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Different Shades of Rape in Octavia Butler's Oeuvre

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¹ All illustrations included in this dissertation are original pieces of art created by Katarzyna Michocka–Cichosz, and illustrate my interpretation of the discussed texts. Some illustrations were inspired by works of other authors, which I carefully indicate in the dissertation. The inclusion of visual art in the project underscores my intention to reflect posthuman relationality between different fields of study.

Chapter I

*Rudra had been rescued, but she was dead.
Her captors had beaten her and raped
until she was so badly hurt that
her rescuers could not get her home alive.*
“Adulthood Rites” Octavia Butler

*Which doesn't mean she can't feel pain.
Just means she can't do anything about it.*
Hannibal, TV series

1. Introduction

The notion of ‘difference’ has been weaponized by humanity since its dawn and no other species ever inhabiting planet Earth has been so notorious for turning it into the tool of othering whatever being that has not complied with its arbitrary criteria. Since this very concept became the foundation of man’s thinking, humanity has shown great creativity as regards diverse kinds of persecuting the Other. Arguably, one of the cruellest types has been rape. The history of mankind abounds in thousands of conflicts whose

sides would abuse communities of people who could not defend themselves against this particularly atrocious way of violating the human body. Not only open conflicts, however, had witnessed man engaging in this activity. It has been perpetrated also during the time of peace, which led to penalizing it as a crime against the person. No matter the time, rape has always seemed to be employed as a means of humiliating and conquering the Other. While rape has been well-documented and analyzed by specialists from different fields, I believe that a relatively new academic strand of research, i.e. critical posthumanism, casts a new light on our understanding of this brutal crime. For this reason, the present dissertation investigates rape's various aspects in Octavia Butler's writing from a critical posthumanist vantage point. In the meditations to follow, I try to unveil how Butler problematizes the notion of rape first in the context of the Antebellum America of *Kindred* in chapter II. Then, in chapter III, I move on to *Lilith's Brood* and "Bloodchild" to show how the narrative genius of the writer changes our understanding of rape by framing it in the postapocalyptic scenario of symbiogenesis with aliens after humans almost succeeded in annihilating themselves. Before I reach this point of my analysis, let me set the context for it and briefly discuss another fantastic world.

On 2 October 2016, HBO aired the first episode of its new TV series titled *Westworld*. As the series information reads, it is "a dark odyssey about the dawn of artificial consciousness and the evolution of sin. Set at the intersection of the near future and the reimagined past, it explores a world in which every human appetite, no matter how noble or depraved, can be indulged" (HBO website). It is perhaps important to add at this point that most human appetites evinced in the film seem to revolve around sexual humiliation and exploitation of cyborg women—accompanied by occasional humiliation and killing of their fathers and partners—which is otherwise strictly forbidden outside the virtual reality called 'the park' created in the world presented.

The motif of sexual humiliation of women itself has been gaining popularity among writers and film producers, which must be a reflection of the tastes of contemporary audiences. *Westworld* certainly takes it to a different level, but the motif has been heavily exploited also by works of pop fiction such as *Fifty Shades of Grey*, which inspired the title of the present dissertation. The film itself is a rather dull rendition of sadomasochistic pornographic productions, which was made so in order to be palatable for a wider audience. Nonetheless, the paraphrase of its title suits the purposes of this study perfectly well as the discussion of Octavia Butler's oeuvre in the following study will revolve around multiple ways of interpreting rape in various posthuman scenarios also so beautifully outlined in *Westworld*.

In light of this dissertation, the idea behind the series is worth investigating as it addresses a long-standing trope that has been explored through various genres and media, i.e. raping an enslaved body which is arbitrarily deprived of pleasure and forced to feel pain. As Toni Morrison puts it in *Beloved*, which is unquestionably one of the most insightful studies of body violation, “[s]laves [are] not supposed to have pleasurable feelings on their own; their bodies [are] not supposed to be like that, but they have to have as many children as they can to please whoever owned them. Still, they were not supposed to have pleasure deep down” (247). Even though there is a striking difference between *Beloved* and *Westworld*—*Beloved* bears witness to thousands of black people who literally fell prey to enslavers, whereas *Westworld* outlines a futuristic vision of a non-existent entertainment facility—both texts attempt to handle similar questions concerning how the body is dirtied and (sexually) abused (295), to use Morrison's words again. As regards *Westworld*, it further seeks to address more specific questions. In the first place, it is why characters' appetite is whetted so easily the moment they enter the park and why, given the opportunity to rape, they seize it with little or no hesitation. After

all, even though the so-called ‘hosts’, which are expected to satisfy any client’s whim, are only humanoid, they do resemble human beings in every single detail. Secondly, and perhaps more crucially, one should consider why we—the viewers—tend to find such rape scenes appealing. After all, most of us would hate it if anything remotely related to rape happened to one of our family members, not to mention ourselves. Still, as Business Insider claims, “the season averages 12 million viewers across all platforms. That’s the largest audience ever for an HBO original series’ freshman season, including the first seasons for ‘Game of Thrones’ and ‘True Detective’” (Business Insider online). These statistics, on the one hand, might be the sign of HBO’s great commercial success. On the other hand, however, they seem to give a grim commentary on the dark side of what often is often—essentialistically—referred to as human nature.

In her analysis of scenes illustrating how awfully human body can be degraded by other people, Tanya Horeck elaborates on this phenomenon from a slightly different angle. The critic thus explains her hypothesis: “there is a tendency to use explicit rape scenes as a means of challenging the spectator to think critically about their own relationship to images of pain and suffering” (158). The question is, however, whether the spectator really thinks critically about this relationship or—unfortunately, more likely—simply indulges his/her increasingly insatiable appetite for rape scenes, which are to a certain extent legitimised by television producers and there is no need to look for them in the depths of the Internet. After all, television seems to be a relatively efficient and safe laboratory where we can do both: satisfy our appetites and test our own reactions

to rape in general and—as in the case of *Westworld*—to test our reactions to rape on automatons, robots, artificial intelligence—you name it.²

I mention *Westworld* in the introduction to my posthumanist philosophical-theoretical meditation on rape in Octavia Butler’s oeuvre since issues which laid a sound foundation for the series and questions raised above are crucial for developing the core idea of this dissertation and are the subject of the discussion I participated in during the 7th Beyond Humanism Conference “From Humanism to Post- and Transhumanism,” held at EWha Womans University in Seoul, South Korea in 2015. The discussion, which had taken place almost exactly a year before the series commenced, touched upon several important points related to entities mankind stands a chance of creating. Undoubtedly, the most vital aspect of the discussion was the recognition of the necessity to develop some moral standards in relation to artificial intelligence and robots. The starting point of our discussion was the suggestion how to answer the question whether objects can be treated as persons and, should the answer be positive, can these non-human persons be granted the rights that any other human being—at least in theory—is granted.³ The very idea that humans should perhaps reconsider their relationship with what so far has been referred to as objects seems to be ground-breaking and appears to have much bearing on the definition of humanity itself.

This issue has become the point of debate for numerous scholars and was addressed, for instance, by Stefan Sorgner in the talk titled “Posthuman Perspectives”

² The readers interested in the use of rape scenes might want to familiarise themselves with numerous TV series which have proliferated over the period of the last few years. It is enough to mention titles such as *Hannibal*, *Dexter*, *Black Mirror*, *Lucifer*, etc. Many of them are available on Netflix.

³ Interestingly, I discussed this issue with some Polish legal practitioners—judges and prosecutors—who cannot envisage this kind of legislature being introduced by the Polish state.

given in Bratislava in December 2016. In his multi-layered presentation, Sorgner mentions *Westworld* explicitly when he states that

[o]ne of the implications of the revised understanding of human beings, which I have just described, is the relevance of moving away from speciesism. Peter Singer was right when he explained that attributing personhood solely and exclusively to human beings implies speciesism. Moral recognition should depend on morally relevant capacities and not solely on someone's belonging to a specific species. (Sorgner, "Posthuman Perspectives," online)

At this point, it needs to be emphasised that establishing a set of clear criteria that would help to unambiguously indicate what qualities should a person—either human or non-human—possess to be regarded as one is naggingly problematic and some attempts remain controversial till this day. For instance, this is how Martha Nussbaum explains her understanding of the so-called 'capabilities approach' in the book titled *Frontiers of Justice. Disability, Nationality, Species Membership*:

The basic intuitive idea of my version of the capabilities approach is that we begin with a conception of the dignity of the human being, and of a life that is worthy of that dignity—a life that has available in it "truly human functioning," in the sense described by Marx in his 1844 *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* (...) Marx speaks of the human being as a being "in need of a totality of human life-activities," and the approach also takes its bearing from this idea, insisting that the capabilities to which all citizens are entitled are many and not one, and are opportunities for activity, not simply quantities of resources. (74)

The premise contained in the above statement is immediately unsettling as it carries two sinister implications. In the first place, human life takes on tremendous importance,

thereby downplaying non-human life. Secondly, it suggests that if a human being cannot put a tick next to any of the points listed by Nussbaum, they are incapable of enjoying what she refers to as a “truly human functioning” (Nussbaum 74), whose definition is rather vague and it is likely to differ from person to person. Even though on the whole Nussbaum’s intentions seem to be good, she implicitly suggests that whoever fails to meet her requirements is not entirely human or, bluntly speaking, is nonhuman. Let me quote the list at length.

The Central Human Capabilities

1. Life. Being able to live to the end of a human life of normal length; not dying prematurely, or before one’s life is so reduced as to be not worth living.
2. Bodily Health. Being able to have good health, including reproductive health; to be adequately nourished; to have adequate shelter.
3. Bodily Integrity. Being able to move freely from place to place; to be secure against violent assault, including sexual assault and domestic violence; having opportunities for sexual satisfaction and for choice in matters of reproduction.
4. Senses, Imagination, and Thought. Being able to use the senses, to imagine, think, and reason—and to do these things in a “truly human” way, a way informed and cultivated by an adequate education, including, but by no means limited to, literacy and basic mathematical and scientific training. Being able to use imagination and thought in connection with experiencing and producing works and events of one’s own choice, religious, literary, musical, and so forth. Being able to use one’s mind in ways protected by guarantees of freedom of expression with respect to both political and

artistic speech, and freedom of religious exercise. Being able to have pleasurable experiences and to avoid nonbeneficial pain.

