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Embodied Pasts. Body as Memory in Postcolonial Speculative Fiction

Corporeal memory: science fiction, the body, and the historical narrative

It seems incongruous at first, perhaps, to talk about science fiction—or speculative fiction in general—in the context of the past and the historical narrative. Science fiction has been usually regarded in the popular consciousness first and foremost as a genre which looks towards the future rather than the past. This is, however, a widespread misconception, which prioritizes the escapist tendencies associated with the genre over the poignant social commentary on our past and present which science fiction is uniquely capable of providing. It is, then, crucial to understand that even though science fiction disregards the principles of literary mimesis and verisimilitude, it is at its core a genre firmly entrenched in the cultural contexts in which it has originated and developed, revealing a deep connection with the past and the present rather than the future. Seen as a reflection of the projected fears and hopes of the successive generations, science fiction emerges, then, as a potential source of revisionist rewritings of histories and facilitates a more in-depth analysis of the contemporary socio-cultural climate. Thus, defined by Darko Suvin as "a literary genre or verbal construct whose necessary and sufficient conditions are the presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition, and whose main

device is an imaginative framework alternative to the author's empirical environment,"[1] science fiction works to recontextualize our experiences of the present and the past by estranging the audience from the verisimilitude of the material circumstances of their quotidian existence, echoing the words of Fredric Jameson, who argues that "[one] of the most significant potentialities of SF as a form is precisely [its] capacity to provide something like an experimental variation on our own empirical universe."[2]

Therefore, it should come as no surprise that contemporary science fiction remains one of the most potent vehicles for postcolonial fiction writing, critically addressing the colonial roots of the genre in its mainstream incarnation and allowing the authors to construct a postcolonial strategy for writing back to the inherently racist and colonial history of science fiction, founded upon the central narratives of imperial expansion and conquest and the encounter with the Other. According to John Rieder, it is not coincidental that science fiction "appeared predominantly in those countries that were involved in colonial and imperialist projects"[3] since, according to him, science fiction, at its most fundamental level, "addresses itself to the fantastic basis of colonial practice"[4] and to this day perpetuates "the persistent traces of a stubbornly visible colonial scenario beneath its fantastic script."[5] Nonetheless, as Jenny Wolmark remarks, "SF is increasingly recognized for its ability to articulate complex and multifaceted responses to contemporary uncertainties and anxieties, and metaphors drawn from SF have acquired considerable cultural resonance."[6] As such, then, the genre opens itself to re-presentation and symbolic reimagining, and, by extension, lends itself particularly well to counter-discursive practices, which, according to Helen Tiffin, "evolve textual strategies which continually 'consume' their 'own biases' at the same time as they expose and erode those of the dominant discourse [...]."[7]

For that reason, the subgenre of postcolonial speculative fiction remains singularly preoccupied with the notions of the past, memory,

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[1] Darko Suvin, *Positions and Presuppositions in Science Fiction* (London: Macmillan, 1988), p. 37.

[2] Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future* (London: Verso, 2007), p. 270.

[3] John Rieder, "Science Fiction, Colonialism, and the Plot of Invasion," *Extrapolation*, Vol. 46, No. 3 (2005), p. 375.

[4] Ibid., p. 376.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Jenny Wolmark, "Time and Identity in Feminist Science Fiction," in: *A Companion to Science Fiction*, ed. David Seed (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), p. 156.

[7] Helen Tiffin, "Post-Colonial Literatures and Counter-Discourse," in: *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, eds. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 96.

and the historical narrative, which echo throughout the works of such prominent postcolonial speculative fiction writers as Nalo Hopkinson, Nnedi Okorafor, or Larissa Lai, who work to recontextualize the notion of what it means to exist as an Othered subject at the intersection between the past, the present and the future. The other central notion which continues to dominate the genre is the notion of the body, which, following Braidotti's understanding of embodiment, is construed as

> a point of overlapping between the physical, the symbolic and the material social conditions [...] an inter-face, a threshold, a field of intersecting material and symbolic forces [...] a surface where multiple codes (race, sex, class, age, etc.) are inscribed [...] a cultural construction that capitalizes on energies of a heterogeneous, discontinuous and affective or unconscious nature.[8]

