



## Violence as Resistance in N.K. Jemisin's *Broken Earth* Trilogy

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### ABSTRACT

Jemisin's *Broken Earth* trilogy details the subjugation of the Orogenes and the Tuners at the hands of the Stills and the Sylanagistines. In this essay, I contend that Jemisin's trilogy suggests that the violence used by the Orogenes and Tuners is not only an effective means to defeat their respective oppressors; it is also a tool to create hope for a more egalitarian society for all. Although Jemisin's trilogy ends before a more equal society can be formed, I claim readers can infer that it is through the use of violence that there now exists the potential for both oppressor and oppressed to be free, autonomous individuals and learn from the past to prevent history from continuing to repeat itself. Through the analysis of Jemisin's trilogy, this essay aims to argue that not all violence inherently equals destruction.

### KEYWORDS

marginalization, oppressor, oppressed, resistance, subjugation, and violence.

## Introduction

The *Broken Earth* trilogy completed in 2017 is arguably N.K. Jemisin's most critically and commercially successful trilogy to date. This compelling trilogy takes place on a single supercontinent called the Stillness. Despite its name, there is nothing still about this supercontinent. Every few hundred years, a devastating climate change triggered by human activity or catastrophic tectonic movement leaves humanity on the brink of extinction. It periodically forces the citizens of the Stillness into survival mode where the society fragments and the survival of the local community or "comm" supersedes all other concerns. These devastating events - "Fifth Seasons" - set an unstable and precarious backdrop for most of the trilogy.

This precarious setting also serves as a metaphor for the relationships between the four groups in Jemisin's trilogy I am interested in exploring- the Orogenes, the Stills, the Tuners and the Sylanagistines. Throughout her books, Jemisin shows that the Orogenes and the Tuners are subjugated and oppressed by their respective oppressors, the Stills and the Sylanagistines. Although Jemisin's trilogy does highlight how these two marginalized communities are abused, I argue Jemisin's work also shows how her marginalized communities' resist.

— 33 — In this essay, I contend that Jemisin's trilogy suggests that the violence used by the Orogenes and Tuners is not only an effective means to defeat their respective oppressors but is also a tool to create hope for a more egalitarian society for all. Although Jemisin's trilogy ends before a more equal society can be formed, I claim readers can infer that it is through the use of violence that there now exists the potential for both oppressor and oppressed to be free, autonomous individuals and learn from the past to prevent history from continuing to repeat itself. To illustrate my argument, I will be focusing my analysis on the characters Nassun, Alabaster and the group of six Tuners. This essay's analysis will be broken down into three parts.

In the first section, I will be focusing on the character Nassun and her volatile relationship with her father, Jija. Upon his discovery that Nassun is an Orogene, Jija manipulates, abuses, and torments his daughter into suppressing her Orogeny to prevent himself from hating her. This leads Nassun to internalize that her father's love is contingent on her despising herself as an Orogene. While this section does highlight the many ways Nassun is forced to contort herself into her father's ideal daughter; this section will also show why this proves to be unsustainable for Nassun. In the end, the violent act of murdering Jija empowers Nassun to metaphorically unbind herself from her father and fully accept herself as an Orogene.

In the second section, I argue through the characters Alabaster and the Tuners that there is legitimacy to using violence to destroy systems of oppression. Although both instances led to

irreparable destruction for themselves and the rest of the world, I claim that even before Alabaster and the Tuners employed violence, their oppressors had already caused irreparable damage to the oppressed and by extension the world. In other words, it is unfair to demonize these marginalized people without first holding their oppressors responsible for placing them in that position. Analysing these characters' decision through this lens reframes their narrative from being a destructive tale to a story about collective liberation.

Finally, the third section will highlight how violence can create hope for a more egalitarian society for all. In this section, I will show how the dangerous act of bringing the moon back into orbit metaphorically does restore humanity for all oppressed people, and ironically, even their oppressors. This violent act sets the stage for a better world.

### Systems of Oppression and Tools of Resistance

The most prominent institution that enslaves Orogenes is the Fulcrum. The Fulcrum is an institution whose purpose is to 'train' Orogenes and use them to prevent the occurrences of "Fifth Seasons". Within the Fulcrum, Orogenes are trained to behave 'respectfully' and control their abilities of Orogeny. If an Orogene demonstrates the aptitude to learn 'correctly', they climb up the Fulcrum hierarchy and earn more rings. An Orogene who is unable to demonstrate control to the desired level has two options in this system. If they are 'lucky' they are killed. However, most of them endure a fate worse than death: they become node maintainers.

An Orogene is 'selected' to be a node maintainer usually from childhood and they remain node maintainers for the rest of their lives. More often than not they are usually Orogene children that are unwanted by the Fulcrum. They are either "feral Orogene" children that are too old for the Fulcrum to train yet "young enough that killing's a waste", or they are children from the Fulcrum that are unable to master control over their Orogeny (Jemisin, *Fifth* 140).

