

THE CHTHONIC AND THE BIRTH OF NEW *TERRAPOLEIS*: COLLABORATIVE ECOJUSTICE IN N. K. JEMISIN'S *THE BROKEN EARTH* TRILOGY

Aishat Ize Yusuf (PhD)

English Department

Federal College of Education, Katsina

yusuf.aishat@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper explores the existence of chthonic forces in N. K. Jemisin's *The Broken Earth* trilogy and how these chthonic forces and beings become agents of apocalyptic events. It employs posthumanist and ecocritical lenses in examining the story's portrayals of the debilitating effects of human interference and abuse of nature, the existence of chthonic monstrous others, and the trials of being 'Other'. It argues that the possibility of redeeming humanity's culpability in the Earth's destruction can only be possible via posthuman connections, ecojustice, and collaborations across racial, class, and interspecies lines leading to the establishment of new iterations of terrapoleis of existence. The paper also explores the ramifications of these new modes of existence on the emergence and the possibility of ecojustice in a new Earth.

The paper begins by exploring how Jemisin positions and identifies the inhabitants of the Chthonic as posthuman identities and how the politics of a manufactured signification and 'othering' of racial categories and minorities establishes and maintains anthropocentric superiority and dominance. It also examines the literary illustration of the 'Gaia hypothesis' and its implications in the literary portrayals and understanding of chthonic forces and beings. The paper concludes that the interconnections and interrelationships between the earth as a sentient, conscious being and other species living within and above its surfaces can lead to a more beneficial, sustainable, and ecologically just society.

Keywords: Chthonic, terrapoleis, ecojustice, Jemisin, Broken Earth, trilogy

Introduction

The events in Jemisin's *The Broken Earth* trilogy are set on a future Earth on a singularly massive continent called the "Stillness". The lone continent is beset by periodic apocalyptic disasters known as Seasons that last for generations and lead to constant and significant changes in the world and its inhabitants. Survivors constantly huddle into Comms which are protected communities to wait out the destruction, then crawl out to try rebuilding a constantly dwindling civilization before the next event. The inhabitants range from "Stone eaters" who are the remnants of an advanced civilization that persist throughout the destruction, to Obelisks; giant, crystals with incredible powers to the survivors of humanity called "orogenes," who can manipulate the Earth via the exertion of incredible magical power and a sentient powerful force known as "Father Earth". The orogenes are marginalized and shunned despite their invaluable ability to stabilize the earth and are often singled out for death from Stills, their non-magical counterparts. *The Obelisk gate* is the second book in the trilogy while *The stone sky* is the final book.

The Broken Earth Trilogy

N. K. Jemisin explores posthuman subjectivity by writing from the point of view of chthonic beings and forces. Her disruptive writing, filled with other-than-human thinking, reasoning, and agency pushes readers out of their anthropocentric comfort zones into the chaotic, cyclic, and often apocalyptic world of forces that constantly make and are remade themselves in a never-ending cycle of destruction and rebirth. N. K. Jemisin took the SF world by storm when in 2018 she broke existing records by being the first writer in the history of the Hugo Award to win Best Novel; three years in a row. One amazing fact was that all three consecutive awards were won by a single continuous story which she divided into three parts. This story was *The Broken Earth* trilogy and it ushered in a new era in SF history. What was it that made this story and her writing so captivating? Some critics have attributed its success to Jemisin's awe-inspiring ability to build new and alien worlds to the type of world-building previously seen in SF writing (Ingwersen, 2019). Some insist that it is the strange experimental way in which she writes her character's voices (Walter, 2019) and for others, like Iles (2019), it is her unique approach to social and ecological justice which tries to include some often ignored voices like that of the 'earth' itself.

Jemisin's novels narratively empower black female characters and other marginalized groups which are often ignored or underwritten in traditional SF. Her writing, especially *The Broken Earth* trilogy has been tentatively categorized as an iteration of ecocriticism and the New Weird SF by critics such as Ingwersen (2019) because "the planetary estrangements she depicts lend themselves to an ecocritical reading that may supplement and challenge recent receptions of both weird fiction and the Anthropocene" (p. 75). Jemisin's engagement with the environment reflects contemporary anxieties about climate change and the dangers of chthonic and planetary agency which manifests itself in counter-attacks and retaliations against anthropocentric destruction of the environment. In a critical exploration of the latent agency of chthonic forces, Haraway (2016) turns to the Greek mythology of the gorgons. The gorgons were chthonic females who were betrayed by their astral Titan relatives and condemned to live wretchedly vindictive lives defending themselves from humans who constantly hunted them for annihilation. Haraway employs the gorgon myth as a literary example of humanity's inability or unwillingness to understand or engage with chthonic others in mutually beneficial terms leading to usually devastating results. In a profoundly ironic take to the ubiquitously long-suffering myth, she muses over how; "The Gorgons turned men who looked into their living, venomous, snake-encrusted faces into stone" and wonders "what might have happened if those men had known how to politely greet the dreadful chthonic ones" (p. 54)?

