Fernanda Sousa Carvalho

RACE, ETHNICITY, SEXUALITY, AND BLOOD IN CONTEMPORARY BLACK WOMEN'S SPECULATIVE FICTION

Belo Horizonte

Faculdade de Letras

Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais

February 2016

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Submitted to the Programa de Pós-graduação em Letras: Estudos Literários, Faculdade de Letras/UFMG in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor in Literatures in English.

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February 2016

Ficha catalográfica elaborada pelos Bibliotecários da Biblioteca FALE/UFMG

C331r

Carvalho, Fernanda Sousa.

Race, ethnicity, sexuality, and blood in contemporary black women's speculative fiction [manuscrito] / Fernanda Sousa Carvalho. – 2016.

220 p., enc.

Orientadora: Sandra Regina Goulart Almeida.

Área de concentração: Literaturas em Língua Inglesa.

Linha de pesquisa: Literatura e Políticas do Contemporâneo.

Tese (doutorado) – Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, Faculdade de Letras.

Bibliografia: f. 206 -212.

1. Butler, Octavia E. – Fledgling – Crítica e interpretação – Teses. 2. Hopkinson, Nalo. – Brown Girl in the Ring – Crítica e interpretação – Teses. 3. Hopkinson, Nalo. – Greedy Choke Puppy – Crítica e interpretação – Teses. 4. Due, Tananarive, 1966- – Living Blood – Crítica e interpretação – Teses. 5. Ficção americana – História e crítica – Teses. 6. Ficção canadense – História e crítica – Teses. 7. Sexo na literatura – Teses. 7. Etnologia – Teses. 8. Sangue na literatura – Teses. 9. Mulheres na literatura – Teses. 10. Negros na literatura – Teses. I. Almeida, Sandra Regina Goulart. II. Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais. Faculdade de Letras. III. Título.

CDD : 809.89287

pós-lit
PROGRAMA DE PÓS-GRADUAÇÃO
EM ESTUDOS LITERÁRIOS

Faculdade de Letras - FALE

UFMG

Tese intitulada *Race, ethnicity, sexuality, and blood in Contemporary black women's speculative fiction*, de autoria da Doutoranda FERNANDA SOUSA CARVALHO, apresentada ao Programa de Pós-Graduação em Estudos Literários da Faculdade de Letras da UFMG, como requisito parcial à obtenção do título de Doutor em Estudos Literários.

Área de Concentração: Literaturas de Língua Inglesa/Doutorado

Linha de Pesquisa: Literatura e Políticas do Contemporâneo

Aprovada pela Banca Examinadora constituída pelos seguintes professores:

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Belo Horizonte, 26 de fevereiro de 2016.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To my mother Ernestina, for her irrefutable love and care; to my father, José Antônio, my sister, Nancy, and my brother, Bráulio, for their support and respect for my work.

To my advisor, professor Sandra Regina Goulart Almeida, for believing in my potential since my undergraduate years, for being such a model for the professional I wish to be, for always supporting me in my projects, and for so generously and wisely guiding my research.

To my American advisor, professor Susan Stanford Friedman, for her generosity and thoughtfulness in helping me to take the best advantage of the resources offered by the University of Wisconsin-Madison (USA) and to have all the necessary conditions to develop my research.

To CAPES, for the financial support that made it possible for me to develop part of my research at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

To professors Leslie Bow, Cherene Sherrard-Johnson, Aida Levy-Hussen, and Mario Ortiz-Robles (UW-Madison), for so generously allowing me to audit their classes, which were fundamental for the writing of this dissertation and very inspirational for my career.

To professors José dos Santos and Marcos Alexandre, who, as part of the committee for my qualifying exam, gave so many priceless contributions to this work.

To my friend Flávia Monteiro, who often soothed my anxieties with consideration and friendship.

To the Corbetts – Bob, Karen, Anders, Carl, Jack, and Ellie – for so generously receiving me in their house in Madison and showing so much thoughtfulness in helping me feel at home away from home. And to my Turkish *kankas*, Leyla and Nihan, for being such considerate friends and making my life in Madison happier.

ABSTRACT

This dissertation investigates how the issues of race, ethnicity, and sexuality are discussed in the novel *Fledgling* (2006) by Octavia Butler, in the novel *Brown Girl in the Ring* (1998) and in the short story "Greedy Choke Puppy" (2001) by Nalo Hopkinson, and in the novel *The Living Blood* (2001) by Tananarive Due. These works are examples of speculative fiction, an umbrella genre that encompasses others such as science fiction, fantasy, horror, and the gothic, and that comments on social constructions and current society by creating alternative beings and ways of life. Written by black women in in the United States and Canada at the end of the 1990s and at the beginning of the 2000s, the works analyzed here show that race, ethnicity, and sexuality are common concerns for the three writers. This is so because these issues, which are constructed by social and cultural discourses that often result in discrimination and marginalization, are interconnected, especially in the lives and identities of black women. This investigation also analyzes how Butler, Hopkinson, and Due use the symbolism of blood in their speculative representations of race, ethnicity, and sexuality. More specifically, the reference to blood in their works often points to racial and sexual abjection, to the black ancestry, the family line, and the ethnic bonds of the protagonists, as well as to a transgressive sexuality and a possibility of nurturance, providing specific discussions about race, ethnicity, and sexuality from the perspective of black women in a contemporary context. Their works imagine a world in which the black race, the ethnicities of African origin, female sexuality, and maternity have a fundamental role for the future of humanity, contradicting, therefore, age-old and prejudiced racist and sexist discourses.

RESUMO

Esta tese investiga como as questões de raça, etnia e sexualidade são discutidas no romance *Fledgling* (2006) de Octavia Butler, no romance *Brown Girl in the Ring* (1998) e no conto "Greedy Choke Puppy" (2001) de Nalo Hopkinson, e no romance *The Living Blood* (2001) de Tananarive Due. Essas obras são exemplos de ficção especulativa, um gênero guarda-chuva que abrange outros, como ficção científica, fantasia, horror e gótico, e que critica construções sociais e a sociedade atual ao criar seres e modos de vida alternativos. Escritas por mulheres negras nos Estados Unidos e no Canadá e no final dos anos 1990 e começo dos anos 2000, as obras analisadas aqui mostram que raça, etnia e sexualidade são preocupações comuns das três autoras. Isso porque tais questões, construídas por discursos sociais e culturais que resultam em discriminação e marginalidade, estão interligadas, principalmente nas vidas e identidades de mulheres negras. Este estudo discute como Butler, Hopkinson e Due usam o simbolismo do sangue em suas representações especulativas de raça, etnia e sexualidade. Mais especificamente, a representação do sangue em suas obras aponta para a abjeção racial e sexual, para a ancestralidade negra, a linhagem familiar e os laços étnicos das personagens, bem como para uma sexualidade transgressora e para a possibilidade de sustento, oferecendo discussões específicas sobre raça, etnia e sexualidade sob a perspectiva de mulheres negras em um contexto contemporâneo. Suas obras imaginam um mundo em que a raça negra, as etnias de origem africana, a sexualidade feminina e a maternidade têm um papel fundamental para o futuro da humanidade, contradizendo, dessa forma, discursos racistas e sexistas ultrapassados e preconceituosos.

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INTRODUCTION

The literary genres that explore the human imaginary have proved to be productive tools to represent and criticize a constantly changing reality and to speculate about alternative ways of life. This is the reason why science fiction and the genres of fantasy, gothic, and horror have often been grouped under a more general term, speculative fiction. An analysis of contemporary works belonging to this umbrella genre makes it possible to understand the current view on issues that address major social and cultural concerns.

A concern with issues related to race, ethnicity, and sexuality has been particularly present in contemporary speculative fiction written by women of African ancestry. Considering this argument, this dissertation offers an investigation of such issues in the novel *Fledgling* (2006) by Octavia Butler, in the novel *Brown Girl in the Ring* (1998) and in the short story “Greedy Choke Puppy” (2001) by Nalo Hopkinson, and in the novel *The Living Blood* (2001) by Tananarive Due. In these works, written by women of African ancestry in Canada and in the United States in the end of the 1990s and in the beginning of the 2000s, race, ethnicity, and sexuality are represented and discussed through the symbolism of blood. The analysis presented here is based on the assumption that the notions of race, ethnicity, and sexuality are interconnected, especially in what concerns works by black women writers, and on the fact that blood is symbolically used to discuss these issues.

I chose to analyze works by the African American writers Octavia Butler and Tananarive Due and by the Caribbean-Canadian Nalo Hopkinson for their widely recognized importance in contemporary speculative fiction, besides the fact that they exemplify the variety of possibilities found in works by black women writers of the genre. Through a comparative study of these works, I point out the similarities and differences in their use of the symbolism of blood, in their discussions about race¸ ethnicity, and sexuality, and in the alternative views

about black women's experiences that they present through such a use. Despite the particularities in the writing of each of these writers, all of them have been included in the speculative fiction tradition for their use of elements of the different genres that are encompassed by this umbrella term.

Octavia Butler is considered the first black woman to write science fiction and is "the only science fiction writer who ever received a MacArthur Foundation genius grant, awarded in 1995" (Lawrence 8). Tananarive Due has called her the matriarch of the black speculative fiction family ("On Octavia Butler" 179). Before her sudden death at the age of fifty-eight in 2006, Butler accumulated many national and international awards, including a James Tiptree Award, two Hugo awards, two Nebulas, a PEN Lifetime Achievement Award for writing, and the Langston Hughes Medal (Papke 79). Such achievements are even more impressive when the difficulties Butler faced are considered: the death of her father when she was a child, dyslexia, and poverty. She started reading science fiction at a very early age, and after graduating at Pasadena City College, California State University, and UCLA, she attended many science fiction workshops, until she began publishing in the 1970s. Ingrid Thaler notes that "Butler's work has enjoyed an unprecedented and much deserved critical popularity since the mid-1990s" and that she is one of the most established writers "in the fields of science fiction, feminist science fiction, and African American literature" (10). Butler's importance as a writer is so noticeable that she is said to have changed the configurations of science fiction with her innovations (Papke 79). Such innovations relate to her engagement with anti-colonial, feminist, diaspora, and black women's discourses, issues which were not approached by sci-fi writers before her. Butler herself once stated:

> When I began to read science fiction, I was disappointed at how little … creativity and freedom was used to portray the many racial, ethnic, and class variations. Also, I could not help noticing how few significant woman

> characters there were in science fiction. Fortunately, all this has been changing over the past few years. I intend my writing to contribute to the change. (qdt. in Foster 38)

This contribution can be perceived throughout her work. As Patricia Melzer puts it, "Butler's writing raises issues of how to resist racism, sexism, and exploitation in ways that elucidate many of the concepts we encounter in feminist thought" (36). Butler has declared that it was "natural that she write herself into her work," that is, it was natural for her to write it from a black woman's perspective, although she has also affirmed that "foregrounding race was not her sole or even primary intention in the case of every racial or ethnic notation" (Papke 80). Indeed, her stories present motifs related to "humanity's struggle with identity and hegemony" (Hampton 247), but it is exactly because in this way they question notions of fixed gender, sexual, and racial identities that they end up undermining racism and sexism.

Fledgling is Butler's last novel and her premature death made some critics wonder if she intended to write a sequel to it (Brox 407), since the novel left open some issues that could be further explored. The novel links vampire legends to the existence of a particular species, the Ina, whose members feed on human blood, are physically stronger, and can live longer than humans. The protagonist, Shori, is a hybrid of Ina and human who lost her memory after having suffered an attack and finds out about her identity and the events that caused her amnesia throughout the novel. She is the product of experiments carried out by Ina female scientists who mixed their own genes with those of a black human woman. A fifty-three-year-old woman who looks like a ten-year-old black girl, Shori represents the hope for the survival of the Ina species because her dark skin offers more protection from the deathly sunlight. Despite showing more strength and aging less than humans, the Ina are limited by the photosensitivity of their excessively pale skin, their inability to stay alert at day time, and by their dependence on human blood to live. Humans, on the other hand, profit from their relations with the Ina who

feed upon them, as Ina's saliva has healing powers and grants them longevity. The existence of a genetically created black Ina, then, also expands the possibilities of a symbiotic life between the two species. However, as the narrative unfolds Shori finds out that there are some Ina who want to destroy her and, consequently, the possibility of hybridity. *Fledgling* is important for my corpus in particular because of the high potential of transgression that Shori represents. The title of the novel, as Thimothy M. Robinson argues, evokes "ideas of dependence and independence – a fledgling denotes a young bird, and to fledge means to acquire feathers necessary for flight or independent activity" (70). Shori is at the same time a young, inexperienced girl (turned even more so because of her amnesia), who needs to learn again how to be an Ina. Not only is Butler's protagonist a black girl, but she is also a hybrid of human and vampire, attacked by racist individuals who want to prevent her from breeding. This hybridity represents new possibilities for her whole community and puts her in an outstanding position as the hope for a future of more racial/species and sexual freedom. The novel uses the well-known subversive potential of the vampire figure in relation to sexual norms and combines it with the issue of miscegenation to challenge fixed notions about race and sexuality that have been used to label and control individuals. The sexual connotations traditionally associated with the vampire's blood drinking is present in *Fledgling* and is the basis of what can be read as racial and sexual relations among the characters.

Nalo Hopkinson is best known for her feminist rewriting of African-Caribbean folklore (Almeida 2009; Wisker 2005), for which she has been considered a prominent voice in contemporary black women's writing. She was born in Jamaica and has also lived in Guiana, Trinidad, and in the United States before moving to Canada when she was sixteen years old in 1977 (Reid 297; Simpson 96). Hopkinson graduated in Russian and French language and literature at York University in Toronto, and at present she is a professor of Creative Writing at the University of California Riverside in the US. Even before her academic studies, she had

been influenced by her father, Slade Hopkinson, who was a renowned Guyanese "writer, actor, playwright, and English and Latin teacher" (Simpson 98), and by her mother, Freda Hopkinson, who was a Jamaican library technician (Rutledge 3). Nalo Hopkinson has always been acquainted with literature and story-telling, and her interest in folk-tales, fairy-tales, and epic tales was stimulated by the books in her parents' shelves and in the many libraries she frequented. Besides her own works (six novels, a short-story collection, and a chapbook), she has edited and co-edited four anthologies of Caribbean and other post-colonial speculative short stories by various authors. Gregory E. Rutledge affirms that, "[f]ollowing in the thematic footsteps prefigured by Octavia E. Butler … and yet writing in an inimitable style no one could have anticipated, Hopkinson makes her fiction as rich as her own background" ("Nalo Hopkinson" 3). Critical analysis of her works usually explores the originality of her use of Caribbean folklore and religion in fantasy and science fiction narratives. She explains in an interview with Hyacinth Simpson: "I start from a tradition of science fiction and fantasy, which is about building on folklore – except that more often than not I start from my native lore, not from the European. When it comes to Caribbean literature, I tend to seek out the stories that have fantastical elements" (104-05). In Alondra Nelson's words, "her writing has introduced unique themes and archetypes into the generic conventions of science fiction" influenced by her Caribbean cultural background (97). As Nnedi Okorafor points out, the themes of "Slavery, slavery's consequences and post-colonialism have been central" to Hopkinson's oeuvre, which, similarly to Butler's, "explores the consequence of slavery and oppression through their impact on individual women" (184). It is mainly by bringing elements of the Caribbean tradition into her works that Hopkinson creates speculative stories charged with discussions about race and ethnicity. Such elements range from folkloric beings to references to Caribbean historical figures, traditional music, literature, and religion. Her use of Caribbean Creoles mixed with Standard English in her stories adds to the originality of her speculative fiction. Feminism is

another element that shapes Hopkinson's writing (Simpson 111) and she affirms that she is interested in exploring issues of gender and sexuality in her stories: "as a woman living in a still-sexist society, I'm interested in using my writing to intervene into some of that sexism" (110). For Simpson, Hopkinson's narratives feature "sharply etched characters whose experiences offer insights into problems of gender, racial and sexual identity, culture, and community" (96).

Brown Girl in the Ring is her first novel, for which she won the Warner Aspect First Novel Contest in 1997, the Locus Award in the First Novel Category in 1999, and the John W. Campbell Award in 1999. The novel draws upon a play by the Jamaican author Derek Walcott, *Ti-Jean and His Brothers*. As Alondra Nelson puts it, in her novel, "Hopkinson mixes Caribbean dialects, references to Derek Walcott's play ..., and quotations from a popular Caribbean children's ring game (from which she borrows the novel's title) with more familiar science fiction conventions such as biotechnology and a postindustrial dystopic urban setting" (97). Instead of the brothers that appear in Walcott's play, Hopkinson's novel is based on a lineage of Caribbean women with supernatural powers. The protagonist, Ti-Jeanne, her mother Mi-Jeanne, and her grandmother Gros-Jeanne are seer-women and healers. Living in a decadent futuristic Toronto, Ti-Jeanne is at first unaware of this power, then rejects it, until she is convinced by her grandmother that she needs to learn how to properly use it in the benefit of her community of immigrants. Throughout the novel, she has to try to use her power to communicate with the Afro-Caribbean entities to save her family from the drug dealer who rules downtown Toronto, Rudy, an evil sorcerer who happens to be her grandfather. Ti-Jeanne is, in this sense, the brown girl of the novel's title. As Gordon Collier explains, in the eponymous game a girl stands at the center of the ring and has to "invent a dance move, … which the other girls must copy" until the best imitator is chosen to substitute the girl in the middle of the ring (445). I agree with Collier, for whom the title of the novel hints at the

protagonist's "survival skills and inventiveness" (445), since towards the end of the story she replaces her grandmother at the center of the community of immigrants in the Burn. Kim Wells also relates this role Ti-Jeanne takes over to her religious practices, affirming that:

> When the "brown girl" in the center of the narrative, Ti-Jeanne, masters the ability to dance the traditional moves that define each *loa* and his/her power, she also begins to master her own dance of balancing her cultural "moves" and power to survive. She becomes the center of her circle, leading those on the edges as she learns to teach Voudun and becomes a healer and community leader. (5-6)

I would add that this cultural role is invested with ethnic qualities, for the very traditional game it alludes to and the notion of brownness, which represents the miscegenation of Caribbean people. Besides, the fact that it is a girls' game, in which women replace each other at the center of the scene, relates to the importance of the women characters in the novel as the ones who keep the ethnic traditions and help their community.

Brown Girl in the Ring is relevant for my purposes in this dissertation for its use of the symbolism of blood to represent ethnicity. Hopkinson's portrayal of blood-drinking Caribbean folkloric characters calls for an interpretation that goes beyond discussions about the demonization of sexually exacerbated women. In Hopkinson's stories, the soucouyant and La Diablesse can be read as characters that represent the complexity of black women's experiences. Besides, Hopkinson's character's use of blood sacrifice rituals for communicating with and getting help from Afro-Caribbean deities in substitution for the science fiction trope of advanced telecommunications exemplifies how creative her use of speculative fiction to discuss ethnicity can be.

Skin Folk, the short stories collection in which "Greedy Choke Puppy" was published, won the World Fantasy Award in 2002 and the Sunburst Award for Canadian Literature of the

Fantastic in 2003. For Simpson, the stories in this collection "are a rich blend of science fiction, fantasy, horror, and realism" (96). More specifically in "Greedy Choke Puppy," as Ruby Ramraj points out, Hopkinson "offers a traditional, matter-of-fact portrait of the Caribbean equivalent of the blood sucking Dracula called Soucouyant in Trinidad and Ol' Higue in Guyana" (196). In this short story, Jacky, a thirty-two-year-old Trinidadian scholar who studies the influence of folklore in everyday Caribbean people's lives, finds out that she is a soucouyant herself, just like her grandmother and her late mother. This vampire-like mythological creature is usually portrayed as an old woman who takes off her skin at night, turns into a fire ball, and sucks the blood of babies so as to keep her longevity. At first, Jacky sees her transformation into a soucouyant as an escape from her anxieties – finding a husband, having a baby, staying young, beautiful, and sexually active. When her uncontrolled greed for blood leads her to kill her friend's newborn son, her own grandmother is the one who has to punish her for abusing the soucouyant's power. This fatally uncontrollable greed is what the title of the short story alludes to. "Greedy choke puppy," or a greedy puppy will soon choke, is a traditional Jamaican saying used to advise avaricious people that their unrestricted desires can bring them bad consequences, in the same way puppies who eat too eagerly end up choking on their food. At the end of the Hopkinson's story, as Jackie refuses to control the hunger for blood that puts the survival of her community at risk, she has to be destroyed by her grandmother. I include this short story for investigation in addition to *Brown Girl in the Ring* by the same author because of the discussion on women's sexuality provided by Hopkinson's portrayal of the blood-sucking Caribbean character, the soucouyant. This character is also present in the novel, but in the short story her transgressive potential and her significance in Caribbean culture are more fully explored, indicating ethnic specificities.

While Butler is best known as a science fiction writer and Hopkinson is praised for her use of fantasy and folklore in speculative fiction, Tananarive Due mixes science fiction with

horror in her narratives (Lawrence 8). She is often referenced to as the "new Butler" and affirms having being influenced by the late writer (8). Although academic attention to her work seems to be less intense than to Butler's and Hopkinson's, Due has been more and more recognized as a prominent name in African American literature and speculative fiction. She graduated in journalism from Northwestern University and has a M.A. in English literature with a specialization in Nigerian literature from the University of Leeds, England. She has taught creative writing at Antioch University Los Angeles and at many workshops. Due's works are included in collections such as *2000 Year's Best SF 6* and the *Year's Best Science Fiction 17th Annual Collection* (8), and she has won the American Book Award, NAACP Image Award, and the New Voice in Literature Award in 2004. Besides her novels, she also published a memoir with her mother, the civil rights activist Patricia Stephens Due. Having grown up among middle-class African American activists, Due was "home-schooled on Black history and social responsibility" (Hood 157) and her socialization with Africans and black Caribbeans while a student in London resulted in her interest in writing about Africa in many of her works, which have, in Tonja Lawrence's words, "an African-centered perspective" (46). For Herman Beavers, "Due's skill as a storyteller is evident through her ability to fuse elements of African myth, African American folklore, and surrealism into a tale that speaks to the ways that reality, as we understand it, is impinged upon by a world of shadows that blurs the boundaries between wakefulness and dreaming …" (275). The elements of terror and suspense and epic plots in her works have led some to compare Due to Anne Rice (Wisker, "Your Buried Ghost" 75), but her emphasis on black characters renders originality to her stories. Susana M. Morris claims that Due's "recent work in horror has revolutionized the genre by focusing on complex black heroines" (162). Due herself affirms in an interview to Yolanda Hood that since she is a woman, her books are "female-driven" and that she tries "to sow the seeds of empowerment for female readers," "an empowerment from loss, from doubt, from illness, from

death" (162). In fact, her black female characters grow more and more powerful in her narratives in terms of self-confidence and importance in their communities.

The Living Blood is the second novel in her *African Immortals* series. In Due's own words, this work portrays "a colony of male immortals hoarding the miraculous blood while a female and her powerful daughter lead the movement to distribute it to humankind" (Hood 162). The female is the young African American Jessica, whose fate changes after her husband grants her immortality through his blood. The husband, David, is actually Dawit, a member of an ancient African men-only clan, the Life Brothers, holders of immortality and supernatural powers. The Life Brothers live throughout the centuries traveling around the world, but their identity must be kept in secret even from the human families they occasionally form. In the first novel, *My Soul to Keep* (1998), Dawit kills Jessica and their older daughter and tries to resurrected them later with his blood. Only Jessica survives and Dawit has to fly away, since he had subverted the clan's rules of not sharing their sacred power with women. *The Living Blood* starts with Jessica giving birth to their second child, Fana, whom she did not know she was pregnant with before Dawit disappeared. The girl soon shows supernatural powers even stronger than the other immortals. Throughout the novel, we learn that Jessica, with the help of her physician sister, sets a clinic in South Africa, then in Botswana, where she uses her blood to cure fatally ill children. Later, she has to go to Ethiopia to try to find her husband and his colony and convince them to help her understand and teach Fana how to control her powers. In the meanwhile, an African American doctor desperate to save his mixed-blood son from leukemia tries to track them, and so do some ill-intentioned men who plan to profit from their powerful blood.

The Living Blood is included in the corpus of this dissertation because, as the very title of the novel suggests, blood is at the core of the relationships portrayed in the story and the key to a future of racial and gender cooperation envisioned by Due. The potential of this

supernatural blood to bring life is explained in this second novel, as well as its origins. The Living Blood is the blood of Christ that runs in the veins of ancient African men, in a symbolism that refers to African American Christian faith. Even though some critics read the immortals in this novel as vampire figures (Brooks 3, Lawrence 89), I would like to argue here that they are different from the vampiric characters in the other stories of my corpus for sharing their life-giving blood instead of feeding on mortals. This fact offers interesting points for discussions about race and sexuality, especially when we consider that Jessica, a black woman, is the one who decides to use the living blood to cure mortals and that Fana, a young black girl, is the most powerful immortal who will lead their future colony. For this focus on Jessica's initiative and for the revelation of the source of the living blood and of Fana's potential I chose this novel among the other three in the *African Immortals* series to be investigated here.

Although in different ways, the works by Butler, Hopkinson, and Due analyzed here connect race, ethnicity, and sexuality through the significance of blood for the lives of the characters, pointing out contemporary problems related to these issues and suggesting alternative views about them. More specifically, the narratives address forms of racism and sexism that black women often suffer and undermine them by giving the women protagonists the power to overcome such oppression and to undertake the roles of nurturers in their communities. My argument is that Butler, Hopkinson, and Due use the symbolism of blood in their characterization of their protagonists as Afro-Caribbean and African American women and also in the ways through which they come to exert agency.

My analysis of the works is based on a theoretical apparatus developed in Chapter 1, "In the Blood: Reading Race, Ethnicity, and Sexuality". The chapter discusses the notions of race and ethnicity and their implications; the notion of sexuality and its effects in the lives of black individuals; the interrelation of these three issues in the characterization of black women's perspective; the social context of the works to be analyzed (namely, the Caribbean,

the United Stated, and Canada); the definition and the characteristics of speculative fiction in general and the one written by black women; and the symbolism of blood. In this way, my first chapter points out aspects related to the issues of race, ethnicity, and sexuality that can be applied to an interpretation of the symbolism of blood in contemporary speculative fiction by black women.

The very definitions of race, ethnicity, and sexuality are constructed socially and culturally throughout time often in a prejudiced and misguided way and repeatedly supporting the interests of specific groups. Aware of this fact, through the theoretical review of the first chapter, I select the concepts to be used in the analysis presented in the chapters that follow. The basis of the notion of race currently used and its implications in the construction of identities are presented in a review of the historical development of race theories. As the notion of ethnicity is commonly included in theories about categorizations of human groups, sometimes as a substitute, oftentimes as complementary to the notion of race, a review of discussions about this issue is also provided in the first chapter. In my reading of the works of my corpus, I discuss how these notions are represented in the narratives.

In what concerns sexuality, my research approaches this notion as socially constructed and usually imposed upon individuals, so as to point out how specific kinds of sexuality are privileged over the others. In order to do so, I discuss the influence of the notions of gender and sex in the conceptualization of sexuality. Since the main characters of the stories analyzed here are women, this dissertation focuses on the representations of women’s bodies and their sexuality, more specifically on black women’s bodies and sexuality, and on the sexual oppression of and discrimination against these bodies.

The symbolism of blood is investigated here in relation to its traditional use in everyday language, as well as to its specific use in theoretical discourse and in literature. Particularly important to my arguments are the meanings associated with blood in the context of racial and

ethnic identification, the characterization of the female body, transgressive sexuality, and the AIDS epidemic. In my analysis of Butler's, Hopkinson's, and Due's works, I discuss how these meanings are used in the narratives to contest traditional notions of race/ethnic belonging and sexual desire and relations, besides being at the core of the supernatural elements that characterize the stories as speculative fiction.

Works about speculative fiction are also reviewed in my theoretical chapter in order to support the definition I use in my analysis of the corpus. The definition of speculative fiction as an umbrella genre, based on a hybridity of forms and themes is at the center of the characterization of black women's speculative fiction I present here. Dana A. Williams argues that contemporary black women writers such as Butler, Hopkinson, and Due "have not only advanced the genre [of science fiction]" but have also "changed the face of it" (84). She goes on to argue that before these writers, what was "traditionally a white male adolescent genre, was limited mainly to ideas about futuristic advances in technology often couched in interplanetary plots;" conversely, their works present "women into full beings, debunking limiting stereotypes" (84). For such a creative mix of science fiction with horror, fantasy, and folklore, charged with feminist and anti-racist discourses, these writers' works can be considered to be part of a particular tradition that I call here contemporary black women's speculative fiction.

For the analysis of the works in my corpus presented in chapters 2 and 3, specific points are considered. These can be summarized as: the depiction of the characters in terms of racial, ethnic, and sexual identities; the relations between them that are based on such identities; and the importance of blood in their experiences and for the discussions conveyed in each story. These points are investigated in relation to the cultural contexts of the narratives.

The second chapter, "Blood Bonds: Reading Race and Ethnicity," discusses the way in which blood reflects the issues of race and ethnicity in each work analyzed here, based on the

theoretical apparatus developed in Chapter 1. The specific points of comparison are the notions of race and ethnicity represented in the stories, the main characters' racial and ethnic identifications, their bonds with their communities, and the presentation of supernatural elements as racialized. Through these points of comparison, the chapter identifies the similarities and the differences in the use each author makes of the symbolism of blood to discuss the issues of race and ethnicity.

The third chapter, "Blood Lust and Nurturing: Reading Black Women's Sexuality," applies the theoretical apparatus of the first chapter to the use of blood as a metaphor to discuss issues related to sexuality. The points of comparison are the representation of sexuality in the stories, the sexual identities and practices of the main characters, the role of women in their communities, and the presentation of supernatural elements as sexualized. The comparative analysis of the works makes it possible to identify similar and diverging points in the authors' use of the symbolism of blood to discuss sexuality and also its relation to gender and race/ethnicity.

By the end of this dissertation, I discuss how Butler's, Hopkinson's, and Due's speculative works use the symbolism of blood to represent the black race or ethnicity and black women's sexuality in a way that contests racist and sexist ideologies. Their works not only reflect contemporary discussions about the issues of race, ethnicity, and sexuality, but also present alternative ways of viewing them. Such alternative views are presented through what I am calling here speculative *nova*, that is, speculative elements that bring new ways to present the female protagonists' worlds. In this sense, I would like to argue here that the use the symbolism of blood to characterize speculative *nova* charged with racial, ethnic, and sexual meanings consists of a recurring strategy in contemporary speculative fiction written by black women.

CHAPTER 1

In the Blood: Reading Race, Ethnicity, and Sexuality

In this chapter, I present the theoretical basis of the analysis I develop in this dissertation. My argument is that the works by Octavia Butler, Nalo Hopkinson, and Tananarive Due analyzed here present discussions about race, ethnicity, and sexuality by means of speculative narratives and the use of the symbolism of blood. Therefore, I start this theoretical review by addressing the issues of race and ethnicity, their definitions and implications in the geographical context I am considering here – the United States, the Caribbean and Canada. Then I review discussions about the notion of sexuality to identify how it relates to race and ethnicity. I make this relation clearer in a section about black women's perspective, in which I point out theoretical considerations about what might characterize black women's identities and experiences. Then I provide a definition of the genre speculative fiction so as to indicate the particular use that black women have made of it. Finally, I review works about the symbolism of blood to point out how it can be useful to represent discussions about race and sexuality.

1. Race and Ethnicity

Defining these two concepts is a difficult task because of the long history of misuse and biased notions attributed to them, besides the complexity of considering how they are related and how effectively they can be applied to characterize human groups. As a way to address such a complexity, I start by briefly discussing the historical development of the notion of race to then explain how the concept of ethnicity came to be proposed as a substitute. After that, I review discussions about the issue of identity in relation to both race and ethnicity so as to

develop a theoretical framework that allows a specific reading of race and ethnicity in the works to be analyzed here.

1.1. Notions of Race

The notion of race has remained from the beginning of its conceptualization an extremely complex issue and a definitive conclusion about what it is and what determines racial difference is far from being reached. Michael Banton affirms that "as new modes of explanation of human variation have arisen, so the word 'race' has been used in new ways, but the old uses have often continued side by side with the new ones" (51). A review of those uses in history reveals that different conceptualizations have served certain purposes, which range from the simple intention to classify human groups to political and nationalistic projects. In this section, I discuss the changes in the notion of race throughout time so as to shed light on contemporary implications of the issues.

According to Kwame Anthony Appiah, since times as ancient as human writing can track, notions of race have been implied in the ways certain peoples would see themselves as different from those of other cultures "in their attitudes and aptitudes" (274). In the articulation of such views, physical appearance and a common ancestry were central to explain those differences. Such conceptualizations, essentialist as they may be, are the roots of modern notions of race.

The eighteenth century was important for the consolidation of explanations for racial difference based on kinship and biological factors. According to Banton, at that time, notions of race as descent were developed in many European languages to suggest "an idiom in which people related themselves to others and developed conceptions of their own attributes" (51). Later on, the development of botanical theories and natural history added to the concept of race as a type, that is, "a person or thing that represents the characteristic qualities of a class; a representative specimen" (Banton 53). The French comparative anatomist Georges Cuvier,

based on the theory that the variety of living beings on the earth could be explained by their adaptation to climatic and topographic varieties, created a method of classification of humans in three main subspecies that he called “races:” Caucasian, Mongolian, and Ethiopian. He argued that those races appeared after a natural catastrophe divided the original single human species and that they “[differ] permanently in ability because of the biological differences between them” (Banton 54). Those biological differences were by then little understood, but the confusion of the notion of race with that of species indicates that prejudiced ideas about different human groups had found scientific support.

If by then the focus was on the difference between people of distant social ranks, as Banton points out, in the nineteenth century it would be transferred to the differences between people of distinct nations. Race was then identified with nation in an attempt to convey a “national character” (51). One of the most important contributions to that change was Hippolyte Taine’s theory, which aligns race with “the surroundings” (milieu) and “the epoch” (historical moment) as the three elements that create a moral estate characteristic of each civilization. In his definition of race, he claims that it involves “the innate and hereditary dispositions which man brings with him to the light, and which, as a rule, are united with the marked differences in the temperament and structure of the body” (10). Such dispositions, according to Taine, “vary with various peoples,” and physical features, personality, and abilities for cultural production are genetically transmitted among people of the same group. By comparing the variety of human races to the variety of animal species, he assumes racial differences to be natural, biologically determined. His theory adds to that of Cuvier and claims to follow Darwin’s studies about the evolution of species. Taine affirms that the characteristics that define a race are influenced by the environment and by the historical conditions with which a human group has to deal. For him, what characterizes a race is not only physical features, but also a personality that is constructed throughout a common history of survival shared by the

members of a group and transmitted to future generations. This notion of "historical" race defended by late nineteenth century scholars such as Taine moves it "from the physical to the cultural plane," as Tzvetan Todorov (67) points out. It is in this aspect that essentialist concepts of race would be used to evaluate different people's cultural habits and to support the belief in human beings as either superior or inferior.

As I discuss more thoroughly in chapter 2, this notion of historical race permeates Butler's and Due's novels. In *Fledgling*, it is implicit in the Ina's sense of superiority in relation to humans. The Ina's written records about their culture goes back to thousands of years before the invention of human writing and the novel's characters are constantly bragging about the richness of their culture and the superiority of their legal system in comparison to human ones. The fact that humans and Ina are different species, rather than races, points to the fluidity of notions of race to account for difference among human groups. Similarly, in *The Living Blood*, the Life Brothers consider themselves superior to human mortals not only in terms of physical power and the supernatural blood they share, but also because of the huge amount of knowledge and technology they were able to develop throughout the millennia. In both novels, therefore, physical and intellectual abilities are believed to be characteristic of a particular group, shaped throughout history and transmitted by Ina's genes and the Life Brother's living blood.

Another theory that is useful to understand the development of the notion of race is that by Joseph Arthur de Gobineau, one of the pioneers in racial theory in the nineteenth century. In his *Essai sur l'Inégalité des Races Humaines* (1853), he divides human beings into three big groups – white, yellow, and black, echoing Cuvier's classification of Caucasian, Mongolian, and Ethiopian. The white race is, according to him, superior to the others, as it "originally possessed the monopoly of beauty, intelligence, and strength" (209). Gobineau sees miscegenation as something that leads to the degeneration of the alleged white people's superiority, even though it also ends up "improving" the quality of the "inferior races." He

disagrees with the common belief at the time that the hybrids (or cross-breeding) of different types are sterile, but argues that an excessive mixing leads to the decline of human progress. Racist notions based on this theory would find in it an allegedly natural justification for exploitation and fear of the non-white other, and consequently, genocide.

This fear of racial degeneration is also present in *Fledgling* and in *The Living Blood*. The Ina who oppose the hybrid Shori argue that the mixing of human and Ina genes that created her will end up destroying their entire species. The fact that she is black while Ina are white can be read as a reference to the anti-miscegenation arguments that have been present in North American societies. Butler indicates the fallacy of biological notions of race when we learn in the novel that the Ina have also been victims of genocide by humans, as many Ina families were destroyed during World War II, for example. In Due's novel, Fana is considered a kind of hybrid for having been turned immortal when she was in her mother's womb. She was born with the living blood, differently from the Life Brothers who had to undergo a ritual of resurrection, and for this reason she is seen by some of them as a "mutant" (220). In this way, the issue of miscegenation is discussed in both novels in view of the opposition that the protagonists suffer from hegemonic groups because of their hybrid nature.

In general, it can be perceived that nineteenth century theories such as those by Gobineau and Taine base themselves in biological factors to consider the non-white races as naturally inferior, closer to animal species, while taking the white race as the ideal human species. What is at the core of this ideology is the essentialist division between nature and culture, in which nature is animal, irrational, and inferior, while culture is human, rational, and superior. Racist theories take the inferior ones as essentially related to nature, while the ideal one represents the domination of nature by men. As mentioned before, this presupposition would justify the domination of the white race over the others.

Darwin's theory about the natural selection undermines those that view the different races as human types, especially for his claim that "there were no permanent forms in nature" (Banton 57). Consequently, the racial types would change as people migrated to another place where they would have to adapt, in a way that historical progress could not be explained by the characteristics of each type. Darwin suggests the notion of "geographical races or sub-species," "local forms completely fixed and isolated" that "did not differ from each other in important characteristics," so that it is impossible to know for sure if "they should be considered species or varieties" (Banton 57). He uses the word "races" to refer to "the outcome of human breeding" and explains them "as incipient species, for … it was by natural selection that favored races became species" (Banton 57). This definition of race as subspecies became relevant for studies of population genetics and statistic accounts for human variation in the twentieth century. Social evolution would now be explained by "man's progress to superior modes of living" instead of by people's "adaptation to changing environments." As Banton explains:

> Sociologists represented [social evolution] as a process in which men first lived in small bands, then successively as members of clans, tribes, peoples, states and empires. Groups designated as races were often thought to belong somewhere in such a scale; skin color and similar traits served as signs of membership in groups that had progressed in different measure, and therefore functioned as boundary markers. (57)

It can be perceived, then, that a notion of hierarchy in the classification of human groups persisted, since their differences would be accounted for as indicating their location in different stages of social evolution. Besides, as Banton argues, Darwinism was not enough to change the popular usages of the term "race," which was more related to the ideas of type and descent.

In this hierarchy created by the theoretical scale of human evolution, African people have always been thought to occupy the bottom and were usually described as savages,

uncivilized. Another nineteenth century humanist, Ernest Renan, famously writes: "Nature has made a race of workers, the Chinese race...; a race of tillers of the soil, the Negro…; a race of masters and soldiers, the European race.… Let each one do what he is made for, and all will be well" (qtd. in Césaire 38). Renan goes beyond the argument that the white race, which he generalizes by using the broader term "European," is naturally superior to affirm that each race is suited for a specific kind of occupation, being the Europeans the warriors who rule the menial laborers that compose the other races. To change such a hierarchy would mean to change something supposedly natural and harmonious. The misguided and prejudiced belief that black people can only do hard hand labor and are incapable of taking over intellectual and administrative work is supported by this kind of theory.

The fact that the Life Brothers in Due's novel are an African clan undermines such theories, since their intellectual and physical abilities overcome those of humans, including Europeans. *The Living Blood,* in this sense, offers a historical revision that reminds us of the importance of African civilizations throughout human history. In the novel, the Life Brothers are extremely ingenious men who have spent most of their time creating technology and improving their psychic abilities through meditation and telepathy. Due's novel, therefore, challenges stereotypical and prejudiced representations of African groups as underdeveloped and uncivilized.

Appiah relates these theories about race developed in the nineteenth century to what he calls "racialism": the belief in the existence of different races as human sub-groups whose members share "fundamental, biologically heritable, moral and intellectual characteristics with each other that they did not share with members of any other race" (276). "Racism," in turn, is the exclusion of those who do not present these characteristics, considered the "essence" of a race. Todorov presents similar definitions as he explains "racism" as related to "behavior, usually a manifestation of hatred or contempt for individuals who have well-defined physical

characteristics different from our own," and to "ideology, a doctrine concerning human races" that is not necessarily justified by scientific arguments (64). The author uses "racialism" to designate the doctrines about racial difference, which are not necessarily racist. According to him, catastrophic consequences emerge from the forms of racism that are rooted in racialism, such as Nazism (64). It must be noticed, therefore, that the relation between racialism and racism is not one of cause and consequence, since the belief in racial differences does not necessarily lead to prejudice and marginalization.

