

**POSTHUMANISM AND FEMINIST THEOLOGY IN SELECTED  
TEXTS OF OCTAVIA BUTLER**

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**THESIS SUBMITTED IN FULFILLMENT OF THE  
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF  
PHILOSOPHY**

**FACULTY OF ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES  
UNIVERSITY OF MALAYA  
KUALA LAMPUR**

**2016**

UNIVERSITY OF MALAYA

ORIGINAL LITERARY WORK DECLARATION

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Registration/Matric No: **AHA100007**

Name of Degree: **Doctor of Philosophy**

Title of Project Paper/Research Report/Dissertation/Thesis ("this Work"):

**POSTHUMANISM AND FEMINIST THEOLOGY IN SELECTED TEXTS OF  
OCTAVIA BUTLER**

Field of Study: **English literature**

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis applies Daphne Hampson's "post-Biblical" as well as Rosemary Radford Ruether's ecofeminist "Biblical" perspectives on four selected texts by Octavia Butler. They are *Parable of the Sower*, *Parable of the Talents*, "Amnesty," and "The Book of Martha." In this research, I try to offer new theological readings to these stories to show how Butler's postmodern theological stand reflects an optimistic view about the spiritual potential of humanity to establish a more promising, that is to say peaceful, life on Earth. The study is concerned with the relationship between God, human beings, and nature, and tries to reveal Butler's mastery in constructing an inclusive approach of life or coexistence on Earth. This study also deals with what Hampson and Ruether recognize as the Othering tendency in Christianity which seems to hierarchically subjugate human beings and nature under the dominance of an Almighty God. Hampson and Ruether discuss how this Othering aspect, which appears in rigid interpretations of the Bible, could be replaced by new theological understandings which recognize egalitarianism as the true pattern in the triangle of God, human beings, and nature.

My research focuses especially on the characterization of the protagonists in these selected stories by Butler; stories which are examples of postmodern science fiction. It reveals how, unlike in traditional forms of science fiction, Butler's heroines are not prefixed within the usual racial and sexual characteristics in science fiction as white and belonging to the masculine gender. In other words, this study tries to reveal the capacity of science fiction to, parallel with the innovative theological perspective of the stories, embody a "literature of change," as advocated by critics of science fiction.

## ABSTRAK

Tesis ini menerapkan pandangan "pasca Alkitab" Daphne Hampson serta perspektif "ekofeminis Alkitab" Rosemary Radford Ruether pada empat kisah pilihan karya Octavia Butler. Teks tersebut adalah "*Parable of the Sower*", "*Parable of the Talents*", "Amnesty", dan "The Book of Martha". Dalam kajian ini, saya cuba menawarkan bacaan teologi baru kepada kisah-kisah ini untuk menunjukkan bagaimana pendirian teologi Butler pascamoden mencerminkan pandangan optimistik tentang potensi kerohanian umat manusia untuk mewujudkan kehidupan yang lebih aman sejahtera di bumi ini. Kajian ini menekankan hubungan antara Tuhan, manusia dan alam semula jadi, dan cuba untuk mendedahkan kemahiran Butler mencipta pendekatan inklusif hidup atau kewujudan bersama di bumi. Kajian ini juga berkaitan dengan apa yang Hampson dan Ruether iktiraf sebagai kecenderungan 'Othering' dalam agama Kristian yang seolah-olah secara hierarki menundukkan manusia dan alam semula jadi di bawah dominasi satu Allah SWT. Hampson dan Ruether membincangkan bagaimana aspek 'Othering' yang muncul dalam tafsiran tegar dalam kitab Bible ini boleh digantikan dengan pemahaman teologi baru yang mengiktiraf egalitarianisme sebagai corak sebenar trinitas ketuhanan, manusia dan alam semula jadi. Kajian saya memberi tumpuan terutamanya kepada penceritaan protagonis dalam kisah-kisah yang dipilih oleh Butler; yang merupakan contoh fiksyen sains pasca moden. Ia mendedahkan bagaimana tidak seperti dalam bentuk tradisional fiksyen sains, heroin Butler tidak diawali dengan ciri-ciri bangsa kulit putih dan seksual yang biasanya berkaitan dengan jantina maskulin seperti dalam fiksyen sains. Dalam erti kata lain, kajian ini cuba untuk mendedahkan kapasiti fiksyen sains untuk selari dengan perspektif teologi inovatif kisah-kisah tersebut, mewujudkan satu "kesusasteraan perubahan" seperti yang diperjuangkan oleh para pengkritik fiksyen sains.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my gratitude to Dr. Carol Elizabeth Leon, my supervisor, for her precious and helpful comments in conducting my research. I am also indebted to Dr. Shalini Teresa Fernandez because of her valuable suggestions in the beginning of this research.

I have to especially thank my parents for all of their support and attention. This study would not have been achieved without their loving care. I am also pleased to have friends whose intellectual debates provided me with extra enthusiasm to accomplish my study. Shall be recalled here Dr. Habib Mohammadi, my uncle, to whom my academic life owes a lot.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 General Background

In this thesis, I will investigate the representation of the posthuman as agents of change in selected texts of Octavia Butler using feminist theological perspectives. My focus in this investigation would be on the characterization of the protagonists in Butler's stories generally defined as science fiction. These protagonists, reflecting a postmodern understanding of agency and subjectivity, are strong saviours who nourish and revive their societies. This revival, as I will show, is based on the depiction of a postmodern understanding of humanity and its connection with divinity and the nonhuman world, beyond the modern, hierarchical, anthropocentric understanding of the human being as the servant of God, on the one hand, and supreme master of the natural world, on the other hand.

Posthumanism considers the human being as a "subject" who "comes to be by conforming to a strictly dialectical system of difference" (Wolfe 11-12). This dialectical system is based on the recognition of communication between divinity, human, and nonhuman worlds in a way which exceeds the fixed boundary between divinity, as a "Transcendent" entity,<sup>1</sup> and humanity as well as that among human being, natural world "and the mechanical or technical" one (6). This boundary is related to a modernist point of view that advocated on early theistic vision which presumed human kind as the exclusive representative of God. This view highlighted "scientism," and regarded human being as the master of universe whose mission was to discover the mechanism of natural laws running the world (Griffin 2-3). This focus created a kind of centrism on the human being which continues to threaten "*the very survival of life on our planet*" (xi).

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<sup>1</sup> A transcendent monotheism believes in an Almighty God who, "set over against" universe (Hampson *After Christianity* 244), exerts His power unilaterally, beyond the natural, causal system of universe. For further information refer to Daphne Hampson's *After Christianity*, chapter VI, and Griffin's *God and Religion in the Postmodern World*.



Tajik discusses the centerism as the desire for an authentic universalism. According to him, “discourse of modernity is that of universality, and it is shaped by focusing on humanity, wisdom, truth, and center on the whole ... in fact, it is an ideological discourse” (11). Challenging the central role of rationality as an exclusive human feature, the posthumanist perspective argues for the relation of human and nonhuman as “fellow creatures” who, based on the latest scientific observations, share varying levels of wisdom as well as vulnerability and mortality (Wolfe 80). This outlook defies the scientific as well as theological ideology of modernism.<sup>2</sup>

Modernism is presumed as a science-based approach which, in Griffin’s terms, relies on a materialist, “mechanistic,” and “dualistic” perspective, relegating what it considers intangible to the realm of the “supernatural” and, as such, untrustworthy. Postmodernism is a reformation within this scientific movement to take in the so-called unscientific illusory concepts within “reality.” In fact, postmodernism is a reaction against what appears to be the ideological nature of modernism. Despite its apparently scientific nature, the history of modernism reveals itself as an ideological discourse. This ideological discourse enacts its dominance via the claim of objectivity. Postmodernism challenges this objectivity by bringing to the fore concepts and notions which have been neglected by modernity.

Postmodernism attempts to answer new questions. Recognizing the validity of the questions equips postmodern philosophy with the power to release itself from the grip of modernist authenticity. Constructive and revisionary type of postmodernism, Griffin asserts, “involves a new unity of scientific, ethical, aesthetic, and religious intuitions” (x). In this new intuition the hierarchical system of life is rejected as immoral and unscientific. This notion is the nub of my argument in this thesis that links the postmodern theological approach of my work to the reflection of posthumanism which I find in Butler’s stories.

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<sup>2</sup> For further information refer to Badmington, Neil. *Posthumanism (Readers in Cultural Criticism)*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000.

As a postmodern concept, posthumanism employs the non-hierarchical perspective of postmodernism to redefine the relationship between God and human being on the one side, and human and nonhuman worlds, on the other side. In his book, *What Is Posthumanism*, Wolfe traces the history of Western favour towards human being and his mastery over the world to the Aristotelian view of human abilities such as reason and speech as divine favourism that likens the human being to God (65). He explains that postmodern perspective and new scientific observations have made it clear that, first, none of these abilities are restricted to human being and, second, human kind in its nature and essence is not very different from the nonhuman world. Naturally, then, it is immoral and illogical to justify human mastery over the nonhuman world under the theological affirmation that the human being is the true and chosen representative of God on Earth (31-91).

Elaborating on the postmodern vision, Griffin points to its expansion of the realm of authenticity to include the spiritual, non-physical dimension of life. It went beyond scientism by widening the concept of “naturalism” to include “supernatural” phenomena, emphasizing on a “postmodern vision” (ch. 2). The postmodern vision authenticates the validity of the non-transcendental relation between creator and creature, and rejects the assertion that “modern natural sciences are alone allowed to contribute to the construction of our worldview” (x). Postmodernism is the developing of a new doctrine in which “modernism as a worldview is less and less seen as the Final Truth... increasingly relativized to the status of one among many, useful for some purpose, inadequate for others” (ix). Put it into other words, postmodernism is the recognition and application of multiplicity within a multi-vocal world.

Explaining the shaping factors of postmodernism, Mendlesohn highlights secularism. According to her, “[b]y 1960, secularism, or at least a liberal interpretation of most faiths, provided an apparently hegemonic intellectual tradition in the USA”

("Religion and Science Fiction" 264). To figure out the importance of secularism in this context, it is necessary to consider the role of Christianity in Western civilization.

As Dawson in his *Religion and the Rise of Western Culture* explains, historically, Christianity has been the dominant religion in the West and, because of that, has played an important role in the shaping of Western cultural life; the investigation of western identity with no regard of Christianity would be incomplete. The influence has established a centralized concept of order and righteousness during its two millennial exertions, institutionalizing the notion of New Jerusalem and human civilization. Nevertheless, it failed to guarantee and perpetuate peace and order in the twentieth century, not just in Western hemisphere, but all over the world.<sup>3</sup> Mendlesohn points to the reflection of this failure in the Golden Age of science fiction in 1940s and 50s when "religious belief and ritual" were used as the "indication of failure" ("Religion and Science Fiction" 266). It seems that art and literature were among the first grounds to hail, nurture, and reflect detachment from dominant Christianity in Western culture.

A genre which flourished during the postmodern era was science fiction.<sup>4</sup> Receiving its name from Hugo Gernsback in 1929, modern science fiction started in the pulp magazines of the early 20th century, and mostly narrated adventure stories. The range of the genre includes Jules Verne's adventure novels, which were called "voyages extraordinaires" to Wells' "scientific romances," John Wood Campbell with his influential "Astounding Science Fiction" (later called Analog Science Fiction and Fact), "passing through Tony Boucher and J. Francis McComas of *Fantasy and Science Fiction*, Horace Gold and later Fredrik Pohl of *Galaxy* and Michael Moorcock of *New World*," who "shaped the way science fiction developed" (Gunn xvi-xvii). Academic scholarship on science fiction flourished in the post-World War II era while mass

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<sup>3</sup>Broderick in the following article explains the nightmarish situation of the twentieth century by referring to World War II and the Cold War resulting from it. "New Wave and Backwast:1960-1980." *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction*. Ed. Edward James, and Farah Mendlesohn. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003. 48-62.

<sup>4</sup> Mendlesohn prefers to term sf as an "ongoing discussion" rather than genre because it does not embody "certain elements and specific tropes" Farah Mendlesohn, "Introduction: Reading Science Fiction," *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction*, ed. Edward James, and Farah Mendlesohn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) 1. However, in this thesis, I refer to it as genre to mean a specific literary kind.

publishers were replacing the traditional supporting fans of the genre that were limited to specified social groups. All these paved the way for a “new period marked by general acceptance of science fiction as a respectable area of scholarship” (xviii). At the time, science fiction, according to Gunn, developed from the status of a genre which was obsessed with entertainment within fantastical frames to a venerable, serious form of literature. With the passage of time, its status achieved a high rank and literary value so much so that annual meetings and conferences were held to highlight and discuss what was new in the realm. Suffice to say postmodern science fiction prospered as an interpretative serious literature, aided by the influential impact of cinema and television.

In his essay, “Newness, Neuromancer, and the End of Narrative,” Huntington writes: “Science fiction is a literary genre whose value has little to do with any privileged insight into the actual future” (60). The sentence points to two important features of postmodern vision. First, it refutes the authenticity of any insight as the privileged one. Postmodernism is a pluralistic perspective which denies absoluteness and affirms that every concept, phenomenon, and entity is susceptible to change. Second, acknowledging the authenticity of individual worldviews, the postmodern approach questions the uniqueness of the concept of actuality. At this point, Huntington’s definition matches Mendlesohn’s understanding of the secular nature of postmodernism that enables science fiction to bring to the fore other ignored ideologies. These ideologies do not centralize an ideal, actual future as the embodiment of God’s will in a divine kingdom. Mendlesohn affirms: “the emerging sf world” of the postmodern era “assumed it was the voice of a secularist future and treated religion with at best polite contempt” (“Religion and Science Fiction” 264). By religion, Mendelsohn refers to the official institutionalized version of western religion that is Christianity. According to this view, postmodern science fiction is a literal-cultural discourse in which the exclusiveness of one legitimate understanding of religious entity and identity based on a divine revelation is challenged.

For Robert Heinlein, science fiction is a realistic speculation, “far more than mere escapist genre literature” that goes “hand in hand” with “technological innovation” (“Science Fiction: Its Nature, Faults and Virtues” *loa.org*). This view assumes science fiction as kind of a scientific product (qtd. in “The Many Deaths of Science Fiction: A Polemic” 44).

When it comes to science, inevitably the concept of objectivity, predictable outcome or possibility comes to mind. This understanding opposes Huntington’s definition. Nevertheless, the relative concept of knowledge and reality in postmodern thinking makes this apparent discrepancy explainable. Postmodern science is a “potpourri of ideas and systems sometimes called new age metaphysics” that

seeks to transcend both modernism in the sense of the world view that has developed out of the seventeenth century Galilean-Cartesian-Baconian-Newtonian science, and modernity in the sense of the world order that both conditioned and was conditioned by this world view. (Griffin x)

The concept of science in this new age recognizes “nonesensory perception” as well as modern “sensationism” as the basis of the true knowledge of reality and, therefore, includes the excluded realms of unreality into the realms of prestigious scientific consideration.

This postmodern view of science leads to the reconciliation between science and theology. Western, modern concepts of science have always banished theological belief from logical explanation by insisting that “science is the one true way for discovering truth and the one true body of doctrine” (Griffin 3). The argument resides on the scientific discoveries that refute traditional religious beliefs and interpretations as superstition. This traditional religion followed two patterns of Western spirituality, none of which was based on logical deduction. Griffin discusses them under the titles of “conservative-to-fundamentalist” and “liberal” theologies. Conservative-to-

fundamentalist theology, according to him, is “based on appeals to supernatural revelation that will not withstand historical scrutiny and which makes assertions about the world that are disproved by science” (1). The other pattern, liberal theology “avoids contradicting modern historical and scientific knowledge by not asserting anything significant; it uses the word God – if indeed it uses it at all – in a Pickwickian way to put a religious gloss over secularism’s nihilistic picture of reality” (1).

The postmodern concept of theology introduces a third pattern that seems more compatible with the decentralizing stand of recent decades. It “involves a naturalistic theism” that is distinctive from “supernaturalistic theism of premodern and early modern theology and nontheistic naturalism of the late modern worldview” (3), which refer to the pre-mentioned two patterns. Having a secularist tendency to associate God with more earthly features, this third orientation replaces the old concept of God as a “personal being distinct from the world who exerts causal influence in it” (4). Through such methodology, postmodern theology targets the “supernatural causation” of the modern “divine causation” which universalizes the idea that because science “deals only with natural causes, cannot deal with divine causation” (4). This postmodern view shifts the dualistic contrastive relation of science and religion and equips postmodern theology with the spiritual capability to fill the gaps resulting from the empty place of religious perspective in modern man’s social life. Postmodern science fiction also reflects this change.

Science fiction is an “ongoing discussion” (Mendlesohn "Introduction: Reading Science Fiction" 1). From its early appearance, this discussion was obsessed with the same wish of change, recognizing and experiencing alternative understandings that appeared and prospered in the postmodern era. As Leonard emphasizes, “science fiction is emerging as a powerful literature of change” (262). Elsewhere, Mendlesohn argues,

[t]he earliest sf relied on the creation of a new invention, or an arrival in a new place. ... Almost all stories ended

either in universal peace or with the destruction of invention and inventor... and employed the explosion as the sf equivalent of 'I woke up and it was all a dream'. ("Introduction: Reading Science Fiction" 3)

Signalling the end of modern objectivity, postmodern science fiction reflected the need to create a new place and time; something which would compensate the shortcomings of the existing, unsatisfying, war-shattered reality. Telotte describes the distancing better through these words: "In the Cold War era, a natural recoil from the technological, based in our fears of mass destruction, was balanced by a cultural fascination with space flight, exploration, and the possibility of encountering alien cultures" (28). This cultural fascination was illustrated in science fiction. Based on these explanations, it becomes clear that an essential aim of science fiction, particularly its postmodern one, is to construct and represent a utopian world.

Here, by 'utopia,' I do not mean specified frames and techniques which carry intrinsic utopian values. What I am referring to is the use of different techniques and concepts that, arranged in fictional settings like that of science fiction, arouse the hope for change and utopian life. Notable among these techniques and concepts are time travels, trans or hybrid identity depiction, alien encounter, space travel, and sexual multiplicity. These concepts are integral to postmodern science fiction, and were meticulously excavated in the literary approaches of the time like feminism (See Gwyneth Jones and Wendy Pearson). Feminist theology is an interdisciplinary field within this approach that, adopting religious perspective, struggles to investigate literary and religious texts for concepts—or even create new ones – that work to build a utopia.

In an integral way, postmodernist science fiction embodies the concepts that feminist theology is concerned with. As I explained above, science fiction strives to create a new world or utopia. Likewise, feminist theology searches to envision utopia by focusing on concepts like freedom, connectedness, equality, security, liberty, and salvation. Hampson writes: "One place to look for the feminist utopia is feminist

science fiction. ... Science fiction allows of the creation of a world in which the aspects of this world which one would like to see accentuated, and brought to reader's attention, can be magnified" (*Theology and Feminism* 143). An important technique that works for this end is 'juxtaposition' through which by putting together "the imagined world with our own world, one may cast light on this world" (143). Juxtaposition provides the science fiction writer with sources to concretize the up-to-now ignored existential possibilities and widen the spectrum of their role.

Over the past 30 years, there has been an explosion in female utopia and science fiction. It coincides with the emergence and flourishing of feminist theology as a liberating theology. On the one hand, the most notable trend in feminist theology, according to Karras, is the emphasis it places on "a future utopian society – the 'kingdom of God' – as the goal of human existence, a goal which is not yet achieved" (255). On the other hand, one of the "abiding themes of science fiction" is "the utopian effort to design a different and, one hopes, better world" (Telotte 29). Hampson, from her post-Christian perspective, reviews feminist attempts to construct this different, better world by reconsidering Christian options of the kingdom of God. As she explains in her *After Christianity*, new feminist theological theories are postmodern renovations that aim at renovating Western religion by going beyond its Aristotelian and modern Enlightenment paradigms. According to her, "Aristotelian notions of a right (and hierarchical) ordering had merged with a Christianity inherited from Constantine" (3). While Enlightenment came to correct this background by providing a revolutionary definition of society as a "contract between individuals rather than the earlier organic notion in which each person had their (God-ordained) place" (3), she emphasizes, the modern Enlightened Western world continued to carry the vestiges of pre-ordained philosophy by placing women in a particular position "in a world which is normatively male" (7).



Predetermined “hierarchical order” is strictly believed in Christianity. As Ruether in her books argues, Christianity rests on the assumption that all creation lies in a particular position that is decided by the Creator, and this particularity guarantees the establishment of order in God’s heavenly kingdom. Based on this view, any attempt to go beyond or dissolve this God-ordered hierarchy is considered as sinful and susceptible to create chaos and turmoil. Adopting postmodern vision, many feminists started to question this perspective and, declining the divinity of hierarchy, relegated it to the masculine temptation to safeguard its exclusivity as the most perfect representative of divinity.

Csicsery-Ronay writes: “From its earliest forms, utopian fiction has depicted imaginary just and rational societies established in opposition to exploitative worldly ones” (114). One important element of utopian fiction is the introduction of “Social Man” (115), who is replaced and reappears again and again as hero or heroine in science fiction. The features of these heroes and heroines deserve attention. Regarding heroines, as the main focus of my analysis, it is of note that writers are not unanimous on the position and effectiveness of women in utopian fiction:

The benefits as Linda Dunne and Rae Rosenthal demonstrate, are spaces where women are not monsters, where society maybe recorded to include rather than to exclude. Other writers call such communities into question as escapist or even harmful in their suppression of difference. (Donawerth and Kolmerten 13)

The first trend signifies my view on the subject of heroines in my analysis. Considering the stories as preliminary sketches of utopia in dystopian contexts, we can observe a clear plan to create a heroine as a role model working for justice, opulence, and equality.

Recalling what I discussed in this part, the main purpose of my study is to analyse the depiction of heroines as posthuman saviours of the worlds described in the four selected texts of my analysis. The texts are: *Parable of the Sower*, *Parable of the*

*Talents*, “Book of Martha,” and “Amnesty.” Considering the utopian and dystopian feature of the represented worlds through feminist theological perspective, I will do my best to show how the protagonists of the stories embody strong characters to change turbulent situations. To do so, I concentrate on the reflection of the sociocultural norms within the stories. The essential focus within these norms will be on the representation of “Self” and “Other” as terms which describe the social classifications within the hierarchical understanding of race, sex, gender, religion, and class.<sup>5</sup> I will try to show how the heroines manage to conceptualize a better world by reconciling Self and Others in the texts.

## **1.2 Methodology and Approach**

In this thesis, I focus on postmodern science fiction, feminism, and theology. Postmodern literature envisions a theoretical discipline based on the recognition of paradox, fragmentation, and decenterism in literary writings. Science fiction, as one of its fledgling branches, encompasses a vast area of fictional writing. In the case of methodology and approach, it is responsive to an extended field of interdisciplinary perspectives ranging from historical (colonial), socio-political and cultural to philosophical speculations. Building their works on these postmodern, alternative ontological as well as epistemological perspectives, feminist postmodern science fiction writers extend these perspectives to undermine traditionally fixed patriarchal norms. Discussing the rise of feminist science fiction, Roberts writes: “In the 1960s and '70s, many feminists found realistic fiction could best convey the anguish of women's oppression, but for presenting alternatives to contemporary society, SF provides a wider range of possibilities that women writers can use to criticize patriarchy” (137).

The applied methodology of my analysis is feminist theology, though there is not a fixed definition of feminist theology. The views of feminist theologians about its scope

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<sup>5</sup> Concept of “Other” was introduced and developed in the works of philosophers like Hegel, Husserl, Beauvoir, Lacan, Derrida, and Lévinas and describes the sense of “difference” where “Self” is privileged as “sameness.”

vary between three main perspectives: Evangelical feminists, Biblical feminists, and post-Biblical feminists. What connects these perspectives is their shared goal of promoting the full humanity of women against a socially structured patriarchy that is emphasized and reemphasized in the Bible which they believe is a patriarchal text. They emphasize that “women have the right to ‘name’ themselves, the world and God” (James "An Overview of Feminist Theology" [theologynetwork.org](http://theologynetwork.org)).

Evangelicals affirm the authority of the Bible through an egalitarian point of view. According to their standpoint, feminist theology is a kind of liberation theology. This theology is critical of sociocultural distinctions and demands egalitarian and gender-free social relations, which are not based on hierarchical, war-mongering, classist, racist, and sexist oppressive perspectives. According to James, to meet this end, Evangelicals stress that a gender-neutral language should be used in translating the Bible to bring to the fore its hidden humanitarian content. Eminent voices of the spectrum are Letty M. Russell and Tova Hartman (who does search on the Old Testament). This group has a conservative approach. They believe that the original Biblical teachings have been egalitarian and their apparent anti-feminist tendency is due to the injection of personal exegesis. Therefore, the purpose of this group is to revive the true and original Christianity.<sup>6</sup>

Standing faithful to Biblical heritage in general, the Biblical feminists seek reform from within. Based on their view, the authority of the whole Biblical canon is not defensible and some reconsideration has to be thought of, recognizing “‘canon within canon’” (James "An Overview of feminist Theology" [theologynetwork.org](http://theologynetwork.org)). They emphasize on “de-absolutizing biblical culture” (qtd. in Scott 8) to show that there are contradictory verses in the Bible that are incapable of being harmonized. As Koester shows, encountering these uncompromising texts, Biblical feminists ignore or discard them as spurious “post-Pauline gloss” (8). Examples of these texts are 1Cor. 14. 33b-36,

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<sup>6</sup> This focus on Christianity is because feminist theology first developed in Christian world and then was adopted by the scholars of other religious beliefs.

Galatians 3.28, Ephesians 5:21-33. Rosemary Radford Ruether and Elizabeth Shüssler Fiorenza are prominent examples of Biblical feminists.

Mary Daly is one of the harbingers of post-Biblical feminism. She asked “women to connect with their wild side and ignore taboos imposed by ‘phallocracy’s fabrications/fictions’”; highlighting the theme that “female spirituality is best expressed in witchcraft/paganism” (James "An Overview of Feminist Theology" *theologynetwork.org*). According to post-Biblical feminists, feminist theology is a power-demanding movement which stresses the superiority of females by encouraging them to rebel against traditional and fixed anti-woman rules which are justified by the Bible and are unresponsive to the requirements of the new world. Daphne Hampson is a well-known voice in this area. She discusses Christianity as a historical and immoral religion which aims to internalize and perpetuate the superiority of masculinity as the most perfect representation of God.

In this thesis, I will apply a theological approach with a focus on Biblical and post-Biblical feminist perspectives. I will be mainly using the ideas of Rosemary Radford Ruether and Daphne Hampson in my interrogation of the postmodern female saviour in postmodern science fiction.

Hampson describes herself as “Post-Christian”( *Theology and Feminism* 41). For her, feminist theology is an empowering discourse which confronts Christianity as a masculine myth. In other words, Hampson is a theologian who refutes the potential of the Bible and Christianity to address all humanity on equal terms. Through her post-Christian perspective, she strives to introduce a completely new theological frame which would not debase women, or femininity on the whole, as the deflected Other of masculinity.

Rosemary Radford Ruether is a Biblical feminist. Though, as a Christian, she recognizes the authenticity of the Bible, but, like Hampson, she also points to the dominance of masculine vision in some of the Biblical texts. Arguing that these texts

have non-Christian origins, she affirms that they render the Bible to a canonical reference of justifying the suppression of woman and nature as inferior parts in the hierarchy of creation. In Ruether's explanation, the degradation of these two categories is because of the influence of ancient Middle Eastern and Greco-Roman civilization. The influence reflects the Platonic division of mind and matter which mirrors the masculine quality of rational wisdom and feminine bodily temptations. Connected to the Babylonian image of the slayed mother goddess,<sup>7</sup> the influence gives church leaders the material to undergird their interpretation of human being made in the image of God. In the *Imago Dei* that these male leaders provide, the creative and exalted soul of God is bestowed on man and, deprived of it, the female half of humanity and the rest of the natural world, including animals, plants, and unanimated creation, take lower positions in the hierarchy of creation.

To compare the two theorists: as a post-Biblical feminist, Hampson assesses the sexual dimensions of the androcentric perspective of Christian theology and, as a Biblical feminist, Ruether brings to the fore the accentuated anthropocentrism of this androcenterism. Despite the differences, both theorists work to offer an egalitarian theological perspective which, in its turn, promises the possibility of a better world.

What I am going to do in this thesis is to analyse the selected texts of Octavia Butler using these two perspectives. Of course, it does not mean that I will not be conscious of the ideas of other intellectuals and social activists who have contributed to theological studies. I will do my best to have a detailed and conclusive study of the texts by considering related views in the theological field.

### **1.3 Literature Review**

The focus of this study is to analyse the characterization of the protagonists in selected texts by Octavia Butler with the intention to show how they operate as posthuman

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<sup>7</sup> For a better understanding refer to Ruether's *Gaia and God: an Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing*.

models of change, who act as saviours. As stipulated earlier, I will be using feminist theological perspectives in this analysis. To achieve this goal, conscious of the religious and mythological background of the belief in ‘the coming of the saviour,’ which I will explain in my reviews, I will concentrate on the sociocultural structures of the selected texts to clarify the reasons for the presence of saviours in the contexts of these stories. To accomplish this end, I will analyse the saviours’ deeds and probe the reasons behind their actions.

What is important in this analysis is the interaction between feminist and religious perspectives. Furthermore, the contributions of postmodernism to both fields will not be ignored. The views of postmodern feminists towards religion are both positive and negative. These feminists argue for theologies which offer redeeming and healing messages to liberate a large number of oppressed, ignored, and marginalized human beings. According to Sharon James, one group is the atheists like Wicca feminists who propagate liberation by leaving the biased monotheist religious heritage. The other group is theists, for whom liberation is resurrection accomplished through recognizing monotheistic religions and practicing them (James "An Overview of Feminist Theology"*theologynetwork.org*). Since the main focus of my analysis is on the characterization of the protagonists from a feminist theological perspective, it is important to observe the intersection of these two views in the chosen stories to gain a comprehensive understanding of these protagonists as agents of liberation. To do this, it is imperative to have a general understanding of postmodernist philosophy. Then, I will review the critical perspective of the feminist theologians that I refer to in my analysis. And finally, I will closely read and analyse the selected texts by Octavia Butler.

### **1.3.1 Theoretical Review**

My literary analysis begins with a detailed consideration of the structuralist roots of poststructuralism by focusing on *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory* by

Selden, Widdowson, and Brooker. This book gives a comprehensive understanding of structuralist concepts and their relevance to poststructuralist and postmodern perspectives. The book provides a rudimentary discussion for further studies about poststructuralism, discussing the ideas of thinkers like Barthes, Derrida, Freud, Lacan and others as forerunners of postmodern criticism. My discussion refers to structuralist perspectives which deal with mythology as one of the main sources of heroic studies, particularly in relation with religious and apocalyptic depictions of the hero as saviour in different cultures, spheres, and periods.

Joseph Campbell's highly influential *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* provided me with a deep understanding of affinities among many heroes, heroines, and saviours from different mythological heritages and communities. In this book, he offers "universalism" as the common theme underlying the cultural heritage of humanity. He writes: "truth is one, the sages speak of it by many names" (vii). This common truth finds its way into human culture through the heroic acts of supermen as saviours. These figures, he believes, act as universal figures whose functions serve the achievement of unity despite differences. According to him, "the great idea of the supreme hero is to come to the knowledge of the unity in multiplicity, then to make it known" (40).

Campbell relates the concept of herohood to that of journey. He explains the journey motif through the cycle of "separation," "initiation," and "return." According to him, the idea of herohood is related to concepts of birth and resurrection, and represents a person who travels through life to gain knowledge, internalizes it, and enlightens the self and others by applying and transferring it. In his book, Campbell refers to the concepts of scapegoat, sacrifice, symmetry, mask, and Freudian father archetypes, dealing with rivalry, oedipal complexes, and ogre father, through which he tries to reveal the creative and redemptive role of the hero as a kind of superman. He believes that such supermen are usually depicted as persons endowed with elevated qualities which could turn the status quo: "Hero is symbolical of that divine creative and redemptive image which is

hidden within us all, only waiting to be known and rendered into life” (39). As he elaborates, such heroes perform at two levels: they “renovate” the world through the “purification of the self,” and embody a “virtuous man” as a sacrifice, who goes beyond mortality by leaving an enduring effect on the community (44). This is done by sacrificing self-centred interests and correcting the abnormalities of community via gaining, internalizing, and expressing self-awareness. This achievement is usually concomitant with tough measures like violence to eradicate the excuses that justify rebellion against the natural rules and orders.

“Sacrifice” is a common term among the texts that deal with saviourism, creativity, and redemption. Girard in *Violence and the Sacred* connects the concept to violence, contending that “the purpose of sacrifice is to restore harmony to the community”(8). According to him, sacrifice always acts as a “preventive measure” to deter community from collapsing into struggle with ubiquitous violence. As Girard states, human societies have permanently been in conflict with the menacing presence of violence. Fear from the perpetual cycle of this violence, subsequently, triggers human societies to guarantee their survival by offering scapegoats; the more critical the situation, the more "precious" the sacrificial victim (18).

Another point that Girard distinguishes in the mechanism of sacrifice is the unity between sacrificer and sacrificed. As he shows, the dominant assumption of the sacrificial ceremony in these mythologies is that the sacrificed is the incarnation of God. In other words, while the sacrifice is done to satisfy God, the same God comes to reincarnate himself within the sacrificed and remove the source and reason of catastrophe. This notion undergirds the Christ figure in modern and postmodern literature. These Christ figures are redeemers through whose murder, regardless of the concomitant violence, catastrophe is removed. This is the dual nature of sacredness and violence, or the “union of beneficent and maleficent” in Girard's words (264). The



concomitancy of the two concepts works to bring the sociocultural order back to society.

*Mythologies* by Roland Barthes investigates the system of myth. This book is divided into two parts. In the first section, Barthes analyses some cases of social behaviour or cultural manifestations based on signification system. The second part, "Myth Today," provides a total academic analysis of myth as a system. In this part, Barthes defines myth as a system which, in turn, consists of two systems: a linguistic system or language, and myth itself or "metalanguage." What makes the arguments of this book important for the current study is its elaboration of the mythical nature of Western culture which, as he shows, tends to systematize itself through the binary opposition of oppressor and oppressed. Through this systematization, the submission of oppressed is always naturalized as a routine order of life. This tendency of mythologizing is also analysed and criticized by feminist scholars. Feminist theologians challenge what they consider to be the immoral, mythological fabrications of Western theology to naturalize the suppression of women in the Western civilization.<sup>8</sup>

According to Osherow, "[w]omen writers of science fiction have found a venue for female characters who not only defy mythic conventions but also refashion them" (68). As she elaborates, "science fiction (S/F) is particularly appropriate for introducing figures that challenge traditional literary representations of women" (68). Historically, in Western literature, there has been a tradition of essentializing female characters as passive and obedient angels at home. By this essentialization, those powerful women, who strive to enact their active roles, are mythologized as powerful shrews that disorder the harmony of life by disturbing the hierarchy of creation pre-designed by the Almighty (Wrenn 9; "Women from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment" *saylor.org*). For centuries, this essentialization was justified and internalized by religious orders and

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<sup>8</sup>The writings of Mary Daly, Sallie McFague, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, and Phyllis Trible as well as some other atheist feminists such as Wicca and Satanists can help to develop a better understanding of the different feminist perspectives about the position of woman in the Western socioreligious context.

practices. Recognizing the same essentialization, other feminists have also challenged the hegemonizing function of orthodox religions in justifying unsatisfying conditions. Science fiction is a genre which reflects a considerable rise of this challenge in, particularly, its recent postmodern samples.

A look at recent science fiction will reveal the sensitivity of writers to create more egalitarian societies in terms of religion. This sensitivity is either in the form of new doctrines of thought challenging the oppressive nature of the Biblical heritage, or revised versions of traditional orthodoxies, uncovering their more human dimensions. Notable examples of these writers are Octavia Butler, Mary Doria Russell, Margaret Atwood, and Sheri S. Tepper to name a few.

Arguing on the presence of religious symbols in science fiction, Mendlesohn in her essay “Religion and Science Fiction” points out that “[r]eligion is repeatedly depicted as dangerous, diverting humans (and aliens) from the path of reason and true enlightenment” (269). This has led to a trend among the authors of the present century: “religion is not only dangerous and misleading, but that sentient beings are generally too weak-willed to reject it. ... ‘the mundanes’, must be saved by us [authors], the technocrats” (269). Focusing on the United States of America as the site where science fiction has flourished, Mendlesohn investigates the presence of religious elements in science fiction to show that the genre in its recent forms explores ritualistic practice more than faith. According to her, especially from 1960 onward,

secularism, or at least a liberal interpretation of most faiths provided an apparently hegemonic intellectual tradition in the USA. ... the emerging sf world assumed it was the voice of a secularist future and treated religion with at best polite contempt: religion was essentially of the ‘Other’. (264)

This tendency rooted in the early forms of high-fantasy adventure, as one of the nurturing genres of science fiction, and “relied heavily on the exoticization of ‘the

Other' which displaced 'religion' on the alternate culture and associated it almost entirely with 'the primitive'" (265). Frank argues:

If the practice of the Christian religion has been a major force in the constitution of broad features of Western culture over the last two millennia, in the contemporary scene it seems to have lost a good deal of its influence. Major achievements of contemporary culture stem from a prevailing cast of mind marked by a kind of practiced indifference.(17-18)

In Western culture, the division between theology and the sociocultural context is discernible. Dawson in *Religion and the Rise of Western Culture* elaborates on the confrontation when he writes,

The rise of new western European culture is dominated by this sharp dualism between two cultures, two social traditions and two spiritual worlds – the war society of barbarian kingdom with its cult of heroism and aggression and the peace society of the Christian church with its ideals of asceticism and renunciation and its high theological culture. ... it remains characteristic in some degree of medieval culture as a whole and its effects are still traceable in the later history of western Europe. (17)

He continues,

[t]he historian and philosophers whose minds were formed by the liberal enlightenment of the eighteenth century could feel little interest and no spiritual sympathy with ages in which the darkness of barbarism seemed only to be deepened by religious superstition and monastic asceticism. (18)

Because of this background, postmodernist science fiction sought to replace what it considered "rotten" orthodox theologies with alternative religions or alternative interpretations of orthodoxies, which were more inclusive of human and nonhuman elements. Of course, this did not mean that conservative ideas were completely obliterated.

There have been religious intellectuals during the present secular age who have protested against the secular, pluralist standpoints of the age which, they believe, negate the presence and influence of traditional religious themes and discourses in contemporary culture. Christopher Dawson is one of them. Other voices which tried to consolidate current world affairs, particularly those of women, and religion (Christianity here) are the ordained Presbyterian Letty Mandeville Russell and Rosemary Radford Ruether. According to Russell:

For Christians all over the world a deep concern has long been felt to express the meaning of salvation in terms that can be heard. ... The task has become especially urgent in the face of modern secular thinking which focuses on the need for social change and the shaping of society here and now, rather than on the need for an individualized after life. (105)

Letty M. Russell is a pioneer feminist theologian whose *Human Liberation in a Feminist Perspective – A Theology* addresses the social structures which relegate women to an inferior position. In her terms, “[l]iberation theology is an attempt to reflect upon the experience of oppression and our actions for the new creation of a more human society” (20). In the book, Russell discusses the concept of salvation via focusing on “Tradition” as the liberating and blessing handing over of Jesus Christ as the “Prince of Shalom.” According to her, this Prince of Shalom has been sent by God to serve humanity and redeem it from all kinds of sin through a process of conscientization and conversion. Focusing on ecumenism, the book is preoccupied with the concept of oppression and Russell maintains that “the oppression of women is the most universal form of exploitation” (29). Then, she explores how the Bible can give the oppressed a voice for demanding justice and equality. Contrary to post-Biblicals like Daphne Hampson, whose ideas will be discussed later, Russell’s vision is the revitalization of Christ as the new human being in an age which is being dominated by the soul of secularism and atheism. Yet, she acknowledges that there is a difference

between Jesus' teachings and posthumous inferences of the same teachings: "In spite of the gospel of liberation and the words and actions of Jesus, the church has too long supported the idea that non-whites, non-Westerners, and non-males are slightly less than human" (35). At this point, she demands that the church, as the canonical institution of Western culture, reconsider and rebuild its past. She stresses this will help the church fulfil its responsibility of bringing up a generation, children of God, who in mutual relation with God will achieve His dream of a perfect human future. This is the point of departure where Russell's argument distances itself from orthodox Christian perspectives.

At this point, human beings come to the understanding that they are not an object to be "manipulated by fate and unseen powers" (35), but is a shaping, creative "maker" of culture. At this point Russell's perspective overlaps with that of Hampson's and Ruether's. The recognition of this subjectivity underlies a common feminist concept of freedom.

According to Russell, "the experience of new freedom leads to new responsibility" (30). The responsibility has traditionally been depicted in the form of service to others as a way of guaranteeing salvation. In a Biblical frame, this notion of responsibility embodies what Hampson in her post-Biblical perspective terms as "attention," that is the caring of oneself and the Other (Hampson *After Christianity* 260). The responsibility represents itself through offering "services." Russell distinguishes three forms of *diakonia* (service, ministry): curative *diakonia*, preventive *diakonia*, and prospective *diakonia* (30-32). She emphasizes that until recent times, due to the absence of solidarity with the third form, the first two kinds did not have an eminent role in the liberation process. Curative *diakonia* is

the healing of the wounds of those who have become victims of life; providing help to the sic, the hungry, and the homeless. ... Untill recently the church has

specialized in curative or “Band-Aid” tasks, and women have strongly supported these causes. (31-32)

Preventive and prospective *diakonia* alternatively are attempts to

curtail developments that easily lead to restriction of full freedom for life... [and] open the situation for a future realization of life; helping those who are outcasts from the dominant culture or society to participate fully in society or to reshape that society. (31-32)

To put it differently, for Russell, *diakonia* is the recognition of “mutual action of people” (32). Embodying a dynamic perspective, this recognition of human agency renders Christianity as a liberating theology “that can become a catalyst for change among those who believe in the Biblical promise for the oppressed” (55). Ruether shares the same perspective.

Believing in the totality of Christianity as a liberating religion, Ruether also points to the discord between what Christ stands for and what some Christian teachings reflect. Nevertheless, unlike Russell, she does not associate it with the posthumous interpretations of Christ’s words, but with the insertion of non-Christian ideas into Christianity. As I already explained, she traces these insertions to the old Babylonian and Greco-Roman cultural influences and argues that, due to these influences, the current Christianity cannot provide a responsive theology before modern and postmodern world views. Based on her explanations, in order to equip Christian theology with the strength to tackle this shortcoming, it is necessary to have a meticulous investigation of Biblical texts and discard the materials which do not coincide with the overall Biblical vision. At this point, Ruether gets close to the ideas of the post-Biblical feminists who, similarly, demand for a departure from the dominant Christian discourse.

Change is the common term among all feminist theologians. This change covers all theological perspectives as well as non-theological contexts. What connects these

feminist approaches is the recognition of plurality, diversity, and difference without subduing them to an inferior position. To put it differently, feminist theology is a discourse of resistance which aims at the redefinition of power relations that have essentialized femininity within a cultural cul-de-sac context throughout history. Daphne Hampson develops the most radical form of this idea in *Theology and Feminism*.

In this book, she bids farewell to Christianity, refuting the concepts of incarnation and anthropomorphism as restricting doctrines which limit God within a frame of revelation in a particular time and place, and through a specific figure. Christianity, as she elaborates, is the basis of the hierarchical patterns in Western societies. Hampson writes: “it is so clear to me that women, or the feminine, can never hold an equivalent place to male figure or motifs within what is a deeply masculine religion” (71). She points to various perspectives and religious renovations – like ‘conservatives’ and Protestants – which she sees as the justification of dominant sexist discriminating systems. ‘Conservatives,’ according to her, are those “Christologies which hold the maleness of Christ to be essential to his nature, and the fact that Christ was male to be central to Christianity” (66). Though they “do not essentially believe that the maleness of Christ in any way harms women” (66), ‘conservatives’ fail to bridge the gap between past and present due to their recognition of past as normative.

In another part, Hampson turns towards “compensatory factors” suggested to alleviate the masculine soul of Christianity. Examples of this are the Spirit conveyed as a female counterpart of the Logos as male, Mary a female equivalent of Christ as male, and undivided unity of God assumed to be female before the male individuated persons. In these instances of reconceptualization, Hampson distinguishes “the centrality of symbolism to the religion” (71), and understanding its effects, leaves it. For example, in cases of the Logos and the Spirit, she explains that they are taken by religious authorities to justify their opposition with the ordination of women. Through these elaborations, she tries to reveal a deep sense of oppression and ignorance embedded in

the structure of Christianity which, despite all justifications, cannot come to terms with the current needs and expectations of Western woman and should be discarded.

Before starting the review of the literary criticism done on Butler's texts, it is necessary to explain two points. In the first part of this section, which focused on the methodology of my analysis, despite the direction of my research that principally deals with post-Biblical and Biblical ecotheological perspective, I had to briefly review Evangelical perspective. I did this by referring to Russell's perspective. The reason is that to have a full understanding of the post-Biblical stand, it is required to be familiar with Biblical concepts and themes.

On the other hand, since the primary sources of this literary analysis are from, and deal with black culture and literature, particularly black feminism, another category of reviewed literature in this literary analysis is black literature. *The Cambridge Companion to African American Women's literature* as well as Patricia Hill Collins' *Black Feminist Thought* were the main sources that provided me with necessary understanding of the black feminist literary tradition.

In the *Companion* writers like Madhu Dubey, Herman Beavens, Dana A. Williams, et al make it clear that the so-called popular fiction – assumed as low literature – of the black American female writers has created a literature of resistance which, along with canonical texts – high literature – serves to embody the experiences and cultural assumptions of the black community, challenging their invisibility in formally recorded histories. Likewise, *Black Feminist Thought* reviews how dominant white discourse had Othered black culture and identity within the American sociocultural context and how, black society, especially black females, challenged this Othering. The anti-Othering strategies that Collins investigates in this book, offered me with useful insights in understanding Butler's protagonists.



### 1.3.2 Thematic Review

In this section, I will go through critical review on Butler's works. Carme Manuel has a theological reading of Butler's *Parable of the Sower*, focusing on its Biblical dimension. She starts her article by pointing to the social ills of mono-dimensional technological progress which has turned a once "prosperous country into a fractured society governed by outright violence and aggressiveness" (111). In her reading, she investigates the novel as a multi-layered narrative built on three inter-related bases: the American puritan heritage, black tradition, and the environment. According to her, this structure prepares the ground for Butler to use science fiction as a means of "social reform" (122). In this context, Manuel explains, Butler's protagonist acts as a caring black prophetess. Symbolizing a puritan Jeremiad, Lauren revives a sense of nationhood by transforming the social-spiritual status quo by focusing on education and resettling the American New Jerusalem. Inseparable from this awakening is Butler's commitment to "an environmental as well as a spiritual tradition" to restore a more "balanced civilization" (115). In creating this utopia, Butler highlights the neglected, critical environmental condition that "if not completely destroyed, is on the verge of utter destruction by human technology and abuse" (115). Manuel believes that while Butler brings into her work a new critical consideration of Biblical heritage as a means which has been openly used to validate exploiting aims of dominant authorities, yet "she is not breaking new ground ... In fact, she is joining a legion of Black women who have reread and revisioned scriptures from the beginning of black history in the United States" (113).

In her criticism, Manuel gets close to what I see as Butler's post-Biblical standpoint as well as her concentration on the protagonist as a posthuman who struggles to redefine the relationship of human being and nature. Nevertheless, she returns to read the text through the Biblical perspective. In other words, she does not consider the imageries which vividly reflect Butler's separation from Biblical tradition and offers a new

perspective of civilization based on an alternative pattern of relationship among human being, God, and nature. In my analysis, I will discuss the post-Biblical entity and the posthuman pattern of the relationships in detail.

Peter Sands in his “Octavia Butler’s Chiastic Cannibalistics” acknowledges critical analyses which have explicated Butler’s “approaches to difference or otherness” (1). These analyses “focus on race and gender in particular, and her reimagination of women’s cultural and narrative roles” (1) as well. In the paper, he applies an alternative reading of the concepts of difference and otherness, focusing on two “unexplored features of Butler’s narratives” (1): cannibalism and rhetoric. He considers cannibalism as a metaphor which presents Butler’s engagement with mind-body problems, revealing how it re-narrates dystopianism in the context of a new America which is afflicted with misery.

Sands traces the roots of cannibalism to the European discourse of colonialism. He explains that Europeans constantly use cannibalism as an Othering metaphor to relegate indigenous culture and existence into the realm of ferociousness and, consequently, rationalize the banishment of indigenous identity to the periphery of civilized community. He sees cannibalism as a rhetorical concern that reflects “an awareness of an interaction with otherness” (1) in Butler’s work, and relates it with “inside/outside and other dichotomies that ground her representations of embodied human intelligence and its interactions with what is outside the body” (2). Contemporary rhetorical theory, Sands explains, is concerned with ambiguity. It is achieved by multiple points of view in Butler’s writing, “through the metaphor of the alien or through the literal otherness of race” (1). Sands incorporates the metaphor of cannibalism to this rhetorical aspect.

For Sands, the metaphor of cannibalism in Butler’s works reflects literal alienness, evolutionary deviation, and viral symbiosis. They act as “catalysts for explorations of the limits of the body and society” (2), while threatening “the stability of the body, and thus consciousness” (9). In the case of Lauren Olamina in the *Parables*, he sees the

metaphor of cannibalism as a literal representation of “hyperempathy” which, though acting as a “zone of instability” for discovering the “potential for change,” still serves as a disabling feature for her “through perception of another’s bodily pain or pleasure” (2). This potential capacity of the metaphor for change serves as a “means of representing unstable boundaries between Self and Other” (6) that Butler uses “to invert the usual representation by whites of non-whites as cannibals threatening the western social body” (6). However, positively recognizing Butler’s strategy to confront the classical imputation of the Other – black here – as “eater-of-human-flesh” (6), Sands succumbs to Butler’s negative view about the human nature, as it is expressed in Beal’s interview with Butler, as well as her overview of body as a colonized entity. He does not investigate alternative construction of the body which is not purely colonized. Put it differently, Sands rhetorically reads the same history of colonization by tracing its symbolical reflection on a black heroine’s body. Lauren does not embody a black cannibalist. She devours the pain of others which, on the one hand, symbolically mirrors the atrocity of others and, on the other hand, reimagines a black female as the target of these atrocities. Here, Sands reads Butler’s work as a traditional re-narration of the history of slavery; he does not analyse other possible histories within the narration.

