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Posthumanism and Black Studies in Nalo Hopkinson's *Brown Girl in the Ring*

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Abstract: The growing field of critical posthumanism provides conceptual tools for dismantling the hierarchical binaries of Europe's liberal humanist tradition. The discipline has, however, increasingly faced criticism for its deracialised analyses and lack of engagement with the insights of Black and decolonial artists and theorists. Scholars such as Sylvia Wynter, whose writing uncovers the foundational connection between the hegemonic conception of the "human" within Western modernity and the creation and hierarchisation of race, have been largely absent from critical posthumanist frameworks. Through an analysis of Nalo Hopkinson's *Brown Girl in the Ring* (1998), this article aims to address this omission of perspectives from those who, rendered foundationally abject within prevailing Western epistemes, have always imagined beyond the narrow codes of what it is to be human within humanist thought. I draw on the language of Spiralism—a literary and philosophical movement developed in Haiti—to articulate how Hopkinson's novel dismantles the anti-Black codes of being and situates the human non-hierarchically within a more-than-human cosmos. In so doing, the novel explores posthuman ways of being without reiterating the Euro-American genealogy of critical posthumanism scholarship.

Keywords: critical posthumanism, Spiralism, Vodou, science fiction, Black studies

I. Critical Posthumanism and Black Studies

Sylvia Wynter's writing centres on tracing the foundational connections between the exclusionary conception of the human in European modernity and the formation and hierarchisation of race. In her essay

"Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom," Wynter performs an archaeology of the hegemonic Western "order of knowledge" (269) to outline how an ethnocentric framework for being, that which she terms "Man" (260), was imposed as a "supracultural" (288) or universal model. She continues to posit what has been the most transversal thesis across her large corpus of work: "the greatest task facing humanity is to dismantle the overrepresentation of Man as a model of what it is to be human" (260). Wynter delineates two secularising processes of the concept of the human, the first of which ranged "from the Renaissance to the eighteenth century" and "the second from then on until today" (264). The first rested on a dualism of rationality/irrationality in which European Man was reified as emblematic of the "Rational Self." Concurrently, those of "the militarily expropriated New World territories . . . , as well as the enslaved peoples of Black Africa" were constructed as "the physical referent of the idea of the irrational/subrational Human Other" (Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality" 266). This binary was extended in the second movement through a perversion of the insights of the Darwinian revolution in the biological sciences, which engendered a "biocentric" perspective distinguishing between those "selected" and those "dysselected" by "Nature" (Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality" 310; see also Wynter and McKittrick 10). In its most contemporary manifestation, naturally "selected" Man is discursively inscribed as "*homo oeconomicus*," a figure "who practices, indeed normalizes, accumulation in the name of (economic) freedom" (Wynter and McKittrick 10). In 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" (10). Material wealth is aligned with rationality, which has the effect, as Alexander Weheliye notes, of naturalising "economic inequities, white supremacy, genocide, economic exploitation, gendered subjugation, colonialism, 'natural selection,' and concepts such as the free market" (*Habeas Viscus* 25). Within the order of knowledge of Western modernity, the overrepresentation of *homo oeconomicus* as a supracultural model of what it is to be human is an onto-epistemological process that naturalises anti-Black codes of being.

A central purpose of this essay is to demonstrate, through an analysis of Nalo Hopkinson's 1998 science fiction novel *Brown Girl in the Ring*, how and why, in the context of the foundational abjection of Blackness in the construction of Western Man, the emerging discipline of critical posthumanism is limited if it does not engage with the insights provided by Black artists and thinkers. Though internally diverse, critical posthumanism coheres around the impulse to move beyond the "possessive individualism" of liberal humanist models of subjectivity (Hayles 3).[1] Stefan Herbrechter succinctly describes posthumanism as a "rewriting of humanism and the human" in the context of the deconstructive insights of poststructuralism and the growing precarity of an increasingly globalised and technologised world (95). Broadly, critical posthumanism is a set of discourses that arise following the "convergence," to use Rosi Braidotti's term, of the critiques of both humanism and anthropocentrism: "The former focuses on the critique of the Humanist ideal of 'Man' as the allegedly universal measure of all things, while the latter criticizes species hierarchy and anthropocentric exceptionalism" (Braidotti, *Posthuman Knowledge* 3). In light of this convergence, theorists produce complex frameworks for the posthuman. There is, of course, no one strand of posthumanism. Posthumanist thinkers draw from various theoretical traditions, including (though certainly not limited to) a neo-Spinozist/Deleuze and Guattarian monistic philosophy of relational becoming (Braidotti, Margrit Shildrick); Derridean deconstruction and Niklas Luhmann's systems theory (Cary Wolfe); and a model of cybernetics and information theory that stresses the necessity of embodiment (N. Katherine Hayles). The claim within Western scholarship is that critical posthumanism represents a "new mode of thinking" (Wolfe xvii); however, several of the discipline's intersecting tenets are consistent with many insights present throughout Black scholarship.[2] While in her most recent book Braidotti acknowledges that "it is urgent to establish encounters between posthuman knowledge and black, postcolonial and anti-racist theories, as well as indigenous philosophies" (*Posthuman Knowledge* 160), much of the work of initiating these dialogues remains to be done.

