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Cross-Cultural Imagination: Survival and Harmony in Nalo Hopkinson's *Brown Girl in the Ring*

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ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes Hopkinson's *Brown Girl in the Ring* (1998) through Harris's (1983) concept of cross-cultural imagination, which envisions cultural hybridity as a path to healing and coexisting instead of effacement. By focusing on the novel's protagonist, Ti-Jeanne, the paper examines how spirituality and Caribbean mythology guide her in reconnecting with her Afro-Caribbean heritage within a dystopian Toronto setting. Through Harris's (1983) lens, Ti-Jeanne's identity conflict is resolved by embracing both cultures as a means to empower herself and her community. The paper examines whether one can coexist harmoniously with a new culture or if abandoning one's background is the only path to adaptation. Ultimately, the novel suggests that exploring diverse cultures is not just an academic exercise but a transformative process—one that fosters healing, reshapes societies, and cultivates mutual respect.

INTRODUCTION

Nalo Hopkinson is a Caribbean novelist who was born in Jamaica and has lived in Trinidad, Guyana, and the US. In 1977, she moved to Canada, where she still lives. Hopkinson's diverse cultural experiences are what shaped her writing skills, enabling her to create vivid and authentic scenes. Mohanraj (2000) confirms,

> I guess I have a sense of many places, not of one. It's given me a sense that all places are unique, so when I write, I try to convey a strong sense of the location where my story is set (p.31).

In Mohanraj's (2000) interview, Hopkinson emphasizes her dedication to establishing her novels in distinct, real-world settings, heightening the reader's sense of immersion and emotional attachment to the tale.

To set her work apart from traditional science fiction writing, Hopkinson attempts to incorporate elements of the Caribbean world into her new genre—Caribbean science fiction—with its roots in a diverse cultural viewpoint. She expresses the lack of Caribbean beliefs and ways of life in the science fiction genre, which makes her merge those two worlds. Wolff (2001) states: "Caribbean worldview is not one that the genre experiences often" (p.38). According to Wolff (2001), Hopkinson's commitment to connecting the Caribbean world with science fiction in her novels has gone beyond a mere representation; it has been developed into cultural reclamation. She also adds that folktales in her novels can be seen as a cultural storehouse. They are

entertaining and memorable and have become a way to pass on these cultural values from generation to generation, even without writing them down (Wolff, 2001).

Hopkinson uses cross-cultural imagination by mixing science fiction and Caribbean culture to reclaim the past and spread awareness of what has been fabricated throughout history. Coleman (2009) underscores the novel's cultural aspects, stating:

> Both literary scholars and Hopkinson herself note the ways in which Hopkinson uses language to identify both the different national distinctions within the Caribbean immigrant community and the relationship that the Caribbean community has with the larger Canadian society (p.1).

Hopkinson highlights cultural differences by depicting Caribbean characters who alternate between preserving their heritage and adapting to Canadian norms through language and ideology. Such a language presentation clarifies the speakers' intentions while using language to justify several attitudes (Mohammed & Abd Alhadi, 2020).

Additionally, Bustamante (2007) comments on the imaginative aspects of the novel, suggesting: "the shift of perception needed to read supernatural and science-fictional tropes allows to discuss issues that may otherwise become blurred and hard to tackle with" (p. 26). The importance of the fantastical and supernatural elements is underscored to explore multiple and sensitive aspects without getting caught up in a specific real-world situation. For example, Hopkinson has created a multicultural dystopian Toronto, where people must live together in harmony to survive when so many intend to harm. The city's transformation embodies both the crises of exploitation and the power of resilience and creativity.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Hopkinson's *Brown Girls in the Ring* (1998) attracted many critics' attention for its blend of speculative fiction with Caribbean folklore set in an urban dystopian landscape. Scholars explore the novel through a diversity of topics that intrigue them by the way the novel waves these topics in a modern futuristic society mixed with the Caribbean traditions, where the protagonist tries to survive in this world.

Several scholars have explored how *Brown Girl in the Ring* (Hopkinson, 1998) can be examined in themes such as identity and selfhood as re-imagined through organ transplantation. McCormack (2016) explains that the novel uses the transplanted body as a metaphor for the reshaping of sociopolitical relations, challenging traditional notions of selfhood. McCormack (2016, p.252) argues that the novel draws a comparison between "the transplanted body and the body politic," where the fusion of donor and receiver can be seen as a challenge to the existence of the division of class and race in the novel's post-apocalyptic world.

In another analysis, Salvini (2012) explores how traditional practices and Vodou rituals are woven into this narrative structure. She particularly focused on the significance of the spirits in Haitian tradition. She highlights how the novel's detailed descriptions of religious rituals serve as an educational template for readers who are unfamiliar with Vodou practices. She also studies how this traditional knowledge is used as survival tool for the protagonist in Toronto's dystopian setting, ultimately demonstrating how Caribbean magic navigates as both as cultural aspect and a means of adaptation to a new environment.