An Orogene becomes a node maintainer through a very complicated, painful and dehumanizing surgery. A cut is made at their organ at the base of their brain stem known as the "sessapinae" - the same organ that allows Orogenes to perform Orogeny. The effect of this surgery is cruel. It completely severs Orogenes' self-control whilst still allowing their instinctive powers to function (Jemisin, *Fifth* 141).

Once the surgery is finished, the Orogenes are barely kept alive. All their bodily functions are hooked up to machines that feed, oxygenate and allow the Orogene to excrete their waste - but they are not thinking or feeling human beings (Jemisin, *Fifth* 141). Instead, they have become mindless, drugged-out servants whose bodies are used solely as machines to quell micro-shakes across the Stillness.

Tuners, on the other hand, are a synthetically created group of individuals made by the Sylanagistines forty thousand years prior to be a group distinctly different from humans and also caricatures of the Niess people. The Tuners sole purpose in their creation is to perform magic and serve as a battery to feed the society of Syl Anagist. The most prominent agents that ensure the Tuners are performing their tasks efficiently are the conductors. They manage and control the Tuners by monitoring their output of magic. They also ensure the Tuners continue to internalize the message of their inferiority to the Sylanagistines.

If the Tuners are not able to perform magic efficiently or to the satisfaction of the conductors, they are sent into ‘retirement’ to the briar patch. The briar patch functions like a backup generator that is meant to add extra power to the magic produced by the Tuners. All the Tuners that have been “retired” and all the Niess people that have been exterminated from society are taken by the Sylanagistines and are kept in the briar patch in a similar condition to the node maintainers. They are kept alive because the Sylanagistines require the use of their bodies to produce “magic” that fuels and maintains the entire Syl Anagist operating system (Jemisin, *Stone* 263). There are millions of bodies in the briar patch, some of whom have been trapped in that condition for centuries.

— 35 — Much like the node maintainers, the briar patch victims are neither thinking nor feeling human beings. Rather, they are mindless, drugged-out, near-corpses who are kept alive in a limbo state because the Sylanagistines have found a way to keep them servile for eternity.

Although both Orogenes and Tuners live in incredibly torturous environments, Jemisin shows readers’ these marginalized people have more power at their disposal through the weapon of the obelisks. Interestingly, these incredibly powerful weapons are only accessible to the Orogenes and Tuners. Neither the Stills nor the Sylanagistines can weaponize the obelisks on their own.

Forty thousand years ago, the Sylanagistines created the obelisks by seamlessly fusing magic and advanced technology. The obelisks were created to drain the earth’s essence to provide an inexhaustible source of energy for the Sylanagistines to consume for the rest of eternity. Upon the Tuners’ discovery about the briar patch victims, they came to a deep realization that the city of Syl Anagist is built on the subjugation of others.

Hence, the Tuners decided to connect all the obelisks, form the obelisk gate and use it against the Sylanagistines and their city. Through their actions, the Tuners set off the first “Fifth Season” by inadvertently flinging the moon out of the earth’s orbit. The first “Fifth Season” is also known as the Shattering - the first world’s end.

In the present time of the narrative, the obelisks are merely seen as floating relics, objects from a distant failed civilization. Their nature and true purpose have long been erased from

history. However, Alabaster uncovers the truth about the obelisks and much like the Tuners, he decides to use the obelisk gate to rid the world of oppression. He breaks the world in half by setting off the worst recorded “Fifth Season” since the Shattering.

In the latter part of my essay, I will draw a parallel between Alabaster’s and the Tuners’ decision to use the obelisk gate. Much like the Tuners, Alabaster also uses the obelisk gate to liberate himself, other Fulcrum Orogenes and node maintainers: individuals that are unable to free themselves on their own. However, I will also show that Alabaster’s motives differ slightly from the Tuners. While the Tuners focused on destruction solely for the sake of liberation, Alabaster is motivated by his desire to build a better society for all people. To do so, he is acutely aware that it is only possible through the act of bringing the moon back into orbit.

Therefore, I will show how the obelisks and the obelisk gate are weapons used by the Orogenes and Tuners as a means to resist. Although there are severe consequences to their use of violence, Jemisin’s trilogy emphasizes that it is only through the use of violent resistance that hope for a better society can flourish.

### Reframing the Dominant Narrative of Violent Resistance

— 36 —  
More often than not, the term violence insinuates something negative. According to the Oxford dictionary, violence is “behaviour that is intended to hurt or kill someone”. Hence, judging from this description, violence connotes this notion of wrongness, evil and injustice. This is especially ironic considering that more often than not those in power themselves utilize sanctioned violence against resisters whilst prohibiting them from using violence themselves. Therefore, who determines what is considered violent and what is not? And what is the relationship of violence to the state and the law?

