of the variety of actions that a being in the world performs.[482]

Cognition is inseparable from the entanglement of the perceptual capabilities and bodily movement of organisms, which causes them to be structurally coupled to an 'external' world: 'Cognition depends upon the kinds of experience that come from having a body with various sensorimotor capacities […] sensory and motor processes, perception and action, are fundamentally inseparable in lived cognition.'[483] Taking the perception of colour as a case study, Varela, Thompson and Rosch argue that it is the *effects* of these structural couplings of

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[480] Erin Manning, *Politics of Touch: Sense, Movement, Sovereignty* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), p. xxiii. Emphasis added.

[481] Hayles outlines the limitations of solely autopoietic models of cognition: 'living systems operate within the boundaries of an organization that closes in on itself and leaves the world on the outside' and, as such, this 'version of autopoietic theory fails to come to terms with the dynamic, transformative nature of the interactions between living systems and their environment.' Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, pp. 136, 148.

[482] Varela, Thompson, and Rosch, p. 10; Owing to their conviction of the codependent emergence of the world and the mind, Varela, Thompson and Rosch position themselves in a 'middle position' between realism and idealism, which they call the 'chicken' and 'egg' position. Varela, Thompson, and Rosch, p. 172; The strength of their belief that there is no world that pre-exists its structural coupling with the embodied mind is often the point of departure of other cognitive theorists with enaction. See for example Lawrence Shapiro, *Embodied Cognition: New Problems of Philosophy* (Oxford: Routledge, 2019), pp. 34–61; Hayles, *Unthought*, p. 63.

[483] Varela, Thompson, and Rosch, p. 173.

world and mind, facilitated by the sensorimotor capacities of the organism, that determine both the structure of cognition *and the world that is perceived*.[484] That is, neither mind nor world pre-exists a lived history of structural coupling. Instead, they are mutually enacted – they codependently arise.

In the memories that constitute *African Origins*, Joseph depicts quotidian processes through which both a mind and a perceived world *of value* are enacted for the narrator's ancestral community. One such example of this process is culinary. Through two memories, from contemporary Trinidad and Kunu Supia respectively, Joseph depicts the process through which a shared perception of Manicou curry is produced:

> my father divides the manicou into join, rib and splinter. He scrapes the burnt bristles from the tail. he splits the skull and washes the pink flesh with lime, fresh thyme and congo pepper. he builds a three stone fire and oils his iron pot to fry onion, green garlic and geera. then pausing to light his cigarette he says,
> "stew?, stew is fo' dem yard fowl, way them hard so, to cook for long, boil down. But manicou? manicou make for curry boy, with coconut milk, thick sauce, uuhmmm," he licks his fingers, "uunmmm."
> my father cracks the white oak seal and tips the first splash for those too dead to drink. (*African Origins*, pp. 62-3)

> "What! But dread I never know you could get jungle rat here. So much time I try bring back bushmeat from dream – but Manicou, yes, give I the tail Rasta."
> When the young man taste the sweet meat so, and suck the bone and chew finger, make him go sit in corner write poem. (*African Origins*, p. 72)

The first memory of the father teaching his son, when coupled to the second memory, becomes a depiction of the enaction of the Manicou as a culturally valued food. The child's memory of their father's preparation of Manicou is one of vibrant sensuality. He hears the 'scrape' of the tail and the splitting of the skull, as well as the smells of the 'pink flesh' mixed

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[484] 'We must locate color in the perceived and experiential world that is brought forth from our history of structural coupling.' Varela, Thompson, and Rosch, p. 165.

with 'lime, fresh thyme and congo pepper', along with the frying of 'onion, green garlic and geera' combined with the father's cigarette smoke. The father's actions as he produces the Manicou curry merge with both the son's sensuous experiences and the father's didactic words to produce the value of Manicou, placing it within what Igor Kopytoff terms a 'cultural biography of things'.[485] This value is not derived from any intrinsic Manicou attribute. Rather it is produced through a cognitive process that Thompson terms sense-making, whereby a world of value is enacted through culturally situated embodied experiences: the 'organism's world is the sense it makes of the environment. This world is a place of significance and valence, as a result of the global action of the organism.'[486] The effect of this process of sense-making is seen in the ongoing value of Manicou in the second memory. The multiple time-periods of *African Origins* allow Joseph to explore the enaction of both the mind and a world of 'significance and valence' as a transgenerational phenomenon in which a shared world of value is produced for an ancestral community.

As with the performances in the past, present and future discussed above, the sense-making processes depicted in *African Origins* are lived histories that reveal transgenerational connections. In the memory of the preparation of Manicou curry, the father pours libations 'for those too dead to drink.' He situates this moment within a non-linear concept of time, whereby ancestral spirits remain in the present. As a result of the recursive chronology of the novel, the second memory of Manicou – the future ancestors' delight at finding Manicou on Kunu Supia – occurs simultaneously with the first memory. The recursive cycling through memories in *African Origins* forms a non-linear network of value-making histories., which are histories of embodied cognitive processes through which a shared consciousness emerges.

The novel's framing as an act of remembrance – as a cyclical journey through the genetic memories of the narrator – is also key to my argument that a collective sense of self emerges within the text. Ron Eglash explains how the '*recursive power*' of systems determines their memory capabilities.[487] The novel's feedback loop structure as it cycles through the past, present and future is analogous to this recursive process of recollection. Hayles explains that memory recollection is a vital cognitive process in the emergence of a sense of self. The experience of an 'I' within consciousness, the sense of a 'more or less continuous identity', is produced through the recollection of past events, as well as the

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[485] Igor Kopytoff, 'The Cultural Biography of Things', in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in a Cultural Perspective*, ed. by Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 64–91.

[486] Thompson, 'Life and Mind: From Autopoiesis to Neurophenomenology', p. 386.

[487] Eglash, pp. 156–59. Emphasis added.

imagination of future ones.[488] Such a self is emergent, produced through the *memory* of sense-making processes, what Hayles would term meaning making processes.[489] Joseph, writing from the position of a Caribbean subject, extends Hayles's insights through the notion of the narrator's recollection of transgenerational ancestral memories. Through the recursive cycling of the narrator's genetic memories, a sense of self emerges that is shared throughout their ancestral community. Again, as an emergent phenomenon, this communal sense of self is not produced through pre-ordained likeness, but rather emerges through the recollection of situated and embodied cognitive processes.

Throughout *African Origins*, memory recollection is not restricted to the mind but is itself tied to sense-perception. A descendent of tantie selma returns on Kunu Supia when Miss Selma's 'black cake', a rum-infused cake common in Trinidad, is described as being able to 'make people ketch genetic backslap' (*African Origins*, p. 57). The experience of eating the cake is posited as generating genetic memory, which is not the biological memory of genes, but rather the recollection of lived histories that are remembered within the body. Joseph speculates on memory as a phenomenon that extends beyond the individual mind and emerges through sensuous engagements with an external world, in this case the culturally significant black cake. This depiction of memory resonates with that of Glissant, as explained by Michael Dash: 'Glissant […] observes that it is not the rational mind that restores the past, but that the past resides in material objects that only release their hidden meanings when encountered imaginatively or sensuously'.[490] In *African Origins*, the cognitive process of memory is generated through eating the culturally specific food black cake, an act of revealing the past through 'backslap'.

