AFTERMATHS OF THE AFRICAN DIASPORA: THE APOCALYPTIC POST-

APOCALYPSE IN OCTAVIA BUTLER'S *KINDRED* AND NALO HOPKINSON'S

BROWN GIRL IN THE RING

By

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To my Scott, for helping me to believe I could fill these pages.

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I. Introduction

Both Nalo Hopkinson's *Brown Girl in the Ring* (1998) and Octavia Butler's *Kindred* (1979) speak from within the African diaspora, the former from strong Caribbean roots to the multicultural metropolis of Canada, Toronto, the latter from a shifting position backwards and forwards in time to and from post-civil rights U.S. and a slave past that is present, tangible. As interpreted here, this diaspora represents, correlatively, home despite homelessness, and a search for belonging despite great loss, both phenomena that can equally be attributed to the African diaspora and to the aftermaths of apocalyptic events. We may call apocalypse what we will: catastrophe, chaotic event, the reckoning, the rapture, doomsday, the revelation, a cataclysm, global disaster, or any other figuration of that fated word, but its meanings are so proliferate as to require further justification for its use here. While dictionaries focus on the grand scale religiocentric apocalypse of tradition, we might ask, in this era of hyperbole, if we can apply it to the personal, to the abstract, to the theoretical framework, so that apocalypse extends past the literal and tangible. Here, I wish to think through the potential of circum-Atlantic slavery and its literary heritages within an apocalyptic yet post-apocalyptic framework—one that makes it not only possible but plausible to bring texts as different in setting and inspiration as *Kindred* and *Brown Girl in the Ring* into a productive and stimulating conversation that challenges and troubles the boundaries of nation, home, time, and genre.[1]

What follows comprises a movement from a discussion of genre and terminology to a discussion of national contexts formed by the African diaspora, to a more detailed textual analysis of *Kindred* and *Brown Girl in the Ring*. Such an organization emphasizes

the trajectory of analysis I take when approaching the texts themselves. Hopefully, it provides a logical progression towards understanding how post-apocalypse might be thought of alongside these texts and in the African diaspora. In this project I discuss what history and time can mean in an African diasporic context that is deliberately and strategically shifted temporally by authors intent upon troubling the boundaries of identity, of temporality in general, and of the temporality of enduring issues within the African diaspora (e.g. social and political recognition, home, belonging, citizenship, etc.). I argue that *Brown Girl in the Ring* and *Kindred* offer notably fertile ground upon which to base a study of the post-apocalyptic and apocalyptic in the African diaspora. Their differing national contexts and differing situational and temporal issues make the task of discussing them in tandem a difficult one, but to some extent such differences and difficulties characterize the majority of African diasporic literary analysis. Admittedly, the stakes of the following work are not readily discernible, in the same way that the realities and temporalities present in the texts analyzed are often indiscernible of and through their seemingly unbelievable settings and subject matters. The stakes thus lie within the importance of believing the unbelievable to affect change in diasporic contexts. Further still, the stakes of this project are the possibilities texts like *Kindred* and *Brown Girl in the Ring* expose through the use of temporally bent, apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic contexts—the possibility for change (good and bad), the possibility that we may not learn from our mistakes, that we may repeat and repeat and repeat the same mistakes, propagate the same injustices, and forget a plethora of lessons learned in the aftermaths of both large-scale and small-scale events. The opportunities inherent in such

possibilities for thinking through our actions within and without the African diaspora are perhaps most notable of all.

Indeed, this is a *diaspora* project. I make this distinction early and clearly to emphasize that this is not a Black Atlantic, Atlantic, hemispheric, circum or trans-Atlantic, American or any other kind of project than a diaspora project—and yet, it is all of those things. I argue that a diaspora project and African diasporic texts can exist comfortably, if challengingly, under the auspices of any of the aforementioned frameworks, irrespective of their particular investments, whether social, political, or personal. Such is the paradigmatic endurance and strength of the very much embodied theoretical framework of the African diaspora [2] that it can both embrace and eschew the political, social, academic, and other investments of other expected frameworks. As I employ it, the African diaspora is everything and nothing, timed and timeless, locatable and diffuse, all at once. What could be more apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic than that?

II. Of generic and terminological investments in the African diaspora

Where does diaspora really fit in post-apocalyptic novels like *Kindred* and *Brown Girl in the Ring*, and of what use is the term in a post-apocalyptic context? Both are by my figuration post-apocalyptic and, in many ways, often signify as devoid of hope through the seemingly insurmountable challenges their characters face. Nonetheless, there must be hope in the chance we are given to read an imagined future that is not so very far from possible, that prompts us to reconsider the forces that shape a nation and a diaspora, that pushes us to reconsider what home is and what it can be. Certainly, part of what Hopkinson's and Butler's novels encourage is a return to terminology, particularly

"diaspora." Often described as non-linear and chaotic in its past-living-in-presentness, diaspora, it seems, signifies quite differently in lived situations. Diaspora speaks to linearity, definitiveness, and rootedness. Rather than the randomness of chaos, one can chart genealogies, consult archives (whether written, oral, or imagined), interrogate or embrace nationhood, and in some ways, notice predictability. Set in motion by African slavery, a calculated, systematic/systemic, ruthless, and ambitious force of modernity, it is no wonder that as a charting of human movement (necessarily at the very least temporally linear), diaspora exhibits as linear, as calculable.

When we consider an African diasporic text speaking largely of an African diasporic community, all within the generic framework of a speculative, dystopic, apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic fiction, what happens to such linearity, such predictability? Perhaps post-apocalypse lends to diaspora what theory has attempted to mine from it: a sense of chaos, of past that is present, present that is past, and a future that is ruined, uncertain, but still hopeful. Perhaps, and from two very different contexts, settings, and temporalities, *Kindred* and *Brown Girl in the Ring* offer a starkly blunt view of diaspora that exposes its encapsulation within the nation and dominant cultures that renders it incapable of a productive chaos. Hopkinson's vague future allows us to repurpose, reconsider, so that the hope lies within the centered blindness, the disavowed and jailed center that stands for a diaspora, being a surmountable and preventable potentiality. Butler's implicit diaspora and her slave past and post-civil rights present painted in such full relief allow us to hope for a re-learning from the past that is present, that is a preventable, if plausible, future.

In terms of both generic and terminological investments, why *apocalypse* and

post-apocalypse in particular? Why not settle upon oft-used descriptors, such as the

broader speculative or science fiction? Why not thriller, fantasy, or futurist text alone?[3] A

rather fraught term, *apocalypse* signifies by turns as highly religiously charged and by

others as so secularly rooted in a contemporary popular culture that routinely conflates

terms that it can feasibly stand in for any number of unfortunate happenings. Similar

terms, of which catastrophe is the most notable, are hardly equal to apocalypse, let alone

to the broad sweep of speculative fiction. Indeed, while they may signify similarly in pop

cultural contexts (that is, the terms are used interchangeably, one to describe the other

and vice versa), their histories vary drastically at times, both between terms and within

terms. Catastrophe and apocalypse, while often conflated [4] even by theorists, both follow

different etymological and definitional paths. Etymologically, *apocalypse* breaks down

ambiguously to an action that covers and/or uncovers, and *catastrophe* breaks down to

either an overturning or a downturning (*OED Online*). For the purposes of discussing

Brown Girl in the Ring and *Kindred*, a simultaneous covering and uncovering seems

more apt than an over/downturn. Terminologically, speculative fiction seems

insufficiently attendant to the specificities of Hopkinson's and Butler's texts, broad as it

is in its signification. Certainly, *Brown Girl in the Ring* is speculative fiction, but its

investments in the aftermath of an apocalyptic event warrant specificity not offered by

the sole generic category of speculative fiction. *Kindred,* too, requires enhanced

specificity through its deeper generic investments than solely the neo-slave narrative or

speculative fiction. Ingrid Thaler coins the category "Black Atlantic Speculative

Fictions," contending that "[b]y combining the speculative with diverse Black Atlantic

perspectives, the texts mediate—or speculate—on concepts of time and history writing, thereby mixing Black Atlantic perspectives that focus on the presence of the past with speculative time plays of past, present, and future" (2). So, speculative fiction and what I will refer to as African diasporic writing share much with post-apocalyptic fiction as I speak of it here. In all there functions a turning back to the past, a present past, and speculations, observances, portents of the future.

There must, then, be a way to consider texts such as Hopkinson's and Butler's as holding a number of categorical and generic investments, so that post-apocalyptic fiction becomes an important and notable addition to already existing categorizations, not an exclusive replacement. Indeed, perhaps the post-apocalyptic brings the aforementioned genres to a more cohesive and thought-provoking point by revealing a thread present in all of them, that is, the present past and future. This is not the fodder of novels including Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*, the literal and yet abstract post-apocalypse, nor is this the post-apocalypse that would come after the postmodern nuclear war of Baudrillard, Lyotard, and Derrida. Instead, this is a post-apocalypse always occurring and never separate from a concurrent apocalypse. If we consider the Atlantic slave trade as apocalyptic, then everything following and resultant from it is necessarily rendered post-apocalyptic. Yet, the apocalypse continues in the reliving, remembering, returning to slavery and through the continual restaging of its resultant constructs in American and global cultures. Nuclear tropes of apocalypse and major natural disaster tropes of apocalypse are not the fodder of the apocalypse stemming from the Atlantic slave trade, which, arguably, manifests differently than these tropes, is carried forward differently,

and can be read differently in terms of the longevity of effect, and longevity of traumatic memory.[5]

What differs, then, when we consider a text within the broader categorizations of African diasporic and speculative fictions *and* within the realm of post-apocalyptic fictions? Arguably, it is a question of semantics, of unnecessary proliferations of terms. Central to what I attempt to argue here, however, is that it is through the uncovering, through the past living in the present living in the past and future, that post-apocalyptic fiction offers extensive analytical possibilities for African diasporic literature. Post-apocalypse and apocalypse necessitate each other; time is not linear. They do not follow a path of so-called logical, temporally linear and spatially predictable modern analysis, and perhaps neither does the African diaspora or its constituents. Notably, Thaler speaks to the mixing of white and black genres, citing speculative fiction as a largely white genre. I cannot argue with her on that point. It seems obvious that when speculative or science fiction is prefaced by black or Black Atlantic in order to signify difference that there is an unsaid origin that is being repurposed. I argue that this repurposing is integral to the significance of the post-apocalyptic in African diasporic writing.