Onur Günay notes that those in power define what is violent and what is not. Günay argues that the “*violent other*” is “constructed” by the state through a repertoire of “images, texts, knowledges and imaginaries” which are all grounded in colonialism, racism and dominant nationalist rhetoric (176). However, state-sanctioned violence is shielded by sovereign law and hence protected from being condemned as violence (Günay 171). In other words, it is the state that creates a narrative around the violent ‘Other’ and uses its available resources at hand to disseminate it to the public.

Freire also emphasizes that it is those in power that decide who and what is violent. He argues violence always begins with the oppressor and is never initiated by the oppressed (Freire 45). The oppressors are those that oppress and exploit because they fail to recognize the “Other” as a person (Freire 46). Instead, the oppressors view the oppressed as “subversives”, “natives”

and “savages” - “these people” that are “violent”, “barbaric”, “wicked” and “ferocious” because they dare to react against the violence committed towards them by their oppressors (Freire 46).

Nevertheless, different theorists have shown that although violence is a legitimate form of resistance, it is a journey that is fraught with difficulty. Despite its difficulty, Andrea Dworkin argues that it is nonetheless a vital journey to undertake. Dworkin argues that disruption, disobedience and violation of conventional ideas are needed to create change (19). Time after time, women have demonstrated that “in order to change laws” and “change convention” women had to “violate them” (Dworkin 19). This tactic of “civil disobedience” was employed by the suffragettes, a militant political activist group, and they managed to “achieve their goals” (Dworkin 19).

bell hooks however notes, while there is power in unleashing Black rage, more often than not Black people are not allowed to show disobedience. hooks argues that throughout the years, Black people have been forced to repress their rage because white people are unable to “hear” Black rage (12). This leaves Black rage “trapped” and “contained” in the “realm of the unspeakable” (hooks 12). Hence, to hooks, it is “humanizing to be able to resist it with militant rage” (17). It is a form of power to be able to express discontent, anger and rage towards white America that has suppressed and oppressed Black resistances for years.

— 37 — hooks’ argument around violent resistance stems from Malcolm X who unashamedly defended Black Americans’ right to self-defence. X consistently argued that “retaliatory violence” is a “necessary response to criminal acts” committed against Black Americans by whites (Cone 179). As X argues, “violence” is the “only language” that “criminals understand” (Cone 179). To inherently “love someone who hates you, is to speak a language they do not understand” (Cone 179). In other words, violence is the only option available to the oppressed to gain their freedom from their oppressors. To negotiate with their oppressors is impossible seeing as they are not treated as equals in the first place.

This is concurred by Fanon: violence is inevitable in a struggle towards freedom. He argues “decolonization is always a violent phenomenon” (Fanon 35). As violence has always plagued the relationship between the native and the settler, for those that are most oppressed and marginalized within a society to be set free, a “murderous and decisive struggle” between the native and the settler is inevitable (Fanon 37).

In application to Jemisin’s trilogy, these theorists’ ideas around violence will be invaluable in understanding why Jemisin’s Tuners and Orogenes view violence as their only available option. These ideas also prevent readers from demonizing Jemisin’s characters’ decisions but instead allows readers to reframe the narrative around violence to focus on the oppressed instead of the oppressor.

### Violence as a Means for Personal Liberation

Nassun begins her journey in the trilogy as the nine-year-old daughter of Jemisin's protagonist Essun. Just like her mother, Nassun is also an incredibly gifted and powerful Orogene. To protect Nassun and her three-year-old son, Uche, from being taken by the Fulcrum, Essun teaches them Orogeny in secret to keep their identities as Orogenes hidden. Essun, being a product of the Fulcrum, teaches her children Orogeny using the same cruel and torturous Fulcrum techniques that she learned as a child to harden her children and equip them with the necessary 'survival' skills to survive in the 'real' world.

However, Essun's cruelty drives a painful wedge between herself and her daughter. Nassun learns to hate being an Orogene and her mother, which in turn drives her to depend on and seek comfort from her father, Jija, who unbeknownst to Nassun, is only able to love her because he is completely unaware of her identity as an Orogene.

One day, Jija accidentally uncovers the truth about his children. Completely disgusted that he had spent years being a "rogga-lover", Jija beats Uche to death in a fit of rage and kidnaps Nassun to take her away from Essun. To cope with the death of her brother, Nassun uses a form of cognitive dissonance to protect herself from fully understanding the extent of her father's hatred towards all Orogenes, and more specifically towards her.

Nassun begins to blame her mother for all the pain she caused her father. She even goes to the extent of blaming Essun for causing Jija to murder Uche: "But. No. He *is* Daddy. Whatever is wrong with him now, it's Mama's fault" (Jemisin, *Obelisk* 79). Her thoughts start with "But", indicating that she is confused; she then says "No" – making a conscious decision to put that confusion aside and choose not to blame her father. This emphasizes how badly Nassun desires to revert to being in a position where she is loved by one parent. Nassun is able to easily blame Essun due to their already tumultuous relationship. However, the cruelty she now experiences from her father pushes Nassun to further hate her Orogene mother, and herself for being an Orogene.