Emerging with the Caribbean Landscape

Depicting the mutual enactment of the mind and of a perceived world, *African Origins* situates the emergence of a cognitive assemblage within intimate co-becomings with the surrounding environment of Trinidad. Throughout the novel, the memories that constitute *African Origins* are rich in sensuous descriptions of the land. This is most overt in a section entitled 'Caura', named after the Caura river in Trinidad. One example from this section

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[488] Hayles, *Unthought*, p. 42.
[489] Hayles, *Unthought*, pp. 41–42.
[490] J. Michael Dash, 'Introduction', in *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*, trans. by J. Michael Dash (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1996), pp. xi–xlv (pp. xix-xlv).

provides a potent image for the entanglement of body and land: 'a swami seems to meditate in the splash of the surg. he lies supplicated on the wet sand and wrings his beard – undulating wave of white muslin – lets his body roll with the late morning tide' (*African Origins*, p. 76). The text here shows a spiralling interaction between person and landscape. The swami's beard is an undulating 'wave' and his body moves 'with the late morning tide'. Joseph depicts the enactive process of how 'organism and environment enfold into each other and unfold from one another in the fundamental circularity that is life itself.'[491] Memory in *African Origins* is tied to such entanglements with the landscape. Just as the swami's embodied actions merge with the sea, throughout the novel, water is imbued with knowledge and memory: 'And when the river speaks I listen. Deep runs the history of this river through this floating island. Space exists where we thought mattered. The earth is indeed hollow, not solid as we thought' (*African Origins*, p. 20). The river remembers a lived history of structural couplings, a history that is not solely present within a human mind, but one that emerges through relations with the landscape itself. Joseph explores what Glissant terms the '*function of landscape*', whereby the 'individual, the community and the land are inextricable in the process of creating history.'[492]

The river is not just a mnemonic device that a human subject uses to recall their personal history. In a neo-materialist vein, the river itself is imbued with agency. It speaks its history to which the authorial voice is present – it listens – but the human does not dominate in the interaction. With this presence of history within landscape, Joseph explores a posthumanist conception of memory. Ann Rigby writes that 'posthumanist materialism […] calls for a truly ecological approach [to memory] that shifts attention away from discrete artifacts towards the continuous interactions between humans and non-humans, between mediations and materialities, within particular social and physical environments.'[493] In *African Origins*, the river remembers a history of its mutual enfolding with the novel's ancestral community, out of which various materialities have unfolded. Neither human nor environment can be said to pre-exist a history of structural couplings. Referring to the world as 'hollow, not solid as we thought', Joseph articulates a conception of the world as 'groundless', which is akin to the groundlessness of the world and mind in the enactive model of cognition: 'We are always constrained by the path we have laid down, but there is no

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[491] Varela, Thompson, and Rosch, p. 217.
[492] Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, p. 105.
[493] Ann Rigney, 'Materiality and Memory: Objects to Ecologies. A Response to Maria Zirra', *Parallax*, 23.4 (2017), 474–78 (p. 475).

ultimate ground to prescribe the steps that we take. It is precisely the lack of ultimate ground that we evoked […] by writing of groundlessness.'[494] There is no primordial ground on which to stake the origins of a world or a mind. Both are mutually enacted and therefore 'hollow'. It is the space of interaction between landscape and subject which in fact comes to matter – 'space exists where we thought mattered'. The text plays on the dual meanings of the word 'matter' – material substance and 'to matter' – in a way akin to Karen Barad in her concept of posthumanist performativity. For Barad, there are no *relata* – entities that pre-exist the relation; instead 'matter comes to matter' only and always in relation as 'things-in-phenomena'.[495] Such intra-actional processes are what constitutes history for the novel's ancestral community.

This posthumanist conception of memory as that which arises from the interstices between people and environments takes on further significance in the Caribbean context. As I outlined above, Glissant argues that African-descended people in the Caribbean experienced a historical rupture which denied them access to a '*collective memory*' – an experience he terms 'nonhistory'.[496] In an essay which situates Glissant within the burgeoning field of memory studies, Bonnie Thomas writes that by drawing on images of the Caribbean landscape, Glissant 'links memory firmly with nature.'[497] In so doing, he aims to bring Caribbean people to an experience of history. *African Origins* similarly draws on images of the landscape to explore the emergence of a collective memory through lived histories of structural coupling with the environment:

old caura sprung up from Ïerèan settlements. Lokono indian and black chine came from mainland maracaibo. nepoio and yao. then Spanish come up from madamas bay through santa cruz valley. and up to when cipriani plane crash, conqueros still grew rich cocoa and coffee. and midwives fed mandrakes white rice in ripe gullies

but the village has long been reclaimed by the jungle. all that remains are beads of steeple from a church; seeds of glass buried deep and overrun by

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[494] Varela, Thompson, and Rosch, p. 214.

[495] Karen Barad, 'Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter', *Gender and Science: New Issues*, 28.3 (2003), 801–31 (p. 817).

[496] Glissant, p. 62, 8.

[497] Bonnie Thomas, 'Édouard Glissant and the Art of Memory', *Small Axe*, 13.3 (2009), 25–36 (p. 29).

thorns. and the bone dry tibias of runaway slaves. (*African Origins*, pp. 78-9)

Joseph depicts the land reclaiming space taken over by the 'conqueros'. In so doing, he once again recalls the legacy of Maroons in the Caribbean, who use the dense vegetation of the landscape to hide their communities from colonial rulers. Kamau Brathwaite describes the forests of the Maroons as 'alter/native' spaces within the Caribbean in which African cultures were practiced and maintained.[498] Throughout *African Origins*, Joseph's writing invokes such 'alter/native' spaces, both through images such as the jungle's reclamation of the land and through an engagement with humanity's non-dualistic relationship with its environment. As I discussed in Chapter Two, the colonising powers instituted within the Caribbean a nature-culture dichotomy by centring the domination of nature to their concept of 'civilisation'. In Glissant's words, the 'control of nature, and of one's nature, by culture was the ideal of the Western mind'.[499] Lorna Burns notes that this conception of civilisation was the justification for colonial domination over the land, the indigenous inhabitants and the transported slaves.[500] Through depicting the mutual enactment of the mind and landscape, Joseph disrupts colonial culture's attempts to dominate the land; however, he does not narrate a transfer of ownership – from coloniser to colonised – but rather reimagines humanity's relationship with nature in non-dualistic terms. He produces what Glissant terms a 'poetics of landscape', which, as McKittrick explains, 'creates a way to enter into, and challenge, traditional geographic formulations without the familiar tools of maps, charts, official records, and figures.'[501] The land is reclaimed through a recognition of nature-culture entanglements and the codependent enaction of the community and the environment. In the image of 'the bone dry tibias of runaway slaves' buried within a jungle that reclaims land from the colonisers, Joseph produces a graphic image gesturing to a legacy of resistance to the imposed separation of nature and culture: a resistance made possible through embodied and embedded relations with the island landscape.

The constellation of memory, landscape and creative expression within *African Origins* is captured in the final passage of 'Caura', which highlights *ase* as a force that ties

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[498] Kamau Brathwaite, qtd. in Hutton, p. 127; Wynter, 'Jonkonnu in Jamaica', p. 36.
[499] Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, p. 73.
[500] Burns, 'Landscape and Genre in the Caribbean Canon', pp. 20–25.
[501] McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds*, p. xxii.

humanity to nature:

> the coast may break for rocks and reeds but the bay flows from horizon to horizon. the
> sea pulls the sand open and then shut, reveals the stems of seagulls polished to pearl
> by atlantic dust. blue water. coconut husks and seashells, drift dried crisp in salt,
> brittle skulls of molluscs that crush powder underfoot, luminescent jellyfish veils.
> seablast shivers the trees – a gust in the ear – and the sun…
> the bay is as wide as memory. (*African Origins*, p. 81)

The vitality of the landscape, the sea's waxing and waning as its 'pulls the sand open and then shut', is an image of the island's breathing, its lungs pulled open and then closed by the sea. The 'seablast' that 'shivers the trees' becomes like a breath which blows over the land. As discussed above, the ancestral memories of *African Origins* arise from an underlung and are the *life's breath* through which a shared consciousness unfolds. Here, Joseph's literary expression as a collection of breaths merges with the breath of the landscape, both of which are manifestations of the force derived from Olódùmarè. Joseph ties memory to creative expressions – both ritual performance and literary expression – which draw on the 'creative energy of a dialectic reestablished between nature and culture in the Caribbean.'[502] This energy is *ase*, the affective force through which memories emerge for the novel's transgenerational community. In the metaphor of the bay as memory, opened and closed by the wash of the sea, Joseph highlights how Caribbean history is embedded in the landscape. A history which can be accessed through creative expressions: life-sustaining breaths from an underlung of collective memory.

