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**INTERSECTIONAL LITERARY ANALYSIS:
READING BETWEEN, BEHIND, AND BEYOND
THE LINES**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis undertakes the creation of a literary paradigm for intersectional analysis, rethinking identity and social theory in literature and developing a framework for productive analysis. It develops the notion of literary intersectionality that considers the ‘in-betweens’ of literary texts. This thesis lays out a framework for intersectional analysis that highlights three major elements for examination in literary texts: close reading, power dynamics, and knowledge production and dissemination. It considers how various manners of storytelling by intersectional authors and communities present spaces ripe with productive potential for social transformation. Engaging in the analysis of contemporary texts by intersectional authors that intersect genres, such as Black American life writing, postcolonial science fiction and Native American ecofiction, this thesis considers how Western methods of analysis, that have historically perpetuated the dehumanisation and socially mandated inferiority of non-white, western, heterosexual, middle-class individuals, can be deconstructed and destabilised to make way for apparatuses of critical thought based in non-Western epistemologies. It seeks to understand the various authors’ use of narrative strategies and adopts the perspective of critical theories as historical contexts and documents that influence the writing of texts that reveal intersectional experiences leading to better understandings of dynamics of power around the world and cultivating a new conception of being and the individual. Finally, this thesis considers the present as historical context to question how, for example, the global pandemic, recent racial violence, challenges to female autonomy, territorial insecurity, and the personal context of the researcher may affect the produced analysis.

LAY ABSTRACT

Taking into account a changing understanding of identity and social theory that includes recognition of multiple elements of identity occurring simultaneously, this thesis seeks to apply this understanding to literary analysis. Drawing on the notion of intersectionality, the term used for the experience of multiple oppressions occurring at once, the thesis creates a framework that examines elements of close reading, power dynamics and knowledge production and dissemination in contemporary novels. Moreover, with a focus on how storytelling varies according to social experiences, the thesis additionally looks at intersecting genres, genres that combine elements of previously separate genres, such as Black American life writing, postcolonial science fiction and Native American ecofiction. Through this analysis and framework, the thesis posits a form of reading that does not depend solely on Western methods of analysis that have perpetuated the dehumanisation of non-white and non-Western individuals. It challenges the assumption of a universal experience and looks to recent history to determine how it impacts the narrative styles of the authors included, the researcher, and the construction of the thesis itself.

DEDICATION

To Ammi, Nano, Babajaan, Baray Baba, and Bina Khala.

My elders, whose storytelling and wisdom led me to where I am.

You are missed.

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This research on intersectional storytelling has subconsciously occupied me for much longer than the four years it took me to write this thesis. Indeed, it evolved from various attempts to untangle the complexities around my own social context and identity as a South Asian woman, born and brought up in the Western world and educated as a Westerner. My racial experience has been defined by a glaring complaint of not being enough, not Western enough to avoid questions of ‘where are you really from’ based on my physical difference (read: race), and not South Asian enough to the point my own family will comment on my anglicised accent when speaking my mother tongue. Indeed, I often find myself occupying a liminal space of non-articulated existence. What that meant and continues to mean for my ability to translate my experiences through the means of storytelling, and the ability of others who find an articulated space of existence eludes them, will likely be a life-long question. One that will no doubt drive me to existential corners of both my mind and the collective world mind that has been struggling to voice. Vital to my experience however was the community that surrounded me while determined the Answers to questions that had yet to be articulated, let alone the vocabulary created. Particularly in my childhood years, I suffered with a growing anxiety and awareness that there was a reality being expressed by my peers and to a certain extent my parents that I did not, and could not, coincide with how I saw the world. There was a schism, both in my mind and my understanding of what was the supposed ‘real’ and what I was personally experiencing. While not resolved, this schism, particularly in being hyper-aware of the experiential isolation, was eased by the coalitions and community that guided me throughout my childhood and those I became a part of as an adult.

First and foremost, to my supervisors, Michelle Keown and Carole Jones, who have been by my side during both my Master’s and Doctorate, without whom I would never had

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INTRODUCTION

Liberating ideas rely on liberating readings of liberating literature.

Sean Kicummah Teuton

2019 marked three decades since the introduction of the term ‘intersectionality’ in the legal field. It was the same year that I began my doctoral journey, ignorant of the ways the world would be transformed in the next four years. While becoming a highly popular tool of analysis and criticism in contemporary identity politics, intersectionality often inspires more confusion than it provides answers. Indeed, it seems that one cannot begin any commentary on intersectionality without an emphasis on just how ambiguous and, at times, paradoxical it can be. Many argue that the term has primarily taken on the function of a buzzword in the arenas of social justice and feminism during the last decade or so, rather than an in-depth engagement with the concept (Carastathis; Cho et al.; Bilge and Collins; Davis). Moreover, because of its relative novelty in academia, there remain gaps in the research that, at times, result in a lack of specificity around the topic. This thesis aims to fill one of those gaps of intersectionality and intersectional analysis in literature.

This thesis undertakes the creation of a paradigm for intersectional literary analysis, thinking *anew* identity theory in literature from the perspective of those whose differences underpin the creation of categorical identities and developing a framework for such analysis. I define a paradigm as a manner of thinking and conducting research to develop better analysis as opposed to content specialisation. This definition pulls from the works of Ange-Marie Hancock, who states a paradigm is a ‘set of basic beliefs on a world view that precedes any question of empirical investigation’ (64). An intersectional paradigm presupposes and accepts that human experiences occur on a matrix of intersecting avenues of power that make up the context of specific struggles but does *not* assume essentialist categories of identity to

define experience. This paradigm aims to highlight the influence of contemporary discourse of identity and oppression in literature.

To the best of my knowledge, a framework of intersectional analysis for literature, one in which the theory and representation of intersectionality are used as a method of literary analysis, has not yet been developed. Leslie McCall points out that ‘despite the emergence of intersectionality as a major paradigm of research in women’s studies and elsewhere, there has been little discussion of *how* to study intersectionality, that is, of its methodology’ (1771). Indeed, this lack of a specific methodology has contributed greatly to the difficulty of incorporating intersectionality and intersectional thought into social discourses. Nevertheless, it begs the question of whether a single methodology or framework is possible or even desirable. According to Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge, no single framework can be applied to every field (99). Instead, each intersectional approach is specifically tailored to the questions, histories, and concerns of the specific field. This specificity of intersectionality to provide new directions for ‘rethinking existing areas within a traditional discipline’ (emphasis my own, Collins and Bilge 99) constitutes the strength of the concept. It is in the *re*-evaluation and *re*consideration of literary texts through the lens, not of an abstract idea or theoretical tradition but rather, of an ongoing commitment to an epistemology fundamentally concerned with social transformation and anti-subordination.

However, to effect such transformation, a methodology needs to exist. Michel Foucault claims that ‘if language expresses, it does so not in so far as it is an imitation and duplication of things but in so far as it manifests . . . the fundamental will of those who speak it’ (1970, 290), suggesting that if the basic framework of language and understanding is missing, manifesting the will of the speaker (or author in this case) is difficult, if not impossible. It follows then that without a way in which to read and analyse representations of

individuals experiencing the effects of intersectional discrimination, the very concept cannot be fully translated from its origins.

By highlighting the unspoken income stream that colonial properties provided in Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*, and challenging the literary otherworldliness of Joseph Conrad's depiction of Africa as racist, critics such as Edward Said and Chinua Achebe respectively began the process of examining texts from a non-Western epistemology. They recognised how Western¹ academic hegemonies leave hidden the complexities and nuances of non-Western, and oppressed, lived realities. This forms the basis of the intention behind this thesis, as well as a desire to push beyond static theories and categories of knowledge that may perpetuate at best and support at worst structures of oppression. Where Said and Achebe turned to literature in the West to see what was missing or unnuanced, I turn to literature from authors of colour, many of whom have lived intersectional realities, to show what is already there but requires non-Western centred methodologies to reveal. Summer Harrison articulates it well, stating that there is a 'complex responsibility to understand the structures of injustice at play and to work to dismantle them, to pass the story on as you also collaborate to change it' (23). This framework aims to be an aid to understand the complex structures and responsibilities represented literarily so as to better understand the stories that have the power to change destructive worldviews. However, before further detailing this thesis' undertaking, an introduction to intersectionality and the relevant literary context is needed.

¹ Cautious to apply a generalisation over the term of the West, and in awareness of Neil Lazarus' concern of an 'ideological category masquerading as a geographic one' (44) I define the West as the Europe and North America, locations that currently have a dominant hold on the creation and dissemination of theory and knowledge, specifically from English speaking countries. When referring to Western or non-Western, an intersectional reading should be applied whereby Western refers to locations that have a history of and may continue to (unknowingly) perpetuate an epistemology that assumes a default white, heterosexual, middle-class, able subject where all others are deviations of this default.

WHAT IS INTERSECTIONALITY?

The ambiguity of the term ‘intersectionality’ is best illustrated by the attempt to search for a definition of intersectionality. For some it is ‘a way of understanding and analysing the complexity in the world, in people, and in human experiences’ (25) as Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge argue in their book *Intersectionality* (2016). June Eric-Udorie asserts that it is ‘a way for marginalised women to talk about how their lives are affected by multiple oppressive structures’ (Ch 1). It might also be understood as ‘an interpretive orientation that leaves these factors [of predetermined subjects and schematics] as open questions to be taken up, to help expose how subjection and dominance operate, sometimes subtly’ (4) as argued by Vivian May. Indeed, many would take the definition of legal scholar and activist, Kimberlé Crenshaw, as authoritative (though many argue she only coined the term for an already pre-existing concept (Collins 92)), describing the ‘intersectional experience [as] greater than the sum of racism and sexism’ (1989, 140). Indeed, even the terminology of intersectionality has been greatly debated, with some according it the status of a theory, while others would regard it as a strategy of analysis or heuristic device (Kathy Davis 68). May questions the critical energies taken from key questions in trying to establish a definition that might, consequently, result in a contradictory exercise in artificial compartmentalisation and classification (18–19). All this to say that an understanding of intersectionality is elusive and has potential pitfalls. With a plethora of definitions, descriptions, and examples to draw from, one would not automatically assume just how incredibly complex and confusing intersectionality is.

Why is the opposite true then? On some level, this can be attributed to the fact that the conceptual framework of intersectionality has reached a stage in its development that it now inspires not only open contradiction but vehement criticism among scholars. However, it has been said that ‘some of what circulates as critical debate about what intersectionality is or

does reflect a lack of engagement with both originating and contemporary literatures on intersectionality' (Cho et al. 788) that runs the risk of it being 'used or talked about in ways that flatten its complexity, ignore its historical literatures, or depoliticize its approach' (May 19). Another aspect arises from the numerous antecedents of intersectionality that function both as part of the development of intersectional thought and apart from contemporary conceptions of intersectionality. Anna Carastathis emphatically argues that 'immanent critiques of intersectionality (and of the field of "intersectional studies") are crucial if we are to achieve analytic clarity, contextual rigour, and a politicized, historicized understanding of the trajectory of this concept' (5), one, which she reminds us, was intended to be a provisional concept. Important to note, too, is that intersectionality has been defined as a 'work-in-progress'. Bilge and Collins express the view that '[f]ar too much intersectional scholarship starts with the assumption that intersectionality is a finished framework that can simply be applied to a given research project or political program' (32). However, it would be misleading to assume that a lack of a more precise or specific definition is a shortcoming of intersectional thought and practice. Indeed, Kathy Davis suggests that 'the vagueness and open-endedness of "intersectionality" may be the very secret to its success' (69). Informed and developed in the context of the richly diverse and discursive traditions of critical legal studies in the 1980s, Crenshaw argues how 'the fact that intersectionality continues to engage multiple discursive communities is nothing mysterious' when considering how 'navigating spaces constituted by . . . shifting dynamics and distinct discursive registers was art as much as politics' (2011, 225).

The term intersectionality refers to the state of experiencing multiple and compounding forms of oppression on the basis of identity categories (i.e., race, gender, sexuality, class, ability etc.). As a mode of thought, intersectionality brings together numerous theoretical and political practices and insights, largely developed by Black

feminists and women of colour whose specific lived experiences were marginalised or ignored by a society built on hierarchies of identity. Intersectionality is an epistemology that recognises the world as a matrix of overlapping and relational avenues of power and lived experiences and, as such, is an inherently multidimensional mode of thought. Audre Lorde explains, ‘there is no such thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not lead single-issue lives (183). As such, the value of nonlinear and narrative ways of knowing, that is those forged in and by marginalised communities, need to be highlighted and legitimised. Intersectionality brings attention to the misleading constructions of identity categories in contemporary political and social arenas, highlighting how the power structures of race, gender, sexuality, class, ability, etc. cannot be fully understood in isolation from one another nor are they innocent of reproducing power structures. The purpose and strength of intersectionality (not to suggest there is only one) lie not only in the ability to articulate and contextualise the complexity of intersecting power dynamics but rather in the ability of intersectionality to challenge dominant modes of thought and, consequently, challenge the structural foundation of political and social hierarchies and to draw on the various antecedents and scholars of the concept to do so. In other words, the most productive approach to determining what intersectionality *is* is to determine what intersectionality *does*.²

Due to the limitations of space and the scope of this thesis, I am unable to fully engage in a history of intersectionality and intersectional thought. Indeed, I am hesitant to do so, as a linear mapping of intersectionality can leave vital contributions to the notions unnuanced. As such, the brief description of intersectionality that follows serves to

² Various versions of this train of thought can be found in Carbado et al. 2013, pp. 304–305; May 2015, pp. 19; Collins and Bilge 2016, pp. 31–62; Crenshaw 2011, pp. 222

contextualise the direction of this thesis and not as an exhaustive or nuanced presentation of intersectional theoretical history.

Intersectionality emerged as a means of political intervention with a long history of racial and sex-based struggles and continues to maintain an element of praxis alongside the ongoing analysis. The notion of intersecting and compounding oppressions was articulated during the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 60s. Many African American women recognised that equal rights for the Black population would not assure equal rights to all of their members. The Combahee River Collective (CRC), a collective of Black feminists who came together during the 1970s, discussed how both the civil rights movement and feminism failed to articulate their unique experience of simultaneous oppression. They articulated the state of interlocking systems of oppression in a statement in 1977, claiming that ‘if Black women were free it would mean that everyone else would have to be free since [Black women’s] freedom would necessitate the destruction of all systems of oppression’. The understanding was that Black women symbolised the bottom of the hierarchy of privilege. This notion was later taken up by Crenshaw in her famed basement metaphor, one of the most well-known descriptors for intersectionality:

Imagine a basement which contains all people who are disadvantaged on the basis of race, sex, class, sexual preference, age and/or physical ability. These people are stacked—feet standing on shoulders—with those on the bottom being disadvantaged by the full array of factors, up to the very top, where the heads of all those disadvantaged by a singular factor brush up against the ceiling. Their ceiling is actually the floor above where the heads of all those who are *not* disadvantaged in any way reside. In efforts to correct some aspects of domination, those above the ceiling admit from the basement only those who can say that “but for” the ceiling, they too would be in the upper room.

Crenshaw similarly recognises a hierarchy within experiences of oppression, placing at the bottom of the spatial metaphor in an ‘unprotected margin’ those disadvantaged by multiple factors. If they are able to be absorbed by a protected category of race or sex, the potential to rise above the ‘ceiling’ becomes available to them. At their essence, the CRC recognised that the category and classification of intersectional individuals have been historically marginalised on the basis that the lived experience of discrimination most often shared or depicted does not fit the experience of multiple oppression. Indeed, they posit that the only solution viable to them is to ‘use [their] position at the bottom . . . to make a clear leap into revolutionary action’. Hence, dismantling single-matrix oppressions, such as racism, sexism, homophobia etc., would necessarily constitute Black women’s freedom.

It became clear to Black women that the civil rights effort included a discrepancy in the benefits promised to Black men versus that of Black women. Years later, Crenshaw expressed the same understanding when she described ‘the particularly vulnerable position of Black women, who must confront racial bias *and* challenge their status as instruments, rather than beneficiaries, of the civil rights struggle’ (1991, 1277). Black women would be asked to set aside their feminist aspirations for the greater good of the anti-racist movement.³ Bilge and Collins aim to tell the story of the development of intersectional thought, noting that various groups of women in the United States, including African American, Asian American, and Native American, would articulate their struggles born from a systematic determination to view their experiences solely through singular axis of social inequality. Similarly, white feminists during the same period would also ask Black women to leave behind the racial aspect of their identities. While political movements like the Combahee River Collective

³ For more information on Black Feminist thought and civil rights history around intersectionality, see Carastathis pp. 15–68.

were undoubtedly pursuing collective anti-racist goals, the Statement was inspired by the political denial of Black women as a unique and separate classification in both anti-racist and feminist politics. The reality of Black women's identity was theoretically and epistemologically ignored. This feeling of theoretical exclusion from rights movements was an aspect that many writers of colour of the time felt drawn to talk about such as Audre Lorde, Angela Davis, and Toni Morrison.

The term 'intersectionality' was ascribed to the experience of multiple oppression by Crenshaw in 1989, which built upon the work of the 1960s and 1970s. In one of her two seminal essays on intersectionality, Crenshaw, a legal scholar and civil rights activist, articulates how 'the failure to embrace the complexities of compoundedness . . . is due to the influence of a way of thinking about discrimination which structures politics so that struggles are categorized as singular issues' (1989, 167), further arguing that '[c]ompoundedness is somehow contingent upon an implicit norm that is not neutral but is white male' (1989, 143). To this day, race, gender, sexuality, and class are understood as events exclusive of one another and following a social order that adheres to the implicit norm of the European, heterosexual, middle-class male. While claiming to be theoretically ungendered, the majority of societies worldwide have adopted the practice of the 'generic masculine', which Caroline Perez argues is 'so firmly embedded in our psyche that even genuinely gender-neutral words are read as male' where things are 'male-unless-otherwise-indicated' (9, 4). Similarly, Bart Gilbert-Moore, commenting on the place of postcolonialism in autobiography and biography studies, (looked at in more detail in Chapter 2) argues that '[if] feminism challenges the conflation of male subjectivity with "the human", postcolonialists question the equally common, if often only implicit, history equation of the (theoretically ungendered) western self with "the human"' (xvii). Without rigorous theorisation that ungrounds essentialist ideas about the 'nature' of race, gender, sexuality, class, etc., differences remain either

unacknowledged or subjugated and the life and experiences of the western male are assumed to be gender-neutral and universal. An intersectional lens renders visible the assumption of the maleness, whiteness, and Westernness embedded in the structural foundation of society. Specifically, a society that uses dynamics of power to determine the worth of the subject and the body.

MATRIX VS. AXIS?

Intersectionality operates on a perspective that values a nonlinear way of knowing, identifying the way identity categories and the inequalities arising from these identities interlock and are mutually reinforcing vectors. In other words, intersectionality follows a ‘matrix’ approach that is fundamentally based on the understanding that everyone has intersecting identities and that we live in a world built from intersection power structures. This perspective recognises that the assumed universality of whiteness is in fact a denial of intersectionality as white men and white women’s race falls from view, becoming ‘transparent’ to quote May (25), creating an artificial, single-axis lens.

A criticism frequently levied against research on intersectionality is an assumed emphasis on Black women’s subjectivity and experiences. For example, Jennifer Nash points to the ‘use of black women as prototypical intersectional subjects’ (4) as an unexplored paradox in intersectional research. The implication here is that attending theoretically to the experiences of Black women constitutes a restriction in thought. Similarly, in her 1989 article, Crenshaw uses the example of a legal case against General Motors, where the claim that discrimination against Black women was occurring was dismissed because ‘[t]he prospect of the creation of new classes of protected minorities, governed only by the mathematical principles of permutation and combination, clearly raises the prospect of opening the hackneyed Pandora’s box’ (quoted in Crenshaw 142). The courts considered the

class of Black women to be too exclusive for their specific concerns and complaints to be considered valid under American law.

The flaw in this logic lies in the attempt to define intersectionality as an additive formula of oppression that relies on single-axis categorisations of identity as essentialist. Not only is this a misleading description of intersectionality but it additionally reinforces the priority of white women in feminist movements, Black men in anti-racism movements or white men in LGBT+ movements. Indeed, as May argues, '[t]here is no reason that an emphasis on Black women's subjectivity should be seen to curtail intersectionality's relevance or applicability when it comes to insights about simultaneous privilege and oppression, multiplicity, and complex subjectivity' (24). Moreover, in response to the General Motors case, May states that the courts were reinforcing 'transparent race and gender privilege, wilfully ignoring the unstated intersectionality of litigants characterized as representative of just one identity' (25), i.e. white women as representative for all women and Black men for all Black people. Lorde writes:

I find I am constantly being encouraged to pluck out some aspect of myself and present this as the meaningful whole, eclipsing or denying the other parts of self. But this is a destructive and fragmenting way to live. (120)

Lorde articulates the pressure to understand identity through a singular lens, emphasising its limitations and resulting in the epistemological erasure of complex identities that do not conform to the axis. Moreover, it implies that the axis model is an illusion that renders the intersectionality in privileged identities transparent and cherry-picks specific aspects of identity for specific purposes. In contrast, a matrix perspective recognises the global application of intersectional thinking that recognises the wider scope of identity politics from being solely focused on discrimination to the inclusion of the notion of subjugation.

In its growing popularity within anti-racist and feminist movements, Carastathis notes that ‘the success of intersectionality may mark its failure’ (3), as shallow engagements and references to the concept obscure, or at worse reproduce, ‘deeply entrenched cognitive habits that inform feminist and antiracist thinking about oppression and privilege’ (3). The implication here is that liberatory movements, such as feminism and anti-racist movements, are shaped and influenced by modes of thinking that function within specific structures of power that have historically neglected to acknowledge or address intersectional contexts in their resistance discourses. The result is the discursive and political omission of intersectional individuals within anti-discrimination movements. Moreover, multiply oppressed individuals are subject to the motives of anti-discrimination movements that control the access to resources and spaces from where their voices may be heard. Crenshaw articulates this point through her basement metaphor of intersectionality, using it to demonstrate how those singularly oppressed rest on the shoulders of those below them, and often at the expense of the multiply oppressed. Failing to recognise the existence of such a hierarchy is denying the existence of those multiply oppressed, relegating them to a position of invisibility.

LITERATURE AND INTERSECTIONALITY

Inherently interdisciplinary, intersectionality is heuristic in nature and as such, as emphasised by Crenshaw, can be used to amplify and highlight dynamics that are ‘constitutive’ but often silenced or overlooked (229–232). May articulates how a heuristic orientation is ‘attentive to experience as a fund of knowledge’ (19). In being fundamentally narrative-driven, literature offers a bank of experiences from which to draw knowledge, one that does not centre oppression stemming from intersectionality but rather the individuals experiencing it and their empowerment. One of the most crucial aspects of intersectional research is the distinction between intersectionality as an experience and as a method of analysis. Indeed, the focus in most research on intersectionality is on the analysis: the avenue

through which productive intersectional work outside of academia can occur. As such, it is undeniably important to emphasise the difference between those experiencing the unique situation of simultaneous and compounding oppressions and the analysis intended to address the epistemological erasure of these individuals for the potential of social transformation to be realised.

However, the experience and the analysis can mistakenly be conflated in the attempt to further the recognition and acknowledgement of compounding oppressions. Indeed, simple descriptions of compounding oppressions can be mistakenly understood as analysis, where the term ‘intersectionality’ is employed alone with the expectation that its reputation as a buzzword in the field will do the work of analysis. In contrast to research in the social sciences, however, this thesis is based on the notion of literary analysis being a potential method of analytical work that does not employ the term ‘intersectionality’ at all. Instead, intersectional literature, in being a narrative-driven approach does not only describe experiences of compounding oppression but challenges and subverts real-world epistemologies that perpetuate the invisibility of intersectional experiences through storytelling. This aspect of ‘analytical work’ is defined by scholars such as Collins and Bilge as critical praxis: ‘the practices that make intersectional knowledge possible, especially practices that involve criticizing, rejecting, and/or trying to fix the social problems that come with complex social inequalities’ (32). In examining the growing popularity of intersectionality, particularly in academic institutions, they determined that a reason for this rise was a result of ‘intersectional knowledge projects foster[ing] new questions and areas of investigation within existing academic disciplines, especially in those fields that focus on the interconnectedness of the academy and some aspect of the general public’ (35). An inherent affinity towards examining the socially complex intersection arose in those fields that similarly saw theory and practice intertwined.

Crenshaw similarly states that her ‘own take on how to *know* intersectionality has been to *do* intersectionality; to assess what intersectionality can produce is to canvas what scholars, activists and policy makers have done under its rubric’ (emphasis my own, 222). This argument echoes the beliefs of nineteenth-century Black feminists, such as Anna Julia Cooper, who claimed that thought and action must be linked to eliminate inequality (285-303). Hence, for any intersectionality analysis to remain true to its motives, it must have an element of praxis involved, reaffirming or establishing a connection between the theory and the practice of transformative social action. This requires inquiring into social inequalities and determining how they can be resisted through intersectional analysis. Moreover, it requires recognising the continuous process of social action. Jasbir K. Puar, for example, whose work follows the intersectional approach of ‘analyses that foreground the mutually co-constitutive forces of race, class, sex, gender, and nation’ (49), uses instead the notion of ‘assemblages’, taken from Deleuze and Guattari’s ‘*agencement*’ meaning design, layout, organisation, and relation. Puar argues that ‘intersectionality as an intellectual rubric and a tool for political intervention must be supplemented—if not complicated and reconceptualized—by a notion of assemblage’ (50) whereby the focus is ‘not on content but on relations, relations of patterns’ (Puar 57). Puar’s work provides a critical lens from which to consider not only examining representation or identification of intersectionality but rather by examining how intersectionality intersects with and influences other concepts. This is what literary intersectionality sets out to do.

Looking at oppression alone fails to consider the context and, most importantly, the subject of the oppression.⁴ Moreover, it does not account for the changing reality of power

⁴ I am deliberately avoiding the use of the term ‘oppressed subject’ or ‘oppressed people’ in a refusal to reduce intersectional experiences and individuals only to their inequalities and suffering. Their oppression is not their defining feature. Instead, the focus is on how their lived experiences resulting from their oppression has been obscured.

structures. Indeed, as Foucault argues, ‘conceptualization should not be founded on a theory of the object’ as ‘conceptualization implies critical thought—a constant checking’ (1982, 778). In this case, I propose a *rechecking*. Foucault calls attention to how global changes require a historical awareness to understand present circumstances. That awareness requires centring the subject and remaining conscientious of the interpretive work required to ensure intersectional analysis is productive in different temporal, political, and institutional contexts. With the constant change of factors and the way oppressions are experienced, it seems ill-suited to focus a discussion on power enactments in isolation rather than on the changing elements of identity and the circumstances around it, that is, experiences and narratives.

Throughout the process of this research, I formed a specific conception and definition of intersectionality in relation to literature. I determine that what sets literary intersectional texts apart from other texts is the capacity for critical thinking via the literary imagination. Though not exclusive to literary intersectional texts, it is a key component of the works. As the chapters in this thesis will demonstrate, the literary works included use storytelling and narratives to undermine understandings of experience that are linked to exclusive identity categories. Instead, the narratives adopt a *long durée* approach to understanding experience that recognises the limitations of identity categories and points to the intersections of those categories to demonstrate how categorical distinctions lack nuance.

As such, I posit literary intersectional analysis is not simply an examination of characters with multiple compounding oppressions. Nor is it just literature written by individuals facing those issues, though it is a part of it. Rather, I define literary intersectional analysis as a method of examining the in-between⁵ of narratives, be that in between genres,

⁵ I borrow the term ‘in-between’ from Homi Bhabha’s *The Location of Culture* and his exploration of the Third Space, which shall be explored further below.

narrative style, themes, and, of course, character hardships and situations. It seeks to determine how the intersections of those elements reveal liminal spaces where the nuances of complex experiences can be examined. Moreover, I explore the potential of such analysis to offer literary alternatives to Eurocentric narrative formulas grounded in hybrid epistemologies.

A FRAMEWORK FOR INTERSECTIONAL ANALYSIS

In her article ‘The Race for Theory’ (1988), Barbara Christian argues that the primary thrust of a literary scholar was ‘that moment when one creates a theory, thus fixing a constellation of ideas for a time at least, a fixing which no doubt will be replaced in another month or so by somebody else’s competing theory as the race accelerates’ (68). I have taken great pains throughout my writing to avoid calling this framework a theory in its own right, or an absolute methodology; that is concrete, finished, or indisputable. Indeed, I have attempted to circumvent this ‘race for theory’ entirely by treating critical theory less than the product of studies in literature but rather as contextual material or historical documents that function as accessories to the formation, definition, and understanding of political and social structures of the world. As such, my work inevitably engages with theories that are characteristic of the current scholarly field. However, it also fundamentally recognises that neither theory nor literature exists outside the material world in an aesthetic bubble, but rather intimately interacts with a complex global system of ideas and experience.

Indeed, the fundamental basis of this thesis is in acknowledging that literature does not exist in isolation and that what we read and *how* we read is inevitably intersected with the social, political, and economic world. The criticism and critics that I refer to throughout this thesis do not function as justifications or rationalisations of my arguments but, more so, referents to the knowledge paradigms and contexts that are relevant to intersectional literary

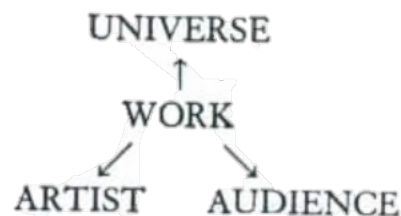
analysis. As Summer Harrison states, ‘stories have a material force in the world [that] . . . can help dismantle a destructive worldview and make a new world possible’ (25). This thesis illustrates how an intersectional framework helps to comprehend the transformative potential of certain novels, particularly by authors on the margins of Western society, the power dynamics they reveal, and the knowledge they emphasise through the narrative strategies they employ. Where the ‘race for theory’ as Christian calls it, has dominated academic ambition, this framework instead seeks to explore the role theory has in the creation of social discourse, including discourses of oppression and inequality.

The following sections explore the three elements of intersectional literary analysis as I conceive it: close readings of representations of experience and identity, determining avenues of power transfer and maintenance in literature, and assessing how that power results in the production and dissemination of knowledge. Separating these elements of the framework under distinct category titles is a frustrating battle between accuracy and simplicity. Much of what I later expound upon intertwines (hence why they are part of the same framework of analysis) but have been articulated and expanded on individually for the sake of clarity. While this categorisation is at odds with the core value of intersectional thought, I have concluded that, in line with various models of academic writing, the separation of the elements for the sake of coherency is a necessary evil. However, it is vital to recall that these elements *do* intersect and mutually influence one another, as is characteristic of all intersectional epistemologies.

In much the same way, representation in literature extends beyond simple description, influencing perception and the way identities are understood by the wider public. The experience of intersectionality finds in its representation the connection to the world that allows for the potential of social change. In other words, in utilising the position of literature within the world and the ability to influence the world, productive intersectional analysis can

be achieved as a form of literary activism. Hence, when defining intersectionality, specifically literary intersectionality in relation to this thesis, I identify two major strands of understanding: the issue of representation (or lack thereof) of intersectional individuals and experiences, and intersectionality as epistemologically capable of social transformation. These strands are crucial to my framework of intersectional literary analysis and the absence of either one would result in an incomplete examination of intersectionality in literature.

Questions regarding the relationship between a text and the world feature heavily in the analysis and criticism of texts, specifically of literature, and vital to considering the place of intersectionality in literary scholarship. What is the text representing about the world? How has the world influenced the creation of the text? What position should this text be accorded in the world? Edward Said argues that ‘texts have ways of existing, both theoretical and practical, that even in their most rarefied form are always enmeshed in circumstance, time, place and society—in short, they are in the world, and hence are worldly’ (4). A literary text is not only a medium of describing the world but a text that cannot help but be part of the world in that it is a physical object, its tangibility proof of its ‘reality’, but also a text that has a hand in producing reality as much as the world and worldly experiences produce the text. In M. H. Abrams’ essay, ‘Orientation of Critical Theories’, he conceives of the text as being surrounded by three points: the universe, artist, and audience.



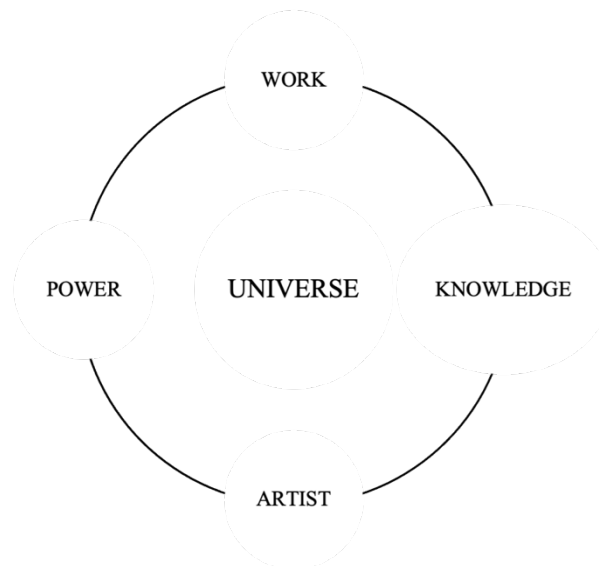
Abrams positions the work as a go-between, distinguishing between the creation and its creator, the world (or in his words, the ‘universe), and the recipients. Moreover, Abrams’ diagram suggests categorical separations of how a text interacts with the world, drawing on mimetic theories of representation between literature and the world, expressive theories of the

author and their work, didactic theories of the interaction of the work with the reader, and formalist theories of the work itself. Abrams argues that ‘a critic tends to derive from one of these terms his principal categories for defining, classifying, and analyzing a work of art, as well as the major criteria by which he judges its value’ (6). This perspective and method of analysis that identifies one major criterion, however, assumes a distinction between the work and all that is in the world. This distinction implies, as articulated by Bennett and Royle, ‘that a literary text is not, in essence, part of the world’ (28); that it holds a position outside of the world, able to represent or imitate the world, but unable to offer more than ‘a window onto the world’ (28). Such a distinction similarly assumes a supposedly empirical truth of ‘the real’ and ‘reality’. That is to say that the label of ‘reality’ lends to the expectation that perceptions and knowledge of the world are objective in that they are undistorted, ‘universal’ reflections of the universe.

In the context of literary texts written by intersectional authors, the reality that is produced in their texts emerges from a specific socio-economic context. Storytelling in all forms underpins people’s understanding of their society. Narratives contribute to creating social realities and as such influence and participate in determining what and who is perceived as acceptable, reasonable, and moral. As such, the conscious and unconscious marginalisation of certain forms of storytelling contributes to an implicit attempt to control and preserve a narrative status quo that prioritises the West and Western hegemonies and perpetuates inequalities. Hence, I argue that the analysis of storytelling, particularly in an intersectional manner, challenges the narratives that legitimise and enable social action and policies that marginalise certain individuals by instead celebrating and highlighting non-dominant forms of storytelling; forms that embrace deviation and difference from the dominant narrative and imply a social potential and power in presenting multiple narratives. The texts presented in this thesis present forms of storytelling that are self-consciously

political in that they examine identity-forming elements of specifically socially, politically, economically, and geographically located cultures. As such, I propose an alternative to Abrams' understanding of how a literary work is positioned.

As stated by Said, 'a text in its being a text is a being in the world' (3). That is, works are produced in the world and as such are part of the world. To position it outside of the conception of the universe would be to ignore how 'our intellectual proclivities often reflect our times, prevailing ideologies and struggles, dominant intellectual traditions, and institutional contexts' (Zeleva, 4). Power and knowledge are then as much part of the universe as are the artist and the work they produce.



I replace the form of the triangle and arrows with a circular shape and no arrows to depict a more integrated understanding of the various elements where there is no single direction of analysis. Instead, guided by an intersectional literary approach, the diagram depicts the desire to understand the work from numerous perspectives and, more importantly, the intersections of those perspectives. In the opening of *The Location of Culture* (1994), Homi Bhabha speaks of a Third Space, the 'in-between' spaces where colliding cultures create a liminal space of transit. Bhabha claims that 'we find ourselves in the moment of

transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion' (2). He states:

The move away from the singularities of 'class' or 'gender' as primary conceptual and organizational categories has resulted in an awareness of the subject positions – of race, gender, generation, institutional location, geopolitical locale, sexual orientation – that inhibit any claim to identity in the modern world. What is theoretically innovative, and politically crucial, is the need to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural difference. These 'in-between' spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself. (2)

Understanding the complexities of subject positions then recognises how both the audience and the artist are influenced by their attempts to define society and the universe, thereby being influenced by the power dynamics and knowledge production and dissemination they are exposed to. In other words, the act of writing and reading literature are influenced by those same power dynamics and paradigms of knowledge.

Paul Zeleza determines that 'much of our individual scholarship is enmeshed in specific historical geographies, current political economies, and generational aspirations and anxieties' (4), speaking to how oppressive systems shape identity, personal choices and default actions that become the norm. Power and knowledge impact the individual, the author, and the audience while impacting the universe simply by having a place in the universe. For the authors referred to in this thesis, and for individuals at social, political, and economic peripheries in general, responses to oppression and inequality are enmeshed in their daily lives, actions, and relationships. The framework presented adopts a critical

intersectional lens to examine how power and knowledge are approached, subverted, challenged, and adopted in literature for the goal of political liberation.

While I argue that Abrams' theories of analysis are reductive and limited in their ability to articulate complex understandings of selfhood that intersectionality has made visible, that is not to say that such literary and critical theories are not relevant to the framework. Indeed, they form part of the contextual underpinnings for much of how we understand literature up to this point and, therefore, cannot be overlooked. Consequently, this framework constructs itself as a form of narrative analysis that does not detach what is presented in a text from the why, including in the texts of critical theory. As such, using the framework offers an understanding of why certain social and political discourses dominate while others are marginalised by highlighting how dominant narratives function to reassert social and political actors from their (class) interests. Instead, these narratives are examined to expound on how they challenge, subvert, and deconstruct dominant dogmas.

The framework primarily aims to be used as a tool to help recognise, highlight, and challenge assumptions in literature and literary analysis that are underpinned by western bias. That is to say, a bias that assumes a default western, heterosexual, able, middle-class positionality in regard to literary representation and theory. Indeed, some specific theories are identified based on their *non*-Western positionality, such as postcolonial and queer, while others simply assume that the conditions of lived experiences are similar enough to establish a so-called 'universal' theory. The intersectional framework of literary analysis functions to identify elements that are specifically *non*universal, using techniques similarly rooted in the specificities of non-Western culture and experience, acknowledging how claims at universality diminish the visibility of minority and oppressed peoples and, as such, feature as vital parts of a text's narrative.

The above has hinted at a series of ideas that serve as the basis upon which the foundation of the framework hinges if it is to be productive. First, there is a connection between resistance discourse, anti-discrimination movements, and the representation or erasure of identities in literature. In other words, there is a connection between literature and the world, between narratives of experience and contemporary beliefs and understandings of identity. Second, there is a need to determine how a social theory can be transferred into a literary analysis and framework while maintaining the initial goal and potential for productive work. Third, it is vital to demonstrate that the reproduction of power and the chance to confer it can come even from those that fight against privilege, resulting in inequality. That is, examining complicity in power dynamics regardless of attempts to resist it. Last, the importance of establishing that literary analysis and praxis must go hand-in-hand. Many of these elements are intertwined and relevant to all three aspects of the framework. To better establish the foundation of the framework these points will function as the main focuses of the following sections, detailing more clearly the theoretical foundations of the framework and how it is used for intersectional literary analysis.

CLOSE READING

A common misunderstanding of intersectionality, as stated by Cho et al., is that it is a theory ‘primarily fascinated with the infinite combinations and implications of overlapping identities’ (797). While not wholly inaccurate, it is an incomplete understanding of intersectionality to see it as being solely occupied with the notion of difference and how it plays out in social identities. Furthermore, as Carastathis argues, it would be reductive to view intersectionality as ‘a representationalist theory of identity that, acting as a corrective to the invisibility of multiply oppressed subjects within monistic politics, makes visible those who can now be declared to have “intersectional identities”’ (62). To categorise

intersectionality as such would be as essentialist as the identity categories it seeks to complicate. I state above that representation in literature has the ability to influence, however, that in itself is not enough to correct the epistemological erasure of the plights of intersectional individuals. Indeed, it is not simply representation but the accompanying analysis, and in the case of literature, close reading, and *rereading* that allows for the influence to occur. As Crenshaw mentions, the goal of intersectionality is not simply to acknowledge and represent intersectional experiences, but rather, through the analysis of those experiences, ‘to encourage us to look beneath the prevailing conceptions of discrimination and to challenge the complacency that accompanies belief in the effectiveness of this [intersectional] framework’ (1989, 167). The impetus is to uncover what lies beyond both the descriptions of the intersectional experience and the consequences of that experience. Indeed, in the case of identity-based oppressions, race, gender, and sexuality are sites of power enactments. Determining the reason behind the absence of intersectional individuals will in turn allow for recognition and representation, as well as highlight the causes of the lack of acknowledgement and exposure. Moreover, and potentially more importantly, uncovering intersectional models of narrative and storytelling allow for the recognition and celebration of non-Western epistemologies. In other words, the purpose of intersectional analysis is to use it as a starting point to rethink and re-conceptualise expressions of selfhood and centre non-Western epistemologies.

Barbara Christian argues that,

people of color have always theorized – but in forms quite different from the Western form of abstract logic. And I am inclined to say that our theorizing . . . is often in narrative forms, in the stories we create, in riddles and proverbs, in the play with language, because dynamic rather than fixed ideas seem more to our liking. (68)

Reading, and by extension close reading, is then a fundamental part of theorizing for people of colour. Literature and the process of close reading that I emphasise here are not intended to be, as Christian says, ‘an occasion for discourse among critics but is necessary nourishment for their people and one way by which they come to understand their lives better’ (69). That is to say that writing and reading contribute to cultural experiences that participate in the formation of a community of readers and writers who remain open to the ‘intricacies of the intersection of language, class, race, and gender in the literature’ (Christian 69). Moreover, this is also true of reading analysis and critical theory.

Traditionally, the function of close reading is to determine why the author has used specific literary forms and styles. In the case of literary intersectional analysis, it also serves to identify where literary forms differ from the Western models and how that difference may be due to an intentional attempt to be more representative of an intersectional mode of storytelling. Indeed, *how* a story is told is as important as *what* is being told. Those who have written about genres and established rules, tendencies, and patterns of genres have historically been located in the West and Western centres of education. As such, the information that is offered takes from Western examples of the genre, meaning that how the genre is used and adapted by non-western writers is largely unexplored without it becoming examples of distinctly non-Western literature, e.g. postcolonial, Indigenous, etc.

Close reading, then, in the intersectional framework looks at Bhabha’s notion of the ‘in-between’. This in-between space manifests itself as a discursive space of demystification in which ‘signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew’ (37). In literature, these ‘signs’, what we know and refer to as metaphor, imagery, allusion, etc., and concepts have been well documented previously, however, always in line with the dominant societal narratives that are deeply intertwined with institutional politics and societal practices. As Carastathis argues, ‘All readings,—whether “close” or “casual”—are acts of

interpretation, so that texts are invested with and not just “mined” for, meaning by their readers’ (95). Close reading in an intersectional manner allows for reading anew in ways that illuminate these discursive spaces as subversive, creative, and imbued with potential.

Moreover, the intersectional framework at hand, thus, emphasises that close reading is fundamental to counter the silencing of narratives and stories by non-Western, non-white individuals, about intersectional experiences. Gayatri Spivak (1988) defines epistemic violence as the forcible silencing, delegitimizing, and othering of (post)colonial or subaltern groups. Indeed, eurocentrism, which continues to shape global understanding of non-Western communities and populations, is a form of epistemic violence that should be placed at the heart of decolonisation and liberatory practices. A foremost scholar in developing world feminist criticism and theory, Paula Gunn Allen’s work points to the difficulties and problems of applying Eurocentric critical methods to non-western texts. Specifically referencing Native American oral texts, she argues that it is difficult to not trivialise or romanticise the culture when reading Native American literature in the context of white Europe. She states that ‘when the patriarchal paradigms that characterizes western thinking is applied to gynocentric tribal modes, it transforms the ideas, significances, and raw data into something that is not only unrecognizable to the tribes but entirely incongruent with their philosophies and theories’ (Kochinnenako in *Academe*). Allen’s argument points to the consequential overlooking of insight in the literature of non-Western authors when primarily examined through Eurocentric critical methods. Moreover, it insists on the importance of having Indigenous critical methods that recognise the various non-western theories and epistemologies that underly their storytelling and narrative actions. Indeed, ‘Practices of close reading train modes of inquiry into language and its products, modes of paying attention to textual structures and historical contexts, ways of making sense, and strategies of interpretation that allow us to understand our own place in cultural traditions’ (Kley 12).

The following details various literary theorists that formed an understanding of close reading as a technical element in the framework to allow for a subversive and productive reading of literature. In the 1930s, a branch of theory called New Criticism argued that literature could only be appreciated in isolation from the history or process of its making; it must be taken as a stand-alone work and only through close reading of the language and textual elements can it be understood. In contrast, later in the century, the New Historians of the 1980s saw the potential in close reading a text to say something about the world outside the text, claiming that a literary or cultural text can offer a better understanding of history. The redefinition of literary texts as cultural objects spun from webs of cultural practices that reconsidered the position literature and authors had in the making and recording of history. New Historicists argued that cultural texts play a role in history rather than simply describing or retelling it. Rather, the notion of historiography as stable and absolute was challenged. A clear revolution of thought occurred in the world of literary analysis and criticism. This thesis adopts the view that literature has an influential position in the wider understanding and comprehension of various kinds of identities in society, and as such, of the history that brought about the categorisation of identities. As such, the development of an intersectional manner of reading literature is, therefore, a necessary step in recognising a more complex structural system of experience and, consequently, of oppression.