Concerned with the literal and figurative threat of cannibalism, Sands believes this metaphor creates a new version of Self “that cannibalistically incorporates that Other” (8). However, I believe that with regards to the identities of Lauren or other characters in *Parables*, this colonization does not fit. They mature to define their identity in relation to others and, in this way, achieve a communal wisdom. Lauren is not disabled, or has not disabled others. She is an “enabler,” to use Aviva Cantor’s term,<sup>9</sup> whose shared understanding and concerns, here in bodily metaphors like literal references to the same cannibalism in statements like “[w]e don’t hunt people. We don’t eat human

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<sup>9</sup>Cantor, Aviva. “The Lilith Question.” *On Being a Jewish Feminist*, ed. Susannah Heschel, 40-50. New York: Schocken Books, 1983.

flesh” (*Sower*301), structures a normal, acceptable way of life and interaction in the midst of looting, murder, and chaos.

Hoda M. Zaki also reviews the reflection of Other in Butler’s works. Her “Utopia, Dystopia, and Ideology in the Science Fiction of Octavia Butler” elaborates on the “interplay of utopian, dystopian, and ideological elements in Butlere’s works... to show how one example of popular culture, containing as it does many authentic utopian elements, also includes the less hopeful forces of anti-utopianism and ideology” (239). In this article, Zaki deals with different views of political and feminist philosophers on human nature and the impact of gender on it. She distinguishes two feminist perspectives on human nature: biological and materialist. The former in this dichotomy, according to Zaki, focuses on “female anatomy as the central and determining factor in shaping the female unconscious and conscious mind” as the “locus of difference” (240). This perspective is an essentialist one which assumes that the entity and identity of self is determined by biology and, therefore, is stable among the persons of the same sex. This determinism defines fixed roles and features as natural – compatible with nature – for women which usual outcome is the suppression of women. Opposing this determinism, materialist interpretation explains “the oppression of women by focusing on the social and historical construction of gender and self” (240).

Zaki believes that Butler advances a particular combination of essential biological determinism and materialism. Through this combination, Butler comes to condemn human nature as “fundamentally violent,” according to which, human being is unable to “tolerate difference,” and has a pervasive tendency to “alienate from oneself those who appear to be different – i.e., to create others” (241). This view seems very problematic and reductionist. At the beginning of her essay, Zaki recognizes that Butler herself, as an Other, is able to go beyond the mainstream feminist science fiction utopias and “brings to her fiction the experiences of being a black woman” (239). This is “different from those of her Anglo sisters in that they embody an indirect critique of the liberal

feminist imagination” (239). Further, Zaki recognizes concomitant positive and utopian elements in Butler’s writing:

[Butler] allows (unique) individuals occasionally to escape the grip of instinct and genetic structure on human behavior. ... Such examples, indicating that Butler has not completely written off the human ability to change for the better, thus leave open the possibility for utopia. (243)

Trying to elaborate on the discrepancy, Zaki refers to Søren Baggesen’s distinction between utopian and dystopian pessimism<sup>10</sup> as well as Sheldon Wolin’s “posting warning”(244).<sup>11</sup> Emphasizing that utopia and dystopia are not “incompatible opposites,” she argues that Butler is obsessed with dystopia, and her dystopianism is pessimistic because “the causes of catastrophe are depicted deterministically as unavoidable” (244). As I will show, this determinism does not suit *Parables*, “Amnesty” and “The Book of Martha.” In these stories, Butler creates situations which display the understanding and free will of human beings to recognize and collaborate with the pluralist outside world in the way that revives hope for a better life. The concept of change in the *Parables* by repeating that “we shape change and change shapes us” reflects “a dialectic view of reality,” including human nature, which “rejects simple determinism” which Zaki talks about in her article (Phillips 302).

Lauren’s hyperempathy in *Parables* signifies a biological determinism at first, but as the story unfolds, Lauren successfully manages to control and even repress this hyperempathy when it is necessary. The negative references to humanity or the Communities in “Amnesty” also do not confirm the biological wickedness (determinism) in either of them. “The Book of Martha” also has nothing related to biological entity. As I will explain, the stories provide contexts within which Butler

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<sup>10</sup> Utopian pessimism is a kind of pessimism in which dystopian elements are due to historical forces, while dystopian pessimism is afflicted with inevitable “ontological” or “metaphysical” origins and, therefore, is “transcultural” and “transhistorical” (Zaki 244). Søren Baggesen, “Utopian and Dystopian Pessimism: Le Guin’s the Word for World Is Forest and Tiptree’s “We Who Stole the Dream,”” *Science Fiction Studies* 14 (1987).

<sup>11</sup> The notion considers most of dystopian texts as warning texts which aim at enhancing readers’ awareness about the possibility of imagined catastrophe if specific conditions go unchecked.

represents an optimistic view of human understanding to establish a peaceful life on Earth.

Mathias Nilges' article reflects the same deterministic view of Zaki. Having a Marxist reading, and referring to Freud and Lacan's psychological ideas, Nilges discusses Butler's *Parables* based on Butler's negative view on human nature. Here, I would concentrate on his discussion more and argue why, contrary to him, I see *Parables* as utopian manifestations of hope. He focuses on the novels not as postmodern liberating cultural products, but as "post-Fordist" ones. He believes that the novels, portraying the bewildered yearnings of human beings for Fordist regulating structure and stability, reveal the psychological struggles of a heroine who is conscious of the latent totalitarianism in Fordist order, but has not the ability and freedom to change and arrange orders based on her consciousness. In his reading, Nilges focuses on change as the most emphasized concept in the series. He believes this change is not a positive utopian liberating concept but, on the contrary, a dystopian, destructive one which has led to the capitalistic disorder in the novel. He stresses that "the motto "God is change" does not constitute an embrace of change but indeed its categorical rejection" (1337). The novels, he rightly notes, "represent the complexity of the experience of post-Fordism as a situation which simultaneously harbors the potential for both hope and tragedy, arising from the fundamentally ambivalent relationship of subject to change" (1337). This situation leaves Lauren with no other option than finding

a way to cope with the post-apocalyptic world by providing the community with a set of beliefs that will allow them to accept the chaos that surrounds them: "God is Change." Members of Earthseed must, according to Lauren, recognize that chaos, disorder, and change are central concepts for life as they find it and cannot be fought but must be embraced. (1337)

The understanding leads Lauren to "reconstitute a feeling of the social in a post-social world, of replacing her lost community and family" (1338). The struggle to create

this harmony and integrity, based on Nilges' reading, revives and re-strengthens the very structures which Lauren aims to challenge.

The important point that Nilges truly recognizes is that “[w]hile recognizing that change is the dominant logic of the world surrounding her, Lauren refuses to formulate a sense of self out of this situation” (1338). Yet, he emphasizes that through this recognition, Lauren remains “nostalgically attached to traditional teleological narratives that promise stability” (1338). Through this statement, Nilges connects the consequences of change with the notion of past, where the most critical conflict of the novels is formed.

Lauren's conflict with the past reveals itself from the first pages of *Sower*. There is a parallel development of a new person, mentality, and philosophy that announces itself by the same birthday with that of her father who, as the priest of the community, symbolizes traditional culture and values. This parallelism continues within the novels by depicting the struggle of the protagonist and her community to achieve their ideal life. The total image of this parallelism reflects a patriarchal symbolism which, Nilges believes, ironically returns to the same static totalistic community, with Lauren as the main patriarchal figure.

What is discernible in Nilges' discussion is that the texts revolve around a circular pattern of a father figure. The narration moves from Lauren's father as priest towards Jarret as the president, who acts based on the same role of fathering the nation, and ends in Lauren's priesting role. Based on his explanation, Lauren's Earthseed turns to “a dogmatic structure” with “its laws internalized by its followers” and repeating the same “humiliation and frustration” (1346) that embodies “the desire to restore the idealized protective father” (1334). Butler creates a world in which the masses wish to change the current situation by returning to the prosperous Fordist realm of security, growth, and opulence. This search for an integrated past, in Nilges' explanation, is shaped based on gathering around a father-figure, and this father-figure, or patriarchal symbolism,

constitutes a determining archetype within the novels. According to him, Butler aims to show that in the mission of cultural restoration, it is unavoidable to escape patriarchal restoration. In her unsuccessful struggle to establish a more tolerant community away from masculine exclusion and repression, Lauren is trapped in the same patriarchal patterns.

Nilges explains the struggle by elaborating on Lauren's consciousness of the "protective" and "punitive" role of the father and that return to the old patterns "cannot be associated with a return to a 'golden age'" (1345). He analyses Lauren's awareness by focusing on her illustration of Jarret's political projects, where she emphasizes that Jarret's throwing back to a "simpler" time does not reconcile with his consideration with now, religious tolerance, and current state of the country. Assuming him as the father of nation – religious connotation of him as religious reviver – Lauren in the beginning of *Talents* warns that Jarret wants to take all back to a time when everybody believed in, and worshiped the same God, in the same way, to guarantee their safety. Despite all these, Nilges emphasizes, Lauren is entrapped with the same allure of power to take advantage of people's eagerness for a more stable situation.

I think at this point Nilges ignores the constant nature of change. This change, according to Melzer, contributes to a "feminist political vision of the future" in Butler's works(34). The essential function of the contribution, in Melzer's terms, is that it does not freeze "the manifestations of difference within their theoretical conceptualizations (i.e. "gender," "race," "class"), ... [but Butler] emphasizes the fluid and transformed aspect behind the term" (34).Regarding difference as the core of change, the unlimited and un-organized nature of difference, which features the impossibility of being shaped based on a particular frame, refutes Nilges' view of circling in a static pre-established masculine frame. The most important characteristic of this change, against Nilges' consideration, is its open-endedness that gives it the ability of representing an open-ended feminine utopian desire of transformation.



Nilges' masculine perspective is a point that I cannot disregard. What he misses in his discussion is the positive sense of transformation which I find evident in Butler's narratives. Regarding the novels as "apocalyptic transformations" where change "does not function as something new" (Nilges 1336), Nilges ignores what Lauren performs as a heroine. While *Parables* openly reveal their tribute to themes of black feminism, Nilges passes them unheeded. A notable gap in his discussion is his ignorance of the reiterated theme of education as an integral part of change in *Parables*. In one passage, he points to Lauren's awareness when he talks of her understanding of the polarity of "celebration of difference" and change, and "safety based on structure, order, and sameness" (1345). But, he does not dwell on it, and shifts to explain Lauren's entrapment in a repressive patriarchal structure.

Maybe it could be argued that education is used by Lauren in a tyrannical way to internalize and transform a negative concept of change to the new community, recreating the circle of violence. But, what is clear at the end of *Talents* is the success of Earthseed to establish a flourishing civilization. This success is not achieved by imposing one's own voice or incessant repetition. *Parables*, as they end in *Talents*, do not restructure a monovocal community as evident in dictatorial societies: the other voices are there and are heard. Melzer in her article explains this feature by examining the journal entries in both *Sower* and *Talents*. She states:

while in *Sower* Lauren's journal is the only reference for the reader, in *Talents* the voices are multiple: Lauren's reflections are the most frequent, but her daughter's entries comment upon them decades later; and her brother's and husband's voices challenge her presentation of events in the course of the novel. Even though in *Sower* Lauren develops her vision in constant exchange with people around her...Lauren's perspective is the only narrative voice. By multiplying the perspectives on events in *Talents*, Butler problematizes the concept of a utopian vision that a single individual formulates. (36)

Multi-vocalism is not the only anti-dictatorial feature of *Parables*. Butler creates a situation where

the community members meet on a regular basis to exchange ideas, worries and strategies, and to discuss Earthseed verses collected in *The Book of the Living*. These weekly Gatherings, “discussions,” create a sense of belonging and solidarity and at the same time function as a democratic political decision-making process. (Melzer 37)

This success in bringing people together, despite its frightening totalitarian collectivism, revives a sense of hope and trust in the novels, where different ideas are “discussed” and decisions are made.

In one part of his article, Nilges has a reference to Lauren’s religion/philosophy, which purpose, he accepts, is “to provide a basis for the articulation of forms of subjectivity that correspond to the radically changed environment” (1337). This conditional acceptance of subjectivity reveals that, despite his deterministic view of change, Nilges cannot dismiss its potential for constructive function in the novels. In this way, he disaffirms his own hypothesis that “[t]he true tragedy Butler cautions us about is hence the lack of utopian narratives and the inability to envision potentiality in the future” (1339).

Another antithesis of Nilges’ explanations is his treatment of the metaphor of the wall in *Parables*. He construes the wall as a protecting building which symbolizes the protective role of father and state as a paternal entity in its nature. Based on the view, falling of the wall prefigures the disappearance of Lauren’s father and the destruction of social order, “marking the desire to avoid the chaos of surrounding world as a futile attachment to outdated logic, as a social arrangement that cannot but fall in the face of the dominance of instability and change” (1341). What Nilges distinguishes here as a disastrous incident is the falling down of all protecting structures, which, later on, he describes as the re-erection of suppressive perspective. In other words, later on, he

negates what he has expressed regret for already. He considers Lauren's community as the incarnation of the same patriarchal protective as well as punitive philosophy which, though is not surrounded by walls, still is secluded by geographical separation. Here again, Nilges misses one point: Acorn is not an isolated island like Robledo; it has its own ties and connections with neighbouring communities. Accordingly, the wall and old structures "cannot but fall in the face of the dominance of instability and change" (1341). This change is not absolutely devastating; it carries loads of promising hope.

Unlike Nilges, Melzer looks at *Parables* as the expressions of "utopian desire and longing to transform" (31). This view of utopia weaves recent feminist politics into a science fictional concept of change and difference to create a feminist version of a better world, if not an ideal one. Melzer starts her argument by explaining how the concept of "ideal community – nation, city, and/or village – is central to western thought" (31). She examines the function of transformed and "re-created living environments" as a utopian principle that is "the foundation of most politics, including feminist" (31). Through this discussion, she emphasizes on difference as the main point of her article and investigates it to distinguish the differences between traditional utopian narratives and feminist utopias. According to Melzer, traditional utopias represent male standardization through enclosing and verbalizing inherently "infinite" and "open-ended" utopian horizons (33). Feminist utopia, she argues, challenges this "one-dimensional utopian" idealism by offering an alternative open-ended concept of utopia.

Based on the above-mentioned perspective, Melzer believes, "Butler's feminist science fiction narratives of the 1990s" define new power relations as strategies of survival to reflect alternative economical, technological, and gender roles (34). The roles, she believes, have been oppressed in traditional utopian constructions by masculine conceptualization of space on the one side, and "hegemonic feminism" on the other side (34). Elaborating on Tom Moylan's "critical utopia," Melzer conceives the world of *Parables* as alternative to dystopian parental societies whose idealization of

sameness makes them “unable to tolerate fragmentation and uncertainty” (32). Melzer believes Butler’s focus on difference reveals the vulnerability of exclusive and monolithic masculine “ideal of community” as a “non-progressive” doctrine that “denies difference within and between subjects by demanding a recognition of, and identification with, all members” (32). Its results are hate and violence, while “embracing of difference not only enhances the quality of human interactions, but that it is an act of survival and of necessity” (37).

She points to the same sensitivity in Butler’s treatment of the concept of race. Though she accepts that it is not as explicit as her concerns with sociocultural policies of gender constructions, yet argues that it manifests itself in her detachment from the feminist utopian milestone of the 1970s and joining with the “utopianism in the context of changing feminist politics” of the 1990s (34). These utopian impulses in Butler’s futuristic vision are conceptualized “as a religious spirituality” that reject “both the patriarchal concept of “God” and the essentialist notion of an “earth mother goddess”... based in cultural feminism that is often an element within feminist utopias of the 1970s” (36). The focus, she asserts, enables Butler to re-dramatize difference, as a traditionally Othered concept, to a component part of Self. I think this inclusive perspective is helpful to understand what I see as Butler’s consciousness of the recent theological debates in feminist writings, and demonstrates her ability in mixing racial-sexual concerns of a marginalized social group in a religious context of science fiction, which in its place is rare for the genre.

However, Melzer sympathizes with Butler’s anxiety of humankind’s susceptibility toward wickedness. According to her, “[t]he power of Butler’s narratives” lie “in the utopian desire and the resulting visions she describes. Yet, at the same time she is critical of the implicit politics of these visions, and the element of faith involved” (46). Describing Lauren’s after-emancipation policy, she writes: “Once free, she changes her political tactics. Instead of only trying to win the disempowered for Earthseed, Lauren

begins to utilize the power and influence of richer people in spreading her message and gathering people” (36). In this point, Melzer, to some extent, touches Nilges’ idea about Lauren’s totalitarian view.

As I discussed earlier, Nilges points to some scenes at the end of *Talents* which, he believes, reveal Lauren’s regressive return to patriarchal oppression. One point should be explained here. Discussing *Earthseed*, Melzer depicts it “in stark contrast to both forms of sexual violence (as a result of social disorder or as a form of social control)” that “does not tolerate any form of oppression of children or any adult” (39). Violence is the most manifested feature of a fundamentalist, masculine Christian America in both *Sower* and *Talents*. As a new philosophy, *Earthseed* challenges believers not to hold on past Christian norms as the embodiment of idealized social laws and seeks ability in this way. Butler’s essential metaphor for this challenge is seed. The metaphor, in Melzer’s words, “symbolizes the success of the vision, the concept of sowing ideas and growing communities not modelled after a remote, idealized past, but focus on the future” (40-41). It values roots that, as experiences of the past history, are sources of learning and identity, and, concomitantly, symbolizes moving forward, as the stem splits the soil and grows.

Melzer also discusses the boundary transgressing metaphors in Butler’s *Parables*. She believes that Lauren’s hyperempathy syndrome “that Butler’s characters refer to as “sharing”” conceptualizes “difference as part of a feminist subjectivity” (45). The notion of sharing represents “a physical mechanism that prohibits the disconnection and alienation from others” (45) and thus, reduces the possibility of seclusion and self-obsession that paves the way for dictatorship. The syndrome can imply a sense of biological determinism, where the role of free will fades, and, thus, support Nilges’ mistrust in human nature as inevitably imperfect and unable of change. Nevertheless, Butler herself, and also Melzer, refute its strictness by focusing on change as the shaping scientific truth of human identity. Lauren’s successful struggle to control it, as I

pointed earlier, also disaffirms the symbolic role of hyperempathy as the representation of biological determinism.

Unlike what Nilges believes, the novels do not redramatize violence through concept of the change. It is true that *Talents*, unlike *Sower*, is constructed by focusing on a systematized structure which is reminiscent of enclosed masculine concepts of utopia. But, Melzer stresses that the change is due to the changed system of violence in *Talents*. Violence in *Talents* is centralized. The Christian America troops that conquer Acorn in *Talents*, are a nationwide network which use violence systematically to control people. Once violence is more centralized, the resistance should be denser. The question is whether Earthseed community at the end of *Talents* continues the same policy of providing shelter and support for others or has turned to an oppressive violent system. We do not see any deviation like that in George Orwell's *Animal Farm* in the novel. Though the final scene of *Talents*, where a rocket carries believers of Earthseed to another planet, leaves the text open for different interpretations of what may happen in the next settled world, it does not confirm any one.

Allen has similar idea of the redramatization of violence in *Parables*. Though she recognizes the utopian aspect of *Parables* by focusing on Lauren's teachings and the tolerance that Earthseed preaches, yet she emphasizes that *Parables* illustrate spiralling or "boomeranging" of violence. According to her, the concept of time in *Parables* reflects "the violent nature of the spiralling of history, especially of African American and other minority groups" (1354). In her "Octavia Butler's Parable Novels and the "Boomerang" of African American History," she points that, in *Parables*, slavery rears its ugly head and puts doubt on the ability of human beings to create utopia. She believes that this boomeranging of violent history of slavery is vividly illustrated in the final scene of *Talents* where the harbingers of Earthseed community leave Earth on a spaceship named Christopher Columbus. The scenery, according to Allen, reflects a sense that "though the members of Earthseed may physically leave Earth, they will not

leave their history behind” (1364). This image seemingly embodies a new history of colonization and slavery by Earthseed.

Oттerson in her article, “Diversity, Change, Violence: Octavia Butler's Pedagogical Philosophy,” which focuses on the series of *Parables* and *Xenogenesis*, investigates the interrelation of the concepts of education, violence, difference, and change to ensure survival. Distinguishing between two forms of compulsive and coercive violence in Butler's work, she tries to show how compulsive violence, focusing on education, serves as a saving strategy in the “encounter between different groups” (436). Though she emphasizes that she does not wish “to justify the so-called myth of redemptive violence by which we literally fight for peace” (434), she accepts that she is tracing “how Butler’s progressive retelling of the relationship linking diversity, change, and intellectual growth with inevitable violence offers, despite its relentless and pragmatic pessimism, a space for pedagogical vision of practical and embodies community to overcome the barriers that divide us” (434).

Oттerson believes that Butler “is interested in the violent process of striving for utopia not utopia itself” (447). According to her, Butler’s utopia is different from other usual utopias in being less concerned with coercive violence “by valuing change and diversity” and embracing pluralism (442). This violence epitomizes the constant “death and renewal of ourselves” (447) and, therefore, is a complementing concept in relation with change. In fact, Oттerson, despite her claim, asserts that to survive in a violent world, violence is needed. This violence by violating metaphorical and rhetorical walls – depicted in the falling of the walls in *Parables* or extra-terrestrial interactions in *Xenogenesis* – empowers individuals through linking them with others.

Interestingly, Oттerson is rather hesitant in her view towards the utopian features of Butler’s *Parable of the Sower*. Referring to the ideas of critics like James Miller or Butler herself, she suggests that

Butler's work presents a pessimistic world in order to stretch our minds and enable us to criticize our own, but I think her criticisms work in a more unusual way, for she does not suggest that we can reach a less violent future through any attempt to rid ourselves of violence. (438)

Outterson is also conscious about Butler's characterization. She believes that "Butler's characters do not so much confront the dominant culture as find themselves learning and teaching" (433). Prior to this, she explains that Butler's characters "learn and teach to adapt" (433). Regarding Lauren's role in the *Parables* the statements are not satisfying. As I will discuss in my analysis, throughout the novels, Lauren challenges all the sociocultural and religious, patriarchal structures of her community, evading "the consequence of *not* being the one to take action" (Green 182). This is evident in her early arguments with her father in *Sower* up to her struggle against Christian America in *Talents*. In this way, as Outterson also shows, Lauren does not evade the use of violence that, in its place, negates the concept of adaptation. It seems that Outterson observes adaptation as a requirement of survival. But, I see Lauren as a posthuman agent of change whose mission of survival is achieved through separation from the dominant culture of her society. I will discuss the aspects of her separation and mission in Chapters Two and Three of this thesis.

Andreolle's article also considers survival, but through a feminist utopian vision in Butler's *Parable of the Sower*. It is a work which deals with Christian fundamentalism in M. K. Wren's *A Gift Upon the Shore* and Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower*. It is concerned with the religious archetypes that reflect a new puritan America within the novels. What is evident in the article is Andreolle's Christian perspective in her analysis. Though she acknowledges that the feminist perspective in *Parable of the Sower* subverts hegemonic "Judeo-Christian discourse and beliefs" as the "powerbase of patriarchal rule in the western world" (121), she emphasizes that "Lauren's religion seeks to overthrow those Judeo-Christian values which led to intolerance and



oppression, and to reinstate a humanitarian faith which returns to Christ's teachings for inspiration" (121). The sentence embodies an Evangelical perspective. For Andreolle, *Sower* is a "bildungsroman, or female novel of self-awakening and self-fulfillment" (119) through which, Lauren as a new Christ revives America as the "New Jerusalem."

Andreolle's article is very inspiring in discussing the general soul of the *Sower*. Particularly, it is very innovative in writing a utopian analysis by focusing on a concept – Christian fundamentalism – that traditionally has been discussed as dystopian. Nevertheless, I think her Christian perspective fails to cover the different dimensions of the novel. It, especially, is controversial to focus on the heroine of the story as a new Christ and ignore the entire Christian traditions – particularly puritan ones – which subdue the subjectivity of woman under strict religious regulations. I think a post-Christian perspective will explain the nature of Lauren's self-declared mission and what she achieves in the story much better. I will discuss the mechanism and aspects of this perspective in my thesis.

Dubey's "Folk and Urban Communities in African-American Women's Fiction: Octavia Butler's Parable of the Sower" discusses dystopianism as a spatial concept in this novel. In the article, she discusses the black American women writers' use of "discursive displacement," which is prevalent in southern folk culture, as a "response to the widely prevalent rhetoric of urban crisis" (103). She argues that this rhetoric acts like an Othering concept which "frame[s] the issue of urban crisis essentially as a crisis in black culture and community" (103). Dubey believes that "discursive displacement" is a reductionist strategy and that Butler goes beyond it to deal with the entire problems which not only affect urban black community, but multi-layered sociocultural sections of social context. Stating that the "novel forcefully rejects localist and organic notions of community" (104), she treats novel as a "lens that clarifies the dangers of advancing folk resolutions to current urban problems" (105). Dubey constructs her debate through focusing on several binary oppositions of the novel like localism/universalism,

urban/rural, Christianity/ Earthseed, and consumption/production to clarify how Christianity, as an unresponsive doctrine, stands with traditional American urban value of the consumption as an unproductive way of life. Through this perspective, Dubey shows how Butler tackles the restrictive labels of class, race, and religion to represent a promising utopia. This perspective echoes that of Miller in his “Post-Apocalyptic Hoping: Octavia Butler’s Dystopian/Utopian Vision.”

In this article Miller reviews Butler’s works as feminist utopian writing that “at the same time, contests it” by questioning “the assumptions shared by many white feminist utopian writers” (337). According to him, Butler’s fictions are simultaneous dystopian/utopian fictions which “challenge not only patriarchal myths, but also capitalist myths, racist myths, and feminist utopian myths” (337). They are “dystopias motivated out of a utopian pessimism ... that... force us to confront the dystopian elements of postmodern culture so that we can work through them and begin again” (337). Referring to Donna Haraway and Gloria Anzaldù’s notions of “cyborg” and “mestiza consciousness,”<sup>12</sup> he discusses Butler’s fictions as sites “where new notions of identity and community are under construction” by defining Self through the Other. Based on the view, unlike Zaki, he believes that the dystopian conditions that Butler reflects in *Sower* do not result from “some essential flaw in human nature, but rather of clearly identifiable historical causes. Hence, ... change is possible” (352). This understanding, to some extent, reflects how I observe the *Parables*.

Miller’s article is very comprehensive in dealing with socioeconomic afflictions that turn a society to dystopia. Environmental devastation, lack of resources, and capitalism are themes that Miller discusses in detail. His obsession with these problems, which, in fact, are the consequences of capitalist perspective, is the same as Davis’ arguments about “the Militarization of Urban Space.” The confrontation between affluence and

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<sup>12</sup>Cyborg is a “hybrid” which breaks the “boundaries” between “human and animal.” (Haraway, Donna. “A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century.” *The Reinvention of Nature*. NY: Routledge, 1991. 149-81. Mestiza consciousness is the “focal point” where “the possibility of uniting all that is separate occurs” (Anzaldù, Gloria. *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. San Francisco: Aunt Lute, 1987. 379, 382).

poverty, exacerbated by the official policy of rendering city life difficult for the poor, particularly minority racial ones, through militarizing the urban texture is an important aspect that Miller also considers in his analysis. At the same time, he is conscious of the alternative theological perspective that *Sower* offers through Earthseed. Though he does not delve into this alternative perspective, yet he recognizes that it “debunks traditional religious hierarchical thinking and suggests a worldview based on the notion of a radical reciprocity” (356). He compares Lauren and her brother Keith in this context, which implies his consideration of the sexual polarization in Christianity and how Earthseed can introduce an alternative to it through Lauren as a religious as well as a social leader. What I am going to achieve in this thesis is to expand the focus of this alternative theological viewpoint and reveal it as an important feature not just in *Sower*, but also in *Talents* as well as “Amnesty” and “The Book of Martha.”

Stillman’s article has the same perspective with that of Miller’s. “Dystopian Critiques, Utopian Possibilities, and Human Purposes in Octavia Butler's Parables” deals with the dystopian setting of *Parables* and how Lauren tackles catastrophe not by restoring old values and traditions, but applying innovative views and procedures in different, but linked realms of religion, family, and personal identity. In Stillman’s word, “Olamina responds to the new U.S. dystopias with new forms of community and new religious world-view” (23). She does not follow institutionalized Christianity or survival through self-centred and isolated nuclear families.

Stillman considers the nature of the religion which Lauren gradually discovers and develops – not invents – as “post-secular religion” (27). According to him, it is post-secular because of two reasons: firstly, it does not consider God as an interfering God in the world and, secondly, accepts and surpasses “the enlightenment’s bifurcation of reason and faith” (28). Applying Hampson’s post-Biblical vision, I will confirm that the opposite of this understanding suits *Parables* more. Hampson’s idea recognizes God as a beneficial goodness whose will runs the world through natural laws. Whenever

necessary this goodness interferes to help His creatures. As I will show, there are scenes in *Parables* which reflect this understanding. In addition, Lauren's Earthseed is not based on the recognition of division between reason and faith. On the contrary, Lauren always argues for the scientific basis of Earthseed.

According to Stillman, a lack of political concern is the big shortcoming in *Talents*. I look at it from two points of view. On the one hand, is it appropriate to prioritize political commitment in the works which are about social, cultural, and religious revival? In other words, is political consideration of priority for a reformer who has aimed at rebuilding existential meaning and purpose of life? In my opinion, a reformer cannot constrain him/herself within political frames because it will damage his/her mission as a saviour. It is obvious that political obsession creates Other by defining borders and raising invisible walls. This is at variance with the visions and missions of a saviour. On the other hand, political commitment is a determining aspect of Lauren's mission. Phillips in "The Intention of the Future: Utopia and Catastrophe in Octavia Butler's "Parable of the Sower"" elaborates on this commitment.

Phillips talks of the sense of responsibility in modern and following postmodern writers. He writes that "prophetic" warnings of a writer like Butler, rejects the "telos of what Lewis calls "the secular apocalyptic tradition"... which posits social revolution as the key transformative force in human history" (301). Sense of responsibility in heading social revolution impregnates the leader with social commitment that is not supposable without some political observations. Phillips recognizes this political commitment in Lauren's sensitivity towards presidential elections in *Sower*, which she hopes to address the economic crisis in her country. According to him, this sensitivity "reveals one aspect of Butler's understanding of modern dystopia: the reduction of community to market economy" (304).

This reductionism, on the one hand, reflects "social disintegration" which Phillips considers as Thomas Hobbes's "state of nature" in which human being's "solitary,

poor, nasty, brutish, and short” life embodies “the breakdown of social order” (305). Phillips believes that *Sower* is a warning through which Butler represents “the fascistic aspects” of this state in modern society where “power systems generate “patternmasters” who seek dominance over other” (305).

The other aspect of the reductionism is the “atomized, corporate” sense of society. Lauren’s hyperempathy is a symbolic syndrome which challenges this reductionism, pre-announcing “a hyperempathic world” where “the other would cease to exist as the ontological antithesis of the self, but would instead become a real aspect of oneself” (Phillips306). These two aspects present the sociopolitical orientation of a mission which aims at offering a utopian perspective of life.

Cassandra L. Jones is also conscious of political commitment in Butler’s writing. Similar to Naomi Jacobs and Nayar, and referring to Spivak’s notion of “strategic essentialism,”<sup>13</sup> she believes that by portraying a “posthuman” concept of humanity, Butler embodies a “political action” that is translated to the metaphorical survival of alien-human hybrid in her stories (8). This political action reflects “the confrontation between fluid and the static required for political engagement” (98). She believes that Butler has a unique consideration of postcolonial concepts, like mestiza identity, through which she offers “a sense of stability in an identity which is ever-shifting” (7). This notion of posthuman is very useful in understanding the hybrid entities in Butler’s oeuvre. Considering the symbiotic relationship of human beings and the Communities in “Amnesty,” same pattern with the same aim of survival is discernible. The difference is that, unlike Jones’ recognized concept of hybridity as “the plexus of body and technology” (8), “Amnesty” describes the combination between two living organic bodies.

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<sup>13</sup> It is an essential concept in postcolonial theory which embodies strategies that Othered groups like minorities or ethnic groups can use to “essentialize” themselves and bring to the for their group identity despite the internal differences. Further information at : Sara Danius, Stefan Jonsson, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. "An Interview with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak." *boundary 2* 20.2 (1993): 24-50.

Jones connects her notion of hybrid posthumanity to the postcolonial perspective of theorists like Haraway, Rosi Braidotti, and Anzaldúa. In such a context, she discusses the “counter-discursive strategies” by which Butler criticizes “the construction of people of color as irrational” in modern European history (iii). Jones believes that Butler’s *Parables*, *Xenogenesis*, and *patternist* series are concerned with the interaction of science and religion to reflect colonial projects. Discussing *Parables*, she points to the role of Christianity as a colonizing tool which debases colonized culture through discrediting colonized indigenous religion. Opposed to it, *Earthseed*, entwined with scientific view, represents indigenous religion as a verified source of knowledge and inspiration. Jones also recognizes the egalitarian sexual and racial perspective that *Earthseed* offers before the hierarchical standpoint of Christianity. She sees these science fiction stories as the “sly combination of despair and possibility” through which Butler challenges the power relations in “patterns of communication and knowledge” that, disguised under religious-technological justifications, silence marginalized groups of people (iii).

Despite this positive perspective towards *Earthseed*, Jones believes that in the end, *Earthseed* is afflicted with the same power-seeking tendency of Christianity. She relates it to *Earthseed* being “united with reason and scientific enquiry,” moving from the margins of social context into the centre (97). Jones extends this skepticism to human beings in the *Parables*. She explains that the reason of Lauren’s success in establishing and running her community is the small and marginal entity of Acorn. A small community like Acorn, later Camp Christian, is a place where the *Earthseed* community finds no one to Other (101-102). When these communities resettle in big cities, in fact, they change to corrupt political systems. Like those of Nilges and Zaki, this view re-echoes the negative vision about human nature in Butler’s writing. Though Jones distinguishes Butler’s promising perspective on posthumanity, reflected through Lauren

and Earthseed, yet she relates it to the absence of the Othering motive not the human understanding.

Luckhurst likely considers the notion of hybridity in Butler's oeuvre. But, unlike Jones, he does not have a resolved perspective of this hybridity. Luckhurst's view of hybridity does not solely concern that of biological notion of posthumanity; it includes Butler's innovative "imbrication of race and gender across cultural and scientific discourses" in postmodernist science fiction ("Horror and Beauty in Rare Combination: The Miscegenate Fictions of Octavia Butler" 28). He deals with Butler's writings as "miscegenate" fictions of unresolved union between concepts of "horror" and "beauty." The horror reflects a fear and hatred of difference while the beauty embodies the hope for embracing the difference. He believes this difference is signified through references to slavery, biological entity -having eugenicist understanding of it -as well as cultural-ideological identity as contexts that Other the difference as "threatening the integrity of the same" (37).

On humanitarian level, Luckhurst appreciates Butler's postmodernist perspective which, he believes, lets her narrate the "temporal intrusion of a repressed history" (31) and, therefore, distance from the fascistic understanding. But, recalling Zaki's deterministic view or Butler's pessimist one expressed in her interview with Beal, he emphasizes that "Butler's *science* fictions are generated from the interstitial space of miscegenation" (34). This feature, according to Luckhurst, renders Butler's writing "difficult to discuss in terms of a simple celebratory hybridity or anti-essentialism" (34). To explain, contrasting Jones' affirmation of Butler's hybrid constructs as alternative, responsive solutions amending the dystopian world, Luckhurst believes that Butler's illustrated new worlds do not reflect such potential. According to him, "Butler excavates a genealogy of horror at miscegenation embodied in slave history and evolutionary theory's implication in racist paradigms and yet attempts to develop from within this matrix a disruptive movement towards difference" (37). But, this "something

different’,” in its turn, “can entrain a recrudescence of conservative and racist thought as much as positive disruption to such paradigms” (37). It seems Luckhurst also credits the biological deterministic view of human nature in a way which prevents humanity from embracing difference fully. This determinism is reflected in bodily problems that Butler’s protagonist are afflicted with, such as Lauren’s hyperempathy or the removal of Dana’s arm in *Kindred*.

While the major debate of those critics who deal with science fiction is that it is devoid of deep characterization and does not consider essential features of human beings, Texter in his “Of Gifted Children and Gated Communities: Paul Theroux’s *O-Zone* and Octavia Butler’s *Parable of The Sower*” advances the argument that Butler’s *Parable of The Sower* reflects a utopian hope of change through embodying a “gifted” heroine. Texter believes that, illustrating a dystopian life of consumerism and disintegrated individuality, *Sower* offers an optimistic perspective of change through an unnaturally gifted adolescent.

Explaining what he means by gifted children, he writes that they are individually different in the sense of being more sensitive and armed with the vigilance to experience life in a different way from majority of people (473). The point with the feature, as Texter also exposes readers to, is the conflict that acceptance of giftedness creates in egalitarian societies like the United States as the context of both novels. In such societies, which bear democratic claims, specializing individual figures as gifted ones targets them to intolerant antagonism due to their difference and superiority based on granted and not earned distinction (458). I think, Texter’s stress on personal ability is not in congruence with the overall flow of the *Parable of the Sower*. Lauren Olamina’s Characterization in the novel is not based on figuring a superheroine whose achievements come true because of personal abilities. Sure, Lauren epitomizes a vigorous talented girl, but the enabling feature as her focused talent is effective in solidarity with others. Further, it is not the only driving force of the novel.



Pointing to Lauren's linguistic giftedness and her ability to "empathize with and organize others around a shared mission" (471), Texter refers to Lauren's walking northward in highway as a "life-changing journey" (471) which, considering her preaching of Earthseed, symbolizes religious renovation and rebuilding the sense of self-identity. Also, he truly points to Lauren's scientific studies which equip her with the necessary understanding of the system of life on the Earth. He connects these concerns with the utopian theme of awareness.

This reading is very promising in revealing the potential of science fiction in depicting strong female characters. Yet, what I see challenging in Texter's reading is his mono-dimensional view of the protagonist, on the one hand, and Othering of other characters and factors, on the other hand. Texter's vision of Lauren in *Sower* centralizes her as the unnatural source of wisdom which makes change possible. In addition, he has a lopsided understanding of Lauren's giftedness which he summarizes in her verbal ability to persuade others to follow her. The Othering and lopsidedness oppose his utopian vision of *Sower* as well as his optimistic view of Lauren. A utopia is not achievable through the humanist attitude of mastering others and conducting them in the way that is individually decided as righteous. In *Sower*, utopia is envisioned through a posthuman perspective of self-understanding and connection with others.

I did not come across much criticism on "Amnesty" and "The Book of Martha." One review is from Clair Light on "Amnesty." It seems that Claire Light has a positive view about Butler's literary characterization. Reviewing "Amnesty," she considers the representation of social divisions in Butler's oeuvre which, she believes, embodies the dichotomy of master/slave. Regarding it as a pattern repeated in the most of Butler's works, Light explains that the protagonist of "Amnesty" embodies a strong woman who, wandering between two oppressive cultures, has the ability to bridge the gaps of communication in the context of the story. Nevertheless, it seems Light cannot escape Butler's pessimist perspective. She is uncertain about the characterization of Noah

Canon in “Amnesty.” In one place, she argues that what Noah does is not because of bravery, but fear of fading: “It is not all heroism; she has nowhere else to go, and if she fails, humanity may not survive” (*edsfproject.blogspot.com*). However, explaining Noah’s dialogue with other six human beings, she emphasizes that “heroic as she is, is also calculating.” At this point, Light points to Noah’s ability to convince her hearers to reconcile with aliens if they want to survive. Yet, she connects this sense of survival with the bitter sense of being helpless and choosing in a position which offers no choice. In her words, Light deals with Butler’s reflection of the experience of being “minority,” loser, and bereft of the joy of life. What Light notably loses is the optimistic soul of the story represented through the Communities’ attempt to develop a connection between themselves and humanity. Noah is the reflection of this effort and her function as translator reveals the capacity of the story as a narration to embody a peaceful coexistence of Self and Other. In my analysis, I will focus on this notion.

Very similar to Light’s perspective is that of Curtis. Curtis’ article considers the same concept of fear in Butler’s “The Book of Martha” and “Amnesty.” In her review, Curtis considers Hobbes’ ideas of “social contract” and “state of nature,” describing them as the reflection of a masculine mechanism to confront the fear resulted from insecurity. Hobbesian understanding sees security at the level of state, that is to say, he considers it under the responsibility of state, based on the social agreement between individual and state. By this agreement, individuals sacrifice the freedom they had in the state of nature (a state free from social rules) and enjoy the protection and safety which is provided by state. Curtis believes that Butler in “The book of Martha” and “Amnesty” offers an alternative feminist mechanism to that of Hobbes. In this way, Butler introduces characters who confront the fear from what is known and unknown.

According to Curtis, Butler in both short stories creates strong protagonists who do not follow the familiar Hobbesian notion of submission to dominant authorities to guarantee their survival. She argues that Butler’s protagonists in these stories embody

strong characters who undergo a process of understanding to learn how to deal with dominant powers in a way which preserves their personal entity and security. Curtis explains the reflection of this struggle for personal security as a manifestation of Butler's "realist utopian mindset" (412). She considers Butler as a "gender egalitarian, modern-day Hobbes revisionist" who "acknowledges fear, but refuses the move to authority" (411). Curtis emphasizes that "instead of recommending an authoritarian sovereign, she [Butler] recognizes the individual responsibility and open communication about the conditions under which we live [and believes that they] provide the most fruitful ground for moving forward" (411).

While Curtis' review recognizes positive aspects of Butler's stories such as character's "universal participation" to challenge "impossible conditions" which embodies "a utopian realist space for human resistance and progressive action" (413) as well as focusing on the concept of education to reject "the presumption that the only way to solve fear is to give up rights to someone sanctioned to use violence to protect us" (414), still her review suffers from a discrepancy.

I believe that despite her view of Butler as a utopian realist, Curtis' reading distinguishes and naturalizes some features as Butler's utopianism which, in fact, in their nature, are dystopian. One case is the naturalization of hierarchy in Curtis' article. Discussing "Amnesty," she argues the hierarchy as a means of survival in both the relation of the Communities with human beings as well as that of Noah with other human beings: "the most understandable attitude for Noah to take towards the recruits would be one of absolute authority" (422). At this point, Curtis turns to represent Noah the opposite of the feminist figure who revises the Hobbesian notion of security: Hobbes argues for authority as a way of guaranteeing security. In the article, Curtis discusses Noah as a caring protagonist who is "seeking security for herself, for other humanity, and for the Communities" (423) and, in this way, embodies a feminist perspective of what Hampson terms an attending practice. Despite this, Curtis

represents Noah as a figure who, to stabilize her survival, struggles to assume an authoritarian position and convince her people that they cannot get rid off the Communities. Exacerbating this negative view of human ability is Curtis' negative view of human nature in "Amnesty." According to her, "Amnesty" reflects Noah's "fear of what is known" that is "the capacity of humans purposefully to harm one another. ... She fears the willingness of humans to inflict pain on other humans while knowing full well what they are doing" (417-418). This notion stands contrary to Curtis' view of Butler's protagonists as strong figures; a strong character resists and challenges the dominant dystopian conditions and features. Curtis' Noah lacks such potential.

Curtis has same hierarchical view about the relationship of God and Martha in "The Book of Martha." She represents Martha as a stock figure who cannot escape the mission that is decided by God. Using this perspective, Curtis, denies the ability of the protagonist to make significant changes in terrible situations. In line with this, she figures God as a dominant authority who creates no space for Martha to freely enact the mission that she is expected to fulfil. Applying the feminist theological views of Daphne Hampson and Ruether, I will argue for the opposite of these perspectives on human being and God in these two short stories.

Frann Michel in "Ancestors and Aliens: Queer Transformation and Affective Estrangement in Octavia Butler's Fiction" substitutes Curtis' notion of fear in Butler's works with shame. Likewise, Michel considers Butler's protagonists as strong characters who undergo a process of embracing shame to guarantee their survival. It seems that like Curtis, Michel believes in the concept of unchanging unsatisfactory conditions – the dominance of authoritative figures such as the Communities in "Amnesty" – in Butler's works. As she argues, "shame has historically been exploited by those interested in controlling others ... . Slavers and torturers have used nakedness to humiliate those they control" (Michel 108). Accordingly, in the context of women, the concept of shamelessness has been used to condemn the "expression of sexuality

and desire” (103). The domination and unchangeable situation again prefigure a concept of hierarchy. Assuming any concept of resistance under such hierarchy by embracing what this hierarchy imposes as a controlling idea – in this case shame – is enacting passive kind of survival and cannot represent resistance which in its nature is very dynamic. The Butlerian protagonists, as Michel argues, struggle to di-absolutize concept of shame by naturalizing it as something acceptable. This cannot change the oppressive situation per se and, therefore, it is superficial to consider it as resistance. Furthermore, considering the presence of the Communities on Earth as an oppressive one in “Amnesty” is a matter of discussion that I will meticulously investigate it in Chapter five.

Considering the literature which I reviewed in this part, the notion that I believe would be of contribution to literary criticism on Butler is the reflection of posthumanity as the source of hope and renovation in her oeuvre. This is what I am going to focus on in my thesis. Applying a feminist theological perspective, I will investigate the image of the posthuman as the combination of Self and Other in the selected texts of this study. This contribution is indeed very important for the scholarship on Butler because it will provide a better understanding of Butler’s perspective for reflecting a better way of life in a time when violence, misunderstanding, lack of communication, and ignorance in various forms threaten the existence and future of humanity on Earth.

#### **1.4 Statement of the Problem**

By the beginning of the modern era, science was centralized as the only venerable means of gaining knowledge and understanding. This perspective limited knowledge to what could be attained through sensory observation, refusing the authenticity of extra sensory experiences. Based on the outlook, concepts related to immaterial dimension of life were dismissed as superstitious, irrelevant, and unreliable. Further, concepts like mind, mentality, and spirituality, as Griffin shows, were totally stripped off their non-

sensory features, systematizing and restricting the understanding of universe, human being one of its members, under a doctrine known as evolution. Postmodern era, with its consciousness towards spirituality and recognition of the authenticity of non-sensory experience, challenged this materialist point of view.

On the other hand, Attebery believes that from the 1940s onwards, obsession with “human problems in society” and “mental issues” has replaced the “applying of experimental method and technological innovation to physical problems” (39). This tendency has paved its way towards different branches of social sciences like the literary products of post-World War II. Science fiction, because of its inherent tendency and nature of representing alternative systems of life seemed to be receptive of this new approach. Still, casting a critical look on the history of science fiction reveals that illustration of human being and his problems in science fiction is not taken as serious. G. Jones argues, “[i]t is often said that sf is a genre devoid of convincing characterization” (171). She explains that “sf writers do not have the space for deep and studied character development, because they are bound to foreground the imagined world, the action-adventure and the gadgets” (171). Though she admits that there are “some remarkable exceptions to this rule” (171), she emphasizes that “sf relies, like other popular fiction genres, on a set of stock figures, recognizable and emblematic as the characters of pantomime or *Commedia dell’ Arte*” (171).

In addition, science fiction, in Veronica Holinger’s words, is a genre widely held as “inherently masculinist” (127). Though, from the 1960s, some feminist science fiction writers have tried to make women visible in science fiction, but most of these attempts are limited to gender differentiations such as stereotypical role reversal, construction of multi-gender types, banishing men, or feminizing traditional male heroes, all of which ignore the full development of women to challenge the traditional myth of man as human in science fiction (129-34). Because of this background, works of female science fiction writers are usually ignored as devoid of serious literary value. The case is worse

when it comes to women from minor social groups, especially racial minorities. Commenting on Butler, Dubey writes: “Octavia Butler is a prolific writer whose novels have usually been targeted at a restricted science-fiction readership and, with the exception of *Kindred*, have therefore remained outside the critical purview of the African-American women’s fictional tradition” (“Folk and Urban” 104).

Recognizing these gaps, science fiction writers of the two last decades of the twentieth century started to represent more complex characters in their stories. These characters emerge from well-developed narrations which, attempting to cover more postmodern intersectional debates of social sciences, reflect the “consideration of the intersections of gendered concerns with postcolonial theory, ecological politics and radical critiques of (Western) science” (Merrick 251). This is due to the penetration of postmodern principles to rebuild a postmodernist form of science fiction. In this new phase, absorbing feminist arguments, science fiction has prepared a ground for rewriting traditional male heroes and replacing them with more inclusive representatives of heroism. The inclusion takes in the early examples of “highly ‘feminized’ hero” like Lois McMaster Bujold’s Vorkosigan, “whose abnormal physicality, avoidance of violence and relationships with women mark him as highly unconventional” (250), or “plays with the masculine space of the military and ‘the hunt’ by placing women (and an elderly clutch of ‘aunts’) at the center of political power” (251).

The sociopolitical waves which influenced postmodernist science fiction came from different origins. As Csicsery-Ronay explains, by the beginning of the 1960s, under the influence of the civil struggles in places like America, led by Martin Luther King, or student unrests in France, gradual independence of many exploited colonies, and sudden burst in technological and economic developments, opposition with bourgeois standards and values develops among the literary intellectuals of the Western world (116). These intellectuals could not find a frame better than science fiction for “imagining alternatives to the bipolar irrationally militarized world order of the cold war” (116).

Resorting to the postmodernist alternative ontological worlds, which accepted the existence of the “excluded middles” and “under erasure” entities, variety of alternative communities are reflected in the science fiction of this era. In these stories, there is an explosion in the depiction of utopia/dystopia, the aim of which is to draw the attention of readers towards the deteriorating situation of the world, which can lead to humanitarian catastrophe if left unheeded.