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[502] Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, pp. 64-5.

IV.   'Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea': Metafiction and the Role of the Caribbean
         Artist in the Emergence of a Collective Consciousness

Recursive Origins: The Destructive and Creative Power of the Sea

I have so far in this chapter argued that *African Origins* consists of ancestral memories of lived histories which form distributed cognitive assemblages. By cycling through the past, present and future, Joseph presents these assemblages as a network through which there emerges a collective consciousness for the narrator's transgenerational community. Within the novel, binding all these processes is the univocal force of *ase*. Joseph's self-referential image of the sea's breathing, which I have described as a metaphor for the novel as the expression of memories housed in an underlung, gestures to an aspect of *ase* that has not yet been dealt with extensively in this chapter: *ase*'s manifestation through art and, in particular, language. Art theorist Abiodun cites William Fagg's description of the importance of a fourth dimension of Yoruba art in order to explain the importance of *ase* to this aesthetic:

> Tribal cultures tend to conceive things as four-dimensional objects in which the fourth
> or time dimension is dominant and in which matter is only the vehicle, or the outward
> and visible expression, of energy or life force. Thus it is energy and not matter,
> dynamic and not static being, which is the true nature of things.[503]

Fagg discusses a concept of Yoruba aesthetics in which art is not representational but rather an affective element of a dynamic cosmos. Abiodun subsequently describes how artistic works are produced to evoke *ase* as 'an enigmatic and affective phenomenon in Yoruba art and culture, the creative power in the verbal and visual arts.'[504] In this final section, I outline how Joseph metafictionally refers to *African Origins* as an affective text that harnesses *ase*. In an ancient Ìerè section of the novel, entitled 'Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea', Joseph writes an origin story that describes the *recursive emergence* of a Caribbean community, akin to that which is represented throughout the rest of the novel. In so doing, he self-referentially

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[503] As Soyinka does in *Myth, Literature and the African World*, Fagg generally uses the term 'Africa' or 'African' when drawing concepts primarily from Yoruban sources. As *ase*'s presence in Trinidad is drawn from the Yoruba religion, I use the term Yoruba both to avoid the pitfall of homogenising an 'African' aesthetics. William Fagg, qtd. in Abiodun, p. 69.
[504] Abiodun, p. 71.

describes *African Origins* as an aesthetic work that, through harnessing *ase* in its representation of ancestral memories, is a constituent element in the emergence of a Caribbean collective consciousness.

The importance of recursivity in Joseph's origin story of non-originary beginnings is foregrounded in the epigraph of 'Voyage':

> The Cosmic egg has fallen into the sea.
> The moon is as large as a large plate
> carrying a bundle of sticks.
> The sun rises from the sea,
> crick
> crack! (*African Origins*, p. 82)

The image of the 'Cosmic egg' falling into the sea refers to the recursive process of creation described in the Ancient Egyptian funerary text *The Book of the Dead*. In this text, the god Atun, also known as the cosmic egg, is born from a chaotic sea to which he returns and is subsequently reborn '[a]t the beginning and end of each great cycle of existence.'[505] Emerging from the 'primevil waters as a snake or an eel', Atun's cyclical rebirth can be depicted through the tail eating Ouroboros.[506] Atun, as Geraldine Pinch notes, was also called 'Ra', meaning sun.[507] The epigraph – depicting both Atun's return to water and his rebirth as the sun – refers to a recursive process of destructive return to and creative rebirth from the sea.

Joseph adopts an ambivalent representation of the sea, as both destructive and creative, as an analogy for the creation of African-descended Caribbean people following the journey through the Door of No Return. The main narrative of 'Voyage' concerns a figure named Milligan Benji as he watches over the flooding of Ancient Ïerè. Benji is met by a

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[505] Geraldine Pinch, *Egyptian Mythology: A Guide to the Gods, Goddesses, and Traditions of Ancient Egypt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 111.

[506] Pinch, p. 111.

[507] Joseph's adoption of the mythology of Ancient Egypt and, in particular, the story of Atun/Ra, is a common trend in Afrofuturism. Sun Ra, the often posited grandfather of Afrofuturism, for example, took his name from Atun – Atun/Ra being the god of the Sun.

merman, who informs him of the destruction both of Ïerè and the African continent:

> "Mister man, where my Ïerè?"

> And the merman replied,

>> "Ïerè dissolved in the flood like sugar in saliva, only
> fragments remain."

>> "And Africa?" Milligan asked.

> And to this the merman calmly replied,

>> "Many died" (*African Origins*, p. 85)

The colonisations of Africa and Ïerè are here imagined as the destruction of these lands through floods. Imagining the sea as both a creative and destructive force is common in Caribbean – and, more generally, diasporic – theorising. It is both the site of the loss of connection to the African continent and the onset of transformation or possibility. In Césaire's 'Notebook of a Return to My Native Land', colonisation is similarly depicted as a flood: 'the volcanoes will break out the naked water and will sweep away the ripe stains of the sun and nothing will remain but a tepid bubbling pecked at by sea birds – the beach of dream, and demented awakening.'[508] Hortense Spillers writes that, following being forcibly removed from their homes, the enslaved 'were culturally "unmade," thrown in the midst of a figurative darkness that "exposed" their destinies to an unknown course.'[509] The 'demented awakening' described by Césaire is a rebirth in the wake of this cultural unmaking. The sea, in this instance, is the agent of traumatic deracination, but is also a potent image for survival through its 'constantly changing surface and capacity for infinite renewal'.[510]

The imagination of the sea as an ambivalent site of creative and destructive forces is also common in Afrofuturism. In her article on Nnedi Okorafor's 'oceanic afrofuturism' in the novel *Lagoon* (2014), Melody Jue writes that 'one of the recurring environments in Afrofuturism is the ocean—imagined not as a space of absolute alterity, but rather as an

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[508] Césaire, p. 75.
[509] Spillers, p. 72.
[510] Dash, 'Introduction', p. xxix.

element of traditional cosmologies and diasporic imaginations after the Middle Passage.'[511] Jue here points to the electronic music duo *Drexciya*, who, as Eshun explains, 'constructed a Black-Atlantean mythology that successfully speculates on the evolutionary code of black subjectivity.'[512] *Drexciya* imagine that the children of pregnant slaves murdered by being thrown from ships during the Middle Passage have survived and formed a community beneath the sea. In *African Origins*, Benji follows in the footsteps of these Middle Passage victims:

> *Now when I jump from that raft was sea snake an' catfish that*
> *   guide me*
> *to Olokun kingdom near the bottom of the sea. And I see*
>
> *my people swim free,*
> *who were bound for slave terror but dove over like me, to escape*
>
> *by suicide – but did not die – they came here and were fed and*
> *   healed.*
> *and now dey 'fraid to swim back*
> <div align="right">*to Africa* (pp. 84-5)</div>

Consistent with Jue's words, the sea here is indeed an 'element of traditional cosmologies and diasporic imaginations'. Benji descends to the kingdom of Olokun – the Yoruba Orisha who rules over all bodies of water and who is the patron to those Africans transported by way of the Middle Passage. Here, he meets a people who, 'bound for slave terror', escaped by diving into the sea. The ambivalence of loss and rebirth is present in the people of Olokun's kingdom. They have found freedom from slavery and a new life in the watery depths. Yet, a return to the past is closed to them – they '*fraid to swim back / to Africa*.' These people, however, have not completely lost a connection to a pre-colonial past. Olokun's presence suggests that the Orisha have followed them on their journey; it is a presence that allows them to maintain communication with their ancestors. The rebirth of this sub-aquatic community therefore contains a trace of the past and its survival is rendered in recursive

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[511] Melody Jue, 'Intimate Objectivity: On Nnedi Okorafor's Oceanic Afrofuturism', *WSQ: Women's Studies Quarterly*, 45.1 & 2 (2017), 171–88 (p. 176).
[512] Eshun, p. 300.

terms. As with Binti's recursive rebirths discussed in Chapter Three, Joseph does not depict a totally new beginning, but rather a creative emergence from within, and yet also beyond, the traditions of the past.