While scholars such as Carastathis see complexity as one of the significant advantages of intersectionality, it is nonetheless commonly expressed as a critique against intersectional theory. For example, Alice Ludvig argues that ‘the endlessness of differences seems to be a weak point in intersectional theory’ (247). Underpinning her argument is the question ‘Who defines when, where, which, and why particular differences are given recognition while others are not?’ (Ludvig 247). Ludvig correctly highlights how extant categories are determined by institutional influence. However, this assumption ignores the

ability of individual stories to articulate intersectional experiences without resorting to an additive relationship between categories of identity.

Pulling on Foucault's question and essay 'What Is an Author' (1969), where he considers the role of the author to have been taken for granted, he asks what function the category of the author fulfils for the critic deploying the notion in the process of analysis. In the essay, Foucault explains how the author serves as a 'classificatory function', whereby the author's texts can be grouped and defined under a general style (210). However, he also notes, as New Historicism does, that the author may not be the origin of the text, and that both author and text are, in fact, effects of larger systematic forces. He questions whether all the works of an author, published and unpublished, should be considered as part of their portfolio of works (207). He goes on to state that 'the subject should not be entirely abandoned. It should be reconsidered, not to restore the theme of an originating subject, but to seize its functions, its intervention in discourses and its system of dependencies' (221). Understanding the author as an individual who is a part of the universe then allows us to consider the work as part of the universe.

Looking at yet another New Historicist critic, Stephen Greenblatt argues for approaching the text as cultural objects, ones that are embedded in 'the contingencies of history' (14). As such, the contents of the text, particularly from the margins of society, often seek to comment and intervene in cultural debates that, one, challenge the veneration of the past and tradition and, two, challenge and dispel Western models of normative identity. We find, instead, a focus not on an abstract universal, 'but in particular, contingent cases [of] the selves fashioned and acting according to the generative rules and conflicts of a given culture. And these selves, conditioned by the expectations of their class, gender, religion, race and national identity, are constantly effecting changes in the courses of history' (15). As such, as much as a text provides indications of the author's positionality, so too does the resultant

analysis provide an understanding of the historical and cultural context that surrounds the creation and response to the text. They too have a similar role in effecting changes in history.

Stanley E. Fish's seminal concept of 'interpretive communities' challenges interpretive theory by looking to readers and, moreover, to the protocols of a community rather than the individual response, to find meaning in a text in contrast to the text itself. His essay begins by declaring that formal features do not exist independently of the reader's experience. Fish states that texts 'are not *meant* to be solved but to experienced' (465), emphasising the importance of interpreters and interpretation, whereby 'the reader's activities are at the centre of attention, where they are regarded not as leading to meaning but as *having* meaning' (474). These meanings are also developed from the community to which individuals belong. In the case of intersectionality, any interpretive strategy evolves from the understanding of intersecting identities and experiences, resulting in a complex reading. A reading that takes into account how 'rather than intention and its formal realization producing interpretation . . . interpretation creates intention and its formal realization by creating conditions in which it becomes possible to pick them out' (477). We are necessarily limited by what our interpretive principles permit us to see. It is for this reason that any act of critical close reading must include both the text and criticism of the text as interpretive communities will necessarily be fluid and as such 'are no more stable than texts because interpretive strategies are not natural or universal but *learned*' (484). A framework of intersectional literary analysis guides the reader to recognise their interpretive strategies but then, by reading criticism and understanding the positionality of both them and the author, how the intention may be more nuanced.

Drawing on the above, the framework posits that accomplishing close reading through a lens of literary intersectionality requires a combination of examining formal elements of literature, the content of the text, and critical responses to the text. Moreover, examining

genre and narrative form is done with a focus on context. That is, how approaches to genre and form contrast or are similar to Western examples of the genre as set out by critics on the topic. The aim is to determine what the differences and similarities, or in other words, the in-betweens, indicate about the epistemological perspective of the author and the culture they are depicting.

In outlining the narrative choices, the analysis provides an understanding of how storytelling is approached by the author, what elements of storytelling are used in the narrative form and for what reasons, keeping in mind the above-noted assumption that non-Western authors are often self-consciously politically. In such cases, differences and deviations from the traditional are used deliberately and subversively to reveal the productive potential and power of difference. Similarly, differences reveal the importance of intersections as a productive site of social transformation and knowledge production as shall be shown below.

DYNAMICS OF POWER

To speak means to be in a position to use a certain syntax to grasp the morphology of this or that language, but it means above all to assume a culture, to support the weight of civilization.

Franz Fanon

The second element in intersectional literary analysis is uncovering the dynamics of power at play in literature. Where the first element of the framework provides an opportunity for a rereading of narratives and literary criticism, the second considers a reexamination of the systemic social forces that affect the narrative. Rather than a chance to reread, it is an opportunity to read *anew*, centring intersectional individuals and experiences and creating space in which to engage with storytelling about and meant for those on the margins without the constraints and orientations of Western-dictated canons. To achieve this, an

acknowledgement of the dynamics of power rooted in characteristics of literature and literary critical theory is vital. Numerous explorations of power have been undertaken in critical theory, including how power engages with representations and perceptions of non-western centres such as Edward Said's seminal theory of orientalism.

However, where an intersectional analysis differs is in its focus not to simply analyse the 'authoritative structure of orientalist discourse' (648) as Tala Asad claims of Said's intention, but, additionally, to create a space intended for a reading that does not rely on western epistemologies and traditions of literature. In other words, to resist using history as simply a backdrop or context rather than substance for analysis that reveals how historical processes set power dynamics into motion that are still relevant today. The framework provides the tools needed to examine the epistemological grounds that root streams of critical studies, how they further productive analysis, and how institutions of knowledge and power interact with these critical pursuits.

In this vein, looking to literature offers an understanding of the construction and perpetuation of dynamics of power. As seen above, critics such as Greenblatt argue that literature must be seen as a cultural artefact in its own right, a political force or power that, just as the human subject, is an 'ideological product of the relations of power in a particular society' (256). If we examine literature through the lens of critic Hayden White who argues in 'The Historical Text as a Literary Artifact', that the historical representation of any event has elements that are inevitably literary or imaginative in nature, we can understand how and by whom an event (i.e. a story) is told invariably affects its power of influence and position it holds within society. Similarly, I argue that there is an active power dynamic in the development of interpretative strategies from institutional communities.

Instead, the framework looks to the author's community and that of the community depicted in the text for relevant interpretive strategies. In doing so, it challenges

institutionalised centres of knowledge that have the power to cement principles and theories of analysis. Donna Haraway, whose notion of the cyborg and the posthuman serve as a critical backdrop to my analysis of postcolonial science fiction (Chapter II), notes the importance of cyborg writing; that is, writing based on hybridity and alternative conceptions of identity that cross boundaries and rejects strict divisions of categories and binary oppositions. She states that '[c]yborg writing is about the power to survive, not on the basis of original innocence, but on the basis of seizing the tools to mark the world that marked them as other' (175). Once again, the framework address dynamics that other to uncover how they can reveal transformative potential but to do so, the framework must also be able to uncover circumstances that establish and perpetuate harmful ideological othering.

Terry Eagleton argues against literature as merely being a form of entertainment but rather maintains that its establishment as an academic subject results in literature functioning as an ideological apparatus, stating 'Literature, in the meaning of the word we have inherited, *is an ideology*' (original emphasis, 19). In many ways similar to Foucault's notion of biopower⁶ and self-regulation, Eagleton proposes that literature has a social significance, whereby 'it has the most intimate relations to questions of social power' (20). While Eagleton's polemical nature of his arguments make him a controversial figure in critical theory, he illustrates how literature, specifically in England, was used as a replacement for the diminishing influence of religion, citing an early Oxford professor of English Literature and critic, George Gordon, who argued that 'English literature has now a triple function: still,

⁶ Foucault's notion of biopower refers to power that operates on the 'micro-levels' of everyday life, is dispersed throughout society, inherent in social relationships, embedded in a network of practices, institutions, and technologies, whereby it operates on our very bodies regulating them through self-disciplinary practices that we each adopt, thereby resulting in societal control by the very acts of our self-subjugation. Understood in an intersectional light, this self-regulation is an attempt to render the intersectional subject intelligible to those around them and themselves in order to be recognised and acknowledged.

I suppose, to delight and instruct us, but also, and above all, to save our souls and heal the State' (20).

While Eagleton, drawing on Mathew Arnold, spoke of literature as a means of 'providing a cheapish "liberal" education for those beyond the charmed circles of publish school and Oxbridge' (23) that would counter political extremism, the resulting institutionalisation of universities, namely in the West, established a dynamic whereby Western political ideologies were prioritised for circulation and education. All this to emphasise that dominant narratives and dominant ways of reading are closely intertwined with political and societal institutions and structures. It is important, then, to read in ways that recognise where, how, and what fundamental shifts have occurred throughout the reading process, using it to uncover how the internal coherence of the storytelling has been disrupted and what the text reveals about the power dynamics under which the culture has developed.

Judith Butler asks, however, whether 'the one who poses such questions knows the conditions of his or her own asking?' (2004, 230–231). In her in-depth exploration of the history and critical debates on and around the intersectionality, Carastathis notes that, according to Marxist critique, intersectionality 'lacks an explanatory theory of power, a problem that results from intersectionality's insistence on the irreducibility of racial, gender, and other oppressions to class exploitation' (126). However, recalling Christian's argument against wholly encompassing theories, the assumption of a singular explanatory theory that can articulate how the 'complex and reiterative processes of social categorisation' (Carbado, 816) could only ever be a reductive perception of oppression that, moreover, does not offer a conception of the lived experiences of the subject. Examining the dynamics of power through a lens of literary intersectionality does not aim to uncover any such 'explanatory theory of power' but rather, as Elizabeth Butterfield argues, to supplement 'a new understanding of oppression . . . [with] a new conception of the person' (1). A conception that considers the

conditions of the person and how dynamics of power contribute to the kind of questions they ask.

Many of the authors included in this thesis are from cultures where their stories emerged from the oral tradition. As Paula Gunn Allen tells us, ‘the oral tradition is more than a record of a people’s culture. It is the creative source for their collective and individual selves’ (2005). In short, that oral tradition is an active participant in the cultural identity of a people. Moreover, Allen goes on to explain that the

oral tradition is a living body. It is in continuous flux, which enables it to accommodate itself to the real circumstances of a people’s lives. That is its strength, but it is also its weakness, for when a people finds itself living within a racist, classist, and sexist reality, the oral tradition will reflect those values and will thus shape the people’s consciousness to include and accept racism, classism and sexism, and they will incorporate that change, hardly noticing the shift. If the oral tradition is altered in certain subtle, fundamental ways, if elements alien to it are introduced so that its internal coherence is disturbed, it becomes the major instrument of colonization and oppression. (2005)

I argue as well that the reading of oral stories can overlook their specific postcolonial or Indigenous significance if the dynamics of power that established the oral tradition are not recognised. For example, various texts in this thesis use non-Standard English, such as African American Vernacular English and patois. Understanding the significance of language and dialects of English reveals the history of power dynamics that are intertwined in the way stories are told for specific populations and cultures. Consider here Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni’s notion of ‘linguicides’, whereby ‘the introduction of imperial languages and the displacement of Indigenous language were deliberate interventions of the metaphysical empire on colonised spaces’ (2018, 96).

However, by ‘language’ I do not solely refer to the grammatical make-up of a text, but also to the spoken system that suggests links to nation and identity. All the texts in this thesis are originally written in English. However, it is crucial to consider how the use of the English language by non-white and non-western authors, to qualify for the label of ‘literature’, is steeped in concerns of power and coloniality. As such, any reading that adopts the intersectional framework of analysis must take into account these embedded dynamics in literature and fiction that carries with them the cultural weight of history. They constitute a ‘haunting’ of sorts, one of empire and imperialism recalling the Derridean notion of spectres and traces, ‘the non-present present’ (1994, 5), whereby features of the metaphysical empires are always there, spectres, even in the empire itself no longer exists. The below chapters examine in depth the dynamics of power, to uncover intersectional methods of storytelling uniquely created by authors whose experiences represent more than simply oppression and suffering, but rather the participation in a rich culture of storytelling. Moreover, the chapters delve into the structural underpinnings of power that are challenged by the authors and their novels that question Eurocentric epistemologies of experience.

In the same vein as considering the epistemological framework of criticism and critical theory, it is important to consider the dynamics of power shown in the content. Said’s *Culture and Imperialism* articulates a method of reading that he refers to as contrapuntal reading. This method examines the role of imperialism and colonialism in the societies depicted in literature even when it seemingly plays no active role in the narrative. Said states that while it is,

too simple and reductive to argue that everything in European and American culture therefore prepares for or consolidates the grand idea of empire. It is also, however, historically inaccurate to ignore those tendencies—whether in narrative, political

theory, or pictorial technique—that enabled, encouraged, and otherwise assured the West’s readiness to assume and enjoy the experience of the empire. (80)

Said looks to Jane Austen’s novel *Mansfield Park* that the park itself, seemingly a representation of rural English life and values, is maintained by colonial actions in Antigua where the head of the family, Lord Bertram, has plantations. Though the ongoings of Lord Bertram’s time in Antigua are largely unexplored, Said calls on readers to recognise the ‘evident historical realities’ that ‘no matter how isolated and insulated the English place . . . it requires overseas sustenance’ in the form of ‘a sugar plantation maintained by slave labor’ (89). Said’s method of reading uses what is mentioned and not mentioned to examine how a manor in the English countryside depended on the global interconnections of imperialism and empire.

English language and English literature then are two wholly separate things that carry with them underlying structures of power.⁷ Indeed, the prefix of ‘English’ is an example of dynamics of power at play, where the term refers both to an ethnicity and a language, highlighting a complication whereby the effort to prioritise English literature in the market of cultural production and academic institutions simultaneously implies superiority of ethnicity as well. Additionally, it remains unclear as to what the term specifically refers to; English literature points to both literature written in English and literature by English people. Indeed, it is most often taken to mean literature written in English in academic settings. However, this continues to perpetuate the power dynamics implicit in the very notion. For non-Western authors and readers, the English language followed the English colonial conquest. As Ngugi wa Thiong’o states, ‘[t]he physical violence of the battlefield was followed by the

⁷ While much of what I argue can be applied to literature in other languages, I focus solely on the terminology around ‘English’ literature as all the texts I engage with fall into that category.

psychological violence if the classroom' (9). Indeed, Alastair Pennycook, in his monograph *English and the Discourses of Colonialism* (1998), argues that the English language, 'was at the heart of colonisation . . . and is deeply interwoven with the discourses of colonialism' (1998, 2) particularly in Africa. Similarly, Bhabha, speaking of the Bible translation project of missionaries argues that 'there is a "transparency" of reference that registers a certain obvious presence: the Bible translated into Hindi, propagated by Dutch or native catechists is still the English book' (1985, 150). Inherently then, it is a political matter, resulting from, as Ismail S. Talib states, 'an identity problem created by the split between race and language' (3). This mould of identity is carved both by the constraints of the English language to encapsulate non-Western identities that depend on specific postcolonial/non-Western epistemologies.

Thiong'o made the connection between language and identity very clear when he wrote that '[t]he choice of language and the use to which language is put is central to a people's definition of themselves in relation to their natural and social environment, indeed in relation to the entire universe' (4).⁸ This also connects to Stoler's notion of 'imperial debris' whereby there are 'principles and practices of empire that remine in an active register' (2008, 192). The use of English for writing can, therefore, be an intensely complex choice that colours the cadences, imaginaries, and perspective of the narrative. Donnelle N. Dreese takes this one step further:

Once one accepts this inevitable fictionality inherent in the historical text, it becomes more apparent how historical representations of cultures and our lives are then

⁸ It is interesting to note here that both Chinua Achebe and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o removed their personal English names they were given at birth, Albert and James respectively, in their adulthood in an attempt to combat the naming practices and conventions that had emerged in African states as a result of colonial presence.

constructions of both imagination and history and form the basis for one's constructed sense of self. (27)

Foucault's persistent occupation with the 'subject' in his discourses around power acknowledges the intersection and mutual reinforcement of the subject and power. Recalling the concern of European languages, primarily English, determining what non-Western literature will be recognised, it is compelling to consider that Foucault's subject exists as both the grammatical and representational subject: the subject of a sentence and the subject as a verb, whereby individuals occupy subject positions. Power, according to Foucault, is not wielded simply through oppression but rather through the 'manufacturing' of individuals, both a self-aware 'subject' topic and as subjected beings. Indeed, the fundamental focus of intersectional analysis is not the text in itself, though it must be examined for a holistic understanding, but the subject, both of the characters included within the narrative and the author-subject. As Foucault states in 'The Subject and Power' (1982), 'while the human subject is placed in relations of production and of signification, he is equally placed in power relations which are very complex' (778). To read without considering the contextual history and the objectivising attempt on the subject is to subject them to power dynamics that deny the individual experiences and force them to identify themselves in relation to limiting structures of identity categories.

In the essay, Foucault articulates three types of power struggles: 1) against modes and institutions of control, such as religious control and the church, or social control through government; 2) against forms of exploitation that separate individuals from the product of their labour, a reminder of Marxist ideology; and 3) the foremost mode of our time, against various methods of subordination that subject people to the power of others through the threat of destitution and expulsion from society. The history of power and its enactment upon 'deviant' individuals is the cumulative history of gender, race, class, and sexuality. The act of

categorisation of gender, race, class, and sexuality into hierarchies and the exclusion of the ‘socially deviant’ and ‘somatically different from “normal” people . . . is deeply rooted in Western scientific and popular thought’ (Urla and Terry 1), including literature and narrative, which has the potential to determine categories of existence or beliefs around cultural identity (which shall be looked at further in the following section). The texts explored in this thesis confront, in many ways, the history of literature and literary theory that attempted to cast ‘Others’ as manufactured individuals to be subjects and subjected.

Highlighting the above elements draws attention to the relationship between literature and the subjects and historical forces they emerge from. Thiong’o observes that ‘writers who should have been mapping paths out of [the] linguistic encirclement of their continent also came to be defined and to define themselves in terms of the languages of imperialist imposition’ (5). Indeed, both authors and their characters are defined by the terms of the imperial language and are dependent on the modes of existence that are prescribed by linguistic possibility in a ‘manner in which a text apparently points to this figure who is outside and precedes it’ (Foucault 1476). This includes criticism and critical theory that have dictated how we read and the implicit suggestion that we must adopt the epistemological frameworks that brought about those criticisms and theories.

Considering the above considerations around power dynamics in literature, the framework seeks to concurrently examine the history and historical contexts that set up the circumstances of the characters. In doing so, hints of structural and societal inequalities become apparent, allowing for readings that consider what the authors are ‘talking back’ to; what hierarchies they are subverting through their writing; and how, in doing so, they become political texts. Indeed, it raises the question: can texts dealing with intersectional matters or adopting intersectional methods of analysis that prioritise an element of praxis be anything but political?

KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION AND DISSEMINATION

'Modes of thought are tenacious. They are no easier to transcend than the "modes of production" they reflect and help to shape.'

Jason W. Moore

The production of knowledge and, hence, critical theory that informs literary analysis, has historically centred and emerged from Western institutions and experiences. Consequently, methodologies that examine and analyse texts similarly developed from a Western epistemology, assuming the default individual positionality of a white, heterosexual, able, middle-class man. The framework offers tools that uncover and centre non-western epistemologies employed by authors examining or experiencing intersectionality; that is, examining specific features of intersectional storytelling that serve as a recourse for political and reparative action. Moreover, this enables intersectional literature to function as a form of praxis that engages in productive social transformation. In short, the framework offers a way in which to read literary texts *anew*, disturbing and displacing historical and social narratives and the assumed default experiential position of whiteness and maleness that overshadows the productive potential of intersectional storytelling.

Intersectional literary analysis draws attention to how the denial of the historical and global significance of the experiences (social, political, economic) of non-Western societies perpetuates tropes of Western universality at an international level, reinforcing colonial hierarchies that position non-Western paradigms and epistemologies as 'Other' and distinctive. Which histories and knowledges come to be known and accepted as truth is deeply entrenched in the colonial process. Anne Fausto-Sterling argues that '[h]uman racial difference, while in some sense obvious and therefore 'real,' is in another sense pure fabrication, a *story* written about the social relations of a particular historical time and then

mapped onto available bodies' (emphasis my own, 21). It is, therefore, vital to recognise how coloniality in literary analysis continues to prevail and consciously address 'the long-standing patterns of power that resulted from European colonialism, including knowledge production and the establishment of social orders' (Tamale 2020, xiii). Moreover, the analysis that is undertaken in this thesis aims to uncover the cultural work that literary writing, particularly by diverse and intersectional authors, performs in different social contexts and complicating and debating perspectives and positions of Western knowledge paradigms by introducing non-western epistemologies.

In the literary field, what we know and how we know it is tied up with the politics of aesthetic discernment and capital, determined by centres of authority, like academic institutions and publishing houses, that answer the age-old question of 'what should we read?' by balancing it with the concern of 'what will sell?'. The biggest myth around the notion of a literary canon is that it is built on the grounds of 'universality'; universal aesthetic discernment, accomplishment, talent, narration and story. Even diverse authors are judged on this basis of universality that is, in fact, an assumed 'default', Euro-, and white-centric epistemology. Moreover, the notion of the universal, of the canon, is detached from social reality. According to Harold Bloom,⁹

Aesthetic criticism returns us to the autonomy of imaginative literature and the sovereignty of the solitary soul, the reader not as a person in society but as the deep self, our ultimate inwardness. That depth of inwardness in a strong writer constitutes the strength that wards off the massive weight of past achievement, lest every originality be crushed before it becomes manifest. (10–11)

⁹ It is worth noting that Harold Bloom's approach as a critic of literature was quite contentious and often controversial both during his career and after his death in 2019.

That is to say, the central focus of both the aesthetic critic and writer is to reprioritise the solitary soul, retreating inwards and enacting a separation from society. Such an act is only possible when knowledge, as produced and presented to the world, determines one's experiential default and is, hence, universal. Those whose life experiences are socially, politically, and economically determined cannot help but be 'a person in society' in their 'ultimate inwardness' as well. As Adam Trexler argues, regarding Bloom's celebration of the sovereign solitary soul, 'these literary values necessarily follow: the privileging of self-reflexivity over reference to the material world; of the historical and literary past over a coherent account of the present or future; of formal innovation over plotting or problems' (12). Indeed, as stated by Antje Kley, 'literature's guiding epistemic value is not scientific truth or plausibility but a notion of truth that is built around historically shifting semantics from beauty coherence and attraction' (10). I would add, however, that information considered objective truth (e.g. statistics, scientific discovery, experiments, mathematics) is always accompanied by a narrative, semantics and context, that determines how and what knowledge is produced in the process of dissemination. As Philip Erchinger rightly points out, 'As the history of science has taught us, what in one context is likely to be dismissed as ill-founded speculation, might in another context well be acceptable as valid and serious knowledge' (136). Context and narrative are fundamental to all knowledge production and dissemination.

As such, literature historically holds the power to compete with official forms of history and knowledge. For example, where Greenblatt turned to history to examine the structures of literary texts, Hayden White was examining the literary structures of history, a reflection on narrative and its relation to culture. White argues against the assumption that history and literature are distinct and diametrically opposed. He proposes that metahistory seeks to address

itself to such questions as, What is the structure of a peculiarly *historical* consciousness? What is the epistemological status of historical *explanations*, as compared with other kinds of explanations that might be offered to account for the materials with which historians ordinarily deal? What are the possible *forms* of historical representation and what are their bases? What authority can historical accounts claim as contributions to a secured knowledge of reality in general and to the human sciences in particular? (81)

White suggests that the form and structure of historical narratives have a discursive function separate and distinct from the aim of disseminating objective fact, therefore, implying that it is not wholly objective in the first place. Understanding the connection between the two raises questions about how history is embedded into literary narratives and how the manner narratives are formed functions to intervene in cultural debates, that is participating in the formation and dissemination of knowledge. Indeed, this is true of intersectional history as well, where, as Hancock argues, ‘indirectly attributing intersectionality’s formulation of power to Foucault, to feminism, or even just to Collins and Crenshaw does little to disturb the politics of knowledge production that is at the heart of intersectionality’s critique.’ (10). Instead, recognising and challenging narratives that position knowledge production in the West acknowledges the inherent power dynamics behind narrative construction.

Kley and Merten point out that ‘The relationship of literature and institutionalized, official forms of knowledge is therefore a shifting and historically contingent one’, going on to add that ‘what has been academic knowledge in one age becomes relegated to a less official realm in the next’ (11). In line with considerations of dynamics of power are the concerns of *doing* theory in regard to oppressed and intersectional populations, where doing theory, as articulated by Elvira Pulitano, ‘means to be working in an Olympian realm, a realm safely located within the confines of an imperialistic West, and thus to ignore the historical

realities that invest the rest of humanity’ (1). Indeed, the question then arises about how to apply theory, which, as many would argue, is a product of Western thinking, to non-Western epistemologies. Moreover, in understanding the dynamics of knowledge production and dissemination, the ethical consideration of whether attempts to speak *about* literature turn into heavy-handed appropriation of minority cultures. The requirements of the knowledge economy are determined by the western-centric model that assumes a Gramscian¹⁰ take that knowledge produced by Western knowledge institutions and universities is just, moral and ‘common sense’, functions as part of a power matrix that serves to legitimise ideologies, ways of knowing and social formations. Indeed, Eurocentric knowledge-based epistemologies have historically silenced and excluded non-western ways of knowing as well as omitting the (neo)colonial violence exploitation and expropriation that established Eurocentric claims to ‘universalism’, what Ndlovu Gatsheni refers to as ‘cognitive injustice’, ‘a social injustice that cascades from the denial of other people’s humanity and, by extension, a refusal to recognise their epistemic virtue’ (887). In an online commentary entitled, ‘Researching Palestinians: Who Sets the Agenda?’, Anaheed Al-Hardan urges an alternative that challenges the political agenda of western knowledge institutions that present themselves as sites of ‘universal truth in the hegemonic version of what constitutes knowledge,’ while ‘the rest of the world is only capable of producing culture, which is to be processed through the universal histories and theories of Europe’.

In his famous essay criticising the image of Africa in Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, Chinua Achebe writes about ‘the desire—one might indeed say the need—in Western psychology to set Africa up as a foil to Europe, as a place of negations at once

¹⁰ Gramsci is best known for his theory of cultural hegemony that describes how the state and ruling capitalist class – the bourgeoisie – use cultural institutions to maintain power in capitalist societies.

remote and vaguely familiar, in comparison with which Europe's state of spiritual grace will be manifest', stating that *Heart of Darkness* 'better than any other work that I know displays that Western desire and need' (15). Indeed, for many decades, the novel was taken as an observational record and truth of the Congo largely because of the aesthetic discernment afforded to a writer of Conrad's ability. Citing Conrad as 'undoubtedly one of the great stylists of modern fiction and a good storyteller into the bargain', Achebe places *Heart of Darkness* into the class of 'permanent literature—read and taught and constantly evaluated by serious academics' (15). However, it is precisely the stylistic capability that raises concern:

When a writer while pretending to record scenes, incidents, and their impact is in reality engaged in inducing hypnotic stupor in his readers through a bombardment of emotive words and other forms of trickery, much more has to be at stake than stylistic felicity . . . Conrad chose his subject well—one which was guaranteed not to put him in conflict with the psychological predisposition of his readers or raise the need for him to contend with their resistance. He chose the role of purveyor of comforting myths. (Achebe 16)

I have lingered on this essay to illustrate the positionality of literature and the potential to examine texts as specific artefacts in wider networks of meaning. 'Knowledge' in the context of literature and culture cannot be regarded independently of how it comes to being in contrast to scientific matters where knowledge is abstracted and removed from referents with the aim of standing in isolation. Literature and culture do not exist in isolation (indeed, I argue, neither does scientific discovery) and fundamentally rely on their referents, narrative, and context. Achebe contends that Conrad's stylistic choices were made with the understanding of the context in which they would be received to reinforce opinions that posit African savagery to the point that they are taken to be 'knowledge'. Aesthetic discernment is, in fact, related to paradigms of critical theory and the political and social context of their

times and not an objective mode of inquiry, regardless of the attempts of critics to attribute it the status of the sciences.

Consider the following passage from E. D. Kolbas's monograph, *Critical Theory and The Literary Canon* (2001), where he makes the case for,

a sociological and historical understanding of canons that is confined neither to schools and universities nor to social representation but that stresses the material reproduction of culture in the process of canon formation . . . In addition to cultural reproduction, the very concept of a canon necessarily involves qualitative judgment, because to be canonical also means to be exemplary. Sociological views of the literary canon that overemphasize the institutional process of canon formation tend to discount or neglect the distinctive, *aesthetic* aspects of canonical works of art. (2, original emphasis)

In citing cultural reproduction and qualitative judgement, Kolbas falls into the trap of positing aesthetics and politics in binary, assuming the existence of aesthetic isolation and the possible depoliticisation of aesthetics. This thesis emphasises through the formation of this intersectional framework that one cannot remove the referents and politics from literature, aesthetics, creation, etc. In claiming judgement to be 'qualitative', Kolbas too attempts to suggest an objective, indisputable knowledge truth, ignoring the very conditions of narration that qualitatively produce judgement; a narrative of social and political history that determines western forms of storytelling and aesthetic experimentation as 'exemplary'. Moreover, he assumes a universal consumption that consumes the universal text. However, as noted above, this universality is rather an assumption of default whiteness that holds the author and reader working in tandem to reinforce a western epistemological aesthetic discernment that is preapproved by institutionalised authority. The very term used to label

such examples of stylistic value, the 'canon', hold religious connotations, suggesting a rule or a principle declared by an authoritative body to be followed on faith.

The intersectional framework takes note of the intersecting influences of various knowledge paradigms to determine what knowledge is being prioritised, and, perhaps most importantly, for what purpose. For instance, where theorists began to proclaim the death of the author as we have seen above, critics like Christian asked instead why such proclamations should gain traction at the same time that the works of Black men and women were just gaining recognition. Her essay, 'The Race for Theory', while criticised for being at times vague and generalising across a broad set of theoretical discourses, nevertheless highlights the power dynamics that underly contemporary academic literary studies, defining the race for theory by:

its linguistic jargon; its emphasis on quoting its prophets; its tendency toward 'biblical' exegesis; its refusal even to mention specific works of creative writers, far less contemporary ones; its preoccupations with mechanical analyses of language, graphs, algebraic equations; its gross generalizations about culture. (Christian 69)

Moreover, Christian interrogates the usefulness of theories that claim to reveal 'truths' of non-Western literature, aware of the role power and privilege play in determining literary value. The concern lies in what 'truths' are being revealed and what knowledge they claim to produce. Indeed, Christian argues that theory becomes a manner in which to 'determine the ideas that are deemed valuable', and states that 'such theory is prescriptive [where] it ought to have some relationship to practice' (69). Additionally, methods of theorisation, and thus knowledge production, differ in periphery populations and can form part of a challenge against 'the literary hierarchy of dominance which declares when literature is literature, when literature is great, depending on what it thinks is to its advantage' (70). Eagleton, thus, points to a need to derive methodology and theory from practice rather than in advance. In an

interview, he remarked ‘back in the seventies we used to suffer from a certain fetishism of method; we used to think that we have to get a certain kind of systematic method right, and this would be *the* way of proceeding’ (2138).

Instead, the production of power and enactment of privilege in the arena of knowledge is what Foucault would identify as ‘regulatory power’ in which institutions such as schools and universities control discursive practices. These practices organise rules that determine the production of different forms of knowledge. Institutions are inherently arenas of power where, as Daphne Spain states in *Gendered Spaces* (1992), ‘by controlling access to knowledge and resources through the control of space, the dominant group’s ability to retain and reinforce its position is enhanced’ (15). This is true of many institutions, not simply those with educational purposes. Additionally, I argue that this line of reasoning can be extended to include those who control the formation of knowledge and the creation of theoretical spaces. For example, scientific institutions have maintained a reputation of objective knowledge, through the production of that which is considered ‘fact’, resulting in the frequent and unquestioned acceptance of all that is prescribed the label of ‘scientific’. However, as Jill A. Fisher points out, ‘facts are produced by individuals who use tools and methods that structure what claims can be made’ (2). In other words, facts are not always facts, but rather observations and behaviours naturalised under the guise and protection of an ‘objective’ institution, in many cases done through discursive practices.

Colonial exploration into Indigenous populations and race led to a process of investigation, collection, and categorisation, establishing the dominance of Western science as vital to the understanding of human differences. Notably, these institutions were the ancestors of modern museums, another institution that established and maintained historical narratives as accurate and necessary. This was a process referred to by Bruno Latour as centres of calculations. Scientists sought to classify all that was being brought back from the

unknown worlds, using it as a way to domesticate the ‘savage’ by making ‘the wilderness known in advance, predictable’ (Latour 218) at a central position of knowledge, i.e. the West. What had previously been explained by ‘difference in level of “civilisation”’ shifted into the ‘nineteenth century construction of race’ (Fausto-Sterling 26), supported by scientific efforts dedicated to discerning human difference through ‘classificatory techniques from natural history, comparative anatomy, and evolutionary biology’ (Urla and Terry 7). Modern museums continue this trend of presenting explanations for natural history and evolution through classificatory techniques. It was from these colonial forays into ‘new’ worlds that filled museums and established them as centres of knowledge. What then becomes clear, as Leslie Le Grange articulates, is that the project of decolonial curriculum reform does not ‘involve destroying Western knowledge, but...decentring it or perhaps deterritorialising it (making it something other than what it is)’ (6).

From this concern arose the importance of the nomenclature of this thesis, where I was aware that the project I was embarking upon was not that of producing knowledge (that is, creating a methodology or theory) but rather of providing tools that enabled one to uncover how knowledge is disseminated and for what purposes (providing a framework). And though the structure of this thesis has placed the articulation of the framework in the introduction, determining the framework was an active process of development that occurred while analysing the various texts and authors in this thesis.

As the section title suggests, I have made it a point to emphasise the duality of knowledge production *and* dissemination, as, I argue, you cannot have production without dissemination and vice versa. I use the term ‘dissemination’ fluidly, referring not to the publication or confirmation of truths (though the exploration of power dynamics has demonstrated that this too is crucial to understanding how certain paradigms of knowledge come to be prioritised) but rather to stress how production does not occur in a vacuum. *Why*

knowledge is produced goes hand in hand with *what* knowledge is produced and hence, determines *how* and to *whom* it will be disseminated. They are, simply put, intersected. As Satya Mohanty states in *Literary Theory and the Claims of History* (1997) that knowledge produced around literature, what is known as literary theory,

does not in fact refer to a theory of literature today. Rather, it points to a larger area of theoretical investigation informed by film and media studies, anthropology, ethnic and third-world cultural studies, feminism, and various kinds of interpretive projects in the social sciences . . . contemporary literary theory opens out onto fundamental issues in social and political theory. (10)

The goal then with this mode of analysis is not to untangle them, as such a thing is would result in the reduction and simplification to the point of inaccuracy of the real circumstances and consequences of their entanglement in the first place, but to consciously recognise where various paradigms of knowledge influence the understanding what is being read. Chapter I examines how Black forms of storytelling inherently evolved from the Black American experience, Chapter II stresses the nuances and distinctiveness of genre writing from non-Western centres, just as Chapter III demonstrates how Indigenous epistemologies form paradigms of literary aesthetics. That is to say that what is considered a form of exemplary aesthetic discernment is itself dependent on the influence of knowledge centres of production and dissemination.

Storytelling in all the texts in this thesis are modes of knowledge dissemination, but moreover, work as a method of, what Nozomi Irei calls, deterritorialising, which ‘is a dismantling of the operative codes of systems and structures in a way that allows for forces to flow, plunging everything and every-“one” into flux’ (261). Irei goes on to explain how, texts deterritorialise ‘majoritarian ways of being, including the territorialized domain of writing: literature’ (261). Moreover, this form of written radical storytelling is unique in that

there are no longer any forms or development of forms; nor are there subjects or the formation of subjects . . . There are only relations of movement and rest, speed and slowness between unformed elements, or at least between elements that are relatively unformed. (Deleuze and Guattari qtd. in Irei 263)

The knowledge produced is altered by whomever it is disseminated to; it is transformative and in a constant process of formation that is dependent on the reader. That is to say that the authors deterritorialise the field of ‘literature’ and challenge the suggestion of superiority of ‘fiction’ and ‘storytelling’. Moreover, it shifts literary priority away from a Western occupation with universalism and totalism.

To accomplish this, we look to the literature of people of colour to uncover the theorising work undertaken in the narrative forms and the language used, finding in the literature the ‘intricacies of the intersection of language, class, race, and gender’ (Christian 69). In understanding what can be revealed through storytelling, literary intersectionality then also challenges notions of English Literature being written solely by the ‘English’ and focusing rather on the ‘literature’. The focus then lies on what knowledge, theorising, and various epistemologies are being disseminated through the narrative and storytelling structures, by reflecting on historical dates and events mentioned and how they are used and historically positioned in the text to provide alternate perspectives and understandings of the world.

CONCLUSION

The key works I have mentioned above form my understanding of intersectionality using this existing scholarship to form the foundation of my framework of intersectional literary analysis. From these works I have determined the following essential themes of intersectionality for my framework that can be used to further the theory of intersectionality

in the realm of literary criticism and theory: I posit that the intersectional individual and their experiences need to be at the centre of any analysis; from a breakdown of power dynamics in relation to intersectionality, it is evident that one cannot look at the oppression alone, but rather the consequences, both negative and positive, upon the subject to determine the full extent of its effects; where so many have seen a call for complexity as the driving force of intersectional work, returning to the originating voices of intersectional thought demonstrate it need not be the case, indeed, complexity is not the goal of intersectional analysis; and finally, intersectionality calls for a new manner of thinking about social identities and experiences, one that renegotiates contemporary social discourses and acknowledges their role in the reproduction of power structure.

Throughout this thesis, I demonstrate how various scholarship on what intersectionality is and how it can be used is applicable to the analysis of literary texts and genres. This includes acknowledging and exploring the relationship between literature and the world, emphasising the reciprocal influence between them. Additionally, this thesis examines how literary theory can maintain the productive potential of a social theory such as intersectionality while emphasising the importance of doing so. To illustrate the potential of a literary framework of intersectionality, the body of this thesis applies the framework to various genres of literature, engaging in close readings of contemporary novels. I turn to novels precisely for, what Vilashini Cooppan describes as, ‘those sociological, ideological, political, cultural, and aesthetic experiments in the representation of everyday life’ (23) that are ‘marked by dialectical form, that is, an interplay of contradictory forces’ (24). And in doing so, I also tackle the question Cooppan raises of whether ‘critical theory that takes the novel as its ever-expanding center risks turning a single genre into a [seemingly] universal model’ (my own interjection, 23).

In line with intersectional thought, I explore texts that feature an intersection of novelistic genres. Chapter I, 'Speaking Identity: Reimagines Models of Selfhood in Black American Life Writing', explores three examples of Black American Life Writing, Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*, and *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. These texts challenge the conventional definitions of life writing by narrativizing orality in the written form by examining them against the history of the Black literary tradition. Set in the style of a story being told to someone, the three texts centre the black tradition of storytelling within the narrative form, repositioning both the reader of a text and the Black subject in the literary tradition. The chapter delves into the specific language of oral storytelling as it is transcribed literarily in the form of African American Vernacular English (AAVE) and country and city slang, collapsing the binary between forms of writing and speech. The texts examine a specifically Black aesthetic representation focused on the lived experiences of Black Americans from not only a race perspective but also from arenas of gender, class, sexuality, and ability, examining the transformative potential and advantage in complexity and hybridity. Following the intersectional framework, the chapter highlights a specifically Black epistemology laid out in the texts, drawing on Black spiritual and historical consciousness. The texts of Hurston, Walker, and Malcolm X are shown to be examples of this uniquely Black epistemology around being, becoming, and selfhood, one that does not depend on or is defined by the racial experience of Black Americans with white people.

Chapter II, 'Subversive Conceptions of Utopia: The Posthuman in Postcolonial Science Fiction', examines the science fiction novels *The Calcutta Chromosome* by Amitav Ghosh, *Rosewater* by Tade Thompson, and *Midnight Robber* by Nalo Hopkinson, all authors from postcolonial nations. Ghosh, Thompson and Hopkinson explore spaces (both physical and metaphysical) of radical possibility and potential that emerge when we diverge from

Western historiography and epistemologies, exploring how silence, loss, and diaspora, all fundamental elements of the postcolonial, can be understood as opportunities of empowerment. The intersectional analysis of such spaces and the representation of them in the novels introduces a posthuman understanding of postcolonial experience that is removed from (neo)colonial frameworks of futurity. The chapter deconstructs the notion of progress that is implicitly tied into science fiction novels, positing a form of progress and expansion from a postcolonial perspective, one that has roots in the devastating history of the colonial mission for progress and expansion. The novels function as literary experiments in science fiction that challenge the conceptions of utopia, asking instead what such worlds cost. From alternative history to present day invasions and future colonies on twin worlds, the three texts offer an alternative understanding of postcolonialism as an ethos and epistemology, rather than a reaction to historical time or an oppositional stance continually reinforcing the centrality of the historical colonisers.

In the final chapter, 'Indigenous Survivance: Slow Trauma and Belonging in Indigenous Ecofiction', the novels of Indigenous writers are analysed to reveal the Indigenous epistemology on survival that necessarily includes living with and alongside nature. Looking at Linda Hogan's *Solar Storm*, N. Scott Momaday's *House Made of Dawn* and Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony*, the chapter explores the potential of restorative healing after the slow trauma born from the consequences of colonialism on both Indigenous people and land by a reconnection with the land. Forms of literary activism, the novels under discussion highlight the interconnected crisis of ecology with oppressions of race, gender, sexuality, class, disability, etc. These multi-layered narratives make use of traditional Indigenous stories to shape the experiences of the characters, finding in the historical stories methods and epistemologies that help to heal intergenerational trauma. Critically, the novels

draw a distinction between bodily survival and psychological survivance, advocating for a recovery of traditional origins and history to restore the vibrant Indigenous culture.

Finally, the conclusion to this thesis delves into a discussion of the implications of such a literary framework of intersectional analysis on social discourse. Moreover, it addresses the question of what kind of impact institutionalising intersectionality has on education and academic institutions. It considers what is at risk if academic theories and ways of thinking are not reconsidered and whether there is a social responsibility within academia to reflect and respond to social and political changes in the world.

The chosen texts were chosen with an eye to the historical context around the concept of intersectionality. Novels such as Hurston and Walkers predate and participated to conversations regarding the specific lived experience of those multiply oppressed, whereas later novels such as Thompson's *Rosewater* and Hogan's *Solar Storm* were published post the rise of intersectionality as a buzzword in identity politics. The wide breadth of time demonstrates how the framework is applicable despite publication date and does not result in anachronistic analyses. Moreover, they have all been recognised by literary bodies and prizes at some point or another. This decision was made for two main reasons: 1) recognised literature inspires further research and thus makes the task of finding relevant criticism easier, and this accessibility is itself a mark of how the power of recognition by literary bodies begins a cycle of further research and recognition, and 2) it raises questions as to what kind of non-Western, non-white narratives are deemed more acceptable than others, which are being prioritised and hence, what power dynamics are being reproduced, knowledge being produced or disseminated or, as is the case in many of these texts, challenged.

By no means do I intend for Black American Life Writing, Postcolonial Science Fiction and Indigenous Ecofiction to be considered an exhaustive series of genres that can be analysed in an intersectional manner, but rather a demonstration of the various ways in which

an intersectional framework of analysis can be applied. The very act of categorising literature into genres is an unavoidable organisation exercise that is in accordance with the notion of essentialist categories this thesis argues against. Indeed, many of the genres and the themes highlighted in the following chapters frequently overlap making them difficult to fit solely into one category. Highlighting this by examining intersecting genres reinforces the understanding that categorisations, even in literature, are based on a false assumption of single-axis relevance. In other words, intersectional literary analysis demonstrates, as it does with identity categories where they are shown to be a hindrance to the representation of contemporary identity experiences, that the division of literature into exclusive genres can result in overlooking the implications the work can have in other genres and inhibiting the potential for social transformation.

We find ourselves at the crossroads where the demands for change are being voiced in various social and political arenas, yet a staunch desire remains to maintain a distance from political and social arenas in academia. However, as Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle point out, ‘we are inescapably implicated – even in the fantasy of academic objectivity – in structures and strategies of power. Power is produced and reproduced in research, teaching, and learning, as it is in any other practice or discourse’ (142). This thesis is animated by concerns of epistemological erasure because of the absence of intersectional theory within academic settings. By addressing the absence and determining the viability of a framework for literary analysis, this thesis hopes to demonstrate the need for new systems of intersectional thought, representation and analysis in literary criticism and theory. Only through its application to new relevant contexts can Intersectional criticism and theory be strengthened.

CHAPTER I

SPEAKING IDENTITY: REIMAGINED MODELS OF SELFHOOD IN BLACK AMERICAN LIFE WRITING

[H]ow can the black subject posit a full and sufficient self in a language in which blackness is a sign of absence? Can writing, with the very difference it makes and marks, mask the blackness of the black face that addresses the text of Western letters, in a voice that speaks English through an idiom which contains the irreducible element of cultural difference that will always separate the white voice from the black?

Henry Louis Gates

Intersectional analysis does not only call for acknowledging in the text that which is not being mentioned explicitly and the implications of such but also reading critically *around* the primary source in question. As emphasised in the introduction, a major aspect of intersectional analysis is recognising that nothing exists in isolation. That is to say that the experiences of multiply oppressed people are specific to their environments and the contexts of their lives. This is equally true of reading, writing and critiquing literature whereby both the source and analysis are read or conducted in specific contexts that affect the broader-reaching influence of the work. This chapter aims to examine three Black American texts that are often considered to be canonical in race writings in North America and relevant criticism and theory in light of contemporary contexts. The three authors and works explored in this chapter are Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1982), Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937) and *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (1965) by Malcolm X and Alex

Haley. Being canonical texts, these works have been heavily read and critically studied. However, through an intersectional analysis of these texts where I examine how the narrative structure, techniques, and cultural context speak back and respond to a history of Black literary tradition, I propose, instead, a *rereading* of these texts. This chapter will highlight the shifting network of power dynamics and differences that inform intersectional experiences and the writing of those experiences by Black American writers and, in doing so, enable a method of reading that centres Black epistemologies and understandings of the world around them.