I am curious, then, as to how the few existing in-depth discussions of post-apocalyptic fiction there are seem to miss the African diaspora completely, or employ works categorized as such as tokenisms, splashes of color (often of the female sort) in otherwise starkly male and blindingly white studies. One such example is Claire P. Curtis' *Postapocalyptic Fiction and the Social Contract: "We'll Not Go Home Again,"* which I will critique here as it remains one of the only works of literary criticism focused upon post-apocalyptic writing and so requires mention, particularly when discussing the

generic particularities of post-apocalyptic fiction in any context. While I will attempt to

be as generous as I can, hopefully veering away from harsh polemic, I find it difficult to

do so when Curtis' discussion of Octavia Butler's *Parable* series is so evidently

appended to what is otherwise a very male, very white, study and contains a largely

surface and truncated reading of race in Butler's texts. Of post-apocalyptic fiction in

general, Curtis asserts that it "provides a window into […] imaginative possibility. These

novels focus on the very idea and possibility of starting over, with all of the potential

hope and utopian imaginings that starting over implies" (2). Curtis continues that post-

apocalyptic novels "take up the primary query of political philosophy: the deliberation

over the conditions under which we would like to live" (2). To the first point, I wonder if

"potential hope" and "utopian imaginings" can ever apply wholesale to post-apocalyptic

fiction, particularly in African diasporic contexts wherein the fallacy of utopia has long

been trampled into the dust by rampant and enduring systemic and individualized

racisms. To the second, I wonder if post-apocalyptic novels take up the conditions under

which we would like to live, or whether they instead take up the conditions under which

we *currently* live, putting them into a fuller, more jarring and stark relief by their

juxtaposition with an imagined future complete with the possible effects of our current

actions.

　　To continue generic discussion, we may briefly consider whether or not the neo-

slave narrative—a category under which *Kindred* most often falls when not referred to as

speculative—can be considered a strange brand of post-apocalyptic apocalyptic fiction. If

the neo-slave narrative marks as its location of production an American framework that is

peculiarly apocalyptic in ethos and falls within what Teresa Heffernan considers a post-

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apocalyptic century in her *Post-Apocalyptic Culture: Modernism, Postmodernism and the Twentieth-Century Novel*, then the post-apocalyptic apocalypse is not too irrational a concept to muster. Thus, the neo-slave narrative—particularly one that takes return as literally and figuratively as Butler's *Kindred* does—demonstrates something that modernity itself demonstrates, that is, the apocalypse living in the post-apocalypse, the two paradoxically inextricable and yet necessarily concurrently existing (a phenomenon shared by *Brown Girl in the Ring*). As Valerie Smith states when speaking of the impetus to create the genre of the neo-slave narrative, globally "slavery as an institution is not an obsolete historical practice," and so the apocalypse continues for many in our so-called post-apocalyptic era. A moment of post-apocalypse birthed the neo-slave narrative, if we consider the civil rights movement apocalyptic, revelatory, renewing in some way. A particular racial climate and set of racial formations emerging from the civil rights movement curried a renewed interest in a looking back that was really a looking *now*. Ashraf Rushdy describes this development in detail in *Neo-Slave Narratives: Studies in the Social Logic of a Literary Form*, later stating that "Neo-slave narratives were able to make a critical comment about the historiographical tradition whose often romanticized representation of slavery was enabled by the exclusion of firsthand African American perspectives on the 'peculiar institution'" (6). The apocalypse of the civil rights movement allowed a *post* wherein time could be bent, subjectivities altered and displaced, history bent over backward upon itself to open up new creative forms that temporally spanned the long-twentieth century. Rushdy contends that "the writers of Neo-slave narratives wished to return to the literary form in which African American subjects had first expressed their political subjectivity in order to mark the moment of a

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newly emergent black political subject" (7). In conversation with this, and though he refers to the genre as "postmodern slave narrative," A. Timothy Spaulding asserts that such novels' "orientation toward time grounds itself in the synchronic moment of slavery while simultaneously positing a diachronic view of time that acknowledges the past's continued resonance in the present" (27). Time is bent again; one fails to know truly who holds the pen, who sits at the typewriter, who commands the word-processor. What is figured as new hardly presents as new, hardly presents as *post*.

What precisely do we observe in these texts but an imagined accumulation of histories, times, and homes that clash and cohere in unpredictable ways within a post-apocalyptic context? Countless times, with varying iterations, Ian Baucom repeats that in the long-twentieth century "Time does not pass; it accumulates" in his *Specters of the Atlantic: Finance Capital, Slavery, and the Philosophy of History*. There may not be a phrase more applicable to both a theory of perpetual apocalypse and post-apocalypse, to the neo-slave narrative, to speculative fiction, and, most importantly, to *Kindred* and *Brown Girl in the Ring*. As readers of *Brown Girl in the Ring*, we know neither how much time has passed from the apocalyptic event nor are we privy to *when* we are in general. We are, however, privy to the results of an accumulation, of a pile of tensions that are released in an event and quickly, as if drawn in by a magnet, came together again, simply in different pieces. So the post-apocalypse generally discussed, that is, the new beginning doing away with the old in a catastrophic reckoning, is fallacious, for the same pieces we begin with remain after the end, in the aftermath. In *Kindred*, these pieces are the same but different during slavery and in the 1970s, but they are perhaps only different in their arrangement. Thus, we can imagine the passing of time in the long-twentieth

century as an imbrication of events and histories that periodically, and with the added impetus of human choices, rearranges, reconstitutes, is built upon just as it is continually dismantled.

In support of my argument that the twentieth-century cannot be described as wholly *post* apocalyptic, and neither can its literature, I will embellish upon my use of what Baucom terms the "long-twentieth century" (17). A concept Baucom borrows from Arrighi, the "long-twentieth century" is a time that "inherits or extends the long-eighteenth," and with its inheritance undoubtedly carries Enlightenment narratives of catastrophe and apocalyptic rhetoric. In this long-dureé century, Baucom says, "time does not pass, it accumulates," and time for him becomes a Derridean haunting, never quite settling in one logical, linear pocket.[6] And yet, in reference to the post-apocalypse and both Hopkinson and Butler's texts, I do not speak of hauntings. With the term haunting comes implications of spectrality that Baucom addresses, and with such spectrality comes the assumption that certain events and issues are ever-present, but somehow intangible—not quite within the realm of the real. Instead, I argue that thinking about both the long-twentieth century as apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic at once and also thinking about the literary genre of the post-apocalypse within the African diaspora requires a refusal of the specter, the haunting, the intangible presence of the past. In *Kindred*, Dana is no specter; the past is not haunting her present. Instead, the two exist concurrently, so that time itself might be said to be spectral, but certainly not the events and histories that run through it. The apocalypse within the post-apocalypse, as I employ it and observe it here, is precisely the opposite of intangibility, and the events within Hopkinson's and Butler's texts refuse intangibility. Post-apocalyptic fiction instead brings the haunting, the specter,

into full relief, into the realm of the real, making it tangible, making its existence in the present unquestionable. In this way, the protagonist in *Kindred* can *literally* experience slavery, and the protagonist in *Brown Girl in the Ring* must *literally* grapple with the realities that a history of damaging policy and societal racism has spit forward in time past an apocalypse and into its aftermath. In *Kindred,* the main character's repeated literal return from her postmodern post-apocalyptic time to an apocalyptic time of slavery makes the haunting a reality, though nonetheless reinforces Baucom's theoretical assertions that the past does not live simply in the past. The apocalypse can thus never end. Baucom states at the end of his book that the fatal Atlantic "'beginning' of the modern is more properly understood as an ending without end" (333). I thus assert that we can consider the long twentieth-century a post-apocalyptic-apocalypse.

III. Nations and contexts hosting the apocalyptic post-apocalypse

I will shift now to thinking of the national differences inherent in considering these two texts in conversation with one another. Here Canada's consummate and politically official multiculturalistic mosaic comes into contact with the USAmerican cultural melting pot, despite the nation-defying force that African diaspora purportedly wields. While diaspora implies borderlessness, borders nonetheless, and very predictably, intervene when it is both least and most expected, complicating notions of home and identity, and even time. The particularities of finding and articulating home undoubtedly vary dependent upon the specific national diasporic context in question. Canada does not present the same home outside of home that the USA does, nor do the UK, France, or the Latin Americas. In the same way, the deployment of a post-apocalyptic context

necessarily differs between national settings. I have asserted already that the US holds a peculiarly apocalyptic ethos (more on that soon). Rinaldo Walcott expounds upon such national particularities in Canada in *Black Like Who: Writing Black Canada.* Walcott succinctly states that "[t]o be black and at home in Canada is both to belong and not belong," and he notes further that to "name black home spaces in Canada and the Caribbean" is a "practice of the in-between" (147). Though Walcott paradoxically speaks of blackness *in Canada* and yet subsequently denounces "nation-centered discourse" (147), he makes no mistake in asserting that "black cultures, especially Caribbean cultures, are over-policed in" Canada (147). Hopkinson's text displays this over-policing in a displaced time and only partially recognizable place, all the while recalling one of Walcott's many questions regarding blackness and Caribbeanness in Canadian contexts and beyond, that is, "what conditions make black community?" (149). One of the many messages within *Brown Girl in the Ring* lies within the answer to this question being two-fold: black community in this dystopic, post-apocalyptic context is *forced* through ghettoization, but some semblance of black community was always already there through the presence of African diasporic bodies within the so-called nation. Even a post-apocalyptic context cannot render broken or even tenuous communal bonds, nor homes away from homes, whether such homes are people, customs, or physical establishments.

Now, what of the US? How does a USAmerican context inflect a post-apocalyptic setting similarly and differently from a Canadian one? I have situated USAmerican neo-slave narrative in Baucom's circum-Atlantic long-twentieth century and will analyze a particularly USAmerican tendency towards apocalyptic thinking that may inflect a variety of genres. So, I concede that what I am doing for the moment is superimposing a

circum-Atlantic theory on a national phenomenon and allowing a nationalized theory to bump heads with a transnational one. However, global Americanization has allowed for many an originally USAmerican myth to become global, so easily conflated are the two terms Americanization and Globalization. Indeed, the Civil Rights Movement expanded from a particularly USAmerican issue into a globalized movement, and the neo-slave narrative written outside of the United States likely owes its genesis to the same USAmerican movement that the African American version does. Returning to Baucom's theory of the "long twentieth-century" from the nascence of the Atlantic slave trade to the present, I posit that we can also understand the long-post-apocalyptic-apocalypse through depictions of (usually) African Americans returning somehow (through memory, cultural underpinnings, or story) to a never-ending, not really, history of slavery. Perhaps we can also consider post-apocalyptic fiction as an inherently USAmerican genre that, through a globalizing, USAmericanizing force, has permeated national literatures worldwide. For now, though, I will withhold definite assertion on that point, plausible though it may be. [7]

I came to thinking about the apocalypse, the US, the woman of color, and the plausibility of an inherently apocalyptic US altogether when reading Cherrie Moraga's 2001 Foreword "From Inside the First World" to the lauded collection *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*. In her discussion of 9/11 she says,

I must confess, I am shocked and horrified by the disaster, but I am not surprised. There resides in me, as in so many others, a deep sense of the inevitability of the United States' demise. The position of the greatest power, like those twin towers which once stood sentinel, shadowing "the gate to the new world" as news anchor, Peter Jennings, described the Statue of Liberty, also occupies the location of the

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greatest vulnerability. As members of a global citizenry, we are forced to acknowledge

that the United States has appropriated well more than its share of the world's

resources, and as such becomes, rightfully, the most visible target for the world's

discontent. The bigger you are, the harder you fall. I speak in cliché, or are these

phrases, which now rise to the surface of our daily discussions, simply tried and true

axioms that this country has forgotten? (xvii-xix)

The making of USAmerica has been necessarily apocalyptic, whether for indigenous

populations, displaced Africans, or various immigrant populations who found their

cultures and customs apocalyptically subsumed by the impulse for USAmerican purity,

whatever that may mean. Moraga also points to USAmerica's 500 years long history of

invasion, which one could posit as intermittently apocalyptic, depending on which side of

the invasion one inhabited. Moraga does not mention the apocalypse by name, but her

rhetoric is one that is recognizably apocalyptic.