Joseph's inclusion of a merman in 'Voyage' refers to the mythology of the Dogon, which I also discussed in Chapter Three. Through this reference, Joseph brings cycles of destruction and rebirth into dialogue with recursive feedback loop processes. The mythology of the Dogon states that their ancestors were visited by entities from space. As Ytasha Womack explains, '[a]ccording to Dogon cosmology, the Sirius system is home to the Nommos, a race of amphibians akin to mermaids and mermen who visited the Earth thousands of years ago.'[513]. In *African Fractals*, Eglash discusses a further element of Dogon mythology and cites it as an example of a recursive cosmology in the African continent. The first beings on the Earth – also called the Nommos – return to the ground, which acts as a 'womb' of creation, and are reborn as a new creature. This process then reiterates until, with the final twist of the recursive spiral, the process 'bottoms out' and humanity is said to emerge.[514] Humanity is produced through a feedback loop process whereby the present inhabitants of the Earth return to the womb in order to become the input for the production of Earth's next inhabitants. As with autopoiesis, Dogon mythology refers to an operationally closed recursive process of emergence.

African Origins explicitly draws a comparison between the autopoietic processes of living systems and the Dogon mythology. The merman met by Milligan Benji repeats an assertion heard earlier in the novel: 'Many things begin and end with the sea – indeed – the earth is hollow, not solid as was thought' (*African Origins*, p. 86). The merman's words gesture to the insights of the Dogon, whose cosmogony, Eglash speculates, reveals an understanding of 'recursion […as] an important feature in biological morphogenesis, as well as in environmental and social change.'[515] Joseph brings this insight of the Dogon into dialogue with enaction and the groundlessness inherent in this cognitive theory, which contends to the codetermining enaction of world and mind. As I noted above, one of the primary arguments proposed by Varela and his co-writers is that the world beyond the embodied mind is not pre-given but is enacted through histories of structural coupling.

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[513] Womack, p. 84.
[514] Eglash, pp. 131–34.
[515] Eglash, p. 133.

Explaining Varela's meaning in the merman's terms, the 'earth is hollow, not solid as we thought.'

References to recursivity abound in *African Origins*. Through the story of Benji, Joseph relates this recursivity to a cognitive process through which a collective sense of self for Caribbean people emerges. Once more, memory is central to this process:

> Milligan saw the water coming up over the hill behind him, flinging wood and beast like sorrow self. And seeing this broke him bare/ The suffer the love, the suffer the love bore thick tears in his eyes. But you see my Milligan was a black heart man. […] He had saved many lungs of breath by then, in a sack his under his armpit for mercy. And so, he just up and leapt into the sea below. (*African Origins*, p. 84)

Benji's survival of the watery depths is dependent on him saving 'many lungs of breath'. As I have argued, *African Origins* consists of memories that are stored in the narrator's underlung, which are charged with the affective power of *ase*, the life's breath of Olódùmarè. In this context, the reference to Benji's survival through saving many lungs of breath takes on resonances beyond his own survival. Benji survives through harbouring memories, as breaths, across the Middle Passage. As discussed above, Glissant describes the Caribbean experience of nonhistory, which arises following the separation from the African continent. The breaths that Benji carries within him following the flooding of Ïerè are like the sustaining memories that can bring Caribbean people to an experience of history, reconnecting them with a 'collective memory' that has journeyed through the ocean.[516] This memory is what facilitates the possibility of rebirth from the destructive force of the sea. It is the life's breath of the community.

'*my tongue became dank with word*': The Communication of *ase* and Joseph as a Caribbean Artist

Joseph ties the possibility of memory to creative engagements with the force of *ase*. Home to the deity Olokun, the ocean in 'Voyage' is an aquatic chthonic realm, which bridges the

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[516] Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, p. 62.

space between the material and spirit worlds. As such, Benji's journey into the ocean takes place on the 'fourth stage' of ritual outlined by Soyinka.[517] Benji, then, becomes the hero-protagonist of ritual, who journeys into the 'storehouse for creative and destructive essences' in order to empower the ritual community.[518] He traverses the chthonic realm with his body filled with memories. Emerging charged with the power of *ase*, his memories are, like those that constitute the novel, imbued with the life's breath of Olódùmarè.

It is not enough for Benji to empower only himself through his journey into the chthonic realm. He has to be able to communicate these memories, and thus this power, to the community.[519] Speech, as Abiodun notes, is vital to the harnessing of *ase*: 'Without Ohun ("voice," the verbalization of performance of the word") neither Epe ("curse," the malevolent use of "*ase*") nor Ase ("life-force") can act to fulfil its mission.'[520] The importance of orality to Benji's journey is foregrounded in the epigraph to 'Voyage', which ends with 'crick/crack', the speaker and participant calls in 'call and response' oral performance.[521] Abiodun highlights how call-response techniques are also central to the success of aesthetic works that aim to draw on an Orisha's *ase*.[522] With 'crick/crack' in the epigraph, Joseph foregrounds aesthetic works harnessing the power of *ase*. Following this, there are several references throughout to the creative power of language. Thoth – he who created the cosmic egg – is the god of language, whose self-creation is at times depicted as occurring through language.[523] Brathwaite also explains that in the Bantu language, Nommo – the Dogon word for merman – is directly translatable as 'the word', a definition which affirms the notion that '*language was and is a creative act in itself.*'[524] In Benji's meeting with the merman – a Nommos – Joseph therefore draws on the multiple meanings of this word to highlight the creative power of language.

As references to creative speech abound in 'Voyage', the possibility of Benji communicating the power of *ase* is apparent in his fate. He dives into Olokun's kingdom only

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[517] This imagination of the ocean as the 'fourth stage' of ritual is not novel within Caribbean literature. In her essay on Earl Lovelace's *The Dragon Can't Dance*, Francis writes that the chthonic realm 'takes on a particular Caribbean memory – the Middle Passage.' Francis, p. 66.

[518] Soyinka, p. 3.

[519] It is the absence of this second step that Francis argues is the ultimate failure of the ritual in Lovelace's *The Dragon Can't Dance*: 'The revolution fails because, as the human representative breaching the chthonic realm "on behalf of the community", Aldrick [the protagonist] must find a way to relay his intuitions and conclusions to his community and does not know how.' Francis, p. 79; see also Drewal, Y*oruba Ritual*, p. 27.

[520] Abiodun, p. 73.

[521] Kamau Brathwaite, 'The African Presence in Caribbean Literature', *Deadalus*, 103.2 (1974), 73–109 (p. 96).

[522] Abiodun, pp. 73-4.

[523] Pinch, p. 209.

[524] Brathwaite, p. 90. Emphasis added.

to be subsequently reborn himself now as a merman – a Nommos: '*My skin become sealed with rugged rubber, my lung become tough with brine, my tongue become dank with word*' (*African Origins*, p. 86, emphasis in original). Benji emerges from the sea his tongue '*dank with word*' and is therefore now able to communicate the ancestral memories that he saved in his lungs. These memories are infused with the force of *ase* and are subsequently given affective power. Indeed, one of the meanings of *ase* is the 'coming to pass of an utterance'.[525] Benji is a figure who harnesses *ase* to give the memories in his lungs affective power.[526] He will speak these memories, forging a collective consciousness through their expression. Joseph therefore ties the survival of Caribbean people following the Middle Passage to *the preservation of memory through aesthetic expression*.