Initially, the three texts seem to have little in common with one another. All written in different forms, and the narrative structures are distinctly varied: Walker's is an epistolary novel, Hurston's a dynamic mix of first-person narrative and free-indirect discourse, and Malcolm X's recollection of his life is told directly to the presumed readers. However, I demonstrate in this chapter how the narratives are more similar than one would first assume. All three texts are based on the notion of telling the story of an individual. Indeed, I argue that the texts can all be considered forms of both fictional and non-fictional life-writing. Life-writing refers to the expansive genre in literature of purposeful accounts of personal narratives, such as autobiographies, memoirs, letters, diaries, journals, etc. Though most often referring to non-fiction, I include the works of Hurston and Walker mentioned in this chapter under the genre due to the centrality of recounting a personal narrative to others in the novels. Individual stories and storytelling are vital components of intersectionality, as elucidated in the introduction, where storytelling is required for a nuanced, critical examination of intersectionality in the literary imagination. Kathryn Russell argues, in regard to feminist dialectics and Marxist theory, that 'current scholarship seems to be caught in a bind between collapsing social categories together and separating them out in a list' (35).

Narratives in contrast adopt a *long durée* understanding of experience that is not based on singular moments nor categorical distinctions of identity.

As such, this chapter serves to establish the importance of individual stories in articulating the intersectional experience at points intersecting dynamics of oppression and power rather than featuring narratives about additive relationships between categories of identities. Thus, narratives articulating intersectional experiences and identities reduce the need for theorised and exclusive categories. Instead, the focus is on the context of experiences rather than experiences determined by extant categories of identity. Moreover, in being examples of life-writing, the texts subvert western models of binary Selfhood. The texts embrace multiplicity and community rather than focusing on the goal of expressing complete and isolated Selfhoods in contrast to arguments of early scholars of life-writing who claim that articulating a centred Selfhood is the goal of the genre.¹¹

Challenging M. H. Abram's diagram¹² of works that require an audience, implying that a work is only such if it is read, the texts in this chapter internalise the audience through the act of storytelling within the text: Walker's protagonist, Celie writes to her sister, Hurston's Janie tells her tale retroactively to Pheoby, and Malcolm is being interviewed by Alex Haley about his life, which is to be widely published. The narrative techniques of Walker and Hurston, the foreword by Alex Haley and the occasional direct notes to the reader by Malcolm X within the text serve to frame the works in such a way that the reader takes the role of an active listener and the audience alongside the one already established in the format of the narrative. As such, the existence of the narrative is established prior to the

¹¹ See Georg Misch's *A History of Autobiography in Antiquity* (1907), explored later in the chapter.

¹² Refer to Introduction for the diagram.

physical text itself through a metatextual approach. Such an approach definitively centres the questions of who is the addressee and what is the communicative context within the texts.

The genre of life-writing has long-standing roots in Black American literature, a precursory form of which can be found in slave narratives dating back as early as 1770.¹³ Specifically, what is referred to as slave narratives at that point in history were testimonies dictated by enslaved Black individuals and written by an amanuensis.¹⁴ According to Henry Louis Gates Jr., ‘from 1970 to the present, almost *half* of the Afro-American literary tradition was created when its authors and their black readers were either slaves or former slaves’ (1991, xv). Gates’ statement remains poignant and encourages one to acknowledge the history underpinning contemporary Black American writing. I locate the analysis in this chapter in the setting of the history of Black American storytelling that informed the beliefs of Black intellectual capabilities from the 18th century and continues to influence and underpin structures of power that oppress Black Americans today.

The label of literature already inspires debate around its classist and elitist implications and is particularly relevant to Black American writing as it raises various colonialist implications and efforts to determine the inherent intellectual capabilities (or lack thereof) of Black authors. The specification of Black American literature, as opposed to American literature, is evidence of a continued belief in the distinction of intellectual and literary production by white Americans and non-white Americans. While the distinction of Black literature is now used to show respect to an essential and shared history, identity, and community among Black people, this distinction initially arose from the belief, after René Descartes, that reason and logic were valued above all other human cognitive characteristics,

¹³ See Henry Louis Gates Jr.’s *The Slave’s Narrative* for examples of slave narrative between 1750 and 1861, after which point *de jure* slavery ceases to exist.

¹⁴ A literary assistant employed to write from diction.

with writing being the visible proof of reason. Moreover, it was a sign of civility and humanity. Therefore, in a society whose structure of privilege rested upon the belief in an ineffable hierarchy of racial superiority, a reasoning and literate Black individual posed a serious challenge to that hierarchy. Indeed, as Gates elucidates in ‘Writing “Race” and the Difference it Makes’ (1985), by this reasoning that could not be refuted by men who so heavily valorised logic, ‘Blacks were “reasonable,” and hence “men” if—and only if—they demonstrated mastery of “the arts and sciences,” the eighteenth century’s formula for writing’ (8). In other words, reason and writing, the ability to translate oral thought and reasoning into the written form was an indicator of one’s humanity. Moreover, Gates further adds that such an indicator would suggest that ‘the African variety of humanity and the European variety were fundamentally related’ (1985, 8). Deliberate moves to silence and deny the potential of literacy for slaves were undertaken, with the ironic justification that literacy went against the nature of Black people.

In 1705, Dutch explorer, William Bosman, recounts the story of creation as told to him by the people of the Gold Coast of Guinea:

in the beginning God created Black as well as White men; thereby . . . giving the Blacks the first Election, who chose Gold, and left the Knowledge of Letters to the White. God . . . incensed at their Avarice, resolved that the Whites should for ever be their masters, and they obliged to wait on them as their slaves. (147)

Bosman’s account serves as a justification for the deprivation of literacy to Black people. What was at stake, then, for the earliest Black authors was ‘nothing less than the implicit testimony to their humanity’ (1988, 171) as Gates states in *The Signifying Monkey*. In South Carolina, the Act of 1740 announced a hundred-pound fine (in 2020 this amounted to just under \$6,700) if anybody was caught teaching or providing teaching materials to Black people. The Act remained in effect until 1865. For Barbara Smith, ‘[a]ny discussion of Afro-

American writers can rightfully begin with the fact that for most of the time we have been in [America] we have been categorically denied not only literacy, but the most minimal possibility of a decent human life' (20). Literacy, which relies on access to education, inherently becoming a question of both social and economic privilege, and underpins the chance for the dehumanised to prove their humanity. Without the ability to write, what was left to slaves and ex-slaves was storytelling.

The previous paragraph details the importance of storytelling in the history of the Black literary tradition for its relevance to the three texts explored in this chapter that actively subvert historical assumptions around and/or denials of Black humanity and Selfhood. To provide a singular definition of 'Selfhood', here, would be contradictory to the aims of intersectional practice that posits there is no singular definition of being. Indeed, a frequent critique of the western model of selfhood in life-writing is that it assumes a centred, autonomous subject, 'a special unity and identity across time' (Gusdorf 35).¹⁵ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel argues that the self is identified in confronting that which is not the self and developing a consciousness in opposition to (an)other subject(s). In other words, he claims that the self is constructed only in being recognised as not being something else. Indeed, in Hegel's words 'Self-consciousness exists in and for itself when, and by the fact that, it so exists for another; that is, it exists only in being acknowledged' (109). If we follow Hegel's reasoning, the consciousness of Black slaves, in being self-thinking and aware, has been denied acknowledgement by others, thus, resulting in their epistemological erasure. In Hegel's *The Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807), we also find his infamous claim that Africans lack historical consciousness as they turned to oral methods of recording history as opposed

¹⁵ Also see Sidonie Smith's *Subjectivity, Identity, and the Body* (1993) and Leigh Gilmore's *The Limits of Autobiography: Trauma and Testimony* (2001).

to the kind of teleological understanding of history and culture that he saw emerging for cultures with a corpus of written texts. Acknowledgement, then, was not simply a case of hearing a narrative or of storytelling, but rather of writing and, importantly, publishing.

The texts in this chapter, which hinge upon the notion of speaking or writing to someone (God, a friend, a journalist), employ methods of storytelling that challenge Western models of Selfhood and humanity dependent on language (spoken and written), approved expressions of experience, and intellect. Bart Moore-Gilbert notes that historically, ‘to appropriate the speaking positions, narrative modes and paradigms of selfhood associated with the hegemonic regime of social power advances claims to equality for those traditionally denied full subjectivity (and therefore humanity) by the established institutions of cultural authority’ (2). In other words, it benefitted minority authors and writers to adopt models of Selfhood that aligned them more closely with Western and white models of literature to prove their right to a voice in a society that historically and epistemologically ignored them.

Nevertheless, positioning the textual narratives of the works in this chapter in the forms of teller and listener recalls the early history of Black American literature where Black slaves who had no education or literacy would tell their stories to a white benefactor to write for them. Early Black American literature would use the opportunity to expose the degradation and dehumanisation of slavery and racism. Themes such as transformation became very common in Black American writing as,

the recording of an authentic Black voice – a voice of deliverance from the deafening discursive silence which an enlightened Europe cited to prove the absence of the African’s humanity – was the millennial instrument of transformation through which the African would become the European, the slave become the ex-slave, brute animal become the human being. (Gates 1991, *xxvi-xxvii*)

However, as a result, there is a continued burden of representation upon Black writers, whereby their texts are expected to speak to and contribute to establishing Black humanity, to (at one extreme) pander to a white consciousness that would judge the merit of the Black literary tradition. Richard Wright, a celebrated Black American writer and a contemporary of Hurston's, claimed that her novel was an attempt to pander 'to a white audience whose chauvinistic tastes she knows how to satisfy. She exploits that phase of Negro life which is "quaint," the phase which evokes a piteous smile on the lips of the "superior" race' (cited Walker "Looking for Zora" 106). Indeed, Christopher Lewis identifies in his writing the expectation for early Black American literature to be a realist representation of the Black racial experience.

This included the use of language, whereby the 'expectation that black writers compose at least partially in [African American Vernacular English] AAVE' has 'over time [become] nearly synonymous with black literary realism' (Lewis 166). However, by including African American Vernacular English (AAVE) in the texts, I argue it can be understood as further proof of the inability of Black writers to ever truly be 'Western'. The realism of AAVE often attests to this image of ignorance and unsophistication for white readers 'informed by the assumption that black writing is . . . a source of unmediated, even unsophisticated information about blackness' (Lewis 166), whereby the style of language is evidence of a lack of intellect. Chinua Achebe argues that to maintain the othering of non-European populations the 'man of two worlds' theory was created to prove 'that no matter how much the native was exposed to European influences he could never truly absorb them . . . he would always discard the mask of civilization when the crucial hour came and reveal his true face' (1989, 74). The biases carried into reading Black texts ask Black authors to consider and centre whiteness every time they write. Indeed, it is difficult for Black authors

to be recognised for their works when distanced from the historical and cultural assumptions of Blackness.¹⁶

Michael Awkward makes the point that until recently, it was virtually unquestioned ‘that the black artist’s primary responsibility was to create protest fiction that explored America’s historical mistreatment of blacks, boosting black self-esteem and changing racist white attitudes about Afro-Americans in the process’ (3). Relatedly, Walker argues that ‘black writing has suffered because even black critics have assumed that a book that deals with the relationships between members of a black family—or between a man and a woman—is less important than one that has white people as primary antagonists’ (261). The expectation from both the audience and critics has required Black American writing to be about race first and foremost. Recalling Hegel then, the expectations facing Black American authors force them to form conceptions of Selfhood that recognise themselves solely as being non-white, in effect requiring Black authors to centre their narratives around the assumption of the primary importance of Black-white relations in Black lives.

The texts of Walker, Hurston and Malcolm X are inherently subversive in that the stories are ostensibly told only to other Black people, about Black communities (rather than focusing on Black-white racial relations) and offer multiplicitous and fluid notions of subjectivity and Selfhood. The writings of these three authors adopt an intersectional method of storytelling that acknowledges and embraces narratives conveying fragmented voices and identities, dismissing the assumed goal in the genre of life-writing of a concluding, unified,

¹⁶ The same can be said of the film industry where criticism has been increasing steadily in recent years regarding the lack of credit given to black actors not in roles of enslavement or depicting black suffering: ‘In the last decade, only 14 women of colour were among the 100 women nominated by the Academy for the best actress and best supporting actress awards. There were even fewer men of colour (nine out of 100). That the same types of roles – slaves, nannies, and maids – continue to be the magic ticket to the red carpet, feels particularly ugly considering the range of parts played by white nominees.’ <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2020/jan/14/slaves-nannies-and-maids-how-oscars-value-female-actors-of-colour>

Cartesian self.¹⁷ Doing so symbolises a significant detachment of the politics of Black American literature from a Euro-centric colonial influence that is still felt in white expectations of stories of Black suffering.

ORALITY IN THE BLACK TRADITION OF STORYTELLING

The tension between the written and the oral, a tension similarly significant in power dynamics around race, gender, and class, is present in all three life-writing texts in this chapter. The condition of being othered is most often felt in the differences between the body and voice. The nature of the three works, in being texts to be read, render the obvious corporeal differences inconsequential. That is to say that the act of reading renders the immediate elements of a body irrelevant. Accents or cadences found in speech, physical signifiers that provide information about the speaker, such as gender, age, ethnic background, or ability are absent. All that is offered to the reader is that which the author chooses to disclose. However, Walker, Hurston, and Malcolm X imbue in their writing elements of a specifically Black American culture and tradition, building models of literature that are more compatible with representing putatively authentic Black voices and intersectional experiences. As Homi Bhabha states in *The Location of Culture* (1994), ‘the recognition that tradition bestows is a partial form of identification’ (3), imbuing methods of storytelling with culture. Part of that model built by Black American authors specifically includes orality in their storytelling.

The relationship between literacy and storytelling is an intersectional issue that hinges upon economic, gender, and racial conditions and circumstances. Moreover, as previously

¹⁷ A concept developed by René Descartes that recognises the certainty of the subject’s ability to think, as even to doubt this certainty is to think.

mentioned, writing has historically served as proof of the capability of reasoning, which, as a result, established a series of Euro-centric cultural values that placed the written word in a privileged position over oral expression. Claude Levi-Strauss, in *Tristes Tropiques* (1955), argues that,

The only phenomenon with which writing has always been concomitant is the creation of cities and empires, that is, the integration of large numbers of individuals into a political system, and their grading into castes or classes . . . My hypothesis, if correct, would oblige us to recognize the fact that the primary function of written communication is to facilitate slavery. (239)

In other words, the ability to write has not only been used as a standard upon which to judge the intellectual capabilities of those in lower hierarchical categories but similarly enabled those in power to maintain their positions. Writing provided social power that functioned to maintain pseudo-scientific beliefs in putatively innate racial, and subsequently sexual, hierarchies. Indeed, a slave or ex-slave's need for an amanuensis to record their stories further hindered the beginnings of the Black American literary tradition as the stories were underpinned by a necessity for white assistance to articulate racial injustices and dehumanisation.

In contrast, in *Of Grammatology* (1967), Jacques Derrida argues that the Western philosophical tradition understands speech to be the site of unmediated and pure presence, particularly the presence of meaning. Accordingly, writing has been viewed as a simple 'supplement to the spoken word' (7), a mediation of thought. As a result, speech was prioritised over writing as being more immediate and manifest than writing as it was free from mediation. However, Derrida claims that all language, whether spoken or written, is in fact 'writing', whereby

the Western concept of language (in terms of what, beyond its plurivocity and beyond the strict and problematic opposition of speech [*parole*] and language [*langue*], attaches it *in general* to phonematic or glossematics production, to language, to voice, to hearing, to sound and breadth, to speech) were revealed today as the guise or disguise of a primary writing. (7)

In other words, if writing is to be understood as a mediation of pure presence, then spoken language, as it too is a mediation of meaning, is a form of writing, where a ‘concept of the relationships between speech and writing have *already* been assigned’ (4). The relevance of this notion to the texts in this chapter sees the collapse of the absolute separation of forms of writing and speech. The texts of Walker, Hurston, and Malcolm X subvert the implicit privilege of the written word by making the oral inseparable from the method of storytelling. In combining the forms of both writing and speech, as a letter in AAVE, a story told in free-indirect discourse, and an autobiography told to and mediated through a journalist, the texts defy categorisation according to ethnocentric systems of hierarchy, of Western philosophical history, and Eurocentric standards of intellect and, thus, humanity that underlies those systems.

Turning first to *The Color Purple*, the novel uses the epistolary form in tandem with elements of the oral, ruminating on issues of silence and freedom. In the aftermath of sexual violation, the novel opens with the demand for silence from the vulnerable and abused. Walker’s protagonist, Celie, a young girl of fourteen who is assaulted at the start of the novel by the man she believes to be her father, Alphonso, is told, ‘You better not tell nobody but God. It’d kill your mammy’ (1). Following his orders, but desperate to be heard, Celie turns to writing to God, and later her sister, to voice her trauma and record her experiences. As a result of the rape, Celie falls pregnant for the second time at 14 years of age but is not allowed to meet her children, as they are taken away by Alphonso and she is left to believe

both children have been killed. When later a widowed man named Albert, referred to as Mr. ____, proposes to Celie's younger sister, Nettie, Alphonso instead forces Celie into an abusive marriage. Unable to live without her sister, Nettie escapes Alphonso to go live with Celie, however, Mr. ____'s obsession over her forces Nettie to leave. Left alone, Celie forges relationships with other black women also facing, often violent, oppression at the hands of men: Sofia who is married to Mr. ____'s son and Shug Avery, a glamorous singer and sometimes Mr. ____'s mistress.

The demand for silence is redolent of the historical silence imposed on Black people through the criminalisation of Black literacy. Moreover, Alphonso places the responsibility of her mother's life in the hands of the girl he has raped to ensure her silence. Martha J. Cutter, in linking the myth of Philomela to contemporary rape narratives, states the danger of communication, saying that 'if women find other methods of communication, these alternatives lead only to more violence and an even deeper silence' (162). Silence is presented by Alphonso to be the avenue for Celie's mother's salvation, implying that having a voice will only lead to more violence. While literacy was eventually extended to Black people, Black slaves who were taught to read and write similarly risked violence or death for learning. In this way, Alphonso parallels the role of the oppressor, dictating whether both Celie and her sister Nettie were allowed access to education and literacy.

However, in her letters to God, Celie defies the expectation of silence and the power dynamics set up by Alphonso. In her first letter, Celie demonstrates a capacity for introspection: '~~I am~~ I have always been a good girl' (1). The correction is an indication of a temporal immediacy in Celie's language, demonstrating the organic, living quality of the language used, more commonly attributed to oral speech. The first half of the novel subverts the historical implications around writing, being used instead as a form of resistance. In being denied an oral voice to speak out against her sexual assault, Celie turns to another form that

has traditionally been withheld to silence voice – writing – and uses it to effect self-actualisation.

Aware of the repressive history, Walker asks, in *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* (1983), 'How was the creativity of the black woman kept alive, year after year and century after century, when for most of the years black people have been in America, it was a punishable crime for a black person to read or write?' (234), articulating that she writes because she is 'preoccupied with the spiritual survival, the survival *whole* of my people,' (250). Walker's protagonist is similarly striving for her spiritual, and additionally creative, survival through writing. Celie writes as she talks, using oral techniques and mechanisms in her writing, imbuing it with Black literary history. When transcribing a conversation Celie had with her sister, the primacy of orality becomes apparent:

The way you know who discover America, Nettie say, is think bout cucumbers. That what Columbus sound like. I learned all about Columbus in the first grade, but look like he the first thing I forgot. She say Columbus come here in boats call the Neater, the Peter, and the Santomareater, Indians so nice to him he force a bunch of 'em back home with him to wait on the queen. (11)

The comic effect of reducing the historical origin of the colonial presence in America to a vegetable ironically undermines the colonialist education system. Moreover, the reference to similar sounding words recalls an oral history and the importance of orality within the Black community. Language is being used following the styles, rhythms, and traditions of Southern folk speech, using spelling, syntax, proverbs, and well-known expressions as more than just cultural or racial indicators. This same move of undermining the imperialistic education method that attempts to ignore the injustices endured by Black people throughout history speaks back to the dismissal of AAVE as slang rather than a dialect. Geoffrey Pullman explains that,

We call an expression slang when it represents a vivid, colloquial word or phrase associated with some subculture and not yet incorporated as part of the mainstream language. No subculture's slang could constitute a separate language . . . Slang is by definition parasitic on some larger and more encompassing host language. It has no grammar of its own; it is a small array of words and phrases used under the aegis of some ordinary language and in accordance with its grammar. (40)

White expectations of the use of Black slang bespeak a desire to see within literary representations of Black individuals and communities the oral disfiguration of the English language as proof and validation of racial othering. In contrast, however, AAVE is an iteration of Black language, Black music, Black style, and Black culture. Indeed, if addressed with a Eurocentric bias whereby Black literature is written with the intention of proving Black equality in sophistication and intellect (but only ever in ways and roles that are recognisable to western audiences) an understanding of the art of AAVE and Black literary tradition is lost.

The written and the oral provide Celie not only with the power to resist the oppression she faces from the men in her life but, additionally, the potential for self-actualisation and healing. Walker's use of AAVE in the novel, particularly when being used by Celie (who lacks a full grasp of Standard English) (re)constructs the language in the cadence and aesthetic of oral and folk Black speech to mitigate the oppressive hold of Standard English and the expectations imposed on poorer Black communities. She finds comfort in her letters, emphasising the inclusion of the oral within the written: 'long as I can spell G-o-d I got somebody along' (19), asking the reader to spell it out, an act typically reserved for speech in service of the written language. That is, spelling out words so that they may then be written. Lauren Berlant argues that 'Celie's narrative radically resituates the subject's national identity within a mode of aesthetic, *not political*, representation' (emphasis my own, 833).

For example, Celie says, ‘By time I git back from the well, the water be warm. By time I git the tray ready the food be cold. By time I get all the children ready for school it be dinner time’ (4). The use of the infinitive verb, ‘be’, signify slippages of time but aesthetically function like a tempo, a repetitive beat to emphasise the repetitive burden of familial responsibility that is placed on Celie, something that would likely be familiar to those within her community.

In *The Same River Twice* (1996), Walker states that the use of AAVE was an attempt to make her writing more accessible to the people she was writing about, people like her mother and neighbours, and not for the benefit of a white audience or reader. She notes that her mother

had not read *The Color Purple* before her stroke, beyond the first few pages, though it was deliberately written in a way that would not intimidate her, and other readers like her, with only a grade school education and a lifetime of reading the Bible, newspapers and magazine articles. (24)

She does not explain the colloquialisms or slang to the reader because, just as Celie knows God and her sister would understand her, Walker recognises that those she is writing for require no explanations for the style of language used. Unlike Paul Dunbar’s dialect poetry, which he remarked was written in AAVE because ‘it’s the only way I can get them [his largely white audience] to listen to me’ (899), Walker’s use of AAVE arose from the desire to communicate with her Black peers. The mode of aesthetic representation that Berlant argues then is one that firmly situates Celie as being part of a community, one that shares her greater history and traumas.

Given this, it is significant that, the use of language functions to bring Celie closer to her community, both physically and spiritually. As mentioned above, a major component of Celie’s letters is their contribution to her personal development, her self-actualisation. One of

the challenges faced by many intersectional individuals is the difficulty of finding a register that can describe their experience. In her monograph *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (1997), Judith Butler argues that the risk of language arises as a ‘consequence of being constituted within its terms’ (2), whereby the possibility of being unwritten consequently puts the existence of intersectional identities in question. In an attempt to counter being unwritten or ignored, and an act of recognising her self-worth after years of abuse, Celie throws back the insults Mr. ___ uses to define her, stating ‘I’m pore, I’m black, I may be ugly and can’t cook . . . But I’m here’ (187). In doing so, she subverts the terms Mr. ___ defines her within, terms that aim to constrain Celie (and women in general) within normative patriarchal conditions of class, beauty, race, and so-called accomplishments ‘that must be fulfilled for life to become life’ (Butler 2004b, 226). That is to say, Celie’s class, race, physical looks, and ability represent the standards upon which the condition of her humanity being recognised rests.

To challenge these standards and the power dynamics that perpetuate them, Celie embraces the community of women who have been similarly oppressed by those categories. She tells Mr. ___, ‘You better stop talking because all I’m telling you aint coming just from me’ (187). In these words, Celie not only defends herself but brings herself further into the community of women that support her by attaching to her moment of triumph their liberation as well. This notion harkens back to Kimberlé Crenshaw’s basement metaphor,¹⁸ where the liberation of one woman comes off the backs of many others who may be multiply disadvantaged. Moreover, as Anna Carastathis argues, the basement metaphor is also temporal (93). Indeed, in recognising the structures of power, Celie acknowledges the history that contributes to both her oppression and the potential for her liberation, Celie’s cry is

¹⁸ Refer to ‘What is Intersectionality?’ section in the Introduction.

profoundly intersectional in that it senses the potential for coalitions among Black women, whereby ‘identity remains a useful basis for political organizing, as long as identity categories are conceptualized as coalitions’ (Carastathis 163). Importantly, Celie does not attempt to homogenise her coalition of women, but rather understands, celebrates, and learns from their differences. Drawing on Crenshaw’s distinction between ‘identity politics’ and ‘coalition politics’, ‘whereby the former is viewed as a kind of separatism based on sameness while the latter depends on alliances built across differences’ (Carastathis 163), Celie finds strength enough in difference to fight for her liberation.

Moreover, Walker embeds Celie’s language within Black traditions and spirituality. In the scene that is often considered to be the pivotal moment in Celie’s character development, she curses Mr. ____, saying, ‘Until you do right by me, I say, everything you even dream about will fail. I give it to him straight, just like it come to me. And it seem to come to me from the trees’ (187). Where previously Celie felt so alone that she turned to God, in her conception styled on a white man, ‘big and old and tall and graybearded and white’ with ‘sort of bluish-gray’ eyes (176-177), she now turns to the voices of those who came before her. Celie’s words are not only hers but carry the weight of her Black female community. When she lacks a sense of community, Celie first turns to God. However, the euro-centric figure is replaced by a female community enabling Celie to rise above the linear narrative of a confession and embracing, instead, the history and voices of women before and around her which she likens to nature. David Spurr’s *The Rhetoric of Empire* (1993) articulates how colonial discourse appropriated surveyed territories as the coloniser’s own, seen ‘most explicitly in the writings of European colonial administrators who saw the natural resources of colonized lands as belonging rightfully to “civilization” and “mankind”’ (28). In much the same way, colonised peoples and those assumed inferior to European white men

have historically been described in terms likening them to nature, as yet another natural resource that needed to be 'civilised'. Spurr goes on to state,

On the one hand, nature is opposed to culture and civilization: primitive peoples live in a state of nature. On the other, nature, or 'natural law,' is also that which grants dominion over the earth to more advanced peoples; the land shall belong by natural right to that power which understands its value and is willing to turn it to account. Colonial discourse thus naturalizes the process of domination: it finds a natural justification for the conquest of nature and of primitive peoples, those 'children of nature'. (156)

Spurr goes on to say that

an idea like 'nature' destabilizes itself in direct proportion to the constancy of its practical function in colonial discourse, which is always that of designating difference and of assigning hierarchical or ethical value to the distinctions that inhere in the structures of power. (169)

Using natural metaphors, Celie lays ownership over nature, transcending the association of 'non-civilised' people with nature, instead subverting the notion of naturalisation by finding strength and agency in it. In an attempt to control her emotions, Celie calls on nature, 'I make myself wood. I say to myself, Celie, you a tree. That's how come I know trees fear man' (23). As Celie finds companionship in Shug Avery, she similarly embraces Shug's conceptions of religion after she tells her that her 'first step from the old white man [God] was trees. Then air. Then birds. Then other people' (176). Instead of being found through devotion, God is found in the admiration of the natural world. Celie makes nature, and her admiration of nature, her religion, finding in it the strength and support to save herself from Mr. ____ and to curse him.

This move is paralleled by Walker elsewhere when she uses writing to preserve and collect the voices of her cultural and literary ancestors. In *In Search of Our Mothers' Garden*, Walker says,

Yet so many of the stories that I write, that we all write, are my mother's stories. Only recently did I fully realise this: that through years of listening to my mother's stories of her life, I have absorbed only the stories themselves, but something of the manner in which she spoke, something of the urgency that involves the knowledge that her stories—like her life—must be recorded. (240)

Walker compounds the acts of speaking, listening, and writing as a foundation for communities that protects and celebrates the lives and experiences of Black women as being complex and complete. For Walker, this community is not limited to her biological relatives, such as her mother. For example, Walker identifies Zora Neale Hurston as a literary foremother for herself and other Black women artists, stating about *Their Eyes Were Watching God* that 'there is no book more important to me than this one' (86). The act of recording was not only reserved for the histories of black women but similarly for the products of their creativity that was, for Walker, a vital part of Hurston's work.

In his preface of *Alice Walker: Critical Perspectives Past and Present* (2000), Gates notes Walker's respect for her antecedents, stating that '[m]ore than any other Black author at work today, Alice Walker has been concerned about grounding her work in a matrilineal tradition of black writing, paying particular homage to the exuberant imagination of Zora Neale Hurston' (ix). Unlike Walker, Hurston was virtually unknown in her time and died in relative poverty. It was only after Walker published several essays about Hurston and her work in the 1970s and the illuminating literary biography on Hurston by Robert Hemenway was published that this literary mother-figure rose to contemporary prominence. Not only did Walker recognise Hurston's work, but she also found and marked Hurston's previously

unmarked grave, saving both from obscurity. This was significant both historically and symbolically as the legacy and history of Black foremothers who helped change and define an exclusively Black creativity was preserved and celebrated. Indeed, Michael Awkward claims that Walker ‘has been the single most instrumental figure in the recent establishment of Hurston’s literary reputation’ (5). However, more than just recording history, Walker speaks of a responsibility to preserve genius, saying,

We are a people. A people do not throw their geniuses away. And if they are thrown away, it is our duty as artists and as witness for the future to collect them again for the sake of our children, and, if necessary, bone by bone. (original emphasis, 92)

Walker speaks of being ‘a people’ as a resistance to the nationless state of slavery imposed upon the Black American population. The responsibility is not only the preservation of those who have been forgotten but similarly in collecting them, in the act of discovering and rediscovering what has been lost or ignored, much in the same way that Celie’s sister Nettie uses her letters to her sister to document African lives and preserve links between African and Black American culture. Walker sees this as an integral quality of Hurston’s work, ‘a sense of black people as complete, complex, *undiminished* human beings, a sense that is lacking in so much black writing and literature’ (85), alongside her creative genius, which makes it so powerful and so vital to preserve.

Their Eyes Were Watching God (TEWWG) begins with an invitation between friends to hear one woman’s story, speaking in AAVE, a dialect they are fluent in and familiar with, and ends with the request that that story is shared with other women. Following the life and loves of Janie Mae Crawford, *TEWWG* uses storytelling to establish a female community. The narrative in the novel shifts to free-indirect discourse, telling Janie’s narrative in the third person, slipping in and out of her consciousness. This narrative method has inspired critical discussion regarding the eschewal of a centralised narrative voice in the text. Jennifer Jordan,

for example, argues that ‘Janie’s voice is not the one that weaves the magic’ (114) pointing instead to the sections between the first and final chapter where she is seated on her porch in Eatonville retelling her tale to her life-long friend Pheoby, and her story is taken over by a third-person narrator. Amanda Bailey similarly states that ‘[i]t is Pheoby . . . who will go on to be the true narrator of Janie’s tale to a wider audience’, further arguing that Janie ‘exhibits a perplexing and consistent need for a narrator, a translator and a mediator both within the text and beyond the bounds of the written narrative itself’ (320). These scholars see this lack of a centralised narrator as implying the inability of a Black woman to tell her own story, relying instead, as it occasionally happens, on the thoughts of her husbands or a white audience who become Janie’s sympathisers during her trial for the death of her third husband, Tea Cake. These critics anticipate Janie’s narrative to be ‘as if the character were not an object of authorial discourse, but rather a fully valid, autonomous carrier of [her] own individual world’ (Bakhtin 5). I argue, however, that Hurston’s third-person narrative is yet another example of a communal oral tradition, similar to Doris Sommer’s assertion that Latin American women autobiographers consider themselves representatives of a community. Indeed, *TEWWG* is built upon a combination of numerous voices, supported by a linguistic register that is their own.

Early in the novel, Janie’s grandmother, Nanny Crawford, notes how she is overwhelmed by the thoughts and ideas she has yet to voice:

There is a basin in the mind where words float around on thought and thought on sound and sight. Then there is a depth of thought untouched by words, and deeper still a gulf of formless feeling untouched by thought. (28)

The imagery of water swirling presents a familiar trope signalling the circularity of orality common to African forms of constructing history, one that similarly hints at a spiritual voice that is not overtly present but can be felt. Jurgen Wolter argues that *TEWWG* is singular in its

conception as ‘it merges two concepts of time, historical/diachronic time and circular/synchronic time’ (233), merging both Western and Black American literary and oral traditions. Gates comments on how the focus on circularity was how ‘postbellum black authors continued to read and revise the central figures they received from the fragments of tradition that somehow survived the later nineteenth century’s onslaught of de facto and de jure segregation’ (2000, 171). The spiralling water in Nanny’s mind is one example of ‘black textual grounding through revision’ (Gates 2000, 171), whereby the thoughts in the basin are both her own as well as those previously left unspoken and unwritten; a historical presence like the one Celie called upon. The same presence is found in what is perhaps the novel’s most well-known scene, the pear tree scene, considered the moment of Janie’s sexual revelation: ‘It was like a flute song forgotten in another existence and remembered again. What? How? Why? The singing that she heard that had nothing to do with her ears’ (13). Like Celie’s liberation from the abuses of Mr. ____, the moment is underpinned by the presence of the spiritual embedded in nature.

As in *The Color Purple*, the relationship between the spiritual and female community in nature is similarly apparent in *TEWWG*. Janie’s narrative is built by the tales and voices of others as well as her own, asserting their presence in the text as the narrative switches from the consciousness of others (spiritual and living) and herself, making the tale a collective one; this is a ‘speakerly text’, as identified by Gates, whereby ‘Hurston’s narrative strategy seems to concern itself with the possibilities of representation of the speaking black voice in writing’ (1988, xxv). Moreover, it suggests a type of polyphonic writing, drawing on Bakhtin’s concept of polyphony,¹⁹ ‘a plurality of independent and unmerged voices and

¹⁹ Polyphony from an intersectional perspective emphasises a decentred authoritative voice and instead recognises and acknowledges the validity and importance of all voices and experiences.

consciousnesses' (6). Where Jordan and Bailey argue that Janie's voice is not the primary narrative, in being a speakerly text I argue that the concept of a singular narrative contradicts the Black American oral tradition. A tradition that constructs narratives and stories through 'a plurality of consciousness, with equal rights and each with its own world [that] combine but are not merged in the unity of the event' (Bakhtin 6). The notion of the speaking Black voice figures prominently in Black American oral tradition in the setting of the porch, a symbol of hearth and home, to pass along stories to the community.

The novel opens and ends on a porch. Awkward ties the symbol of the porch to the novel's navigation 'between two distinct narrative traditions – a black oral tradition characterized by active interchange between responsive storytellers and participatory listeners, and a (written) Western literary tradition where, typically, the author composes and the reader reads in isolation from the author' (2). For example, Nanny's method of storytelling directly contrasts with Janie's, whereby she takes to a metaphorical stage, speaking from it not for growth but rather to lecture, driven by the goal of informing and directing. Nanny tells Janie,

Honey, de white man is de ruler of everything as fur as Ah been able tuh find out. Maybe it's some place way off in de ocean where de black man is in power, but we don't know nothin' but what we see. So de white man throw down de load and tell de nigger man tuh pick it up. He pick it up because he have to, but he don't tote it. He hand it to his women folks. De nigger woman is de mule uh de world so fur as Ah can see. (17)

I highlight this paragraph as significant for two reasons. First, the use of the language that Hurston employs attempts to create a synthesis between what Gates describes as 'a profoundly lyrical, densely metaphorical, quasi-musical, privileged black oral tradition' (1988, 174) in the speech of the characters and the standard English literary tradition. The

two poles of language in the novel reflect Hurston's attempts to minimise the demarcation between the two traditions, finding instead a hybrid between the tendency towards linearity in Western literary tradition and some of the more circular patterns of orality in Black American literary tradition. Second, this passage demonstrates how Nanny identifies the double burden upon Black women. However, in her desire to protect Janie from the cruelty of race dynamics in a society that privileges white lives above Black, she is willing to accept the risk of oppression from Black men. Indeed, Gates recalls that 'while the theme of oppression has been one of the great concerns of Black fiction since the novel form was first employed by William Wells Brown and Harriet E. Wilson, the oppression of Blacks by Blacks does not have a long history as a subject for representation' (1991, xi). Nanny's testimony, though accurate in her perception of the world, fails to see past a Western, linear manner of thinking, materialised in the form of hierarchy. Instead, her notion of a good life comes from the example of 'settin' on porches lak de white madam' much like how Joe Starks, Janie's second and most oppressive husband, sees the white landowner as the top of the social ladder and tries to emulate him. Nanny's method of speaking and thinking reflect a European model of hierarchy that supposed her, and all other Black women's, position at the bottom as inevitable, stating 'Ah wanted to preach a great sermon about colored women sittin' on high, but they wasn't no pulpit for me' (19). She yearns for a stage but does not think it is possible. In contrast, Janie's storytelling style assumes a stage of equal footing from the start, the significance of starting her story on a porch, and offers the possibility for a growing self-consciousness:

She was stretched on her back beneath the pear tree soaking in the alto chant of the visiting bees, the gold of the sun and the panting breath of the breeze when the inaudible voice of it all came to her. She saw a dust-bearing bee sink into the sanctum of a bloom; the thousand-sister calyxes arch to meet the love embrace and the ecstatic

shiver of the tree from root to tiniest branch creaming in every blossom and frothing with delight. So this was a marriage! (13)

The passage deploys obvious sexual metaphors, however, it is distinct from Nanny's descriptions of burdens and mules by emphasising a mutual relationship as opposed to one predicated on the assumption of Black women being at the bottom of the hierarchy. Janie's world perspective is an example of a transformed social structure. For example, Wolter contrasts Nanny Crawford's method of storytelling with that of Janie's saying, 'Janie changed Nanny's "white" metaphor (the pulpit as an elevated stage for an individual to preach down to a group) into the "black" metonymy (the porch as the center of black communal life and a culture of call-and-response interaction)' (235). The move away from the pulpit to the porch reorients the location of emotional vulnerability and revelation from a formal stage built upon a white hierarchy to the stage of Black community centred on a society built on mutual love and fulfilment. Janie's first husband, Logan Killick, though doting, could not provide her with the model of love she wanted; she reports to Nanny, 'Ah wants to want him sometimes. Ah don't want him to do all de wantin'' (26). Her conception of love and a happy marriage depends on equality, whereas Nanny is preoccupied with the 'big protection' (26) Killicks can offer Janie. Similarly, while her second husband, Joe Starks, offers Janie a porch, his conceptions of it match that of Nanny, where the porch is a symbol of status and not a place to engage in community interaction and storytelling. Starks appropriates the porch to perform the role he craves of the 'bossman', a 'Mayor – post master – landlord – storekeeper' (54) all in one. Moreover, this role requires Janie to follow this model, and to accomplish this he isolates her from her community:

Joe had forbidden her to indulge [in mule talk]. He didn't want her talking after such trashy people. 'You'se Mrs Mayor Starks, Janie. I god, Ah can't see what uh woman

uh yo' sability would want tuh be treasurin' all dat gum-grease from folks dat don't even own de house dey sleep in.' (61)

Susan Meisenhelder calls Joe Starks 'a false model of black manhood' who 'strives simply to usurp the white man's place at the top of the social ladder' (65). In doing so, he refuses to acknowledge the dynamics of race and class so that he can claim his position and fortune are a result of innate superiority over others in the community. I argue that this attempt to adopt white and Black racial dynamics within an all-Black community is a form of internalised colonisation, what Frantz Fanon calls an *epidermalization*.²⁰ At the root of Starks' desire to emulate his oppressors is his unconscious acceptance of the stereotypical conception of Black manhood, sexual prowess, and patriarchal models of marriage. Angela Davis makes the argument that '[t]he first condition of freedom is the open act of resistance—physical resistance, violent resistance . . . It is refusal not only to submit to flogging, but refusal to accept the definitions of the slave-master' (108). Janie's style of writing and resistance to her first two husbands demonstrate her resistance to their expected models of wifehood, of being more than just their insistence for her obedience where she prioritises community over status.

The Autobiography of Malcolm X similarly draws on the idea of a story being shared between two people, a metaphorical porch fostering a relationship that extends beyond the active speaker and listener. A non-fiction example of life-writing created in partnership with Alex Haley, the relationship began with an interview with Malcolm X about the Nation of Islam figurehead, Elijah Muhammad. The autobiography not only tells the story of Malcolm

²⁰ While Fanon's concept was specifically in reference to the Black experience, viewed from an intersectional perspective, one can draw parallels with Foucault's notion of biopower and self-regulation where the colonial dehumanisation of non-white, non-western individuals result in attempts to make themselves more intelligible to society. This intelligibility often demands of them a lessening or wilful denial of their intersectional aspects, in a sense an epidermalization.

X's life but similarly features as an equally important part of Malcolm X's life. Amanda Bailey notes that

[m]any sociolinguists, William Labov and Barbara Johnstone among them, consider oral narrative of impactful, personal accounts to represent not just a speaker's desire to express significant events to a sympathetic listener, but also to constitute a primary way for an individual to express and perform identity. (325)

As an autobiography, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* defies simple generic categorisation, in being both historical and literary. Indeed, the genre of autobiography has similarly been notoriously difficult to theorise, having been subject to numerous phases of critical scrutiny.²¹ Reading *The Autobiography* intersectionally entails recognising both the content and the process of writing it as fundamental to the text's significance. In being non-fiction, the text assumes a so-called 'objective' position that most fiction, in being classified as such, cannot lay claim to. Nevertheless, *The Autobiography* is still recognisable as Black American *literature*, complicating the distinction between literature and history, a question that is similarly broached by the genre of life-writing. Fundamental to understanding this relationship is understanding that literature and historiography are not intrinsically separate genres or elements. Indeed, it would be an oversimplification of the complex relationship between them to assume so. The deconstruction of these false dichotomies can be explored in genres such as autobiographies and life-writing. Even before the act of writing it down occurs, the act of mediation has already taken place, whereby there is an attempt to create order and meaning, a story, out of the events that have occurred.

²¹ Gilbert-Moore divides the study of autobiography and biography into three phases, the first starting in the late 19th century and lasting until the end of World War II. The second until around the late 1970s and early 1980s, which began developing into the third, and current, phase in 1975 with the Autobiographical Pact.

Hayden White argues that historical knowledge often depends on narrative configurations, on the way the story of the past is told: ‘By the very constitution of a set of events in such a way as to make a comprehensible story out of them, the historian charges those events with the symbolic significance of a comprehensible plot structure’ (91–92). When history is eventually written, there is often a false lay assumption that it now occupies a space outside of the world, an objective and impersonal space. The assumption is similarly applicable to autobiographies. As Alex Gillespie explains, the ‘genre encourages the writer to speak about her or his life as if it were over, as if the autobiography itself were not part of the life described’ (26–27). Moreover, readers collude with the author to establish the illusion of occupying a point outside of time, something that is simply impossible. While the first half of *The Autobiography* fits into this model of a complete story to tell, the second half embraces a model that places emphasis on the act of storytelling and, subsequently, the act of writing the biography becomes part of the story that is being told. Early twentieth-century exploration in auto/biography studies saw Georg Misch argue that the objective of the autobiographer is to ‘stand as an I’ (vol 1, 9). That is to say that the purpose of an autobiography was to be a performative demonstration of a unified or centred Selfhood. However, this attitude, repeated by various phallogocentric criticism in the field over the years, has been contested by women, as well as postcolonial, critics of life-writing as being incompatible with genuine Black representation. That is, representation that does not attempt to imply a singular form of ‘authentic’ experience but rather considers the complexities, nuances, and differences of experiences that make up Black American lives.²²

²² See Georges Gusdorf.

While the traditional narrative template for autobiographies traces the formation of one identity into another,²³ for Malcolm X it is more accurate to argue, as Gillespie does, that ‘each new one is layered upon the previous identity’ (31), compounding Malcolm Little, Mascot, Homeboy Harlem, Detroit Red, Satan, Minister Malcolm X, and El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz within the same person and culminating in the international human-rights activist he was at the time of his death. However, Malcolm’s early understanding of socialisation was determined by a white-centric hierarchy, much like Nanny and Starks. Indeed, the first half of the text is built following Western literary traditions, just as the construction of Malcolm’s character was built upon Western models of being. Nancy Clasby argues that Malcolm’s ‘prior view was so conditioned by societal limitations that it was scarcely his own. This new ordering, while consciously his, is also deeply affected, and, in fact, is modeled on the white man’s way of perceiving reality’ (23). For example, while in high school, Malcolm comes to understand that his intellectual capacity did not matter: ‘I realized that whatever I wasn’t, I *was* smarter than nearly all of those white kids. But apparently I was still not intelligent enough, in their eyes, to become whatever *I* wanted to be’ (original emphasis, 119). Malcolm is faced with the reality that, regardless of excelling intellectually in comparison to his peers, his racial identity renders him societally ineligible for the rewards available to successful white people.