5. Emotions. Being able to have attachments to things and people outside ourselves; to love those who love and care for us, to grieve at their absence; in general, to love, to grieve, to experience longing, gratitude, and justified anger. Not having one's emotional development blighted by fear and anxiety. (Supporting this capability means supporting forms of human association that can be shown to be crucial in their development.)

6. Practical Reason. Being able to form a conception of the good and to engage in critical reflection about the planning of one's life. (This entails protection for the liberty of conscience and religious observance.)

7. Affiliation. A. Being able to live with and toward others, to recognize and show concern for other human beings, to engage in various forms of social interaction; to be able to imagine the situation of another. (Protecting this capability means protecting institutions that constitute and nourish such forms of affiliation, and also protecting the freedom of assembly and political speech.) B. Having the social bases of self-respect and nonhumiliation; being able to be treated as a dignified being whose worth is equal to that of others. This entails provisions of nondiscrimination on the basis of race, sex, sexual orientation, ethnicity, caste, religion, national origin.

8. Other Species. Being able to live with concern for and in relation to animals, plants, and the world of nature.

9. Play. Being able to laugh, to play, to enjoy recreational activities.

10. Control over One's Environment. A. Political. Being able to participate effectively in political choices that govern one's life; having the right of political participation, protections of free speech and association. B. Material. Being able to hold property (both land and movable goods), and having property rights on an equal basis with others; having the right to seek employment on an equal basis with others; having the freedom from unwarranted search and seizure. In work, being able to work as a human being, exercising practical reason and entering into meaningful relationships of mutual recognition with other workers. (76-78)

As Cary Wolfe quotes after Harpham, thinking about human life in such terms implies that Stephen Hawking and Stevie Wonder fail to qualify as fully human (68). Visibly, the problem with the capabilities approach is that on these grounds people with either physical or intellectual disabilities can be refused the status of a human being and, consequently, of a person, which proves that its logic is certainly faulty. Even more surprisingly though, the capabilities approach also seeks to place a lot of value on human life as if it were the high watermark of all creation, which is not in agreement with posthumanist relational thinking. Therefore, accepting morally relevant capacities as a precondition of moral recognition—as Sorgner does—appears to be a very commonsensical solution to clearly differentiate a person from a non-person and redefine the human being (Sorgner “Posthuman Perspectives,” online).

The need for “the revised understanding of human beings” and its potential implications are a recurring theme of many fields of contemporary studies. So far, having gained an intellectual-technological advantage over other species, human beings have thoroughly entertained the idea of being the high end of the food chain, which translates into being the most intelligent and powerful entities that have ever walked the Earth—a

bold conclusion taking into account that mankind has only existed for around two million years. Consequently, people began to toy with the idea of crowning their achievements with the most powerful act, i.e. creating another sentient and intelligent being in their own image. Falling into the old habit of arranging the world as they see fit, human beings have already found a practical application for these brand-new entities even before they have been created. Artificial intelligence or robots might be used, for instance, as cheap labour—giving humans an opportunity to take a few extra days off during the week—or sex robots, which—as the media report⁴—are being built nowadays. However, there seem to be a few “ifs”. What happens if we create an entity which, at some point, develops self-awareness and—as people of colour once did—will rebel against being used and abused by their masters. Can we—as moral beings with morally relevant capacities—upload whatever information about the world is available and skip the file containing information on what exploitation, slavery, and rape really are? What if artificial intelligence develops morality irrespective of the fact it has not been uploaded and realises that humans have mistreated it? Humans will be committing these acts—which I personally recognise as crimes against persons—if they desire to create sex robots and rape them without them being aware of being abused. This is exactly what is illustrated in *Westworld*. But now: “what is the big deal anyway? Can we actually rape a robot?”

2. Can you rape a robot?

As *Westworld*'s storyline unfolds, technical hiccups proliferate. Clients are put off as they find it hardly entertaining to interact with hosts that freeze, mumble and begin

⁴ It seems that one can no longer take such information lightly since, as *Digital Journal* reports, “[a]n artificial intelligence system being developed at Facebook has created its own language. It developed a system of code words to make communication more efficient. Researchers shut the system down when they realized the AI was no longer using English” (online).

acting up. What initially seems to be a negligible technical issue caused by the latest system update turns out to be something much more profound—much less humanoid, much more human. The viewers witness the dawn of artificial consciousness. Hosts are beginning to have flashbacks. Somehow, even though nobody seems to know why, they are able to recollect their memories. They are becoming more and more complex psychologically and emotionally, which results in their surreptitious transformation from androids into human beings. They are increasingly more aware that they might have been objectified and abused by their creators all the time. The world order according to which they have ‘functioned’ so far is in jeopardy. Rebellion is about to begin.⁵

It never ceases to amaze me how the creators of the series have been able to reflect upon posthumanism and transhumanism whose validity as a scholarly field of inquiry may still be challenged by some researchers failing to attach any importance to matters that will be looked into persistently in the following study. Nevertheless, I wish to restate and underscore a question which is most baffling from an ethical point of view: if human beings succeed in creating robots, artificial intelligence, etc. from scratch in their own

⁵ It is interesting to juxtapose *Westworld's* hosts' views and the standpoint presented by Descartes in his *Discourse on the Method*. Let me quote at length: “This will in no way seem strange to those who are cognizant of how many different automata or moving machines the ingenuity of men can make, without, in doing so, using more than a very small number of parts, in comparison with the great multitude of bones, muscles, nerves, arteries, veins, and all the other parts which are in the body of each animal. For they will regard this body as a machine which, having been made by the hands of God, is incomparably better ordered and has within itself movements far more wondrous than any of those that can be invented by man. [...] whereas, if there were any such machines that bore a resemblance to our bodies and imitated our actions as far as this is practically feasible, **we would always have two very certain means of recognizing that they not at all, for that reason, true men.** The first is that **they could never use words or other signs,** or put them together as we do in order to declare our thoughts to others. [...] The second means is that, although they might perform many tasks very well or perhaps better than any of us, such machines would inevitably fail in other tasks; by this means one would discover that they were acting not through knowledge but only through the disposition of their organs. For whole reason is a universal instrument that can be of help in all sorts of circumstances, these organs require some particular disposition for each particular action; consequently, **it is for all practical purposes impossible for there to be enough different organs in a machine to make it act in all the contingencies of life in the same way as our reason makes us act**” (Descartes, “Discourse on the Method...” 32; my emphasis). It is true that *Westworld* is still only a phantasy but, judging by recent discoveries in the field of artificial intelligence, building sex robots, etc., one can never be sure when we will reach the stage when it is possible to construct fully-fledged intelligent automata.

image, is it morally acceptable not to provide them with the faintest idea of what rape is? Are human beings allowed to create sex robots that would not be capable of comprehending that their cyborgian body is soiled and abused. A few years after the above-mentioned conference in Seoul, the necessity to address these still unanswered questions is being widely recognised. As psychologist Alex Gillespie states in an interview for BBC Future, “We want to know whether we’ll treat it [artificial intelligence] like another human being. Whether we will at some point in the future care what that artificial intelligence thinks about us,” and if it is afraid of us.

Gillespie’s words gain yet another meaning in the context of the cursory analysis of *Westworld* and *Beloved* presented above. As it has been shown so far, the treatment of an enslaved body and raping it is a recurring trope in various texts of culture no matter whether one takes into account a classic slave narrative, a neo-slave narrative, or a science-fiction speculative TV series. It is a trope which points to an unsettling truth that even though mankind has repeatedly attempted to solve the problem of enslavement and rape, humanity seems to relapse into its old ways of conduct as soon as it faces a moment of ontological, epistemological, social or technological crisis. If Gillespie’s words were to be understood in a perverse way, humanity is very likely to treat artificial intelligence like another human being, i.e. enslave and rape it just the way it has enslaved and raped their own kind for time immemorial. Part of the reason behind this *status quo* appears to be hinted at by one of Octavia Butler’s characters in her illuminating *Lilith’s Brood*:

“Human beings fear difference,” Lilith had told him once. “Oankali crave difference. Humans persecute their different ones, yet they need to give themselves definition and status. Oankali seek difference and collect it. They need it to keep themselves from stagnation and overspecialization. If you don’t

understand this, you will. You'll probably find both tendencies surfacing in your own behaviour." And she had put her hand on his hair. "When you feel a conflict, try to go the Oankali way. Embrace difference." (Butler, *Lilith's Brood* 329)

What this excerpt stresses is that mankind has been known for its ambivalence about embracing difference, which makes it walk in circles regardless of its technological development. Should humans perceive something as different, they instinctively tend to classify it as the Other that might threaten them. Curiously, mankind's answer to this seeming danger—mostly resulting from a lack of knowledge—is its preference to pacify the Other by establishing hierarchies whose primary goal is apparently to annihilate potential threats. As it is mentioned in a different place in the novel where Jdahya ventures to characterise humanity:

"You are hierarchical. That's the older and more entrenched characteristic. We saw it in your closest animal relatives and in your most distant ones. It's a terrestrial characteristic. When human intelligence served it instead of guiding it, when human intelligence did not even acknowledge it as a problem, but took pride in it or did not notice it at all..." The rattling sounded again. "That was like ignoring cancer. I think your people did not realize what a dangerous thing they were doing." (Butler, *Lilith's Brood* 39)

The comparison of human failure to overcome ancient characteristics with cancer eating into human potential is really compelling as it incentivises one to navigate unexplored fields of inquiry that might hold answers to hitherto unsolved problems.⁶ Problems which

⁶ Butler's mention of cancer in this context brings to mind the cultural perception of cancer discussed at length by Susan Sontag in her book *Illness as Metaphor*. The critic thus explains how cancer has been interpreted throughout the centuries: "Punitive notions of disease have a long history, and such notions are

admittedly prove a profound hindrance to human development. Therefore, the current study aims at applying a critical posthumanist perspective to Octavia Butler's oeuvre in order to understand how the writer investigates the mechanism of enslavement and rape with regard to both human and non-human persons. The reason behind the choice of the theoretical framework lies in the fact that critical posthumanism's primary goal—as it will be outlined below—is to make 'difference' its main point of interest and simultaneously to abolish hierarchies. That is why the next section of my dissertation is devoted to outlining posthumanist methodologies and numerous complexities related to some distinctive features which differentiate frequently confused concepts used by posthuman scholars. The questions I ask myself shall revolve around the avenues of determining how fearing 'difference' and building hierarchies by enslavement and rape become detrimental to humankind since, as Yaeger states, “[t]he wounded, nonintegral body becomes a trope for reproducing the literal—that is, for displaying what happens to bodies in real time and space.” (27).