Butler’s *Parable* novels, “Book of Martha,” and “Amnesty” are the selected texts of the current analysis. Reflecting a female anxiety about the waning peaceful life on Earth, they emerge as cautionary tales which “warn readers about what might happen if they continue along their current path of destruction” (Hampton 247). Baggesen, terms these kinds of narrations as optimist dystopias. In contrast to it, what I am trying to highlight here is that, far from having dystopian frames, the texts are written based on utopian hope. A notable feature of this hope is that sometimes it justifies the use of force to make other voices powerful as well. Yet, it should be highlighted that this reading goes beyond discussing utopian or dystopian features of the novels; it aims at investigating the characterization of protagonists in the selected works.

Feminism is an approach which focuses on enhancing women’s consciousness of self and identity. Postmodernist perspective challenges this feminist self-awaking demand by decentering the sense of self. Despite this discrepancy, what postmodernism and feminism share in common is a differential concept of identity. The differential notion of existence and identity recognizes the sense of being in mutual decenterism and interaction with the Other. Feminist approach resides on the same view in defining feminine identity. Woman normally sees and defines herself through interaction with others. Intrinsically, women are always interested in developing their existential skills through sharing their thoughts, interests, and experiences with others. Now, the question is while feminist considerations presume women’s identity as being defined and shaped via communication with others, how can women maintain Self-identity. Is feminine



identity dissolved in collectivity, and if so, how a woman can preserve self-identity to play self-roles in social interactions. More critical than these is the question of marginalized women including those of other religions and races. When someone is interested in the feminist notion of communication, he or she is probably eager to know whether the feminist call for unity includes all women with different social, sexual, racial, and religious backgrounds or not.

What intrigued me to attempt my hand in tracing the depiction of posthuman as saviour in science fictions was what I came to know as its openness towards difference. It was the point where my curiosity was aroused to see if the genre provides any space for the challenging debate of Self and Other based on feminist theological assumptions. This study is indeed significant since it aims at investigating the common concerns behind all differences and despite apparent prejudices. I am interested to know how Butler's writings bring to the fore the significance of a reformer's role in teaching and spreading self-awareness, recognition, tolerance, and co-relation to establish a promising life through separation from determinist, modern, humanist standpoint.

The reasons why I choose Butler is to investigate her literary style and concerns as a science fiction writer. According to what I discussed in the previous paragraphs, this is important from two aspects: she was woman, and she was black. As a black woman science fiction writer, she was an Other in a strictly exclusive masculine domain. Butler was a woman from a marginalized, outcast slave background who wrote science fiction, and I am interested to know how this 'outsidedness' affected her outlook when she wrote about women based on feminist sensitivities. Based on this interest, some questions come to mind: What priorities did she have, and how were they developed? Did she think the same as white female science fiction writers when it came to the patriarchal norms of society? Writing about religion, did she experience religious difference the same as a white woman experiences it? If not, what were the reasons, and how they shaped her identity as non-conformist?

## 1.5 Objectives

To discuss the concept of posthuman, it is needed to consider the presentation of individuality and personhood in postmodernist writings. An essential feature of postmodernist fiction is its delineation of a decentred entity of person. Margaret Farley summarizes it in these words: “postmodernist rejection of the personal subject and self, a dissolution of “person” into a plurality of differences” (183). How can the characterization of a saviour be imaginable in such kind of fiction? Focusing on the characterizations of postmodernist fiction, Farley has gone so far as to argue that, “[w]e would look, then, not for features of personhood, but for a solidarity among fragmented, partial, separate, even oppositional, socially constructed temporary selves” (183). Here resides the gap which this scholarship tries to provide some samples for. This study is an attempt to show that there are strong individuals in postmodernist science fiction, some ones who reflect a deep and mature characterization. They embody figures would play an important or central role in changing the unsatisfactory situations depicted in the stories.

To summarize, in order to explore posthumanism through feminist theological perspectives in Butler’s writing, I have chosen stories that have strong religious themes, and embody the relationship of human beings with God and the nonhuman world. Investigation of the stories reveals a similarity among them. In these texts, the writer uses conventions of futuristic novels to display dystopian worlds which are replaced with, or resurrected to, another way of life. The early represented worlds demonstrate societies drowning in corruption, atheism, war, violence, sexism, racism, and in dire need of a reformer. Reading and analysing them is beneficial since it provides us with a better understanding of the reasons of the illustrated chaos and, therefore, incites us to be conscious of the destructive effects of our ignorance towards others as well as ourselves.

## CHAPTER 2: A UTOPIAN IMPULSE: POSTHUMAN AS THE UNITING VOICE OF SELF AND OTHER

Octavia Estelle Butler's Parable series (*Parable of The Sower* and *Parable of The Talents*) are post-apocalyptic postmodernist science fictions. They bring the utopian/dystopian features of a civilization to the surface by focusing on the conflict of the Self and Other. The conflict is enacted through the entire formal and thematic elements of the novels, i.e. setting (time and place), themes, and characterization. Focusing on the characterization of the protagonist in the stories, I see the stories as the embodiment of utopian hope in a "postmodern subject," to use Heffernan's term, whose actions stimulate the hope of re-establishing security, order, and harmony through devotion to the unification of Self and Other. This unification is achieved by the protagonist as a reformer whose deeds typify a "posthuman" saviour. Defining posthumanism, Heffernan writes, it is an understanding of the Self as "fluid, contingent, and as contesting and rending the hierarchical binaries of nature/culture, self/other, male/female, human/nonhuman" (118). I believe the characterization of the protagonist, that is to say her roles and functions, as well as the new perspective of society that she offers in the stories, challenge the hierarchical understanding of life system and offers an alternative, utopian perspective of life based on non-hierarchical correlation among human beings, God, and nature. In the following two chapters I focus on the role of the protagonist to reveal how she works to make the correlation possible.

In my analysis, I investigate the anti-Othering perspective of the novels by looking at the fictional space in the novels, as well as the multiple roles played by the protagonist. It is done via focusing on the actions of the heroine, to reveal how she enacts the role of a rebellious figure who confronts the widespread corruption of an uncaring society. In both cases, I consider the legitimated assumptions that restraint social-religious ideology within a deep patriarchal, racial, and classist perspective.

Written by a black female science fiction writer and embodying a black protagonist, the novels seem to reveal the racial considerations of an author who herself is shaped by personal and communal experiences of living as a minority.

A central theme highlighted in the novels that opens them to compelling feminist theological analysis is the accentuated confrontation between an unresponsive Christianity and a responsive Earthseed. These two religious beliefs are discussed as two opposing doctrines in the novels: Christianity, as the constituting base of American society, and Earthseed as an alternative solution. It is a new religion that the protagonist introduces to resolve the problems of a civilization on the verge of collapse. It should be noted that the focus of the preceding chapters is not to clarify whether the novels are fully utopian or dystopian. Rather, these chapters argue that in the novels, the figure of the heroine acts as a saviour, or agent of change, to revive humanitarian life in her society. As I will show, despite featuring pessimistic arguments, these literary works are the embodiment of a hope, and my analysis attempts reflect that hope.

The following chapter analyses how the protagonist brings a shift to the stereotypical structures and social factors which affect human life and encapsulate it within fixed roles. Though I have tried to discuss the roles separately and in detail, this does not mean that these functions stand or operate in isolation. In several cases, I have had no other option but to discuss and repeat the concepts when discussing various roles. In turn, this inevitability reveals the connectedness that is one of the concepts germane to this analysis. Regardless, I would like to emphasize that I have tried to clarify the scope and function of each concept as much as possible.

## **2.1 Universal Feminism: A Utopian Voice of Recognition**

Otherness is the first notion that is recognized when considering *Parables*. This Otherness is the link between overlapping views of place, humanity, nature, God, and religion in the novels. For their part, these views work as biases resulting from spatial,

racial, sexual, classist, and religious differences, and drag a civilization to the edge of annihilation. Offering an alternative to the world which is an amalgam of these contrasting differences, *Parables* weave together a world of interconnected differences and bring to the fore the attempts of a reformer who acts as a Saviour.

Embodying a black woman with particular mental and physical capabilities, the protagonist of the novels displays a universal understanding of coexistence based on self-understanding. Till today, blacks have largely occupied a marginal space in the American social landscape.<sup>14</sup> Investigating the logics of this Othering within white societies in the recent century, Corbey and Salih point to the influence of the seemingly scientific perspective of the modernist era which “animalized” blacks, differentiating them from “civilized,” white citizens. Blacks were “undesirable other humans” who were perceived as “apish” or “bestial” because they were different from whites in appearance (Corbey 29-30). Salih argues this categorization as a form of “speciesism” to secure the mastery of the white, masculine human over the dark, apish nonhuman (96-98). This understanding relegated blacks to a place between humans and animals and deprived them from being fully accepted into human societies. Exacerbating this perspective was the trope of black females having sexual intercourse with male orangutans, which Salih explains as the white masculine discourse to erase the history of its sexual assault of negro slave women (109). The spread and internalization of this trope targeted black womanhood and burdened them doubly, both as woman and black within the social context. Offering a postmodernist alternative, *Parables* embody a world based on non-hierarchical system of interaction among humans, free from “speciesism,” racial, and sexual understandings.

In *Parables*, Butler highlights implanting, internalizing, and practicing self-awareness as rudimentary steps towards self-definition not just for a black woman, but for the complete body of women in social context. At the same time, Butler does not

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<sup>14</sup> Refer to Feagin, Joe R. *Racist America: Roots, Current Realities, & Future Reparations*. New York and London: Routledge, 2001.

limit her vision to women and womanhood; she creates a heroine whose aim is to enlighten others, man or woman, enabling them to find their own way in a world in which nothing is in its place. The success of this enlightenment depends on considering all social voices, regardless of racial and sexual presumptions. Following this vision, Lauren's mission starts from herself, those surrounding her, including family, friends and neighbourhood, and later on, expands to include the world at large.

Daphne Hampson, in her book, *After Christianity*, discusses the practice of self-awareness as a spiritual female activity necessary to connect oneself with others. She explains the notion through the theological term of 'attention': "the ability to attend to others and to listen" (259). According to her, it is an integrating activity which, through cultivation, will guarantee an "unforced manner to change and growth" (264). From her point of view, coming to oneself, or achieving "centredness," is a necessary 'ethical matter' to connect with, and likewise, heal others, because "[u]ntil people know and have come to be at peace with themselves they simply will not be able to be 'present' to others" (264). This being "present" means to have a constructive correlation with others.

This movement towards self-awareness is not without problems. The challenge to be "present" confronts one with sexual-racial pressures, which work ceaselessly to reduce and eliminate the feminine role from the scene of social interactions. "Centredness" is a resistance and counter policy against this removal. Due to it, the spreading of knowledge, understanding the importance of self-reliance, and internalizing it within the people are essential duties of a reformer who is determined to revive a dead society.

This revival needs to address economic, political, and religious dimensions of life; the three essential categories of human interaction. Based on Hampson's feminist theological perspective in *After Christianity*, the political and economic reawakening cannot be complete without ethical purification which aims to increase the social values of tolerance and acceptance. The capacity to internalize tolerance and acceptance is key to perpetuating the social presence for Self and the Other; it is achieved by the extension

of understanding and depends on the expansion of education. Education will equip women with the necessary knowledge to distance themselves from more aggressive feminist strategies that attempt to guarantee female presence, but at the cost of relegating masculinity to a secondary position in the binary of femininity versus masculinity.

The attempts to substitute the dominant and all-present masculinity with an alternative femininity are not responsive solutions for filling the gendered-based gaps and claiming feminine presence. A more constructive alternative to reform male-female relationships is to change the dominant masculine mono-lateral relationship of one's presence at the expense of the other's absence by nurturing a culture of coexistence – one that trains and brings to the surface the ignored dimensions of the other's presence. Education is the main initiating step of this process. The nature of a reformer's mission demands a commitment to education so as to nurture an inclusive mind. In such a case, the focus is on nourishing latent internal human capacities and helping human beings to personally understand these features, and confidently manifest them. *Parables* reflect such a commitment.

Lauren is a preacher who is obsessed with the priority of education. This obsession is the beginning and end of her mission. At the end of *Talents* we read: "I know what I've done. I have not given them heaven, but I've helped them to give themselves the heavens. I can't give them individual immortality, but I've helped them to give our species its only chance at immortality" (405). Here, Butler reflects a view compatible with Hampson's. Lauren cannot give immortality to others; she can only help them to understand and, therefore, achieve it themselves. This immortality is to have one's voice and effect – that is to say, to have a chance to be ever-present through recognizing and manifesting individual potentialities. It is doubly significant in the case of a writing which deals with a black protagonist. In a context doubtlessly subjected to racial

prejudices, establishing a universal foundation for equal presence is the most crucial step to be taken by a reformer.

In *Parables*, Butler explains the concept of revival by reflecting on the black tradition of “survival.” Lauren is a reviver who brings to the fore the notion of immortality, not for individuals, but species. This goal of immortality is depicted as a challenge to the concept of group survival, which was dominant in black women’s literature. The notion has been the fundamental theme of resistance in black history. It, most notably, has been the touchstone of black feminist activity.<sup>15</sup> Butler widens her scope to go beyond this sexually and racially bounded tradition.

To have a better understanding of the black feminist concept of survival, it is necessary to have a look at the structure of their preserved integrity. Family and motherhood are the first social structures that provide a rather safe space for young black females to develop their self-understanding. On the other hand, education is an inseparable part of black mothers’ consciousness. While Collins accepts that “[d]ifferent historical eras provide new challenges and opportunities for U.S. Black women’s activism,” yet she stresses that “[a]s long as social justice remains elusive for African-American women,” similar patterns are observable in the different phases of black women’s activity (222). The focus on learning for “racial uplifting” is the most essential strategy for group survival. Uplifting awareness is the guaranteeing factor of success in these struggles, and it is achieved through “institutional transformation.” This institutional transformation presupposes the establishment of an informal frame within which the black community comes to be educated to manage group potentialities and sources necessary for its survival. These two domains, Collins discusses, are the foundation of the attempts by black women to change oppressive situations and foreground “the kind of visibility that emerged as community leadership” (212). Butler

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<sup>15</sup> The arguments of Black feminists like Patricia Hill Collins, bell hooks, Audre Lorde, June Jordan, Alexis De Veaux, and Barbara Smith would be of great help to have a crystal clear understanding of this concept.



locates her novels in this traditional black heritage. She enriches her writing by addressing the intersecting oppressive structures that lash out at black identity and brings these structures within the familiar black frame of “group work” for survival, while at the same time, expanding this frame to include other non-blacks. According to this view, *Parables* are novels which embody a changed concept of survival, distancing themselves from a restricted black standpoint.

Lauren of the *Parables* is a black heroine who seeks survival not within racial walls. Her viewpoint opposes that of her father who, as the manager of his community, tries to ensure the wellness of the community by protecting it from the outside world. This reflects the black tradition of prioritizing the masculine voice or perspective to preserve the “integrity” of the group or community (Collins 7-8). It is concomitant with the racial concept of “group survival.” Lauren’s paternal community symbolizes such a black notion of survival. In such an understanding, the black community defines itself through attachment with people of its own, signified either by black or dark-skin. Though Robledo (the paternal community) had white members, it was a community singled out by its coloured people. Later on, Lauren, in her own way, accepts people of different colour into her small band moving towards North, her coloured friend Zahra, for example, and Harry, a white boy. She follows the same attitude in Acorn, her established community. This view and how she manages her community embodies “deghettoisation.” Collins explains “gehttoisation” as the systematic sociopolitical discrimination against blacks in the United States which result was “all-Black neighborhoods” that “provided a separate space where African-American women and men could use Africa-derived ideas to craft distinctive oppositional knowledges designed to resist racial opposition” (9-10). Struggling against the pressures imposed by the dominant masters, blacks resorted to the same ghettoization. Lauren of the *Parables* confronts this policy. She does not seek survival through isolating her community and closing it to people other than her race.

Lauren's alternative perspective of survival reflects an internal shift within the black community to face exploiting, organized institutions. These institutions constantly tried to perpetuate their superiority through crushing blacks within their isolated ghettos. The internal change equips the black community with the awareness to open the doors of its "barred room" to include other non-black members in an "autonomous," and not "separatist," humanitarian struggle for survival (Collins 208). The challenge and change of the institutionalized suppressive structures will be discussed in the next chapter.

The internal change is not bound to "racial uplifting" through increasing "racial integrity." Alongside the racial considerations, it challenges the "fundamental gendered assumptions that underlie both Black nationalism and racial integration" (Collins 208). The change targets the ideological wall of "gender-appropriate political behavior for African-American women and men" (Collins 208). This ideological wall has been a controlling device in the hands of black masculine society. They apply it to separate and subdue black women. The separatist black gendered assumptions associate women with "the private sphere of family and community," which Collins terms as "nation within a nation," and leave the responsibility of defending the "Black community within the public sphere of U.S. social institutions" (208) with men. Collins emphasizes that this view has been dominant up to the present time. Based on this view, even those women who were active in the civil rights movement were routinely deprived of serving "as leaders and spokespersons" (Collins 208). Butler's novels challenge this Othering philosophy too.

*Parables* are the embodiment of the hopes and attempts to share power and effectiveness on behalf of women, black and white, as well as men, black and white. This sharing of power is achieved by undertaking social responsibilities. This sense of responsibility and the determination to fulfil it reflect the "attentiveness" or "self-actualization" that Hampson explains as the result of self-awareness in chapter seven of *After Christianity* and five of *Theology and Feminism*. A truly active role in social

interaction will be achieved when the ignored or Othered social groups are included and respected, when they are given or have gained the recognition to decide on the affairs of their life. As Hampson explains, this is the most ethical duty, particularly of women, which will let them work for “equality and the empowerment of others” (*Theology and Feminism* 153). It means that equality in social affairs demands the empowering of the Other as well as the Self; no recognition of Self’s rights, either individual or group, is possible or sustainable without recognizing the rights of the Other. This concern for the Other gives a strong spiritual facet to this perspective – regardless of attachment to a transcendent God –and, internalizing the perspective through this facet, perpetuates it. Lauren is the incarnation of this understanding.

She is not an ordinary person working with her colleagues to reach a predefined point. She is a social-spiritual leader who uses all of her capabilities to understand, and then inspire, teach, and conduct others to establish a more natural and sustainable habitat for themselves. Her diaries reveal her as a critical mind who from an early age was incessantly obsessed with the two categories of God (spirituality) and science as concepts that shape the basis of her perspective:

God is much on my mind these days. I’ve been paying attention to what other people believe... A few believe God is another word for nature. ... Some say God is a spirit, a force, an ultimate reality. ... Is there a God? If there is, does he (she? It?) care about us? (*Sower* 14-15)

...

“Space could be our future,” I say. I believe that. As far as I’m concerned, space exploration and colonization are among the few things left over from the last century that can help us more than they hurt us. (20)

The extracts demonstrate the conscious struggle of a black girl to get a full understanding of the world she lives in. Obsession with the concept of God reflects a spiritual dimension of life. The other understanding is a material one that is reflected through reference to the scientific aspect of human life. Colonization and space

explorations were the dominant scientific explorations of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The story narrates a distant future and Lauren's reference to these scientific traditions as well as spirituality shows that these concepts are the fixed notions of humanitarian life.

Persuaded to revive a humanitarian life, and regarding the corruption afflicting her time, Lauren is resolved to deepen her understanding of the aspects and system of life. To confirm her position as a reviver, and succeed in enlightening and leading humanity, she must prove her suitability by representing full awareness of the entity of life. This embodies an "attentive" practice of "self-actualization" through self-development, and equips her with the necessary knowledge for "attending" others. In other words, Lauren's mission is defined within the spiritual and scientific disciplines. Despite this, the contribution of her perspective is that, unlike the traditional Western perspective, it does not divide these disciplines to separate divine and earthly categories: she offers a "natural" unified concept that I will discuss as the main feature of her mission. She is an enlightened leader who, through focusing on the training of her natural capabilities beside that of others, manages the obstacles, and devises practical strategies to tackle the blockage which is caused by these obstacles. The notion is discussed under the section of education in this chapter.

From my argument in this part, we see that *Parables* emerge as novels which represent a change in black culture and activity, in particular, and in American life, in general. As it emerges from the discussion, the change focuses on and develops the importance of self-awareness, bridging the distanced worlds of Self and Other in various interracial, sexual, and classist interactions. Investigating the dimensions of these self-awareness and change will serve as an appropriate device to understand the utopian feature of the texts better.

## 2.2 *Parables*: An Attempt to Embody a Feminist Ecotopia

*Parables* deal with a variety of themes. The themes cover the wide spectrum of dystopian afflictions that influence and are influenced by the human-nature relationship in a dualistic interaction. Environmental problems like pollution, climate change, the lack of energy and critical resources like water resulting from previous misuse, population explosion, hunger, and homeless people are prevalent in *Sower*. These conditions are worsened by the mismanagement of available resources. Lauren points to the “money wasted on another crazy space trip when so many people here on earth can’t afford water, food, or shelter” (*Sower* 17). This dystopian situation leads the protagonist to think of other spaces as a utopian Eden at the beginning of *Sower*: “Mars is a rock-cold, empty, almost airless, dead. Yet it’s heaven in a way. We can see it in the night sky, a whole other world, but too nearby, too close within the reach of the people who’ve made such a hell of life here on Earth” (21). This other world symbolizes the feminist wish to establish another world by solving the causes of problems on this world. It works by providing a more caring system of thought which replaces the differentiating system with a more inclusive one. This caring system does not Other nature, with its animate and inanimate elements, as something below the human being, but instead creates integration between nature and human beings which, in turn, promotes harmony and well-being on Earth.

In *Parables*, Butler reflects a posthuman consideration to replace the exploitative Christian discourse of the domination of nature. The novels, in fact, are the explanation of a more respectful, productive, and protective alternative to compensate the exploitative treatment of nature by human beings.

In 1967, Lynn White started a controversial discourse by his published speech, “The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis.” In this speech, he challenged dominant Western power relations constituted by an ideology based on an anthropocentric Christianity. This human-centeredness was the main reason for the inability of

Christianity to “respond to the environment and the marginalized” (Parsons 1). In the speech, White argued that though we are in a post-Biblical age, a time when the majority of Christian assumptions go unheeded or refuted, the nucleus of the techno-scientific identity of Western civilization is the same Christian axiom of the superiority of humans over nature (3). According to him, this belief, unlike the main pillars of Occidental scientific heritage, has no roots in the Greco-Roman or Oriental past, but in Judeo-Christian theology (3). Based on this view, in the order of creation, nature had not a tenable “reason for existence save to serve man” (6). He argues that this mentality has penetrated into the secular scientific era of Western technological progress and, in an undemocratic process, has demolished the idea of respect for the rest of creation (5). Christianity was not able to improve the ecological crisis resulting from this human-centeredness. Consequently, White concludes that “[m]ore science and more technology are not going to get us out of the present ecologic crisis until we find a new religion, or rethink our old one” (5).

Due to the nature of their activities to oppose the suppression and marginalization imposed by the masculine world of Christianity, feminists were attracted by this new ecotopian debate. They related the debate to their feminist assumptions of theology to substitute what they saw as the uncaring side of masculine mastery of the world. This theorizing was practiced through merging it with other disciplines like ecology that led to the gradual emergence of echo-feminist movements with theological sensitivities. These theological concerns attempted to either reconcile Christianity with human-nature relationship, or dispatch canonical Western religious tradition, trying to excavate canonical texts for ignored passages or alternatively to search for new interpretations. The first trend is observable in the new interpretation of the Biblical texts aimed at vitalizing ignored concepts like creation “out of love” hidden under the dominant “being made in His image” (Parsons 2), in the works of theologians like Jürgen Moltmann. Another category includes those Biblical theologians who, having a more inclusive

interpretation of the same concept of creation in His image, come closer to post-Biblical terms to include gendered differences. The prominent example is Rosemary Radford Ruether with her feminine concept of God as “Gaia.” There also have been voices within the Post-Biblical feminists who are concerned with ecological sensitivities, like that of Mary Daly’s “Gyn/Ecology.” She discards devotion to Christian values and seeks an alternative frame by resorting to the rules of objective physical world to explain the true system of relation among the world phenomena.

Highlighting ecological concerns, *Parables*, at first, review the history of Christianity in the Western civilization. The aim of the review is to launch a counteractive attempt to initiate a change. The books address Christian justification as a self-righteous discourse through depicting an obsessively self-centred community. Then, they continue by picturing a new community and system of mutual interaction where no interaction is based on the unilateral recruiting of the rest for the benefit of self. Acorn, Lauren’s established community, represents a liberating point of view which opposes the “human-centeredness of Western Christianity” (Parsons 1). Practicing Earthseed as a nature-friendly religion, Acorn challenges a “male-centred, anti-God and anti-culture theology existed for many of the same reasons” (1) and normalized as the “Christian assumption of separateness in the creation” (2).

Robledo, the paternal community, symbolizes this Christian separateness and human-centeredness through a guarding wall which is erected to protect the good, uncorrupt Christians residents of Robledo from the unwanted people of the outside:

We got up early this morning because we had to go across town to church. Most Sundays, Dad holds church services in our front rooms. He’s a Baptist minister, and ... those who feel the need to go to church are glad to come to us. ...

To us kids—most of us—the trip was just an adventure, an excuse to go outside wall. ... We rode past people stretched out, sleeping on the sidewalks, ...

A woman, young, naked, and filthy stumbled along past us.

...

Maybe she had been raped so much that she was crazy. ...maybe she was just high on drugs. The boys in our group almost fell off their bikes, staring at her. What wonderful religious thoughts they would be having for a while. (*Sower 7-9*)

Here, human-centeredness in Robledo is reflected through encompassing a chosen group of people who vehemently exclude others. It is illustrated through gathering around a Christian identity that is prescribed as the norm of true humanity, whereas the non-Christian world is shunned.

The exclusion is not limited to unwanted human beings. It includes the natural world also. In fact, it is one of the aspects of the conflict between Christian and non-Christian perspective in the *Parables*. The same Christian pattern of seclusion is practiced in the Christian camp in *Talents* where people are not only separated from the outside world, but also from the natural scenery around them under the pretext that nature is linked with heretical beliefs: “Our teachers had made us cut down the older trees for firewood and lumber and God” (*Talents 253*).

Ecological sensitivity is a defining feature of Acorn and it is harshly suppressed by the Christian American troops who call it heresy. This suppression somehow mirrors the arguments about the intrinsic nature of Christianity as the manifestation of “man’s domination over creation” (Genesis 1:28), replacing “respect and protection” of nature with the “ethic of power and control over nature” (Parsons 1). Parson believes that this feature defiles the potentiality of Christianity to launch a change to improve ecological crisis. Nevertheless, this human-centeredness is not a concept that all the theologians, particularly feminist theologians, agree with.

There are Christian feminists who consider this anthropocentrism as a concept originated from non-Christian contexts and penetrated into Christianity in the later phases of its spread. Ruether is a prominent voice of this perspective. She is a Christian



feminist who calls for the investigation of the deep layers of Christianity to reveal its egalitarian stand and acknowledgment of the inter-dependency of creatures in the universe.

Discussing the apparent hierarchical nature of Christianity, Ruether in *Sexism and God-Talk—Toward a Feminist Theology* points to the biases which have been imposed on the “true” Christianity via “developing institutional minister” (123). According to her, the institutionalized version of Christian theology followed by bishops has authoritatively closed all other considerations of Christ as the ongoing Logos of God who “is speaking now” (121), historicizing him as “the center of history” (124). This historicizing has had pernicious effects on other members of this ideological hierarchy. It provisions the ideal human in the form of a man who, as the incarnation of God, represents Him as the centre of creation. He is assumed as the revelation of “God’s ‘last word’ and ‘once-for-all’ disclosure” and, therefore, prefigures an obligation of the priority of reference to an old model of human-centred masculinity to judge the true and harmonious order of creation (122). This surface, Ruether believes, has different deep levels which reveal Christianity’s potential to address woman and nature on equal terms with dominant masculinity.

Ruether asserts that this surface is due to the gradual influence of the deep masculine anthropocentric Judaeo-Greek background of Christianity. She believes that during the expansion of Christianity this ideological background coupled with a search for an everlasting God and resulted in a philosophy which debased body and nature because of their affiliation with death and change. In this understanding, woman as the embodiment of physical matter and productivity was affiliated with nature. Simultaneously, the male half of creation, following the Greek mythological model of male consciousness, was raised “to the same transcendent status as God” (78), embodying mind and intellectuality. Succeeding this belief, true salvation was only

possible by denying body and its exclusive features of sexuality and maternity. Only in such a case, would a woman be able to “become male spirit ‘equal to the male’” (80).

The natural offspring of this mentality has been the demonization of nature as the fallen form of culture. Ruether contends that Romantic scholars and those of the Modern era attempted to refine this biased view, but due to their restricted scope, their amendments were not inclusive enough to address all the involved aspects. While she accepts that the Romantics “seek to restore in idealized form the communal village that would reunite family, handicraft, and small-scale agriculture” (*Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* 84), she does note that their attempts are biased by having their origins “in alienated white male consciousness seeking restoration of its lost ties with nature” (84-85).

On the other hand, the modern scientific era, having undergone a process of secularization, started to “reclaim the earth as his true home and the sphere of his control” (*Sexism*82). Through this secularization, modern science claimed that it “exorcises the devils from nature and reclaims nature as the realm of human knowledge and use” (82). In this way, scientific reconsideration of nature disinterred the “universal reason” pervading nature, and cleared up “[t]he rationality of the deist God, immanent in nature’s laws” (82). However, despite the hopes, the outcome of this mentality appeared to be the mathematical formulation of natural laws, which turned them into objectified knowledge under the control of man as knower. It marks an era of sexualized scientific obsession with nature that led to the emergence of a “male mind” asserting “its transcendence over nature” (83). Under such circumstances, the promising hope of knowing and recognizing the mechanism of nature as the source and teacher of a balanced life turned to a disappointing “manipulation of material nature” (83). The manipulation, along with “European capitalism and colonialism” (83), worked to expand the “technological domination of nature, purchased by increasing domination over the bodies and resources of dominated people: women and workers in

industrialized countries, slaves and exploited races in the vast new lands being conquered” (83). The final draft of such a scientism was the replacement of its egalitarian intentions by a hierarchicalism which made “women, workers, peasants, and conquered races the image of dominated nature in contrast to the Euro-American male, the true bearer of transcendent consciousness” (83).

Besides reviewing both Romanticism and Modern scientism as Western attempts to reconcile the human and nature, Ruether explores both the Old and New Testaments. In this investigation, she recognizes traditions and “normative principles of Biblical faith which, in turn criticize and reject patriarchal ideology” (*Sexism* 23). She refers to some of these examples and emphasizes that under the oppressive social context which was created by economic and political powers, these passages have been silenced or interpreted in ways which justify the authoritative dominance of the powers. What she offers is the reinterpretation of these texts by referring to evidences from Biblical texts. Some of the examples she offers are the “denunciation of oppressive economic and political Power” (24) in parts of the Prophets like Isa. 10-2, Amos 8:4-6, where God “is seen not as the one who represents the powerful, but one who comes to vindicate the oppressed... to judge those who grind the face of poor, those who deprive the widow and the orphan”, or Jesus’ preaching in the synoptic tradition in Luke 4:18-19 (25). Another sample which Ruether mentions is Paul’s letter to Galatians. Ruether believes that in the letter Paul extends the “vision of a new social order” to include overcoming of the all “relations of sex, race, and class of human divisiveness” in Christ (26).

In these sample texts, the “prophetic God is seen overthrowing unjust society by turning it upside down” (*Sexism*25). This divine intervention, in Ruether’s argument, “not only judges the injustice of the present social order but comes to create a new social order that will truly be in keeping with the divine will” (25). She acknowledges this determination in Jeremiah’s speech (Jer. 31:22), where he speaks of an era “when a new thing will be created on the earth: the woman will protect the man” (25). According

to Ruether, this is not a mere reversal of roles; rather it is going “beyond the critique of the present order to a more radical vision, a revolutionary transformative process that will bring all to a new mode of relationship” (30). All these examples reflect a prophetic vision of change running through the Bible.

The “prophetic critique of society” which Ruether emphasizes, is discernible in both Testaments. What it implies is a “critique of the perversion of Biblical faith itself into a religion of cult and rote, particularly when religion is used to sanctify unjust power and to ignore God’s agenda of justice” (*Sexism* 26). This is exactly what the early Christian church recognized in institutionalized Judaism, and yet, under the suppressive intervention of institutionalized Christian ministry, came to be afflicted with. Tracing the “Hebrew prophetic critique of religion,” Ruether clarifies its renewal in the “ministry of Jesus,” as revealed in passages like Matt.23:23. Based on the view, she even considers Jesus’ crucifixion as the consequence of the “confrontation with falsified religion at the right hand of oppressive political power” (27). Ruether reinterprets this prophetic vision of renewal as the precise explanation of “The Word of God.” She emphasizes that it is the dynamic and liberating Biblical tradition that, confined within the oppressive socioeconomic context of Hebraic prophetic tradition, was stripped of ideological mystifications by the writers of the New Testament, and is now being extended by feminist theologians to include “the oppressed of the oppressed” that is women and “women of the oppressed” (32).

The egalitarianism which Ruether investigates in the New Testament, unlike that of the Old Testament, does not constitute a preserved unified whole. They are in fragmentary forms which, due to the established patriarchal “canonical framework for interpreting Christianity” (*Sexism*34),<sup>16</sup> have been discredited as “heresies,” and

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<sup>16</sup> Christian Canonical texts are lists of authoritative scriptures that are categorized into two groups of “closed” and “open.” “Closed” one is the list into which nothing can be added or deleted. It is based on the assumption that public revelation is closed and no new book, based on a new inspiration, can be added to the list. “Open” one is based on belief in continuous revelation and permits the addition of new books. In the case of lists there are disagreements between the Eastern and Western churches as well as the sub-branches within each one of them. Nevertheless, some common examples of these cannons are books of the Hebrew protocanon like Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Lamentations, Proverbs,...

suppressed in the early centuries of Christianity. Several of the heresies, as Ruether mentions, include Montanism, Gnosticism, and Reformationists like Quakers and Shakers. What distinguishes these alternative so-called “deviants” as unaffirmed Christianities is the concept of equality which they take beyond the fossilized accepted norm of canonized Christianity. Ruether argues that institutionalized Christianity never denied “the equality of men and women in Christ but rather interpreted it in a spiritual and eschatological way that suppressed its relevance for the sociology of the Church” (35). By applying this notion of equality on different aspects which influence mundane life, deviant Christianities challenged the nullified eschatology of institutionalized Christianity. For examples, Montainists preserved an understanding of prophetic gifts not only as “prophetic authority but also equal participation in ordinary ministry” (34). Quakers “affirmed the equality of men and women in the *Imago Dei* and in the original order of creation. They wrote that the subjugation of women was not God’s intent but represented the sinful distortion of human nature by sin” (35). The Gnostic ideas of an androgynous God were unquestionably important contributions, which were rediscovered by mystic writers, and came to attention in the writings of utopian sects like Anglo-American Shakers. Connecting God’s androgyny with the concept of *Imago Dei* under an egalitarian perspective, Shakers taught that “Humanity imagines the divine, and because it was created in the dual order of male and female it cannot be redeemed by a male saviour alone. The Messiah must appear in female form as well” (36). Because of this challenging entity, Ruether adds, most of these alternatives have not “survived living moments,” and “[w]e can only guess at what these groups really meant” (36). It seems Ruether believes that, having the potentiality to cover different suppressed categories and what is related to them, these alternative theologies can be seen as theologies of change and liberation.

The examples mentioned above put Ruether in the same tradition of change with a post-Biblical feminist like Hampson. Though Ruether believes in the very heritage of

the Bible as the source of a constructive change in western culture yet, like Hampson, she believes that the current dominant and institutionalized Christianities are inappropriate frames of thought to establish an inclusive doctrine of unity and equality and, therefore, are in dire need of change. What she recognizes in the original teachings of Jesus, as the reformer of Hebraic religious tradition, and the saviour of all creation, not just humanity, is in direct relation with the post-Christian soul of reformation. Both of them are seeking to cast a new light on the life of humanity and rebuild it with a new sense of universal interrelation.

Regarding the debates, from an ecological perspective, Butler's *Parables* reflect her consideration of what pure scientism, moving away from the interdependency of knower-knowee relation in human-nature relation, may create on Earth. Her focus on environmental problems reflects feminist theological questioning of the "hierarchy of human over nonhuman nature as a relationship of ontological and moral value" (*Sexism* 85). It considers the side effects of the unilateral modern technological scientism being "passed along to the public in the form of pollution of soil, air, and waters" (84). According to Ruether, one of the main aims of feminist theology is to encounter humanity with the disappointing consequences of its deeds to help us to understand that we "cannot violate the ecological community without ultimately destroying our own life system"(89). Recognizing the theological sensitivity about the sacredness of the entire chain of life, away from the tendency to subjugate one category under another, would be of great help to internalize the ecological sensitivity. As Hampson and Ruether discuss, orthodox forms of Christianity traditionally have abstained from this sensitivity. On the contrary, their highlighted values and teachings reveal their inability to address the sensitivity.

It seems that Butler is concerned with the same idea. Earthseed verbalizes similar distrust of the ability of institutionalized Christianity to respond to anxieties resulting from ecological problems. The distance of Lauren's philosophy and established

community from that of her father's Christian neighbourhood and Jarret's Christian America, respectively, reflects this distrust. Lauren substitutes these reflections of Christianity with a new doctrine more cognizant of the human-nature relationship. In both *Sower* and *Talents*, there are no direct or indirect references to any attempt by authorities to change or eliminate the sources of the problems that have afflicted their societies. While there are references to ambitious plans like interstellar trips which, according to Lauren, are a waste of money, there is no evidence of attention, planning, or investment in eco-related areas like farming and forestry that would be effective in developing the living conditions of stricken humanity. Instead, there are references which denote the carelessness of Lauren's early paternal community and the hostility of later Christian America's troops towards her environmental activities. Explaining her training in shooting, Lauren in one of her early notes writes:

Most of us have practiced at home with BB guns on homemade targets or on squirrel and bird targets. I've done all that. My aim is good, but I don't like it with the birds and squirrels. Dad was the one who insisted on my learning to shoot them. He said moving targets would be good for my aim. I think there was more to it than that. I think he wanted to see whether or not I could do it—whether shooting a bird or a squirrel would trigger my hyperempathy. (*Sower* 37)

The note differentiates two mentalities which run from the early pages of the novel: a masculine Christian one, which credits the misuse of creation for the benefit (in this case survival) of humanity, and a female environmentalist mentality which does not feel at ease with the justification of survival at any cost. Lauren embodies this female environmentalist stand.

In the beginning, the ineluctable sense of rivalry with the rest of creation is taught and implanted in her nature to such an extent that it is not possible for her to free herself from its reassertions immediately and completely: "The blow, though still soft, was a little harder with squirrels and sometimes rats than with birds. All three had to be killed,

though. They ate our food or ruined it. Three-crops were their special victims: Peaches, plums, figs, persimmons, nuts ...” (Sower38). Nevertheless, this understanding does not remain fixed. As the story unfolds, Lauren increases and deepens her understanding of interdependency and respect for the rest of creation. This understanding is visible in the reduction of violence in *Talents* which, in *Sower*, is committed under the guise of “adapt to your surroundings or you get killed (Sower182). In fact, at this stage, Butler envisions the maturity of a feminist eco-justice seeking mind to show that “[c]onverting our minds to the earth cannot happen without converting our minds to each other” (Ruether *Sexism* 91). In other words, the stability and peace which surrounds Lauren’s community in *Talents* is the peak of a gradual development of a caring perspective. This perspective works to lessen and finally stop the violence targeting the lives of human beings. It is achieved by focusing on the sustainability of this peaceful life through productive activity of cultivating and caring for land. It envisions a reciprocal relationship of respect between human and nature which reduces the need for violent competition for survival, especially in hard times.

On the other side, the feminine dream of reconciliation with nature challenges the masculine need to master the universe to guarantee its hegemony over the rest. The environmental imagery works here again to clarify the nature of masculine Christianity in the invasion of Acorn:

I looked and saw maggots being used to string wire behind several of our homes, up the slope. As I watched, they smashed through our cemetery, breaking down some of the young trees that we planted to honor our dead. The maggots were well named. They were like huge insect larvae, weaving some vast, suffocating cocoon. (*Talents* 199)

The comparison touches the masculine/feminine friction at two points simultaneously: denouncing masculinity as the destructing agent of environment, and showing how it achieves this function through separation and bordering. Here, Butler repeats the same



theme of masculine separation and isolation through the image of the cocoon. On another occasion, Butler directly confronts masculine consumptive nature, which exerts its authority through religious clothing, with feminine productivity, so that femininity and nature converge as one marginalized entity:

And we work in the fields... We're feeding livestock and cleaning their pens. We're turning compost, we're planting herbs, we're harvesting winter fruits, vegetables and herbs, clearing brush from the hills. We're expected to feed ourselves and our captors. They eat better than we do, of course. After all, we owe them more than we can ever pay, you see, because they're teaching us to forsake our sinful ways. They keep talking about teaching us the meaning of hard work. They tell us that we're no longer squatters, parasites, and thieves. (*Talents* 212)

The religious wording here naturalizes the taming of both nature and this fallen community—in the view of the Christian captors—which is organized around a feminine heretic misconception. Simultaneously, it reverberates what Ruether in her “Ecofeminism –The Challenge to Theology” recognizes as the traditional Christian discredit of femininity, seeing it as a source of sin and an entity in constant need of repentance. It is completely predictable that this Christian installation will be twinned with harsh violence. Any feminine attempt to preserve one's own space in this sexist hegemony will receive severe punishment: “I've earned myself more than one lashing by saying that my husband and I own this land, that we've always paid our taxes on it, and that we've never stolen from anyone” (*Talents* 212). Clearly, the reason behind this rampant severity is the fear of losing a position of mastery.

On another level, the confrontation between the female environmentalist and masculine exploitative nature is the confrontation between the concepts of life and death in the novels. Recognizing the theological sacredness of nature as the origin and provider of life necessities, Lauren's religion plays on the concept of revival by connecting to nature. It is obsessed with nature as a source which has an innate

potentiality for reviving Self-and-Other if it is kept in harmony with the rest of creation. Released from the tensions of the early phases of Lauren's movement in *Sower, Talents* distinctly develops the notion of equating nature and life. In this equation life and death are unified through nature:

We give our dead  
To the orchards  
And the groves.  
We give our dead  
To life. (Talents 5)

The notion of referring to nature is repeated over and over in the novel: "Today we gave the Noyer children oak seedlings to plant in earth that has been mixed with the ashes of their parents" (*Talents* 56). Here, again, Butler equates nature with life or, to put it better, with life-giving or reviving force. When the ashes are mixed with growing oaks, it means that they are given an evergreen presence or life. This revival is done through attachment to nature which, as I already explained in chapter one, is assumed to share the same feminine essence. This imagery has a second layer.

Affiliated with the title and the theme of the novels, seed stands as a metaphor for the knowledge and message that Lauren is preaching. The provider, bearer, and transformer of the seed is nature or soil. Lauren, metaphorically, is illustrated to be the feminine representation of this fertility. The seed here reminds Tree of Knowledge in Paradise, taking the fruit of which led to the initiation of a new creation by human being on Earth. From this perspective, Eve of the traditional Christian falling mythology not only is not the evil tempter of disobedience, but on the contrary, the initiator of a lively life of curiosity, knowledge, and creation.<sup>17</sup> As a new Eve, Lauren is the messenger, educator, and reviver of her new society.

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<sup>17</sup>For the story of Eve in Bible refer to Genesis 2:4-3:24.

This characterization resides on the mythological conception of woman as the grain gatherer and natural healer as well.<sup>18</sup> In this myth, woman is considered as a knowledgeable person whose knowledge comes from association with nature. Embodying a new healer, Lauren fulfils her mission by clarifying the necessity of a constructive productivity. Through this clarification, she teaches her followers to have a healthy and peaceful existence by engaging with the world not “as a resource for consumption and self-assertion, but as a part of greater living identity” (Clark 2). This instruction renders Lauren a posthuman healer whose religion and the society originating from it rewrite and reinterpret the holy book of creation from a more responsive and receptive approach where “language is not *about* the world, making it its object or representation,” but “[w]ords respond to ‘speak *to* the world and to the expressive presences that, with us, inhabit the world’” (51).

The connection between the concepts of knowledge and land-related activities reverberates in some passages of *Talents*. Lauren’s reference to the education of three Mexican-Korean children in her group, verbalizes the notion as the headline of her mission: “we’re teaching them to read, write, and speak English because that will enable them to communicate with more people. And we’re teaching them history, farming, carpentry, and incidental things” (29). According to the reference, in this new community, awareness of the connection between human life and nature, concretized through focusing on activities like carpentry and farming, is necessary for an unstressed and normal life. It demonstrates the practical way through which Lauren challenges “the inability of some human cultures to create sustainable ecosystems” (Ruether *Gaia and God* 53).

Ruether relates this inability to human beings’ ignorance of the interrelation of life and death. Based on her argument, human culture has permanently ignored that the

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<sup>18</sup> See: . Retrieved on 13 April 2010 from [www.insurgentdesire.org.uk](http://www.insurgentdesire.org.uk) John Zerzan, "Patriarchy, Civilization, and the Origins of Gender,"\_(The Anarchist Library: <http://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/john-zerzan-patriarchy-civilization-and-the-origins-of-gender.pdf>): Retrieved on 13 April 2010 from [www.insurgentdesire.org.uk](http://www.insurgentdesire.org.uk). 9/5/2015).  
Achterberg, Jeanne. *Woman As Healer*. Massachusetts: Shambhala Publications, 1991.

“death side of the life cycle is an essential component of that renewal of life by which dead organisms are broken down and become the nutrients of new organic growth” (53). Putting the focus of her teachings on the mutuality and not the hierarchicality of the human-nature relation that highlights nature’s life-giving state, Lauren introduces a philosophy of life based on equality. Performing a religious ceremony like burying the dead members with planting seeds not only symbolizes the constant renewal of life, but also underlines the sacredness of natural life and its role in maintaining the nonstop renewal of life. This role is further emphasized by describing the educational programs Lauren offers to the learners. Mixing the theoretical and literal teachings with the practical skills like farming and carpentry helps these new learners to understand the extent their life depends to nature. It lets them to learn how to make use of nature in a productive way that provides their needs and, at the same time, guarantees the sustainable growth of nature as the first ring in a chain that secures the sustainable life of humanity on Earth.

Parsons refers to the ideas of feminist theologians like Ivone Gebara to describe the aims of feminist environmentalists to challenge masculine mastery of creation. She points to men’s self-assumed “God play” role. Men, she explains, undertake the role to escape mortality. In this way, they exert androcenterism as a divine norm of power to incorporate “women, the poor and vulnerable, animals and nature” (5). Parsons emphasizes that the logic of this policy for a man is “to create for himself a semblance of safety” (5). Ruether in her “Ecofeminism – The Challenge to Theology” traces the root of this fear to mortality, androcentrism, and Augustinian Genesis commentaries, recognizing it as an established ecclesiastic tradition. According to her, the Augustinian heritage considered Eve as the initiator of “disobedience to God” and Adam as a “generic man” who, in “assenting to her prompting, ... conceded to his lower self” (26). According to this view, the woman is the cause of falling into sin and, consequently, is condemned to have an inferior nature and status. The punishment of this sin has been

the “loss of original immortality that was the gift of union with God” (26) as well as “free will that allowed them to choose God over their sinful self-will” (26). Due to this exegetical understanding, “women are punished for their special fault by coercive subjugation” (26). This attitude helps men to transgress their natural position in the hierarchy of creation and guarantee their hold using religious justification. Feminist environmentalist theology confronts this philosophy with a converging alternative understanding that is based on certainty and not fear. This alternative philosophy not only eliminates the mythology of the fall as the result of woman’s faulty nature, which also is considered as the cause of mortality, but, as Butler embodies, highlights the position and role of woman by attaching her to nature as the origin of life.

The feminine concentration on ecological affairs reverberates in the overall layering of the novels. Lauren’s interest to continue her natural-like style of life in Acorn, instead of accompanying her husband to Halstead as an urban area, echoes a feminine wish to save an exclusive and exemplary space based on her ecological concerns. Acorn is a place where direct contact with nature helps her to bring a natural melodious rhythm into her community. From this perspective, Lauren’s confrontation with her husband’s yearning for Halstead highlights an all-caring cognition which distances her from the masculine anxieties of her husband.

Bankole’s aim of relocating to Halstead is to establish a more secure and providing location for his family. It reflects a masculine, possessive instinct. His family symbolizes the personal space of his life, where, as his household, he strives to safeguard his seed as well as headship. Lauren observes the root of this anxiety by pointing to her alternative perspective: “If I went to Halstead, the seed here might die” (*Talents* 177). Here, Lauren uses agrarian imagery to elaborate on two dimensions of her mission. On the one hand, ‘seed’ stands as a metaphor for the children of Acorn. As the seeds of Earthseed community, they are the future believers who, in direct contact with the mother of Earth, will receive the shaping influence of nature and guarantee the

continuity of Earthseed. On the other hand, due to an environmental awareness, Lauren is concerned with the lack of productive activities to provide food security, economic independence, psychological serenity, and political stability in an urban place like Halstead. Productive cause is the touchstone of her belief. Its absence symbolizes a halt, not only in the chain of natural life, but also in the spread of her religion. She is aware of the importance of her presence as a central figure in the growth of her community, and does not want to leave it at this phase. In her debate with her husband, she confirms this stand:

I want us to go on growing, becoming stronger, richer, educating ourselves and our children, improving our community ... I want to send our best, brightest kids to college and to professional schools so that they can help us and in the long run, help the country, the world, to prepare for the destiny. ... They'll teach, they'll give medical attention, they'll shape new Earthseed communities within existing cities and towns and they'll focus the people around them on the Destiny. (*Talents* 176-177)

The explanation points to the three principles of Lauren's mission: connection, destiny, and the role of education in elaborating on the aspects and effectiveness of these concepts. If Acorn's progeny lose their connection with its constituting principles before internalizing the knowledge and understanding which governs Acorn, they will not be able to spread the teachings, the most crucial of which is awareness of destiny. The theme of destiny in the novels refers to change. Understanding the natural form of life, and struggling to revive and expand it in different places, following the sample of Acorn, is the inevitable destiny of Earthseed as the constituting root of Acorn.