The 'Chthonic' in literary, mythological, and scientific contexts, signifies the collective existence of the infernal, earthbound creatures and forces that inhabit and regulate the Earth's subterranean surfaces. According to Haraway (2016), "the Greek *chthonios* means 'of, in, or under the earth and the seas'" (p. 53). Chthonic creatures and forces of the earth have undergone many stages of perceptions and reception throughout the history of humanity (Haraway, 2016, p. 71; Coupe, 1997, p. 71; Ruse, 2013, p. 141). Chthonic or earthbound beings represent in mythological and fictional accounts, the primitive earthly creatures and forces of "Terra" or "Gaia" in contrast with the Astral or the sky-bound civilizations that have characterized the anthropocentric reign of humanity. Often considered dangerous and mysterious, these denizens of the dark earthly spaces along with their respective cosmologies and manifestations are presumed to defy reason and rationality and therefore beyond human ability for mutual cognizance. They instead simply became the source of humanity's internalized horror of the 'dark other', especially in Western philosophies (Cixous, 1976, p. 878). Chthonic others are not regarded as sharing parity with the Western astral "Homo" at least not in

Western configurations. They are considered as the lesser members of the hierarchical binary because, as Haraway points out, to Western understanding, chthonic ones show a seeming marked lack of ideology, are primal and irrational; constantly remaking and being unmade themselves (2016b, p. 2). Some non-western cosmologies do not share the same denigrating view of the Chthonic, however. For many writers of chthonic narratives like Jemisin, these very other-than-human qualities not only follow reasoning and worldviews that may be strange, illogical, and obscure to normative human sensibilities but like many marginalized categories, are worthy of representation in their own right.

In *The Broken Earth*, the main chthonic force, “Father Earth,” like the Greek gorgons, also turned some humans into ‘living’ stone. In this fictional version, however, it quickly becomes obvious that the chthonic force is coerced into doing so in a desperate bid to generate empathy from humanity; an emotion which is often sorely lacking in a selfishly anthropocentric world. This emotional and philosophical anthropocentrism which emphasised only the importance of humanity and its selfish ends gave rise to the destructive activities of humanity in a broad period increasingly referred to by scholars as the ‘Anthropocene’.

The “Anthropocene” is a proposed name by meteorologist Paul J. Crutzen to announce and describe a new geohistorical epoch in which humans began to affect the Earth’s climate and ecosystems, especially in widespread and often negative ways. Narratives before and during this unofficial period are heavily proliferated with accounts of earthbound forces and creatures which have inspired various reactions from humanity’s forbears and later contemporary civilized sensibilities, ranging from disgust to reverence; from a conscious respect for beneficial connections and inter-dependence; to sometimes unethical manipulations. Conversely regarded as gods or monsters or as contemporary materialist chthonic life forms, these earthbound forces and beings have had a presence that was only overshadowed by the astral non-materialist ideologies of the anthropocentric age of humanity. Informed by religion, especially the monotheistic ones, the creeping, slithering, digging, monstrous, many-tentacled and multiple-limbed denizens of the Earth or the subterranean underworld lost their terrible appeal and became instead, the shunned icons of evil and remnants of a more reprehensible, savage and darker past best forgotten or at least buried in the unearthed annals of the past (Coupe, 1997, p. 69-71).

Science fiction with its tendency towards the alien, the fantastic, and the uncanny, has traditionally been a site for the proliferation and portrayal of chthonic influences especially in negative ways. Contemporarily, a resurgence in ecocritical and posthumanist inclusivity for all of earth's inhabitants which repositions the human as no longer the central figure of existence but just one of many equally important elements has led to the possibilities of new "Terrapoleis"; variations of new earth(s) societies whose diverse citizens interact in deeper, much more interconnected ways than that contemporarily found in the Anthropocene. In a bid to record the tentative beginnings of an imagined ecologically egalitarian and inclusive future in which all of earth's inhabitants exist in much more harmonious interactions than what is presently obtainable, some scholars, scientists, and geohistorians have designated this futuristic and optimistic epoch, the 'Chthulucene'.