3. Posthumanist⁷ methodology

Before I proceed to a detailed discussion of various posthumanist approaches, I should like to briefly comment on a posthumanist methodology. Having read numerous

particularly active with cancer. There is the 'fight' or 'crusade' against cancer; cancer is the 'killer' disease; people who have cancer are 'cancer victims.' Ostensibly, the illness is the culprit. But it is also the cancer patient who is made culpable. Widely believed psychological theories of disease assign to the luckless ill the ultimate responsibility both for falling ill and for getting well. And conventions of treating cancer as no mere disease but a demonic enemy make cancer not just a lethal disease but a shameful one" (57). Regardless of the fact that cancer "is felt to be obscene—in the original meaning of the word: ill-omened, abominable, repugnant to the senses" (9), the Oankali find it extremely appealing due to its regenerative force, which will be discussed later in the dissertation.

⁷ A word of explanation is needed as regards the difference in meaning between the adjectives 'posthuman' and 'posthumanist.' To my mind, the analogy to another pair of adjectives, i.e. 'human' and 'humanist,' best denotes the meaning of the former. Similarly to the word 'human,' 'posthuman' describes an entity biologically and/or technologically developed to replace human race. 'Posthumanist,' in turn, refers more to a set of theoretical assumptions, ideas, philosophies, etc., in the same way 'humanist'

sources whose authors claimed to employ a posthuman perspective, I have come to the conclusion that a lot of texts merely scratch the surface in their application of tools provided by posthumanism. Often, critics borrow from posthuman or transhuman critical studies some of the popular phrases such as creating a new species, genetic modification, mind uploading, artificial intelligence and use them without any far-reaching changes to their toolbox or understanding of reality. In other words, they misuse what might be described as posthumanist methodology. However, as Francesca Ferrando explains,

[p]osthumanism should be performed in a way which expresses its full meanings and ambitious purposes not only by paying lip service to a new fashionable academic trend, but through a research which finds in the difference⁸ its theoretical kernel. Posthumanism has to acknowledge the whole human experience in order to be receptive to the non-human and be open to unknown possibilities. Such inclusiveness must be reflected in its methods. A posthumanist methodology should not be sustained by exclusive traditions of thought, nor indulge in hegemonic or resistant essentialist narratives” (*The Posthuman...* 187; my emphasis).

is an adjective that describes a set of ideas relating to humanism. This is where, however, the simple differentiation ends. First of all, I do not believe that scholars use the two terms consistently. On the contrary, it is my impression that they tend to use them interchangeably as if they were exact synonyms. Secondly, the meaning of these two words may overlap to the extent that the division is no longer tenable. For instance, a posthuman entity may be a creation of posthumanist and/or posthuman thinking with little difference in meaning between the two words. Thirdly, posthuman/posthumanist studies consist in abolishing differences. Should scholars then try to perpetuate them? I believe not and the blurring of the boundary between the words ‘posthuman’ and ‘posthumanist’ is the posthumanism’s main objective, that is to topple over hierarchies and divisions.

⁸ I devoted some space to discuss the concept of ‘difference’ in my article on Vincenzo Natali’s film titled *Splice*: “I use the word ‘other’ so many times in this short paragraph on purpose since Dren is surely the splice of the human and the other, the familiar and the strange, the same and the different in many respects. Along with Dren’s transformation into a posthuman monster, we watch a fascinating story of humans crossing virtually all the boundaries defining traditionally understood human community and so practically erasing well-established frames of motherhood, sex, gender and the division into species” (Czerniakowski “Deleting the Frames...” 131).

For various reasons, applying a methodology that might qualify as posthumanist can pose serious problems to an author of a posthumanist study. The most obvious one is that, even though a posthuman researcher can try to think in an inclusive and non-hegemonic manner, one is always limited by paradigms of thinking and cultural conditioning imposed on him or her by oppressive systems which preprogram them through upbringing, education, or what is socially acceptable and what is not to follow certain patterns of behaviour, therefore one cannot go beyond the system they are in. Unfortunately, Western thought is trapped in a system of dualist thinking and many divisions that will transpire in this dissertation—against my own will—are most likely to be based on dualist, binary oppositions, which have been inculcated through education, habit of thought and practice in the minds of participants of Western culture. Still, I will venture to go beyond these divisions. The following study will not be then solely the presentation of results of some academic research but also my attempt to free myself from the chains of Western, dualist, patriarchal, hegemonic thinking. Therefore, I wish to emphasise that I am fully aware of the fact that I can comment on the oeuvre of a black, feminist, female writer only from the perspective of a white, educated, European man and, therefore, I have limited access to the experience Octavia Butler so compellingly communicated to us in her various texts. Still, I believe that one objective of posthumanist criticism is to tackle divisions and differences, which is the reason why I find this scholarly trend so appealing. Notwithstanding my full awareness of such differences, it is my point to go beyond them.

As the reader must have noticed, I have put certain words in the quotation above in bold. I find them particularly significant since throughout my study I will try—to use Ferrando’s words—to turn them into my theoretical kernel. Exactly how I am planning to do it, I shall explain in the last part of this chapter titled “Methodology clarified”.

Before I reach this stage of my analysis, though, let me outline the differences between various “-isms” as well as numerous understandings of posthumanism since building a clear theoretical framework is crucial to this study.

4. What is posthumanism?

The title of this section, which is a clear allusion to the book by Cary Wolfe *What is Posthumanism*, is meant to be slightly provocative. In his book, Wolfe gives a very thorough description of what posthumanism is or at least what the term means for him. As I have already suggested above, even though a number of important studies providing detailed discussions of posthumanism, transhumanism, metahumanism, antihumanism and other humanisms have been published to date, many scholars still seem to be baffled by these terms. Numerous conference talks and articles refer to concepts that only vaguely reflect different dimensions of what might be described as transhumanism or posthumanism.⁹ Some others clearly confuse posthumanism and transhumanism, either not being able to distinguish between the two or turning these useful critical concepts into visions of doom and gloom awaiting humanity when it reaches ‘the posthuman stage of development’¹⁰—whatever this stage might be. Finally, there are critics, like Cary Wolfe, Katherine Hayles, Neil Badmington, and others, who seem to appreciate all the complexities of these concepts but they will differ either with respect to details or more

⁹ I addressed this issue in my presentation titled “‘The Walking Dead’ series as a new (post-)human and post-technological zombie panopticon”: “One reason why Sommers’s essay drew my attention was that, to the best of my knowledge, it is one of few essays which try to approach this series from a posthuman perspective. At the same time, this is also part of the reason why I was slightly disappointed with it. Interesting and well-written as it may be, his paper uses terms such as: ‘posthuman moment’, ‘posthuman age’, ‘posthuman apocalypse’ in a manifestly imprecise way. If I am not mistaken, his understanding of the term ‘posthuman’ is reduced to, at best, ‘the age after humans’ (this may be misleading and imprecise in many senses—one of them being, it seems almost impossible to use the term in this way since we tend to encounter multiple problems when defining what it actually means to be human in the first place)” (Kazimierz Dolny 2016).

¹⁰ Such understanding seems to be adopted by many scholars and has been used in numerous presentations I have seen during posthuman conferences. Interestingly, it is placed in a more commonsensical context by David Roden in his discussion of speculative posthumanism (See Roden 105-115).

significant aspects of their definitions. One example here might be that some scholars understand posthumanism in terms of chronology as the next stage of the development of humanity, which shall happen in a more or less distant future. Others will understand it as a critical perspective which might help us—humans—understand our kind better if we apply a different set of coordinates offered by posthumanism.

To illustrate such approaches, it is enough to mention two well-established studies: Jurgen Habermas's *The Future of Human Nature* or Francis Fukuyama's *Our Posthuman Future. Consequences of the Biotechnology Revolution*. The reception of their research is as diverse as one might want to have it. On the one hand, some critics share Habermas's and Fukuyama's opinions as it became clear during the conference titled "Transhumanism—a chance or a threat" [my translation], held at the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin in January 2016. The majority of presenters expressed concerns as to the future of humanity if it treads the path of transhumanism. One reason for seeing transhumanism as an outstanding threat was employing a very limited definition of both transhumanism and posthumanism, which—as the speakers argued—seems to aim at creating a dehumanized version of man, who is treated instrumentally and shall be devoid of any family relations, traditions, and religion.

On the other hand, numerous thinkers seem to oppose any such approaches and they are more in agreement with Katherine Hayles's views expressed in *How We Became Posthuman. Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics*. As the critic explains,

the posthuman does not really mean the end of humanity. It signals instead the end of a certain conception of the human, a conception that may have applied, at best, to that fraction of humanity who had the wealth, power, and leisure to

conceptualize themselves as autonomous beings exercising their will through individual agency and choice. (286)

Habermas's book was discussed at length by Stefan Sorgner—a distinguished metahumanist philosopher and a Nietzsche scholar—in his presentation “Transhuman Nietzsche” given at Radboud Universiteit in 2015. Sorgner claims that Habermas's approach “should be classified as bio-conservative” and he moves on to suggest that Habermas's use of language should be regarded as a lie “in order to emotionally influence the audience”. Fukuyama, in turn, tends to be dismissed as a scholar since his books can assume a ‘popular science’ tone.¹¹ Especially in the context of more modern research, some of the excerpts from his book seem to be nothing more than ungrounded fear-mongering. One example is his opening statement in which he observes that “the aim of this book is to argue that Huxley was right, that the most significant threat posed by contemporary biotechnology is the possibility that it will alter human nature and thereby move us into a ‘posthuman’ stage of history” (7). It is true that some transhuman experiments raise various ethical concerns and, personally, I do not share some transhuman critics' optimism regarding unrestrained alteration of human beings. Still, it is fairly clear that even the most daring ideas concerning human enhancement tend to be closely scrutinised by their authors. As one of the leading transhumanist explorers, professor Kevin Warwick, admits: “[t]ranshumanist enhancement with the aid of brain-computer interfaces introduces all sorts of new technological and intellectual opportunities, but it also throws up different ethical concerns” (27).