It may seem that this kind of predestination using a top-down approach embodies a kind of masculine seclusion. But, the difference is that Lauren does not impose her ideology through a supremacist separation. She shares them, argues about them, and lets the others know about all of her beliefs. She has won her community by clarifying the

principles of her thinking and, as emerges in the next stages of the novels, changes and adapts herself with changing conditions. She does not change the nature of her message. Away from masculine strictness, she avoids sticking to fixed frames. Moving side by side with the others, and not maintaining a hierarchical role, she practices a lively model of democratic environmentalist feminism. Observing this sensitivity, her struggle to preserve Acorn as her residence is the embodiment of a feeling free from possessive fear. It is the realizing of a settlement based on knowing, believing, connection, and simulation; a compensatory option to unite oneself as part of a whole instead of separating oneself as the representative of God or the best of all.

Lauren's focus on God as a capable and changeable entity works with the very notion of relatedness, destiny, and the eco-theological imagery in the novels. In fact, it is a postmodern deposing of His transcendency over creation and levelling His position with the rest of creation in a democratic theological organizing. The natural result or the tacit aim of this outing is to desacralize masculinity as the incarnated image of God and level man with the rest of creation. Challenging greed as an essential masculine motivation in utilizing the rest of creation, Lauren is personified as a posthuman female version of St. Francis of Assisi, whom White calls the "patron saint of ecology" (6). She casts her new seeds of production, equality, accessibility, protection and respect for the rest of creation. As generous and supportive as the Earth, she extends her protection to cover all creation –symbolized through her sensitivity in sharing the pain of others – via recognizing and training self-abilities.

From this perspective, *Parables* are the embodiment of change. The change, on the one hand, demonstrates the separation of the writer from the main body of science fiction, where traditional separatist male heroes have created ideal societies through underlining differences. Butler's black heroine is a harbinger of a new version of science fiction where gender stereotypes are challenged. On the other hand, the characterization and plot of the story portray Butler's detachment from the dominant

black feminist writing. Black feminist writing traditionally reflected black concerns. But, *Parables* depict a wider and more inclusive realm of interaction where constructive connection among all people, and not particular racial groups, is envisioned. Nevertheless, this interaction is not limited within solely human-centred circles. Butler in *Parables* narrates a story based on a theological ground which revitalizes ecological concerns and strives to establish an egalitarian society based on a non-hierarchical connection between human being and nature.

### **2.3 Change: Posthuman as Saviour**

Progress is impossible without change, and those who cannot change their minds, cannot change anything.

George Bernard Shaw

The notion of saviour acquires a particular meaning in turbulent, non-satisfactory, and problematic times that characterize dystopian situations. The *Parables* introduce readers to a disappointing realm of violence, disorder, and corruption. Within this context emerges an enlightened heroine who revives this dead community and sets it on track to normalization by restoring serenity and purpose. To have a clear understanding of the ways the heroine achieves her goal as a reformer, it is necessary to clarify the dystopian dimensions of the world depicted.

Human society in this world is afflicted with “widespread adult illiteracy” (Dubey “Folk and Urban” 114). The scarcity of teaching materials, notably written sources, in this world is exacerbated by segregation and an urban order manifested through the spatial trope of walled communities. The population has been kept unaware of an unannounced war on its constitution, and is gradually disappearing (104). In the dystopic world Butler creates, humanity is losing its meaning because of the growing pressure of a paradoxical mixture of paralysing and hypocritical ideologies, prejudices, and indifferences. The result is widespread ignorance and violence that severely inflict and disharmonize society. The most essential duty of the reformer in such a societal



situation is to create and spread awareness. This awareness guarantees a revival based on self-understanding.

Butler's *Parable* series are novels of identity formation. This identity formation is figured through re-conceptualizing the notion of Selfness in a marginalized, coloured woman. Lauren is a black woman whose racial, sexual, class, and religious differences have rendered her a susceptible target of discrimination of a white exploitative society on the one side, and intolerant, indifferent black masculinity, on the other side. Osherow writes: "evident in Butler's characterization is her reliance on African American Women's history to represent the experiences of an oppressed alien" (69). The concept of the alien for a science fiction writer, especially when s/he is from a marginalized group within the United States, is very controversial. As Butler also acknowledges in some of her interviews, the icon of "alien" in a society like the United States has been employed to avoid direct references to blacks, coloured people as well as immigrants and foreigners "who are still regarded by the United States – at least in the law and in the language –as Other and other than human" (Smith 387). The identity formation of these groups confronts the history of Othering in American civilization, and the confrontation, naturally, cannot be actualized without power.

The world of *Parables* is a challenged world of otherness. The concept of the Other is one of the intense contradictions of modernity which *Parables*, as reflections of the postmodern spectrum of thought, challenge. Early in *Sower*, "the constitution of communities of "'them' and 'us' through the politics of race" (Phillips 300), combined with "the application of bureaucratic rationality to socioeconomic problems through the agency of the state" (300), as two failed modern utopian options, create a shocking context which intrigues Butler's readers, encouraging them to think of possible and effective solutions. These solutions vary between human factor and applicable strategies "to reinvent the utopian vision at a time when utopia allegedly has been rendered impossible" (300). The prerequisite of this utopian reinvention is to challenge the

oppressive process of Othering. The challenge is achievable by uplifting social recognition through increasing general awareness and applying alternative inclusive strategies of togetherness to intensify the interaction resulting from this awareness.

In their struggle for social recognition, the oppressed groups come to recognize the importance of power in shaping their resistance. What cannot be ignored is that in oppressive atmosphere, individual attempts are doomed to fail without the assistance of others. This fact is not missed by the oppressed crowds. Reflecting on the dimensions of black life and attempts to tackle the hardships which afflict their social and personal life, Butler makes references to the social constructions of black community as available options for illustrating the alternative inclusive strategies of togetherness.

To change and challenge the denigrating context of American society, black community institutions are launched and undeniably have been important “in developing strategies of resistance” (Collins 101). But, what black feminist thinkers observe is that due to the racial and sexual priorities of racial uplift and integrity, “many of these same institutions of Black civil society have also perpetuated racist, elitist, and homophobic ideologies” (101) in dealing with feminine concerns. Because of that, a reconsideration of the dominant black sense of self and identity has attracted the attention of black female thinkers in the last twenty years. This is evident in the works of critics like Alice Walker, Collins, Pat Parker, June Jordan, and others. The reconsideration has likewise found its way into the literary fiction of black female writers.

Throughout the two novels, Lauren talks of change; in fact, change is the unifying motif of the novels. The question is what the writer means by this concept. Does Butler envision deep changes in the world of novels or not? Does this change embody a shift in the dystopian world of the story? In an interview with Frances M. Beal, connecting the concept of change with yearning for utopia, Butler denies the utopian tendency in her writing, emphasizing that, “I’ve actually never projected an ideal society. I don’t believe

that imperfect humans can form a perfect society” (14). This perspective, according to Zaki, refers to Butler’s deterministic view towards human nature which Butler denounces as fundamentally “violent” and “flawed”(241). Concomitant with this view is her idea about the “static” quality of human nature, “evidenced in human incapacity to change in response to radically altered conditions” (242). Zaki adds,

[c]onnected to this trait is an inability to tolerate differences, usually physical differences of race and gender. For Butler, there is a pervasive human need to alienate from oneself those who appear to be different-i.e. to create others ... For her, the human propensity to create other can never be transcended. (241)

If we accept this determinism, it would mean that Butler’s dealing with the concept of change is superficial.

This view contrasts with Lauren’s characterization. By comparison, Lauren emerges as a subject who enjoys freedom of will, and acts against the determinism which Zaki sees in Butler’s works. Lauren seems to have the ability to fulfil what her mind is obsessed with. These mental obsessions are defined goals which incite her to leave Robledo – though the situation acts as a catalyst– reach out to others, trust them, and make her life in community with them. This characterization clearly reveals her as a person who has the power to work at “imagining and developing new strategies in response to the dystopias in which she lives” (Stillman 16). This feature, as Zaki also partially accepts, indicates that “Butler has not completely written off the human ability to change for the better, thus leav[ing] open the possibility for utopia” (Zaki 243). As the investigation of the novels shows, Lauren goes beyond the stereotypical heroines of science fiction as well as the female protagonists of black fiction. She does more than take the position of a male character; she is not a mono-dimensional type, but the

reflection of the “diversification of women’s roles in contemporary culture” (Osherow 68).<sup>19</sup>

God in *Parables* is described as change. The standard Christian concept of Him in the novels is reflected as an Almighty entity –a perfect model to justify boundless power. Through the implications of *Earthseed*, Lauren affirms again and again that “God is change,” in harmony with human struggle and, therefore, “human beings should assert their wills and shape change in accordance with their needs and desires” (Phillips 303). This challenge to the traditional concept of God reflects the postmodern vision of God as a deity who, unlike the medieval and early modern notions of divinity, interacts with His creatures in a persuasive and not coercive way.<sup>20</sup> This new understanding of God reflects a caring and cooperative soul who, sharing his knowledge and power with His creatures, beneficently inspires them “by instilling new feelings of importance in them” (Griffin 25). This vision, on the one hand, resolves the mental confusions of the modern human beings about the presence of evil in this world despite the absolute reign of an all-inclusive God. On the other hand, it fills the human person with a sense of hope about the effectiveness of his attempts to improve critical situations.

This postmodern vision of God reveals the retrieval of religious sense in human life and purifies the spotted image of God as an uncaring force as well. Emphasizing that “God does not create unilaterally” (Griffin 25), the perspective highlights the freedom of action for the created world, notably humans as postmodern subjective agents, and asserts that a “vast amount of evil does not count against the reality and goodness of a divine creator, because all the creatures have some degree of power to act contrary to the purposes of the creator” (25). Butler overtly preaches the same approach through Lauren. In a talk with Travis, Lauren describes God in this way: “I was looking for God ... I wasn’t looking for mythology or mysticism or magic ... *Earthseed* deals with

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<sup>19</sup> Although Osherow uses this phrase to describe Lilith’s character in Butler’s *Dawn*; nevertheless, it is completely applicable to Lauren in *Parables*.

<sup>20</sup> According to Griffin, the first stage of modernism assumed God as an omnipotent creator who had created the world “out of absolute nothingness, which meant that the world had no inherent power of its own” (24).

ongoing reality, not with supernatural authority figures” (*Sower* 217-219). Elsewhere in *Talents* Bankole writes: “Some of the faces of her god are biological evolution, chaos theory, relativity theory, the uncertainty principle, and, of course, the second law of thermodynamics” (46). These descriptions create a sense of a God who is not a supernatural entity outside of creation, but an entity working through natural phenomenon.

Though the explanations seemingly invoke the image of an uncaring God, there are illustrations in the stories that support the notion of God as “fundamental goodness,” using Hampson’s term (246), who interjects when the harmony of natural life is threatened –though this interjection is described as a natural incident. The freedom of Acorn from the savagery of Christian American troops illustrates this perspective:

We had a terrible storm...wind and rain... and a landslide. ... hill has slumped down into our valley. ... hillside has broken away and come rumbling to us. It has buried a maggot and three cabins, ... Six “teachers,” four captive women, *and all of our collars* were dead. (*Talents* 253-254)

One corollary of this naturalized divine involvement in Earthly routine affairs is that human beings can also influence and even change life affairs through natural rules of life. This leads to hope in the ability of human beings to change undesirable life conditions. Likewise, recognizing the responsibility of human beings, it removes the blame of indifference from God. To assume that God is not fully responsible for what is going on in creation instils human beings with the courage and belief that they can play a role in reconstructing the system of life. This is another aspect of the posthuman understanding of human agency redefined in the postmodern notion of the God-human relationship.

The recurrent theme of change emerges as an inclusive concept that redefines the entire racial, sexual (with its gender connotations), political, economic, and religious

paradigms of human life in the novels. The most notable pairs of binaries in the stories cover concepts like future/past, Earthseed/Christianity, femininity/masculinity, tolerance/fundamentalism, and universalism/localism. By implicating these binaries, the novels refute as static the obsession with the past-striving notions, replacing them with new ones which recognize the authenticity of dynamism by focusing on change. Butler assigns these retrospective binaries with religious justification, showing how Christianity has been used as a fundamentalist tool to dictate masculine norms, the scope of which does not go beyond limited frames. She also demonstrates how this Christianity is used to manipulate female reactions, rendering them passive escapist alternatives, even if the goal has been to liberate oneself from subjugating disciplines. Historically, Black feminism has been more vulnerable to this tenor and Butler, conscious of that, rebels against it. In fact, Butler by creating Lauren as a revolutionary black female missionary with a new concept of spirituality within black fiction, serves as an agent of change herself.

*Parables* are novels of change, and Lauren is the embodiment of this change. In dramatizing it, Butler depicts Lauren as a figure who loses all her connections with her past. She loses family, community, and Christian faith as the main defining elements of her social and personal identity, and gains new ones, which symbolize the rebirth of a new person and society. In other words, Lauren's characterization embodies the fact that one who wants to be an agent of change must initiate change from within herself. The characterization reflects Hampson's notions about the concept of the past in the Christian context.

Hampson in both *After Christianity* and *Theology and Feminism* rejects the obsession with the past as a Biblical tradition dominant in both Judaism and Christianity. She confirms that "we cannot have such a sharp break with the past" (*Theology and Feminism*2); nevertheless, she stresses that "[w]e have to find a way to move forward from where we are" (2). For Hampson, the preoccupation with the past is

“the nub of the problem” (5) in Christianity. The obsession historicizes Christianity as the incarnation of God in Christ, and as she emphasizes, “[i]t cannot lose that reference so long as it remains Christianity” (5). This creates a problem: the reference is always a reference to a past “patriarchal history” (5). Griffin elaborates on this concept when he talks about the necessity of the incarnation of God within us as a way of salvation open for all. The focus of Christianity on a particular time, place, and person, and its attempt to judge everyone and everything based on it, stifles creativity as a spiritual force running through the entire creation and blocks movement and growth. As Hampson stresses,

[t]he law of life is: advance or decay. Our task is not simply to recover, or to preserve, the best way of being human developed in the past. Our task is to envisage, and incarnate, a still better way, a way that fulfils the human potential more fully, a way that more completely realizes the image of God in us. (26)

Similarly, Lauren detests the passivity and stagnation that have afflicted their lives. Her separation from the traditional Christian perspective of God –that epitomizes posthuman agency – is reflected in her repeated postmodern references to God as change:

In the end, we yield to God.  
We adapt and endure,  
For we are Earthseed  
And God is Change  
(*Sower 17*)

Or elsewhere in *Talents*, “Change is the one unavoidable, irresistible, ongoing reality of the universe. To us, that makes it the most powerful reality, and just another word for God” (75). These over-repetitions help to clarify the decay which is associated with passivity by juxtaposing the traditional concept of God in Orthodox Christianity with that of Change in Earthseed. Focusing on concepts like “ongoing reality of universe”

and God as the essence of this changeability, Earthseed, in fact, discredits the normative reference to the past as a fixed model, confronting it with the natural dynamism within the world.

Obsession with past traditions and orders and wishing to restore them are revealed as futile perspectives throughout the novels. In several cases, Lauren points how the older generation waits for the returning of “the good old days,” whether through resorting to religious institutes or political commitments:

To the adults, going outside to a real church was like stepping back into the good old days when there were churches all over the place and too many lights and gasoline was for fueling cars and trucks... They never miss a chance to relive the good old days or to tell kids how great it's going to be when the country gets back on its feet and good times come back. (*Sower* 8)

What happens to Robledo and its Christian neighbourhood shows that this retrospective perspective is in vain. Elsewhere in *Talents* we read: “the unity, the Christianity, and the hope that Jarret has brought to the country makes Jarret not the monster we all feared but a potential saviour. The country, he tells us, must get back to God or it is finished” (156). Pointing to the religious base of this yearning by reflecting the desires to revive the old, strong, and Christian America, Lauren clearly shows that for these people, political commitments are mostly meaningful through a Christian perspective. The case is completely obvious in the support people offer Jarret. The bitter results of this support for Christian president affirm that the retrospective view is in vain, even dangerous. Lauren is a Messianic heroine in this sense. She rebels against the dominant static Christianity as a religion with roots in the past. But, she does not stop there; she has her own plans to act on. She continues her mission by sowing the grains of her new religion to revive the society into a new future. It is done by observing the destructive causes, avoiding them, and trying to resolve them by introducing alternative responsive solutions.



Criticizing the Christian tendency to posit the re-creation of an ideal past cultural heritage as the criterion for a healthy model of life for all ages, Hampson calls for a “discontinuity in religion” (*Theology and Feminism* 2). The discontinuity reflects Hampson’s call for the discontinuity of the past by urging a change in the dominant ideology of Western life, replacing it with new perspectives correspondent with present demands. The scope of these demands, she believes, has not been considered in the dominant, historical Christian ideology in most cases, creating a deep gap in the dominant ideology to address the issues of different times and places. Hence, introducing an alternative ideology, which will not restrain itself within the moral obligations of attachment to a special time and place through a centralized character, would be an appropriate alternative. Hampson’s desacralized, “natural” monotheism seems to exemplify this alternative. Lauren’s embodied character reflects such a decentralized, desacralization. Throughout the novels, there is no evidence to reflect Lauren’s centralization and judge deeds through attachment to her.

Hampson believes that Christianity comes to “seem not only untrue but immoral” (2). Accordingly, any attempt to revive a dying society administrated by this doctrine requires the moralizing of the doctrine by reforming or replacing its principles. Hampson does not believe in the possibility of reform in Christianity. In her view, the nature of Christian culture is rooted in fixed norms, and any attempt for innovation within them will face the charge of heresy. The responsive alternative, in this case, is to change the dominant perspective, and replace it with a more flexible alternative. *Parables* embody this change. Earthseed is the alternative which Butler creates to replace Christianity. The literal repetition of change in Earthseed’s *The Book of Living* signifies the change which challenges the Christian perspective in the novels, particularly that dealing with the obligation of reference to a particular past. The repetition highlights an alternative, non-Christian understanding which recognizes

change as the only everlasting truth in the world. Based on this view, no truth is assumable in reference to a fixed concept within a fixed frame of time:

All that you touch  
You Change.

All that you Change  
Changes you.

The only lasting truth  
Is Change.

God  
Is Change. (Sower 3)

The described change is not a superficial reshaping of social orders, assumptions, and mentalities through renaming some concepts or replacing them with similar constructs. Going meticulously through the novels and their challenging of power relations, the concept emerges as the acceptance of difference and plurality in defining a postmodern self who is searching for a new identity to guarantee her position in a pluralistic world:

Embrace diversity.  
Unite-  
Or be divided,  
robbed,  
ruled,  
killed  
By those who see you as prey.  
Embrace diversity  
Or be destroyed. (Sower 196)

According to the epigraph, “[t]hey [Acorn community] adapt, change, and embrace diversity to survive” (Stillman 23). Embracing change and diversity, in one sense, is the achievement of the religious “discontinuity” in a society which is expected to be an Earthseedian model. However, it also reflects a posthumanist alternative to the “liberal humanist” perception “of self as fixed, autonomous, authentic, coherent, and universal” (Heffernan 118).

Butler depicts several phases in Lauren's mission. At first, she lives in a Christian community which her father tries to run by applying fixed Christian assumptions. In the next stage, Lauren has established her own community where she does not follow Christian disciplines. In the third phase, her community is raided by American Christian troops who make it a dogmatic community where no dissident or heretic idea is tolerated. The last phase shows Lauren's more mature state of mind. At this last stage, she has established a wide web of Earthseed communities all over the United States. These communities are stable societies that freely pursue their programs and enjoy a much more peaceful coexistence with their Christian counterparts.

The final situation suggests a sense of unity and peace which is achieved through the recognition of difference. One point true of both Lauren's paternal community and that of the Christian American troops' is that both are closed on anyone other than the members of the community. In the first community, the walls prevented any unwanted entrance or exit. It was a community that tried to preserve its existence by sticking to common beliefs and norms. Any difference which could disturb this homogeneity was kept away. The Christian American troops were stricter in this case. Any reflection of difference in their community was repressed with maximum violence. These policies reflect a strong notion of Othering in which difference is demonized. The result of this refutation is what happened to both communities: they collapsed. Naturally, the Othering process destroys unity among people and creates a deep social split which in turn causes the principles of cooperation and coexistence to lose their hold.

Such a thing happens in the two exemplary Christian communities in the novels. Contrasting them are the communities which Lauren found. The last phase that I explained above, reflects a receptive mentality which creates a peaceful cohabitation. For sure, it is not possible to claim that this example embodies a perfect utopia where everything is in its place, and all are living in complete harmony. In this society, boundaries still persist, and communities have their own independence to some extent.

But, what is of importance is that they have come to accept each other's differences. This implies a sense of tolerance, especially in the case of Christian communities. Compared with the previous phases, such a tolerance reflects a complete change in their attitudes. It embodies a "discontinuity" in their religious prejudices, due to which, they no longer simply discard what does not subscribe to their deeply-laid values.

In *Parables*, Butler creates the ground for readers to figure the feminist theological concerns of the heroine distanced from the ordeals of past-stricken Christianity. The obsession with the past is contextualized within the religious, sexual, and racial boundaries of Christianity. The question of note is to figure out how successful Butler is in depicting the new religion and its removal of the sexist and historical allegations of Christianity. The novels are based on the theological renovations the heroine as a female leader considers. By locating the position and view of women within Christianity, and comparing it with Lauren's developed Earthseed, a tenable criterion to judge the effectiveness of the heroine's role would emerge.

Traditionally, within masculinist ideological systems, women are assumed to move within prescribed internalized spheres that define what is appropriate regarding their behaviour and beliefs. Feminist theologians regard it as the manifestation of the hierarchical mentality.<sup>21</sup> According to their view, parallel with the assumption of God as dominant male, and humanity as obedient female, the female is considered as servant in front of a free male. This view is deeply internalized within female community. As Hampson notes, in a reference to William James' "once-born" and "twice-born," usually women evade challenging the oppressive social "structural sin of sexism." It can be explained as their "wish to work with themselves, transforming an already given sense of self, rather than jettisoning the past in a dramatic break" (*Theology and Feminism* 129).

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<sup>21</sup>The view is common among both theist and atheist Postbiblical feminists. Examples are Hampson, Mary Daly, Carol Christ. Biblical feminists like Ruether accept this hierarchism, but see it as the reflection of lately canonized understandings, not the core of Christianity. Jewish feminists are more conservative. A prominent voice is Tova Hartman who like Ruether recognizes hierarchy as an ideological norm in Judaism that has been inserted into the original religious texts lately.

Rebelling against this perspective, feminist theology demands that woman actively react to change it. The change must be deep to contest the dominant hierarchical system of relationships and convert it to an egalitarian one. Such a change directly targets the theological philosophy that prescribes hierarchy as the divine order necessary for a harmonious way of life. On this basis, Hampson theorizes her Post-Biblical view of the necessary recognition of discontinuity of the past in order to achieve complete change. It seems that the Post-Biblical perspective of this strategy, by highlighting concepts like relationship, is responsive enough to deal with women's demands to reconsider the hierarchical order of society in Western communities. Lauren's departure (leaving Robledo) reflects the very discontinuity which Hampson calls for.

#### **2.4 Education: A Way Towards a Sustainable Survival**

One of the Othering aspects of the dystopian world of *Parables* is the limitation and monopolization of education by the upper class. Early in *The Talents*, we read a note from Bankole: "I have watched education become more a privilege of the rich than the basic necessity that it must be if civilized society is to survive" (8). On the other hand, the most necessary tool of achieving a deep change in every context is the spread of knowledge via education. In fact, a solid foundation of knowledge is the precondition to real change in every kind of system and a guarantee for its survival. It is on this rudimentary point that feminist theology intersects with *Parables*. Feminist theology is a discourse of power and change. It is a religious perspective of change which challenges diverse fields – biological, sociocultural, and linguistics – that predetermine women's identity according to a prejudiced masculine authority which refutes other voices in order to stabilize social order. The shift, as Ruether elucidates, aims at the "nature of truth and knowledge" ("The Emergence of Christian Feminist Theology" 4), and is done through education. According to Ruether, "women must gain education and agency in some social institutions that enable them to gain a voice" (4). The lack of

voice is the lack of power to speak on behalf of oneself, and will leave women as vulnerable targets to be marginalized or Othered and silenced in the end.

Repeated again and again through the sequels, Lauren emphasizes on reading and writing:

“Have you read all your family’s books?”  
“Some of them. Not all. ... Books aren’t going to save us.”  
“Nothing is going to save us. If we don’t save ourselves, we are dead. ... use your imagination.” ...  
“Go home and look again. ... use your imagination. Any kind of survival information from encyclopaedia, biographies, anything that helps you learn to live off the land and defend ourselves. Even some fiction might be useful”. (Sower59)

Or again in *Talents*:

To shape God  
With wisdom and forethought,  
To benefit your world,  
Your people,  
Your life,  
Consider consequences,  
Minimize harm  
  
Ask questions,  
Seek answers,  
Learn,  
Teach. (61)

This emphasis is because of Lauren’s understanding of the inevitability of destructions and the necessity of education for survival. Indeed, survival cannot be fully achieved when half of society is kept ignorant and unaware. This half should develop its understanding and struggle to utter it.

Education leads to a better understanding of the all contradictory forces within social context, and equips the members of society with adequate wisdom to “move beyond them” (Phillips 303) when it is necessary. Explaining to her friend why people

followed her as an eighteen year old girl in the dangerous path of the highway, Lauren says:

Those people were willing to follow... because she seemed to be going somewhere, seemed to know where she was going. People elected Jarret because he seemed to know where he was going too. Even rich people like your dad are desperate for someone who seems to know where they're going. (*Talents* 363)

The focus on the knowing reflects the necessity of knowledge and the consequent trust of the people who “had no purpose beyond survival. Get a job. Eat. Get a room somewhere. Exist” (363). For Lauren, survival is not merely physical survival, and this is one of the insightful aspects of her teachings: “I wanted more than that for myself and for my people, and I meant to have it. They wanted more too, but they didn’t think they could have it. They weren’t sure what ‘it’ was” (363). As her words reveal, Lauren’s mission is to clarify the concept of survival, basing it on productive participation. She defines her world by challenging the passive philosophy of survival, which does not attempt to know and remove the cause of the catastrophe.

Her Earthseed manifests the yearning to elaborate on new policies which focus on “economic self-sufficiency,” “reproductive technology,” and new “gender roles” in terms of sexual policies.<sup>22</sup> The obsession with sexuality reveals the critical points of a paternal system which defines and arranges all kinds of activities for its benefit. This policy is beautifully illustrated in *Talents*, where the Christian masters misuse Lauren and her troop to provide their food and satisfy their sexual needs. The image represents the masters as consumers who have no notion of existence beyond safeguarding what they want at the expense of other people and the nature around them. The example, ironically, reproaches those in *Sower* who yearned for the revival of the old days or past ways of life to guarantee their survival. The American Christian troops are a bold

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<sup>22</sup> The categorization is from Melzer

embodiment of past norms and justifications. Butler undergirds this notion by highlighting Lauren's understanding about the inadequacy of preserving the status quo, as his father wishes, and the uselessness or even danger of recovering the old days and ways.

Lauren is sure that such a survival is not a sustainable one and struggles to make her people understand this. She assumes that survival must be liberating. It is this liberating feature that empowers survival to embody a new beginning in the apocalyptic setting of the novels. Survival, in Lauren's view, is not mere resistance. It is the application of science and technology to create a new social order which, aware of the dynamic mechanism of creation, will guarantee its well-being.

Lauren's assumption of survival is unlike the masculine one. She does not consider it as a goal in itself. Recalling the conversation between her parents, she highlights the masculine justification by quoting her father: "'Live!' Dad said. 'That's all anybody can do right now. Live. Hold out. Survive. I don't know whether good times are coming back again. But I know that won't matter if we don't survive these times.'" (*Sower* 76).

Lauren does not think in this way, her philosophy is completely different:

It isn't enough for us to just survive, limping along, playing business as usual while things get worse and worse. If that's the shape we give to God, then someday we must become too weak-too poor, too hungry, too sick—to defend ourselves. Then we'll be wiped out.

There has to be more that we can do, a better destiny that we can shape. Another place. Another way. Something! (*Sower* 76)

In the extract, Lauren reveals her consciousness of the ethical and material consequences of competitiveness as a source of corruption behind the drive for survival at any cost. It shows her concerns about the modern tendency of the "survival of the fittest," which Griffin discusses as the religious dimension of decayed modernity (57). Commitment to this mentality equals the extinction of those who are vulnerable, or do



not have the power and resources to compete and, ironically, abrogates the rudimentary intention of survival. Indeed, survival at the cost of another's disappearance cannot be a stable, sustaining survival. In the pyramid of power, the existence of those at the top completely depends on the interaction with, and reliance on those who are down in the lower layers. Without them there would not be any one at the top. The notion clarifies Lauren's yearning for a non-hierarchical structure of social life, which she materializes later on in *Acorn*.

Lauren regards the very notion of survival at any cost as one of the provoking reasons for greed, killing, and disorder which final result is the appearance of a dictator:

When apparent stability disintegrates,  
As it must-  
God is Change-  
People tend to give in  
To fear and depression,  
To need and greed.  
When no influence is strong enough  
To unify people  
They divide.  
They struggle,  
One against one,  
Group against group,  
For survival, position, power.  
They remember old hates and generate new ones,  
They create chaos and nurture it.  
They kill and kill and kill,  
Until they are exhausted and destroyed,  
Until they are conquered by outside forces,  
Or until one of them becomes  
A leader  
Most will follow,  
Or a tyrant  
Most fear. (Sower 103)

Another danger is also detectable in Lauren's refutation of this concept of survival. Excavating black women's movements for empowerment, Collins points how "survival for most African-American women has been such an all-consuming activity that most have had few opportunities to do intellectual work" (4). Diverting the attention on survival at any cost prevents the mind from thinking about the reasons for turmoil and

exhausts it. Butler's protagonist reflects those persons who recognize this deficiency and are determined to change it by highlighting the importance of teaching, encouraging and practising public debates. There are a lot of occasions depicted in both novels where the community gathers to discuss various issues. In the novels, Lauren is represented as a determined leader who shows the goal and the way, but the most important point is that she never imposes her thoughts and ideas on others. Her preferred way is to let the others think through an issue. In her community, all decisions are made based on public agreement and consultancy. It helps them to improve their own individual analytical skills as well as their patience in the cases which are unapproved by all:

Our gatherings, aside from weddings, funerals, welcomings, or holiday celebrations, are discussions. They're problem-solving sessions, they're times of planning, healing, learning, creating, times of focusing, and reshaping ourselves. They can cover anything at all to do with Earthseed or Acorn, past, present, or future, and anyone can speak. (*Talent* 66)

This does not mean that she completely refutes the notion of physical survival. What she does is to expand the notion beyond that of mere self-survival. She is an "enabler" whose role is crucial for the survival of others. Butler's reference to Lauren's hyperempathy, and the fact that she is a sharer, is very symbolical. The sharer, with her Christ-like selflessness, is the epitome of a sacrificing healer who "enable ' all those with whom she comes in contact" (Osherow 76). Lauren knows and recognizes pain. Every time that she decides to put herself at the risk of participating in dreadful activities, which pains she receives, in fact, she sacrifices herself on behalf of others. She does it without disempowering herself and others to create a sense of unity. The sense enables her to share her experiences and views with others; women at first, and men later on. Sympathizing with them helps her to liken herself to them and, consequently, define common goals to satisfy their needs, demands, and wishes. Manuel confirms: "Her sharing of pain gives way to her sharing with others of her philosophy,

her verses, her inner self” (119). This procedure, in its way, releases all the members of community from a sense of loneliness, engenders trust, and brings them closer together. The feature is the substantive essence of the Womanist movement, and reflects the humanitarian vision of black feminist intellectuals.<sup>23</sup>

In Alice Walker’s words, one is “Womanist” when one is “committed to the survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female” (xi), regardless of racial, cultural, sexual and gender divisions. From this Womanist point of view, Lauren, unlike her father whose view symbolized a masculine autonomous, individualist, and isolated mentality, sees survival not as an individual mission, but as a concept of solidarity with humanity, which symbolizes a feminist mentality. This is a new concept of survival which expands its scope to benefit from an increasing awareness of unity. This new sense of unity contrasts with the depicted masculine disciplines in the novels. These disciplines, searching a panacea, resort to the past experiences of stability through separatist practices. In *Talents* we read:

To survive,  
Let the past  
Teach you-  
Past customs,  
Struggles,  
Leaders and thinkers.  
Let  
These  
Help you.  
Let them inspire you,  
Warn you,  
Give you strength.  
But beware:  
God is change.  
Past is past.  
What was  
Cannot  
Come again.  
To survive,  
Know the past.  
Let it touch you.

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<sup>23</sup> It is introduced by Alice Walker, and refers to feminist movements, particularly feminist theological perspectives within black activists. It was first used in the short story “Coming Apart” and was defined in her *InSearch of Our Mothers’ Gardens: Womanist Prose*, 1983.

Then let  
The past  
Go. (377)

In the second book, *Talents*, we have a more prominent presence of sharers. It reflects the improving sense of co-understanding as a sustainable way of survival. The sense is nurtured by giving priority to the availability of education for all and at the same level. This especially targets traditional racial and gender segregation, and shows how important it is for black women to make their idea of sustainable survival heard. It is because of this sensitivity that Lauren's manuscript circles among the members of her community. This action reflects Butler's commitment to the notion that "women's claims of cultural agency must be organized as a movement or community of discourse that supports women's (and men's) critique of the dominant gender paradigm" (Ruether "The Emergence of Christian Feminist Theology" 4).

For a black woman, emphasis on writing is a policy to counter the attempts of white society to ignore and deny black cultural heritage. The main goal of the ignorance is to deprive blacks from the sense of having roots, a place of their own, a history, or a sense of subjectivity, identity, and belonging. Dubey explains that the lack of writing ability and history have been used as a trump card in the hands of slave masters to justify their authority: "people of African descent were disqualified from human states and therefore held to be fit for slavery because of their lack of written cultural tradition" (Dubey "'Even Some Fiction Might Be Useful': African American Women Novelists" 163). Through Lauren, Butler introduces a model whose commitment to teaching addresses this inhuman perspective towards blacks.

Pointing to the bitter experiences of World War II, Phillips talks of the responsibilities of writers to correct and prevent human wrong doings by their art and skill. Citing Lewis Mumford, he writes:

[i]f our civilization is not to produce greater holocausts, our writers will have to become something more than merely mirrors of its violence and disintegration; .... For the writer is still a maker, a creator, not merely a recorder of fact, but above all an interpreter of possibilities. His intuitions of the future may still give body to a better world and help start our civilization on a fresh cycle of adventure and effort. (299)

The black tradition of writing reveals a strong affinity with this notion. Determined to act as a voice of protest to change the segregating status quo as the heritage of slavery and actualize racial equality, black writers have been sensitive to reflect their views on the problems infecting their community. Writing to develop the social conditions through the engagement with a wide range of problems has been a powerful tradition in black female literature. The problems cover concepts like “lynching, labour, education, women’s rights, sexuality, and spirituality” (Mitchell and Taylor 10), which have afflicted the black community for a long time. It is related to the “life-saving power of fiction” that “emerges as a recurrent motif in African American Women’s novels published from the mid nineteenth” (Dubey ““Even Some Fiction Might Be Useful”: African American Women Novelists” 150). Writing, for black women, has been a tool to manifest healing, liberation, and resistance. In fact, it is a vehicle “for their own independence as well as for their people’s achievement of future political advancement” (Barrios 10). This intention is completely visible in *Parables*. Allen writes:

Like her role as writer/teacher, Butler’s novels are filled with characters who write and teach others; from Dana Franklin in *Kinred*,...; to Lauren Olamina, [who] creates a religion, *Earthseed*, that is founded upon the principle of equal access to education in a futuristic society where only the wealthiest Americans are formally educated. (1354)

As a teacher, an essential feature of the protagonist is to spread the new, sacred, and emancipatory word into the new world to bring salvation. From a feminist standpoint, salvation is to liberate oneself from all the sinful institutional structures of society which

naturalize the subordination of woman as the divine order of creation. Hampson affirms: “Salvation for a woman may be to come into her own; finding the right relationship to herself and the others, and so healing” (*Theology and Feminism* 145). This kind of salvation renders American woman’s writing to a “fertile site for utopian imagination” (Miller 336). In this kind of utopianism, the western masculine utopian self, “as separate, bounded, and autonomous” one, is replaced by a feminist notion of utopia, concretizing a “dialectical relationship between the individual and society” (Pfaelzer 95). It is a critical issue. In a highly racial and gendered society, where oppression is completely institutionalized, relationship is a strategy that is used to guarantee survival. It works through embracing diversity and accepting responsibility, disregarding the established norms which promote passivity when it comes to women, especially the coloured ones.

Writing on black women’s intellectual activity, Collins notes: “The economic, political, and ideological dimensions of U.S. women’s oppression suppressed the intellectual production of individual Black feminist thinkers” (12). The quote reveals one essential point. If black women want to fulfil their social and intellectual roles, they must not only improve their intellectual abilities, but also expand the web of their relationships to include the women from outside of their community. This is the nub of Womanism and will enable black women to increase the sphere of their influence on behalf of womanhood. It is true that, due to different historical backgrounds, there are some tenable differences between white and black feminism. But, what is not ignorable is that working in isolation will leave both groups vulnerable to socio-ideological pressures which work hard to exclude the feminine voice.

The teaching and learning which Lauren emphasizes, are very dialectic. This “dialectical sensibility,” as Phillips terms it, guarantees social revival as the result of “self-revival.” The self-revival, as a feminist theological value, gives a sense of identity to Lauren through which she comes to see neither herself nor others as doomed to an

omnipotent superpower. According to this perspective, Butler's creation of Lauren as the creator and bearer of a new message, is the reflection of what Hartman believes to be the "beginning of shared authority in the religious world" (17). This "shared authority," not only recognizes the defining role of femininity in "the religious world," but also acknowledges the religious pluralism where traditional Christian monopoly has ignored and refused dissidents. To be an effective panacea for this chaotic world, it should be endorsed that "[n]o reputable theology that ignores religious diversity and continues the tradition of Christian hegemony is possible in this religiously diverse world" (Gross 73).

#### **2.4.1 Religion, Education, and Dictatorship**

*Parables* are novels that demonstrate how the writer, despite her pessimistic view about human nature, demonstrates a situation in which the leading character conducts others in the way of awareness to embrace difference. This challenges the "exclusive truth claims" in religion, and is what "[o]ne might hope and expect that feminist theology, with its sensitivity to diversity and to the pain of exclusion, would be among the leading movements to condemn" and, therefore, "manifest a different, religiously diverse stance"(Gross 73). It does not mean that this process does not carry prejudices and hardships.

It may be discussed that there are cases of lapses in Lauren's way where she appears as if suffering the same Othering view, turning others to "evil," in Long's word. In such a view, it seems that, for Lauren, the outside world is the other. She appears to be a specimen of Butler's human protagonists who, in Krell's word, are "saviors corrupted by their own vision and goals who become terrible tyrants" (29). Nilges also refers to the same feature when he equals Lauren's intentions to establish a stable society with that of dictators who exploit "the same psychological condition in order to advance their agenda" (1343). He equals Lauren with her rival, Jarret, who makes use of "widespread

social instability to seize power” (1342) by “providing the nation with the rigorous and repressive form of centralized paternalistic order it appears to long for” (1342).

In both *Parable of the Sower* and *Parable of the Talents*, Lauren negates what is not compatible with her desired community; most notable of which is her refutation of Christianity. From this perspective, her conflict with her father and brother as Christian ministers is very symbolic: both of them stand for the Christian entity. She is not able to compromise with them, and this destroys her relationship with her brother. In her established community, there is no representative of other religions as well. It appears to be a form of “imperialist exclusion of its religious others” (119) to use Shapiro’s words, which exactly is what Christianity is often charged for doing. The same determinism is observable in her marital life. Her determination to impose her wish to stay in Humboldt County, instead of going to Halsted with her husband, destroys her future relationship with her daughter too. Grace G. Burford believes,

exclusive truth claims are not about personal or group superiority, but about understanding the nature of reality and living within and valuing that distinctive understanding of the world-and considering that mode of behaving and understanding to be the best, if not the only, way to human religious transformation and fulfillment”.  
(89)

Lauren, it seems, reflects the same “exclusive truth claiming” by sticking to Earthseed. I believe that to structure any assessment of Lauren’s behaviour and Hampson’s perspective as a recognizable strategy in Lauren’s attitudes, we should ask if Lauren imposes her approach as the only and best one, and if she manipulates others to fulfil her yearnings. Griffin asserts that a prominent influence of postmodern religious consideration on our thinking as postmodern people is the “renewed sense of the importance of the lives of our fellow human beings, no matter how outwardly insignificant they may seem”(26). According to him,



people who look upon their fellow human beings as fellow travelers on a long journey to an all-inclusive common wealth of love will be less likely to use them as mere means to their selfish ends, or try to destroy the evil that is perceived to be in them by simply destroying them. (26)

If we consider the story as it unfolds, it is Lauren's brother who, as a Christian minister, tries to impose his idea and when he cannot, leaves the community. He does it while Lauren strives to keep him in the community despite his differences. His leaving signifies a very important religious challenge in the novels: as a Christian male minister, it is he who cannot accept the difference.

On the other hand, the strictness and its influence on Lauren's relationship with her family members, like her brother, are justifiable from another perspective. They are sacrifices which she offers to illuminate others. Teaching and learning are activities that, in Outterson's explanation, are concomitant with violence. According to him, the "inherent goal of teachers" is to "communicate ideas. No matter how progressive or Socratic the pedagogy, the final goal is still to produce specific effects and changes in the student, and those changes do not come easily," sometimes they are very painful (445). Learning is to gain awareness. The awareness is the death of ignorance, and this death is "necessary for rebirth and growth"(446); it is to move up from one "stage" of life to another, and this moving, as Outterson stresses, is not possible without sacrifice (446). Lauren, in this way, offers great sacrifices.

The greatest of the sacrifices is the loss of her family, represented in the disappearing of her father, distancing of her brother, and the kidnapping of her daughter, Larkin. Especially, in the case of her daughter, Lauren's commitment to Earthseed is doubly intensified. It is a strategy which Lauren, as a black woman, applies to preserve the identity and roots of her community as a leader-teacher mother; she must face the consequences of breaking in her mission, symbolized through the kidnapping of children from the community. To deal with it, she remains strict. She knows that the aim

of this kidnapping is to dry the root of Earthseed. These children were going to be the second generation of her community. But, they were kidnapped and given to Christian families to be raised as Christians. Lauren cannot let this challenge cancel her mission. For years she tries to find these children, yet she tightly sticks to her mission. The consequence results years later; after almost thirty years, Earthseed is a widespread belief.

This raises a question. The kind of reading which I applied here tries to highlight the positive features of a character who, in my view, disturbs traditional views about black women. She, to some extent, reflects a strong woman whose strength embodies norms and values which are different from the familiar white feminist and masculine ones. Yet, an argument, which may be made here, is that can she embody a successful revolutionary figure, while she is not able to fulfil her most natural roles that are mother and wife. To answer it, we should consider her situation and available options.

Nowhere in the story is Lauren characterized as a superheroine. The fact that she is afflicted with hyperempathy, not only reflects her caring nature, but also shows that she also has her weak points. In the case of sisterhood, motherhood, and household duties, she does what she can. It is clear in her commitment to release her brother when she faces him as a slave. She pays the demanded money and brings him home. Or, she spends years to find her abducted daughter along with other abductees of Acorn. Truly, some situations are out of her control. The only thing which she can do in these situations, as a leader and mother, is to explain the problems and invite others to understand and deal with them. In the case of her daughter, it is difficult. Because of her upbringing in a Christian family, Asha Vere (the later adopted name of her daughter) is steeped with white, Christian norms about motherhood and family values and she cannot understand and accept her mother's choice to fulfil her aim.

Collins explains that “[i]n contrast to the cult of true womanhood associated with the traditional family ideal, in which paid work is defined as being in opposition to and

incompatible with motherhood, work for black woman has been an important and valued dimension of motherhood” (184). Disregarding the subject of money, the mere act of working for a woman is looked upon as unacceptable by traditional white American society. Hampson sees motherhood as the construction of the “ideal” images of this womanhood, which she believes is “encapsulated in the Virgin Mary” (*After Christianity* 173) and recommended as the role model by church. This perspective assigns women with an inferior position which is defined in relation with the position of man as the embodiment of a male God. It conceptualizes God as the father, and “serves to legitimize the man’s understanding of himself” (174). The problematic point of the notion, which turns it into a target for feminist criticism, is its lack of “any sense of woman as an independent agent, the equal of man, involved in a reciprocal relationship with him” (174). Black womanhood and consequently black motherhood do not stick to this idealization.

The characterization of Lauren challenges the typical Christian model of womanhood. The Christian perspective, with its focus on Mary as Mother, firstly, brings her down to an objective statue, “whom the son needs her to be” (Hampson *After Christianity* 174) and secondly, freezes Christianity into “a religion of a mother and her (boy) child” (175). The commitment to the belief, on the one hand, reduces the power of woman to less than a perfect human; she is someone whose being is summarized “in relation to her child” (175). On the other hand, it tenses up the perspective towards the mother-daughter relationship. It is clear that in a religion that is committed to secure patriarchy based on the Father and son, that is to say the God-Jesus division, no imagery will signify a venerable mother-daughter relationship. Having the shadow of such an ideology over their life, Lauren and her daughter are bereft of a mutual understanding. In relation with her mother, Asha Ver looks forward through her Christian upbringing, while Lauren, substituting Christianity with Earthseed, does not have any model to fill the gap of mother-daughter relationships. It seems that being obsessed with the notion

of survival under tough situations, Lauren has not come to think of any alternative model for mother-daughter relationship in her *Earthseed*. It partly reflects Butler's indebtedness to the black concept of mother-daughter relationship. Through this concept, African American mother is characterized as a teacher whose priority is to teach "her daughter how to survive, cope, and succeed in a hostile environment, while fostering family and community loyalty" (Cauce et al. 101).

Further, it plays on the theme of "physical separation" that, according to Collins, was a prevalent action taken by historical slave masters. It is to illustrate how slavery has influenced the mother-daughter relationship in the past, present, and future of black life. In fact, it highlights the effects of a segregating policy that, together with a dualism of masculinity versus femininity reflected in the saying that "[m]others *raise* their daughters and *love* their sons" (Cauce et al. 100), for generations has affected the life of individuals who live in such a society.

This slavery-beaten mother-daughter relation is obsessed with the concept of the "past." Black female society cannot escape and cure the consequences of slavery, which is still afflicting their social life, if it does not recognize the icons and controlling images which were used to justify slavery as a moral matter. As Collins explains, by defining black woman through special characters, these icons and images have associated her with stereotypical roles for centuries. It has been a systematic marginalization through which white hegemony has tried to malign black women as sexual nymphomaniacs, prostitutes, or careless, self-obsessed mothers (Collins 69-97). A necessary challenge in black literature is to change this systematic malediction, and represent true samples of black motherhood. Maxine Thompson argues "[o]ne way African American mothers can be lauded is through our own literature" ("The Power of Mother/Daughter Relationships" *maxinethompson.com*). In response to this reverberating call, especially in the postmodern era, black females have launched a literary tradition of black feminism as a healing device to reconstruct their turbulent

relationship with family and society. Attempting to depict themselves as devoted and understanding black mothers, despite apparent toughness, black female writers have tried their hands in types of writing which aim at educating black daughters to be able to stand on their feet in a society where being a black girl is not that easy.

To stop the paralyzing effect of the past on the present and future, Maxine Thompson believes that black women should reconnect with the past as a source of knowledge and self-understanding, not as a source of shame. This real past carries their roots and cultural heritage, and is buried under a fake past that is defined by the white hegemony. Therefore, an important thing is to excavate it and bring its voice to the surface. One example is the references to reading and writing which based on Mitchell and Taylor's reference to the poetry of Lucy Terry, has more than 200 years of history (I). White slaveholding society always pictured black slaves as illiterate savages who do not have any cultural background. Lauren's habit of writing her daily memories offers a model which challenges this claim. This model recalls the posthuman aspect of the novel. As I explained in the beginning of this chapter, the racial, white humanist perspective, highlighting the absence of the physical features of white humans in blacks, relegated blacks to the status of nonhuman. Depicting a black woman with high intellectual capacities, Butler offers an inclusive perspective of humanity beyond the racial boundaries of speciesism.

Another example of reconnection with past, which is the main aspect of the story, is the introduction of the new religion that is Earthseed. An incessant action of white society in interaction with blacks was to force them to convert to Christianity. Their justification was that these slaves have no true conception of God or divine religion, and besmirched their religious beliefs as paganism. Surely, having several thousand years of civilization, these people could not be without theological speculations including

monotheistic perspectives.<sup>24</sup> The introduction of Earthseed by Lauren as an African American and its condemnation by white Americans as paganism is reminiscent of historical religious exploitation by the white society. The spread of Earthseed and its appeal to the people who accept it, despite the strong and bloody attacks, is a symbolic commemoration of the theological background of a race whose religious heritage has much to say to those who want to hear.

In *Parables*, Butler refers to the black cultural heritages, bringing the old and bitter racial memories to the fore, and arranging them in a postmodernist form of science fiction. This strategy lets her expose her readers to the bitter consequences of slavery and give those readers a chance to contemplate on them. This is the true reflection of the “racial uplifting” mission and Butler emerges as a black intellectual who is committed to this mission.

Manuel explains the separation from a fake past in *Sower* through the trope of the journey. It is a trope which simultaneously has cultural and Biblical aspects. Journey is a bold motif in African American writing. It recalls the journeys that black slaves underwent to reach the United States as well as the hard and dangerous ones they made to escape to the free northern lands during the time of slavery.<sup>25</sup> According to Manuel, Lauren’s journey towards the north also symbolizes “a journey through a biblical valley of death and shadows which is in fact a separation from the past, from the idea of traditional family and community” (118). Butler puts it in these words:

In order to rise  
From its own ashes  
a phoenix  
First  
Must  
Burn.(*Sower*141)

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<sup>24</sup> One writer dealing with this subject is Alexh Haley whose *Roots* (1976) investigates several generation of Christian blacks whose ancestor was a Moslim slave. His *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (1965) also considers the theme of ancestral religion among blacks and their curiosity and demand to know and return to it.

<sup>25</sup> There are several recorded names of black agents from that time who were associated with the aid to educate and transfer the slaves towards north. Interestingly, sometimes they were given Biblical names. One famous one is Sojourner Truth. Another one is Harriet Tubman who got the title Moses for leading many slaves from slavery.