Although in the twentieth century the notion of a racial essence that accounts for moral, intellectual, and artistic aptitudes was rejected by science, especially the fields of Biology and Anthropology, its consequences in human social life are still perceived. Appiah argues that:

> however mythical the notion of race seems to be, we cannot deny the obvious fact that having one set of heritable characteristics – dark skin, say – rather than another – blonde hair, for example – can have profound psychological, economic, and other social consequences, especially in societies where many people are not only racialists but racists. Indeed, much of what is said about races nowadays in American social life, while literally false if understood as being about biological races, can be interpreted as reporting truths about social groups – Afro-Americans, Asian-Americans, Jewish Americans – whose experience of life and whose political relations are strongly determined by the existence of racist stereotypes. (285)

In other words, even though essentialist notions about race are now known to be inappropriate, their use throughout time created real conditions that cannot be ignored in contemporary societies. From the stereotypes mentioned by Appiah, prejudice arises as racism, and the groups that are different from the predominant European whites are marginalized from social life.

It is interesting to observe that the social groups mentioned by Appiah in the passage quoted above can be understood in terms of ethnic difference, and the author himself calls this North American categorization a "racially understood ethnicity" (285). Indeed, the concept of race has been questioned by critics who suggest substituting or complementing it with other notions, including that of ethnicity. A sense of the inappropriateness of the term race appeared after World War II, when the notion that it represented a unity was questioned by biologists and sociologists and, because of the horrors of Nazism, also discredited in popular use (Banton 58-59). On the other hand, the term started being used again to designate different population groups, as a way of labeling people in the new context of migration movements and globalization. The problem of the appropriateness of a term to define human groups in such a context has to do with identification politics, as I am going to discuss later. Before that, it is necessary to understand how ethnicity has been defined and why it has been considered by some authors a more suitable term to designate difference among human groups.

1.2. The Use of Ethnicity

For Werner Sollors, "[it] makes little sense to define 'ethnicity-as-such' since it refers not to a thing-in-itself but to a relationship: ethnicity is typically based on a contrast" (288). As the previous section shows, the same can be said of race. In fact, clear-cut definitions for both concepts are difficult to be drawn, and for this reason, the differences between them and the ethical and political implications of their use in critical discourse have been challenged.

According to Naomi Zack, ethnicity is usually related to groups of human association, in which the "members self-identify in distinctive ways and … are recognized in distinctive ways by others, usually members of contending, dominant or subordinate, and sometimes culturally appreciative groups" ("Ethnicity, Race, and the Importance of Gender" 102). But criteria for membership, such as "cultural traditions, ancestral origins, religion, common language, physical appearance, nationality, ideology, geography, politics, or common history,"

vary so much from group to group that an informative universal definition of ethnic group is impossible (102). The same impossibility can be observed in relation to the conceptualization of race. The criteria often applied for determining racial identity (bodily appearance, ancestry, self-awareness of ancestry, public awareness of ancestry, culture, experience, and self-identification) may also lead to conflict (Mill 50), proving to be inappropriate to approach certain cases that would be wrongly considered mere exceptions.

If the examples of criteria for characterizing race and ethnicity mentioned above are compared, it can be perceived that they are very similar. Indeed, a confusion about what these terms refer to is very common and sometimes they are used as synonyms or as complementary. Some authors, on the other hand, try to point out the differences that separate the two terms, arguing that they address two distinct levels of human existence, namely, biology and culture. Even so, it can be perceived that shared genetic traits are sometimes used to characterize ethnicity, in the same way that shared cultural aspects are occasionally included in the characterization of race.

Karim Murji and John Solomos compare the notions of ethnicity and race by affirming that they are "terms often used in conjunction or in parallel to refer to social groups which differ in terms of physical attributes which are accorded social significance in the case of race or in terms of language, culture or place of origin – or common membership of a descent group without distinguishing physical characteristics in the case of ethnicity" (8). Therefore, the most distinguishable trace between "race" and "ethnicity" for the authors is in the importance of physical characteristics for ascribing membership: while it is fundamental for race, it is irrelevant for ethnicity.

A preference in the use of one of these terms over the other can be understood in relation to historical contexts. As mentioned above, the use of the term race developed mainly in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The spread of the notion of ethnicity, in turn, relates to the

increase of bourgeois power after the American and French Revolutions. As Werner Sollors observes,

> Ethnicity and ethnocentrism may thus be described as modern Europe's and North America's most successful export items. … The watershed between old aristocratic or colonial orders in which nationalism and ethnicity were still unknown (or played very minor roles) and new systems in which these forces proliferated and claimed exclusive allegiance, is typically marked by bourgeois revolutions or movements for national independence which may adopt their "ethnic" strategies, ironically in the name of purity, authenticity, and originality, from the very entity that they oppose, secede from, or define themselves against. (289)

The notion of ethnicity, therefore, came to play an important role in the affirmation of some people's originality and independence in relation to other hegemonic cultural groups. Ironically, having spread in the United States as an attempt to create the notion of "Americanness" as separate from "Britishness," the usage of the term in that country acquired much more complicated contours in face of the diversity of people in the US because of immigration.

In order to account for such diversified configuration of populations in countries marked by a history of immigration waves, such as the US and Canada, some authors have argued that the notion of ethnicity is nowadays preferred over that of race. Zack, for example, affirms that "[e]thnicity is particular in myriad ways, whereas race is abstract. Ethnicity is like sand, race is like fog. … If we disabuse ourselves of false biologistic theories of race, we are left with ethnicity in all of its multiple concrete forms ("Ethnicity, Race, and the Importance of Gender" 101). The metaphor suggested here hints at a concreteness of the concept of ethnicity in opposition to an abstract and confusing nature of the notion of race. Proponents of a change

in the ways the terms are used argue that ethnicity should be used to correctly approach the same issues that race wrongly approaches through its biological assumptions.

Nevertheless, a consensus about which concept is more appropriate for approaching difference among human groups is yet to be reached. As Jorge J. E. Gracia explains, there are scientific and philosophical challenges to both notions of race and ethnicity, as well as a number of different responses to these challenges that involve moral and political dimensions. Some of such challenges are, according to him, factual, since they point out that "the concepts of race and ethnicity do not correspond to anything real outside mind and therefore need to be abandoned" (Gracia 1). The very basic points of racial categories are contested by the fact that genetic differences among races are irrelevant and insufficient to characterize whole populations. Similarly challenging is the fact that phenotypes like skin color are not simply inherited, but "the result of complex genetic relationships, often involving the environment" (2). Against ethnicity, factual challenges include the fact that ethnic labels neglect the existence of substantial differences inside groups (among individuals and subgroups) and that those labels are usually based on stereotypes (3). This would be the problem with characterizing, for example, a supposedly Caribbean ethnicity, since the group of people called Caribbean possesses different nationalities, languages, traditions, and physical characteristics for which it is impossible to create a single label.

Other challenges against race and ethnicity are of an epistemic nature, as "we have no effective criteria to establish membership in races or ethne [*sic*]" (Gracia 3). Such criteria vary "from person to person, group to group, context to context, place to place, country to country, and time to time" (3). An example is the notion of "mulatto" as a mixture of black and white in Latin American countries, while in the US the one-drop rule establishes that if an individual has any level of black ancestry, he or she must be considered black. Another problem is the difficulty of accessing evidence to satisfy the criteria for categorization; an example is the

phenomenon of "passing," which proves that the appearance is not enough to identify somebody as black or white. Elaine K. Ginsberg explains that by passing, "[a]s the term metaphorically implies, such an individual crossed or passed through a racial line or boundary – indeed trespassed – to assume a new identity, escaping the subordination and oppression accompanying one identity and accessing the privileges and status of the other" (2-3). In this sense, a light-skinned descendant of black people, for example, can pass as white in the United States so as to avoid the discrimination suffered by African Americans and access the social privileges denied to that group. As to epistemic challenges to the notion of ethnicity, they reside in the contextual and variable character of the criteria used to attest membership in a group, which render them imprecise and unreliable (4). In sum, it can be observed that what is at the center of challenges against the terms race and ethnicity is their character of constructed, abstract notions, and their tendency to homogenize human groups under a set of essential characteristics.

In order to respond to those challenges, some authors suggest conceptual changes. J. Angelo Corlett, for example, defends that ethnicity should substitute for race and be approached in terms of public-policy, "to accurately classify people into categories of ethnicity for purposes of justice under the law", or metaphysically, "to determine what it is to be, say, Latino" (Gracia 5). Appiah, on the other hand, supports the use of "racial identity" in lieu of "race," since it "reflects more accurately our discourse about races, racial phenomena, and racial groups" (Gracia 6). He affirms that racial identity implies ascription of a label by a majority of people, self-identification by the one being labeled, and "a set of descriptions that has a historical association with a label involving a racial essence," regardless of its being real or not (6). Yet, other authors defend that the concepts of race and ethnicity are inextricable and for such they ought to be replaced by the terms "ethnic race" or "racial ethnicity" (7-8).

There are also some authors who propose the total abandonment of the old conceptions of race and ethnicity, which should be replaced by new ones (8-9). Gracia, for example, proposes a "Familial-Historical View" of ethnicity as different from a "Genetic Common-Bundle View" of race. He defines "ethnos" as "a subgroup of individual humans" whose unity "is similar to that of family, and as such there is no necessarily identifiable feature, or set of features, that is shared by all members of an ethnic group throughout the history of the group" (Gracia 9). What accounts for belonging in a group, as in a family, is the fact that the members are historically, but not necessarily genetically, related. In contrast, according to what Gracia calls "the Genetic Common-Bundle View," a group of people constitute a race if its members are "linked by descent and have one or more physical features that are genetically transmittable, generally associated with the group, and perceptually perspicuous" (10). It can be noticed here that the differentiation between ethnos and race that Gracia proposes is in line with Murji and Solomos's argument that the importance of physical characteristics to define race is what makes it fundamentally different from ethnicity.

In general, the complexity of the concepts of ethnicity and race and the implications of their use in social discourse and analysis indicate points of confluence between them. However, there is no consensus about the appropriateness of those terms, not even about basic questions such as the one concerning their character as real facts or constructed notions. Even so, I tend to agree here with the claim that "regardless of whether race and ethnicity are real or not, we need concepts of race and ethnicity for ethical, political, and historical reasons" (Gracia 15). As it can be perceived from the review presented so far, I believe that the problems that have been raised from their use throughout time have to do with misconceptions created to justify biased ideologies, such as the notion that essential characteristics make a group of people inferior than the other and that supported slavery and Nazism.

It is not my purpose in this dissertation to come up with conceptualizations for race and for ethnicity that can account for the discursive and practical problems involving the use of such terms. Rather, having identified the main points of the discussions about their applicability, I try to indicate how such points are presented in the fictional works analyzed here. It must be clear by now that classifying the groups presented in these works in terms of race or ethnicity is a complex task. I demonstrate in chapter 2 that while the focus of Hopkinson's stories is more on the characterization of Caribbeans in terms of ethnicity, Butler's and Due's characterizations rely more on notions of race. However, no clear-cut definitions can be used to classify the racial and ethnical conditions and identities presented in the stories. My analysis consists of indicating how the convergence of these two notions can also be perceived in the speculative works of the corpus analyzed here, in a way that they reflect contemporary discussions about ethnicity and race.

The symbolism of blood, which I use as the basis for my comparison of the four stories by Butler, Hopkinson, and Due, also relate to both notions, adding to the ambiguity of their use to classify human groups. At first, this symbolism may seem to relate more closely to the biological traits that the concept of race traditionally addresses. Nevertheless, as such biological aspects hint at connections related to the notion of ethnicity, my analysis of the speculative works shows how the sense of belonging to what can be considered an ethnic group is approached in the stories also in terms of shared blood. In this sense, although I do not aim at solving the problems concerning the use of the notions of race and ethnicity, my dissertation may offer a contribution to such discussions.

1.3. The Cultural Contexts: Racial and Ethnic Relations in the United States, in Canada, and in the Caribbean

As the main characters of the stories analyzed in this dissertation are from the United States, Canada, and Caribbean islands, it is important to consider here the configuration of

these three contexts in terms of race and ethnicity. What is common among them is the fact that they house African diasporic communities. However, since each of these places is characterized by specific historical, geographical, and social conditions, the configurations of racial and ethnic relations in each of them is also particular.

As Martin N. Marger affirms, the United States and Canada share some similarities in terms of racial and ethnic relations (454). Both societies, according to him, "are among the most ethnically diverse in the world" and their ethnic development started "with a process of migrant superordination, in which an indigenous population was overcome by a colonizing force" (454). Later, both the US and Canada were "populated by successive immigrant waves" that have had similar "societal impact" in the two countries that still are "among the major destinations of global immigration," mostly by non-Europeans (454). The racial and ethnic diversity originated from immigration, therefore, is characteristic of both countries. From the fact that both were colonized by white Europeans (English and, in the case of Canada, French as well) results the constitution of whites as the dominant group in North American societies. But the fact that most of the immigrants those countries receive nowadays are non-Europeans has changed their social configurations in terms of ethnicity and race.

The differences between the US and Canada are due to the particularities of their historical development. In the United States, the Anglo group formed by the colonizers first conquered the indigenous peoples, then enslaved the blacks, and later "established its social and political dominance … and exercised the power of selection over those who came afterward" (Marger 135). Consequently, the hegemonic group of white Anglo Protestants have occupied up to these days the top of the American ethnic hierarchy, followed by "white ethnics of various national origins, along with most Asian Americans, in the middle; and Hispanic Americans, African Americans, and American Indians at the bottom" (136). It is no surprise, then, that national ideologies and the public policies concerning ethnic groups and issues "have

consistently reflected Anglo cultural preferences and Anglo economic and political interests" (135). As I have been arguing, this particularity of the US context renders the structuring of racial and ethnic relations in the country also particularly complex.

Zack states that, in the United States, "ethnicity can work within groups to pattern peaceful social relations, while race often works across groups to disrupt or destroy the ethnic patterns of 'Others'" ("Ethnicity, Race, and the Importance of Gender" 101). In other words, the function of the notion of ethnicity in the US is more related to the reinforcement of a sense of bondage among the members of a group; the notion of race, on the other hand, is used to disenfranchise the ones outside a specific group. This is what can be perceived in the racism against African Americans, who have been historically denied their rights to be considered citizens in terms equal to those of the white Americans.

Sollors affirms that race is "in current American usage, sometimes perceived to be more intense, 'objective,' or real than ethnicity." He adds:

> What is often called "race" in the modern United States is perhaps the country's most virulent ethnic factor. It is used to make distinctions on the basis of such generalized propositions as "black ≠ white" or "red ≠ white" which mark more dramatic fault lines in this specific cultural context than such oppositions as "Jew ≠ Gentile," which, especially since the late 1940s, may simply be subsumed under the common United States category "white," but formed the crucial distinction in Nazi "racial" theory. (289)

In other words, the terms race and ethnicity have been used to account for more or less the same kind of human differences, the choice of either of them depending on political anxieties of the historical context. In the United States nowadays, race has been used in a way that is different from its usage in the context that led to World War II, a way that addresses issues usually related to ethnicity.

For Gracia, the common view about race and ethnicity in the United States is that "the first has to do with biology and genetics and the second with culture" (1). This can be perceived in the categories developed in 1997 by the US federal government to describe "groups to which individuals belong, identify with, or belong in the eyes of the community" (NCES). The categories are divided in ethnic and racial. The former is limited to "Hispanic or Latino," defined as "a person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin, regardless of race" (NCES). Racial categories, on the other hand, are five: American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Black or African American, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, and White. By "Black or African American," the US government means "a person having origins in any of the black racial groups of Africa"; in turn, "White" is "a person having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, the Middle East, or North Africa" (NCES). Such designations, therefore, really seem to consider racial differences in the categorization of social groups. The definitions of each term indicate the superficiality of the categorizations, which refer to the notion of ancestral origin. As Marger puts it, "rather than clarifying the conceptual morass of race and ethnicity in American society, these categories have further confounded the issue and contributed to even greater confusion" (132). An example of such a confusion can be perceived in the way an African American is differentiated from a Black Latino: in classifying the former, the US government considers race, while the latter categorization refers to ethnicity. The existence of ethnic differences between African Americans and other groups and of racial differences inside the Latino group are, in this way, overlooked. The same applies to Caribbeans: Spanish speakers, such as Puerto Ricans and Cubans, are classified as Latin Americans, but there are no specific categories for Anglo, Dutch, and French Caribbeans. Although most of them would fit the category of "black" together with African Americans, they in no way form a coherent group.

Canada, as Marger points out, "is a two-nation society, with two distinct cultural groups having charter-group status," namely, French and English-Canadians. There are two other dimensions of ethnicity in the country: groups that are neither French nor English in origin and Aboriginal peoples (453). Among the groups included in the former, the black population is mainly composed of immigrants coming from the Caribbean, "especially Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana, and Haiti" (437). It is important to observe that there was no institutionalized slavery in Canada and therefore, no former slave population to be integrated into its mainstream society. Even though the white population (at first, especially the British descendants) occupy a higher position in the social hierarchy, the gap among the other groups is not as big as in the United States, because of a pluralistic society and public policies intended to promote tolerance toward ethnic diversity. As a result, the prejudice and discrimination existing is Canada today "are milder in form and substance than those of the United States, but were evident in the past in immigration policies and in the treatment of nonwhite peoples" (453). In the United States, there has always been a preoccupation with assimilation, in promoting social equality in order to "Americanize" the other groups. In a country like Canada, already divided in two, such nationalistic aims would not make so much sense.

In what concerns the Caribbean, this name refers to a region that is in itself complex to be characterized because of the "diversity of its geography, its politics, and its cultural tradition and values" (Goulbourne 237). Besides the islands in the Caribbean Sea, the region also includes countries in Isthmus Central America and on the northeastern tip of South America (237). Each country that compose the Caribbean contains its own level of ethnic and racial diversity. As Stuart Hall affirms, "[n]ot a single Caribbean island looks like any other in terms of its ethnic composition, including the different genetic and physical features and characteristics of the people. And that is before you start to touch the question of different languages, different cultural traditions, which reflect the different colonizing cultures"

("Negotiating Caribbean Identities" 5-6). The fact that the Caribbean countries where colonized by different European nations contribute to the physical and cultural diversity of the place, in addition to the very ethnic variances among the Africans who were taken there through slave trade and other immigrants from different parts of the world (East Indian, Chinese, Syrian, Lebanese, Portuguese, Jewish, among others). Consequently, it is impossible to define a notion of "a singular or unambiguous Caribbean identity or consciousness" (Goulbourne 238). Such a notion may vary from country to country, depending on its own history of colonization, slavery, struggle for independence, and immigration.

As to the presence of black people in the Caribbean, it results from the involuntary immigration of Africans, brought by European colonizers. According to Perry Mars, "the European slave trade to the New World started a massive wave of forced migration of the cream of African populations, particularly from West and Central Africa, to the Caribbean and thence to South and North America, the objective being to provide cheap labor on white-owned plantations" (57). The author affirms that the first motivation for the African slave trade was economic, being the race question "a secondary phenomenon," and that "racism certainly developed as a consequence of this inhuman trade, for [it] characterized and influenced the very unequal hierarchical structure and fabric of plantation and social life in the region as a whole" (57). Needless to say, in such a hierarchy, African descendants have been at the bottom while the white descendants of the European colonizers have occupied dominant positions. After the emancipation, which happened first in the British colonies in the Caribbean (the British West Indies) in 1934, the British authorities paid compensations to the white slave owners, who started importing labor force from China and India, while the ex-slaves started building "independent farming villages for themselves" (58). Those African villages, the author continues, "became the centers of Africanist cultures, which by the time of emancipation were significantly influenced by European values, thereby creating a hybrid, or 'creole,' cultural

frame of existence" (58). Therefore, although the white descendants of Europeans have had financial support to maintain their economic and social status, the Afro-Caribbeans could live according to their own culture, which, despite having been influenced by that of the colonizers, still kept some traces of their African ancestors' traditions.

The hybridity that is said to characterize Caribbean societies involves not only the biological process of "cross-breeding" of plant or animal species, which, as Susan Stanford Friedman affirms, is the original meaning of the term (83), but also "the cultural grafting that is the production of geographical migration" (24). According to the author:

> This migration through space materializes a movement through different cultures that effectively constitutes identity as the product of cultural grafting. Alternatively, hybridity sometimes configures identity as the superposition of different cultures in a single space often imagined as a borderland, as a site of blending and clashing. (24)

In other words, hybrid cultures result from the intermingling of different cultures throughout time and space. As a geographical space where various cultures have coexisted and interacted, the Caribbean is marked by this cultural hybridity.

Harry Goulbourne explains that over the past five hundred years the Caribbean has been the place of "constant inward and outward flow of population" and "this experience of migration has come to define the region's people, their fluidity, and their emergence as part of the process of modernity and cosmopolitanism" (238). Interestingly, while the definition of a single Caribbean identity is far from being created, "the racial and ethnic definition of the consciousness of being Caribbean [can] be found more outside than within the region" (238). The presence of Caribbeans in different parts of the world, particularly in Britain and in North America, has led to attempts to characterize those immigrants, be it by ethnographic research or by the immigrants' own need to identify themselves in the context of their host countries.

Nalo Hopkinson's personal life illustrates this fluid identity, since she spent her childhood in different Caribbean countries (Jamaica, Trinidad, and Guyana) before immigrating to Canada.

The presence of Caribbean communities in other countries, such as Canada, makes of them, in Hall's term, "twice diasporized" ("Negotiating Caribbean Identities" 6). He observes that such Caribbean communities are characterized by the retention of old customs and, at the same time, "the profound process of assimilation" (7). The Caribbean culture maintained by immigrants in North America is in itself the result of a retention of African traditions that were at the same time modified by the European colonizers' imposed values and costumes. The process of assimilation that Caribbeans go through in their own diaspora, consists, in Hall's words, of "dragging the whole society into some imitative relationship with this other culture which one could never quite reach" (8). In other words, through assimilation, immigrants incorporate traits of their host country's culture, never completely leaving behind their old traditions and, therefore, never reaching the status of locals. Therefore, the hybridism that already characterizes Caribbean communities is enhanced by the fact that they are mostly a diasporic community. As I demonstrate in chapter 2, this hybridism is a fundamental point in Hopkinson's characterization of Caribbeans in her stories.

In my analysis of the literary works in this dissertation, I point out how the narratives represent and comment on such racial and ethnic configurations of the United States, the Caribbean, and Canada. But since the official definitions used by the governments to categorize people are not clear enough, and since the sociological and demographic accounts for diversity seem incapable of explaining the complexity of such a configuration, I acknowledge that my analysis cannot be satisfactory if based only on that kind of data. For this reason, an important point in my reading of race and ethnicity in the corpus of this dissertation is a focus on the issue of racial and ethnic identities.

1.4. The Issue of Racial/Ethnic Identity

The notion of identity informing my work is the one discussed by Stuart Hall as characteristic of the post-modern subject: moveable, "formed and transformed continuously in relation to the ways we are represented or addressed in the cultural systems which surround us" ("The Question of Cultural Identity" 598). According to him:

> Identities are never unified and, in late modern times, increasingly fragmented and fractured; never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions. They are subjected to a radical historicization, and are constantly in the process of change and transformation. ("Who needs Identity?" 4)

This understanding of identity opposes the belief that an individual always occupies fixed positions in the social and cultural articulations of his or her community and, consequently, undermines essentialist notions. These notions are inaccurate because, as Hall puts it, identities are "constructed through, not outside, difference". He adds:

> It is only through the relation to the Other, the relation to what it is not, to precisely what it lacks, to what has been called its constitutive outside that the "positive" meaning of any term – and thus its "identity" – can be constructed… [I]dentities can function as points of identification and attachment only because of their capacity to exclude, to leave out, to render "outside," abjected. Every identity has as its "margin," an excess, something more. The unity, the internal homogeneity, which the term identity treats as foundational is not a natural, but a constructed form of closure, every identity naming as its necessary, even if silenced and unspoken other, that which it "lacks." (4-5)

In other words, identities are created through an awareness of and a constant negotiation with alterity in terms of power and exclusion.

By the same token, Hall defines race as “a discursive, not a biological category.” It is, according to him:

> the organizing category of those ways of speaking, systems of representation, and social practices (discourses) which utilize a loose, often unspecified set of differences in physical characteristics – skin color, hair texture, physical and bodily features, etc. – as symbolic markers in order to differentiate one group socially from another. (“The Question of Cultural Identity” 616).

Race, in this sense, is also a constructed notion that creates racial identities through a discourse about differences among social groups. This is what I try to investigate in the works I analyze here: how racial and ethnic identities are constructed in the stories, for and by the characters, and how they negotiate with racial and ethnic differences.

In line with Hall’s arguments, Sollors affirms that “ethnic, racial, or national identifications rest on antitheses, on negativity” (288), that is, they depend on one’s perception of the different other. Quoting Georges Devereux, the author explains that, more specifically, ethnic identity “‘is logically and historically the product of the assertion that ‘A is an X because he is not a Y’’ – a proposition which makes it remarkably easy to identify Xness” (288). In this sense, an individual is identified with a certain ethnic group by contrast with another – she is African American because she is not Anglo American, for example. However, Sollors explains that an ethnic categorization that rests on contrastive identification, for being too essentialist and generalizing, takes the risk of reinforcing prejudiced assumptions about basic tokens, such as the humanity of the other (288). Identities constructed under this perspective, thus, tend to lead to a racist view of those who are identified as different.

This construction of identity through contrast can be noticed in Butler’s *Fledgling*, for example. Because of her amnesia, Shori cannot remember who she is and (re)constructs her identity throughout the novel by comparing herself with the people she meets. She understands

she is not human by perceiving her differences in relation to the first humans she meets; later, as she encounters other Ina, she starts seeing in them the same characteristics that make her different from humans. However, the Ina who oppose her in the story refuse to identify her as one of them, pointing out her human (mainly black) traits. Not only physical appearance, but also psychological responses and manners are used by prejudiced Ina to compare Shori to animals and deny her any Ina identity, echoing racist discourses that have denied black people the same level of humanity as whites.

When contrastive identification comes to inform a country's official policies for ethnic and racial categorization, the problem is even more complex. The US one-drop rule is a good example, as the ultimate basis for black and white racial designations in the country. As F. James Davis explains, the one-drop rule is also called the "hypo-descent rule," "meaning that racially mixed persons are assigned the status of the subordinate group" (*Who is Black?* 5). Therefore, not only does the one-drop rule define as black any person who has any level of black ancestry, it also ascribes to those people an inferior social status. At first "a social construction created to reinforce slavery," this rule emerged from the US South to be officially implemented in law and public policy in the whole country by the beginning of the twentieth-century, and then was strengthened to enforce the Jim Crow segregation laws (Davis, "Black Identity" 109). Even when the 1960s civil rights movement ended those laws, the one-drop rule was not challenged, but rather used by black activists to re-affirm their identities and call for support from so-called lighter blacks (104). It is important to observe that this rule applies exclusively to African Americans, since, as Davis affirms, "[n]o other ethnic population in the nation, including those with visibly non-caucasoid features, is defined and counted according to a one-drop rule" (*Who is Black?* 12). Moreover, this rule is found only in the US, which accounts for contrasts between the way North Americans identify black immigrants and the way those immigrants identify themselves.

Davies explains that in the US, “the terms black, Negro, African American, and colored include both mulattoes and unmixed blacks” (*Who is Black?* 6), while in other countries mulatto is another category in the racial classification. The author goes on to explain that blackness becomes an important feature in a person’s identity in the US, and even light-skinned African Americans tend to embrace it, despite the social disadvantages that it encompasses, for a fear of losing their most basic family and community bounds (14-15). For this sense of belonging to a community, together with the fact that the African American group is composed by racially varied people (descended from different European, African, Amerindian peoples, and other immigrant groups), they also form an ethnic group inside the US. As Davis puts it:

> Because blacks are defined according to the one-drop rule, they are a socially constructed category in which there is wide variation in racial traits and therefore not a race group in the scientific sense … However, because the category has a definite status position in the society it has become a self-conscious social group with an ethnic identity. (*Who is Black?* 15)

Blackness in the United States, in this sense, is a constructed social discourse to classify people who may have some genetic African traits in common, but who actually constitute an ethnic group that has developed a distinctive culture “within the general American framework” (*Who is Black?* 18). This interrelation between race and ethnicity in the characterization of African Americans can be perceived in Due’s novel, as differences in the definition of blackness emerge in the encounter among the black American characters and other blacks from different African countries, also hinting at the varied cultural aspects that indicate that the African diaspora is composed by different ethnic groups.

The one-drop rule emerged from the social stratification created by slavery. Although the British colonies in the Caribbean have also experienced this condition, as Africans were introduced there as slaves and subordinated to the white group, there is no such a rule for

defining blackness in the Caribbean, in which categorizations developed in a more varied way. In both the US and the Caribbean, according to Davis, whites have generally rejected "marriage with mulattoes who have discernible negroid traits." However, Northwestern colonizers in the Caribbean where more flexible and accepted miscegenation with colored people, even though a lighter skin complexion was still required (*Who is Black?* 106). Such flexibility resulted in three general categories for color stratification in the West Indies: white, colored (mulattoes), and unmixed blacks. Davis explains that Anglophone Caribbean, mixed-race people had more opportunities of social status improvement than in the US (107-08). Miscegenation has been seen there more as a way of whitening a predominantly black population than as threatening the alleged purity of the white race.

Up to these days, no category of mixed black and white race has been recognized by the US federal government. In such a context, identification assumes complicated contours in terms of limits and possibilities, as the commonly used criteria for categorization are not enough. Linda Martín Alcoff observes that ethnicity and race are mixed in the way immigrants are perceived in North America. She explains that "[t]he generic term 'black', used today intentionally by many critical race theorists …, signifies a transnational grouping that crosses geographical and national boundaries but shares, at minimum, the obstacle of antiblack racism and the legacy of colonialism" (174). The fact that blackness is shared by different ethnicities attests the complexity of understanding racial and ethnic relations. In this sense, although Afro-Caribbeans and African Americans share the racial trait of blackness, as well as the common experience of slavery, they can be seen as part of two different ethnic communities. This issue is even more complicated by the fact that the different groups identify blackness in a particular way. One drop of black blood makes a person black in the US, but this same person may be considered creole or white in the Caribbean or in Latin America. This fact has even led some African Americans to refuse to recognize African descendants from other countries as blacks

and to refer to them instead in terms of other ethnic and national classifications, such as Latinos or Haitians.

In the case of the United States and Canada, according to Marger, as "multiethnic societies where ethnic boundaries are not rigid and where there is much marriage across ethnic lines," ethnic identity has a more "voluntary nature" (10). On the other hand, "for those whose ethnic identity is based on physical, or racial, characteristics, … the capacity to choose becomes more limited," and then ethnic group membership becomes fundamentally ascribed (10). Ascribed here, the author explains:

> means that one's ethnicity is a characteristic acquired at birth and not subject to basic change. Being born a member of an ethnic group, one does not leave it except in unusual circumstances. … Through the socialization process, individuals come to learn their group membership early and to understand the differences between themselves and members of other groups. (10)

In this sense, if African Americans, for example, are considered an ethnic group defined by racial characteristics, it can be understood that an African American identity is something that an individual assumes automatically when he or she is born, regardless of personal desire. African Americans often consider as exclusive marks of their group a notion of blackness that goes beyond phenotypical characteristics such as skin color and the process of slavery and racism they have suffered in the US.

Many authors have tried to explain how an African American identity is formed. One of the most relevant works about the topic is that by the sociologist and activist W. E. B. Du Bois. In *The Souls of Black Folk*, he claims that:

> the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world, – a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a

> peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others … One ever feels his twoness, – an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (8)

This notion of a double-consciousness indicates the complex negotiation between a national (North American) and a racial (black) identity that African Americans have historically dealt with. Such a negotiation is even more complicated by the racist, stereotypical notions associated with black people by the white hegemonic group, which tries to exclude them from the category of US citizens.

A nationalistic approach is what black activists have used to reaffirm their identity and demand their inclusion as fully citizens, as it can be attested by the American Civil Rights movement of the 1960s, for example. Paul Gilroy explains that an understanding of nationality within black political discourse indicates the desire "to acquire a supposedly authentic, natural, and stable 'rooted' identity" (30). But the term "black nationalism," he argues, has been used loosely and he points out a problem with what he calls the "the over-integrated sense of cultural and ethnic particularity" used by the movement. According to Gilroy, when black political discourse is based on essentialist notions of a black race/ethnicity, it is marked by an arbitrariness that fails to account for internal diversity (31). The opposite standpoint is pluralistic, as it "affirms blackness as an open signifier and seeks to celebrate complex representations of a black particularity that is internally divided: by class, sexuality, gender, age, and political consciousness" (32). However, "in leaving racial essentialism behind by viewing 'race' itself as a social and cultural construction, it has been insufficiently alive to the lingering power of specifically 'racial' forms of power and subordination" (33). In other words, the pluralistic view fails to account for the specific kinds of oppression suffered by people who

have in common blackness as a racial trait. Therefore, neither of these two positions (essentialist and pluralistic) is totally effective and the lack of a debate involving those terms makes it worse. That is why Gilroy proposes a "transnational and intercultural perspective" over black cultural history, arguing that:

> The fractal patterns of cultural and political exchange and transformation that we try and specify through manifestly inadequate theoretical terms like creolization and syncretism indicate how both ethnicities and political cultures have been made anew in ways that are significant not simply for the peoples of the Caribbean but for Europe, for Africa, … and of course, for black America. (15)

Under this perspective, it is possible to understand how racial and ethnic identities are shaped in the context of diaspora, immigration, and post-colonization in a way that questions nationalisms and notions of absolute, pure, ethnicities. It is important to considerer, however, that in this case, too, there is the risk of overgeneralizations.

Even though my approach to the works of Octavia Butler, Nalo Hopkinson, and Tananarive Due is a comparative one, in trying to reveal common points that characterize what I am calling here black women's speculative fiction I also identify the particularities that relate each work to its specific socio-cultural context. Accordingly, another fundamental point in which this dissertation is based refers to the multiple possibilities of a so-called black identity. In bell hooks's words: "employing a critique of essentialism … allows us to affirm multiple black identities, varied black experience. It also challenges colonial imperialist paradigms of black identity which represent blackness one-dimensionally in ways that reinforce and sustain white supremacy" (425). Recognizing that black identities are more varied than the traditional characterizations, therefore, contests this domination. My argument is that the works I analyze

here not only represent identities that are observable in everyday experiences, but also create alternative, speculative identities.

As I demonstrate in the next chapter, in Butler's novel, the racial aspects of the main characters' identities are at the core of the plot conflict. Shori's blackness mark her as part human, and the Silks, who despise her, claim Ina supremacy by means of arguments that are reminiscent of nineteenth-century theories of white superiority and that preach white domination. At the same time, the Ina can also be read as forming ethnic groups in the countries where they are settled, and the "Ina ways" are considered inherent traits that point to their distinction from humans. Hopkinson's stories deal more clearly with ethnic identities, in a way that the main characters identify themselves as Afro-Caribbean. "Greedy Choke Puppy" is set in Trinidad and some particularities of that island's traditions are highlighted in contrast to that of other places, namely Guiana. A broader notion of Caribbean tradition also permeates the short story, as in Jacky's assumption in her thesis that the everyday lives of Caribbean peoples as a whole are influenced by folklore. In *Brown Girl in the Ring*, set in Canada, a notion of Caribbeanness is also evoked, not only as the main characters' ethnic identity as first, second, and third-generation immigrants, but also as a model of hybridity and cooperation for the community of immigrants formed in the downtown Toronto, excluded from the scope of Canadian governmental assistance. In both stories, however, since the aspects of Caribbeaness presented are also of an African matrix, the notion of a possible black racial identity is evoked. Due's novel explores the racial aspects of the characters' identities, complicating them by pointing to the ethnic differences among the black characters: African Americans, South-Africans, and Ethiopians end up widening their understanding of blackness through their contact with each other. In all the four stories, hybridity and mutual cooperation among different races and ethnicities is celebrated as instrumental for the future of the characters' communities.

1.5. Race and Ethnicity in Literature

Literary production has been used to characterize the essence of a people and often serves as a criterion for racial and ethnic categorization. Some nineteenth century theories such as the ones discussed above use the notion of racial essence to explain the literary aptitudes of certain peoples in relation to others (Appiah 275). Taine, for example, suggests that the literary production of a race reflects its essence and mentality, that is, a set of intellectual and cultural characteristics that make it particular in relation to others (10). But literary works have also been used to represent racial difference and help in the proliferation of racial stereotypes common in the popular mind of a specific time.

At the turn of the nineteenth century, according to Appiah, literature's interest in race as a theme can be related to the then emerging identification of race with nation, in which people share a common literature and language (279). He also points out the development of African American literary criticism as indicative of the importance of the notion of race in literature: the denial to black people in the US of the very status of citizens motivated the urge to characterize a cultural production of their own (285-86). Since the beginning of their presence in the Americas, African descendants were considered by their white counterparts as unable to contribute for the cultural present state and for the future intellectual development of the country. African American literary production has always tried to contradict that belief, so much so that most of it "has been concerned thematically with issues of race" (286). I recognize in this work that much has been debated about regarding how blackness is represented in literature and about how it is addressed by literary criticism. What can be perceived from works such as Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (1989) and Saidiya V. Hartman (1997) is that there is here as well a claim against essentialist notions and homogenizing modes of representation.

In what concerns ethnicity in literature, the same function of characterizing a nationality can be perceived. According to Sollors:

> "ethnicity" as a term for literary study largely evokes the accumulation of cultural bits that demonstrate the original creativity, emotive cohesion, and temporal depth of a particular collectivity, especially in a situation of emergence – be it from obscurity, suppression, embattlement, dependence, diaspora, or previous membership in a larger grouping. (290)

This notion of ethnicity relates to the belief that common folk art forms could hold a people together since they can represent this people's particularity in relation to others. Thus, for example, a reading of Nalo Hopkinson's *Brown Girl in the Ring* and "Greedy Choke Puppy" as representing and discussing Caribbean (more specifically Jamaican and Trinidadian) ethnicity may consider how the particularities of that culture in relation to hegemonic cultures (white Canadian) are portrayed in the texts to communicate identification and belonging.

On the other hand, Sollors points out a possible danger in "the ethnic approach to writing," that of making excessive generalizations about a writer's ethnic identity and using them as the central way of reading his or her text (290). In other words, the fact that Nalo Hopkinson is Caribbean-Canadian should not be the only fact informing the "Caribbeanness" of her text, which, in turn, should not be considered an essential notion for it is not possible to grasp what it means to be Caribbean, Trinidadian, or Jamaican-Canadian, neither in her texts nor in everyday experiences. But it is possible to investigate how notions of such ethnic characteristics are constructed in Hopkinson's works.

The analysis of race and ethnicity in the texts studied here makes possible a reading of the representation and discussion of differences that could not be communicated through other notions, namely nationality. What is being expressed in those works is something that would make national labels such as "American" or "Canadian" too broad. The identities adopted by the characters reveal notions of belonging to specific ethnic and racial groups among the variety of communities that form the multicultural societies in which they are inserted. All of these

communities are recognized or recognize themselves in terms of national identities, but what makes them different from each other is what is being discussed in the works analyzed here. In fact, even the racial and ethnic aspects of the ideologies and identities discussed in the texts are too complex to be investigated alone. I argue in this dissertation that an understating of the interconnection of these notions with that of sexuality can be even more productive to analyze Butler's, Hopkinson's, and Due's works.

2. Sexuality

The works analyzed in this dissertation were written by women and are about women as protagonists, and this is an important aspect that connects them to each other. Nevertheless, "being a woman" carries complex implications that must be understood before any analysis is developed. Judith Butler explains:

> If one "is" a woman, that is surely not all one is; the term fails to be exhaustive, not because a pregendered "person" transcends the specific paraphernalia of its gender, but because gender is not always constituted coherently in different historical contexts, and because gender intersects with racial, class, ethnic, sexual and regional modalities of discursively constituted identities. As a result, it becomes impossible to separate out "gender" from the political and cultural intersections in which it is invariably produced and maintained. (*Gender Trouble* 4-5).

In other words, identification with the feminine gender is not clear-cut; it implies a complex interconnection with one's cultural and historical contexts and other aspects of identity, such as race and sexuality. Actually, my focus in this work is rather on sexuality than on gender, but as the sexuality to be analyzed is that of the main characters, who are identified as women, it is important to bear in mind the interrelation between these two notions.

2.1. Towards a Definition of Sexuality

In order to analyze the issue of sexuality in a literary work, it is necessary to consider a specific definition for the term and its implications in private and social life. Similarly to the notion of race, sexuality has been approached by scholars as a socially constructed concept. This is so because the notion of sexuality has been used for controlling individuals' sexual practices, directing them exclusively to the objective of reproduction. Also similarly to the notion of race, it is important to acknowledge that the conceptualization of sexuality has to be discussed in relation to others, namely sex and gender. Again, definitions for each of these terms are not clear-cut either and have often led to misconceptions. Prejudicial and stereotypical notions arise from the misguided belief that sex, gender and sexuality are interdependent.

Some authors have tried to elaborate on the differences and connections among these notions so as to call attention to epistemological and practical mistakes in their usage. Gender, as Lizbeth Goodman puts it, "refers to ways of seeing and representing people and situations based on sex differences", being "a social or cultural category, influenced by stereotypes about 'female' and 'male' behavior that exist in our attitudes and beliefs" (vii). Concerning the notion of sex, it has traditionally been defined as referring "to the anatomical differences between men and women," having therefore to be distinguished from the concept of gender, which relates to "the social differentiation between men and women" (Weeks 367). However, this distinction has been contested by critics such as Butler, who claims that the notion of sex is as socially constructed as that of gender. For her, the notion of sex implies a set of norms and practices used to give meaning to and regulate bodies (*Bodies That Matter* 1-2). She draws her arguments from Michel Foucault's explanation of sex as constructed by discourse. For him, "the notion of 'sex' made it possible to group together, in an artificial unity, anatomical elements, biological functions, conducts, sensations, and pleasures, and it enabled one to make use of this

fictitious unity as a causal principle, an omnipresent meaning. … sex was thus able to function as a unique signifier and as a universal signified" (1: 154). According to Foucault, then, the notion of sex goes beyond the perception of physical traits to include the bodily economies and pleasures involved in the sexual act and sexual desire, as if in a natural relation of cause and effect. In Butler's words, "sexuality is understood by Foucault to produce 'sex' as an artificial concept which effectively extends and disguises power relations responsible for its genesis" (*Gender Trouble* 117). The notion of sex, therefore, emerged from discourses about sexuality as a way of interpreting and controlling the bodies. Foucault suggests that sex should not be understood as the biological characteristics and functions that give rise to a more abstract notion of sexuality, but rather taken as a concept developed by the same discourses that historically construct sexuality.