Can we say the US has an exceptionally apocalyptic imagination? Heffernan roots

her study in a USAmerican framework and posits the twentieth-century as *necessarily*

post-apocalyptic, in part as a result of deconstructionist theory (Derrida's work on

Enlightenment thinking about apocalypse in particular). It is also, however, a result of

increased secularization of USAmerican imaginaries, ensuing in a lack of dependence

upon the apocalyptic, revelatory and thus revealing narrative. I agree with her, and I do

not. I do not agree that the US in the twentieth-century is solely *post*apocalyptic, and I

disagree that the US in the twentieth-century has made large strides toward

secularization; in fact, in the face of certain post-apocalypses, quite the opposite seems

true. Of the strangely medieval insinuations of political and media response to the 9/11

attacks, Bruce Holsinger says: "9/11 undeniably functioned as a prolific generator of new Manichean allegories, dualisms rooted in self-consciously medieval rhetorics of crusade, religious fundamentalism, and divine right"(470). And so in this so-called post-apocalyptic nation and time, the post-apocalypse paradoxically creates religiously-charged apocalyptic thinking. Hardly secular, hardly neutral. So, we can say that the US certainly does persist in its apocalyptic thinking, both decidedly religious and secular. In continuing to discuss the merits and pitfalls of Heffernan's study, I would ask you to think of the fetishization of the zombie myth in USAmerican cinema, the plethora of websites dedicated to surviving an apocalypse, and reality television, including programs such as National Geographic's "Doomsday Preppers" in which countless USAmerican families hoard various survival items, establish homesteads, and stock up on survival skills for what they consider ever-impending doom. These instances only represent the more recent occurrences of national apocalyptic thinking. Such is long history of apocalyptic thinking in the US, always periodically reinforced when Mother Nature steps in with yet another natural disaster reminding the nation of its mortality, but also of its potential for regrowth, rejuvenation, reconstituting—a regenerative *post* apocalypse always feared and yet always striven for.

Up to this point I have been staging a case for the United States as a nation with a particularly apocalyptic consciousness—necessary and already existing work, when considering a primarily USAmerican genre. But what of Canada in these terms? Is Canada an apocalyptic nation by osmosis? One would think so, so often are the US and Canada conflated on hemispheric and international scales. I would posit instead that Canada denies its ties to the apocalyptic nature of the US by refusing its history of

slavery, by thinly veiling its racism through the official passing of the Multiculturalism Act, and by asserting a national difference from the United States that rests upon such denials, and upon the mosaic versus melting pot dichotomy. In this way, we might think of Canada certainly as an apocalyptic nation, but one that does not embrace her apocalypse or its post in the same way that the US does. Certainly, some of the most notable white-authored post-apocalyptic was written north of the 49th, Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) and *Oryx and Crake* (2003) being two of the most notable. Hopkinson's *Brown Girl in the Ring*, though, is an anomaly both within and without a Canadian context through its focus upon race and belonging within a post-apocalyptic framework.

If we are to focus for a moment upon that most defining of politic-social differences between the US and Canada, multiculturalism, we may gain some clarity regarding how and why *Kindred* and *Brown Girl in the Ring* can be spoken about alongside each other despite their different, though certainly intertwined, national contexts. Rennie Warburton notes that "[s]everal clearly identifiable structural and cultural conditions existed when Canada's multicultural policy was introduced," including "ethnic inequalities, the class and gender structure of the country [and] Canada's weak conception of nationhood, which clung to the myth of a historical preserve of British traditions with emphasis on anglo-conformity, and various efforts to portray Canada as an essentially northern nation" (276). Warburton continues to say that "[m]ajor objections to the policy came from those who saw multiculturalism as failing to accomplish its objectives by creating ethnic ghettoes that impede the integration of immigrants by dividing and fragmenting Canadian"(282), and from critics who assert that

the policy "perpetuates the colonial status of Aboriginal peoples by failing to acknowledge their status as diverse sovereign nations" (284). In terms of Hopkinson's text, how ironic it is that the very complaints against ethnic ghettoization launched by assimilationist white Canadians against multiculturalist policy are realized through the ethnic and racial ghettoization of Toronto's inner core. With multiculturalism came a refusal of binarized, Manichean thinking that characterizes USAmerican racial belonging, so that instead of being instantly labeled white or black, a person of color in Canada will be asked where they are from, what ethnicity they are, where their parents came from, or what their heritage is. Thus, the person of color in the United States is colorized and categorized, but most often assumed to be USAmerican, and yet multiculturalism has fostered a climate in Canada wherein a perpetual state of immigration is assumed of the person of color. One is never simply Canadian, if one is not white. Where are you *from*? What are *you* doing *here*? These questions always complete with the enduring implication that "here" is *not* yours to truly have. Such questions and assumptions ring absolutely true as portents for what Hopkinson envisions is to, or at the very least, could, come.

Writing out of a millennial Canada, Himani Bannerji positions multiculturalism as an ideology, and distinguishes between a resistant "public multiculturalism" that directly challenges "official or elite multiculturalism" (5). She considers multiculturalism as an Althusserian ideological state apparatus, a positionality that exposes within it a process "of racialized ethnicization, which whitens North Americans of European origins and blackens or darkens their "others" by the same stroke. This is integral to Canadian class and cultural formation and distribution of political entitlement" (6). This process is

certainly at work within *Brown Girl in the Ring,* only we are presented with the futurity

of consequences that multiculturalism causes. In Bannerji's observation of Canada as a

nation state, elite/official multiculturalism results in the fallacious elimination of class,

gender, and racialization, all terms that are hypervisible and of which individual citizens

are hyperaware (at least within the confines of whatever political direction they lean).

Bannerji draws the astute parallel between the US and Canada that "[i]t is the

culturalization of antiracist and other oppositional politics in the last decade or so that has

largely made it possible for the government of the US or of Canada to maintain the

appearance of a democracy" (8). It is multiculturalism, and perhaps the bleeding of such

ideology from Canada south to the US, that has fostered such antiracist and oppositional

politics. Canada's exceptionalism stems from its official multiculturalism, and the

"development of this discourse in Canada rather than in the United States, which is also a

multi-ethnic country, may be due to the lack of an assimilationist discourse so pervasive

in the US. The melting pot thesis has not been popular in Canada, where the notion of a

social and cultural mosaic has had a greater influence among liberal critics" (8). Notably,

while the US and Canada often share Bannerji's "colonial history, imperialist present,

and a convoluted liberal democracy" (10), *Brown Girl in the Ring* unsurprisingly creates

windows into the lives of a variety of Canadians, white, Afro-Caribbean, Romani, Indian,

and First Nations, while *Kindred* retains the binary so closely married to USAmerican

societal thought and practice. Thus, the relationship between the US and Canada in terms

of multiculturalism exposes both their stark differences—especially in their respective

national approaches to history—as well as their similarities.

In her work on community building among African Caribbean populations

specific to Toronto, Amoaba Gooden asserts that a major obstacle to the recognition of

African Caribbean and other African diasporic people within Canada is an "ideology of a

peaceful Canada [which] resounds and has become a permanent part of the Canadian

racist and national consciousness" (413), contributing to a nation-wide ignorance of the

very diasporic populations that have been intrinsic to Canada's cultural progressions.

Brown Girl in the Ring refuses this fallacious ideology of peace by its very dystopic

setting, much marked by a drug and gang related violence that Hopkinson relates not to

pathologies within African Caribbean communities and cultures, but instead to the

abundant, though veiled, racism enacted within Canada that often forecloses lucrative and

sustainable employment for immigrant populations, particularly those of African descent.

Canadians are not only ignorant of African diasporic cultures within Canada's borders;

the very people of the diaspora in Canada are *ignored*, something quite different from

racial relations south of the 49th parallel. This act of ignoring manifests in Hopkinson's

text as she positions metro-Toronto as predominantly African Caribbean and

hypervisible, centered and hemmed in by suburbs, but forgotten and left to itself in every

way—a site of being that is a focal point and a wilderness at once. As Gooden calls

attention to the hypocrisy of white Canadian disdain for the treatment of African

Americans by white USAmericans, Hopkinson calls attention to a national disdain,

ignorance of, and disinterest in African Caribbean peoples, setting her text in the not-too-

distant apocalyptically charged future, perhaps as a warning of what *might* be. Indeed, her

text calls attention to resistance against Canada's seeming refusal to welcome African

Caribbeans *home,* effectively leaving them to make a home of what they would. As

Gooden states, African Caribbeans "developed a diasporic sensibility." While she leaves this "diasporic sensibility" largely undefined, perhaps it is the very ability to make a home of what one has, to accept that home, whether dystopic and post-apocalyptic, whether unwelcoming in practice or policy, is wherever and whatever and whenever you make it. This sensibility undoubtedly extends past national borders, so that we can easily consider this making of a home and persistence to belong as somehow enacted in *Kindred* as well.

Toronto's historical relationship to race and African diasporic populations is troubling, and Hopkinson's text comes at a time closely preceded by proliferate police violence against African Canadians within Toronto. Race riots and numerous killings of African Canadians by Toronto police occupied much concern during the late 1980s and early 1990s, prompting political and legal inquiries to resolve a violent situation (Mensah 11). With the presence of such a violent and unwelcoming history, Hopkinson's novel is unsurprising in its attempt to displace Toronto temporally, warning of what could happen if currently disenfranchised Canadian groups continue to garner little to no public, political, or judicial support. Speaking to this lack of attention, M. Nourbese Philip's dedication prefacing her collection *Frontiers: Essays and Writings on Racism and Culture* (1992) reads, "For Canada, in the effort of becoming a space of true true be/longing." In her introduction to the collection, entitled "Echoes in a Stranger's Land," Philip moves through a multitude of particularities of the African Canadian experience with an incisive eloquence, noting that her position—and that of many within Canada—is one wherein Canada is "'home,' a word of apparent fixity yet also subject to dangerous fluidity" (11). In multicultural Canada—Canada being the first modern state to institute

official multiculturalist policies (Johnson and Enomoto 3)—Philip underscores the

staunch and paradoxical anti-racist racism of Canadian culture, stating that "[t]he

dismissal by white Canadians, led by the media, of the complaints by African Canadians

once again underscore[s] the resistance of Canadian society to any acknowledgement or

acceptance of racism" (12). A lack of acknowledgement leads to myopia, myopia leads to

blindness, and, for Hopkinson, to a post-apocalyptic near future where such blindness is

starkly and extremely expressed. Philip queries, "I carry a Canadian passport: I, therefore,

am Canadian. How am I Canadian, though, above and beyond the narrow legalistic

definition of being the bearer of a Canadian passport," and asks further: "does the racism

of Canadian society present an absolute barrier to those of us who are differently

coloured ever belonging?" (16). Canadianness, whatever it may constitute, matters for

belonging and undoubtedly matters for home. If one could put a name on the

Canadianness perpetrated most in media and popular culture, however, a European

immigrant beginning flashes to mind, not First Nations, nor the minority groups who

helped (either through slavery or poorly compensated labor) build the vast nation, nor any

immigrants of color who sought refuge and home in later decades. Canadianness,

nationhood, and belonging are vacated of significance for the person of color within

Canada, as a blindingly whitened and politically correct multiculturalist impetus results in

a national identity that accepts everything, and yet acknowledges nothing outside certain

strict borders. These figurative and discursive borders are as policed and polarizing as

those in Hopkinson's novel. Indeed, Hopkinson's setting serves as a metaphor for Canada

at large: people of color—primarily those of the African diaspora—are hypervisible in an

overwhelmingly white nation, and yet hyperinvisible, a blind spot in the paradoxically multicultural nation.