The Othered body, then, understood in Braidotti's terms, is regarded as a cultural construct and an inherently historical entity, whose material condition facilitates the connection between the past and the present. With that in mind, the present article examines the ways in which three authors: Larissa Lai (*Salt Fish Girl*), Suzette Mayr ("Toot Sweet Matricia") and Andrea Hairston ("Griots of the Galaxy") discuss the relationship between the Othered body—particularly the female body—and collective memory as well as the historical narrative. Thus, the article argues that for the discussed authors, the experience of the body constitutes a fundamental element of constructing (or rather reconstructing) the continuity of the historical narrative in colonial and postcolonial realities. In this perspective, the body of the Other becomes the place in which the past, the present, and the future converge, allowing the Othered subject, through the experience of her body, to reach the hidden or otherwise forgotten histories and reconstruct the fragmentary memories of diasporic communities, which pave the way for an ultimate revision of the colonial discourse. Thus, the body of the Other becomes not only the locus of ancestral memories, but also a tool of resistance against the hegemonic historical narrative.

Although the selected short stories and novels constitute only a small sample of postcolonial speculative texts that engage with the topic of the bodily experience at the intersection between the corporeal and the historical, they are nonetheless representative for their use of the most commonly employed themes associated with exploration of the historical

[8] Rosi Braidotti, "Between the No Longer and the Not Yet: Nomadic Variations on the Body," archeologia.women.it, accessed June 3, 2018, http://archeologia.women.it/user/cyberarchive/files/braidotti.htm.

dimension of the corporeal in postcolonial speculative fiction. For those authors who emphasize the unique properties of fantastical Othered bodies when it comes to their relationship with memory and the historical narrative, three distinct yet interrelated aspects seem to come to the fore, reappearing throughout a variety of narratives originating in diverse communities ranging from the Chinese diaspora in Canada, through the Caribbean and African-American diaspora, to Native American and First Nations peoples. Those notions, which encompass the acts of transmitting memory/recording the past, excavating the past, and reliving the past—acts which are of primary interest for this article—stress the importance of the Othered body in their enactment, echoing the words of Bill Ashcroft, Helen Tiffin, and Gareth Griffiths, who observe that

> [t]he 'fact' of the body is a central feature of the post-colonial, standing as it does metonymically for all the 'visible' signs of difference, and their varied forms of cultural and social inscription, forms often either undervalued, overdetermined or even totally invisible to the dominant colonial discourse.[9]

Similarly, in the introduction to her book, *Queer Postcolonial Narratives and the Ethics of Witnessing*, Donna McCormack writes: "Flesh is woven into history as both the bloody deaths necessary to achieve the desired goals and the skin on which it has become possible to write these new foundational narratives."[10] McCormack's remark regarding the possibility of utilizing the body of the Other for the purpose of writing new foundational narratives remains particularly significant for the genre of postcolonial speculative fiction, which looks not only to critically examine and dismantle the mainstream narratives of the genre, but also to imagine (or re-imagine) possible futures for people of color, who, as Elizabeth Anne Leonard observes, are often excluded from the predominant narratives of science fiction, which shy away from acknowledging their Othering tendencies as well as the lack of any substantial examination of the implicit Other/alien parallels perpetuated by the genre.[11]

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[9] Bill Ashcroft, Helen Tiffin, and Gareth Griffiths, *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 321.

[10] Donna McCormack, *Queer Postcolonial Narratives and the Ethics of Witnessing* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), p. 2.

[11] Elizabeth Anne Leonard, "Race and Ethnicity in Science Fiction," in: *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction*, eds. Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 254.

Riding the body: transmitting memory, recording the past

The notion of transmitting memory and recording the past, which involves passing down the memory of the past generations through the body, thus making that body the explicit carrier of memories of the community, echoes the function performed traditionally by the griots, who are described by Andrea Hairston in the epigraph to her short story in the following way: "The Griots of West Africa are musicians, oral historians, praise singers negotiating community. They stand between us and cultural amnesia. Through them we learn to hear beyond our time and understand the future."[12] It could be argued that the griots themselves—who practice traditional oral forms of storytelling and performance—already embody history in the most literal sense: they are not only those who remember, but also those who, through bodily movement and through speech, echo the memories of a community back at its members, signifying the link between the corporeal and the historical. Their engagement with remembrance, then, seems to be deeply rooted in notions of corporeality, as they retain the stories passed down to them in their bodies, before passing them on to the next generations, transmitting the cultural heritage of a community across time. This preoccupation with the body conceptualized as a carrier of memory and history is, in turn, reflected in the works of postcolonial speculative fiction, which abound with griot-like figures who, through their sometimes strange, unfamiliar forms of corporeality, are capable of embodying and transmitting the memories of Othered communities in order to preserve them, signifying practices which have been to a large degree denied to the representatives of those marginalized communities in the mainstream science fiction discourse.[13]