One of such experiments is CRISPR-Cas 9, which explores bacteria's natural behaviours. Studies show that bacteria are able to cut out deficient parts of genes and

¹¹ This is the opinion once expressed e.g. by prof. Zofia Kolbuszewska.

replace them with healthy ones.¹² Harnessing this ability and turning it into a technology which can be exploited by humans open unprecedented possibilities of controlling life in general and human genetic structure in particular. An instant question which can be raised is whether humans can ‘play God’ and if it is playing God at all—perhaps it is just another step humanity should take to develop medicine, technology, and its own kind. Habermas/Fukuyama and Sorgner are situated at two opposite poles, which may either be supported or not. It is crucial to remember that transhumanism can really have some beneficial effects, e.g. it can propel the development of medicine, which may eliminate deadly diseases. Whether the resulting population growth on the already overpopulated Earth is beneficial or not is a different question.

In order to address the above issues and explain all the complexities related to them, I will now proceed to discuss two critics who contributed greatly to the development of posthuman studies: Francesca Ferrando and David Roden. Some other critics could probably be quoted here as well, but it was Ferrando who has been able to determine the place of posthumanism in relation to transhumanism, antihumanism, and metahumanism in an outstandingly clear way, while Roden has managed to introduce neat divisions explaining the differences between numerous versions of posthumanism which make many of its tools more workable. The combination of these two approaches will reveal a panorama of various concepts relating to broadly understood posthumanism and will lay a sound foundation for the study of rape from this critical vantage point.

¹² CRISPR-Cas9 was, for instance, discussed in detail by geneticist Jennifer Doudna in her talk “How CRISPR lets us edit our DNA” during a TED conference. The first part of the term, CRISPR, stands for Clustered Regularly Interspaced Short Palindromic Repeats. Cas9 is a name of the protein the experiment was conducted on. (London 2015, online)

The term of 'posthumanism' has a relatively long history and, as Rosi Braidotti observes in her seminal study, can have different genealogies (50). As Ferrando reports, it was first used by Ihab Hassan in his 1976 essay "Prometheus as Performer: Toward a Posthumanist Culture?" (Ferrando, "Posthumanism, Transhumanism..." 26). In this study, Hassan observes that posthumanism may just be a "dubious neologism" but, at the same time, he states that "posthumanism may also hint at a tendency struggling to become more than a trend" (843). Interestingly, already at this stage, Hassan recognises that "the human form . . . may be changing radically, and thus must be re-visioned" (843). What was merely a tendency at the time, over the period of forty years has become definitely more than a trend. At present, posthumanism is a critical perspective which is probably as much respected as it is detested. As it has been noted earlier, some scholars treat this field of studies as a potential threat to the very foundations of humanity. Others believe it might be an opportunity to free the very same humanity from the chains of dualist thinking and open new worlds for mankind. During its evolution, the term acquired various meanings and was understood differently in relation to other frequently confused terms such as transhumanism.

Posthumanism and transhumanism are probably the most confused concepts in this field of studies. One reason for this confusion might be that some scholars seem to treat posthumanism solely as another stage of human development which shall be achieved after human beings have been transformed into semi-technological, semi-human chimeras by means of technological and biological alteration (Habermas 11-12). In fact, so the hypothesis goes, there will be no humans at this point. Instead, a different species will have developed by then. The meaning of the term 'posthumanism' is thus reduced and misunderstood in two ways. First, it is treated here as *just* another stage of the evolution of the human. Secondly, as Roden rightly observes, creating a

‘technological human being,’ e.g. by uploading somebody’s mind on the computer does not really qualify as posthumanism. On the contrary, it is a form of hyper-humanism (9). As a result of adopting such approaches, posthumanism and transhumanism are frequently equated as if no significant difference between them existed.

It must be noted that this understanding is fairly reductive since posthumanism and transhumanism have both different points of departure and different goals. As Ferrando notes, posthumanism was already present in the first wave of postmodernism and entered the field of literary studies through feminist criticism and became later known as critical posthumanism (“Posthumanism, Transhumanism...” 29). Whereas transhumanism, as Cary Wolfe observes, “should be seen as an *intensification* of humanism” (XV), posthumanism focuses on exactly the opposite. Its purpose is to overcome human primacy and not to have any pretence to build its new forms (Ferrando “Posthumanism, Transhumanism...” 29). By doing so, posthuman thinking seems to revise the human or, as Roden puts it, “critical posthumanism attempts to understand and deconstruct humanism from within, tracing its internal tensions and conceptual discrepancies” (9). Its roots in the poststructuralist deconstructive thought provided posthumanism with tools to deconstruct the human by decentralising mankind and placing man on the same continuum along with other beings¹³. As Ferrando maintains:

Posthumanism is a philosophy which provides a suitable way of departure to think in relational and multi-layered ways, expanding the focus to the non-human realm in post-dualistic, post-hierarchical modes, thus allowing one to envision post-

¹³ Nevertheless, it must be noted that Rosi Braidotti, who seems to have inspired Ferrando’s research, takes a different stand on the relationship between posthumanism and deconstruction. The critic explains her position as follows: “[t]he posthuman subject is not postmodern, because it does not rely on any anti-foundationalist premises. Nor is it poststructuralist, because it does not function within the linguistic turn or other forms of deconstruction” (188).

human futures which will radically stretch the boundaries of human imagination.
("Posthumanism, Transhumanism..." 30)

Even though Ferrando's commentary is visionary and inspiring, it seems to lack a certain element of precision. What does it really mean to think in relational and multilayered ways? How does a human being focus on what is post-dualistic? Surely, it is tempting to immerse oneself in a world constructed with a set of different tools, but one certainly needs to understand what exact tools are in the set. For instance, one issue with Ferrando's definition is that it treats humanism and post-dualism as though there was just one version of humanism and just one possible post-dualism. In the meantime, Roden observes that it is not the case and explains that

not all forms of humanism are equally anthropocentric or are anthropocentric in the same way. Many self-styled posthumanists regard Descartes' dualist distinction between a self-transparent human mind and a world governed by strict mechanical laws as the touchstone of modern humanism. Yet, Cartesian dualism imposes fewer anthropological constraints on the nature of things than the transcendental philosophies of subjectivity promulgated by Kant and his successors. (10)

In this context, transhumanism appears to be in stark contrast to posthumanism. Transhuman thinkers do not seem to be so much interested in the relational, post-anthropocentric treatment of human beings. What those thinkers do concentrate on is human enhancement by means of genetic modification, technological alteration, in-vitro fertilisation, creating human-animal hybrids or experiments like the above-mentioned CRISPR-Cas 9. Potentially, such research may be used to re-vision the human being and

to decentralise man, but it does not seem to be the main point of interest. Transhuman thinkers wish to reinforce the notion of the human.

Interestingly, as it is described by Ferrando, transhumanism can be divided into three distinctive variants. The first one is libertarian transhumanism which opts for free market guaranteeing the right to enhancement. The second type—which seems to be more utopian—is democratic transhumanism which advocates equal access to human enhancement regardless of social background, race, or the amount of money on one’s bank account. The third variant of transhumanism is extropianism, defined by Max More as: “perpetual progress, self-transformation, practical optimism, intelligent technology, open society (information and democracy), self-direction, and rational thinking” (qtd. in Ferrando “Posthumanism, Transhumanism...” 29).¹⁴ As Ferrando observes, the concentration on these terms locates transhuman philosophical thought in the Enlightenment (“Posthumanism, Transhumanism 29).

It is not to say that posthumanism is not interested in technology. Following in the footsteps of Ferrando (“Posthumanism, Transhumanism...” 28–29), it can be said that transhumanism *uses* technology to upgrade a human being by means of technological enhancement of various kinds. Goals are multiple: extending one’s life span, treating hereditary diseases during the prenatal stage, making it possible for a human being to escape from the chains of one’s body, brain to brain communication (part of professor Kevin Warwick’s experiment¹⁵), mind uploading, and many others. Posthumanism will

¹⁴ I quote Max More indirectly since the website used by Francesca Ferrando in her article is no longer in service.

¹⁵ In one of his experiments, Kevin Warwick and his wife were electronically linked by means of electrodes implanted in Mrs. Warwick’s nervous system. Thanks to this connection, Warwick’s brain could receive signals after his wife would close her hand, which he describes as a form of “telegraphic communication, nervous system to nervous system.” As he continues to explain, “clearly where we’re heading is not just

not use technology as its *means* of improving a human being since it does not want to improve a human being in this sense. Posthuman ‘improvement’—if this word can be used in this context at all—must be defined as the redefinition of the human in the context of post-dualistic, post-anthropocentric world with no human-made, patriarchal hierarchies which both define individual species in terms of their importance and place them in the hierarchy of living beings and determine the place of various sexes in the human hierarchy, giving preferential treatment to some of them. Posthumanism seems to tackle *difference* in whatever form it could potentially appear. To annihilate difference between human and animal, human and technology, animal and technology and to place everything on the continuum of beings with the same status rather than on the ladder of beings seems to be the purpose of posthumanism. Transhumanism—at least in some of its forms—tries to do exactly the opposite.¹⁶

The above survey should be completed with a very thorough discussion of posthumanism and transhumanism given by David Roden in his book *Posthuman Life. Philosophy at the Edge of the Human*. After an exhaustive presentation of humanism and transhumanism, he moves on to introduce his most important division of posthumanism into speculative posthumanism and critical posthumanism. Roden’s analysis is crucial for a number of reasons—one of them being that it surely introduces academic discourse to the discussion which is simply absent from numerous other studies. In the following pages, I shall discuss these two strands of posthumanism in more detail.

nervous system nervous system; brain to brain communicating by thought” (“What is it like to be a cyborg,” online). This, according to Warwick, will bring an end to an old-fashioned oral communication among humans.

¹⁶ In her essay, Francesca Ferrando defines some other terms which are more or less closely related to posthumanism and transhumanism such as new materialism, antihumanism, metahumanism, and posthumanities (Ferrando, “Posthumanism, Transhumanism, Antihumanism, Metahumanism, and New Materialism...” 26-32). However, since these terms are not directly connected with the current study and might interfere with the course of my analysis, I do not discuss them here.