The word Chthulucene, coined from the Greek words *Khthom* (earthly) and *Kainos* (new) by Donna Haraway in her book *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, (2016) describes an epoch signaling a return to the earth; not the traditional 'mother earth' whose nurturing benevolence we often take for granted, but an earth which while retaining its maternal and nurturing peculiarities, still contains and hides sinister forces under its surfaces which can and will collectively bring about an end to the arrogant excesses of the Anthropocene. She further describes the connection of the Chthonic past and present entities with the contemporary insurgence of "the webs of speculative fabulation, speculative feminism, Science fiction, and scientific fact" (p. 105). These entities often only fully realized in fictional representations are usually envisioned as tentacled and multi-stringed, endlessly forming connections, breaking apart and reconfiguring themselves in ways similar to Deleuze & Guattari (1987) rhizomatic branching model. The chthonic inhabitants of the chthulucene differ markedly from the anthropocentric fantasies of most traditional SF writers and according to Haraway, could not have been imagined by even H. P. Lovecraft, the famous Horror/SF author of *The Call of Cthulhu* and creator of the Chthulhu Mythos. Unlike Lovecraft's famous horrific literary creation, "Chtulhu"; chthonic creatures according to Haraway, "were terrible only in the patriarchal mode" (p. 174). These entities of the chthulucene as imagined in these emergent narratives, are very different from his "misogynist racial nightmare monster" but are named and conceived after "diverse earth wide tentacular powers and forces and collected things" (p. 101).

For Haraway the 'Chthulucene', is "neither sacred nor secular" but a harbinger of new and less destructive modes of existence for chthonic beings whose existence is currently "...at stake now" (p. 55). It is a gradual process of remaking the world through the activation of the chthonic forces; in a slow but sure process of composting (degradation) of the wanton waste of the Anthropocene. It also symbolizes the earth's resistance against humanity's centuries-long genocides, "speciecidies" and violent "extremism" which became even more prevalent in the contemporary geo-historic period of the Capitalocene (p. 36). In the chthulucene, connections are made and remade, generating entirely new relationships between humans and other actants in the natural environment; in essence, leading to a new Earth and new realities. This idea of a new terrapolis is often fictional and speculative. It is mostly a product of literary fabulation which exists mostly in fictional imaginations instead of scientific fact but like all posthuman becoming, it is constantly in the process of arriving. It is a futuristic "n-dimension", "a niche space"... for companion species and unexpected companionships, a fantastical world of storytelling "in which multi-specied players are enmeshed in partial and flawed translations across distance" (p. 10).

These fictional, projected multispecies connections which are used to mark the new materiality of the Earth are designated as an oddkinship by Haraway. Different from established biological kinships, these connections which cross the dividing lines between species and physical laws, hint at the arrival of posthuman beings. Going further, beyond the banality of the "posthuman" and other fantastic and chimeric genealogical and biogenetic family relationships, oddkin are unexpected collaborations and combinations. They are a "kind of material semiotics" that is always "situated someplace and not noplac, entangled and worldly" (p. 4). These entanglements generate new ways of interacting with nature, interspecies realizations, and new ways of envisioning possibilities away from the ever-looming apocalyptic disaster and collapse which frequently characterize narratives about the anthropocentric destruction of planet Earth.

Theoretical Framework

This study employs Posthumanism as its theoretical framework. In its various iterations, Posthumanism as a philosophy and practice inclusively examines subjectivities that are not only often ignored and excluded by Western humanism, but could also be said to exist within or even outside the fringes of anthropocentric society by virtue of some genetic, cultural, technological

and even virtual markers. As a philosophy, it seeks to include a wide often bewildering range of persons within the accepted categories of the 'Human' (Gladden, 2018, p. 52). Essentially, the most important or overriding task for posthumanism as a critical discourse;

...is reflection on how the effects on and of contemporary techno-culture and biotechnology force through a rethinking of the integrities and the identities of the human: not forgetting, either, those of its non-human others, many of them of humanity's own making and remaking – gods, monsters, animals, machines, systems (Callus and Herbrechter, 2012, p. 241).

Posthumanism like many other contemporary criticisms which share the same prefix of 'post-', according to Ferrando (2013), is not only generated from postmodernism but also shares its "critique of objective knowledge and absolute truth"(p. 181). It is a mutable, dynamic and constantly shifting methodology which like postmodernism and other contemporary 'posts,' is a questioning of the basic tenets of traditional Western 'Humanism' and its anthropocentric principles.