Over time, Nassun forces herself to accept that her relationship with her father has completely altered. The first moment she realizes this is when Jija hits her when she attempts to hold his hand. The disgust that Jija visibly shows Nassun in this simple act of tenderness emphasizes how Orogene children are never seen as mere children. Rather, Stills perceive them as dangerous, diseased animals that must be cured of their illness of Orogeny: "There is only one disease that afflicts her in [Jija's] eyes, only one poison he would journey halfway across the world to have drawn out of his little girl" (Jemisin, *Obelisk* 114).

Therefore, Nassun learns that to ensure her continued survival around Jija, she has to resort to tricks and manipulation to recreate memories of her relationship with him before his discovery that she is an Orogene. Nassun does so by calling him “Daddy”:

it is the thing that has swayed him, these times when he has come near to turning on her: remembering that she is his little girl. Reminding him that he has been, up to today, a good father (Jemisin, *Obelisk* 83).

In these moments, Nassun allows Jija to pretend that he is a loving father who has not murdered his son or threatened the life of his daughter. Nassun feeds Jija’s fantasy of what he wants his daughter to be instead of the person she is. She forces herself to play the role of “his little girl”, and not an Orogene, a monster he despises.

Nassun’s relationship with Jija can be related to Dworkin’s argument of binding. In her chapter, “Gynocide: Chinese Footbinding”, Dworkin equates the literal foot binding Chinese girls were forced to endure for a thousand years with the psychological and emotional binding all women are forced to undergo to appear more appealing to men.

Chinese girls’ feet from the tender age of seven (and perhaps even younger) are forced to be bound and broken to ensure the marriageability of the girl. Chinese customs believed that foot binding made girls more attractive and desirable in the eyes of men. It supposedly “distorted the natural lines of the female body” and provided a “most useful alteration of the vagina” (Dworkin 96). However, in reality, foot-binding did nothing to beautify the vagina and the practice was “excruciatingly painful” (Dworkin 96). It was so harmful that it later even prevented girls from being able to walk.

To Dworkin, this practice serves as an example of how a “man’s love for a woman”, his “sexual adoration for her, his human definition of her, his delight and pleasure in her, requires her negation: physical crippling and psychological lobotomy” (112). In other words, for a man to love a woman, a woman must undergo cruel and sadistic changes within herself to be accepted and valued.

Similarly, Nassun is forced to bind herself physically, psychologically and emotionally as an Orogene to be accepted by her father. She is forced to refrain from doing Orogey and thus appear non-threatening around her father, “because her life depends on it” (Jemisin, *Obelisk* 113). Nassun is constantly forced to repress herself to provide space for Jija to be able to view her as a human being. This emphasizes how Nassun is bound.

However, Jemisin shows that this dynamic proves to be unsustainable for Nassun. While it appeases her father and prevents him from killing her, by forcing herself to be someone she is not, Nassun runs the risk of completely losing herself. Nassun is constantly forced to hear the same derogatory rhetoric from Jija that all “*Roggas*... lie, sweetening. They threaten, and manipulate, and use. They’re evil, Nassun, as evil as Father Earth himself. You aren’t like that” (Jemisin, *Obelisk* 310). Jija has manipulated the situation so that Nassun’s entire existence is solely about being the perfect daughter for her father.

Nassun finally comes to her breaking point when she realizes that her father has completely altered the truth with lies to ensure he can continue to live out his fantasy as a loving father. He has demonized Essun and Uche and placed them in the category of “*Rogga*” but has completely separated Nassun from this category through cognitive dissonance to allow himself to continue to love her.

More than that, Nassun discovers that he has changed the narrative to make it seem like he is the victim and not Uche, the son he murdered:

In a sudden blur of understanding as powerful as magic, Nassun realizes Jija does not remember standing over Uche’s body... Now he believes he has never threatened her.... Something has rewritten the story of his orogene children in Jija’s head.... It is perhaps the same thing that has rewritten Nassun for him as *daughter* and *not roggas* (Jemisin, *Obelisk* 311).

This violent rewriting of the narrative awakens Nassun to the truth of who her father really is - a man who has murdered, kidnapped and threatened his children. She stops feeding herself lies about her father and finally accepts the truth. Her younger brother Uche was murdered by Jija simply because he hates all Orogenes, including Nassun.

This profound realization finally pushes Nassun to accept that she can never stop being an Orogene nor should she stop to simply appease her father: “I am trying to get better, Daddy... I’m trying to become a better orogene” (Jemisin, *The Obelisk Gate* 313). At first glance, this interaction may suggest that Nassun is again attempting to change for the sake of her father. On closer inspection, Nassun is subverting this and becoming the Orogene that she wants to become. Through this empowering line, readers learn that Nassun is finally able to unbind herself from her abusive father, Jija.