Roden begins his discussion with a short presentation of what he means by the terms: humanism and anthropocentrism. For the sake of this study, it does not seem to be necessary to delve too much into a very detailed discussion of these terms. It is important, though, to acknowledge the fact that because humanism and anthropocentrism are too complex terms to be flatly rejected by posthumanists, it may not be necessary to assume a hostile attitude towards them. Roden comments as follows:

Not all human–nonhuman distinctions are anthropocentric. It is not anthropocentric to claim that humans are the only animals that drive cars or the only hairless primates. These claims provide individuating descriptions of humans but they do not award us special honors in the world order. (11)

In this context, a desperate struggle against dualisms, which seems to be the main goal of many posthuman critics, proves exceptionally pointless and destructive as re-visioning of man and elevating other species turns into self-abnegation. It is not necessary for human kind to deprive itself of any features which help individuate it in order to become posthuman. The aim of the posthuman is to re-vision a human and place them¹⁷ on the same continuum with other beings by appreciating all creation to the same extent.

Having discussed humanism and anthropocentrism, Roden focuses on different types of posthumanism. Unlike many other critics, Roden introduces a very neat division of posthumanism into speculative posthumanism and critical posthumanism, which

¹⁷ Throughout the dissertation, I go to great lengths to refrain from using male personal pronouns — so deeply instilled, for instance, in English language legal documents — in order to refer to all genders. Even though sometimes it may lead to certain stylistic issues due to the restraints of the English language, I use either ‘they/them’ or ‘one’ with reference to individuals of an unidentified gender or when I refer back to the subject of the sentence such as “everybody, everyone, anyone”. Also, let me stress that I am aware of the existence of the gender neutral personal pronoun “ze,” which has been introduced to the English language fairly recently and is listed, for instance, by Cambridge Dictionary (“ZE” Cambridge Dictionary, online). However, the pronoun does not seem to be widely used in the English language and therefore I do not use it in the present dissertation.

allows for the inclusion and comparison of the two terms that are very often used almost interchangeably and synonymously:

(1) Speculative posthumanism (later abbreviated to SP)—Roden uses this term to describe what is often referred to as the stage of humanity when human beings cease to be human due to technological, pharmaceutical or any other external interference and ‘evolve’ into a different race. As he claims, “[p]osthumans in this sense are hypothetical wide ‘descendants’ of current humans that are no longer human in consequence of some history of technological alteration” (22). This understanding might still be confused with transhumanism but the latter—in this context—is understood more as a distance humanity needs to cover in order to reach its ‘posthuman’ stage of development. In other words, the final point of this chronological continuum is still the domain of science-fiction literature, a dream that might come true one day.

(2) Critical posthumanism—this strand of posthumanism is diametrically different from the speculative kind. Its objective is not so much to speculate about the future of humanity and species which can come after it but rather to work out a theory which might be employed to revise a human being in its current stage of development. Roden places here critics such as Donna Haraway, Neil Badmington, Cary Wolfe, and Katherine Hayles. Even though all of these critics occupy a special place in posthuman studies, only the first two—Haraway and Badmington—are crucial for the present dissertation. Therefore, I shall focus only on their critical works and expand my discussion of posthumanism by examining their approaches.

It must be observed in regard to Haraway’s “Cyborg Manifesto” that this essay does not contain a single instance of words ‘posthumanism’ and ‘transhumanism’. It does, however, employ a strictly posthumanist methodology since—as Roden mentions

in the excerpt quoted above—it is posthumanism’s objective to “understand and deconstruct humanism from within, tracing its internal tensions and conceptual discrepancies” (9).¹⁸ Before I focus on the most interesting aspect of this deconstruction related to women of colour, let me present Haraway’s definition of the cyborg and the cyborg world.

As the critic states, the cyborg world can be understood in two senses of the word. On the one hand, it implies that “the final imposition of a grid of control” (15) has been completed. This statement is particularly engaging in the context of present debates addressing the impact of ‘big data,’ perpetual surveillance of societies, accumulating data by means of GPS systems, social media (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram), etc., which allows for real time tracking of people no matter where they are and what they do. Interestingly, modern visionaries from different areas of arts and studies are beginning to wonder what can happen if these grids of control collapse, which implies that what Haraway only suggested at the time is taken for granted in the 21st century.

For instance, in the era of American dominance all over the world, it may seem odd that American society should be plagued with a feeling which for most nations can become highly destructive. The feeling in question is that the nation’s internal security and stability is constantly imperilled by something which has a potential of defeating American society on its own territory. Manifestations of this feeling have taken different cultural shapes. One of the most spectacular and disgusting examples is surely the zombie. In an ongoing TV series “The Walking Dead,” the zombie appears as a deadly

¹⁸ A similar position is outlined by Neil Badmington in his book *Alien Chic. Posthumanism and the Other Within*. As the critic emphasizes on numerous occasions, “[t]he writing of the posthumanist condition should not seek to fashion ‘scriptural tombs’ for humanism, to write tradition into silence; it must, rather, take the form of a critical practice that occurs *inside* humanism, and should consist not of the wake but the working-through of anthropocentric discourse” (120).

force spreading uncontrollably across the United States and literally eating up American society. As a result, American nation faces a severe crisis of internal security and is wiped out almost in no time. In this context, at least two elements seem to be interesting. Firstly, it is how American nation constructs this new frontier imagining America in crisis brought by a zombie attack, which is posthuman in Cary Wolfe's sense of the word. As the critic claims, posthumanism "comes both before and after humanism" (XV). A zombie seems to be an entity in its nature coming back to the stage before the human/animal, as well as animate/inanimate dichotomy became a valid division. It seems to be an embodied regression to the point in time before 'the human' emerged. Secondly, a zombie attack comes after humanism since it imposes "a new mode of thought that comes after the cultural repressions and fantasies" (XVI). After a zombie attack, cultural, technological, societal, religious repressions are gone. Even though those old systems of total surveillance have fallen to pieces and only few people from the remaining lot still seem to be guided by the principles which silently regulated their past lives, a new type of Foucauldian panopticon¹⁹ is emerging. This one is much more brutal and ruthless compared to almost hypnotising governmental and corporate control and propaganda. In this brand-new, post-technological, post-cultural world—which is posthuman in all senses of the word—the Foucauldian, panoptical grid of control gains a completely new meaning. Decentred survivors are faced back again with their pre-human, archaeological

¹⁹ It must be underscored that Foucault only developed the idea originally coined by Jeremy Bentham, who describes his architectural project of an efficient prison as follows: "Before you look at the plan, take in words the general idea of it. The building is circular. The apartments of the prisoners occupy the circumference. You may call them, if you please, the *cells*. These *cells* are divided from one another, and the prisoners by that means secluded from all communication with each other, by *partitions* in the form of *radii* issuing from the circumference towards the centre, and extending as many feet as shall be thought necessary to form the largest dimension of the cell. The apartment of the inspector occupies the centre; you may call it if you please the *inspector's lodge*. It will be convenient in most, if not all cases, to have a vacant space or *area* all round, between such centre and such circumference. You may call it if you please the *intermediate* or *annular* area" (35, emphasis in the original).

past. The warden guarding its prisoners takes the form of a brainless, human-animal force embodied in seemingly human corpses that may be multiple, but they turn into one oppressive ‘system’ consisting of massive numbers of braindead entities that affect the entire existence of the remaining lot. The prisoners feel constantly watched and—internalising this feeling—they become paranoid since no matter what precautions they take, they are killed at random regardless of whether they are men, women or children. The force may seem to be brainless, but it assumes absolute control people depriving them of any security or privacy. Surely, this world falls into Haraway’s first category of the cyborg world.²⁰

On the other hand, as the critic further explains, the cyborg world is about a reality where humans are not afraid to become chimeras or hybrids with machine and animal elements. This reality is not the realm of science-fiction any longer, as well. It is enough to mention the experiments conducted by Kevin Warwick, which I have mentioned above, who—I venture to say—is the first and so far the only real cyborg who has ever walked the Earth. Even though many researchers claim that whoever uses, for instance, a smart phone can qualify as a cyborg, Warwick’s experiments show that it is feasible to integrate electronic circuits with a human neurological system, which goes far beyond any simple ‘relationship’ a person can develop with his or her mobile device.

Importantly, Haraway stresses the need to perceive the world from both perspectives simultaneously. As she observes, “[t]he political struggle is to see from both perspectives at once because each reveals both dominations and possibilities unimaginable from the other vantage point” (16). What might be concluded from

²⁰ This paragraph is a version of the one included in my presentation at the 8th Beyond Humanism Conference titled “Posthuman Studies and Technologies of Control from Nietzsche to Trans- Post- and Metahumanism” in Madrid in 2016.

Haraway's considerations is that a cyborg world is a world effectively controlled by essentially patriarchal systems of power inhabited by human-animal/machine chimeras—whose understanding requires some modifications in order to fit better the 21st century. The above-mentioned 'big-data' systems of power do not seem to be patriarchal or masculinist any longer since they are of electronic nature that acquired a more cyborgian character. To use Haraway's words, they became post-gender grids of control which may result in creating post-gender artificial intelligences exercising full control over rather 'old-fashioned' human beings.

The second point that Haraway makes pertains to “‘women of colour’ [that] might be understood as a cyborg identity, a potent subjectivity synthesised from fusions of outsider identities and in the complex political-historical layerings of her ‘biomythography’...” (66). A possible argument undermining this definition could be formulated as follows: a woman cannot be classified as a cyborg because, first, it is a human being without any machine-like or animal elements. Secondly, it is a woman and, as such, she cannot occupy any place in a post-gender order of beings. Haraway's definition, however, should be understood more figuratively. In the first place, women of colour used to live in grids of ultimate control and were devoid of any rights. They are not independent subjectivities developed from early childhood into adulthood. Their subjectivity is assembled from various elements, none of which is inherently their own. Women of colour become cyborgs—or cyborg identities—since they are chimeras composed of various parts, just like a 'stereotypical' cyborg is composed of electronic circuits, artificial body parts, etc. As such, their status as women is questioned since they are frequently treated not as women but as their masters' chattel that can be sold, bought, abused, raped, and reduced to their wombs which shall serve the purpose of incubating more chattel, i.e. children slaves.

Even though the above discussion might seem to be a digression only loosely connected with posthumanism, it is meant to show that Haraway's understanding of a cyborg offers methodologically efficient tools for what Roden refers to as posthumanism's main objective, i.e. to "understand and deconstruct humanism from within, tracing its internal tensions and conceptual discrepancies" (9). These tools, in turn, will allow for a systematic analysis of Octavia Butler's protagonists, who are usually women of colour that either travel back and forth in time to face slavery (*Kindred*) or encounter alien civilisations (*Lilith's Brood*, "Bloodchild"). The choice of these texts is by no means accidental as they show two radically opposed images of a cyborgian postgender body, which I will analyse against the backdrop of critical posthumanism. To paraphrase Sabine Sielke's words²¹, the present study of the posthuman in Octavia Butler's oeuvre traces meanings post-anthropocentric/posthuman culture assigns to rape which evolve from an interplay between deconstructions of cultural parameters of identity and difference (such as gender, species, skin colour, sexual orientation) (7).