The problem with Foucault's theory, which Butler tries to make up for in hers, is that it does not consider gender difference, failing to account for the way differences between male and female sexualized bodies are constructed. Butler extends Foucault's arguments to claim that sex is used to render a sense of materiality to the way bodies are interpreted. She argues that "the regulatory norms of 'sex' work in a performative fashion to constitute the materiality of bodies and, more specifically, to materialize the body's sex, to materialize sexual difference in the service of the consolidation of the heterosexual imperative" (*Bodies That Matter* 2). In this sense, the norms that prescribe that to a female biological sexual organ correspond sexual desires towards the male biological body, for example, are materialized in the bodies that perform them. This performance is not natural, not triggered by the female sexual organ, but signified as such by those norms. The very biological and anatomical aspects of the notion of sex are constructed, as they are interpreted in this specific way by the social norms that regulate sexual practices and desire. Sexuality, then, should be understood not as depending on the individual's sex, but as being constructed alongside with the way one's sex is interpreted and

controlled. A discussion about sexuality, in turn, should consider how it is socially and historically created and implemented.

Crucial to this view are Foucault's arguments in his *History of Sexuality*, in which he states that this concept is constructed and controlled through social discourses sustained by a "regime of power-knowledge-pleasure" (1: 11). He affirms that since the nineteenth century, when the term sexuality started to be used, discourses about sex have been produced in order "to expel from reality the forms of sexuality that were not amenable to the strict economy of reproduction" (1: 36). But instead of simply repressing sexuality, those discourses ended up multiplying "legal sanctions against minor perversions" (1: 36). Foucault explains that the discourses about sexuality produced by the sciences and social institutions tried to control the patterns and behaviors they considered inappropriate by extensively analyzing, categorizing, and classifying them. The intention, as Foucault puts it, was "to absorb, for the benefit of a genitally centered sexuality, all the fruitless pleasures," that is, pleasures not employed to satisfy basic social concerns, namely, "to ensure population, to reproduce labor capacity, to perpetuate the form of social relations: in short, to constitute a sexuality that is economically useful and politically conservative" (1: 37). Consequently, the discourses on sexuality created a set of rules to determine at the same time what is acceptable and what is considered a transgression in terms of sexual practices and identities, which Foucault refers to as "implantation of perversions" in the "sexual heterogeneities" created in the last two centuries.

This view of sexuality as a socially constructed category is fundamental for my reading of this issue in the works I analyze in this dissertation. Sexual norms and the role they play in the control of individuals can be perceived in all the stories. However, the protagonists break the social norms that regulate their sexuality. In *Fledgling*, sex between an Ina and a human symbiont, for example, is free from both the rules that control Ina sexuality and the ones that control human sexuality. Besides, Shori somehow breaks the Ina rules that separate male and

female families in different households when she lives with a male family, the Gordons, for some time. Similarly, the soucouyants in Hopkinson's stories represent a free, transgressive female sexuality. Such cases in which individuals do not follow the rules that are socially imposed on them indicate a point not fully discussed by Foucault in his theory, for which he has received some considerable criticism: the process of identification through which an individual assumes a certain sexuality.

According to Hall, Foucault's theory suggests a subject that passively occupies the position ascribed to him or her through discourse ("Who Needs Identity" 10). Hall disagrees with Foucault's claim that "nothing in man – not even his body – is sufficiently stable to serve as a basis for self-recognition or for understanding other men" (11). He contends that, even though the interpretation of one's body is influenced by the meanings that have been historically attributed to it, never revealing, then, the truth about the individual (if such a thing exists), it is useful to understand how this process of signification is materialized in the body (11). Foucault does not fully address this issue, as Hall argues, failing "to think this relation of subject to discursive formations as an articulation" ("Who Needs Identity?" 14). In other words, thinking in terms of sexuality, Foucault's theory does not explain how the subjects understand and negotiate with the sexual identities imposed on them by social discourse.

Hall suggests that this theoretical problem could have been solved if Foucault had engaged his "discursive phenomenology of the subject" with psychoanalysis ("Who Needs Identity?" 14). Butler is the one who articulates these two theoretical tools to explain the relation among the subject, the body, and identity. She does so by suggesting, as mentioned above, that bodies are materialized as sexed through performance, that is, "through a ritualized repetition of norms" (*Bodies That Matter* iv). To use Elizabeth Grosz's words, the contribution of Butler to Foucault's notion of sexuality can be perceived in the former's argument that both sex and sexuality are:

> marked, lived and function according to whether it is a male or female body that is being discussed. Sex is no longer the label of both sexes in their difference, as in Foucault's writings, a generic term indicating sexed, as opposed to inanimate, existence; it is now the label and terrain of the production and enactment of sexual difference. (213)

Therefore, Butler's conceptualizations suggest that gender differences influence the constitution of the individual's subjectivity, making up for Foucault's total neglect of the gender issue in his work.

In this sense, it is not enough to consider that the very notion of sex is discursively created; it is also necessary to understand how the way the bodies are sexed depends on a notion of gender differences. This dependence should not be dismissed only because it is socially created through discourses that preach that the biological differences between male and female sex are natural. Rather, it is exactly because the relation between sex and gender is artificial that an understanding of its role in the formation of a subject's identity is relevant. In my analysis of Butler's, Hopkinson's, and Due's stories, therefore, I consider how the main characters' sexuality is presented in relation to their identities as women. I demonstrate in chapter 3 that the specific sexualities attributed to them in the stories, as well as their sexual desires and practices, are informed by the fact that they are women.

As mentioned before, the problem involving the notions of sex, gender, and sexuality consists in the misconceived belief that they are interdependent: for example, that to the female sex correspond a feminine role and a sexuality aimed at reproduction (a woman's heterosexuality). To refer to this belief, Butler uses the term "heterosexual matrix," that is, "that grid of cultural intelligibility through which bodies, genders, and desires are naturalized" (*Gender Trouble* 194). She explains it as:

> a hegemonic discursive/epistemic model of gender intelligibility that assumes that for the bodies to cohere and make sense there must be a stable sex expressed through a stable gender (masculine expresses male, feminine expresses female) that is oppositionally and hierarchically defined through the compulsory practice of heterosexuality. (194)

Thus, according to Butler, this heterosexual matrix that characterizes our society designates roles to each of what it considers the two biological sexes – male and female –, in order to make bodies culturally intelligible. A compulsory performance of such roles is what reinforces the very character of naturality and appropriateness attributed to them. Butler's notions of performativity, as she puts it, "must be understood not as a singular or deliberate 'act', but, rather, as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects it names" (*Bodies That Matter* 2). In this sense, the norm of heterosexuality is reproduced and reinforced through its repetitive practice by individuals.

Furthermore, Butler claims that the same matrix that creates the norms also presupposes the subversive forms (3). The sexual identities that do not conform to the heterosexual norm are marginalized and become abject, serving as the opposition against which the so-called proper sexuality is formed, and at the same time as a threat to its constitution. Homosexuality and bisexuality can be understood as occupying what the author calls "'unlivable' and 'uninhabitable' zones of social life" (3). Butler goes on to argue that, since the marginalized sexual identities are necessarily disavowed so as to guarantee that the normative sexuality goes on as such, undermining this disavowal can indicate the ideology that supported the creation of the norm.

In the analysis of the works by Butler, Hopkinson, and Due presented here, I investigate how the characters conform or fail to conform to the heterosexual norm as a way to comment on the social regulation of sexuality. It can be noticed that the four narratives explore this

artificial quality of sexuality to create their characters' sexual identities and practices that defy what is prescribed as the social norms in North American and Caribbean societies. More specifically, it can be noticed that the sexual identities and practices assumed by the women characters can be related to what Butler calls culturally unintelligible sexualities (*Gender Trouble* 98), that is, those that do not conform to the heterosexual matrix.

The fact that the women in the stories are black makes it necessary to understand the interrelation between race and sexuality in the formation of their identity, as well as in the oppression they suffer. If, as Foucault affirms, discourses on sexuality have served to guarantee population control, reproduction of labor force, and the maintenance of social powers (1: 37), the control of black women's sexuality also presupposes a control over the reproduction of the black race. Next, I review the interrelation between these two issues that guide the analysis I present in chapter 3.

2.2. The Interrelation of Sexuality and Race

The whole notion of an exclusionary matrix for sexual identification is in line with what was discussed in the previous section about racial and ethnic identification, which also operates through exclusion. When we think of these three issues together, that is, of how race, ethnicity and sexuality work in relation to each other, the question of identity becomes even more complex. Butler addresses this point in *Bodies That Matter*, claiming that:

> it seems crucial to rethink the scenes of reproduction and, hence, of sexing practices not only as ones through which a heterosexual imperative is inculcated, but also as ones through which boundaries of racial distinction are secured as well as contested. Especially at those junctures in which a compulsory heterosexuality works in the service of maintaining hegemonic forms of racial purity, the "threat" of homosexuality takes on a distinctive complexity. (18)

For Butler, then, the logic of reproduction that characterizes the discourses that impose heterosexuality as a norm have important effects when this reproduction is targeted to guarantee the supposed purity of a race. Homosexuality and miscegenation become transgressions that the heteronormative matrix disavowals.

It is in this sense that Butler argues that the plural identifications that constitute a subject can serve as "the vehicle for one another," in a way that, for example, "a gender identification can be made in order to repudiate or participate in a race identification" and "what counts as 'ethnicity' frames and eroticizes sexuality, or can itself be a sexual marking" (116). This interrelation can be perceived in *Fledgling*, for example, as Shori is recommended to learn from other female Ina how to be one of them. In Hopkinson's stories, some traits that are considered characteristic of Caribbean women are raised, such as the spirituality of the priestesses of Afro-Caribbean religions and the dangerous sexuality of the soucouyant and La Diablesse. In *The Living Blood*, the fact that Jessica and Fana are women is the main reason for some Life Brothers' refusal to accept them in their clan. My analysis of Butler's, Hopkinson's and Due's works explores these interrelations in the construction of the characters' subjectivities, in order to identify how the narratives comment on sexist and racist ideologies.

Although Judith Butler's notions are fundamental to the theoretical framework I use in this analysis, some problems in her work require further attention. Friedman criticizes Butler's theory, especially her notions of performativity and of identity/subjectivity as an effect of discourse and her dismissal of the importance of "concepts of material conditions on the one hand and the agency of the subject on the other" (247). Indeed, Butler's explanation of the way in which bodies are materialized through discourse does not fully address aspects of identity positions that are more "locational," in Friedman's term.

Friedman's suggestion of a "localized feminism" is interesting for my purposes of offering a comparative analysis of writers from different cultural backgrounds, as she argues

against the generalizing belief that "women suffer the same gender oppression in all societies, an approach to internationalizing feminism that bases affiliation solely on gender victimization, thus muting women's agency, ignoring cultural contextualization, and suppressing understanding of gender's interaction with other constituents of identity" (5). Such a generalizing notion, then, is essentialist since it dismisses the differences among women who occupy different social and cultural contexts. In her approach, Friedman proposes a "new geography" that investigates spatialized identities that are constantly moving, as cultural formations are always changing. This kind of approach focuses not only on the biological and/or historical difference that form boundaries among people "as a form of dominance and resistance," but also on "the search both material and utopian for fertile borderlands, for the liminal spaces in between, the sites of constant movement and change, the locus of syncretist intermingling and hybrid interfusions of self and other" (19). Friedman's concept of new geography is a useful tool for the analysis of speculative works I present here. Even though my dissertation concentrates more on the diasporic condition of African descendants than on geographical locations *per se,* the notion of boundaries is important in the formation of the characters' identities as their crossing the limits of race, ethnicity, and sexuality are mediated by a crossing of other limits such as that of humanity/supernaturalism, science/spirituality.

Considering this latter pair, what I mean by spirituality here relates to what Tomoko Masuzawa explains as the current use of the term:

> something like the general essence of religion, which is perforce less tangible and more universal than any particular religion … [and which] used to be embodied in religious institutions but now has been partially liberated from those traditional institutional confinements and can find more personal, 'free' expression through a variety of cultural venues. (71)

Spirituality, therefore, can be understood not as relating to particular religions, but as referring to the general belief in something that transcends everyday experiences. I chose to use this word because it can be related at the same time to the Afro-Caribbean religious practices explored in Hopkinson's stories, to the African-American Christianity in Due's novel, as well as to the notion of sacredness that makes of the Life Bothers' practices a kind of cult, even though they are not part of an official religious institution. As to the opposition between science and spirituality, Deepak Chopra and Leonard Mlodinow's words help elucidate it: "Spirituality looks toward an invisible, transcendent realm discovered within the self. Science explores the world as it is offered to the five senses and the brain, while spirituality considers the universe to be purposeful and imbued with meaning" (xxiv). This difference can be explored especially in Hopkinson's *Brown Girl in the Ring*, in which the spirituality that is typical of Afro-Caribbean religions is more efficient to save the lives of the impoverished immigrants in Toronto than technological apparatus and science itself.

In what concerns identity, Friedman's locationality considers it as encompassing both difference and sameness:

> *Identity* is constructed relationally through difference from the other; identification with a group based on gender, race, or sexuality, for example, depends mostly on binary systems of "us" versus "them," where difference from the other defines the group to which one belongs. Conversely, *identity* also suggests sameness, as in the word *identical*; an identity that affirms some form of commonality, some shared ground. (19)

Racial and sexual identities, in this sense, may also be based on one's notion of belonging to a specific group and of being different from one another. When we apply this "new geography of identity" to the analysis of works by women writers, we are able to perceive the formation of identities within the texts in a more complex way. As Friedman claims, it makes it possible

to think about those writers "in relation to a fluid matrix instead of a fixed binary of male/female or masculine/feminine." which replaces a focus on women with "the interactional, relational, and situational constituents of identity" (27). Concerning this attention to the writer's identity, Friedman recognizes the fallacy of "deterministic biography and authorial intentionality in the reading of narrative texts," but affirms that "reading the subjectivities within a text involves tracing the mediated link between the multiply situated, historically specific producer and product, writer and text, scriptor and narrative voice" (27). I agree with her arguments and believe that considering the positionality of the writers I analyze here in relation to race, ethnicity, and sexuality can help shed light on the discussions they convey through their characters, even though it is not a determining factor.

Being black and being women seem to be important parts of the writers' identities and it is from this particular perspective that they discuss the issues of sexuality, race, and ethnicity in their works. In an interview to Randall Kenan, Octavia Butler talks about her identification with feminism: "it was just as important to have equal rights for women as it was to have equal rights for black people and so I felt myself to be very much a feminist" (501). Nalo Hopkinson, when questioned about her choice of using young black women as protagonists in many of her stories, explains: "I'm a feminist, and my work builds on a tradition of science fiction writing about women's issues" (qtd. in Simpson 111). Tananarive Due relates her use of African characters alongside African Americans with her personal experience with African friends while studying in England, as she claims: "I left England with the sense that my racial identification was not confined to this nation's borders. I am a Black American, but first I am Black, period" (qtd. in Hood 158). Keeping these writers' personal agendas in mind, therefore, is important to understand the way they discuss the issues of race, ethnicity, and sexuality in their stories.

The construction of a notion of a black race based on an African ancestry in North American societies, which results in the subjugation and marginalization of the members of this race, can be compared to the construction of an ideal of women's sexuality that results in their control and oppression in the heterosexual matrix of Western societies. Therefore, in what concerns black women, this relation between race and sexuality is even more obvious, since those women are characterized by two factors that are underprivileged and marginalized in North American societies: woman's sexuality and African ancestry. Hence the importance of considering the interconnection between these issues when analyzing literary works by black women.

3. The Black Women's Perspective

In her famous essay "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House," Audre Lorde argues:

> those of us who are poor, who are lesbians, who are Black, who are older – know that survival is not an academic skill. It is learning how to stand alone, unpopular and reviled, and how to make common cause with those others identified as outside the structures in order to define and seek a world in which we can all flourish. It is learning how to take our differences and make them strengths. For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. (112)

Lorde's statement refers to the interrelation of identities discussed in the previous sections, as she mentions some issues that characterize a subject as marginalized: low social class, homosexuality, racial minority, and old age. Hence, Lorde's well-known lines suggest a theoretical and political challenge to the very structures that create oppression, "the master's tools," in order to disrupt it.

When it comes to black women, the condition of double oppression calls for a kind of challenge that goes beyond the particular agendas of feminism and black criticism. In this respect, the development of black feminism raises important notions to be applied to black women's experiences and construction of identities. As Patricia Hill Collins explains, the black feminist thought developed in the US attempts to make up for racist ideas inside Western feminisms (concerned with "White, middle-class women's issues"), as well as "masculinist bias" inside African American social and political thought ("limited by both the reformist postures toward change assumed by many US Black intellectuals … and the secondary status afforded the ideas and experiences of African American women") (*Black Sexual Politics* 5-7). Therefore, black feminist thought aims at opposing the essentialist notions that equate black women's experiences with those of white women and with those of black men, as if they were oppressed in the same level and through the same means.

The particularity of black women's experiences can be understood through a questioning of their oppression in terms of gender and racial issues. Black lesbian writers, such as Lorde (1984), argue that differences in terms of sexuality can reveal even more specific particularities that a study of gender alterity alone cannot grasp. In trying to demonstrate what characterizes the experience of African American women, Collins argues that "the convergence of race, class, and gender oppression characteristic of US slavery shaped all subsequent relationships that women of African descent had within Black American families and communities, with employers, and among one another" (*Black Sexual Politics* 4). She points out three interdependent dimensions encompassed by African American women's oppression. The first is the economical dimension, characterized by "the exploitation of Black women's labor essential to US capitalism" (5). A second kind of dimension of oppression is political, as it "has denied African American women the rights and privileges routinely extended to White male citizens" (5). And finally, there is the ideological dimension, attested by "controlling

images applied to Black women that originated during the slave era" (5). The repression of black women's sexuality and racial/ethnic identity, which is the specific interest of this work, can be understood as motivated by an ideal of reproduction put in the service of economic development and of the supposed hegemony of a group.

My analysis of works by black women here is especially concerned with stereotypes of black womanhood. Such stereotypes, as Collins observes, include images created by the same discourse used to justify slavery and by notions that have been disseminated through popular culture. She argues that "[f]rom mammies, jezebels, and breeder women of slavery to the smiling Aunt Jemimas on pancake mix boxes, ubiquitous Black prostitutes, and ever-present welfare mother of contemporary popular culture, negative stereotypes applied to African American women have been fundamental to Black women's oppression" (*Black Sexual Politics* 5). The reproduction of such stereotypes, therefore, serves to perpetuate the objectification and marginalization of black women's bodies. In this sense, black women's writing of fictional works can be understood as having an important role: their reshaping of such stereotypes contests the discourses that have historically created them and also undermines the power of such discourses in controlling black women's sexuality. I want to argue here that this role can be enhanced by the possibilities of the use of speculative fiction by black women writers.

4. Speculative Fiction

Before explaining how speculative fiction is useful for black women writers' contestation of sexual and racial oppression, it is necessary to explain what characterizes this kind of genre. The term speculative fiction refers to works that speculate about fictitious and alternative worlds. As Sandra Almeida points out, it "has often been used to describe a genre that comprises several other literary blends, such as science fiction, magic realism, fable, horror, and fantasy" ("Geographies of Places and Bodies"182). R. B. Gill explains that

"[w]orks that fall within the micro-subjects of Speculative Fiction conjecture about matters that in the normal course of things could not be. More specifically, their emphasis is not so much on possible though fictional matters as on events that are impossible under the physical laws and constraints of our ordinary world" (72). In other words, speculative fiction imagines how things would be had the physical and social rules that govern the world been different.

The term is somehow incipient and still confused with the other genres that it encompasses, especially science fiction. It is well known among scholars and writers that the term science fiction appeared first and that the notion of speculative fiction derived from it as an attempt to create a clear definition for the former as a respectable literary genre (Thaler 8-10). The term was coined in 1948 by Robert A. Heinlein in his article "On the Writing of Speculative Fiction." The author, by categorizing different types of science fiction regarding themes, ends up by creating the term speculative science fiction. In this kind of story, he explains:

> accepted science and established fiefs are extrapolated to produce a new situation, a new framework for human action. As a result of this new situation, new human problems are created – and our story is about how human beings cope with those new problems. The story is not about the new situation; it is about coping with problems arising out of the new situation. (3)

It can be noticed that Heinlein uses the term speculative fiction here as a synonym to science fiction, or, more specifically, as one of its possible kinds of plot: a story more focused on the human answer to an imaginary new and problematic situation that raised from technological and scientific questions of the present reality.

This new situation that is necessary to the speculative science fiction is also on the basis of one of the most accepted definitions of science fiction, developed in the 1970s by Darko Suvin: the concept of *novum*. According to the author, science fiction is "distinguished by the

narrative dominance or hegemony of a fictional ‘novum’ (novelty, innovation) validated by cognitive logic” (63). The *novum* is, therefore, a “cognitive innovation,” “a totalizing phenomenon or relationship deviating from the author’s and implied reader’s norm of reality” (65). According to Suvin, the *novum* can be a discrete new invention, such as a “gadget, technique, phenomenon, relationship”, or something of greater magnitude, such as a setting (“spatiotemporal locus”), an agent (“main characters or characters”), “and/or relations basically new and unknown in the author’s environment” (64). He also uses this concept of *novum* to differentiate science fiction from other imaginative genres:

> what differentiates SF from the “supernatural” genres of fictional fantasy in the wider sense (including mythical tales, fairy tales, etc., as well as horror and/or heroic fantasy in the narrower sense) is the presence of scientific cognition as the sign or correlative of a method (way, approach, atmosphere, world-view, sensibility) identical to that of a modern philosophy of science. (65)

In this sense, for Suvin, a *novum* must be something scientifically plausible, but never supernatural. The scientific cognition of the *novum* cannot be verified empirically, as it exists only in the world of the text. However, it must be explained inside the narrative: “it can be methodically developed against the background of a body of already existing cognitions, or at the very least as a ‘mental experiment’ following accepted scientific, that is, cognitive logic” (66). When the new element created in the narrative is supernatural, there is no scientific explanation for it, and therefore the work is rather fantasy or horror than science fiction.

Writer Samuel R. Delany argues that a science fiction work leads the reader to re-direct his/her expectations driven by the *novum*, and therefore to imagine and re-conceptualize the reality that is familiar to him or her (Roberts 20). Curiously, it is this possibility of reconceptualization resulting from the process of estrangement and cognition that has been taken as the basis of definitions for speculative fiction as different from science fiction. In the

1960s, the critic and writer Judith Merril was one of those responsible for disseminating the use of the term, which she considered a subcategory of science fiction. The difference, according to her, is that while speculative fiction uses strategies to distort empiric notions of reality, in a way to speculate about society, time and space, science fiction is concerned with scientific and technological issues (Thaler 9). Therefore, estrangement in relation to everyday experience can be said to characterize both genres, but in speculative fiction it is used to lead to social and political reflections outside the text.

The way the fictional world relates to the everyday one is also considered by Margaret Atwood in her critical view about the difference between these two genres. For her, science fiction refers to "those books that descend form H.G. Wells's *The War of the Worlds*, which treats of an invasion by tentacle blood-sucking Martians shot to Earth in metal canisters – things that could not possibly happen;" speculative fiction, in turn, relates to "plots that descend from Jules Verne's books about submarines and balloon travel and such – things that really could happen but just hadn't completely happened when the authors wrote the books" (6). Put differently, speculative fiction for her deals with imaginary situations and conditions that are achievable or possible to happen, whereas the ones in science fiction are impossible. Her classification is thus different from the one quoted above by Gill, for whom speculative fiction deals with facts that are impossible. It can even be observed that both writers' notions seem contrary to what Heinlein calls speculative science fiction, in which a new situation would be created from something (scientific or technological) that already exists. Atwood also contrasts her opinion about the definition of the genres with that by the writer Ursula Le Guin: "what she means by 'science fiction' is speculative fiction about things that really could happen, whereas things that really could not happen she classifies under 'fantasy.' … in short, what Le Guin means by 'science fiction' is what I mean by 'speculative fiction,' and what she means by 'fantasy' would include some of what I mean by 'science fiction'" (6). The diverging

opinions of these writers indicate that a consensus about the difference between science and speculative fictions has not been reached yet. A definition for each genre based on the plausibility of the new elements presented in the stories seems inconclusive. On the other hand, it can be perceived that both genres are defined as presenting something new, not observable in everyday experience. For this reason, I believe that the concept of *novum* from science fiction can be applied to speculative fiction.

Indeed, the notion of *novum* seems to be implicit in more recent definitions of speculative fiction. We can consider again, for example, Gill's argument that speculative works focus on "events that are impossible under the physical laws and constraints of our ordinary world" (72). The *novum* created in speculative fiction, in this sense, can be defined as something not only new (as a technological invention in science fiction) but also impossible under the circumstances observed in human experience. Even though Suvin defines the *novum* as something new but plausible, different from the supernatural, Gill's definition can still be related to this concept, since it emphasizes that issues approached in speculative fiction works must be completely new. The author affirms that Suvin's definition of science fiction is in some ways similar to his definition of speculative fiction, but he observes:

> Although our definition of speculative fiction encompasses alternative environments and thus implies the inevitable modicum of estrangement that follows on an encounter with the unknown, "estrangement" nevertheless carries unhelpful connotations for our purposes since, as we shall see, some speculative fiction is intended to bring recognition better characterized by engagement than by the distance caused by estrangement. (73)

In this sense, for Gill, by feeling estrangement in relation to the *novum* in speculative fiction, the readers do not distance themselves from it, but compare it to their experiences. What the author calls engagement can be understood as the readers' participation in the critical reflection

to which their contact with the unknown in the speculative text invites them. The imaginative elements presented in speculative fiction, therefore, lead to self-reflection through the contrast with everyday experiences.

The problem with using Suvin's definition of *novum* to analyze speculative works is that it invalidates the classification of supernatural elements as such, failing to account for the mix of science fiction elements with gothic, horror, and fantasy that characterizes speculative fiction. However, as Ingrid Thaler notes, "[a]ppropriating known science fiction strategies such as cognitive estrangement, extrapolation, and the *novum* (Suvin), speculative fiction includes genres that follow both natural laws (science fiction), as well as those that permit the suspension of natural laws (fantasy; Nichols)" (9). In agreement with this statement, I want to argue here that the concept of *novum* can be applied to speculative fiction, as long as it is redefined under the particularities of this genre, that is, as including elements that are not possible in everyday experiences. I see it as appropriated by speculative fiction writers to incite reflection about alternative world views and ways of life rather than simply raising a sense of estrangement in the reader. An example from the works I analyze in this dissertation is the Ina species in Butler's novel, whose members are characterized as different from humans in a way that reminds the readers of racial and ethnic differences between whites and blacks; consequently, this argument becomes a comment on racism. Suvin would not call the Ina a *novum*, since the existence of such people is impossible, fantastical. In order to avoid confusions with Suvin's notion, thus, I use the term speculative *novum* in this work to refer to the imaginative elements presented in the narratives I analyze. More specifically, I try to demonstrate in my analysis that black women writers have appropriated speculative fiction to create *nova* that defy the sexual, gender, racial, and ethnic basis of everyday life oppression by presenting them in unfamiliar ways.

It must be recognized, however, that the appropriation of speculative literary devices to discuss race and sexuality by black writers is not totally new. According to Gregory Jerome Hampton and Wanda M. Brooks, "African American literature has always had elements of what many would refer to as science fiction" (10). The authors argue that "African American literature has sought to express the humanity of black people through narratives of struggle, adaptation, and survival" and conclude that "the genre of science fiction is the new frontier for African American literature that might lead to a more critical view of the past and a future that dismantles the concepts of alienation and marginalization, while it reinterprets the meaning of 'otherness'" (74). I would say that this possibility also applies to speculative fiction, since it could also comprise science fiction elements.

Nalo Hopkinson recognizes this possibility when she rearranges Audre Lorde's words quoted above to explain her writing, affirming: "in my hands, massa's tools don't dismantle the massa's house – and, in fact, I don't want to destroy it so much as I want to undertake massive renovations – they build me a house of my own" (Thaler 4). As speculative fiction can also be seen as a kind of "massa's tool" for being "generally considered a 'white' genre" (Thaler 2), Hopkinson describes the use she makes of it to create a discourse for identification. She does not disrupt the genre of speculative fiction, but rather uses it to offer alternative representations of black women. In her definition, she affirms that speculative fiction "examine[s] the effect on humans and human society of the fact that we are toolmakers. …[It] tells us stories about our lives with our creations" (qtd. in Nelson 98). These tools or creations are what I am calling here speculative *nova* and my argument is that they represent alternatives to everyday experiences.

Another way of understanding the possibilities of the use of speculative fiction is what Gina Wisker affirms about the appropriation of horror by black authors:

> African-American and Afro-Caribbean women's horror as a hybrid form crucially exposes and dramatizes Black women's originated and located fears, questions the historical abjection of Black people and women in particular, rewrites history and the present, reviews, and reinscribes. Next, it projects forward into potentially positive futures where the destructiveness of oppositional structures, hypocrisy, deceit, oppression, and so on, exposed by Gothic horror strategies, can be exorcized and a future envisioned in which their restrictive presence might be eradicated. ("Your Buried Ghost" 74)

In other words, through the undermining power of speculative fiction elements such as horror, these women rewrite their cultural and social experiences as individuals who are twice marginalized (as blacks and as women) in phallocentric North American societies. By doing so, they criticize and stir up the bases of sexism and racism. As Hopkinson puts it, "what Speculative Fiction can do in the world of the imagination [is to] explor[e] a wider range of possibilities for living" (qtd. in Johnston 203). These possibilities, I would add, include not only those related to non-normative sexualities but also those related to marginalized racial or ethnic groups and their cultural practices.

Similarly, Thaler argues that this kind of fiction "subverts in a deliberate and explicit way the mimetic notions of a realistic representation" (2). Hopkinson also observes that "Speculative Fiction is a great place to warp the mirror, and thus impel the reader to view differently things that they've taken for granted. It can also allow us in a way to accelerate or intensify the status quo, or follow it along a course of logical progression, and to look at what some of the results might be" (qtd. in Glave 149). Hence the possibility of creative appropriation of this genre by contemporary women of African ancestry: it makes it possible for them to represent the issues of black race and ethnicity and of women's sexuality in a transgressive way.

Thaler proposes a way of understanding this appropriation by calling it black Atlantic speculative fiction. She bases her concept on Paul Gilroy's notion of black Atlantic as "an imaginary cultural-historical space … concerned with positioning black diaspora culture in transnational contexts and thus aim[ing] for a global(ized) understanding of culture that is not tied to national boundaries" (2). I agree with Thaler that, as Gilroy's notion suggests, speculative fiction written by contemporary black writers can be understood in a comparative way, unlimited by national specificities, but at the same time considering the local configurations of black women's experiences. In the analysis of speculative works I present here, I take the use of the symbolism of blood in these narratives to discuss race, ethnicity, and sexuality as a point of comparison among them. In the next section, I discuss this symbolism in order to explain how it relates to the issues I address in this dissertation.

5. Blood

In literature and in social discourse in general, blood is a recurring symbol to discuss race, ethnicity, and sexuality. It must be noticed, however, that some notions related to blood are contradictory. Isabel Carrera Suárez affirms that "the commonly held knowledge regarding blood and its functions has historically been … slippery" (171). The author explains that "aside from specific Christian associations," metaphors of blood "are generally associated with the target domains of death (violence, aggression), life (vitality, passion) and kinship (heredity, ancestry, reproduction, origin). In this latter guise, they have been particularly linked to 'race,' gender, difference and nation" (171). Therefore, on the one hand, blood is the source of life, bearer of biological characteristics that make of an individual part of a race (according to the traditional concept) and heir of ancestral features passed to future generations through the so-called natural practice of heterosexuality. On the other hand, blood can bring pollution, contamination and death, especially if the racial, ethnic, gender and sexual identities that it

represents are not those considered, in Judith Butler's words, socially "intelligible" (*Gender Trouble* 194).

When considered in relation to race, blood can assume positive meanings, as Du Bois' words exemplify: "[a race] is a vast family of human beings, generally of common blood and language, always of common history, traditions and impulses, who are both voluntarily and involuntarily striving together for the accomplishment of certain more or less vividly conceived ideals of life" ("The Conservation of Races" 80). Here, blood is used as a metaphor for common ancestry, as something that connects the members of a racial group and is at the core of their sense of belonging. This notion of blood community has been central to the notion of race since the origins of the use of the term.

Blood has also acquired important meanings through religion. Dennis J. McCarthy explains that in Hebrew practice "blood was the universal purifier and consecrator" (167), used in sacrifices to God because it represented life and was considered divine. Old Testament books such as the Genesis, Deuteronomy, and Leviticus preach that the blood of animals sacrificed to God should not be eaten with the meat, but offered to him, since "the blood is the life" (*New American Standard Bible*, Deut. 12.23). Offering blood to God is what "makes atonement for one's life" (Lev. 16.11). In some African religious rituals and oaths, blood is what connects humans with the spiritual world, as the blood sacrifices are used to please and conjure the entities and the ancestors' spirits (Chireau 61-62).

In the analysis of Butler's, Hopkinson's, and Due's works presented here, I discuss how these religious meanings attributed to blood also contribute to the ethnic characterization of the stories. In Hopkinson's *Brown Girl in the Ring*, for example, sacrificial blood is used in the Afro-Caribbean religious rituals to invoke the entities, the Eshus. In Due's novel, the African Life Brothers share Christ's blood, which is what confers them immortality and binds them as a clan. The symbolism of blood as healer in this work relates to the cleansing that the drinking

of Christ's blood represented by the wine in Holy Communion is believed to bring about. On the other hand, characters who drink blood, such as Shori and the Ina in *Fledgling* and the soucouyant and the duppy in Hopkinson's stories break the taboo that forbids actual blood drinking. While this transgression is dangerous to the community in the latter, it is portrayed as the basis of a symbiotic life between two different species in the former.

The symbolism of blood as representing kinship and community also plays an important role in the configuration of power relations. According to Foucault:

> For a society in which the systems of alliance, the political forms of the sovereign, the differentiation into orders and castes, and the value of descent lines were predominant; for a society in which famine, epidemics, and violence made death imminent, blood constituted one of the fundamental values. It owed its high value at the same time to its instrumental role (the ability to shed blood), to the way it functioned in the order of signs (to have a certain blood, to be of the same blood, to be prepared to risk one's blood), and also to its precariousness (easily spilled, subject to drying up, too readily mixed, capable of being quickly corrupted). (1: 147)

Put simply, the importance of blood for the mechanisms of power is in its relevance for human survival, both in physical life and in society. Foucault explains this importance for the kind of society that characterized the Western civilizations up to the eighteenth century, which he calls "a society of blood." The value of "sanguinity" for such a society is that "power spoke through blood: the honor of war, the fear of famine, the triumph of death, the sovereign with his sword, executioners, and torture; blood was a reality with a symbolic function" (1: 147). Therefore, power could be imposed and reinforced through the threat of interrupting the life that blood represents.

According to Foucault, this kind of society to which blood had a central importance was substituted by the modern one: "a society of 'sex,' or rather a society 'with sexuality,'" in which "the mechanisms of power are addressed to the body, to life, to what causes it to proliferate, to what reinforces the species, its stamina, its ability to dominate, or its capacity for being used" (1: 147). In this sense, Foucault argues that the production and maintenance of power now have their source in the control of sexuality. Although I agree with this argument, I believe that the symbolism of blood is still relevant because it is part of discourses about and representations of sexuality and gender.

Foucault seems to recognize this relevance when he affirms that since the second half of the nineteenth century, the old symbolism of blood has been used in discourses for the legitimization of political power. He relates this new attention to blood relations to the consolidation of racist theories based on biology, affirming:

> it was then that a whole politics of settlement (peoplement), family, marriage, education, social hierarchization, and property, accompanied by a long series of permanent interventions at the level of the body, conduct, health, and everyday life, received their color and their justification from the mythical concern with protecting the purity of the blood and ensuring the triumph of the race. (1: 149)

What Foucault is addressing here is the use of the notion of blood as the carrier of racial characteristics in the control of sexuality with the intention of controlling the reproduction of racial groups. Similarly, Maria Luiza Tucci Carneiro explains that the myth of blood purity has served for racist assumptions and social exclusion since the fifteenth century (344-45). Under this myth, the alleged inferiority of certain ethnic and religious groups is justified by the notion that the blood of their members is infected and evil, a notion based on both theological and scientific theories.

Foucault's argument that sexuality substituted for blood as the central concern of power discourses is contested by critics such as Homi Bhabha. He affirms:

> It is, for Foucault, the great historical irony of modernity that the Hitlerite annihilation of the Jews was carried out in the name of the archaic, premodern signs of race and sanguinity – the oneiric exaltation of blood, death, skin – rather than through the politics of sexuality. … Characterizing the "symbolics of blood" as being retroverse, Foucault disavows the time-lag of race as the sign of cultural difference and its mode of repetition. (364)

In other words, Foucault's historicization of the importance of blood for the mechanisms of power relations in terms of racial difference is limited, as he fails to recognize the recurring effects of racial ideologies. I agree with Bhabha and would add that the symbolism of blood is helpful in understanding the connection of race and sexuality not only in the control of reproduction but also in the regulation of women's bodies.

The notion of abject developed by Julia Kristeva can help explain the symbolism of blood in relation to the female body. According to her, blood is abject in the same way that other body fluids are, as it is expelled from the body in a process that is necessary for its proper working (*Powers of Horror* 3-4). Once blood is eliminated from the body, it becomes something filthy, improper, and once it is not part of the self anymore, this fluid causes repulsion. However, at the same time, this improper thing causes attraction, for it destabilizes the notion that the individual has about his or her own body. The psychoanalytic notion of abject as something expelled from the body that needs proper functioning extends to social organisms that are expelled from a society that requires stability. By the same token, blood abjection is extended to its symbolism related to race and sexuality. Menstrual blood, for example, is something that differentiates the female sexualized body from the male, contributing therefore for the abjection of the former.

One of the main reasons for blood abjection, and which is directly related to sexuality, is the rise of the AIDS epidemic in the 1980s. Attributed to the sexual practices of homosexuals and identified as having first appeared in the African continent, this epidemic contributed a lot to the development of prejudiced ideologies. According to Susan Sontag, the metaphor of pollution is at the core of the AIDS epidemic (17). That this transmission occurs through blood renders greater symbolism to this body fluid besides the ones implied in the notion of blood purity. Now, blood can also be associated with a disease that in turn is associated with sexual transgression and excess. The discrimination against black people and homosexuals grew stronger and the prejudice against them was justified by the fact that they were considered transgressive for breaking with the rules of the white heterosexual ideal.

When blood abjection represents prejudice against African ancestry and women's transgressive sexuality, it often suggests the condition of marginalization of these categories in society. In Butler's *Fledgling*, Shori's mixed blood (black human and Ina) is considered by the Silks as a threat to the purity of the Ina species and they try to kill her whole family to get rid of such a threat. In Hopkinson's stories, the soucouyants and the duppy from Caribbean folklore drop blood while flying around without their skin and drink the blood of their victims, thus, representing sexually transgressive women. In Due's novel, the notion of Africa as the cradle of the HIV is challenged by the presentation of a magical blood held by the immortal members of a clan in Ethiopia. This blood is capable of curing diseases, but the members of the men-only clan refuse to share it with women.

The symbolism of blood in the works analyzed here, therefore, includes a connection with the ancestors and with other individuals who form racial and ethnic communities. It also refers to the dangerous transgression of borders between life and death and between the proper and the improper. As I discuss in the third chapter, Shori's and the soucouyant's feeding on blood adds to the abjection of their female bodies and they represent transgressive women's

sexualities. The blood sacrifices of religious rituals in *Brown Girl in the Ring* are usually the basis of the stigmatization of Voudun priestesses in North American societies, but the women in this novel, as well as those in *The Living Blood*, are the ones who are able to make a better use of blood to help the whole community. Gros-Jeanne, Mi-Jeanne, and Ti-Jeanne use their rituals to assist the people in downtown Toronto, while Jessica uses her immortal blood to cure sick people in Africa and in the US. In this sense, blood is part of the characterization of the black women in the works analyzed here as transgressive, but it is also what grants them abilities to exercise a certain agency in their communities.

To sum up, my theoretical apparatus presented in this chapter is based on the notions of race, ethnicity, and sexuality as socially constructed, and of black women's identities, as well as their experiences of oppression, as shaped by an interrelation among those issues. Besides, I consider that black women's perspective shapes their particular use of speculative fiction elements. As a genre that speculates about alternative and fictional worlds and conditions, speculative fiction comes to be a useful tool for African American and Caribbean Canadian women writers to discuss the issues of race and ethnicity. Similarly, the issues of sexual and gender repression and marginalization find in this literary genre a fertile terrain for representing the so-called subversive genders and sexualities as alternatives to those that are socially imposed. A complex, integrated representation of such a subversion in terms of sexuality, race, and ethnicity is achieved by the works I analyze here through the use they make of the symbolism of blood. Such symbolism relates to images of black women in terms of abjection, impurity, contamination, and excess, but at the same time relates to notions of belonging to a community.