This burning of phoenix is a rebirth. It is the painful process of coming to maturity and understanding through facing the bitter facts, lessons, and experiences of the past. It is a journey of self-understanding that demands separation from imposed norms and obligations that are internalized by sticking to old religious justifications. This self-revival is not without hardships. The rampant depiction of violence in the stories is a symbolic reflection of hostilities towards those who want to reconstruct their lives based on a new understanding.

Outterson regards inevitable violence as a dominant interacting theme in all of Butler's works. This violence covers the relationships among characters, whether human or alien, parents or children, and trainer or trainee. She writes: "if the metaphoric possibilities of "violence" are extended, the word also carries the idea of the violation of boundaries, transgression of the lines defining personal identity and integrity – an idea central to Butler's interests" (443). This is a compulsive violence which, according to Outterson, paves the way for the development of intersubjective relations to guarantee communal continuity. These are placental structures,<sup>26</sup> which in her words, "offer hope by preserving the between-ness of the subjects being connected into a community that gives shape and structure to its members" (440). As she clarifies, "Butler's treatment of the relation between change and violence in her parable novels is particularly complex and suggests that even diversity, freedom, and education within the utopian enclaved community are not sufficient for lasting survival" (440). It means that the authentic survival will only happen when true education enables individuals to understand the necessity of crossing through the boundaries of diversity. In other words, the acceptance of diversity will not be complete without the attempt to get close and embrace it. The overall plot of the *Parables* moves towards this end.

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<sup>26</sup> It refers to Irigaray's placental economy which image mediates between two subjects that are neither separated nor absorbed. For further information refer to Bollinger, Laurel. "Placental Economy: Octavia Butler, Luce Irigaray, and Speculative Subjectivity." *Lit: Literature Interpretation Theory* 18.4 (2007): 325-52.

No doubt, *Parables* embody a notion of collectivity, which has been inseparable from utopian writing since its early history.<sup>27</sup> Nevertheless, what I see as challenging is the very notion of the disappearance of boundaries or the disappearance of individuality. Does not this collectivism embody a kind of totalitarianism? Does it not reflect Butler's pessimist view of the impossibility to establish a utopia in this world? It may seem that, despite undeniable positive traces and hopes, *Parables* cannot escape from stepping into dystopianism. I believe overall this collectivism is a healing feature which works to unify displaced persons whose individuality is crushed under social pressures.

Mitchell and Taylor proclaim that African American prose writers "have long advanced the ideology of black feminism, using their prose writing to build and to heal community" (10). This healing ideology is rooted in the 1960s ideology of black writing, which promoted self-awareness to recognize repressed internal abilities. In other words, it was a surge for self-revival. This trend has continued up to the present time. Contemporary writings of African American women represent the two patterns by focusing on personal experiences and self-knowledge as a tool to recognize and define oneself through connection with others (8). To put it differently, black feminist writing does not separate collectivity from individuality. In black feminist literary tradition, focus on self-revival is assumed within social context. *Parables* pay tribute to this tradition.

According to what is discussed, Butler's novels are not subjected to "dystopian pessimism." Explaining it, Zaki emphasizes that this kind of dystopia "is inevitable because its origins are ontological or otherwise metaphysical. In this view, the reason proposed for social degeneration cannot be successfully countered because they are transcultural and transhistorical" (244). Minding this explanation, Butler's dystopia appears to be a "pessimist utopia," which focuses on "historical forces." To clarify,

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<sup>27</sup> See: Csicsery-Ronay Jr., Istvan. "Marxist theory and science fiction", *Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction*. ed. James, Edward, and Farah Mendlesohn. Cambridge: Cambridge University press, 2003.



“pessimist utopia” is obsessed with context. The context of life in different places has never been the same. All of this is about belief in the freedom of human will and its ability to distinguish between good and evil. This understanding leads to an open-ended conception of social context, accepting the possibility of change as an “essentially progressive” force (244). Miller puts it in these words: “any form of literature that seeks to help us see things anew is driven by a utopian impulse—even if the work in question is dystopian” (337). *Parables* embody such a capacity. Though undeniably they represent dystopian features, at the same time, they reflect a utopian hope and attempt to change tragic conditions.

Talking of a coherent and autonomous self in postmodernist literature is meaningless. In these novels which focus on a heroine who is a social reformer, strong characterization of the protagonist demands the preservation of difference as a contributing factor to change. As postmodern novels, *Parables* conjure situations in which the individuality of the protagonist is extended to embrace the capabilities of others to establish a new society based on cooperation. In such a context, “only by becoming Other, by totally accepting and affirming difference can the self achieve understanding itself” (Leon 206). This self-understanding paves the way for the unification of self and other to fulfil a common goal that is change.

*Parables* are novels which are written based on the Othered literary heritage of black Americans. The novels allude to all the techniques, traditions, icons, and themes common to the black literature, regarding the past, and looking to the future. They are works about hope and anxiety, concepts through which the novels pay attention to what affects black people’s lives and identities in a society like the United States. To summarize, *Parables* are novels of utopian hope. They reside in the cultural heritage of a racial group and embody a social context which challenges the Othering philosophy of difference. They emerge as successful literature of change and exemplify an alternative

theophilosophy which effectively responds to the problems generated by the decayed and strict theophilosophy of Christian America.

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### CHAPTER 3: FEMINISM CHALLENGING GHETTOISM: A SPATIAL CONSTRUCTION OF RACE, SEX, AND RELIGION

*Parables* are novels about ghettoism and how it is challenged by developing and applying alternative perspectives.<sup>28</sup> Going beyond the literal meaning of isolated neighbourhoods, ghettoism in the stories envisions a contextual weaving of racial, sexual, and religious paradigms which, due to biological and doctrinal bigotry, are spatialized, degraded, and ignored. The ghettoism is based on a racial humanist perspective. The alternative perspectives that the stories offer, challenge and deghettoize this humanist perspective by offering the posthuman concept of equality despite the differences.

As I explained in the previous chapter, the ideology of this racial humanist perspective resides in a modernist, masculine, and racial discourse which “animalized” blacks and justified it as a “divine plan.” According to Salih, the nub of this justification was that “in his infinite wisdom, God has diversified the human species according to varying degrees of intellectual capability” (108). The discourse assumed that in the divine design of creation, the closest animals to humans are orang-utans, which are a “race,” “kind,” or “type of man,” while negroes “are one step up; and from there ‘the human’ ascends into lighter shades of complexion, and therefore more advanced degrees of ‘humanity’ up to most ‘pure White’” (108). It created an ideological hierarchy in which a particular “space” or “degree” between white man and orang-utan or ape was decided for blacks which, as a discriminated species in humanity, they were not ““destined to pass”” (108).

Resorting to her cultural background as a black woman, Butler in *Parables* envisions a posthumanist world beyond the discrimination that the racial-sexual

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<sup>28</sup>I explained the term in the previous chapter. It is also discussed in “Roundtable: Feminist Theology and Religious Diversity: Feminist Theology: Religiously Diverse Neighborhood or Christian Ghetto?” Author(s): Rita M. Gross, Carol P. Christ, Grace G. Burford, Amina Wadud, Yvonne Chireau, Susan Sered, Judith Simmer-Brown, C. S'thembile West, Naomi R. Goldenberg, Susan E. Shapiro. In this roundtable, the authors discuss the various dimensions of exclusion from religious interaction within academic and social milieu because of different beliefs, perspectives, and race within the Western, Christian, and white societies.

humanist boundary forms. This posthumanism is compatible with feminist theological perspectives of Ruether and Hampson. Recognizing religious justification as the basis of this discrimination, Butler, directly targets Christianity as the ministering system of the segregated world of *Parables*, substituting it with a new system which is attentive to feminist values.

Spatial consideration is an overriding feature in feminist theology. From this religious perspective, the trope of space is discussed as an excluding factor that banishes women from the sociocultural scenes of life. As Hampson argues, the history of Western art, language, and literature is shaped by the absence of women as agents and it is replete with masculine symbolism. The two trends have worked incessantly to subordinate women as objects before masculine power and will. The trends, Hampson emphasizes, are “the normal panorama of Western culture, depicting, we should note, almost equally scenes from the Bible and from ancient mythology” (*After Christianity* 87). Feminism emerges as an agenda to change and challenge this exclusion. It is a discourse that overthrows preconceived sexist values of Christian theology, which is “far from being a side-issue in this our secular age” (88-89). The new feminist theology destroys the racial, sexist-gendered segregating wall that has separated the white/black and masculine/feminine worlds, and strives to provide another alternative.

In the early world that Butler constructs in *Parables*, the literal depiction of a wall masterfully symbolizes the ideological wall of racial, sexual, and religious segregation. The wall separates the internal world of Lauren’s neighbourhood from the outside world of “strange” others. The pressure of the dystopian conditions, both inside and outside of the walled community, leads to clashes which end in the falling of the wall and the consequent emergence of a new world. In fact, the clashes are the literal embodiment of struggle against isolation or, to put it in different way, segregating ghettoism. The wall, as the protecting construction of this secluded habitat, is the metaphorical depiction of the running ideology of ghettoism. Therefore, to excavate the mechanism of ghettoism

within the novels, it would be of great help to have a general investigation of the motif of the wall in the novels.

### 3.1 The Wall

The wall is a major motif and metaphor in *Parables*. It is used in both literal and figurative forms. Having two facets, it is the visible defining part of the secluded communities in *Sower* and the invisible separating obstacle of connection and unity in both *Sower* and *Talents*. The wall is a motif that connects different dimensions in the novels. Its significance is its potentiality to reflect the mechanism of Otherness in the novels.

The wall has two sides for Butler. On the one hand, it symbolizes segregation with its spatial, racial, and sexual dimensions. On the other hand, based on her racial background, Butler is aware of the historical desirability of a wall to establish the private sphere of personal life for a racial minority like blacks in the United States. Depicting this metaphor, Butler, turns to a posthumanist perspective to represent an inclusive thinking. The falling down of the wall symbolizes the falling of the humanist understanding which tries to guarantee its safety by establishing an exclusive sphere for itself. In the world that *Parables* represent, safety and personal life is not guaranteed by separating oneself from oppressive structures by undergoing the isolation imposed by oppressors. In this way, the protagonist of the *Parables* appears as a woman with strong mental and physical abilities who challenges the racist and sexist humanist view which debases black human beings as ape and bereft of true human intellect.

Leon regards space as an essential trope of difference. In her *Movement and Belonging*, she notes that “[w]hen a rigid spatial boundary is erected, it becomes a location of difference, not positive difference but a fixed and limiting point of reference” (58). The metaphor of the wall plays the same role in *Parables*. The wall of Robledo symbolizes concepts of difference and separation. It acts like an obstacle which

influences the different dimensions related to racial, sexual, economic, and religious ghettoism. The intersection reveals a dominant pattern. In the social-personal life of Black Americans, the concept of difference has acted as an erected wall or boundary. It works as a racial demarcation which pins the blacks within a predefined location. Difference here is like a modern slavery which defines, controls, and blocks the natural stream of black life as something nonhuman. In *Parables*, Butler depicts how the waves of sociocultural awakening break through this wall of difference.

*Parables* are novels about slavery. It is not possible to go through the works of black writers and disregard the reflection of slavery in their works. At the first level, the wall of *Parables* skilfully reflects the bitter experiences of the hardening social pressures on enslaved black families, preventing them from having a normal, human life. In her shocking discussion on the counteraction of slavery and motherhood, Collins explains that white hegemony had severely problematized the very natural right of family life for slaves. In the contradictory context of slave-holding states, “[w]hites of all classes and citizenship categories had the legal right to maintain and, if needed, to work for pay,” while African Americans “had great difficulty maintaining family and family privacy in public spheres that granted them no citizenship rights” (49). In response to this dehumanization, Collins explains, “African notions of family as extended kin units” were recreated, and bloodlines “were replaced by a notion of ‘blood’ whereby the enslaved Africans drew upon the notion of family to redefine themselves as part of a Black community, consisting of their enslaved ‘brothers’ and ‘sisters’” (49). This reaction acted as a separating wall between enslaved and white men and women, and “stimulated the creation of an important yet subjugated Black civil society” (49). Attempting to establish a private sphere of security, black citizens expanded the width of their desired securing walls by developing neighbourhoods where they were related to and cooperated with people from their own race and social class.

The crumbling of Robledo in *Sower* vividly shows the failure of making oneself out of reach. The erection of the walls in that community has no other benefit than the gradual disappearance and loss of influence in social life. *Parables* are the products of a time when hot debates about social rights in America were on the air. Butler's focus on the wall as the determiner of the private and public sphere recalls the privatization of public spaces as well as segregation in particular period of American history. Over decades after this period, social discrimination, or segregation and hyper-segregation in more exact terms, were focused concepts among the black activists. The gist of the arguments was that segregation, especially its *de facto* form, or "The New American Apartheid" as Randall G. Shelden terms it, persists in American life.<sup>29</sup> Shelden argues that though formal segregation is illegal in constitutional terms, discrimination is still exerted by whitewashed institutionalization and practice. According to him, the policy is applied by limiting the access of racial minorities, especially blacks, to qualified civil services such as education, job opportunities, political rights, housing or public space availability. The aiding tools of this engineering are legal loopholes, which prepare a bed to manipulate laws based on the geographical settling of social groups ([zcommunications.org](http://zcommunications.org)). A familiar phenomenon in this case is "redlining." Still practiced, it is the intentional denying of social services such as insurance and health care for the residents of a particular area by increasing costs and, thus, reducing their chance to receive the services on equal terms with the members of the ruling race and social class. Any attempt to tackle this problem by developing private spheres is, in fact, to subdue to the aim of the same policy of ousting the unwanted. Having this understanding, Butler develops *Parables* as a kind of enlightening pamphlets which

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<sup>29</sup>For further information refer to: Shelden, Randal G., and William Bud Brown. *Criminal Justice in America: A Critical View*. 1st ed. Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 2002.

Shelden, Randall G. "The Imprisonment Crisis in America: Introduction." *Review of Policy Research* 21.1 (January 2004): 5-12.

*De Facto* is a refined form of segregation that, unlike *de Jure* segregation, is not enforced by law. In fact, it is a kind of minority disenfranchisement by manipulating federal laws in a way that will suit the intentions of authorities to establish racial residential. Examples are mortgage discrimination, or redlining.

promote the integrated and extra-neighbourhood sense of identity. Describing the essence of her belief and ideal society, Lauren in her *Books of The Living* writes:

We are all Godseed, but no more or less  
So than any other aspect of the universe,  
Godseed is all there is—all that  
Changes. Earthseed is all that spreads  
Earth life to new earths. The universe is  
Godseed. Only we are Earthseed. And the  
Destiny of Earthseed is to take root among  
the stars. (*Sower 77*)

This reference to taking root in stars while the Earthseed community considers itself as “Godseed, no more or less ... than any other aspect of ... universe,” verbalizes Lauren’s “universal” perspective. Contrasting “universalism” with “tribalism,” *Parables* illustrate an ideology of posthuman egalitarianism versus human hierarchicalism.

The “universalism” has theological as well as racial aspects. It challenges what Griffin distinguishes as the “tribalistic” dualism of “us” and “them” (58). This “tribalism” embodies an Othering of the unwanted “them,” being dismissed as “agents of the inherently evil empire” who “would not, in other words, be understood as equal creatures with equal interests and equal rights to exercise their own freedom” (134). Griffin believes that this is a bipolar, particularly American, perspective which separates “God’s *really* chosen people” (133), who are assumed as White American Christians, from others. Millhisser explains this understanding by elaborating on its racist Evangelical background.<sup>30</sup> He argues that one strong excuse that these Evangelists offered to justify their hold on segregation was its implementation by God as a “divine order”; when God created people in different races and colours and placed them in different continents, it was against His will to bring these people together (“When ‘Religious Liberty’ Used To Justify Racism” *thinkprogress.org*). Following this perspective was the understanding that whites are the best and purest Christians and,

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<sup>30</sup>Emerson and Smith believe that “evangelical religion and black-white race relations are controversial and unique aspects of American life.” According to them, evangelical Protestantism is the “mainstream religion, integrated in American society” (3). For further information refer to: Emerson, Michael O., and Christian Smith. *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.



therefore, ranked above others. The “universalism” in *Parables* refutes this “tribalism.” Another aspect of this “universalism” is Butler’s avoidance to construct the traditional frame of black safe havens in her novels that is a tradition prevalent in black literature. I will explain this tradition later in this chapter.

To embody “universalism,” Butler imagines Earthseed as an alternative understanding of community. She achieves it by resorting to another black tradition: learning. Notably, Butler highlights Lauren’s emphasis on delimiting the scope of training. This delimitation shifts the focus of Lauren’s teachings to include not only blacks, but also the other racial categories before whom the blacks have no other option than interaction. In *Parables*, Lauren is astute and experienced enough to know that limiting the scope of education within racial walls will deprive the outside group of the chance to understand the isolated group. What follows this abstention is the filling of the empty place of secluded group by the propaganda of those segregating powers whose presence depends on keeping and widening the social rifts. Lauren determinedly opposes this abstention.

From this perspective, the metaphor of the wall in the stories deals with the monopoly of education. The wall of “exclusive” education has fallen in the novels. In *Parables*, the direction of knowledge is from a black girl towards others. In other words, the direction is from blacks towards a mixed multi-racial assembly the majority of whom are whites. In the history of slavery, there has always been strict prohibitions on the education of black people. In an ironical vision, Butler in *Parables* portrays an alternative America where the majority of whites are enslaved and deprived of education. The monopolization of money in this society has led to the emergence of a bi-polar social structure of rich and poor, whereas, education has become exclusive for the well-to-do class. In this alternative America, multi-national industrial factories exploit the majority of poor white Americans. It is an emaciated society where services are available at high costs and illiteracy is widespread. When Lauren starts her mission,

unlike the past racial preceding, she does not monopolize literacy within racial walls; she is committed to expand knowledge by bringing down the wall of racial discrimination. This represents the utopian aspect of *Parables* which seeks to construct a non-hierarchical world.

Unlike Nilges' argument, Lauren's policy does not repeat the same cycle of oppressing power. One important feature which Nilges ignores about Lauren's established community is the free exchange of information. It lets members of the community expand their awareness and knowledge by sharing experiences. There is no reference, direct or indirect, in the novels to suggest the silencing of others by Lauren. The community welcomes the expressed visions, experiences, and understanding and, in a more tangible way, uses them. What is of importance is that in this world, the focus on training is not an absolute value in itself. Following Lauren's teachings, the community considers the sharing and practicing of new lessons, gained from their experiences, as the shaping factor of social revival. In other words, it defines and values education within a contextual perspective. Lauren does not erect a wall around education to render it exclusive for a particular group and strengthen her superiority. In *Parables*, education is a cooperative activity which accomplishes its aims by functioning within the aspects of social life, whether political, economic or religious.

Lauren uses training as a weapon to rebel against economic monopolization. Butler started writing during the post-civil rights era. She wrote *Parables* when much had not passed from the time when the segregation policy banned blacks from entering public spaces such as schools, churches, working places, army, and alike, as identical with whites. During this time, the explicit law of *de jure* and the inexplicit ideology of *de facto* segregation manipulated blacks as second or third-class or "separate but equal" citizens. The policies were devices that perpetuated the violation against the rudimentary right of blacks to choose the place and rank of their work and, consequently, the place and quality of their life and education. This kept blacks

permanently poor. The first half of *Sower* represents the expanded form of this segregation. The walled Robledo in *Sower* is an embodiment of inner-city black ghettos, while the outside guarded residential areas of the rich families typify traditional rich, white, and suburban residences.

In the dystopian hell of the early *Sower*, poverty rolls out rampantly throughout the country. In such a context, the rich minority class has developed a privatization of public services like security that works to ensure its financial dominance. There are many times in the story when the police do not attend on reported cases of crime unless they are paid:

The deputies all but ignore Bankole's story... . They wrote nothing down, claimed to know nothing. ... they doubted that he even had a sister, or that he was who he said he was. So many stolen IDs these days. They searched him and took the cash he was carrying. Fees for police services, they said. He had been careful to carry what ... would be enough to keep them sweet-tempered, but not enough to make them suspicious or more greedy. (*Sower* 316)

Representing a middle-class community, Robledo reflects the same intention of its residents to safeguard a level of security by privatizing an affordable amount of facilities within strictly protected walls. In other words, the walled community imitates the same system that the rich caste has preserved. Through the destruction of Robledo, Butler vividly shows the inefficacy of this kind of policy.

From the very beginning of *Sower*, the reader observes Lauren's developing doubts about the effectiveness of the walls. What happens to Robledo confirms her view. Butler clearly shows that the best way to conquer social problems is not to isolate self, but to fight with the causes of these problems. In her Acorn as a sample of an egalitarian community, Lauren does not take advantage of the dire economic needs of asylum seekers. She is not a master searching to make use of the labour of others. Acorn is a micro-model of a macro world. In this micro-model, the community gives no priority to

racial categories or economic class. On the contrary, in its interaction with the surrounding world, it practices a corporative way of life.

Another aspect of the metaphor of the wall in the stories is the concept of sexuality. The notion of privacy in citizenship is not just limited to racial considerations. As Silbergleid elaborates, the case is completely susceptible to cover sexual and gender-related debates. According to her, “[b]y denying women the traits of an individual, then, the sexual contract divides civil society into public and private spheres, allowing for both productive and reproductive prosperity; in this formulation, sexual difference is tautologically invoked to account for the gendered nature of citizenship” (158). In this masculine conceptualization of individual citizenship, “one’s ability to own property and head a family and subsumption of wives in coverture” is socialized as the natural norm of identity and citizenship (158). As Lauren refers to it in her diary, the primary criterion of membership in Robledo was to have property or a house. It guaranteed the ability to form and manage a family in such a place. For example, Moss, having a harem, was granted membership to house his wife and concubines. Here is also showcased Butler’s consciousness to challenge the priority given to masculine sense of ownership as a natural principle of citizenship.

As I discussed in the Introduction, science fiction is considered a literary genre in which sexuality does not have a tenable role, at least before the 1960s. Rarer than that, the “critical attention to the issue has been close to non-existent” (Pearson 151). This absence meant the absence of women in a genre that, being naturally defined in sexual terms, embodied an androcentric perspective which equated humans with men. It was based on the argument that science fiction’s “ostensible subject matter – science and technology – were inherently masculine endeavours” (Merrick 241). Despite this justification, Merrick stresses that the presence of women in science fiction has been unavoidable, whether “actual, threatened or symbolically represented (through the alien, or ‘mother Earth’ for example)” (241).

It was the writers of the 1950s who took the first steps to reconcile feminist considerations with science fiction.<sup>31</sup> They were female science fiction writers, who did what they could to “make women ‘visible’ in sf through a focus on female characters, or writing from ... ‘the woman’s point of view’” (Merrick 246). The trend, according to Merrick, was castigated “both at the time and in later feminist critique,” for being highly simplistic (246). In an attempt to cover the defect, the 1960s female writers of the genre provided depictions of “more complex characterizations,” where there were “portrayals of women as fully ‘human’ rather than ‘female men,’ or complementary adjuncts to, or reflections of, the masculine” (246). The movement led to the “absent” and the “multiplying” tradition of the 1970s. This extremist tradition sought female equality through a “construction of a society where men are absent” (248), or the celebration of “all kinds of gender/sexual difference” (249). *Parables* reveal Butler’s conscious response to this context by considering the 1980’s tradition of “dystopian vision,” reflected in “role reversals and worlds which split men and women into separate societies” (249). Apparently, the “move away from ‘androgyny’” (249) of the 1980s was a reaction against the radical visions of the previous decade. One important feature of this decade was the recognition of communication – “traditionally seen as a female attribute – ... as a ‘science,’” to expand the scope of “the conventionally ‘masculine’ narratives of ‘hard’ sf” (250). These conventional narratives focused on technology as an exclusive masculine field; the 1980s tradition moved forward “to include areas considered ‘unscientific’ in Western technoculture” (250) into the scientific half. These features show that, in line with posthumanist understanding, postmodern science fiction distances from the modern assumptions of science fiction as an escape, masculine, white genre. In *Parables*, we have an African American woman as protagonist who succeeds in fulfilling the role of a saviour. This characterization is based on a posthumanist

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<sup>31</sup> Individual female science fiction writers like Clare Winger Harris or Gertrude Barrows Bennette had started their writing much earlier.

understanding that does not “animalize” – to use Salih’s term – what is physically different from a white masculine hero. As this, postmodern science fiction works to widen the scope of social understanding, tolerance, and harmony by recognizing difference not as other, but part of self. We have the reflection of this acceptance at the lucid representation of sexuality in postmodern science fiction.

Active and positive reflection of dissident sexual norms has been rare in science fiction of the pre-1980s. Science fiction texts that had the theme of sexuality up to recent history have “been vastly outweighed by the number of stories which take for granted the continued prevalence of heteronormative institutional practices – dating, marriage, the nuclear family and so on” (Pearson 150). References to alternative sexual acts in *Parables* are few. Still, the references put them in confrontation with strict and normative Christian sociocultural codes and, in this way, embody a struggle for representing ignored social groups.

In the first place, Lauren’s paternal community is one established based on centralizing a Christian minister (her father) as a leader whose Christian teachings define the norms of his society, including sexual life. In the next part, in *Acorn*, she reveals her compromise by having a more flexible view towards sexuality, family, and religious codes of marriage. Her view represents itself in the open acceptance and support of non-normative sexual relationships among the members of her community in *Talents*, despite the threats and pressures of the Christian America’s troops:

Other people find other comforts. Mary Sullivan and Allie combine their blankets and make love to one another late at night. ... I heard them at it. They aren’t the only ones who do it, ...

“Do we disgust you?”...

I looked at her, surprised. ... “Do you love my friend?”...

“Of course I do!”

I managed a smile, ... “Then be good to one another,” I said. “And if there’s trouble, you and your sisters stand with us, with Earthseed.” (223-224).

As the extract reveals, the heroine, notably, and those following her, refuse to act based on the traditional roles dictated by Christian norms of womanhood and motherhood as a reflection of true humanity. Of course, it is not to say that they strictly oppose the norms. Rather it emphasizes that Butler is consciously refusing to dramatize her narration in a way that masculine heteronormative Christian norms demand. In Butler's representative world of *Earthseed*, heterosexuals have a tolerant coexistence with those who have non-heterosexual interests. This imagery mirrors a consciousness towards alternative sexualities in science fiction that flourished through emerging conceptual disciplines such as queer theory and provided "new ways of looking at sf" (Pearson 159). This reconciliation of science fiction and sexuality reflects a common sense where both share "a dystopian view of the present and a utopian hope for the future, a hope that will be, at the very least, a place where we do not automatically kill what is different" (159).

To summarize, the metaphor of the wall in *Parables* represents a multifaceted literary figure. Butler uses this figure to reflect her considerations about the different forms and aspects of segregation in a spatialized context. The context juxtaposes examples of fictional neighbourhoods, which are reflections of real models. In the first half of *Sower*, Butler depicts a walled neighbourhood that struggles to preserve its social order and peace through attachment to Christian norms. Fear and anxiety from what may come from the outside world has blocked any innovation and motivation for change in this community. The wall, in this sense, symbolizes self-made, mental barriers which need to be eroded for improvement to take place. In such a context, the falling of the walls and developing a new sense of community based on co-existence symbolizes the acceptance of non-identical people, places, and ideas as part of self. Assumed to indicate the necessity to expand the concepts of self, home, nation, and religion, the metaphor successfully reflects Butler's struggle against ghettoism and, under the light of expanded education, offers a view of a better world.

### 3.2 Racial Ghettoism

*Parables* are American novels about urban problems and their pressure on the middle class, poor people, and downtrodden racial minorities. They deal with “the social ills of over industrialization and fierce competitiveness which have reduced a once prosperous country into a fractured society governed by outright violence and aggressiveness” (Manuel 111). They are stories which, obsessed with such problems, warn against a lost sense of nationhood. They embody a dystopian world that is not fair, and will lead to misery if things go unchecked.

To illustrate the causes of the uproar inflicting the United States in *Parables*, Butler depicts racial injustice as a prominent feature of this society. Slavery is a strong notion in the background of the novels. In fact, *Parables* are postmodern re-narrations of slavery. The depicted city of Robledo in *Sower* is subjected to harsh economic and racial inequality. As Dubey states, an important feature of the American city at the end of the twentieth century was its “hardening racial and economic division” (“Folk and Urban” 105). Butler conceptualizes *Sower* within frames that seem to evoke what Dubey says. Throughout the novel, we have descriptions of two kinds of communities: those inside the walls, in the first half of the story, and those outside the walls, in the second half. The first half describes wall-bounded communities and privatized public space which try to protect themselves from the entrance of a widespread violence, looting, and assassination surging in the outside world. These walled communities are either rich or middle class. As it is understood from the story, poor people live outside the walls in streets. Another point is that the rich neighbourhoods are mostly white, while the middle class ones include mixed people. Clearly, these neighbourhoods are “spatial manifestations of a segregated urban order based on unequal distribution of economic resources” (105). This spatial framing is made along with images that reflect the privatization of public places under the excuse of security:



This morning Zahra took us to Hanning Joss, the biggest secure store complex in Robledo... Hanning, ... was one of the safest places in the city. ... The store was full of people eager to put up with the inconvenience and invasion of privacy if only they could buy the things they needed in peace. ... "Show your Hanning disc or money," an armed guard demanded ... I showed him the bills that I intended to spend. (*Sower*173-174)

The description, on the one hand, shows the exclusiveness of place for a particular social group who has the financial ability to shop in such a place. On the other hand, it embodies Mike Davis' notion of the militarization of urban space which, he argues, is done to kill "underclass Other." Having a racial perspective, this strategy aims "to obliterate all connection with Downtown's past and to prevent any dynamic association with the non-Anglo urbanism of its future" ("Militarization of Urban Space" *Imc.gatech.edu* ).<sup>32</sup>

The framing parallels with the concepts of Self and Other. In this parallelism, the wall-bounded communities stand for Self and personhood and those of outsiders for Other. From this perspective, the dualism of urban versus rural or national versus local are binaries that reflect the dichotomy of Self and Other. In this context, spatial housing is used as a racist strategy to relegate those who do not enjoy high prestigious social life to unrecognized, neglected ghettos. There are black feminist writers such as Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, Gloria Naylor, Ntozake Shange, and Octavia Butler who deal with this binary of urban and rural life in their writing with an interest to illustrate an idealized, traditional, rural-like, black life (Dubey "Folk and Urban" 103). There are depictions of these idealized, village-like "bounded communities rooted in a stable locale" (109) in Butler's fiction too. However, they are represented through "urban understanding of place as the inescapable basis for constructing alternative images of social order" (109). Butler does it intentionally. She does not wish to limit the style of

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<sup>32</sup> Davis discusses this militarization in the context of Los Angeles. Yet, the strategy is detectable nationwide.

her writing to stereotypical techniques like “southern folk aesthetic” that is normally the response of black authorship in the face of white hegemony.

Black female writers’ depiction of black communities in the past two decades fluctuates between two settings: representing a modern city life where “black community is perceived to be irreparably fractured in the contemporary city,” and a revival of “southern folk aesthetic ... locating authentic black community in the rural south” (Dubey "Folk and Urban" 103). Collins explains it as the reflection of the historical background of racial segregation. According to her, “[b]ecause African-Americans have long been relegated to racially segregated environments, U.S. Black feminist practice has often occurred within a context of Black community development efforts and other Black nationalist inspired projects” (30). It seems that the southern folk aesthetic succumbs to the same cultural ghettoism exercised by the white society. Butler astutely understands this situation and faces it by writing in the same white urban style to reflect her heroine’s sense of integration with others.

In *Parables*, Butler does not have a black perspective. Zaki believes that Butler “brings to her fiction the experiences of being a black woman” (239). It is true. But, also true is that she does not stop there. *Parables* reveal the maturity of a more responsible mind. They are the embodiment of what Phillips argues as the anxieties of modern [and postmodern] intellectual mind in making art and wresting “from a Barbarous world, in which catastrophe looms large, the positive sense of a “better world,” even an ideal world” (299). It is not possible to imagine this ideal world in an exclusive social-racial perspective. Such exclusiveness, as Phillips elaborates, would not lead to anything other than fascism or Nazism. The dystopian feature in *Parables* highlights this danger, and avoids it. This perspective is in strong harmony with the theological entity of Lauren’s mission that is expressed in *Earthseed*; the new God in *Parables* is a coordinator who removes the segregating concept of space in racial and race-related contexts like

religion, education, politics, and economy. This segregation recalls the same “tribalism” that I explained earlier.

Griffin regards “neotribalism” as one of the negative consequences of the “modern death of God” (58). According to him, recognizing the negative function of this “neotribalism,” which segregates “us” and “them,” distances us from limited perspectives and keeps the Othering temptation at bay. From this point of view, believing in God as a creator who does not have a divine favourism towards any particular group of His creatures replaces modern “liberalism with universalism” (58) and helps to establish a more egalitarian and just social system. Lauren’s focus on her unique concept of God accommodates this view.

The Earthseedian notion of God aids Lauren to deghettoize God from the monopolization of Christian doctrine. The God of Earthseed is a being who is available for all at every social and theological level. Unlike the foundation of Christianity as a religion revolving around a particular historical figure, Jesus of Nazareth, Earthseed does not characterize itself by attachment to a person “who stood in different relationship to God than do other human beings” (Hampson *Theology and Feminism* 8). The God of Earthseed does not prioritize a particular group of people as his chosen one, and does not prefigure Himself as someone in need of special mediums like priests and saints to connect His creation with Him.

Hampson asserts that after the Enlightenment era, due to concepts like human equality, and the refutation of the interruption of the natural order in creation, “[i]t becomes difficult to believe that we are in God’s particular providence” (*Theology and Feminism* 2). She explains that an axiom of Christianity, which separates it from followers of other religions, is a “particularity” in Christianity. This particularity proclaims that there has been a divine revelation in history, in a particular time, and for particular people. Based on this belief, Jesus and this particular time are chosen by God and, therefore, reflect the truest message from God. Naturally, the people who follow

this model believe that they follow the truest way (Hampson *Theology and Feminism* 7-8). The natural consequence of this perspective is the sacred “tribalism” where, at the expense of the exclusion of non-Christians, the followers of Christ are included as brothers and sisters (Griffin 58).<sup>33</sup> The disappointing outcome of this selective inclusion is its application as a sacred model on the social life of a Puritanically-backed society like the United States. This perspective, confirms my earlier discussion of the incessant references of the masters and dominant authorities of such a society to specified history to justify segregation, relegation, and exploitation of those who are not within the Christian category. Butler’s post-Biblical God in *Earthseed* challenges this ghettoism by being “equally available to all times and places” (Hampson *Theology and Feminism* 8).

As a posthuman heroine, Lauren enjoys the wisdom to sidestep an exclusive spatial perspective. She successfully dodges the fundamentalist and divisional theistic consideration of rightfulness by underlining “the sense of kinship” that according to Griffin, is “created by the belief that we all have a common divine source, live in the presence of a common reality, and have a divine goal” (58). Lauren’s notion of “We are all Godseed, ... The universe is Godseed” (*Sower* 77) reflects this understanding.

The universal tendency within Butler’s novels, also symbolized by the presence of multiracial people in the novels, frees these narratives from the charge of localism. In *Talents*, the destruction of Acorn and its turning into a Christian camp brings Lauren to the understanding that “Acorn is too small, weak, and local to be an effective response to contemporary problems” (Stillman 24-25). This understanding leads her to expand her interactions, preaching, and enlightening to, first of all, her neighbourhood, and then national, international, and later on, interplanetary spheres. This reveals Butler’s indebtedness to the feminine notion of an extended relationship, where “women see their lives bound up in a web of connection with the lives of others (Hampson *Theology and Feminism* 142). On the other hand, it reflects Butler’s departure from restrictive

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<sup>33</sup> In the sense that Griffin describes the restricted view of natural theism to monopolize or, in fact, localize the true spirituality, banishing the others as inferior, unwanted in theological hierarchy.

black feminist literary traditions like folk aesthetic which favour closed and often black frames of narration.

This does not mean that Butler refutes black feminist traditions. She makes use of techniques pervasive in southern folk aesthetics. But she applies them to highlight the contribution of black intellectual collective memory to shape human culture, instead of isolating it in havens of southern folk aesthetic. Notably, she does so through mixing two traditions of oral and textual communication by referring to textual heritages and reciting poems:

We spoke our individual memories and quoted Bible passages, Earthseed verses, and bits of songs and poems that were favorite of the living or the dead.

Then we buried our dead and we planted oak trees.

Afterward, we sat together and talked and ate a meal and decided to call this place Acorn. (*Sower* 328)

Here, the black tradition of “oral modes of communication”(Dubey "Folk and Urban" 113) is highlighted through the physical presence of Lauren as author, reciting the songs and poems, and talks that follows the ceremony. References to written texts like the Bible and Earthseed recall the Western tradition of prioritizing writing over speech.<sup>34</sup> Reciting these textual heritages together with songs and poems embodies the postmodern argument about the orality of the written text.<sup>35</sup> It helps Butler to highlight the connection and unity of black and white cultural heritage in shaping American civilization.

Although Butler writes as a black female writer, she does not employ black feminist concepts in a way that the majority of black feminists do. A notable example is the motif of drug, paraceto in *Parables*. Lauren’s mother used to take it and due to this, Lauren is a “sharer” now. In *Talents*, there is an emphasis on the fact that these days

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<sup>34</sup>Refer to: Hanson, Erin. “Oral Traditions.” The University of British Columbia : <http://indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/home/culture/oral-traditions.html>. Erin Hanson, "Oral Traditions," (The university of British Columbia: <http://indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/home/culture/oral-traditions.html>, 9/8/2015).

<sup>35</sup> Jacques Derrida’s *Of Grammatology* discusses this understanding in detail:

Derrida, Jacques. *Of Grammatology*. Trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998.

there are a lot of sharers because their parents used to take paraceto (13). Collins explains the metaphor of drug as a form chronicled by black women writers to represent an escape from a “derogated image of Black womanhood” (94). According to her, “[f]ictional African-American women characters use drugs, alcohol, excessive religion, and even retreat into madness in an attempt to create other worlds apart from the ones that produced such painful Black female realities” (94). Through Lauren, Butler does not dramatize an escapist hallucinatory woman obsessed with her escapist world. She characterizes a black heroine who relies on her traditional black literary and non-literary heritage to empower herself and others.

Lauren’s character and the unity that she strives to accomplish are detached from the spatial frames of the stories. Although the communities in *Parables* image both rural and urban habitats, none of them is described as utopian per se. Unlike Robledo, Acorn is connected with other communities, yet it is cautiously located at a distance from other communities. Still, this isolation does not save it from the violence of the outside world. In this, it is similar to the urban residential neighbourhoods of *Sower*, or the big cities in the early *Talents* that are afflicted with violence. These images aim at highlighting human being’s role in rendering his habitat as utopia or dystopia. When human beings come to accept, unite, and respect each other despite the entire differences, their habitats will be safe utopias. For example, the secluded Arcadian-type Acorn in *Talents* is a very calm and friendly habitat with no serious internal problem. Misery afflicts it when crime and violence storm in by human agents who tighten their dominance by the aid of people from Acorn. The example is the betrayal of Faircloth sisters in *Talents*; the sisters reveal the affair between Allie and Mary Sullivan:

Beth and Jessica ... were picking their way through the congregation, ...

“We’ve sinned too,” Beth cried. “We didn’t mean to. We didn’t know what to do. We knew it was wrong, but we were afraid.” ...

“At night,” Beth continued. “We knew it was wrong.”

...

“You can hear them kissing and making noises,” Beth said, making a face, to show her disgust. “Perverted!” (249-250)

On the other hand, the hypocritical forms of Christianity and atheism are shown as the cause of human wickedness in the stories. The Christian troops who have occupied Acorn use the Christian discourse to implant their violence. Describing the hard conditions of the life that the Christian troops have established in Acorn, now Christian Camp, Lauren points to religious confessions that they are forced to make to their Christian masters. She writes: “People did this sometimes, gave voluntary testimony in hope of currying favor with the “teachers.” It was harmless—or had always been harmless before. And it might buy you a piece of bread or an apple later” (*Talents* 249). This reflects a hypocritical atheism, as her cult and people were known as atheists.

(Butler *Parable of the Talents* 249)(Butler *Parable of the Talents* 249)In both stories, these concepts (violence and hypocrisy) stand in close affiliation with the masculine understanding at this stage of the story. The rural landscape of Acorn, with its peaceful life, embodies a feminine understanding, symbolized by Lauren. The fall of Acorn signifies that by restricting feminist understanding within religious prejudice (against Christian society and president), utopia cannot continue. Recognizing and attaching oneself to a “natural,” unprejudiced divinity serves to create a classless, de-ghettoized human settlement.

Focusing on spatial frames and characterization brings to the fore Butler’s optimism about the capability of innovative human deeds and spiritual contemplations to launch more humanitarian societies. The wickedness reflected in the story is not due to a biological determinism. It is the result of wrong and prejudiced training. Since it is not biological, it is also not related to male wickedness. To conclude, *Parables* do not reject human perfection. Neither do they reflect an alternative true feminist world at the

expense of discarding the wicked male one. They embody a trace of hope in the possibility of change through casting a more humane look. Stillman confirms it with these words: “Butler makes her characters (and her readers) strain to traverse dystopias and seek possibilities of better ways of life” (16).

### **3.3 Religious Ghettoism**

As I have explained from racial and sexual perspectives, *Parables* are novels dealing with Otherness. The Otherness is not just related to inferiority. It also deals with those concepts assumed as far-fetched or unattainable due to the belief in their transcendence or superiority. *Parables* are novels that revitalize concepts that have been inferiorized and normalize the ones that have been superiorized. In this way, they create a more tangible, believable, and understandable world. Religious ghettoism is a dimension related to this perspective. *Parables* depict the clashes between two world views: a transcendent monotheism represented as a monopolizing Christianity, and a natural theism represented through Earthseed. Hampson considers monotheistic – monotheism as transcendent – thought as a dualistic perspective which “creates insiders (who are like) and outsiders (who are others)” (*After Christianity* 126). The following section discusses this dualism and how Earthseed challenges it.

#### **3.3.1 Earthseed Challenges Christianity: A Religious Mission**

God is neither good  
nor evil,  
neither loving  
nor hating. (*Parable of the Sower* 245)

Lauren’s view of the indifferent God reflects a particular postmodernist understanding. The view reflects Lauren’s eagerness for a natural theism and her struggle to textualize this theistic perspective before the masculine theoretical as well as practical disciplines of spirituality. Explaining a postmodern concept of God, Griffin writes:



God influences all finite events, but totally determines none of them, ... The relative autonomy of the world from God is therefore not based upon a voluntary self-limitation on the part of divine omnipotence, ... it is an inherent feature of reality. (90)

Elsewhere he argues: “This God neither controls all things nor interrupts the natural processes here and there. God does not coerce, but persuades. God does not create unilaterally, but inspires the creatures to create themselves by instilling new feelings of importance in them” (25). God-creature relationship in postmodern theology is a bilateral interaction where creation has a tenable degree of influence in shaping its destiny and leading the gradual process of evolution. Lauren acknowledges this capacity when she pens, “[w]e must find the rest of what we need/within ourselves, in one another, in our destiny” (*Sower* 245).

*Talents* develops the levelling tendency which *Sower* starts.<sup>36</sup> In an early epigraph in *Talents*, Lauren describes the God-universe relationship in terms of the same system of relation running among the constituting parts of the universe:

Darkness  
Gives shape to the light  
As light  
Shapes the darkness.  
Death  
Gives shape to life  
As life  
Shapes death.  
The universe  
And God  
Share this wholeness,  
Each  
Defining the other.  
God  
Gives shape to the universe  
As the universe  
Shapes God. (7)

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<sup>36</sup> By levelling tendency here, I mean a social perspective in Lauren’s teachings which negates the establishment of the social classes, creating a mono-level community.

Here Butler introduces Earthseed as a religion that considers God as a “natural” entity in mutual and non-hierarchical relationship with the universe. This concept of God and its ideological applications constitute the backbone of the novels; *Parables* manifest a journey from Christian theology towards a postmodern concept of theology. This new theology recognizes the role of multiple sources of power.

As Long clarifies, Western traditional religion has regularly assumed “divine reality as wholly other or unnamable ...[an] infinite other” (4). It is based on the Augustinian background of Christianity. Griffin in his book explains that the Augustinian concept of the Christian faith, which presumes a transcendent God, has been the dominant doctrine of the Christian tradition over the centuries. This doctrine, according to Griffin, highlights the supernatural omnipotence of God as the central source of power, and refutes the efficacy of non-divine factors as a dualistic heresy that puts divine spiritual force in passive and impotent position (111). As Griffin argues, despite its undermining concern of “spiritual discipline within the Christian tradition” that is revealed through the Donatist and Pelagian controversies,<sup>37</sup> the doctrine continued to be a dominant perspective of the Christian faith up to the postmodern era (111). The natural product of this doctrine is an Othered, “supernaturalist” concept of God that “leads us to consider a noncompetitive relation between God and the creatures” (121). Postmodern theology challenged this perspective.

*Parables* move away from supernaturalist, Christian theism. Lauren names God with a new term, and introduces Earthseed as a new system of thought or religion. This new religion naturalizes God’s essence by describing Him as change, challenging the Othering Christian concept of Him as a “supernatural authority figure” (Stillman 25):

God is power.  
God is Change.  
We must find the rest of what we need

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<sup>37</sup> Donatists theologically believed that the spiritual wickedness of a priest or any religious leader who transfers God’s words affects the validity of administered messages. Pelagians believed in some freedom of human being in relation to God. Augustine was against both mentalities.

within ourselves,  
in one another,  
in our destiny. (*Sower* 245)

This naturalization reflects the postmodern reflection of God as a natural theistic power with more earthly, imaginable, and reachable features. God in the postmodern theology is not an “external creator of a wholly contingent world” (Griffin 77). He does not embody an eternal and infinite source of existence beyond the finite world. He is the starting ring of a causal relationship where the plurality of God-and-world interacts to shape a finite cycle of cosmic life. This consideration seems to assert the autonomy of scientific tradition and the blind dedication of orthodox Christianity to divine omnipotence as the only source of power, knowledge, and being is overruled.

Recognizing multiplicity and creativity in the creator-creature relationship helps postmodern theology to reduce the misusing of divine power as religious justification to rule and subordinate particular target groups. Postmodern theism is a natural theism that favours persuasion and denounces the suppression of other creatures in favour of the Almighty. It is a liberating theology which nurtures the people who “would not have dreams of controlling the rest of the world” (Griffin141). Butler precisely reflects this approach through illustrating Lauren’s confrontation with the Christian American teachings. Refuting Jarret’s religious policy, Lauren writes:

Religious tolerance does not suit him. ... Jarret supporters have been known, now and then, to form mobs and burn people at the stake for being witches. Witches! In 2032! A witch, in their view, tends to be a Moslem, a Jew, a Hindu, a Buddhist, or, in some parts of the country, a Mormon, a Jehovah’s Witness, or even a Catholic. A witch may also be an atheist, a “cultist,” or a well-to-do eccentric. (*Talents* 19)

The lamentation tells of the totalitarian dictatorship running through fundamental Christian justifications. It reveals Lauren’s intention to replace this totalitarianism with an embracing, persuasive alternative. The word “witches” here reflects a theological

prejudice to refute any other religious belief as evil. Besides, it has a very strong gendered connotation. The word witch describes a woman who has magical powers and uses the power for wicked purposes. Through the comparison, Lauren shows how dominant masculine ideological powers use difference as a demonized concept and connect it with feminine identity. Hampson in *Theology and Feminism* discusses femininity as a term that carries “wholly negative connotations” (x). She also explains that the term designates “what it has been supposed by men, in a sexist society, that women should be” (x). It means that generally in masculine perspective, femininity or female identity cannot be anything other than evil. The term automatically demonstrates the male criterion of what is suitable and unsuitable in female identity, and provides masculinity with the authority to control and quell those considered as abhorrent. The description of any religious belief other than Protestant Christianity as witch in the above quotation reflects the very demonization that Hampson explains.

It is possible to assume that there is an essential difference between the God that Butler creates in *Parables* and Hampson’s Post-Biblical concept of Him. It seems that in most of the descriptions in *Parable*, Butler describes a classical postmodern “natural” God, while Hampson develops a particular concept of a “supernatural” one. Though Hampson, in a postmodern tradition, recognizes the authenticity of human beings as subject and not object – in shaping their destiny – yet, as she emphasizes in chapter VI of *After Christianity*, God is a dimension of reality beyond material earthly life. Her concept of God is a “transcendental” being who is different from His creation in kind and, therefore, does not stand on the same level as humanity. Because of this, whenever necessary, He interferes in the universe and changes the situation. Nevertheless, she stresses that this interference is within the frame of causal relations, and is usually achieved through sharing power with humans (212-254).

A meticulous scrutiny reveals that, despite obsession with postmodern “natural” theism, Butler’s protagonist does not have a permanent commitment to this perspective.

For example, while there are many references to God as change throughout the novels, which means there is an entity or force that acts naturally through nature, it seems that, in practice, Butler's protagonist separates natural phenomena from an entity called God. This separation represents itself in the first intellectual doubts that she shares with her father:

There's a big, early-season storm blowing itself out in the Gulf of Mexico. It's bounced around the gulf, killing people from Florida to Texas and down into Mexico. There are 700 known dead so far. One hurricane. And how many people has it hurt? How many are going to starve later because of destroyed crops? That's nature. Is it God? ...Is there a God? If there is, does he (she? It?) care about us? Deists... believed God was something that made us, then let us on our own.

"Misguided," Dad said when I asked him about Deists. "They should have had more faith in what their Bibles told them." I wonder if the people on the Gulf Coast still have faith. (*Sower* 15)

The argument has two levels. At one level, it reflects a dualism between the concepts of nature and divinity. Lauren does not presume any aggregation between the two. She points to the hurricane and the agricultural products which it has destroyed, but does not affirm that it is based on a cooperation between God and nature. As I explained through the image of the destruction of Acorn in the previous chapter, God in *Parables* appears as a blessed source of goodness that, recalling Hampson's description of divinity, is not the coordinator or the indifferent spectator of unpleasant or catastrophic situations. He stands respectful to the autonomy of the natural world, but interferes in cases where human agency cannot restore normal conditions.