The intersections of almost all aspects of human life have led to the questioning and revisions of all hitherto absolute 'truths' and certainties. Unlike postmodernist-generated anti-humanism, which posited itself against various aspects of traditional Humanism, posthumanism generally does not necessarily position itself against every tenet of Humanism but instead decries the often inflexible nature of humanist categorizations and concerns and "offers a revisitation of the being as 'transcendent immanence', disrupting one of the founding splits of Western thought....which traditionally relates to every other traditional dualism"(Ferrando, 2012, p.11). Thus it interrogates the often oppressive hierarchical ordering of life and traditional humanist dualisms and binaries such as "mind/body, subject/object, self/other, male/female, human/animal-alien-robot" by calling for more inclusive definitions and a greater moral/ethical response and responsibility to life in general; thereby discouraging indiscriminate exploitation and the subsequent eradication of life forms. This inclusive critical posthumanist thought "is often perceived as providing entangled networks of pluralities that are post-racial and post-gender" (Rahn, 2019, p. 83). Posthumanism undertakes an essential departure from established Humanist models of categorization and engagement with a world that has essentially been a reflection of the ideals of the Western European Enlightenment.

Posthumanism as a philosophy insists that the contemporary discoveries and re-discoveries of ancient myths, entities, and forces (Oziewicz, 2016) have necessitated a re-visitation of the insistence on reason, intelligence, and agency as the essential bases of global privilege. The Enlightenment scholars held the rather narrow view that the faculties of reasoning, intelligence, and even the ability to feel pain were a preserve of the human being; a distinguishing characteristic which they assumed was denied or limited for non-humans, animals for example. The scientific revolution heralded by the mechanistic worldview of Rene Descartes insisted on the superiority of the human mind (identity) to all 'others' generated from his famous dictum "ego cogito ergo sum" (I think, therefore I am). For Descartes, the ability to think was tied to the acquisition of an identity, a trait which included even the ability to feel pain and emotions, something which he and later scientists and philosophers denied to those they blindly and prematurely assumed was devoid of this all-important ability (Capra, 1975, pp. 41-48).

Posthumanism like other modern philosophies, seeks to come to terms with recent discoveries that collaborate with ancient mythological narratives that insist on the deep physiological and psychological interrelationships between humans, metamorphosed humans, and non-humans. It explores the possibilities of new and existing identities that escape the rigid categories that divide humans from all others by emphasizing the hybrid and concatenated nature of human existence itself. It also emphasizes the inability of humanity to ever truly separate itself from those different 'others' it constantly seeks to push out of its exclusivist understanding of the self. These new subjectivities/identities commonly referred to as 'posthuman' are therefore persons (human, non-human, ahuman, entities, beings, etc.) which exist in states which can be considered as being beyond human. The recognition of the posthuman subject in contemporary times opens up a myriad of questions about the qualities which have been hitherto exclusively ascribed to humans alone.

Posthumanism as a general methodology and approach is therefore explained by Ferrando (2013);

...an onto-epistemological approach, as well as an ethical one, generated as a philosophy of mediation which discharges any confrontational dualisms, as well as any hierarchical legacies. Historically, the posthuman can be seen as the philosophical approach which suits the informal geological time of anthropocene.....while the posthuman focuses on decentring the human from

the centre of the discourse, the anthropocene marks the extent of the impact of human activities on a planetary level, and so it stresses the urgency for humans to become aware of pertaining to an ecosystem which when damaged, negatively affects the human condition as well (p. 23).

Braidotti, a prominent posthumanist critic, on her part, examines the emergent rise of various forms of critical posthumanisms in contemporary times as critiques of the Western anthropocentric model through the multivalent lenses of Race, Class, post-colonial, feminist, Ecological/environmental, technological and even spiritual concerns. All these conflate into an uneasy recognition of how groups and individuals are considered and treated as being 'sub-human', inhuman, or non-human and therefore embodying the humanist justification for their exclusion from human societies; their indeterminable positions outside anthropocentric societal hierarchies, dehumanizing marginalization and exploitative subservience to those considered superior in their respective societies.

The 'Gaia Hypothesis and its implications for literary representations of chthonic consciousness

The 'Gaia hypothesis' is a speculative hypothesis propounded by British environmentalist James Lovelock and other ecocritical scientists who in contemporary times are increasingly turning towards the view that the Earth is a living "organism" with an agency of its own, "a self-regulating system" able to act and affect intended outcomes in the face of provocative conditions (Lovelock, 2000, p. 253-254). The 'Gaia hypothesis' according to Ruse, owes its coinage to the novelist William Golding, author of the *Lord of the Flies*, who as a good friend of Lovelock, got so enamored with the theory of the earth as a living organism that he suggested the name of the Greek goddess of the earth 'Gaia' to designate this new hypothesis. Coupe (1997) considers the adoption of this name as a shrewd move by the scientist who himself was an avid reader of Science fiction because the Greek creation myth's namesake personally encompassed "both life and death, both maternal affection and violent revenge, both reward and punishment" all elements which the Earth embodies too (p. 201). This anthropomorphic view of the earth as not just inanimate matter that we inhabit and exploit endlessly and carelessly was however not popular among scientists at the time Lovelock began to publish his findings.