The analysis that follows in the next two chapters, therefore, presents discussions about race, ethnicity, and sexuality that are reflected in the characterization of women protagonists

and in the symbolism of blood in speculative fiction written by contemporary North American black women. The works *Fledgling*, by Octavia Butler, "Greedy Choke Puppy" and *Brown Girl in the Ring*, by Nalo Hopkinson, and *The Living Blood,* by Tananarive Due subvert traditional ideologies about sexuality, race, and ethnicity and offer alternative points of view about these issues. I am arguing here that the use of the symbolism of blood to present such points of view is a recurring strategy in speculative fiction written by black women in the 1990s and in the 2000s. The use of this strategy can be attested in other works by the authors analyzed here, such as the other three novels in Due's *African Immortals* series – *My Soul to Keep* (1998), *Blood Colony* (2008), and *My Soul to Take* (2011) –, and Butler's "Bloodchild" (1995), in which human males are impregnated by female aliens. The use of symbolism of blood can also be perceived in works by other black women writers, such as Jewelle Gomez's *The Gilda Stories* (1992), about a black lesbian vampire. The reading I develop in this dissertation may serve to analyze these other stories in future works.

CHAPTER 2

Blood Bonds: Reading Race and Ethnicity

In her autobiographical essay "Positive Obsession," Octavia Butler writes:

> But still I'm asked, what good is science fiction to Black people?
>
> What good is any form of literature to Black people?
>
> What good is science fiction's thinking about the present, the future, and the past? What good is its tendency to warn or to consider alternative ways of thinking and doing? What good is its examination of the possible effects of science and technology, or social organization and political direction? At its best, science fiction stimulates imagination and creativity. It gets reader and writer off the beaten track, off the narrow, narrow footpath of what "everyone" is saying, doing, thinking – whoever "everyone" happens to be this year.
>
> And what good is all this to Black people? (134-35).

Butler's rhetorical questions indicate the boldness of the appropriation of science fiction, a genre mainly written by, about, and for white people, to serve the political agenda of black people. Including science fiction among other fantastical genres, speculative fiction, as I have been arguing here, has the potential to subvert notions of race and ethnicity that are often internalized. Such a potential is the focus of this chapter, in which I present a comparative analysis of Octavia Butler's *Fledgling*, Nalo Hopkinson's "Greedy Choke Puppy" and *Brown Girl in the Ring,* and Tananarive Due's *The Living Blood* in order to identify how their portrayals of race and ethnicity reflect and disrupt the points discussed in the previous chapter of this dissertation.

Critics have recurrently recognized discussions about race and ethnicity in the works of the three writers (Morris 2012; Thaler 2010; Wisker 2000). According to Patricia Melzer,

Octavia Butler "addresses contemporary political issues linked to diaspora and anticolonial movements that are problematized in feminist debates" (Melzer 36). Regarding Nalo Hopkinson, Nnedi Okorafor affirms that "slavery, slavery's consequences and post-colonialism have been central to her work" (194). Tonja Lawrence claims that "slave narrative and its historical and contemporary connections" are the main components of Due's work (8). I argue here that these three writers use the symbolism of blood in their works to portray particular ethnic and racial groups and the relationships among them in a way to explore alternative identities and discuss the issues of racism and sexism. The black protagonists' racial/ethnic identities and their relations with the communities around them are at the core of the stories.

My analysis of the works is divided into the following sections, according to the points of comparison I consider fundamental to the discussion of racial and ethnic issues in the stories. First, I analyze the notions of race and ethnicity used in each work, pointing out to what extent they reflect and/or disrupt the ones discussed in the first chapter. Second, I investigate how the main characters' identities are constructed in terms of blackness and/or ethnic belonging, by themselves and by those around them. Third, I explain how a sense of belonging and being responsible for the communities into which they are inserted is constructed and undertaken (or not) by the protagonists. Finally, I identify what the writers present as speculative *nova*, that is, new features that exist only in the world of their works, and how these are invested with notions of race and ethnicity. My argument is that in these four aspects discussed below, the symbolism of blood is an important factor.

1. Blood and Notions of Race and Ethnicity

In all the works analyzed here, the notion of blood as marking a specific racial and/or ethnic group and bringing about a relationship among different people can be perceived. This

notion reflects the most common definitions of race presented in the previous chapter, in which blood is considered the carrier of a group's literally biological and metaphorically cultural features. But more than representing the character's racial/ethnic identities, blood is what connects them to others in the stories, making a harmonious life among different groups possible.

In Butler's *Fledgling*, the issue of race can be read in two ways: in the characterization of Shori as black in contrast to the Ina, who are white, and in the characterization of Ina as different from humans. But this representation of race is not as clear-cut as a simple division between black and white and human and non-human might suggest. Butler's portrayal of the issue is complex, mirroring the very complexity of the notion of race and its implication in everyday experience.

In fact, humans and Ina are presented not as two different races, but as two different species. However, their characterization carry along all the implications of race difference in terms of what Appiah describes as the traditional notion (274). The very fact that a confusion between definitions of race and species marked the development of racist ideologies (Banton 54) validates this reading of the relations between Ina and humans as racial. While the use of the species difference analogy to discuss racial difference may seem regressive, as it echoes nineteenth-century humanist theories, in *Fledgling* it can be read as a strategy to give evidence on how such theories have led to biased notions. Butler's narrative, by attributing prejudiced discourses to a non-human group that despises humanity, makes a distanced, critical view of ideologies that represent human racist notions possible.

In spite of being very similar, both genetically and in physical appearance, humans and Ina are considered very different because of some biological aspects, as well as for their culture. Iosif, Shori's father, explains that: "I think we must be related to them… We're too genetically similar to them for any other explanation to be likely. Not all of us believe that, though. We

have our own traditions – our own folklore, our own religions" (67). In this sense, Ina and humans can also be considered two different ethnic groups, with different ways of life and traditions, but occupying the same territory. The distinction made between the two species through the characters' discourses also brings to mind Hall's explanation of race as a constructed notion that creates racial identities through discourses about differences among social groups ("The Question of Cultural Identity" 616). Therefore, racial difference can be read in *Fledgling* not only in terms of the physical and biological characteristics that distinguish humans from Ina, but also through the discourses in the novel that suggest racist notions.

As Ali Brox observes, Shori is "the black and interspecies – part vampire, part human – subject, whom audiences read as a biracial figure" (391). The fact that the visible sign that indicates Shori's partial humanity is her brown skin makes possible a reading of her condition as biracial, part black and part white. The hybridity represented by Shori is seen by some characters as the possibility of creating less vulnerable beings, but as a threat to Ina's superiority by others. Among these latter, the Silk family, the Ina who led the attacks that destroyed Shori's families, present an anti-miscegenation discourse to justify their actions. For Brox, such discourse resembles racist rhetoric against inter-racial relationships between blacks and whites (396). The author argues that Butler "uses the hybrid figure not only to challenge the Ina's species prejudice but also to challenge the black/white binary that preoccupies American society" (395). This challenge is even more clearly perceived in the way the notion of racial difference based on skin color is presented in the novel as part of human discourse, not originally Ina. The Silks' racist discourses are, in fact, reproducing the human notions they have heard throughout their existence.

Nevertheless, Butler makes the point of showing that even among humans such discourses have been contested. A passage of the novel that exemplifies this argument is the one in which Victor, a white human programmed by the Silks to kill Shori and her whole

family, is interrogated by her after an attack. When asked if he knows who she is, he answers, to her surprise:

> "Dirty little nigger bitch," he said reflexively. "Goddamn mongrel cub." Then he gasped and clutched his head between his hands. …
>
> It was clear that he was in pain. His face had suddenly gone a deep red.
>
> "Didn't mean to say that," he whispered. "Didn't mean to call you that." …
>
> "They call me those things, don't they?"
>
> He nodded.
>
> "Because I'm dark-skinned?"
>
> "And human," he said. "Ina mixed with some human or maybe human mixed with a little Ina. That's not supposed to happen. Not ever. Couldn't let you and you … your kind … your family … breed." (173)

In a mental confusion caused by the Silk's venom mixed with Shori's in his blood, Victor reproduces the formers' prejudiced words, and at the same time implies an awareness that what he is saying is politically incorrect for humans. Even after the attacks, Shori heals him and asks her symbionts to feed him, inciting his sympathy instead of more hatred. The contrast between what he was told about her and his personal impression of her shows that the constructed ideological matrix of racism is something also imposed in power relations.

Later, Victor apologizes again: "I didn't mean to call you … what I called you. My sister, she married a Dominican guy. Her kids are darker than you, and they're my blood, too. I would kick the crap out of anyone who called them what I called you" (174). Here, the human's empathy towards Shori relates to a sense of shared blood with his nephews, who look like her. He knows the racist discourses he is reproducing under the influence of the Silks' venom from his own experience, which exemplifies the complexity of the issue of skin color for racial categorization in the US. As discussed in the previous chapter, there is no category

for mixed people in that country, in a way that Victor's nephews are seen as black even though their mother and her family are white. Moreover, as half-Dominicans, Victor's nephews are probably identified as Latinos, a category separated from that of African Americans, despite their blackness. This confusion of categories indicates their inefficiency in accounting for people's experiences in US society, as well the double-consciousness of those who see themselves as belonging to different categories at the same time. This case exemplifies what Hall calls the fluid identity of the post-modern subject ("Who Needs Identity?" 4). As a white man, Victor occupies a privileged position in American society, but the fact that he has close, beloved relatives in a position in-between unprivileged categories (Black, Latino, mixed), makes him question the same discourses that grant his privileges.

It must be noticed that the symbolism of blood as carrier of family and racial characteristics is perceived in the novel only in Victor's words quoted above. The other characters mention DNA, not blood, to indicate Shori's hybrid condition: she is the result of genetic engineering experiments that mixed black human and Ina genes. Nevertheless, a parallel can be made between the racism in the Silk's discourse about the superiority and purity of Ina's genes and historical discourses about the superiority and purity of white blood. Put differently, Ina talk about their species' characteristic biological traits as being passed along through their genes, but their discourses against miscegenation echo the myth of blood purity. I show later in this work that the main importance of the symbolism of blood in relation to race in Butler's novel is in its role as the basis of interspecies/interracial relations between humans and Ina. Before that, I argue that racist Ina, who have Caucasian phenotypes that make them resemble white humans, appropriate these latter's historical contempt for black people. In other words, since Ina are white and Shori, the hybrid created by mixing Ina and human genes, is black, the discourse that racist Ina use to attack her mimics the ones that have been used to attack black people.

The Silks try to completely destroy Shori's female and male families, as well as their human symbionts, so as to prevent the possibility of breeding. When confronted by the Ina council that is judging his family's crimes, Russell Silk refers to Shori in overtly racist terms: "Murdering black mongrel bitch... What will she give us all? Fur? Tails?" (300). As Patricia Hill Collins explains, this comparison of black people with animals, such as apes, is part of a historical discourse created to dehumanize them and justify slavery (*Black Sexual Politics* 100). In this sense, the attackers' motivations, although actually based on hatred for species differences in the novel, resemble racist discourses by white supremacists against African Americans and interracial relations.

Those racist words quoted above imply the fear of contamination of an alleged pure race, a recurring point in supremacists' discourse. Katharine Dahlman, another Ina who supports the Silks' arguments and who also attacks Shori, tries to justify her opposition to hybridity when she says to the Gordons: "You want your sons to mate with this person. You want them to get black, human children from her. Here in the United States, even most humans will look down on them. When I came to this country, such people were kept as property, as slaves" (272). These words suggest, again, that Ina are appropriating human racist discourse against miscegenation to convey their own fear of hybridity. There is also the fear that blackness will make their breeds be discriminated against by humans. As the story is set in the US, the Ina characters must be aware of the implications of the one-drop rule, according to which even a single drop of black blood, that is, black ancestry, suffices to classify a person as black. Sara Ahmed's arguments can be useful to understand the racist Ina's fear of blackness, when she says that the figures towards whom racial hate is targeted "embody the threat of loss. They signify the danger of impurity, or the mixing or taking of blood. They threaten to violate the pure bodies; such bodies can only be imagined as pure by the perpetual restaging of this fantasy of violation" (118). Put differently, the notion of race as containing distinguishable

features that make a group superior to another motivates a violent attempt to maintain such an alleged purity of such features. Shori's black skin is the most visible sign of the mix of Ina with human genes. Ina's purity as a species is seen by some members of the group as threatened by her hybridity, even though the scientific experiments are intended to bring benefits for their survival.

For Brox, "the Silks want to rewrite the Ina history of Otherness to include a legacy of purity in order to justify their perceived superiority" (399). Indeed, it is mentioned in the novel that the Ina's physical appearance – "tall, ultra pale, lean, wiry" – could cause repulsion in humans, who would historically regard them as outsiders: "They usually looked like foreigners, and when times got bad, they were treated like foreigners – suspected, disliked, driven out, or killed" (130). Shori learns that her Ina father's family was killed by Nazis during World War II and later by Communists in a passage of the novel that reveals that the Ina have also been victims of hate crimes by human beings for the way they look. This prejudice that the Ina have suffered can be understood through Kristeva's approach to the anxiety felt by natives towards foreigners. She argues: "Confronting the foreigner whom I reject and with whom at the same time I identify, I lose my boundaries, I no longer have a container, the memory of experiences when I had been abandoned overwhelms me, I lose my composure" (*Strangers to Ourselves* 187). Kristeva's description of the foreigner recalls her notion of abject, as Nöelle McAfee points out (123). The foreigner is abject for threatening the borders of the symbolic and the national order, besides the individual border between "undifferentiated being and subjectivity" (McAfee 122). But if in the past the Ina have been seen as abject by humans, now the Silks claim superiority over the other species, whom they describe as animals that can be slaughtered without remorse. Through this alternation between the positions of oppressor and oppressed, Butler's novel seems to criticize any kind of prejudice, showing that it can be relational.

This relative character of racism is the point that allows us to dismiss a possible reading of the novel as based on biological determinism. Although Butler's narrative relies on biology to explain that Shori's black skin is the result of genetic manipulation and that this physical trait makes her stronger than the other Ina, this is not the source of racist notions in the novel. Butler herself, when questioned by Marilyn Mehaffy and Ana Louise Keating about the biological determinism implied in her works, explains her views:

> Don't worry about the *real* biological determinism. Worry about what people make of it. Worry about the social Darwinism. After all, if sociobiology, or anything like it (people don't really use that term much anymore for obvious reasons), is true, then denying it is certainly not going to help. What we have to do is learn to work with it and to work against people who see it as a good reason to let the poor be poor, that kind of thing – the social Darwinism: "They must be poor because of their genes," that kind of foolishness. (57)

It seems plausible to affirm, therefore, that for Butler biological determinism is not dangerous, as long as it is not used to justify domination of a species or race over the other. Analyzing earlier works by Butler, Nancy Jesser argues that the writer "consistently undermines racially based biological determinism and promotes 'miscegenation' as a solution to dangerous or cherished genetic 'purities,' even to the extent of interbreeding with non-humans" (50). I believe *Fledgling* can also be read in this way. In this novel, blackness, as a physical trait that enables Ina to stand daylight, is celebrated rather for guaranteeing survival than for claiming any superiority. Hybridity of Ina and black humans is what promotes such a survival, not the purity of any of the species/races. This positive portrayal of black skin as a desirable feature contests the racist notions that have often seen it as animalistic and ugly.

Butler complicates the issue of race in the novel through the overlapping of species difference with racial difference. When discrimination is taken to the species level in the novel,

it is disclaimed by the incongruence of the racist ideologies the Silks use to attack Shori. Their discourse about Ina's superiority reflects Gobineau's arguments in favor of the superiority of the white race (209). By comparing Shori with a monkey, they echo eighteenth and nineteenth century humanist theories based on the division between nature and culture, according to which the non-white races are inferior for being closer to nature, similar to other animal species, while whites are closer to culture and consequently superior. Brox explains the presence of such theories in Butler's novel:

> Using the analogy of a mule … as evidence, many believed that if the offspring of black and white parents were sterile, as a mule is sterile, then the inability to procreate would prove that blacks and whites were different species. … the Ina who oppose [Shori's] mixed blood concentrate on preventing her ever reproducing because they fear that her child would prove that Ina and humans are a single species. (397-98)

Fledgling, therefore, imagines the possibility of creating beings of hybrid species as something positive. Only those who have prejudice based on a misconceived superiority are against this hybridity. By refusing to recognize Shori as Ina, the Silks try to reinforce their own self-identity as opposed to the humans. In this sense, they echo Hall's argument that identities are formed through the exclusion and abjection of the other ("Who Needs Identity?" 4-5). In the same way that blacks have often been excluded from society, so is Shori excluded by the Silks as non-Ina. Humanity is then seen as abject in the Silks' construction of Ina identity. I agree with Brox, for whom "racial discourse becomes the means through which the Ina/human species conflict is articulated, and this discourse creates a hierarchy that Butler challenges her characters, and readers, to overcome" (396). In other words, by reflecting the constructed basis of discourses that claim the superiority of a race over the others, *Fledgling* exposes the inadequacy of their applicability.

The celebration of miscegenation in the novel can be perceived in that most Ina are in favor of Shori's hybridity and that, in general, human categorizations of race do not interfere in the Ina's relations with their human symbionts. The reader learns throughout the novel that, for the Ina, skin color is not really important, as they do not perceive race difference in the same way humans do. As an Ina character explains: "Human racism meant nothing to the Ina because human races meant nothing to them. They looked for congenial human symbionts wherever they happened to be, without regard for anything but personal appeal" (148). Similarly, when Shori's symbiont Brook explains to another human why their Ina did not tell him that her new symbiont was black, she says: "They're not human, Wright. They don't care about white or black" (168). As Brox puts it: "While some Ina are overly attentive to distinctions between species – vampire and human – Butler seems to suggest that human readers are the ones who interpret the Ina situation as one comparable to racial considerations" (395). Indeed, except for the Silks' discourses that reproduce human racism against blacks, the reader and the other human characters are the ones that pay attention to the racial identities of the symbionts.

Shori and Ina in general do not discriminate against their symbionts in terms of race because their humanity is the characteristic that really matters, as it is what makes symbiosis possible. Ina cannot feed on other Ina and when they feed on animals the satisfaction is not the same as when then drink human blood. In addition, the kind of emotional bonds that symbiosis encompasses occurs only between humans and Ina. The novel, in this sense, seems to criticize the use of the notion of race as a category to differentiate individuals, pointing to the humanity that makes the so-called races equal.

Moreover, it can be said that in Butler's novel, the traditionally white male figure of the vampire is appropriated to represent an alternative species, the Ina. Interestingly enough, the hybrid that results from mixing humans and Ina with the intention of reducing the vulnerability

of both species is black. What becomes clear is that this hybridity is profitable for humans and Ina alike, as it mingles their best qualities and creates more powerful beings. Again, the issue of race in the novel is celebratory of the acceptance of difference and of hybridity as positive. Besides, it goes beyond the binary differentiations of black/white and human/Ina to explore more complex relations, showing that racial difference is relative and arbitrary.

In Hopkinson's stories, alternative possibilities of representing race and ethnicity are presented through the portrayal of Caribbean folkloric figures and African-based religious deities. While the focus of Butler's novel is on the issue of species/racial hybridity, Hopkinson's stories are more concerned with ethnic hybridity. In "Greedy Choke Puppy," a sense of ethnicity is conveyed by the folkloric elements in the story and the language spoken by the characters, in accordance, therefore, with notions that indicate a common language and cultural traditions as criteria for ethnic characterization. While reviewing this short story and others in the *Skin Folk* collection, Ruby Ramraj points out the uniqueness of Hopkinson's "easy use of the Caribbean demotic 'creole' or 'patois' (which hybridizes English or French words to create a distinct language)" (196). According to her, "[t]hese 'new' words fracture old associations creating innovative meaning and nuances." And she continues: "Hopkinson's language adds realism and, at the same time, imparts an exotic flavor to the stories" (196). Indeed, the dialect used by the characters clearly shows their ethnic identity, especially when contrasted with the language (Standard English) used by the narrative voice and in entries from *Huracan,* the literary journal on folklore that Jacky uses in her research. If the use of the Trinidadian dialect offers new meanings in opposition to the standard ones, as Ramraj suggests, it also reveals a particular world view, characteristic of Trinidadians. While researching for her thesis paper "Magic in the Real: the Role of Folklore in Everyday Caribbean Life," Jacky constantly finds out about the different names by which each Caribbean ethnic group calls the same folkloric figures. When she explains to her friend Carmen what a Lagahoo is, for example,

she says, "Is French creole for 'werewolf.' But as Trini people tell it, is a donkey, not a wolf. Only we could come up with something so jokey as a were-donkey, oui?" (171). Here, the Trinidadian folkloric figure is explained as different from the French myth, suggesting that there must be local cultural aspects informing the substitution of a donkey for a wolf. But the most important folkloric figure in the story is the soucouyant, which, as Jacky reads in the *Huracan*, is the "Caribbean equivalent of the vampire myth. … 'Soucouyant,' or 'blood-sucker', derives from the French verb 'sucer', to suck" (174). This term is used in Trinidad to refer to the same kind of figure that in Guyanese creole is called "Ol' Higue," meaning "an old hag, or witch woman" (174-5). These differentiations in Hopkinson's short story mark it as representing a specific ethnic group, the Trinidadians, inside the larger group of the Caribbean peoples, and also in relation to the Canadians, as the story was published in Canada. In this sense, this characterization of Trinidadian as different from French, Guianese, and Canadian exemplifies the dissociative pattern of ethnic categorization, which Sollors refers to and which depends on a perception of the other groups as different (288).

As to the symbolism of blood used to inform this notion of ethnicity in Hopkinson's short story, it is related to the blood of the women in the protagonist's family, which is said to be what makes of them soucouyants. This fact is revealed only towards the end of the story, when Jacky's grandmother tells her: "The soucouyant blood in all of we, all the women in we family" (180). Granny tries to explain that as soucouyants they have to avoid being greedy so as not to kill the community's babies. Nevertheless, as Jacky does not learn this lesson, just like her mother before her, the old woman has to kill her, even if it means to bring to extinction her own kind; Granny laments: "You and me is the last two. … Your mami woulda make three, but I had to kill she too, send my own flesh and blood into the sun" (181). Blood here carries the old implication of family lineage, characterizing the soucouyants as a women's lineage inside the Trinidadian ethnic group. As I explain in more details later, this family bond becomes

less important than the ethnic bond, so that Jacky and her mother are killed by her own grandmother when their blood-hunger becomes a threat to the survival of the community. Gracia's notion of "Familial-Historical View" (9) can shed light on this portrayal of ethnicity in Hopkinson's short story. According to him, belonging to an ethnic group depends on a shared history and common experiences, not necessarily on genetic relations and the similar physical features that they carry along.

In *Brown Girl in the Ring,* the emphasis is also on ethnicity. In an interview to Ellizabeth Anne Leonard, Hopkinson affirms about the novel: "I saw it as subverting the genre which speaks so much about the experience of being alienated, but contains so little written by alienated people themselves" (253). As a Caribbean immigrant in Canada herself, she chooses to characterize her protagonist as a Caribbean-Canadian woman negotiating with her cultural background in a segregated futurist Toronto. She uses speculative fiction's potential of representing alienated lives to reimagine how productive marginalized ethnic practices can be in a hostile environment. The Caribbean supernatural figures and traditional practices not only characterize Ti-Jeanne's family as Caribbean, but also help them cope with the difficulties of their diasporic lives.

In the novel, downtown Toronto is abandoned by the government, the police, and the rich residents, turning into a kind of ghetto called "the Burn," inhabited by poor immigrants of varied ethnic backgrounds trying to survive in the middle of poverty and violence. I agree here with Michelle Reid, for whom "Hopkinson's novel can also be read as a more specific questioning of Canadian multiculturalism and the official government promotion of a diverse Canadian national identity," since it "explores such gaps between centralized Canadian identities and government structures, and the experiences of minorities living in Toronto" (297-8). Indeed, the crisis that devastated Toronto in the novel started with a refusal by the province government to negotiate land claims with the Temagami Natives, which led to an international

embargo, a reduction of federal resources to the province, and a progressive increase of local violence and economic downfall. Besides, the very fact that the people who did not have conditions to fly to the suburbs were exactly the immigrants indicates that they were not considered citizens in the same level as locals. In Hopkinson's novel, when the government's multiculturalism policies fail to help the Burn residents, they find help in Gros-Jeanne's private healing practices. She combines her knowledge of nursing procedures, traditional Caribbean herbal healing, and Voudun rituals to help her community.

Gros-Jeanne's rituals are attended by people of different cultural backgrounds, which can be perceived in the passage that describes the languages they spoke: "Mostly Caribbean English, but some spoke Spanish and others the African-rhythmed French of the French Caribbean islands. One or two were White, and there was Mami's friend Jenny, who was Romany" (87). For Reid, "this community is based on a Caribbean model of hybridity," as Hopkinson herself has suggested that this is an intrinsic characteristic of Caribbean cultures, affirming: "Hybridity was a strategy for survival and resistance amongst the enslaved and indentured people. They all came from different cultures with different languages and then had an alien culture and speech imposed on them. They had to find ways to use elements of all the cultures in order to continue to exist" (qtd. in Reid 305). Indeed, the people in the Burn community bring something of their own culture into their practices. The gipsy woman, Romni Jenny, for example, is the one who teaches Gros-Jeanne to read tarot cards, which she adapts to cards featuring characters from the Caribbean folklore. Once again, Hopkinson uses a notion of ethnicity as something more based on shared experiences than in common ancestral origins. But differently from the portrayal of Caribbean ethnic characteristics with a focus on the Trinidadian folklore she presents in "Greedy Choke Puppy," in *Brown Girl in the Ring* she focuses on the Caribbean traits of a community that is hybrid in itself, formed by immigrants in Canada.

Gros-Jeanne refers to the presence of African religious traditions in the diaspora when she explains to Ti-Jeanne who the deities she serves are:

> The African powers, child. The spirits. The loas. The orishas. The oldest ancestors. You will hear people from Haiti and Cuba and Brazil and so call them different names. You will even hear some names I ain't tell you, but we all mean the same thing. Them is the ones who does carry we prayers to God Father … and no matter what we call it, whether Shango or Santeria or Voudun or what, we all doing the same thing. Serving the spirits. (126)

These religious practices, therefore, are what links African descendants to each other in the diaspora, also connecting them to their common origin.

Albert J. Raboteau explains that the African diaspora transplanted "elements of African folklore, music, language, and religion" to the New World, where they were "[s]haped and modified by a new environment," mixed with "colonial European and indigenous native American cultures" (4). In an attempt to control the slaves, the masters often tried to eliminate "all forms of African culture because of their power to unify the slaves and thus enable them to resist or rebel;" however, the slaves kept many aspects of their cultures and were able to transmit them to their descendants, resisting their masters' control. For Raboteau, religion is "[o]ne of the most durable and adaptable constituents of the slave's culture, linking African past with American present," even though the African religions continued to develop "living traditions" instead of being "merely preserved as static 'Africanisms' or as archaic 'retentions'" (4). It is this very adaptability of the African religions to new conditions and their openness to syncretism with other religions that account for "the continuity of a distinctively African religious consciousness" (5). Despite the fact that the African religions brought by the slaves from different regions of the continent were varied, as Raboteau points out, "a common religious heritage" resulted from their "blending and assimilation" in the New World (8).

Religion in the African Diaspora has been, since slavery, a relevant cultural element that promotes the association of all African descendants in an attempt to help them resist oppression and survive the difficult life conditions they had to face in the Americas.

This aspect of resistance and survival of African-based religions is evoked in *Brown Girl in the Ring*. The traditional practices that the characters carry out in the diaspora are different from what used to happen in their original places, as this passage shows: "In the eleven years since the Riots, [Ti-Jeanne]'d had to get used to people talking out about her grandmother's homemade medicines. Among Caribbean people, bush medicine used to be something private, but living in the Burn changed all the rules" (14). The breaking of the original rules of the practice of herbal healing as secret is due to the new conditions in which the people in the Burn live, without any other kind of help available. This secrecy also has its cultural and historical roots, as Gros-Jeanne explains to Ti-Jeanne: "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?" (50). The reference in Hopkinson's novel to slavery and to the ways black people developed to cope with it implies a notion of racial identity informed by shared experiences. Religious practices carried out by black people have been kept in secret so that they could go on helping the practitioners. The need for this secrecy is due to the prejudiced ways in which African religions have often been seen by non-Africans.

As Yvonne Chireau affirms, in academic and social contexts, religious practices of African origin have been simply understood as "magic" in an approach based on to the dichotomy between Christian/non-Christian (4). When compared to Christian doctrines, such religious practices have been erroneously seen as superstition, for being based on the relationship among individuals, the spirits of their ancestors, and the religious entities who take active and direct part in human life. Chireau argues that rather than standing in opposition to

Christianity, African religious practices such as Conjure are carried out in the Americas as a complementary practice, coexisting as alternative strategies "for interacting with the spiritual realm" (151). However, as Aloysius Muzzanganda Lugira observes, "people from outside the African continent have tended to misunderstand and to dismiss African religion, often because of stereotyping and prejudice" (104). Consequently, for a long time the religious beliefs and practices from that continent were not considered religions, but rather "fetishism – superstition and magic" (106). Even after being recognized as religions, which took about three hundred years, according to Lugira, they would be called "primitive," suggesting "something crude and unformed, whereas African religious practices were often highly refined" (106). While some studies have viewed the supernatural qualities of religions of African origin as a marginal subset in the countries occupied by diasporic communities (Chireau 4), it has been widely recognized that their diverse traditions "show strong African connections and harbor African cultural memory; they are religions of the people, by and for the people" that help them cope with "oppressive conditions of colonialism in the Americas" (Murrell 1). Similarly, Chireau affirms:

> Ever conscious of the fundamental power of their ancestral beliefs, black men and women grasped what they could of their spiritual heritage as a lifeline. … Employed to challenge the cruelty of harsh slaveholders and to deflect the ruthlessness of a system that oppressed them, supernatural power was a weapon of the weak. (154)

In this sense, the practice of African-based religious traditions in the diaspora has been a tool for the survival of black people since slavery times.

This importance of African religions to help diasporic people cope with oppression can be noticed in *Brown Girl in the Ring* in the practices of Voudun and obeah, which are characteristic of Caribbean ethnic groups. Monica A. Coleman explains the presence of such

practices in the novel as contributing to a "pan-Caribbean identity" that Hopkinson creates for her characters (1). She argues that "Hopkinson draws together various African-derived religious traditions found throughout the Caribbean into one religious practice," those carried by Gros-Jeanne and the other members of her community. As the author observes, the characters themselves mention different names to refer to their practices, alluding to the various designations to African-based religions that depend on the specific country where they practiced. Coleman argues that the term "serving the spirits" used by Gros-Jeanne in the novel dissolves "the boundaries in religious practices" and "functions as the basis for a unique pan-Caribbean identity for the characters" (1). In fact, the term "spirits" in the novel refers to both deities and ancestor spirits, being incoherent with the terminology used by the various African-based religions that often distinguish the spirits of the dead from the entities (orishas or Eshus, for example). I believe, in agreement with Coleman, that the use of "spirits" as a general term in the novel refers to the African-based spirituality as a whole, indicating the convergence of the many traditions in the Caribbean diaspora. Even though some characters, such as Ti-Jeanne at first, see those practices with suspicion, relating them to evil-doing practices, Gros-Jeanne's rituals prove to be at the basis of the community's survival. This overt practice of Afro-Caribbean religions in the novel not only breaks with the way those rituals are carried out in the Caribbean, but also comments on the prejudiced way Afro-Caribbean religions are usually seen in Christian societies.

It is for its importance in Voudun and obeah practices and in the characterization of Caribbean folkloric figures that blood is related to a concept of ethnicity in *Brown Girl in the Ring*. Blood is part of the religious rituals carried out by Gros-Jeanne, as it comes from the animal sacrifices done to please the Eshus. This fact contributes to the very negative notions associated with the Voudun practices, as Ti-Jeanne's concerns demonstrate:

> "Is not obeah, Tony! Mami is a healer, a seer woman! She does do good, not wickedness!" But Ti-Jeanne herself wasn't so sure. There was the drumming that went on in the crematorium chapel, late in to the night. The wails and screams that came from the worshippers. The clotted blood on the crematorium floor in the mornings, mixed with cornmeal. (28)

Besides being abject for the reasons explained by Kristeva – as a body fluid, it is "what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty, on the part of death" (*Powers of Horror* 3) –, the blood of sacrificed animals is associated with harming practices. Dianne M. Stewart explains that even in the Caribbean, "Obeah is principally viewed as 'evil magic' and feared by the average person until some treacherous personal circumstance compels an individual to forfeit her/his suspicions and seek counsel from the nearest well-known Obeahist" (119). This fear, according to the author, may have resulted from the negative way in which Christian missionaries used to see the African religious practices that were maintained in the Caribbean.

The presence of blood in the rituals may suggest violence, a transgression of the boundaries of the body and of life and death, and implies a threat to the physical integrity of the viewer. However, there is no threat in the intentions of blood sacrifice in Afro-Caribbean religions; the purpose, instead, is to bring comfort and healing to the people who take part in the ritual. As Raboteau explains about Cuban Santeria, the blood of sacrificed animals is poured over blessed stones to feed the *santos* and allow the possessions to start (22). The very process of blessing those stones, as well as other charms, involves covering them with a mixture of herbs and blood. These two possibilities of interpretation of blood sacrifice reveal the misguided basis of the prejudice against practices such as Santeria, Voudun, and obeah: removed from its ethnic, religious context, the blood ritual that is intended to bless objects and please the deities may seem evil.

Later in the novel, when Ti-Jeanne's body is possessed by her Eshu, the Prince of Cemetery, the powerful abjection of blood comes to scene again:

> Ti-Jeanne/Prince of Cemetery chuckled, a hollow sound like bones falling into a pit. He danced over to Eshu's stone head and used a long, long finger to scoop up some of the chicken blood thickening there. Slowly he liked and sucked it off his finger, smiling like a child scraping out the batter bowl. Tony's stomach rolled. (95)

In the ritual Gros-Jeanne performs to find a way to help Ti-Jeanne's son's father, Tony, escape from Rudy, she sacrifices a hen and drops its blood on the cement head that represents the Eshu. The purpose of the sacrifice, therefore, is to ask for the entity's protection and the blood is a treat to him. But seeing his girlfriend's body licking the blood is repulsive to Tony, and so is it to the reader. In the context of the ritual, however, this repulsion is suspended, since the one licking the blood is not Ti-Jeanne, but the Eshu Prince of Cemetery, and this fluid is not disgusting for him. Once again, blood represents a transgression of the limits of life and death, and of the mortal and spiritual worlds, and acquires a particular importance in an Afro-Caribbean religious ritual: it is what makes a connection with the entities that bring the practitioners protection and hope possible. If, as Chireau claims, the so-called magical traditions have been used since slavery "to resist the conditions of oppression that African people encountered" in the New World (154), so the blood sacrifices and other religious traditions practiced by Hopkinson's characters serve as a strategy of survival and resistance against the deplorable conditions in which they live in the Burn.

Nevertheless, not all of the Caribbean characters make a good use of the power of blood to communicate with the entities. Rudy makes human sacrifices to feed the spirit of his own daughter and Ti-Jeanne's mother, Mi-Jeanne, whom he imprisoned in a calabash bowl to serve him. As the calabash duppy, Mi-Jeanne's spirit turns into "a fine mist of blood" (156), in which

"ravening jaws, mad eyes, and clawing hands" swirl (163), or into a bloody fire ball that can burn or strip and eat its victims' skin and suck their blood. Her blood hunger is only satisfied by Rudy's sacrificed victims when she completes the terrible services he demands. The scenes of the duppy feeding on blood have a different connotation when compared to those of the Gros-Jeanne's rituals, as in this passage:

> With a quick slash, Rudy slit the women's jugular vein. Bright arterial blood gouted into the bowl. An appalling sound came from it, like someone guzzling great amounts of liquid as fast as they could. … [Tony] was looking at that thing that must have died and never stopped dying, a thing that Rudy would not allow its natural rest, that he kept barely appeased with the blood of the living. Tony's heart clammered in his chest. He could not endure another moment of that gaze. (138)

The terror that Tony feels here when witnessing Rudy feeding the calabash duppy with human blood is much stronger than the abjection he felt when he saw Ti-Jeanne/Prince of Cemetery lick the sacrificed hen's blood. This ritual is more transgressive than the one carried out by Gros-Jeanne for intending evil. Instead of a helpful Eshu, what is feeding on blood is a monster, a wicked soul. Besides, Rudy's ritual involves human sacrifice, while Gros-Jeanne used an animal. Not only do Rudy and his duppy cross the limits of life and death, they also disrespect what is considered in African religions a natural death, that is, the proper course of the soul after death. As Gros-Jeanne explains, "[e]very time a African die … them spirit does fly away to Guinea Land. Is the other world, the spirit world" (104). Rudy disregards this spiritual rule as he orders his duppy to imprison in the calabash the souls of the victims it feeds on in order to extend his own life span.

The notion of blood as kinship also has an important implication in *Brown Girl in the Ring*. The fact that Rudy is capable of imprisoning the spirit of his own daughter, his own

blood, shocks the humans and the entities in the story. For that very reason, and for the terrible things Rudy has done, the fact the Ti-Jeanne has this family blood in common with him does not prevent her from trying to defeat him. This fact actually becomes a trump card when she needs to confront Rudy in his office and destroy his calabash. Papa Legbara can make her invisible to human eyes and extend this invisibility to the person whose gift she is carrying in her body. She carries the rose Tony has given her to make both of them invisible and help him escape the posse. Now that she needs to make Rudy invisible too so as to confront him without the interference of his men, she asks Legbara: "I want to extend the invisibility to someone else. I carrying he gift in secret. Papa, I carrying Rudy blood in my veins" (196). After she is able to destroy Rudy with the help of "the Oldest Ones," the healer Eshu, Osain reminds her of their blood relation: "Though it had come to this, he'd been her grandfather, her blood" (226). And Emanjah, the water goddess, interrupts: "Nah give the child any more to fret about, Osain. Me know say she not going forget is who blood she come from" (226). Emanjah's words suggest that even though Ti-Jeanne cannot despise her kinship with Rudy, her obligation with the entities she should serve is above that, in a way that her rising against him should not be regretted.

As to the Caribbean folkloric figures in the novel, blood is a meaningful aspect in their characterization. The ominous figure that Ti-Jeanne sees in her dreams and on her grandmother's tarot card, La Diablesse, is described as "a tall, arrogant-looking mulatto woman in traditional plantation dress and head-tie. Her smile was sinister, revealing sharpened fangs. Behind her ran a river, red like blood" (51-52). Seeing this devil woman, according to Gros-Jeanne, means trouble or death to somebody, usually a man. The imagery of blood associated with La Diablesse on the tarot card suggests life-threat, contributing to the abjection of this folkloric character. Giselle Liza Anatol argues that she can also be read as a biracial character, explaining that:

> the myth of La Diablesse casts the woman of mixed race and blended features as extremely dangerous, not simply desirable and physically superior to those possessing more distinctly African characteristics. Promoting a type of African pride, the figure echoes conventional negative depictions of The Mulatta, who threatens to further corrupt "pure" bloodlines with her seductive behavior. As both evidence of miscegenation and the promise of future "taint," the biracial character occupies a condemned space in both white and black communities. ("A Feminist Reading of Soucouyants" 39)

The representation of death as a woman, the stereotyped figure of the seductive Caribbean mulatta, is ethnically and also sexually charged, as I discuss in the next chapter. She may be feared by blacks who see her as representing the dissipation of their own African bloodlines through miscegenation with the whites, the same reason that can make her be feared by whites.

The soucouyant is also present in Hopkinson's novel. She appears in Ti-Jeanne's dream, trying to suck the blood of her baby until the Jab-Jab, another embodiment of Prince of Cemetery or Papa Legbara, tricks her to death. Later in the novel, Ti-Jeanne realizes that the soucouyant is her own mother, who can turn into a fire ball and suck blood as the calabash duppy. As in "Greedy Choke Puppy," the soucouyant's blood hunger in *Brown Girl in the Ring* is a threat to the survival of her family and her community.

Another link between blood and ethnicity in the novel relates to the heart transplant that Ontario's premier Utley needs. Pig farming for organs is the common practice in the future envisioned by Hopkinson in the novel. But in a political strategy designed by her policies counselor to win her more voters, the premier decides to demand a human heart, using the slogan "People Helping People" and claiming it a moral issue (40). As human voluntary donation is not practiced any more, the government realizes that it can be easier to find a donor in the Burn, where violence makes victims all the time. The person who has the same blood

type and physical characteristics as the premier is Gros-Jeanne, so Rudy orders Tony to kill her in order to guarantee the white politician's transplant in exchange for money. As Reid argues, the fact that Utley's heart is too weak and incapable to bomb blood around her body may be read as an incapability of the Canadian government to care for the many different peoples that compose the country (310). When she receives Gros-Jeanne's heart, a transformation occurs. At first, the transplanted heart starts rejecting its host body, but then it takes over:

> [Uttley] had realized that she was being invaded in some way, taken over. The heart's rhythm felt wrong, not her own. … "Stop that. You're here to help me. Just settle down and do your job." The heart's frenzied buffeting had slowed to a more regular pace, but then Utley began to feel a numbness spreading out from her chest with each beat of the heart. … She was now completely paralyzed. All she could do was wait for it to reach her brain. She had known that when that happened, she would no longer be herself. Unable to move, unable to save herself, she had felt her brain cells being given up one by one. Then blackness. Nothing.
>
> And then she was aware again. Her dream body and brain were hers once more, but with a difference. The heart – her heart – was dancing joyfully between her ribs. When she looked down at herself, she could see the blood moving through her body to its beat. In every artery, every vein, every capillary: two distinct streams, intertwined. She had worried for nothing. She was healed, a new woman now. (236-7)

The "blackness" into which Utley falls after the surgery, as Reid well points out, is racially-charged, suggesting "a revolutionary act of resistance by Gros-Jeanne's heart" (311). The way this new heart takes control over the premier's body also implies a spiritual possession, as if the transplant had been a Voudun ritual. Gros-Jeanne's heart functioning in

Utley's body in a way represents the immigrants inserted in the Canadian society. The imagery of invasion and the premier's urge that the new heart should "settle down and do its job" resembles biased discourses often targeted at poor immigrants and their exploitation by the local economy. As Reid goes on to argue, "[j]ust as the body comprises a complex map of veins, arteries, and capillaries carrying blood to all extremities, so the necessary relationship between the Canadian state and immigrant minorities must be fully connected and far reaching if the health of the state is to be maintained" (311). Put differently, Gros-Jeanne's transplanted heart brings about a change in the way premier Utley will govern, as if by making the blood circulate in her body in a more efficient way the heart could also change her political point of view. I would add that this implied argument that the old Caribbean seer-woman's heart is more sensitive to the minorities' cause is invested with the notion that Afro-Caribbean women have a central role in their communities. I further develop this point in the next chapter. For now, it suffices to observe that the Caribbean heart in the white politician's body is also charged with ethnic meanings and suggests cultural hybridity as a productive socio-political solution.