Zakiyyah Iman Jackson is one figure who has begun to bridge the gap between critical posthumanism and Black studies. As she notes, an acknowledgment of how theorists such as Wynter have traced the inherent link between anti-Blackness and the construction of Man disrupts a commonly touted genealogy of posthumanism. Critical posthumanist frameworks often cite a deracinated form of European poststructuralism as their critical forebear, frequently upholding a "patrilineal link between postructuralist criticism and posthumanist theory" (Jackson 670). This, Jackson argues, elides "parallel genealogies of thought that have anticipated, constituted and disrupted these fields' categories of analysis": "For instance, fifteen years before [Michel] 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?" (670). In response to this omission of Black thinkers and artists within critical posthumanism, this essay has two intersecting strands. First, it aims to unveil the ways in which *Brown Girl* dismantles the equation of the anti-Black construction of Western Man with the human. Second, it demonstrates how, by drawing on Afro-diasporic spiritualities in the Caribbean, Hopkinson engages with, and at times pre-empts, growing contemporary discourses surrounding the posthuman without reiterating critical posthumanism's "ongoing investment in Europe as standard-bearer of 'Reason' and 'Culture'" (Jackson 673).

Brown Girl is set in a near-future Toronto in which an economic crash has led the wealthy (and predominantly white) population to flee to the suburbs, "leaving the rotten core to decay" (Hopkinson 4). Neglected by the Ontario government, the inner city has become a multicultural hub of predominantly immigrant communities surviving despite the lack of infrastructure. The downtown area, known as the Burn in an allusion to New York's dilapidated Bronx neighbourhood (Clemente Bustamante 17–18), is controlled by the "posse"—a gang headed by a ruthless leader named Rudy. The words of one Ontario official describing the downtown area as a "rat hole, complete with rats" (Hopkinson 240) indicates that Toronto has an anti-Black cartography, which naturalizes associations

between Black bodies, in particular Black female bodies, and neglected spaces.[3] Those who live in the Burn are rendered the dysselected others to *homo oeconomicus*, represented in the novel by the materially selected inhabitants of the suburbs. *Brown Girl* concerns the experiences of a young, third-generation Caribbean girl, Ti-Jeanne, who at the novel's opening hopes to flee the Burn in order to assimilate into the "selected" position of *homo oeconomicus*. Ti-Jeanne 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 act as a healer and community leader to the people of the Burn; her mother Mi-Jeanne, who begins the novel suffering from amnesia and wanders the inner city unrecognised as Crazy Betty; her child Baby; and her once-lover and Baby's father, Tony, who is also a sometime-member of the posse. The family drama is completed when Ti-Jeanne learns that Rudy is in fact Gros-Jeanne's ex-husband and Ti-Jeanne's maternal grandfather.

Ti-Jeanne's plans to move to the suburbs are thwarted by visions of and possessions by the pantheon of Caribbean spirits, the *lwa*, who are active participants in the novel's events. Initially, Ti-Jeanne hopes to end the influence of the spirits in her life, which she sees as a threat to the individual identity she hopes to cultivate. As the novel progresses, however, and Ti-Jeanne learns to embrace her relationship with the *lwa* and engages in aspects of her grandmother's spiritual practice, she explores alternative means of being-in-the-world to that of *homo oeconomicus*. In her essay on *Brown Girl*, which focusses on Hopkinson's challenge to the "nullification" of the "black female figure" within prevailing Western epistemologies, Jackson argues that Hopkinson embeds "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" (*Becoming Human* 91). The blurring of "myth" and "realism" is the means through

which Hopkinson approaches the task of disrupting the universalising of *homo oeconomicus* by the cultural hegemony within *Brown Girl*'s Toronto. By envisioning the material world entangled with the world of the spirits, Hopkinson disrupts the overrepresentation of Man within Western discourse and challenges the anthropocentrism and material self-interest of this figure by embedding humanity within a more-than-human cosmos.

The language of Spiralism—a literary and philosophical movement developed in Haiti by Frankétienne, Jean-Claude Fignolé, and René Philoctète—provides the tools for articulating the kinds of frameworks for the posthuman that *Brown Girl* explores. The range of influences on Spiralism includes both the tradition of Haitian Vodou—central to *Brown Girl*—as well as scientific theories that are present in the development of critical posthumanism, such as quantum mechanics and chaos theory. In terms recognisable to critical posthumanist frameworks,[4] Aara 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" (3). A sustained investigation into Spiralism—which, being modelled on the chaotic and non-linear flows of the spiral, is necessarily wide-ranging and ill-defined—is beyond the scope of this essay. I draw on the terms of the movement, however, to argue that Hopkinson engages with a Spiralist imaginary in order to explore ways of being-in-the-world that are conscious of humanity's mutual entanglement with other humans, the *lwa*, and the environment. From the situated perspective of one coded as an "other" within the hegemonic Western episteme, Hopkinson explores what Kristen Lillvis calls a "black posthumanist approach to identity formation [which] offers an alternative to deracialized and dehistoricized theories of . . . posthuman subjectivity" (99). Hopkinson widens critical posthumanism's scope to the epistemological ways of being-in-the-world beyond European and North American frames. The discipline is reframed from a set of conceptual tools bestowed by a former colonial centre to a practice of decolonial resistance.