As more independent research and collaborations from other highly significant scholars such as the American geneticist Lynn Margulis and the ecopsychologist Theodore Roszak, the ‘Gaia hypothesis’ moved from a homeostatic to an autopoietic worldview (Onori & Visconti, 2012), and slowly began to garner recognition and support in western academia. This recognition had profound interdisciplinary implications. It also brought about a renewed focus on the exploitative activities in what some scholars refer to as the Holocene, Capitalocene, and Anthropocene epochs and their destructive impact on the earth. One of the implications of these new interrogations into the relationship between human activities in the past century and the current and future states of the Earth meant that scientists and philosophers could no longer apply simple dualistic Cartesian divisions between the mind (*res-cogitans*), and matter (*res-extensa*). Humanity became implicated in the fate of the earth and all which existed on and within it. There began a heightened understanding of our inability to separate ourselves from our environment.

According to Capra (1975), the “...‘Cartesian’ division (had earlier) allowed scientists to treat the matter as dead and completely separate from themselves, and to see the material world as a multitude of different objects assembled into a huge machine” (p. 7). This had huge implications not only for science but also for philosophy and literary productions which told stories mostly from the point of view of humanity as a superior force that had the moral justification to exploit what it could of the earth to satisfy its incessant wants and ambitions. The rights of the earth had little to no literary or ethical considerations because humanity was constantly encouraged to distance itself psychologically from primordial connections with a prehistoric Mother Earth. With the resurfacing of the Gaia hypothesis in contemporary Western thinking, some scholars, Roszak in particular, according to Onori and Visconti (2012), established the link between the human psyche and the planet and between the soul and the earth. This in essence gradually drew attention to the fact that the “anthropos” (humanity) cannot escape experiencing internally, the damage it wantonly inflicts on the earth and it inhabits.

Posthuman ethics informed by ‘material ecocriticism’ seeks to inform humanity and its pretensions of an exceptional essentialism that there can be “no neutrality in experiencing, knowing and telling” (Iovino, 2018, p. 114), the stories of our existence on earth since according to Barad (2003), “we are a part of that nature that we seek to understand” (p. 832). Writing nature and more specifically, the earth and our connections to it becomes an act of interpretation which according to Iovino, also serves

as an act of mediation between human and non-human components of nature (Earth) and between text and cognition.

Human activity is thereby understood as a complex and interconnected geography of subjects and forces. This understanding enables not only new posthuman ethics advocating less destructive behaviour but also encourages us...

To *read* bodies and landscapes as the storied embodiments of countless intra-acting agencies - pollutants, political choices, non/human creativities, and natural dynamics - might indeed reveal unexpected proximities that prompt us to redesign the maps of agency and responsibility, thus creating a deeper awareness in the matter of 'sustainability' (Iovino, 2018, p. 114).

There have been many speculative/Science fiction literary productions before the Gaia hypothesis that have shown the important relationship between the Earth and every creature or being that resides within or above its surface. SF which have dealt with representations of chthonic elements and the complex relationship humanity has with the earth is Jules Verne's *Journey to the centre of the Earth* (1864), Robert A. Heinlein's *Stranger in a strange land* (1961), *The call of Cthulhu* (1928) by H. P. Lovecraft, Frank Herbert's *Dune* (1965), Lewis Carroll's *Alice adventures underground* (1865), Edgar Rice Burroughs' *Pellucidar* series (1915), Umberto Eco's *Foucault's pendulum* (1988), Jeanne Duprau's *The city of ember* (2003), *The Underland chronicles* (2003) by Suzanne Collins and others. While most of these stories treated the subterranean as a site populated by chthonic forces, monsters, and creatures, both humanoid and non-human; entangled in the manner of Haraway's conception of the Chthulucene, other Science fiction writers such as Isaac Asimov in *Foundation's edge* (1982), David Brin in *Earth* (1990), Orson Scott Card in *Lovelock* (1994), John Varley in *Titan* (1979), Piers Anthony in *Being a green mother* (1987) and to a much more intensive degree, N. K. Jemisin in *The broken Earth* trilogy deviated slightly by writing the earth based on earlier or post Lovelock's 'Gaia hypothesis' which saw the planet as a living conscious entity with limited to unlimited levels of agency.