Through Benji, Joseph provides a metafictional reference to himself as a Caribbean artist involved in the creative emergence of a Caribbean collective consciousness. Metafictional self-reference is foregrounded in the epigraph of 'Voyage' and its reference to the Egyptian God Thoth. As the deity who creates himself through language, Thoth is a potent metaphor for metafiction. More specifically, the reference to Thoth points to the justification for the novel's structure of *three* chapters of *eight* sections each. Eglash explains the importance of three and eight to Thoth when citing the deity as a further example of a recursive cosmology. Thoth is also named 'Hermes Trismegistus' which means both '*thrice* great Hermes' and '*eight* times great Hermes.'[527] The reason for the choice of both three and eight, Eglash argues, is based partly on *recursion* as a common element 'of African numeric systems'.[528] Joseph's reference to Thoth is therefore a metafictional reference to the novel's recursive structure, which, I have argued, mimics the autopoietic feedback loop structure of cognition through which there emerges a collective consciousness. By linking the novel's structure to the recursive logic behind the naming of Hermes Trismegistus, who creates himself through language, Joseph highlights the role of aesthetic expression in the creation of such a consciousness. That is, by referring to the '*self-generating* creation of the material

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[525] Vega, p. 46.

[526] Lucie Pradel explains how the power of verbal incantations is derived from *ase*: 'Verbalization initiates dynamic action: the choice of words, verbs and adjectives, and adverbs work towards its realization. Underlying this dynamic action is a metaphysical force the Yoruba call *ase*.' Lucie Pradel, *African Beliefs in the New World: Popular Literary Traditions of the Caribbean*, trans. by Catherine Bernard (Asmara: Africa World Press, 2000), AHU, p. 49.

[527] Eglash, p. 134. Emphasis added.

[528] 'Why both three and eight? It makes sense if we think of those common elements of African numeric systems, *recursion* and base-two arithmetic. Thrice great because while an ordinary human may rise as high as the master of masters, Hermes Trismegistus is the master of masters of masters (three [recursive] iterations); thus we can surmise "eight times great refers to $2^3 = 8$.' Eglash, p. 134.

world' in Ancient Egyptian metaphysics – that which is expressed through the figure of Thoth – Joseph notes how his novel is both a representation of, and an agent in, the emergence of a collective consciousness for the novel's transgenerational community.[529]

Joseph employs recursive self-reference in 'Voyage' in order to reflexively highlight *African Origins* itself as an affective text of remembrance. The figure of Benji, who speaks the memories of his ancestral community, is akin to Joseph himself, who in *African Origins* has produced an aesthetic work that contains memories of transgenerational lived histories. The memories in *African Origins* are, like the breaths of Benji, infused with the power of *ase*. Just as Benji, whose tongue is 'dank with word', communicates the memories that survive the Middle Passage, *African Origins* is an aesthetic expression of the memories, like breaths, that emerge from the narrator's underlung. This informs a recursive paradox at the heart of the novel. *African Origins* is both the representation of the history of an ancestral community and, at the same time, this community cannot be said to exist prior to the text. Wynter describes this paradoxical self-creation of humanity: '*we cannot/do not preexist our cosmogonies*, our representation of our origins – even though it is we ourselves who invent those cosmogonies and then retroactively project them onto a past.'[530] Joseph's examination of the origins of the ancestral community in the novel is not a passive description of past events and the imagination of future ones, but rather a constituent act in an ongoing emergence in which memories of the past are taken up anew and which exist synchronously with events in the present and the future. Joseph is the artist creatively producing history following the journey through the Door of No Return.

This actualisation of the past in new ways is constituent of a distinctly Caribbean rendering of the posthuman assemblage of *a* people. Such a people, Braidotti argues, 'is always missing and *virtual*, in that it needs to be actualized and assembled. A people emerges through praxis, a collective engagement to produce different assemblages.'[531] *African Origins* is part of the process of the configuration of a Caribbean people across multiple generations. The novel's aesthetic communication of ancestral memories is an active agent in the dynamic actualisation of an assemblage of posthuman subjects. Here, the posthuman's telos is non-linear in the sense that it is both ever present and, at the same time, it is perpetually displaced through creative engagements with the past, present and future. Memory in the novel is not

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[529] Eglash, p. 135. Emphasis added.
[530] Wynter and McKittrick, p. 36. Emphasis in originals
[531] Braidotti, *Posthuman Knowledge*, p. 52. Emphasis in original.

the sedimentation of past events chronologically described, but is instead a virtual plane that can be actualised in multiple ways.[532]

Conclusion

African Origins's final section depicts the events that inspired the novel – Daaga's liberation from slavery by escaping the Caribbean in a spaceship. In this section, Joseph further locates the non-originary origins of the novel's ancestral community within process. Imagining Daaga's journey as a metaphor for Black people searching for their roots, Joseph draws from a theory on the origin of life on Earth known as Panspermia:

> Long time people used to call dem flying sauces. UFO an' space ship. Dey didn't know then 'bout panspermic dust. Dey never get genetic flashback. Or spend nine night on de mourning ground. But now we know different, how plenty time them object appear in de sky, was just Daaga and those he led, lost in space, drifting from place to place, still trying to find where they come from. (*African Origins*, p. 137)

The Panspermia theory centres on the idea 'that interstellar dust is rife with prokaryotic spores that could have seeded an early earth.'[533] That is, life on earth was generated from dust

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[532] The openness of the past to creative becomings in *African Origins* is analogous to the distinction between the virtual and the actual in Deleuzian thought. The actual event is a singular, differentiated moment in time that can be described from a detached vantage point. What Deleuze terms the *event* exceeds this singular definition to include *both* the actual and the virtual. While the actual exists on the linear time of chronos, the virtual takes place in the copresence of temporalities, aion, an 'undifferentiated' time of being and becoming. The virtual event exists on a plane of consistency and is thus open to alternative actualisations. See Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Theory: The Portable Rosi Braidotti* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011); Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, p. 59. In her book on the intersection between Caribbean writing and Deleuze, Lorna Burns argues that the 'virtual field' is, for Deleuze, as well as for Bergson, open to 'different/ciation'; that is, past events are open to transformation. Existing within the cyclical time of aion, recursivity is the posthuman's telos in the sense that it is both ever present and perpetually displaced through the different/ciation of the past, present and future.' Burns, *Contemporary Caribbean Writing and Deleuze: Literature Between Postcolonialism and Post-Continental Philosophy* (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2012), p. 92.

[533] Jesse McNichol, 'Primordial Soup, Fool's Gold, and Spontaneous Generation: A Brief Introduction to the Theory, History, and Philosophy of the Search for the Origin of Life', *Biochemistry and Molecular Biology Education*, 36.4 (2008), 255–361 (p. 259). Joseph's reference to panspermia is most likely the result of his engagement with the writing of the controversial psychologist Timothy Leary. Leary was drawn to the Panspermia theory because of his own belief that human life evolved from materials that originated from space. This notion informs Leary's transhumanist-like belief that humanity's teleology is to leave Earth and return to being extra-terrestrial, thus becoming post-human (note the hyphen). The teleological aspects of Leary's theory are tied to humanistic notions of progress that are absent from the recursive becoming depicted in *African Origins*. See Timothy Leary, *Exo-Psychology: A Manual on the Use of the Human Nervous System According to the Instructions of the Manufacturers* (California: Starseed/Peace Press, 1977).

that came from space. In *African Origins*, it is Daaga, who, travelling through space, disperses panspermic dust. These particles of dust are the memories of embodied and embedded histories, the construction of distributed cognitive assemblages, which are remembered in the novel as 'genetic flashbacks'. Daaga's once-captor fears the man's escape, because 'anywhere he plant that melocyte seed blacknuss sure to spread' (*African Origins*, p. 136). The image of Daaga sowing the seed of 'blacknuss' on a journey described as a search for his roots is an apt ending to a novel that refuses the possibility of singular origins. Daaga's journey symbolises roots that are formed and re-formed through movement – 'the journey is the destination'.