However, this is unacceptable to Jija. Once again, in his fantasy, Nassun has been corrupted by other Orogenes and the only way he can save her is by murdering her. He twists his actions to view himself as a hero and justify his hatred towards all Orogenes. Therefore, to

survive and finally cleanse herself of Jija's lies and abuse, Nassun decides to use the obelisk to protect herself and kill Jija:

She wills [the obelisk] to move to a new position and it does. In front of her. Between her and Jija, so that when Jija angles his body to stab her, he cannot help bumping right into it. This makes it easy, inevitable for her powers to lay into him (Jemisin, *Obelisk* 388).

Here, Nassun uses the obelisk as a weapon to enact her violence against her father. Through this discussion, I argue that Nassun uses violence as a cleansing force. It allows her to reclaim her space against her oppressor, Jija, who has forced her to repress herself and be small. Moreover, Nassun also learns to free herself from her inferiority complex that both her father and mother imposed on her. She learns to embrace herself as an Orogene and use her Orogeny to empower herself to fight against an attack from her father.

This directly mirrors Fanon's argument that "violence is a cleansing force", it can "free the native" from "his inferiority complex" and "from his despair and inaction" (94). Violence also makes the native "fearless and restores his self-respect" that has been stripped by the settler (Fanon 94). This emphasizes how the violent act of murdering her father empowers Nassun to accept herself without hatred and liberate herself.

### **The Legitimacy of Violence as a Tool to Resist**

Aside from being a tool of empowerment, violence is also a legitimate weapon to use in resistance against systems of oppression. This is because not all violence can be equated. The effect of the violence committed in self-defence by the oppressed is not comparable to the violence used to persecute and subjugate them.

It was Malcolm X who strongly argued it was unjust to demonize the choice of Black Americans to use violence to protect and defend themselves when the violence used against them by their oppressors is not only socially accepted but is also legalized. X argues,

when you can bring me a nonviolent racist, bring me a nonviolent segregationist, then I'll get nonviolent. But don't teach me to be nonviolent until you teach some of those crackers to be nonviolent.

Therefore, “retaliatory violence” according to Malcolm X is not only legitimate but also a “necessary response to criminal acts” committed against Black Americans (Cone 179). It is the only means which Black Americans can use to achieve their freedom and liberation. As X notes, because it is the “only language” that “criminals understand”, it is the same language that Black Americans are forced to use (Cone 179).

In Jemisin’s trilogy, through Alabaster and the Tuners, Jemisin demonstrates that the decision to use retaliatory violence is forced upon them by their oppressors. Moreover, Alabaster’s and the Tuners’ decision is shown to be calculated and not only reactive. It is fueled by the understanding that violent resistance is the only option available to them to gain their freedom and the freedom of all oppressed individuals.

When Hoa and the other Tuners are first introduced, they all collectively identify themselves as “tools”. It is an identity that they take immense pride in: “we may be tools, but we are fine ones, put to a magnificent purpose. It is easy to find pride in that” (Jemisin, *Stone* 98). They are brainwashed to believe that as tools they are seen as an integral part of the city of Syl Anagist. Although they may not be treated equally to the Sylanagistines, the service they render to the city is nonetheless valued.

However, the Tuners begin to understand the extent of their persecution upon their — 42 — discovery of the briar patch victims. This horrifying reality forces them awake and out of their learned docility and down a path of resistance. As Hoa notes,

there are stages to the process of being betrayed by your society. One is jolted from a place of complacency by the discovery of difference, by hypocrisy, by inexplicable or incongruous ill-treatment. What follows is a time of confusion – unlearning what one thought to be the truth. Immersing oneself in the new truth. And then a decision must be made (Jemisin, *Stone* 311).

This step-by-step guide on how to awaken to resist violently, clearly shows that violent resistance is premeditated and not reactive. In a parallel situation, Alabaster also decides to use violent resistance through a moment of realization. It dawns upon him that, “*the world as he knew it could not function without forcing someone into servitude*” (Jemisin, *Stone* 313). Just like the Tuners, Alabaster realizes that all Orogenes will always be enslaved. They will always be forced to become node maintainers and Fulcrum Orogenes in service to the Stills.

Thus, the only available option for both the Tuners and Alabaster is to destroy all forms of power structures that keep the Tuners and Orogenes oppressed. Violence is the only weapon

they can utilize against their oppressors. Therefore, both the Tuners and Alabaster use the obelisk gate to bring the world to an end.