Moreover, his self-perception is tainted by adhering to the conventions of the white American society and, as a result, he is unable to become the person he wants to be. As Clasby points out, quoting Richard Wright, ‘Western culture’s congenital inability to recognize the mode of life which expresses itself not in terms of society’s “good and bad, but

²³ For example, child to adult, innocence to wisdom, etc.

in terms of its own fulfillment” (20) risks the erasure of Black people. Malcolm learns this at a young age:

it just never dawned upon [the Swelins] that I could understand, that I wasn't a pet, but a human being. They didn't give me credit for having the same sensitivity, intellect, and understanding that they would have been ready and willing to recognise in a white boy in my position. But it has historically been the case with white people, in their regard for black people, that even though we might be *with* them, we weren't considered *of them*. Even though they appeared to have opened the door, it was still closed. Thus they never did really see *me*. (original emphasis, 107)

The Swelins, his guardians while he is resident at a detention home, assume that there is a limit to Malcolm's capacity for success because of his race. Malcolm recognises the dehumanisation of both his mind and body from the onset, a condition that denies him both community and recognition as a possible member of the detention home community. The experiences of his childhood result in profound trauma to Malcolm's self-perception, stemming from the impossibility of fitting into a society built on racial hierarchy and instead internalising the models of existence proposed by Western society. Fanon states that the inevitable reaction to this sort of dehumanisation and erasure of Black individuals is a destructive impulse focused inward, an epidermalization of inferiority (84). Indeed, Malcolm points to acts of his own so-called 'self-degradation' when he recalls having 'joined the multitude of Negro men and women in America who are brainwashed into believing that the black people are "inferior" – and white people "superior" – that they will even violate and mutilate their God-created bodies to try to look "pretty" by white standards' (138). I note that it is 'so-called' because while he claims the act of conking of Black hair to be an act of self-degradation, 'literally burning [his] flesh with lye, in order to cook [his] natural hair until it was limp, to have it look like a white man's hair' (138), Gillespie argues that it is 'a

distinctive black, not white, tradition' (28). Though Malcolm sees the move as inspired by the desire to emulate white people, the result is a hybrid, a consequence of Black men faced with white standards of beauty and attraction.

However, most interesting is that even in the reflective exercise of the autobiography, at this early stage of writing, Malcolm X does not entertain the possibility of hybridity. Instead, he describes the act as being specifically in reaction to and determined by the relationship between Black and white people. Though he overcomes his desire to be the model of a Black man that is expected and shaped by the label of 'non-white', the model of thinking he adopts from Elijah Muhammed is similarly determined by a binary opposition between white and Black, whereby the existence of the Black man is expected to be based on the condition of a required hatred for not only white supremacy but all white people. The only mode of thinking that is available to Malcolm is that of 'difference and separation' (Clasby 20). Malcolm's self-narration illustrates the oscillation between binary oppositions that change and transform throughout his life, swinging between dual identities and two extreme points. W. E. B. DuBois famously articulates this feeling as double consciousness: 'a peculiar sensation . . . of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity' (14). Gillespie argues that the reason for this adherence to a binary perspective is a (euro-centric) autobiographical model variously called 'a conversion narrative and a metamorphosis narrative . . . a story of someone who has fallen, in a moral sense, and who "sees the light."' (27). The narrative mimics the hero narrative typical of classical mythology, such as Odysseus, where a deserving individual overcomes his hardships, returning transformed and rewarded. Inherent in this reward is the achievement of an identity categorised by being complete and autonomous.

However, in *Postcolonial Life-Writing: Culture Politics and Self-Representation* (2009), Bart Moore-Gilbert argues that this model of Selfhood is falsely considered universal, ignoring more complex modes of self-representation that exist in postcolonial life-writing and are inevitably influenced by the cultural and material conditions of colonial history. Moreover, Moore-Gilbert claims that the lack of theorising around specific post-colonial examples of life-writing meant certain wider truth claims regarding ‘the epistemological status of authorial/autobiographical identity . . . [have] conventionally [been] made by, and on behalf of, canonical autobiography’ (xxii). Autobiographies, and the alternative term life-writing, have been theorised through the dominant lens of established Western literary methods and conventions. It would not be far-fetched, then, to claim that Malcolm X and Alex Haley were similarly influenced by these dominant conventions in their writing, consequently maintaining a narrative template of examining Malcolm’s life through the expectations and standards of others.

This narrative technique is underpinned by the colonial narrative that ignores the implicit inequality hindering non-white people from achieving success. Throughout the text, there is a noticeable change in the writing style. The ultimate aim of the narrative is no longer an attempt to be seen as successful in the eyes of non-Black Americans, nor achieving success by the standards of those who hate any race not their own; a hatred that Elijah Muhammed’s teachings encourage. Fanon states that ‘the black man who wants to turn his race white is as miserable as he who preaches hatred for the whites’ (2). When Malcolm finds himself discontented with the teachings of Elijah Muhammed, the narrative style of the autobiography similarly disconnects from the previous model. Resultantly, Malcolm brings examining his experiences through the lens of a more dynamic understanding of racialised interactions. Interactions not only between white, Black, and other non-white peoples, but between men and women, and the rich and poor as well.

Indeed, the experience of writing the book compounded Malcolm's experiences in that it simultaneously recorded and functioned as part of the final transformation that enabled him to break from the Nation of Islam, embracing instead a dynamic identity of perpetual transformation and change. Much like Celie's journey of self-liberation, Malcolm's self-exile from the world of education he loved so much as a child to the bebopping Detroit Red in Boston whose language becomes nearly unrecognisable to his own family, and his eventual return to learning is illustrated by the changes in his language. Malcolm's time in Boston saw him 'in no time at all . . . talking the slang like a lifelong hipster' as he joined his friend Shorty in going 'to groovy, frantic scenes in different chicks' and cats' pads, where with the lights and the juke down mellow, everybody blew gage and juiced black and jumped. [He] met chicks who were fine as May wine, and cats who were hip to all happenings' (140). The bebopping language that Malcolm acquired during his years in Boston allowed him to form close relationships with other Black youths in a way his intellect had not allowed him during his time in the reform school. Indeed, Malcolm reproached the 'fancy-acting Negroes . . . with their accents so phoned up that if you just heard them and didn't see them, you wouldn't even know they were Negroes' (143-4). The performative elements of speech contribute to the racialised identity and offer Malcolm a community of Black individuals who celebrated in a language specifically their own.²⁴

Having witnessed Malcolm X's speeches in person, Larry Neal describes the experience, saying,

²⁴ This is similar to the 'common literacy' created by rap. bell hooks explains, 'It is no accident that "rap" has usurped the primary position of R&B music among young black folks as the most desired sound, or that it began as a form of "testimony" for the underclass. It has enabled underclass black youth to develop a critical voice, as a group of young black men told me, a "common literacy". Rap projects a critical voice, explaining, demanding, urging' (9).

Then we began to hear Malcolm, the black voice skating and bebopping like a righteous saxophone solo – mellow truths inspired by the Honorable Elijah Muhammad, but shaped out of Malcolm’s own style, a style rooted in black folk memory, and the memory of his Garveyite father. (19)

Neal emphasises how Malcolm’s experiences contribute to the development of a position where the total transformation of one identity into another is abandoned in favour of layering identities. Indeed, the appeal is in compounding the polarised identities of Detroit Red and El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz and everything in between. James Smethurst similarly writes that Malcolm X’s

artistry with language in a range of black modalities drew many of the young artists to him because he provided a model of how one might be a black man and artist-intellectual and still be grounded in the African American community. (81)

Malcolm X shaped his life by narrating his specifically Black experiences (poverty, racial discrimination, Harlem life, prison, militancy etc.), resistant to the desires of what white society want him to be.

FRAGMENTATION AS EMPOWERMENT

In the attempt to subvert euro-centric literary and representational traditions and expectations, the texts of Walker, Hurston, and Malcolm X demonstrate the importance that specific modes of storytelling have in presenting Black American voices. More specifically, of creating models of being that do not hinge upon racial, gendered, or classist expectations. The privilege given to writing in Western literary history is undermined by the significance of varying oral modes and dynamic situations described in the texts. Moreover, the modes of orality offer more complex representations of identity, explored below, namely those celebrating fragmentation, multiplicity, and collaboration.

Notions of double-consciousness have dominated understandings of race in North America since the writings of DuBois, and later Fanon, articulated by DuBois as ‘two souls, two thoughts, two unrecognized strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder’ (14). However, in reading double-consciousness through an intersectional lens, the possibility of a different kind of double-conscious experience emerges. An experience that does not necessarily see doubling as a disadvantage but, instead, finds empowerment in complexity and hybridity. Moreover, in her close reading of Crenshaw’s seminal text ‘Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics and Violence Against Women of Color’, Carastathis argues that

conceptualizing identities as coalitions—as internally heterogenous, complex unities constituted by their internal differences and dissonances and by internal as well as external relations of power—enables us to form effective political alliances that cross existing identity categories and to pursue a liberatory politics of interconnection.

(165)

Without dismissing the psychological violence of the Black experience in America, the potential for a dynamic process of building coalitions can begin inwardly, as an alternative to self-destruction. Furthermore, embracing multiplicity in identities builds the foundation for collaboration and coalition outside of the self. Indeed, fundamental to all three texts is the notion of collaboration and coalition. Celie’s liberation owes much to the community of diverse women that become her family. The reconstruction of Pheoby’s tale would not exist without her engaging in a modified form of Black orality and the initiation of female community. *The Autobiography* was written in partnership with Alex Haley in a complex blending of Black manhood and Black masculinity, the former being the actual experience of being a heterosexual Black man and the latter the expected performative acts that constitute Black masculinity in Western society.

As noted above, various scholars of life-writing have argued that totalising conceptions of Selfhood are a Western preoccupation that is not relevant to postcolonial or feminist contexts.²⁵ The Black American Self cannot escape the consequences of the material history of slavery and racism. The same is true for intersectional individuals whose lived experiences and internal conceptions of Self are shaped (but not wholly determined) by the oppressions they face. The Self is necessarily altered from the Western conception of a universal subject with assumed universal humanity, while simultaneously being confronted with assertions of an inner being that separates Black individuals from the white population:

For not only must the black man be black; he must be black in relation to the white man. . . Overnight the Negro has been given two frames of references within which he has had to place himself. (Fanon 82–82)

In the above passage, Fanon articulates how the racialised experience necessarily fragments Black male subjectivity. However, the reference to the generic masculine, while unintended to be a gendered explanation, does overlook the experience of the Black woman. Celie and Janine’s narratives demonstrate how the Black woman, even within Black communities where they are supposedly free of the fragmentation of racialisation, are nonetheless confronted with various distinct frames of reference: who they are in relation to men, who they are in relation to the Black man, who they are in relation to the white man, and who they are in relation to the white woman.

²⁵ Frantz Fanon famously made the argument in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) that Freud’s Oedipus complex holds no water in the context of Antillean society. Similarly, in ‘The Political Economy of Women as seen by a Literary Critic’, Gayatri Spivak has argued that ‘regulative psychobiographies . . . the model narratives that give “meaning” to our readings of ourselves and others’ (227) cannot be unquestionably applied to postcolonial women and men and neither to intersectional individuals.

As Fanon states, ‘Negro experience is not a whole, for there is not merely *one* Negro, there are *Negroes*’ (104). Black individuals and communities develop multiple identities decided by whom they are interacting with and, importantly, pre-determined notions of the Black individual. As Fanon explained of his experience, ‘it is not I who make a meaning for myself, but it is the meaning that was already there, pre-existing, waiting for me’ (102). The same can be said, allowing for multiplicity, for Black women. However, some scholars have cautioned against the deconstruction of the subject and Selfhood asking, as bell hooks does, whether we should be ‘suspicious of postmodern critiques of the “subject” when they surface at a historical moment when many subjugated people feel themselves coming to voice for the first time?’ (9). The risk here lies, however, in generalising Black narratives to be, as Sandra Pouchet Paquet describes it, a ‘diasporan quest for wholeness’ (234). Indeed, the notion of wholeness or a defined Selfhood is subverted by writers like the ones in this chapter who do not make the achievement of Selfhood the primary goal of their narratives.

The texts in this chapter reject constricting notions of Blackness that attempt to define Black experiences through the relationship between Black and white people and do not consider the lack of or the consequence that accompanies class mobility, gender freedom, or sexual liberation for Black individuals. Rather, the act of telling the stories that features in all three texts is fundamental to the construction of dynamic Selfhoods and challenges the oversimplified binary of complete and incomplete subjectivities. Turning first to a pivotal moment in Celie’s development in *The Color Purple*, the curse she delivers to Mr. ___ is a by-product of the Selfhood Celie is actively building, not an indication of achieving a complete and isolated Selfhood. Instead, the identity she constructs is built around community, specifically female and collaborative. According to Rachel Lister, ‘Walker, through her elaboration of Celie’s narrative, rejects the traditionally masculine emphasis on self-containments and strong ego boundaries and presents fragmentation as a form of

empowerment' (65). That is to say, intersectionality is a fragmentation of traditional conceptions of social roles and identities, but with a twist, whereby the acknowledgement of such fragmentation empowers the individual.

Sidonie Smith similarly claims, in *Subjectivity, Identity, and the Body* (1993), that 'the politics of fragmentation reveals the cultural constructedness of any coherent, stable, and universal subject' (155). Smith goes on to argue that women writers often turn to the politics of fragmentation to counter masculine conceptions of Selfhood. The curse Celie aims at Mr. ___ contributes to her growing subjectivity that is made up of, what Butler refers to as, a 'linguistic community with a history of speakers' (1997, 52). This heralds a different kind of double consciousness that empowers rather than compromises her. Instead, it breaks from a binary understanding of society, one divided between white and Black, good and bad, where even her image of God is of a white man with a white bushy beard. Celie's internalised hatred of herself comes from the belief that all that she is and represents is ugly and wicked. By subverting the labels Mr. ___ and Alphonso give her, Celie embraces the multiplicity of Self, her beliefs, and ways of thinking.

Moreover, vital to that community is Celie's relationship, both romantic and platonic, with Shug Avery. Shug encourages Celie's inquisitiveness about her body and sexual pleasure, rewriting the identity she was given as an object of sexual exploitation to one she chooses as a body and presence to be acknowledged and celebrated. Indeed, the sexual relationship between Shug and Celie is one of the reasons that the novel has received the recognition it has. The inclusion of Black lesbian and queer characters is a direct attempt to bring Black homosexuality into the open. Barbara Smith argues in her 1979 essay 'Towards a Black Feminist Criticism' that, '[a]ll segments of the literary world—whether establishment, progressive, Black, female, or lesbian—do not know, or at least act as if they do not know, that Black women writers and Black lesbian writers exist' (20). Writing in the 1970s and 80s,

Walker and other Black lesbian authors were at odds with major male writers of the Black Arts Movement who, due to their belief in the vulnerability associated with homosexuality and femininity, argued that ‘the representation of effeminate homosexuality as disempowering is at the heart of the politics of hegemonic blackness. For to be ineffectual is the most damaging thing one can be in the fight against oppression’ (Johnson 51).

The Color Purple subverts this belief by making Celie’s same-sex relationship fundamental to the strength and independence she develops by the end of the novel. When Shug takes Celie to Memphis, she tells her ‘You not my maid. I didn’t bring you to Memphis to be that. I brought you here to love you and help you get on your feet’ (191). Celie has spent most of her life believing that she needs to provide services to be accepted and sheltered. In discovering that there are no conditions to Shug’s love for her, Celie is not only able to heal from her trauma, but similarly engage in an entrepreneurial pursuit of creating her own company, ‘Folkspants, Unlimited’ (193), guided by her love for Shug that leads her to make ‘the perfect pair of pants. For my sugar [Shug], naturally’ (191). Her relationship enables her to succeed both personally and professionally. Not only does Walker represent ‘black women’s sexual relationship with and tutelage of one another as an alternative to being subjected to masculinist and dominative ideas of sex’ (Lewis 162) but acknowledges and places Celie in a position to overcome the economic restraints placed on both Black women and men. Lewis further notes that Walker does ‘not position identities like “black,” “woman,” “white,” and “man” against one another in re-structured hierarchy, but rather conceive of blackness as an experience through which the vulnerable, inter-subjective qualities of gender, racial, and sexual identification are clearly seen’ (159), and by doing so prioritise complex and nuanced expressions of Blackness and Black experiences.

TEWWG provides yet another critical reply to the notion of double consciousness in characters like Janie’s second husband, Starks, whose state of double consciousness is

ultimately his undoing. Starks fails to come to the recognition that Malcolm does with the Swelins of the impossibility of being afforded the same status and respect as his white counterparts. Consequently, in basing his life and ambitions around a white, patriarchal structure and attempting to fill the role of the white man in a Black community, Starks culturally alienates himself from the community. The inhabitants of Eatonville see him as ‘a familiar strangeness’, feeling as though ‘that they had been taken advantage of . . . it was bad enough for white people, but when one of your own color could be so different it put you on a wonder’ (55). Fanon articulates a similar theme, stating, ‘Without a Negro past, without a Negro future, it was impossible for me to live my Negrohood. Not yet white, no longer wholly black, I was damned’ (106). Though DuBois espoused double-consciousness as a survival technique for enduring the dehumanisation faced by Black people, Fanon highlights the fact that adopting a double-consciousness can cause additional mental anguish. The dual pressure of racial and gendered expectation cause Starks to examine both his Blackness and manhood, and when virility is denied to him, the Selfhood he has built upon these tenets collapses.

The adaptation of white to Black power dynamics in *TEWWG* subjects Janie to gendered oppression whereby Starks places her on a pedestal ‘above other black women, but decidedly beneath him,’ (Meisenhelder 66). The outcome suggests that replacing a white man in power with a Black man does not necessarily liberate Black women. Janie finds her voice when she defies Starks’ direct order not to talk to the men on the porch and publicly reveals his impotency:

Ah’m uh woman every inch of me, and Ah know it. Dat’s uh whole lot more’n *you* kin saw. You big-bellies round here and put out a lot of brag, but ‘tain’t nothin’ to it but yo’ big voice . . . When you pull down yo’ britches, you look lak de change uh life. (90)

Janie robs him of this ‘illusion of irresistible maleness that all men cherish’ (91), effectively administering a metaphorical death blow to his sense of identity that actualises as Starks becomes ill and dies, an implied consequence of Janie’s defiance. Moreover, it illustrates how the blame for failed masculinity is placed on women. Starks begins to hate Janie, both for revealing his impotence as well as refusing to contribute to a Eurocentric model of Selfhood available to Black men; what Frank Rudy Cooper calls the ‘Good Black Man who distances himself from blackness and associates with white norms’ (853). Following his theory of bipolar Black masculinity, Cooper explains that the only other prescribed model by the dominant white culture for Black men is the ‘Bad Black Man who is crime-prone and hypersexual’ (853). This model does not offer Starks adequate self-esteem and cultural autonomy and, as a result, he is unable to construct a Selfhood disconnected from the constraints of Western conceptions of identity. When Starks’ virility is called into question, the other features of his identity, in their already fragile position of blended white and Black manhood, crumble.

This highlights the limitations to the prescribed manhood for Black men and the consequences associated with departing from them. As such, this model of masculinity relies on determining who has power and freedom, a situation that inevitably requires some people to be denied that power and freedom. This assumes a model of masculinity that is inherently based upon oppression. It is clear then that for Black men who are already denied the full realisation of their masculinity by white men who fear that it will contradict the rhetoric of assumed white superiority, this model of masculinity is not viable. Hence, it is reasonable to conclude that the burden of hypermasculinity imposed on exploited people is, in fact, an intersectional matter. Overlapping avenues of power are exercised, first, upon Black men, making the embrace of a hypermasculinity vital to their survival in white society and, second, upon Black women, who bear the burden of it. As such, it is vital that masculinity is explored

and theorised so it, and by extension heterosexuality, can be understood as a colonial tool of oppression.

As a tool, colonialism, and its extensions, is per Ashis Nandy a state of mind. In dismantling hypermasculinity in Black men through collaboration and coalition, one starts to dismantle the double consciousness of the Black experience. Cooper articulates that his theory of bipolar Black masculinity ‘seeks to seduce heterosexual black men into accepting the right to subordinate others as compensation for [their] own subordination’ (853). Moreover, he explains that ‘a hidden effect of bipolar representation is that it disciplines black men into accepting the present hierarchies as inevitable’ (859), whereby Black men embrace a hierarchy that promises them superiority over women and homosexuals as compensation for their assumed inferiority to white men. However, much like Nandy, who argues that there is a ‘vested interest in denying that the colonizers are at least as much affected by the ideology of colonialism, that their degradation, too, can sometimes be terrifying’ (30), Cooper argues that in such a situation, particularly for Black men, the oppressor reinforces his own oppression while oppressing others.

Moreover, there is a real, bodily risk of falling outside the lines of permissible Blackness that white society reinforces by rewarding behaviours and actions that mimic whiteness. Indeed, all three texts exemplify the dangers of departing from the behaviours allowed by non-white individuals prescribed by the dominant white society. The beginning of *The Autobiography* foreshadows Malcolm’s ultimate demise when he states ‘[i]t has always been my belief that I, too, will die by violence’ (80), just as his father, Earl Little, did. In her essay, Maria Josefina Saldaña-Portillo argues that Earl Little was killed not for his Garveyite beliefs, but rather for ‘exceeding the bounds of acceptable black masculinity’ (293). In the context of the police searching the Little house, Saldaña-Portillo states that ‘[t]hey are not concerned with what is evident, with what is permissible within the given terms of black

manhood, the hunting rifles that “everyone had.” They are obsessed with what Little might conceal, the impermissible’ (293). Celie’s biological father is similarly killed for being too entrepreneurial in comparison to those in the white community around him, encroaching on levels of success believed to be reserved for his white counterparts.

In *TEWWG*, Tea Cake, at various points in the novel, is attributed characteristics typical of the Bad Black Man: animalistic, inherently criminal, and sexually unrestrained (Cooper 876). However, his only true crime in the eyes of society is that he is Black and he refuses to ‘surrender [his] blackness’ (Cooper 887). Janie is encouraged to distance herself from anything blatantly Black, by her neighbour, Mrs Turner, who, envious of Janie for being lighter skinned, says ‘If it wuzn’t for so many black folks it wouldn’t be no race problem. De white folks would take us in wid dem. De black ones is holdin’ us back’ (161). Mrs Turner separates herself from dark-skinned Black people assuming herself superior to them and consequently hoping to be rewarded for her race-distancing strategies by the white population. Ironically, the very elements that she feels set her apart from other Black people, specifically her physical features, possibly indicate a history of rape experienced by her ancestors. However, Mrs Turner, oblivious to this history, says with pride, ‘Look at me! Ah ain’t got no flat nose and liver lips. Ah’m uh featured woman. Ah got white folk’ features in mah face’ (161). She internalises the assumed inferiority of Blackness resulting in overlooking the racial crimes against Black people and, consequently, isolating herself from her community. Similarly, Malcolm’s lighter-skinned complexion and reddish-brown hair meant that when he was ‘in Boston and New York, I was among the millions of Negroes who were insane enough to feel that it was some kind of status symbol to be light-complexioned – that one was actually fortunate to be born thus’ (81). He recalls his father was more lenient with him than his other children, stating that ‘as anti-white as my father was, he was subconsciously so afflicted with the white man’s brainwashing of Negroes that he inclined to

favor the light ones' (83). For Black men, this is doubled with not only the need to remain within the bounds of accepted Blackness but additionally, masculinity.

While much of Malcolm's life was dominated by Western models of gender, Patricia Hill Collins reminds us that by 'taking his cues from the dominant gender ideology of his times, Malcolm X's view on women reflected dominant views of white manhood and womanhood applied uncritically to the situation of African Americans' (74). A substantial corpus of scholarship around Malcolm X's relationships with women focus on the sexism that he voiced and enacted.²⁶ The cultural context of manhood depended, to some extent, upon the marginalisation of women, specifically Black women. However, it would be erroneous to overlook the impact women had on Malcolm and his success. Jeffrey Leak argues that there is a representation of community and collaboration with women in *The Autobiography* that is essential to 'imagining and creating a more substantive, truly emancipated, form of black masculinity' (60). This form does not depend on models of Black men established by a society seeking to retain the status quo. Early recollections of Earl Little, Malcolm's father, particularly of his relationship with his wife, Louise Little, illustrate the danger posed to women who exhibited independence in thought and body. Speaking about the volatile relationship between his parents, Malcolm noted:

Sometimes my father would beat her. It might have had something to do with the fact that my mother had a pretty good education. Where she got it I don't know. But an educated woman, I suppose, can't resist the temptation to correct an uneducated man. Every now and then, when she put those smooth words on him, he would grab her.

(82)

²⁶ See Hilton Als' "Philosopher or Dog?", Sheila Radford Hill's "Womanizing Malcolm X", Angela Y. Davis' "Meditations on the Legacy of Malcolm X", Farah Jasmine Griffin's "Ironies of the Saint: Malcolm X, Black Women and the Price of Protection".

Much like Janie and Sofia in *The Color Purple*, Louise is punished for being free-thinking. Malcolm's own interjection of opinion similarly illustrates his early sentiments regarding educated and independent women, implying that his mother's actions brought about the abuse.

Much later when he is living in the rooming house occupied by prostitutes, Malcolm attributes the appearance of white men at the house early in the morning to '[d]omineering, complaining, demanding wives who had just about psychologically castrated their husbands' (179). Speaking of Sophia, the white woman from Boston with whom he carried on a long-term relationship, Malcolm expressed the opinion that, 'It seems that some women love to be exploited', going on to say 'every now and then, I had given her a hard time, just to keep her in line. Every once in a while a woman seems to need, in fact *wants* this, too' (226). These examples reveal a model of masculinity that depends on the participation of meek and subjugated women to uphold it. Indeed, Malcolm and his father embrace another colonial code, that of hypermasculinity, articulated first by Nandy that invites 'a cultural consensus in which political and socio-economic dominance symbolized the dominance of men and masculinity over women and femininity' (4). The discrepancy in levels of education between Earl and Louise constitutes a lack of male dominance for which Louise is punished, comparable to the way that both Celie and Janie shoulder the burden of the failed masculinities of Mr. ___ and Joe Starks. The importance of an intersectional understanding of Black masculinity (the constructions of Selfhood that challenge notions of Black male identity) whereby Black manhood (the material means to be a man) should not develop at the expense of Black women but in tandem, then, cannot be overstated.

Simultaneously, however, *The Autobiography* notes how Malcolm's success owes much to the various women in his life. Indeed, Radford-Hill argues that

[b]lack women should explore the contradiction between Malcolm X's misogynistic statements *about women* and his actual relationships *with black women*, most of whom were thoughtful, politically astute, educated, and as resourceful and committed as he was to the liberation of black people. (64)

This is particularly true of his sister, Ella, on whom Malcolm relies heavily during both his self-destructive phase and his life after prison. The stories that Malcolm X tells reveal not just his tenacity but also the importance of the role of women in bringing him to the point in his life at which he received global recognition. Indeed, Malcolm comments on the compounded limitations upon Black women, saying 'I always had the feeling that Ella somehow admired my rebellion against the world, because she, who had so much more drive and guts than most men, often felt stymied by having been born female' (230). Malcolm illustrates his high opinion of his sister through this comparison to normative manifestations of masculinity. The backhanded compliment he pays her rests upon standards of masculinity in that Ella is 'more' than 'most men', which simultaneously illustrates the standard upon which success and achievement are measured (i.e. how closely one emulates a man). In pointing out Ella's lack of success due to her gender, Malcolm acknowledges how the ideology of masculinity, and by extension hypermasculinity, permeates society in refusing women equal access to opportunities regardless of their ability and capabilities. The resentment Malcolm believes Ella feels is in being denied the opportunity for financial success solely due to being a woman in a society where masculine ideology retains a stranglehold in the capitalist economy.

It also serves as a prelude to the political development Radford-Hill draws attention to, where Malcolm 'remade his masculine subjectivity in ways that allowed him to see women as agents of social change' (68). Though abusive to Sophia, Malcolm notes that 'Sophia always had given me money' (226), acknowledging her vital material support, one

that subverts the traditional indicator of a successful man as being the breadwinner in a relationship. Instead, at a time when Malcolm had very little in life, he was financially supported by Sophia. In this case, it was support provided by another man's success, specifically a white man, Sophia's husband, bringing attention to an unspoken but always present risk to Black men. This is manifested in the limits of hegemonic masculinity available to Black men. Moreover, in acknowledging the disadvantage experienced by women, Malcolm, consequently, acknowledges his advantage as a man. Though seemingly obvious, the two do not always come hand-in-hand, as the male sex has become the normative baseline for identity, so that gender is assumed to only be possessed by those who are not male. In openly recognising the support of the women around him manifesting in traditionally masculine ways (through financial support), Malcolm begins to disrupt the system that dictates the inferiority of women and, additionally, his own racial inferiority.

Moreover, Malcolm X, who finds himself fitting into the model of the 'Bad Black Man', reconstructs the model through his collaboration with Alex Haley, building an emancipated form of Black masculinity through both female collaborations and male coalitions. In much the same way that *The Autobiography* featured as an important part of Malcolm X's life, the form of the text is the product of a socially conscious Black masculinity that is not limited by the social pathologies often attributed to Black men. That is not to say that Haley and Malcolm X did not have their differences. Haley recalls how he had to argue against Malcolm wanting to change his depiction of his relationship with Elijah Muhammad following his estrangement from him. Haley claimed that 'if those chapters contained such telegraphing to readers of what would lie ahead, the book would automatically be robbed of some of its building suspense and drama' (39). Ultimately, though an autobiography, the text was also an exercise of self-creation, underpinned by Malcolm X's desire for a 'writer . . . not an interpreter' and similarly by Haley's struggle to be 'a

dispassionate chronicler' even though he claims Malcolm X to be 'the most electric personality [he] ever met' (78).

The Autobiography is, in essence, a collaborative project, the negotiation of two personalities and the product of Black male relationships; one that is predicated on mutual respect between Black men. Leak points out that 'what makes this agreement so instructive is the example of two Black men, rather than, in the case of a slave narrative, a white person and a Black person, working together to produce a narrative rendering' (54). Through his collaboration with Haley, Malcolm undertakes a reconfiguration of traditional masculine rules, developing a model that is not based on the colonial binaries of the Good Black Man versus the Bad Black Man. This is not to say that Malcolm wholly succeeds in developing this model. Indeed, as noted above, his behaviour towards the women in his life displays an ingrained patriarchal structure. However, that behaviour is informed by both sex *and* race. By saying that oppression enacted by oppressed people is an intersectional matter, I do not suggest that it excuses those behaviours. Rather, the acknowledgement of the dynamics at play, for Black men in particular, illustrates how their treatment of Black women is a product of the man-made hierarchy of human bodies.

The text illustrates how the experiences and subsequent actions of certain oppressed people have been informed by the intersections of discourses of identity, such as gender and race (as is the case for Malcolm). As such, it becomes clear that intersectional analysis can be applied to singularly subordinated people as well, to encourage collaboration and coalition to combat all oppression. Malcolm X's familiarity with racism and racial inequality is paralleled by his ignorance of and complicity with gender inequality. Nevertheless, when read intersectionally, looking for what is unspoken, the role of women in his success is revealed. The creation of the movements inspired by Malcolm X owes much to this forgotten history of Black women, and specifically, the history of Black women within their own communities.

Moreover, the subtle elements of colonial ideology in contemporary society, such as hypermasculinity, become clear and how in leaving them untheorised and unexplored, they can reproduce and dehumanise Black men, the consequences of which are felt by Black women.

CONCLUSION

In his essay, 'Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse' (1984), Homi Bhabha argues that colonial mimicry is a strategy of imperial power that allows difference but with the consequence of normalising colonial ideals. However, Bhabha goes on to describe the mimicry as the colonial 'desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, *as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite*' (original emphasis, 126). In other words, the imposition of Eurocentric and white standards of being intelligible to society on the colonised 'Other', while attempting to reinforce a normative model of identity, nevertheless maintains a clear sense of difference. Regardless of efforts to make the 'Other' more like the coloniser, they are still submitted to the hegemonic cultural and political system of the dominant white society. Bhabha describes the continued expression of difference as an 'ambivalence' of colonial mimicry, which, in requiring 'slippages' to function, can become a subversive tool for the colonised as it 'poses an immanent threat to both "normalized" knowledges and disciplinary powers' (126). Throughout this chapter, I have used a method of literary intersectional analysis of the texts to uncover this subversive potential. The texts use methods of mimicry, through various characters' ambitions to assimilate to white models of existence, that reveal the dynamics of power dependant on Eurocentric knowledge paradigms levied upon Black American stories and individuals.

The expectation of centred Selfhood as a measure of humanity, or the coercive assumption of a collective identity of race, imposes upon Black writers what has been

described as the burden of representation. The intersectional reading of the texts in this chapter makes it apparent that while race is a concern in the stories being told, it is not the defining element of their experiences in the models of subjectivity elaborated in the texts. Rather, race and the resistance to the knowledge paradigms that present difference as the defining element of the Black experience are subverted through the formation of intersectional collaboration and coalitions.

The texts included have all been recognised by the academic community as being worthy of study and commentary. Though in some cases, as with Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, it can take some years for this acclaim to emerge, it is nevertheless important to note that at the time of writing this paper, all three texts are frequently found in academic syllabuses. One might assume that this suggests that the recognition of Black hardship and struggle in America is evidence of changing attitudes. To some extent this is true. The voices of Black people are being heard more often, however, the categories according to which their existence and experiences are evaluated remain a legacy of oppression. The question of what kind of Black stories have become acceptable and worthy of 'academic' study is then important to raise, particularly in the context of the 2020 riots and protests against police brutality to Black Americans, where stories are being shared in the form of social media acting as archives of Black narratives. As argued in the introduction, the literary text is a historical artefact, subject to the biases and forces of history in the responses it garners.

However, the form of the literary text is changing, from stories being passed down and offered to an interpreter or amanuensis, to being expressed in 240 characters or less on social media platforms such as Twitter and Instagram. What underpins this observation is, as is often the case in literary circles, the question of what constitutes a literary text, who gets to decide this and why? In an age when electronic technology was not available, only a certain type of text, a written narrative, was acceptable within a society predicated on white

intellectualism. While these texts have written back against white narrative traditions and attempted to emphasise Black methodologies of storytelling, it is nevertheless still important to question the relationship these texts have with western institutions of publicity and publication.

Graham Huggan proposes the term ‘postcolonial exotic’ to refer to a form of postcoloniality ‘that is more tied to the global cultural market, and that capitalises both on the widespread circulation of ideas about cultural otherness and on the worldwide trafficking of culturally ‘othered’ artifacts and goods’ (28). Huggan goes on to explain that

postcolonial products function, at least in part, as cultural commodities that move back and forth within an economy regulated largely by Western metropolitan demand . . . This economy functions on a symbolic, as well as a material, level; it is regulated, that is, not only by the flow of material objects (books, films, videotapes, etc.), but also by the institutional values that are brought to bear in their support. (30)

That is not to say that the works of Alice Walker, Zora Neale Hurston, and Malcolm X find value only within a Western metropolitan market. Indeed, these texts are heavily valued by many people around the world. However, the question of how these texts have gained such a commodified status and whether that signals a complicity with the very institutions of knowledge production these writers resist remains pertinent. Indeed, the texts included in the following two chapters are similarly recognised works and authors in the canon of the specific genres explored. While there is a temptation to celebrate canonised works by authors from the margins as overcoming the dynamics of Western knowledge production, it is also vital to consider the interplay of political and cultural authority with global contexts. That is to say that a self-reflexivity regarding the position of the text within historically colonial institutions and ideas to resist capitalist strategies of appropriation that commodify the work of resistance.

For example, in contrast to *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, texts such as *Monster: The Autobiography of an L.A. Gang Member*, a memoir about gang life written in prison on toilet paper by Sanyika Shakur, has adopted a place of pride within popular culture, but not so much in the academic arena. Fanon argues that an undeniable fact of life is that ‘Black men want to prove to white men, at all costs, the richness of their thought, the equal value of their intellect’ (3). If this is true, the question arises of how to separate the tradition of Black literature from the confinements of Black-white relations? Furthermore, is it possible for people of colour to achieve the level of self-definition that Fanon sees as the ultimate liberation from white hierarchies when using the tools and instruments of western civilisation? Indeed, Sardar, in the foreword to *Black Skin, White Masks*, states that

If western civilization and culture are *responsible for colonial racism*, and *Europe itself has a racist structure*, then we should not be too surprised to find this racism reflected in the discourses of knowledge that emanate from this civilization and that they work to ensure that structural dominance is maintained. (xv, original italics marking quotes from *Black Skin, White Masks*)

The works of Walker, Hurston, and Malcolm X demonstrate conscious efforts to be self-reflexive in their positionality as authors and theorists. Through an awareness of historical contexts, the texts work to expose where discourses of oppression are maintained in the narrative structures of storytelling.

My aim in this chapter, and this thesis as a whole, is to demonstrate how applying an intersectional lens to literature and critical readings around those texts illuminates both the history of oppression and discrimination present in their conception as well as the underlying instances of intersectionality that are overlooked. The writings of Walker, Hurston and Malcolm X used in this chapter are as much about storytelling as their novels were stories themselves. Indeed, they are as much about the intersections of literature and history as they

are stories of intersectional experiences. In the case of Alice Walker, she used her writing to pay homage to Zora Neale Hurston, who allowed AAVE in literature to be legitimised as a written medium of expression. Both Walker and Hurston used their writing to conceptualise and theorise the experiences of Black women's lives in America and to challenge the initial dismissal by intellectuals of the literary potential of oral traditions. For Malcolm X, writing is both descriptive and performative in that the event of writing the autobiography with Alex Haley was a significant experience during his life that allowed Malcolm to establish himself as a dynamic Black man, resisting the literary and subjective models provided to him by white society.

In all the texts included in this chapter, storytelling, particularly of historically colonised and exploited populations, becomes an intersectional endeavour for Black individuals, where the act of writing and telling the story itself is a moment of empowerment. I have used methods of close reading to illustrate specific structures of narrative, such as storytelling and recounting tales to another within the context of the text, drawing on a long history of Black American expression. Moreover, in examining the use of language and AAVE, the significance of the oral tradition points to an awareness by both character and author of a history of polyphony. The various indications of collective voices and ancestral presences also outline the transformative potential of coalitions as a form of resistance. These various iterations of coalitions, of Black women and Black men, revealed white, capitalist power dynamics that sought to isolate individuals, so they were unable to counter those dynamics. The coalition of Black women in *The Color Purple* allowed for the liberation of a community of women struggling under the constraints of patriarchy and poverty, while the coalition between Alex Haley and Malcolm X and the narrative of Pheoby in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* served to offer a new narrative of Black lives that did not centre Black-white relations. In doing so, these texts outline methods of knowledge production through the

act of storytelling, whereby stories become methods of archiving Black experiences and subjectivities.

CHAPTER II

SUBVERSIVE CONCEPTIONS OF UTOPIA: THE POSTHUMAN IN POSTCOLONIAL SCIENCE FICTION

‘Arguably, one of the most familiar memes of science fiction is that of going to foreign countries and colonizing the natives, and . . . for many of us, that’s not a thrilling adventure story; its non-fiction, and we are on the wrong side of the strange-looking ship that appears out of nowhere.’

Nalo Hopkinson

In the introduction to a collection of science fiction short stories written exclusively by writers of colour, Nalo Hopkinson makes the above observation. She draws attention to the fact that stories of voyages to far-away exotic worlds and confrontations with unknown and potentially dangerous or primitive (often both) inhabitants have become synonymous with science fiction. In *Colonialism and the Emergence of Science Fiction*, John Rieder asserts that ‘the thesis that colonialism is a significant historical context for early science fiction is not an extravagant one’ and has ‘strong foundations in the obvious’ (2). Science fiction as we understand the genre now (particularly in the West), with its well-known tales of mapping non-human worlds to settle, mine, and farm in large part minimally deviate from the narrative model of colonial expansion. That is the narrative of how,

Europeans mapped the non-European world, settled colonies in it, mined it and farmed it, bought and sold some of its inhabitants, and ruled over many others. In the

process of all this, they also developed a scientific discourse about culture and mankind. (Rieder 2)

Indeed, the earliest works of science fiction appeared first in countries most heavily involved in the imperialist project of the late nineteenth century. However, more recent examples of science fiction emerging from postcolonial authors have resisted recreating this colonial dynamic in their writing, using allusions to colonial history to challenge imperial discourses about the ‘Other’.

This chapter investigates how intersectional analysis can challenge assumptions of technological and societal progress through an exploration of science fiction novels written from a postcolonial perspective, that is postcolonial science fiction. Both terms share inherent contradictions in nomenclature, whereby the postcolonial offers a juxtaposition of disenfranchisement and empowerment and science fiction counters assumptions of truth. Ken Macleod argues that ‘[s]cience fiction is essentially the literature of progress, and the political philosophy of sf is essentially liberal’ (231). In other words, science fiction deals with the progression of history and the consequences, both positive and negative, of the progress of technology. However, the understanding of what ‘progress’ refers to is notoriously problematic in postcolonial circles and a concern shared by early examples of science fiction,²⁷ where, as Gerald Gaylard calls it, the ‘imperialistic hubris’ of humans sought to improve nature (22). It is a concern shared in intersectional studies that questions how progress can occur, what that progress looks like, and who it is for when the experiences of intersectional individuals are still ignored and dismissed.

²⁷ For example, Jonathan Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels* (1726), Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1819), Jules Verne’s *A Journey to the Center of the Earth* (1864), and H. G. Wells’ *War of the Worlds* (1898).

This chapter examines challenges to western dynamics of power that have been so deeply integrated into the genre of science fiction that they now go largely unnoticed and unquestioned outside the critical academic field. To do so, I turn to three novels that I categorise as postcolonial science fiction: *The Calcutta Chromosome* (1995) by Amitav Gosh, *Rosewater* (2016) by Tade Thompson and *Midnight Robber* (2000) by Nalo Hopkinson. The chapter progresses through examples of postcolonial science fiction that consider representations of an alternative record of history, a contemporary context of alien invasion, and a distant future where history has turned into myth and legend. Fundamentally, the texts are ‘writing back’, literally, in that they challenge frameworks of western colonial power and history, and literarily, in that they employ a literary strategy that confronts the authority of the literary canon and the reductive and problematic Western representations of the ‘Other’. The three novels explore spaces (both physical and metaphysical) of radical possibility and potential that emerge when we diverge from Western historiography and epistemologies, exploring how silence, loss, and diaspora,²⁸ all fundamental elements of the postcolonial, can be understood as opportunities of empowerment.

The genre itself is dominated by white, Western authors as notable science fiction prizes and awards, such as the Hugo and Nebula awards, have seen few non-white or non-western writers being celebrated. Indeed, science fiction has historically been deemed a Western genre, first popularised in France, the United Kingdom, the United States, Germany, and Russia—countries with long colonial histories. Uppinder Mehan writes, in an essay on Indian science fiction, that ‘SF is as Western as Coca-Cola, big cars and computers’ (54). However, the subgenre of postcolonial science fiction emerged from discussions and

²⁸ It is important to note, however, that not all once-colonised countries have formed diasporas, and as such, this is not a general claim to all postcolonial nations.

critiques on the colonial tensions and influences within science fiction between the late 1990s and early 2000s, only being consolidated in name after an anthology of speculative fiction by people of colour was published in 2004.²⁹ There is a plethora of science fiction writing emerging from postcolonial centres that offer alternative conceptions of futurity that transcend Western imperial epistemology.³⁰

In understanding the matrix mindset of intersectionality, postcolonial science fiction can be seen as more than just a reaction or site of resistance. Nudrat Kamal defines postcolonial science fiction as ‘a critique of colonialist ideology . . . [through] its narrative conceptualisation of the identity of the Other, which challenges colonial discourses, assumptions and stereotypes’ (193). By exploring how dynamics of power are inherited, adopted, caricatured and distorted by writers from historically colonised countries, this chapter demonstrates how an intersectional analysis of postcolonial science fiction moves beyond forms of protest literature to forging interrogatory and anti-subordinative spaces for identity. Kamal argues that ‘postcolonial science fiction has to consciously write from outside the traditional strands of Western science fiction while acknowledging those strands as progenitors’ (193). Indeed, this chapter makes apparent that intersectional forms and analysis of speculative fiction are sites of exploration and discovery of the self and self-characterisation as well as of space and time.

This chapter explores how postcolonial writers utilise science fiction as more than simply a means of resistance to the colonial project, but additionally, through a constructivist lens, interrogates the continuation of (neo)colonial epistemological frameworks to consider a

²⁹ *So Long Been Dreaming: Postcolonial Science Fiction and Fantasy* edited by Nalo Hopkinson

³⁰ Due to limitations of space, translated fictions could not be examined as the considerations around translation and literature would require at minimum a separate chapter, if not a full dissertation. However, it is important to note that considerations around what qualifies as literature in academic fields and courses such as ‘English Literature’ are often vague and often only consider literature written by and for those who speak English as a first language.

possible futurity beyond imperial paradigms. Moreover, in constructing a science fiction text from postcolonial origins, I argue that the authors necessarily embrace an intersectional perspective that asks the readers to read *anew*, from a perspective rooted in postcolonial epistemology, the genre of science fiction considering the underlying imperialist themes and inject it with specificities from the relevant countries rather than the ‘postcolonial’ or ‘third world’ region as a whole. Specifically, the texts in this chapter engage with uncovering how Western science and knowledge are employed to reproduce imperialist trends and how postcolonial science fiction emphasises and highlights the multi-narrative, multi-experience component vital to intersectionality, offering a productive alternative and potential of imagining a futurity not rooted in colonial frameworks.

While contemporary science fiction may tell tales of heading into space to colonise new worlds, postcolonial science fiction uses elements of science fiction writing as tools to challenge spheres of knowledge and explore new ways of thinking. Science fiction is not, as some might assume, beyond the realms of reality but rather its very conception depends entirely on the very features of reality, its structures of power, history of development and risks of collapse. Even as some science fiction looks forward to imagined futures, its foundation rests on history. The parallels between intersectionality and science fiction are apparent when intersectionality is understood,

As a critical orientation [that] is forward-looking and historically focused.