II. Obeah Magic and the Aspiration towards Western Man

Ti-Jeanne begins the novel living with Gros-Jeanne, who acts as a healer to the community by using both her Caribbean spiritualist knowledge and her medical training as a nurse. Ti-Jeanne notes the syncretism in the practice of Gros-Jeanne: "Mami freely mixed her nursing training with her knowledge of herbal cures" (Hopkinson 12). Rachel Stein comments that "[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" (217). Ti-Jeanne's grandmother adapts a creolised body of knowledge in the difficult conditions of downtown Toronto. Her healing practice is a hybrid form that refuses a romantic evocation of Afro-Caribbean spiritual knowledge as a binary alternative to contemporary medical practices.[5]

In contrast to Gros-Jeanne, Rudy uses his own knowledge of the spirits for personal gain. Though a contemporary of Ti-Jeanne's grandmother, Rudy prolongs his youth through a ritual which includes draining the blood of several of the Burn's homeless children. Facilitated by his spiritual powers, Rudy's domination alludes to multiple intersecting histories: the representation of obeah practice in the Caribbean; the violent manipulation of folk culture in Haiti during the Duvalier dictatorships; and the colonial and neocolonial exploitation of Black subjects.

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" (124). In *The Cultural Politics of Obeah* (2015), Diana Paton describes obeah loosely as "practices involving ritual attempts to manipulate a world of spiritual power" (2). She argues that by the end of the twentieth century, as a result of the devaluation of African-derived Caribbean 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" (312). 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 villagers being tricked by an obeah man, such representations were informed by Western scientific perspectives in which obeah was considered irrational and unscientific. In representations of obeah as a malignant force, practitioners drew power from the world of the spirits, a skill that they manipulated for their own material gain. *Brown Girl*'s portrayal of Rudy points to this latter representation of obeah. Rudy, as an obeah man, is undoubtedly self-interested, but he is no charlatan. His spiritual powers are what allow him to dominate the Burn.

The novel's ambivalent representation of Afro-Caribbean spirituality through the figure of Rudy is also tied to the history of "Indigenism" in Haiti. Indigenism refers to the renewed interest in Haitian culture in defiance of 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" (*Haiti Unbound* 56–57). Spiralism developed out of the context of the brutal Duvalier dictatorships in Haiti—first François and then his son Jean-Claude. Rudy's control over the Burn, made possible through his knowledge of the spirits, reifies him as a figure similar to the "Vodou-empowered" François Duvalier. As Gros-Jeanne notes, Rudy "take the knowledge [of serving the spirits] and twist it" (Hopkinson 122) to maintain his brutal rule. The association of Rudy with the Duvaliers' violent rule is further evident in his distressing treatment of his servant Melba, who, as Rebecca Romdhani notes, exists as Rudy's "living zombie" (85). Controlled by Rudy and devoid of "*volition*" (Hopkinson 28; emphasis in original), Melba is akin to the zombie figure in the Vodou tradition. Glover outlines that the Vodou zombie is a metaphor Frankétienne employed to express the "Duvaliers'

body-and-soul fracturing dictatorships" (*Haiti Unbound* 58). The Vodou zombie is "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" (59) in the interstices between life and death. Rudy's violent control over the Burn renders powerless those living there, metaphorically zombifying them just as he has truly transformed Melba into a zombie. He is not only a generalised obeah man but also, through his zombification of Melba, a figure akin to the Duvaliers.

Discussing the zombie and multiple zombification processes in *Brown Girl* at length, Romdhani argues that Hopkinson draws on Vodou to represent various forms of "zombifying shame" (73). Her essay usefully delineates another aspect of Rudy's character, claiming that he "symbol[ises] . . . those Africans—in Africa and the Caribbean—who collaborated with the European enslavers" (86). Anna Bedford takes Romdhani's statement on Rudy's complicity in the subjugation of Black subjects further, arguing that Rudy's control over Melba is representative of "the exploitation of labor (especially non-white and female) under capitalism" (25). Through his transformation of Melba and the Burn's inhabitants into the "thingified non-person[s]" of Spiralism's zombie, Rudy is presented as the agent of a process akin to that which Aimé Césaire terms "thingification" (42): the dehumanisation of colonised subjects. *Brown Girl*'s prologue also connects Rudy—an individualistic, exploitative force—to the neocolonial forces of contemporary capitalism. In the prologue, an Ontario official visits Rudy and entreats 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 employs Tony to find a suitable donor amongst the Burn's poor inhabitants and to murder them so that their heart can be harvested. The prologue represents Rudy's complicity with the bio-colonial/capitalist exploitation of the marginalised poor, since the meeting 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 transplant organ is indicative, in Braidotti's words, of "a perverse form of the posthuman" (*The*

Posthuman 7). The theft of Gros-Jeanne's heart subsumes her into the "opportunistic political economy of bio-genetic capitalism," which views human matter as "commodity for trade and profit" (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 (254–55). This scene also mimics the consultation of an obeah man in Jamaica, as described by Edmonds and Gonzalez (124), by one who hopes to employ a practitioner to manipulate the spirits on their behalf. In this way, the novel draws a comparison between the "thingification" of this act of "bio-piracy" (Stein 210) and the zombifying effects of Rudy's individualistic obeah practice.

Rudy's obeah practice and exploitation of the "dysselected" others of the Burn represents an assimilation to hegemonic Western frameworks and to a mode of being akin to *homo oeconomicus*. As Sarah Wood notes, Rudy privileges personal material gain over all else: "[what] Rudy aspires to in his ritual practice of Obeah are the Western elixir of youthful appearance, material wealth and gain and physical prowess and power at the expense of both community and family" (322). The networked forms of Rudy's domination cohere in his violent murder of Melba, whom Rudy kills to send a message to Tony. Initially unwilling to carry out the murder required to obtain a heart for Premier Uttley, Tony attempts to flee the Burn only to have his attempt foiled by Rudy. To scare Tony into submission, Rudy forces him to watch as he flays Melba alive. Literally reducing Melba to flesh, Rudy is solidified as the force behind the dehumanization and precarity of life in the Burn.