In Due's *The Living Blood*, the notion of race is present in the characterization of African Americans and Africans in an intricate story of blood relations, both human and supernatural. The novel comments on the kinds of experience black people have in the United States, South Africa, Botswana, and Ethiopia, expanding the notion of blackness to an international level. At the same time, the local contours of Due's representation of African Americans are emphasized, in a way that the characters' journey to Africa is a kind of *bildungsroman*, making it possible to compare and contrast different perceptions of blackness.

The notion of blackness as a physical racial mark is important in the novel, as it brings about discussion concerning racial segregation, interracial marriage, the one-drop rule, and the phenomenon of racial passing that are present in US society. The African Americans' experiences represented in the novel are mainly those of middle-class blacks. Jessica's mother,

Bea, for example, is described as "a product of the north-Florida 'blackristocracy'" who raised her daughters as "society girls" and would use etiquette even when their financial situation started declining after Jessica's father's death (202-3). Jessica became a journalist, and her sister, a physician, and they lived comfortably until the incident that turned their typical African American middle-class life upside down, forcing them to run to Africa.

The clearest example of racialized experiences among high middle-class African Americans in the novel is that of the microbiologist Dr. Lucas Shepard. He grew up in a traditional middle-class black family and had an interracial marriage, but his white wife died from a brain cancer and now his light-skinned ten-year-old son, Jared, has terminal leukemia. He also goes to Africa in an attempt to change the tragedies that have come upon his family. Throughout the novel, we learn from his memories of past experiences how his skin color has affected the way he is seen by people in the US. Even as a renowned doctor in a comfortable financial situation, Lucas is constantly offended by racist remarks. His colleagues criticize his research on the benefits of alternative medicine as "voodoo," invoking the stereotype of black people's traditional spiritual practices as superstitious. The syncretism of medicine and herbal healing that characterizes Gros-Jeanne's practices in *Brown Girl in the Ring* also characterizes Lucas. His being called "witch doctor" and "Dr. Voodoo," despite his having won an important award and being considered the American "leading authority in alternative healing and magic in medicine" (370), also represents the pejorative way in which African-based religions are still seen. Even Lucas's best friend, Cal, makes racist jokes that criticize the very claims for racial equality demanded by civil rights activists in the 1960s. After recommending that Lucas should change his worn-out clothes while waiting for his son in the hospital lounge "before someone comes in here and sticks a broom into your hands", Cal says:

> "You know how it goes, one of these redneck MDs walks in and sees a black man lounging in here … Some of these less enlightened may not realize you're

> free at last, free at last, thank God Almighty, you're free at last." Cal's expert imitation of Martin Luther King's preaching voice was almost frightening – especially from the lips of a blue-eyed white man whose usual speaking voice was cracker to the core. (15-16)

Even though Lucas laughs with his friend, the fact that he has been laughed at is disturbing, since it implies that racism is still present in American society and that the black middle class illusion of equality is fragile.

Gina Wisker well points out that:

> Due uses historical references to Martin Luther King, slavery, Black mothers, and the often thinly veiled racism of everyday life even for well-to-do middle class professionals. In South Africa …, the recent memory of apartheid affects all Black and white interactions while in central Africa, the spiritual homeland, alternative religious histories can be imagined and dramatized. ("Your Buried Ghost" 75).

I agree with Wisker here and would add that it is the spirituality that is found in Ethiopia that ends up bringing comfort to the characters by providing them with a deeper knowledge of their origins.

This spirituality has roots in African traditions but is also intermingled with Christianity in the novel. The importance of Christian beliefs for African Americans is constantly portrayed throughout the novel and the fact that the very source of the Life Brothers' power is the blood of Christ adds to the religious syncretism of the story. Raboteau argues that among the slaves in the US south, Christianism was assimilated in a different way when compared to the Caribbean and Brazil, where the African traditions were more clearly preserved (87). He explains that this difference is due to a number of factors, such as "the character of the religious milieu, the average number of slaves on plantations, and the number of Africans in the slave

population" (92). Protestantism was less open to syncretism with the African religions than Catholicism was, and the slave population in the Caribbean and South American colonies was much larger than in the US. Raboteau affirms that "in the United States all these factors tended to inhibit the survival of African culture and religion. It was not possible to maintain the rites of worship, the priesthood, or the 'national' identities which were the vehicles and supports for African theology and cult organization" (92). However, he argues:

> even as the gods of Africa gave way to the God of Christianity, the African heritage of singing, dancing, spirit possession, and magic continued to influence Afro-American spirituals, ring shouts, and folk beliefs. That this was so is evidence of the slaves' ability not only to adapt to new contexts but to do so creatively. (92)

In this sense, in the US, the slaves adopted the Christian belief but did so adapting it to their own reality and cultural traditions. At the conclusion of his book, Raboteau affirms:

> Like the children of Israel of old, [the slaves] had lived through Egypt and Exodus and the experience had constituted them a peculiar, a chosen, people. This identity was to remain - in the midst of the chaos, disappointment, and disaster of Reconstruction - a bedrock of hope for freed black Christians as it had been for them as slaves. As the one institution which freed blacks were allowed to control, the church was the center of social, economic, educational, and political activity. It was also a source of continuity and identity for the black community. In their churches, black worshipers continued for decades to pray, sing, preach, and shout as they or their parents had during slavery.

African Americans, therefore, identified with the biblical people from Israel for their common past of exile and suffering, finding in Christianity their hope for freedom and salvation.

Through their church, black people in the US could be respected and could exercise an agency that was denied to them in the other realms of social life.

This importance of Christianity in the lives of African Americans is represented in *The Living Blood*. As Kinitra Brooks argues, "Tananarive Due pushes the boundaries of Christianity, blood cults, and goddess worship in her African Immortals series" (2). In the Life Colony, Jessica discovers that it was created by an ancient Ethiopian, Khaldun, who was turned immortal by a man who had stolen some blood from Jesus's crucified body. Feeling regret for having participated in the theft, Khaldun retreats in reflection for centuries and discovers what he calls "the Rising," the achievement of "higher planes of thought" that are above the mortal plane (272). He then decides to construct an underground village in Lalibela, Ethiopia, and converts fifty-nine pupils to share his immortal blood and the unimaginable knowledge he acquired throughout the centuries. He keeps the living blood in secret in order to prevent it from falling into wrong hands. As he explains another reason for such a secrecy, Khaldun reveals a nobler and humbler intention: "I was careful to conduct my teachings in secrecy, so I would never become revered by mankind like Jesus before me. I am not worthy of such worship. I only wanted to bring other men to the Rising" (272). Khaldun, in this way, represents a kind of spiritual leader that does not overshadow the importance of Jesus and the Christian tradition, but rather coexists with them.

Tonja Lawrence calls attention to the importance of Due's choice of Lalibela as the place where Khaldun constructed the Life Colony. This city is "the religious center of Ethiopia," standing in the novel as "a symbol of heritage, education, culture, and strength," since it is "the only African nation that remained unoccupied by Western nations, developing a distinctively strong African religious and social system" (91). Lawrence goes on: "With Lalibela, Due makes clear a competing metanarrative that illustrates the successful resistance to domination and spiritual essentializing, in a nation that flourished in large part because of

its ability to adapt to the diversity inherent within its borders" (91). Due's story, therefore, connects African American Christian belief with the history of Christianity in Africa. It is interesting to observe that the term Ethiopian has been used to refer to the black race in general in theories such as the one developed by Cuvier. At the same time, the fact that Ethiopians are mentioned in the Bible indicates their remarkable encounters and exchanges with other peoples throughout time. The culture developed in Ethiopia contradicts prejudiced images of black people as uncivilized, such as the ones that Du Bois describes:

> The Negro has already been pointed out many times as a religious animal, - a being of that deep emotional nature which turns instinctively toward the supernatural. Endowed with a rich tropical imagination and a keen, delicate appreciation of Nature, the transplanted African lived in a world animate with gods and devils, elves and witches; full of strange influences, of Good to be implored, of Evil to be propitiated. Slavery, then, was to him the dark triumph of Evil over him. All the hateful powers of the Under-world were striving against him, and a spirit of revolt and revenge filled his heart. He called up all the resources of heathenism to aid, - exorcism and witch-craft, the mysterious Obi worship with its barbarious rites, spells, and blood-sacrifice even, now and then, of human victims. Weird midnight orgies and mystic conjurations were invoked, the witch-woman and the voodoo-priest became the centre of Negro group life, and that vein of vague superstition which characterizes the unlettered Negro even today was deepened and strengthened. (*The Negro* 69)

Du Bois is referring here to recurring prejudiced notions about African religious practices as primitive, merely superstitious, and directed towards evil-doing. In fact, even for African American activists such as Martin Luther King, Jr., Christianity seems more appropriate to guide their people's behavior and more likely to lead their salvation; besides, the leaders of the

movements, as Gilroy argues, “drew on the power of Old Testament patriarchy to cement their own political authority” (207). The history of religion in Ethiopia undermines such generalizing notions and makes it possible for Due’s novel to imagine African spirituality as coexisting with Christianity in creative ways, such as the ones described by Raboteau (2004). One kind of belief does not dismiss the other in *The Living Blood*, as even what is rendered superstitious in everyday experiences (shamanism and voodoo, for example) is as relevant in the lives of the characters as the Christian beliefs.

This link between different religious traditions can also be found in the father figure that Khaldun represents for the Life Brothers. Despite his humble intentions, he is worshiped as a god by the immortals and controls them as such. Juxtapositions with his image and that of the Old Testament God are recurring in the novel. One example is when Jessica and Fana first see him as a floating gigantic image in the colony’s Council room:

> Their gods and customs were strange to her, but the spirit of God’s love was in this room, and God had given her this blood. That was good enough for her. … She could see an image of a man … *in the air*. He was blown up six or eight times the size of a normal man, and he was sitting cross-legged in the air itself, hovering above them like a balloon in the Macy’s Thanksgiving Day parade. Jessica tried to see his face and could not make out his features because the figure was hazy; … all she could make out of his face was dark skin and a long, bushy, black beard. (208)

Khaldun’s appearance as a black personification of God relates to Jessica’s attempt to understand the colony’s culture according to her own Christian values, but it also comments on the historical relation between African spirituality and Christianity. As Lawrence argues: “By tracing the connection back to African customs and beliefs, Due decenters ideas of privilege in the Christian construction of African American religious practices, alluding to the

possibility that spiritual beliefs of African origin remain a central part of African American identity" (99). Religion, therefore, becomes an important topic in the characterization of African descendants in Due's novel. Instead of the recurring criticism of Christian belief as having been imposed on Africans since colonization and slavery, the novel refers to the significance of Africa in the history of this religion. At the same time, a spirituality characteristic of African religions is presented in a way that it contradicts the bigoted notions that see it as primitive and superstitious. In this way, *The Living Blood* emphasizes the interrelation of these traditions in the lives of African Americans, in consonance with Raboteau (2004).

Due's characterization of the Life Brothers also comments on racist representations of Africa as a place of uncivilized people. Hall explains how the image of the continent changed in Europe throughout time, following the different stages of the contact of Europeans with Africans. In the middle ages, in addition to the image of a mysterious land, there was a positive idea of Africa, especially for the importance of Christian communities such as the one in Ethiopia. But such an image gradually changed, motivated by the European exploration and colonization of the continent: "Africans were declared to be the descendants of Ham, cursed in The Bible to be in perpetuity 'a servant of servants unto his brethren.' Identified with Nature, they symbolized 'the primitive' in contrast with 'the civilized world'" ("The Spectacle of the Other" 239). The arguments presented by Du Bois in the quotation above came up in this context. By setting a super-powerful ancient clan that knows the secret of immortality from Christ blood in Ethiopia, Due's narrative is alluding to that old image of Africa as a place of ancient civilizations and of Christian faith, and dismissing the racist images of Africans as primitive. Throughout the novel, images of Africa's poverty and lack of access to health and education abound, but they are also contrasted with the rich ancient culture of the underground Life Brothers' village.

In addition, the characterization of the Life Brothers' colony resembles that of an ethnic group. As a clan that lives in an isolated African village, with their own technology, customs, medicine, law and educational systems, the Life Brothers can be interpreted as another ethnic group among the ones the African American characters meet in the different African countries they visit. However, the importance of this group in the novel can be better understood in terms of what they represent for the black race: they are the living ancestors, holders of centuries of experiences of both glory and suffering that black people have endured, in the continent and in the diaspora. Their superiority and power contest the misconceived notion that blacks are inferior to whites, at the same time that they embody the old ancestors which make of black people, their descendants, a racial and ethnic group. The immortals also resemble the Eshus in Hopkinson's novel in that their spiritual powers can help their descendants. This similarity with African deities is recognized in the novel by the mortals who do not know the identity of those men. After having witnessed one of them curing his dying daughter by pouring his blood into her wounded wrist, Lucas can only imagine the nature of that mysterious person: "the man could have been an African deity who spent only one night on earth, then vanished from sight forever" (37). Even the Life Brothers themselves describe each other referring to African deities; Dawit, for example, is compared to the war god Ogun (222). Lawrence argues that Khaldun, for always dressing in white garments, can be read as representing Olodumare, the Yoruba deity that links the spiritual and the corporeal worlds (99). Even Fana, according to her, "becomes a signifier for Oya, the goddess of chaos who can control the actions of humans by her power" (100). Moreover, the place where Fana often goes to while in a trance seems to correspond to the place where Ti-Jeanne meets Papa Legbara in Hopkinson's novel: Guinea Land, the plane between the world of the living and that of the deities and spirits. Similarly to the Eshus in *Brown Girl in the Ring*, these immortals are capable of influencing the lives of their mortal descendants scattered around the world.

On the other hand, the Life Brothers are often selfish and unwilling to help humanity. Similarly to the racist Ina in Butler's novel, there are prejudiced Life Brothers who condemn Dawit for having shared their secret and intend to destroy Jessica and Fana. Teferi, a member of the colony who is more sympathetic to mortals, explains to Jessica when they meet the brother who "objected most loudly" to Fana's presence and hers in the colony: "Kaleb is what we call one of our Lower Brothers. … He is unevolved, more primitive in his ways of thinking. He is still far from his Path. Khaldun often assigns such men to be Searchers, since they enjoy the world above" (204). The "Path" is how the Life Brothers call their evolution way towards "the Rising," which, as mentioned above, is "a form of perfect meditation," "a way of dwelling with the divine" (192). Living in contact with mortals is believed to hinder the completion of the Path, as a kind of distraction; hence the coldness and contempt with which the immortals see the mortals. The Searchers are the ones that guarantee that their brothers who are living outside the colony do not break their rules, the "Covenants." Since Dawit breaks the two most sacred ones ("No one must know" and "No one must join") by sharing his blood with this wife and their baby, the hatred of the Searchers towards his family is intense. Such a hatred is even deepened by the fact that their leader, Khaldun, forgives Dawit and welcomes Jessica and Fana to the hidden village. Kaleb's prejudice is explained by his narrow-mindedness in comparison to the other Life Brothers, but a contempt for mortal humans is felt by all of them. The difference that is at the basis of such a contempt is in the living blood: the Life Brothers, the ones who share it, are the chosen ones, supposedly superior than the mortals, who do not even know of its existence. Khaldun's fear that the secret of the blood cannot be revealed for the danger of falling into wrong hands proves to be valid, as some mortals in the novel do whatever it takes to profit from its powers.

The issue of immortality, therefore, is a central aspect in the distinction between the Life Brothers and the mortal characters in the novel. They share the same origin, since the

members of the Life Colony were once humans; however, in order to accept the living blood and follow the Path to the Rising, the brothers have to forget their mortal past. The immortal blood that they share is what grants them the supernatural gifts that make them different from mortal humans. The prejudice that rises from this difference is based on this immortality, which can be interpreted as a biological feature that is connected to ethnic characteristics.

Finally, the immortals, just like the soucouyant in Hopkinson's stories and the Ina in Butler's novel, can be read as a racialized version of the vampire myth. Jim Casey argues that:

> fantasy – even in a white male, Dracula-centered genre – can produce remarkable ethnic variety, such as the seemingly prepubescent African-American girl of Octavia Butler's *Fledgling* (2005), the Soucouyant Caribbean vampires of Nalo Hopkinson's *Brown Girl in the Ring* (1998) and "Greedy Choke Puppy" (2000), or the Ethiopian immortal of Tananarive Due's *My Soul to Keep* (1997). (118)

In fact, although the Life Brothers do not suck human blood to live, they carry immortality in their blood. I agree with Casey that the characterization of vampiric figures in the works analyzed here is charged with notions of ethnicity, since they are conceived as alternative groups in relation to humans, having their own set of rules, traditions, and ways of life. However, as those alternative groups are associated with an African ancestry, they can also be understood in terms of race.

2. Racial and Ethnic Identities

The racial/ethnic aspects of the main characters' identities in the four stories analyzed here are developed throughout the narratives during a process of self-discovery. Such identities prove to be fluid, reflecting Hall's notion of the post-modern subject as "formed and transformed continuously in relation to the ways we are represented or addressed in the cultural

systems which surround us" ("The Question of Cultural Identity" 598). It can be perceived that all the characters analyzed undergo a process of self-identification that is triggered by unsettling events and shaped by these characters' contact with other people and cultures.

The identity of Butler's protagonist, Shori, is marked by hybridity, more in terms of race than of ethnicity. She is half-human and half-Ina, half-black and half-white. In fact, her blackness is exactly the part of her identity that marks her as human. The fact that Shori lost her memory at the beginning of the novel is important for the understanding of her racial identification, as it happens progressively throughout the story. At first, Shori does not remember her name, nor who she is, but becomes soon aware that she is not exactly human when she meets a young man, Wright, and perceives that she is different from him, as she tells the reader: "I understood him a little better now that I'd had my hands on him. I thought I could break his wrist if I wanted to. He was big, but not strong. Or, at least, I was stronger" (10). Then, instinctively, by liking the way he smells, she bites him, feeds on his blood, and makes of him her first symbiont. In trying to understand what she is, Wright misidentifies Shori in terms of species and age. He confesses that when he first saw her lost on the road, he thought, "What a lovely elfin little girl", and explains to Shori that by "elfin" he means "[l]ike an elf … a short, slender, magical being" (60-1). Right after she bites him, he concludes: "You are a vampire, you know. … You bite. You drink blood" (12). Here, Wright makes a mistake in identifying her species, or at least its correct name. He uses a human notion of race when he asks her: "Ordinary sun exposure burns your skin even though you're black?," and she tells the reader:

> "I'm..." I stopped. I had been about to protest that I was brown, not black, but before I could speak, I understood what he meant. Then his question triggered another memory. I looked at him. "I think I'm an experiment. I think I can withstand the sun better than…others of my kind. I burn, but I don't burn as fast

> as they do. It's like an allergy we all have to the sun. I don't know who the experimenters are, though, the ones who made me black." (31)

Here, Shori understands that what Wright means by "black" goes beyond skin color to refer to the categorization of race as a group in North American society. This suggests an interpretation of race as social discourse, in the terms explained by Appiah (274). Moreover, the idea that she was literally made black through a scientific experiment that intentionally used a dark skin color as an advantage for survival contrasts with the traditional association of blackness as being inferior.

The nature of Shori's non-human side is explained only later in the novel, when she and Wright meet her Ina father, Iosif. When Shori sees him, she is able to perceive similarities between their physical features and in contrast to Wright's:

> He was a tall, spidery man, empty-handed, and visibly my kind except that he was blond and very pale-skinned – not just light-skinned like Wright, but as white as the pages of Wright's books. Even so, apart from the color, if I ever grew tall, I would look much like him – tall, lean, probably not elfin at all. (61)

As in contrastive identification, Shori concentrates on the physical similarities she shares with her father to recognize that they belong to the same "kind." The first piece of information he gives her is her real name; until then she could not remember it and Wright had been calling her Renee. Iosif explains: "The name your human mother gave you is Shori. Your surname is Matthews. Your Ina mothers were distant relatives of mine named Mateescu, but in the 1950s, when there was a great deal of suspicion about foreign-sounding names, they decided to Anglicize the name to Matthews" (62). Knowing her real name is an important part of Shori's identification, as it indicates her descent. From her father's account, we learn that she is not only a mix of black human and Ina, but also the child of non-English immigrants. Besides, the revelation of a preoccupation with having "foreign-sounding names" suggests that the Ina, even

though their real identities are secret, have had problems living among humans for racial and ethnic discrimination.

Now that Shori knows for sure that she is not human, she asks Iosif, “What are we?”, and he replies:

> “Vampires, of course – not that we call ourselves by that name.” He smiled, showing his very human-looking teeth, except for the canines, which looked a little longer and sharper than the other people’s, as my own did. If his teeth were like mine, they were all sharper than other people’s. They had to be. He said: “We have very little in common with the vampire creatures Bram Stocker described in Dracula, but we are long-lived blood drinkers.” (63)

Shori’s paying attention to her father’s teeth suggests the contrastive logic through which she identifies with him and not with humans. Iosif’s answer, in turn, ascertains that they are not humans, but at same time demystifies the vampire figure with whom they are associated in a way similar to the construction of racial and ethnic stereotypes.

As to Wright’s misperception of Shori’s age, Iosif also relates it to the particularities of their species. Although the young human had thought Shori looked as if she were ten or eleven at first, he conceded that she:

> “had to be older… Maybe eighteen or nineteen?”
>
> Iosif smiled without humor. “That would make things legal at least.” … “In fact, Shori is a child. She has at least one more important growth stage to go through before she’s old enough to bear children. … In all, she should live about five hundred years. Right now, she’s fifty-three.” (64)

The fact that Shori is older than he thought is a relief to Wright for he is concerned about the legal consequences of his having sex with an underage girl. But the explanation that Iosif gives further complicates any age identity we can conceive of in terms of humanity: she looks like a

pre-adolescent human, but is old enough to be middle-aged. On the other hand, she is still a child in Ina's lifespan. Such details serve to deepen the differentiation between humans and Ina.

As the narrative unfolds, Shori learns more and more about the differences between humans and Ina and the racist hatred the Silks feel toward her. It is interesting to observe that she is anxious to learn about the Ina to find out the similar characteristics she shares with them and also to learn the cultural factors she has forgotten. Such an anxiety suggests that she is eager to identify herself as an Ina, which is made clearer by her posture in the trial against the Silks, when she fights for the right of being considered one of them. She seems to feel bound to identify with and carry out Ina's way of life, since she had been raised in her Ina community before the attacks. However, her difficulties in understanding certain aspects of Ina's customs (even if mainly because of her amnesia) and her empathy toward her human symbionts, which is stronger than the one other Ina feel for theirs, seem to be due to her percentage of human identity. All in all, Shori's identity proves to be difficult to define in the essentialist terms with which the characters are familiar. I agree with Brox, for whom "Shori's existence forces readers into the ambivalent realm of the hybrid Third Space where one must rearticulate the conversation about identity beyond fixed racial categories" (395). In other words, Shori's complex identity in a community of varied and sometimes contradicting cultural practices comments on the inefficiency of racial and ethnic categories that North American societies still often use nowadays.

In Hopkinson's stories, Caribbeaness is at the core of the main character's identity, which shows, as I have been arguing, a concern about ethnicity. In "Greedy Choke Puppy," this ethnic identity can be perceived concerning the characters' classification not only as Trinidadian in relation to other Caribbean groups and to the colonizers, but also as soucouyants in contrast to humans. The fact that the women in Jacky's family have "soucouyant blood" also

informs the Caribbean ethnicity portrayed in the text, since they are Caribbean folkloric figures. Differently from the other stories analyzed here, nobody else knows about these women's identities. Young people like Jacky friend's, Carmen, regard soucouyants only as folklore, not a real threat, and the old people, who could be suspicious about these women, are absent from the short story. Only Granny, a soucouyant herself, is the one to find out about Jacky's abuses of human babies and punish her. This punishment suggests that even though Granny and Jacky share kinship and ethnic identities, their identification as members of the human Caribbean community is more important.

When Jacky finds out she is a soucouyant, she completely embraces that identity, which she finds more fulfilling than that of a thirty-year-old single Trinidadian woman. The fact that she can change her physical appearance from human to soucouyant – more specifically, from woman to fireball to skinless woman – relates to her fluid identification, in a way that the skin and the woman's body serve as a confinement for her "real" self. This sense of confinement is better understood in relation to Jacky's sexuality and gender, as I demonstrate in the next chapter. But the racial/ethnic implications of her transformation into a soucouyant are worth noticing, since it reveals that she is not only a Trinidadian woman, but also a Caribbean folkloric figure.

In *Brown Girl in the Ring*, it is spirituality that marks Caribbeanness in the formation of the main characters' identities. Gros-Jeanne had come from Jamaica to live in Canada with her then husband Rudy. Mi-Jeanne and Ti-Jeanne are respectively second and third-generation immigrants. Their initial reluctance to join Gros-Jeanne in the traditional practices of herbal healing and Afro-Caribbean religious rituals can be related, therefore, to a clash of generations in which the younger descendants have more and more difficulty in identifying with the culture of their ancestors.

The character's engagement with their cultural traditions can indicate the extent of their ethnic identities. Gros-Jeanne and Rudy, first generation immigrants, are the ones that keep up with their Caribbean cultural practices more intensely. But while the woman uses the religious rituals to help her family and her community, "serving the spirits," the man uses them to serve his selfish, evil interests: vengeance upon his enemies, eternal youth and physical strength, and financial and political power as the leader of the Burn's posse. Both Ti-Jeanne and Mi-Jeanne seek to be free from Gros-Jeanne's influence and live what they seem to consider regular Canadian lives. Mi-Jeanne runs away from her mother's house, refusing to undergo a training that would help her control her visions, and ends up transformed into a folkloric evil character, a duppy, at the service of her own mean father. Ti-Jeanne wants to escape the Burn with Tony and live with him and their baby as a Canadian family, away from her grandmother's rituals that she is so afraid of. Tony, in turn, is also of Caribbean descent, but was raised in Canada without a deeper engagement with his parents' culture, apart from the fear of Caribbean obeah and the dialect he still speaks.

Ti-Jeanne changes the way she understands herself after discovering that she is a seer woman, spiritual daughter of Prince of Cemetery. This newly acknowledged identity also empowers her, as she finds out that she is capable of destroying her evil-doing grandfather and of helping her community with her gifts. Marger's notion of ascribed membership to an ethnic group (10) can be applied to her case, as it becomes clear in the novel that for having been born in a Caribbean community, she grew up with an ethnic heritage that she cannot totally divest herself of. Her mother, Mi-Jeanne, undergoes a similar process, but hers is also marked by an experience similar to that of Jacky's. Living for fourteen years as a duppy, exiled from her own body, she learns the terrible implications of turning into an evil supernatural character: bringing death to members of the community. Differently from Jacky, however, she regrets that and is able to return to her human body and go on performing the Caribbean traditions her mother

tried to teach her. As to Gros-Jeanne, just like Granny, she seems to be more aware of her identity and is then responsible for helping the next generations to understand the ethnic traits in theirs. Towards the end of the novel, all the new-generation characters learn that their cultural practices can help them cope with the difficult lives they have in Canada. They overtake the old generation, carrying on the healing practices of Gros-Jeanne and remembering to always avoid Rudy's misuse of obeah. The hybrid, syncretic practices of herbal healing and Afro-Caribbean spirituality in Canada also mark their identities as hybrid.

Just as Jacky and Ti-Jeanne in Hopkison's stories and as Shori in Butler's novel progressively discover who they are throughout the narratives, so does Fana in *The Living Blood*. At the beginning of the novel, she is named Beatrice after her grandmother, and her family calls her Bee-Bee. At this point, she is still unaware of the nature of her supernatural powers. Her self-identification as an immortal begins with an incident in which she dies from drowning in a bathtub and is resurrected by her own supernatural blood. During this process, as if in a dream, she meets Khaldun and he reveals that her real name is Fana – which means light in Amharic, an Ethiopian language (253) – and explains her powers. From then on she demands to be called by that name and comes to know more and more about her potential. By changing her name, Fana dismisses a mortal identity that was ascribed to her by her mother to assume an immortal one, revealed by Khaldun.

Also similarly to Shori, as Wisker argues, Fana can be read as a hybrid, since she is the daughter of "Jessica, a mortal woman made immortal, and an Immortal, David/Dawit" ("Your Buried Ghost" 83). In addition, Fana is similar to Shori for being special and representing the hope of a better future, since her blood can heal humans and she possesses immeasurable powers. She was already born an immortal, different from her mother and the Life Brothers, including Khaldun, who were mortals before being transformed. This fact makes of her unique, the only sample of a new race that may spring from her.

Another point in common between *Fledgling* and *The Living Blood* is that both portray groups whose blood has healing powers and speculate that sharing this blood creates more powerful beings. But what in Butler's novel causes a racist, unjustified fear of racial degeneration, in Due's may be a real threat, represented by the ambiguity of Fana's potential. In Wisker's words, "[she] could be totally warped and bring terror and violence to all who deal with her, or, alternatively, could be guided and nurtured, eventually contributing towards a new race of beings who use their powers for good rather than hiding them or using them for evil to destroy mortals" ("Your Buried Ghost" 83). In fact, the dangerous aspect of Fana's power relates less to her blood than to her gifts of telepathy, mind-control, telekinesis, command of natural phenomena, and future-telling, which she often uses unconsciously.

The fact that Fana is only four years old means that she can still be taught to choose the good side of her potential, and it depends on a family-like environment of love and support. Khaldun describes her as follows: "Fana, miraculously, was born within that divine stream. She has Risen. She can touch physical objects with her mind and alter perceptions on her whims. There is no end to the good she could do. … She is a miracle bringer. (*The Living Blood* 275). The hybrid child's power makes her resemble a goddess who has free passage between the mortal and the spiritual worlds, and the way she is worshiped by some Life Brothers really indicate so. Fana herself, before starting her training, cannot understand exactly who she is and fears she is like the evil characters of the Western children stories she hears, such as a witch. Her fears are mainly based on her difference from mortal humans.

Jessica's identity is also marked by the difference between immortality and humanity. Raised in a middle-class Black-American family, she has always identified herself with her community. But the immortality she receives from her husband against her will in a way alienates her from her family in terms of humanity and interferes in her sense of race. This can be perceived in her older sister's anxieties: "Alex was still Jessica's big sister as much as she

could manage the role, but she was something else now, too: She was just a mortal like most of humankind for all history, and Jessica was not. Jessica and Bee-Bee were part of another race now. Literally, they had inherited the world" (61). Jessica's sister sees the Immortals as a kind of different race, probably for their ethnic differences as a tribe in relation to North American blacks. But the concept of race informing Alex's understanding relates to the notion of blackness her family raised her in, that is, family blood lines and shared experiences. Now that not even the most basic experience of mortality can be shared between the sisters, they seem to be estranged.

Although Dawit advises Jessica that sharing her immortality with her family can be dangerous for her, she tries to convince her mother and sister to take an injection of her blood to at least improve their health. Fearing that it would interfere in God's plans and compromise the salvation of their souls, they always refuse her help. Religion is an important aspect in the identity of the women in Jessica's family and they see the immortal blood with suspicion, as if it threatened their humanity. In this sense, it can be said that Alex and Beatrice see that blood as abject. Despite the fact that they recognize the possibility of cure that the living blood brings, they see it as something abject for threatening their self-identification as God's children. One has to die so as to be turned into an immortal through a transfusion or injection of the living blood. Bringing a corpse back to life is a transgression of natural laws and also implies a heresy since only God can give life. In some way, Jessica agrees with this idea, since she refuses to use the chance she has of injecting Kira's body with Dawit's blood, a situation she is able to hide when the police arrives and interrupts the ritual he was performing. Jessica deliberately chooses not to do resurrect her daughter with the living blood so as to guarantee that her soul will go to heaven.

An important factor that influences Jessica's construction of a new identity is her constant feeling of non-belonging. She feels misplaced not only for being an immortal living

among mortals, but also for being a North American in Africa. Differently from Alexis and Fana, who try to adapt to the communities they move to, learning their languages and taking part in social life, Jessica isolates herself in the house and avoids meeting the neighbors. Alex seems interested in having contact with cultural production by Africans in the continent and in the diaspora as much as she can; she collects music by singers from different African countries and has a Bob Marley poster in her bedroom. Jessica, on the other hand, always feels like a foreigner in the African continent, as this passage illustrates:

> *Welcome home*, a South African man had told her kindly, squeezing her hand in greeting soon after her family's arrival in Johannesburg years before. He'd apparently noticed she was American from her dress and accent. At the time, the unexpected words had brought Jessica to tears. She'd been touched by the man's sense of brotherhood, but his words had filled her with grief over what she'd left behind. How could anyone meet her when her life was in turmoil, when she was a stranger in a strange place, and claim that she was *home*? (100)

Jessica is not able to reciprocate the South African man's sense of brotherhood, an idea that is common among African descendants, neither can she feel that Africa is her home in the way African Americans have often believed it is. Her feeling of estrangement is strengthened by her new immortality, and also by nostalgia for the happy life she lost.

When Jessica arrives in Lalibela, Teferi is the one who welcomes her "home" and she really believes that this city, for the Christian faith that is exposed in its many churches and monuments, is where she belongs (157). When she goes to the underground Life Colony, however, she does not feel at home at all. Her first contact with the clan and their habitat is described as a trip to a foreign, extraordinary land. An alternation between mortals and immortals in the position of the others can be perceived here, indicating the relative character of prejudice in a way similar to Butler's discussion about the topic. Jessica soon learns from

Teferi that some immortals are "bigoted enough to compare [humans] with chimpanzees" (186), which hints at the uneasiness she will feel when she meets them. Then, by seeing the artificiality of the nature the Life Brothers reproduced in their village, she remembers sci-fi movies and concludes, "these people [are] aliens" (201). Although she is one of them now, Jessica is still too attached to mortals to identify with the immortals, as Teferi explains. When she finally meets the other brothers, she imagines herself and Fana in the estrangers' position again: "The men watched them as if they were circus animals brought to perform for them. … The group suddenly burst into spontaneous laughter and nodding" (205). Here, Jessica imagines the way she and her daughter are seen by the immortals in terms that resemble the exposition of Africans in Europe as exotic attractions in the nineteenth century. However, when the reason for the brothers' laughter is explained, it implies that such comparison was in Jessica's mind, not in theirs: "We apologize for laughing … It appeared to us that our guest thought she herself was about to be served as our meal" (205). This thought that the Life Brother could read in Jessica's mind represents another inversion of the self/other positions. She relates them to the cannibal stereotype that has often been used to portray African tribes. It can be noticed that Jessica's American identity is somehow maintained in the places she visits in Africa, even though she tries to isolate herself from other people more to avoid raising suspicion about her immortality than for despising them. This immortality that separates her from mortal humans could make her identify more easily with the Life Brothers. Nevertheless, when she finally meets the immortals, the living blood they have in common seems less important than the mortality that once characterized her identity. It is interesting to observe that skin color, a common African ancestry, and shared blood do not make her identify so much with neither the immortals nor with the African mortals. Throughout the novel, she learns how to deal with her new immortality and is able to reconcile her African American identity with what she discovers about the African Life Brothers. As Lawrence argues, "[r]eturning to Africa

allows Jessica to heal emotionally and spiritually, empowering her to become a meaningful contributor to the global village. This focus of energy lies … in Jessica's return to her roots" (103). The importance of the trip to Africa, especially to Ethiopia, for the development of Jessica's new identity echoes, therefore, what Gilroy notes as a common notion in the African diaspora: the return to one's origins in the black ancestor's land (208).

Besides the complication of immortality to racial identity in the novel, Due also represents the oddities of everyday life identification through her mortal human characters. Again, Dr. Lucas Shepard offers the best example. In one of his jokes, Cal calls him "one of them high-yallow [*sic*] Negroes," "[o]ne of them Atlanta Negroes with a complex", and goes on, mockingly: "It's all right, Lucas, man. Black is on the inside, not the outside." (24). Later, when explaining to his mixed-blood son, Jared, that "yellow" is the way blacks used to call "fair-skinned blacks" (26), he thinks about the fact that while Jared is as white as his mother, he, Lucas, was too dark to pass for white as his own father used to. He remembers what his father said to his family after having passed for white to check them in a motel while the darker kids had to wait in the car to sneak in later: "I've told you before, every one of us in this room is black as coal in the eyes of God, because not one of us wasn't suckled on the suffering of a slave. I ain't trying to be white. I just want some sleep so I won't drive us all in a ditch" (27). The comparison of skin complexion among the members of the same family and the anecdote about passing for white reveal the complexity of race identification in the United States. In this passage, religious beliefs associated with the one-drop rule's prerogative that blackness does not depend on one's skin color calls for an affirmative identity, while at the same time the social privileges of racial passing cannot be ignored. Being related to the notion of fraud, the phenomenon of passing happens when a person identified as black because of his or her ancestry can perform as white because of his or her phenotypes. This denial of a black identity is seen as negative by both racial groups and is motivated by a person's desire to avoid the

marginalization with which black people have been treated. Light-skinned African Americans have often struggled with the feeling of belonging to a black community in opposition to a desire to take advantage of the social privileges guaranteed only for whites.

This fluid identification that African Americans can experience because of their complexion is even further questioned when they find themselves in another country, where racial categorization is different. When Lucas is in South Africa, he is told that he looks "like a white man" (163), to which he replies: "Well, in America, there were never any distinctions between 'black' and 'colored' as there were under apartheid… People my skin color were bought and sold as slaves, too. In my mind, there's no difference between your skin color and mine. I'm black" (164). Lucas explains here the cultural difference in racial classification in the United States and in South Africa. At the same time, in a discourse that resembles his father's words quoted above, his assertion that he is as black as the Zulu man talking to him dismisses any national or racial difference to proclaim them equal. The notion of race exalted here goes beyond skin color and national boundaries to bring people who have a similar origin in the African continent closer. And when the South African man sees a photo of Jared and says, in surprise, "*This* is your son? … Surely *he* is white!," Lucas retorts:

> "He's black … In America, black people are all colors."
>
> Zenzele Shabalala laughed for the first time. "I like that! Here, black men want to be white! In America is just the opposite."
>
> Lucas knew that an effort to try to explain the social and political history of American racial consciousness would be a long, useless road. (166)

Due seems to comment here on the arbitrariness of racial categorization and also on the particularity of the case of African American identity, created by complex socio-historical conditions. However, this seemingly impossibility of reconciling different perceptions of blackness into a broader notion capable of encompassing the Americans and the various

African ethnic groups can be solved in the novel by the formation of a community of international cooperation, in which the Life Brother's healing blood and knowledge will be shared. For Lawrence, "it is a reconnection with Africa, Due suggests, that allows cultural regeneration and recovery of community, and fosters stability for Africans in the Diaspora and on the Continent" (102). In fact, in all the stories analyzed here, the importance of communities of mutual support and hybrid racial and ethnic identities is at the core of the alternatives the writers offer in the fight against prejudice and discrimination.

3. Blood and Community Bonds

Susana M. Morris includes Octavia Butler, Nalo Hopkinson, and Tananarive Due in a tradition of black speculative fiction called Afrofuturism, which, according to Mark Dery, "describ[es] African American culture's appropriation of technology and SF imagery" (6). Morris argues that "Afrofuturism insists that blacks fundamentally *are* the future and that Afrodiasporic cultural practices are vital to imagining the continuance of human society" (153). Indeed, all the stories analyzed here are invested with this view of black people playing a fundamental role in the survival of humanity. Such a role is conveyed through the supernatural gifts of the characters' black blood.

The community bond is something progressively learned in Butler's *Fledling*. Shori gets to know more and more about her role as the hope of a better future for Ina and humans as the members of her community tell what her amnesia made her forget. However, the characterization of these community relations in Butler's novel is even more complex, since the hybridity they involve, besides being racial/ethnic, is inter-species (human and Ina) as well. At the core of this complexity is the fact that the members of Shori's community are together not only by the blood they have in common as Ina families, but also by the blood Ina and humans share through feeding.

In fact, a harmonious connection between Ina and humans is possible because of their interaction by blood. Human blood is the vital force of Ina, their food. The venom in Ina's saliva, when in contact with humans' blood, can heal them, make them live longer, and cause them intense pleasure. The Ina's feeding on humans, therefore, is profitable for both parties and the mixing of genes in a new being is even more promising. Blood in Butler's novel assumes a healing and a nourishing power and becomes a metaphor for the possibility of a harmonious co-existence in co-operation between ethnic groups. Moreover, the Ina live together with same-gender members of their families and with all their human symbionts. Those latter, in turn, have varied cultural and racial backgrounds, forming a hybrid community similar to the one in Hopkinson's novel. As Ina are characterized as a racial/ethnic group with a way of life that is different form humans, their living with their symbionts further expands the level of hybridity of the communities.