Andrea Hairson's short story "Griots of the Galaxy" (2004), which appears in the anthology of postcolonial speculative fiction *So Long Been Dreaming*, engages with the theme of embodied transmission of cultural heritage and memory through the portrayal of a race of alien beings—the titular griots—whose ability to inhabit the bodies of dying or recently deceased creatures in order to collect their memories and pass them on to the archives maintained on their homeworld makes them effectively the custodians of cultures and communities which are in danger of or near extinction. As the protagonist of the story, Axala, remarks:

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[12] Andrea Hairston, "Griots of the Galaxy," in: *So Long Been Dreaming: Postcolonial Science Fiction and Fantasy*, eds. Nalo Hopkinson and Uppinder Mehan (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2004), p. 23.

[13] Leonard, "Race and Ethnicity in Science Fiction," p. 253.

> Body historians, griots of the galaxy, we didn't diddle ourselves in jungle paradises, we inhabited flesh to gather a genealogy of life. We sought the story behind all stories. Collecting life's dazzling permutations, however sweet or sour, was our science, religion and art—nothing nobler in eternity.[14]

Thus, the singularity of their purpose, as they jump from body to body to record the memories of species for posterity, reveals the deep connection between the body and memory and history. To this end, the story repeatedly emphasizes the importance of the lived experience of the body, necessary for the gathering of memories, effectively establishing the corporeal as the primary locus of the historical account and remembrance.

This practice, in turn, facilitates the resurgence of hitherto extinguished or suppressed voices and stories, enabling the postcolonial act of writing—and speaking—back. Reflecting on her task, Axala (now residing in the body of a freedom fighter named Renee) remarks, "You didn't get to choose a life; you only had minutes to find what was available. A true historian should be glad for any dying body to ride. Every story offered precious insight."[15] This approach, apart from once again underscoring the importance of the corporeal for the processes of remembrance and reexamination of the historical narrative, emphasizes also the importance of the polyphony of voices and stories preserved by the griots, arguing against the hegemonic unifying narrative of universalist claims of superiority perpetuated by the colonial enterprise. Instead, the griots are granted immediate access to the corporeal memory of the bodies they inhabit, symbolically defying the colonial efforts aimed at, as Albert Memmi puts it, extinguishing the memories and histories,[16] which are then replaced by narratives approved by the hegemonic discourse.

At the same time, however, the story reflects on the contemporary condition of postcolonial communities with regard to their relationship with their ancestral heritage and memory, pointing to the fragmentary nature of such memories and recovered narratives. Just as Tiffin remarks on the fact that it is impossible for any postcolonial narratives to fully recover any "pre-colonial cultural purity,"[17] so are the memories recovered by the griots often fragmentary, fractured, and incomplete. This condition of contemporary postcolonial communities—and diasporas in particular—manifests symbolically in the story through the concept of the Edges,

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[14] Hairston, "Griots of the Galaxy," p. 27.

[15] Ibid., p. 25.

[16] Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993), p. 52.

[17] Tiffin, "Post-Colonial Literatures and Counter-Discourse," p. 95.

which, the narrator explains, are disjointed fragments of the griots' former selves, remembered only in flashes, since the griots can physically hold the memories of only one body at a time, while the rest of them become suppressed until released later on to the griots' repository of knowledge. When Axala remarks on her condition, she refers to the griots as serial amnesiacs,[18] while at the same time stressing the importance of communality in the practices of remembrance and storytelling, as the histories collected by the griots can unfold in their entirety only after they have been uploaded to their general repository. This practice, therefore, echoes the communal forms of storytelling, characteristic of the communities which rely on primarily oral accounts—i.e. accounts actively involving embodied performance—to preserve their history.

Subversive archaeologies: excavating the past

Another notion that allows us to conceptualize the ways in which, in postcolonial speculative fiction writing, the corporeal and the historical remain closely intertwined, is the concept of excavating the past. This motif, which appears across multiple stories within the genre, draws on the idea of transmitting memory across generations through the bodily element—a practice discussed in more detail in the section above—at the same time as it engages with the legacy of Western archaeology, reclaiming the act of excavation in a subversive practice that questions the legitimacy of Western accounts of the historical narrative. As Matthew Liebmann remarks in the first chapter of *Archaeology and the Postcolonial Critique*, "From the earliest days of the discipline, archaeology has played a part in creating and controlling the representation of the past in colonized societies."[19] In turn, the narratives of postcolonial speculative fiction reclaim those means of representation of the past, destabilizing the fixed meanings and assumptions perpetuated by the colonial discourse, depriving them of their hegemonic power through questioning the underlying principles of the discipline.