In the context of Rudy's violence and the anti-Black structures of Toronto, Ti-Jeanne's plans for survival centre on the aspiration of moving to the suburbs and the position of *homo oeconomicus* represented by life in this area of Toronto. Romdhani argues that "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" (73). To this end, Ti-Jeanne hopes to leave the Burn and to take up the position of the materially selected within the suburbs, subsequently becoming symbolically separated from her

grandmother and her Afro-Caribbean heritage. Describing Wynter's work, Walter Mignolo explains that owing to the discursive practices of coloniality, "particular epistemologies" become "unthinkable and/or unarticulated within Western hegemonic categories of knowing" (106). In the neocolonial context of *Brown Girl*, Ti-Jeanne can only imagine her route to personhood through an adherence to the central tenets of Western Man. For Ti-Jeanne's character, Hopkinson draws on a history of Caribbean women's writing in which a member of the younger generation becomes an "expatriate of the mind" (Niesen de Abruña 92), who identifies worth and progress with European or North American culture over and against their own.

The novel reveals Ti-Jeanne's self-imposed alienation from her Caribbean heritage in her reaction to a vision in which she is visited by the vampiric figure of Caribbean myth—the Soucouyant. The Soucouyant is a malevolent spirit that drains the blood of its victims. It appears in a vision to Ti-Jeanne and attempts to "drink the blood" (Hopkinson 44) of her child, Baby. However, another Caribbean figure, the Jab-Jab, prevents the Soucouyant's attack. Mythology dictates that the Soucouyant must count rice before committing murder, so the Jab-Jab throws rice onto the floor to delay the Soucouyant's assault. As the spirit counts 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 implications with her grandmother:

> "Mami, 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. Is a gift from God Father. Is a good thing, not a evil thing. But child, if you don't learn how to use it, it will use you, just like it take your mother." (46–47)

Ti-Jeanne pathologizes her visions as a sign of madness; they are an affliction that threatens the autonomous personhood that she aspires to.[6] As such, Ti-Jeanne confuses all spiritual practices, even her grandmother's community-oriented religion, with the more pejorative obeah. Paton argues that 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" (315). 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. Adhering to Afrophobic perspectives, Ti-Jeanne believes she can only achieve personhood through a disavowal of all spiritual practices.

Gros-Jeanne's reference to Ti-Jeanne's mother in the above quotation situates Ti-Jeanne's dislocation from a Caribbean heritage within the symbolic history of Caribbean writing. In her discussion of the intersection of history and womanhood in Caribbean women's literature, Caroline Rody argues that the loss of a "primordial, collective memory . . . tends to gather around a figure we might call the mother-of-forgetting" (109). 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" (110). Ti-Jeanne's dislocation from her cultural heritage is symbolised by just such a figure of forgetting. Ti-Jeanne's mother, Mi-Jeanne, who abandoned Ti-Jeanne as a child, has had her spirit trapped in a calabash bowl by Rudy so that her body now wanders the Burn as Crazy Betty. As an absent mother in a literal state of amnesia, Mi-Jeanne embodies the mother-of-forgetting figure in Caribbean women's literature. Her estrangement from Ti-Jeanne symbolises the latter's alienation from her Afro-Caribbean heritage.

Ti-Jeanne's vision of the Soucouyant challenges her Afrophobic perception of all spiritual knowledge and practices. Ti-Jeanne is frightened by her experience with the Soucouyant and becomes more determined to end the influence of the spirits in her life. What she fails to realise, however, is that it is actually the mythical Jab-Jab and its knowledge of the Soucouyant's weakness to sunlight that saves her and Baby. Romdhani writes that Ti-Jeanne must "read" the dream from a different perspective to that of "western epistemologies and cosmologies" (82) in order to understand that it is knowledge of the spirits, rather than a disconnection from the spirit world, that represents the possibility of survival. Indeed, as Sarah Wood writes, "it is through the initially frightening apparitions of the Jab-Jab and the Soucouyant that she becomes equipped with the knowledge which will help her defeat her grandfather" (323). At the novel's end, Ti-Jeanne has a final showdown with Rudy during which the Jab-Jab once more appears. The figure encourages Ti-Jeanne to use her spiritual knowledge to call on the *lwa* and to defeat her grandfather. The scene with the Soucouyant therefore adumbrates the battle with Rudy, most evident through the similarities between the vampirism of the Soucouyant and Rudy's consumption of homeless children's blood to prolong his youth.[7] Whilst Ti-Jeanne's desire for power and autonomy leads to her rejecting her heritage, in fact it is knowledge of an Afro-Caribbean epistemological tradition that saves her from the Soucouyant and, later, will save her from Rudy.