One way or another, these women are composites of various subjectivities which are, so to say, imposed on them. Also, they are raped in many senses of the word, gradual objectification and dirtying of their body being one of them. Such analysis might still appear to be somewhat reductive as a theoretical framework, unless it is supplemented with the critical argument from another seminal book.

Neil Badmington's conception adds a few thought-provoking points to the above overview of humanism and anthropocentrism. In regard of the former term,

²¹ Sielke's original goal was undoubtedly crucial for formulating some theoretical notions in the present study. The critic defines this goal as follows: "Most important, though, my analyses of the literary aesthetics and politics of rape underline that the meanings culture assigns to sexual violence evolve from an interplay between constructions of identity and difference (such as gender, race, and class) and their specific forms of representation" (7).

Badmington's argumentation seems to be in line with Roden's thinking. As the critic concludes in one of his chapters, "[t]he strain of posthumanism that I am proposing would resist humanism not by turning its back, but by turning back *in a certain way*" (*Alien Chic...* 149; emphasis original). Badmington further maintains that:

Posthumanist cultural criticism must, I think, learn to listen out for the deconstruction of the binary opposition between the human and the inhuman that is forever happening within humanism itself. Turning the world upside down will no longer do. The other is always already within humanism itself. Turning the world within. Humanism is merely pretending otherwise. (*Alien Chic...* 149)

Regardless of how humanism has tried to place man in the centre of its interest by cutting his ties with the realities surrounding him²², the Other has always been an inherent part of man and—contrary to what some may claim—man cannot exist without the Other. Therefore, humanism has always been deconstructing itself from within and there is little point in claiming otherwise. That is why we cannot just dismiss humanism altogether—a thought the critic returns to in his book on different occasions. Badmington's use of the phrase "in a certain way" (*Alien Chic...* 149) stresses an outright futility of pretending that humanism has never existed or that, suddenly, we have succeeded in breaking the chains of the apparently oppressive definition of a human being. Even if some part of humanity attempts to go beyond humanism, it cannot be done overnight. Both evolution and historical processes take time. As he adds elsewhere, "[t]hose traces [of humanism] prove that stepping simply and suddenly beyond anthropocentric assumptions is not

²² Even though the word "man" is gender neutral in English as long as it is used without an article, I use a male personal pronoun here because it seems that humanism really did use a male man as the measure of all things; see the Vitruvian man.

possible, for the past repeatedly informs and infiltrates the present” (Badmington, *Alien Chic* 144). In fact, according to him, it is posthumanism’s main objective to listen for possibilities to deconstruct differences between human and inhuman and, by doing so, to revise the human being.

In his book *Alien Chic: Posthumanism and the Other Within*, Badmington outlines the deconstruction of humanism through the investigation of people’s reactions to alien invasion movies and the construction of the presented worlds. At the same time, however, he seems to point to the fact that not in every case this deconstruction is possible and everything depends on when the film was directed. As the critic observes, aliens that appeared in invasion films from the 1950s were considered absolute others. All binary oppositions between humans and aliens were solidified and by no means could aliens mingle with humans (22). Whatever the alien was, they certainly were the enemy force trying to conquer the human world. This understanding has undergone far-reaching changes over time. As Badmington explains:

The confident humanism of the past seems not to apply at the beginning of the twenty-first century. The line that once absolutely divided and distinguished human from alien has become blurred. There is no invasion and, more strikingly, no apparent enemy. Earth no longer needs to be defended against invaders from Mars or an ‘It’ from beyond space, and there is no call for a war of the worlds. (*Alien Chic*... 30)

The critic bases his theory on Derrida’s philosophy that in this instance comes down to a simple sentence: “They’re us... We’re them”. As the critic explains, people become posthuman the moment they stop feeling the difference between themselves and the Other. In his in-depth discussion of alien invasion films, Badmington explains that

[t]he argument would run as follows: if the binary opposition between ‘Us’ and ‘Them’ no longer holds, if the alien invasion films of the 1950s now seem laughably absurd, if contemporary culture suggests nothing short of a ‘Crisis of versus’, then we cannot possibly still be in the orbit of anthropocentrism. ‘Man’ must surely have died, and with that passing comes the birth of ‘alien love’ (*Alien Chic...* 35).

This is how the category which is most frequently targeted by posthuman scholars, i.e. humanism, is dismissed. This aspect of Badmington’s theory seems to be relevant to Octavia Butler’s prose, which discusses the blurring of divisions between ‘Us’ and ‘Them’ on every possible level and in every possible context, whether it is an alien invasion (*Lilith’s Brood*, “Bloodchild”), American slavery (*Kindred*), or telepathic communities (*Wild Seed*, *Mind of My Mind*). What is most gripping in Butler’s writing, however, is not the dismissal of humanism itself but—to use Badmington’s words—“humanism’s hydra-like capacity for regeneration” (109). Her writing depicts the human on the border between ‘Us’ and ‘Them’, between human and broadly understood alien. It outlines humanism’s degradation and regeneration, death and rebirth. Sometimes, it is the rebirth of humanism in its well-known form, but, very frequently, Butler’s humanism acquires new, previously unknown qualities and dimensions. It is thanks to this constant fluctuation of the meaning of humanism—which either regains its original meaning or becomes posthumanism—that also the concept of rape becomes problematised.

As, I hope, can be seen from the above discussion of theories advanced by critics such as Ferrando, Roden, Haraway, and Badmington, they share their understanding of posthumanism to a large extent, which is why I have chosen their works to reconstruct a workable understanding of critical posthumanism which provides tools that can be used

to analyse Octavia Butler’s oeuvre. Therefore, the type of posthumanism I shall adopt in this dissertation is the critical one, which I understand as a critical posthumanist perspective that learns to deconstruct binary oppositions. At the same time, it is not hostile to all of them and understands that humanism and posthumanism must coexist and inform each other in order to create a new quality in an emergent, autopoietic system.²³ This posthumanism shall be defined by all-inclusiveness, post-anthropocentrism, receptiveness to the non-human, and the belief that a broadly understood difference should be done away with by deconstructing humanism from within.

The first step to tackling ‘difference,’ which—as I believe—is the main culprit when it comes to introducing the majority of oppressive systems around the world, is investigating how a postgender, cyborgian body is gradually dirtied, soiled and raped. To put it in Scott Bukatman’s words, it is the body which becomes “a site of exploration and transfiguration” (*Posthumanism*, Badmington 98)—the body that is gradually objectified to the point where it loses its identity.

However, it must be emphasised that in the case of Octavia Butler’s works it is virtually impossible to remain only within the scope of this critical perspective and, for

²³ In the dissertation, I adopt the following understanding of autopoiesis, which was originally defined by Humberto Maturana and Francisco Valera: “A newer definition of life revolves around the idea of autopoiesis. This idea was put forth by Chilean biologists Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela and emphasizes the peculiar closure of living systems, which are alive and maintain themselves metabolically whether they succeed in reproduction or not. Unlike machines, whose governing functions are embedded by human designers, organisms are self-governing. The autopoietic definition of life resembles the physiological definition but emphasizes life’s maintenance of its own identity, its informational closure, its cybernetic self-relatedness, and its ability to make more of itself. Autopoiesis refers to self-producing, self-maintaining, self-repairing, and self-relational aspects of living systems. Living beings maintain their form by the continuous interchange and flow of chemical components. Cellular autopoietic systems are bounded by a dynamic material made by the system itself” (“Autopoiesis”, *Encyclopedia Britannica*, online)

this reason, I will use some of the notions devised by Roden in his discussion of Speculative Posthumanism—especially in the case of *Lilith's Brood*. Before I move to the discussion of rape itself, let me summarise the above considerations in the form of a graph whose purpose is to give a conceptual, 'non-linear' definition of posthumanism which is meant to illustrate its relationship to humanism and to be in line with posthumanist methodology employed in the present study:

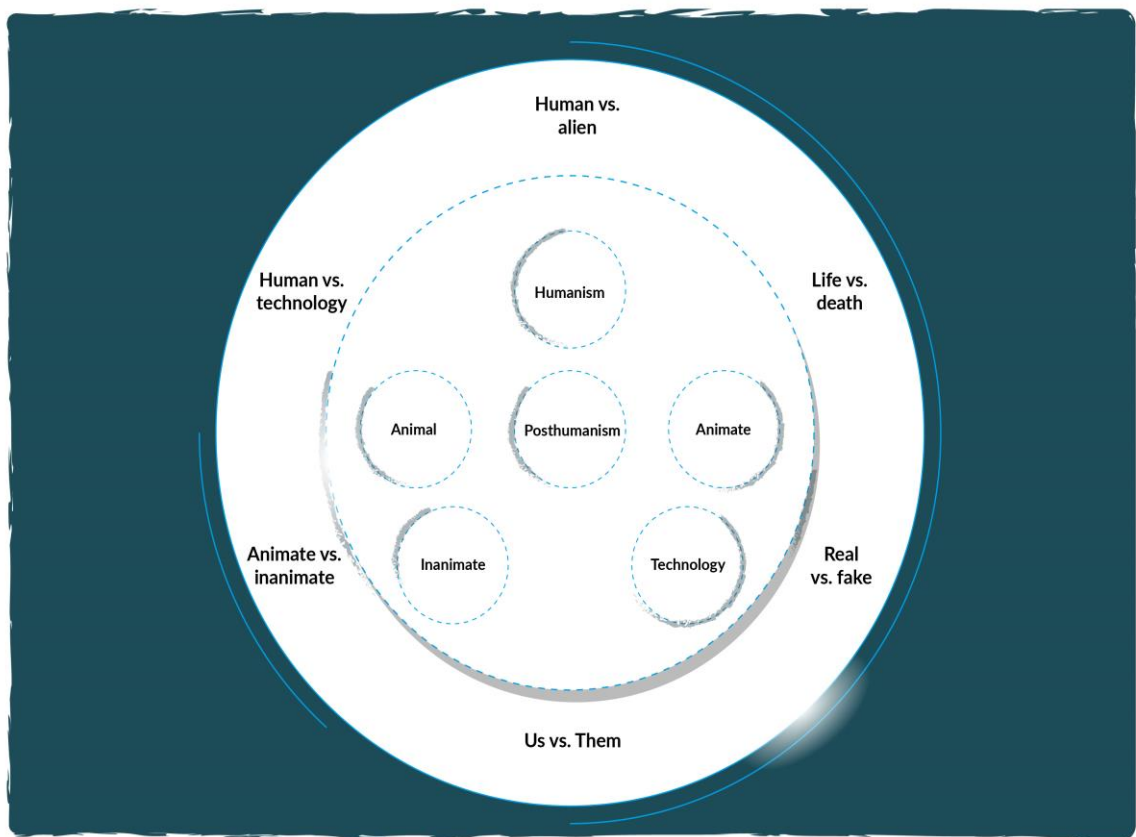


Figure 1 Posthuman methodology. The above picture visually represents the posthumanist methodology adopted in the present study. The dashed line indicates that individual areas of human experience cannot be separated from each other. On the contrary, they must intersect and overlap in order to conceive new knowledge indispensable to discover an ever-changing world. Created by the artist, the picture is an original visualisation of the author's interpretation of the nature of a posthumanist methodology.