Furthermore, Wilby (2021) offers an essential conceptual framework for deconstructing the hierarchical binaries of liberal humanist traditions, particularly those rooted in European modernity. As Wilby (2021)

argues, scholars within this field have primarily neglected the insights of Black and decolonial thinkers by exploring posthuman ways of living without repeating the dominant Western frameworks.

Lastly, the cross-cultural imagination in *Brown Girl in the Ring* (Hopkinson, 1998) is an indispensable concept that scholars have not approached yet. The novel challenges readers to pay more attention to traditional narratives of power, belonging, and heritage in an interconnected world of cultural tensions. This paper analyses this concept from various angles, such as spiritual, political, and generational angles. It also explores the complex ideas about dual identity and survival in a multicultural dystopian society. Hopkinson's (1998) work is praised for its ability to fuse Caribbean and Western cultural elements using the speculative fiction genre.

METHOD

This paper uses Harris's (1983) concept of cross-cultural imagination to analyze Hopkinson's first novel, *Brown Girl in the Ring* (1998). This concept, which emphasizes the potential of cultural coexistence and duality through imagination, interprets the novel's exploration of many themes such as postcolonialism, traditions, and identity. Harris's idea of the concept of cross-cultural imagination is to allow readers to explore cultural diversity and prevent those traditions from being forgotten. This concept serves as the guiding framework for this paper by focusing on how the protagonist, Ti-Jeanne, negotiates her Caribbean heritage in the urban Canadian setting.

The primary method that was used in this research is close textual analysis, focusing on the symbols that reflect the cross-cultural themes in the post-colonialism world of the novel while being limited by the focus on the concept of cross-cultural imagination and does not address the other potential themes in this novel, such as feminism or dystopian elements. In particular, attention will be paid to moments when Ti-Jeanne engages in supernatural events, which are presented as key points to understanding how Hopkinson shapes the intersection of multiple cultures. The paper will analyze how these moments serve as the embodiment of Harries' (1983) concept of cross-cultural imagination. This paper will explore how *Brown Girl in the Ring* (Hopkinson, 1998) reflects Harris's (1983) idea of cultural duality in a way of surviving in a dystopian multicultural society while going through some doubts and self-discovery.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Concept of Cross-Cultural Imagination

The world is like a canvas; no painter can create a painting with one color. The combination of different colors is what makes a delightful artwork. This is how the cross-cultural imagination works. It is a powerful tool that fills cultural gaps by embracing diverse ways of thinking and living. It allows readers to connect with people from different cultural backgrounds, forming a mutual understanding of the universe. This concept contributes to building a harmonious and connected society to develop empathy, tolerance, and respect for others. One of the most influential writers on this concept is the Guyanese writer Harris (1921-2018). He plays a central role in developing and exploring ideas via his works, contributing to the broader understanding of how literature can bridge different cultural contexts and stimulate critical thinking about identity and society.

In *The Womb of Space*, Harris (1983) delves deeply into themes related to history, identity, and culture. These themes reflect his belief in building a cohesive society, inviting readers to enter a different world with an unfamiliar landscape. Harris (1983) speaks about the importance of cultural interconnectedness from a

subjective and poetic perspective to reach the mind and the heart. "All cultures," he asserts, "reflect a psychical jigsaw in the stars" (Harris, 1983, p.103). Harris (1983) shows how myths and cultural narratives capture the complex and interwoven character of the cosmos by sharing his viewpoint on humanity and the universe and fusing philosophical and artistic concepts. Symbolically, he emphasizes the depth and richness of cultural interactions, indicating that understanding one culture requires seeing how it fits into this broader, universal mosaic (Harris, 1983).

Harris (1983) posits that multiculturality is distinct from cross-culturality, contending that within a multicultural society, the most dominant culture will prevail over others. It gives no choice but to abide by the beliefs and values of the most substantial culture. In an interview, D'Aguiar (2003) confirms that Harris defined cross-culturality as "an opening to a true and variant universality of a blend of parts we can never wholly encompass". According to D'Aguiar, Harris's definition suggests that cross-culturality allows readers to explore and embrace a diverse universality—combining different pieces from various cultures. In D'Aguiar's interview, Harris claims that as people become aware of these pieces within other cultures, they may obtain a sense of unity or seek the interconnectedness that these pieces present. It also implies a desire for harmony and understanding across many cultures. Eventually, it is suggested in the interview that embracing cross-culturality can prevent the dominance or oppression of singular perspectives or beliefs (D'Aguiar, 2003).