At another level, the passage reflects a kind of dualism between the masculine concept of God in Christianity and a feminine consideration of it expressed by Lauren. Lauren rejects the religious faith which she connects with the masculine Biblical belief represented and defended by her father. In this way, the text tries to highlight Lauren's demarcation from a "centralist" supernatural concept of God. The proceeding passage

illuminates this notion. Explaining her detachment from her father's God and religion, she writes:

I read a lot about that kind of thing. ... My favorite book of Bible is Job. ...

In the book of Job, God says he made everything and he knows everything so no one has any right to question what he does with any of it. Okey. That works. That Old Testament God doesn't violate the way things are now. But that God sounds a lot like Zeus-a super-powerful man, playing with his toys the way my youngest brothers play with toy soldiers. (*Sower* 16)

Through this comparison, Lauren likens the Christian concept of God to that of reigning manhood. In fact, she points to the masculine concept of God that represents a conservative Christian perspective. Traditionally, conservative Christians make use of masculine metaphors to explain true Christianity as a complete obedience to the Creator, in whose presence, no questioning on behalf of humanity is acceptable. In this conservative view, man is assumed as the natural representative of God, and Christ, as the role model, has accepted the will of God. As a result, the incident, two-dimensionally, works as a model for true manhood/womanhood, where man is expected to embody the same divine role and woman is demanded to accord with the basic principle of accepting man's lordship in the social and personal aspects of her life.

The focus on the will of God is a tool that, according to Hampson, men, especially those in power, have used to define and control the position of women under religious pretext. In her words, "since – it is thought – the new testament does not allow the headship of a woman, and through the fact that women did not exercise headship in that society, that a woman should be head of state is as wrong as that a woman should exercise headship within the church" (*Theology and Feminism* 12). The reflection of Lauren's new belief system is a feminist challenge against this masculine appropriation. Through Lauren, Butler characterizes a heroine whose aim is directed to represent a successful model of a female head. The natural consequence of this alternate modelling

is to embody actions which are unexpected by the conservative, male part of her society. Butler illustrates the reactions through the first references to the attitudes of her father in the early pages of the story, and the social authorities, on a larger scale.

Butler's depiction of the above-mentioned reactions focuses on the duality of religious perspective between Lauren and her father. She represents it through the humiliation that Lauren's father imposes on her by placing her as the last one to receive baptism; a notion whose reasons, Lauren emphasizes, makes no sense for her (*Sower* 14). Considering the justification of this view, "In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost" (14), Lauren searches for a new concept of God to replace the previous one. The backbone of this new concept challenges the gendered nature of the religious hierarchy in Christianity:

The idea of God is much on my mind these days. I've been paying attention to what other people believe – whether they believe, and if so what kind of God they believe in. Keith says God is just the adults' way of trying to scare you into doing what they want. He doesn't say that around Dad, but he says it. He believes in what he sees, and no matter what's in front of him, he doesn't see much. I suppose Dad would say that about me if he knew what I believe. Maybe he'd be right. But it wouldn't stop me from seeing what I see. (*Sower* 14)

The reference mirrors a Christian perspective to subdue woman as second to man in the order of life and Lauren's determination to confront it. Lauren reveals what she considers a source of inanity in her society, which is the fear from what others may infer as disobedience to God, and at the same time, she shows that society is conscious about the disobedience when it is committed by women. Compared to Lauren, Keith has more self-confidence to divulge his dissenting opinions. It is true that he does not talk about them before his Dad, but he enjoys the tolerance guaranteed for him because of his masculinity.

Another point that buttresses this view is the capitalized form of Dad. With no exception, the word is referred to in this format throughout the novel, prefiguring a religious Fatherhood as the head of the Church and neighbourhood than a homely sense of paternity. Up to his disappearance, there is almost no scene in the entire *Sower* to depict him apart from his official duty as the divine Father of the community. Even in the most private family talks, he addresses the members from a priestly position and never comes down from that. The meaningful absence of a Mother-figure in this phase of the novel, which is emphatically motivated through the death of Lauren's biological mother and the weak and ignorant character of her stepmother, intensifies the resonating echo of patriarchy. Related to this is her stepmother's mania for her son Keith. Reflecting a Christian model of Mary and Jesus, and searching for a male attention which she cannot find in her husband, Cory seeks solace in her blind love for her son. The failure of this relocation because of Keith's escape from home and his sudden death – unlike Jesus, he does not have a heroic death, but is killed by his gang group – in addition to the death of the father disassociates Butler's opus from any Biblical recognition.

*Parables* illustrate the gradual replacement of Christian norms with alternative values of Earthseed, bringing to the fore the values that are ghettoized in orthodox versions of Christianity. *Parables* deghettoize these values by implementing a postmodern theology which recognizes the authenticity of religious diversity in defining social and personal identity.

Butler's postmodern vision of God and theism displaces Him from His high and dominant position in the hierarchical perspective of the orthodox Christianity; it does not define God as centre and source of everything. Early in *Sower*, Lauren emphasizes that all Earthseed resides on realist scientific observation. Explaining that God is change, she argues:



change is inevitable. From the second law of thermodynamics to Darwinian evolution, from Buddhism's insistence that nothing is permanent ... to the third chapter of Ecclesiastes ("To everything there is a reason. ..."), change is part of life, of existence, of the common wisdom. ... we go on to create super-people – super-parents, super-kings and queens, super-cops – to be our gods and to look after us – to stand between us and God. Yet God has been here all along, shaping us and being shaped by us in no particular way or in too many ways at once like an amoeba – or like a cancer. Chaos.  
(26)

As the extract manifests, Earthseed is an understanding which reflects a postmodern theism. As I explained earlier, postmodern theology is a natural one that recognizes the causal nexus of relations as the channel for divine interference in the world.<sup>38</sup> It is worth highlighting at this point that this kind of theism, somehow, recalls the modernist, mechanistic perspective, especially its second phase.

The modern doctrine at early stages rested on the principle that “all perceptual experience of the world must come through one's (material) sensory organs” (Griffin 55). During this initial phase, due to the influence of modernists like Francis Bacon, there was a dualistic recognition which accepted the “possibility that the soul could have a direct perception of other worldly realities, both physical objects (clairvoyance) and other souls (telepathy)” (55). In the next phase, this non-material recognition gave its place to a wholly materialist understanding. The second understanding equated “perception exhaustively with sensory experience, thereby making belief in God rest solely on rational inference from the order of the world as known through sensory experience” (55). Postmodern reform took and widened this narrow deterministic consideration. While modernist thinking denounced the authenticity of non-material dimension in animate and inanimate life, postmodern science expanded this vision

to include types of causal influence associated with religious beliefs that were excluded in principle by

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<sup>38</sup> It means that God's interference in the world follows the natural laws of life, not a supernatural revelation.

modern science. ... Postmodern science does not insist that all causal explanations involve agents that can be observed through sensory means or that can be blocked out in controlled experiments. (80)

The explanation clarifies the mechanism of Lauren's scientific perspective. It is a posthuman perspective that reconciles the spiritual and physical dimensions of life and, in this way, does not Other any element as trivial. It is a perspective that does not monopolize any particular feature to a particular category in creation.

The fact that Lauren introduces God as change shows that she wants to familiarize Him as an experienced entity by all. In Miller's term, "Earthseed has nothing to do with a big-daddy-God or a big cop-God or a big-king-God or the notions of hierarchy and passivity" (356). In the novels, readers face repeated expressions that describe God as being shaped by human, changed or being the very concept of Change, being aided, and alike. The aim of all of these references is to remove the distance between God and human being, unite them and, therefore, in Anderson's word, achieve "divinity" on behalf of humanity (42). This is the point where Butler's feminist view recognizes the divine essence of humanity and, in this way, accomplishes union between God and human being.

However, as I pointed out earlier, this utopian potential is not without lapses in the stories. *Parables* have references that describe God as indifferent or uncaring of what is going on: "My God doesn't love me or hate me or watch over me or know me at all, and I feel no love for or loyalty to my God" (*Sower* 25). The notion n – uttered by Lauren – creates some disharmony in *Parables*. For sure, disregarding the presence of a helpful God in a couple of scenes is in discrepancy with the overall perspective of *Parables* which assumes Him as a cooperative force of goodness. In fact, it is a deviation towards the modernist, scientific anthropocentrism which privileges human agency, as the indifferent observer, on the rest of creation and equates it with divine agency. According to Griffin,

To assume that God could hate or be indifferent to creatures is to think of divine knowledge by analogy with sense perception, in which there can be knowledge without sympathy, or to apply to God our finite inability to know more than small portion of reality with any directness and fullness. (144)

In these cases, Lauren, despite her references to God, has a very materialistic perspective. She scrutinizes each phenomenon through a physical view, ignoring the spiritual dimension. One example is the destruction of the Christian Camp. Lauren describes it in these words: “we had a terrible storm—truly terrible. And yet, it was a wonderful thing: wind and rain and cold... and a landslide” (*Talents* 253). The storm and the following landslide free them from the prison of the Christian Camp. Lauren’s explanation for how and why this happens just covers the physical aspect:

The hill where our cemetery once was with all its new and old trees, that hill has slumped down into our valley. Our teachers had made us cut down the older trees for firewood and lumber... Because they forced us to do this, the hillside has broken away and come rumbling down to us. (254)

The landslide buries the central cabin which controls the electrical collars that were used to captivate them. After the storm, all are gone: the “teachers” and the collars. In the entire scene that Lauren describes, there is no reference to a benevolent goodness whose mercy, working through natural phenomena, frees them from slavery. It embodies a secular humanist vision.

Still, this secularism, away from the lapses it creates, serves the anti-Christian content of the novels. The stand reduces the emergence of another ideology which justifies its exploitation through attaching itself to God. To some extent, it gets close to the post-Biblical theistic principle that nothing is miraculous and, consequently, denies the extraordinariness of a particular group of people as chosen intermediating agents between God and humanity. Hampson clarifies it in this way:

I do not believe that there could be peculiar events, such as resurrection, or miracles, events which interrupt the normal casual relationships persisting in history and in nature. I do not believe in uniqueness. Thus I do not for example think that there could be a human person (which Christians must proclaim) who stood in a different relationship to God than do all other human beings. (*Theology and Feminism* 8)

Similarly, Lauren's Earthseed refutes belief in "super-people" who 'stand' between us and God" (*Sower* 23). This leads to a sense of unity which is achieved by "being really of the world" rather than "in the world" (Phillips 302). The difference between this "of the world" and "in the world" resides on the sense of autonomy and relation that "being of the world" creates to connect the self with others. Feeling oneself connected with the dynamic power of life instils a person with enough motivation and will to advance and not to succumb to a pre-destined fate. It is the real destiny that Lauren strives to familiarize her people with. In this way, Lauren sides the "existential sense of the human condition" which "accepts contingent possibility as shaped by concrete human action," opposing "the metanarrative of providence" that "expresses faith in the progressive unfolding of a necessary order decreed by God" (302).

*Parables* are stories that challenge the orthodox Christian presumption of particularity. They are novels about religious tolerance, pluralism, and fundamentalism. Discussing the Othering stance of Christianity, Hampson writes, "[i]t comes to seem much more likely that the religious myth of the people of Israel, and the structure of Christian theology, are simply the creation of one particular group of people, who interpreted the world from their perspective" (*Theology and Feminism*3). Hampson does not refute the importance of having religious interests, but emphasizes that "if we are to remain in any sense religious" (2), we should undergo a "discontinuity in religion" (2), by which she means putting aside the Christian understanding of particularity. This discontinuity, recognizing the effectiveness of other theistic views, prepares ground for

a better spiritual understanding of salvation to create a more cooperative and unified humane society. *Parables* reflect such an understanding.

### 3.3.2 *Parables*: Pursuing Religious Discontinuity

Lauren's theological perspective in *Parables* embodies religious discontinuity. This discontinuity not only struggles against Christianity as a "particular" religion, in the sense that I explained above, but also refutes its sexual conservatism. The conservatism is a steadfast resort to the directly stated Biblical orders that oppose the female voice and action in public and private life:

<sup>22</sup> Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. <sup>23</sup> For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. <sup>24</sup> Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing. (Ephesians 5:22-24)

<sup>34</sup> Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience as also saith the law. <sup>35</sup> And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church. (Corinthians 14:34-35)

To challenge this understanding, Butler arranges images that reflect this conservatism and offers Lauren as a heroine whose religious mission characterizes an understanding opposed to this conservatism. For instance, there is a scene in *Talents* where Lauren points to the conservative Christian reaction towards a woman who wants to have her voice heard:

She does understand English, but doesn't speak it well enough to be understood ... . That's because sometime before she joined us, someone cut out her tongue. ...

I've heard that in some of the more religious towns, repression of women has become more and more extreme. A woman who expresses her opinions, "nags," disobeys her husband, or otherwise "tramples her womanhood" and "acts like a man" might have her head shaved, her forehead branded, her tongue cut out, or, worst case, she might be stoned to death or burned. (50)

Lauren, representing an Earthseed clergywoman, moves away from this understanding. Recalling Hampson's post-Biblical refutation of the essentialist nature of Christianity, which Hampson believes prefigures a man as saviour, Lauren's religious mission envisions a dynamic version of theism that is compatible with feminism.

Hampson suggests some examples to clarify what she means by Christian essentialism. The examples show that the trend of silencing women under religious justification, irrelevant to social context, is common among all Christian sects. For instance, she points to an English Anglican church bishop who justifies his opposition to the ordination of women by referring to the will of God, and refutes the effect of context on words and deeds of the Lord of the Gospels:

Jesus was an essentially free agent. If then his actions simply accorded with what was the convention of his society, this was not because he had so to act, or failed to see that a certain convention was socially limited. He could, as God, have chosen to act otherwise. Thus the fact that he did not act otherwise is held to indicate that these social arrangements do indeed accord with the will of God. (*Theology and Feminism* 13)

This will of God has been fortified by patriarchal social norms and wrong biological presuppositions. Hampson, in the same reference, explains that these two factors have acted to exacerbate the conditions of women's social position. These two intertwined traditions collaborate as the root of many sexist strategies to normalize and expand exclusive masculine power relations. Conservatives, determined to obey the will of God, refute the effectiveness of cultural context on the Christian traditions. They argue that because church has never done the other way, notably in the case of women's ordination, so it "cannot have been wrong" (*Theology and Feminism* 16). Aquinas explains priesthood as a signifying authority and based on his Aristotelian understanding concludes that since "[w]oman's defect is by contrast by nature," her

ordination would destroy God's natural order of creation (17). Based on the Aristotelian view, woman is a "mutilated male" and "male is the efficient, formal, and final cause of conception" (Hartel 94). These views have paved their way to the Western philosophy of life, dethroning women as unnatural, second citizens before men as the perfect epitome of the human being. The natural output of this doctrine is the divinization of man; as a Christian man in a Christian context, of course. Under such circumstances, any attempt to change the hierarchy or exercise an active role on behalf of women, either through Christian or non-Christian perspectives, would be maligned as non-divine or, in worst terms, witchcraft, as I referred to in previous pages. The strictness leads post-Biblical feminists to leave Christianity and replace it with a more responsive option that observes the autonomy of its agents in a freer manner. This observation is achieved by recognizing difference and diversity.

*Parables* describe detachment from Christian norms and replace them with non-particular, non-sexual, and non-essential ones. It is achieved through the feminist perspective of the protagonist who offers Earthseed to bring to the fore and celebrate the concepts and aspects that have been ignored in the dominant, masculine form of Christianity. This detachment reveals itself early in *Sower* through Lauren's arguments with her father and her confrontation with his Christian teachings. The confrontation later develops into her arguments and rivalry with her brother Marc and the U.S president, Jarret, in the second novel. It is based on a full understanding: Lauren is completely "aware of all the ways" that masculinity takes advantage to guarantee its superiority by "resurrecting a centralized father-God whose law everyone is subjected to" (Nilges 1345). Lauren is sure that no reformation will work within this sexual and essentialist Christianity. Marc as the representative of this Christian orthodoxy (he is a minister of Christian America) is a good example. He sincerely believes in the exclusive authenticity of Christian faith and, refusing Earthseed as heresy, struggles to convince its followers to convert back to Christianity:

My brother laughed. ...“you’ve been misled. You already have an immortal soul, and where that soul spends eternity is up to you. Remember the Tower of Babel! You can follow Earthseed, ... fall down into chaos, and wind up in hell! Or you can follow the will of God. And if you follow God’s will, you can live forever, secure and happy, in God’s true heaven.” (*Talents* 156)

Lauren’s distrust in Christianity mirrors Hampson’s negative view of the cultural context of the societies shaped by Christian perspective. Though, in the recent years, the Protestant church has given women the permission to ordinate, Hampson refuses the possibility of achieving equality within the Christian church. She writes: “While men (and some women) consider whether women can be full insiders within the church, women debate whether or not they want to be” (*Theology and Feminism*4). For Hampson, Christianity is an impasse where the feminist cause leads to nowhere. From this perspective, the walled cul-de-sac communities of the *Parables* symbolically stand for the Christian church and its masculine traditions. As a female figure with a message to deliver, Lauren is completely aware of these traditions. Because of it, she plans to leave while, simultaneously, knows that the structure is susceptible to collapse and cannot resist before the increasing pressure of external pressures. Lauren’s quarrel with her father in *Sower* is in this direction. Texter explains it through Lauren’s hyperempathy. In his words: “Because of his religious worldview, Lauren’s father doesn’t view his daughter’s hyperempathy as a girl, and she in turn wisely does not share her newly forming religious perspective with him” (475). Based on the explanation, the Christian perspective of Lauren’s father does not let him understand the essence of this hyperempathy because it is associated with his daughter. It creates a lack of communication between them which gradually leads to her distancing from her father’s teachings.

As a hyperempathic person, Lauren tries to stay away from the sources of pain as much as she can. Along with her distancing from Christian teachings, the feature



signifies the suffering that interaction with the steadfast Christian masculine rules, with their ideological dos and don'ts, creates for a woman who attempts to communicate her theistic perspective. Texter stresses, "[s]he's not able to realize her vision fully while [her father is] alive" (474). The view rejects the prospect of dialogue and reconciliation between female perspectives and the Judeo-Christian tradition. Lauren's hyperempathy and her concept of Earthseed symbolizes an "attending" feminist spirituality opposed to that of Christianity: "Earthseed, of course, with its very impersonal Taoist conception of God, clashes with the Judeo-Christian uncaused cause that Lauren's father represents" (474). Clearly, Texter sees it as a substantial difference dealing with the concept of God. The difference, naturally, affects other perceptions that are related to the concept of God in both Earthseed and Christianity. Solidifying these perceptions within strict and fixed principles, Judeo-Christian tradition prefigures a gulf of distrust with Earthseed as a feminist understanding of divinity, which covering is a matter of doubt. Hampson believes that Christianity has permanently and successfully aborted women's strive "to express their understanding of God within a different thought structure" (*Theology and Feminism* 4). She reflects the distrust when she argues about the incompatibility of feminism and Judeo-Christian tradition as a masculine myth. The incompatibility, Hampson argues, is because of the internalization of the "patriarchal history" that ties the essence of Christianity to the incarnation of God through Christ as a male figure who perpetuates "the use of metaphors which are male not female" (8). The perpetuation, she stresses, rules out the expectancy of "equality of women," and leaves a gap to be bridged "between past and present" (11).

In an attempt to discuss the answers offered to fill the gap, Hampson investigates three different strategies, none of which she affirms, are responsive. Hampson believes that conservatives, various groups of the Christian feminists, and liberals have responded to the anti-feminist nature of Christianity. According to her, "conservatives see the past as normative" (*Theology and Feminism* 11). The historical belief that God

became “incarnate within a particular society, ... tradition and people” and “women did not exercise headship in that society” signals that “a woman should be head of state is as wrong as that a woman should exercise headship within the church” (12). A moderate reformation within this perspective tries to “differentiate between what is God’s will for His people, and what is allowable in the world at large” (12). Protestant conservatives mostly use the justification to show the dualism between what “has been perceived to be natural by humankind,” and “the will of God” (14).

Hampson recognizes two dominant groups between feminist theologians. One group, she asserts, are the Christian feminists and liberals, who try to reconcile between the past (indicative of the Christian doctrine) and the present. Another group comprises those who “believe there to be no real gap, so that the problem is thereby solved” (*Theology and Feminism*11). The first category covers three essential perspectives. The first perspective, which Hampson calls the ‘kairos’ approach, entails “past is basically normative but it is said that there can be development” (22). The second perspective, the “golden thread” approach, lifts out a “leading motif” and applies it on other situations (22). The third approach is a “‘a priori ethical’ position, in which essentially authority is seen to lie in the present but there is not perceived to be any fundamental clash with the past” (22).

Hampson distinguishes inherent discrepancies in the ethical coherence of the approaches and refutes their efficiency as responsive strategies in dealing with the status of women in contemporary religious life. She believes that the incoherency, in its turn, leads to the ambiguity in detecting the fundamental themes of the Scriptures and, as a result, reduces the possibility of having a firm and compatible base for feminist sensitivity within them. She sums up:

I shall turn to a religious position such as my own which is not Christian, though religious and within the western tradition, in which the present is normative and the past is only drawn upon in so far as that seems to be appropriate. Such a religious position

alone, I shall suggest, is compatible with feminism. (*Theology and Feminism*11)

Earthseed to some extent embodies this religious position.

Lauren offers a religion that is compatible with feminism and is determined to establish her new society based on the philosophy of this religion. Her religious perspective refutes the conservative faith in the Christian theology as “God-given and self-enclosed, unaffected by humanity” (Hampson *Theology and Feminism* 20). In a talk with Dan, she explains how differently they assume and worship God. She does not deny His existence, but represents a feminist perspective that, according to Hampson, strives to reveal how women “want to express their understanding of God within a different thought structure” (4):

“You guys don’t believe in God or anything.” ...  
“Dan, of course we do.” ...  
“We don’t believe the way your parents did, perhaps, but we do believe.”  
“That God is Change?”  
“Yes.” ...  
“It means that Change is the one unavoidable, irresistible, ongoing reality of the universe. To us, that makes it the most powerful reality, and just another word for God.” ...

Inexorable God  
Neither needs nor wants  
Your worship.  
Instead,  
Acknowledge and attend God,  
Learn from God,  
With forethought and intelligence,  
Imagination and industry,  
Shape God  
When you must,  
Yield to God.  
Adapt and endure.  
For you are Earthseed,  
And God is Change.”

(*Talents* 75-76)

The extract represents a postmodernist understanding of a divinity that is entirely disassociated from the dominant Christian concept of God as the Almighty. As a

postmodern religion, Earthseed talks of a God who interacts with human beings and collaborates with them to change the dystopian condition of life.

To conclude, though there are some lapses in the full development of the Earthseed as a typical postmodern religion, it reveals the capacity to put an end to the monovocality of the orthodox Judeo-Christian theology in *Parables*. It is a new religious understanding that recognizes the authenticity of the feminine spiritual articulation and challenges the passivity and complacency accompanied by an apocalyptic vision, “according to which our everlasting life will be preceded by the foreordained destruction of the earth... followed by the creation of a new earth” (Griffin 104).

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## CHAPTER 4: A POSTHUMAN RECONCILIATION OF DIFFERENCE AND MULTIPLICITY

In this chapter, I will analyse two short stories from Butler's *Bloodchild and Other Stories* using feminist theological perspective. Both "The Book of Martha" and "Amnesty" reveal similar considerations which appear in Butler's other writings. However, their concerns differ from those of the novels I analysed in previous chapters. Overall, I view these two stories as utopian texts that deal with the concepts of power and agency in relationship with what is Othered. These works are not novels; therefore, they do not embody a range of incidents in a clarified frame of time. What readers encounter in the two stories are arranged dialogues between what is assumed to be God and Martha in "The Book of Martha," and between Noah and several other characters in "Amnesty."

There is no description of any kind of action in either story. In fact, nothing is done in any one of them. In each, Butler arranges scenes which reflect her assumptions about the integrity of human nature in interaction with the outside world. The technique of dialogue prepares a bed in the stories where, exposing the mentality of the characters, Butler discusses her familiar considerations about humans, as well as concepts related to humanity. The concepts cover aspects of human identity like race, gender, and sexuality, as well as human being's attitude towards the outside world that includes a presumed ever-present God and the "unintelligent" natural ecology (by unintelligent here I mean a form of intelligence that is not based on human standards that are based on deductive and inductive reasoning).

What connects these two short stories to the *Parable* series is their focus on a concept of the posthuman. This promising posthuman notion of the individual is in accordance with postmodern feminist assumptions of subjectivity. Butler's depiction of humanity in these short stories is not based on the masculine, modern concept of

subjectivity as a separatist, rational, self-defined, and self-determined agent (Jacobs 91). This new postmodern human embraces new concepts of mind and body as flexible, open, and receptive organs in communicating with other existential entities. This new posthuman figure enables Butler to create “new forms of subjectivity and agency, grounded in relation rather than separation” (Jacobs 92). This relational concept of subjectivity embodies Butler’s feminist wish to exemplify a “changed relation to difference, identity, and agency” (Jacobs 92). In what follows, I will try to investigate the concepts of power and agency to show how the protagonists of the stories interact with other characters, and how this interaction echoes Butler’s contributions to a posthuman sense of identity.

#### **4.1 “The Book of Martha”**

“The Book of Martha” is a story that reflects the challenges between the worlds of manhood and womanhood.<sup>39</sup> This challenge is masterfully woven in a theological sketch reflects the relation of God and human being. In fact, the challenge rests on a feminist theological claim about the identification of God as a masculine Being, and how this identification influences a woman’s concept of herself and her attitude towards God and the world she recognizes through this God. Nevertheless, this challenge is not simplified to reflect a traditional Christian norm of a superior masculine Almighty and an obedient inferior female. On the contrary, I believe that Butler develops her story by revealing a parallel non-Christian approach to this relationship in which a benevolent God accompanies a woman to come to a real understanding of herself. This self-understanding helps her to recognize not only her abilities but also the masculine world which surrounds her, and to contemplate ways of changing the dominant situation. This alternative model of God-human relationship embodies a utopian hope and intention for change in which God commissions the protagonist of the story to do something to save

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<sup>39</sup>By the terms manhood and womanhood I mean the special roles, duties, and responsibilities, i.e. the worlds that man and woman occupy.

humanity from itself. Though this mission reflects Butler's familiar distrust of human nature, which she views as the source of all troubles, I also see it as the reflection of a utopian hope to change the situation through recognizing self-abilities in consultation with God.

From the first page of "The Book of Martha," Butler puts forth a feminist challenge to substitute the stereotypical image of the God-human relationship with a new one. The whole story revolves around two views about this relationship: Christian and non-Christian. According to feminist theologians like Hampson and Ruether, the historical and theological representation of the God-human relation in Christianity, and in Judaism as its background, has always been shown as God-Man. Butler's model turns to God-Woman in the story, which is very revolutionary in science fiction, especially in black feminist science fiction. In this story, Butler progressively opposes the traditional typecasting of the God-human relationship. She, it seems, creates a feminist "conceptual space" as a "different system of thought" to "critique the past from a feminist perspective," and transform it to a "life-style, a value system, and a way of conceiving of the self" (Hampson *After Christianity* 84-85). This new concept of self is entirely different from the traditional Christian perspective. In the Christian tradition, normal self-identity, modelling a transcendent God by men, who are assumed to be His natural representatives, is defined based on self-isolation for men, as well as self-denigration for women. Opposing this paradigm, Butler's model of self-identity development in "The Book of Martha" is based on a "differing conception of the self-in-relation" (84) between God and human being, where human being is not supposed to be in *Imago Dei*. Instead, God is understood by improving human self-awareness. This modelling reflects a perspective, which Hampson terms as the "theology of experience."

Explaining the God-human relationship as the basis of the Western concept of self-realization, Hampson distinguishes three models of theology: "theology of revelation," "theology as history," and "theology of experience" (*After Christianity* 280-85).

According to her explanation, theology of revelation and theology as history are the objectified frames of thought where the agency of the human being is banished, and he is displaced from “the center of the stage” (281). In a theology that is revelation kind, God is assumed as “other than the world,” creating a “‘distance’ between God and humanity” which is “traversed by a doctrine of incarnation” (281). Through this doctrine, God is assumed to reveal Himself in the world through the mechanism of revelation that is outside of the natural order of creation. In other words, this kind of theology believes in a disruption in the continuity of the natural physical laws of life by a divine interruption through a supernatural spiritual dimension.

This doctrine of the incarnation refutes the concept of humanity as a trusted source of agency in dealing with affairs concerning its salvation. In such a case, true salvation is supposed to be achieved by breaking open the self by which Hampson means the recognition of true and divine self “not on itself but on God” (*After Christianity* 281). To reconcile this anti-humanism with the concept of salvation, traditional Christian canonical texts and teachings have introduced the Trinitarian doctrine. Hampson mentions theologians like Karl Barth who used this kind of theology as a justification to highlight the position of the human being as the second person of the Trinity, “taken up into the fullness of God” (280). Nevertheless, she emphasizes that this concept in itself relays a “resounding ‘No’ to humanity” where Christ stands as an imposed ‘Yes’ on that ‘No’ (280) and, therefore, needs an intermediary agent who, in the case of Christian belief is, yet, an incarnated God. This modelling, according to Hampson, is fundamental to the Judaeo-Christian tradition.

Another type of theology that Hampson considers as fundamental to the Judaeo-Christian tradition is theology as history. In this kind of theology, God “becomes in a sense history; ‘he’ (or it) works ‘himself’ (or itself) out in history” (*After Christianity* 280). She believes that this kind of theology launches a discourse in which “history is *par excellence* a grand narrative” and “takes on a purposefulness as it moves towards a



climax or *telos*” (280). It constitutes a context, in the Hebrew Scriptures of which God is believed “bound up with the unfolding history of a nation,” and in its Christian Scriptures, “Christians look forward to an eschaton, seeking to bring about the reign of God on earth” (280). The problem with this kind of theology, far from basing self on what is beyond self, is the little concern for the individual self on the whole (281). In this perspective, the “individual is submerged in history,” and his or her salvation is achieved only if “he or she is caught up in a greater whole which will be redeemed, and that scarcely in that person’s life-time!” (281). These denigrations of self reflect masculine perspectives because they completely ignore what is fundamental in feminism, that is individuality (281).

Hampson believes that sexism is deeply laid in the traditional theological models of revelation and history. With regard to the theology of revelation, she argues,

if God transcends history and has the power to intervene in history...– why then has the lot of humanity not been otherwise? Why, in particular, has the situation of women –in all times and cultures –been what it has?... how can it be that...the supposed revelation has in *any* sense served to legitimize sexism if that revelation is indeed from God? (*After Christianity* 281)

Having a view of modern disasters in front of her eyes, Hampson distinguishes the same problem of sexism in theology as history:

As we approach the end of the twentieth century, ...we are more likely to fear that the world will end in a nuclear holocaust or in ecological degradation. Again, women must ask–if God or spirit be bound up with history –how is it that the circumstances of women have been what they have? At least on a grand scale, ‘history’ has left women out. (*After Christianity* 281)

Regarding these shortcomings, Hampson offers a third model of theology based on human awareness. This awareness is concerned with the feminist affirmation of self and the refusal of turning to God by first turning away from selfhood. She terms this

practice the “theology of experience,” and explains that it is a theology that “places the human self center-stage,” and makes God “known with and through the self” (*After Christianity* 283). According to her description, in the theology of experience, the God-human relation is neither heteronomous nor isolationist. It is not heteronomous because it does not assume that God can be understood in anthropomorphic terms as the perfection of imperfect humanity, separated and “set over against us (244). In this model of relationship, He is not a transcendent presence beyond humanity, but humans are in “transcendental” cooperation with Him (244). Hampson uses the term “transcendental” to describe the divinity following what she considers to be the recognized conventions in the Anglo-Saxon tradition of empirical experience and pragmatism in religious studies. Through observing these experiences, Hampson has come to believe that human determination plays the same effective role as that of the divine in shaping and turning situations and conditions of spiritual as well as physical life. This concept of human agency offers a model that can help us to understand the characters in Butler’s texts. Laurie considers this concept in his review of Butler’s work.

Comparing Butler’s concept of “human” with that of Deleuze, Laurie writes that both reject the “‘top down’ structuralist explanations of human behavior and cultural norms” (178). He argues that “[i]nstead, the immanent and variable necessities of creation and survival, shaped by the urgencies and traumas of lived experiences come to the foreground as starting points for ethical thinking and living” (178). In this explanation, Laurie reflects an understanding of the human being that touches my understanding and discussion to the notion of posthuman in Butler’s writing. It recognizes a kind of human who is neither shaped nor controlled by a superpower of any kind. From an ethical stance, it is the humanity that, due to its experiences, earns an ability and confidence to apply its agency to control, change, and shape its life. The following extract from “The Book of Martha” embodies this recognition:

"Don't you know what I see?" she demanded and then quickly softened her voice. "Don't you know everything?" God smiled. "No, I outgrew that trick long ago". ...  
This struck Martha as such a human thing to say that her fear diminished a little—although she was still impossibly confused.(189-90)

This “human thing” that Martha senses in God’s talk describes the non-oppressive nature of their communication which lets her to gain her subjectivity while her fear of His presence fades little by little. The question and answer model adopted here reflects a God who listens to and cares for His creatures.

Observing the overall route and affairs of the world, Hampson recognizes a “fundamental goodness” which works in an “extraordinary way” for “healing and renewal” (*After Christianity* 246). Unlike the transcendent concept of God, this fundamental goodness is not a noumenal being,<sup>40</sup> applying its power and will in mono-lateral imperialism and breaking natural laws; He is an Almighty who cooperates with human agency. Nevertheless, Hampson asserts that He is of a different kind from humanity and, therefore, it is unfitting to refer to Him in anthropomorphic terms. “The Book of Martha” reflects this notion. As I will discuss, the story is a literary narration of three anthropomorphic concepts of God and how they disappear when the protagonist improves her understanding of selfhood and divinity.

In the cultural context of the postmodern era, with its scientific heritage of modernity as historical background and its foregrounding of feminist paradigms, there is no place for “an anthropomorphic agent who is somehow other than the world” (*After Christianity* 252). Hampson views conventional beliefs such as “God is somehow ‘outside’ space or ‘before’ time” with the greatest suspicion (250). While this new generation may accept a divine understanding or spirituality, it is one that satisfies their yearning for a God who is “intimately connected with what we are” (252). Such a God

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<sup>40</sup> Opposed to phenomenon, in philosophy of Kant, noumenon is an object in itself, independent of mind. Immanuel Kant. “On External Objects.” *Critique of Pure Reason*. 1781. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Max Muller, ed. Marcus Weigelt, Revised ed. (London: Penguin Classics, 2008).

does not guarantee His greatness “at the expense of our weakness,” and His goodness at the expense of casting us “in the role of sinners” (252). This permeability adapts individuals to be centred in connection and, as a model, facilitates it for us, as humans, “to conceive of that which is more than what we are, yet with which we stand in the most intimate relation” (252). Hampson observes this relation as the ground of true salvation in human life and stresses that “in a theology of experience the individual comes into her or his own” not in isolation, but via an awareness of God obtained through the “relationship with other people” (283). It is natural that when there is going to be experience, that experience is assumed to be achieved via interaction with others, not in isolation.

The focus on relationship reflects a thoroughly feminist concern. Following it, the heteronomous understanding of the God-human relationship is germane to feminist criticism. Whether the heteronomy mirrors a masculine formulation of religious understanding, where men guarantee their position as the separated and superior representative of a transcendent God, or the Almighty God is defined through a psychological masculine self-understanding, the result is one thing: the marginalization of women as inferior. This marginalization, automatically diminishes the features related to the female and her existential interactions, the most definitive of which is relationality as I explained in previous chapter. This inferiorization of relationship discredits it in every form of connection such as that between human being and the Creator.

According to Hampson’s explanation in chapters III and VII of *After Christianity*, the human being obtains religious understanding from personal experiences. This notion openly challenges the strict masculine conception of ‘objective’ theology. Based on this feminist perspective, by recognizing personal experience, the influence of sociocultural circumstances comes to the fore, and religion emerges as a cultural production, the understanding of which varies based on the contextual setting of the self. While

Hampson recognizes degrees of internal difference between the Christian branches, like the Catholic openness to the possibility of “spirituality and awareness of God” independent of the strict grasping of the Christian doctrines, yet she notes that “if one says that theology should be based in human spiritual awareness, this is held to be ‘simply too vague’, unacceptably ‘subjective’, or just ‘waffle’ – or so it is implied” (*After Christianity* 256). This strictness is fixed in Christianity. Hampson analyses it as the masculine refutation of subjective understanding of religion, which I take as the masculine fear of feminist self-recognition, and refers it to a psychological structure which governs male desire for power and getting over a sense of loss.

Casting a meticulous look based on this view, the complex of Christian beliefs, “[f]ar from being ‘objective’,” emerges as shaped by “male experiences,” and reflects “the situation and needs of men” (*After Christianity* 257). The experiences, as Hampson distinguishes in the writings of Lacan and Irigaray,<sup>41</sup> results from the masculine fears of loss and separation from the mother in the early stages of development. In an attempt to conquer this sense of difference and loss, men come to define the sense of separation and isolation as the reflection of strength, and relegate the sense of relation and dependence as the embodiment of weakness.

Besides, Hampson points to another historical reason for the obliteration of the position of women in the religious history of Western civilization. It is the reputation of women as the bearers of “an alternative wisdom” (*After Christianity* 257). Reviewing it under “horrendous history... of men trying to control,” Hampson explains that reputation of women as retainers of “the healing power of herbs,” could overshadow “the power of the (male) church” (257). Confrontation with this feminine alternative has led to the emergence of a totalitarian male theological perspective that is not welcoming towards alternative understandings. Cassandra L. Jones recognizes the same binary of authorized Christian science versus heretical non-Christian one in her dissertation. In

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<sup>41</sup> For more information read chapters III, IV, and V of *After Christianity*.

her reading that is done from a postcolonial perspective, she focuses on the characterization of black protagonists in Butler's works who, in a "counter discursive mode," challenge "dominant racist discourses" by producing, carrying and introducing an alternative knowledge (28). This pattern is seen in the introduction of Earthseed in the *Parables* and, I believe, is true about the new mission that Martha is appointed with in "The Book of Martha."

Jones sees the clash between the Christian and non-Christian knowledge in Butler's oeuvre as a clash between "colonialist science fiction's dismissal of indigenous religions" and postcolonial reviving of indigenous cultural heritage, including religions (29). But, the clash, I believe, cannot be limited within colonial discourse. The prominent presence of women as bearers of new messages, which novelty distances them from a mere reminder of a past cultural history, represents Butler as a writer who consciously strives to render womanhood authentic in creating or conveying an alternative knowledge. Martha is an illustration of this understanding and is presented as a woman writing a book of her own, which is her alternative knowledge. This alternative knowledge includes her spiritual considerations.

Hampson introduces theology of experience as a model which recognizes the freedom of human agency in dealing with the divine dimension, with no gender-related restrictions. She presents three types of spiritual practices to enhance a more open and humanitarian awareness of that dimension of reality which is God. These practices have the capacity to nurture their practitioners to demand and play an equal role in interaction with that sacred dimension and the earthly order of life which follows it. These practices stand on the fundamental principle of avoiding the great sin of "domination of other life" (*After Christianity* 259) which, according to Hampson, can be "other persons and exploitation of the animal creation" (259). Related to this view are her positions on patriarchy as the "first-order-crime," and "compassion for others" as the "hallmark of the spiritual life" (259). She asserts that "truly spiritual people," in

the theology of experience, are those who “let others grow and blossom in their presence” and, therefore, “foster human becoming” (259).

With these observations, Hampson introduces three practices of true spirituality: “attention,” “honesty,” and “ordering.” “Attention” or “attending,” in her words, is “a way of being in the world,... an ethical stance” which empowers one to “listening to, and watching both oneself and others” (*After Christianity* 260). It involves “allowing oneself to be affected by art or great literature, or being observant of nature,” and doing so, helps a person “to grow and change and so make appropriate response when response is called for” (260). Based on this definition, she accepts that the practice of “attention” is, somehow, a complex mode which, while “keeping a certain critical distance” from the setting, is yet “deeply involved, in the sense of caring for that to which one attends” (260). Unlike traditional spiritual behaviour, which demands “making decision in accordance with abstract and impersonal norms” in everyday life (261), attention constitutes a kind of ethics that recognizes performances based on contextual appropriation. Hampson believes that because of their “social situatedness,” notably “at the center of family,” women have developed an openness to environmental voices and, therefore, they are good communicators (262). A feature of this art of communication that Hampson highlights as central is the ability of attending as a good listener.

“Listening” is fundamental to Hampson’s theology. In fact, one cannot assume perfect communication without listening. Clearly, a genuine relationship can never be cultivated with monologue. Instead, it would need to be a dialogue, where both sides exchange thoughts and emotions. Hampson extends the pattern to include the God-human relationship. In this communicative kind of relationship, her symbolized God is not “that single eye which terrifyingly looked down on medieval worshippers from the chancel wall,” but an “ear” (*After Christianity* 263). Through this symbol, she reflects her sense of God as “hearing” humans into being. The imagery stands contrary to the

masculine conception of the God-human relationship which normalizes the image of humans listening to God through the reading of Scriptures; an image which is emphasized and reemphasized by male clergymen (263). Hampson compares this kind of relationship with the male-female relationship – in Christian tradition, God is assumed as male before humanity that is assumed as female (125) – where “it is peculiarly healing when men listen to women” (264). If the relationship between God and humans be understood and accepted as a mutual attending, it will have a healing effectiveness, addressing world problems. Hampson concludes this debate by emphasizing that none of them will be possible if humanity does not achieve a centeredness oneself (264).

The second practice of the true spirituality, which Hampson directly links to integration and attention is “honesty.” By “honesty,” she explains that she does not solely mean “not telling lies,” but “a complete integrity” that involves “for example, not exaggerating, or not weighting the evidence in one’s favour in a disagreement. ...., reading carefully (with attention, one might say) and representing the view of others accurately” (*After Christianity* 265). To put it in concise words, it is “seeing oneself in a true light,” that is “to be integral to one’s whole self-understanding” and “gain a sense of oneself” (265). Hampson furthers her debate to say that “honesty” is to have a “fundamentally friendly attitude towards others rather than a tendency to take oppositional and defensive stance (265). Nevertheless, she emphasizes that “(...particularly in the case of women) it should entail the ability to be forthright about one’s own strengths and talents” (265). She also is cognizant of the possibility of “personal fantasy” in practicing honesty when she talks of strengths and talents. Based on her explanations, it is an escape, an inability, or “self-induced blindness” in front of the situations that are painful to the psyche, through which the individual protects him or herself by “self-aggrandizing and consoling wishes and dreams” (265-266).



A look at the depicted relation of God and Martha in “The Book of Martha” shows that the form and quality of their interaction reveals both practices of honesty and attention. This co-appearance, as I will explain in the theoretical discussion that follows, reflects the interconnectivity of the practices as a unified whole. Martha and God have a friendly interaction where the exchange of views is not based on mono-directional orders from God towards Martha. It is a dialogical practice of spirituality on both sides: God does not take an oppositional stance towards Martha’s imperfect plans, nor does Martha feel threatened to repress and censor her own concerns. I will explain this spiritual mutuality through references to the story later in this chapter.

The third option which Hampson introduces as a fundamental practice to lead a centred and spiritual life is “ordering.” “Ordering,” in her words, is “having a certain control over one’s time and one’s affairs” (*After Christianity* 266). For Hampson, regarding this practice, “procrastination” and “scattiness” are “the greatest sin” and “the most selfish of the vices” (266). She claims that ‘ordering’ is “not just a personal idiosyncrasy... but a social discipline (266). From this perspective, “ordering” is an aspect of the theology of experience which attentively aims at guaranteeing change and growth: “A person drowning in the chaos of her own life is unlikely to be free in herself to be present to another” (267). It is clear that when someone is present to another one, s/he is practicing “attending.” This attending is a conscious involvement through which the practitioner gets in, to change an already turbulent or a lethargic situation whether sociocultural or economic. To be successful, such a practice should be based on a clear objective and plan; a mind obsessed with the mess of its own life cannot successfully participate in such a practice.

Hampson believes that the concept of “ordering” as a social discipline is a skill which is decisively unified with the life of many women. She again describes it as a product of the social situatedness of women which sees them “at the center of a many-faceted existence” where “juggling different demands on their time and energy,” they

go on to “exercise a reasonable control” (*After Christianity* 266-67). If feminism is a theoretical understanding which lets women create a conceptual space compatible with their needs and perspectives, ‘ordering’ is the critical practice of this conceptual space which provides women with “space and time and freedom” for things that are crucial in their life (267). “The Book of Martha” vividly reflects such a practice.

In the beginning of the story, the narrator describes Martha’s confrontation with God in a spatial position which confuses her:

“Where is this?” she asked, not really wanting to know, not wanting to be dead when she was only forty-three. “Where am I?”

“Here with me,” God said.

“Really here?” she asked. “Not at home in bed dreaming? Not locked in a mental situation? Not... not lying dead in a morgue?”

“Here,” God said softly. “With me.”

After a moment, Martha was able to take her hands from her face and look again at the greyness around her and at God. “This can’t be heaven,” she said. “There’s nothing here, not one here but you.”

“Is that all you see?” God asked.

This confused her even more. “Don’t you know what I see?” she demanded and then quickly softened her voice. “Don’t you know everything?” (“The Book of Martha” 189)

The conversation obviously shows that “The Book of Martha” is about the struggle of a woman to define a space for her thoughts or individuality. It prefigures two spaces: a space associated with divine presence, which is described as grey and mystifying, and a space associated with Martha’s view and understanding, symbolized through the removal of her hands from her face, reflecting her desire to know where she exactly is and under what conditions. These two spaces, alternatively, describe masculine and feminine spaces related with the traditional reflection of Christian doctrine of masculine God and feminine humanity. From a feminist perspective, the removal of the hand embodies a self-declaring gesture of a woman who starts to put aside what has covered her self-consciousness and demand a brighter space of her own based on self-

recognition. Through this self-recognition, she develops an understanding of her power to shape an existential space of her own that is not based on a passive acceptance of an omniscient divinity. Relying on this understanding, the protagonist initiates a controlling practice to, firstly, have her life in her hands and, then, contemplate plans to revive the humanitarian life of her fellow beings.

At this point, Martha employs “ordering” strategies to actualize her control on her life, thereby, creating her own space. The strategy or technique that she resorts to for this end is dialogue. Involved in mutual question and answer with God, which in its turn embodies a feminine interest, Martha gains the knowledge and confidence to control the way, aim, and end of her life. To deal with this notion, it is necessary to consider it in relation with the two other practices because, as I explained already, dialogue is an “attending” pattern.

They are ‘life practices’ which equip one to be “at peace with oneself” and, certainly, such a peace is not achievable “with the clutter in one’s life” (*After Christianity* 268). To be at peace means to be present to oneself and, therefore, it “involves clarity and directness” (269). It creates an integrated person who “is free to attend to others. ... whether to other people or to the world of nature” (269), and gain the confidence which comes with having control over her or his own world. Such a person will come to feel “‘at home’ with oneself and in tune with the world,” have “strength in oneself”, enjoy “a level of self-integration to attend to oneself and to other,” and to be “fearless” and demanding of “self-control” (269). These are virtues that openly oppose those assumed as virtuous for women within Christianity.

Hampson names some of the traditional Christian disciplines like “self-denial,” “self-denigration,” and “self-flagellation” as fundamental virtues in Christianity. She also points to an essential belief of Christianity through which human beings come to know themselves as sinners (*After Christianity* 270). Because these disciplines are based on a profound theological ideology according to which “to place oneself at the

centre is understood as a manifestation of the sin of pride” (270), sticking to them stifles any intention for change and growth. Opposite to this ideology, any feminist movement for growth and transition focuses on the concept of self-knowledge, presence, and centeredness. Because of this discrepancy, Hampson believes that Christianity is incompatible with feminism. She replaces it with the theology of experience which, she believes, as a theological model is responsive to the spiritual as well as physical needs of human life. Unlike the tradition of looking to men for spiritual guidance, the new spiritual recognition provides a space for women to recognize and manifest their visions of spirituality (271) beyond the stereotypical role models valorised in traditional masculinity.

Theology of experience verifies a just and egalitarian theological direction in which there are no “sexist presuppositions about the ‘natural’ ordering of society” (*After Christianity* 272). It does not presume a hierarchical order in which God stands above humanity, determining select male mediators as his best representatives to convey his message. In this conception, there is no necessity for the recognition of men as the “counsellors of women,” and woman is “empowered to take her own needs seriously” (272). In this kind of theology, there is no unique representative of God to “direct the life of another in a non-reciprocal way” (272). Hampson’s theology of experience claims for itself an openness in conceptualizing both God and humanity. Its conceived God is not “a ‘Thou’ placed in opposition to oneself,” and its assumed humanity is not a disempowered obedient object in the hands of a “higher power” (272). Hampson’s reflection of human beings in this observation boasts a manifest feminist understanding of a subject who enjoys a balanced harmony within him or herself, and comes to have a reciprocal constructive interaction with the lively world outside. I believe Butler’s characterization of Martha in “The Book of Martha” gets close to this kind of understanding.

“The Book of Martha” starts with a conversation between God and Martha. It becomes clear from the very beginning that God has a mission for Martha. This mission emerges like a utopian dream which aims at the future of human life by reconsidering past and present norms and beliefs. The very notion of mission and the exchanged arguments, I believe, reflect a different non-Christian understanding of the God-human relationship as the initial step to achieve the goals that God is clarifying for Martha. This new understanding reflects the outlook of the theology of experience. Unlike the traditional Christian perspective, it presumes a non-heteronomous relationship between God and human being, here woman, and due to it, reflects a new ordering of human life in contrast to the hierarchical mono-directional masculine conception of obey and worship. Hampson elaborates on worship and obedience as the “hierarchical modes of being” (*After Christianity* 251) which demand a full submission to God’s will. In what Butler depicts, we do not see any focus on such surrender, whether expected by God or felt by humanity. As it appears, from the beginning, God has a mission for Martha, but this mission is not that of the must-be-fulfilled variety as found in traditional theologies depicting, for example, Jesus and Mary obedient to what God as creator decides. In fact, Martha resembles much more a free agent who is not beholden to a creator, but who works in cooperation with a benevolent transcendental being who recognizes her freedom to accept or deny His visions. As I explained earlier, related with these concepts of worship and obedience is the notion of God as an omnipotent creator.