Thus, in Suzette Mayr's short story "Toot Sweet Matricia," also published in the anthology *So Long Been Dreaming*, the author engages with the concept of the body understood as the repository of memory and ancestral heritage, at the same time employing the imagery of excavation to imbue the process of archaeological discovery, steeped in Western, colonial

[18] Hairston, "Griots of the Galaxy," p. 25.

[19] Matthew Liebmann, "Introduction: The Intersections of Archaeology and Postcolonial Studies," in: *Archaeology and the Postcolonial Critique*, eds. Matthew Liebmann and Uzma Z. Rizvi (Lanham: AltaMira Press, 2008), p. 6.

understanding of history and the progression of time, with subversive, transgressive properties that allow for the recovery of seemingly lost histories and memories. Telling the story of three generations of selkie women, described in the story as dark-skinned and dark-haired, and narrated by a nameless protagonist, "Toot Sweet Matricia" examines the struggles experienced by liminal, hybrid subjects in colonial and postcolonial realities as they search for roots and identity. The story posits that, on the one hand, under the hegemonic discourse, the body of the Other becomes subject to the process of colonization of the body—which manifests in the metaphor of hiding or destroying the selkie skin[20]—but, on the other hand, it retains in part its subversive, transgressive properties, refusing containment and manifesting its Otherness.

This story, therefore, constitutes first and foremost an account of the colonial Other's desperate search for identity and a place to belong—a search which is, once again, grounded in the experience of the body, emphasizing the importance of collective memory. Mayr employs the metaphor of the bog and digging in order to evoke the image of a repository of memory—here, the bog and digging come to symbolize the excavation of history, memories, and the hitherto inaccessible parts of the ancestral heritage of the Other, concealed by the processes of colonial erasure. The narrator says: "I feel something. Putting on the skin when it's not really yours is like putting both arms into a bog and drawing up pieces of corpse [...]. Matricia is a very black woman, much blacker than me [...]. I dragged her up piece by piece from the bogs of memory and horror."[21] Thus, the bodily element once again comes to symbolize the relationship between identity and ancestral memory: the protagonist dreams of unearthing a body, which—though grotesque and horrifying in its fragmentariness—constitutes a link with the ancestral past and a source of identification for the protagonist. Moreover, the act of pulling Matricia's body out of the bog signifies a form of subversive archaeology, in which the power over the history of a particular community is given back to its members, contesting the truth of the Western, colonial historical account. As Bill Ashcroft remarks,

> when we investigate history itself we find that, particularly in its nineteenth-century imperial forms, it stands less for investigation than for perpetuation [...]. At base, the myth of a value-free, 'scientific' view of the past,

[20] Suzette Mayr, "Toot Sweet Matricia," in: *So Long Been Dreaming: Postcolonial Science Fiction and Fantasy*, eds. Nalo Hopkinson and Uppinder Mehan (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2004), pp. 46–47.

[21] Ibid., p. 47.

> the myth of the beauty of order, the myth of the story of history as a simple representation of the continuity of events, authorized nothing less than the construction of a world reality.[22]

Here, the return of Matricia's body—initially fragmentary and almost monstrous—from the bogs of memory and horror not only collapses the Western understanding of the linearity of history mentioned by Ashcroft, but also, in its exorbitant disobedience and disregard for the narratives imposed upon it, brings back all that the hegemonic discourse has been working to falsify, extinguish, and bury.[23] Moreover, Matricia's body, now recovered from the bog and pieced together, is not a passive object to be gazed upon, an exhibition piece onto which one can impose a particular narrative. Instead, she constitutes an active agent imbued with subjectivity, who is able to testify to the history of subjugation and bear witness to the colonial experience. Through the description of her body, which is "much blacker"[24] than that of the nameless protagonist, the story juxtaposes Matricia's apparent blackness with the narrator's own experience of racial difference—including the act of Westernizing her appearance, i.e. straightening her hair,[25] which contributes to the creation of ambivalent double vision, a distorted mirror image, at the same time as it complicates the questions of ancestry, race, and ethnicity. Hence, where Matricia's body symbolizes the ancestral past, the narrator embodies the fractured, liminal nature of the postcolonial experience. Nonetheless, while Matricia's embodiment constitutes a connection with the ancestral past that is the object of the narrator's longing, the narrative emphasizes that the access to that repository of ancestral memory is equally fractured and incomplete, echoing the sentiments expressed by Helen Tiffin in her examination of the postcolonial condition,[26] and paralleling the central motifs of Andrea Hairston's short story.