The cooperation among Ina happens in terms of reproduction and social life, while the one between humans and Ina involve deeper emotional bonds, nurturance, healing, longevity, and protection. The gift of Shori's blood contributes to this community for her humanity makes her emotional bonds with her symbionts stronger and her skin color makes it possible for her to better resist sun light and stay alert during the day, improving the communities' protection. Besides, there is also a possibility that she will be able to bear children of human fathers, granting them benefits of her hybrid genes. Butler seems to celebrate an ideal of cooperation among different races/species through the very possibility of a stronger being that is both human and Ina and through the symbiotic relationships between Ina and the humans they feed upon.

Differently from *Fledgling* and the other stories analyzed here, Hopkinson's "Greedy Choke Puppy" does not present this contribution to the community survival as a potential for nurturance, but as a self-restriction, self-sacrifice in the name of the community. The

soucouyants usual instinct is to satisfy themselves, regardless of the effects of their feeding on the blood of babies, to guarantee their own longevity. But Granny seems to recognize that such selfishness is amoral as she scolds her granddaughter: “You never had no patience. Doux-doux, you is my life, but you can’t kill so. That little child you drink, you don’t hear it spirit when night come…? I does weep to hear it. I try to tell you, like I try to tell your mother: Don’t be greedy” (180). The old woman’s plea to her young granddaughter is based on the notion of a necessity of preserving the youth, out of maternal compassion and also out of prudence. It is implicit in the story that the reason for Granny to favor her community in detriment of her own family is that the murder of babies hinders the survival of the next generations of their ethnic group, besides raising the suspicion of the members of the group against the soucouyants. It seems to be suggested in “Greedy Choke Puppy” that a soucouyant can live in her human community as long as she controls herself and channels her desire for freedom and satisfaction to other things in life rather than to youth’s blood. A sense of belonging to an ethnic and racial group can be perceived here as enhanced by the commitment not to shed the blood of the other members of the ethnic community.

The soucouyant in *Brown Girl in the Ring* is also scolded for taking the lives of babies, but here only in Ti-Jeanne’s dream, by the Jab-Jab, who claims: “Baby blood not for you! You must leave little children alone!” (45). As Mi-Jeanne’s duppy is the one that acts like a soucouyant in the novel, this recrimination extends to her, who drinks the blood of the street children Rudy sacrifices for her. In the next chapter, I discuss how this representation of the soucouyant’s blood hunger as harmful to the community relates to their characterization as anti-maternal figures, the opposite of the roles of nurturing mothers commonly found in Caribbean culture.

The community bonds in Hopkinson’s novel are presented as nurturing through the role of the women in Ti-Jeanne’s family as a lineage of seers and healers. This spiritual gift, which

is charged with Caribbean ethnicity, is present not only in the blood they share as members of the family and the ethnic group, but also in the blood sacrifices that are part of the Afro-Caribbean religious rituals to communicate with the Eshus. Their abilities to see people's future and to be possessed by their father and mother Eshus who bring messages and aid to the living help the members of their community in the same way their traditional practices of Caribbean herbal healing do. Those practices, as mentioned before, represent a valuable aid in the environment of lack of safety and healthcare in which Toronto is transformed in this futuristic novel.

It must be observed that, differently from the lineage of women in "Greedy Choke Puppy," the women in this novel have to stay together as a family to help their communities. In Reid's words:

> This family forms the center of a localized community that provides the support and services that are otherwise lacking in the Burn. This community is based on a Caribbean model of hybridity which develops out of necessity and the need to combine all available resources: social, cultural, and spiritual. Towards the end of *Brown Girl in the Ring* the communal model formed by the Burn residents is seen as a potential means of reintegrating and regenerating Canadian society. (298)

Therefore, even though Mi-Jeanne and Ti-Jeanne are at first reluctant to take over their responsibilities with the multicultural community of the Burn, they end up knowing the importance of their roles and carrying them over together, as a Caribbean family. Even Gros-Jeanne, after death, is able to continue respecting her commitment to help the community as her heart, now in premier Utley's chest, assumes the control of the white politician's social consciousness. This position leads her to create policies that will benefit the province's ethnic minorities.

In *The Living Blood*, Jessica realizes that she can help the communities around her by using the gift of healing that is literally in her blood. However, this bond she starts to make by injecting diseased people with her blood is threatened as some prejudiced Life Brothers are against it. They consider Dawit and his human-turned-immortal family a heresy and try to destroy them. For Brooks, by making Jessica and her physician sister set clinics in South Africa and Botswana to cure sick children, "Due specifically juxtaposes the secret power of the men of the Colony of Immortals and Jessica's willingness to share those powers with those in need of power" (10). Her sense of commitment to her adopted community, and later, to the whole humanity, also reflects the notion of maternal roles carried out by women of African descent. About this commitment to community, Due declares:

> I do like to use any opportunity I can to encourage Black American readers to look beyond the confines of their own attitudes and existence. We are part of a grand Diaspora, and while we may have more financially than our brothers and sisters elsewhere, there are some fundamental ways in which we have been robbed. (qtd. in Brooks 10)

It can be concluded, therefore, that the fact that Jessica is an African American woman trying to make a better use of the Life Brother's gift of life in their blood conveys the possibility of an international cooperation of black people, or even among humans in general, that can be more productive to face situations of calamity. The potential for the cure of AIDS and other blood-related diseases in the living blood that Jessica is willing to share is an example of the potentials of such cooperation.

As to Fana, the hybrid child that carries in her blood and supernatural powers the greatest potential for bringing benefits for humans and immortals, it becomes clear in the novel that she is so strong that, in order to learn how to bring harmony and not destruction, she must be first well nurtured by a family-like community. Lacking the knowledge about this power,

Jessica needs the help of Dawit, Khaldun, and the other Life Brothers to instruct the girl. Fana is even more powerful than any member of the clan, but too young to ponder on the consequences of her acts. Jessica decides to stop hiding and to try to find the Life Colony exactly because she realizes that being alone and not knowing about the nature of Fana's gifts she will not be able to help her control them. This realization also means her awareness of an African model of community life, as this passage suggests: "It takes a village to raise a child, Jessica thought suddenly, remembering the African proverb that was one of her favorites. Fana needed everyone she could get" (324). For her gifts, the girl can also be compared to Ti-Jeane in *Brown Girl in the Ring*, who, just like her, needs the help of those of her own kind (her grandmother, her mother, and the members of the Burn who were Gros-Jeanne's followers) to learn how to better use her powers. The responsibility of nurturing future generations and instructing them into community's values is present in *The Living Blood* as well, and the source of this responsibility is placed once again first in the mother and then in the community. The comment implicit in Due's novel is that black women can play an important role in the transformation of a harmonious society, channeling their power to beneficial actions towards blacks and whites alike.

Just as Ti-Jeanne, who, while temporarily a duppy, is tempted by the supposed benefits of a negative use of her power if she serves Rudy in the calabash, so Fana hears in her trances a voice offering her more destructive powers: "Don't you want all of them to be afraid to call you bad names?" (86). As Wisker explains, "[i]nitially, Fana is tempted by evil thoughts and suggestions [that] invite her into an existence where she would be entirely selfish and destructive, exercising her power over others, enjoying their fear of her (as do the traveling Life Brothers)" ("Your Buried Ghost" 82). But in the same way that Ti-Jeanne, guided by her spiritual father, is able to realize her responsibility in engaging in a benefic use of her power,

so does the immortals' leader Khaldun guide Fana to better understand who she is and how to use her power to do good things.

As Wisker puts it, "[t]he story asserts the necessity of combination and equality of Black and white, mortal and immortal, woman and man to produce transformation. Specifically, all must take on a positive, nurturing role for the future" ("Your Buried Ghost" 84). The end of the novel reinforces this idea, as back in the US, Fana's family and some immortals receive a group of social and spiritual leaders to share the secret of the living blood. Jessica envisions the future of this new group of nurturers, which includes a Native American healer, a Zulu nurse, an Anglo-American lawyer, an African American journalist, and an Anglo American oncologist: "Only seven in all, but a beginning. One day, there would be more" (514). I agree with Wisker that this ending indicates that "a sharing of the Blood is the potential way forward for a new future of race and gender equality" (84). Interestingly, this blood comes from an African clan, whose powerful members got immortality from Christ's blood, and whose future guide is a powerful African American/immortal girl. Therefore, it may be argued that Due's novel dismisses any racist notion about black inferiority or about Africa as the cursed cradle of diseases, such as AIDS, that can exterminate humanity.

4. Racialized Speculative *Nova*

For their potential to bring about a better future for human beings, the gifts of supernatural powers in the four stories analyzed here can be read as speculative *nova* invested with notions of ethnicity and race. As I have been arguing here, Darko Suvin's notion of *novum,* which is at the basis of definitions of science fiction, can also be applied to the analysis of speculative fiction. I am using the term speculative *nova* to refer to the appropriation of the science fiction *novum* by speculative writers. In this sense, what I call speculative *nova* here are not only the scientific innovations but also the supernatural elements that characterize the

experiences narrated in the stories. These speculative *nova* represent alternative ways of dealing with the issues of race and ethnicity, at same time that they comment on their implications in everyday experiences.

In *Fledgling*, Shori is the *novum*, as a hybrid of Ina and human that represents a more complex and better equipped version of both species. She is more specifically a scientific *novum*, the result of genetic experimentation for creating a new, hybrid species out of two distinguished ones. The racial charge of this *novum*, as mentioned before, is in the fact that this species difference is invested with notions of racial difference in the story, besides the very novelty of using the socially marginalized mark of black skin to produce genetic improvement.

As a species that exists only in the world of the narrative, the Ina can be considered a *novum*, and so can the symbiotic relationship between Ina and humans. Some critics argue that Butler's portrayal of the relationship between Ina and humans is reminiscent of slavery, as the Ina somehow deprive their symbionts from freedom (Border 13). This similarity between the Ina's control over humans and slavery is even mentioned by a character in the novel. Martin, a black symbiont, tells Shori what he thought when he was told how his relationship with his Ina would be if he became his symbiont: "The whole think was too weird for me. Worse, I thought it sounded more like slavery than symbiosis" (204). The possibility of getting into a situation similar to the one that oppressed his ancestors for centuries scared Martin, but the pleasure he experienced with his Ina and the possibility of learning history from older members of that species make him concede to become a symbiont. This necessity of the humans' consent for the relationship to be set, by the way, is a factor that disqualifies the claim that symbiosis is a form of slavery. On the other hand, as symbiosis is enforced by a dependence of the symbionts on their Ina, some critics see it as a kind of addiction, in that the Ina venom works like a drug in the human body (Mickle 71). Actually, the venom that the Ina inject in the human blood system when they first bite a person does not turn the human into a symbiont automatically.

Only after the human agrees in becoming the Ina's symbiont is the bond sealed, through more successive bites. Besides, the effects of this venom on human body are mainly beneficial, as it heals and enhances the immune system, granting longevity to the symbionts. I believe that, even though some details of the bonds between humans and Ina can really suggest slavery and addiction, the fact that both species benefit from their interactions is the main focus of the novel. My conclusion, thus, is that Butler's work presents the possibility of a harmonious existence between the two species as an alternative to the exploitation of one race over the other observed in many human societies.

In Hopkinson's stories, the speculative *nova* relate to the Afro-Caribbean folkloric characters and deities. Although they are part of Caribbean people's everyday practices and beliefs, in North American societies they are regarded as superstition and non-Caribbean audiences may read them as fantastical. In Hopkinson's fiction, the presence of soucouyants, La Diablesse and Eshus is also physical and they become characters in the narrative. In "Greedy Choke Puppy," Jacky turns into the character that she heard about in folk tales and that she studies as myth in her doctoral research. The soucouyant can be read as a *novum*, as an imaginary possibility for women to seek vitality and longevity in the blood of babies. Her ability to take off her skin and fly around as a fire ball, invading houses through breaches on the doors and materializing again into her woman's dripping flesh, can be seen as a folkloric rendition of science fiction tropes such as teletransportation, shapeshifting, and aesthetic medicine. The substitution of folklore for technology is what makes Hopkinson's soucouyant an ethnic *novum*.

In *Brown Girl in the Ring*, besides the soucouyant, more *nova* are taken from Caribbean tradition: the conjuring of entities in Afro-Caribbean spiritual rituals used for good purposes by Gros-Jeanne and Ti-Jeanne, and in the obeah used for evil-doing by Rudy. Instead of super-advanced telecommunication systems, Hopkinson's characters use Caribbean religious

practices to communicate with the spiritual world and help the living. Actually, in both stories by Hopkinson, the *novum* is something new only in the broader context of the Canadian society in which her books were first published. For Caribbean people on the islands and in diaspora, these supernatural characters are considered part of their spiritualized experiences of everyday life. Another *novum* in *Brown Girl in the Ring* is the syncretic practice of herbal healing with official nursing training. Gros-Jeanne adapts Caribbean recipes to the Canadian herbs she has more easily at hand and mixes her knowledge of medical procedures with spiritual and herbal healing, making them complement one another. Instead of medical advances, Hopkison's *nova* are drawn from old, traditional Caribbean practices that are alien to Canadians.

In *The Living Blood*, the *nova* relate to the fictional clan of the Life Brothers, their supernatural powers, their immortal blood, the scientific achievements they developed throughout the centuries, and Fana's gifts of telepathy, telekinesis, command of natural elements, and fortune-telling. These *nova* can also be read as a mixture of racial/ethnic and scientific aspects, as the living blood is used in medical procedures to cure diseases. Differently from Hopkinson's stories and more in tune with Butler's, the racial/ethnic trait is totally invented here, as there is no such a thing as a colony of immortal men in Africa, not even as a myth or religious belief. Everything about that colony is new, including the technologies they develop with the knowledge they have accumulated throughout the centuries. On the other hand, the characterization of an African origin for the *nova* in Due's story renders them a racial charge. In other words, the presentation of Africa as the source of an enduring race/ethnic group that was scattered around the world and possesses an unimaginable amount of technological knowledge and supernatural power has interesting implications. Considered by scientists the cradle of humanity, the continent is a direct source of life in the novel. Ironically, Africa is also allegedly the source of a major blood disease, AIDS (Sontag 52), and in *The Living Blood* it becomes the source of its potential cure. The fact that the Life Brother's blood conveys cure

and immortality subverts this view of Africans (especially men) as carriers of the HIV virus. Conversely, their blood represents hope for a stronger humanity.

It can be perceived that all the stories analyzed here portray supernatural races/ethnicities (the Ina, the Life Brothers) and characters (the soucouyant, the duppy, the Eshus) in a way that challenges essentialist notions of race and ethnicity. In Butler's novel, the notions of race and species are mixed, and skin color is presented at the same time as being possible to be determined through genetic engineering and as a social construction. Essentialist notions of race that have informed social discourse cannot fully grasp the identities and relations in *Fledgling*, except as racist ideologies constructed by the antagonists. In Hopkinson's stories, the folkloric figures and the religious entities evoke the cultural hybridity that is typical of Caribbean communities. Ethnicity is discussed in both stories through the deities and folkloric characters that, although usually deemed mere superstition by non-Caribbean people in everyday experience, are real in the lives of Hopkinson's characters. In Due's work, racist notions about the inferiority of African peoples are also contested, as the continent is the source of powerful beings and a rich culture. The notion of a brotherhood among peoples of African descent is also explored and revealed as complex through the interactions of African American characters with Africans of different origins. The four works, therefore, present race and ethnicity as complex issues, constructed through discourses that can be harmful when aiming at the domination of a group over the other, but also useful if the differences are thought to be productive for a harmonious coexistence. This coexistence is based on hybridity, in terms of both race (as in the case of Shori and Fana) and ethnicity (in Hopkinson's works).

In all the stories, the symbolism of blood is at the core of the characterizations of such complex races and ethnicities. In *Fledgling*, Shori's blood is a mix of Ina and human genes,

representing the possibility of stronger beings at the same time that it is a threat to those who believe in racial/species purity. The blood the Ina suck from their human symbionts is also what guarantees a bond among them, in mutually beneficial relations: Ina feed on the blood of humans, whose immune system is strengthen by the venom in Ina's saliva injected in their bodies during the bite. In Hopkinson's works, the blood that the soucouyants and the duppy drink make of them abject figures that threaten the survival of the next generations. On the other hand, in *Brown Girl in the Ring*, blood is also what makes the communication with the entities possible, and through it the maintenance of Caribbean cultural practices. The gifts of communication with the Afro-Caribbean entities and herbal healing are also in the blood of the women in Ti-Jeanne's family. In Due's novel, the blood of the Life Brothers, infused with the blood of Christ, can heal and grant immortality and telepathic powers. After being an exclusive privilege of the men-only ancient African clan for centuries, it is shared with two mortal women who in turn decide to use it to help humanity by curing blood-related diseases. Therefore, the symbolism of blood that informs the notions of race and ethnicity in the short story and in the novels analyzed here include: abjection (the soucouyants' and duppy's hot blood and blood-hunger, and also Shori's, Jessica's, and Fana's mixed bloods); transmission of genetic characteristics of race/ethnicity (the soucouyants' blood, the seer-women's blood, human and Ina genes/bloods that make Shori a hybrid, and the Life Brother's blood); and nurturing or healing (the blood that the soucouyant, the duppy, and the Eshus drink, the sacrificial blood that allows a communication with the entities for help, the living blood, and the serum made out of it).

For its nurturing potential, blood in the four stories is related to bonds the protagonists assume with their communities. *Fledgling* explores the sense of commitment to a community through the importance of Shori's hybridity for humans and Ina alike, besides the symbiosis among the two species that is possible through Ina feeding on human blood. In "Greedy Choke

Puppy," the soucouyant has to restrain her blood-hunger to care for her community, which becomes more important than immediate family members. While Jacky fails to take over this commitment, Granny is the one who carries it out to the point of having to kill her own daughter and granddaughter. In *Brown Girl in the Ring*, the bloodline that links the women in Ti-Jeanne's family and grants them the gifts of herbal healing and communication with the Afro-Caribbean entities also makes them the care givers of their ethnically hybrid community in Canada. The living blood in Due's novel is what gives Jessica the power to help mortals, a commitment she makes first with the more immediate African communities in which she lives and then with humanity in general. Fana's potential for helping humanity and immortals is even greater, and she counts on the nurturing community formed by her parents and the Life Brothers to be prepared to take over this responsibility. Blood, in this sense, when properly used by the protagonists, makes it possible for them to care for their communities, nurturing and healing their members.

Finally, the four stories use racially/ethnically charged speculative *nova*. In Butler's novel, the *nova* are the Ina species, whose relationships with humans can be mutually beneficial, and Shori, the hybrid of black human and Ina. In Hopkinson's story, the *nova* are Afro-Caribbean folkloric characters and religious entities turned real in the plots in a way that shows the importance of such cultural beliefs and practices in the lives of diasporic communities. In Due's story, the *novum* also relates to an invented race or ethnic group, the Life Brothers, besides Jessica, a mortal turned immortal, and Fana, a born-immortal girl who possesses the greatest power in the story. In all the works analyzed here, the subversive possibilities of imaginary races and ethnic groups make the discourses against the marginalization and oppression of black people stronger. Stereotypes and prejudiced notions about those people are undermined in the stories in a way that also undermines racist discourses against blacks. The way in which a relation among these supernatural characters and humans

is celebrated as productive in the stories suggests an idealized racially and ethnically mixed community for the future of humanity.

The speculative works analyzed here, therefore, suggest alternative ways of understanding and promoting racial and ethnic relations. In general, they praise a harmonious cooperation between different racial and ethnic groups for the improvement of life quality in society. In the next chapter, I discuss through an analysis of sexuality in these works how they also suggest sexual diversity and cooperation between the genders as contributing to this ideal human future.

CHAPTER 3:

Blood Lust and Nurturance: Reading Black Women's Sexuality

Sexuality is often a major issue in works by black women about black women protagonists. Their struggles against sexual oppression, sexism and exploitation walk alongside their struggle against racism. Patricia Hills Collins argues that understanding black women's sexualities requires analyzing "heterosexism as a system of oppression" and conceptualizing "its links to race, class, and gender as comparable systems of oppression" (*Black Feminist Thought* 128-29). She explains that this framework emphasizes two interdependent dimensions of heterosexism, the symbolic and the structural one:

> The symbolic dimension refers to the sexual meanings used to represent and evaluate Black women's sexualities. For example, via the "hoochie" image, Black women's sexualities are seen as unnatural, dirty, sick, and sinful. In contrast, the structural dimension encompasses how social institutions are organized to reproduce heterosexism, primarily through laws and social customs. For example, refusing to prosecute Black women's rapists because the women are viewed as sexual "freaks" constitutes a social practice that reinforces and shapes these symbolic structures. (129)

According to Collins, therefore, the oppression suffered by black women can be understood by an analysis of the stereotypes often used to characterize those women and by the social practices that support such stereotypes.

Stereotyping becomes an important tool in the sexual oppression of racialized bodies. Stuart Hall explains that through this practice, racial difference has been represented through the body and thus "naturalized" ("The Spectacle of the Other" 244). Stereotyping reduces the others to their difference and characterizes them as abnormal and misplaced. Relating

stereotyping to Mary Douglas's and Julia Kristeva's theories, Hall points out that this other that is different and out of place is considered "polluted, dangerous, taboo," and thus abject, and "must be excluded if the 'purity' of the culture is to be restored," ("The Spectacle of the 'Other'" 258). As abject, the black body is at the same time desirable and repulsive, especially when the racial difference is also sexualized. As Hall explains, "whites often fantasized about the excessive sexual appetites and prowess of black men – as they did about the lascivious, over-sexed character of black women – which they both feared and secretly envied" (262). The black body, often characterized as excessively sexual, is feared for its difference in relation to the white body and for its threat to the supposed purity of the white race through miscegenation.

Similarly to Hall (1997), Collins (2004) also sheds light on this stereotyping of the black body as overtly sexual. She explains that in the United States, a notion of heterosexuality as the normal, natural, and normative category of sexuality has been emphasized in a way that all the other possibilities are considered deviant (*Black Feminist Thought* 29). This heterosexist ideology has racial implications: "[w]ithin assumptions of normalized heterosexuality, regardless of individual behavior, being White marks the normal category of heterosexuality. In contrast, being Black signals the wild, out-of-control hyperheterosexuality of excessive sexual appetite" (129). In other words, supported by essentialist notions about racial difference, black people's sexuality was constructed to appear abnormal and excessive in relation to white people's heterosexuality, which is often taken as the normative pattern of sexual behavior and desire. According to Collins, stereotypes that emerge from such a notion vary according to gender, not to individual characteristics (129). Black men are seen as potential rapists, a threat mainly to the purity of white women, and black women are considered potential prostitutes, object of the sexual desire of white and black men. Consequently, as Collins explains:

> Black people experience a highly visible sexualized racism, one where the visibility of Black bodies themselves reinscribes the hypervisibility of Black

> men and women's alleged sexual deviancy. Because US understandings of race rely on biological categories that, while renegotiated, cannot be changed – skin color is permanent – Black hypersexuality is conceptualized as being intergenerational and resistant to change. (130)

The hypersexuality attributed to black people, in this sense, is taken as something as inherent to their bodies as the race that their skin color allegedly marks. Similarly to race, hypersexuality is seen as something passed along the generations and impossible to be changed.

The female black body has suffered a kind of oppression that is different from that suffered by the black male body, since it is the one capable of generating inside itself new racialized bodies. Dionne Brand argues that "[i]n many senses the Black body is one of the most regulated bodies in the Diaspora. Perhaps the most regulated body is the female body, any female body, but the Black body is a close and symbolic second" (*A Map to the Door of No Return* 37). Being both black and female, black women's bodies are then the site of intense regulation. Such a regulation can be particularly perceived in terms of sexuality and seems to have begun under the US chattel slavery. According to Naomi Zack, "black female slaves became the object of sexual desire to white slave owners because money could be made if they bred them, and more money could be made if they themselves bred them" ("The American Sexualization of Race" 150). Put differently, the black female body has been seen, since slavery, as a tool for the reproduction of work force and for the satisfaction of the slave owner's sexual desire and economic interests.

The black female body, in this sense, has been reduced to its alleged reproductive potential and hypersexuality. In Collins' words:

> If Black slave women could be portrayed as having excessive sexual appetites, then increased fertility should be the expected outcome. By suppressing the nurturing that African-American women might give their own children which

> would strengthen Black family networks, and by forcing Black women to work in the field, "wet nurse" White children, and emotionally nurture their White owners, slave owners effectively tied the controlling images of jezebel and mammy to the economic exploitation inherent in the institution of slavery. (*Black Feminist Thought* 81-82)

The economic dimension of the sexualization of the black female slaves, therefore, is based on the control over those women's fertility and nurturing capacity to sustain the white slave owner and his family, in detriment of the nurturance of their own black families.

After the slaves' emancipation in the US, black women's reproductive capacity started to be seen as economically damaging to the whole society, giving rise to a denigrated image of black women as irresponsible mothers, whose children become a burden for social welfare (Collins, *Black Feminist Thought* 132). Collins relates this stereotype of the "welfare mother" to the image of the black matriarch, who "represents the sexually aggressive woman, one who emasculates Black men because she will not permit them to assume roles as Black patriarchs" (84). Both images, as well as that of the sexually aggressive jezebel (or her more contemporary version, the hoochie, who acts like an insatiable prostitute), are supposed to represent women who are not associated with the ideal of passivity often attributed to the idealized image of women by society.

In black women's speculative fiction, those stereotyped images have frequently been contested. In such works, as Kinitra Brooks puts it, the black female body "demonstrates a power that allows for personal explorations of pleasure and pain and the possibilities for socio-political change within the black community" (1). In the stories by Butler, Hopkinson, and Due analyzed here, possibilities of living a free sexuality and taking over the nurturing mother role in benefit of their communities replace the marginalized, oppressed existence historically reserved for black women in society. Sexuality can be read in these stories in the

characterization of the black female body's desires and practices through the symbolism of blood that relates to notions of sexuality and nurturing.

My comparative analysis in this chapter starts by indicating how the notion of sexuality is represented in general in the stories, to then demonstrate how the main characters' identities are constructed in terms of sexuality. After that, I explain how the fundamental role the women in the stories have in their communities, which I discuss in the previous chapter, can be read in relation to their sexuality. More specifically, I investigate how they negotiate their sexual desires and practices with this community bond. Finally, I point out how the *nova* presented in the stories can also be read as sexualized.

1. Sexuality and Blood

In the four stories analyzed here, the meanings of blood in relation to abjection, life, and sexual exacerbation can be applied to identify an implicit discussion about sexuality. Blood is important in the specific notion of sexuality that informs each story, being at the basis not only of the construction of abjection for the female black body, but also of sexual desire and relations among the characters. Such relations challenge the patterns of normative heterosexism often prescribed by patriarchal ideology.

In Butler' *Fledgling*, sexuality can be read mainly in two ways: in the relationships Ina have with each other and in the relationships they have with humans, both made possible by blood. About this latter, Ali Brox affirms that "[t]he Ina/human relationships exemplify various inclinations: the Ina have no reservations or prohibitions about interracial, homosexual, or pedophilic sex between Ina and their humans, and multiple sexual partners are encouraged for both the Ina and their symbionts" (393). Thus, Ina's alternative sexuality can be seen as more related to homosexuality and bisexuality, being subversive in relation to traditional human

sexual norms. Ina have sexual relations with their symbionts, regardless of their gender and even their age, and blood plays a fundamental role in such relations.

Sexual arousal is triggered by the Ina's bite when they feed on their symbiont's blood, hence culminating in a sexual act. The intense pleasures both parties feel during the feeding and sexual intercourse relates to the physical dependence they have on one another, which seems to be due to "an instinct for self-preservation," as the female Ina Joan Braithwaite suggests (270). It is explained as something biological, so much so that lack of physical contact can even lead to the symbionts' death. Iosif, Shori's father, affirms that the symbionts "die of strokes or heart attacks" if their Ina is not there "to take the extra red blood cells that [their] venom encourages [the symbionts'] bodies to make" (80). As a natural survival mechanism, the venom in Ina's saliva stimulates an increase in the production of blood in the symbionts' bodies, making the sexual acts among them become frequent. Even though the effects of Ina's saliva on the symbionts blood are described as an addiction, as discussed in the previous chapter, they bring more benefits than damage. Besides improvements in the symbionts' immune system, life span, physical conditions, and even memory, Ina venom injected in their blood enhance the pleasure they feel during their sexual intercourse with their Ina. For this reason, blood seems to be what makes possible deeper sexual relations between Ina and humans. Since such relations do not depend on the symbiont's age, gender, or sexual orientation, but on the appeal their blood have for the Ina, their interconnections through blood can also be understood as bringing alternative sexual experiences for both species.

However, it is important to notice that while human sexual norms do not apply to human/Ina relationships, they resonate in Ina's sexual relations with each other. This is so because procreation is possible only with other Ina mates, in that only heterosexuality is encouraged among them. Their sexual relations with other Ina are extremely controlled, to the point that males and females have to live in separate houses even after mating. Iosif, refers to

these rules when he tries to explain that Shori is “a little too old to be sharing territory with the adult males of [her] family – with any adult Ina male since [she is] too young to mate” (79). He implies that it could be dangerous for her, further explaining that “as [her] body changes,… [she] will be perceived more and more as an available female”, even by her brothers and her own father (80). And even though Iosif affirms that they would not hurt her because their rationality and morality can control their instincts, he suggests the need to avoid pedophilia and incest when he communicates his urgency of finding Ina mates for her in other families. Yet, his concern with finding mates for Shori to guarantee safe procreation is still invested with heteronormative values, reflecting at first glance an attempt to control women’s sexuality.

It can be said that the sexual practices among Ina, as extremely normative, reflect Foucault’s arguments about the social control of sexuality. According to him, discourses about sex have been produced in order “to expel from reality the forms of sexuality that were not amenable to the strict economy of reproduction: to say no to unproductive activities, to banish casual pleasures, to reduce or exclude practices whose object was not procreation” (1: 36). The relationship among Ina is controlled in this way, while sexual relations with humans, since it does not produce offspring, can be undertaken only for pleasure. They have the choice of feeding on random humans, but they achieve a more complete satisfaction when feeding and having sex with their symbionts.

Kristin Lillvis approaches the two kinds of sexual relationship Ina engage in using the notions of sex for procreation and sex for recreation. The difference between these two kinds of sex, according to her, “operates on a hierarchy… and with the positioning of reproduction over playing comes a ranking of heterosexual behavior over homosexual or lesbian relationships” (176). Indeed, the heteronormative relationships among Ina seem to be prioritized, so much so that Shori’s sexual intercourse with her symbionts is referred to as

"child-play" (80), something she can carry out despite her sexual immaturity in terms of Ina biological cycles. In tune with Lillvis's arguments, Margaret R. Border affirms:

> This prioritizing does send out an interesting message to Black women that men should not be ignored when searching for a romantic partner. However, Butler does not only limit relationships to include just one partner, which expands the aforementioned message – her Ina have polygamous relationships with multiple symbionts. (12-13)

Border is referring here mainly to the implications of Shori being black, which she relates to the common argument in conservative Black American thought that lesbian relationships are harmful for the survival of the black race. Although I agree with Border's point that heterosexuality is seen as priority by Butler's characters to guarantee race (or species) survival, I believe that more than being just represented in the novel, this priority is actually challenged.

The distinction between sex for recreation and for procreation can be understood as part of what Judith Butler calls heteronormative matrix of Western societies (194), which has been used to justify limitations for both women and homosexuals. Historically and traditionally, only heterosexual men have been allowed sex for recreation without moral judgment. I believe that Butler's novel does not draw from such a distinction, but rather undermines it. Among each other, Ina have sexual urges, animal-like instincts, but not the emotional bonds they have with their human symbionts. In this sense, the homosexual, interracial, and interspecies relationships that a female Ina has with her symbionts expand rather than limit her possibilities of association.

The most thought-provoking aspect of Ina sexuality presented in Butler's novel is in the fact that it renders the females more powerful than the males. Brook explains this fact to Shori and her other symbionts:

> Venom from Ina females is more potent than venom from males.… It has something to do with the way prehistoric Ina females used to get and keep mates. … long ago, groups of sisters competed to capture groups of brothers, and the competition was chemical. If a group of sisters had the venom to hold a group of brothers, they were more likely to have several healthy children, and their sons would have a safe haven with their fathers when they came of age. And their daughters were more likely to have even more potent venom. (109)

The evolution of the Ina species throughout time is what explains the superiority of female Ina in their society, in an inversion of the historical domination of human males over females. Among the Ina, the females have always had the right of mating with many partners, which, among humans, has historically been a privilege granted to men. Shori's symbiont Brook identifies this inversion: "It's like the way males have competed among humans. There was a time when a big, strong man might push other men aside and marry a lot of wives, pass on his genes to a lot of children. His size and strength might be passed to his daughters as well as his sons, but his daughters were still likely to be smaller and weaker than his sons" (109).

Ironically, the Ina women are always stronger than their men, even physically. Butler in this way imagines a world in which biological determinism results in women's superiority, as this passage suggests: "Ina children, male and female, wind up with more potent venom, but the female's is still more potent than the male's. In that sense, the Ina are a kind of matriarchy. And a little thing like Shori might be a real power" (109). As Florian Bast puts it, "[t]he reason for the Ina living in a matriarchy is firmly based on Darwinian principles, and biological influences on both specific behavior and social constructions are undeniable" (4). Even though Ina rules encourage only heterosexual relationships among their people, the fact that women are in a controlling position opposes the supposed ideal of gender roles that Collins mentions (*Black Feminist Thought* 156). In Ina society, women are the active subjects on whom the men

depend. Interestingly, this point puts male Ina in a position similar to that of the human symbionts, as Brook observes: “Ina men are sort of like us, like symbionts. They become addicted to the venom of one group of sisters. That’s what it means to be mated. Once they’re addicted, they aren’t fertile with other females, and from time to time, they need their females” (109). The bond between Ina mates is made through blood exchange during their sexual relations, in a way similar to what happens in Ina-human intercourse. After being bitten by a group of female Ina sisters, male Ina, just like humans, are somehow marked as belonging to them, which makes them unfertile and even undesirable to other female Ina. In this sense, male Ina’s survival - as individuals, as a family, and as a species - will depend on their mates.

As a female black Ina-human hybrid, whose venom is described as being even more powerful than that of other female Ina, Shori’s characterization is more challenging to patriarchal ideologies. Anatol argues that through this characterization, “Butler reinforces notions of a more powerful female subject” and “subtly explore[s] issues such as Black women’s ‘willing’ participation in sexual liaisons with White masters and men of influence in the pre-Emancipation Americas” (*The Things that Fly in the Night* 183). Anatol is referring here to the freedom Shori has to choose her own partners, humans and Ina, regardless of the racial/species, class, and gender issues that has historically motivated the social control of black women’s relationships. Indeed, it can be observed that Shori’s blackness does not hinder her physical and emotional attachment to white men. When she looks for protection in the house of the male family her father had been negotiating with to become her mates, the Gordons, they are soon worried about the disastrous implications that their commitment to her can imply. Since all the sisters of a female family mate with all the brothers of a male family, and since Shori is the only surviving person of her family, she is the only chance the four unmated Gordon brothers have of procreating. If she happens to be unfertile when reaching adulthood, the Gordon’s lineage is doomed forever. In the same way, the older Gordons fear that Daniel’s

intense attraction to Shori, even though she is not mature yet, puts him in a too vulnerable position. If she tastes his blood and injects him with her venom, he will be inevitably attached to her, missing any future chance of mating with members of another female Ina family. It only does not happen because Shori is aware of this situation and restrains from biting Daniel in spite of her desire and his submission to her. Instead of being used by white men for sexual pleasure and breeding, Shori is the black young woman on whom they depend and to whom they develop a physiological, emotional, and psychological attachment. Nevertheless, instead of using a controlling position to subjugate the male Ina as human men often do to women (especially to black women, as previously discussed), Shori seems to choose to treat them sympathetically.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Butler's novel celebrates the idea of cooperation among different races/species through the symbiotic relationships between Ina and the humans they feed upon. This cooperation is extended to the level of sexual relations. First, because the act of feeding on blood resembles and actually includes a sexual intercourse, with its implications of pleasure and ecstasy for both Ina and humans. Second, because Ina can have both male and female human symbionts, in which case bisexuality becomes a more complete level of cooperation that crosses the limits of the normative heterosexism. Such a cooperation is not envisioned only by those Ina who oppose Shori's hybridity, as for them her sexuality is also seen as a threat to their purity as a species. In this sense, another point raised in *Fledgling* relates to the anxieties about interspecies sexual relations that reflect those about human interracial relations.

In fact, interracial coupling has historically been seen as problematic in the US, as "it reflected two ideas that the UNIA (Universal Negro Improvement Association) and white supremacists held in common: racial purity and the integrity of the women of their respective races" (Summers 29). The anxieties of the Silk family in relation to Shori's breeding reflect

this fear of impurity. In chapter 2, I argue that the Silks' belief in the genetic purity of the Ina species parallels the blood purity of the white race defended by nineteenth century theories. In chapter 1, I discuss Foucault's argument about the use of the symbolism of blood as carrier of racial characteristics in political discourses that aim at controlling reproduction of racial groups through a control of their sexuality (1:149). Bearing these two points in mind, I want to argue here that the Silks' plans to exterminate Shori and her family to prevent the breeding of Ina/human hybrids reflects the historical control of racial minorities by shedding their blood and regulating their reproduction. Brox reads the Silks' trial in the novel as indicating a concern about miscegenation, arguing that Butler may have included it in the narrative to imply that the verdict would "both reflect and create the vision of the future she [had] in mind" (401). This is so because, by sanctioning interspecies breeding, possible through genetic manipulation and Shori's breeding with male Ina, the Ina law system controls the reproduction of the species. In this sense, not only the Silks' racist attitudes but also the Ina legal institution seem to be engaged in a control of the new hybrid species that will spring from Shori.

Butler's representation of sexual norms in the novel, therefore, is complex and even ambiguous. On the one hand, Ina/human sexual relations suggest an alternative kind of sexuality, more open in terms of possible partners, exacerbated, free, and mutually satisfying. On the other hand, sexual relations among Ina are heteronormative, and their social norms guarantee that their animalistic sexual desire is controlled and directed only towards reproduction. At the same time, the female Ina's sexuality overpowers that of males, putting them in the fragile position of those who depend on the females' willingness to procreate. In both cases, blood plays an important role. It is at the basis of the relations Ina have with their symbionts, as they suck human blood and inject it with the venom that will guarantee their affective and sexual bonds. Besides, this same venom injected in the male Ina's blood marks them as their females' sexual partners and an alleged blood purity is believed to be guaranteed

by the heterosexual relationships Ina have with each other. As a hybrid girl, Shori is seen by most Ina as a possibility of improvement of the species, while the Silks believe that their purity will be polluted if she turns out to be able to bear children from Ina and/or human fathers. Butler's narrative seems to favor the Ina/human relations, by implying that Ina rules are debunked for resembling ancient patriarchal norms as, for example, in the necessity of officializing the mating between male and female families, of having the parents negotiate the mating of their children with other families, of keeping those families physically separated, and of prescribing sex only for reproduction. Even so, the superiority of the female Ina, supported by biological determinism, makes their society different from the patriarchal ones and resemble a matriarchy. I believe *Fledgling*, especially through the Ina-human relationships, suggests that a sexuality based on pleasure and freedom is a possible alternative to heteronormativity.

The blood the Ina drink and inject with their venom is the key to such alternative relationships, being what connects Ina and humans, as well as male and female Ina, in sexual and affective bonds. While some components of the venom have neurological and psychological effects, making the humans more suggestible to and needy for Ina's touch, others affect the production of blood, suggesting a disease. However, regardless of these facts that could cause abjection, the blood relations that involve sexual relations in the novel are presented as desirable and mutually beneficial. Abjection can be seen here only by the reader, who may confront these invasive body fluid exchanges with everyday experiences of diseases such as AIDS. But even so, Butler is careful enough to explain in the novel that Ina's venom keeps the symbionts safe from many diseases and improves their immune system, in an effect that is the opposite of that of the HIV virus.

In Hopkinson's "Greedy Choke Puppy," blood is emblematically associated with exacerbated sexuality. It is the soucouyant's hot blood of Jacky's family that makes this association, as Granny's words indicate: "We blood hot: hot for life, hot for youth" (180). The

soucouyant represents the danger of women's free sexuality, so much so that the legend is used as a cautionary tale for mothers and grandmothers to scare and discipline young girls. Kristeva's notion of abjection sheds light on this representation: as an abject, the soucouyant is repulsive and desirable at the same time. She is repulsive because she feeds on blood, brings death to her victims, and is able to take off her own skin to assume the form of a fireball or dripping flesh. She is desirable because by sucking the blood of young children, she extends her own life span, and by getting rid of her human skin, she is free, not only from the physical boundaries of matter but also from the metaphorical ones of social norms. The possibility of getting out of one's skin can be seen as a metaphor for crossing the social boundaries that, as Douglas suggests, are inscribed on the margins of the body (141). In this sense, by leaving her skin, a woman is free to act according to her own will and satisfy her lust, which in Hopkinson's story is a sexual lust symbolized by blood lust.