III. Indigenization: Cultural Practice and Resistance

So far in this essay, I have argued that Ti-Jeanne imagines gaining freedom through an identification with the Western concept of Man. For Wynter, the binary opposition of Man and not-Man produces a concomitant dualism of symbolic life/death. Those who can claim to possess the attributes of Man experience symbolic life. The "dysselected" others experience symbolic death (Wynter and McKittrick 28–29). In *Brown Girl*, this symbolic life/death dualism plays out through the common science fiction trope of urban spaces segregated by wealth. In this context, Ti-Jeanne views leaving the Burn and taking up life in the suburbs

as a life-saving manoeuvre. 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" (106; emphasis in original). *Brown Girl* depicts how following either of these two requirements—assimilation or exclusion—amounts to the maintenance of the racialised epistemology of imperialism. As Ti-Jeanne's life becomes more embroiled in Rudy's affairs, she uncovers an alternative mode of survival to that of the binary outlined by Mignolo—that of indigenization.

The concept of indigenization as I employ it here is derived from the idiosyncratic use of the term by 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 therefore refers to the becoming-indigenous of African people within the Caribbean through cultural praxes that forge a foundational relation with the landscape. In what were termed provision spaces—land away from the plantations on which slaves could till for their own resources—those transported from Africa engaged in cultural practices built from knowledge systems that represented a "paradox and contradiction" to the epistemic *doxa* of the plantation owners (Wynter, "Jonkonnu in Jamaica" 36). That is, opposed to the extractive plantation economy and the hierarchical ontologies posited within European colonial cultures, those which delineated between white and Black humanity, the indigenization of enslaved Africans engendered a non-hierarchical relationship with their environment. 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" ("From Masquerade" 206). By procuring a relationship with the landscape through indigenising practices, African people and their descendants in the Caribbean embedded alternative conceptions of being to that of the hegemonic culture of the plantation owners.

Gros-Jeanne's actions as spiritual leader and medical practitioner represent just such a process of indigenization. As the source of healing for many of the inner city's inhabitants, Gros-Jeanne draws on the communalism embedded within her spiritualism to practice an ethics of care. In one instance, Gros-Jeanne tends to the broken leg of one of the Burn's many homeless children—those whom Rudy kills to prolong his youth—while simultaneously feeding the rest of the girl's companions (Hopkinson 60–71). Bedford describes how Gros-Jeanne's actions are informed by an ethical understanding of the self as a "self-in-relation"—one that emerges through entanglements with other members of the community, the *lwa*, and the environment (23). Her acts of care and worship rest on a spiritual worldview in which the human is fundamentally a relational entity. Such a conception of humanity is consistent with the "non-hierarchical ideology" of Spiralism, which acknowledges the quintessentially posthuman concept of "the relational bio-interdependency of all forms of existence" (Zweifel 29).[8] Gros-Jeanne indigenises a posthumanist model of embodied relationality through her spiritual and medical practice, that which emerges from her Spiralist cosmological worldview.

Relational embodiment 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!" (Hopkinson 97). Possession produces a blurring of the self-other distinction as Gros-Jeanne's body holds within her the spirit of Papa Osain. Later, after Ti-Jeanne and Tony are captured by members of the posse during the failed escape attempt, Ti-Jeanne is possessed by the

"Prince of Cemetery" (Hopkinson 117). Consistent with Vodou practice, the possession engenders a relational embodiment in which "the two identities merge, blurring the distinction between god and human" (Wood 321). Ti-Jeanne's body is altered and as "Ti-Jeanne/Prince of Cemetery" (Hopkinson 117), she gains the physical strength to defeat Rudy's henchman and escape.

Although it is possession that saves her, when Ti-Jeanne returns to her grandmother she remains determined to deny her relationship with the spirits: "'Mami, I need to know how to deal with this. 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, but she didn't say it out loud" (125; emphasis in original). Ti-Jeanne wants to learn more of her link with the spirits only so that she can sever the connection. Aspiring to the individualist personhood defined as *homo oeconomicus*, Ti-Jeanne views her possessions as pathological threats to her autonomy and, as such, believes possessions can only result in a loss of self and the "powerlessness" (Romdhani 77) that occurs through zombification, such as that experienced by Melba. Romdhani indicates a central irony in Ti-Jeanne's fear of zombification when she outlines how Ti-Jeanne's dismissal of her "African heritage" (73), as an attempt to cultivate individual autonomy, itself leads to zombification. She argues that Ti-Jeanne's desire for assimilation "into the colonizer's culture" is an effect of the capture of her thinking by the hegemonic episteme of Canadian society, a phenomenon she relates to becoming a zombie (73).

This irony of becoming powerless through attempts to cultivate individual autonomy is played out in the novel's denouement: Ti-Jeanne smashes the calabash bowl in which her mother's spirit is trapped and breaks the magic that had kept Rudy young. In response, Rudy attempts to replace his daughter Mi-Jeanne's spirit with Ti-Jeanne's, which requires a zombification process he describes as "*indoctrination*" (Hopkinson 212; emphasis in original). 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" (215). Rudy's paradoxical offer of freedom-through-coercion mimics colonisers' offer of liberation through assimilation to Western epistemic systems. In Romdhani's words, Rudy's indoctrination of Ti-Jeanne is akin to the "mental colonization of Caribbean people under the colonial education system" (85). Braidotti describes the societal indoctrination of subjects when she writes that "traditional modes of representation are *legal forms of addiction*" (*Transpositions* 85; emphasis added). Established modes of thinking and representation define the prevailing "imaginary" (85), which becomes an internalised supervising presence within the subject. Braidotti goes on to note that, in feminist theory, the issue of the imaginary has predominantly been approached through the psychoanalytic conception of the "imaginary as the process of linguistic mediation. This refers to a system of representation by which a subject gets captured or captivated by a ruling social and cultural formation: legal addictions to certain identities, images and terminologies" that, following Louis Althusser and Jacques Lacan, are handed down as the "symbolic system" of "Phallic Law" (85–86). In *Brown Girl*, identification with the culturally dominant Western imaginary is presented as a zombification. Rudy's attempt to indoctrinate Ti-Jeanne occurs inside the Canadian National (CN) Tower, which, as Romdhani argues, is an emblem of both Canadian capitalism and the needles that are used to inject the highly addictive drug Buff, sold by Rudy and his posse (79). The phallic image of the CN Tower—as an overt emblem of patriarchal capitalism—brings to mind the addiction to the deterministic Phallic Law that Braidotti describes. *Brown Girl* therefore forges a link between the symbolic circumscription of the subject by Western epistemologies and Rudy's obeah-enabled zombification. 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 imaginary.