Furthermore, the notion of cross-cultural imagination safeguards cultures and traditions from being forgotten by drawing them from the collective memory of those who hold them dear and presenting them for exploration by new audiences. Harris (1999) states that the writer's capability to bring back old myths and traditions alive is significant via using imagination:

> He discovers (he may also never discover it) that there are myths, ancient myths, which lie like fossils in the ancient past, that come alive within his own work so that the substance of tradition, which we apparently have forgotten, begins to re-enact itself, to come through the imaginative tradition (p.78).

Traditions might not be forgotten, and an author only needs to dig through history and introduce them to the world through his words. Harris (1999) emphasizes the importance of the imagination in its many forms, such as poems, novels, and plays, where people can better understand different cultures as they see the world from a new perspective. Stylistically, storytelling, which weaves together past, present, and myth with no order, is appreciated by critics (Mohammed, 2020).

For culture to survive across generations, cross-cultural imagination is essential. Historical events have a lasting impact on generations, and how they affect people varies according to their status in society. This idea promotes a happy society where people from different cultural backgrounds may support one another without invading one another's personal space. Traditions are maintained through the generations without being harmed by outside factors. In this sense, cross-culturality should be voluntary in a community with the "freedom to experience certain external culture with the choice to adopt for the development of that community" (Dimkpa, 2015, p.19). Gaining a deeper understanding of another culture through language or historical study can pave the road for harmony and peace, where people accept one another's differences and embrace reality.

Dystopia in a Postcolonial World

As a philosophical and literary concept, dystopia is an imaginary society shaped by extreme political oppression, social inequality, and inhumanity. Dystopian literature typically portrays an authoritarian government, environmental catastrophe, or unrestrained capitalism that warns readers of a future shaped by present-day consequences. Panda (2023) defines dystopian literature in his research, highlighting its evolution

as a genre that reflects historical and contemporary fears. Panda (2023, p.1080) states, “Dystopian literature, the antithesis of its utopian counterpart, presents readers with nightmarish visions of the future. It often explores themes of totalitarianism, surveillance, environmental collapse, loss of individual freedoms, and the erosion of ethical values”.

In his research, Panda (2023) describes dystopia as the opposite of utopia, or the idealistic world free from suffering. Instead, he says dystopian literature presents an unsettling and disturbing image of the future. These narratives serve as a warning for readers about the potential consequences on the horizon of an unchecked misuse of power leading to a catastrophe. Ultimately, critics state that dystopian literature forces readers to face disturbing truths about their societies and the future, urging them to question authoritarian power and recognize the dangers ahead (Chakravorty, 2015).

However, in Hopkinson's (1998), the postcolonial dystopia presents itself in Toronto, where the consequences of colonialism, racial oppression, and systemic neglect shape the city. This dystopian environment is not a speculative future but a reflection of past and present reality in marginalized communities. In Sejpal (2017):

> I think dystopia is everywhere, as opposed to utopia, which is literally translated as nowhere. Particularly for peoples who are surviving the effects of colonialism and globalization, the apocalypse done happened already. We have been living it for centuries (p.117).

In this sense, dystopia in *Brown Girl in the Ring* (Hopkinson, 1998) is not a fictional idea. However, it is an ongoing struggle from historical and political violence, something that already exists in the world. Unlike utopia, which exists as an imaginary place that is beyond reach and nowhere to be found. Chakravorty (2015) can be taken as a support to Hopkinson's words, saying: "The temporal stretch of postcolonial dystopias is neither toward an immanent future to be feared or a "vanishing present", as Spivak would have it, but an elastic present that is already here and continues to persist" (p.270).

The traditional dystopias often warn about an imminent catastrophe. Nevertheless, postcolonial dystopias demonstrate that oppression and political inequalities are not just potential threats but already exist, persisting from the colonial histories into the present. In contrast, postcolonial dystopia shows that these oppressive structures do not vanish. Therefore, rather than portraying a "non-existent society" as worse than the present, they insist that dystopia is an ongoing lived reality. Thus, postcolonial dystopias reform the dystopian genre by rejecting a futuristic downfall and instead asserting that dystopia is an immediate and current condition (Panda, 2023).

By describing dystopia as an ongoing struggle instead of a far futuristic nightmare, Hopkinson (1998) demolishes conventional boundaries between speculative fiction and social realism. The novel highlights how violence is displayed through racial discrimination and poverty, creating a dystopian environment for the marginalized. In this way, Hopkinson (1998) challenges the traditional costumed view of dystopian literature. In Glave (2003):

> It's pretty clear that for the past 500 years or so, the fortunes of the European nations were built on the backs of black and other racialized bodies. That has repercussions into the present day, because the work hasn't been done to even the imbalance in any big way (p.153).

According to Glave’s (2003) interview, Hopkinson asserts that the apocalypse is not an imminent catastrophe but a reality they have always known. As she states, it is clear that for the past 500 years or so, although formal colonialism has ended, its consequences persist. *Brown Girl in the Ring* (Hopkinson, 1998) is a lived reality for those who have been historically dispossessed and continue to experience the residual effects of post-

colonialism. Hopkinson's (1998) picture of Toronto as an abandoned, economically damaged city serves as a microcosm of bigger global inequalities, where the people left behind, predominantly Black and Indigenous communities must manage survival in an environment shaped by neglect and oppression (Glave, 2003).