[Intersectionality] asks that we imagine future possibilities and reconsider omissions, past and present, from a “matrix” mindset . . . to expose historical silences and to understand oppression and privilege as lived experiences and processes situation in and shaped by material, political, and social conditions. (May 6)

Moreover, through the lens of an intersectional matrix, in a context readily open to multiple registers of existence, entangled forms of domination in the way we understand identities can

be recognised and unravelled. Specifically, through an examination of posthumanism from a postcolonial and intersectional perspective.

SCIENCE FICTION AND EMPIRE

As Jessica Langer notes in her monograph aptly named *Postcolonialism and Science Fiction*, ‘Often, where there might be postcolonial science fiction, there is instead a real or perceived silence. Sometimes this is because science fiction itself is seen as aligned with colonialism and therefore anathema’ (1). Implicitly tied to the notion of progress, specifically in the global south and (post)colonial settings, is the Western subjugation of Indigenous and Eastern forms of knowledge and practice, namely, science and language. The domination of Western, white science fiction authors in publishing and as authors of texts for study in academia point to this subjugation, whether intentional or not. If unintentional, it nevertheless implies a concerning absence of critical consideration of the genre’s history, present and future. Indeed, there is an abundance of postcolonial authors or authors of colour writing science fiction in the literary market, but these authors are rarely found in lists of accolades or prizes. Moreover, much postcolonial science fiction challenges the colonial narrative of non-Western countries as *terra nullus*, imbued with knowledge and civilisation only following Western ‘discovery’ but, nevertheless, find themselves hidden behind western science fiction writers that leave the genre seemingly defined by western writing, never mind the inherent colonial story arc that serves as the basis of most science fiction.

It is apparent that the themes of expansion, discovery and potential genocide find purchase in many, if not the majority of, science fiction texts and have obvious roots in the

colonial project. Indeed, many scholars argue that the notion of ‘empire’ is integral to any discussion of the genre.³¹ As Langer argues,

the figure of the alien—extraterrestrial, technological, human-hybrid or otherwise—and the figure of the far-away planet ripe for the taking are deep and abiding twin signifiers in science fiction, are perhaps even the central myths of the genre . . . the very same twin myths of colonialism. (3)

Another science fiction scholar, Adam Roberts, writes that the genre serves as the ‘dark subconscious to the thinking mind of Imperialism’ (66). However, many early science fiction writers claimed to employ the genre to criticise the imperial³² stance prevalent in Western history and thinking. H. G. Wells, author of *War of the Worlds* (1898), for example, apparently based his concept of the Martian aliens’ invasion of Earth on the European genocidal invasion of Tasmania (Rieder 5). Wells asked his readers to consider a reversal of roles whereby the destruction of Western civilisation was on the horizon. However, problematically, the analogy centres on the white coloniser and a western ethnographic model. The narrative, which is intended to be a reversal of the colonial position, remains firmly within the framework of the colonial gaze, a concept which Rieder adapts from Laura Mulvey, that ‘distributes knowledge and power to the subject who looks, while denying or minimizing access to power for its objects, the one looked at’ (quoted in Rieder 7). As Rieder rightly states, ‘it is not a matter of asking whether but of determining precisely how and to what extent the stories engage colonialism’ (3). In other words, it is not a matter of *if* but rather *how*.

³¹ See Hoadlan and Sawal (2010), Kerslake (2007), and Langer (2011).

³² I recognise that for some scholars, the terms colonialism and imperialism are distinctly different. The term ‘imperialism’ is used throughout this thesis in a broader sense not specific to the period of colonisation but to denote the ideologies of white supremacy that drive empire.

It is worth questioning, then, how science fiction can be considered the appropriate genre for a postcolonial epistemological framework when having established in the same breath that the genre lies on a foundation of colonial thought? To consider this I unpack first the notion of the postcolonial. In singling out the postcolonial, I refer specifically to societies and cultures that have historically been colonised or under colonial control but no longer are. Moreover, they are societies usually engaged in a process of decolonisation, whereby they are navigating an identity separate from the former coloniser. Peter Hulme states that postcolonialism ‘refers to a *process* of disengagement from the whole colonial syndrome’ (120). However, this question and the term itself give rise to numerous concerns that require clarification. Primarily, and one that is often addressed by postcolonial scholars,³³ is the conceptual inadequacy of the term postcolonialism that presents a descriptive neutrality in assuming colonialism has come to an end. Moreover, the term is rife with a vagueness that does not denote a specific period or country, resulting in a generalisation of theory.

The western adoption of the ‘postcolonial’ as a category assumes a common history between the countries and regions that are considered under the term. As Hoagland and Sarwal state, ‘[e]liding difference and assuming similarity, much like “postcolonial,” “third world” becomes a too easy and comfortable manoeuvre of geographical, historical, and cultural slippage’ (14). The lack of acknowledgement of the differences and complexity of the power matrixes that lend themselves to creating the different experiences of colonialism, tendrils of which are still very much active and apparent today, function to reproduce those same dynamics of power that position the so-called ‘third world’ as inferior to the West. This supposed inferiority is determined in the arena of political science by standards of technological advancement and development, which is consequently determined by an

³³ See Anne McClintock (1992) and Ella Shohat (1992), for example.

economic standard. This is far from an objective determination or stemming solely from an economic standpoint. As history illustrates, countries also known as part of the ‘developing world’ do not share a singular experience or common history. However, former colonised countries and regions do share an economic consequence from their colonial history: a lack of capitalist development resulting from the colonial experience unless that capitalist development occurs with overseas (western) countries extracting profit through multinational companies. Indeed, a desire for material resources not found in Europe has historically been the motivation behind imperial expansion by western powers to the borders of the global south. The sense of entitlement to those resources by the Europeans arose from a presumed superiority intellect in the West born from a theory of evolution developed from a Western scientific discourse of culture and mankind. As Rieder articulates:

colonialism is not merely an opening up of new possibilities, a ‘new world’ becoming available to the ‘old’ one, but also provides the impetus behind cognitive revolutions in the biological and human sciences that reshaped European notions of its own history and society. (4)

In considering the desire for resources and the anthropological framework adopted to justify the colonial presence of the West, a postcolonial analytical framework is inherently concerned with intersectional issues. Indeed, it provides an examination of how the economic, cultural, and political histories of the countries have been used as justification by Western imperialism for the subordination under a power matrix that ensures Western supremacy. This matrix is in part maintained by the perpetuation of discourses of colonialism and imperialism in literary narratives and the pervasive desire to define countries primarily in relation to colonialism and capitalism.

In much the same way, science fiction narrative frameworks, particularly narratives that incorporate the notion of the alien ‘Other’, often explain their arrival or invasion as a

desire to conquer resources or dominate the other and the other's space. This aspect of the Other and *Othering*, fundamental to both science fiction's expansion narratives and a common tool of colonisation,³⁴ ties together postcolonial and science fiction literature, not only to explore aspects of oppression but to challenge textual strategies of alienation. That is to say, strategies that require the presence of an 'exotic' other, to be 'scrutinized, analyzed, theorized, catalogued, and displayed' (Rieder 4). This is possible through the genre of science fiction, which, despite its roots in imperial thought, can be considered, as Patricia Kerslake puts it, as 'an unending succession of literary experiments' (2). Science fiction concerns the possibility of the existence of an extra-terrestrial other. As such it can offer, as Adam Roberts states, 'a mode through which groups who have often been socially marginalised can find imaginative expression' (3). Marginalised groups can find space in which to subvert their societal othering through the 'imaginative expression' of science fiction writing. Moreover, it offers the possibility for those who have historically been scrutinised to 'turn back upon and re-evaluate those who had thus appropriated and appraised it' (Rieder 4).

This imaginative exercise similarly extends to the postcolonial human as well, who, in being already othered, is further transformed by the postcolonial authors into a posthuman state. The posthuman is a common trope in science fiction writing in which authors posit a liminal identity between humans and the machines we use in a post-industrial world. Indeed, Donna Haraway's seminal work, *A Cyborg Manifesto* (1985), celebrates the rejection of rigid boundaries that the cyborg represents. Lava Cox argues that 'the partial, human-cum-machine, constitution of Haraway's cyborg resembles the liminal view of identity presented by queer theory, which seeks to blur strict divisions between sexual and gender categories, dissolving binary oppositions such as women/man and heterosexual/homosexual' (317). As

³⁴ A concept articulated in Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978).

pointed out by Cox, Haraway's understanding of the cyborg is comparable to intersectional discourse. Calling it an 'ironic political myth', Haraway explains that 'irony is about contradictions that do not resolve into larger wholes, even dialectically, about the tension of holding incompatible things together because both or all are necessary and true' (4). The cyborg is a key feature of science fiction, where couplings between machines and organisms indicate a sense of progress, both in humanity and society. Additionally, however, it holds a politically subversive potential, whereby notions of essentialism are challenged in favour of hybridity, where boundary-dissolving identities are accepted. The irony of the posthuman concept, then, is that for technological and medical 'progress' in the form of the human and machine to exist, society must adopt a queering of notions of essentialism that are the basis of racial, sexual, and ableist essentialism.

ALTERNATIVE HISTORY: EMPOWERMENT IN THE GAPS AND SILENCES

Central to Amitav Ghosh's *The Calcutta Chromosome: A Novel of Fevers, Delirium, and Discovery* (1995) is the notion of a hidden history found in the gaps and silences of imperial history, engaging in another subgenre of science fiction known as 'alternative history' (Thrall 295). Where silence is typically understood as a lack, Ghosh transforms that absence into a tangible space of radical possibility, exploring the potential of what can only be found between the lines of Western-sanctioned historiography and ways of thinking, including the fraught relationship between science and religion. The novel takes place during a fictional 1990s, following Antar, an Egyptian employee of the International Water Council, who becomes fascinated by the life and disappearance of a fictional Indian scientist, Murugan, who was in turn is fascinated (if not obsessed) by the life of British scientist Sir Ronald Ross, a real-life historical figure. As the story unfolds, Ross' discovery of the

importance of mosquitoes in the spread of malaria, which earned him the 1902 Nobel Peace Prize, is subverted in the fiction of the novel by suggesting it was guided by an external party, a vast conspiracy that Murugan is determined to unravel.

When the novel begins, Antar is living in New York in an undetermined future year. When a bit of data crosses his desk (digitally), an ID card belonging to Murugan, Antar recalls a bizarre encounter with the card's owner he had many years ago. The narrative flits back and forth between Antar in New York, Calcutta in 1995 when Murugan disappeared, and the early 1900s following Ross's letters during his time in India researching malaria. The letters tell of a man, Lutchman, who assisted him in his research, and a maid called Mangala. Using a global search system, the AVA/IIe computer, which is humanised and feminised as Ava throughout the novel, Antar traces the events of Murugan's disappearances, while in the past Murugan traces the historical events around the discovery of malaria. Throughout the novel's nonlinear structure, Ross' attempt to control the narrative of his discovery unravels as it becomes clear that he is guided along by Lutchman and Mangala. The two are revealed to be part of a cult of counter-science, who by combining precolonial and prescientific practices and rituals with scientific innovation are attempting to discover the means to immortality. In the conclusion to the novel, Antar discovers that the cult managed to humanise technology, and through Ava, who is finally revealed to be Mangala, achieve immortality.

Ghosh uses the science fictional mode, through the lens of the 'what if' historical approach, to highlight how the work of British scientists depended on the labour of many local Indian people that were never acknowledged. They, as the Other, are further Othered through the dominant Western scientific model of knowledge discovery through the appropriation of Eastern geographical and spiritual locations as sites of knowledge production and revelation. The subgenre of alternative history principally deals with historical events that are resolved differently than they were in real life. In the case of

postcolonial science fiction, it also asks how formerly colonised states would be regarded in the history of science if historiography were not so western-centric. Derrida argues that,

Ethnology could have been born as a science only at the moment when a decentering had come about: at the moment when European culture . . . had been *dislocated*, driven from its locus, and forced to stop considering itself as the culture of reference. (original emphasis, 282)

Through Antar and Murugan's investigation into the past, they reveal a futurity separate from the future-present assumed by a European colonial narrative and continue to decentre the Western position as the cultural reference in historiography and ethnography.

What sets science fiction aside from other forms of speculative fiction is its rootedness in material and physical rationalisation, often, as Roberts points out, from a "scientific" outlook' (5). He goes on to say that 'it is not the "truth" of science that is important to SF; it is the scientific method, the logical working through a particular premise' (9). It is precisely this aspect that postcolonial science fiction challenges whereby techniques considered fundamental to form objective 'truths' are complicit in the creation of social hierarchies that posit the 'robust, European, heterosexual gentleman' (Urla and Terry 4) as the default. Indeed, Robert Scholes, a highly influential critic of science fiction, states that structural fabulation, the term he uses in place of science fiction, 'is neither scientific in its methods, nor a substitute for actual science. It is a fictional exploration of human situations made perceptible by the implications of recent science' (8). For the postcolonial world, the implications of recent science are complicit in the historic colonial structures and systems of oppression that they are attempting to transcend. As Kamal argues, 'science fiction that attempts to imagine futures without confronting the past will be limited in its perspective' (194). If we were to take this further and consider critic Damien Broderick's definition of science fiction as 'that species of storytelling native to a culture undergoing the epistemic

changes implicated in the rise and supersession of technical industrial modes of production, distribution, consumption and disposal' (155), it becomes apparent that postcolonial literature shares this fundamental aspect, not in its fictionality or detachment from current reality but rather because it examines those epistemic changes brought about by colonialism and the colonial 'scientific' beliefs around progress, transformation and civilisation.

The novel opens in the near future in New York, where Egyptian national, Antar, acts as a human informant to the digital feminised AVA, a computer that catalogues 'the endless detritus of twentieth-century officialdom—paper-clips, file-covers, diskettes' (6). While never stated directly, the assumption, employing the firm's name and infrastructure, is that the International Water Council have a benevolent mission to solve the depletion of the world's water supplies. However, Antar questions this, concluding that the endless cataloguing functions as part of the real mission of 'making History', complete with wringing out 'the last, meaningless detail' from Antar, the 'native' before moving on. He states that 'instead of having a historian shift through their dirt . . . they wanted to load their dirt with their own meanings' (7). The capitalisation of 'History' rather than connotating importance as capitalisations typically do in Western discourse, is done in irony, highlighting the constructed nature of an overbearing and all-encompassing 'History', or 'grand narrative' per Jean-François Lyotard, controlled by a corporation and institution. Lyotard's grand narrative, developed in *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1979), refers to a theory or narrative that claims to explain various historical events, providing meaning by connecting disperse events and appealing to a so-called 'universal' knowledge. It also functions as an attempt to legitimise power, authority, and social customs. The implication of this is that there is a lower-case 'history' that is being ignored and overwritten.

Ghosh redirects this narrative in drawing attention to the existence and significance of the lower case 'history', where, as Kamal articulates, 'a deep engagement with history is in

fact instrumental in articulating visions of the future' (194). Throughout the majority of the novel, the reader is left in the dark about the nature and significance of the Calcutta chromosome, the element through which the process of interpersonal transference and, hence, immortality is made possible. In revealing his theories, Murugan states that it would take 'someone who's completely out of the loop, scientifically speaking, [to] be able to find it – even if [they] didn't know what it was and didn't even have a name for it' (247). Ghosh suggests that there is a limitation of perspective through which a potentially great scientific discovery is lost, of knowledge forever hidden because of a colonial narrative that unquestioningly ascribes superiority to Western modes of thinking.

Murugan goes on to say that the possibility of interpersonal transference is 'exactly the kind of entity that would be hardest for a conventional scientist to accept' because 'biologists are under so much pressure to bring their findings into line with politics' (247). Scientific institutions have maintained a reputation of objective knowledge, through the production of that which is considered 'fact', resulting in the frequent and unquestioned acceptance of all that is encompassed within the category of the 'scientific'. However, as Jill A. Fisher points out, 'facts are produced by individuals who use tools and methods that structure what claims can be made' (2). In other words, facts are not always objectively true, but rather observations and behaviours naturalised under the guise and protection of an 'objective' institution, in many cases through discursive practices. The politics of conventional scientists, i.e. those trained under the framework of regulatory power structures according to which knowledge and discursive practices are controlled and frequently reinforce imperialistic epistemology through industry and institutions. Ghosh points out how this framework is inherently limiting and limited in what it can accomplish.

Murugan sets out to expand those limits as he personifies the genre of postcolonial science fiction. His most substantial interactions with other characters are as a storyteller,

frequently setting up the scene by saying ‘picture this’ (51), ‘I’ll turn a few pages for you’ (58) and ‘it’s a long story’ (240), all typical narratological formulations, yet only spoken by one character to demonstrate his role as the storyteller while he simultaneously endeavours to unravel the same story he is attempting to tell. Through the character of Murugan, Ghosh deliberately draws attention to the instability of the Western scientific model that is necessarily inadequate without including a variety of voices and knowledge, thereby illustrating the inherent contradiction in both ‘science fiction’ and ‘postcolonial’. However, as Langer argues, ‘The instability of science fiction is not a weakness but rather a strength: it has shown itself capable of including a wide variety of texts and voices’ (2) through the postcolonial scientific purview that is characterised by hybridity and, therefore, less restricted by imperialistic politics. In other words, in the search for answers, Murugan constructs a postcolonial science fiction story as a hypothesis of what occurred, illustrating the power of hybridity and amalgamation rather than resistance and separation.

This model is furthered through its treatment of the Other and Otherness by comingling esotericism with rationality. Farah Mendlesohn argues that the role of religion in early science fiction ‘was essentially of the “Other”, the backward and the primitive, and its role in sf was either to be undermined or to indicate the level of civilisation which any alien race had achieved’ (264). She expands, explaining that ‘sf is full of stories in which superstition is defeated by explanation; the immaterial is tamed by manifestation’ (265). Indeed, religious, spiritual, and especially ritualistic societies are often depicted as less advanced than secularist ones, suggesting that secularism is an inevitable feature of advanced cultures. This secularism is often comingled with a reverence for rationality and perceived scientific objectivity as mentioned above. Moreover, Mendlesohn points out that ‘the association of religion with intellectual degradation remains intact . . . consequently, religion is seen less as a mode of thought and more as a lack of thought. This prejudice is reflected in

the role which religion is permitted to play in world-building' (266). This trope in science fiction works as a homology for the Orientalist binaries of the Western coloniser as scientific and logical, in comparison to the colonised counterpart who is spiritual and religious and, therefore, irrational and removed from reality.

The Calcutta Chromosome raises significant philosophical questions around spirituality and, necessarily, posthuman questions about the nature of life and the integrity of human life. Ghosh does so by playing on common science fiction tropes, such as the binary of esoterism and rationality, by introducing the notion of 'the ultimate transcendence of nature . . . immortality' (105). What Murugan terms 'interpersonal transference' is in fact another well-known trope in science fiction texts of swapping an older, decaying body for a newer, more sophisticated one. However, the concept in *The Calcutta Chromosome* is swathed in the spiritual, born from the Hindu belief of reincarnation but conceived in techno-scientific terms. The talisman belonging to the secret cult, for example, 'a figurine, a semicircular mound with two painted eyes, on one side of the mound was a tiny pigeon, and on the other a small semicircular instrument' (225), combines images of western science, an old-fashioned microscope, with iconic Eastern deities, such as the pigeon.

Ghosh's conflation of the two highlights a larger hidden history of the contribution of the colonised to colonial 'progress'. Claire Chambers argues that 'science, technology and medicine were not conveyed to India by the British in a one-way process of transfer, but were in fact involved in a complex series of cross-cultural exchanges, translations and mutations' (Chambers 58)—a hybrid, like a cyborg, of old and new, of spiritualism and putative technology and progress. Indeed, recalling the cyborg, Haraway states that 'the cyborg is a matter of fiction and lived experiences . . . this is a struggle over life and death, but the boundary between science fiction and social reality is an optical illusion' (6). In other words,

there is no stable boundary between ‘lived social reality’ and ‘fiction’ because both categories are constantly defining and redefining each other.

Ghosh’s particular contribution to science fiction takes into account its history as a dominantly Western genre and considers how writing beyond colonialism may necessitate using and mastering the resources, both material and immaterial, left behind by European powers. In other words, Ghosh suggests that forging a national identity ‘post’ colonialism requires using, adapting and combining Western methodologies and technologies with those methods and technologies from cultures that have been destroyed or forgotten, offering, as James Thrall states, ‘varies historic legacies as available models for examining the wide issue of marginality itself’ (295). For example, Mangala and her assistant Lakhaan, the leaders of the group orchestrating the putatively ‘Western’ discoveries, are coincidentally found ‘at the new railway station . . . That’s the place to go if you need a willing worker . . . it’s full of people looking for a job and a roof over their heads’ (145); this is a train station that emerged from the railway systems born from and perpetuating the colonial control of India, and is teeming with those who are ‘fringe people, marginal types; they’re so far from the mainstream you can’t see them from the shore’ (105). Ghosh deconstructs colonial binaries of intellectual/uncivilised, Global North/Global South, and centre/periphery by constructing, instead, alternative histories and possible futurities.

Langer points out, ‘postcolonial science fiction foregrounds the concept that Indigenous and other colonized systems of knowledge are not only valid but are, at times, more scientifically valid than is Western scientific thought’ (9). In this case, *Calcutta Chromosome* does so by specifically centring Indigenous folklore, which is often dismissed as spiritual and logically unsound as seen above, and Indigenous historiography. Moreover, it offers an alternative understanding of postcolonialism as an ethos and epistemology, rather than a reaction to historical time or an oppositional stance continually reinforcing the

centrality of the historical colonisers. In this context, postcolonial science fiction offers an opportunity to read anew, creating fresh understandings and experiences of reading/hearing stories rooted in the lived experiences of those at the fringes. Indeed, Kamal points out how, historically, the locals in India were aware of the connection between malaria and mosquitoes before Ronald Ross officially made the ‘discovery’ for which he was awarded a Nobel prize. In an interview, Ghosh states,

Ross’s memoirs clearly shows that he used folk knowledge in advancing his work. His real achievement then, lay in translating folk knowledge into the language of science . . . Ross made a major breakthrough in science based upon a very partial acquaintance with folk knowledge. It follows, surely, that someone who was better acquainted with that knowledge would do even better, especially if they happened to pick up a fluency in the language of science. (Kincaid 2021)

Language, suggests Ghosh, is fundamental to the West’s encoding of knowledge. The dense language of the novel itself, fluidly moving between concepts of science, religion and technology, emphasises the importance of both being able to put ideas into language and understanding the language. This does not refer solely to standard dialects spoken, though as we often see in literary publishing, Standard English is prioritised. Rather, I am exploring language regarding fluency in terminology and structures of logic imbedded in certain linguistic patterns. Where earlier in the novel, he articulates a similar idea, stating that ‘to communicate, to put ideas into language, would be establish a claim to *know*’ (103), Murugan identifies, in what some scholars call the ‘counter-science cult’³⁵ (which Ghosh positions as folk knowledge), the mantra ‘to know something is to change it’ (215).

³⁵ See Carlotta Beretta (2018), Christopher Shinn (2008), Diane Nelson (2003), Suchitra Mathur (2004).

Indeed, the process of ‘interpersonal transference’ is conceived upon the understanding of a fundamental change:

The essence of an individual—human personality, the soul, and subjectivity—can migrate from one body to another body when brain chemistry is altered or stimulated by the implantation of a viral-type substance into the body; this transforms the body into a conductor for “interpersonal transference”. (Shinn 148)

I have cited Christopher Shinn’s (2008) clear articulation of the process in contrast to that from the novel precisely because of the challenge of synthesising the layers of religion, technology, and science in the novel. However, this difficulty also recalls Ghosh’s subversive attempt to make silence empowering. The language necessary here for understanding is that of the hybridity of technology, the organic and the social. Antar’s computer is on just such a mission to collect knowledge and information. Where initially Antar sees it as an attempt to create ‘History’, Mangala and her followers instead use the computer’s complex digitised manipulations to conjoin as Shinn states ‘the earthly and ethereal existence of the human race’ so that they may be ‘united in cyberspace’ (146) and achieve both immortality and a postcolonial alternative to posthumanism; that is a cyborg identity that serves as the global south’s resistance to first-world hegemony.

The mysterious figure of the cult’s leader, Mangala, then serves as an autonomous cyborg, free from the power dynamics of one-way technology transfer that colonial powers attempted to enforce. More important, however, is that this cyborg, as Suchitra Mathur points out, is,

created by the establishment of connections, by the infection of western science by native knowledges that creates these new humans whose hybridity not only challenges old notions of the “human” but also enables new liberating modes of being (such as

non-sexual reproduction) that are not subjected to the hegemony of existing discursive formulations. (Mathur 133)

Mangala's very existence stems from the gaps and silences that contributed to and perpetuate the cult of interpersonal transference. Not only does it root itself in a postcolonial epistemology, but its empowerment also comes from a posthuman hybridity that rejects binaries and hierarchies of existing discourse and Western hegemony.

Ghosh's use of the intersecting genres of science fiction and postcolonialism challenges Eurocentric frameworks of knowledge production and dissemination. A literary intersectional analysis of *The Calcutta Chromosome* makes Ghosh attempt to subvert colonial historiography by positing an alternative history apparent. Moreover, it reveals the dynamics of power sought to minimise or erase the contribution of colonised nations in scientific discovery. Ghosh embraces the concept of the Other by finding empowerment in the Othering and subverting the otherwise forced silence, seeing in it a potential to destabilise European culture as the reference culture and purveyors of historiography.

CONTEMPORARY SECOND CONTACT: UTOPIA UNDONE

Where Ghosh explored a postcolonial alternative to the posthuman through interpersonal transference, only achievable by and because of Indigenous knowledge and spiritualism, Tade Thompson explores this potential by confronting the notion of the posthuman as a new stage of human evolution. He considers, instead, how the posthuman might be another form of invasion. Thompson's *Wormwood* trilogy, the first novel of which – *Rosewater* – is the focus of discussion, similarly positions local knowledge and experiences at the centre of the Afrofuturist world presented. Engaging in what has come to be known as a 'second contact' (O'Connell 112) narrative, Thompson overhauls the notion of salvation by turning a utopicity – a utopic city – into a site of an apocalypse, challenging what utopia and

progress mean and, due to historic experience, what it will cost. Thompson, and other African science fiction writers, decentre western imperial hegemonies as the primary site of futurity, and foreground, instead, African cities, politics, economic structures, and ecologies.

Pan-African science fiction and Afrofuturism (also known as Africanfuturism) is a developing field in critical discourse. However, what is clear amongst most critics and scholars, as articulated by Ivor W. Hartmann in the inaugural anthology of pan-African science fiction, *Afro SF: Science Fiction by African Writers* (2012), is that ‘SciFi is the only genre that enables African writers to envision a future from our African perspective’ (7). Nnedi Okorafor stated, in her TED Global talk in August 2017, that ‘African science fiction’s blood runs deep and it’s old, and it’s ready to come forth, and when it does, imagine the new technologies, ideas and sociopolitical changes it’ll inspire’. Indeed, for African science fiction authors, these new technologies are essential, as Jason W. Moore notes, given that ‘the kind of thinking that created today’s global turbulence is unlikely to help us solve it’ (1). Often this is accomplished by refashioning and enervating several science fiction tropes and sub-genres, such as cyberpunk, utopia, human-machine-alien symbiosis, second contact narratives (a term that shall be unpacked below), alien invasion and, fundamentally, the apocalypse narrative, giving rise to a complex and nuanced multiply-located³⁶ generic discourse.

Rosewater is a generic hybrid in being both a science fiction novel and a distinctly African and postcolonial work of fiction. In adopting this intersectional position, not only through the intersecting of literary genres but also in the important understanding of its subversive potential in having ‘its roots in social-justice movements and critical intellectual

³⁶ A term I shall return to later in the chapter when looking at Nalo Hopkinson’s writing and novel, *Midnight Robber*.

projects' (Carastathis 5). Moreover, as outlined as part of intersectional praxis by Carastathis, Thompson uses the intersectional positioning of the novel as a means to challenge and 'overcome our entrenched perceptual-cognitive habits of essentialism, categorical purity, and segregation' (4). *Rosewater* assumes a position that envisions a futurity influenced by the multiple and diverse narratives of the alien invasion in the novel being the *second* contact, and where Nigeria is presented as a postcolonial attempt to emerge from under an uneven capitalist world system. *Rosewater* imagines a futurity that is not based in the imperial, capitalist, western hegemonic mode that has contributed to bringing the world to the edge of a state shift.³⁷ Thompson's narrative, which is deeply rooted in African colonial history, parallels the arrival of an unknown entity veiled in promises of advancement and progress, hiding the apocalyptic destruction that similarly came with the imperialist 'first contact'. *Rosewater*'s plot and setting are organised around the notion of 'life after the dual crisis of ecology and capital' (Omelsky 36), positioned in a futurity challenging for Eurocentric narratives to imagine in a way that is not for African science fiction, simply because, as Mark Sinker puts it, for postcolonial African nations, the 'Apocalypse has already happened' (30).

Rachel Haywood Ferreira argues that postcolonial alien contact narratives necessarily constitute 'second contact' stories, whereby 'the degree to which the original historical circumstances and the colonial legacy inform their content and perspective' (70). In other words, Ferreira claims that any postcolonial alien contact story follows the historical contact and subsequent invasion by the colonial west in the Global South; postcolonial history and its consequences form the basis on which Thompson's version of Nigerian politics operates. Inevitably, second-contact narratives are followed by the reordering of a global political

³⁷ A term used by earth scientists used to describe the moment ecological systems shift abruptly and irreversibly to a new unknown state when forced across critical thresholds.

economy of colonialism that is made possible in *Rosewater* by the loss of the global hegemon, the United States, which '[goes] dark' following the arrival of the alien. While this seemingly places Nigeria in a position to significantly influence world events, Thompson demonstrates how the current world system is always biased towards capitalist exploitation and destruction. Moreover, the narrative of *Rosewater* centres on the uneven development of the capitalist system that disproportionately effects the global south and the Anthropocene.³⁸ Indeed, Hugh Charles O'Connell argues that this reflects 'an Atlantic narrative—one that indelibly connects the developmentalism of capitalist modernity to the slave trade and devastation of African and the Americas' (117).³⁹

Rosewater takes place following the arrival of an 'amoeboid blob of alien organic matter' (233) on Earth, first in Hyde Park, London. Following a failed attempt by the UK military to destroy it, it burrows itself through the earth's core to Lagos, Nigeria, where it forms an impenetrable dome around which the titular city of Rosewater springs up. The arrival of the alien, known as Wormwood, seeds the biosphere with xenofoms, a fungus, that creates a worldwide information network called the xenosphere as the xenofoms permeate everything and everyone. Once a year, the dome opens and all sick people in the vicinity are healed, though not always returning them to the way they were before their illness. The novel follows Kaaro, a 'sensitive' who can tap into the xenosphere network that links everything and is recruited from a life of thievery and crime by a secret government organisation and made to use his sensitivity to telepathically interrogate suspected terrorists. When sensitives begin to turn up dead, Kaaro must find who is murdering them before he is next. He

³⁸ Anthropocene refers to the most recent period in human history where human activity has been the cause of significant changes to the Earth's climate and ecosystem. Read against intersectional analysis, the notion of the Anthropocene also intimately ties racial, sexual, class, and ability-based oppressions as well ecological, which shall be looked at more closely in Chapter III.

³⁹ This is also true for Indigenous populations, where capitalist developments came at the cost of Indigenous knowledge and, as shall be explored in Chapter III, huge ecological destruction.

discovers that the alien presence consists of a collective entity, made possible by the xenosphere, spreading underground and through the population in ‘an extrarrestrial symbiotic binding with the entire biosphere’ (O’Connell 114).

This style of science fiction, like *The Calcutta Chromosome*, centres a posthumanist understanding of alien contact through the extended metaphor of colonial contact.

Posthumanism, as understood through a science fiction lens, is a ‘state beyond humanity as one understands it due to its shaping by both technological and biological sources’ (Bawin 27). Recalling Haraway once again, she argues this posthuman state is encapsulated in the cyborg, a ‘creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction’ interpreting the ‘cyborg’ as ‘a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism’ (5). Technology is far from being antithetical to human organisms; it is a material and symbolic apparatus deeply involved in what it means to be human. Rather it is a metaphor for the ‘disassembled and reassembled post-modern collective and personal self’ (Haraway 33) of contemporary cultural theory suited to the West’s late capitalist social order within which technology is omnipresent.

Technology is immersed in the lives of the characters in *Rosewater* as an inevitable fact of life, where bionic implants, androids and the xenosphere—a virtual space of mental projection—facilitate activities from the mundane to the professional. The xenosphere, ‘made up of strands of alien fungi-like filaments and neurotransmitters’, creating ‘a global store of information in the very atmosphere, a worldmind’ (56), is reminiscent of the omnipresence of the modern-day internet. It is ‘everywhere, in every environment on Earth . . . Everybody is linked to this network of xenofoms, this xenosphere is uploading information constantly, passively, without [anyone] knowing’ (56). The xenosphere also functions as a metaphor for the capitalist world system that relies on a flow of constant and immense streams of data and is considered a symbol of a new age in technological advancement. Indeed, Karoo’s reticence

to wear biomechanical implants that are the norm in Thompson's world—equated to common items of clothing and dress worn by his colleagues, such as 'tank tops and t-shirts and metal in their hair. They have phone implants' (2)—results in his colleagues considering him to be 'prehistoric' (8), especially as he is also a sensitive.

That the xenosphere can only be accessed by a select few 'sensitives' suggests an evolutionary development of humanity. However, Thompson subverts this trope of biological and technological integration being the inevitable next step in human progress by not only revealing that the xenosphere was caused by the arrival of an alien entity, but also that it is slowly replacing human DNA with alien matter. Following the miraculous healing of the protagonist Kaaro, without which he would have surely died, he states 'I am not the same . . . I don't know what my healing has cost me . . . how human am I?' (358). Kaaro voices an existential concern, drawing a parallel to what was already lost, sacrificed, and risked, in this case, human extinction, in the imposition of seemingly necessary technological progress by colonial powers, saying 'I know that rather than healing, I am seeding these people with their own destruction' (263). Indeed, posthumanism and transhumanism are frequently conflated with western, White notions of modernity and progress. According to Cary Wolfe, transhumanism is a project on human advancement that 'derives directly from the ideals of human perfectibility, rationality, and agency inherited from Renaissance humanism and the Enlightenment' (xiii). *Rosewater* instead portrays the medical possibilities of the posthuman negatively, representing a science fiction trojan horse whereby 'the posthuman does not manifest itself as the next step in human evolution but rather as the last one before its total annihilation' (Bawin 30).

This tension between possibility and destruction lies at the centre of *Rosewater*. As O'Connell argues, 'the novel is ultimately permeated by loss' (109), a looming consequence of the seeming potential of the alien presence (read invasion). Throughout the novel, the

medical ‘miracles’ of the dome that inspire a cult of worship around it comes hand in hand with horror. While some are healed, gruesome corpses are reanimated (there is reference to one whose head ‘is abnormally long and one of his eyeballs is missing, the empty socket gaping like a toothless second mouth’ (32)) and attack citizens. Others are disfigured beyond recognition:

men and women with multiple and displaced orifices, like a girl with two mouths . . .
a guy on a trolley . . . What’s left of his is a jumble of too many limbs and tufts of hair
here and there . . . Many wrap themselves up like Egyptian mummies, hiding
whatever grotesque changes they have brought upon themselves. (124)

These are changes that occurred in their pursuit of healing from the xenosphere, only to find themselves being ‘rebuilt . . . bigger and better’ (124) by the xenforms: ‘The healed are miraculous, the deformed a tragedy and the reanimates a horror, but the reconstructed are perhaps comedy or...whatever’ (123). The novel assumes a post-crisis sensibility where the promise of progress and potential is a dual-edged sword. Sensitives, though seemingly evolutionarily advanced, are then the first to be eliminated as the xenofoms integrate themselves into the metabolism of all individuals on the planet. *Rosewater* acknowledges and deliberately draws attention to the deaths of the sensitives as being victims of the deceptive illusion of posthuman progress, in that their abilities to connect to the xenosphere initially brought them status and opportunity but left in its wake their poisoned remains.

Additionally, recruited and hired by government officials as resources to exploit the newfound network of information, the commodification of the sensitives’ services and the attempt of national players in the novel to capitalise on the ‘Wormwood event’ for their own gain follow a capitalist logic. As Melinda Cooper argues, the arrival of Wormwood becomes a new spatial fix for a ‘capitalism anticipating and seeking to overcome its own ecological limits’ (quoted in O’Connell, 118). Indeed, Femi, an official from a discreet section of the

government that uses sensitives to solve crimes and conduct interrogations of suspects, S45, articulates what the presence of the alien, if it can be controlled, could mean for the country:

If we could befriend it, there's the scientific data, the contact with unknown species, the health benefits, the defence applications . . . it could help us clean up the environment. We, Nigeria can be the first nation to engage it. Think of what it would mean. (313).

Fundamental to the S45 is the potential for control and liberation from the status of a developing postcolonial nation in the global hegemon. This perspective hinges on the history of colonialism, whereby the first contact with an alien presence was with European imperialists. In Femi's words, then, there is a sense of desperation. Where 'the prosperity of the rich countries is constructed by way of a monopolization of the benefits of the earth and an externalization of environmental damages' (Bonneuil and Fressoz 224–225), the S45 seeks to monopolise the possible benefits of the second contact to restructure the economic and political world-system.

The above describes what Christophe Bonneuil and Jean-Baptiste Fressoz term as the 'Capitalocene', which 'ties the concept of the Anthropocene directly to the development of the capitalist world-system'. The notion of the Capitalocene can be used to understand a linked network of cause and effect, where the capitalist world system affects the climate crisis that is disproportionately felt by the global south whose resources are used for the benefit of that world system. In the same way, O'Connell argues that the alien Wormwood, 'works as a multivalent symbol. Its tentacular and totalizing structure, lacking any central command and control centre, is redolent of both global finance capitalism and Anthropogenic climate crisis' (115) acting as a metaphor for a Capitalocene; that is a metaphor of the totalising effect of a world system that would use the xenforms to generate enterprise and other forms of capitalist 'progress'. O'Connell states that,

Rather than merely representing the borderless flow of information and global finance as a neutral technological development, the directly somatic system of the xenosphere, and thus Africanfuturism more broadly, links global capitalism's advance to the destruction that it wrought by calling forth the bodies that lie in its wake, thus setting the path for the second apocalypse narrative and the weak utopianism that its devastation will usher forth. (117)

In other words, rather than focusing on the abstract notion of the human and its impact on the climate, it is vital to recognise and understand how the uneven development of the capitalist world system, which is inherently tied up with the history of colonial expansion and consequently slavery and imperialism, reflects the causes and effects of climate change across the world. It is, as Kaaro think, 'like a tumor, budding and infiltrating' (234) moving from the biological to the geological as it burrows through the earth in cave systems that remind Kaaro 'of an iceberg with most of it below the surface' (234). This discourse recognises that categories such as 'nature' and 'society' do not exist without the other and that any understanding of the future must acknowledge how the false binaries that attempt to separate one from the other contribute to uneven global developments.

The events of *Rosewater* are founded on the existing history of African colonialism and postcolonial praxis. Where Ghosh's novel sought to reveal a hidden history as empowerment, Thompson reinforces the consequences of the imperial project by imagining a contemporality separate from and despite 'First World' presence, challenging models of utopia and first contact by countering with a narrative wholly from an Afrofuturist perspective. Thompson emphasises the first-cum-second narrative to illustrate the falsity of a utopia built from exploitation of any form, where posthuman progress comes at the expense of the climate, human life, and ultimately humanity. In the final words of the novel, Kaaro articulates the danger of the xenosphere as a slow violence against the world, saying:

Humanity dies one cell at a time. I don't know what will happen when we all become full xeno, but it's like climate change or that asteroid that will collide with the Earth and wipe us out. We all think we'll be dead and gone by the time the carnage begins . . . For this disaster we will all be present. (287)

The worldmind, then, is a warning against an unlimited network of connections that, like a wolf in sheep's clothing, offers salvation for the price of extinction. Nalo Hopkinson's novel *Midnight Robber* similarly engages with the question of technological progress but instead ask what kind of utopia and technology could be created from an African perspective as shall be explored in the following section.

DIASPORIC DOUBLE CONSCIOUSNESS: POSTHUMANIST SURVIVAL

The most clear-cut example of science fiction out of the three texts in this chapter, featuring space travel, alien species, and sentient AI, Nalo Hopkinson's *Midnight Robber* is situated two hundred years in the future on two mirror planets, Toussaint and New Half-Way Tree, where descendants of Caribbean people have left Earth in search of independence and freedom; in search of utopia. They name the planet they settle on Toussaint after Toussaint Louverture, often referred to as the Black Napoleon, a Haitian revolutionary and leader of the Haitian Revolution, which temporarily made Haiti the first free Black republic in the New World.⁴⁰ The planet becomes one of materialistic comforts and advanced technology where nearly all citizens are posthumans, as shall be demonstrated below. As Hopkinson explains in her online essay 'Code Sliding', the novel serves as an experiment to 'imagine what paradigms for technology a society might develop without the all-pervasive influence of American technology and the way it references Greek and Roman mythology'. Throughout

⁴⁰ See Hazareesingh (2020) for a comprehensive history on Toussaint Louverture.

the novel, we reimagine a world of a near inescapable network (much like the cult of silence in *The Calcutta Chromosome* and the xenosphere in *Rosewater*) in African and Caribbean terms. Where *Midnight Robber* differs, however, is in its feminist ‘hacking’ of the genre of science fiction and its uncovering of power dynamics within so-called utopias.

In the introduction and Chapter I, I considered the power dynamics inherent in the English language and literature. One of the most distinctive stylistic features of *Midnight Robber* is that it is written in patois. As Langer states, ‘Hopkinson herself is the first science fiction writer to write in Jamaican patois, which works to ground the text in a particular history as it speculates about the potential trajectories of that history’ (68), combining Jamaican and Trinidadian creole with English, ‘hacking’ as Hopkinson calls it, a language with roots in the histories of imperialism, the middle passage, and slavery. Hopkinson explains that she was ‘fascinated with the notion of breaking an imposed language apart and remixing it’, further arguing that ‘to speak in the hacked language is not just to speak in an accent or a creole; to say the words aloud is an act of referencing history and claiming space’ (Code Sliding). In an interview, Hopkinson points out that technology encodes certain histories, putatively in its nomenclature:

So many of our stories about technology and our paradigms for it refer to Greek and Roman myth and language: we name rocket ships ‘Apollo’ and communication devices ‘telephone,’ a human-machine interface a ‘cyborg.’ It shapes not only the names for the technology we create, but the type of technology we create.

(‘Conversation’ n.p.)

She notes that the ways in which technology is created, named, and analysed influence how technology will be made in the future and for *whom* it shall be made. The technology in Hopkinson’s novel considers what an African diasporic culture might create: Granny Nanny, or the Nansi Web, was the answer.

Explained in the same interview, Hopkinson states that the AI was named after a seventeenth-century Jamaican ‘revolutionary and magic worker who won independent rule in Jamaica for the Maroons who had run away from slavery’ (‘Conversations’ n.p.). She goes on to say that ‘Rather than being a “Big Brother” paradigm it is an affectionate reference to her sense of love, care and duty’ (‘Conversations’ n.p.). The affectionate moniker of Granny Nanny invokes the character of the antebellum mammy, one of the most enduring historical caricatures of the African slave woman. Described as ‘enormous’, Granny Nanny is designed to keep the ‘Nation Worlds protected, guided and guarded’ (10). Written by Afro-Caribbean programmers prior to their escape from Earth, its programme fundamentally differs from the digital binary code of programmes as we understand them today; Granny Nanny was ‘tonal instead of text based’ (52). Elisabeth Boyle argues this sound-based, oral communicative language points to ‘the novel’s ultimate suggestion for a community governed by bonds of language and orality rather than body and colour’ (181). Hopkinson’s use of patois for the narrative then suggests a rejection of the privileging of standard English and also of the written discourse, making apparent the dynamics of race and class in literature.⁴¹ *Midnight Robber*’s narrative structure similarly draws on typical features of oral storytelling, emphasising narrative breaks, asides, and multiple voices. The novel, then, rejects conventional models of narratology, identity, and community, exploring, at the heart of the novel, the experience of double-consciousness and diaspora.

The novel follows Tan-Tan, a young girl born and brought up on the planet Toussaint. Daughter to an influential politician and a socialite mother, Tan-Tan is brought up in luxury on Toussaint. The premise of the planet pulls from its namesake and rests upon the notion of

⁴¹ Similar to how, explored in Chapter I, early Black American literary tradition emerged from a tradition of oral stories being told to an amanuensis so that they could be recorded.

a free Black republic, a New World in and of itself. However, with this free republic comes the mirror planet of New Half-Way Tree, where criminals are exiled. Every citizen of Toussaint is injected with a nanomite solution as babies to implant the AI eshu (named after the African god) as well as biotechnological enhancements. The biotechnical device acts as a personal assistant and educator to the citizens of Toussaint, minimising all their discomforts. In other words, through their implants, they become posthuman. However, these technological implants do not work in New Half-Way Tree. Those exiled to the planet are stripped of their access to Granny Nanny, the artificial intelligence system carefully engineered by the Marryshow Corporation to achieve peace and prosperity through social stability. The comparison between those with working implants and those without sets up a hierarchy between the planets, where the status of working posthuman cyborgs reflects a seemingly civilised position over the supposedly uncivil inhabitants of New Half-Way Tree, reconstructing a narrative of colonial understandings of civilisation.

Following a crime committed by Antonio, Tan-Tan's father, he takes her with him into exile on the mirror planet of New Half-Way Tree. Though separated from Granny Nanny and the AI eshu, Tan-Tan settles into her new life. However, as she gets older and begins to look more like her mother, Antonio starts raping her. In a desperate attempt at self-defence when he rapes and, unbeknownst to her, impregnates her on her sixteenth birthday, Tan-Tan kills Antonio. Aided by the native alien species on New Half-Way Tree, the douen, she hides in the hidden douen villages. Undergoing the simultaneous transformation of learning the douens' ways of life and being pregnant, Tan-Tan transforms yet again into the Robber Queen, an iteration of a figure from Caribbean folklore, stealing from the rich and giving to the poor. However, when she unknowingly reveals the douens' secret village, Tan-Tan is exiled yet again, except this time with a young female douen companion, continuing to act as the Robber Queen and finding her place on the planet with her child.