For the Tuners, they realize that the system of oppression in Syl Anagist, much like the Stillness, can never self-destruct. Rather, it is a system that self-replicates. This is seen through Hoa's reflection:

The Niess were not the first people chewed up in its maw, just the latest and cruelest extermination of many. But for a society built on exploitation, there is no greater threat than having no one left to oppress. And now, if nothing else is done, Syl Anagist must again find a way to fission its people into subgroupings and create reasons for conflict among them. There's not enough magic to be had just from plants and genengineered fauna; someone must suffer, if the rest are to enjoy luxury. (Jemisin, *Stone* 334)

— 43 — This idea of feeding on oppression is emphasized by the phrase “chewed up in Syl Anagist's maw”. The personification of Syl Anagist suggests a monstrous consciousness that is behind the oppression of the Tuners and the Niess people. Syl Anagist will always be a society that ravenously feeds on oppression - it is a society fundamentally built on exploitation. Hence, while the Tuners are technically breaking the world to ‘set free’ themselves and the briar patch victims, they are also doing it to destroy the corrupted city of Syl Anagist and prevent any other group's oppression.

Furthermore, this notion that one person must suffer for the rest to enjoy luxury strongly resembles the idea behind Le Guin's short story, “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas”. Le Guin's short story centres the narrative of the perfect utopian city Omelas, with its advanced technology, pristine nature and happy citizens. However, lurking beneath this utopia in a basement lies the secret behind Omelas' success. Chained, malnourished and lying in its own excrement is a child confined in its prison because the subjugation of the child is needed for Omelas' continued happiness.

In this sense, Syl Anagist is a direct parallel to the city of Omelas. To the Sylanagistines, the Tuners must also remain trapped in servitude for eternity for the rest of Syl Anagist to thrive. However, that is the extent of the similarity between the two cities. Unlike Omelas, Syl Anagist is eventually destroyed by the Tuners. Thus, I argue that through this act of destruction, Jemisin's trilogy demonstrates a narrative that centers the liberation of her oppressed people. Jemisin empowers her Tuners to destroy the city that

requires their subjugation to thrive, while Le Guin's narrative illustrates a sense of futility because there is no escape for the child in the basement.

Forty thousand years later, Alabaster also uses the obelisk gate to destroy the Stillness. Part of his intention is to destroy the Fulcrum and with that, 'set free' the Fulcrum Orogenes and the node maintainers. Just like the city of Syl Anagist, Alabaster concludes that the system the Stills have imposed is broken, "*I've decided. It's wrong. Everything's wrong. Some things are so broke that they can't be fixed. You just have to finish them off, sweep away the rubble, and start over*" (Jemisin, *Stone* 299). Whilst Alabaster is advocating for the destruction of a corrupt system, in the latter part of this essay, I will also show how Alabaster uses this destruction as a hopeful avenue to create a more egalitarian society.

In both instances of violence used by Alabaster and the Tuners, ironically, 'setting free' the node maintainers, Fulcrum Orogenes and briar patch victims means killing them. At first glance, their decision seems horrific. It can be viewed as another way in which more violence is committed on the bodies of these already marginalized people. However, I argue that the killing Alabaster and the Tuners perform through this violence is, in fact, an act of mercy.

Death here is the only true way out for the oppressed. It is the only solution to end their misery and suffering. Unlike the oppressors, neither Alabaster nor the Tuners perform this act lightly. Rather, they are giving the most marginalized people in society freedom, through any means necessary. This mirrors Malcolm X's words as he notes, "we want freedom by any means necessary. We want justice by any means necessary. We want equality by any means necessary".

Moreover, despite their good intentions for using violent resistance, there are devastating consequences. For a start, the Tuners created the "Fifth Seasons". In their actions to destroy the world, the Tuners unintentionally used too much power from the obelisk gate and with that flung the moon out of the earth's orbit. With the moon gone from the earth's orbit, the world fell out of balance and is now plagued with "Fifth Seasons" every hundred years or so.

The second consequence came at the expense of the bodies of the Tuners and Alabaster. Jemisin shows that tapping into the enormous power of the obelisk gate has a dire unintended effect on the body of the user. In the case of the Tuners and Alabaster, they undergo a very painful transformative experience in which they turn into stone eaters.

Stone eaters are essentially immortal beings whose bodies are made completely out of stone. The Tuners are the first original stone eaters. The consequence for the Tuners breaking the world in half is that they are forced to live for eternity experiencing the horrendous disasters of the "Fifth Seasons". More than that, with more time that passes, more and more of their identity is forgotten. Forty thousand years later, in the present time, Hoa is the last of the original stone eaters that remember their history and even their name.

Although in both cases Alabaster and the Tuners set off horrifying “Fifth Seasons”, I still claim it is wrong to view their actions as unwarranted. Doing so erases the responsibility of their oppressors for the years of subjugation and abuse they committed. For the oppressed, the world was already broken and inhospitable. Alabaster and the Tuners are merely responding to these abuses through the only means available to them, violence. Furthermore, I assert that for those living in these inhumane conditions, this destruction is an act of hope for them. It creates hope to build a new society in which they are now free from further persecution.