Demystifying Obeah

In Hopkinson (1998), the Caribbean mythological and spiritual traditions are indispensable in shaping the narrative and the characters' identities. Obeah is one of these traditions, and the narrative revolves around a practice that is misunderstood and surrounded by shame. Scholars like Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert (2003) define Obeah in their book as "a set of hybrid or creolized beliefs dependent on ritual invocation, fetishes, and charms-incorporates two very distinct categories of practice" (p.131). To them, Obeah is not a religion; it is a system of beliefs that originated from the Creole notions of spirituality and relies on rituals, fetishes, and charms. Obeah is seen to follow two paths: The first concerns spirituality, while the second concerns the healing and medical field (Olmos & Paravisini-Gebert, 2003).

The first path consists of casting spells, dealing with the spirits, and seeking their protection. Each person has a "father spirit"; there are eight critical names that have been mentioned in the novel by the protagonist's grandmother, Mami Gros-Jeanne: "Shango, Ogun, Osain, Shakpana, Emanjah, Oshun, Oya, and Eshu" (Hopkinson, 1998, p.89). Those spirits, which Ti-Jeanne—the protagonist—manages to summon at the end, save her from death, and guide and protect those considered as their children. It goes for Eshu, called Legbara, Ti-Jeanne's "father spirit", who claims her as his belongings and daughter. Mami Gros-Jeanne introduces Legbara to Ti-Jeanne after unintentionally summoning him in a ritual meant for Osain, stating:

> "Prince of Cemetery claim you for he own," she said, "just like Osain is my father spirit. No wonder you does see death." In the shadows, Tony kicked at a pew, slammed his hand against it for good measure. Then he sat down, chin in hands, muttering. "But what that mean, Mami? I going to dead?" "No, child. Prince of Cemetery is an aspect of Eshu, who does guard crossroads. Prince of Cemetery does see to the graveyards." Ti-Jeanne didn't like the sound of that (Hopkinson, 1998, p.74).

Legbara is the ideal symbolic interlocutor between Ti-Jeanne's urban environment and her Caribbean heritage. The supernatural elements in this novel are deeply connected with the complex relationship of the protagonist's dual identity as Caribbean-Canadian (Bustamante, 2007).

The second path is less threatening than the supernatural aspect because it only involves the knowledge of using animal products or plants to heal illnesses and injuries. Obeah practitioners intend to use herbs and traditional healing methods instead of modern ones. It is evident in the novel that the author wrote: "She [Mami] had built up quite a stockpile of antibiotics and painkillers, so Ti-Jeanne didn't understand why Mami insisted on trying to teach her all that old-time nonsense" (Hopkinson, 1998, p.27). People keep giving medicine to Mami Gros-Jeanne from the abandoned drugstores after the riots, but she does not use them, replacing them with herbs and old-fashioned medicine. In this vein, willow bark makes a suitable replacement for painkiller pills (Coleman, 2009).

Disregarding the strictness and violence of colonial rule, several Obeah practitioners possessed positions of power in their communities. Their people and the British colonists felt threatened by those Obeah men. Whether it was used for good or evil, it did not make a difference for the British colonists; Obeah was just an evil slave act. As a result, in 1760, the British Empire had a vigorous campaign against Obeah. According to the historian Paton (2019), the British colonists had successfully made Obeah an illegal practice that whoever does or gets associated with an Obeah practitioner would suffer the punishment: the law made Obeah a crime

punishable by death if done by any Negro or another slave. Sets of laws were established to punish Obeah practitioners, usually by death. Many free black people were killed or punished due to the accusations of practicing Obeah, even without any proof.

Harris (1983), who tackles Obeah, argues that it has been associated with negativity and is considered a stigma. He suggests: "Obeah remains a pejorative term in that it reflects a state of mind or an embarrassment over addiction to magic, necessary hell-fire or purgatory through which to re-enter lost' origins, 'lost' divinity" (p.52). People who practice Obeah may be seen as an embarrassment because of their addiction to magic and spirituality. Due to that, the grandmother, Mami Gros-Jeanne, denies it whenever someone tells her she is practicing Obeah, which is seen multiple times in the novel. One of these times is when Mami offers to help Ti-Jeanne understand her visions, but she faces some hesitation from Ti-Jeanne:

> "But Mami, Obeah…" Mami stamped her foot. "Is not Obeah! You don't understand, and you won't let me teach you, so don't go putting your bad mouth 'pon me!" Ti-Jeanne pouted, but she held her tongue. It felt good to be unburdening her problems to Mami. If she pushed the old woman too far, she would only retreat into silence again (Hopkinson, 1998, p.37).