Conclusion: Encountering Asterisks

I.   The Posthuman in 2021

In this thesis, I have investigated animist realist texts that combine African and African diasporic cosmologies with the dynamics within science fiction to continue and expand on a legacy of Black experiments with what constitutes 'the human'. In different ways, each text displaces colonial ideologies of progress that continue to posit the transcendence of white Western cultures as the pinnacle of human development. Rather than presenting the case for Black subjects' inclusion within the hegemonic category of Man, Hopkinson, Okorafor and Joseph unveil this figure as an object of knowledge, subsequently imagining the emergence of the posthuman through ontological entanglements with human and more than human others. Grounded in the experiences of Black subjects living in the afterlives of slavery and colonialism – 'which is to say in an ongoing present of resistance and survival' – each of these writers reveals and disrupts ongoing racializing assemblages, while also displacing the colonial genealogies of critical posthumanist scholarship.[534]

Submitted in early 2021, the final year of writing this thesis took place in the context of a series of intersecting global crises. The Covid-19 pandemic began at the start of 2020 and has led to barely conceivable death tolls and economic turmoil. The combination of the global threat to life and a series of local lockdowns have led to long periods of isolation and a disorientating mixture of boredom, anxiety and fear. In May, the murder of George Floyd by officers of the Milwaukee police force sparked global Black Lives Matter protests. In the US, peaceful protests were met with violent retribution from state officials, including, in June, the use of rubber bullets and tear gas to clear protestors to allow Donald Trump to pose, Bible in hand, in front of St John's Church in Washington. In January 2021, baited by the white nationalist president of the United States, hundreds of Americans stormed the United States Capitol building, a riot which was met with significantly less resistance than the largely peaceful BLM protests. Meanwhile, the effects of the climate crisis are becoming more overt. Covid-19 was itself generated, or at least exacerbated, by 'human'[535] influence over

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[534] Sharpe, p. 20.
[535] As Wynter has written, describing climate change as the result of human influence on the environment flattens difference through the equal attribution of agency over behaviours leading to climate breakdown. It is Man, 'whose normal behaviours are destroying the habitability of our planet', that is more accurately at fault. Wynter and McKittrick, pp. 23–24.

environmental conditions.[536] 2020 tied with 2016 for the hottest year on record,[537] brutally exemplified by the post-apocalyptic images of wildfires in the US and Australia – extreme examples of phenomena now common in many regions across the globe.[538] While this thesis does not engage explicitly with any of these intersecting crises, and while an analysis of their complexities is far beyond my scope here, they have remained present in my thoughts while writing. For me, this project will always be marked by an asterisk pointing to the events of 2020, and by way of conclusion, I want to reflect on these peripheral, but formative, issues. In doing so, I will outline the possible ramifications of scholarship, like this thesis, that operates at the intersection of critical race studies and critical posthumanism, while I will also indicate some further avenues for critical posthumanist study that emerge through an engagement with this intersection.

When I consider this project's asterisk, I am returned to thinking about Sharpe's *In the Wake*. As discussed briefly in Chapter One, Sharpe employs the asterisk to invoke the absent-presence of Black people in the wake, the way in which their 'ejection' and 'abjection' represents the unacknowledged conditions for the maintenance of contemporary global capitalist systems. She writes: '[t]o encounter people of African descent in the wake both materially and as a problem for thought is to encounter that * in the grand narrative of history'.[539] The asterisk, then, points to how Black subjects inhabit the 'position of unthought' within colonial modernity.[540] Each of the crises of 2020 provide conditions for 'encounter[ing]' that asterisk. For example, in the UK there are growing reports of the disproportionate effect of Covid-19 on Black and other non-Black people of colour.[541] More widely, while the effective response to the pandemic by several African governments has been met with barely concealed incredulity by some in the West,[542] the disproportionate

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[536] Simon and Benjamin Coghlan explain the link between infectious disease and human influence on the climate in Simon Coghlan and Benjamin Coghlan, 'One Health, Bioethics, and Nonhuman Ethics', *The American Jounral of Bioethics*, 18.11 (2018), 3–5 (p. 3).

[537] Andrea Thompson, 'NASA Says 2020 Tied for Hottest Year on Record', *Scientific American*, 14 January 2021 <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/2020-will-rival-2016-for-hottest-year-on-record/> [accessed 15 February 2021].

[538] See for example, 'How Wildfires in the Americas and Tropical Africa in 2020 Compared to Previous Years | Copernicus', 14 December 2020 <https://atmosphere.copernicus.eu/wildfires-americas-and-tropical-africa-2020-compared-previous-years> [accessed 15 February 2021].

[539] Sharpe, p. 33.

[540] Hartman, qtd. in Sharpe, p. 30.

[541] Tony Kirby, 'Evidence Mounts on the Disproportionate Effect of COVID-19 on Ethnic Minorities', *The Lancet Respiratory Medicine*, 8.6 (2020), 547–48 <https://doi.org/10.1016/S2213-2600(20)30228-9>.

[542] David Crone and Elizabeth Smith, 'Insights From Africa's Covid-19 Response', *Institute for Global Change*, 17 December 2020 <https://institute.global/advisory/insights-africas-covid-19-response> [accessed 10 February 2021].

access to vaccination sets to leave those in vulnerable categories across the continent unprotected, while lower-risk groups in richer nations are vaccinated.[543] Those living on the African continent are also situated at the vanguard of climate breakdown, which is set to increase the forced migration of African people both within and beyond the region.[544] All of these crises reveal and intensify what Sharpe, in dialogue with Saidiya Hartman, describes as 'the conditions of Black life and death [...] ("skewed life chances, limited access to health and education, premature death")'.[545] This intersecting, though non-homogenous, threat to Black life across the globe is an element of what allows BLM to 'travel', as Rinaldo Walcott explains, expanding beyond US borders to become 'a significant symbolic rally cry that achieves a kind of diasporic intimacy.'[546] Conscious of the potential tensions that arise when claiming such an 'intimacy' across the heterogeneous experiences of Black people across the globe,[547] Walcott nevertheless argues that BLM unifies through the shared search for, and the insistence of, a 'life': 'what travels from BLM is the emphasis on a life, on what a life might be, on how we might achieve our lives.'[548]

Throughout this project, I have outlined how Hopkinson, Okorafor and Joseph imagine Black posthumans within narratives that are conscious of ongoing racializing assemblages, those which continue to bar Black life from the position of 'the human'. In part, the resistance to the ontological negation of Black life through the imagination of posthuman forms of being in the world represents a defiant affirmation of Black life, an 'insistence on existence', an example of Black people 'insist[ing] Black being into the wake.'[549] In all of the texts discussed here, however, life is never configured in an anthropocentric frame: from the human entanglements with the *loa* in Hopkinson's novels; the interstellar kin-making in the *Binti* novellas; or the emergent embodied and embedded collective consciousness in *African Origins*, life is immanent and unfolds within more than human worlds. The reimaging of life in relational and processual terms represents one creative means of confronting the ongoing

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[543] 'Africa Needs Timely Access to Safe and Effective COVID-19 Vaccines', *WHO | Regional Office for Africa* (21 January 2021) <https://www.afro.who.int/news/africa-needs-timely-access-safe-and-effective-covid-19-vaccines> [accessed 10 February 2021].

[544] Sharpe provides examples of the threat to life migrants face when fleeing conflict across the globe. Sharpe, pp. 41–67.

[545] Sharpe, p. 33; Hartman, 'Venus in Two Acts', *Small Axe*, 26 (2008), 1–14.

[546] Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, Rinaldo Walcott, and Glenn Coulthard, 'Idle No More and Black Lives Matter: An Exchange', *Studies in Social Justice*, 12.1 (2018), 75–89 (p. 84).