The soucouyant may also be analyzed as an example of what Barbara Creed calls the "monstrous-feminine," a concept based on what a society sees as "shocking, terrifying, horrific, abject" about female bodies (1). For Freud, men's fear of women's body derives from the child's comparison of the body of the father with that of the mother, when he concludes that the absence of a penis in the latter is due to castration (154). Joseph Campbell affirms that this fear is present in many different cultures under the myth of the *vagina dentata*, the toothed vagina that castrates (79). According to Creed, this myth, associated with vampire legends, may have been created to explain two causes for the flow of blood from the female body: menarche and defloration (66). Unable to understand the biological cycles of women's sexuality, ancient people believed that the bleeding was caused by a bite inside the vagina, which posited the danger of castration. As a vampire figure, the soucouyant drips blood when she takes off her skin and the danger she brings by sucking her victims' blood is even worse

than castration for it brings death. Her blood hunger represents sexual lust, and she is abject not only for being a woman, but also for being a vampire-like figure.

The abjection of the soucouyant is even enhanced by her opposition to another body that is already abject: the maternal one. Besides Freud, for whom the mother's body can suggest castration, other writers have tried to explain the fear of that body. Kristeva associates it with Freud's notion of primal repression and the psychoanalytical postulation that the subject is constituted through a self-identification as different, separate from the mother's body (*Powers of Horror* 13). She also relates it to the incest taboo and with a fear of the maternal body's generative power and matriliniality (77). Judith Butler also explains it in relation to the logic of reproduction: "The classical association of femininity with materiality can be traced to a set of etymologies which link matter with mater and matrix (or the womb) and, hence, with a problematic of reproduction" (*Bodies that Matter* 31). Through this logic, maternity is instituted as compulsory for women: "The clearly paternal law that sanctions and requires the female body to be characterized primarily in terms of its reproductive function is inscribed on that body as the law of its natural necessity" (*Gender Trouble* 92-93). When it comes to women's sexuality, therefore, the social imposition of maternity has been crucial for the control of their bodies, in a way that sexual practices not aimed at reproduction have often been discouraged and sexual freedom prohibited.

As Anatol argues, the soucouyant can represent both sexual freedom and evil anti-maternal tendencies ("Feminist Reading of Soucouyants" 38-39). For being sexually free, she acts against the prescriptions of maternity, which is at the same time imposed as an ideal and feared: she feeds on babies' blood instead of nurturing them or bearing babies herself. It is important to remember here that, as discussed above, the black female body has been reduced to its reproductive function since slavery, when black women's fertility was controlled to serve the economic interests of the white slave owners. Bearing this fact in mind, the soucouyant's

act of freely indulging in her blood lust can be considered rebellious in relation to the regulation of black women's sexuality and fertility.

In *Brown Girl in the Ring*, this relation between sexual freedom and anti-maternal behavior can also be observed. It is found in the acts of Mi-Jeanne, who abandoned her own daughter to live what she thought would be a more independent life with her father, free from the matriarchal control of Gros-Jeanne. Nevertheless, as her father imprisons her soul in the calabash, she is transformed into a female-monster, a duppy. The description of the duppy in the novel brings it closer to the soucouyant figure, as it can materialize into a fireball that sucks the blood of human victims, usually street children that Rudy sacrifices, as the following citation shows: "The fireball charged [Ti-Jeanne] again. She felt its heat, felt hot talons score deep trails through her cheek. … Fingers of flame tugged at her jacket as the duppy pulled her close to itself, eyes begging forgiveness, to lick the blood hotly off her torn cheek" (203). In this scene, the duppy/Mi-Jeanne, unable to disobey Rudy's orders, attacks her own daughter. Differently from the soucouyant, then, the duppy is not completely free, as she is bound to do the evil services her master desires. This patriarchal power that Rudy represents proves to be even stronger and more destructive than Gros-Jeanne`s matriarchal power.

The description of the soucouyant that Ti-Jeanne sees in her dream also suggests anti-maternity, as she states: "She ol'-lady dugs dripping blood instead of milk" (44). This image of an aged female body dripping blood from the nipples enhances the inherent abjection of the maternal body that spills milk. It also communicates the demonization of the female body that does not serve the so-called natural maternal function.

Ti-Jeanne is tempted by such anti-maternal tendencies. She shows impatience with her baby in many moments of the novel, revealing symptoms of postpartum depression, which also seems to have been a problem for Mi-Jeanne. The baby is somehow an obstacle for the satisfaction of her sexual desires and emotional needs, since it is for his sake that she decides

to abandon Tony, whose drug addiction would prevent him from properly providing for his son. This obstacle is clear in the passages of the novel when Ti-Jeanne is almost surrendering to the sexual attraction she feels for Tony only to be brought back to an awareness of her maternal obligations when the baby starts crying or her breasts start dripping milk. In both stories by Hopkinson, therefore, women's sexuality is presented as being intensified by supernatural powers and contrasted with a maternal role. Such a role is prioritized in the stories, and the characters who cannot negotiate their sexuality with maternity pay a high price.

However, it is important to notice that the mothers in *Brown Girl in the Ring* are not completely deprived from sexual involvement. Gros-Jeanne, for example, after banishing Rudy from her house for beating her, finds another partner among the Afro-Caribbean religions practitioners. She is then accused of adultery by her own daughter, who uses the mother's sexual and affective needs as another excuse to run away from her. Ti-Jeanne also surrenders to her passion for Tony in the only sex scene in the novel. Her desire is intensified at the thought that he is sleeping downstairs and desiring her too. At first, she even refrains from masturbating for feeling ashamed of doing that in the presence of her baby. Later, when she decides to leave her room and meet Tony, she prefers to run to the barn so as to have sex with him in a place where Gros-Jeanne cannot hear them. Although the details of the scene are not narrated, we are told that when Ti-Jeanne goes back to the house to feed her baby, "[s]he remember[s] Tony's mouth on [her breasts] earlier, the game he'd made of licking the drops of milk that arousal had squeezed from her nipples" (81). The maternal body here is presented as sexualized, as the breasts that feed are still aroused by sexual excitement.

This representation of mothers in Hopkinson's novel can be read in relation to Brand's criticism about the way black female sexuality has been portrayed in Caribbean literature. She argues that talking about this sexuality is usually avoided:

> In a world where Black women's bodies are so sexualized, avoiding the body as sexual is a strategy. So is writing in the most conservative term, striving in the text for conformity to the norm of monogamous heterosexual male gratification. Leaving pleasure to men, that's a strategy, too. I know that not talking about the sexual Black female self at all is as much an anti-colonial strategy as armed struggle. But what a trap. ("This Body for Itself" 27).

Even though she recognizes the importance of avoiding the reproduction of images of exacerbated black female sexuality as an act of resistance, Brand points to the danger of repeating the same discourses that regulate black women's bodies. One way of avoiding discussing these women's sexuality is to represent them as asexual, emphasizing maternity instead of sexual desire and pleasure. Janice Lee Liddell criticizes this representation of black female bodies by Caribbean writers:

> The image of mother – giver and nurturer of life; teacher and instiller of values and mores – has indeed become one of the most persistent of Caribbean archetypes. In the Caribbean as in nearly every place in the world, any criticism of this most celebrated and procreative human role will more than likely be met with wild-eyed contempt by women and men, both of whom have so internalized the myths of motherhood as to ignore its harsh realities. … It has been difficult for women – and practically impossible for men – to admit that this most honorable woman-destiny can be and usually is both restrictive and debilitating; that society's pressure to be "the good mumma" almost always obstructs more creative opportunities than it provides. (321)

Liddell is referring here to the fact that the imposition of maternity as compulsory for women is regulatory and limiting. Such criticism is also in accordance with Collins's argument that

black women have been sexualized since slavery through the economic exploitation of their bodies for breeding.

The maternal roles that Hopkinson's characters assume depart from the restrictive images that Liddell and Brand criticize. The narrative in *Brown Girl in the Ring*, through the examples of Gros-Jeane and Ti-Jeanne discussed above, suggests that these mothers have a satisfying sexual life. The subversive power of this representation is questioned only by the presence of guilt and shame in the minds of those women as they struggle with the moral values that might have taught them that maternity and sexuality are two opposite spheres. In some sense, this guilt has a function similar to Granny's role in "Greedy Choke Puppy:" to restrain the female characters from forgetting their responsibilities with their children and completely indulging in sexual pleasure.

The mothers in Hopkinson's novel can also be seen as undermining the stereotype of the supposedly irresponsible black mother that Collins refers to (*Black Feminist Thought* 132), since, despite being poor and single, they are able to provide for their children without the help of the government. The Canadian healthcare is actually inefficient in the decadent future of the story. Gros-Jeanne, as the nurturing grandmother, is the one that helps Mi-Jeanne and Ti-Jeanne take care of their babies until they have conditions of doing so by themselves. In this sense, she relates to an image that Brand identifies as typical of Caribbean women's stories: the supportive grandmother who offers "protection from resistance to the outside" ("This Body for Itself" 36). Moreover, through the characterization of Gros-Jeanne Hopkinson also contests the stereotype of the black matriarch that emasculates men (Collins, *Black Feminist Thought* 84) In the novel, the male characters' inability to conform to the heterosexual patriarchal ideal is not caused by the women's control of the household, but by their own refusal to take over their responsibilities as fathers and husbands in order to satisfy their personal interests.

The implications of the troubled relationships between black men and black women in Hopkinson's novel seem to reflect what Collins explains about "the heterosexist, Eurocentric gender ideology" that posits "White masculinity and White femininity as models for African Americans to emulate" (*Black Feminist Thought* 153). According to this ideology, men must be active to control and protect the women, who must be passive. Nevertheless, the historical conditions that characterized black men's lives as different from that of white ones make undertaking this supposed ideal masculine role a difficult task. Black men have initially been constructed as "sexually violent rapists, as brutes, and as irresponsible boys who fail to marry the mothers of their children and financially support [them]," and the very powerlessness they had under slavery rendered them unable to fit "manhood as defined by White propertied men" (156). After the abolition of slavery in the US, many black men, resentful of the treatment given to female slaves, called upon themselves the task of "protecting Black women from both economic and sexual exploitation" (156). However, Collins affirms:

> this important choice to protect Black women, for many men, became harnessed to ideologies of Black masculinity in such a way that Black manhood became dependent on Black women's willingness to accept protection. Within this version of masculinity, a slippery slope emerges between protecting Black women and controlling them. This control is often masked, all in defense of widespread beliefs that Black men must be in charge in order to regain their lost manhood. (*Black Feminist Thought* 157)

In this sense, control and possession of black women become a requirement for black men to recover an ideal of masculinity that was denied them during slavery. Black women, in turn, have to submit to black men's control and renounce any kind of independence in order to help them recover their so-called lost masculinity. As Collins puts it, "Black men who feel that they cannot be men unless they are in charge can be highly threatened by assertive Black

women, especially those in their own households" (*Black Feminist Thought* 157). This is the case of Rudy in Hopkinson's novel, as he complains that the women in Gros-Jeanne's family are always on his way. The ex-wife who was assertive enough to expel him from home and who can provide for their daughter and granddaughter better than he could reminds him that he cannot control her and does not fulfill his so-called masculine role. Hence, the contesting function of the matriarch role in *Brown Girl in the Ring*: it shows that women are able to provide for themselves and for their community the protection and nurturance that their men cannot provide.

In Due's *The Living Blood*, the Life Brothers, similarly to the Ina in Butler's novel, can also be read as an alternative race with an alternative kind of sexuality. In this case, too, blood is important for the characterization of this sexuality, as the living blood can enhance the senses and the members of the clan even develop techniques of deep meditation and technologies such as spring water treated with chemicals to affect perception and lead to transcendental pleasure. However, as in the case of the Ina, there is here the ironic fact that the people who have alternative ways of experiencing sexual pleasure are patriarchal in their control of the sharing of the supernatural gifts in their blood.

A fundamental point in Due's imaginary clan is the fact that its members are exclusively male. Their blood is sacred and cannot be shared with the human women they live with throughout different times and places. Gina Wisker argues that in this way "Due critiques the withholding of power and secrets from women" ("Your Buried Ghost" 80). Going beyond Wisker's analysis of this novel, I argue here that this portrayal of a misguided male agency in contrast with a beneficial female agency resonates the debates about black men's civil-rights movements in the United States that usually excluded black women. The power and agency granted to those who possess the living blood that is denied to women in the novel may represent the right to express oneself and to take a more expressive part in the black activism

that was denied to black women in the US past. The Life Brothers' ideology, in this sense, can be read as representing the black men's anxiety to be superior and control women that Collins explains in her work (*Black Feminist Thought* 156).

As previously mentioned, the leader and creator of the Life Brothers is a man, Khaldun, who is worshiped as a god by the members of the clan. Although he is portrayed as a benevolent figure, his overwhelming power and knowledge can be compared to those of ancient leaders of patriarchal civilizations. I believe this ambiguity in the characterization of Khaldun in the novel can be better explained in relation to Due's rewriting of the links between Christianity and African culture also discussed in the previous chapter. Khaldun confesses that he was turned immortal in a ritual in which he was killed and then resurrected by Jesus's blood. Besides, the Life Colony was created in the ancient city that is considered the Ethiopian religious center, Lalibela. For these connections, Khaldun is portrayed as a spiritual leader with Christian values, seeming less oppressive in the eyes of Jessica and her family, who are devoted Christians. He allows Jessica's and Fana's presence in the village and plans to prepare the girl, who is more powerful than himself, to take his place as the leader of the immortals. Those who take up the role of patriarchal oppressors in the novel, like the Silks in *Fledgling*, are the Searchers, the members of the clan who travel around the world tracking the brothers to prevent them from breaking their rules. Among them, Kaleb expresses intense sexism in his hatred for David, who shared their sacred blood with women, and in his despise for Jessica and Fana.

The control of sexuality in *The Living Blood* can be read, then, not so much as a way of preventing mixed offspring (hybrids of immortals and mortal humans) as in *Fledgling*, but to guarantee the maintenance of patriarchal power. The Life Brothers are allowed to have human wives and children, but they are prohibited to share with them their secret, to say nothing of granting them the powers of the living blood. Fana is conceived as an immortal inadvertently, as neither Dawit (then called David) nor Jessica knew she was pregnant when he performed

the ritual and injected her then dead body with his blood. Born immortal, different from the Life Brothers who were transformed by Khaldun, Fana is more powerful than any of them, hence the threat she represents. Similarly to Shori, this young black girl is powerful in such a way that no men, mortal or immortal, can control her. This image deviates from traditional representations of black women that have been historically discriminated and silenced in the Americas.

Although the arrival of Jessica and Fana at this men-only society is seen as a political threat by most sexist Life Brothers, it is welcomed by Khaldun himself and other members of the clan. They see in Fana more possibilities for the future of their group, and in the sequel to the novel, entitled *Blood Colony* (2008), she really substitutes for Khaldun as the leader of a new immortal community set in the Florida. She represents a new agency granted to women, even though as a child she still needs to be guided so as not to misuse her powers, similarly to the women in Hopkinson's stories.

Another factor through which sexuality can be read in Due's novel is in the relationship between Jessica and Dawit. The relationship that looked perfect, between a young middle-class journalist and a bright, charming university professor, who formed an ideal middle-class black family with their daughter, Kira, is spoiled by sexism. When Jessica finds out, in the first novel of the series, My Soul to Keep (1997), about Dawit's real nature and the terrible things he did to keep the Life Brothers' secret, she feels she had been living a lie. Dawit's role evokes the image of the bad husband stereotypically reproduced by culture and that also characterizes Rudy in *Brown Girl in the Ring*: the man who gets violent toward his wife and kids in an effort to control them and prove an ideal of masculinity. After his unsuccessful attempt to turn Jessica and Kira into immortals, the American media tells his story as that of a serial killer who had once been nicknamed "Mr. Perfect" but then tried to kill his own wife and child, as an example of black male rage. This version of the story is incorrect, since Kira's murder was not

intentional, but even so, the fact that throughout his immortal existence Dawit had killed many of his human children to protect the immortal's secret proves that his monstrosity was not the exaggerated creation of sensationalist newspapers. In this sense, despite the fact that Dawit, living as David in the US, had already achieved the so-called ideal of masculinity, he could not afford losing control over the women in his family by granting them the immortal gift. His Life Brothers, Khaldun included, consider it a weakness on his part to try to share his immortality with Jessica and Kira out of absolute love for them and the desire to live with them forever. When they order Dawit to abandon Jessica and go back to the colony in Africa to redeem himself, his compliant acceptance of that penalty shows that for him his brothers and their ideology are still more important. Jessica then raises her new baby, Fana, in the same way so many black single mothers raise theirs: with the help of the other women in their families. Therefore, the relationship between Jessica and Dawit is spoiled by what can be interpreted as domestic violence, abandonment, and sexism.

When Dawit and Jessica reunite for the sake of Fana, their relationship seems to change mainly because of their communal interest in protecting their daughter, but also because of the living blood. Their immortal blood enhances the physical sensations, so that proximity with Dawit causes intense sexual arousal in Jessica. This can be perceived in the scene when they are bathing in the hot springs in the colony: "As [Jessica] looked at his virtually hairless chest and the thick cluster of wiry hair beneath his navel, she remembered the milky muskiness of David's private male scent, and the way she had always savored it. She felt her nipples tingle" (303). Finding herself in a moment of intimacy with her husband after a long time being apart from and resentful of him, Jessica is uncertain about his feelings for her, but the attraction she feels is clear. She had been trying to convince herself that they should be together only for the sake of Fana, that their relation had shifted, as "if they behaved more like brother and sister" (304). However, the sex scene that follows this passage shows that sexual attraction between

them is still intense, even though Jessica is not sure about the real source of the intense pleasure she feels and wonders: “Was it the springs? Her long abstinence? Or was it the blood? Sexual touch had never felt like this to her” (304). Indeed, the sex scene between Jessica and Dawit suggests that the chemicals in the water and the living blood were able to enhance the pleasure she feels, empowering her in the sexual act in a way she had never felt while mortal. This intense sexual satisfaction had been so far known only by the Life Brothers, who engage in sexual acts with numerous women throughout their immortal existence. Now that Jessica has the living blood in her veins, this pleasure is also possible for her and her sexuality is somehow freed.

The narrator presents the inner thoughts and perspective of the two characters about the episode. While Jessica wonders if her willingness to be intimate with Dawit again and the pleasure she feels is only possible because of the springs’ chemicals, he seems to have used this possibility on purpose to make his wife less reluctant. Ironically, what can be considered as just another of his attempts to control her and make her more suggestible ends up empowering her. A sense of frailty is suggested when Dawit feels like a teenager in the presence of Jessica, this attractive woman for whom he cannot control his passion and who he anxiously wishes to attract (305). She does not even perceive it, but her sexual appeal, enhanced by the hot spring and by the living blood, changes Dawit’s intention of submitting her to his wishes. He becomes more aware of his role as a husband and father that listens to the opinions of his wife instead of imposing his. Therefore, the mutual sexual satisfaction that is made possible by the living blood also leads to a complicity in the other levels of Jessica and Dawit’s relationship and from this moment on they leave behind the stereotypical roles of submissive black woman and violent black man in a troubled relationship to assume those of an assertive black woman and a supportive black man.

In sum, sexuality in *The Living Blood* is discussed through the representation and undermining of sexist notions. The Life Brother's refusal to share the living blood with women is supported by a discourse according to which black women should be passive and supportive of black men's struggles for agency in society. The living blood itself, as well as other technologies created in the clan, such as the hot spring's chemicals, represent the power to attempt to control one's own body that has been denied to black people historically, especially to black females, since slavery. With them, women can enjoy their own bodies and be the masters of their own pleasure instead of submitting to white men's sexual and economic interests and to black men's necessity to assert their so-called lost masculinity. Moreover, the very fact that Fana, even though she is still a young girl, is a powerful being, destined to rule even other black immortals, suggests that in Due's imaginary world the role reserved for black women is similar to the one in Butler's narrative: they are the bearers of the future of the species, not only for their reproductive potential, but also for their irrefutable agency. The living blood is what makes this empowerment possible, since it triggers Jessica's sexuality and grants Fana physical abilities that make her too strong to be controlled. Besides, as I discuss later in this chapter, Jessica's and Fana's willingness to share their living blood with mortals is also what makes of them nurturing figures in the new blood colony they start in the US.

Finally, it is must also be observed that the abjection implicit the soucouyant's and Shori's sexualities is not present in Jessica's. This can be explained by the negative connotations suggested by the vampire figures' blood drinking, which is at the core of the sexual exacerbation associated with them. Instead of feeding on other people's blood, Jessica gives her blood away. The serum made of her living blood is characterized as precious in the novel, being sought by desperately sick people and by greedy men. The living blood does not make Jessica and Fana female monsters, it makes them powerful agents and nurturers. I believe this is so because of the religious connotation of blood used in the novel: it is Christ's blood,

invested with the biblical meanings of purification, atonement, and life. Hence the positive implications of Jessica's living blood even for her sexuality. Due's novel can be said to use the symbolism of blood to suggest sexual and gender empowerment, while in Hopkinson's and Butler's works it implies sexual exacerbation and sexual freedom.

2. Resisting Social Control: The Black Protagonists' Sexual Identities

In the four stories analyzed here, the main characters, all black women, are confronted with norms that try to regulate their sexualities. In *Fledgling* and *The Living Blood,* Shori and Fana, respectively, are still children, but their breeding potential is the target of patriarchal figures who see it as profitable for the community (Iosif, the Gordons, and Khaldun) or harmful (the Silks and the Searchers). In *Brown Girl in the Ring* and *The Living Blood*, Ti-Jeanne and Jessica have to refrain from completely indulging in their heterosexual desires in order to dedicate part of their lives to their children. In "Greedy Choke Puppy," Jacky refuses to submit her sexual impulses to a control and is punished for that. Although all of these protagonists are identified as women, their sexual practices, relations and the ways they deal with external control vary in each story.

In *Fledgling*, Shori learns about her identity in terms of gender and sexuality throughout the novel. It is interesting to notice that her memory loss at the beginning of the novel has also affected her understanding of female Ina sexuality and gender roles. She is able to remember some facts instinctively, as when she is alone with Wright and realizes that she is old enough to have sex with a human man, but others she only learns when she meets other Ina.

As Anatol puts it:

> Butler's choice of a young, Black female – an intersection of three of the least empowered populations in societies of the African diaspora – [is] quite provocative. Although childlike in appearance and without full access to her

> personal, cultural, and historical legacies because of her amnesia – a metaphor for her position as African in the Americas – she becomes a more than capable matriarch when the male side of her Ina family is murdered. (*The Things that Fly in the Night* 183-84)

In this sense, the fact that Shori is a fifty-three-year-old woman who looks like a ten-year-old black girl challenges stereotypical representations of the black female body as overtly sexualized and as a mere object of male desire. Shori can pass in many ways - for a human, for a child, for a heterosexual person - and this influences the way she is seen by the other characters and by the reader. When Wright first meets her, for example, he believes she is a human child, until she bites him and he realizes there is something different about her because of the sexual pleasure he feels. Examining her body, he says: "No breasts… Pity. I guess you really are a kid. Or maybe… Are you sure you're female?" "I'm female… Of course I am" (18). Here Wright is confused by the fact that a little black girl who does not have the characteristics that he appreciates in women's bodies (big breasts) can make him feel so much sexual arousal. As her body is different from the one he idealizes, he questions the very possibility of her being biologically female and is convinced of that only when he sees her genitalia. Shori, on the other hand, is certain of that, even though she has not recovered her memory yet. This is one of the first aspects of her identity she is aware of in the novel, even earlier than her awareness about her appearance. When Shori sees her own reflection in a mirror for the first time, she does not recognize it: "I touched my face and the short fuzz of black hair on my head, and I tried to see someone I recognized. I was a lean, sharp-faced, large-eyed, brown-skinned person – a complete stranger" (18). This characterization of a black girl as having masculine features evokes a way of imagining the black female body that is stereotypically represented, as Collins observes: "Black women can be depicted as ugly women who too closely resemble men (big, Black, and short hair) and because they are aggressive like

men, become stigmatized as 'bitches'" (*Black Sexual Politics* 125). Except for the fact that she is small, this description relates to Shori, mainly to the way she is seen by the Ina who despise her. Her assertive ways, particularly when she confronts the attacks of the Silks and of Katharine Dahlman in the trial, exemplify this "bitch" attitude that her opponents call outrageous and use to disqualify her for not having Ina genes.

Moreover, Shori's exacerbated, bisexual desire in a body of a black girl is extremely disturbing, for it implies disruptions of the taboo of pedophilia and, less shocking for contemporary readers, interracial sex and homosexuality. For humans, she looks like a child but the fact that she is fifty-three somehow gives her an adult consciousness, which dismisses an accusation of child abuse that might otherwise be committed by her symbionts. On the other hand, Shori is really considered a child by the Ina people, as she will only be mature enough to procreate when she is about seventy years old. For them, her sexual relations with her symbionts is more like a play, a recreation, in a way that the childhood symbols that society commonly seeks to preserve (sexual purity, innocence) are not threatened by humans. In this way, the fact that Shori's black body is pubescent may also be read as a comment on the sexual abuses suffered by black women's bodies throughout the history of slavery and discrimination. The possibilities of such abuses are dismissed in the novel because her sexuality is characterized in a way that cannot be classified by humans. Shori is in many ways stronger than both humans and other Ina, which makes her not as vulnerable as she may seem.

The details about Shori's sexuality are unveiled as she meets other members of her species. It is only when she meets other Ina women that she learns about gender roles in her own species. Having lost her Ina mothers and sisters, she has no other close female relatives and interacts only with some of them at the council meeting. Before that, she confesses to feel uncomfortable with her lack of knowledge: "It's very strange to be an Ina female and yet have no clear idea of what Ina females are like" (209). She is advised to talk to the Braithwaite

sisters, her closest female relatives, although they may be too old to tell her about "being a young Ina woman" in the present (209). The vision of the two sisters' bodies, however, helps Shori to have a better understanding of Ina's codes of femininity:

> Joan and Margaret Braithwaite were a head shorter than Daniel, but still taller than Celia or Brook. They were very straight, very pale women in white shirts and long black skirts. … Their chests, beneath their clean, handsome, long-sleeved shirts, were as flat as mine. I suspected that that meant I would not be growing the breasts Wright liked on women. Yet as ignorant as I was, even I wouldn't have mistaken these two for men. There was something undeniably feminine and interestingly seductive about them, even to me. Was it their scents? (210)

Shori understands the particularities of the Ina female body by comparing it to the human female body. Hers seems to be in-between, since she is black, as her two female symbionts also are, and shorter than the average Ina female. On the other hand, she learns that the flatness of her breasts must be an Ina characteristic, which goes against what is considered sexually attractive in North America. It can be noticed that Butler's characterization of Ina femininity draws on physical features, but also on physiological aspects, such as the scent. The Ina are able to distinguish males from females through their scents, but dress code and behavior function as visual marks of gender difference among them as well. This fact resonates Judith Butler's arguments about gender performativity, which also explains the insistence among the Ina that Shori learns their ways from other Ina women. Therefore, despite appearing at first to be strongly based on biological aspects, gender in *Fledgling* is also culturally constructed and performed.

In addition, female Ina sexual appeal as described in the novel is more related to sensorial aspects (especially their scents and the power of the venom in their saliva) than to

physical appearance. This is the reason why Shori, despite looking like a little boyish black girl, can cause so much sexual arousal in Ina males and humans. Her venom is described by other Ina as having a stronger hold and her scent as extremely interesting (much more than the Braithwaite's, Shori learns later, because she is much younger). One of the elderly Gordons even says that she has "the scent of a female who will have no trouble producing children" (218), indicating once more Ina's main concern with reproduction. For her human symbionts, the pleasure she can give is intense and irresistible. Although Shori's appearance does not match either the human or the Ina ideals of female body, her sexual appeal and her breeding potential are powerful.

The relationships Shori has in the novel are also important for understanding how her sexuality is characterized. As mentioned above, the superiority of Ina females, together with the improvements granted by her black human genes, make of Shori's body impossible to be controlled in the way black women's sexuality has been historically repressed. Her encounters with Daniel Gordon are among the best examples of her sexual agency in the novel. When Shori has the chance to be alone with him for the first time, she reaffirms her intention to mate with him and his brothers, but restrains from having more intimacy with him at the moment. She confesses to be surprised to feel desire for him: "He was Ina, not human, not a potential symbiont, not a temporary food source. And yet I wanted very much to bite into the tender flesh of his throat, to taste him, to let the sweet, smoky scent of him become a flavor as well" (218-19). She feels, in other words, the same impulses when she identifies potential symbionts: the urge to bite them, injecting their blood with her venom, and having sex with them. Daniel, in turn, confesses that he "half-hoped" she would bite him, that her memory loss would make her "simply give in to [his] scent, his nearness" (219). She, however, proves to be capable of controlling her impulses and resisting his attraction, as this passage shows:

> I stopped and slipped down off his lap because I wanted so badly to taste him, drink him, to lie beneath that tall, lean body and feel him inside me.
>
> He watched me, left the decision to me. If I tried to bite him, even now, he would let me do it. And then what? If I died, he, at least, might age and die childless. His brothers might mate elsewhere, but he could not. … I decided that I had better protect him from his wants. (225-26)

Here, in an inversion of traditional gender roles, Shori is not a powerless black teenage girl, vulnerable to the desires of a young white man with whom she is alone in his bedroom; rather, she is the one who posits a moral and physical danger to the man, who is in turn ready to give in to her desire. Shori's attitude of caring about Daniel's future and controlling her impulses imply that, in spite of being in a dominating position, she tries not to be oppressive.

Another interesting implication of the characterization of Shori's sexuality is found in her relationships with humans: her bisexuality. The figure of a black girl who engages not only in interracial but also in lesbian sex posits considerable challenge to representations of black female sexuality. Collins explains that:

> Gay men and lesbians have been depicted as threats to Black families, primarily due to the erroneous belief that gay, lesbian, and bisexual African Americans neither want nor have children or that they are not already part of family networks. Holding fast to dominant ideology, many African American ministers believe that homosexuality is unnatural for Blacks and is actually a "white disease." As a result, out LGBT African Americans are seen as being disloyal to the race. (*Black Sexual Politics* 108)

Black lesbians, in this sense, have been ostracized in African American communities because their refusal to submit to black men and, in some cases, to bear their children and form

conventional families, goes against the heteronormative ideal that is supposed to guarantee the survival of black families.

Brand sees a potential for positive representation of the black women in this transgression of heteronormativity, as she affirms that “the most radical strategy of the female body for itself is the lesbian body confessing all the desire and fascination for itself” (“This Body for Itself” 46). Black lesbian sexuality, according to her, subverts the limiting regulations imposed on the black female body as object of male desire (both white and black) and tool for reproduction, exploring the ways women’s sexual desire and pleasure can be achieved beyond the restraints of the heterosexual norm. Similarly, Audre Lorde claims that lesbian relationships among black women represent the possibility of assertion and cooperation among them, a freedom to live their sexualities for their own pleasure instead of submitting to male desire (“Age, Race, Class, and Sex” 121-23). Allying with black lesbians could promote more possibilities of self-assertion even for heterosexual women. It does not mean that they would have to reject men, but that they would learn from women who do not depend on men even for sexual satisfaction how to be more assertive and demand their rights to the same sexual pleasures and gender privileges that men have.

Butler’s novel can be said to explore these possibilities of lesbianism to represent black female sexuality. Shori’s lesbian relationships are not contested by other Ina, as in their culture it is seen as being perfectly normal between them and their symbionts. However, as the reaction of some human men in the story suggests, the implications of her lesbian sexuality is subversive. For Anatol, “[t]he Ina culture, more accepting and visionary than many of its human counterparts in terms of views on sex, intimacy, and companionship, allows space for all types of gender configurations. It is the human symbionts – and especially the men – who demonstrate the most homophobia and rigidity about gender roles” (*The Things that Fly in the Night* 186). An example can be found in the views of Shori’s second male symbiont, Joel, a

black young man who was born and grew up in an Ina-human community, as his parents were symbionts to two of the Gordons. His father did not want him to have this kind of life and sent him to college, but as soon as he graduated, he came back to the Gordons's community asking them to find him a female Ina. His father tells Shori that he does not totally approve his son's choice, saying: "Too much energy in that boy for him to be just some kind of house-husband" (205). This passage suggests that gender roles in Ina communities might bother male symbionts, as educated black men may find this kind of life of dependence on an Ina too low for the male assertiveness they pursue. Joel explains to Shori his reasons for wishing to become her symbiont: "I didn't want to join with a man. There's too much sexual feeling involved when you guys feed. I wanted that from a woman … You are the only Ina I've ever been attracted to" (159). Joel's preference for Shori, therefore, can be said to be based on heterosexual desire, echoing the prescriptions of so-called conservative middle-class African Americans about heterosexual and intraracial relations for the preservation of the black race.

By the same token, Wright's contempt in relation to Joel can be read not only as caused by jealousy of another male's relationship with Shori, but also as a racial issue. I agree with Anatol, for whom:

> Wright lashes out in his discomfort with anything outside the heteronormative monogamous bond… Even though he knows that Shori needs another food source, he is unwilling to relinquish his position as "ruling" male with all of the sexual relationships within his purview. (How striking, then, that Butler writes sex with an adolescent into his code of acceptability.) (*The Things that Fly in the Night* 187)

Wright's outrage upon knowing that Shori is the one to occupy the ruling position in their relationship can be explained by the subversion that this situation represents in relation to the patriarchal heteronormativity. For Shori, however, racial identity and skin color are not part of

her criteria for choosing her symbionts, as Brook explains when Wright wonders why Shori dif not tell him that Joel was black: “They’re not human, Wright. They don’t care about white or black” (168).

Another example is when Wright first learns that Shori needs more symbionts and will have sex with them, too, and that she is already feeding on Theodora. He gets angry to think that she is bisexual and that he will be part of what he calls “a harem,” which Shori understands as a reference to Dracula’s three wives in Bram Stocker’s novel (83-84). For Anatol, in this passage Wright demonstrates homophobia in his pejorative reference for her disregard for her symbionts’ gender and also sexism as later that night he tries to rape her, “perhaps an attempt to induce sexual shame or to forcefully take the body he views as his and his alone” (*The Things that Fly in the Night* 186). In the scene Anatol refers to, Wright cannot resist the urge of having sex with Shori again and affirms: “I should get some pleasure out of all this if I don’t get anything else” (85). But being confused and furious, he intentionally acts more violently:

> He rolled onto me, pushing my legs apart, pushing them out of his way, then thrust hard into me. I bit him more deeply than I had intended and wrapped my arms and legs around him as I took his blood. He groaned, writhing against me, holding me, thrusting harder until I had taken all I needed of his blood, until he had all he needed of me. …
>
> “Did I hurt you?” He asked very softly.
>
> …“You didn’t hurt me,” I said. “Were you trying to hurt me?”
>
> “I think I was,” he said. (85-86)

In this passage, two common oppressive situations for women are undermined. First, according to the Ina tradition, Shori is supposed to have many sexual partners, contradicting the norms in human societies, in which people often overlook men having multiple lovers while condemning women who try to do the same. Second, when Wright is violent against her, as if in an attempt

to punish her and reaffirm his masculinity, he cannot hurt her at all. Instead of a fragile victim of male rage, Shori is the strong female who can get and give as much pleasure as she wants. Her care towards Wright even after he admits having tried to hurt her is an example of the emphasis on affection and protection in the symbiotic relation between humans and Ina. The fact that the sex Shori has with humans is charged with emotional tones, because of the intense bonds they share through blood feeding and venom injection, suggests a possibility of love and mutual pleasure instead of abuse in interracial relationships.

Anatol argues that "Shori's assertiveness, passion, and physical strength allow her to maintain control of her body and the dynamic, but Butler hints at the violence that so often accompanies acts that transgress social norms" (187), as Wright's outputs of rage exemplify. Bast notes a reversal in power relations implicit in the characterization of the relationship between Shori and Wright. He explains it: "This is not to say that the novel simply posits a complete reversal of power roles, that it advocates or claims a power relation of females ruling over males, blacks over whites, or children over adults. It rather tries to deconstruct simplified binary views of oppression and agency" (4). I agree with this reading and would add that Butler's novel, in this sense, challenges discourses that control bodies in terms of the classification of sexual and racial taboos.

The human women who become Shori's symbionts, in turn, seem more willing to accept not only the fact that she is a black, but also that she is female. The protection and pleasure that Shori grants them are enough to convince them that their relationship with her is beneficial. This is clear, for example, when Brook explains her own reasons for having accepted Shori as her new Ina instead of another male, saying: "I would probably have chosen a man if I'd had a choice initially. But I'm okay with Shori. I can find myself a human man if I need one" (163). As a heterosexual woman, Brook is interested in men, but as the particularity of Ina-human relationships makes it something that operates beyond the realm of human heteronormativity,

it seems to be easier for her to focus only on the advantages of female association that Shori offers. When Ina die, as Iosif – Brook's first Ina and Shori's father – did, their symbionts die too if another Ina does not bite them, turning them into his or her new symbiont. The process is usually extremely painful and long for both Ina and human, because of the dead Ina's venom in the symbiont's system. Brook is impressed by how fast it takes her to feel more comfortable when Shori feeds on her and confesses: "I can't wait to know what it will be like when I'm fully her symbiont. … I suspect her bite is spectacular" (163). It is implied in the novel that there is something special, more powerful, about Shori, hence the irresistible attraction she exerts on her symbionts and on Ina males. It is this sexual satisfaction, together with the emotional bonds that make of women-women relationships resemble that between mothers and daughters, that make Brook, Celia, and Theodora comfortable with Shori.

It is also important to notice in *Fledgling* the implications of Shori being a black vampire woman. This fact is surprising for the humans who meet her for the first time. Her first female symbiont, Theodora, expresses such a surprise by contrasting her with the traditional vampire figure: "You are a vampire… Although according to what I've read, you're supposed to be a tall, handsome, fully grown white man. Just my luck" (91). This difference, however, does not prevent Theodora, a white woman, to consent in becoming Shori's symbiont and engaging in sexual intercourse with her. This is so because the sexual pleasure and affective companionship that the young hybrid gives her is more satisfying than what she achieves in her human relationships. However, Anatol sees Shori's relationship with Theodora as ambiguous, as her first encounter with the middle-aged woman resembles a rape, a prerogative of the very characterization of vampires as embodiments of patriarchy. For her:

> in a radical inversion, Shori's first interaction with Theodora resonates with disturbing rape imagery, despite the fact that Shori is much younger, smaller, mentally disadvantaged (with a concussion, psychological trauma, and

> amnesia), and essentially homeless and socioeconomically impoverished. The protagonist lies down next to the sleeping woman and uses her hand to cover her unsuspecting host's mouth. …The physicality of the scene is distressing, to say the least. The older woman eventually experiences a passionate desire for her vampiric mate … However, questions of choice and control are unmistakably raised in this first encounter when Theodora starts to turn to face Shori but then "obey[s]" the young woman's command of "No, stay as you are" (31). (*The Things That Fly in the Night* 183)

I agree with Anatol's reading of this relationship as problematic as it blurs the limits between conscious consent and suggestibility, and between sexual freedom and abuse. Actually, this is a problem that permeates all the other Ina-human relationships in the novel. But it is important to recognize the implication of Shori's bonding with Theodora for the discussion about the relationships between black and white women, who have suffered different kinds of oppression because of their racial difference. Black women, imagined as sexually aggressive and more physically predisposed to reproduction, are the objects of male desire and are often sexually exploited. White women, in turn, are often stereotypically imagined as pure and passive, depending on men's protection. The sexual and emotional allegiance between a middle-aged white woman and a black girl in Butler's *Fledgling*, in this sense, breaks with any expectation about such a relationship. Instead of opponents, these women help each other to achieve a more fulfilling existence, with affection and sexual pleasure instead of loneliness and subjugation to male domination.

If, as Lorna Piatti-Farnell explains, vampire fangs can be read as a phallic symbol, "with the penetration of the teeth into the skin emulating the sexual act" (70), then the sexual pleasure that this black girl with fangs offers to her human symbionts is in no way less emblematic than the one given by the stereotypical vampire. Shori's characterization as bisexual combines the

sexual implications of the phallic fangs with those of the *vagina dentata* myth. As Anatol puts it, Shori "penetrates the boundary of the skin – that which most desire to be unassailable, incorruptible – and in doing so resembles the male sexual aggressor rather than the passive female" (*The Things that Fly in the Night* 187). Likewise, for Brox, Shori "represents an inversion of the hierarchy of pure, white, and masculine. Butler posits a future where the traditionally dominant white, male figure may not possess all the advantages" (401). Indeed, all the new possibilities for Ina and human sexuality mentioned above reside in the fact that Shori is a woman and has black skin. Pure Ina blood, which produces white beings, is not enough to grant the powers that hybrids like Shori can have.

Shori's sexuality is, therefore, invested with black women's agency. In everyday experiences, this agency is often denied to those women, who are often frowned upon if they choose white partners, and even more if they engage in lesbian relationships. In the black community these women also find such a denial, as their people have preached that they should limit their choice to male blacks in order to guarantee the survival of the black race. Shori is also threatened with a denial of agency in the novel, when Milo Silk says to her at the trial: "You're not Ina!… And you have no more business at this Council than would a clever dog!" (244). Here he denies her the rights conferred to the members of the Ina species in a way that can be related to what Collins calls the political level in which black women have been oppressed: their disenfranchisement as citizens (*Black Sexual Politics* 5). The fact that, despite the Silks' opinion, she is embraced by the Council and the rest of the community as one of them and as their hope for a better future attests Shori's agency.

As Border accurately points out:

> Butler's novel uses the Gothic vampire monster to offer a different view of the ability of Black and/or queer women to make their own judgments regarding their pursuit and choice of romantic partners. *Fledgling* thus highlights the

> agency available to those who, in the past, did not have power in who they were romantically and sexually involved with: Black women, especially queer Black women. (1-2)

Put differently, Butler's appropriation of the vampire figure, who is typically a symbol of white male exacerbated heterosexually, to represent a free black woman's bisexuality undermines the nature of racist and sexist oppressions against black women. And if lesbianism is the most subversive way of representing black women's sexuality, as Brand suggests ("This Body for Itself" 46), Shori's free sexuality challenges typical representations in an even more subversive level for having a child's body.