This reaction appears due to the fear and stigma associated with Obeah in the Caribbean culture, as their life, safety, and happiness are entirely dependent on it. Moreover, the mention of "hell-fire" implies the suffering and torment mentally and physically—viewed as necessary steps to reconnect with lost ancestral connections and spiritual power (Harris, 1983).

Nevertheless, some people lived up to Obeah's bad reputation. It is shown that most spirits do not intend to hurt humans. Those people seek harmfulness and power, overwhelmed by power and authority, to make the spirits serve them instead of serving the spirits. Such intentions are manifested in Rudy, who is not only the protagonist's grandfather but also the drug lord and the antagonist in the novel. Rudy's hunger for power plucked humanity from inside him. Despite Legbara's rejection to help him with his vengeance, he never stopped seeking revenge. Rudy never gives up until he gets what he wants.

In chapter six, Rudy tells his story to Tony, Ti-Jeanne's ex-boyfriend and her baby's father, of how he earned his power by ignoring Legbara's warnings of the consequences: "He tells me if I do all that, neither he nor the rest of the ancestors want nothing more to do with me. Well, me didn't business with that; what the ancestors ever do for me before?" (Hopkinson, 1998, p.94). He has been told that neither Legbara nor the other spirits will want to have anything to do with him. Rudy, who wants revenge and power, never cares about the spirits' approval. He sees only the potential for his benefit, unconcerned with the consequences for himself or his surroundings (Coleman, 2009).

Rudy's abuse of power is compared to the theft of cultural knowledge by Bedford (2018) saying: "Rudy's appropriation and misuse of ancestral knowledge of conjuring might well be read as an analogy for the theft of Indigenous scientific knowledge" (p.25). This "theft" refers to the way valuable knowledge developed by Indigenous peoples has been misused, leading to harm not only to the community but to one's own family. It underscores how Rudy controls his daughter's soul to bring him victims to feed his power (Bedford, 2018).

These actions lead Bustamante (2007) to suggest that Rudy is the one who brought his down-fall from the start by threatening the peace between humans and spirits; she says in her review: "Rudy's breaking of the spirit-human collaborative system we mentioned above is what brings his downfall through his granddaughter herself, who restores the traditions that her grandmother represented" (p.24). Rudy's shattering of the harmonious collaboration between spirits and humans led to his ruin. His actions threaten to destroy the

traditions that Mami Gros-Jeanne taught him, traditions Ti-Jeanne prevents from happening by using his headquarters, on top of the CN Tower, as a linking tool to the spirit world to call upon the spirits to help her defeat Rudy (Bustamante, 2007).

Ti-Jeanne is responsible for restoring these traditions and the balance between humans and spirits. Her internal conflict escalates when she calls upon her ancestral heritage to face Rudy, forcing her to confront the limitations of her skepticism towards her grandmother's practices of the Obeah. Wilby (2021) explains Ti-Jeanne's realization of defeating her grandfather, Rudy, saying "In order to understand that it is knowledge of the spirits, rather than a disconnection from the spirit world, that represents the possibility of survival" (p.13). She realizes that the only way to survive is to accept her heritage to the spirits instead of ignoring it, which grants her the power to defeat Rudy and the key to unlocking a deeper connection with her identity and her ancestors. Eventually, Ti-Jeanne embraces her visions, trusting them as guides rather than fearing and seeing them as ominous (Wilby, 2021).

Ti-Jeanne’s connection with her ancestors deepens, offering a sense of belonging. In the last chapter, at Mami Gros-Jeanne's funeral, Ti-Jeanne confesses to Legbara about the uncertainty of her knowledge compared to her grandmother; she tells him: "Well, Papa, look my answer here. I go do this for a little while, but I ain't Mami. I ain't know what I want to do with myself yet, but I can't be she" (Hopkinson, 1998, p.174). Ti-Jeanne did not have much time to learn more things from Mami Gros-Jeanne. She has accepted her heritage, though she does not know if she can replace Mami Gros-Jeanne after her death. Nonetheless, she is still holding onto her heritage and the traditions she has abandoned before to help people, just like how her grandmother did with peace inside her heart and did not run and throw away what her grandmother worked hard to keep (Bustamante, 2007).

Cultural Fear and Shame

Hopkinson (1998) also portrays gendered struggles through a cross-cultural lens. Ti-Jeanne’s growth as a woman and mother living in an oppressive society is deeply interconnected with the cultural and spiritual knowledge she inherits from her culture. This dynamic demonstrates how the concept of cross-cultural imagination maintains identity and empowers individuals to redefine their roles within society and challenge the typical stereotypes.