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 spiritual world. In Spiralist thinking, the zombie is both a metaphor for the constricted existence under the Duvaliers and, paradoxically, a figure of resistance:

> 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*. . . . [T]he 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* 60–61; emphasis added)

As with the Spiralist zombie, Ti-Jeanne finds resistance from a position of liminality. She is once again visited by the Jab-Jab, who inspires Ti-Jeanne 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 (Edmonds and Gonzalez 110):

> 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. (Hopkinson 221)

By using the CN Tower as a *poteau-mitan*, Ti-Jeanne calls on the *lwa*, 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 (Glover, "Insularity"). Rather than accept her indoctrination, Ti-Jeanne transforms the CN Tower, that symbol of "Phallic Law," into the *poteau-mitan* replete with spiral decoration. Her victory signals the indigenization of a Spiralist worldview within Toronto as a means of cultural resistance to the epistemological hegemony symbolized by the CN Tower.

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. Ti-Jeanne's mother Mi-Jeanne regains her memory and Ti-Jeanne is reunited with the novel's mother-of-forgetting, symbolically reconnecting her with her Afro-Caribbean heritage. The final events of the novel occur during Gros-Jeanne's funeral that takes place in the "Toronto Crematorial Chapel," which Gros-Jeanne had repurposed as a "palais" (Hopkinson 86), the temple used for possession ceremonies. During the funeral, Ti-Jeanne meets Tony outside of the palais and the latter 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" (246). Before Ti-Jeanne can answer, the drumming at the funeral interrupts by "reach[ing] a new intensity" (246). As Craig Keener notes, drumming is central to the calling of the *lwa* in Vodou possession rituals. 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" on a drum (Hopkinson 92). Saliently, drumming is that which opens the space between the spirit and material realms facilitating relations between humanity and the *lwa*. As Tony questions how Ti-Jeanne mustered the strength to defeat Rudy during Gros-Jeanne's funeral, the drums impose an answer. Ti-Jeanne and the reader are reminded that her strength is derived from her conscious engagement of her relationship with the *lwa* through ritual practice. Such a relationship, however, is not one akin to the unidirectional relations of domination that Ti-Jeanne experienced under Rudy. 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" (244). Ti-Jeanne refuses to simply replace her grandmother and to serve the spirits in the same way that she did, yet she now understands that cultivating relations with the *lwa* does not make her a powerless zombie, as she once feared.

IV. Vodou Possession and Imagining Posthuman Embodiment

Alongside Ti-Jeanne's narrative and her symbolic dis-identification with a Western imaginary is the description of Uttley's heart surgery, during which Hopkinson interweaves medical discourse and Haitian Vodou to imagine a Spiralist model of posthuman embodiment. McCormack argues that Caribbean epistemologies imagine 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" (254). 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 the possessed as a "horse" (Hopkinson 95) ridden by spirits, for example, is specific to Vodou.[9] 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 transplantation 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. (Hopkinson 167–68)

Chimerism—a word derived from the chimera of 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 the transplant recipient is a technique known as an allograft, which uses chimerism to prepare the recipient to receive the donated organ (Shildrick, "Chimerism" 99). Through the pre-transplant introduction of stem cells into the recipient's body, chimerism "trick[s]" (Hopkinson 167) (in Wright's words) the immune system—made up of human leukocyte antigens (HLAs)—into not attacking the 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" ("Chimerism" 95).[10] That is, 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 overtly posthuman Deleuzian "concept of assemblage . . . as a better model for organic life" (96).

The concept of assemblage devised by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari is commonly employed across a range of critical posthuman scholarship as a means of theorising subjectivity beyond the individual and static conception of Western modernity (see Braidotti, *The Posthuman*; Shildrick, "Why Should Our Bodies End"). Claire Colebrook writes that assemblage describes how "[a]ny body or thing is the outcome of a process of connections" (xx). There is no entity that pre-exists the formation of assemblages. Rather, all bodies and things are always already in relation. Shildrick adopts the anti-identitarian concept of assemblage in her study of chimerism to produce a relational and processual model of posthuman subjectivity.