However, Brox calls attention to a lingering condition of oppression in the novel: "Shori's value, even among those who are sympathetic to her situation, remain contingent on her reproductive abilities. While Shori does represent change in the way Ina females choose their mates, her reproductive choices are not presented as being completely in her control" (404-5). Indeed, the fact that the Council decides that Shori has to find adoptive sisters in order to mate with the Gordon brothers implies that she is still subject to patriarchal rules. Nevertheless, I would contend that her dependence on the guidance of adult Ina can also be justified by her sexual immaturity (in terms of Ina biological cycles) and that the necessity of her having adoptive sisters to help guarantee offspring for the Gordons does not hinder the fact that as an Ina female she is in the controlling position. Besides, Shori becomes interested in the Gordons, especially in Daniel, deciding to mate with them out of her own will. The potential future of her sexuality guarantees to her so much political power inside her community that it is possible that, when she comes of age, she will be totally free to make her own choices. This is, by the way, another reason why Butler's fans and critics lament her early and sudden death: she did not have the chance to continue Shori's story and we will never know if this potential that the character represents would be concretized in her fictional world.

The fact that besides being racially hybrid she is also bisexual brings complex implications to her identity. As half-human and half-Ina, it is still uncertain for her people if she will be able to bear children from both Ina and human fathers. This is a possibility that the narrative leaves open, since it depends on Shori's sexual maturity to be revealed. But even so, the potential in her sexuality is notorious. She is able not only to engage in heterosexual relations with both Ina and human males to generate hybrid, stronger offspring, but also to go on with her lesbian sexual relations with her human symbionts. Another point not mentioned in the novel but that seems plausible is that, once increasing the possibilities of sex for reproduction (to include breeding with human men), Ina will be able to expand their options of sex for pleasure engaging in homosexual and bisexual relations also with each other.

Regarding Hopkinson's "Greedy Choke Puppy," it can be observed that it is different from the novels analyzed here for being the only one in which the protagonist rejects any kind of control over her sexuality. Jacky willingly embraces the supposed exacerbated sexuality that the soucouyant symbolizes, being more interested in satisfying her desires than caring for her victims' lives. Such interest is presented as selfish in the story, as her bloodlust is considered destructive and has misguided implications. As a scholar, Jacky seems to be aware of the sexual connotations of the female-monster figures in Caribbean folklore. She tells Granny that in her doctoral paper she argues that La Diablesse (the devil woman) shows herself only to men because she represents the male fear of female sexuality (169). Granny ignores her remarks, but when Jacky thanks her for braiding her hair saying, "[w]hat I would do without you to help me make myself pretty for the gentlemen eh?," the grandmother replies: "Never you mind all that. You just mind your studies. It have plenty of time to catch man" (170). In her experience as an old woman (and also a soucouyant), Granny is worried only about her granddaughter's anxiety to find a partner before she gets older. This difference between an academic

interpretation of Caribbean women's sexuality and knowledge from cultural experience is central for considerations about the representation of the female body in the story.

Jacky's anxieties about her body can be clearly perceived in the following passage:

> I was younger them times there, and sweet for so, you see? Sweet like julie mango, with two ripe tot-tot on the front of my body and two ripe maami-apple behind. I only had was to walk down the street, twitching that maami-apple behind, and all the boys-them on the street corner would watch at me like them was starving, and I was food. (170)

Here, the metaphors used to describe the female body with reference to ripe and juicy fruits resonate the notion of sexual and reproductive functions associated with that body, which is also the object of male desire. I agree with Anatol, for whom, through such a description, Jacky "sets herself up as a willing participant in her literal consumption by male gaze and sexual appetites. The story inherently critiques a society that grooms women to feel this way" (*The Things that Fly in the Night* 140). Indeed, by being eager to fulfill this ideal of female body, Jacky reveals herself as less reactive against social norms than as complying with sexist values. Moreover, I would add that the Trinidadian dialect used here reveals the specificities of the construction of the female body through a regional language charged with cultural implications. The use of a local vocabulary in the discourse that constructs the ideal woman's body may suggest that such an ideal is also local and typical of the traditional community in which Jacky lives. However, in the same way that, as Collins argues, idealized notions of black masculinity and black femininity have been prescribed, so can such ideal of female body in the Caribbean be understood as influenced by the European colonizers' ideologies. The ideal of female body desired by Jacky can be contrasted to what Granny recommends that she pursues instead, that is, love for other things in her life, such as her work and her family. The old woman's words

suggest that a woman has more important and empowering roles in the Caribbean community than that of being the object of male desire.

In this same part of the short story, Jacky reveals her concern about the unavoidable changes in her body throughout time:

> But I get to find out that when you pass you prime, and you ain't catch no man eye, nothing ain't left for you but to get old and dry-up like cane leaf in the fire. Is just so I was feeling that night. Like something wither-up. Like something that once used to drink in the feel of the sun on it skin, but now it dead and dry, and the sun only drying it out more. (170)

The ideal of woman's body that Jacky wants to reach requires youth. When she realizes that aging is inescapable and that it results in the progressive loss of sexual appeal, she feels frustrated. Anatol analyzes this passage affirming that here Jackie "voices the socially sanctioned belief that women's worth is determined exclusively by male desire" (*The Things that Fly in the Night* 140). The metaphors used here oppose those of juicy fruits. The dry, withered leaves in the fire or in the sun symbolize sterility. This characterization relates to Judith Butler's notion of unintelligible body, which does not materialize the reproductive function traditionally associated with the female body (*Gender Trouble* xxiii). It also relates to the notion of abject: the dried leaves are discarded as the rest of the dead plant, in the same way that the old body will be expelled from existence when it becomes a corpse, the maximum level of abjection, according to Kristeva (*Powers of Horror* 3-4).

This aging female body is thus seen as a prison by Jacky, something that hinders her freedom, as her words suggest: "The skin only confining me. I could feel it getting old, binding me up inside it. Sometimes I does just feel to take it off and never put it back again, oui?" (177). Ironically, the ideal body she wishes to have can also be understood as a confinement, since it is subject to aging and stylized by socially imposed norms and practices that aim at reinforcing

the sexist notion that women's sexuality should be reduced to its reproductive function. But Jacky's feeling of imprisonment is so strong that, at this moment, with a desire to be set free from the prison of the body, she finds herself to be a soucouyant:

> And the feeling make a burning in me belly, and the burning spread out to my skin, till I couldn't take it no more. I jump up from my little bed just so in the middle of the night, and snatch off my nightie. And when I do so, my skin come with it, and drop off on the floor. Inside my skin I was just one big ball of fire, and Lord, the night air feel nice and cool on the flame! I know then I was a soucouyant, a hag-woman. (171)

This kind of unconventional female body in which Jacky is transformed represents the possibility of escape from the norm, a liberating unintelligibility. Nevertheless, this freedom Jacky achieves is destructive and this is why her own grandmother has to discipline her. The motivation for her feeding on babies' blood is not related to survival, as in the case of the Ina, but to the satisfaction of her vanity. For Wisker, the story "homes in on the destruction of an internalization of society's demands for women to 'stay young and beautiful, if you want to be loved'" ("Your Buried Ghosts" 80). Jacky's anxieties, therefore, are presented as selfish and shallow, especially if compared to the behavior prescribed by her grandmother.

I agree with Wisker's argument that "Greedy Choke Puppy" is "a tale of woman preying upon woman, woman bringing justice on her own wayward family member" and that it "makes a social comment about the misdirected destructiveness of seeking after eternal youth and beauty, based upon a specific internalized self-image of woman's worth" ("Your Buried Ghost" 79-80). What Jacky desires is this ideal of beauty, longevity and satisfaction that she achieves through the power of the babies' blood. Through the satisfaction of this blood lust she also gets satisfaction for her sexual desires, since the freedom of the soucouyant to burn herself up in the night symbolizes sexual freedom. The grandmother's interruption of this satisfaction,

oppressive as it may seem, can actually be read as a reeducation into the traditional values of their ethnic group (Afro-Caribbean) and different from the ones that preach the ideal of beauty and youth for women (so common in North American societies).

When Granny tricks Jacky and exposes her soucouyant body to the fatal sunlight, she is, in Wisker's words, "teaching a wayward granddaughter to learn about the sharing and caring qualities of nonsexualized, nurturing love" ("You Buried Ghosts" 73). If a feminist view would condemn the grandmother's guidance as oppressive and limiting, reinforcing in this way the social control of women's sexuality, in an Afro-Caribbean context it can be seen as rather positive. Here, therefore, we have arguments for the claim that a black feminist criticism should be guided by principles different from those of general (which is mostly white) feminism, and for the localized approach to women's writing, suggested by Susan Friedman (5).

The same cultural particularities apply to *Brown Girl in the Ring*. Here too, the figure of the grandmother, Gros-Jeanne, tries to discipline her daughter and granddaughter into Caribbean values that prioritize women's duties as the bearers of culture over sexual desire. As mentioned above, the figure of the duppy in the novel, associated with the apparition of the soucouyant and La Diablesse in Ti-Jeanne's premonitory dreams, represents the notion of anti-maternity and misguided use of female agency. These figures are associated with Mi-Jeanne, who ran away from home because she refused to be educated by her mother into Caribbean cultural practices and values. She accepts serving her evil father as a duppy for seeing it as an opportunity for freedom and complete satisfaction, unattached from the bonds of skin, flesh, and family (her mother and her baby, Ti-Jeanne).

Ti-Jeanne also refuses Gros-Jeanne's instructions at first, hoping to run away from the Burn with her baby and Tony and to live with them a regular life. She sees the imminent need to stay with her grandmother as a burden and as a prison, as this citation shows: "She had to come back to Mami. Just long enough to find out how to control the dreams, keep the spirits

out of her head. Then she'd be free" (105). Her motivations for abusing her supernatural powers, which may represent women's agency, are the same as Jacky's and Mi-Jeanne's: to be free to live her sexuality. When she confronts Rudy at the end of the novel and he starts her transformation into a duppy, she is tempted with hopes of freedom in the same way her mother was. However, helped by her spiritual father, Papa Legbara, she is able to become aware of her identity as a seer woman, whose duty is to "serve the spirits" and her community.

In what concerns Due's novel, as previously mentioned, Fana is guided by a male figure, Khaldun. But similarly to what happens in relation to Shori's dependence on the guidance of adult Ina, this fact does not totally hinder the agency Fana has in the novel. Khaldun is for her a spiritual guide, in a way similar to what Papa Legbara is to Ti-Jeanne. He is the one who helps her resist the temptation of embracing the evil force that comes to her dreams to convince her to abuse her powers in a selfish and destructive way. What is intriguing here is the fact that Fana sees this evil force as a feminine figure, whom she calls "the Bee Lady," an old woman who smells of rotten eggs, which turns out to be the smell of hate, and whose face is swarmed with bees (256). A possible explanation for this portrayal of evil as female in Due's novel can be that the Bee Lady represents Fana's dark side, her potential for destruction. The name she calls this evil force even reminds us of Bee-Bee, the nickname by which she was called before the incident in the bathtub when Khaldun named her Fana. This incident symbolizes her rebirth into immortality and marks the beginning of her self-identification. After that, Fana understands the potential of her abilities and feels stronger, even to resist the lure of the Bee Lady, which Khaldun calls "the Shadows," while Fana means light in an Ethiopian language.

Fana, however, does not have total control over her destructive power yet. It is interesting to notice that when she uses her power to hurt somebody in the novel it is in response to some kind of sexist oppression. She reveals to Jessica, for example, that with the power of

her thoughts she made an old man who was fixing their roof slip on his stepladder because she could see in his mind his sexual fantasy with her mother (95). Later, while she is with Jessica in an Italian airport waiting for a connection flight that will take them to Ethiopia, Fana grasps the thoughts of a pedophiliac soldier. We can understand his intentions even though the narrative is told from Fana's childish perspective. She has dream-like visions of him telling her how he takes little girls who get lost from their mothers to a little room at the back of the airport and hurts them if they do not "follow the rules" (150). When she wakes up and sees that the soldier is real and plans to take her, Fana is able to cause him to have a fulminant heart attack. In the colony, when the prejudiced Life Brother Kaleb strongly offends mother and daughter saying he should have killed them when he had a chance, Fana makes him die from exsanguination (316). At a very early age, Fana already identifies the danger that men can pose to women and is concerned with the safety of those around her. Her powers, therefore, can also be used to defend women from abuses.

As to Jessica, her sexuality is presented mainly in terms of her desire for Dawit. Similar to Ti-Jeanne's attraction to Tony, her feelings for her husband are strong, even though she struggles to be more rational and to remember that he kept secrets from her and ended up killing their daughter. Her sexual urges and love towards him must be controlled as a way of self-defense, as a woman must stay away from violent partners. Even when she realizes that living with him in the colony can be helpful for Fana's upbringing, the thought that her daughter must have priority over her sexual desires always comes to her mind. As discussed above, she is only able to release her sexual desire when she gets closer to Dawit in the colony and finds out, even if helped by the living blood and the hot springs' chemicals, that she still loves and desires him. Having sex with her husband in the colony not only satisfies Jessica's repressed desire for him (as in the sex scene between Ti-Jeanne and Tony in Hopkinson's novel), but also makes

her realize that the living blood grants her more possibilities of sexual pleasure and self-assuredness.

Jessica's identity as a black woman develops progressively throughout the novel as she understands her power and how she can exert agency. According to Brooks,

> Due illustrate[s] how the growth of the personal self aids the political, for it is only when [her] characters come into their own as women/sisters/daughters/wives/mothers/lovers that make up their multi-faceted identities that they truly begin to aid the community at large. This is a direct assault on the stereotypical, harmful, and reductionist stereotype of the strongblackwoman [sic] who sacrifices their personal self and their vulnerability for the gain of the black community. (2-3)

Indeed, although at first Jessica believes that she must sacrifice her desires and needs for the sake of her daughter, she later realizes that only when she grows more assertive and free from social limitations (imposed by the Life Brothers and by society in general) can she become a strong woman.

Jessica's personal development can be understood as starting at the moment she abandons the role of a fragile bourgeois African American girl who suffered domestic abuse by a husband she had thought was perfect. Having to face her new life as an abandoned mother of a baby girl and as an immortal, she changes with time, and even her husband notices that. The narrative voice tells us: "Jessica had never been easy to control in the ways Dawit had grown accustomed to asserting his will over women in years past, but she had developed an even more stubborn brand of independent-mindedness in their time apart" (410). Nevertheless, details about her upbringing reveal that she was brought up to assume a feminine role that was prescribed by her middle-class African American community, as the following passage illustrates:

> Jessica remembered feeling as if she were in perpetual training for some imaginary debutante ball where she would one day be introduced to her dashing husband-to-be; it meant good posture, learning to walk with her toes touching the ground before her heels, speaking in sentences free of grammatical errors, firm handshakes, and above all, eye contact. (203)

Such a training is intended to prepare black girls to compete with one another for the scarce well-off black men in their communities, the ones who are supposed to protect them and to whom they must passively submit themselves. It is a training in gender intelligibility, not enough to grant the women being trained any assertiveness or independence. This is so much so that when Jessica needs to act with more confidence at her first encounter with the Life Brothers in their colony, she feels intimidated and becomes aware that her attitude is the opposite of the one she was trained to have. We are told that "now, Jessica found herself walking with her eyes cast solemnly to the ground, something that would have made her mother cringe. Every time she glanced up and saw one of the scathing gazes, a part of her shrank and she would stare at the smoothly polished rock floor again" (203). This scene, when Jessica is in an outcast condition among the Life Brothers for being a woman, proves that her training to be a perfect African American wife in nothing helps her to gain more confidence, since she sees herself as inferior to those men. What is going to be really empowering for Jessica is the living blood that Dawit shares with her. However, she realizes this fact only in the third part of the novel, when she sees the urge to flee from the colony with Dawit and Fana to guarantee their safety from the revengeful immortals and then go back to the US to save her sister, who was kidnapped by men who want to find the source of the blood serum.

It is only under these extreme circumstances that Jessica is able to trust her own potential. Dawit, on the other hand, is resentful of the growing assertiveness of his wife, as his thoughts reveal: "His recollection of their lovemaking came to [him] in dreamlike fragments

during quiet moments, but he wondered if Jessica thought of it at all. Her sister's disappearance had cast a pall on Jessica's life and clouded her common sense, it seemed. He could survive her lack of attention, but how could Jessica overlook the effects of this search on Fana?" (411). Dawit's sexism and selfishness are clear in this passage as he accuses Jessica of being negligent to her duties as a wife and as a mother when she diverges her attention from him to focus on saving her sister. Not even their sexual encounter was able to strengthen his hold on her, as he seems to have thought. This is an example of how Jessica starts acting out of the passive black wife script, but contrary to what Dawit thinks, she does not forget her duties as a mother. Rather, she expands her maternal care to her missing sister without failing to try to rescue Fana from the deep trance-like state she is starting to get into.

Maternity is an important part in Jessica's identity. She is a young, attractive woman, and thanks to the living blood she will stay like that forever. Her anxieties, therefore, are not the same as Jacky's, who pursues an ideal of beauty and youth. The blood that makes Jessica beautiful forever is already in her veins, so she does not have to make victims to achieve it. Differently from the soucouyant, her supernatural powers do not make her have anti-maternal tendencies, but rather compel her to assume a nurturing function. Fully embracing her role as a nurturing mother, Jessica goes beyond her duties towards Fana to extend it to the African children she saves at her clinic and to Jared, Lucas Shepard's son, in the US.

Towards the end of the novel, she is the one who ends up saving all the characters who were in danger either directly – by giving Jared some of her blood in time to cure his leukemia –, or indirectly – by interpreting Fana's clues about the place where Alex and Lucas are being tortured and sending Dawit and Teferi for their rescue and, most importantly, by persuading Fana to come out of the trance that is causing the hurricane that is about to destroy Miami. But Jessica has to brace herself with all her power to face the terrifying Bee Lady, who had taken over her daughter's body and mind. She is confronted with her own anxieties, as the entity in

Fana's body torments her with provocative words: "You're such a nervous Nellie … You'd jump at your own shadow, Mommy" (447); "you stupid woman. Can you see how laughable you are? You are a glorious joke" (460). These offensive words speak directly to Jessica's lack self-confidence, and the Bee Lady uses it to fight her attempt to rescue Fana. But Jessica finds the strength to face the evil entity when she realizes that "God was in her heart. In her veins. She was meant to go to her daughter. She was meant to offer herself to whatever had taken Fana, to stand in its way however she could" (459). At this moment, Jessica understands that Jesus's divine blood (the living blood) in her veins will grant her the power to rescue Fana. Even after the Bee Lady's provocations, in a death-like state caused by the swarm of bees the entity sends to attack her, Jessica goes to the "not-real place," the realm between life and death where Fana goes to when in a trance, and searches for her daughter.

Fana, too, has a realization of her identity at the moment she hears her mother's voice. She remembers that "[s]he was Fana. Her name meant light. The Man told her so. He had also told her she was stronger than anyone else who had ever lived. And her mommy was waiting for her" (494). Her potential as a strong woman had been revealed to her by Khaldun, but Fana is also aware that, as a child, she needs her mother, who is there for her. Jessica, stuck in the not-real place, is about to succumb into muck when her daughter brings her back to life. The narrator tells us that as "Fana's fingers tightened around [Jessica's] and pulled," her mother miraculously "felt herself being lifted high, like an infant to her mother's breast" (494). This scene, in which the roles of mother and daughter are inverted, suggests that Jessica is being reborn into a new life, as a stronger woman, and that Fana, despite still being a four-year-old girl, also has a maternal role to care for her mother and other people around her.

All things considered, it can be said that the sexuality of the women protagonists of the stories analyzed here is presented as intense, but to some degree controlled by the issue of maternity. Jacky refuses to let her sexual freedom be tamed, preferring to engage in the anti-

maternal practices of the soucouyant. Mi-Jeanne and Ti-Jeanne are tempted to do the same, but end up taking over their roles as mothers and caregivers in their community. Shori is still a child, but her reproductive potential is already envisioned by her Ina community. The manifold possibilities of her sexual satisfaction, therefore, indicate that her sexuality may not be totally controlled. Besides, she takes over a maternal role in relation to her symbionts, who are also her sexual partners. Fana's sexuality is not explored in Due's novel, since she is only four years old, but an interest in her reproductive potential is also envisioned and her feminine agency is already powerful. Jessica's sexuality is somehow overpowered by her maternal duties in relation to Fana and to mortal children in general, but towards the end of the novel it contributes to her empowerment.

Therefore, although maternity can be seen as limiting to a woman's sexuality, in the stories analyzed here it is praised. Related to reproductive or nurturing functions, this maternity is the means through which the women in the stories exert agency. It is how they assume a political power as the center of their communities, instead of playing a maternal role regulated by patriarchal norms.

3. Women's Blood Bonds and Maternity

As mentioned in the discussion about racial/ethnic bonds in the previous chapter, in Butler's, Hopkinson's, and Due's stories the women protagonists have to renounce individual plans to take over a nurturing role in their communities. When related to the issue of sexuality, this role can be understood in terms of matrilineality. Mother/daughter and grandmother/granddaughter relations in the stories are central to their undertaking their roles.

In Butler's *Fledgling*, there are no mothers like in the other stories, since Shori's Ina and human mothers were killed. However, a sense of mother-daughter relation can be perceived in the Ina-human relations. Maternity in this relationship can be read in the two directions:

female Ina acting as mothers to their women symbionts and these symbionts also caring for them in a maternal way. These possibilities are implied in the way the women feed their Ina with their own blood, which stands for maternal milk, and also in the care and protection the Ina offer their symbionts as if the humans were their children. Moreover, it is also revealed in the novel that the women born and raised in the Ina-human community are usually interested in becoming symbionts of Ina children, acting as their adoptive mothers. Brook sometimes assumes a mother role when Shori takes her as her own symbiont and she usually teaches the Ina girl what she cannot remember about the Ina-human relationships. She is the one who explains, for example, that Shori needs to touch her symbionts and certify that they are nearby to help her in case she needs them as much as they need to be touched by her (177). The Ina should protect and feed their symbionts and in turn be protected and fed by them, in a kind of relationship that mixes the roles of lover and mother.

Jacky in "Greedy Choke Puppy" is an exception among the women characters analyzed here, since, just like her mother, she refuses to give up her freedom and bloodlust to care for the lives of the babies in her community. More than a desirable freedom of female agency, the soucouyant symbolizes an evil and selfish use of such a freedom that ends up undermining the stability of the community. Although this figure results from the demonization of anti-maternal women by the African-Caribbean culture (Anatol, "A Feminist Reading of Soucouyants" 41), it can be said that Hopkinson's works use it to present a particular kind of agency that is related to women in that culture. While in the eyes of non-Caribbean critics it seems to be a prejudiced view, it must be considered that women in Afro-Caribbean culture are seen as powerful holders of spiritual knowledge, and for this reason respected to the point of been feared.

When Granny explains to Jacky how their blood hunger, caused by their hot soucouyant blood, can be soothed, she stresses the function of nurture of the maternal body: "Loving does cool we down. Making life does cool we down" (180). She advises her granddaughter to control

her blood lust and undertake this role, saying: "When we lives empty, the hunger does turn to blood hunger. But it have plenty other kinds of loving, Jacky. Ain't I been telling you so? Love your work. Love people close to you. Love your life" (180). Community and family life, thus, can soothe the soucouyant's anxieties. As Wisker puts it:

> "Greedy Choke Puppy" indicts the internalization of cosmeticized images of youth and beauty and replaces this myth with the importance of the insight and power of the maternal role (here, the grandmother) to instill positive values of self-worth and nurturance which could enable a less selfish, next generation to flourish. … Grandmother wisely stops Jacky's selfish, insatiable greed. It is a cautionary tale with a feminist angle. It is also a homely tale of the older generation controlling the waywardness of the younger, insisting on self-management. ("Your Buried Ghosts" 80)

In this sense, while Jacky fails to control her destructive impulses and assumes a nurturing role in the community, Granny is the one who takes it to the worst consequences. I agree here with Wisker's point that this maternal role is not oppressive in the story, but empowering.

Following Wisker's lead, it can be argued that the roles of Ti-Jeanne, of her mother Mi-Jeanne, and of her grandmother Gros-Jeanne in *Brown Girl in the Ring* represent the power of women in African-diasporic societies ("Your Buried Ghost" 73). They are the bearers of tradition, of community bonds, and are responsible for the nurturance of future generations. Misunderstandings about the religious practices of those women are raised throughout the novel but, at the end, their commitment to use such practices in favor of good and against evil doing becomes clear. It is important to point out here that in the African-based religious traditions represented in Hopkinson's novel women are the ones responsible for the rituals as priestesses, a role they pass to one another in their family line. It is not only women's, but

mainly Afro-Caribbean women's practices that are being celebrated in *Brown Girl in the Ring*, exorcized from the racist stereotypes with which they have been traditionally associated.

Although this depiction of the misguided use of women's power and freedom in Hopkinson's stories seems to endorse an oppression that is traditionally present in Afro-Caribbean societies as well, the restoration of women's proper place in the community is celebratory. It presents the role of women in society as fundamental for keeping ancestral and future connections, healing diseases and protecting against mischiefs through the use of tradition. The power of blood erroneously used to feed the evil duppy is at the end of *Brown Girl in the Ring* used by the seer women to keep such connections and the community's integrity.

In *The Living Blood*, the role of the mother as the one who instructs is also present. Although Jessica has to ask for Dawit and the Life Brother's help to train her daughter to control her supernatural powers, it is clear in the novel that her role in the girl's upbringing is crucial. She is the one to teach Fana the importance of caring for other women and children, since the immortals are oblivious to this importance. In their lives with their mortal families, those men have to abandon their wives and children when it becomes impossible to conceal the fact that they cannot age. Eventually, they have to kill their mortal families when this secret is threatened or when they cannot bear the pain of seeing their children becoming old and sick. Thus, although they can teach Fana how to control her powers, the Life Brothers cannot teach her how to love a family above everything. Jessica is the one who does that, in a way that Due's novel comments on women's ability to instill the values of caring, loving, and nurturing. Even if we assume that this ability is socially constructed as being proper of women and absent or less strong in men, the fact that a super powerful person is being raised according to these values promises to threaten this division.

In addition, as already mentioned, Jessica's sense of her nurturing power is enhanced by the living blood. Psychologically affected by the death of her older daughter, Kira, she decides to let her physician sister Alex use her healing blood to create a serum that can save human lives. Jessica and Alex's wish to save as many lives as they can collides with the need to avoid calling the attention of the Searchers. Having to reduce the number of patients they assist, Jessica decides to give priority to children, suggesting once again a concern with future generations.

As opposed to this nurturing role of women in their communities, there are misguided male roles in most of the stories analyzed here. Only "Greedy Choke Puppy" does not present relevant male characters that can be analyzed in this way. It can be said, however, the masculine privilege and power often make women feel that, in order to be loved by men, they have to reach these men's ideal of female body.

Comparing *Brown Girl in the Ring* and *The Living Blood,* Wisker argues that both set "unscrupulous, violent male groups, gangs, and posses, against the potentially positive and nurturing behaviors of mothers, grandmothers, and daughters" ("Your Buried Ghosts" 83). I agree with this argument and believe it can also be applied to *Fledgling*. In Hopkison's novel, Rudy uses the ability to communicate with the Afro-Caribbean entities, which Gros-Jeanne had taught him when they were married, for his own selfish and evil purposes. In Due's novel, the Life Brothers refuse to share their immortal blood and knowledge with women, forming a men-only clan that is oblivious to the sufferings of those around them, including their families. At the same time, a young African man, whose sister is a nurse in Jessica's clinic, sells the blood serum in the black market while a more avaricious gang formed by men of different nationalities track the immortals to profit from their blood through large-scale productions of the serum. In Butler's novel, the Silks can be seen in a way similar to the Life Brothers, as they oppose hybridity because they do not want to lose the exclusive powers and privileges granted

by the Ina's pure blood. By making the women in the stories the ones who can make a better use of supernatural powers, these narratives contest the unprivileged positions that have been given to these women, even inside black communities.

Finally, in all these four stories, it can be noticed that the women who instruct each other to assume a central role in their communities are linked by blood bonds. Jacky, her mother, and Granny are from the same line of soucouyant family, in the same way that Gros-Jeanne, Mi-Jeanne and Ti-Jeanne belong to the same line of seer women and Afro-Caribbean priestesses. Shori's bond with her women symbionts is due to her feeding on their blood and injecting them with Ina venom, creating a family based not on shared genes but on mutual cooperation. Jessica's relationship with Fana is the most important one in Due's novel, but her relationship with her sister Alex is also relevant, since she not only shares the secret of the living blood but also helps Jessica carry out her commitment to help ill children. These blood bonds among the women in the novel enhance their nurturing power in the communities, celebrating the union of women under the same cause.

4. Sexualized Speculative *Nova*

In Butler's, Hopkinson's, and Due's stories, the *nova* that convey their speculative elements can also be read as being related to the issue of sexuality. In *Fledgling*, the Ina-human relations through blood feeding are a *novum* that represents alternative sexualities based on bisexuality, disregard for any kind of fixed identity (race, age, class, or gender), and affection. Ironically, the new species created by Butler is the one characterized by a conservative kind of sexuality, aiming exclusively at reproduction. On the other hand, Ina sexuality can be considered innovative in relation to human norms since it is based on the power of the female over the male Ina. The females' venom is stronger and can attract and attach the males to them, turning them into their exclusive sexual partners. Moreover, mating happens not only between

two individuals, but between a group of sisters and a group of brothers. Another important aspect is that Shori, as a black vampire figure, represents an innovation in relation to the traditional portrayal of the vampire as white and male. Presenting both the phallic symbol of the fangs and the aggressive femininity of the *vagina dentata* myth, she is seen as a female-monster by those who oppose her. Her reproductive potential is viewed as abject by the Silks and her sexual power is feared by the older Gordons. On the other hand, her sexuality is seen as desirable rather than repulsive by other characters, especially by Daniel and by her symbionts.

In addition, Shori's characterization as a child is innovative, since it dismisses any possibility of reproducing the hypersexualization of the female black body that has been so common in literature and popular culture. Estrangement can be felt at the thought of pedophilia. But even so, the way Shori's narrative voice describes her sex scenes is not overtly eroticized, perhaps exactly because she is still a child in terms of Ina's biological life cycles and has lost her memory of any sexual imagery from human or Ina culture. Moreover, her sex with her symbionts is more charged with affection than with sexual desire as a biological instinct of reproduction, which is what the Ina feel for each other. This sexuality that cannot be grasped under empiric notions is, for this reason, challenging to such notions. Butler's novel, therefore, portrays alternative sexualities to discuss unconventional sexual relationships and identities. The healing power of Ina's blood and the nourishing power of human blood are what makes a symbiotic relation between the two groups and consequently the existence of those alternatives possible.

The soucouyant and the duppy in "Greedy Choke Puppy" and in *Brown Girl in the Ring* are *nova* that represent the demonization of women's exacerbated sexuality. They feed on the blood of their victims, usually children, instead of nurturing them. Ti-Jeanne's, Mi-Jeanne's, and Gros-Jeanne's spiritual gifts, in turn, overcome these women's sexual urges, in that serving

the spirits is more important than serving their men's desires. These gifts can also be related to the issue of gender, since they are better used by the women in the family, who do not employ them to achieve evil goals as Rudy does.

In *The Living Blood*, the *novum* is this immortal body fluid that enhances the senses, including sexual desire and pleasure. However, the most important implication of this blood in the novel is that it can cure all blood-related diseases, including AIDS. This fact is even more meaningful if we consider that such an epidemic is believed to have started in Africa, as Susan Sontag affirms (53). As she explains, "[t]he subliminal connection made to notions about a primitive past and the many hypotheses that have been fielded about possible transmission from animals (a disease of green monkeys? African swine fever?) cannot help but activate a familiar set of stereotypes about animality, sexual license, and blacks" (52). The very association of AIDS with Africans is in itself a racist premise, based on stereotypes of black people as supposedly having animal-like sexuality. Therefore, by presenting the source of the cure for AIDS in an ancient African clan, who possesses unimaginable scientific knowledge and supernatural powers, Due's novel challenges racist notions about black sexuality.

As it has been noted, the supernatural *nova* associated with the women protagonists in the four stories discussed here convey a notion of sexuality through their blood. It is exacerbated in the hot blood of the soucouyant and in the blood hunger she and the duppy feel. In relation to Shori's hybrid blood, this sexuality is at the same time free to be completely satisfied and nurturing, representing a potential for reproduction that is not reductive. In Fana's blood, this same potential is perceived, although her sexuality is not developed yet. Jessica's blood is the one that has a nurturing function in the novel.

In summary, sexuality can be read in Hopkinson's, Butler's, and Due's stories as discussed through the symbolism of blood. This symbolism includes: abjection for the feeding

on blood by female-monster figures, nurturance given through the supernatural blood as if in breast-feeding and child-caring, and blood lines among women who engage in practices such as instructing, caring, healing, and lesbian relations. The sexual identities constructed for and by the protagonists are those of heterosexual women, except for Shori, who can be identified as bisexual. These protagonists struggle to reconcile their sexual desires with the nurturing roles called upon them in their communities. Shori is an exception again, since the new kind of sexuality created in Butler's novel allows her to undertake both and she is more sexually free in her relations with humans.

Moreover, in all the stories, black women's sexuality is presented in a different way from the stereotypes often associated with them in everyday experience. They are sexually active, feel desire and are desired, but not in the abject way so commonly related to them in literature and popular culture. Their supernatural powers, their assertiveness and independence, and the nurturing role they assume make them oppose the stereotypes of the sexually aggressive woman (the jezebel), the welfare mother, and the asexual mother. The narratives suggest that even though the women protagonists are not the mere object of male desire, their sexuality should be controlled so as not to be experienced in detriment of the nurturing roles that they must overtake in their communities. This appraisal of nurturance and maternity can be related to a concept of reproduction targeted for the maintenance of a specific race or ethnicity. However, rather than the continuation of the black race as a supposedly pure group, the women in the works analyzed here seem to invest in guaranteeing the future of more hybrid generations. Butler's, Hopkinson's, and Due's narratives suggest that, because of the great power of the women protagonists, their nurturance will be extended to humanity in general. In this sense, it can be concluded that black women in these stories are empowered by their nurturing potential, contesting in this way the abjection and oppression these women have historically suffered.

CONCLUSION

The issues of race, ethnicity, and sexuality are central to the lives of women of African ancestry, and racism, ethnocentrism, and sexism are at the basis of the kinds of oppression they have historically suffered. The black female body has traditionally been objectified for the satisfaction of male desire and for the reproduction of slave labor force. This body has historically been regulated in order to control the demographic configuration of black people in the Americas. At the same time, black women's bodies have been policed to guarantee the survival and development of the black race/ethnicity. Literature by black women writers has frequently been engaged in denouncing and contesting such oppression and discrimination. Contemporary writers seem to have found in speculative fiction new tools for this task, presenting alternative views on race, ethnicity, and sexuality in a way to empower black women.

The analysis of the speculative works by Octavia Butler, Nalo Hopkinson, and Tananarive Due presented here indicates that blood is a productive metaphor to discuss the importance of race, ethnicity and sexuality in the lives of contemporary women of African ancestry. Blood suggests a connection with African roots, as in the blood sacrifices used to conjure Afro-Caribbean religious entities in Hopkinson's *Brown Girl the Ring* and in the immortal blood from the African ancient clan in Due's *The Living Blood*. This notion of blood carrying the biological traits of a race and connecting those who share it reflects what Gracia calls the "Genetic Common-Bundle View" of race (10). Blood also symbolizes family lineage and ethnic belonging, as in Gracia's "Familial-Historical View" of ethnicity (9). Such a meaning can be noticed in the Ina family bloodlines that make Shori part of that group, in the soucouyant's and the seer women's blood in both stories by Hopkinson, and in the immortal

blood that connects the Life Brothers in Due's novel. But blood in the stories also have abject connotations, which can be noticed in racist discourses used by the Silks to oppose Shori, which reflect nineteenth-century racial theories, and in the sexist ideologies through which the Searchers despise Jessica and Fana.

In what concerns sexuality, my readings show that all four stories analyzed here convey a notion of sexual freedom and agency granted to the women characters by blood. A free sexuality is suggested by the blood exchange that characterizes Ina's sexuality, especially in their relationships with humans, which are not restricted by race, age, gender, or sexual orientation. In Hopkinson's stories, this sexual freedom can be noticed in the soucouyant's hot blood and blood lust. In Due's novel, the living blood enhances Jessica's sexuality, but most notability it enables her to become a more assertive and powerful woman. Therefore, it can be noticed that the sexuality of black women characters in these novels is not restricted by social control and, thus, challenges stereotypes such as those of the whore, the welfare mother, and the mammy, often traditionally associated with black women.

Moreover, in all these stories, this same blood helps the women characters to exert agency in their communities as nurturers and healers. In Butler's *Fledgling*, the symbiotic relations between Ina and humans is possible because they feed on their symbionts' blood and inject them with a substance that grants them immunity and longevity. Through a constant need for nurturance and affection, their relationships resemble those between mothers and children and Shori is characterized in the story as being more inclined to undertake such a nurturing role than other Ina. In Hopkinson's stories, the women learn that their sexual freedom should not hinder their roles as mothers and care-givers. In *Brown Girls in the Ring*, Ti-Jeanne, Mi-Jeanne, and Gros-Jeanne use their healing gifts and the blood sacrifices to help their progeny and the other needy people from their community. In "Greedy Choke Puppy," Jacky cannot understand that her blood lust should be controlled in order to guarantee the safety of her village's youth

and is punished by her own grandmother, the one who cares for her community. Although this restriction seems to indicate a limitation to women's free sexuality, it relates to the importance of women in Caribbean culture as the providers of future generations. In Due's novel, Jessica is the one who uses the immortal blood to cure sick children. Besides, she teaches her daughter Fana to use her gifts to save people instead of destroying them. It is interesting to observe that in *Brown Girls in the Ring, Fledgling,* and *The Living Blood,* a power of healing and nurturing through blood is also possessed by some men – namely Rudy, the Silks, and the Life Brothers –, but their use of such a power proves to be necessarily misguided, directed towards their selfish interests. In these stories, the women protagonists are portrayed as the rightful holders of this nurturing power, through which they bring a positive resolution to conflicts in the narratives. Hence, blood in the stories analyzed here is the source of the black women protagonists' power, attributing to them an important role in the hope for a better future in which sexism and racism will be overcome.

All the four stories also present what I am calling here speculative *nova*, that is, conditions and situations that offer new perspectives, different from the ones previously observed in society. As explained in Chapter 1, the term speculative *nova* expands the term *novum* coined by Darko Suvin (64), since it also includes the supernatural elements that differentiate fantasy and terror from science fiction. As speculative fiction contains elements of all of these different genres, and as Butler, Hopkinson, Due mix them in their narratives, the term speculative *nova* proves to be useful to explain their belonging to this umbrella genre. What is particular about these works to allow their inclusion in the subgroup I am calling speculative fiction by black women writers is the charge of racial, ethnic, gender, and sexual connotations with which these *nova* are invested through the symbolism of blood.

In Butler's *Fledgling*, the vampire-like Ina species is a *novum*, characterized by an alternative sexuality and ethnic traits. Shori is also a *novum* as she is the hybrid of human and

Ina portrayed in ways that challenge the exploitation of black women's bodies, as well as taboos related to miscegenation and bisexuality. In Butler's novel, blood relations create a notion of family that goes beyond genetic bonds and includes bisexual partnerships. Such relations also contest essentialist notions of race/ethnicity/species and celebrate hybridism between humans and Ina.

In Hopkinson's short story and novel, the *nova* are the Caribbean folkloric characters that are considered fantastical in North American societies, while having meaningful influence in people's experiences on the islands. Among these figures, the blood-drinker soucouyant can be read as a sexualized *novum*, since she represents the possibility of a free, transgressive female sexuality. Also part of Caribbean people's lives are the blood rituals and the deities that are presented as *nova* in *Brown Girls in the Ring*, in which Afro-Caribbean religion appears as a possible solution to the marginalized immigrants' problems in a decadent and futuristic Toronto in substitution for the trope of technological advances in traditional science fiction plots.

The living blood is the *novum* in Due's novel through the miraculous blood of Christ that grants immortality and healing. The Life Brothers constitute another *novum* as they represent an imaginary clan of ancient and immortal African men that dispute racist theories that endorse a stereotypical view of Africans as uncivilized and of Africa as the source of the world AIDS, contaminated through blood and sexual fluids.

In sum, discussions about black race, Caribbean/Trinidadian and Caribbean Canadian ethnicity, African American identity, African roots, women's sexuality, and bisexuality are present in the stories analyzed here and are a crucial aspect in their characterization as speculative works. The way these issues are presented also convey black women's perspectives, focusing on the black women protagonists and their struggles. Moreover, the variety of ways through which the protagonists deal with race, ethnicity, and sexuality in the

stories attests to the diversity of black women's experiences that call for a non-essentialist view of their conditions. The aspects pointed out here as common among the four works make it possible to classify them under the same category, characterized by the use of strategies to contest traditional notions of race, ethnicity, sexuality, and gender that have often been used to discriminate against black women.

All that being said, I believe that this thesis contributes to the body of criticism of the umbrella genre speculative fiction. The notion of speculative *nova* that I propose here can be used in the reading of works as speculative in a more multifarious way than Suvin's notion of *nova*, which only applies to works of science fiction. In addition, my discussion of how blood can be a productive tool to represent and approach issues of race, ethnicity, and sexuality by three of the most prominent black women writers of speculative fiction leads the way to future analysis of other works in this genre.

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