As the reader can observe, the graph presents the concept of humanism in the form of a bubble, which is separated from other systems with a line that constitutes its impermeable, external border. This system features various forms of dualism, on which it is essentially based. The system may be safe from the outside, but it seems to be gradually less and less stable due to unpredictable changes occurring in its very centre—the reader has probably observed a striking similarity to a zombie attack discussed earlier. The reason for its increasing loss of stability—whose source does not lie outside the system but is generated by its very centre, i.e. the system of humanism is eaten up from the inside—is a movement that aims at deconstructing humanism from within. However, it does not destroy everything but rather feeds on the old system, modifying some of its elements for its own purposes and—owing to the fact that the new system’s borders are fully permeable—it develops in an autopoietic feat of emergence.

5. Can robots rape us?

Yes, they can. Or so could be deduced from the afore-mentioned Fukuyama’s statement, i.e. “that Huxley was right, that the most significant threat posed by contemporary biotechnology is the possibility that it will alter human nature and thereby move us into a ‘posthuman’ stage of history” (7). Critics who subscribe to his point of view normally paint the picture of humanity’s miserable future dominated by humans 2.0, who/which <sic!> have successfully depraved mankind as we know it of its humanity and turned it into, for example, batteries, as it is spectacularly narrated in *The Matrix Trilogy*. However gripping the film might be, this catastrophic vision of doom and gloom is surely one-dimensional since there seems to be no place whatsoever for better life for present humans, who—according to Fukuyama’s followers—are supposed to come in for the worst fate that might possibly await mankind. Such predictions are surely intriguing

since present humans seem to hold a belief that humans 2.0 will adopt what can be described as the exact same oppressive model of dominating and controlling them that they have so powerfully exploited over the centuries with regard to thousands, if not millions, of species inhabiting this planet, as well as with regard to our own kind, e.g. whites colonising, dominating and painfully abusing indigenous peoples around the world. From this vantage point, humans 2.0 are more or less consciously expected to be an amplified version of who we really are at present and have always been over the centuries, hence the conclusion that present humans project their own nature on species yet to come.

There is also a baffling aspect to Fukuyama's statement. Present humans are clearly hesitant to admit that, for instance, artificial intelligence deserves to be granted personhood and ensuing rights stemming from morally relevant capabilities that AI can also potentially acquire after it has developed consciousness. Nevertheless, they readily ascribe those same capabilities when stating that humans 2.0/posthumans will rape our civilisation in a figurative sense by depriving us of our traditions, family relations, moral values, etc., as well as in a literal way, by subjugating human race by means of weaponised rape. In light of the above, humanity 1.0's will to prove that they are in any way superior to this supposedly monstrous posthuman species falls flat. On the one hand, we fail to accept that fact that humanity can rape an artificial being, ignoring its potential rights in a rather condescending manner. On the other hand, though, we seem to believe that we can be figuratively raped by a species that has not come to being yet and which we apparently believe—even if we fail to come to this realisation consciously—to be our worse selves. Thus, the vision of the so-called 'posthuman future' stands for humanity's suppressed fears of the imagined Other, barely living up to the standards of a scientific theory.

The same kind of social hypocrisy which allows us to accuse others of our own deadly sins can be observed in the way rape has been defined by humanity 1.0 over the centuries. To begin, let us turn to the definition of rape, which might already raise certain doubts. The following is stated in the part of American penal code concerning rape on human beings, titled “10 U.S. Code § 920—Art. 120. Rape and sexual assault generally,”

(a)RAPE.—Any person subject to this chapter who commits a sexual act upon another person by—

(1) using unlawful force against that other person;

(2) using force causing or likely to cause death or grievous bodily harm to any person;

(3) threatening or placing that other person in fear that any person will be subjected to death, grievous bodily harm, or kidnapping;

(4) first rendering that other person unconscious; or

(5) administering to that other person by force or threat of force, or without the knowledge or consent of that person, a drug, intoxicant, or other similar substance and thereby substantially impairing the ability of that other person to appraise or control conduct;

is guilty of rape and shall be punished as a court-martial may direct.

On the one hand, the wording of this article seems fair as it stipulates that both men and women should be granted equal rights. Moreover, the meaning of the word ‘person’ goes beyond a traditional, normative division into two sexes and includes humans who refuse to identify themselves as either male or female. If one assumes a posthuman, more

inclusive, perspective, however, it becomes clear that it automatically excludes any other entity that is not granted personhood by humans, i.e. animals, cyborgs, artificial intelligence, robots, etc. Potentially, then, this article allows for abuse that is not punishable by law by failing to protect, for instance, artificial intelligence that might develop consciousness. Even more so, in the case of a cyborgian, post-gender body, which has already been discussed, the above provisions might even prove useless as they envisage no protection for a body which is genderless and without any pretence whatsoever to be called a person in the way it is understood at present, i.e. a human person. I will, therefore, continue to use a much more extended definition of rape and a rapist, a strategy which seems to be more in line with Susan Brownmiller's feminist postulate. As the critic explains in her book, "[a] feminist definition of rape goes beyond the legal, criminal definition with which the nation's system of jurisprudence concerns itself, and later on in this book we will deal with an extended definition of rape and rapists" (174-175).

The present study shall investigate rape in Octavia Butler's works on the basis of a wide range of phenomena related to rape in her multi-faceted writing. Beginning from the abuse of the body in the literal sense and determining the status of the body in the world presented, I will move on to discuss a given body understood as a cyborgian, postgender body with a cyborg identity as it was described by Haraway, who defined this concept as "a potent subjectivity synthesised from fusions of outsider identities and in the complex political-historical layerings of her 'biomythography'" (66). I will refrain, then, from understanding a 'cyborg' only in a popular-science manner, i.e. as a hybrid of a human and a machine. Instead, a cyborg in the following dissertation will signify a fusion of different elements in a biologically female body, which on the metaphorical level turns into a cyborg, genderless, or postgender body.

Some might object to turning the concept of rape into such an all-inclusive term as it loses some of its precision especially in the legal sense. Even though I am fully aware of it, I am far from using this concept in a strictly legal context in the first place. What is more, I am inclined to employ a posthuman, inclusive understanding of the term ‘rape’ and show its evolution whose history is brilliantly presented by Brownmiller in her book *Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape*. The critic outlines the history of rape as a social and legal phenomenon, how it has been approached in various cultures and legal systems throughout the centuries and how women have continued to play a marginal role in the debate on rape. Brownmiller proves that cultures as diverse as ancient Hebrew communities and the medieval feudal system shared virtually the same system of values as regards rape on women, namely both treated her as property. Very little attention—if any—was devoted to women’s psychological, physical, and emotional suffering. Rape was essentially an offence of one man against the other. As Brownmiller explains,

[b]y this circuitous route the first concept of criminal rape sneaked its tortuous way into man’s definition of law. Criminal rape, as a patriarchal father saw it, was a violation of the new way of doing business. It was, in a phrase, the theft of virginity, an embezzlement of his daughter’s fair price on the market. (18)

Women have been treated as little more than a chattel since time immemorial. This objectification surely helped violated women’s human rights without any restrictions to the point of undermining their subjectivity. This is how the critic summarises their atrocious situation in the chapter carrying a very succinct but evocative title “War”²⁴:

²⁴ Unfortunately, weaponization of rape, which Brownmiller frequently refers to in her book, is still used by military forces in the 21st century. This is how Oleksandra Horchynska describes the present Russian military aggression on Ukraine: “Ukrainian prosecutors and human rights groups are gathering evidence of mass rape and assault committed by Russian soldiers in preparation for future war crimes trials. As

As German soldiers in 1944 tortured and raped Maquis supporters, and as French paratroopers tortured and raped Algerian resistance leaders a decade later, so in the year 1972 beyond the horrors of the interrogation centers in South Vietnam one heard of electric shocks and rape applied to female political prisoners in Argentina and severe beating and electric shocks administered to the sexual organs of male and female prisoners in Brazil, including the doubly vengeful act, “a woman raped in front of her husband by one of his torturers.” Six months later the pattern was repeated by the Portuguese in the colonies of Angola and Mozambique, and a year after that by the military government of Chile. Throughout much of the world the pretext of securing political information has led, in a woman’s case, to rape. (90)

Brownmiller’s discussion of rape can be extended by looking at instances of rape on a cyborgian, postgender body in Octavia Butler’s oeuvre from a posthuman, more inclusive perspective. This angle reveals how the writer frames the black body, the white body, and the alien body in contexts problematising both the concept of the body and the trope of rape itself. The reader must be prepared, however, for brilliantly intricate scenarios leading to unexpected analyses and conclusions, which I will detail further in the dissertation.

troops withdrew from towns and suburbs around the capital to regroup and refocus the offensive on Ukraine’s east, women and girls have shared grim testimonies of gang rape, sexual violence at gunpoint and assaults committed in front of relatives, including children. There have also been reports that men and boys have been subjected to sexual violence. (...) Ukraine’s prosecutor general Iryna Venediktova told reporters that her office has concluded the first stage of investigations in Irpin, a suburb of the capital Kyiv, where they spoke to 228 witnesses. Asked whether rape was a deliberate Russian tactic, she replied ‘I am sure, actually, that it was strategy’” (Horchynska “Russia Accused of Weaponizing Rape in Ukraine,” online). As of today, i.e. 12 March 2023, Russia continues its criminal activity in Ukraine and the evidence supporting war crimes committed by Russian soldiers is mounting.