Philip also writes at length of her position of perpetual exile: first ancestrally from Africa to the Caribbean, then now from the Caribbean to Canada and back. She links exile to her discussion of African diasporic presence in Canada and Canada's refusal to acknowledge the particularities of African diasporic life. I can understand why it might be tempting to consider Hopkinson's text fodder for a discussion about exile, and in certain ways perhaps it is. However, in its post-apocalyptic context, with the ghettoized space of metro Toronto constituting the African diasporic presence, exile seems the opposite term to be most effectively used. There is no freedom or forcible direction of movement here; there is simply and forcibly no movement at all. Butler's exile is a temporal one, and in that sense, too, perhaps not categorizable as exile as we most often think of it at all. Dana in *Kindred* also does not deliberately move through time and space and is instead at the whim of her many times great-grandfather. Is this exile, when exile implies some semblance of agency, even if it is one that is restricted? In these ways, perhaps exile is not as inextricable a term from the African diaspora and these texts as one might assume. We are given a diasporic setting devoid of movement, restricted in the most extreme sense, put on display and also refused. Instead of solely relying on exile, then, we search for a term in a comparative sense by keeping the meanings and implications of exile in mind while also acknowledging its inapplicability. Exile is inapplicable in another, less tangible, sense. In his discussion of Saidian exile, Iain Chambers contends that it "presumes an initial home and the eventual promise of a return, the questions met with *en route* consistently breach the boundaries of such an

itinerary. The possibilities of continuing to identify with such premises weaken and fall away" (2-3). In *Brown Girl in the Ring*, however, we are repeatedly confronted with the ability of the intangible home (memory, custom, tradition, folklore, spiritual life, etc.) to refuse boundary, so that there is no "initial home" or "return" existent or necessary. Instead, home is ever-present.

IV. Kindred, in the Ring

Delving into the textual, rather than theoretical and inferential, particularities of two so very different (and yet, similar) texts necessitates some level of measured and logical organization. As such, I will begin with *Kindred,* in the most predictable of logical argument constructions: the chronological. In her eerie and stirring quasi-sci-fi novel, Butler articulates the return so prevalent among neo-slave narratives, making it literal, and corporally felt by her African American main character Dana, as well as Dana's white husband Kevin. Butler's dystopic novels and series (among them, the oft-cited *Parable* series) are often spoken of in terms of the post-apocalypse, and *Kindred* joins them through frequent classification as science and/or speculative fiction, but is rarely spoken of outside the neo-slave narrative canon.[8] In an interview with Charles H. Rowell, Butler recounts the story that was inspiration for her novel. At a time when she was attending college during the Black Power Movement, she came across "a young man who was the same age I was but who had apparently never made the connection with what his parents did to keep him alive. He was still blaming them for their humility and their acceptance of disgusting behavior on the part of employers and other people" (51). The young man's anger and refusal to identify himself or his generation with older

generations of black people Butler says was "the germ of the idea for *Kindred*" (51). In effect, her decision to throw her main character backwards in time rested upon an observed lack of apt historicity amongst her peers, and a desire to make noticeably timeless a history that was very much within the present.

In *Kindred* the main characters Dana and Kevin are an interracial couple living on the west coast of the US in 1976, and the novel reveals in flashbacks Dana's impoverished life as a writer and their meeting and forging of a relationship despite the socially restrictive times. With taunts of "chocolate and vanilla porn," and comments made by strangers with "typical slave-market candor that [Kevin] and I were 'the weirdest-looking couple' she had ever seen (56-57) ringing in their ears, they represent a living anachronism, only of a time not yet realized. Dana receives varied criticism for her relationship with Kevin from the aunt and uncle who raised her, her aunt disconcerted but glad for the expected lighter skin tone of any offspring, her uncle personally offended by Dana's choice of a man phenotypically opposite of him (111). Kevin experiences disgust from family members he thought he had known, whom he had assumed were progressively accepting of difference (110). The interracial relationship in the text mirrors the more temporally obvious movements in more implicit ways, as Dana and Kevin are thrown back in time by the reactions of their family and friends just as they are literally thrown back in time by whatever strange force propels them.[9]

Both Kevin and Dana's lives are turned upside-down, sideways, and back and forth when they move into a new house and Dana is repeatedly thrown back, or rather, beckoned, into a past where she is forced to find ways to coexist with her ancestors in— at first—1815, antebellum Maryland. Her many times grandfather, on her first visit, is a

small red-headed boy, and so her relationship to him begins as one of caretaker, emphasized by the fact that he seems to be the one who, unknowingly at first, beckons her into his present when it becomes too difficult or dangerous to handle on his own. Dana is a guardian angel on-call, of sorts. Spells of dizziness mark her travels back and forth through time, and she repeats iterations of "I feel like it could happen again—like it could happen anytime. I don't feel secure here" (17). These iterations continue even after she realizes it is the boy who becomes a man on her later journeys, Rufus, who is calling her—and to return, she in turn needs to feel like she may die. Time itself does not match up between Dana's two points of contact; a matter of hours in 1976 can mean months in the 1800s, a few days can mean a few years. These comings and goings (and how elusive what is coming and what is going is!) hinge upon personal apocalypses, and are also apocalyptic in and of themselves. They mark the possibility of no return, of an entire life lost, of a forced new beginning. During one of his times in the past with Dana, Kevin astutely chastises her for her rash and anachronistic behaviors, telling her, "You're gambling. Hell, you're gambling with history" (83). One might say that the entirety of the post-apocalyptic fictional genre is a gamble with history, so rooted it often is in a history that has not yet occurred. But of course, when time is bent and unruly, perhaps unruly and unpredictable practices are not only warranted, but expected and useful.

The story becomes more complicated still. You see, Dana needs to keep her captor in time and space alive, as well as her many times grandmother, a slave, alive, to ensure her own future survival. As such, her existence in her present necessitates and is directly resultant from her visits to the past. She literally experiences the shakiness of the long-twentieth century through these mini, personal apocalypses and post-apocalypses,

feeling physically the displaced remnants of slavery that are on a continuum with a present that suffers still from slavery's residual constructs. She is whipped and almost killed multiple times, almost raped, manipulated by Rufus through the selling of those close to her, and is made to understand truly what it is to be considered sub-human. Kevin, too, is pulled back to the past if he holds on to Dana as her travel begins, and at one point is left in the 1800s upon her return to 1976—a period of four years for him, and eight days for Dana. Dana and Kevin are changed remarkably, and unsettlingly, each of them resolving somewhat into the roles cut out for them by antebellum America. They unwillingly and yet quickly accept that their relationship will be considered as one of master and slave mistress, not as one of legitimate and meaningful partnership. Their bodies become weathered and torn in differing ways, corporally representing the weathering and tearing of their faith in the safety of time and logic. Both of their movements matter beyond themselves, the potential ripple effects vast and uncompromising. If Dana makes the mistake of telling Rufus too much of what is to come for his country, she risks others' lives. For example, telling him of Sojourner Truth could enable him to foreclose Truth's life preemptively before it had a chance to truly take flight.

Kindred is a novel about the dangers and consequences of conflation: conflating past with present, conflating cultural constructs across time, conflating a free woman from 1976 with her grandmother in the 1800s as Rufus does, and conflating apocalypse with post-apocalypse. This is never more evident in the text as when Dana kills Rufus out of self-defense which catalyzes a course of events resulting in her return to 1976 incomplete, devoid of an arm grasped by Rufus before Dana was propelled forwards in

time. There is a literal piece of Dana in the past, and Dana who was once of the past, now occupies the future. In fact, violence in the text in general contributes to the emphasis upon conflation, in that any violence done in the past may not settle there. Dana may be hurt in antebellum Maryland and carry those injuries with her to 1970s California, a literal reminder of the longevity of violent acts upon the minds and bodies of the disenfranchised across time and history. When Dana is whipped for the first time, she realizes that the same fear-of-death mechanism that Rufus needs in order to summon her can send her home if she experiences it. Her pain propels her quickly from the plantation to her house, disappearing her body from one place and time to another. Her pain is nonetheless kept in stasis, and exacerbated by her instant realization that Kevin has been left behind. She says, "I sat for a long while without moving, without thinking, listening for what I knew I would not hear elsewhere in the house. The pain was a friend. Pain had never been a friend to me before, but now it kept me still. It forced reality on me and kept me sane" (113). How ironic, then, that the source of her agony, the source of her separation from her partner, and also that which was inflicted in the most seemingly unreal of circumstances is in fact Dana's tether to the real. Her ultimate conflations, the sites of her pain—whether bleeding whipping welts or a missing arm—are also her ultimate links to herself and what she makes of a temporal and physical reality.

Indeed, as Dana loses her arm to the past, she does not. Her arm is as much lost to her present as to her past, as much lost to the time in between her two points of return as it is to their more concrete situations, part and parcel of Baucom's cited Benjaminian past "coming together with the now to form a constellation" (29). I would say that this constellation is one of scars on the African diasporic body. With the post-apocalyptic

apocalypse we enter the realm of the always already, the always still, the always ending, and the always beginning—and all of this always and in all ways at once. This is a realm where the start is necessarily the end, and the end, a hopeful if catastrophic beginning. So what happens when we muddy those constructs further than they already are? When we consider an apocalypse, or end, and a post-apocalypse, or hopeful renewal, as concurrent throughout the long twentieth-century, time no longer presents as linear, and a logical stream of events and effects no longer exists? The "singular historical trauma" (Baucom 315) of the circum-Atlantic slave trade proves far from singular, and instead re-presents as proliferative. A constellation of scars forms on Dana's body after multiple whippings; a constellation of scars forms on an American history, one that never fades. These keloids will remain from apocalypse to post-apocalypse and during everything in between. Apparent changes over time reside within the varying contemplations of the scars, not the scars themselves. Baucom's "eternal return" wherein "modernity unfolds its nonsynchronicities within collective time consciousness, capital history, and textual form," upon which he bases his "conception of the long-twentieth century" (29-30), is indeed an eternal return in this postapocalyptic apocalyptic context—and yet more than return. Perhaps *eternal presence* feels more fitting here.