[547] This heterogeneity of Black abjection is also outlined by Sharpe: 'The suffering of Black people cannot be analogized; "we" are not all claimed in the same plain of conflict, since the Black is characterized, as [Frank] Wilderson tells us, by gratuitous violence.' Sharpe, p. 29.

[548] Simpson, Walcott, and Coulthard, p. 84.

[549] Sharpe, p. 11.

subjugation of Black being in the wake. Walcott writes:

> All of the emergencies of Black life that produced the movement, energy and the demands of and for BLM will remain with us until a concerted effort to think alternatives to global human organization is given serious thought. Indeed, we must invent alternative ways of being together and articulate them as possible, and we must be willing to put flesh on the bones of those new ways for living together.[550]

The fictions discussed in this thesis contribute to the invention of 'alternative ways of being together'. Importantly, they do not dictate new universals, that is, they do not provide *the* answer to the question of organisation. Rather, they imagine, to borrow Rosi Braidotti's terms discussed in Chapter Four, praxes for the construction of *a* people, an assemblage that forms and reforms through experiments with relations within more than human worlds.

The importance of rethinking ways of living together beyond the hegemony of Man cannot be overstated. As noted in Chapter Two, the most contemporary manifestation of Man, *homo oeconomicus*, naturalises the exploitation of both natural resources and the global poor in pursuit of economic profit. One need only look to the ongoing failures to address climate breakdown – to governments' abandonment of all but rhetoric to prevent the cataclysmic effects that will result from two degrees of warming – to see *homo oeconomicus* in action. Extractivist practices continue to abound, exemplified by reports that state-owned fossil fuel companies are set to invest a further 1.8 trillion US dollars in the next decade.[551] Addressing climate change from the perspective of *homo oeconomicus* will not prevent the disaster to come. As Wynter has shown, it is inconceivable that climate change can be overturned using tools provided by an order of things that caused the problems in the first place.[552] What is required, she continues, is '*a far reaching transformation of knowledge.*'[553] That is, not the reform of the hegemonic episteme, but its rewriting.[554] Similarly, Walcott has outlined how abandoning the transformative potential of BLM for a reformist agenda erases

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[550] Simpson, Walcott, and Coulthard, p. 86.
[551] Fiona Harvey, 'State-Owned Fossil Fuel Firms' Plan to Invest $1.9tn Could Destroy Climate Hopes', *The Guardian* (9 February 2021) <http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/feb/09/state-owned-fossil-fuel-firms-planning-19tn-investments> [accessed 13 February 2021].
[552] Wynter and McKittrick, p. 24.
[553] Wynter and McKittrick, p. 24. Emphasis in original.
[554] See Ferreira Da Silva, 'Before *Man*'.

the movement's potency:

> In the USA, we are already seeing both liberal incorporation and intra-Black political dissent around what the future might look like for the movement. Indeed, it is clear that few are willing to begin to articulate alternatives to our present mode of life and instead claim a pragmatic reformist agenda. History teaches us that such a move signals the already-defeated larger political horizons. Such a retreat means for me that BLM is in many ways a stalled movement now.[555]

The incorporation of BLM into the hegemonic liberal episteme prevents the possibility of transforming knowledge, which is required to find new ways of living together.

In the UK, the critical need for transformation rather than reform is evident in recent attacks on critical race theory by the Conservative government. When in October 2020 equalities minister Kemi Badenoch railed against the threat of critical race theory for its promotion of 'partisan political views', her comments were a direct rebuke to the anti-racist movements – most notably the BLM protests – that had been prominent in the months leading up to the statement.[556] In part, the attack on critical race theory is an element of the UK government's ongoing attempt to reduce discussions of structural inequalities into a culture war, a move intended to distract from the failures of its tenure, which have culminated in their disastrous response to the pandemic.[557] On the one hand, critical race theory is an incidental target – a casualty of the wider desire to contest the claims of anti-racists. On the other hand, critical race theory is a threat because, as Wynter explains, it has the potential to '"exoticize" Western thought by making its "framework" visible from another "landscape"'.[558] It enables a perspective from which to view structural racism and the hegemonic order of things that institutes ethnocentric Man as the universal model for what it is to be human.[559] The attack on critical race theory, as an attempt to avoid meaningful discussions of racism in the UK, indicates the value of such scholarship, which provides perspectives from which to analyse the ongoing structural conditions of the wake. These

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[555] Simpson, Walcott, and Coulthard, p. 86.
[556] Daniel Trilling 'Why Is the UK Government Suddenly Targeting "Critical Race Theory"?, *The Guardian*, 23 October 2020 <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/oct/23/uk-critical-race-theory-trump-conservatives-structural-inequality> [accessed 13 February 2021].
[557] See Remi Joseph-Salisbury, 'Anti-racism under attack', *Red Pepper*, 2020, 12.
[558] Wynter, 'Map for the Territory', p. 112.
[559] Wynter, 'Map for the Territory', p. 115.

perspectives are vital, particularly as the superficial anti-racism of the British government occurs in the context of its refusal to address ongoing racism in the UK.[560]

While there are many tensions between critical race theory and critical posthumanism, this thesis has attempted to meaningfully engage with such tensions in an effort to explore a core commonality. As Zembylas writes, 'posthumanism shares a common interest with decolonial critique', as well as, I add, with critical race theory, 'in that it directs our attention toward "that" which is objectified, muted or rendered passive by a certain manifestation of anthropocentrism or human exceptionalism.'[561] Together, these discourses provide analytical tools for uncovering the conditions of the present, highlighting both ongoing racialisations and extractivist practices that are informed by the perpetuation of Man as a universal. Fiction by Hopkinson, Okorafor and Joseph imagines and experiments with possible ways of being in the world that emerge from such discourses. From their demonic ground position, these three writers produce texts from perspectives beyond those of Man, subsequently contributing to the possible transformation of knowledge. To recall the terms of Chapter Three, they represent parasitic presences which produce negentropic systemic disruption; they introduce the noise that induces complexity and thus systemic change.

My engagement with the intersection of critical race theory and critical posthumanism helps to reveal a potential critique of this project. I am aware of my tendency throughout the thesis to highlight the affirmative potential of the posthuman entanglements within the fictional narratives discussed. The assumption could be that posthuman formations are *inherently* liberational. Nicole Shukin rebukes such a contention, writing of the 'anthropocentric order of capitalism whose means and effects can be all too posthuman, that is, one that ideologically grants and materially invests in a world in which species boundaries can be radically crossed.'[562] The porosity of boundaries that is present across all six texts discussed in this thesis opens subjects to further vulnerability and exploitation, while those rendered sub- or inhuman through anthropocentric speciation experience the greatest risk. Hopkinson's depiction of the biocapitalist extraction of biological material in *Brown Girl* represents the most overt example of this in the texts discussed in this thesis. The Covid-19

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[560] Maya Wolfe-Robinson, 'UK Government Accused of "dragging Heels" on Racism', *The Guardian*, 11 February 2021 <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/feb/11/uk-government-accused-of-dragging-heels-in-response-to-racism-report> [accessed 15 February 2021].
[561] Zembylas, p. 254.
[562] Nicole Shukin, qtd. in Neel Ahuja, *Bioinsecurities: Disease Intervention, Empire, and the Government of Species* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), p. xiv.

crisis similarly outlines how living beings' embeddedness within wider ecologies, as well as socio-economic and political systems, represents posthuman threats to health. What I have attempted to outline throughout this project, however, is the commitment of Hopkinson, Okorafor and Joseph to explore, within imaginations of the posthuman, the possibilities of projecting Black life beyond the antiblackness of the hegemonic mythos of Man.