Chthonic monstrosity: *Orogenes*, Stone eaters, and the trials of being 'Other'

In Greek mythology, the fact that Medusa, a Chthonic goddess, was more of a victim of the rape and tyranny of the astral titans is far less addressed than the more belaboured issue of her monstrosity.

Banished to a life of obscurity and exile, the gorgon is constantly hunted by so-called heroes whose main ambition is bragging rights for finally destroying her perceived threat. Like Gaia herself (the earth mother goddess of the Greeks), Medusa's rage at the men who seek to destroy her seems justifiable. At least, that is the impression that a reading of the persecution inflicted on the race of an oppressed and powerful category of people in Jemisin's chthonic story gives. The Orogenes and the 'stone eaters' in N. K. Jemisin's *The Broken Earth* trilogy are not much different from Father Earth in the treatment they get from by humans and in their reactions to mostly unfair and unjust exploitation, especially in the case of the orogenes. They exist outside of what Nayar (2009, p. 20) calls "the immunity paradigm", a process of exclusion of groups of people as "bare life (*zoē*)" outside a safer "political life (*bios*)". Their humanity is never truly established and they are therefore subjected to inhuman and often torturous existence as a result. The entire societal systems are designed to keep them in the non-human status to deny them the same rights as the privileged humans. Their monstrous nature which manifests in their ability to tune into the workings of the earth to manipulate and change its workings, while agreed to be an invaluable help in surviving the terrors inflicted by Father Earth, is still feared as destructive and dangerous. Their lives are treated as "*homosacers*", Giorgio Agamben's term for those "who are so outside the pale of the human that to kill them would not amount to murder" (Agamben cited in Nayar, 2009, p. 12). As in many human societies, the treatment meted out to the Orogenes in the Stillness is backed by Law and a mythic/religious cum historical record simply known as "Stonelore", which not only serves as a record of past seasons and civilizations but also as a guide to existence itself. In a conversation in the first novel in the trilogy, Syenite explains the danger-filled status of the Orogenes to the childlike but ancient Stone eater, Hoa, thus; "They kill us because they've got stonelore telling them at every turn that we're born evil—some kind of agents of Father Earth, monsters that barely qualify as human" (Jemisin, *The fifth season*, 2015).

Orogenes are sometimes born to human families who have no orogenic abilities themselves as in the case of the protagonist Syenite/Essun. Others, such as another important character Alabaster are born in the Fulcrum, an institution which was established by the present Sanzed Kingdom/civilization for the control and training of the Orogenes. The genetic difference between the Orogenes and the non-orogenic human population known as the "Stills" also ensures that they will never be treated like other

humans and in extreme cases are even considered non-human and monstrosities to justify many of the dehumanizing degradations they are forced to endure and even perpetuate on each other.

The Orogenes who were born in the Fulcrum are shown in the course of the story to be products of forced sexual couplings, (very similar to the forced reproductive couplings of slaves by their masters) for the sake of producing more Orogenes to be enslaved and exploited without any concern for the feelings and lives of all involved. The Fulcrum is both a symbol and an enforcer of the terrible injustices that are visited on the orogenes. Led by the Guardians, it “functions as the control institution of the orogenes” (Walter, 2019, *para.* 28). They train and use orogenes for the dangerous work of controlling the Earth’s convulsions, but the orogenes are not allowed any autonomy or rebellion. This control is enforced by brainwashed Fulcrum-trained higher-up orogenes and a specially trained deadly *force* known as the Guardians. These Guardians who have unclear origins hunt down renegade orogenes to serve as ‘node maintainers’ where inhumane surgeries are carried out on them. Like the disastrous lobotomies of the 1950s in our world, parts of the rebellious orogene’s brain that enable autonomous thought are removed. During surgery, the magic-wielding Sessepinae is preserved to enable a continuous mindless and automatic ‘sessing’ and response to the earth’s movements while being permanently attached to node chairs until their bodies waste away and they are no longer usable.

Critics consider how they are treated as similar to that of a slave class bred for use and exploitation by the ruling class (Walter, 2019; Iles, 2019, p. 8). The orogenes also relentlessly face the unconscionable challenge of existing with the non-magical population, known as the Stills who are very much afraid of the terrible powers of the orogenes. This fear persists even though they know that whatever hope they have of survival is dependent on the orogene ability to calm the earth’s convulsions such as the incessant earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, tsunamis, and other strange deadly ways Father Earth takes his revenge. Interestingly, Jemisin gives a logical justification for this fear. In the story itself, we are made privy to the fact that stories abound of very young orogenes who in moments of distress or anger manipulated the earth’s forces to protect themselves or get back on their attackers. Entire communities (known as comms) were wiped away in an instant with little time for those not even involved to flee the disaster. So in a way, the orogenes shared similar negative references with the “evil earth” which has ensured that humanity only barely survived in the most extreme of situations for countless millennia. These incidences in their turbulent history have left an indelibly inherited mark on the Stills’ collective psyche. Instinctive fear leads to unbelievable acts of

cruelty that culminates too frequently in family members and communities murdering very young children in horrible ways unless they are rescued by the Fulcrum or Guardians on time.