The earth's revenge: reliving the past

Finally, the connection between the corporeal and the historical finds its ultimate manifestation in the motif of reliving the past. This narrative, which can be traced across the postcolonial speculative fiction genre, places the body at the center of these processes, maintaining that the corporeal is

[22] Bill Ashcroft, *Post-Colonial Transformation* (London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 82–83.
[23] Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, p. 52.
[24] Mayr, "Toot Sweet Matricia," p. 47.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Tiffin, "Post-Colonial Literatures and Counter-Discourse," p. 95.

capable of collapsing the boundaries between the past, the present, and the future, at the same time destroying the Western, linear notion of time and the historical narrative, thus echoing Ashcroft's sentiments.[27] Those liminal, atemporal bodies which can reach back into their own past while remaining in the present are, therefore, capable of reconstructing the lost memories, histories, and genealogies, emerging as disobedient subjects who refuse temporal containment and question the nature of our relationship with the hegemonic historical account.

In Larissa Lai's 2002 novel *Salt Fish Girl*, the protagonist, Miranda Ching, through her connection with an ancient Chinese aquatic deity named Nu Wa, establishes her relationship with the past via her body, which constitutes, as Braidotti puts it, "an enfleshed kind of memory,"[28] enabling strategies of resistance against the neo-colonial hegemonic discourse into which she has been inscribed. Miraculously conceived after her mother's ingestion of the illegally obtained durian fruit coming from the Unregulated Zone, in which the goddess Nu Wa, hidden in a seed, waited to be born again, Miranda lives as a reincarnation of Nu Wa and a visible marker of bodily disobedience, collapsing in her very existence the notion of the linear progression of time and history.

It is Miranda's body, then, which bears the visible marks of her connection with the past, making the link explicit. Her fistulas, located behind her ears and leaking salty fluid, as well as her scales, which she initially identifies as having come from a piece of salmon,[29] constitute an explicit link with Nu Wa's aquatic origins, betraying her ancestry and establishing a direct connection to her past. Moreover, the overpowering scent of the durian fruit, which accompanies her from the moment of birth as a physical reminder of her link with Nu Wa and, by extension, the hidden genealogy of her reincarnations, outs her as Other at the same time as it signalizes her corporeal disobedience, seeping and leaking into the cracks and crevices, permeating her surroundings, refusing to be contained.[30] This, in turn, can be construed as a metaphor for the impossibility of extinguishing all perceptible signs of the colonial Other and a return of the suppressed subject to serve as a source of anxiety for the hegemonic system, while the durian fruit, simultaneously associated with exoticness and arousing disgust in Westerners, emerges as a physical reminder of the

[27] Ashcroft, *Post-Colonial Transformation*, p. 83.
[28] Rosi Braidotti, *Transpositions. On Nomadic Ethics* (Cambridge: Polity, 2006), p. 156.
[29] Larissa Lai, *Salt Fish Girl: A Novel* (Toronto: Thomas Allen Publishers, 2002), pp. 44–45.
[30] Ibid., pp. 16–17.

link to the past, existing outside of the imposed neo-colonial order, in the unregulated spaces of the periphery.

Miranda's body, then, becomes a living site of history, looking to the past while anchored firmly in the present, while Miranda herself, through the established connection, begins to remember and relive the past, gradually gaining unmediated access to the historical account. This access is further enabled by Miranda's status as the patient zero of what the characters refer to as the memory disease (or the dreaming disease), which manifests itself in the past leaking into the present as those afflicted by the disease continue to dream of war, death, torture, famine, and rape, reliving traumatic experiences of marginalized communities. Her body, which already bears the marks of her past lives, is for that reason capable of partially resisting the devastating effects of the disease, even though she still suffers from the symptoms. As Miranda says:

> I had no consciousness of sleep-talking, though sometimes the intensity of my dream world frightened me. But only sometimes. At other times it seemed the most natural thing in the world that I should remember things that went on before I was born, things that happened in other lifetimes. They happened to me; I was there, and the memories are continuous. Why should they be anything but? I did not realize that other people did not have these memories. I did not think of myself as a child afflicted by history, unable to escape its delights or its torments.[31]

Even though the primary symptoms of the disease are psychological in nature, this affliction remains nonetheless grounded in the experience of the body, as several of the characters in the novel believe it to be transferred through the soles of the feet, originating from contact with polluted soil.