Brown Girl similarly imagines non-unitary, fluid subjectivities through the posthuman blurring of self and other indicated by

chimerism. However, Hopkinson's guides are not Deleuze and Guattari, but rather Vodou—specifically, the cohabitation of two entities in one body during Vodou possession. In Wright's description of allografting as the means to "trick" the immune system, the surgeon unknowingly invokes the *lwa* Papa Legba, the trickster god of indeterminacy, who is called on first in all possession rituals to allow transference between the spirit and human worlds.[11]

Alessandra Benedicty-Kokken describes "possession as a representational form that helps negotiate feelings of 'displacement and desubjectification.'" (34). Possession, in this sense, is akin to Édouard Glissant's "*poetics of location*," whereby the body is understood as a "signifier waiting to receive its meaning from a relational experience that depends on location" (Benedicty-Kokken 35; emphasis in original). The body as a Glissantian signifier is, Benedicty-Kokken argues, a fluid, creolising "domicile" that, like the possessed body containing human and *lwa* in one space, acts as a vehicle for the "complementary and contradictory" union of cultures that is integral to Haitian life and religious practice (36). 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 as a material site of Spiralist or posthuman relationality. Braidotti notes that while postructuralism "paved the way" for posthuman models of transversal becoming, "the posthuman turn materializes it and composes a new ontological framework of becoming-subjects" ("Theoretical Framework" 33). In a similar sense, the framework for posthuman subjectivity explored in *Brown Girl* cannot be divorced from materiality. In the novel, as in the practice of Vodou, possession is not representational but is a physical event in which human and *lwa* coexist in a single body. Chimerism, while challenging a Western sociocultural imaginary of the individual as rigidly delineated, is rendered in *Brown Girl* as continuous with the presence of otherness in *lwa* possession. By equating Haitian spirit-possession with the surgical procedure of a heart transplant, *Brown Girl* figures

posthuman subjectivity through what Frankétienne describes as the scientific and Spiralist blurring of the spiritual and material (Taleb-Khyar 390), that which fundamentally runs counter to Cartesian metaphysics. Premier 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" (Hopkinson 236), a scenario in which cells from the transplanted organ, in this case the 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 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.* (237; emphasis in original)

Initially, Uttley registers Gros-Jeanne's heart's influence in her body as an attack. She is "invaded" and "taken over" by a rhythm that is "not her own." As McCormack notes, Uttley's thoughts are equivalent to "the rhetoric of immune therapy in transplantation [that] is steeped in a sociopolitical imaginary of aggressive coexistence, where parts fight for their survival and immune systems battle a raging war to ensure the recipient valiantly lives on" (255). 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 a spiralling double-helix, Uttley and Gros-Jeanne are like two streams "intertwined" yet "distinct." As with chimerism, there is neither homogenisation nor the fundamental self/non-self split that both McCormack and Shildrick note is common in contemporary immunological discourse. 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" (Shildrick, "Chimerism" 104).[12] If the two-in-one model is alien to "classical culture" as Shildrick sees it, it is certainly not to the embodied experience of possession, where human and *lwa* coexist within one body ("Chimerism" 101). *Brown Girl* depicts such a coexistence when Ti-Jeanne is possessed by Papa Osain: "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" (Hopkinson 223–24). Papa Osain exists with Ti-Jeanne in her body. The two are not assimilated into one being but rather exist together within a singular space.

The ontological relationality between both participants in the transplant scenario informs an ethics of relationality that disrupts the divided cartography of Toronto. Upon waking up after 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" (Hopkinson 239–40). 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" (Hopkinson 239). McCormack argues that "Hopkinson's reconfiguration of visceral co-constitutive relationality changes the body politics, demanding that the Premier share resources with those in Downtown Toronto" (253). 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 is indigenized into Toronto, leading to 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 *lwa* 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" (Hopkinson 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 self-interest" (239). Rehabilitating the Burn strengthens Uttley's own political position and improves the circumstances for all of Toronto's citizens.

The transfer of Gros-Jeanne's heart to the Premier is not wholly a positive act of liberation. As McCormack writes, while 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" (256–57). There is indeed 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 the future Toronto. *Brown Girl* brings to light the potential violence that posthuman biotechnologies such as transplantation may reproduce, 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. The ambivalence of the zombie—as a metaphor for both subjugation and resistance—is therefore present at *Brown Girl*'s end, which prevents any uncritical valorisation of posthuman interconnectivity. This ambivalence is a further aspect of Spiralism in *Brown Girl*. "The spaces of Spiralists' narratives," Glover writes, "are dialecticized, alternately immobilizing and liberating, degraded and filled with potential, real and marvellous. They reflect the sustained ambiguity of the zombie"

(*Haiti Unbound* 103). As *Brown Girl* makes clear, it is vital in discussions of the blurring of self-other boundaries that posthuman theorists remain attendant to how ongoing anti-Black structures disproportionately attribute vulnerability of the self to the other, which contributes to a heightened precarity of Black life.

Whilst posthuman subjectivities potentially perpetrate ongoing anti-Black violence, Hopkinson's novel maintains the hope that the consciousness of ontological relationality holds the potential to unsettle both ongoing colonial discourse and coinciding neocolonial 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 *lwa* in Vodou possession (135). 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. In this framework, an action benefitting the other is not an altruistic move encouraged by a moral imperative but an ethical act informed by a posthuman understanding that what one does for the other is simultaneously done for oneself. This perspective is consistent with the Vodou conception of the worshiper as relationally implicated with other members of their spiritual "family." As Karen McCarthy 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" (206). The invocation of a single organism that contains alterity within—human, *lwa*, and ancestor—informs an idea of obligation based not on an assimilative collectivity of like individuals but rather on a fundamental interconnectivity. 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" ("Chimerism" 104). In *Brown Girl*, the entanglement of Haitian Vodou with biomedicine both unsettles the individualist conception of Western Man and proposes the socio-political effects that may arise from an ethics of posthuman ontological relationality.