The orogenes are viewed and treated as monsters, ‘othered’ and excluded from society in the same way humanity has always reacted to “entities that hover in the liminal state between life and death” (Satkunanathan, 2019, p. 524). This liminality and the difference it implies, has impressed on the orogenes an internalisation of the derogation inflicted on them after generations of being treated as sub-human. This internalization, like that witnessed among African Americans, has made them adopt and even refer to themselves with the same derogatory epithet “rogga” used to separate and denigrate them by the supposedly superior and uncontaminated Stills. The terrible ill-treatment inflicted on them is justified by psychologically reinforcing denials of the orogene’s humanity. “That we are not human is the lie they tell themselves so they don’t have to have to feel bad about how they treat us” (Jemisin, *The fifth season*, 2015).

This dehumanization and the inevitable culmination of generations of abuse, causes the orogenes to rebel from time to time which is usually brutally and effectively squashed. This time though, one of them, Alabaster, who has managed to achieve the almost impossible honour of becoming a ten ringer, the highest achievement an orogene could achieve, has become brokenhearted after years of being forced to produce more genetically superior orogenes to be further enslaved by the system. After witnessing countless numbers of his offspring whom by Fulcrum law he is not allowed to bring up or even form any relationship with, destroyed and sentenced to serve as node maintainers, he begins to question his existence and just like Father Earth, plan for the destruction of the entire human civilization in the Stillness.

By the end of the story, during the turbulence and destruction of another fifth season which threatens to be the worst with the emergence of the earth-controlled Stone Eaters who have been deployed to carry out Father Earth’s final cleansing of humanity, the lives of humans and every living thing is dependent on the favours of a few orogenes and Stone Eaters. These renegade categories who have defied the collective vengeance of their fellows share the belief that humanity was not a completely lost cause despite the horrific treatment they had received from said humanity. Orogene mother, Syenite/Essun, and her similarly powerful daughter Nassun whose still father had murdered her brother, forced her and her mother into separation and exile and awakened a vicious hatred for humans

in his daughter's psyche, fight each other at the end of the story for the privilege of ensuring mankind's survival or destruction. Each is buttressed by righteous but opposing beliefs about the justifiable fate of humanity and the earth.

The chthonic, ecojustice, and the birth of new *terrapoleis* in *The Broken Earth* trilogy

In the sense in which Cixous (1979) describes the feminine text, Jemisin's *The Broken Earth* story is volcanic and eruptive in its subversion of contemporary anthropocentric, dominant, masculinist ideologies. It forces readers to come to terms with the possible self-defensive reactions of the dark, demonized, and subjugated other in the face of oppression and total annihilation. Yet, as Haraway (2016) exhorts, "If there is to be multispecies ecojustice, which can also embrace diverse human people, it is high time that feminists exercise leadership in imagination, theory, and action to unravel the ties of both genealogy and kin and species" (p. 102).

If this scenario in which an ecojustice encapsulating all forms of life on planet Earth should be realized, it would give birth to new "Terrapoleis" of existence; a collaboration of societies in which the rights of everyone do not destroy anyone. While for some critics, this is an unachievable fantasy born out of irrational views and ideologies, social justice warriors (as they are often derogatorily called), ecocritics, and posthumanist scholars have championed the realization of new modes of existence across categories which are quite alien to the dominant anthropocentric worldview even in contemporary times. For Jemisin and many other Science fiction and ecocritical writers and critics, it seems that such a call for an ecologically just world is increasingly non-negotiable if humanity is to have any chance of survival in a world where the marginalized are increasingly vocal and sapient and the shared earth is slowly dying due to unrestrained anthropocentric activities.

Jemisin's writing is disruptive. Her authorial presence is heavy and sustained and effectively gives life to the middle-aged main character in the story, Essun. Although Jemisin claims in an interview given to PBS News Hour in 2019 that she did not deliberately choose to write that way, the pathos and frustrations of being a middle-aged female in a world that desperately tries to contain and destroy powerful women from marginalized populations finds its voice powerfully through the Jemisin/Essun voiceover narration. Essun, and later on in the story, her lookalike daughter who shares the same powers as her mother, gradually become apocalyptic versus renewal/change agents who seriously although briefly contemplate the destruction of humanity and the collateral damage of every living

thing on the planet as viable solutions towards ending the brutal and sustained pain humanity had wantonly and irresponsibly inflicted on the weak.