For Miranda, her suffering from the memory disease signifies in yet another way her liminal nature and link to the past accessed through her body, but for the other sufferers of the disease—those marginalized and rejected by the society; those too destitute to afford shoes—such contact with relived memories is soon to prove fatal. As Miranda says:

> The disease had not yet reached the point of epidemic. In fact, there were not yet any indications that this strange disorder was causing any real harm, except, perhaps, at a social level. Its sufferers had not yet begun their compulsive march into the rivers and oceans, unable to resist the water's pull. Their bodies had not yet begun to wash up on the shores like fragments

[31] Ibid., p. 70.

> of an ancient rock separated from their seemingly indestructible mass of origin and pummelled smooth by the tide.[32]

It appears, therefore, that the dreaming disease becomes at the same time a metaphor for the colonial trauma and a sign of a temporal discontinuity which rejects the Western ideas regarding the linear nature of time and the historical narrative. It could be argued, then, that it is ultimately the body which becomes the central locus of remembrance, granting access to the ancestral repository of memory and allowing the subject to establish a connection with their heritage, even though the process necessitates engagement with the traumas of the colonial past.

Thus, the novel argues that memory is, in fact, as much corporeal as it is psychological, facilitated through the experience of the body which, in rejecting the Western understanding of the passage of time and the construction of the historical narrative, is capable of transcending the hegemonic narratives imposed upon it and engaging with the processes of memory- and history-making, in order to rediscover lost stories and voices, if only in part.

Final remarks: bodies of the future, bodies of the past

The consideration of embodiment as a vehicle for engagement with the historical narrative constitutes a familiar trope in postcolonial speculative fiction writing. In positioning the body simultaneously as the ultimate locus of colonial politics and the ultimate locus of resistance against the hegemonic narrative, the authors are able to critically examine and reconceptualize what it means to possess an Othered body within the constraints of a genre that habitually places such bodies in the roles of the alien/the unfamiliar other. Moreover, their inquiry into the issue involves crucial engagement with the temporal aspect of the existence of Othered bodies, as the history of exoticization and fetishization of such bodies has by necessity relegated them to a more "primitive," atavistic status.[33] For that reason, postcolonial speculative fiction works to dismantle those limitations, allowing Othered bodies at the same time to remain the bodies of the past, engaged with their ancestral heritage, but also to become the bodies of the future, unrestrained by the hegemonic discourse.

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[32] Ibid., pp. 70–71.

[33] Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 359.

Thus, those strange embodiments come to constitute the sites of cultural and historical seepage, refusing containment, allowing the characters to bridge the gaps between the past, the present, and the future at the same time as they contest the Western, linear notions of the passage of time and the historical narrative. Through the various forms of embodying memory and testifying to the histories of their communities (transmitting memory/recording the past, excavating the past, reliving the past), the Othered bodies of speculative fiction emerge as potent vehicles for the critical reexamination of the historical narrative in colonial and postcolonial realities. As the body of the Other becomes the place in which the past, the present, and the future converge, it enables the unearthing of the hitherto inaccessible stories and histories, reconstructing the fragmentary memories of marginalized communities and demanding a thorough revision of the colonial narrative, emerging as not only the repository of ancestral memory and knowledge, but also an agent of resistance against the dominant narratives of the colonial historical account.

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Embodied Pasts. Body as Memory in Postcolonial Speculative Fiction

The article considers the ways in which postcolonial speculative fiction conceptualizes the Othered body—particularly the female body—as the corporeal manifestation of collective memory as well as the historical narrative. Therefore, the article proposes that for three authors: Larissa Lai, Suzette Mayr, and Andrea Hairston, the experience of the body constitutes a fundamental element of constructing (or rather reconstructing) the continuity of the historical narrative in colonial and postcolonial realities. In this formulation, the body of the Other becomes the place in which the past, the present, and the future converge, allowing the Othered subject to reach the hitherto inaccessible histories and reconstruct the fragmentary memories of diasporic communities, which pave the way for an ultimate revision of the colonial discourse. The body of the Other becomes, then, not only the locus of ancestral memories, but also a tool of resistance against the hegemonic historical narrative.

Keywords: postcolonial science fiction, body, memory, Larissa Lai, Suzette Mayr, Andrea Hairston

Słowa klucze: postkolonialne science fiction, ciało, pamięć, Larissa Lai, Suzette Mayr, Andrea Hairston