One would be remiss, if speaking of Baucom's emphasis upon accumulation, history, and a present past, to fail to mention the inspiration he finds in Edouard Glissant and his *Poetics of Relation* (1990). I will, however, defer to Baucom and countless others for an in-depth discussion of *Poetics* and Glissant's own theoretical inspirations, including Agamben and Benjamin. I am instead drawn to a passage in Glissant's *Caribbean Discourse* (1981) and his discussion of history, time, and identity. Glissant

states, "[o]ne of the most disturbing consequences of colonization could well be this notion of a single History, and therefore of power, which has been imposed on others by the West […] The struggle against a single History for the cross-fertilization of histories means repossessing both a true sense of one's time and identity: proposing in an unprecedented way a revaluation of power" (93). Here we are also drawn to a present past, to an eternal presence that extends into the future. We are drawn to the call for a multiplicity of Histories, and to the potential to embrace what is an impossibility, that is, a *true* sense of time and identity. Perhaps, though, a true sense of time is one that refuses linearity, embracing the chaotic, pulsating nature of time, particularly within African diasporic history. Wading through Glissant's often-thick prose (albeit in translation), we are drawn to the way in which his words have a universal quality that extends past the Caribbean, so that his Caribbean discourses may speak most specifically to the particularities of Caribbean life while also speaking to the larger African diaspora.

As Dana's sense of time and identity is twisted in *Kindred*, she exclaims to Kevin, "To me, it's getting more and more believable. I don't like it, I don't want to be in the middle of it. I don't understand how it can be happening, but it's real. It hurts too much not to be. And…and my ancestors for Godsake!" (46). Her steady realization of her situation relies upon believability, and as I suggested earlier, perhaps believing the unbelievable is crucial to creating change within the African diaspora, just as Dana's belief in an unbelievable slave reality is Butler's way of changing the mind of a generation of black radical youth completely blind to the value and impetus of their predecessors' actions. Her situation is also tangibly ancestral, for it is her ancestor who calls her back to the past in his times of strife, and it is her own present/future life that

hangs in the balance as well as those of her ancestors. History, then, is tangible, and so time runs amok, disavowing teleology, refusing to adhere to expectation. This ancestral tangibility translates well to *Brown Girl in the Ring,* evident through the often-literal presence of figures outside of time and history, the spirits who possess the characters in the novel.

In the same way that Butler's *Kindred* is rarely spoken of outside neo-slave narrative or science fiction canons, Hopkinson's *Brown Girl in the Ring,* when spoken of at all, falls under the accommodating and vast speculative fiction heading. From one pigeon-holed text to another, we leap: Hopkinson's Toronto is out of time, somewhere within a vague future, and thus its place is decentered, even as it centers its minority populations. Toronto, in Hopkinson's dystopic future, has suffered an apocalypse of sorts and has figured its post-apocalypse to be a raced one and a classed one. This apocalypse expresses in full relief disparities existent prior to the social upheaval and rioting that result from a successful First Nations land claim on Toronto itself. Thus, Hopkinson's text is more than fantasy; it is dystopic and post-apocalyptic fiction rooted in the socio-cultural issues of the present. Hopkinson deploys the apocalyptic in a way to which we are unaccustomed, that is, not as a catastrophe followed by renewal, regrowth, and rejuvenation in a "post." In Hopkinson's novel, we experience the apocalypse of the dominant order, leading to the post-apocalypse of a racialized and classed reordering, in the concentrated locale of metropolitan Toronto (referred to by characters as the Burn). This apocalypse and post-apocalypse sound familiar: insurrection and anarchy result in a withdrawal of local, provincial, and federal funds for legal protection and the judicial system, no funding for the dissemination of information through various media forms,

and military occupation followed by military withdrawal to the borders of the "affected zone." Which begs the question: what affects the 'zone' that is Toronto? Difference? Poverty? Perhaps to those creating the zone, what makes it *affected* is of little importance, so long as it remains *quarantined*. Hopkinson's quarantined spectral center, the paradoxically hypervisible black hole space that is metropolitan Toronto, presents an intriguing opportunity to interrogate what constitutes center and periphery, home and belonging, and what significance generic investments have within African diasporic literature.

Brown Girl in the Ring opens in livable aftermath. Culture, crime, homemaking, family, all endure but with a difference. Ti-Jeanne, her as-yet unnamed infant, and her mother, grandmother, grandfather, and lover find themselves entangled in a web of obeah, revenge, drug crime, and murder set in action by a force from outside the ghettoized metro-Toronto. The Premier of Ontario requires a new heart from a human donor, rather than the animal donor farms that exist in Hopkinson's near-future dystopic version of the world. Since the premier is indifferent as to how the hospital obtains it, agents for the hospital are sent into Toronto to find a donor no matter the cost to themselves or to others. Enlisted by these agents, Ti-Jeanne's grandfather, an obeah-wielding drug lord who commands the city from atop the CN tower, commands Tony, Ti-Jeanne's drug-addicted lover and father of her child, to find a donor heart by *any* means necessary. Finding that Ti-Jeanne's grandmother is a match, the lover kills the grandmother, stealing her heart, and leaving Ti-Jeanne to enlist the help of the spirit world with which she and her grandmother are deeply connected in order to protect herself and her child.

So what of home in this dystopic, post-apocalyptic near future? Is it the Caribbean that the narrator Ti-Jeanne's ancestors left for Canada? Is it the Toronto that has ghettoized its lower-class communities of color? What does home become after the assumed social fabric is cut into scraps and strategically sewn back together in a strange but predictable panopticon-like arrangement, the center of the re-sewn tapestry consisting of the lower classes that are notably black and/or blackened? Metro-Toronto lies in full view; its borders are policed, and yet it becomes disavowed, ignored, a gaping chasm in the consciousness of the suburban residents who represent the middle and upper classes. Again, where is home, in this dystopic, post-apocalyptic text? Well, it is everywhere and yet nowhere, that is, home resists place and time in *Brown Girl in the Ring,* and instead resides in the unexpected. This residence is taken up in much the same way as apocalypse: in things that extend past traditional notions, so that the apocalypse I speak of here extends conceptually past the traditional fire and brimstone, religio-centric apocalypse. The home I speak of here transcends a house with a white picket fence on a quiet avenue. Home instead becomes cultural memory, spiritual belief, and loved ones. It is an existence marked by a necessary and constant resistance to sublimation and assimilation, the darker sides of multicultural Canada. Home is cultural survival, the ability to code-switch; it is language and story and tradition and the loved ones who share it, so that home is *everywhere* that a person *is*, rather than concentrated in one locale. This particular kind of home refuses the fickleness of place and time, as well as the easily destroyed physical home (one could say this, too, of home within the African diaspora in general). In this sense, *Kindred* also emphasizes home outside of tradition, positioning

Kevin and her own time as Dana's true home, as the safety of a traditional home, the house, the domicile, is compromised time and again when Dana is called back to the past.

Instead of the hopeful look to the future of renewal, the chance for a new beginning that is often focused upon in "white" post-apocalyptic fiction, Hopkinson's text not only minimizes the blast radius of the apocalypse, but also refuses the blindly hopeful urge toward a better future. Instead, she makes it clear that this is not the accustomed indiscriminate doomsday apocalypse, but rather a focused one. The disenfranchisement, rioting, occupation and then blatant forgetting of the minority populations who inhabit the city's core only signified as apocalyptic to those within the core, those in the suburbs easily move on with a clear future and a clear past. Indeed, there operate at once two past, two presents, and inevitably two futures. And so, with the vagueness of the past and the inconclusiveness of the future, Hopkinson's text urges a questioning of home and belonging, and also of how one can articulate history and culture in a post-apocalyptic setting.

In an interview with Alondra Nelson published in *Social Text*, Hopkinson speaks of what brought her to the broad umbrella of speculative fiction: "As a young reader, mimetic fiction (fiction that mimics reality) left me feeling unsatisfied. The general message that I got from it was 'life sucks, sometimes it's not too bad, but mostly people are mean to each other, then they die'" (98). She continues that, to her, her work represents an attempt to "identify science fiction/fantasy/horror/magical realism as fiction that starts from the principle of *making the impossible possible*" (98, emphasis mine). In situating her novel within a post-apocalyptic near future that does not mimic reality, Hopkinson explores a *potentiality*. By reinforcing the importance of cultural history in

the form of spirituality, healing, and strong interpersonal bonds, Hopkinson makes

possibility even out of a seemingly impossible situation. She rearticulates home in the

post-apocalypse that is here African, Caribbean, Canadian, disenfranchised,

impoverished, disavowed, ignored, and the list goes on, to mean the warmth of a lover's

embrace or the comfort of a soup that reminds you of a country that you may know all

about but have never visited. Home is what you believe and how hard you believe in it,

and how much you refuse the implausibility of belief in the face of the pervasive and

damaging rationality of modernity. Home is everywhere, and somewhere, nowhere at all,

and in oneself.

Within the temporally vague, centered and decentered setting of Hopkinson's

novel, we find numerous possibilities for theoretical analysis. Cultural lacunae,

centre/periphery, problem-space, interstice, all conglomerate around the post-apocalyptic

setting of *Brown Girl in the Ring*, demonstrating the complexity and possibility inherent

within such a setting, and emphasized by its location within the African diaspora. In her

Framing Silences: Revolutionary Novels by Haitian Women (1997), Myriam Chancy

discusses the significance of apocalyptic rhetoric for Third World nations, in particular

Haiti. She asserts that "it is essential to confront this phenomenon, the rhetoric of

apocalypse, for it presents us with yet another form of neocolonial thought that

suppresses a crucial facet of global reality—again, the exploitation of the South by the

North," and that Haitian women's writing "unveil[s] the ways in which the modern

discourse of apocalypse also serves to denigrate as well as to constrict the aspirations of

Third World inhabitants" (136). Chancy follows this by positing particularly salient

questions: "[W]hen we speak of the apocalypse in the West," she states, "we must first

address two interlocking, crucial questions: Whose world? And, whose end?" (137). Chancy is speaking to cultural lacunae, as she terms them, the refusal to recognize that "for the Third World and its inhabitants, the apocalypse is already under way" (137). While she is speaking in a strategic and specific manner about Haitian contexts and Haitian writing, I argue that her discussion of apocalyptic rhetoric and Third World, impoverished, disenfranchised contexts can be employed in a broader sense that would extend to other Caribbean sites, and to their diasporas within Canada. I wonder if the writing of the post-apocalypse by authors like Hopkinson works against Chancy's lacunae by telling the story of the apocalypse and its aftermath through the eyes of populations that were always already living in the post-apocalypse, so that their hyper-centeredness in metro-Toronto and yet hyper-invisibility in the eyes of the greater Canadian nation mirrors the lacunae of which Chancy speaks. After all, what is a numerous yet largely impoverished minority population of African diasporic subjects within Canada but a Third World within a First World? This world within a world exists today, let alone in Hopkinson's vague future, and is indeed both a world within a world and a home within a home. So, is Hopkinson's post-apocalyptic portrayal of African diasporic peoples from the Caribbean in Toronto a resistance? It is a continuation where none seemed possible, where none was *deemed* possible by neocolonialism, and so, perhaps it does indeed constitute resistance. Her novel is a beginning again irrespective of expectation, an unexpected survival through the creation and sustaining of a home that both refuses and is refused a concrete placement.