Another limitation of this thesis is the study's monolinguality. This is of extra concern when considering Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's ongoing analyses of the entanglement of language and culture. From this perspective, elements of cultures that were predominantly constructed within one language are lost in translation. Ngũgĩ contends that the imposition of foreign languages on colonial subjects is a driving force of mental colonisation.[563] The hybridity brought to English by the three writers in this thesis, most overtly evident in Hopkinson's patois and Joseph's unique 'liquid-text fiction', represents one form of resistance to such a colonisation. Yet, for Ngũgĩ, for whom language is the communication of culture, colonial subjects are transformed by their being forced to primarily communicate in the coloniser's language: 'language and literature were taking us further from ourselves to other selves, from our world to other worlds.'[564] Ngũgĩ's science fictional language is useful here at pointing to further avenues of study for critical posthumanism. I have argued in this thesis that a rhizomatic form of knowledge production fitting for immanently situated posthuman subjects produces the necessity for a proliferation of perspectives. Engaging with cultures not primarily expressed in European languages is one way in which critical posthumanist discourses can open to the insights of 'other worlds.'

My commitment to diversity in critical posthumanist scholarship is drawn from the notion that an engagement with multiple perspectives is the mode of knowledge production appropriate for posthuman subjects immanent to the conditions upon which they reflect.[565] In this sense, engaging with diverse theoretical and aesthetic explorations of what it is to be human is crucial to the process of developing praxes for the 'becoming other-than-the *Homo Universalis* of Humanism or other-than-the *Anthropos* of anthropocentrism.'[566] This perspectivism acknowledges the situated and grounded, and therefore differential, forms of

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[563] 'The domination of a people's language by the languages of the colonising nations was crucial to the domination of the mental universe of the colonised.' Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 'The Language of African Literature', in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*, ed. by Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (London: Routledge, 2013), pp. 435–56 (p. 442).
[564] Ngũgĩ, p. 439.
[565] Braidotti, *Posthuman Knowledge*, p. 54.
[566] Braidotti, *Posthuman Knowledge*, pp. 54–55.

knowledge production that keep open the question of what it is to be human. In this sense, this thesis aims at elucidating one element of a necessarily ongoing process.

II.   The Asterisk of Blackness in Critical Posthumanism

That the decolonisation of critical posthumanism is an intrinsic element of this thesis reflects the journey I have taken during its completion. When I began the project, I had envisioned the thesis as a study of posthuman subjectivities in the context of contemporary biotechnologies, focussing on texts such as Margaret Atwood's *Maddadam* trilogy (*Oryx and Crake*, 2003, *The Year of the Flood*, 2009 and *Maddadam*, 2013); Jeanette Winterson's *The Stone Gods* (2007); and the poetry in Michael Symonds Roberts's collection *Corpus* (2004). All of these works engage with issues that arise from developments in genetic science and are indicative of what Lars Schmeink describes in *Biopunk Dystopias* (2016) as the 'shift from physics to biology in our cultural perception of life-altering and/or life-threatening sciences by this exemplary genre and its visions of dystopian future'.[567] Fascinated by the cultural impact of developments such as the CRISPR-Cas 9 genetic editing technique, I hoped to build on Schmeink's work by bringing critical posthumanist discourses to an analysis of the cultural movement 'away from a cyberpunk imaginary […] and towards another technocultural expression of scientific progress: One that favors genetic engineering, xenotransplantation, and virology and is thus best expressed in the metaphor not of the cyborg but of the splice.'[568] While I did not articulate it explicitly at the time, this original project shared a central mode of enquiry with its final iteration: a consideration of what counts as life.

The shift in the project's focus came following a presentation of my Masters' thesis – in which I examined posthuman subjectivities in Octavia Butler's *Xenogenesis* trilogy – to colleagues at the University of Leeds. As I fielded questions, a fellow postgraduate student, Dima Chami, commented on the absence of any reference to antecedent non-dualistic cultures within critical posthumanist discourses. At the time, I felt that I was becoming fluent in critical posthumanist frameworks and was surprised to realise that such an absence was not something I had seen confronted before. Alerted to this gap, I began to seek out critiques of

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[567] Schmeink, p. 5.
[568] Schmeink, p. 7.

the discipline from those who share critical posthumanism's commitment to displacing *Anthropos*, to reimagining the human beyond the narrow terms of liberal humanism, yet who avoided the label of critical posthumanism. This search led me to become absorbed in Black studies and the work of scholars whose names are littered throughout this thesis.[569] Most significant was the writing of Wynter, whose archaeology of the colonial episteme led me to consider the role of the coloniality of knowledge in informing my own ignorance of wider critiques of Humanist Man.

As I continued to follow this line of enquiry, I was inevitably led to further engage with race. What became apparent to me was the impossibility of separating two central areas of concern for this thesis, which emerged through analyses of the texts discussed throughout: the legacy of Euro-Western exceptionalism within critical posthumanist frameworks and the representation of Black life living in the context of the ongoing abjection of blackness within the racial longue durée. As Anna Lentin explains, race 'plays a role in repeating narratives of European progress vis-à-vis the supposed poverty or non-existence of Indigenous and majority world languages and knowledges.'[570] Race, which continues to reify Man and posit white Western culture as the pinnacle of human development, informs the elision of certain knowledges and thinkers from the critical posthumanist archive. This occurs not necessarily through the conscious nefarious actions of scholars, but rather as effects of the ongoing coloniality of academia. I speak here from personal experience.

Outlining the entanglement of these two elements central to this thesis – the Euro-Western exceptionalism of critical posthumanism and Black science fiction writers' representation of life in the wake – allows me to articulate Dima's influence on this project. That is, she encouraged me to encounter the *asterisk* of Black life, scholarship and knowledges within posthumanist discourses.[571] The process she began led me to consider what Neel Ahuja has succinctly termed the 'colonial genealogies of the posthumanist turn', a

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[569] I was also inspired by indigenous scholars critiques' of critical posthumanist discourses. See Todd, 'An Indigenous Feminist's Take On The Ontological Turn'; Juanita Sundberg, 'Decolonizing Posthumanist Geographies'; Sarah Hunt, 'Ontologies of Indigeneity: The Politics of Embodying a Concept', *Cultural Geographies*, 21.1 (2013), 27–32; Vanessa Watts, 'Indigenous Place-Thought & Agency amongst Humans and Non-Humans (First Woman and Sky Woman Go on a European World Tour!)', *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, 2.1 (2013), 20–34.

[570] Alana Lentin, *Why Race Still Matters* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2020), p. 7.

[571] Of course, Dima's scope was wider than only Black knowledges, pointing as it did to the exclusion of all but white knowledges in critical posthumanist scholarship.

phenomenon that this thesis ultimately attempts to disrupt.[572] This returns me to Walcott:

> the Human Sciences remain deeply complicit with the regimes of knowledge, power and practice that subtend and produce the material effects and condition of unfreedom. The radical move would be for the contemporary Human Sciences to produce the necessary sustenance required to both undo the chimera effects of democracy and freedom and instead point us towards a new perspective, one in which grappling with Black being might yet produce the routes, intellectual and otherwise, for a freedom yet to come.[573]

The demonic texts discussed in this thesis point to new perspectives for critical posthumanism, those that are cognizant of the ongoing coloniality of knowledge and which subsequently transform the terms through which the posthuman can be imagined. Through its analysis of Hopkinson, Okorafor and Joseph, this project aims to make a contribution, however small, to what Sharpe terms 'wake work' by 'turn[ing] away from existing *disciplinary* solutions to blackness's ongoing abjection that extend the dysgraphia of the wake.'[574] The tensions between critical race studies and critical posthumanism mean that this process is not without risks and certainly there will be those who disagree with some of the statements I have made throughout this thesis. My hope, however, is that the project encourages other critical posthumanists to engage with this tension in order to develop fresh understandings of critical posthumanism through further engagement with critical race and decolonial scholarship.

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[572] Ahuja, p. xiv.
[573] Simpson, Walcott, and Coulthard, p. 87.
[574] Sharpe, p. 33. Emphasis in original.

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