V. Conclusion

Discussing expressions of identity in Black women's writing, Carole Boyce Davies notes the productive insufficiency of the plethora of terms that Black women have employed to define themselves:

> Each represents an original misnaming and the simultaneous constant striving of the dispossessed for full representation. Each therefore must be used provisionally; each must be subject to new analyses, new questions and new understandings if we are to unlock some of the narrow terms of the discourses in which we are inscribed. In other words, at each arrival at a definition, we begin a new analysis, a new departure, a new interrogation of meaning, new contradictions. (*Black Women, Writing and Identity* 5)

The Spiralist-informed posthuman subjectivities in *Brown Girl* are not meant as definitive statements of identity but rather interventions in an ongoing process of self-definition. These expressions of Black being "unlock" the "narrow terms" of ongoing colonial epistemologies that define female Blackness as Man's other. As with the indeterminacy that Spiralism lays out, however, the narrative's ending contains no certainties. The novel ends with Gros-Jeanne's funeral and her murder haunts the burgeoning posthuman ethical perspective of Uttley, while the Premier's new policies aimed at rejuvenating the Burn are themselves only necessary interventions into an ongoing process. Nevertheless, *Brown Girl* ends with the potential of radical political change. Wynter describes the feedback loop process through which "cultural conceptions, encoded in language and other signifying systems, shape the development of political structures and are also shaped by them" ("Beyond the Categories" 65). *Brown Girl* depicts how practices of indigenization disrupt cultural hegemonies and contribute to the challenging of concomitant anti-Black political structures.

Notes

1 In *How We Became Posthuman* (1999), Hayles refers to C. B. Macpherson's study of possessive individualism as "one of the definitive texts characterising the lib-

eral humanist subject" (3). She cites a useful passage from Macpherson to define the concept: "Its possessive quality is found in its conception of the individual as essentially the proprietor of his own person or capacities *owing nothing to society for them*. . . . The human essence is *freedom from the wills of others*, and freedom is a function of possession" (Macpherson qtd. in Hayles 3; emphasis in original).

2 As Weheliye writes, "black humanist discourses emphasize the historicity and mutability of the 'human' itself, gesturing toward different, catachrestic, conceptualisations of the human" ("Feenin" 26). A further criticism of critical posthumanism arises from North American Indigenous scholars, who argue that critical posthumanism often rearticulates the insights of various onto-epistemologies which never assimilated to humanism, nor maintained anthropocentric perspectives (see Todd; Hunt; Sundberg).

3 McKittrick discusses this naturalisation of geographic inequalities in her study of the racial-sexual dimensions of geography: "If prevailing geographic distributions and interactions are racially, sexually and economically hierarchical, these hierarchies are naturalised by repetitively spatializing 'difference'" (xv).

4 Braidotti's framework for posthuman subjectivity exemplifies such a crossover. She contends that the subject emerges relationally within a non-hierarchical and interrelational world: "The relational capacity of the posthuman subject is not confined within our species, but it includes all non-anthropocentric elements. Living matter—including the flesh—is intelligent and self-organising, but it is so precisely because it is not disconnected from the rest of organic life" (*Posthuman Knowledge* 60).

5 Attempting to locate a structural root for Caribbean spirituality contradicts the production of inherently creolised traditions that developed as a result of cultural contact: "The complex dynamics of encounter, adaptations and assimilation and syncretism that we refer to as creolization are emblematic of the vibrant nature of Diaspora cultures. . . . [T]he resulting religious systems are fundamentally complex, pluralistic, and intergenerational" (Fernandez Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert 3–4).

6 Ti-Jeanne's conflation of possession with "madness" is consistent with certain studies of possession in Haitian Vodou. According to Benedicty-Kokken, who vehemently disagrees with this analysis, American and French epistemologies construct

> a discursive order that has conflated the representation of "Haiti" with an understanding of Vodou primarily as an occult religion, and not as a philosophical system. I argue that it is the Western imperative for empirical evidence and authenticity that causes even the most well-intentioned social scientists to misrepresent possession as illegitimate: as "abnormal" as "*pathological*," and "diabolic." (102; emphasis added)

7 Romdhani makes a similar connection between the Soucouyant and Rudy, referring specifically to Rudy's "insatiable hunger for power and wealth" (81).

8 Braidotti's conception of posthuman subjectivity derives from her understanding of a similar "bio-interdependency" to that posited within Spiralism. Braidotti's framework for the posthuman centres on what she terms a "*zoe*-centred egalitarianism"—a "vitalist approach to living matter [that] displaces the boundary between the portion of life . . . that has traditionally been reserved from *anthropos*, that is to say *bios*, and the wider scope of animal and non-human life, also known as *zoe*" (*The Posthuman* 60).

9 For more on possession and the description of the possessed as horses, see Deren.

10 Immunological science has been reluctant to come to a similar conclusion as Shildrick. Shildrick writes "[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" ("Chimerism" 95).

11 During the Vodou possession ritual in which Gros-Jeanne turns Ti-Jeanne and Tony invisible, Gros-Jeanne first calls on Papa Legba to lower the boundary between the spirit and material world (Hopkinson 91). This process of calling on Papa Legba to facilitate transfer between the two worlds is also described by Fernandez Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert (125).

12 In this sense, chimerism gives Shildrick a microbiological basis for her career-long philosophical critique of Cartesian duality (see her essays "Posthumanism and the Monstrous Body," "The Body which Is Not One," and "'Why Should Our Bodies End at the Skin?'").

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