Potentialities for resistance prompt an interrogation of what resistance can be possible, what home can be made within a context that refuses conventional conceptions

of center and periphery. Thinking about center and periphery alongside the African

diaspora, and the Caribbean diaspora in particular, reveals a number of possible situations

for center and periphery.[10] Is the center the colonizing metropole or the colonial

metropole? Is it the slave-ship or the middle passage more broadly? Can the periphery be

pinpointed, or does it consist of the diasporic bodies at large? Or, indeed, is the periphery

the colonial metropole in this our possibly postcolonial era?

These broad questions lead to more specified ones in *Brown Girl in the Ring*.

Only a few pages into the novel, a list of major newspaper headlines Ti-Jeanne had

encountered since the ghettoization of metro-Toronto charts the course of events between

the successful Teme-Augami Anishnabai land claim and "RIOT COPS LAY DOWN

ARMS, ARMY CALLED IN: TORONTO IS 'WAR ZONE,' SAYS HEAD OF

POLICE UNION" (11). But what holds Ti-Jeanne's attention are two headlines taken

from the "New-Town Rag," a handwritten community newspaper founded after the

apocalyptic ghettoization. They read "TEMAGAMI NATIVES WIN LAWSUIT:

TRADE EMBARGO LIFTED, TOO LATE FOR TORONTO?" and "ARMY

OCCUPATION OF TORONTO ENDS: NOW WHAT?" (12). This recount stems from

Ti-Jeanne's visit to "Mr. Reed, self-appointed town librarian," who erects a display of the

major headlines under the heading "TORONTO: THE MAKING OF A DOUGHNUT

HOLE" (10). From a war zone to the incredulity of aftermath, of after the end, to the

summary "making of a doughnut hole." Appropriately ambiguous, the metaphor of the

doughnut hole may signify as constituted, whole, apparent, the greasy remains but still

bearing a reference to the doughnut itself. Alternately, the doughnut hole means the hole

itself, the emptiness left when a no longer discernible something is cut out of what

purportedly matters, the doughnut. Reminiscent of greasy spoons and cheap chain coffee companies it may be, but the doughnut hole metaphor encapsulates the ambiguity of existence in Hopkinson's post-apocalyptic metro-Toronto as well as the ambiguity of existence in a diaspora wherein center and periphery are so often conflated, confused, indefinite.

Let us say, for the moment, that the suburbs make up the doughnut, the paradoxically powerful *periphery* that holds the empowered middle-upper classes of Toronto, and thus the hole, of course, is metro-Toronto, black and blackened, diasporic, poor, disenfranchised, and powerful in an entirely different way. Western—temporally linear, cemented in space and place—notions of power rooted in center and periphery are doubtlessly put into question through Hopkinson's post-apocalypse. Like Benjamin's Angel of History, his back turned to the future, gazing fixedly on the past, so too are the guards, and suburbanites, and Canada as a whole standing with backs turned to the disavowed future that lives in the ghettoized metro Toronto. Of the angel Benjamin says:

> His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress. (258)

We can imagine Benjamin's angel of history facing an apocalyptic event, a total disenfranchisement, and being forcibly removed from the event, but by what? What is

this Paradise whose storm violently catches the angel's wings? Perhaps the Paradise is a fallacy, the religio-apocalypse thus, too, a fallacy, and in the place of Paradise lies history, ambiguous, fickle, seemingly insurmountably static, and yet in flux. The past, the apocalyptic event, the pile of resultant debris occupies his foremost attentions, to the detriment of the future. This insinuates that the storm of so-called progress, which Paradise/history blows forth perpetually, finds its purpose in futurity, while holding steadfast to a fallacious history that entraps, thus preventing the angel from turning to the future. To present my extrapolations in simpler terms, one, as a substitute for the angel of history, can look upon the realities of the apocalypse and its aftermath and become so enmeshed in some version of the history that preceded it that a future does not come into view despite a forward temporal momentum. In the midst of a failed attempt to escape the ghettoized metro-Toronto, Ti-Jeanne and Tony come to the edge of the city, and the narrator notes deserted, unmaintained, wilderness-like presence of various unkempt freeways that seem to be in the process of a slow death from the fecundity of the "heavily wooded valley" that they once "dug through" (110). The narrator continues to note "Ti-Jeanne had heard that the police in the five satellite cities had set up guard posts at their borders to keep Toronto out" (110), and the encroaching wilderness offers the only cover possible to shade their escape. And so the police, and before them the military, and after them the citizens, look towards an apocalyptic past, but do not *see* it. They observe the pile of rubble; they mine it for its healthy organs, its illegal drugs, its degradation, but progress and an alternate history propel them ever forward. Here center, periphery, history, and time come together to prompt an interrogation of what it means for citizens of a nation to occupy the place of Benjamin's angel, all the while standing at the edge of

a doughnut periphery staring into the abyss of the doughnut hole (ignored, unsupported, deprived of provincial and federal political representation), that is also very much an instantiated, material, remnant of a once whole doughnut (healthy hearts, drugs, whatever resource available).

This coming together of center, periphery, history, and time, can be aided and deepened by David Scott's theorization of "problem-space" in *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment*. For Scott, such spaces present contexts of "what is in dispute," "rival views," and "knowledge and power" (4).[11] Further, "a problem-space necessarily has a temporal dimension or, rather, is a fundamentally temporal concept" which "alter[s] historically because problems are not timeless and do not have everlasting shapes" (4). Scott's problem-spaces are not literal spaces, places. Instead, they exist for him in a realm of the discursive, abstract, conceptual, idea-based, and so on. However, I contend that such a theoretical concept can be thought of alongside Hopkinson's post-apocalyptic space of metro-Toronto, and its perception from the outside and in. In Hopkinson's text, the problem-space that is metro-Toronto contextualizes what is in dispute and constitutes one unnoticed half of a rivalry. It presents the aftermath of a simultaneous withdrawal and exertion of power, all the while preserving an enduring cultural knowledge. It has a temporal dimension inherent in Hopkinson's choice of genre—the apocalypse that is past living in the now that is the post—and in the refusal of temporal restrictions upon cultural and spiritual transmission. Like Scott's formulation, Hopkinson's problem-space also presents a "context of language" (Scott 4), again demonstrating the temporally negligent transmission of knowledge through linguistic expression in the form of patois and créole. Hopkinson's

space is a problem for the periphery that is the suburbs, that is the nation, and, further, it is an interstitial space between a definite event and a definite rejuvenation. This metro-Toronto interstitial space seemingly exists in some in-between area of significance and acknowledgement for the suburbs. The organ hunters know there is a place to go to illegally obtain the healthy heart they need, but that same space/place is negated, a black hole, a nothingness at the times at which it is not needed. Forever both doughnut hole material, and doughnut hole nothingness. The problems Hopkinson's text probes (nation, belonging, home, culture, among many others) are indeed "not timeless and do not have everlasting shapes" (Scott 4). Instead, by choosing the post-apocalyptic as a literary generic device, Hopkinson draws attention to the stasis of problems within their given time (not timeless), and also to the shifting nature of the problem in the aftermath of an apocalyptic event (do not have everlasting shapes).

In contemplating the preceding theories, I am drawn to a passage near the end of Michel-Rolf Trouillot's *Silencing the Past, Power and the Production of History*. Regarding practices of historical narration, he remarks

 That the foundations of such practices were set by our precursors with the added value of their respective power is an inherent effect of the historicity of the human condition: *none of us starts with a clean slate*. But the historicity of the human condition also requires that practices of power and domination be renewed. It is that renewal that should concern us most, even if in the name of our pasts. The so-called legacies of past horrors—slavery, colonialism, or the Holocaust—are possible only because of that renewal. And that renewal occurs only in the present. Thus, even in

relation to The Past our authenticity resides in the struggles of our present. Only in

that present can we be true or false to the past we choose to acknowledge." (151)

Hopkinson gives us a post-apocalypse that renders our present into a past and

simultaneously reminds us that we have never had and will never have the satisfaction of

an extrapolated Lockean Enlightenment thinking: a blank slate. A nation built upon the

backs of a variety of disenfranchised peoples, whether African or Indigenous, can never

claim to have had a clean slate before or after an apocalyptic event. Hopkinson's dystopia

stems from a renewal of practices of power and domination, for from a successful First

Nations land claim—a victory—comes a seeming apocalyptic loss, for some. So if our

current present is the past of *Brown Girl in the Ring*, our authenticity resides in what we

acknowledge *now*. Our legacy is still in the making. Moreover, Trouillot's assertion that

the renewal of "practices of power and domination […] occurs only in the present"

speaks to the renewal and concentration of national issues within the vague future post-

apocalyptic setting of Hopkinson's novel. In the traditional sense of apocalypse and post-

apocalypse, renewal signifies as enduringly positive, a clean slate, a fresh start.

Trouillot's words alongside Hopkinson's text prompt us to consider how negative aspects

of culture and nation can be renewed just as easily as positives ones, and that a clean slate

cannot exist.

In searching for all the, sometimes unpredictable, locations of home, belonging,

and cultural histories in the text, language presents as one of the most salient. I return,

then, to Chancy's *culture-lacune*, that which "positions the margin as its own center and,

paradoxically, as a tool not only for subversion but also for self-expression" (17). Out of

these cultural holes, these ignored, silenced, and dismissed sites comes identity

irrespective of location and other restrictions. Out of these holes comes agency, resistance, some of which rests upon the tenacity of speaking from a *within* that is a *home* for one's cultural history, a *within* that yells past policed borders to say, "I am here, though you choose not to hear me no matter the language I speak, so I shall speak what I will, and one day you must listen." Chancy speaks of her essential Haitiennité as something imbricated by language and as both the site of her identity, and a primary site of her alienation in Canadian contexts and elsewhere. Correspondingly, in *Brown Girl in the Ring* Ti-Jeanne is taught the value and instrumentality of language by her grandmother Gros-Jeanne, who seamlessly switches from speech infused with Anglophone Caribbean creole to Canadian English. Gros-Jeanne uses her language strategically, code-switching when speaking to young white street-children who are in need of her medical attention, as Gros-Jeanne and Ti-Jeanne have conventional medical training as nurses and extensive knowledge of folk remedy. Only at this point does Mami break with her Anglophone Caribbean creole speech, and when one child asks if her leg is broken, Mami replies, "I think so, darling. If you let your friends bring you inside, I can look at it, and give you something to make the pain go away" (Hopkinson 64). This does not carry the "doux-doux," "ain't," "nuh," and so on of her regular speech, but it is nonetheless equally hers to claim, use, and incorporate into her identity and belonging within Canada. Hopkinson herself describes language as a "thorny matter" (Rutledge interview, 601), in response to backlash against her use of types of vernacular speech in her novels and short stories. However, rather than conceding that her language is disrespectful, Hopkinson holds that though people "are dismayed at what they read as internalized racism on my part, in fact I'm representing a different but no less complex

version of English […] they aren't accents or ignorance" (Rutledge interview, 601).

Hopkinson conveys through her writing what figures into her characters' sense of self,

belonging, and home, complete and replete with true-to-life expressions, or as true as oral

dialects can be on a written page.