Gartner (2021) argues for one of the novel’s key gendered concerns, which is the representation of black motherhood. Ti-Jeanne’s journey as a single mother challenges the conventional stereotypes of motherly instincts and biological traits. “Hopkinson depicts motherhood as a difficult task for which women are not necessarily innately suited” (Gartner, 2021, p.4). This perspective destroys the traditional idea of femininity and challenges the false assumption that women are inherently suited for caregiving. Ti-Jeanne finds it difficult to embrace her role as a mother, reflecting a broader struggle of black women framed in this novel as a process of growth and adaptation (Gartner, 2021).

Additionally, Roberts (1997) also states that black motherhood has been devalued in American society by saying, “This devaluation of Black motherhood has been reinforced by stereotypes that blame Black mothers for the problems of the Black family, such as the myth of the Black matriarch—the domineering female head of the Black family" (p.950). Roberts (1997) refers to how the stereotypes have been used to blame black mothers for the struggles faced by the black families, rather than acknowledging the structural influences such as racism, systemic oppression, and poverty.

Hopkinson (1998) presents this perspective as a complex experience shaped by social circumstances, personal history, and cultural expectations. Ti-Jeanne's struggle with being a black woman in a dystopian society and her journey in learning how to be a good mother to her baby is not just a personal failure. However, it portrays a broader issue of the pressures and stereotypes placed on black women to embody nurturing, resilience, and self-sacrifice, even when they have been denied the care and stability that such a life requires (Gartner, 2021).

Furthermore, it also underlines the racism from both within and outside one's own culture. Hopkinson creates a narrative work that reflects Caribbean culture, representing the reality of it. Obeah is always linked to dark magic, even if used for good instead of evil, creating discrimination and fear between the other cultures and within their culture. In chapter four, an interaction of Mami Gros-Jeanne with the street children is stressed; the readers witness the fear that the injured little white girl named Susie had when she was taken to Mami Gros-Jeanne looking for help:

> The little girl whimpered, clutched at her friends. "No, no! She's a witch! She's going to eat me! Don't make me go in there!" "Just shut up, Susie!" said the eldest of the children, a young woman of about fifteen with matted hair and torn clothing (Hopkinson, 1998, p.46).

Although Mami Gros-Jeanne has never done evil and served the spirits for good, she is still associated with evil and wickedness, even though she does not intend to harm anyone. Despite all of that, Mami Gros-Jeanne shows her selfless approach to healthcare. Not only did she help the injured girl and provide a proper meal to the other children, but she expects nothing in return (Bedford, 2018).

Not only from the surrounding cultures, but also from the Caribbean community itself, Obeah practitioners might face racism and discrimination. Tony, who maintains the Canadian mindset with his Caribbean heritage, dismisses Obeah, saying: "Obeah? Nobody believes in that duppy business any more!" (Hopkinson, 1998, p.26). Such a refusal shows the internal skepticism and rejection of some Caribbean individuals' traditional practices. Despite his Canadian mindset, Tony shows a contradiction. He understands the power of the Obeah and how dangerous it is.

Such fear is expressed in chapter one, where Ti-Jeanne witnesses an interaction between Tony and her grandmother, Mami Gros-Jeanne, as she threatens him that if he does not walk away: "Ti-Jeanne knew that for all his medical training and his Canadian upbringing, he'd learned the fear of Caribbean Obeah at his mother's knee" (Hopkinson, 1998, p.26). It is a view that was grown in him as a part of his Caribbean identity. This fear substantially impacts the characters and their interaction, creating some distance simultaneously (Coleman, 2009).

This discrimination was the reason for making Obeah practices a secret. Many people would gather in one place at night to perform the Obeah rituals and serve the spirits. Unconsciously, hiding it from the other became a habit, which is what Mami Gros-Jeanne tries to explain to her granddaughter when it is time for her to understand her connection to the spirits:

> I used to hide it from you when I was seeing with them. I don't really know why, doux-doux. From since slavery days, we people get in the habit of hiding we business from we own children even, in case a child open he mouth and tell somebody story and get them in trouble. Secrecy was survival, oui? Is a hard habit to break. Besides, remember I try to teach about what I does do, and you run away? (Hopkinson, 1998, p.36).

Ever since slavery days, Obeah practitioners used to hide their activities even from their children in case one child exposed them. It is an act of protective instinct and ingrained cultural habit. Such a habit that grows with

them over the years is hard to break. Still, when Mami Gros-Jeanne wanted to teach her granddaughter about these traditions, the latter rejected it. Ti-Jeanne did not wish to be involved in such activities, showing complete rejection until Obeah became her last choice to survive and protect whom she cared about (Coleman, 2009).

Still, nothing has only one side, no matter how horrible people react towards the Obeah. Many people still see it as their salvation and a reason to live in this world, and they intend to help others with their gifts. That has been said by Moore and Johnson (2004): "Obeah might have been bad magic, but for many people, it seemed to empower them to shape their existence by manipulating the spirits, both benevolent and malevolent" (p.46).