### The Utility of Violent Resistance to Create Hope for a Better Society

As I have demonstrated in the previous section, violent resistance can cause destruction that negatively affects both the oppressor and the oppressed. However, I have also firmly claimed that more than destruction, violent resistance also creates room for a better society.

According to Paulo Freire, the act of rebellion, although it can be as violent as the initial violence committed by the oppressors, also has the power to “initiate love” (46). Freire strongly distinguishes between the violence committed by the oppressed and the oppressors. When the oppressors use violence, it strips humanity away from both parties - the oppressed and the oppressors. On the other hand, by removing the oppressors’ power to “dominate and suppress”, the oppressed also ironically restores their oppressors’ “humanity” which they had lost in the “exercise of oppression” (Freire 46). Simply put, it is only the oppressed who through freeing themselves can also, in turn, free their oppressors (Freire 46). In Jemisin’s trilogy, she uses the characters Alabaster and Nassun to show how violence utilized by the oppressed can also be a symbol of hope.

Although Alabaster uses the obelisk gate to destroy the world, as mentioned he also uses it to create a better world. In this section, I will show that he also uses violence with the desire to create a better future in which Orogenes are no longer oppressed. This is observed through a letter he writes to Syenite: “*I’m breaking [the world] because I was wrong. Start it over, you were right, change it. Make it better for the children you have left*” (Jemisin, *Stone* 300).

The way in which Alabaster hopes to accomplish this task is by bringing the moon back into orbit. Alabaster’s decision to use the power of the obelisk gate to bring the moon back symbolizes both a literal and metaphorical act of bringing equilibrium back into this world: only when the “moon is back in orbit”, can “equilibrium be re-established” and “peaceful coexistence by any means necessary” be achieved with the end of the Seasons (Jemisin, *Obelisk* 127).

This line “peaceful coexistence through any means necessary” echoes Malcolm X’s words “freedom through any means necessary”. Interestingly, X’s words demonstrate that for the

oppressed to gain their freedom, the oppressors are required to relinquish their power, or the oppressed will take it through any means necessary.

On the other hand, while Jemisin's line also illustrates the same sentiments as X, I argue that Jemisin's words also highlight the hope that peaceful existence between different groups of people is possible. Although violence and destruction are needed for the oppressed to break the cycle of abuse, in the long run, it will bring peace for everyone. This also emphasizes Paulo Freire's words that violence committed by the oppressed can instigate love.

In this instance, the resetting of the moon is a cosmic metaphor for things being set right with the world through the end of the "Fifth Seasons". For a start, "Fifth Seasons" would no longer force citizens into survival mode, where the survival of the local "comm" supersedes all other concerns. This would also mean that individuals that are not deemed useful within the "comm" are no longer ousted or worst eaten by the "comm" in times of difficulty. The end of "Fifth Seasons" would allow actual communities to build and develop – not just the truncated "comm".

Secondly, it would allow the relationships between Orogenes and Stills to heal. In Essun's "comm" Castrima, the leader Ykka, another Orogene, and Essun frequently disagree about the relationship between Stills and Orogenes. Ykka has faith in the "comm" she is trying to build where Orogenes and Stills can exist together in harmony. However, Essun disagrees with this possibility. For Essun, through her traumatic experiences with Stills from her time in the Fulcrum to her relationship with Jija where he killed her son and kidnapped her daughter, she has learned that Stills are untrustworthy and dangerous and therefore "roggas and stills can never live together" (Jemisin, *Obelisk* 294). This prevents her from trying to build any form of meaningful relationship with Stills. However, Ykka argues that Essun's divisive attitude prevents Orogenes and Stills from moving past the labels of "oppressed" and "oppressor":

You're saying these people—my parents, my creche teachers, my friends, my lovers—  
You're saying just leave them to their fate. You're saying they're nothing. That they're  
not people at all, just beasts whose nature it is to kill. You're saying roggas are nothing  
but, but prey and that's all we'll ever be! No! I won't accept that (Jemisin, *Obelisk* 295).

Hence, to Ykka, because the "Stills *learned* to hate us. They can learn differently" (Jemisin, *Obelisk* 294). Only through time can trust between these two fractured groups heal and lead to a community in which all people are allowed to live in freedom. Therefore, as much as Orogenes should be allowed to be free from persecution, the Stills should

also be allowed to grow and learn from their history. However, this idealistic future can only come to pass with the cosmic resetting of the world.

Lastly, with the end of the “Fifth Seasons”, it would also mean the end of abusing Orogenes and turning them into node maintainers. When the “comm” Castrima is forced to migrate to Rennais, they discovered,

to survive in Rennais, Castrima will need the node maintainers. It will need to take care of them. And when those node maintainers die, Castrima will need to find some way to replace them. No one’s talking about that last part yet (Jemisin, *Stone* 268).