A language in and of itself, spirituality and belief in Caribbean deities factor

largely into the text and its plot. This spirit world transcends the borders of reality and

tangibility in the text; it also transcends place and time. Its syncretism necessitates such

temporal and spatial transcendence in the first place, but it certainly performs such

transcendence through its strength on Canadian soil thanks to the strength of the people

who believe in it. Belief figures in this novel as a home of sorts, rooting the characters

wherever they stand, for its strength depends on their own. Resistance thus manifests in

the form of ensuring the endurance of cultural and spiritual belief, creating a home and

belonging regardless of circumstance. That such strength endures past the apocalypse,

that it pays no heed to enforced borders and ghettoization, or class, or anything else, is

not just notable, but truly remarkable. This comprises one of the most powerful messages

within the text: that home and belonging and nation are certainly intrinsically tied to one

another, but that cultural histories endure past the boundaries that predictable notions of

home would present. *Culture lacune*, myopia, problem-space, and so on are consistently

countered by alternative histories and alternative beings that would expose the prejudice,

self-interest, and exclusionary nature of, in Hopkinson's text, the suburban history, the

conventional, white history that seeks to erase through an apocalypse the very cultural

and personal significance of minority populations. Oshun, Ogun, Legbara/Eshu/Jab-Jab,

Shakpana and many more make appearances in *Brown Girl in the Ring*, and refuse the

ghostly haunting or the imaginary. Instead, Hopkinson envisions a matrilineal line of spiritual healers and communicators in Gros-Jeanne, Ti-Jeanne, and her mother. Gros-Jeanne asserts, "allyou have to stop calling the thing 'obeah.' I don't work the dead, I serve the living" (59), in order to distinguish herself from practitioners like her former husband, who wantonly practices the darkest forms of obeah. The same deities serve both practitioners, and only the agency of the practitioner enacts difference. Gros-Jeanne's quote refuses the stasis of the angel of history, looking back perpetually to the past, and in this text brings once more into question how history and culture can be understood, disseminated, and enacted in vastly different ways.

Hopkinson's text also makes particularly sure to explore articulations of home within personal relationships that defy space and place and endure past the apocalypse. Matrilineal love and romantic love tragically intertwine in *Brown Girl in the Ring*, but Hopkinson retains a measure of the incomprehensibility of home by positioning Ti-Jeanne as drawn to Tony despite his murder of her grandmother. Home, even in the post-apocalypse, can be so rooted that even murder cannot displace it. Engaged in a romantic tryst with Tony (one forbidden by her grandmother), Ti-Jeanne "stepped into his embrace. It was like coming home […] Taking his hand, she quietly led them both out the front door and headed for the Francey barn. 'It warm in there,' she whispered. 'And Mami can't hear we" (79). Home lies in a lover's embrace. And yet this occurs steps from her grandmother's house, the woman who has made Ti-Jeanne a more conventional, material home through the passing on of traditions, the sheltering warmth of support and a physical home space. The matrilineal bears great importance in *Brown Girl in the Ring,* and the tension between the matrilineal home and the romantic home is palpable in the

text. Even as Ti-Jeanne engages with one home, she thinks of the other, and this personal juggling extends more broadly to culture and nation in that she engages with an African diasporic home, the Caribbean and its deities, and thinks of the other, of Canada, as she plans with Tony to run away with the baby to the suburbs. Two homes or more existing at once, and always, even when disenfranchised and refused access to one or the other, and even when the desire for access of one or the other seems an illogical self-sabotaging.

To shift briefly from Hopkinson's text, how might we speak of *Kindred* in the terms of the cultural lacunae, centre/periphery, problem-space, and interstice? Can we? There is no doughnut-hole in Butler's novel, or a discernible periphery, or a center. Instead, center, periphery, culture-lacune, problem-space, interstice all become married to shifting time, become abstract and disembodied, but nonetheless present and applicable. In *Kindred* each of these terms multiplies appropriately to the two temporal locations, so that we are made aware as readers of the problem-space of slavery, and of post-civil rights, so that we understand that the periphery of existence for Dana cannot be pinpointed outside of the control her ancestor has over her temporal location. The culture-lacune, the margin as center, is revealed through the centrality of a marginal temporal space, that is, slavery. Assumed to occupy a margin, to occupy only history rather than the present, the culture-lacune of slavery is now, is always stemming far throughout the long-twentieth century from the nascence of the slave trade. And the interstice, well the interstice is the time that separates Dana's two focal points: compressed to an infinitesimal space and also broadened wider than can be imagined.

Familial ties and resemblances across time and space offers another valence of how cultural lacunae, centre/periphery, can be thought through within *Kindred*. The

physical similarities between Dana and Alice are striking, their resemblance forming a conflation that echoes across the apocalypse of slavery to the post-apocalypse of Dana's time (that is always apocalyptic). What once occupied the margins of Dana's thought and being, her ancestors, are now centered and thus the periphery becomes the center. Indeed, the making present of a slave past is itself the centering of a periphery. When time shifts unpredictably, so too do the margins, centers, periphery, and interstices of Dana's life, and of history itself. The conflations Dana brings with her to each of her times drive those around her mad, particularly Alice, her great-grandmother. Faced with the stark comparison between her abusive and forced relationship with Rufus and Dana's loving, loyal, and entirely consensual relationship with Kevin, Alice exhibits mood swings towards Dana, and her psyche rapidly deteriorates. Dana notes, "[s]he was strange now, erratic, sometimes needing my friendship, trusting me with her dangerous longings for freedom, her wild plans to run away again; and sometimes hating me, blaming me for her trouble" (164). Crying softly and asking advice one moment, and then "moments later for no reason that I could see, she attacked me, 'You ought to be ashamed of yourself, whining and crying after some poor white trash of a man, black as you are. You always try to act so white. White nigger, turning against your own people!'" (165). David Scott's problem spaces are abstract, theoretical, intangible, and yet here we have a similar space between two relatives that is intangible, and yet wholly present. It is a problem of culture, of time, of society—intangible—and yet it is a problem of the flesh, pain, and of the immediacy of depressing comparison. Family, then, marks a site of painful conflation that can bring the theoretical constructs I earlier attributed to *Brown Girl in the Ring*, to *Kindred* in a significant manner.

Abruptly—or perhaps not, if we are thinking in both texts of returns, eternal presences, and the endurance of homes traumatically wrought—how can we think through trauma in terms of the post-apocalyptic-apocalypse of the long twentieth-century? I realize I have mentioned trauma in this paper, as well as traumatic memory. I consider it already somewhat ubiquitous, but necessarily inseparable from discussions of recurrence in terms of slavery and the neo, and especially inseparable from thinking about things that persist in flux, things that do not obey linear time, whether because of traumatic return or memory. One of the most lauded trauma and PTSD theorists, Cathy Caruth, in her *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, asserts that "[t]o be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event" (4), and that the "[t]he traumatized, we might say, carry an impossible history within them, or they themselves become the symptom of a history that they cannot entirely possess" (5). I strategically focus here on the term "possession" as deployed by Caruth, as possession figures quite importantly in thinking about Dana and Kevin's decentered existence in *Kindred.* Possession enters the conversation in an entirely different way in *Brown Girl in the Ring*, prompting consideration of literal possession by spirits and deities, and the uncontrolled or uncontrollable nature of many of the violences and traumas unleashed in Hopkinson's text. Reading Caruth and her interpretation of the Freudian traumatic event, Baucom states, "Caruth discovers at the unrepresentable center of the Freudian scene of trauma, the inaccessible traumatic occurrence that fails to present itself to consciousness because it happens too fast and too soon, catching the subject unaware and positioning the subject subsequently as perpetual latecomer or screened spectator to *the* event of his or her own life" (254). First, Dana and Kevin are *possessed* by an incomprehensible twisting of

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history, ancestry, and memory—they are *possessed* by the image and event of Maryland antebellum slave life, tied to it by necessity and by feeling. Their traumatization is profound. They are made symptom of a history which is unpossessable and yet *always* in their possession. Or can possession remain the useful term when the remnants of slavery are always and in/at any time inescapable, involuntary, unwelcome. Moreover, can one ever possess the "unrepresentable"? Dana is caught unaware, positioned as latecomer and spectator to *the* event of her own dis-arming (meant in the most morbidly literal sense). Ti-Jeanne in *Brown Girl in the Ring* experiences a series of traumatic events, not the least of which is the discovery of her grandmother's recently violated body in her kitchen, and then in short order the discovery that her lover and father to her child is responsible. To exact justice, Ti-Jeanne welcomes her possession, welcomes her ability to see and feel and *be* the spirits she worships and consults with. Ti-Jeanne thus possesses the ability to hold a history of culture and belief within her self and becomes its instrument, but is also and at once possessed by this history.

Before continuing this traumatic discussion, to visit Dana's event, her ultimate trauma, in necessary fullness:

Something harder and stronger than Rufus's hand clamped down on my arm, squeezing it, stiffening it, pressing into it—painlessly, at first—melting into it, meshing with it as though somehow my arm were being absorbed into something. Something cold and nonliving. Something…pain, plaster, wood—a wall. The wall of my living room. I was back at home—in my own house, in my own time. But I was still caught somehow, joined to the wall as though my arm were growing out of it—or growing into it. From the elbow to the ends of the fingers, my left arm had become a

part of the wall. I looked at the spot where the flesh joined with plaster, stared at it

uncomprehending. It was the exact spot Rufus's fingers had grasped. I pulled my arm

toward me, pulled hard. And suddenly, there was an avalanche of pain, red impossible

agony. And I screamed and screamed. (261)

This scene ends Butler's novel, with only a brief epilogue remaining to tie together loose

ends. As one can almost immediately deduce, trauma theory applies in many varied ways

to *Kindred,* particularly when faced with scenes like that above. And yet, it is a different

trauma from the memorial variety most often encountered in neo-slave narratives.

Instead, Dana's spectatorship is not a retrospective one, one of a Morrisonian

"rememory," no. Dana's spectatorship to her event that is her own life cannot be

extricated from her present in any sense, when her present is as present as it is past. Flesh

becomes plaster, growing *into* rearticulates as growing *out of*, left arm is wall, Rufus's

grasp does not remain painlessly, effortlessly, simply in the past, and her sudden

avalanche of pain, her screaming does not know a time or a place in particular. For Dana

it is everywhere and always and everything. In the same way, the trauma of the post-

apocalyptic apocalypse of the long-twentieth century fails to adhere to Caruth's brand of

trauma completely. Caruth focuses on the return of an event or events, rather than a

return of a person to an event, or a perpetual and inescapable living of an event, though

the ways of living it and circumstances under which the living occurs may change over

time. Indeed, she also does not focus on the futurity of traumas, as does Hopkinson. The

apocalypse occurs constantly with the constant promise of a regenerative post; the event

occurs constantly with the constant but never fulfilled promise of a healing and

subsequent transcendence of trauma.