Hampson’s feminist theism rules out the concept of God as creator. She states that belief in God as creator is inconsistent with the “experiential evidence that prayer is effective or spiritual healing possible” (*After Christianity* 247). The effectiveness of prayer or the possibility of spiritual healing is tied with the recognition of the human agent as a free partner cooperating with God in conducting world affairs. It is very important to notice the lack of an Almighty ever-present holy divinity in the divine-human relationship present in Butler’s “The Book of Martha”; Butler’s concept differs

radically from the canonical Christian understanding. Like Hampson, Butler's concept of the God-human relationship focuses on humanity. This new kind of humanity is not the male figure of the traditional Trinity who stands second to the Holy Father and has no other temptation besides fulfilling His wishes. In the traditional Christian model, humanity has no autonomous existence of itself and its existence is defined in God's existence. But, through Martha, Butler creates a new concept of posthumanity, which recognizes and develops an autonomous sense of self through a process of mutuality. Butler's posthuman representative is a She missionary, or a She Messiah, who neither negates the presence of God, relegating Him to a phenomenon that results from human projection,<sup>42</sup> nor refutes the equal partnership of masculine and feminine force beside the Divine-human relationship.

Martha's gradual recognition of her "centeredness" enables her to define order and discipline of her surroundings based on this understanding. For sure, this symbolizes a feminist world-view; a feminist sense of life which contrasts with masculine norms and understandings. Nevertheless, it does not presuppose a sexist prioritizing of "attending" feminine virtues over "ignoring" masculine ones. Instead, it deals with what is human, and considers these virtues genuine human concerns, regardless of sexual prejudices. It does not negate and relegate masculinity to the realm of nonsense, but brings up a more conclusive model. Unlike the traditional masculine symbolism of Jesus Christ, it does not restrain itself by sticking to an alternative female iconic imagery replacing "the appalling picture of a naked and bleeding man impaled on an executioner's gibbet" (*After Christianity* 270). This openness embodies a challenge between masculine and feminine forces associated with everyday life, but it also manages this challenge, preventing it from turning into a schism between these two worlds. The allusions which Butler makes to the male models in the story work to balance the masculine and

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<sup>42</sup> This idea nested in the contemplations of figures like Hegel and came to flourish in the works of thinkers like Feuerbach and Marx. Complete discussion at: Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich. *Philosophy of Religion*, 1837. Squashed version edited by Glyn Hughes © 2011.

feminine voices of the story in an ordering of life. Butler, masterfully, handles her story as a postmodern force of transformation that works to reform and not to deform.

“The Book of Martha” reflects a postmodern recognition of God, or better, a postmodern theology. This recognition helps Martha shape a wholly new understanding of herself and humanity. As the story proceeds, following Martha’s increasing knowledge and understanding, the masculine concept of God changes step by step. The image of God changes from the “twice-live-sized, bearded white man” (190) of the early story to the “familiar woman’s body beneath the blue jeans and black T-shirt... as though it had come from Martha’s own closet” (212) at the end of the story. As the story continues, in the critical moment when Martha decides to choose her way and destiny, this figure fades, “becoming translucent, transparent, gone” (213). The first imagery exactly echoes Virginia Woolf’s description of the embodiment of men’s power, which domesticizes women as ‘looking-glasses’ to reflect the superiority of men: “Women have served all these centuries as looking-glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size. Without that power probably the earth would still be swamp and jungle” (41). This power reflection, according to Woolf, constitutes the basis of the masculine world-view which has worked through centuries to enlarge its power and control over the rest of the world. It represents itself as a legislative power which, under the disguise of disciplining affairs, covers man’s weakness and symbolizes him as the perfect representative of God. The possibility of any challenging voice or ‘being,’ especially female, in equality with this masculine power is nullified by relegating it to an inferior position. The injustice of such an understanding is whitewashed by appointing womanhood to the status of a ‘protected sex’ requiring support (40). Such a treatment has kept femininity malleable in the hands of masculinity for a long time, and has prevented women from accessing the necessary knowledge and facilities to improve their position. Feminist awakening raised a big challenge against this domestication, and since its emergence, has worked

to theorize a ground for the flourish of self-understanding on behalf of womanhood. As a branch of it, feminist theology has taken the same route. The second and third imageries referred to above, embody this awakening.

To explain women's coming to self-understanding, Woolf points to the concept of 'centeredness.' In this kind of centeredness, releasing herself from historical adjustments, the woman no longer considers herself as an ancillary agent or one in need of protection, but someone with tenable and trustable abilities. Woolf writes:

if she begins to tell the truth, the figure in the looking-glass shrinks; his fitness for life is diminished. How is he to go on giving judgment, civilizing natives, making laws, writing books, dressing up and specifying at banquets, unless he can see himself at breakfast and at dinner at least twice the size he really is? (41)

This self-understanding is a simultaneous practice of "honesty," "attention," and "order." It challenges the entire historical adjustments that, as the codes of righteousness, have misused religious justifications to keep women in their place. Through these practices, woman comes to recognize and reflect a true understanding of her entity and ability. In other words, she develops the knowledge and, consequently, the confidence to be true to herself. The second image, which I referred to above, illustrates this understanding. Martha no longer sees God as a "twice-live-sized" man, but a woman like herself. Her God is not a man with legislative authority to whom she was taught to refer for the authentication of her thoughts and actions. This new conception equips her with the mental courage and freedom to trust her understandings and, therefore, take her life under her own control. This God emerges as an entity on equal terms with her, or how Martha's mind understands Her (God as female) at this phase. It may seem that Butler reflects this understanding at the beginning of the communication between Martha and God:



“You see what your life has prepared you to see,” God said.  
“I want to see what’s really here!”  
“Do you? What you see is up to you, Martha. Everything is up to you.” (“The Book of Martha” 191)

I see the conversation as an illumination from God that shows He recognizes human agency through acknowledging the authenticity of human understanding as a reflection of his will. To explain, here God, addressing Martha, stresses that her journey of understanding depends on her own determination to take it. Yet, the quote also has another layer. Through the exchanged sentences, God exposes Martha to the fact that human’s reasoning functions in a reductionist perspective that formalizes his theological contemplation. The interaction reflects two understandings: a reasonable masculine view, which embodies the scientific modernist understanding, and that of a feminine one, which touches existence and relations. The masculine view that I am pointing to here is the modernist understanding of the recent century. As I discussed in previous pages, this understanding reduces an entity like God to a phenomenon projected by human knowledge. In contradistinction to this idea lies the common feminist notion that focuses on the authenticity of personal understanding of a world seen within a relational context. Martha’s understanding engages both notions. On the one hand, she sees God in a way that her mind has prepared her to view Him: at first as a man, who initially is white and then turns to black – “She looked upward ..., then looked at God and saw, ... he was black now, and clean shaven” (208) – and after that, as a woman who resembles herself. This observation, somehow, reflects a feminine sense of relationality, where her mind defines her and her God based on the mutual interaction they have together. On the other hand, Martha emphasizes she wants to see what is exactly there. The emphasis embodies a masculine objective reasoning which seeks to provide a theoretical frame of observation for describing its understanding. Though reductionist, the two dimensions reflect a progressive movement in Martha’s self-assertion.

Exposed to the conversation, Martha comes to think on the entity addressing her and the nature of His mission for her. It is in this state of mind that she stops figuring him as man and, soon after, turns to have a feminine conception of him, while wanting to know what exactly is there. This phase reflects a state of in-betweenness in Martha's understanding which, in its turn, heralds a promising movement forward from the regular masculine conception. The in-betweenness resides on two aspects. In one aspect, it reflects a feminine reconceptualization of an entity based on her views and, in another, reveals the masculine tradition of solidifying a trustable basis for this view.

At this stage, Martha develops an understanding of God as the reflection of herself. Though this understanding is sexist in its nature, it nevertheless is a conscious step to remove the veneer of superiorized masculinity from the image of God. The end of the story, where Martha abandons the sexual reflection of God, whether masculine or feminine, verifies the progressive nature of this movement. Describing the phases of feminist awakening, Woolf explains two stages of sex-consciousness and sexlessness (106-10). Sex-consciousness is a state of mind in which femaleness is superiorized and concepts and mental understandings are attributed with feminine features to compensate for the ignorance and suppression imposed by masculine dominance. Martha's female conception of God reflects this stage. Though this conceptualization reflects the awakening of a mind which strives to concretize its understanding as an authentic one, it is still susceptible to the same sexism which it recognizes in the superiority that masculine understandings claim in dealing with phenomena.

Sexlessness is the next stage of this process. As Woolf explains, it is a mature state of mental understanding and expression which is not bonded within sexual lines. For Woolf, every physiological body has two sides or states of mind which are masculine and feminine (106-10). In those who are obsessively concerned with masculine authenticity, the masculine side of mind is dominant. The same is with those feminists who are concerned with feminine superiority; in them their feminine side of mind is

dominant. None of these states is natural per se. A balanced and harmonious state of mind occurs when these two sides are in harmony and one does not dominate the other. This state embodies the most perfect human understanding, and is achieved when humanity releases him/herself from sexual boundaries. I believe that when Martha ceases to have a female conception of God at the end of “The Book of Martha,” this reflects this perfect human mentality. Hampson is concerned with the same sexist notion of God when she describes the aberrations within the feminist movement.

There is a trend between some Christian Feminists who, according to Hampson, in an attempt to unite themselves with divinity, liken God to themselves as ‘our friend’ (*After Christianity* 244) and, therefore, attribute a feminine entity to Him. Hampson emphatically refutes this notion as a kind of paganism, explaining that, through this imagery, God is metamorphosed to god. She believes in a kind of a God who has His agency and power, different in quality from that of human and, yet, recognizing human agency to enact his role to establish a hopeful situation of life. This understanding is a kind of optimistic theism that acknowledges the possibility of change and growth through accepting the effectiveness of both divine and human agency. Butler ends her story with the same theistic understanding.

Through the story, we see God discussing and demonstrating the shortcomings of Martha’s plans to help her fulfil her mission. The first point here is that the mission is from God and Martha is asked to accomplish it. In this way, Butler stays away from compromising the divinity of God at the expense of human subjectivity. The second point is God’s trust in Martha’s process of decision making. As we see, God does not impose His presence and propositions on her. Butler embodies a postmodern situation where the mutual interaction of human with God leads to the development of her self-consciousness, without abnegating the Godness of God. What I mean here is that, throughout the story, God emerges as an inspiring goodness who guides Martha, but does not restrain her way of coming to understanding.

The conversation starts a chain of dialogue, through which, Butler embodies her view about the subjective development of a woman. As the conversations reflect, Martha has been challenged with many obstacles leading to her independent and respectful position as a citizen. Determined to control her life, she has incessantly striven to proclaim and fix her position as an intellectual black woman with religious beliefs opposed to dominant societal norms.

Through Martha's arguments, Butler mirrors the mental ability of a woman to shape her world based on what she sees and achieves, not based on what she has already been taught. In contrast to the standardized Christian norms of thought and behaviour, she reflects a feminine desire to have a self-trusted base of understanding in response to self and what is beyond the self. In this story, Butler exemplifies the development of the ethical awareness of a woman, whom I take as the symbolic incarnation of the feminist ideals of an independent woman who strives towards a "divine identity."

But, what is "divine identity" and what is the relationship between "divine identity" and the independence of a woman? To be independent in a dominant masculine world, it is imperative to have an equality with masculinity. As Hampson clarifies through reference to Irigaray, such an equality and its consequent "subjectivity" would not be achievable "without a fundamental respect for the subjective rights of both sexes, including the right to a divine identity" (*After Christianity* 76). According to Hampson, this subjectivity equates with the real sense of self-understanding.

Divine identity is not a side-issue of self-understanding. As the natural core of theology, it deals with human being's concept of God as fundamentally constitutive of the attitude towards, and understanding of, the different aspects of life. Martha's construction of a notion of God that opposes the orthodox notion of the Almighty is, then, also an attempt to shape all the other aspects of her life. In other words, it helps her to develop a "changed subjectivity" and, therefore, "gain a new sense of self" (*After Christianity* 75). Through this developing characterization, Martha gets close to

touching the core of Hampson's theology. The new sense of identity that Martha reflects is not achievable within traditional Christian spirituality. The Christian "transcendent monotheism" with its extraordinary views of an Almighty male has "the effect of consolidating a certain construal of gender" through which "[p]articular gender arrangements... are thought to conform to the way in which things ought to be" (89). Butler's Martha, as we see, represents the opposite of this expected obedience. She reflects a determination to construct a world based on her own ethical understanding, and not blindly accepting prescribed masculine norms and models.

"The book of Martha" depicts two forces that are traditionally assumed to work in a Christian context. These forces are divine masculinity and feminine humanity. But, as the story proceeds, we come to see that the apparent conflict of these two forces does not reflect the traditional feminist critique of masculine mastery. Here, we do not have a feminist refutation of full masculinity. In truth, the story refutes some masculine norms like worship and obedience. As a matter of fact, the story embodies the attempt of a woman to offer a solution for improving the life and existence of her fellow beings. She ends up with the understanding that, to achieve such a goal, she must establish her position by refining and defining the realm of her spiritual life.

In an inspiring comparison at the outset of the conversation, Martha likens God to "a living version of Michelangelo's Moses ... . Except that God was more fully dressed than Michelangelo's Moses, wearing from neck to ankles, the kind of long, white robe that she had so often seen in paintings of Christ" (190-91). The comparison continues in the conversations that follow. The way that Butler describes this awesome God (regarding the solemnity with which Moses is associated and Christ as God's son) and the fact that Martha is addressed by this God like a Moses-figure and, unlike the traditional Moses, does not surrender herself to His ubiquity, helps Butler to highlight the two forces mentioned above. Despite their traditionally presumed hostility, the forces emerge to reveal a notion of uniqueness in this imagery: the strong masculine

ever-presence, on the one side, and, on the other side, a demanding feminine power that does not recognize herself based on the stereotypical roles instructed and prescribed by Biblical authors. Other descriptions are also arranged to clarify the initial challenge and the gradual merging of the two forces in the story. For example, in the early discussions in which Martha still contemplates on her Christian background, Butler shows God's interaction with her along with a male gaze:

He didn't answer at once. He looked at her with what she read as amusement—looked at her long enough to make her even more uncomfortable.

“What do you want me to do?” she repeated, her voice stronger this time. (191)

Martha's response to God here reflects a sense of obedience. Nevertheless, at the same time, she starts to raise her voice in front of this God; moving away from His shadow.

Another example is the role models God puts in front of Martha, asking her to consider them:

“I have a great deal of work for you” he said at last. “As I tell you about it, I want you to keep three people in mind: Jonah, Job, and Noah. Remember them. Be guided by their stories.”

“All right,” she said because he had stopped speaking, and it seemed that she should say something. “All right.” (191)

Here we have the masculine voice of a God who demands obedience through naming some examples, all male missionaries. The stories of these models are reminiscent of the tradition of reward and punishment. However, this mono-directional power play does not continue in the way that traditional feminist reading expects. The other non-Christian understanding that Martha develops in interaction with this God, emerges as a mediated power relation of the story. As Martha's mental Moses imagery reflects, God and Martha are equalized as Moses-figures and Father/Son unity, as His Christ-like worn robe reminds her. Martha's equalization with God is an unorthodox role reversal

and its significance is understandable given the traditional Biblical view about the God-human relationship, where the human is the passive receptive partner.

First, it is important to note that this Moses-like God is described wearing like Christ. Jewish and Christian traditions are blended here. The God of the Jewish tradition, reflected in the Hebrew Bible, embodies a powerful Father-figure whose will rules the world. It is a rule with no interruption from any other agent. The form and content of His relationship with humanity is defined within the frame of the Covenant.<sup>43</sup> Fortifying this allusion is the attached reference to Jesus Christ. As Hampson emphasizes, both Jewish and Christian traditions share a similar belief about the nature of human relationship with God, that is its hierarchical conception (*After Christianity* 129). The God of Christianity is the same Father-figure borrowed from Judaism. He is a kingly father who resides ‘in heaven,’ and His will is fulfilled, though not realized (129). In relation to Him, the human mind is expected to understand “a feudal relationship of absolute dependence” because, as Father, he was “the head of family” and “was designated in what was a deeply patriarchal society” (129). In such a patriarchal understanding, every kind of relationship is legitimated within the Father/Son relationship—the Incarnation – where “the essence of the father” as “seed” is transmitted to son, generation after generation (135). The Biblical tradition recognizes it as a liberating mechanism which, prescribing and receiving obedience and sacrifice, makes it possible for humanity to gain salvation.

Butler in “The Book of Martha” plays with the dichotomy of the Father/Son as the spine of Christian belief. Reflecting Martha’s first consideration of God, the Moses-like God somehow reflects the notion of a transcendent Present Father. But, following the comparison, we see Martha is reciprocally likened to Him as a Moses-figure, being addressed and verified by Him. Martha’s character here, in one sense, interferes with the

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<sup>43</sup> In the Biblical tradition, there are several categories of Covenants aim of which is to bridge the distance between supreme God and humanity by offering a frame of complete obedience for humanity. These Covenants are agreements between God and humanity, based on which, God promises to protect and reward his chosen people if they have absolute dependence and obey in front of Him.

Father/Son imagery, transforming it into something like a model of Father/daughter. In another sense, it substitutes the hierarchy of the traditional Father/son with a more levelled pattern of God-human relationship through which the agency of human being as a co-working partner of the divinity is acknowledged. Later on, Butler talks of another present binary – a mother/daughter relationship – in referring to Martha’s mother. The binary, regarding Hampson’s reference to the feudal Father-figure of God as the head of the family and the Father/son dichotomy, brings to the fore the other ignored and related binary. The reflection of these ignored relationships makes it clear that the story, unlike the Christian prescription, is concerned with a gendered pattern of relationship that is not overly strict.

As the story proceeds, we see that the God of “The Book of Martha” is not a patriarchal authority dictating gendered rules and obligations. Regarding the second example I referred to, it is important to notice that God in his mission for Martha, in fact, likens her to the three people whom she is expected to keep in mind. In other words, in the absence of intermediary agents,<sup>44</sup> God directly addresses Martha like a Moses-figure, as if she is another one in the line of prophethood:

Jonah had tried to run away from the work and from God, but God had caused him to be shipwrecked, swallowed by a great fish, and given to know that he could not escape.

Job had been the tormented pawn who lost his property, his children, and his health, in a bet between God and Satan. And when Job proved faithful... God rewarded Job with even greater wealth, new children, and restored health.

As for Noah, ... God ordered him to build an ark and save his family and a lot of animals because God had decided to flood the world and kill everyone and everything else. (192)

It is true that the references reverberate a male imagery of role models, worship, and obedience, or a tradition of Covenant, on the whole. But, the coin also has another side.

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<sup>44</sup> By intermediary I mean priests or the interpreters of religious texts who normally are men.



The clarification which is explained through Martha's contemplation of the Biblical history of these figures reflects an awareness that is burgeoning in her mind. This awareness is a harbinger of a practice of "attending" that she fulfils on behalf of herself and others. In addition to reminding Martha of the inevitability of God's will, these Biblical figures remind her of personal responsibility before others. In fact, they are reminiscent of the responsibility of the individual within society. She is familiar with the stories since childhood. As a girl, she was taken to church and Sunday School to attend Bible class and the vacation Bible school, because her mother "wanted her child to be "good" and to her, "good" meant "religious" ("The Book of Martha" 192). Related with this sense of responsibility is the description we have from the mother. Butler notes that she was "only a girl herself, hadn't known much about being a mother" (192). Here, Butler is pointing to what passes in Martha's mind. Right now, as a grown up educated black writer, Martha is conscious of the sufferings afflicting her race and gender. But, it is not all. She is also conscious of the mechanism of righteousness, prescribed in the Christian norms here, which shapes, guides, and controls people in over determined ways. Having this understanding, and being confronted with the divine order, Martha faces the essential question of why she is supposed "to remember these three Biblical figures in particular? What had they do with her—especially Job and all his agony?" (192) I believe, the mission and God's order to remember these stories are examples of divine beneficence that equip Martha with the power she needs in her mission.

Clarifying Martha's mission, God says: "This is what you're to do, ... You will help humankind to survive its greedy, murderous, wasteful adolescence. Help to find less destructive, more peaceful, sustainable ways to live." (192) To do it, God emphasizes "I won't be sending you back home with another message that people can ignore or twist to suit themselves. ... You'll borrow some of my power," (193). To share the divine power, Martha must have a full understanding of herself, her weak

points, and her abilities. Remembering the religious teaching of her childhood in the case of the stories that God refers her to, Martha emphasizes that she “had come to regard their stories as parables rather than literal truths” (192). Here, Martha openly explains that she has lost the Christian belief with which she was brought up. God’s order to turn back and consider the stories of her childhood, in her present situation, works as a motivator that not only revives a sense of social responsibility or ‘attending’ in her, but also functions as a more active theological modelling from God on her behalf.

Turning back to childhood stories incites Martha to rethink her past with a different understanding. Her current situation is entirely different from what she has been, and where she has come from. Right now, she is a writer, with a much better social position. Her childhood, as we understand from the explanations about her mother and her own experiences, has not been a sweet one. Explaining her mission, God tells her:

“When you’ve finished your work, you’ll go back and live among them again as one of their lowliest. You’re the one who will decide what that will mean, but whatever you decide is to be the bottom level of society, the lowest class or caste or race, that’s what you’ll be.” (193)

The mission and this conversation lead Martha to review her entire childhood and the miseries that used to afflict her and her mother. She remembers how her mother, a child herself, which shows she was a victim of abusive social relations, worked hard to bring her up as a good Christian. In Martha’s reflections, there is no reference to any practical action of her mother to change the terrible situation of their life. The mother embodies a passive and obedient figure whose only concern is what her Christian mentors have to tell her. The teachings guarantee a mental asylum for her, where she is not encouraged to change her situation. In other words, they embody a place in her mind where she resides to avoid the difficulties of her life. When Martha alludes to her upbringing, we see her mother’s only concern is to raise her as “good,” that is to say, a

religious person. In the kind of religious education which she has received as a woman, she is not ultimately responsible for anything. She has models like Saint Mary and a few other Biblical women as well as a lot of men, whose lives have nothing to do with her life. What she learns from these models is just to follow what is asked of her as a good Christian. Her duty is to be patient, and leave everything to a God who will finally overturn the abusive condition. This is the core of the tradition of Liberalism in orthodox Christian theology.

The Liberal tradition of the Christian orthodoxy talks of a God who works “to overturn the hierarchies of this world” (*After Christianity* 132). In Hampson’s explanation, this kind of theology embodies a God who stands for the repressed ones. In the end, He replaces the lords of the power with those whose rights have been violated. In other words, Christian Liberalism guarantees the interference of a God who, whenever necessary, will act as a saviour to save humanity from the evil of its deeds. Based on this view, He usually does it by sending his representatives, who are men and convey and preach His message. Whenever these representatives are not patient enough to complete their mission, like the case of Jonah, God will interfere personally to accomplish it, punishing the representatives.

Hampson raises some doubts about the efficacy of the Christian theology as a liberal doctrine of belief to solve the suppressive problems that afflict women’s lives. She observes Christianity as a belief whose basis is laid on the passing of the divine essence and responsibility from the Father to the Son and, therefore, paving the way for the integration of power in the hands of his representatives, who traditionally are males. Lorde also elaborates the same concepts when she argues that we cannot “dismantle the master’s house” when relying on “master’s tools” (110-14).<sup>45</sup> Following her explanation of the masculine nature of Christianity, Hampson does not believe that Christianity, as a liberating belief, has the potential to understand and address the problems that affect

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<sup>45</sup> It is taken from the title of her essay “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle The Master’s House” in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*, 2007.

women's lives. As I discussed in the previous chapter, it is a religion which focuses on a special male figure (Jesus Christ) whose character, time, and deeds suit the needs of a patriarchal society while this figure and his time and its norms are particularized and recommended to be replicated in all times and situations (*Theology and Feminism* 9-11).

The above-mentioned quotation, where God emphasizes that Martha will be at the 'bottom-level' of society, works to dismantle the Liberal tradition of Christian theology. The God whom Butler depicts here does not reveal any intention, or even capacity, to interfere on behalf of His messenger and overturn the repressing consequences of her mission. Unlike the traditional stories of reward which she knows about Noah, Job, and even Jonah, she is warned that she cannot expect to be rewarded for her suffering and patience. In other words, He does not enforce Martha with another Covenantal mission. He is a God who invites Martha to share his power to improve the situation. It is an "attending" practice which Martha is expected to accomplish because of herself and her fellow beings. In fact, in this case, God openly shows that it is partly the duty of humanity to rise and change the situation and not leave it entirely to God. Having left her Christian upbringing behind, Martha reveals the determination of a changed mind that understands her role and responsibility and is committed to fulfil what is necessary. Answering God about her low level in society, Martha emphasizes:

"I was born on the bottom level of society, ... You must have known that." ...

"I was born poor, black, and female to a fourteen-year-old mother who could barely read. We were homeless half the time while I was growing up. Is that bottom-level enough for you? I was born on the bottom, but I didn't stay there. I didn't leave my mother there, either. And I'm not going back there!" (193-94)

However, regarding the notion of bottom-levelness, one other implication should also be observed. God's focus on the bottom level, somehow, reflects Butler's pessimist view about the imperfect nature of humanity and human inability to create a perfect

society. Here, through God, Butler points to the inequalities that would afflict this coming society. That Martha is going to be at the bottom level implies that this new society will also suffer from the unjust distribution of power, wealth, and the presence of social classes, consequently. In other words, it seems that this warning aims to show that the struggle of humans will lead nowhere; despite all attempts, the same problems will afflict humanity, or at least women, particularly those who come from repressed racial and social groups. This implication is true. As I stated earlier, Butler openly expresses a pessimist view about human nature. Thereby, it is not strange to encounter such dystopian illustrations in her works. Nevertheless, what should be considered is to see whether the plot of the story develops and verifies this pessimism.

Through the above quotation, Martha reveals herself as a responsible person who has worked to change the conditions of her mother's life as well as her own. For her, it has been the practice of "attending" to improve her family life. Now, the mission expands the scope of this "attending" in front of her eyes. Considering the missions of the role models that God recommends to her, and the influences of the righteousness mechanism on her personal life, she comes to understand the inseparability of social and personal life as well as their theological dimensions. It leads to an ethical awareness in her theological understanding which, as the basis of her mission for the well-being of her fellow beings, undergirds the social aspects of her life.

One concern regards how effective this awareness is in questioning the ethical and religious benefits of the male missionary role models for woman. Hampson refutes the suitability of sacred masculine symbolism as the model of goodness and true humanity for women. Regarding the problem "that Christians must necessarily make reference to a past patriarchal history" in which recital and understanding of God, "contained in the purportedly sacred literature," continues "to distort relationships today and exclude or disadvantage women," Hampson argues that "[o]ne needs to consider whether a religion founded in this history and literature can ever potentially embrace women as equals"

(*After Christianity* xv). She believes that “the paradigms (the thought forms) of Christianity, and behind that of Judaism” are “the product of a male psyche” which is “inimical both to what is for women’s good and to the way in which women commonly think” (xvii). Hampson emphasizes that the Western Biblical tradition has permanently prioritized a patriarchal “continuing tradition” which totally lacks the role models “to which women who are Christians could look” (63).

On the other hand, Hampson believes that if we look at the female role models that Christianity offers as suitable for women, we come face to face with passive characters whose passivity is recommended as their most precious value. The most notable figure of this modelling is Saint Mary. She has never been depicted as “part of the Godhead” (*Theology and Feminism* 74). In the picture that Christianity offers, Mary is represented as a devout mother, the philosophy of whose existence is explained through attachment to her son. Hampson considers her character as a “masculinist conception of femininity” whose only reason of appearance is to give birth to a “(male) child” (74). In other words, in this model-making, it is Jesus who is centralized and Mary’s presence is defined due to her son. She never questions, but fulfils the authentic role of “nurturing and caring” (96), as has been decided for her. Such a prescription does not match with Martha. What we get from the mission that Martha is appointed with is that she, unlike Saint Mary, is not supposed as a holy mother who patiently accepts what is decided for her. She is expected to, firstly, decide on a plan to change the life of her fellow beings in a positive way and, secondly, act based on that plan. To figure out the effectiveness of her awareness in challenging the superiority of male symbolism, the male models who are suggested by God should be regarded. Considering these models, it is a matter of curiosity that God does not refer Martha to Jesus Christ who is, of course, at the centre of Christian symbolism.

As I discussed, Christianity is defined based on connection and reference to a particular past and to figures that, alternatively, are the cultural atmosphere of Old

Palestine, and Jesus Christ. But, God, I think, consciously, does not refer Martha to this particular past. He, also, does not refer her to Saint Mary as the embodiment of virtuous femininity, paralleling the historical Jesus of Christianity. In my opinion, Butler here arranges an imagery that disrupts the traditional Christian role modelling. God chooses Martha, an intellectual black woman, reminds her of some past models and, then, asks her to go to her fellow human beings and save them from themselves. It is completely clear that, through this mission, Martha is recognized as an active agent whose expected function does not resemble that of Saint Mary as in the Bible. On the contrary, Martha is assumed as a saviour whose function is mediated through references to Noah, Job, and Jonah. Additionally, as I pointed out already, the emphasis on the “bottom-level” of society shows that reference to these names is not mentioned to confirm the traditional Christian Liberal theology working through the notions of punishment, obedience, and reward. If we believe in them as the Biblical models, there will be no justification to explain the ‘bottom-level’ that Martha will be placed in, despite following them. As the Biblical references about them indicate, the end of their mission was happy, and they enjoyed social reverence and recognition.

Martha also does not embody a female version of a Christ-figure. In Christianity, Christ’s mission and his end are understood within the tradition of the Covenant, as the Covenant conveys a notion of contract or agreement between God and His people to worship Him. This worship is enacted through absolute dependence and obedience. In fact, this contract is not “freely undertaken between those who have an essential equality” (136); such a must is not imposed on Martha. In Covenantal theology, everything is considered through the Will of God or the “questions of obedience and disobedience” (136). Martha’s case is different. She has a free hand to consider her situation and accept or refuse the mission. As is understood from the end of the story, she ceases to obsess over the mission to which God appoints her:

I'm afraid knowing all that might drive me out of my mind someday. She stepped away from God, and already God seemed to be fading, becoming translucent, transparent, gone.

"I want to forget," Martha said, and she stood alone in her living room, looking blankly past the open drapes of her front window at the surface of lake Washington and the mist that hung above it. She wondered at the words she had just spoken, wondered what it was she wanted so badly to forget. (213)

The extract, which is the climax of the story, highlights an alternative non-Christian liberalism that develops throughout the story. It reflects a kind of ethical awareness that is achieved through an interaction with God. The description of Martha's room as the place of this interaction reflects the awareness. It is a room with three walls covered by bookshelves. The subjects of the books cover different fields like history, medicine, religion, and crime. The scene figures Martha as a prolific writer and thinker whose field of concern deals with the affairs of human life and entity. Near the end of the story, where she asks God to leave and let her think about the mission, she turns on a lamp and looks at her books. This visual image reflects her mental world. Martha's room, in fact, is a spatial description of her personal identity, understanding, and desires. To use Virginia Woolf's phrase, it is "a room of her own" that not only guarantees a personal space where she can scribe her mental workings, but also symbolizes an independent state of mind contemplating on experiences, understandings, duties, likes, and dislikes of its own. The lamp light in this scene is a metaphor which, reflecting Martha's enlightened state of mind, prefigures her emergence as an independent and strong woman.

Martha gains the courage to say no to God. It is exactly in the way that God, the true goodness, leads her to. He gives her the courage to observe and accept her fears as an ordinary human being, and understand that she is not expected to be a perfect heroine to undertake what is demanded by Him:



And she went from being elated to—once again—being terrified. “What if I say something wrong, make a mistake?”

“You will.” ...

“Won’t you fix it so I don’t hurt or kill anyone? I mean, I’m new at this. I could do something stupid and wipe out and not even know I’d done it until afterward.”

“I won’t fix things for you,” God said. “You have a free hand.” (195-96)

The notion is completely against the Christian tradition of perfection through absolute dependence. It does not incarnate a devoted chosen messenger who has no free will, and is warned against submission to her temptations. It seems like a test where God helps Martha to improve her knowledge, facing her ignorance:

“Why should it be my work? Why don’t you do it? You know how. You could do it without making mistakes. Why make me do it? I don’t know anything.”

“Quite right,” God said. And he smiled. “That’s why.” (196-97)

The answer and what follows, show that it cannot be an absurd game through which God makes fun of human ignorance and imperfection. In what follows, God emphasizes on the most important and deep change which Martha will make, because the effects of some changes are very important and can continue for a long time: “Think about this: What change would you want to make if you could make only one? Think of one important change.” (197) No doubt, the God revealed here is a supportive Being who stimulates Martha to think, and advises her where to start. In what continues, there is a serious discussion about the dystopian situation of life in the world, including the problems afflicting life on the planet, its reasons, and the solutions that Martha offers. Martha points to the “growing population” as maybe the worst problem which makes “a lot of other problems worse” (197), and puts forward her suggestion to control it. In the subsequent exchange, God emerges as a patient “listener” who listens politely, distinguishes the shortcomings of Martha’s plans, and suggests His comments to

improve them. This practice of “listening” is a technique of “attending” which humanizes God’s power and accelerates His unification with Martha.

“Listening” is the tool through which God shares his divine power with Martha as He had announced early in their conversation. It is a mutual practice through which Martha also develops knowledge, understanding, and self-confidence in interaction with divinity. In fact the practice is partly a divinization through an enlightening dialogue on behalf of Martha. The conversation equips Martha with an understanding to change her traditional conception of God. She no longer sees Him as the embodiment of that monitoring eye which used to gaze disturbingly upon His creatures. At this point, He becomes a listening ear that responds with a caring attitude: “She glanced at God and saw that he seemed to be listening politely” (197). This change already starts when God begins to address her, and continues as the dialogue progresses:

Now when he looked at her, they were eye to eye. He did look at her. He saw that something was disturbing her, and he asked, “What is it now? Has your image of me grown feathered wings or a blinding halo?”

“Your halo’s gone,” she answered. “And you’re smaller. More normal.”

“Good,” he said. “What else do you see?”

“Nothing. Grayness.”

“That will Change.” (195)

The text reveals an essential change in Martha’s attitude towards God. Due to the change in her conception of God, she no more behaves like an obedient worshipper surrounded by the magnificent glory of a ubiquitous God. Neither the text offers a miraculous situation of a heavenly and supernatural interference to put everything in its place. The primary concern of the theology running through this God-human interaction is the focus on the human being, and not God, and how this focus changes the mental perspective of the protagonist. The reference to the three Biblical prophets must be regarded in this context.

If we consider the features and deeds of the three Biblical figures of Noah, Job, and Jonah, they do not reflect super-heroic characteristics. Apart from the traditions of punishment, obedience, and reward from supernatural intervention that are associated with their life narratives – much as any other Biblical figures – they embody persons with ordinary human thoughts, behaviours, and mistakes. They represent features that are naturally found in the human person. Noah embodies a masculine determinism. This determinism is entwined with patience in front of God's order to complete his work. Together, they equip him with the power to stand on his mission till God decides for the moment. During this time, he is active; persists in his mission, and starts to make his ark based on the orders he receives. God rewards him by saving him and those with him in the ark. Job represents the same patience and determinism. Nevertheless, regarding the misery afflicting him, he reflects a kind of passivity at the same time. He surrenders to the Almighty's test and wins his approval. The case of Jonah almost embodies the same passivity. He also waits till the moment when God saves him after his repentance. Though the passivity and the shortcomings of their characters render them more believably human, at the same time, it raises doubt as to their suitability as models. It leaves them susceptible to the traditional Christian notion of humanity as an obedient creature in front of an uncontested Almighty being. It also carries a gendered connotation of female subordination because, as I pointed earlier, in the orthodox Christian tradition, humanity is assumed as feminine in front of a masculine God.

To consider the possibility of this interpretation, we shall put it beside the pessimist streaks of the story. As I explained earlier, Martha's hesitation to conclude an inclusive plan for solving human problems reflects Butler's deep disappointment over human ability to change the dystopian conditions of life. It seems that while Butler openly propagates a non-Christian philosophy of God-human relationship, she cannot completely unleash herself from the vestiges of Christian pessimism about human nature. The Augustinian concept of "original sin" and its pernicious effect on human

nature is deeply rooted in traditional Christianity and its influence on Western perspective of life continues until recently (Duffy 603). It believes that because of the Fall, human soul is contaminated and is bereft of perfection. Butler's repetitive reference to imperfect human nature and its inability to create a utopian condition reflects her indebtedness to this perspective. To put it in more precise words, it is from a discrepancy that Butler's text cannot escape. While it is a piece of writing which tries to reflect the strong notions of non-Christian mentality, nevertheless, it cannot escape from the influence of Christian belief. To reiterate, in traditional Christianity, humanity is assumed to have a feminine nature in front of a masculine God. It is presumed through attributing a passive and obedient attitude to humanity in front of a God who is independent, perfect, and self-enclosed. This attribution is commensurate with the humanity of the three models recommended by God. Nevertheless, there is another aspect to be regarded here. The femininity that I explained through Woolf's clarification reflects another side of man as a natural human being. Adopting this perspective, challenges Hampson's argument about the unsuitability of male symbolism for women's cause.

Concerning Hampson's belief in the intrinsic goodness of God, the God-human relationship in "The Book of Martha" questions Hampson's disagreement about the suitability of sacred male symbolism for women. If this symbolism is not used in a way to dictate the norms associated with male superiority, it can be applied in a way to highlight human features. The application is in parallel with the characterization of Martha. In a wider scope, it also parallels the dualism of past and present in the story. Martha's childhood, her mother, and the traditional religious teachings she used to receive, including the understanding she had of the Biblical figures, are associated with a past that embodies a Christian self-understanding. On the other side, there is the present sense of self which embodies a new understanding of identity by featuring the

dynamic character of a woman who does not fit within the past norms. She is going to look at the past heroes of human history from a new perspective.

Martha is the prototype of a posthuman. This sample of posthumanity is tied to a realist view which Butler reflects in her story. This realist perspective neither heightens the position of any human figure as a perfect superman/woman, nor condemns him/her fully. Regarding the allusion to the three figures as models, and the nature and form of her mission, Martha develops a new sense of humanity which is free from superiorized norms of racial, spiritual, and gender distinction. This understanding helps her to develop a non-hierarchical natural theistic concept of her relation with divinity as well as the masculine half of humanity. Though there are discrepancies like the traces of Butler's pessimism in human nature that disturb the coherence of this perspective, yet, in themselves, they are instances which manifest the decentrism of the text as a postmodern sample of writing.

To sum up, if we consider the three models and the features that they stand for; and, then, if we regard the content of the conversation between Martha and God more closely, we will realize a discrepancy in their Biblical connotations and what the conversation reveals. This discrepancy reflects the postmodern characterization of a posthuman reformer who, recognizing an alternative reading of Christian doctrines, experiences a new form of God-human relationship that exemplifies a natural theistic ideology. Envisioning God as a source of goodness, this non-Christian theology equips Martha with the understanding needed to see herself non-hierarchically and in relation with the rest of creation. This recognition allows her to develop a self-confidence that foregrounds her subject position as a coloured woman in relation with God and a historically Christianized, sexualized, and racialized society.

## 4.2 “Amnesty”

“Amnesty” is a story about spirituality. It reflects the mutual “attentive” practices of sample representatives of humanity and the alien Communities of special plants who struggle to launch a life of friendly coexistence on Earth. This attentiveness is embodied in a discipline of “honesty” through which a chosen representative of humanity and a bunch of these Communities work together to put in “order” and harmonize the relationship among humans, on the one hand, and the humanity and the Communities-natural world – on the other hand.

Like “The Book of Martha,” “Amnesty” focuses on the concept of mission for a black woman. The difference is that in “The Book of Martha” the mission was from God, but here it is from a subcontractor from the alien Community-like plants that have settled on Earth and strive to have a symbiotic relationship with humanity. From this perspective, “Amnesty” follows the same concept of co-existence as Butler’s *Xenogenesis* trilogy.<sup>46</sup> In “Amnesty,” Butler is obsessed with a similar concept of survival by focusing on the same postmodern dialogic interaction between the Biblical and African-American slavery discourse as well as “sociobiological determinism,” by which peppers believes our identity is assumed to be situated in our genes (48). Focusing on these discourses, Butler creates a context in which she deals with the same concepts of Self and Other. Her voice in this context is the protagonist of the story, Noah Cannon, who is depicted as a “Translator” working to make the communication between humans and the Communities possible.

In addition, “Amnesty” reflects Butler’s familiar concern with change and how human agency deals with it. “Amnesty” is an entirely metaphorical story. Beside its exterior literal layer, which deals with an ecological sensibility to put the Othered natural herbal entities in equal position with humans, it embodies the potentialities to challenge what writers like Zaki, Nilges, and Luckhurst, though in their own ways,

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<sup>46</sup>The trilogy includes *Dawn*, *Adulthood Rites*, and *Imago*; Warner Aspect Books, 1997.

discuss as Butler's essentialist perspective about human tendency to create Other. What I am going to clarify in my discussion is the potential aspects of the story, particularly its characterization of the protagonist, to reflect a posthuman agent as I referred to at the beginning of the chapter.

At the ecological level, "Amnesty" reveals the spiritual sensitivity that Hampson recognizes as the right of 'other life' to live (*After Christianity* 259). From her perspective, any attempt to control "other life" whether that of "other persons" or "animal creation" is a practice "inimical to being a spiritual person" (259). "Amnesty" reveals a dedication to be spiritual in this sense. It represents the spiritual struggle of a reformer to balance and harmonize the coexistence of the human and animal life as equal and not hierarchical partners. The pattern of relation that the story reflects through this coexistence reveals the commitment of a girl to control her own life, and not that of the others. This conscious "ordering" equips her with the capacity to conduct others in the way necessary for their survival.

In this part, I focus on representing how Butler, through arranging dialogues among the characters of the story, reveals the protagonist's increasing cognizance of her power to control her life and, in an "attentive" attitude, conduct her fellow beings. Butler, as I will argue, accomplishes this through a reflection on the power of humanity to embrace difference as a means of survival.

The notion of survival reflects "a new beginning." This new beginning, in Peppers' explanation, illustrates the acknowledgment of a new way of life that, in its postmodern nature, negates the "outmoded reifications of humanist, essential notions of identity"(47). It embodies the recognition of the "post-gender' origin-less" concept of the posthuman body and identity that, as a science fictional strategy, confronts the Othering tendency of the eugenic as well as sexist notions of identity.<sup>47</sup> "Amnesty"

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<sup>47</sup>Peppers explains it as the modern preference of safeguarding the purity of race and species through limiting the scope of relation within the approved boundaries. She relates it to the Darwinian notion of the "natural selection" as a means to determine the survival of the fittest (47-48).

conceptualizes such an understanding of human entity and identity. The entire story concretizes the confrontation between two eugenic and posthuman concept of humanity. The representation of this eugenic consideration, mixed with the evil deeds of some human beings, turns “Amnesty” in to a narration that one might suspect reproduces the wicked side of human nature. But, I think the characterization of Noah Cannon in the story reflects the Other of the eugenic, “humanist,” essentialist (biological) perspective. In line with it, Noah emerges as a figure who, embodying a postmodern notion of humanity (posthumanism), challenges the traditional reflection of femininity in science fiction – as explained in chapter one – as well as “science fiction by women, often characterized by soft rather than hard science, by emphasis on character and interpersonal relations,” which is also thoroughly “humanist” (Gordon, “Yin and Yang Duke It Out” *streettech.com*).

“Amnesty” plays with concepts that render it susceptible to the pessimistic and deterministic views of the imperfect nature of humanity. On the whole, “Amnesty” envisions three points of view. The story revolves around the interaction among the Communities, free human beings, and abducted ones who have started to have a coexistence with the Communities. Free humans and the Communities are at two ends of the spectrum. The depicted free humans embody an aggressive perspective which views the other two groups as unintelligent in the case of the Communities, and betrayers in the case of the pre-abductees. What makes the narration prone to seeing it as another representation of imperfect human nature is the quality of this relation among free humans and the two other groups.

The plot of the story is about six free humans who have applied for work in one of the Communities that is the stranger-Community. The Communities are also interested to expand their relations with humanity. The coordinators of this communication are Translators like Noah who are pre-abductees, and have developed a signifying code of communication during the years of their captivity to communicate with the



Communities. These Translators, whose number is not more than thirty in the entire Communities, are recruited by these Communities to link their societies to human ones by training more Translators. The afore-mentioned six characters have applied for the very translating positions.

From the beginning, it becomes evident that communication is the major concern for the three groups. Nevertheless, simultaneously, it is shown that the tendency goes with a deep sense of hatred and distrust from both humans and Communities:

Her employer had warned her that the job that would be offered to her would be unpleasant not only because of the usual hostility of the human beings she would face, but because the subcontractor for whom she would be working would be difficult.(Butler "Amnesty" 150)

The quote shows that from the beginning of the story, Butler deals with the theme of Self and Other. It seems that, on the one side, the story reflects what Butler persistently has emphasized as human preference for the refutation of difference and, on the other side, points to the unnatural condition that life and work with strangers will impose on humanity.

It is unnatural because it does not resemble what is expected in normal human life. As appears from the text, this unnatural condition results, partly, from the subcontractor's distrust of human nature and, partly, from its (or his) unfamiliarity with it. In this way, the story supports the pessimist and dystopian readings of Butler's works. To accept the possibility it needs to consider the presence and function of the strange Communities, free, and abducted humans in the context of the text to see what "narrative expectations"<sup>48</sup> they embody, and how. To put it differently, to understand the nature and mechanism of the interactions, besides considering the eugenic tendency that is represented by free humans, it must be clarified whether the Communities enact a

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<sup>48</sup> The term is from Wolmark (31). Jenny Wolmark, *Aliens and Others: Science Fiction, Feminism and Postmodernism* (Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 1994).

“rescuing” or “destroying” function in the story.<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, the role and function of the protagonist must be investigated to assure whether or not she epitomize an alternative version of human understanding in the face of difference.

To start, we will regard the concept of survival in “Amnesty.” In fact, it is the central theme of the story and the other concepts and concerns are defined in relation to it. To figure out whether the concept embodies a negative view about imperfect human nature or a positive concern covering the schism between the Self and Other, it is necessary to regard the domain of survival in the story. The point is whether the survival in “Amnesty” represents a merely physical notion or a sustainable concept. If we accept the biological determinism that Zaki, Nilges, and Luckhurst identify in Butler’s writing, it means that we recognize the physical survival as the main concern of the story. In such a case, first of all, the Darwinian concept of the “natural selection”<sup>50</sup> comes to the fore and, second, a reconsideration of the perfect/imperfect reflection of human nature becomes indispensable.

As I pointed out above, the concept of survival is the reflection of a new beginning. “Amnesty” is about the beginning of an alternate life. It is about the “immersion and gradual orientation in its wholly other structures of kinship and relation” (Luckhurst “'Horror and Beauty in Rare Combination': The Miscegenate Fictions of Octavia Butler” 35) in the story to reflect a new horizon of life, tolerant and receptive of what has already been Othered as the alien or stranger. These new structures take root in the biological, historical, and theological background of the story and illustrate how the gradual development of the protagonist’s understanding, resulting from her confrontation with the past, equips her with the necessary knowledge and experience to “attentively” cooperate in reshaping a new life of coexistence on Earth. I explain these structures in the following discussion.

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species*, London: John Murray, 1859.

In the case of “natural selection” in “Amnesty,” one point must be stated. Definitely, the story “is not about a stronger race annihilating a weaker, or incorporating weaker difference into its sameness”; a model which Luckhurst distinguishes as the reflection of a “racial science” (“Horror and Beauty in Rare Combination: The Miscegenate Fictions of Octavia Butler” 36). On the contrary, it “amplifies and pursues” what Luckhurst, explaining Darwin, terms as “another, muted Darwin – one of the view that ‘man resembles those forms called by naturalists protean and polymorphaic’” (36). What Luckhurst terms as “racial science” here points to the eugenic notion of ‘purity’ that, according to the modern notions of the “integrity of the same” (37),<sup>51</sup> strives to give a fixed and categorized notion of human identity. According to this view, what has emerged as pure humanity is due to the evolution of the fittest sample and, therefore, embodies a final version of perfect species. “Amnesty” challenges this understanding. Imagining a mutual striving for coexistence between humanity and the Communities of the unicellular-like plants, the story envisions a new picture of human identity whose essence is redefined in direct contact with the Communities. One notion applied by this mutuality is the sameness of the essence between the two species that connects the apparently independent and intelligent humans to the Other unintelligent, unicellular entities.

The reflected convergence and coordination between the humans and Communities recasts the concept of perfection, destabilizing Butler’s view of the static nature of humanity argued by critics such as Nilges. Producing a unified notion of the Self-Other through the assumed unity between human being and the aliens – Communities here – “Amnesty” suggests another version of perfection. It is realized through the protagonist’s recognition, as one who carries the burden of her experiences, that the interrelation between humans and the Communities is the only way of human’s survival. It is through this recognition that the story de-essentializes the imperfection

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<sup>51</sup>It means to define self through connection to what has the same entity, refusing difference.

which Butler attributes to humanity. In this posthuman version that Butler envisions, the possibility of the perfection of human nature is affirmed. Based on this affirmation, “Amnesty” emerges as the reflection of a postmodern sense of identity that deconstructs the unified sense of self as an isolated entity.

Butler’s Noah represents the embodiment of the postmodern view about “decentered subjects and bodies” (Luckhurst 30). Paralleling it, “Amnesty” envisions the “dissolution of the boundaries between human and the alien” (Wolmark 38). To explain, the Communities’ violation of bodily boundaries concretizes a new structure of physical body which, in its place, decentres the modern human concept of the physical integrity. This new concept of body, metaphorically, suggests the emergence of a new sense of relation and communication. Recalling the history of slavery, this boundary violation is incessantly repeated via reference to the enfolding of humans by the Communities throughout the story.