While Obeah is viewed as negative or dark magic, it can also be seen as a way for people to better their lives through spiritual means. Manipulating the spirits may be done to seek protection, healing, or influencing events through rituals. The line between good and bad magic is subjective and depends on the individual's point of view; what one society considers terrible may be seen as beneficial in another.

Hopkinson (1998) gives readers two sides that manipulated spirits for evil intentions: Rudy controlled his daughter's spirit in the duppy and made an uncountable amount of people suffer to death, and for the good intentions as in Ti-Jeanne who acted with the help of all spirits. Bustamante (2007) has highlighted Ti-Jeanne's importance of bridging the two worlds by saying: "her link with her patron spirit allows her to become an interlocutor not only for the traditions she has abandoned and her present life but also for the disconnected worlds of mortals and spirits" (p.21). Through her willingness to return to the culture and traditions Ti-Jeanne had previously abandoned, she could reconnect the human and spirit worlds, bridging the past with the present. She prevented her culture from being forgotten since she is the last of a line of supernaturally gifted women.

Cultural Duality

Brown Girl in the Ring (Hapkinson, 1998) mirrors the cultural duality that Caribbean immigrants face in Toronto. Coleman (2009) notes that characters in the novel express duality in their identity as both Caribbean and Canadian through many things. In this respect, she contends: "There are times when the novel's characters maintain a Caribbean identity, and other times when they adapt to the Canadian context" (Coleman, 2009, p.3). The characters had to adapt to the Canadian context, mainly in traditional practices and language.

Mami can be seen as the perfect embodiment of the duality of the Caribbean and Canadian identities. She does treasure her Caribbean heritage and herbal knowledge. However, she understands the need to adapt to the new life through the willingness to learn the northern herbs: "She missed the tropical herbs she could no longer get in Toronto, both for healing and for cooking, but no help for that. Romni Jenny and Frank Greyeyes were teaching her about northern herbs" (Hopkinson, 1998, p.100). Hopkinson shows the absence of tropical herbs rooted in the cultural Caribbean heritage and needed to make traditional medication. However, Mami Gros-Jeanne adapts to this loss by learning the northern herbs from Jenny and Greyeyes. This knowledge transfer stresses the need to blend the Caribbean heritage with the new Canadian reality, presenting the concept of cross-culturality, where immigrants must widen their knowledge and perspective to thrive in their new surroundings (Coleman, 2009).

Hopkinson (1998) uses language to reflect the cultural duality within the Caribbean characters as they switch between their language. Mami Gros-Jeanne code-switches between Creole and standard Canadian English in *Brown Girl in the Ring*. Hence, Mami Gros-Jeanne speaks in Creole with people from her Caribbean community and switches to standard Canadian English when she communicates with non-Caribbean people; it is seen when she helps an injured white Canadian little girl: "Come. Bring her inside,' Mami said, switching

to the more standard English she used when speaking to non-Caribbean people" (Hopkinson, 1998, p.46). Mami Gros-Jeanne immediately code-switches when she talks to the little girl who might not be familiar with any other accent. It showcases her ability to adapt to the Canadian setting, bridging cultures and paving the way for cultural harmony.

Hopkinson focuses on what readers may think, such as how the use of Creole shows the characters as less educated. Hopkinson herself sees language as the core of the person's identity. In Rutledge (1999): "A lot of Caribbean identity is bound up in language" (p.26). Hopkinson (1998) mainly focuses on using the Creole language in her narrative, and this code-switching represents the mindset of the people who use Creole and ties it up to its words. She states that she would not reach satisfaction if she did not represent them. Salvini (2012) comments on this part of the interview:

> When her novel was published in 1998, science fiction readers were certainly not used to coming across characters that speak like Rudy. In her writings, hybrid languages and sociolects, as she highlighted in the same interview, aim at reproducing the complexity of urban life by including a variety of speech patterns (p.183).

Salvini (2012) states that Hopkinson (1998) represents the Caribbean culture by challenging the traditional linguistic rules in science fiction. It is a unique way to distinguish her characters through language. That is clearly shown in her novel, where the readers can witness the change in the Premier's way of talking. Hopkinson (1998) clarified to the audience that Mami Gros-Jeanne's heart transferred to the Premier's body and soul as she started to use Mami Gros-Jeanne's way of talking, saying her usual word, "stupidness". Hopkinson manages to convey this information only by switching the language since Mami is one of the characters bound to her language (Rutledge, 1999).

While Mami Gros-Jeanne shows balance in her duality, Ti-Jeanne struggles in such a matter. Instead of equalizing between the two cultures she belongs to, she experiences a dilemma and difficulty stabilizing in one culture. As Ančić (2009) explains Ti-Jeanne's struggle saying:

> Ti-Jeanne is caught between two different places: the one here (Canada) and the remembrance of there (the Caribbean), which are personified by her grandmother who makes a living with her nurse's training and her knowledge of Caribbean remedies, and Tony who is aligned with the consumerism of destructive Canadian culture (p.154).