However, with the end of the “Fifth Seasons”, Castrima will be able to finally put the node maintainers out of their misery and will not have to worry about turning any other Orogene into a mindless, drugged-out servant, forced to live in a dehumanized state for the rest of their lives. It would also mean Ykka would not be forced to turn into an oppressor and her dream of building a community built on equality can finally become a reality.

Thus, although Jemisin’s trilogy shows that the use of violence is needed to achieve this progress, in the long run, I argue Jemisin’s narrative rejects a constant state of conflict as its outcome. The end of all “Fifth Seasons” brings an end to all forms of tumult.

Before Alabaster can complete this task though, he dies and turns into a stone eater. Therefore, the task of bringing the moon back falls unto another powerful Orogene. The mantle is eventually taken up by young Nassun. At first, Nassun is torn between using the power of the obelisk gate to bring back the moon into orbit or killing everyone in the world. Her anger and rage at the unfairness of the fact that all Orogenes are raped to serve the Stills overwhelms her and pushes her to the extreme:

*I wouldn’t fix it... I’m sorry, I don’t want to fix it I want to kill everybody that hates me — G-g-gone! I want it all GONE... I want it to BURN, I want it burned up and dead and gone, gone, NOTHING l-l-left, no more hate and no more killing just nothing, r-rusting nothing, nothing FOREVER — (Jemisin, *Stone* 90).*

The broken syntax, the stuttering, the capitalisation, all show the extremity of Nassun’s emotions. It comes as no surprise that Nassun craves to destroy and kill off everyone that hates Orogenes, including all Orogenes. If everyone is dead, then no one else has to suffer in the same

way that Orogenes have been forced to suffer. Moreover, by killing all Orogenes, Nassun is inadvertently also saving them from a life of persecution.

Through this line, Jemisin also highlights the overwhelming hopelessness that Nassun feels towards society. Nassun cannot imagine a world in which power structures such as the Fulcrum do not exist because that is the only world Nassun knows. Therefore, destruction at this moment will bring a sense of relief for Nassun. It will liberate her from all the trauma she is forced to carry around with her from the abuse she suffered at the hands of her mother, father and the rest of society. Through this act, Nassun will be breaking the cycle of abuse forever.

However, Nassun changes her mind due to her mother's sacrifice for her. As I have mentioned, using the obelisk gate comes with repercussions of turning the user into a stone eater. Acutely aware of the danger Nassun and the rest of the world are facing, Essun decides to take control of the obelisk gate and recapture the moon herself.

When Nassun refuses to let go of the obelisk gate and its power, it forces Essun to decide to either let Nassun win and be turned into a stone eater or choose to sacrifice herself. Without hesitation, Essun chooses to sacrifice herself and she turns into stone. This action by her mother, with whom Nassun has had a tumultuous relationship with, shocks Nassun beyond belief: "She inhales, her eyes widening as if she cannot believe what she is seeing: her mother, so fearsome, on the ground. Trying to crawl on stone limbs. Face wet with tears. *Smiling*" (Jemisin, *Stone* 386).

Nassun cannot understand how her mother whom she strongly believes hated her would sacrifice herself for her daughter. At that moment, Nassun realizes that the trauma that she has undergone from being an Orogene is one that her mother also lives with. Through this act, Nassun can let go of her hatred towards her mother and see her as a person for the first time:

But she cannot stop staring at [Essun's] drying tears. Because the world took and took and took from [her], too, after all. She knows this. And yet, for some reason that she does not think she'll ever understand... even as [Essun] died, [she was] reaching for the Moon (Jemisin, *Stone* 387).

Therefore, in the end, Nassun chooses to bring back the moon into orbit and save everyone from total annihilation. The motivation that Nassun uses is the love that she feels from her mother. With this action, Nassun brings the equilibrium back both physically and metaphorically to the society of Orogenes, Stills and even the stone eaters. This emphasizes the words of Freire that violence from the oppressed can restore the humanity of both the oppressed

and the oppressor. Hence, Jemisin's trilogy ends with a symbol of hope. This is especially felt through the words of Hoa:

Imprisonment of Orogenes was never the only option for ensuring the safety of society... Lynching was never the only option. The nodes were never the only option. All of these were choices. Different choices have always been possible (Jemisin, *Stone* 395).

This line clearly illustrates that destruction is only the first step; the next step is the act of rebuilding a better world. The options are limitless for how the Stills and Orogenes can choose to rebuild this world together.

While Jemisin's text does not directly illustrate what type of system is created, the final words spoken by Essun as a stone eater, "I want the world to be better" (Jemisin, *Stone* 398), fill readers with hope that the world that is born anew will not be worse than the one that Alabaster just destroyed. Thus, once again illustrating Fanon's point that "violence is a cleansing force" (Fanon 94).

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**BIO**

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