In “Amnesty,” Butler represents a metaphorical as well as literal creation of black science fiction that bridges the traditional white masculine humanist science fiction with strictly warded black feminism. In this literary construction, the physical descriptions of bodily touch, simultaneously, negate the eugenic concept of the original integrated self and recall the familiar master/slave dichotomy of the black discourse:

The tips of what looked like moss-covered outer twigs and branches touched her bare skin. She wore only shorts and a halter top. The Communities would have preferred her to be naked, and for the long years of her captivity, she had had no choice. She had been naked. Now she was no longer a captive, and she insisted on wearing at least the basics. ...

This subcontractor enfolded her immediately, drawing her upward and in among its many selves, first hauling her up with its various organisms, then grasping her securely with what appeared to be moss. ...

Enfolded within the Communities, she couldn’t see at all. She closed her eyes... She felt herself surrounded by what felt like long dry fibers, fronds, rounded fruits of various sizes, and other things that produced less identifiable sensations. She was at once touched, stroked,

massaged, compressed in the strangely comfortable, peaceful way ... She was turned and handled as though she weighed nothing. ... she felt weightless. She had lost all senses of direction... . ("Amnesty" 151)

The explanation beside the other reference like Noah's captivity and her blackness, automatically provides reader with an understanding of the text as directly referencing the theme of sexual harassment in the narratives of slave history. Regarding the reflected points of view, one wonders if the text embodies a pessimist reverse irony, recreating the same imperfection recorded in humanity's unpleasant past? It seems that in this reverse irony, the currently dominant plant-like Communities have established settlements, applying a modern system of slave holding. Considering the overall concerns and arguments of the text, we cannot accept this view. Though there are reactions from the humans of the story which reveal their hatred of the new settlers (the Communities) and, therefore, reinforce the pessimist considerations of the text, I still think that these imageries in their entirety, including the Communities and human beings, work to address a "constant need to *negotiate* with a legacy that still literally scars the present" (Luckhurst "Horror and Beauty" 33).

On the one hand, there are repeated references to the mental distance between humans and the Communities in the story that describe the lack of communication and understanding between them:

There are six recruits, it signaled... You will teach them.

...

The recruits are disturbed ... They may be dangerous to one another. Calm them. ...

I will answer their questions and reassure them that they have nothing to fear. Privately, she suspected that hate might be a more prevalent emotion than fear ...

Noah repeated, I will answer their questions and reassure them that they have nothing to fear. That's all I can do. ...

... she was about to be hurt-twisted or torn, broken or stunned. Many Communities punished refusal to obey orders -as she saw it- less harshly than they punished what they saw as lying. (Butler "Amnesty" 152-53)

Two problems are considered here. First, the Communities hold a negative view of humanity. It results from their previous contact and experiences with humans. In the first and second phase of abducting humans, the Communities used to put groups of abductees in shared cells. Monitoring them, the Communities observed how human beings attacked and damaged each other to ensure their survival. This is why they are worried that the new applicants may damage each other. They are also suspicious of the human habit of lying. Similarly, it comes from their earlier contact with humans or what they observe in the attitude of human beings towards each other.

The other problem is the strong distrust that free human beings have for the Communities and whatever or whoever represents them, like the Translators. The distrust is not hidden just in fear, but in the hatred that they have towards these Communities. The following extracts exemplify the way that free humans address Noah and talk about the Communities:

“do these... these things... actually understand that we’re intelligent?”...

“I mean I know you work for them. ... But what do they think of us?”...

“But what does a contract mean to things that come from another star system?” Michelle Ota demanded.

Rune Johnson spoke up. “Yes, it’s interesting how quickly these beings have taken up local terrestrial ways when it suits them. Translator, do you truly believe they will consider themselves bound by anything they sign? Although without hands, God knows how they manage to sign anything.” ...

Rune Johnson shook his blond head. “In all, they’ve been on earth longer than I’ve been alive, and yet it feels wrong that they’re here. It feels wrong that they exist. I don’t even hate them, and still it feels wrong. ... that’s because we’ve been displaced again from the center of the universe.” (“Amnesty” 155-57)

As the text shows, the free humans, in their perspective of the Communities and Noah, repeatedly refer to them as something or someone other than themselves. They

use the word “things” to describe the Communities, and address Noah as Translator; they never call her by her first or last name. The real entity and presence of the Communities and Noah as a human is negated through this kind of consideration. As Noah suspects, it reflects the fear and hatred which they have of these strange entities who, they believe, have come to threaten human being’s monopoly on Earth.

Second, both the interests of the Communities and Noah’s perspective reflect an alternative demeanour compared to manner of the free humans. Despite the vivid images related to slavery, Butler describes scenes that both embody the longing of the Communities to know humanity and reflect Noah’s compassionate concern for her fellow beings, despite the terrible experiences she has of them. The feelings, no doubt, come from a conscious belief in the possibility of the constructive communication and understanding from both the Communities and Noah:

The communities liked her signs to be small, confined gestures ... She had wondered at first if this was because they couldn’t see very well. Now she knew that they could see far better than she could – could see over great distances with specialized entities of vision, ...

In fact the reason that they preferred large gestures when she was out of contact and unlikely to hit or kick anyone was because they liked to watch her move. It was that simple, that odd. In fact, the Communities had developed a real liking for human dance performances and for some human sports events—especially individual performances in gymnastics and ice skating. ("Amnesty" 152)

At the beginning of the extract, Butler reviews Noah’s gradual understanding of the physical capacity of the Communities. Though it is concerned with physical abilities but, as the rest of the extract reveals, there is also a strong hint at the wide scope of the Communities’ perspective. The perspective is an inclusive sight to observe and understand humanity not only as a biological entity, but also the embodiment of its specific sociocultural heritage. As such, this highlights an “attending” practice.

According to Hampson, attending “can also involve allowing oneself to be affected by art or great literature, or being observant of nature” (*After Christianity* 260). It is because of this understanding that the Communities are determined to start a new form of communication to safeguard a peaceful coexistence with human beings. This is not to fix the bases of their dominance on Earth. Dominance in this context reflects a perspective of colonization and slavery.

One of the strategies that the colonizing powers used to guarantee their dominance over the colonized nations was to learn their language and culture. It was accompanied by bringing up a generation of locals who were trained by the dominant language and, having internalized the alien culture and values, acted as an agent of change to transform the native civilization or culture to something more malleable in the hands of the colonizer. Regarding the focus on the mission of Noah as a Translator to train other human Translators, it is probable to assume the story as a bitter retelling of the history of slavery or colonization. Nevertheless, the attitude of the Communities toward humans does not confirm what Coogan-Gehr explains as the ‘homogenizing’ attitude of colonizer toward the colonized culture. Based on her explanation, colonization is a ‘homogenizing’ practice through which the cultural differences of the colonized are ignored or obliterated (94). The Communities of “Amnesty” do not follow such a policy. In the entire story, they appear as eager learners who struggle to know much about humanity and use that knowledge for a constructive relation with it. They never consciously force any human to behave as they do or follow their habits.

One reading of the story could be that the abduction of humans from their homes and their transfer into the Communities is reflective of the hunting of slaves in Africa and their transfer to America by white colonizers. In this huge transfer, which no doubt was done by force, big groups of humans were abducted from their home land and smuggled to America where, cut from their roots, they were distanced from their native culture, language, and religion and gradually dissolved into an American style of life.



For sure, this does not mean that traces of the past African traditions do not exist in the daily life of American blacks. Yet, certainly their routine life with all its sociocultural, political, and religious aspects is completely different from what their brothers and sisters follow in Africa.

Clarifying the motivation of the Communities in “Amnesty” to kidnap humans, Noah explains, the Communities abducted humans because they wanted to know human kind and communicate with him; they had no understanding that this was an act of abduction. The fact distinguishes their act from that of humans. The actions of humans were based on consciousness and free will, while what the Communities did were not based on familiarity with human entity and needs:

“The Communities didn’t know anything about us. They killed some of us with experiments ... By the time they snatched me, they at least knew enough not to kill me by accident.” ...

“They wanted to understand us and communicate with us. ... They wanted to know how we got along with one another and they needed to know how much we could bear of what was normal for them.” (“Amnesty” 159-60)

After the Communities release her, humans capture her:

“The only difference ... was that the so-called human beings knew when they were hurting me. They questioned me day and night, threatened me, drugged me, all in an effort to get me to give them the information I didn’t have.” ...

“It mattered more than I know how to tell you this time my tormentors were my own people. They were human. They spoke my language. They knew all that I knew about pain and humiliation and fear and despair. They knew what they were doing to me, and yet it never occurred to them not to do it.” (170-172).

As the story stipulates, some Communities and abducted humans have succeeded “to put together a code—the beginning of a language” (“Amnesty” 161) that has helped the two species to start communication and, consequently, understand each other. Based

on this clarification and the next interaction, there is not any evidence to show that the Communities have imposed their language and culture on human societies. Moreover, the launching of this new system of communication, as appears from references like “without hands, God knows how they manage to sign anything” (157), is due to the biological limitations of the Communities that prevent them from using human ways.

Another susceptible interpretation is to consider “Amnesty” as a reverse irony where humans are captured as laboratory mice in the hands of the Communities. This reading is reinforced by Noah’s comparison where she likens the Communities to “human scientists experimenting with lab animals – not cruel, but very thorough” (“Amnesty” 161). Taking into account the disappointing references to the humans of the story, it seems logical that the story is a pessimist reflection of the impossibility of the human liberation from the plights that afflict this Earthly life. Noah’s final emphasis “It was a short, quiet war, ... We lost” (184) is in line with this interpretation. Yet, the structure and content of the story does not verify such a possibility. The story does not embody an up-down system of exploitation where the needs and wanting of the Communities cost the life and entity of humans.

Though there is a mission from the Communities for Noah, which suggests a hierarchical order of control, yet the nature of relation and the physical unity that the story reflects, embody a horizontal sense of understanding where human being’s free will and control on his life is recognized. It is particularly reflected in their permission to those humans who wanted to return to their own human societies:

“Years later when the Communities could talk to us, when they understood more of what they’d done to us, they asked a group of us whether we would stay with them voluntarily or whether we want to leave. I thought it might have been just another of their tests, but when I asked to go, they agreed.” (“Amnesty” 169)

As the narrative progresses, Noah is seen to try control her life. Problems arise when she encounters the dark side of her fellow beings and, disappointed at that, she returns to the Communities. Experiencing the peace and serenity in co-living with the Communities, she ends up sharing these feelings with her fellow humans. It is a practice of “attending” through which she struggles to advise her people to guarantee their survival through a conscious control of their negative views against the Communities.

We cannot assume Lauren’s attempt to reconcile humans and the communities as her dependence on the Communities. What is discernible from her explanations is that it is human society that, diverted from its natural entity, has turned into a torturing cage where natural life has become impossible. Carrying the experience of living with the Communities, Noah decides to cooperate in a plan which, she believes, will save humanity from collapsing in its self-Othered world.

Moreover, according to the explanations about the habitat of the Communities, they are settled in deserts. It shows that the settlers had no intention to occupy the human-settled areas: “They’ve taken over big chunks of the Sahara, the Atacama, the Kalahari the Mojave and just about every other hot, dry wasteland they could find. As far as territory goes, they’ve taken almost nothing that we need” (181). Nowhere in the text have the Communities appeared as colonizers who usurp and exploit the material resources of human habitats.

Furthermore, regarding the racial dimension of the story, with the black protagonist and the allusion to the system of slavery, one may expect to witness the tradition of the spatial dislocation of the Other (slave, colonized) as a homogenizing policy. Reviewing Walker’s *Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World*,<sup>52</sup> Apap distinguishes a cultural homogenizing policy followed by the American Colonization Society (ACS) which, propagating the relocation of blacks in their ancestral land (Liberia as part of Africa), “envisioned a nation void of racial differences, in which undesirable others, whether

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<sup>52</sup>*Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World, but in Particular, and Very Expressly, to Those of the United States of America.* David Walker. Boston, 1829.

African or Indian, were continually and safely “outside” of the nation’s borders” (326). The Communities do not follow such a policy. As the text reflects, their interest to contact and mix with humanity contrasts with homogenizing colonization. While they are settled in locations which meaningfully do not come across with human-settled spaces, yet they are determined to be connected to these societies. In addition, after gaining the knowledge and ability to communicate with humans, the Communities never try to drive them away from their lands. The fact that Noah emphasizes “We lost” (184) and invites her people’s representatives to learn to live with the Communities shows that there is no obligation on them to leave their home that is to say Earth. It is despite the Communities power to dismiss them; the way they abducted the first human beings shows that they can easily make humans disappear from their houses. It is not difficult for them to do it on a larger scale.

Noah’s emphasis on human’s loss apparently confirms the inevitability of the unconditional surrender to the alien invaders. Yet, in spite of this, there is the sense that if compared to humans, the Communities display a more peaceful reaction and controlled power to confront the unfriendly attitude of humanity and still strive for a friendly relationship with humans.

The conquest of humans by Communities has been kept hidden by human authorities. Noah learns of it via the alien Communities and her human captors. It is about the time the Communities started to land on Earth. First of all, the allied forces of several countries had tried “to knock them out of the sky before they landed” (183), and had failed. Later, they had managed “coordinated nuclear strikes at the aliens when it was clear where they were establishing their colonies” (183). But, these attacks had been repelled and “half of the missiles that had been fired were returned. ... armed and intact” (183). Washington, Beijing, London and Paris received half of the missiles they had fired, whereas, it seems the other half are in the hands of the Communities “along

with whatever weapons they brought with them and any they've built since they've been here” (184).

The reference to this event, in some sense, reflects the patience that the Communities have in dealing with humans. It is clear that they have not come to usurp what does not belong to them. They embody a more mature wisdom than humanity. While these humans use the atomic missiles at the expense of destroying their planet, the Communities return half of missiles intact. This hints at their invulnerability as well as their intention to avoid any tension with humans. Maybe keeping half of the missiles shows the intention of the Communities to use them if necessary. But, it could also suggest their distrust in humanity. This consideration is in accordance with the early references to the sense of distrust in humanity among the Communities. From this perspective, and regarding their invulnerability in front of any kind of threat, they keep the missiles as a pledge to prevent humanity from committing any other kind of madness. It is the strategy of the Communities to have a peaceful coexistence with humanity. Considering Noah's negative experiences of her fellow beings, her determination to start a communication between humans and the Communities reflects her indebtedness to this strategy to establish a peaceful cohabitation between the two species. The cohabitation, in its turn, represents a new sense of posthuman identity, as I discussed earlier.

Claire Light believes that Butler's protagonists are characters “who are balanced between two hostile cultures, and choose to absorb that hostility to create a bridge. They allow her to put them through hell, so that she can report on what hell is like, and maybe report a way out of it” (*edsfproject.blogspot.com*). This pattern is true when applied to Noah Cannon. Noah embodies a character who vacillates between choosing the perspective of two different species. The two species have their separate cultural and biological life. Nevertheless, this separation is not the defining feature of their being. On

the contrary, the story, despite the hostilities, reflects a struggle towards mutual understanding and unity. Noah acts as an agent to fulfil this unification.

The mechanism that Butler uses for this end is the recreation of a context that reminds the historical condition of slavery. The contextualization allows Butler to combine the racial history of slavery with the postmodern notion of identity and, therefore, address the need to reflect and heal the scars left on black identity as well as reflecting a posthuman understanding of her generation. This masterful combination reflects the multidimensionality of the concept of identity in the postmodern age. The racial dimension helps Butler to replace the “amnesiac severance from the past... by an assumption of some kind of responsibility” (Luckhurst “Horror and Beauty” 32). This responsibility is fulfilled by “confrontation with a disavowed history” (32). As Butler in her interview with Randall Keenan explains, black history is a background which black generations have not been eager to bring to the fore during their activities for social recognition and equality in the recent century (496). Referring to this past through a reflection on the postmodern dimension, “Amnesty” lets the readers, particularly its black addressees, have the opportunity to face and deal with what obsesses them as a racial heritage. This illustration acts like a healing model through which the protagonist, gained the knowledge and ability to manage and control her life through connection with others, attentively challenges to familiarize her people with the same understanding to help them live meaningfully in radically different conditions.

Connecting the historical allusion to slavery with the coming of the interplanetary aliens, “Amnesty” reflects the permanent presence of the Othered figures in human’s routine life. The story deals with the concept of alien as a source of fear and hatred. Wolmark believes, “Butler uses the device of the alien being to explore the cultural determinants of definitions of the other as a signifier of threat” (29). “Amnesty” deals with this concept of Othering when it reflects the hatred and distrust of the free humans and the Communities toward each other. Yet, it is not the only voice heard in the story.

“Amnesty” also reverberates with the promising voice of change which works to bring together the Othered and separated voices of the story. This is done through focusing on the concept of developing communication between the two communities of humans and plant-like beings, as I discussed earlier. The strategy employed for this development is training.

Education is a concept which connects “Amnesty” to Butler’s previous works. Dealing with reading and writing, it reverberates a reference to the black slaves’ history of literacy. Reading and writing were forbidden activities for slaves and those who disobeyed faced severe punishments. There is an allusion to this tradition in the story: ““You can’t bring in radios, televisions, computers, or recordings of any kind. You can bring in a few books-the paper kind-but that’s all”” (“Amnesty” 178). What we should consider to understand this imagery is the temporal dimension in the story. Apparently, the time of “Amnesty” envisions a far future. Naturally, the form and content of learning in that time appropriates the technology of the time. Digital technology is the means that makes learning and communication possible in such circumstances. The prohibition of the digital gadgets which have educational functions in the Community reminds us of the forbiddance of education for black slaves. But, it also has a second layer.

The layer refers to the dichotomy of the story, where the Communities reflect a nature-related life and the human societies an industrial one, the dystopian condition which has afflicted the human-settled areas reflects the end of the rampant use of technology that humanity has followed. The allowance for the paper-kind of books in “Amnesty” parallels the changing and challenging strategy that the Communities have towards the technological human civilization. It reminds me of Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World*. In this story, Huxley represents a group of isolated people who have preserved their ancestral literary heritage in the form of printed texts. They are assets which keep them connected to their past. The emphasis of the Communities in “Amnesty” on the printed texts reflects the same idea to some extent. As reflected in

their interest in human sports and dance, they strive to observe and understand humanity through connection to their original cultural heritage and work. Their favour towards printed text shows that they somehow like to reconcile humanity with its original heritage preserved in printed texts.

The obsession with this humanitarian concern shows that despite the references to black history, like her other works, Butler has not restrained herself within racial limits. There are repeated scenes in the story which represent Noah's conflict with a black man who criticizes her in the face for cooperating with aliens. Noah's confrontation with his allegations reflects what I explained in chapter one about the black feminist awakening to challenge the dominant black masculine norms of racial integrity and uplifting. There are quotations where James Adio, the black man, likens those humans who are connected to the Communities to "[w]hores or house pets" ("Amnesty" 179). Noah's reaction to this derogatory language, which aims to belittle her leading role, is to confront him with his own offensive view, emphasizing on the practicality of what she is offering as a responsive solution: "'We're neither of course. But you'll probably feel as though you're both unless you learn the language. We are one interesting and unexpected thing, though.'" She paused. "'We're an addictive drug'" (179). Describing humanity in terms that reflects Adio's understanding, Noah challenges him to illustrate the inevitability of the symbiotic mixing with aliens as the only option that will guarantee human's sustainable existence on Earth. Doing so, she introduces an alternative feminist perspective that simultaneously refutes the essential (biologically deterministic) understanding of human nature. In this un-essential understanding, womanhood is not defined by pre-fixed roles; a woman can be a leader or reformer who conducts her people to achieve a goal.

In addition, by mixing Noah's explanations about her inevitable sexual intercourses in the captive cells of the Community with the experience of the body being held by the Communities, the story reflects the "post-gender"ed notion of the postmodern identity



that, as I referred to in the beginning of this section, embodies an alternative model of feminist understanding (see page 212). This understanding moves beyond the traditional feminist concern of the necessity to preserve female body as an exclusive marker of femaleness. In other words, the imagery discloses an alternative dimension of the story which, concretizing an originless post-gendered body, negates the totality of the biological determinism, distinguished by writers like Zaki, Luckhurst or Nilges, as an inescapable pattern of humanity in Butler's writings.

According to what I discussed thus far, sketching a frame of life that includes historical background as well as sociobiological entity, Butler offers a tenable sample of science fiction which defies the stereotypical notion of science fiction as a genre not dealing with what is going on "here-at-home" (Wolmark 28).<sup>53</sup> These features help us realize Butler's story and differentiates it from the escape fantasies of science fiction. She does not characterize the protagonist as a hero who overcomes everyone and everything with her supernatural power. To use Pepper's term, "Amnesty" is not a "feminist revision" to embody a "heroic agency." The story of "Amnesty" is about the decision of a human being to live the "choice" she is "enforced" to choose (Peppers 50). She is the embodiment of an enlightened human who has come to understand her restrictions, capabilities, and duties and chooses to take her way through this understanding, helping others to see its necessity also. Wolmark points to the same concept when, explaining the reflection of "collective human experience" in Butler's literary writing, argues how Butler deals with the problems of her society not by creating "heroic individuals but by drawing on the power of network" (42).

Noah reflects a woman who is determined to start a mental change in humans. As the same source of goodness, she resembles the God of "The Book of Martha" who worked to open Martha's horizon of thought to the aspects of her duty towards her fellow beings. Discussing her mission with her employer, Noah says:

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<sup>53</sup>It refers to what is related to Earth and ordinary life on it. Science fiction is dominantly assumed as a genre that deals with non-real and interplanetary adventures.

I want to make them think. I want to tell them what human governments won't tell them. I want to vote for peace between your people and mine by telling the truth. I don't know whether my efforts will do any good, in the long run, but I have to try. ("Amnesty" 155)

The quote represents Noah's sense of responsibility in front of her people. Despite the disappointing feature of humans in the story to Other, not only the Communities, but also people of their own kind, Noah represents an emblem of hope to change this propensity. Her sense of responsibility is not limited within mental assumptions, but is actualized through an "attentive" commitment to train a generation of Translators who will work to bridge the gaps between human and non-human societies. The commitment, verbalized in "I want to vote for peace... by telling truth," entails a conscious practice of "honesty" to establish "a fundamentally friendly attitude towards others rather than a tendency to take an oppositional and defensive stance" (Hampson *After Christianity* 265). Her determination to establish peace encourages her to show her people the importance of more open view towards others. This openness, gained from her mutual interaction with the Communities, lets her start and continue the spiritual practice of "listening" with some representatives of her own people. Embedded in her patient dialogue with these people, the practice works as a therapy that reduces the tensions through "speaking and being listened to" (263). The excerpt highlights the protagonist's dedication to work for a complete integrity between her people and the Communities. It seems this integrity is reflected in the breaking down of the hierarchical relationships, albeit partially, within human society, on the one hand, and between humans and the Communities, on the other hand. Noah is fully aware that dialogue is the key to maintain a sustainable life on Earth and, therefore, uses her knowledge and experience to heal the scars left from misunderstandings between humans and the Communities.

Another aspect related to the concept of survival in the story is its name symbolism. The symbolism resides on a Biblical allusion and connects the historical and biological dimension of the story to its theological aspect. As a female, the protagonist has the name Noah which is entirely strange and uncommon for a woman. The point is discussed emphatically in the story:

“Noah Cannon,” Rune Johnsen said, ... “I thought that name sounded familiar. ... I remember seeing your name on the lists of abductees. I noticed it because you were listed as female. I had never run across a woman named Noah before.” (“Amnesty” 159)

The name Noah alludes to the Biblical name of Prophet Noah who, under God’s guidance, made an ark and saved the selected members of humanity and natural life from global destruction – global in the sense of that time, of course – despite the extinction of the rest. Through this allusion, Butler very beautifully ties the two Biblical and sociobiological discourses of the story. The notion of selection in “Amnesty,” embodies a new theological discourse different from the Biblical one. It also challenges the sociobiological determinism which Butler is concerned with.

Noah does not go through the same process of selection as the traditional Biblical Noah. Her concern for the unification of humanity and Communities does not exempt any one as the unwanted or preferred in both groups. Unlike the masculine norms of selection based on ideologically divine worth, she embodies an attending guide who does not neglect or banish any one as the Other worthless one. On the contrary, she represents an ideologically open-minded figure who stands open to the world around her. As an alternative to traditional Christian ideology, this perspective challenges the culturally restrictive Christian theology which, veneered by a pedagogical morality, strives to control and dismiss what it Others as unnatural. The most noticeable representative of this voice in the story is James Adio, a conservative black man, who

finds himself caught in the unavoidable dilemma to work for what he sees as exploiting Communities or be loyal to his human race:

He let his shoulders slump. "I'm here to work for them, lady. I'm poor. I don't have all kinds of special knowledge that only thirty people in the whole country have. I just need a job." ...

"You can make money here."... "I'm wealthy myself. I'm putting half a dozen nieces and nephews through college. ... why shouldn't yours?"

"Thirty pieces of silver," he muttered. ...

Rune Johnson smiled but James Adio stared at her with open dislike. ("Amnesty" 168)

The theological dimension here is hidden in his sensitivity about the money he is going to be paid. It seems the work and the money remind him of the betrayal of Judas Iscariot and he sees himself as Judas selling his humanity here. It is also reflected in the sinful concept of "whores" in Adio's first quote which I referred earlier. Adio's remarks highlight a religious perspective that works to justify the discrediting of others as unworthy and, therefore, wishing for their disappearance. The view is also supported by some of the applicants:

"They can't leave," Noah said.

Thera nodded. "Maybe not. But they can die!"  
("Amnesty" 182)

Through the entire interactions that she has with her fellow humans, Noah attempts to remove the tensions between the two species. To achieve this, she struggles to cope with the condemnation she receives from her fellow beings. Unlike her Biblical forerunner, she does not embody a missionary who leaves the majority of her people and other species, denouncing them as uncompromising cursed ones.<sup>54</sup> Embodying a similar threatening situation of annihilation similar to the Biblical Flood story, "Amnesty" narrates a saving story in which the saving function is not practiced though the selection of a chosen group to the destruction of the Others. Noah does not limit the scope of her

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<sup>54</sup>For the Biblical story of Noah and the Flood refer to Genesis 6:11-7:5

survival to humans or the Communities. Her vision includes both of them, working hard to help them understand and come together, as she emphasized in her answer to her employer. This theological non-selectivity has a natural biological dimension as well.

In the traditional Biblical story, Noah selects samples of various animals to save their species, letting the rest disappear as a result of human sins. It does not embody a natural selection of the strongest or the fittest. Instead, this culling represents a random selection. Conscious to preserve the biological species, Noah chooses a couple of each type, bringing them into his ark and keeping them till the flood subsides. The Communities of “Amnesty” reflect the same sense of ark. But, there is an essential difference that determines the postmodern nature of the coexistence in this postmodern or post-Biblical ark. The gathering of biological types in these Communities does not follow a natural or biological selection, whether random or not, to ensure preservation in the modern sense. On the contrary, the argument of the story, I believe, follows a non-essential biology in which the symbiotic coexistence of all is sought as the best way to achieve sustainable survival. Though it is true that the early random locating of the kidnapped humans within the cells embodies a natural selection, as appears from the text, this practice is abandoned when the Communities learn more about humans. In natural selection, survival is the result of natural abilities. Combined with instinctive experiential knowledge, these natural abilities aid the strong samples of species to win the battle of life. “Amnesty” is not solely obsessed with the natural abilities and experiential knowledge of the survivors. Along with them, it considers the factor of awareness. This awareness results from a conscious assessment of experiential knowledge and is practiced via recognizing, and not ignoring or deleting, the presence of others.

Hampson argues that “a disregard for the beauty and integrity of other life, an inclination to stamp it out, does seem to me to be contrary to what I could count a true spirituality” (*After Christianity* 259). “Amnesty” entirely enlivens the same spiritual

standpoint. It constructs an imaginary world in which the disappearance of hierarchical classifications works to envision a more fully integrated coexistence. Recruiting the historical discourse of slavery which philosophically rested on the New Testament implication “that the use of slaves, provided it is humane, does not contravene the will of God” (*Theology and Feminism*<sup>26</sup>), the story transforms this history to develop alternative non-Christian sociobiological and theological discourses. In the new conceptual world that results, Noah of “Amnesty” is convinced that cooperating for openness toward the differences is a promising asset which paves the way for an ‘integrated’ life.

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## CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

Analysing a “posthuman” politics in Butler’s *Fledgling*,<sup>55</sup> Nayar notes a new biological sense of citizenship through a new understanding of multispecies relationship (796). I see the same pattern running in the four works I analysed in this thesis. All four works embody a movement towards a “posthuman” sense of self that is a movement from “bare life” towards “good life” (797). In this pattern, the self(human) develops an understanding that, first, recognizes its own capabilities, desires, and needs and, second, “does not see the human as the center of all things” (796). It offers an alternative discourse of power that “sees the human as an instantiation of connections, linkages, and crossings in a context where species are seen as coevolving, and competition is rejected in favour of cooperation between life forms” (796). Focusing on the descriptions of physical touch, vulnerability, and invasion, as well as the connection and communication following this physical attachment, Butler’s stories (*The Parables*, “The Book of Martha,” and “Amnesty”) envision a new world – though not a perfect utopia – where the recognition of Self through the Other works towards a better life. This focus on the interrelation of self and other, and the way Butler deals with it to reflect a better world, renders the stories successful samples of serious postmodern science fiction.

The selected texts in this thesis are works of science fiction that deal with the concept of change. This change embodies a positive perspective of survival through the recognition of humanity’s agency, symbolized by strong, coloured heroines, to refashion sustainable life situations. Survival is an umbrella concept that covers entire biological, cultural, and sociopolitical situations, fully addressing their racial, sexual, and classist aspects. As I explained in the Introduction, science fiction was traditionally looked at as a literary genre which reflected an obsession with the mechanical, technological world of gadgets and when it dealt with humanity, took up the concerns

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<sup>55</sup> Butler, Octavia. *Fledgling*. New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2007.

of the white, middle-class masculine. Postmodernist science fiction changed this tradition.

The texts I investigated in my analysis reveal the strength of Butler's voice in this field. Her stories recreate worlds where coloured heroines, adopting a spiritual-scientific perspective, work successfully as reformers to change a dystopian situation. The common feature of these reformers is their obsession with the concept of difference as Other and how it can exacerbate an unsettled situation rendering it into a nightmarish life. The obsession with difference as a unifying concept in turbulent situations reveals Butler's science fictions as serious works of literature through which she narrates the gradual change from dystopian worlds of hatred and isolation to humanitarian peaceful ones. In these stories, her experiences and heritage as a black woman are assets that enrich her writing. She draws on this background to provide tangible illustrations of Othering –whether biological, regional, social, political, racial, and sexual–whitewashed by the religious justifications of the white society. Butler's stories embody science fiction as a "literature of change" and succeed in envisioning alternative worlds where diagnoses of problems as well as the acceptance of Other as part of Self, work to recreate or, better, revive dead sociobiological life.

Like Sheryl Vint and Jones, I also believe that Butler's works "reveal moments of 'becoming'" (C. L. Jones 95). This "becoming" is their strong point which safeguards Butler's writing from turning into a shallow fabrication of anti-white, contra-masculine, and unspiritual science fiction. The works reflect the gradual maturity of a mind that uses her racial experiences as a tool to provide helpful solutions for reforming worlds in which warding off of unwanted people and ideas is drawing civilization to the abyss. In other words, she introduces alternative worlds. Butler's mastery at creating alternative worlds is revealed in the way she introduces alternative "attentive" perspectives which, in their turn, actualize inclusive strategies that tackle the dystopian exclusive ones. These "attentive" perspectives and consequent inclusive strategies cover the realms of



inter-human relationships as well as the God-human, and human-nature ones in the *Parables*, “The Book of Martha,” and “Amnesty.” Likewise, they are postmodern not in the sense that they refute origin, but they recognize “the multispecies and multi-origin presubjective conditions of all life forms” (Nayar 808).

These stories embody a “[rebirth] into a new life” (Nayar 799). But, the thing that differentiates their focus from the strong biological perspective that Nayar traces in *Fledglings* is their deep cultural and historical connections. All the four selected texts of my analysis feature candid racial observations. They are narrated based on black American history and its cultural-political heritage of “racial uplifting” and “integrity,” showing how this heritage, contextualized within a broader perspective of non-racial integrity, can serve as an effective instrument to change a “bare life” into a “good” one, which in Nayar’s term, is the “posthuman” one.

Another notion that has strong presence in black American culture and which Butler highlights as a utopian strategy in her writing is education. Education and its concomitant disciplines of reading and writing demonstrate an innovative “merging of reason and religion” (C. L. Jones 97) in the four science fiction works of my analysis. Jones relates this feature to the postmodern nature of Butler’s fictions. Modern science fiction regarded religion as “essentially of the ‘Other’, the backward and the primitive, and its role in sf was either to be undermined or to indicate the level of civilization which any given alien race had achieved” (Mendlesohn “Religion and Science Fiction” 264-65). Butler’s science fictions demonstrate a vision opposing this understanding. They are stories about religion.

In their postmodern representation of religion, they reflect a “naturalist” vision of spirituality which successfully bridges the gap resulting from the hierarchical, “supernatural” understanding of it. In orthodox supernatural theism, of which Butler takes Christianity as the most notable sample, God, human being, and the rest of creation stand in a hierarchical relationship. This hierarchy, according to Biblical and

post-Biblical feminists like Ruether and Hampson, embodies a colonizing system of master and slave, where God stands as a mastering Lord over human and non-human creation. Assuming itself as the chosen representative of God, humanity inserts the same dominating role on the non-human world. The difference is that in this imitation of divine order, the masculine part associates itself with divinity, and taking the God-Father image, relegates femininity to a lower rank, affiliating it with the world of nature. Biblical and Postbiblical feminists share this understanding and demand change within the realm of theology. The distinction between the visions –my study considers that of Ruether and of Hampson exclusively –is that a Biblical feminist like Ruether attributes this male-centred hierarchy to insertions from non-Biblical sources, while Hampson attributes it to the masculine nature of Christianity. Reflecting the same notion of theological change towards non-hierarchicalism, the stories of my analysis reflect a change towards a nonsexual and non-hierarchical “natural” theism.

The *Parables* reflect the attempts of a she-missioner who develops an egalitarian theological doctrine to reshape her society based on a same-level understanding of cooperation between God, humanity, and nature. This doctrine, called Earthseed, challenges the religious assumptions of Christianity as the only true one before God, refuting others as heretic. On the one hand, the gender-neutral perspective of Earthseed, unlike that of Christianity, does not restrain women within prefixed feminine roles. On the contrary, confronting the religious ghettoism of the Christianity, Earthseed offers a vision that elevates woman to a leading position where she can share the religious responsibility at the same level with man. What gives Earthseed the power to claim for such a world is its particular “natural” understanding of God.

Mirroring Hampson’s concept of God as the beneficent, non-Almighty source of goodness, Earthseed conceptualizes a humanitarian Deity who cooperates with humanity and nature to reestablish a harmonious, peaceful order of life on Earth. Through this understanding, the mutual Otherness of the God-human relationship, that

is to say the superiority of God versus the inferiority of human, is refused and the relationship is “naturalized” within a constructive, inclusive, and cooperative frame. Still, beside its spiritual essence, this naturalization has a scientific dimension.

Hampson explains it by referring to “causal system” as the only possible system of life. Based on her explanation, the supernatural intervention of divine will in the world is not possible. By supernatural, she means the breaking down of the causal system rules. She believes that God’s presence and revelation in this world is through scientific rules and to have a theological understanding, we shall know the mechanism of natural rules. Earthseed of the *Parables* manifests the same view. Lauren’s entire mission is represented in her struggle to know the scientific mechanism behind phenomena and encourage others towards the same understanding. This vision integrates the physical and spiritual dimensions of the *Parables* and they emerge as successful concretization of postmodern religion.

Moreover, in parallel with the black history of learning and education, this focus on scientism recalls the scientific discrimination against blacks in American history. From this perspective, *Parables* are stories against the educational ghettoism imposed on black society. Through the focus on learning, they represent how illiteracy and ignorance can work as a mechanism to safeguard slavery. The alternative world that Lauren establishes, reveals the potential of knowledge and literacy to put an end to oppression.

Earthseed also challenges the anthropocentric view of Christianity. It reveals *Parables* as stories which narrate the sacredness of nature as the source of life on Earth. There are many references within the stories that describe the renewal of life through the circular movement of life and death in nature. Decentering the fixed stand of human as the master of nature, the pattern echoes change as the most powerful theme in the novels. It conceptualizes the nonstop nature of life beyond the control of human beings

and, by connecting it to the concept of “God is change,” levels out the hierarchical relationship among God, humanity, and nature.

The same egalitarian view of the interrelationships between God, human being, and nature runs through “The Book of Martha” and “Amnesty.” “The Book of Martha” envisions a dialogue between God and Martha. In this story, God is depicted as a source of goodness who has a mission for Martha. In this mission, He asks Martha to save humanity from itself. The story follows the same notions presented in the *Parables*: it features an afflicted human society and the coming to self-knowledge of a coloured woman. This woman is the symbol of an “integrated humanity”; being woman and black, she dismantles the sexual and racial connotations of “perfect humanity” from an orthodox Christian perspective.

Framed as a dialogue, the story embodies the “attentive” practice of “listening” on both the divine and human side that works to enlighten the protagonist on her way towards salvation. Salvation is the nub of her mission, or a point of division, where her new theological understanding reshapes her identity in a conceptual space other than that of Christianity. Embodying a perspective similar to that of Hampson’s post-Biblicalism, “Amnesty,” like *Parables*, challenges religious ghettoism. The way God addresses Martha and offers role models to her, creates a space where her understanding, leading role, and determinism are appreciated by God. The imagery and what follows up to the end of the story reflects the gradual mental growth of a coloured woman who, based on her personal experiences and the “attentive” interaction with God, gains the knowledge and confidence to “control” her life in what she sees as the right way. This control is reflected in her arguments with God, her refutation of stereotypical orthodox beliefs, and the determination to act and choose based on her own understanding. The story does not represent a blind subjugation of Martha before God. On the contrary, the dialogue with God gives her an idea about the authenticity of her decision to not fulfil His demand. I see this understanding reflecting the essence of

God as a benevolent helper who accompanies Martha towards self-confidence, giving her a free hand to counter the masculine “supernatural” conception of God and the cultural consequences of it.

“Amnesty” is also obsessed with Othering. Recalling *Parables*, it deals with the Othered relationship between human being and nature. The symbol of nature in this story is the strange plant-like Communities which have come from other planets and are striving to engage in a symbiotic life with humanity. Narrated within a frame of interrelated biological, cultural, and historical discourses, the story reveals the conceptualization of a new world under a new spiritual consideration. In this world, the struggle to learn about human being’s entertainments, habits, culture, and language is eagerly pursued by the Communities as an “attentive” practice to initiate peaceful coexistence with humanity. In Hampson’s explanation, this is a spiritual practice which allows “watching both oneself and others” (*After Christianity* 260). But, this new perspective is not exclusive to the Communities. “Observing nature” is another practice that Hampson unites with the above “attentive” cultural observations. Noah of “Amnesty” is a protagonist who has fulfilled this practice, and is struggling to encourage her fellow beings to do the same. The communicating code is one result of this observation that has provided humanity with the chance to communicate with the Communities, thereby, permitting mutual understanding. Nevertheless, the interaction between human being and the Communities in this story may raise some doubts about the subjugation of humanity before them.

Describing the scenes in which human beings are enfolded by the Communities, “Amnesty” tempts reader to see connotations of slavery. These connotations are further strengthened by the description of the disappearance of human beings from their homes, recalling the abduction of black people from their continent and their smuggling to America. Fortifying this interpretation is the imagery illustrating the entrance of the strange Communities into the sky, reminding the reader of the arrival of settlers on the

new continent (America). These were the very settlers who relocated the blacks as slaves in America. Nevertheless, given the overall plot of the story, these interpretations are challenged.

The resettling, abduction, and attempt to know about human culture and biology does not embody an enslaving or colonizing strategy. These Communities do not keep abductees – to use human terms – by force, do not impose their culture and language on humanity and, most importantly, they do not usurp the habitats of human beings. As the story unfolds, it becomes clear that the abduction of human beings was done without any understanding of human biology, culture, and system of life. The Communities even did not know that this was abduction; they had no intention to colonize humans. In their settlement on Earth, they never occupied human-settled areas, and they did not force human beings away from their homes. Their interest in human culture and language is not a strategy for infiltrating humanity in order to raise a generation of human beings that would internalize and follow the culture and language of the Communities. Such a strategy, in Coogan-Gehr's explanation, demands a removal of the cultural differences of the target society (90). We do not observe such a policy from the Communities; they neither impose their culture and language, nor remove that of human beings.

From a biological standpoint, "Amnesty" offers an alternative understanding to that of modernity which was based on a hierarchical system of evolution. In this hierarchy, the presumed pure and fittest species were given priority over the others, justified under the notion of "natural selection," while human being was assumed to be the master of all. Opposing this perspective, as I explained in the previous chapter, "Amnesty" replaces the "eugenic" concept of purity and notion of the survival of the fittest with a postmodern understanding of agency, where the Christian perspective of human being as the master of creation is shaken. In this new understanding, the entity and identity of humans are recognized in connection and correlation with the nonhuman world. The

new concept of agency that this view reflects, leads to the acceptance of “difference” or the “Other” and the emergence of a “posthuman” understanding of humanity. In this new agency, humanity unites with what is nonhuman and consciously decides to work with it to guarantee its survival. Like *Parables* and “The Book of Martha,” the leader of humanity in this way is a coloured woman. Considering her experiences of contact with her fellow beings and the Communities, she develops a sense of agency through recognizing the negative and positive features of the two species, struggling to share the understanding with both of them.

The agency is reflected in her determined “attentive” concern for her fellow beings where, despite their hostility, she consciously works with the Communities to enlighten her people about the importance of accepting these strange Communities within themselves. Her agency is that of a conscious teacher and is symbolized by her “translating” position; she is a “Translator” who tries to instruct her people to use the signifying code of communication that is commonly developed by selected human “Translators” and the Communities. Here, education is again a theme that links “Amnesty” to the other three stories of my analysis. It is the mission that Noah struggles to fulfil.

The mission does not reflect the agency of a committed agent working for the benefit of its masters. Noah is a conscious and devout human being who tries to ensure the survival of humanity by helping the two species understand each other. Unlike Lauren in *Parables* and Martha in “The Book of Martha,” Noah’s agency in “Amnesty” is not defined within a mission from God. Nevertheless, it is an agency with a spiritual dimension. The story has Biblical connotations. The name of Noah, as is pointed out in the story, is strangely attributed to a woman. This name symbolism carries a Biblical allusion and, simultaneously, challenges the biological and sexual-racial ideology of this allusion. Noah’s name and her residing in a Community, while attempting to persuade her fellow humans to enter into the Communities and experience coexistence

with these Communities, remind us of Noah's Ark. Like the Biblical story of Noah, "Amnesty" reminds the mission and agency of a reformer to ensure the survival of life on Earth. But, it embodies a mission concluded through a logical contemplation on the status quo, not because of divine inspiration.

In this new version of the story of Noah, survival is not exclusively limited for a chosen group of people and animals, pushing others into annihilation. It also puts forward a new female Noah who, on the one hand, challenges the exclusive Biblical tradition of masculine reformers and, on the other hand, unlike the father-figure Noah of the Bible, expands her consideration of survival to cover everyone. Mirroring the unconditional inclusion of the species within the Communities, this post-Biblical retelling of a biblical allusion is exactly in line with dismantling the biological restriction of the survival of the fittest.

At the same time, the post-Biblical vision of "Amnesty" challenges the sexual and racial prejudices in the other white and black characters. This challenge fully represents itself in the conflict Noah feels in the argument with James Adio, a black man, as well as the white characters who represent vivid anthropocentric, hierarchical prejudices. By standing up to Adio's abusive language, Noah confronts the sexual discrimination in masculine norms which, according to Collins, give priority to masculine voice under the pretext of "racial uplifting" and guaranteeing "racial integrity" (208). Agreeing with this uncompromising perspective is her stand in favour of the Communities, which demurs at the traditional Western white anthropocentric perspective as a "patriarchal hierarchy" (C. L. Jones 10). It is in line with my discussion of Ruether's ecofeminist perspective as a nature-friendly perspective to guarantee a sustainable and fruitful life on Earth.

To summarize, the posthumanity that is observable in the texts, unlike that which Nayar recognizes in *Fledgling*, is not a mere biological product. Though biology is a decisive discourse – particularly in "Amnesty" – the posthumanity that Butler reflects in *Parables*, "The Book of Martha," and "Amnesty" is the by-product of culture and



biology. The “hyperempathy” of Lauren and the prominent presence of hyperempathic “sharers” in *Talents* as well as Martha’s physical considerations of God in “The Book of Martha” are motifs which are at the service of the cultural theme of the stories: change. This change is a desired state of life resulting from a new state of mind. In this new standpoint, difference is no longer negated as Other, but appropriated as a constituting part. As my analyses reveal, feminist theology, with its revolutionary perspective in bridging the isolated concerns of culture and nature, would be an illuminating discipline to uncover and investigate the mechanism of this change.

### **5.1 Suggestions for Further Reading**

In this analysis, I focused on the selected texts of a postmodern black female writer who is a science fiction writer. Despite the dominant concept of science fiction as escape literature, the stories embody the skilful weaving of knowledge, culture, and religion and this renders them innovative forms of serious postmodern fiction. My focus on the concept of saviour as a teacher, along with the application of a theological perspective on the stories was an attempt to highlight the interaction of the very concepts of knowledge, culture, and religion in them. However, it must be noted that despite interaction with knowledge, these stories are not fictions about technology. Though they are obsessed with the “denaturalization” of life, which renders them susceptible to critiques of technologically afflicted life, we do not see the familiar obsession with gadgets normally found in science fiction narratives.

Butler’s priority in these works is to use scientific understanding as a tool to investigate social crises. As a writer from a black minority whose life, culture, and understanding has incessantly and systematically been oppressed in American society, she is sufficiently experienced and well-equipped to represent social Others in the stories. Furthermore, narrating the stories within a theological perspective, she not only

bridges scientific thinking with religion, but also prepares a ground for exploring the religious justification on the background of slavery.

My priority in this thesis was to investigate the promising aspects of the selected texts as the narrations of a “new beginning.” Since I had the obligation to deal with a particular concept within a limited frame and space, I had no chance to deal with those aspects of religious agency that affirmed slavery. I think one of the themes that deserves consideration, and yet is not fully examined in Butler’s writing, is the relationship between Christianity and slavery.

It was really illuminating to analyse Butler’s works from white, post-Biblical and Biblical feminist perspectives. This analysis helped me to have a better understanding of the spiritual commonalities between the black feminist struggle for self-recognition and reflection, and that of white feminist theologians. Yet, this reading, no doubt, is not perfect. Parallel to the connection between Christianity and slavery, a major contribution to Butler studies is to probe the role of the Christian missionaries as agents of colonization. Apart from theological perspectives, it would provide readers with a better understanding of the role of non-Christian missionaries in confronting colonialism. This understanding, in its turn, would assist the reconsideration of Butler’s literary activity as a manifestation of postcolonial mentality. The *Parables* strongly suit this perspective.

In such a postcolonial refiguring, as C. L. Jones points out, Butler illustrates the hostility of modern scientific perspective towards indigenous religions. She explains this hostility as a means of colonization (15). Under this rubric, colonizer is depicted as a rational and illuminating power, liberating an ignorant colonized society that is attached to illogical superstitions. *Earthseed* is a fictional recreation of such religions.

The hostility is not limited within the dichotomy of science and religion. It would be more illuminating if we investigate the cooperation between Christianity and modern science to discredit indigenous religions. While “science and Christianity have long

held a contentious relationship” (C. L. Jones 22), one probability that Jones emphasizes is not examined by scholars is “the ways in which Christianity as an accepted Western religion functioned alongside science and reason to justify colonial expansion” (22). Resorting to scientific reasoning, *Earthseed* envisions an indigenous religion that struggles to terminate Christianity’s monopoly as source of truth and wisdom. The illustration of Christian American troops as savage, illiterate, and exploitative usurpers attacking the truth-seeking followers of *Earthseed*, on the other hand, overturns the dichotomy of civilized Christian nation versus uncivilized non-Christian ones. Considering these two groups as symbols of civilized Western civilization versus the uncivilized Eastern one, *Parables* appear as novels that write a new history of human civilization, opposed to the approved Western one. This retelling deserves to be excavated.

Taking into account the religious aspect helps widen the perspective of postcolonial analyses of Butler’s texts. Her writings have repeatedly been the subject of postcolonial readings. In this category is of Haraway’s cyborg theory which locates bodily metaphors in Butler’s stories to illustrate colonizing strategies and offer solutions to survive the racial and sexist impositions of these strategies.<sup>56</sup> Other examples are Rosi Braidotti, Anne Balsamo, and Chela Sandoval to which Jones refers in order to elaborate on Butler’s literary oeuvre. Despite these illuminating perspectives, I think what will enrich the postcolonial perspective on Butler is to regard the alternative spiritual dimensions in Butler’s works that envision an egalitarian society less susceptible to exploiting temptations. We observe these alternatives in “The Book of Martha” and “Amnesty,” either through the vivid description of the “natural” relationship of God and human being or the more “attentive” and “controlling” practices of the protagonists to put their life as well as that of others in “order.”

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<sup>56</sup> Haraway, Donna. “A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century.” *The Reinvention of Nature*. NY: Routledge, 1991.

By depicting alternative spiritual worlds attuned to racial and sexual aspects, *Parables*, “The Book of Martha,” and “Amnesty” emerge as powerful texts with significant implications for political considerations. This openness to multiplicity of critical disciplines, no doubt, reveals the literary power and innovation of a writer whose serious science fiction disaffirms the traditional label of science fiction as a fantasy written for the entertainment of young white men.

To conclude, I would like to emphasize that in this thesis I did my best to discuss the potentiality of the stories for inspiring a better life as well as their other sociopolitical potentialities. Nevertheless, I am aware that this analysis is far from perfect and it is worth investigating Butler’s science fiction from other possible perspectives. Definitely, any study able to reveal other aspects and themes which I have not discussed in my analysis, or elaborate on the other works of this writer, who has striven to tear apart the sociopolitical and spiritual ideologies which restrict human thought within classist, sexual, and racial walls, will benefit black literature.

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