This is all to say that, while important, notable, and intrinsic to consideration of post-apocalyptic fiction within the African diaspora, perhaps trauma should vacate the central role it holds in consideration of African diasporic work that incorporates racial violence, returns to slave pasts, or projected futures imbued with traumatic events. Perhaps what is needed is for trauma to join in a conversation with questions of history, time, place, and belonging rather than dominate discussions under the assumption that it transcends all of those things. Certainly, it can and does transcend those questions, but I contend it should not subsume them. Thus, trauma has not been a central discussion in this study, even if tendrils thereof permeate my readings here. Instead, I hope that the equal importance and generative quality of history, time, place, belonging, and so on has been evident throughout as integral to a comprehensive and thought-provoking discussion of post-apocalyptic fiction and the African diaspora.

V. Towards, and of, an end without end

Finding new meanings and new possibilities for texts that are far from new remains the thrust of much literary scholarship. As such, I hope that introducing the apocalyptic post-apocalypse to discussions of *Kindred* and *Brown Girl in the Ring* is embraced as just that: an introduction to a discussion, a joining in with a conversation, rather than a replacement or subversion of existing work. A significant part of African diasporic critical work is the embrace of difference, whether disciplinary, national, cultural, theoretical, and so on. This generative difference, which echoes past the boundaries of time and place, home, belonging, catastrophes, apocalypses, and long centuries characterizes African diasporic literature at large, but most certainly the post-

apocalyptic works under the umbrella of such literature. Post-apocalypse in the African diaspora presents more than a fevered warning of what could come if our actions continue on in certain trajectories unfettered. It is a reminder of a past that will not disappear, and a call to embrace the longevity of this past, in the interest of best serving our possible futures.

To end now does a marked disservice to the complexity and propagative nature of the topics considered here. Nonetheless, an end must come, though with the caveat that much more needs doing. Questions remain, as they should: What happens when we mine African diasporic texts outside of hemispheric North America for signs of the post-apocalyptic? Is there a formulaic method of analysis to be found here, or can the similarity between texts considered be solely the post-apocalypse, freeing us to consider separate texts at once but under different theoretical frameworks? Are flexibility, malleability, and an accommodating nature inherent to the post-apocalyptic in African diasporic texts, so that open interpretations of post-apocalypse are welcome, and so that we no longer have to recognize post-apocalypse only in the nuclear aftermath, the wholesale destruction of life but for a few chosen pockets? What are the stakes and importance of ignoring the traditional post-apocalyptic text in such analyses without bolstering an argument with the fictions of white men and women writing novels devoid of racial considerations? And more questions, of course, stem from those, into the same seeming perpetuity of legacies within the apocalyptic, post-apocalyptic long-twentieth century.

Notes

[1] I am not prepared to assert that these two texts are exceptional, or exceptions to some rule. Thus, texts like Gayl Jones' *Corregidora* (1975), Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987), Gloria Naylor's *Mama Day* (1988), Grace Nichols' *I Is a Long Memoried Woman* (1983)*, Charles Johnson's *Oxherding Tale* (1982) and so on are not exempt from discussions and implications similar to those I posit for my chosen two texts. This is, nonetheless, a comparative meditation on these two texts alone, for the moment, and the rest is yet to come.

[2] Many discussions of diaspora employ some discussion of Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (see, for instance, Stuart Hall's "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," Brent Hayes Edwards *The Uses of Diaspora*, and Avtar Brah's *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities*) which I will not discuss here. Instead, I defer to Sidney Lemelle and Robin D.G. Kelley, who both acknowledge the inapplicability of Anderson's theories to the African diaspora, while also cogently defining the African diaspora itself (so cogently that I will quote at length). They assert "that Anderson's notion of 'an imagined community'—employed originally to analyze nationalism situated in nation-states—could not be directly applied to the African diaspora without some substantive revision or qualification. First, the diaspora is not a sovereign territory with established boundaries, though it is seen as 'inherently limited' to people of African descent. Second, while there is no official language, there seems to be a consistent effort to locate, no matter how mythical, a single culture with singular historical roots. Third, many members of this diaspora see themselves as an oppressed 'nation' without a homeland, or they imagine Africa as the (future?) home. Finally, linked to the search for a homeland is the

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fourth barrier to the wholesale adoption of Anderson's concept to the African diaspora

[…] most Black folk outside of African and the Caribbean live in countries where they

are 'external to and estranged from the imagined community' of the dominant culture"

(7). While she does not discuss Anderson's text, Arlene Keizer's work linking diaspora,

time, and the neo-slave narrative (what she calls contemporary narratives of slavery) in

Black Subjects: Identity Formation in the Contemporary Narrative of Slavery is useful

for thinking through related topics to mine with regards to terminological and theoretical

investments. In addition to the already listed texts on diaspora, Tejumola Olaniyan and

James Sweet's interdisciplinary collection of essays is also useful for thinking through

the different interpretations of the stakes and articulations of African diaspora.

[3] For more on black futurism or Afrofuturism see Alondra Nelson's edited issue of *Social Text*, 20.2, Summer 2002, which features articles on music and futurism, the cyborg and

posthumanity in the African diaspora, futurism in popular culture, among other topics. It

features an interview with Nalo Hopkinson I will discuss later. Central to Nelson's

discussion of Afrofuturism is the irreconcilability between the imagined future (now our

present or near-future) that presented a utopic, postracial, post-gender space, and the

reality that technology does not eliminate such articulations of difference. It is partly

through the centering of the technological and the push against the globalizing force of

the technological that I differentiate my project from Afrofuturism, among other

distinctions. I would align my work here fully if differently, however, to Ishmael Reed's

"living past," which he fleshes out in his article in the same issue.

[4] Lecia Rosenthal accomplishes one of these conflations of *apocalypse* and *catastrophe*,

and constitutes this conflation by equating a secular apocalypse with catastrophe. While

this is not something I am trying to do here, I do understand her meaning, and the impulse towards this deliberate conflation. She elucidates by stating that catastrophe can be thought of as an "emptying out of apocalypse, or apocalypse without reserve or remainder, the end of the world without the redemptive gains of divine judgment and heavenly reward" (39).

[5] I will return to the idea of trauma and traumatic memory in these texts and genres later, though notably both are ever-attendant in some way or another to discussions of African diasporic histories and the temporally broad effects of the slave trade. Despite this ever-attendant quality, however, I will argue that a more open view of the role trauma might play in texts like these is necessary, so that rather than occupying a focal point, it can occupy a happy periphery alongside numerous other theoretical interventions.

[6] Of course, Baucom's study falls under the heading of Atlantic studies criticism, and as I have stated, mine is an African diasporic project. But, as I have also stated, this should not pose a barrier to thinking through and with Baucom on such issues. The texts I consider here may not be written about contexts that sit opposite each other separated by an ocean, but they are nonetheless very different parts of a global diaspora, and though Baucom's text focus on Atlantic crossings, I wonder if his project is not African diasporic as well. I return to Baucom the Atlanticist once more during my discussion of *Kindred*, even though I am purportedly doing a diaspora project. I wish to divorce the idea from the theoretical investments, if possible, for the moment, and emphasize the applicability of Baucom's long-twentieth century for my considerations of apocalyptic post-apocalypse. It is this idea I wish to mine and converse with, not Baucom's own

investments, and so such engagement should not detract from my own investments, diasporic as they are.

[7] Tangentially, I would like to point to Sarah Wood's striking observances of the link between setting, nationalism, and time in *Kindred*. She notes that "[t]he dates *Kindred* employs to frame the action remind the reader of the intricate links that bind the individual to the state. The story of Dana's time-travel begins on her birthday and ends on 4th July 1976: the bicentennial of America's independence. Conflating personal history and national history, the text's events comment on the insignificance, for many black Americans, of this most significant date in US history. *Kindred* is able to examine the potential disparity between personal history, the memory of events, and the act of remembrance or commemoration that is sanctioned in the nation's official celebrations of its independence. In *Kindred*, official culture is rarely prominent. Dana and Kevin spend the day of the bicentennial in hospital; national celebrations are thus marginalized by the immediacy of tending to their physical injuries—injuries that are a direct result of America's slaveholding past. In this way *Kindred* begins to point towards the contradictions underlying the nation's celebration of its independence" (87). Wood's study is intriguing and very well-researched, as is her study of *Brown Girl in the Ring*, though both depart significantly theoretically from my own.

[8] A small sampling of articles that either exclusively discuss *Kindred* in terms of the neo-slave narrative or as science fiction, or that discuss Octavia Butler's oeuvre in terms of apocalypse and post-apocalypse with little to no mention of *Kindred*: H.M. Zaki's "Utopia, Dystopia, and Ideology in the Science Fiction of Octavia Butler." *Science Fiction Studies* (1990); A. Mitchell's "Not Enough of the Past: Feminist Revisions of

Slavery in Octavia E. Butler's *Kindred.*" *Melus* (2001); J. Miller's "Post-Apocalyptic

Hoping: Octavia Butler's Dystopian/Utopian Vision." *Science Fiction Studies* (1998). D.

LaCroix's "To Touch Solid Evidence: The Implicity of Past and Present in Octavia

Butler's *Kindred*" *The Journal of the Midwest MLA* has an intriguing discussion of

temporality, but does not make the jump to associate the text with apocalypse and post-

apocalypse, nor seemingly engage it in terms of genre at all.

[9] Notably, Dana and Kevin's marriage and relationship is rarely focused upon in criticism

of *Kindred*, and instead criticism of the caustic and abusive relationship between Rufus

and Alice garners the most attention. Guy Mark Foster takes issue with this at length in

his article, contending that such a focus encourages the stasis of certain myths

surrounding interracial relationships, namely: "1) They encourage the false assumption

that to be white automatically means that one espouses a racist perspective, just as one's

ancestors presumably did, whereas to be a person of color, especially blacks,

automatically means that one espouses a hardcore antiracist perspective; 2) that

contemporary African Americans who enter sexual partnerships with whites are self-

haters and racial traitors while whites who couple with blacks are, at best, politically

radical, and, at the worst, sexual fetishists" (148). By contesting the hypocrisies and

enduring issues surrounding interracial relationships, Foster exposes the legacy of caustic

thinking that prevents, even now, interracial relationships from being recognized as

whole and unsullied, devoid of some premeditated pretense.

[10] Discussing the Caribbean and/or its diaspora along with center and periphery inevitably

brings one to Antonio Benítez-Rojo's *The Repeating Island* and his "meta-archipelago"

(4). However, here there may be no definitive or discernible center and periphery (or

boundary, in Benitez-Rojo's words), but there is also no sea (and the wilderness that is

Canada cannot stand in for the impassibility of the sea).

[11] Giorgio Agamben's "state of exception," from his book of the same name, offers

another theoretical option through which to consider both Hopkinson and Butler's texts,

but particularly Hopkinson's. Agamben describes the state of exception as anchored to

the judiciary powers that be, and representative of "the inclusion and capture of a space

that is neither outside nor inside […] *Being-outside, and yet belonging*: this is the

topological structure of the state of exception, and only because the sovereign, who

decides on the exception, is, in truth, logically defined in his being by the exception"

(35). This sounds very familiar, and yet what we see in Hopkinson's text is not an

"inclusion" or "capture" of a space, but an exclusion and release, but into a bordered

hinterland. The ghetto is outside, but centered, so that the populations in metro-Toronto

belong inside and outside, depending on how you look at it.

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