Many Western anthropocentric SF writers have always advocated the fear of and thereby justified the domination of the dark, dangerous, and mysterious other; and have used racist ideologies and dehumanizing portraitures to justify their mistreatment and exclusion. Jemisin on the other hand, presents the depths of hidden worlds and their realities in ways superficial narratives like that of Lovecraft, Conrad, Burroughs, and Haggard could not. These dark, mysterious others who have a very intimate relationship with the chthonic and its dark, ever-active, and frightening mysteries do not indulge in ideology. They just are. They make and unmake their realities and in so doing, constantly transform the earth and the lives on it in ways that make anthropocentric ideologues very uncomfortable (Haraway,2016).

The prevalent humanist ideological indifference to human culpability in the face of earth-wide catastrophes like genocides, climate change, and multispecies extinction is indicted when such dark, chthonic others are faced with total annihilation. Like all living, sentient, and sapient beings, there is the understanding that life itself is a sacred, non-negotiable right. Even a constantly self-renewing earth that endlessly experiences the cycles of death and rebirth will not tamely accept a future where it can no longer renew itself, where death is total and inescapable. This is even more true of intelligent humans however marginalized and subjugated they may be.

This undeniable impulse for life even in the most abject servile beings is seen in the travails of the main character Essun. Essun is a middle-aged woman past her prime, suffering marginalization from multiple intersecting points of her existence. An aging female in a world where femininity is valued primarily for the ability to reproduce offspring in a constantly dwindling human population, an orogene in a world where people like her are treated worse than all others, and a runaway from the Fulcrum and the monstrosly malevolent Guardians who tirelessly track her from place to place; life to assumed life. She is also a mother whose son was brutally murdered by his father for his childish display of orogeny; an orogene who has to bear the company of a strange stone-bodied humanoid creature who latches on to her for its enigmatic ends and a woman who slowly realizes along the course of the story that she possesses great power which could decide the fate of an entire world.

Despite the often negative implications of her experiences, these same experiences are shown to bear upon Essun's final decision to save humanity and all life by symbolically birthing a new world, a new terrapolis where all life is sacred. Just like the Syl Anagists believe, she comes to understand that life is precious but unlike their strange dominant anthropocentric attitude towards how all life should always exist in servitude to humanity's wants and desires, Essun's travails as one of the marginalized enables her to understand life from multiple points of view. This posthuman hybridity which connects her to human and non-human modes of existence, her experiences with different types of creatures and even those who identified as human, is a pivotal reason in the story towards birthing a better world out of the terrible mess of the old. She realizes that ecojustice is the best way to end the collective misery of life in the Stillness.

As Jemisin gradually leads readers through the debilitating effects of the fifth seasons on most 'comms' in the entire storyline, one comes to the rather inescapable realization as Illes (2019) explains, that human survival is only possible through "comm-building, rather than by competition and exploitation" (p. 7). This model of collaboration and reparation instead of competition, marginalization, and exploitation which has been the hallmark of the Anthropocene is shown to be the logical way out of the inevitable trajectory of destruction humanity has embarked upon in modern times.

Conclusion

This paper examined the representation of posthuman characters derived from various chthonic actants (both material and animist) whose indeterminate categorization within the humanist hierarchies has ensured their existence on the fringes of human society and subsequent socio-political marginalization in Jemisin's *The Broken Earth* trilogy. It began by positioning and identifying the inhabitants of the Chthonic as posthuman identities and how the politics of a manufactured signification and 'othering' of racial categories and minorities establishes and maintains anthropocentric superiority and dominance. It also examines the literary illustration of the 'Gaia hypothesis' and its implications in the understanding of chthonic forces and beings, especially the interconnections and interrelationships between the earth as a sentient, conscious being and other species living within and above its surfaces. It investigates the negative consequences of human exploitation and destruction of these earth forces, beings, and resources as portrayed in the story.

This paper also examines the existence of chthonic forces and the arcane as well as how these chthonic forces and beings become agents of the ‘Apocalypse’. The existence of chthonic monstrosity in N. K. Jemisin’s *The Broken Earth* trilogy and the trials of being ‘Other’ as well as the possibilities of redeeming Humanity via posthuman connections and the possibilities of emergent modes and terrapoleis of existence are also explored in this chapter while the ramifications of these new modes on the emergence and the possibility of ecojustice concludes the chapter.

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