When Antonio takes Tan-Tan with him claiming he is rescuing her from the neglect of her mother. To escape, they enter a transportation pod to pass through the ‘dimensional veils’ to arrive at New Half-Way Tree, cutting off their connection to Granny Nanny. This represents a diasporic journey and consequent transformation:

For Tan-Tan it was as though her belly was turning inside out, like wearing all her insides on the outside. The air smelt wrong . . . A curtain of fog was passing through the pod, rearranging sight, sound . . . A next veil swept through them, slow like molasses. Tan-Tan felt as though her tailbone could elongate into a tail, long and bald like a manioc rat’s. Her cries of distress came out like hyena giggles. The tail-tip twitched. She could feel how unfamiliar muscles would move the unfamiliar limb.
(73–74)

Hopkinson, here, melds the trope of intergalactic travel with de-corporealisation. Both the transportation pod and her exile from her homeland causes Tan-Tan to experience an irreversible mental transformation. Moreover, Hopkinson also invokes the vanishing Black body, a trope frequently used in Black American and Afro-Caribbean literature, which Boyle argues is used as ‘a vehicle with which to explore troublesome erasures of slave history and identity’ (178). Though framed within the context of divergences from established science fiction tropes, Hopkinson’s narrative seeks to explore and make apparent histories of colonisation. The de-corporealisation of Tan-Tan’s body in a futuristic setting re-enacts the separation and exile from family and homeland experienced by slaves during the Middle Passage. This journey of the Middle Passage is invoked twice in the novel, where the independence of Caribbean migrants from Earth extends what Ingrid Thaler calls ‘the maritime imaginary of the Black Atlantic to the emptiness of outer space’ (99), subverting the slave journey to one of freedom. However, Tan-Tan’s experience of another transportation ship (pod) taking her away from Toussaint and the de-corporealisation foreshadows a

realisation that the founding and freedom of Toussaint came at a heavy cost. During the journey, not only is her body changed but also animalised and dehumanised, a survival strategy for what is to come as Tan-Tan understands they were ‘being taken away from home like the long time ago Africans’ (74), her ancestors. Indeed, Madhu Dubey remarks that,

Afro-diasporic, as well as Euro-American women’s science fiction, exploits the trope of becoming an animal not only to explore the implications of (black people and women) being identified with animal nature, but also to call into question dualistic and overlapping opposition between nature and culture, magic and science, animal and human, body and mind, female and male, European and African, and so forth.

(35)

Other Black American and Caribbean fiction, such as Jean Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea* and Octavia Butler’s *Kindred*, feature the vanishing body as a conclusion to the narrative, where the protagonists’ bodies are sacrificed for a larger purpose.⁴² In contrast, Hopkinson offers agency through transformation and diaspora, re-corporealising Tan-Tan’s body and eventually her mind so that she does not vanish during her journey. She is still aware of her own diasporic status, however, and due to being so young when she travelled to the planet struggles with a sense of double consciousness as she is still somewhat connected technologically to Granny Nanny, unlike the citizens of New Half-Way Tree.

This double consciousness finds expression in Tan-Tan’s embodiment of the Robber Queen, the personification of her need to ‘hack’ the system. A prerequisite in cyberpunk science fiction novels is a protagonist’s ability to hack. Examples of this can be found in William Gibson’s famous cyberpunk novel, *Neuromancer*, and the Wachowski’s *Matrix*

⁴² I have argued elsewhere that though a sacrifice, it is also a form of agency in intersectional postcolonial resistance. For example, Rhys’ protagonist’s ‘madness allows for resistance, acknowledging the sacrificial role she plays for Jane and for Western female liberation transforming her from a sacrifice to a martyr’ (Khan 2021, 10).

Trilogy where the protagonists work to crack the code, hack the system to stretch their capabilities and do so alone. However, Enteen argues that,

Contrary to the Jamaican Rastafarians or Voudon figures that are either fetishized by William Gibson or voiceless in the majority of cyberpunk, Hopkinson renders the complexities of multiple cultures in contact, the cross-fertilization of histories, languages, and cultures, and diasporic dislocations. (263)

In *Midnight Robber*, the hacking that both author and protagonist undertake invites the reader to embrace the disorientation of the multi-cultural histories and languages as well as the various storylines that form the novel's weaving chronology and unreliable narrators. The character of the Midnight Robber is a quintessential cultural facsimile of Caribbean carnival tradition, a trickster. The trickster narrative is modelled on what Barbara Babcock in a series of conference proceedings, refers to as 'symbolic inversion'. Symbolic inversion attends to inverted patterns of culture, including artistic, social and political inversions. Contradicting and negating commonly held values, beliefs, and norms in culture, the trickster figure offers an alternative to dominate Eurocentric narratives of experience. Through elements of paradox, parody, humour, disguise, and deception, which Babcock argues are central features, symbolic inversion creates order out of disorder or vice versa, whereby order refers to the restructuring of society so that social injustice is replaced by equity and equality.

Such tradition and practices centre, as Emily Zobel Marshall states, 'resistance to officialdom, linguistic innovation, and the disruptive nature of play, parody and humour' (210). As such, Hopkinson's rendition of this carnival trickster and 'badman' in the Robber Queen, descended from West African dress and oral tradition, is the personification of Tan-Tan's search for freedom and agency that has been lacking her whole life. In her most desperate moments, Tan-Tan subconsciously, and later consciously, turns to the Robber Queen, a queer-bending manifestation of the Caribbean Midnight Robber. The final time

Antonio rapes Tan-Tan, she defends herself, stating, ‘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 onto the blade’ (168). Later in the novel, ‘her voice swelled with power as the Robber Queen persona came upon her’ (317) and ‘power coursed through Tan-Tan, the Robber Queen’s power – the power of words’ (319). The Robber Queen’s words emphasise Hopkinson’s mission to imbue the tradition of orality from non-Western cultures with power. This hacked power enables Tan-Tan to defend herself, yet by doing so she is forced to leave her home yet again, a fracturing of her already doubled consciousness; the consequence of safety is the loss of yet another homestead.

The Robber Queen, therefore, is not a conclusion or endpoint of Tan-Tan’s diasporic journey between her home world of Toussaint and New Half-Way Tree but rather a linguistic, geographical and cultural hybrid needed to survive the sexual trauma, loss of her homeland and home (which occurs twice) and aborted techno-posthumanism. Wendy Knepper argues that,

Tan-Tan, the nomadic, cross-dressing hero(ine) serves as a kind of avatar for the narrative discourse itself, which moves through space and time as well as across disciplines of knowledge in order to reincarnate identity in a more pluralistic, experimental fashion . . . to express alternative constructions of identity and community through a virtualized Caribbean queer imaginary. (140–141)

The Midnight Robber instead offers a version of posthumanism and (post)identity that, like Thompson’s *Rosewater*, seeks an alternative futurity not dominated by a techno-organism binary, but in the hybridity of both identity *and* community. Langer states that the novel ‘engages with the multiplicity, proliferation and (particularly) *ambivalence* of both historical and potential identity in a diasporic context’ (original emphasis, 65). It is in this context of a double diasporic context that Tan-Tan finds strength and agency, but moreover, she uses that

agency to address the colonial replication that was the cost of Toussaint's creation: 'She wasn't Tan-Tan, the bad Tan-Tan. She was Tan-Tan the Robber Queen, the terror of all Junjuh, the one who 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' (140). The Robber Queen becomes a symbol of chaos and trickery intended to hack the system of power and domination that allows for genocide and slavery as a consequence of its existence. As Langer points out, '[i]n *Midnight Robber*, the slave narrative has not been erased but rather *displaced*' (67). The Robber Queen, who emerged from a survival instinct, became the tool through which Tan-Tan becomes aware of and challenges the reproduction of colonial tendencies and power dynamics in the genocide of the douen and perpetuation of hierarchical structures in the slavery of the people sent to New Half-Way Tree.

Hopkinson explores numerous science fiction tropes, including new world settlements, utopia and posthuman development. While exploring pressing issues in the current decolonial intersectional agenda, she reworks these from a distinctly intersectional perspective that considers whether all settlements are colonial in nature. Moreover, she examines how the cyborg human hybrid sets out a new liberal humanism that serves as the default standard for the citizens of Toussaint. Hopkinson herself has hinted at an intersectional understanding of writing, using the descriptor 'multiply located' (Batty 200) to describe a state of not fitting into a single generic mould but crossing boundaries, locating herself in several. As this framework of intersectional literary analysis does, Hopkinson's descriptor applies to both the genre and the author, pointing to authors from multiply located backgrounds whose writing similarly does not fit into one genre alone.

As such, Hopkinson's world confronts notions of the digital divide, which Enteen defines as referring 'not only to the inequities pertaining to access but also to hegemonic

cultural assumptions about who understands and can influence developing technologies'⁴³ (264), whereby the technological structure of Toussaint is built upon the multiply located cultures of the African diaspora in the Caribbean. The world Hopkinson conjures is positioned as a utopic conclusion to the mission of Caribbean descendants to forge a new society. Fundamentally built into the trope of finding a new planet/utopia is the dual mission of escaping disaster/dystopia. It becomes clear through the planet's name and the incorporated traditional African myths and ideologies, that the settlement sought to escape the racist structures indivisibly melded in Earth's societies. Toussaint, instead, is intended to be a place of freedom and material comfort enabled by advanced technology, allowing citizens who are part cyborg to enjoy a labour-free life.

Its mirror planet, New Half-Way Tree, in contrast, is home to exiles, those deemed a risk to Toussaint's peace:

where Toussaint civilized, New Half-Way Tree does be rough...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. (2)

Though Toussaint flourishes from the femininity and fertility of Granny Nanny impregnated into the planet that New Half-Way Tree lacks, it is sinisterly mirrored by the repeated rape and eventual impregnation of Tan-Tan by her father following their exile to New Half-Way Tree. As Belen Martin-Lucas states, '[t]he birth of the nation of Toussaint is a sort of in-vitro

⁴³ Enteen pulls from Nelson, Hines and Tu's introduction to their edited collection, *Technicolor: Race, Technology and Everyday Life* (2001), where they argue that 'solutions to the digital divide often fail to address problems that we can't solve by simply placing a computer in every home or classroom, problems that include social barriers . . . Moreover, the digital divide has become a self-fulfilling prophecy, confirming that people of color can't keep pace in a high-tech world that threatens to outstrip them' (1-2). The Covid-19 pandemic brought to the fore these failures to close the digital divide when the failure to recognise that 'working remotely' and 'working from home' required economic and digital privileges that many, particularly people of colour from the working class, did not have.

fertilization planned by the Marryshow Corporation that rephrases in techno-medical discourse its very colonial enterprise, an invasive mode that reiterates the colonial metaphor of the male explorers penetrating/raping the virgin lands' (108). Lucas remarks in her analysis of *Midnight Robber* that 'the insidious persistence of the trope of the territory envisioned as a female body in order to facilitate its conquering and exploitation, extended into the nationalist metaphor of the motherland, has been widely analyzed as the ideological root for the recurrent use of rape as a war crime' (108). With this in mind, Hopkinson's description of 'plunging into the womb of soil to impregnate' in tandem with the violent incestual impregnation of Tan-Tan hints at an ominous history behind the so-called utopia of Toussaint. The revelation that New Half-Way Tree is what the planet Toussaint looked like before colonisation suggests a dark history of violent terraforming and genocide of the native species.

Following the murder of her father and escape from the community that would condemn her for this act of self-defence, Tan-Tan is saved and taken in by Chichibud, the douen she first encountered right after she and Antonio fell through the dimensional veil who protected them while guiding them to civilisation, as eshu and Granny Nanny would have done on Toussaint. Where the lack of AI effectively leaves the exiles of New Half-Way Tree to fend for themselves, the douen are the overlooked guides, and for Tan-Tan, her saviours. The animalistic transformation Tan-Tan experienced while dropping through the dimensional veils is invoked once again as she effectively becomes a new member of Chichibud's family during her exile. She learns the douen's secrets and behaviours, adopts (some of) their habits and diets and lives with them in their sacred home. Their Indigenous knowledge offers an opportunity for communal welfare that is not realised until Chichibud offers Tan-Tan both safety and a radically different future than any she could have imagined: 'Come in peace to my home, Tan-Tan. And when you go, go in friendship' (179). The interspecies hostility bred

from the history of douen genocide is bridged by this act of faith and kindness: ‘Understand that I doing it to save you life, but you have to guard ours in return . . . When you take a life, you must give back two. You go keep douen secrets safe? You must swear’ (174). The queer imaginary of the cross-dressing Midnight Robber is extended from a defensive position to a transformative one by bridging cross-species communities and relations. Indeed, crossing the divide between the two species ‘might prove our advancement into or beyond the human; we might demonstrate our willingness to accept difference and to make it our own’ (Ahmed 2). That is a radical, potentially transformative version of posthumanism that challenges notions of gender, family, the human and community, defamiliarizing modern Western ontology. As Braidotti argues, the capacity for intense affinity despite difference is,

An extra-personal and a tran-personal capacity, which should be driven away from any universalism and grounded instead in the radical immanence of a sense of belonging to and being accountable for a community, a people and a territory. (205)

Tan-Tan’s connection with the douen results in the creation of a trans-species community, further reinforced by the birth of her son, the actualised body of the hybridity of linguistics, geography, technology, and culture as it traverses space and creates hybridity between the techno posthumanism of Toussaint and the inter-species posthuman community Tan-Tan has created in New Half-Way Tree.

As Langer notes, ‘[a]n interesting result of this replication is that colonialism is expanded outside of the exclusive domain of the historical colonial powers, and portrayed as an independently destructive force *no matter who* its perpetrator is’ (66, original emphasis). Hopkinson’s novel is an observation of the power dynamics of colonialism as an abstract phenomenon, emphasising how the cost of a utopia for some is nearly always destruction and genocide for others. The very notion of externality, the belief that there is an environment elsewhere available for possession and exploitation, as the descendants of the Caribbean

population desired in their escape from Earth, inherently links to questions of colonialism and postcolonialism and, therefore, humanism and posthumanism. Chela Sandoval argues that,

Colonised peoples of the Americas have already developed the cyborg skills required for survival under techno-human conditions as a requisite for survival under domination over the last three hundred years. Interestingly, however, the theorists of globalization engage with the introduction of an oppositional 'cyborg' politics as if these politics have emerged with the advent of electronic technology alone, and not as a requirement of consciousness in opposition developed under previous forms of domination. (248)

This type of survival, as Sandoval notes, is a cyborg, posthuman experience as illustrated by the Robber Queen. However, the Robber Queen alone is not enough. The survival cyborg skills and knowledge of the native population, that is the douen, is required for individuals to thrive. Moreover, the truly radical potential is realised in the birth of Tan-Tan's son, the product of rape by her father.

While Tan-Tan lost her connection to Granny Nanny when dropping through the dimensional veils, the implant in her ear had not yet been fully absorbed into her body as she was so young, therefore allowing Granny Nanny to retain some connection and control over the nanomites in Tan-Tan's body. Without knowing it, Tan-Tan represents the first cross-spatial bridge between Toussaint and New Half-Way Tree, and as such holds the potential for either transformative radical or destructive colonial potential. This potential is realised when Granny Nanny, who is revealed as the storyteller in the first person chapters, tells Tan-Tan's son, Tubman during his birth that

Nanny . . . instruct the nanomites in you mamee blood to migrate into your growing tissue, to alter you as you grow so all of you could *feel* nannysong . . . your whole body is one living connection with the Grande Anansi Nanotech Interface. (328)

Tubman is the first ‘born’ posthuman, and the third member of the hybrid inter-species, posthuman community that began with Tan-Tan and Abitefa, Chichibud’s adolescent daughter who joins Tan-Tan in exile after she inadvertently brings destruction to the douen’s home by revealing the location of the Daddy Tree to the humans. In essence, Hopkinson actualises the clashing aspects of Haraway’s cyborg world:

A cyborg world is about the final imposition of a grid control on the planet . . . From another perspective a cyborg world might be about lived social and bodily realities in which people are not afraid of their joint kinship with animals and machines, not afraid of permanently partial identities and contradictory standpoints. (154)

In other words, Hopkinson imagines a form of identity and community that embraces multiplicity, fragmentation and hybridity and challenges essentialist notions of single models of utopia, society, and survival.

CONCLUSION

The novels of Amitav Ghosh, Tade Thompson, and Nalo Hopkinson explored in this chapter work to increase the ‘cultural repository of ideas’ (Enteen 263) to simultaneously speculate about potential trajectories of a history that is not framed by, nor centres Western epistemologies. An intersectional reading of these texts primarily uncovered, considered, and challenged how various dynamics of power (including colonialism, capitalism, and globalisation) serve to reinforce a narrative of subservience to an assumed authority of the West. In the development of a postcolonial, posthuman present in all three novels, the authors challenge the ideological frameworks that posit a technological future that echoes the colonial past. The inequalities and injustices of worlds the authors build are structured upon various iterations of capitalist corporations and organisations: Ghosh’s International Water Council, Thompson’s S45, and Hopkinson’s Marryshow Corporation. The posthuman

conceptions function to suggest alternative futurities that consider not only knowledge production through dominant Western institutions but also what potential knowledge and progress can materialise through wider dissemination of postcolonial knowledge.

Understanding the contexts in which the authors' texts 'write back' with a critical intersectional lens that foregrounds hybrid epistemological methods, highlight the non-Western traditions, histories, and communities that are fundamental to the growing cache of postcolonial science fiction.

Diane Nelson argues that more than a science fiction novel, *The Calcutta Chromosome* is a *social science* fiction, where it is 'a pharmakon, a poison and a cure, a threat and a promise, a warning sign and a how-to guide for postcolonial new humans' (262). This is similarly true of the other texts discussed in this chapter. I would argue that postcolonial science fiction, in its engagement with critical posthumanism, affect theory, and postcolonial literary criticism is inherently occupied with the social as much as it is with the scientific. The strict genre categorisations limit critical reading as they attempt to position the texts within a specific field of critical theory. Indeed, Lucas argues that Black speculative fiction or Afro-futurist fiction 'has done much to deepen the interrogation of the human and the posthuman, and to describe forms of affective relation that are more enabling and empowering for the currently oppressed' (106). Moreover, through an intersectional analysis, the posthuman can be understood to subvert and highlight how the Western 'humanist sense depends on the myth of original unity and fullness' (Haraway 8), that is a Cartesian self. The authors instead posit hybridity and fragmentation as fundamental to the postcolonial posthuman, and with it, point to a futurity of hybrid communities for empowerment.

What the authors in this chapter are fundamentally able to accomplish is creating stories and narratives that do not centre the suffering of people of colour for the illusion of some global good. The discrimination, hardship, and pain the characters experience is not

washed over by moments of white and colour comradeship that ultimately only provide solace to the non-coloured readers. In other words, the history of intersectional and people of colour is fundamentally integrated into the method of storytelling and the conceptualisation of the science fiction world in ways that acknowledge and validate the experiences of intersectional people without tying them to the experiences of the dominant white society.

Moreover, the conceptualisations of hybrid communities emphasise the importance of communal responsibility and communal welfare. The novels included in this chapter, while based on fictional premises, use as Dillion describes ‘Indigenous and embedded knowledge of biological mutualism’ (30) to imagine posthuman communities that require communal responsibility to survive. Drawing away from the ‘inwardness’ of Harold Bloom’s argument⁴⁴ and challenging the ‘autonomy of imaginative literature’ (10) by instead positing that the imaginative literature for intersectional literature and the potential futurities it creates can only exist by acknowledging and celebrating existing postcolonial and Indigenous knowledge. That is also to say, acknowledging and celebrating postcolonial and Indigenous communities and histories.

⁴⁴ See discussion on Bloom in ‘Knowledge Production and Dissemination’ section in the Introduction.

CHAPTER III

INDIGENOUS SURVIVANCE: SLOW TRAUMA AND BELONGING IN INDIGENOUS ECOFICTION

'Storytelling; to utter and to hear . . . ' And the simple act of listening is crucial to the concept of language, more crucial even than reading and writing, and language in turn is critical to human society.

N. Scott Momaday

Writing a chapter on Indigenous fiction is, from the onset, an exercise that requires careful consideration of the social, political, economic, and spiritual contexts that inflect these texts. In *The Man Made of Words*, N. Scott Momaday recalls the stories of his Kiowa grandfather and ancestors, including 'The Toll Road'. The story tells the tale of a runner who, while on his daily jog through the foothills encounters an obstacle of a bundle of branches in the middle of the road that he moves everyday only to find it back in the same place again the next day. Every day he runs and every day he finds and must remove the branches from his path until one day he leaves a bottle of wine for the mystery person leaving the branches. The branches disappear from his path from that day forward. Momaday describes the wine as a gift that 'acknowledged the [unknown obstacle maker's] possession of the land' (190). Moreover, as Joseph Coulombe states, 'the bundle of branches initiates a dialogue with a trespasser, and such an assertion requires a response. To ignore the bundle would be to dismiss not only another's right of possession but also the gift of access' (2).

A feature of much Native American fiction is its roots in the oral (hi)stories of various tribes, stories that, prior to the emergence of published literature by Indigenous authors, were

largely unknown to the wider world. They are, indeed, a gift of access and an offer of dialogue that I respond to as a non-Native American and, hence, a constant learner in the culture and matters important to Indigenous peoples, relying on the authors themselves to share their expertise and from their writings, to glean an intersectional perspective that lends itself to a growing understanding of Indigenous⁴⁵ cultures, lives, politics, and – the particular focus of this chapter – Indigenous relationships with the environment. I take on this role as a matter of responsibility, responding to the enforced ‘invisibility’ of Native American fiction in both the academic and publishing world, but never as an expert in matters of Indigenous fiction, culture, or beliefs. Rather, I view the novels in this chapter as forms of ‘literary outreach’ that allow access to some aspects of Native American culture and belief that can serve as a model for a transformative ecological epistemology.

This chapter examines the literary intersection of Native American and Environmental Fiction, also known as Ecofiction, where the land and the individual’s connection to it become a focus for considerations of the spiritual and social damage the disconnection from land can cause. An ecocritical lens is employed to examine how the physical environment is interacted with in literary texts. Above I have referenced the connection between literature, writers, the world (the world being synonymous with society), and the social sphere including its historical contexts. Ecofiction and ecocriticism expand this notion to include the ecosphere. In the case of ecofiction, access to liveable and flourishing nature are conditions for just-living, where the lack of resources such as clean water and land in cases of those who live outside of urban centres becomes an intersectional issue. As Patrick Wolfe states ‘The question of genocide is never far from discussions of settler

⁴⁵ As this chapter focuses specifically on the Indigenous populations of the United States of America, the terms ‘Native American’ and ‘Indigenous peoples’ are used synonymously and interchangeably.

colonialism. Land is life—or, at least, land is necessary for life. Thus contests for land can be—indeed, often are—contests for life’ (387). Furthermore, I draw on the theoretical framework of Ecofeminism, an offshoot of the feminism movement arising from academic circles in the 1970s. First coined by Françoise d'Eaubonne in 1972, Ecofeminism was the rising understanding of the link between the subjugation of women and society’s brutal oppression of nature. Rooted in the argument was the belief that the degradation of the environment was caused by the patriarchy and capitalism. Much like its theoretical predecessor, this train of thought was both a form of intellectual critique and political activism that sought to deconstruct the patriarchal structural makeup of society that understood conquest as progress. Drawing on the implied connection between environmental and women’s rights, I further complicate this area by recalling an intersectional lens that considers the connection between the environmental and post-colonial, whereby the patriarchy, capitalism, *and* racism contribute to the ongoing contest for land that Wolfe articulates.

I argue that this intersection is inherent in Indigenous fiction, whereby the focus of the narrative is no longer the human realm alone, but rather how humans live with the natural world. Recalling Harold Bloom’s celebration of the ‘ultimate inwardness’ of Euro-, white-centric literature,⁴⁶ Adam Trexler similarly articulates how ‘[u]nderpinning the [Western] canon is a model of imagination whereby the author pulls all the strings, and the character is the centre of the fiction. In short, it revolves around the human’ (13). In contrast, the Indigenous epistemology of Native American writing recognises an alternative understanding of reality by articulating human relationships with history, culture, politics, environment, and more as integral to storytelling. As Lanlan Du states, ‘non-Western understandings of the

⁴⁶ Mentioned in the Introduction in the section on knowledge production and dissemination.

relationship between human and nonhuman nature have made significant contributions to the ecocritical discourse' (787), a discourse that highlights that the same hierarchical structures of western society that produce both racism and sexism also allow for ecological domination.

The three novels explored in this chapter reference specific Indigenous methods, ceremonies, and rituals of healing and surviving that reinforce the mutual relationship between the individual and the land. Robert Nelson states,

Place matters: literature grounded solidly in Native American thought and experience proceeds from the proposition that the land itself lives, which is to say it functions not only as 'setting' but also as 'character'; landscape can therefore exert an influence that not only contextualizes but also provides criteria for evaluating human events occurring—'taking place'—there. (1)

The novels of Linda Hogan, N. Scott Momaday, and Leslie Marmon Silko explore this notion of identity being heavily inflected by place. For these authors, *who* we are has a lot to do with *where* we are. This connection between land and identity presents yet another perspective in understanding intersectional experiences and paradigms. Hogan's *Solar Storms* (1995), Momaday's *House Made of Dawn* (1968), and Silko's *Ceremony* (1977) illustrate the potential of restorative healing of both the individual and the landscape and, with it, the possibility of reparative justice.

These novels were chosen because they form part of what can be considered the current Native American 'canon'. While not widely read outside of academic circles, these authors are the ones most often referenced in analyses of Indigenous American literature. I turn to them because of their history of being widely discussed to consider, as I have with all the texts in this thesis, what they and their historical influence across readerships offer to an intersectional framework and literary epistemology of critical analysis. It additionally serves as a point of interest to consider why these texts, compared with so many others, have

reached such levels of critical visibility. As noted previously, the publishing industry remains skewed ethnically, biased towards white and western authors. Questioning the reasoning behind the recognition of non-white authored texts offers insights into what knowledge is deemed appropriate and valuable within western epistemologies, as well as within non-Western societies. Thus, this chapter, like the thesis as a whole, aims to discover what has been left uncovered and unacknowledged in readings of Indigenous authors, seeking in them enlightenment regarding Indigenous epistemologies and histories.

Throughout this chapter, I argue that the Indigenous American authors under discussion write as a form of literary activism, writing not only to reject stale stereotypes of the noble savage, the drunken degenerate, or the mystical natural world (though they do use these elements to subvert western caricatures of Indigenous people) but moreover as a form of praxis. The focus on nature and the natural world challenges the imperial vein in Western writing where,

The concept of nature, whether implied or explicit . . . stands for an empty space in the discourse, ready to be charged with any one of a number of values: nature as abundance, as absence, as original innocence, as unbridled destruction, as eternal cycle, as constant progressions. (Spurr 168)

‘Understanding art for life’s sake’, says Daniel Heath Justice, an academic and citizen of the Cherokee nation,⁴⁷ ‘aids all Indigenous peoples, including the literary scholars among us, to decolonize our world in mind, as well as body, to dismantle the ideas and forces that tear us into pieces’ (118). In other words, Indigenous literature often functions as an active proposal of potential futurities and solutions to many Native American and global problems, proffering

⁴⁷ I have made concerted efforts to explicitly and correctly identify all Indigenous scholars, recognising that the absence of accurate tribal nomenclature and identification participates in both overlooking the immense work of Indigenous scholars and assumes a generalised pan-Indian identity that seeks to ignore the diverse Indigenous culture that has in the past been used as justification for colonial oppression.

a different epistemology from the colonial, capitalist Euro-Western models that currently dominate. Specifically, it explores Indigenous trauma, examining how colonial violence has contributed to intergenerational trauma and ecological trauma that continues to be experienced in Indigenous communities.

Native American history is filled with accounts and stories of violence, displacement, loss, and betrayal. As late as the 1920s, 70 per cent of Native children were forced to attend off-reservation boarding schools with the threat that rations would be withheld from parents who refused.⁴⁸ Richard Pratt, the first superintendent of the Carlisle Indian School famously stated in 1879 ‘Kill the Indian in him, and save the man’ (quoted in Coulombe 28). These schools were created to efface Native American history, traditions and culture, the very elements that make up a society. Children were forced to speak English, dress in western clothing and forget their tribal heritage. Laura Tohe, a Navajo author and poet, argues that ‘Assimilation made us feel ashamed for what we were, where we came from, how we spoke, our stories, our families, how we dressed, and for speaking our language’ (x). Consequently, much Native American literature represents the effort of Indigenous authors to recall and maintain the oral traditions and cultural ceremonies vital to the various tribes’ way of life.

The depictions of trauma in Indigenous literature serve to challenge Eurocentric understandings of loss and healing, arguing the importance of culture and place for true recovery. Moreover, the variety of post-war Native American fiction suggests the rejection of generalisations about pan-tribal ontology and culture by Indigenous authors. A fundamental element of this articulation is the subversion of the typical Western bildungsroman plot of leaving home, replaced, instead, with the homing plot as articulated by William Bevis:

⁴⁸ For a more detailed account of Native American history see, for example, *Reading Native American Literature* (2011) by Joseph L. Coulombe and *An Indigenous People's History of the United States* (2015) by Roxanne Dunbar Ortiz

In Native American novels, coming home, staying put, contracting, even what we call “regressing” to a place, a past where one has been before, is not only the primary story, it is a primary mode of knowledge and a primary good. (582).

Bevis goes on to say that “‘identity” for a Native American, is not a matter of finding “one’s self”, but of finding a “self” that is transpersonal and includes a society, a past and a place’ (585). The argument here is that Native American ontology differs from the ‘inwardness’ celebrated by Bloom as a feature of the Western novel. The individual and the individual’s mind are not the sources of meaning or enlightenment. Instead, the narrative is about belonging: to a community, to a faith, and a place.

Place, specifically, is a fundamental element in the three novels discussed in this chapter. Cheryll Glotfelty argues in the introduction to *The Ecocriticism Reader* that

If your knowledge of the outside world were limited to what you could infer from the major publications of the literary profession, you would quickly discern that race, class, and gender were the hot topics of the late twentieth century, but you would never suspect that the earth’s life support systems were under stress. (xvi)

However, Glotfelty overlooks an important intersection where, as Karen Warren argues, the environmental crisis is ‘integrally connected to an understanding of the plight and status of women, people of color, the poor, and children’ (xv). To push this further, the importance of place in novels about colonial trauma and oppression is integral to many Indigenous narratives. As Wolfe argues ‘So far as Indigenous people are concerned, where they are *is* who they are’ (388). The novels explored in this chapter are examples of the intersecting genre of ecocriticism and Indigenous fiction. They highlight the interconnected crisis of ecology and oppressions of race, gender, sexuality, class, disability etc. This is particularly evident in a characteristic feature all three novels share: a multi-layered narrative structure that features tribal stories and poems adapted from Indigenous oral storytelling. These

vignettes, which Summer Harrison refers to as ‘insert narratives’ (7),⁴⁹ present pieces of Indigenous knowledge that evaluate the role of stories in responding to and articulating colonial trauma, both for Indigenous people and for the land in general. In doing so, the authors imply that *place* should, indeed, be considered a critical category like that of race, gender, sexuality, and class. These excerpts of Indigenous knowledge serve as examples of ecocriticism, as described by Glotfelty: ‘Ecocriticism takes as its subject the interconnections between nature and culture, specifically the cultural artifacts of language and literature’ (xix). Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin expand this definition to also include ‘the fields of environmental philosophy and bioethics’ (12). Glotfelty’s arguments are particularly relevant to Indigenous oral storytelling, where nature and the role of nature is indistinguishable from human experience.

Hogan, Momaday, and Silko’s novels demonstrate how Indigenous knowledge forms have been effaced and replaced by western epistemologies. Indeed, as Trexler argues in *Anthropocene Fiction: The Novel in the Time of Climate Change* (2015), ‘[s]uperficially, it would seem that the imaginative form of the novel could present any possible idea, yet evidence would suggest that the articulation of climate change is highly constrained by existing cultural narratives’ (24). Eurocentric cultural narratives continue to shape knowledge production as a form of epistemic violence as they simultaneously overwrite colonial histories and, following Trexler’s argument, inhibit cultural narratives that enable productive responses to climate change. As argued by Corinna Mullin, ‘Not only does Eurocentric epistemology silence and exclude non-Western ways of knowing, but also elides the

⁴⁹ Harrison is specifically referencing Linda Hogan’s *Solar Storms* when ascribing this label, nevertheless it is an appropriate term for the works of Momaday and Silko.

violence, exploitation and expropriation that went into establishing eurocentric claims to “universalism” (5).

Hogan, Momaday, and Silko write back against the reductive stereotypes of Native American culture and life, eschewing notions of a singular, ‘authentic’ version or representation of Indigenous cultures or people. Instead, the authors present a pastiche of experience, representation, and tribal traditions, not a postmodernist version but rather a postmodernisation of narrative. That is, a deconstruction of Western Native American histories and a politics that proffers a decolonised, intersectional method of storytelling. In reacting against colonial stereotyping, these authors invoke elements of these caricatures and stereotypes, such as ‘bad’ mothers, drunken vagabonds, mystical shamans, and the Native American figure of the wendigo to reveal links between (neo)colonial trauma, the environment, and racialised and gendered Indigenous bodies, and to promote a form of reparative justice and healing. As Linda Hogan states, ‘[w]e need new stories, new terms and conditions that are relevant to the love of land, a new narrative that would imagine another way’ (*Dwellings*, 94).

HISTORY IS BLOOD DEEP

At its core, Linda Hogan’s *Solar Storms* is a novel about survival. In contrast to Derrida’s notion of ‘survivance’ as an ‘indeterminate space between life and death that does not include human agency’ (quoted in Castor 451), Gerald Vizenor, an Anishinaabe storyteller, theorist and scholar, describes Indian survivance as ‘an active continuation of stories, not mere reaction, however pertinent. Survivance is greater than the right of a survivable name’ (1). Indeed, as Laura Castor states, ‘Native practitioners insist on an active survival that responds actively to a particular set of obstacles, not survival as merely holding

on to life on settler state terms' (452). Fundamental to Indigenous survivance⁵⁰ then is the agency and intention behind the methods that not only seek bodily survival but a spiritual, natural and cultural one as well. *Solar Storms* focuses on the perseverance of women as they combat the violence and colonisation of white settlers to save their homes and land from destruction. The novel follows four generations of Indigenous women: Angel, a young mixed Cree and Inuit woman; Bush, a Chickasaw and the first wife of Angel's maternal grandfather; Agnes, Angel's great-grandmother and mother of Angel's grandfather; and Dora-Rouge, Angel's mother. *Solar Storms* is an example of an intersectional environmental feminist novel, or intersectional ecofeminist novel, whereby the destruction of the land is equated with the devastating effects of the Western patriarchal hegemony upon Indigenous populations. At seventeen years of age, Angel is returning to her ancestral home, Adam's Rib for the first time after having been violently scarred and abandoned by her birth mother as a baby and spending the interim years moving between various white foster homes.

Angel's return to Adam's Rib, which lies on the border of Canada and Minnesota, and her quest to find out more about her mother from her maternal grandmothers intersects with the missions of her grandmothers to stop the building of a dam upriver that would cause irreparable harm to the land. Moreover, throughout this journey, Angel comes to the realisation that the racism, sexism, and ecological destruction she witnesses and experiences alongside other Indigenous peoples result from the same set of hierarchical structures of domination imposed by white American society. After Angel spends time with each of her grandmothers and learns the ways of her people, her tribe, and importantly, the land and waters of her homeland, the four women embark on their mission to stay the building of the

⁵⁰ Survival here refers to a true, holistic survival beyond the conditions of biological continuation, dependant, rather, on the social, political, and economic conditions that limit one's ability to survive beyond simply being alive.

dam together. Canoeing through flooded waterways, Angel learns about her heritage and the stories of her ancestors. When they reach their destination, they arrive one short, as Agnes dies of illness along the way. Navigating grief and the importance of their task to stop the dam from being built, Angel finally reunites with her mother, Hannah, and the baby sister she did not know she had. Hannah passes away shortly after this and Angel takes on a maternal role, adopting her sister into the community they have built and eventually many years later, emerging victorious in the courts to stop the building of the dam. Through her experience of the matrilineal connections between the generations of women, Angel learns to reconnect to her heritage, her mother, and the land around her and draws upon those relationships to develop her own resistance against the Western presence on Native American lands. Aided by Indigenous stories passed down by her various grandmothers, Angel learns to dismantle the Western epistemological beliefs she adopted during her time in foster homes, specifically regarding western-centric ideas of 'good' and 'bad' motherhood.

Returning to her ancestral home, Angel simultaneously seeks a reason for her survival as a baby and guidance for future survival. The novel challenges the chronological understanding of time often central to Western epistemologies, instead, practising a cyclical model of time, where past, present, and future exist simultaneously. Hogan accomplishes this by referencing historical events and traumas that are cross-generational. Having spent much of her life moving between white foster homes, reduced to 'a life on paper stores in file cabinets' (26), Angel has no knowledge of her Indigenous history, instead her understanding of herself and her history is restricted to her history of institutionalisation as a deracinated individual in 'a series of foster homes' (26). As Angel reflects, 'I'd been lost from my own people, taken from my mother' (26), unconsciously evoking Indigenous histories of children being taken from their families to attend reservation schools. These reservation schools had been intended to Westernise Indigenous children, forcing them to forget their language,

culture, and traditions, and therefore, their indigeneity. Hogan exposes the epistemic violence of assimilation, emphasising how Angel is lacking in vital knowledge that can only be gleaned from her culture.

Rather than having gained knowledge from the experience of being taken from her mother, as was the intention with the westernised ‘assimilation’ schools, she is deprived of it and consequently feels incomplete. Moreover, she is deprived of a connection with the nonhuman world, which makes up a vital part of her heritage, assuming, instead, a western perspective that sees the nonhuman as simply a backdrop to a human world. Indeed, soon after her arrival, she is shown shunning the presence of nature, fearing its power:

One of the vines came through the window like a dark green hand. The first thing [Angel] did was to put it out and close the uncurtained window. [She] did not want the world to sneak in on [her]. Like the missionaries, [she] was threatened by its life and the way it resisted human efforts to control it. (70–71).

The reference to the missionaries connects a fear of nature and its uncontrollability with the Western colonial impetus towards control over colonised peoples as well as environments. Moreover, it reveals how Angel’s ‘education’ has exacerbated colonial presence and atrocities enacted on Native American lands and peoples by further disconnecting Angel and others like her who have been taken from their families, from their Indigenous history and heritage. As such, her future survivance – more than just her physical survival, but rather her future ability to reconnect with her history, culture, and heritage – is intertwined with her ability to decolonise her mind. The first few months of Angel’s life at Adam’s Rib are defined by a journey of relinquishing control, ‘returning to the watery places in order to unravel [her] mind and set straight what [she] had lost’ (72). This mental journey, which manifests in the real world as a journey through actual watery places, must be undertaken for

Angel to develop an Indigenous form of knowledge and being, and, importantly, to allow for reconciliation with her mother.

The catalyst for this development arises from a growing Indigenous network of activism and ecological protection. While Angel is living with Bush on an island in the waters that border Adam's Rib, two Indigenous men from the north travelling in canoes bring the news of an upcoming dam project that threatens to destabilise the ecosystem and destroy many Native American villages, homes, and livelihoods. They explain how the diversion of water, which is already underway, has resulted in flooding that has 'killed many thousand caribou and flooded land the people lived on and revered' (57). Hogan references yet another historic event here, modelling the novel's dam project on the 1970s James Bay hydroelectric dam. The project became an example of 'environmental injustice in which Native peoples bear the brunt of harms resulting from the extraction of electric power while consumers in Southern Canada and the United States benefit' (Harrison 3). The dam project, therefore, not only represents the destruction of the natural world for the benefit of capitalist gain, but also a disregard for Indigenous lives and lifeways.

Kim TallBear, a Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate professor, made the point during a conference that 'violence against nonhumans—water, earth, plant, animal—is linked to violence against particular humans who have historically been de-animated, made "less-than-human", made "animal"'. Highlighting this injustice, the news bearers explain to Angel and Bush that 'Agents of the government insisted the people had no legal right to the land. NO agreement had ever been signed . . . no compensation offered' (57). Not only are their homes being threatened the dam project ignored centuries of Indigenous history and occupation of the land, perpetuating processes of colonial expansion and trauma. The dam planners 'didn't remember the sacred treaties between humans and animals' (279). Recognising the epistemic violence that underpins it, Angel understands that 'If the dam project continues, the lives of

the people there would cease to be, a way of life would end in yet another act of displacement and betrayal' (58). Moreover, she recognises the connection between nonhuman and human spheres, between ecological trauma and Indigenous colonial trauma.

The metaphysical walls Angel built around her mind begin to disappear as she undergoes a process of learning and unlearning. Where Angel previously sought to keep the lines between the human and nonhuman, material and organic worlds impermeable, she 'began to form a kind of knowing at Adam's Rib', going on to say that 'if we had no separate words for inside and out and there are no boundaries between them, no walls, no kin, you would see me' (54). As the artificial categorisations of nature that separate the human and nonhuman become less stable in her mind, Angel begins to adopt an Indigenous epistemology that 'refuse[s] to flatten the world conceptually through philosophical Cartesian binaries, oppositions between subjects and objects' which 'justified the dominant Euroamerican cultures' acquisition of the earth's mineral, wind, water and agricultural resources, and its genocide of Indigenous people' (Castor 452). The promise of progress is reserved for those who observe Western standards of civility and civilisation, ignoring the irony of the incivility of colonial violence. The novel challenges these elements of Euroamerican rationality that consider humans separate and superior to nature and the nonhuman world.

Embarking on a matrilineal journey to stop the building of the dam, Angel discovers the restorative, healing capacity of Indigenous landscapes through storytelling. As Silvia Schultermanndl states, 'in order to restore the peace within herself, within her family and within the biosphere, [Angel] must restore the interconnectedness between human and nonhuman nature' (73). Travelling with her many grandmothers in canoes along increasingly flooded waterways to avoid road blockages put in place by the government to stop protests, the four women set off with differing goals. The journey illustrates how aspirations of

homecoming, reconciliation, and justice are intimately intertwined with nature and landscape. The journey is also an enlightening experience for Angel as she is told many stories and myths along the way. ‘Storytelling’ says Schulterman, ‘shapes Angel’s understanding of a cosmogonic balance between human and nonhuman nature before the intrusion of a phallogocentric patriarchic dominant society’ (70). Indeed, I argue that storytelling is a fundamental part of active Indigenous survivance. The insert narratives of storytelling in the novel allow for culture and tradition to be remembered and learned by the younger generations.

Storytelling enables Angel to reconnect to her culture and history; she notes that ‘These were my people, I listened carefully’ (58). These Indigenous stories emerge from and are embedded in the land. The destruction of the landscape threatens to erase the stories and ‘knowledge that emerges from sustained interaction with particular ecosystems’ (Harrison 17), thereby threatening Indigenous ways of living. Moreover, the dam project similarly overlooks the historical claim of Native Americans to their land by making the land unliveable, thereby ensuring that ‘the devastation and ruin that had fallen over the land fell over the people too’ (Hogan 226). In one story, Dora-Rouge tells of how two children who had been left by their parents and raised by wolves were found in the summer of 1924. The story evokes the Roman myth of Romulus and his brother Remus, twin brothers raised by wolves; in adulthood, Romulus kills Remus and goes on to found the city of Rome and the Roman Empire. Where the Roman myths glorify fratricide and betrayal for the sake of progress and empire, the children in Dora-Rouge’s story learn instead, ‘how to evade explorers and priests’ (65). However,

After being found they fell into a state of despair. The captive lives that held most humans could not hold them. They saw through the savagery of civilization. They grieved something fierce for their lost kin, the murdered wolves. (65)

The western myth is subverted to illustrate the brutal cost of so-called 'civilisation'. In contrast, the Indigenous people, Angel's people 'had lived [on the land] forever, for more than ten thousand years, and had been sustained by these lands that were now being called empty and useless' (58). Angel learns that for Native Americans, civilisation and 'progress', which the dam is presented as bringing, is a lie that comes at the too high cost of ecological destruction and trauma.

On another occasion, when Dora-Rouge reveals bits of Angel's history to her, she begins by saying:

Nobody knows where it began, your story . . . I've thought of it for years where the beginning was . . . What happened to you started a long time ago. It began around the time of the killing of the wolves. When people were starving . . . There wasn't a single beaver that year. They'd killed them all. And they'd just logged the last of the pine forests . . . It might have started when the crying children were taken away from their mothers or when the logging camps started and cities were built from our woods. (37-40)

Dora-Rouge emphasises how history is experienced communally. As such the history of Angel's trauma is tied to the history of her people, the stories rooted in the land and the evidence of their colonial trauma. References to the destruction of wildlife and the kidnapping of children to be taken to residential schools link the tragedies to historical colonial expansion. Stories link the past to the present and the future, in a cyclical understanding of time, an Indigenous understanding, that embraces community over individualism. Moreover, Dora-Rouge states: 'As in Genesis, the first word shaped what would follow. It was of utmost importance. It determined the kind of world that would be created' (37). In referencing the biblical story of creation, Dora-Rouge emphasises how, for Indigenous people, all stories are rooted in beginnings, in the earth, and, as such, are shared

and communal, where their ‘beginnings [are] intricately bound up in the history of the land’ (96). Angel’s birth then is not the beginning of Angel’s story, but only an interrupted mid-point governed by a Western understanding of individualism where one’s birth and death mark the start and end of any story. Instead, Angel goes through a long process of ‘mental decolonisation’ to discover where she is from and who she will be which ‘includes the emerging capacity to stay with the sense of corporal vulnerability she recognises in herself’ (Castor 454). In other words, Angel must learn to accept the physical scars on her face given to her by her mother, but more importantly, also the psychological scars of her mother and her ancestors.