Ti-Jeanne's struggle with the influences of her Caribbean heritage and Canadian urban life is reflected in her relationship with her grandmother and ex-boyfriend. While Mami keeps reminding Ti-Jeanne of the importance of her cultural knowledge, Tony dismisses the it, deepening her doubts. It was her mission to balance these influences in order to survive. As Salvini (2012) speaks on Ti-Jeanne's way of adapting in such duality, "Ti-Jeanne has done good, but she did it in her own way, adapting the traditional knowledge of the previous generations to her post-apocalyptic condition of urban settler" (p.186) despite her suffering from her visions, she learns to accept her "hybridized self" and embrace her heritage to defeat her grandfather, Rudy.

The novel, using the concept of cross-cultural imagination, shows the importance of cultural duality and how people should be more open to exploring more cultures. It is a way to provide a place and shatter the dilemma of choosing one culture to stick with for immigrants and mixed-blood people. Cultures are woven together, and none should be abandoned or forgotten. Harris (1983) believes that sticking to the comfort zone without exchanging or experiencing human diversity can lead to alienation, usually occurring in a postcolonial environment. This alienation would lead to hatred among different cultures and create enemies that fight each other.

Speaking about the rejection of engaging with other cultures, Glassman (1989) states: "My point is this, that those people who believe that you can return to some ground purity in which you dispense with the European heritage, I believe are quite wrong. These things have been woven together for centuries" (p.25). According to Glassman's (1989) interview, Harris disagrees with the idea of returning to the so-called "ground purity," where people reject European influences and wipe them away by living in alienation.

However, despite all of that, people should hold onto their own culture, as Lalbakhsh et al. (2015) said, "Neglecting tradition means losing their true identity and culture and letting colonizers exploit their soul as well as their land" (p.97). When tradition is abandoned, it will only weaken the souls, letting the colonial hands take control of land and mind, leaving the community vulnerable. The colonizers' and the colonized people's lives and histories have been interwoven for centuries. It is hard to untangle them because the past cannot be erased, and the effect will remain, especially when people, including Harris himself, are mixed-blood and have ancestors from more than one culture (Lalbakhsh et al., 2015).

CONCLUSION

This paper examines *Brown Girl in the Ring* (Hapkinson, 1998) through Harris's (1983) concept of cross-cultural imagination, explaining the way Hopkinson's narrative uses Caribbean spirituality and mythology to negotiate identity in a dystopian, futuristic Toronto. Through the characters, the novel shows that people can merge their cultures without overstepping one another by being open to cultural exchange and benefiting each other to thrive even in ruined environments.

The novel depicts the cultural perspective of Caribbean myths and spiritual practices within its protagonist, Ti-Jeanne. It is demonstrated by her struggles to turn to her heritage with the demands of a rapidly changing modern society as it clashes with her own. However, her connection to the spiritual world made her more aware of her responsibility to hold onto her traditions with pride, returning to the heritage she abandoned before and choosing to hold onto her traditions and help others using them. The characters, especially Ti-Jeanne, navigate their dual Caribbean-Canadian identities by balancing their heritage with the need to adapt to their new environment. This duality increases their sense of belonging and participation in both cultures, proving that abandoning one's heritage is not the solution to adapting to a new environment. Instead, it is by crossing the cultural benefits between each culture and representing them in their best shape.

However, Hopkinson (1998) not only explores cultural hybridity but also captures gendered struggles within one's own culture, specifically through Ti-Jeanne's evolving understanding of motherhood. Gendered struggles, particularly around motherhood in a dystopian postcolonial world, are highly linked to cross-cultural imagination as they highlight the skepticism on identities between the traditional role, colonial remnants, and modern reality, leading to a new view of motherhood. Through Ti-Jeanne's journey, Hopkinson (1998) demonstrates that cultural hybridity is not just a theme of a novel, but also survival mechanism for the individuals and communities against colonization, modern social pressure and globalization.

Overall, this paper contributes to literary studies by bridging Hopkinson's (1998) speculative fiction with Harris' (1983) theoretical framework. It manifests how Harris' (1983) vision of cultural fusion and identity healing becomes real and visible in Hopkinson's (1998) work. Thus, instead of talking about the concept, the novel shows it happens through the characters where imagination gives life into theory. By doing so, the study offers a new way to understand both Harris's (1983) theory and Hopkinson's (1998) novel. Not as an individual exploration of culture, but as interdependent efforts to reframe identity beyond the colonial image. In this way, *Brown Girl in the Ring* (Hopkinson, 1998) becomes more than a dystopian fantasy. It becomes a living example of Harris' (1983) vision of cross-cultural imagination, where the fractured identities of the postcolonial world find healing through narrative recovery of suppressed traditions.

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