Angel’s desire to find her mother and understand why she was abandoned by her further requires decolonising the notion of trauma. Trauma studies have historically followed a eurocentric model, as Michael Rothberg states, where ‘turn-of-the-millennium trauma studies has remained stuck within Euro-American conceptual and historical frameworks’ (225). Part of this conceptual framework is one that views the onset of trauma as an immediate event. The various stories and insert narratives in the novel challenge this assumption, placing inherited generational trauma at the centre of Indigenous reality and experiences. Stef Craps and Gert Buelens argue that,

Instead of promoting solidarity between different cultures, trauma studies risks producing the very opposite effect as a result of this one-sided focus: by ignoring or marginalizing non-Western traumatic events and histories and non-Western theoretical work, trauma studies may actually assist in the perpetuation of Eurocentric views and structures that maintain or widen the gap between the West and the rest of the world. (2)

Trauma, Craps and Buelens suggest, can manifest very differently in non-Western and marginalised societies. Indeed, Jennifer Yusin notes how the postcolonial critique of trauma

studies and ‘the poststructuralist methods employed by trauma theory concentrate on subjective experiences of pain and suffering in the effort to disclose the ways in which the very concept of trauma is a Western artifact’ (239). That is to say that trauma, as understood through its Western theoretical framework, is built around a Western, event-based narrative that does not apply to victims of colonial oppression and subjugation. For Angel, this realisation results in two important mental shifts. First, (postcolonial) trauma, particularly slow trauma, is often intergenerational and communal in post-colonial societies.

Unbeknownst to Angel, the recurring reference to children being taken away from their mothers and communities is a trauma she shares with the oldest in the matrilineal line. Dora-Rouge describes how when she was twelve,

the agents from the school caught me . . . They caught me. I held to my little sister tight and wouldn’t let go. The men hit us to get us apart. It was so sad . . . It was just a few years later when little sister, taken to another school, walked into the snow, lay down on it, and froze to death. (167)

Hogan subverts western models of linear time as Dora-Rouge and Angel, separated by four generations, share the trauma of being taken from their families and homes, referencing instead a circular understanding of history.⁵¹

Once the women reach the land of the Fat-Eaters, who originally called themselves the Beautiful Ones, where the dam is being built, ‘lands they’d lived on since before European time was invented’ (225), more indicators of shared trauma emerge. Some of the younger inhabitants are so despondent that they ‘drank alcohol and sniffed glue and paint. They staggered about and lay down on the streets’ (226). These indicators are present prior to

⁵¹ In 1978, Native Scholars including Carol Mitchell, Paula Gunn Allen, Martha Kimble, Virginia Randall, Larry Evers and Wayne Ude specified that Native Americans maintain a unique understanding of time that is circular in contrast to the Euroamerican understanding of time as linear.

the building of the dam, suggesting that the cause is the shared trauma of their colonial history. Stereotypes of the lazy, drunken Indian are posed as provocations, representing the very real consequences of intergenerational trauma, and continued colonial hegemony, emphasising the circular framework of time, whereby the younger inhabitants are inheriting trauma from their ancestors. Moreover, Hogan depicts the despondency, not as laziness or addiction, but rather as a form of spiritual self-cannibalism as a traumatic response, a response shared by Angel's mother, Hannah. This self-cannibalism is similar to Frantz Fanon's notion of *epidermalization*, where the trauma of colonial violence results in self-hatred and a distancing from Indigenous traditions and rituals.

Second, more than just understanding the impact of ecological destruction on the people and their shared trauma, Angel must also reconsider and decolonise her understanding of motherhood, which in Western traditional models of the family is rooted in female sacrifice and patriarchal understandings of labour. Indeed, notions of motherhood and Ecofeminism are interconnected in Western constructions of women and nature. This is noticeable in the very way that the environment and nature is constructed in language, demonstrating how it intimately bound to Western cultural conceptions of motherhood. The first encounter Bush has with Hannah, the daughter of the man she loved conceived with another woman, involves Hannah ominously walking out of dark cold water on the shore of Adam's Rib. Hannah arrives motherless, but with indicators of a violent history:

Beneath all the layers of clothes, her skin was a garment of scars. There were burns and incisions. Like someone had written on her. The signatures of torturers . . . and further in, [Bush] knew, there were violations and invasions of other kinds. (99)

Bush understands that Hannah experienced the very worst kind of trauma, a colonial violence enacted not only on the body but on the very soul, 'a murder of the soul . . . Murder with no consequences to the killers' (226). Hannah is feared by the occupants of Adam's Rib not only

for what had happened to her, but the darkness she carried from the horrors she had experienced. Indeed, it penetrated even to her smell, that of bitter almonds and apple seeds, the smell of cyanide, which the Elk Islanders exuded when they ‘became so hungry they ate poisoned carcasses of deer that the settlers left out for the wolves. The starving people ate that bait’ (38). Hannah’s body is a carrier of both the physical and ecological trauma experienced by her people, trauma that ‘was deeper than skin. It was blood deep. It was history deep’ (40). However, the occupants also fear Hannah because of what she had to become to survive her trauma. Her neighbours understand that Hannah carries the psychological scars resulting from her people’s trauma, as well as physically experiencing trauma. However, what they cannot comprehend is how Hannah’s trauma transforms her into a creature of apathy, and blind desire with a heart of ice: a wendigo.

The wendigo is a mythical Indigenous creature that, according to Cree and Anishinaabe mythology is cannibalistic with an insatiable hunger, who smells of death and decay. Though the term ‘wendigo’ is never mentioned explicitly in the novel, the references to women with hearts of ice and a disregard for the suffering of others are numerous in the novel. Traditionally, stories of the wendigo were intended as warnings against selfishness and greed. In *Solar Storms*, Hogan uses the wendigo as a product of colonial trauma. Hannah is often described as being cold, at one point being described as a glacier that ‘gives off what it can’t absorb, blue light and beauty’ (105). However, rather than representing traumatised individuals as inhuman, Hogan demonstrates how the immense cruelty of colonial and imperial violence results in a dehumanisation of the individual.

Rather than a cannibal of people, Hannah self-cannibalises, eating away at the light and beauty in her body that cannot exist alongside the horrors she has endured: ‘she was a body under siege, a battleground. But she herself never emerged. The others, with their many voices and ways, were larger than she was. She was no longer there’ (99). Her way of living

is her only recourse to resistance, as Angel points out, 'For my people, the problem has always been this: that the only possibility of survival has been resistance' (325). Recalling Vizenor's definition of Indigenous survivance, we understand that there is an agency in the choices Hannah has made to survive, but that her survival depends on emptying her body and mind of light and beauty. Hannah's consequent inability to mother is then, as Schultersmandl states, 'the painful repercussions of a phallogocentric culture dominating women, ethnic minorities, and nonhuman nature' (74). As a glacier, Angel is the 'light given off by [her] mother' (105), which Hannah hates because it represents hope and goodness that cannot exist alongside colonialism.

Angel's reconciliation with her mother only comes on Hannah's deathbed. The shroud of death, of ending, serves as a metaphor for the success of the decolonisation Angel embarked on at the beginning of her journey. Hannah had been stabbed by the man she was living with, Eron, who claimed 'she's a spirit . . . she's not a real woman at all' (246). Along with the image of a woman with a heart of ice once again evoked, the psychological toll of the residential schools is articulated. Eron is described as having been the 'chosen one' of his people, however, 'when he came back from school, that's when his troubles started. At school they told him everything he learned was wrong, and with these two knowings, that's when he got lost. He was lost ever since' (246). The Eurocentric notion of linear time is once again turned on its head as history repeats itself, but moreover, demonstrates how the horrors result in more violence in an unforgiving cycle. Hannah and other victims of colonial torture and violence are unable to escape the consequences, instead isolating themselves as a survival mechanism. Hannah's death brings an end to this cycle, but moreover, her death, where Angel takes on the role of her carer in an ironic role reversal, results in a process of Hannah being mothered in a way Angel never experienced. Angel explains,

It was death, finally, that allowed me to know my mother, her body, her house of lament and sacrifice that it was. I was no longer a girl. I was a woman, full and alive. After that, I made up my mind to love in whatever ways I could. I would find it in myself to love the woman who had given life to me, the woman a priest had called a miracle in reverse . . . Yes, she tried to kill me, swallow me, consume me back into her own body, the way fire burnt itself away, uses itself as fuel. But even if she hated me, there had been a moment of something akin to love, back at the creation. Her desperation and loneliness was my beginning. Hannah had been my poison, my life, my sweetness and pain, my beauty and homeliness. And when she died, I knew that I survived in the best of ways, for I was filled with grief and compassion. (250–251)

Angel, finally understanding what Hannah was driven to because of the violence she experienced, is able to offer her compassion, seeing instead of greed and selfishness a desperate attempt in her actions to fill the darkness and warm the coldness of her body. Moreover, Angel forgives Hannah for the violence of her attempt to consume her physically, biting her face as a baby, and giving her the scars on her face that she grew up ashamed of. As an adult, however, she understands that those scars are an extension of Hannah's attempt at survival. A pivotal moment in Angel's journey, the passage represents a mental breakthrough where Euroamerican standards of what motherhood is 'supposed' to look like is challenged and confronted by the context of Euroamerican epistemic violence and its resulting trauma. Angel can be compassionate and legitimises Hannah's absence as a mother as a survival mechanism, recognising that Hannah was not the 'original sin' (36) and that their 'beginnings were intricately bound up in the history of the land', 'one of broken lives, gone animals, trees felled and kindled' (96).

Angel's final act of compassion for her mother and the end of the cycle of trauma and violence is to willingly adopt the baby half-sister she did not know she had, Aurora.

Moreover, in a continuation of a decolonised model of mothering and parenting, Angel brings up the baby communally where Aurora becomes ‘a child of many parents’ (264). Carolyn Merchant, in her book *Reinventing Eden: The Fate of Nature in Western Culture* (2003), describes a similar model that she refers to as ‘partnership ethic’, promoting a ‘moral ethic of care’ whereby communal interdependence replaces the individual. Where Hannah retreated into herself, isolating herself with the voices of the murderers and torturers inside her, Aurora represents a new hope, a new beginning. Time is once again represented as circular, ‘the ancestors returned in the new bodies of children’ (256), allowing Aurora to be ‘be what [Angel] was not. She would know her world and not be severed from it’ (258). *Solar Storms* depicts a multi-layered approach to survivance rooted in Indigenous epistemologies that are translated to Aurora through her communal upbringing.

Community then, one that includes a symbiotic relationship between the human and nonhuman, is put forth in the novel as a method of healing rather than just surviving. The preservation of the land, then, also preserves stories and histories that allow for the healing of displaced people and provides a sense of community to isolated people (Harrison 21). Where Angel had once ‘been empty space’, she finds ‘a language, a story to shape [herself] by’ (94) emphasising the importance of place in identity and the preservation of culture; a culture that challenges the Euroamerican legacy of ‘the removal of spirit from everything, from animals, trees, fishhooks, and hammers, all things the Indians had as allies’ (180). This is a legacy that demonstrated ‘they’d forgotten how to live’ (180) but in addition, suggests an absence of a holistic means of living in harmony with the earth.

The novel emphasises the destructive ideologies that convinced Euroamericans of their separation and superiority from the nonhuman world, making them willing to destroy the lives and lifeways of Indigenous populations. Indeed, Angel notes that ‘to the builders of the dams we were dark outsiders whose lives had no relevance to them’ (283). As Harrison

argues, 'failing to see the relevance of Indigenous peoples' well-being of the larger living community serves to justify trauma' (21). Moreover, it fails to recognise how the destruction of the living community affects all humans, including the Euroamericans vying for the dam's production, prepared to 'destroy all that could save them, the plants, the water' (86). Instead, 'they believed they were limited and could only live in one way and they wanted [Native Americans] to give up [their] way of life for their. They thought the land would starve them. Maybe it would. It couldn't live with them' (315). Hogan conveys their fundamental lack of understanding in their western ambitions for more power and territory that humans were also part of nature.

Indeed, Rob Nixon argues that the colonial accumulation of environmental resources results in and justifies a willing spatial amnesia as 'communities, under the banner of development, are physically unsettled and imaginatively removed, evacuated from place and time and thus uncoupled from the idea of both a national future and a national memory' (151). That is, where Indigenous presence in North America is deliberately removed from Euroamerican historiography, simultaneously removing indicators of their lifeways and epistemologies to allow for colonial access to resources. Wolfe, who argues that 'settler colonialism is inherently eliminatory' (387), further states that 'the primary motive for elimination is not race (or religion, ethnicity, grade of civilization, etc.) but access to territory' (388). This drive similarly encourages a fetishization of bureaucracy and documentation in 'the flat, two-dimensional world of paper' where 'words were powerless beside their figures, their measurements, and ledgers' (279), and uncouples the notion of community from the land that could be a resource for white settlers. This voracious drive for power and territory, inflected by notions of manifest destiny, is rejected by the Indigenous communities through their relationship with nature.

Rather, Native American spirituality in the novel is nurtured through the body and its relationship with nature, deepening through breath and smell rather than prayer, through breathing ‘the scent of long, wet grasses and the stronger smell of all towns that live by fish and by seasons’ (24). Angel learns to see God not as a singular, all-powerful, omniscient figure, but rather ‘everything beneath [her] feet. Everything surrounded by water; it was in the air and there was no such thing as empty space’ (170). Indeed, even the land itself is more organic than the suggested reference to the pristine Garden of Eden, surrounded by ‘a maze of lakes and islands that were doors to another wilderness, a deeper, wilder north’ (22). The act of coming together as a community to protect the land, to fight the courts and to take care of a baby, one who is offered a chance at ‘newness, in the freedom of a beginning outside the past, outside history’ (257), reinforces the epistemology at the heart of this feminist Ecofiction novel that recognises a ‘collective responsibility for the physical lives of one another’ (Butler 30), including nonhuman life.

HOLDING AND BEING HELD BY THE LAND

Laguna Pueblo author, activist and professor, Paula Gunn Allen states, ‘there is no way to be acceptably Indian (with all the pain that implies) and acceptable to whites at the same time’ (156). Walking this line of acceptability specifically between a colonising culture and a colonised one, is the foundation of M. Scott Momaday’s 1968 novel, *House Made of Dawn*. Where Hogan’s *Solar Storms* explored the narrative of someone returning to their roots after having been unwillingly taken away, *House Made of Dawn* explores the challenges of trying to appeal to two distinct cultures simultaneously. Moreover, considering Homi Bhabha’s notion of cultural hybridity, Helen May Dennis writes that ‘Mixed-blood narrators by definition find themselves negotiating the untranslatability between cultures. Mixed-blood narratives educate their implied readers, and through diegesis and mimesis tell and show the

transformative cultural spaces that they dwell in' (119). Transformative though it may be, Momaday recounts the protagonist, Abel's, story by examining first how Indigenous trauma is coded in terms of disability in normative western culture because it departs from the 'Western positivist views of knowledge' (Teuton 24). Momaday illustrates this departure by drawing upon elements of the bildungsroman through an intersectional lens of compounding traumas and intersectional experiences of oppression. His treatment of the bildungsroman acts like mimicry where 'the discourse of mimicry is structured around an *ambivalence*' (Davis 86), almost the same but not quite.⁵² That is to say that the slippages and slight differences from the traditional form defamiliarise the reader's senses, making the differences all the more noticeable. It is a similar perspective adopted with regard to disability, where those labelled as disabled do not adhere to the assumed standard of 'normalcy', where our bodies and psychologies are expected to be 'a seamless whole, a complete unfragmented entity' (Davis 68). Momaday illustrates how this assumption elides the reality of traumatic responses, particularly colonial and ecological trauma.

The novel follows Abel, a young Navajo-Tanoan man, who returns to his motherland after fighting in World War II. Abel suffers from a sense of alienation and, as I shall argue, self-imposed isolation. After a half-hearted attempt to adjust to life back in his homeland, Abel kills an albino man and is sent to prison for it. Following his release eight years later, he is relocated to Los Angeles where he struggles with excessive drinking and racist altercations. After almost being beaten to death, Abel decides to return home, only to find his grandfather on his deathbed. At the conclusion of the novel, Abel honours his grandfather in the spirit of the tribal traditions and following his death, joins his community in a ceremonial

⁵² Recall how mimicry and ambivalence are explored in the conclusion Chapter I to destabilise notions of the Western 'norm'.

run across the reservation. Invoking the bildungsroman motif of leaving one's hometown, Momaday challenges the traditional definition of the genre that sees it as 'the novel of all around development or self-culture' (Buckley 13), by questioning the possibility of culture existing without place, community, and history. Instead of the escape from home, *House Made of Dawn* details the process of returning, of homing, to find knowledge and a sense of cultural peace.

In an interview, Momaday describes Abel's experience as a 'dislocation of the psyche' caused by 'having to deal immediately. . . not only with the traditional world but with the other world which was placed over the traditional world so abruptly and with great violence' (Coltelli 142). Historically, 'the belief that moral character and worth of an individual is actualised in the body shaped the conditions under which people were deemed valuable to society' (Khan 2021, 1). As such, acts deemed outside the realm of normalcy resulted in ostracization, further 'alienating individuals from the benefits and security that come from societal compliance' (Khan 2021, 1). Indeed, as stated by R. D. Laing,

sanity today appears to rest very largely on the capacity to adapt to the external world—the interpersonal world, and the realm of human collectivities. As this external human world is almost completely and totally estranged from the inner, any personal direct awareness of the inner world already has grave risks. (98–99)

Along key points of Abel's journey, he fails to respond in the 'appropriate' ways expected of him by both Indigenous and Euroamerican communities. Instead, as a result of extended and intersecting slow trauma, Abel experiences what Wilson Kaiser refers to as an 'existential disorientation' that results in non-normative methods of experiencing, remembering, and reinterpreting experiences that are divorced from hegemonic models of Western 'rational' thought and are then understood as madness and disability. I argue, however, as Elaine Showalter did of English women who were accused of hysteria in the 19th and 20th centuries,

that Abel's 'mental pathology [is] suppressed rebellion' (Showalter 147). It is a response to the unfulfilled potential that was made impossible by the epistemic violence of Western imperialism, whereby 'invasion is a structure not an event' (Wolfe 388). Moreover, this deep unfulfillment results in a hybrid epistemology that is not wholly Western nor wholly Indigenous, causing unresolved tension and alienation from both cultures.

The novel's disorienting form, interweaving between past and present and stream-of-consciousness style flow between topics, is indicative of Abel's psychological perspective, grounded, as Kaiser argues, 'in his entirely atypical understanding of the environment that he inhabits (191). The prologue, which opens with the Jemez opening phrase for storytelling, similar to the English 'once upon a time', commences by celebrating the landscape through which Abel is running, that was 'very old and everlasting' (1). The created tableau, which is revealed to also be the same image that concludes the novel, establishes the landscape as the beginning and the end of a cyclical journey, emphasising, as *Solar Storms* did, a specifically Indigenous perspective on time. Moreover, the jumps through time and numerous characters' perspectives that detail Abel's psyche, often indirectly, serve to illustrate how 'there is no outside to the fragmented and alienated condition of the Native American in sixties culture' (Kaiser 196). For example, Angela St. John, a white woman from LA who comes to the reservation, seeking mineral baths from the spring water to help alleviate pain in her back, describes Abel as 'a wooden Indian—his face cold and expressionless' (35), and his eyes that 'were soft, full of color, ranging; they had seen into her, through her, even, but his vision had fallen short of the reality that mattered last and most' (36). Though knowing nothing of Abel's history, Angela's observations point to an attempt to mask intense emotional turmoil that causes otherwise perceptive eyes to become metaphorically short-sighted, unable to see beyond the trauma.

The opening chapter introduces Abel's grandfather Francisco, a man rooted in his traditions and a life dedicated to the landscape around him, who collects Abel from the bus stop only for Abel to come off the bus 'drunk, and he fell against his grandfather and did not know him' (9). Disoriented both physically and mentally, Abel requires his grandfather's help to return home illustrating from the outset of the novel a schism that alienates Abel from his home, family, and community. This schism is paralleled in the literary form that goes on to describe the loss of his mother, brother and an absentee father Abel never knew. Jerome Hamilton Buckley describes the early life of the typical bildungsroman protagonist as 'a repressive atmosphere', where

A child of some sensibility grows up in the country or in a provincial town, where he finds constraints, social and intellectual, placed upon the free imagination. His family, especially his father, proves doggedly hostile to his creative instincts or flights of fancy, antagonistic to his ambitions, and impervious to his new ideas he has gained from unprescribed reading. (17)

This general outline is subverted by Momaday who describes a life of tragedy and social constraint, not from familial pressure, but from a society that assumes a lack of civility among Native Americans. Indeed, at the sight of an intoxicated Abel coming off the bus, 'tears came to [Francisco's] eyes, and he knew only that he must laugh and turn away from the faces in the windows of the bus' (9). Francisco's attempt to retain a sense of pride in the face of Abel's condition, the stereotypical image of the drunk Indian, recognises it as a symptom rather than the condition itself. However, as shall be explored below, this is but one form of trauma response Abel experiences.

Francisco, whose first introduction is of working the land, offers Abel a potential father figure that he desperately lacks and attempts to find through various communities – the Eagle Watchers, the military, and with other Native Americans in Los Angeles – to provide

him with guidance. Much like the typical bildungsroman protagonist, however, Abel resists the model Francisco provides for him but, nevertheless, aims to find wholeness. However, though he participates in various ceremonies and rituals, many of them informal, attempting to find that wholeness that colonial trauma has stripped from many young Native Americans, Abel continues to illustrate a lack of understanding of those ceremonies. As such, the attempts at community continue to fail as Abel is unable to adhere to the expectations set out for him due to the disorientation he experiences. While Momaday claims in the preface of the novel that Abel 'is a man disabled by his experience of warfare and disorientation' (xii), I argue that Abel's so-called disability began prior to the war. Abel's trauma of losing his family is cast in terms of an inevitability, predetermined by a boy with an understanding beyond the ordinary: 'the boy could sense his grandfather's age, just as he knew somehow that his mother was soon going to die of her illness. It was nothing he was told, but knew it anyway and without understanding as he knew already the motion of the sun and seasons' (11). Abel manifests an inherent sense of knowing, a trait connecting knowledge of his community with the natural world. However, he is still disoriented, fighting against this knowing, and countering the expectations of the society around him.

This contradiction of knowledge and experience is particularly exemplified by his experience with the Eagle Watchers. Observing the eagles as a young man with a community of other Indigenous eagle watchers, Abel describes two

golden eagles, a male and a female, in their mating flight. They were cavorting, spinning and spiralling on the cold, clear columns of air, and they were beautiful. They swooped and hovered, leaning on the air, and swung close together, feinting and screaming with delight. The female was full-grown, and the span of her broad wings was greater than any man's height . . . She carried a rattlesnake; it hung shining from her feet, limp and curving out in the trail of her light. (20)

Describing the scene as ‘an awful, holy sight, full of magic and meaning’ (14), the interaction between the eagle and the snake has a profound effect on Abel. Throughout the novel, snake medicine and eagle medicine are repeatedly referenced in regard to Indigenous events that test Abel’s relationship with his homeland, which in his case is left wanting.

The snake and eagle medicine imagery and motif are well-known Indigenous epistemologies that reiterate the notion of interconnectedness between the human and non-human. Robert Nelson argues that ‘the relationship between the life of the individual and the life of the land is one of intimate and “indivisible” reciprocity’ where ‘separation from the land leads to disease—spiritual illness, alienation, and uncertainty’ (1). Nelson’s article, ‘Snake and Eagle: Abel’s Disease and the Landscape of House Made of Dawn’, further explains the significance of the snake and the eagle in connection with the land:

As Momaday casts it and as Abel sees it, at Walatowa the hold of the land (and the reciprocal human willingness to be thus held) manifests as the “snake spirit” of the land, while the human ability to hold the land (and the reciprocal willingness of the living land to be thus held) manifests as the “eagle spirit” informing Abel’s vision for much of the novel. In part, then, both snake and eagle are, in this novel, avatars of place, manifestations of the life of the land itself. (1)

Abel views the interaction between the eagle and the snake and assumes the superiority of the eagle in the same way that he unknowingly relies on western epistemology asserting human superiority over the land. This belief comforts him as he feels he has no control over anything. After capturing an eagle, he steals away to look at it. But instead of seeing a creature of power, Abel sees the bird,

bound and helpless, his eagle seemed drab and shapeless in the moonlight, too large and ungainly for flight. The sight of it filled him with shame and disgust. He took hold of its throat in the darkness and cut off its breath. (22)

The parallel between Abel and the ungainly eagle is evident. Abel is not driven by a sense of pity but rather disgust and shame. The eagle cannot be free, seemingly helpless here and, hence, unable to do what it was, in many senses, created to do: fly. In much the same way, Abel feels similarly about himself, lacking freedom, lacking a sense of control, and lacking belonging to either the tribe he was born into or the nation-state that attempts to eliminate Indigenous culture. So, he kills the bird in a self-annihilating act that sabotages his place in the Eagle Watcher community, rejecting the Indigenous epistemology that understands a mutual connection between human and non-human.

Abel's experience in the army, however, acts as the mirror opposite of his time with the Eagle Watchers. While many critics have argued that wartime trauma lies at the heart of Abel's disability, Nathan Pfaff argues instead that Abel found a community in the military and misses it. Not the violence or aggression, but the comradery:

the breadth and depth of Abel's loss is not fully appreciated because critics pass over or discount the historical reality that the vast majority of Native American World War II veterans felt they were full and equal members of their military units. Like most veterans, their membership in their company, platoon, and squad became part of their identity, and because of this collective identification, these military units became communities. Thus, Abel's trauma is deeper than just the evident shock and stress of combat—it is also the loss of community. (39)

Within the military, Abel found a community he was unable to find elsewhere, a community he was lacking even in his hometown with his family and tribe. The loss of his community, from both the deaths he witnesses and his own actions that isolate him, causes despondency and exacerbates his trauma. The unexpected severing of bonds made during the war from death in combat contributed to this and becomes the second form of trauma Abel suffers from.

However, it is more so the severed community that Abel caused himself which causes a deeper sort of slow trauma, pointing to an intersecting form of trauma. In a particularly traumatic moment during the war, after most of the group he was part of had been killed, Abel survives a final surveillance by an enemy tank. His response to this survival is detailed by another soldier named Bowker who witnessed it along with two other companions:

Everybody else was dead, see, and that tank was just cleaning up to make sure . . . We didn't know if they had seen him or not, and, Jesus, that tank hitched over and it was coming right down on him [Abel], it looked like. But they *hadn't* seen him, and it went on by about as close as it could without running over him. *Jesus!* Mitch— Corporal Rate—he swore and I was holding my breath. And that's when the chief here got up, sir. Oh Jesus, he just all of a sudden got up and started jumping around and *yelling* at that goddam tank, and it was maybe thirty, forty yards is all down the hill. Oh Jesus, sir. He was giving it the finger and whooping it up and doing a goddam *war dance*, sir. Me and Mitch, we just groaned. We couldn't *believe* what was going on. And here *he* was, hopping around with his finger up in the air and giving it to that tank in Sioux or Algonquin or something for crissake. (114).

This passage provides many clues to the situation, indicating the extent of the trauma Abel has just suffered. Pfaff, using textual evidence to recreate a specific military context, notes that,

Bowker's group and Abel are most likely from the same company but different platoons . . . Since Bowker says himself, his two companions, and Abel were "the only ones to get out," at least a company of soldiers died in the battle. (38)

This suggests that over a hundred soldiers have died, many of whom would have been members of Abel's platoon and, as such, his closest friends. Not only has Abel suffered the loss of the majority of his friends and community, but consequently his sense of identity,

which leads him to cling to the only other identity he has. Though stated in clear anger and no shortage of racist intonation, Bowker's reference to a 'war dance' may not be inaccurate terminology. Abel's knowledge of Indigenous culture and traditions causes him to respond in an Indigenous manner that unconsciously places Bowker and his companions in danger by bringing unwanted enemy attention, alerting the tank to not only his presence but that of the other soldiers. Bowker's interjections of 'sir' and corrections when using Corporeal Rate's first name implies an official setting, such as a court-martial, where Bowker's story is a testimony of events where 'Abel was listening to him, self-conscious, growing angry and confused that this white man should talk about him, account for him, as if he were not there' (113). These clues finally suggest that Abel's attempt to walk the line between both western and Indigenous epistemologies results in his place in the military being sabotaged as he is removed and rejected by both the soldiers and the institution in response to the grief and shock of his trauma that, in the moment, he is unable to process in a non-Indigenous manner.

As explored in *Solar Storms*, this unwitting sabotage can be understood as yet another form of the wendigo, whereby self-cannibalism occurs from a failure to walk the line of both western and Indigenous ways of being and consequently a failure to belong to either. Indeed, Abel claims that 'everything in advance of his going [to war]—he could remember whole and in detail' (22). Those memories form a fundamental part of his understanding of the world, yet Abel chooses to disconnect from them and the land, 'center[ing] upon himself in the onset of loneliness and fear' (22). Abel falls into the 'ultimate inwardness' (Bloom 10) of a Euroamerican understanding of existence that then causes 'the recent past, the intervention of days and years without meaning, of awful calm and collision, time always immediate and confused, that he could not put together in his mind' (22–23). Abel's mind is compromised by this attempt at inwardness, which, combined with his traumatic dismissal from the army,

results in his inability to recognise the reciprocal relationship between human and nonhuman worlds.

His return to his homeland sees Abel battling the call of the landscape and submitting to it, holding the land and being held by it, the eagle and snake spirits. The disconnect Abel has caused by his retreat into his fear and loneliness results in a 'tendency to identify snake energy as a force that originates *outside* rather than from within the landscape' (Pfaff 7), in being assumed as a foreign, and hence evil, force, specifically in relation to whiteness as it is associated with the figure of the albino and later, the corrupt cop Martinez, both of whom Abel identifies as 'culebras'.⁵³ Reyes, the albino, is encountered in moments of ritual and tradition. Abel describes him as a snake, linking his alienness, otherness, and perceived whiteness as reasons for his label. The ceremony taking place re-enacts a historical moment when the saint, Santiago who was 'derided at first [for entering the royal games], for everyone supposed him to be a peon and a fool' wins the games and is allowed to marry one of the king's daughters. However, the king, refusing to allow such a man to take away his daughter, plans to kill him. Santiago produces a rooster from his mouth whole, fed to him by an old couple who had nothing to give but this rooster, who tells him of the plot on his life and enables him to survive. During the ceremonial games, Abel is smeared with the blood of a rooster by his opponent, Reyes, symbolically marking him for the purpose of the ceremony, as the violent monarch. Instead of seeing the blood of the rooster as an indicator of the reciprocal use of animals and their sacrifice for the benefit of land and community, Abel sees it only as an insult that marks him as a coward and a liar. However, a closer look at the context and the historical circumstances suggests rather that the snake spirit is invoked with reference to people who fail to honour their traditions and celebrate their cultures.

⁵³ The Spanish word for snake.

The spirit of the snake is further explored with the murder of the albino by Abel who, unable to let go of the perceived insult and humiliation, blames Reyes and strangles him. The consequences are his imprisonment, further separating him from his home and the land that 'he was no longer attuned to' (57), mere weeks after having returned from the army, likely disgraced. Abel believes he has slain the snake, but Reyes, moments away from dying, lays his hands upon Abel 'as if in benediction' (80). The death of the snake does not bring freedom to Abel. In contrast, it results in his imprisonment for seven years and yet he believes 'in his own mind that it was not a man he killed. It was something else . . . An evil spirit' (99). Snake energy, then, suggests more than an evilness, but rather a warning against treading too far from the traditions of the *homeland* and land itself, where 'the world was open at his back. He had lost his place. He had been long ago at the centre, had known where he was, had lost his way, had wandered to the end of the earth, was even now reeling on the edge of the void' (101). It is a warning that distancing oneself too far from the land and natural world, trying to hold oneself above and superior to the land, results in a soul-deep disconnection from the culture and traditions that form Indigenous identity.

Trapped by the multiple epistemologies that vie for his attention, Abel attempts to form a hybridity of thought. Momaday hints at the potential of a pan-Indian community in the city and urban centres, where Indigenous people form networks of knowledge and protection. However, ultimately these communities are untenable, not because of a breakdown of the Indigenous community but rather because of the challenging Euro-American generalising perspective on Indigenous culture. The fear and risk of invisibility and disappearance lie heavily over the novel, especially in moments that relate to Indigenous ceremonies and rituals. The characters of Ben Benally and Reverend Tosamah become models for the potential of a pan-Indian community in Los Angeles. Abel's time in Los Angeles returns to the structure of the *bildungsroman* where his experience oscillates between 'the integration of

the hero into society or one that regards the hero as forever alienated' (Selinger 39).

However, in the context of the native-American urban experience, these options are clouded by the very real intersectional risk of racist violence and poverty.

Momaday's subverted bildungsroman is an approximation of the Euro-bourgeois model that, as Bhabha claims of mimicry, 'mocks its power to be a model, that power which supposedly makes it imitable (128). In this case, this approximation challenges the bildungsroman narrative that focuses solely on the inwardness of the individual, instead examining how the material and interpersonal realities of society are indivisible from the inward journey. The fact that Abel does not narrate this section of the novel serves to illustrate how the urban experience disconnects the Indigenous individual further from their culture. Rather it is Benally who narrates the section, yet it is wrought with uncertainty, a dominant characteristic of Benally himself. As Selinger states, 'His hesitancy, doubt, lack of knowledge, perhaps, leave him and his narrative constantly poised between negation and affirmation' (50). Moreover, while he and Tosamah appear to extol the virtues of a Pan-Indian community, they are riddled with controversy and uncertainty. Phrases such as 'I don't know', 'I don't remember', and 'maybe' are repeated frequently by Benally and Tosamah, who claims to be a guiding force for pan-Indianism but has never lived on a reservation himself. The two exist in a state of indeterminacy and ambivalence.

In the preface to the novel, Momaday speaks of Jemez in terms of freedom, stating 'I came to know that world as one knows the rooms of one's house. It was for me a house made of dawn, pollen, rain, and wonder' (xi). The House Made of Dawn is a song that Abel and Benally promise to sing together once they return to their tribal lands. The section of the novel narrated by Benally titled 'The Night Chanter' recalls a Native American religious ritual and song, a 'chantways', which was one of the first Indigenous ceremonies studied by non-Indigenous scholars, the translation of which is where the novel finds its title. The song

evokes a sacred place, a house made of dawn, for recovery, a place where the beauty of the natural world encourages happiness:

Happily may I walk

Happily, with abundant dark clouds, may I walk.

Happily, with abundant showers, may I walk.

Happily, with abundant plants, may I walk.

Happily, on a trail of pollen, may I walk.

Happily may I walk. (145)

The promise of a song of recovery is only ever a potential, however, as Benally only hums parts of the song, too ashamed to sing it without being drunk himself:

We were getting pretty drunk and I started to sing all by myself. The others were singing too, but it was the wrong kind of thing, and I wanted to pray. I didn't want them to hear me, because they were having a good time, and I was ashamed, I guess. I kept it down because I didn't want anyone but him [Abel] to hear it. (144)

To cure the alienation he feels, Abel also falls into the false promise of alcohol as a cure. However, instead of bringing him relief, alcohol leads to a stasis of body and soul. Benally then is shown to be a false model of pan-Indianism, where his only connection with the religious tradition comes with the crutch of alcohol.

The image of the drunk Indian has been a colonial tool to justify the dehumanisation and conquest of Native Americans. However, as Nicholas Warner points out, 'Momaday's tone is free of didacticism. He recognizes for instance, alcohol's attractiveness as an emblem, however deceptive, of companionship, as a psychological buttress for sad Indian drinkers gathering in forlorn bars' (22). Indeed, this image of the forlorn bar is frequently adopted in the Los Angeles section of the novel where drinking serves as an escape, where you 'take it easy and get drunk once in a while and just forget about who you are' (155). Benally's

narrative makes it clear that being a Native American in an urban centre that rejects the historical Indigenous relationship to the land is too painful and so 'you think about getting out and going home. You want to think you belong someplace . . . You go up there on the hill and you hear the singing and the talk and you think about going home' (155).

The song, nevertheless, implies a turning point for Abel. The section presents an ironic situation where, while seemingly trying to be helpful and the more adjusted of the pair, Benally in fact has given in and accepted the injustice and maltreatment of Indigenous people in urban centres. He speaks of going home and returning to the land but immediately after says,

you know it's no use; you know that if you went home there would be nothing there, just the empty land and a lot of old people, going noplac and dying off. And you've got to forget about that, too. (155–156)

Benally speaks of forgetting as a cure and drinking as the vehicle to aid the process; however, Abel's struggle to control his drinking habit suggests his inability to also forget. The song speaks of recovery in connection with the land, of traversing an abundant natural world and finding happiness in it. Following a likely racially motivated attack where he almost dies, Abel comes to understand and accept that it is not forgetting but remembering his culture and traditions that will bring him wholeness.

On his last night in the city, Abel and Benally climb the hill that they frequented; however, instead of looking at the city lights, they embrace the beauty and the darkness of the night sky:

We knew the lights were there, all the rows and squares of light far below, and it was beautiful . . . but we didn't want to turn around. We could hear the singing and see the stars. There was a faint yellow glare like smoke on the sky, but the sky was too much

for it, and at the center we could see the stars, how small and still they were. And he was going home. (184)

Returning home for Abel becomes about reconciling to the land and honouring the traditions of his tribe. His last night in the city metaphorically and literally clears the way back to nature and the promise of it away from the glare of city lights that act as false stars. Though it comes at the cost of his grandfather, Francisco's, death, Abel, despite his own sickness and recovery from alcoholism, joins the dawn runners as his grandfather did, and to honour his memory, gives into the hold of the land and 'he was running, and his body cracked open with pain, and he was running on. He was running and there was no reason to run but the running itself and the land and the dawn appearing' (205). Finally, for Abel, reason and rationality take second place as he submits to understanding that both holding the land and being held by the land, eagle medicine and snake medicine, in equal measure bring balance and recovery: 'He was running, and under his breath he began to sing. There was no sound, and he had no voice; he had only the words of a song. And he went running on the rise of the song. *House made of pollen, house made of dawn. Qtsedaba*' (original emphasis, 206).

House Made of Dawn, like the other novels in this chapter, approaches storytelling and Abel's story in a distinctly Native American time-space that is cyclical, in contrast to the Western model of linear time, layering multiple stories simultaneously and challenging notions of chronology. The novel emphasises this distinct literary palimpsest, compounding the themes of the subverted bildungsroman, snake and eagle medicine, Indigenous myths and traditions, and deep-seated respect of land and home that contribute to encouraging a holistic world perspective that not only recognises but centres intersecting and intersectional experience. Furthermore, *House Made of Dawn* complicates trauma theory by adopting an intersectional lens that regards it in the environmental and postcolonial context and in doing so illustrates how 'the theoretical thinking of trauma assumes the immediate

applicability and adaptability of the event-based model to any and all forms of violent effractions' (Yusin 239). The intersection of the bildungsroman with Momaday's postcolonial, Ecofiction novel counters this model by outlining Abel's trauma responses throughout his life, demonstrating how structural oppression that informs colonial trauma 'is not a momentary intrusion on everyday life, but rather *a way of life*, a permanent state of things' (Yusin 239, original emphasis). In doing so, Momaday puts forward a model of postcolonial trauma that simultaneously challenges the event-based understanding of trauma and the linguistic order of the postcolonial. Trauma in the postcolonial, Indigenous context then does not arise from either an immediate nor singular event, nor is the trauma experience necessarily prior to the moment. Much like the contestation with the accuracy of the term 'postcolonial', Momaday's representation of Indigenous trauma questions the implication of being post-colonialism and post trauma. Instead, in line with Yusin's argument that '[i]n opposing the primacy of the law and order of Western knowledge and thinking about the subject, the postcolonial intends to produce new relationships to the other and to their pains and suffering' (240), Momaday presents Indigenous trauma through the understanding of cyclical time as ongoing and constant; a way of life.

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the environmental crisis is 'integrally connected to an understanding of the plight and status of women, people of color, the poor, and children' (Warren xv). Moreover, Momaday points to how the use of Indigenous people in America's armies affects their inherited colonial trauma, causing young Indigenous individuals to sacrifice some their links to Indigenous culture. Abel's intersecting traumas, from the war and Indigenous trauma, affect how (un)effectively he can adopt a wholly Indigenous or Western identity. Being removed from the system of communal living that represents life on the reservation causes Abel to engage in more self-destructive behaviour. He is unable to reconcile himself as an Indigenous man without ties to the land. Moreover,

the poverty and racism he faces in the urban centres compound his trauma, resulting in a serious physical assault. The battering of his body becomes a metaphor for Abel's battered sense of identity that, because of intersecting traumas that are specifically postcolonial, Indigenous experiences of trauma, must be ever-changing, fluid, and active.

The process of homing then links to the process of 'becoming' in that it is fluid and cannot be contained within specific forms of identity. Momaday counters a pan-Indian identity because it does not leave space for transformative potential for active becoming. The novel, then, emphasises how this process is encouraged by returning to traditional roots and honouring one's place within the non-human world, rejecting the rigidity of urbanism for the fluidity of a holistic relationship with oneself, one's community, and the land.

ECOLOGICAL TRAUMA AS COLONIAL VIOLENCE

Drawing from Homi Bhabha's notion of cultural hybridity, hybridity can be examined to show how cross-cultural survival mechanisms offer space for healing in the wake of slow colonial and geological trauma. Leslie Marmon Silko's 1977 novel, *Ceremony*, details the productive potential of cultural hybridity that provides the opportunity for transformative spaces. Where *House Made of Dawn* warned against the possibility of hybridity, questioning whether the act of walking the line between two distinct cultures creates and further exacerbates the psychological schism created from the dehumanisation of colonialism, *Ceremony* asks what transformation is possible within hybridity and how it serves to enable reparative communities and justice.

Following a young half-Pueblo, half-Mexican man, Tayo, after he returns from fighting with the military in the Pacific during World War II, Silko explores transformative spaces through the narrative of a mixed-blood narrator. The novel examines how violence and aggression within Indigenous populations are caused by a form of 'witchery' emerging

from the ongoing violence of the colonial, ontological paradigm. The first half of the novel flits between past and present memories, documenting how Tayo and his cousin, Rocky, grow up, herd cattle with their uncle, and join the military together, only for Tayo to return home alone following their time in the Pacific participating in the war. Suffering from what the white doctors term 'battle fatigue' (now called post-traumatic stress disorder), Tayo turns to alcohol and the companionship of other Indigenous veterans who are angry and disappointed by the lack of acceptance from white Americans despite the community and respect they found in the military having fought their white war. Inevitably, this self-medicating tendency only results in further violence and isolation, a drought of the soul that parallels a real-life drought facing the reservation.

The later sections of the novel follow Tayo's encounters with a medicine man, Betonie, who mixes elements of the modern world with traditional Pueblo elements and begins a ceremony that promises to bring relief to Tayo and simultaneously save the Pueblo people from the drought. As part of the ceremony, Tayo sets out to retrieve his uncle's missing cattle, encounters a potential spirit woman with whom he shares an idyllic summer and escapes his old companions, now resentful of his budding recovery, who see his non-drinking and ritual rural life as evidence he has gone crazy rather than healing. Having retrieved the cattle, the ceremony is complete, Tayo healed, and the drought ended.

Much like *House Made of Dawn*, Silko's novel explores the specificity of Native American experiences of trauma. Returning home from the Pacific, Tayo is stuck in a cycle of self-sabotage and isolation. The novel implies the presence of slow trauma, one that has been ongoing and the effects compounding, stemming from the ecological violence brought about by colonialism. Martin Premoli argues that 'climate change is a form of slow violence that spawns correspondingly slow trauma' (175); slow in the regard that the act is not immediate but continuous and pervasive. The ongoing drought that parallels the events of the

story link Tayo's trauma to the ongoing ecological violence of nature whereby healing the colonial trauma contributes to healing ecological damage through prioritisation of Indigenous knowledge.

Indeed, much of what this thesis deals with is the need to decolonise not only literary studies but how to think about literature which has the potential to impact and influence recovery and healing from colonial trauma. It raises the question, then, of whether Indigenous knowledge and its application are inherently decolonial? In the case of the texts explored in this chapter, Indigenous paradigms do emphasise reciprocity between the human and nonhuman and *Ceremony*, in particular, considers how, in the context of a post-colonial setting, Indigenous paradigms can be used to transform and recover from the destruction of non-Euroamerican ways of life. The structure, interactions with family and companions, and representations of the nonhuman world contribute to a specific mixed-blood, hybrid narrative of trauma and healing.

As mentioned previously, the Eurocentric model of trauma generally views the onset as an immediate event. However, Silko demonstrates, through the non-traditional structure of the novel, that the notion of being able to point out a specific moment or event that results in traumatic responses minimises and ignores colonial experiences and the possibility of intergenerational trauma. Cathy Caruth, one of the leading figures in trauma studies, argues that 'the language of trauma, and the silence of its mute repetition of suffering, profoundly and imperatively demand . . . a new mode of reading and of listening' (9). Moreover, this new mode of reading and listening must also take into account non-Western epistemologies and methods of knowing that inform how trauma is experienced. Unpacking the definition of trauma, Caruth explains that 'the term *trauma* is understood as a wound inflicted not upon the body but upon the mind . . . the wound of the mind—the breach in the mind's experience of time, self and the world' (3–4). Vital here is the idea of a breach in one's experience of the

world, which then translates to a breach in how one understands their identity in response to their experiences.

As noted previously, knowledge production and dissemination are dominated by the white, western, affluent world, meaning that the understanding of trauma is also dominated by a white, western epistemology of the world. How then do we unpack and consider the experiences of the trauma of non-white, non-western individuals? In a 2011 article, Irene Visser claimed that ‘There is at present no consensus about the question whether trauma theory can be effectively “postcolonialized” in the sense of being usefully conjoined with or integrated into postcolonial literary studies’ (270). Similarly, Premoli argues that ‘Reconceptualizing the scales of trauma . . . requires the concomitant disruption of humanist ontological and epistemological models inherited from a Euro-American philosophical discourse, models that inform the classical field of trauma studies’ (174). I argue however, that a co-joining of trauma theory and postcolonial theory is an oversimplification of the intellectual work required for a trauma theory that considers the specific context of the onset of, and the response to, trauma. Much like the theory of intersectionality, the additive formula of a Euro-Western-centric trauma theory and postcolonial, Black, queer, and feminist literary critique is reductive and does not address the complex nuances of how trauma theory is formulated in such a way that it cannot be directly applied to intersectional people. Therefore, in the case of Indigenous ecofiction, trauma theory must be reconstructed (or constructed *anew*) to allow for a revelatory trauma. Caruth points to the idea that trauma reveals certain truths, that ‘cannot be linked only to what is known, but also to what remains unknown in our very actions and our language’ (4). This form of revelational trauma comes hand-in-hand with the notion of slow trauma that Premoli argues for in his article, where

Silko’s exploration of trauma encourages one to consider how ecological loss exceeds the parameters that traditionally delimit the traumatic moment, allowing one to

experience climate change as a form of slow violence that one can assimilate, process and critically engage with at its most complex scale. (176)

Moreover, as all three novels in this chapter reference, and indeed many of the novels in this thesis at large, the trauma of the protagonists, and how they attempt to heal from them, are influenced by intergenerational trauma that they inherit from their ancestors. According to Sue Grand and Jill Salberg in the introduction to the edited collection *Trans-generational Trauma and the Other: Dialogues across history and difference* (2016), intergenerational trauma refers to ‘the way massive trauma can shape the familial unconscious’ (1). In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), Freud states, ‘In the case of the ordinary traumatic neuroses two characteristics emerge prominently: first, that the chief weight in their causation seems to rest upon the factor of surprise, of fright; and secondly, that a wound or injury inflicted simultaneously works as a rule *against* the development of a neurosis’ (12) This often quoted passage on traumatic neurosis then suggests an incompatibility between a physical and psychical injury and that the unexpected occurrence of the event acts as a trigger for a pre-existing, primary conflict of the ego. This then becomes even more apparent in inherited/intergenerational trauma given the absence of a physical injury whereby trauma is a symptom of psychological conflict caused by oppression. I argue then, that an awareness of intergenerational trauma and reoriented trauma studies is inherently a part of intersectional analysis of historical trauma.

Tayo’s experience is, from the onset, influenced by and unique because of his mixed-blood status. Moreover, in being half-Mexican, the novel not only examines the effect upon Tayo and his upbringing but emphasises how his heritage plays into the colonial and intergenerational trauma of those around him. The structure of *Ceremony* lends itself to this perspective, whereby the lack of numbered sections and traditional chapters combined with minimal indications of past versus present moments highlight the interconnectedness of

experience and intergenerational slow trauma. Prose, poetry, and storytelling-style texts are interspersed in the novel, paralleling Tayo's encounters with Native American myths and legends with their roots in oral traditions, while simultaneously incorporating Western written literary traditions. Nelson argues that *Ceremony* is a carefully integrated novel, 'created to function as a print text, albeit perhaps a print text "about," *inter alia*, oral performance' (2). The embedded poetry style texts, similar to the insert narratives of Hogan's *Solar Storm*, conventional of oral storytelling methods, are set apart from the prose, 'center justified on the page, surrounded by white space, and oddly skeletal-looking in the context of the margin-to-margin prose preceding and succeeding them' (Nelson 13). While disjointed and sectioned, the embedded texts act as a metaphorical spine to the novel's prose which, while visually more orderly, is chronologically varied and, hence more challenging to follow. The embedded oral elements function as both supports of the prose and guidelines for the reader much in the way that Silko suggests throughout the novel that Indigenous knowledge can support the literary tradition.

The contradiction of the prose being unordered represents the mental schism Tayo experiences due to both inherited and personally experienced trauma. He is unable to wholly follow the Western example that follows a linear understanding of time and instead returns to an Indigenous cyclical framework. For example, early in the novel, Tayo suffers disjointed nightmares of the people he has lost and being back in the Philippine jungle, warping time and space where his 'memories were tangled with the present, tangled up like colored threads from old Grandma's wicker sewing basket' (6). The melding experience began during the war when 'the sergeant told them to kill all the Japanese soldiers . . . Tayo could not pull the trigger . . . in that instant he saw Josiah [his uncle] standing there' (7). The 'now' of Tayo's experiences are intertwined with the 'before' and the 'after' making it unclear whether the prose is intended to be a retrospective account, in which case trauma has blurred events

together. These memories torment Tayo, allowing him to ‘get no rest as long as the memories were tangled with the present’ (6). It does suggest, however, a developing awakening of a historical consciousness that permeates Tayo’s experiences and eventually his healing. Indeed, Caruth argues that ‘the treatment of trauma requires the incorporation of trauma into a meaningful (and thus sensible) story’ (117). This story, for Native Americans then, must include the manner in which the telling of a story draws on and incorporates Indigenous forms of ‘storytelling’, as a cultural phenomenon with recourse to political and reparative action.

The ceremony Tayo undergoes later in the novel becomes an action to connect his trauma that ‘was only part of something larger’ to the recovery and cure that ‘would only be found in something great and inclusive of everything’ (125-126), linking a not solely Indigenous historical community consciousness but rather a hybrid Native American and Euroamerican one. Moreover, this entanglement of past and present and the development of historical community consciousness means that ‘the chronological order of time or the principle of causality is subverted’ (Jeong 5), challenging the existence of intellectual and epistemological ‘post’ in both the postcolonial and post-traumatic.

Community consciousness and intergenerational trauma indeed affect a majority of Tayo’s experiences, particularly his relationships. One of the most tumultuous relationships in Tayo’s life is with his aunt who sees him as a constant reminder of her little sister, his mother. Reminiscent of the wendigo figure, all that is known of Tayo’s mother is that her drunkenness, lust, and selfishness led her to abandon Tayo with her sister. Much like in *Solar Storms*, her actions are indicative of the degradation and trauma Indigenous people suffer at the hands of white Americans. As such, Tayo’s aunt sees within him an ongoing loss of culture and identity being chipped away and, moreover, carries a sense of guilt:

When Little Sister had started drinking wine and riding in cars with white men and Mexicans, the people could not define their feeling about her. The Catholic priest shook his finger at her drunkenness and lust, but the people felt something deeper: they were losing her, they were losing part of themselves. The older sister had to act; she had to act for the people, to get this young girl back. (63)

The above recalls the importance of communal interdependence as a means of survivance. There is a sense of community and collective responsibility brought on by the grief of losing one of their own to a reckless abandon that is a consequence of intergenerational and historic trauma. Indeed, Joseph Gone explains that the notion of historical trauma emerges ‘as an explanatory frame for rampant substance abuse, trauma, violence, depression, pathological grief, and suicide in present-day American Indian communities’ (274). While there is disapproval, there is also an understanding that the actions of Little Sister arise from a greater sense of pain and injustice shared across the tribes, where her sickness is, like Tayo’s ‘part of something larger’ (125). For Auntie, then, Tayo is a sign of her failure to recover her little sister and bring her into the protection of the tribe.

Moreover, Auntie’s response to Tayo demonstrates how her understanding of right and wrong, good and bad, is not solely drawn between the lines of Indigenous and white culture. Rather, hybrid elements of a Christian upbringing and a non-Native culture are present in the ways that she interacts with and worries about Tayo’s behaviour, using it as an ‘opportunity to show those who might gossip that she had still another unfortunate burden which proved that, above all else, she was a Christian woman’ (27). For Auntie, the individual redemption that arises from a Christian belief guides her actions, taking in her sister’s illegitimate son to hide the shame but also prove her worth and protect her family’s reputation. Tayo, however, like his grandmother believe in traditions of clan worship and mass redemption. Indeed, for Tayo, Christianity represents an isolation from culture, where

‘Christianity separated the people from themselves; it tried to crush the single clan name, encouraging each person to stand alone, because Jesus Christ would save only the individual soul; Jesus Christ was not like the Mother who loved and cared for them as her children as her family’ (62). Auntie’s attempt to navigate between two cultures illustrates a more complex understanding of trauma response and its effect on families that her sister also felt that her actions might have been prevented if,

the girl had not been ashamed of herself. Shamed by what they taught her in school about the deplorable ways of the Indian people; holy missionary white people who wanted only good for the Indians, white people who dedicated their lives to helping the Indians, these people urged her to break away from her home. (63)

Both women were educated to believe in their lack of worth unless deemed otherwise by missionaries and white people. Where religion becomes the source of validation for Auntie, Little Sister finds it directly from white men who ‘smiled at her from their cars as she walked from the bus stop in Albuquerque back to the Indian School’ (63). To retain their approval she maintained a specific ‘approved’ appearance ‘her dress, her lipstick, her hair—it was all done perfectly, the way the home-ec teacher taught them, exactly like the white girls’ (63). Little sister employs her sex in an attempt to counteract the racial oppression, and instead becomes the victim of intersectional oppression where sexism and racism compound.

The village’s communal desires and attempts to bring Little Sister back to a point of safety are simultaneously a desire for her to remember the value and importance of the tribe. As is part of Indigenous epistemology, her safety is a communal responsibility which then transforms into communal grief when they fail: ‘the people felt something deeper: they were losing her, they were losing part of themselves . . . the humiliation fell on all of them; what happened to the girl did not happen to her alone, it happened to all of them’ (63). The responsibility consequently falls on Auntie who not only felt the humiliation of her sister’s

situation, but takes on the burden of another child, the anger of the people who feel the sting of Little Sister's self-destruction and internalised shame at her indigeneity, and the judgement of white Americans who would see her sister as yet another example of the drunk and lazy Indian. Her turn to a religion of individual redemption serves as a method of personal protection for Auntie where she would go

to church by herself, where she could show the people that she was a devout Christian and not immoral or pagan like the rest of the family. When it came to saving her own soul, she wanted to be careful that there were no mistakes. (71)

Consequently, her actions keep Tayo just slightly outside of the family, separating him and Rocky both physically where she can and through the different ways she interacted with the two boys. Throughout this process she encourages Rocky to shed the old-time ways, wanting 'him to be a success. She could see what white people wanted in an Indian, and she believed this way was his only chance' (47). Auntie unconsciously resigns to the model of settler colonialism that 'destroys to replace' (Wolfe 288) recognising in conversion a possibility of safety. In contrast, Tayo's mixed-race position is accentuated through not being fully part of the family as Auntie keeps him at arm's length, a constant reminder of the trauma enacted on her sister and herself as well. Moreover, it emphasises how neither Indigenous nor Euroamerican model will offer him safety.

Outside of the family, to other young Native veterans, Tayo represents a bitter truth regarding their acceptance, or lack thereof, in white society. Like Abel, Emo, one of Tayo's peers, found inclusiveness within the military community during his time in the army. Indeed, Pfaff states that '[o]verwhelmingly, Native veterans couched the treatment they received in their military units in positive terms' (34). However, unlike Abel, Emo finds a sense of worthiness within the limits of Western predatory, imperial notions that require him to use violence to prove his worth: 'He was the best, they told him; some men didn't like to

feel the quiver of the man they were killing; some men got sick when they smelled the blood. But he was the best; he was one of them. The best. The United States Army' (62). His sense of belonging intertwined with his ability to fulfil the goals of the colonial system that subjugated him and his people in the first place. He suffers under the delusion that his sacrifice of others will render him un-Othered in the eyes of the imperialistic system. Indeed, 'Tayo could hear it all in his voice when he talked about the killing—how Emo grew from each killing. Emo fed off each man he killed, and the higher the rank of the dead man, the higher it made Emo' (61). His hatred of Tayo stems from a resentment of his being partially white but also that Tayo does not make an effort to appear less Native American and appeal to white society. Moreover, he hates Tayo for calling attention to the truth:

One time there were these Indians, see. They put on uniforms, cut their hair. They went off to a big war. They a real good time too . . . They were MacArthur's boys; white whores took their money same as anyone. These Indians got treated the same as anyone. (38)

Tayo's drunken ramblings, presented in the form of oral storytelling where stories were intended as lessons, calls attention not only to the hypocrisy of the uniform that promised freedom and equality but additionally the naivety of his friends who bought into the bribery of respect. However, Tayo continues:

See these dumb Indians thought these good times would last . . . They were America the Beautiful too, this was the land of the free just like teachers said in school. They had the uniform and they didn't look different no more. They got respect. (38)

The moral lesson Tayo imparts feeds into Emo's hatred of him as Tayo sabotages how they 'spent all their checks trying to get back the good times, and a skinny light-skinned bastard ruined it' (39). For Emo, Tayo is a constant reminder of what he can never be, but moreover, the only other person aside from himself available to blame:

They blamed themselves for losing the new feeling. They never talked about it, but they blamed themselves just like they blamed themselves for losing the land the white people took. They never thought to blame white people for any of it; they wanted white people for their friends. They never saw that it was the white people who gave them that feeling and it was white people who took it away again when the war was over. (39)

I have quoted broadly from the text here to draw attention to the similarity of colonial-driven self-loathing that Fanon articulates in *Black Skin, White Masks*. Much like Fanon's notion of epidermalization, Emo and the other young Indigenous men turn their dehumanisation into a form of self-loathing and blame. Understanding that his peers have been robbed of a sense of identity and blame themselves for it rather than the colonial history and institutionalised racism they suffer, Tayo breaks down and sobs. His trauma around the death of his cousin makes it more difficult for Tayo to idealise his time in the army and is, therefore, able to see the truth of the situation that his peers do not want to accept. What makes Tayo's trauma different to that of the others is the intersectional trauma that is born both intergenerationally and from his inability to walk the line between the cultures like his peers do. In being half Mexican, Tayo experiences the rejection and subjugation on multiple levels, incorporating the unspoken trauma of his father (absent and ignored both metaphorically in that he does not appear in the story and literally in Tayo's life).

This truth is explained in terms of witchery and the trickster,⁵⁴ crucial notions in the novel as it becomes a way for Tayo and other Indigenous people to explain the colonial

⁵⁴ Previously I have explored the incarnation of the Caribbean trickster in regard to Nalo Hopkinson's *The Midnight Robber*. Trickster characters are common in many cultures and are so culture specific that no two are representative of the same beliefs. However, a recurring feature in most trickster incarnations is that they disturb the status quo and by doing so 'uncover distinctions and ironies between narrative voices' (Vizenor, *Narrative Chance* 192).

history and resulting trauma. The internalised shame that those around him, like Emo, never thinking to blame white people for his situation, and Auntie and Rocky, willing to dismiss Indigenous traditions so that they are more likely to be accepted by white society, are forms of witchery and trickery manifesting where they have been deceived and blame themselves for their situation. But moreover, they are blind to the other situations that are bringing them problems, such as turning their backs on their traditions and forgetting to honour nature. Witchery, as defined by Matthew Craft, is ‘the disruption of identity caused by the inherent violence of the colonial, ontological paradigm’ (13). In this way, the real evil is not whiteness, where Tayo’s Indigenous community is tricked by a witchcraft that ‘want us to believe all evil resides with white people’ to the point that they ‘will look no further to see what is really happening’ (132). Rather the consequences of slow trauma and institutionalised racism by white society, and by extension witchery, that attempts to eliminate Native language and culture: ‘They want us to separate ourselves from white people, to be ignorant and helpless as we watch our own destruction. But white people are only the tools that the witchery manipulates’ (132). The education system made for Native American children taught them witchery that made them feel ashamed of who they were to the point that they conduct themselves for the approval of white people as mentioned previously regarding Tayo’s mother. Similarly, Tayo’s relationship with Emo is characterised by the understanding that Emo carries evil within him, keeping with him ‘his war souvenirs, the teeth he had knocked out of the corpse of a Japanese soldier’ (56). Tayo recognises the witchery in Emo, screaming ‘Killer!’ (58) at him moments before he guts Emo with a broken bottle.

Though Rocky died in the war against the Japanese, Tayo does not hate them, nor does he hate Emo who degrades him and calls him ‘white trash’ and ‘half breed’. Instead, he notes that ‘the space to carry hate was located deep inside, below his lungs and behind his belly; but it was empty’ (58). It is not hate that drives him but the awareness that respect for

life has been lost in the struggle for acceptance and it is risking Indigenous self-destruction; a form of self-cannibalism. Tayo's accusation of 'Killer!' has a dual meaning then, of both a literal killer of a Japanese soldier and the symbolic killer of Native American identity as a price for white societal acceptance. To use a phrase from *Solar Storm*, 'It was murder of the soul that was taking place there' (226). According to Monika Kocot, moments of trickery and witchery emerge in 'liminal situation[s], between two events, on the border of two worlds, or at a moment where one has to make a conscious decision' (294). Witchery is the consequence of cultures clashing from settler colonialism and a non-holistic hybridisation between them and the result is slow ecological destruction.

Perhaps most indicative of the slow trauma that Silko illustrates afflicts most Native American communities is the ongoing drought that parallels the events of the novel that was 'drying out the land, stealing away the ricer, so that even the cottonwoods and tamarics along the banks were drying up' (80). Within communities that live according to land-based ontologies, notions of health exceed the typical understanding of Western medicine whereby a relationship with the land, 'the site from which personal, social, spiritual, and ecological ties are maintained' (Premoli 178), is crucial to for both physical and mental health. The intersection of climate health with that of human health in Indigenous epistemology is illustrated in *Ceremony* in many ways. One of these is through the ritual Tayo must undergo to cleanse his spirit after the war and possibly having killed someone.

The narrative is interspersed with poems telling the story of how taking the Mother for granted caused the people into being tricked to abandon the Mother corn and resulted in a great drought. A metaphor for the respect given to the land affecting communal health and success, the story suggests a communal responsibility in a way that counters Western individualism; a communal redemption in contrast to the individual redemption promised by Christianity. The Fly and the Hummingbird, the drivers of the myth, must travel between

numerous worlds to appease the Mother, worlds that were all connected and intertwined: ‘from before they were born and long after they died, the people shared the same consciousness’ (62). Indeed, the very form of the poetic narrative, centred on the page, acts as the backbone to the narrative, metaphorically holding it up, emphasising the reciprocal relationship while still implying a spiritual respect for the land. Moreover, the tale being told in the embedded texts recounts the mistakes of other spell consequences for all, and should, therefore, be everyone’s responsibility to fix. For example, while the drought has been going on for some years, Tayo believes that it is partially his fault because of the evil he committed while in the war. Unlike Rocky, Tayo did not have the same success or popularity in school resulting in him remaining more in tune with Indigenous traditions. Where in school, ‘the science teacher had explained what superstition was, and then held the science textbook up for the class to see the true source of explanations’, Tayo continues to believe in something more, when ‘things were different, the animal could talk to human being and many magical things still happened’ (87). The ceremony Tayo undertakes celebrates hybridity throughout a process of reconnecting to the land and past ways to combat the witchery that deludes Indigenous communities that giving up their ways will bring them societal acceptance.

Indeed, the first ceremony Tayo tries from the medicine man old Ku’oosh does not work. Old Ku’oosh confirms that the reason for this is the colonial impact, stating ‘there are some things we can’t cure like we used to . . . not since the white people came’ (35). The ceremony does not work for Tayo because the ceremony does not take into account cultural clashes, such as the new technological form of warfare that Tayo experienced in the Pacific and Tayo’s mixed-blood hybridisation, as ‘the old man would not have believed white warfare—killing across great distances without knowing who or how many had died . . . the old man would have said something close and terrible had killed these people. Not even

oldtime witches killed like' (33-34). Instead, guided by another medicine man, Betonie, Tayo makes his own ceremony, a hybrid constructed from a hybrid individual.

Betonie's form of medicine is an evolving one that has been learnt from many medicine men and women. However, Betonie, a kindred spirit to Tayo, also stands at the brink of clashing cultures. Like all medicine men, Betonie is expected to be a bridge between the spirit world and the real. Yet, Betonie's heritage is also mixed, being part Laguna and part Mexican, therefore straddling another line between worlds evidenced by his hogan (house) and the boxes and stacks all around that combine aspects of both the Native American and white world. The things Betonie collects are used as indicators and symbols of the world around them. In this way, Betonie's medicine is better equipped to heal those affected by the white world as he does not hide away from what they have to offer, saying 'in the old days it was simple. A medicine person could get by without all of these things. But nowadays . . .'

(111). Betonie recognises that the witchery he is trying to cure is influenced by the actions of white society but is not inherently white and the clutter he collects integrates just as many elements of Native American paraphernalia as white-American, symbolic of the complexity of hybridisation. Tayo's specific ceremony of recovering his uncle Josiah's lost cattle similarly evolves from the stories he has learnt from childhood and his experiences of being mixed-race. It requires a hybridisation to be relevant and creates a space of transformative potential for multilevel recovery and healing from the multilevel trauma Tayo suffers.

Tayo's final test of the ceremony is learning to recognise when hybridisation fails and confronting the witchery in two incidents of violence. In his quest to find his uncle's lost cattle and simultaneously revitalise the land and bring back the rain, he is guided by various people and animals. Where prior to his encounters with Betonie Tayo's trauma had isolated him from the community, the healing that began with the ceremony enabled him to re-establish connections to nature and the land that make his quest successful. The search for the

cattle on a white rancher's land angers Tayo, from the fences that are put up to take possession of the land that cannot truly be owned by anyone to the disrespect towards the nonhuman world where animals are killed not for survival but for status. He becomes aware of the extent of white Americans' attempts to consume and own without recognising the destruction that comes with it, hatred growing in him, 'Not for what they wanted to do with him, but for what they did to the earth with their machines, and to the animals with their packs of dogs and their guns' (189). Moreover, and intensely more traumatic, 'It happened again and again, and the people had to watch, unable to save or protect any of the things that were so important to them' (189). Tayo highlights how the repetition and continuous nature of this colonial possession of both land, and consequently Indigenous way of life, results in the slow trauma that resulted in dissonance between Indigenous people and the land. By tuning to the knowledge and re-igniting the respect his culture provides him with for nature, Tayo is guided in his quest by various animals, such as a great mountain lion, who leads him to the cattle just as he is losing hope. The appearance of the animal suggests once again a reciprocal relationship between the human and nonhuman worlds that the white people's 'machines' and 'guns' jeopardise. Moreover, they turn animals on each other, using 'packs of dogs' to their benefit, another instance of self-cannibalism where the destruction brought on by the dogs will only result in hurting other dogs if not the ones being used as well. Indeed, in this way, the dogs can be understood as metaphors for Native Americans who are seduced into committing violence on behalf of white people, like Emo.

However, unlike Emo, Tayo does not want to be a part of that destruction and consequently, he is able to recognise how the internalised shame and anger that so many in his community have faced is destroying his people more than the actions of the white people. Tayo is able to overcome the education he was given that taught him to internalise his hate and embarrassment causing him to blame his culture and society rather than the real culprit:

white tools of witchery. These tool, in destroying the world around them, ‘taught [the Indigenous people] to despise themselves because they were left with barren land and dry rivers’ (189). However, this re-ignited respect for nature and everything in it results in a greater understanding in Tayo, not only about what white colonialism has done to Indigenous people and culture but also what it has done to white people, realising that:

It was the white people who had nothing; it was the white people who were suffering as thieves do, never able to forget that their pride was wrapped in something stolen, something that had never been, and could never be, theirs. The destroyers had tricked the white people as completely as they had fooled the Indians, and now only a few people understood how the filthy deception worked; only a few people knew that the lie was destroying white people faster than it was destroying Indian people. (189-190)

Much like Angel in Hogan’s *Solar Storm*, Tayo’s epiphany articulates the global consequence of ecological destruction, how destruction of nature affects all. This epiphany solidifies his return to Indigenous ways of living with nature, a decision that, for those who attempt to fight their dehumanisation by becoming like the coloniser, feels like betrayal. As previously mentioned, Emo, angry and resentful of his exclusion from the white world, is unable to recognise how his actions will result in his own ruin too. His inability to recognise this results in him being a pawn for the white men, calling on them to arrest Tayo, convinced that his choice to return to the old ways, camping in the desert, and not drinking is proof enough of insanity. Emo cannot understand turning away from what the white world has to offer. As a result, he directs his anger at Tayo, blaming him and his actions for his own inability to not be white.

In contrast, Tayo’s racial hybridity and the feelings of isolation and exclusion he felt his whole life offer him valuable insight. It opens him up to understand the artificiality of the binaries the white Americans tried to convince Native Americans of in their education

systems such as science versus superstition. Instead, Tayo is able to see beyond the delineations:

He cried the relief he felt at finally seeing the pattern, the way all the stories fit together—the old stories, the war stories, their stories—to become the story that was still being told. He was not crazy; he had never been crazy. He had only seen and heard the world as it always: no boundaries, only transitions through all distances and time. (229)

Hybridity, the compound of difference, then, offers a chance for productive futurities, particularly in communities suffering from the consequences of ongoing slow trauma such as colonialism and its consequences on the environment. Tayo, whose mixed-blood status has rendered him an outcast in his own home, is finally able to use his heritage. He comes to understand that the stories of the past are ceremonies of their own to recall one's culture just as the formation of stories in the future will also become rituals for healing. Moreover, Tayo finally understands that his difference and hybridity offer more potential for change than those around him believe.

CONCLUSION

A common element in all three novels is the invocation of the notion of the word. In *Solar Storms*, Dora-Rouge chooses her words carefully:

She searched for words. As in Genesis, the first word shaped what would follow. It was of utmost importance. It determined the kind of world that would be created. (37)

In *Ceremony*, the medicine man Ku'oosh details the importance of contexts for words:

It took a long time to explain the fragility and intricacy because no word exists alone, and the reason for choosing each word had to be explained with a story about why it must be said this certain way. (*Ceremony* 33)

In *House Made of Dawn*, the preacher man, Tosamah speaks of Genesis:

“In the beginning was the Word” Brothers and sisters, *that* was the Truth, the whole of it, the essential and eternal Truth, the bone and blood and muscle of the Truth. (*House* 91-92)

Recalling Nozomi Irei’s work on how storytelling as writing works to deterritorialise literature,⁵⁵ the novels in this chapter share characteristics that defy dominant rules of narrative through the use of poetry, recorded myths and retold legends. In doing so, the authors illustrate how Native American land, culture, histories, and traditions cannot be territorialised. Indeed, the novels are rooted in hybrid and the fluid relationships with non-human nature that the text itself cannot be territorialised, therefore, enabling the texts to be continuously transformative spaces.

The novels in this chapter offer new methods of decolonising that suggest alternative methods of understanding and knowing the world through an Indigenous epistemology that balances the importance of human and non-human lives. As Linda Tuhiwai Smith states, ‘[m]eaningful decolonizing practices are not all about theory or about action but they are all about praxis and the reflexivity that is necessary for the integrity of research and of the researcher themselves’ (xiv). The impetus of these novels for other Native American readers is how to construct one’s own Native selfhood. For non-Indigenous readers, it offers an understanding of the constant process of becoming that Native Americans undergo in various and near-constant conditions of struggle. Importantly, it also highlights how theories of trauma as conceived of in Western academia do not accurately consider trauma induced by colonialism. This kind of trauma not only alters the individual but is inherited by the community and later generations, resulting in a slow, intergenerational trauma where the

⁵⁵ See ‘Knowledge Production and Dissemination’ section in the Introduction.

epistemic violence of (neo)colonialism is ongoing and, hence, so is the wound of it in Indigenous culture.

The intersectional analysis I have employed demonstrates how Indigenous ecofiction, specifically of the Native-American variety, is inherently political and, moreover, articulates the transformation of Indigenous identity due to colonial and ecological trauma that is accomplished through very specific methods of storytelling that integrate Native traditions and epistemologies. In emphasising how place is integral to Indigenous conceptions of identity, ecofiction necessary becomes intersectional and through an intersectional literary analysis, hybrid epistemologies that are born from intergenerational and intersecting traumas can be explored and celebrated. The Indigenous understanding of time as circular then ties into the possibility for fluid and active becoming that does cause young Indigenous individuals to engage in self-cannibalistic tendencies, wendigo tendencies. The authors posit a model of healing for both the Indigenous individual and the land through community and a sense of collective responsibility over the dissemination of Indigenous stories.

Speaking of how his grandmother was a storyteller, Tosamah emphasises the importance of stories and words for healing, through which a symbiotic relationship between the human and the nonhuman world can be explored:

She told me stories, and she taught me to listen . . . You see, for her words were medicine; they were magic and invisible. (*House* 92–93)

Tosamah speaks of medicine emphasises the importance of stories and storytelling for Indigenous survival beyond just the physical. Understanding the complexity of a specifically Indigenous, slow trauma that is inherently interconnected with ecological trauma gives way to further understanding of how healing can occur. Specifically, a healing that reinforces the continuing existence of Indigenous cultures and ways of living, and in doing so, offer a

potential futurity that learns to live nature and the environment rather than at the expense of its resources.

In her essay ‘Violence, Mourning, Politics’, Judith Butler explores the sense of ‘disavowed mourning’ that ‘follows upon the erasure from public representations of the names, images, and narratives of those the US has killed’ (xiv). Not only do the works of Hogan, Momaday, and Silko demonstrate how this mourning results in volatility that is the result of the destruction of both culture and land, but also emphasises how Indigenous community and coalition challenge the erasure of Indigenous culture. As Daniel W. Smith states, ‘the task of a political literature is to contribute to the invention of this unborn people who do not yet have a language’ (xliii). Indeed, it becomes clear through an intersectional analysis of the texts that the authors of texts use their words in the form of narrative and the characters in form of storytelling, as previously stated, as a form of literary activism. One that reinforces Indigenous survivance and leaves space for restorative healing and reparative justice for both Indigenous people and the environment.

CONCLUSION

In the last few pages of this thesis, I will contextualise the role of the researcher, myself, in the creation and development of a doctoral thesis. From its conception, the thesis has been designed to reassess the position of oppressed populations and their local and Indigenous knowledge in the academic understanding of contemporary literature. Where this thesis has insisted that non-Western authors deserve non-Western methods and epistemologies to fully grasp the transformative potential of their work, it occurs to me that a critical examination of my positionality as a researcher is needed as part of a framework of intersectional literary analysis, considering how (for they inevitably have been) my interpretive strategies are impacted by the context in which they were deployed.

This thesis began from a desire to interrogate if and how literary theory is equipped to explore non-western, intersectional narratives, and methods of storytelling. Statistics around the recognition of authors of colour demonstrate that the literary landscape continues to fall short in presenting and celebrating diversity. For example, since the 1917 inception of the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction, only 30 women have been awarded the prize, only three of which have been women of colour: Alice Walker, Toni Morrison and Jhumpa Lahiri. A survey conducted by Richard Jean So (2020) of a sample of more than 7,000 random books published by Simon & Schuster, Penguin Random House, Doubleday, Harper Collins and Macmillan determined that while white people account for 60% of the United States population, they wrote 89% of books in the sample. These are but a few examples of a reoccurring pattern that suggests stories by and about intersectional individuals lack attention. Indeed, in her essay, 'What White Publishers Won't Print' (1950), Zora Neale Hurston argues that white people cannot conceive of Black and Indigenous people outside of the constraints of stereotypes. She claims that, as publishers only print what they believe will

sell, they only print depictions of Black and Indigenous populations that conform to and reinforce white readers' expectations and stereotypes, celebrating 'tradition', one of racism.

This raises questions about how to increase the presence and publishing of non-white literature. Indeed, if the publishing market is concerned with questions of marketability, the answer lies in driving up demand for non-white stories. However, as outlined by Hurston, the existence and stories of non-white and intersectional individuals have been deemed marketable only in forms recognisably in the tradition of racism and oppression; that is in stories of suffering that centre race relations. It is then necessary to challenge literary traditions that assume the universality of experience. We are faced with determining, as Judith Butler asks, 'what point of view do such questions become possible, and in what framework are they sensible?' (2004b,230). Integrated into the above chapters, therefore, is the development of such a framework of analysis that challenges the reduction of non-white stories into stereotypes despite people of colour being the global majority.

Audre Lorde's well-known quote comes to mind here, where she cautions against 'a particular academic arrogance' when examining differences of race sexuality, class and age, instead urging contemplation of what it means when 'the tools of a racist patriarchy are used to examine the fruits of that same patriarchy' (110–111). Initially, I was convinced of the need to reread literature and critical theory in tandem, convinced that there was a potential for subversion while recognising the limits and potential of both when read separately and together respectively. However, as my research developed, I began to understand that rereading was in fact a repackaging centring of Western epistemologies, though proposed with the best of intentions. The resultant approach was then to read *anew*, reading from the perspective and epistemology of non-Western, non-white cultures and developing knowledge and meaning specific to those perspectives. The fundamental question was not how to understand texts about and by intersectional individuals but rather how to adapt and engage

with critical theory as a historical artefact and not as authorities on theorisations, but rather, criticism from specific moments in history and culture, to be considered and debated without accepting an assumed all-encompassing authority. In doing so, it recognises that ‘Social literacy is not a purely academic enterprise’ (Hancock 4), but includes an understanding of ‘narrative hybridity, mutability, and the displacing of particularly culturally derived truth claims of imperial epistemology that come smuggled in through the backdoor of genre constraints’ (O’Connell 781). To accomplish this, I argue that the circumstances surrounding the development and writing of this thesis must be articulated and explored. Moreover, its position and historical significance and the influence it has had on the direction of my critical response to the texts in this thesis and the construction of this framework must be acknowledged.

First and foremost, I turn to the privilege of language. Despite my desire to produce research that would benefit and celebrate non-Western and, more specifically, postcolonial, intersectional cultures much like the ones that I am from, I was confronted with the realities of my own positionality. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o famously argues that ‘language was the most important vehicle through which that power fascinated and held the soul prisoner. The bullet was the means of the physical subjugation. Language was the means of the spiritual subjugation’ (9). Despite this desire to offer recognition and visibility to non-white, intersectional peoples, I am very aware that the research I produce will be illegible for a vast majority of South Asians, due to language. My own geographical positioning and my academic history raise questions about the dynamics of power that privilege certain people and thoughts. While I am a non-Western, non-white researcher, writing in English will, nevertheless, cater towards a majorly white elite audience that can understand both English and the academic dialect (for it too can be considered a particular form of language specific

to a social group).⁵⁶ Indeed, in many ways, the very production of this thesis enacts dynamics of power that exist in the academic world where non-white scholars and researchers are required to accept English as the *lingua franca* of the academic world to substantially participate in the field. Moreover, the language of politics that we use to articulate issues of identity, oppression, and experience is cast in the western belief in an underlying universality of experience.

Additionally, my economic context in being a student became a source of interesting ruminations regarding the circumstances in which research is developed. Throughout my four years of writing this thesis, I worked a minimum of two part-time jobs concurrently with my research, one of which was in hospitality. My first time encountering an angry patron while on shift at my part-time bartending job, occurred after I entered the wrong ale on their receipt (on a till of 300+ buttons), at which point they angrily proclaimed to my manager that staff should be better trained before starting the job. It struck me as an ironic comment at the time, where the social expectations surrounding class and jobs like waitressing and bartending are regarded as work with minimal skill requirements; work that supposedly anyone and everyone can do, but only those who lack ambition do. An overgeneralisation, but in anger, most patrons fall back to this assumption. Interestingly, the majority of my fellow bar staff at the time were students, turning to the hospitality sector to supply an income.

As for myself, after a couple of years attempting, and failing, to make ends meet via postings within the university or short-contract roles in what was considered more academically appropriate fields, I found myself for the first time in a position of financial freedom with three shifts of tending bar a week. Mr-Angry-Ale inadvertently suggested that I was not trained, or at the most trained poorly, when the irony is that according to the degrees

⁵⁶ As defined by Oxford Languages Dictionary.

that adorn the walls of my childhood home, I am in fact highly trained. And yet, there was no job in my field that gave me enough part-time hours, flexibility, and income to survive during my full-time PhD, let alone during a pandemic.

The disparity between striving for a doctorate, which would qualify me as an expert in my field and being yelled at for a human error while in a supposedly low-skill job only served to reinforce the relevance and necessity of my topic. The system that purported a definition of success but dismissed hourly wages or physically intensive labour as a legitimate pathway to success assumed that, until the point, I could join the ‘real’ 40-hour, five-days-a-week labour force, I would be bankrolled, either by family or by loans. Rather, because of my globalised status where my nationality and my address of residence did not correlate, I was not eligible for loans. My financial situation inevitably played a role in the development of this thesis, where the irony of swinging between labour-based jobs during the day and conducting intersectional analysis on literature speaking to and about power dynamics was not lost on me.

Turning to the political context, the writing of this thesis was heavily influenced by events that changed the global landscape. When I began this thesis in January 2019, I, like the entirety of the world was unaware of the global historical events that would alter the lives of everyone. I am not only referring to the COVID-19 pandemic, which at the moment of writing, has claimed 6.95 million deaths worldwide.⁵⁷ I am also referring to the murder of George Floyd on 25 May 2020 that sparked outrage at the ongoing police brutality towards Black Americans and non-white minorities in America; to the mounting evidence of genocide found in Canada throughout 2021 where the bodies of First Nations children who were taken

⁵⁷ Hannah Ritchie, Edouard Mathieu, Lucas Rodés-Guirao, Cameron Appel, Charlie Giattino, Esteban Ortiz-Ospina, Joe Hasell, Bobbie Macdonald, Diana Beltekian and Max Roser (2020) - "Coronavirus Pandemic (COVID-19)". *Published online at OurWorldInData.org*. Retrieved from: '<https://ourworldindata.org/coronavirus>' [Online Resource]

away from their families, put in residential assimilation schools where they were beaten and verbally and sexually abused were left in unmarked graves after dying from disease, neglect and suicide; to the unlawful and violent attempted invasion of Ukraine by the Russian government early February 2022, reminiscent of imperial intentions of denying a people their right to shape their own political community; to the flooding in Pakistan that since June 2022 has killed approximately 1,717 and displaced 33 million people representing the growing global climate catastrophe; to the protest in Iran following the murder of 22 year old Masha Amini on 16 September 2022 by the state for violation of the Iran's hijab law. These are but a few of the global incidents that occurred during the four years of my doctoral research.

To look at one example more closely, Chapter I, specifically the later sections and much of the writing on *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, was largely written during the protests and riots against police brutality in the United States, in May and June of 2020, during which time the world was unknowingly only at the beginning of the global pandemic. I openly recognise that this has impacted the direction of my analysis. Indeed, I argue that it is vital that the events find their way into my research, in support of Carastathis' warning that we must be wary of the illusion of a "pure" or "true" intersectionality' (Nash 16). The privileging of whiteness within national American politics became especially prevalent during the years of Donald Trump's presidency of the United States of America that the need to destabilise and deconstruct identity categories is more necessary now than ever before. The texts explored in Chapter I come to the shared conclusion that the models of humanity determined by the West are inherently designed in a way that excludes Black Americans. Moreover, that those categories were historically constructed to deprive non-white people of their humanity, justifying their lawful oppression. The categories of race and gender imposed upon the characters in the texts serve as tools of subjugation to a model of society that perpetuates a racial and patriarchal hierarchy. The very models the texts highlight were ones

created to hinder the full liberation of Black people in the US. It is precisely this reason that prompts the necessity of intersectional readings of texts. Indeed, as Carastathis points out, too often the concept of intersectionality is ‘invoked as a theory based on these same categories . . . its normative upshot is reduced, at best, to a politics of “inclusion,” or at worst, to “diversity management”’ (101). What remains then from the intersectional reading of these texts is that the categories of understanding race, gender, sexuality and class must at minimum be destabilised and disrupted, if not completely deconstructed. While the pandemic comes most readily to mind as globally influential, the reality is that all events across the world have a global impact, whether that is felt today, tomorrow or fifty years from now.

Another example raised questions about ethical conduct in academic institutions. At the end of 2021, questions of accountability and reputation arose when a Harvard professor, a white, South African-born academic and an influential name in his field of anthropology who had created an extensive network of influence, support, and loyalty, was accused of sexual misconduct towards students. His Harvard colleagues, many of them senior academics and known names in the field, signed an open letter in his support, attesting to his character. The signatories included Henry Louis Gates, Homi Bhabha, Jamaica Kincaid and others well-known in postcolonial and African studies. The works of Gates and Bhabha are particularly relevant to this thesis, referenced often, and as such raise concerns over, what Sean Jacobs called in his article on the situation, ‘systems of patronage that sustain power in academia and expose[s] how a small group of people act as gatekeepers and maintain a chokehold on the discipline’ (‘Letters’).⁵⁸ How do we navigate issues of oppression in light of those whose

⁵⁸ Jacob’s essay examines the political economy of silence in academia and the role of influence senior academics hold in the field that threatens any who speak out against them being locked out of the network, and consequently the field: <https://africasacountry.com/2022/02/letters-of-recommendation>.

theories and critical work so heavily contribute to an understanding of dynamics of power speaking out in support of the abuse of power?

It also raises the question of the dynamics of power in academic writing. The typical structure of power in pedagogy establishes the lecturer/researcher at the head of the hierarchy, the conventional position of authority, with students often not in positions to confidently question or challenge what is being taught. Similarly, a power dynamic is established in the analysis of texts, particularly when accompanied by theory and critique from canonical names in the literary field. The analysis is required to be supported by those considered 'experts' in the field, often eliding newer and transformative interpretations from being made. Indeed, pedagogical analysis is often considered incomplete without supporting criticism from these canonical researchers. While contextually important, these critiques and theories reinforce power structures, particularly western-led epistemological ones, that make transformative and liberatory analysis challenging. How then are challenges to Eurocentric and Western epistemologies to be raised?

I have, throughout writing this thesis, attempted to demonstrate a total interconnectedness of events, experiences, and beliefs across the globe. At times these events inspired new questions to critically engage with and at others, created challenges and obstacles to the completion of this thesis. I consider this once again in this conclusion to emphasise how the work I have set out to accomplish is in the context of an ever-changing and interconnected world that affected my writing of this thesis. However, as is the struggle with any thesis, there were various elements that fell out of the scope of my research but are still important considerations.

The biggest trial of the thesis arose from the difficulty of challenging the organising principles of western-centric academic methods whilst simultaneously using them. It can be helpful to examine the institutionalisation of literature and literary and critical theory through

the same lens in recognising that the majority of these theories were built around literature written about and for predominantly Western white men. This leads to an explanation of why the works of academics and authors of colour are so vital and why it is essential for a framework that acknowledges, celebrates and articulates the experiences of those authors to be developed. However, the difficulty lies in how to articulate critical readings of such literature. How do we evolve beyond methods of analysis centred around western epistemologies without using the language and the diction of the same methodology? One example of this is how this thesis focuses heavily on canonical theory, particularly the first section which deals exclusively with illustrating the theoretical foundation upon which the framework for intersectional analysis was built. This extensive review of theory can be a strength of the thesis provided that it remains aware of the role many of these theories play in hierarchies of power by being institutionally supporting as part of a canonised forum of ‘critical’ theory.

Another of these methods that I continually employ throughout this thesis, and which I outline my chapters on the basis of, is that of genres. I have attempted to illustrate throughout the chapters that genres are rather arbitrary and abstract divisions of literary texts that can potentially result in limited and reductive readings of texts. There is an inherent rejection of essentialist labels in intersectional theory that nevertheless acknowledges and examines the categorisation of people and their experiences through traditional identity labels. The difficulty with such work is in determining how to challenge the essentialist framework without using the same mechanisms that feature as an ongoing challenge throughout the thesis.

While exploring the concept of intersectionality, I have focused on the intersections of genres, acknowledging the categorisation of texts, which can seem inherently contradictory to the very basis of intersectional theory that rejects essentialist labels. However, I have

attempted to simultaneously highlight the potential of unexplored avenues made up of numerous and compounding literary traditions and methods. Intersectional analysis and praxis work to cross the arbitrary boundaries and labels established by institutions to draw attention to their inefficiencies and limited potential. Moreover, as mentioned above, these inefficiencies result in a reductive understanding of texts and the stories they tell of those who do not fit into the manmade categories. Though intersectionality is *not* a concept of additive categorisation, the various combinations and areas of storytelling and experience that are illuminated are fundamentally intersectional in that they highlight that which has been lost, ignored, or suppressed through the system that favours categorisation.

Due to the constraints of space in this thesis, however, I have been limited to ‘combinations’ of only two major genres at a time. Areas for further study include examining more complex and nuanced examination of multiple genres, or, as Lorde would have it, doing away with genres altogether. As a result of the need for an organising system to convey the methodology behind this thesis, however, I have had to include genres and limit it to two at a time to best illustrate the framework that will challenge and demonstrate the limitations of genres and literary theory that do not consider intersectional experiences.

These considerations arise from the concern and attempt to mitigate the increasing institutionalisation of intersectionality that has often resulted in the de-politicisation and hollowness of some work in the name of intersectionality without engaging in its analytical and theoretical methodologies. It is therefore important to reinforce the point, as Catherine MacKinnon does, that intersectionality begins at the concrete experiences of classes of people in hierarchical relations (Mason and Watson 4).

Other areas of study that are missing from my thesis due to space constraints include discussion around what qualifies as a valid ‘literary’ text in the studies of English Literature which would have been incredibly insightful and relevant to the topic. For example, the

potential list of texts would have been increased if it included translated fiction. As Langer rightly points out, ‘Untranslated literature is not *unread* literature’ (2) and would allow for rich discussions around the priority given to English-speaking writers in publishing. Finally, there is a missed opportunity around graphic novels that could have been pertinent around the discussion of intersectional analyses and frameworks of storytelling that go beyond the traditional written format.

In closing, I respond to the concern by Judith Butler, who asks, ‘Should we be wary of any final or definitive knowing?’ (2004b, 222). I expect, and moreover, invite investigations of, contradictions to and conversations with this framework as it is and will forever remain unfinished. I do not imply a utopian conclusion. Despite common aesthetic expectations, I have conceptualised this framework to constantly adapt, evolve and adjust to the circumstances and contexts at hand and in this way, attempt to fulfil one of the basic tenets of intersectionality: praxis.

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