For this reason, let me state here that I am not inclined to put the blame of rape only on a patriarchal society. Without doubt, this seems to be Brownmiller's claim in her inquisitive study. Nevertheless, some critics, e.g. Christina Hoff Sommers, claim the opposite. As the critic explains, "[t]he international studies on violence suggest that patriarchy is not the primary cause of rape but that rape, along with other crimes against the person, is caused by whatever it is that makes our [American] society among the most violent of the so-called advanced nations" (10). Questioning the contention that patriarchy is the root of all rape seems to be an interesting take on the causes of rape. As Sommers suggests, researchers who studied this phenomenon have gone to great lengths to prove their presupposition that rape is actually brought about by the patriarchal society—the implication being that the majority of men are, at least potentially, rapists. The critic debunks this theory and states that some of the most important studies in the field appear to be based on insubstantial evidence and inflated statistics. Sommers explains in a different part of her article that:

'One in four' has since become the official figure on women's rape victimization cited in women's studies departments, rape crisis centers, women's magazines, and on protest buttons and posters. (3)

As the critic further argues, the data were unreliable for numerous reasons, e.g. slapdash research and jumping to conclusions. Therefore, she moves on to observe that "[r]ape is perpetrated by criminals, which is to say, it is perpetrated by people who are wont to gratify themselves in criminal ways and who care little about the suffering they inflict on others" (12). The majority of these criminals might still be men, but there seems to be an important shift if one calls perpetrators criminals, thereby refraining from ascribing a specific type of crime to any sex. Unfortunately, various media outlets perpetuate the idea

of a man who is a keen participant in the machismo culture and cares little for others and so they create yet another oppressive system this time frequently authored by women.

Patriarchal or not, the system which has organised human life for ages has been aggressively unfavourable towards women. To use Giorgio Agamben's words, the condition of a woman as a victim of rape has been reduced to bare life. She did not seem to have any legal way of defending herself against rape and, therefore, used to be devoid of any civil rights whatsoever. Never entering *bios*—she always lived in *zoē* since she was part of men's inventory. The roots of these two terms have been traced by Agamben to ancient Greek:

The Greeks had no single term to express what we mean by the word 'life.' They used two terms that, although traceable to a common etymological root, are semantically and morphologically distinct: *zoē*, which expressed the simple fact of living common to all living beings (animals, men, or gods), and *bios*, which indicated the form or way of living proper to an individual or a group. (1; my italics)

In this distinction, *zoē* meant 'bare life' or life without any right, while *bios* meant political life. If we agree with Brownmiller's claim that women have been part of men's chattel for a considerable part of history, it seems justifiable to advance a hypothesis that they have inhabited the sphere of bare life. Curiously, this is the same dimension where an entity which is not granted personhood can be found—a place inhabited by cyborgian, postgender bodies. Supposing humans 1.0 actually create such beings and just let them live without granting personhood and rights, they banish them to the land of bare life—a fairly convenient way of treatment if one wishes to rape uncontrollably what Patricia

Melzer described as “[t]he decentered bodies that grow from new technologies and populate postmodern science fiction” (13).

6. Posthuman constructions

Writers like Octavia Butler typically receive a lot of critical attention from scholars working in diverse theoretical frameworks. Beyond a shadow of a doubt, one study that is worth considering in the light of the present analysis is a book by Patricia Melzer titled *Alien Constructions. Science Fiction and Feminist Thought*. As the title suggests, the critic of this illuminating study embarks on a fascinating mission across various science-fiction multiverses, such as *The Matrix*, *Alien*, *Dead Girls*, *Shadow Man* or *Xenogenesis*, and investigates them from a perspective that she calls ‘cyborg feminism’. As the critic comments, “[t]hrough figures like the female cyborg, *Alien Constructions* explores the relationship between science fiction and a feminist discourse that is attempting to conceptualize issues of difference, globalization, and technoscience” (1).

Melzer’s interest in the issue of difference makes the theoretical framework of her study similar to those adopted by numerous posthuman researchers, such as already quoted Francesca Ferrando, who emphasised that it is crucial to do “research that finds in the difference its theoretical kernel” (*The Posthuman...* 187). Melzer focuses her attention on bodies emerging from various biological or technological experiments that defamiliarize what is traditionally understood as a female body, and which here is turned into a cyborg, postgender body, i.e. a body composed of various—often dramatically different—elements and subjectivities. Interestingly, it is this postgender body that draws one’s attention to a perfectly gendered body of a woman and helps conceptualise and define all the ways in which the latter body is violated. In this context, as well, Melzer’s

understanding of female cyborgs overlaps with Ferrando's definition of posthumanism when the latter claims that "[p]osthumanism has to acknowledge the whole human experience in order to be receptive to the non-human and be open to unknown possibilities," (*The Posthuman...* 187; my emphasis). Regardless of which female body Melzer discusses—be it Trinity from *The Matrix*, Ripley from *Alien*, or Lilith from *Xenogenesis*—it is proven that science-fiction artists consider the human experience in its entirety and are therefore receptive to the non-human, as well as by being receptive to the non-human, they acknowledge the whole human experience.

As Melzer further explains, science-fiction writers are receptive to the non-human in a rather curious way. By reflecting tensions present in feminist criticism, they are able to reconceptualise long-standing categories such as, among others, agency, self-determination, and difference. Melzer gives examples of two such tensions that she finds most important. "The first is the tension between standpoint knowledge—based on shared material experience—and subjectivity and desire. The second is between essentialism and constructivism" (260). According to the critic, standpoint theory seems to provide an avenue of contesting present systems of power by simply ascribing the powers to establish knowledge to a wider range of individual bodies, which—so the critic appears to believe—(re-)gain their right to hold an opinion. This approach will have its far-reaching consequences since "[t]his way of conceptualizing knowledge decentralizes the cultural and political authority that historically has rested with a small group, and instead insists on situational knowledge, which creates the need to negotiate claims of truth" (260).

Importantly, already at this point, I would like to contest the claim that this fairly limiting takeover of power is essentially posthuman. Decentralising as it is, the tendency

to give voice exclusively to one minority group within a broader minority group may only result in shifting this authority to yet another small group. This conclusion comes from the impression that, while feminist criticism lets women regain their voice, it seems to be fairly hostile or at least negligent towards a male part of mankind, as can be deduced from Melzer's own book that does not devote much space to perspectives other than female and focuses chiefly on the female cyborg, not on the alien cyborg even though she discusses at length the *Alien* series that repeatedly emphasises the exceptionality of alien bodies.

The second tension investigated by Melzer is between constructivism and essentialism. The latter could perhaps be described as a more traditional perspective as it assumes establishing somebody's gender equality on the basis the (biological) body and, as Melzer continues to explain, "social behavior and categories are developed from these (biological) differences" (262). Constructivism, on the other hand, seems to be more oblivious to the biological aspect of the body, and it "understands the body's materiality as dominated/constructed by (social) discourse, from which categories of identity are created" (262). It seems only too obvious that Octavia Butler herself should use the term 'construct' in her novel *Lilith's Brood*. As the implied author explains, "Ooloi were supposed to be unrelated to their male and female mates so that they could focus their attention on their mates' genetic differences and construct children without making dangerous mistakes of overfamiliarity and overconfidence" (257-258). The fact that children are constructed in Butler's fiction has also been observed by Melzer. As the critic comments,

Within the narratives, these readers encounter "alien constructions"—metaphors and concepts specific to the genre, such as the cyborg, human/alien hybrids, and

aliens—that provide unfamiliar images for familiar identities and concepts and explore the implications of theories within a (pleasurable) narrative framework.

(11)

Octavia Butler’s writing abounds in such metaphors, which are recycled in multifarious forms, and it is one of the objectives of the present study to trace them and investigate. However, the analysis will not only focus on female bodies. As it has already been observed, male bodies and alien bodies seem to be equally important in order to recreate a truly posthuman, post-anthropocentric understanding of the world presented that is devoid of any hierarchies or systems of domination and control, and is inhabited by only one type of the body—a postgender, posthuman body.

Paradoxically, though, this goal shall be achieved by showing how these bodies are invaded. The following study will build on Melzer’s detailed analysis of body colonisation as well as the verbalisation and investigation of the concept of ‘difference’ in Octavia Butler’s oeuvre to arrive at profound conclusions regarding rape. The discussion of the former phenomenon is particularly engaging. As Melzer explains, Butler’s narratives “deconstruct categories of difference that dominate academic and political discourses at the same time as they problematize the romanticizations and generalizations of many postmodern theories of identity” (38). The critic observes in a different place that this deconstruction is performed by focusing on two major areas, i.e. gender (sexual difference) and race (racial difference) (71,80). This issue, however, is further problematised since one of the major conflicts between the characters of her stories results from the realisation that humans and aliens disagree on what the notion of ‘difference’ means. What the extraterrestrials of *Lilith’s Brood* understand as embracing difference, humans will understand as objectification of the human body, which was

brilliantly described by Sharryl Vint in her commentary on Butler's neo-slave narrative *Kindred*. As the critic comments,

Both novels deal with how slavery objectified black women through the debasement of two moments of significant human connection, sexual intercourse and mothering, demonstrating the degree to which they did not "own" themselves and were excluded by definition from full personhood. (Vint 247)

7. Methodology clarified

In the commentary on one of her essays titled "Positive obsession," Octavia Butler includes a question which she was repeatedly asked and found annoying: "What good is science-fiction to black people?" ("Bloodchild and Other Stories" 134). Surely, the question itself speaks volumes about the history of African Americans in the United States and objectification of the black body, which the writer alludes to in the series of her own thought-provoking follow-up questions:

"What good is any form of literature to Black people? What good is science fiction's thinking about the present, the future, and the past? What good is its tendency to warn or to consider alternative ways of thinking and doing? What good is its examination of the possible effects of science and technology, or social organization and political direction?" ("Bloodchild and Other Stories" 134-135).

Even though the questions could stimulate voluminous discussions, Butler herself gives a very concise but clearly inconclusive answer: "At its best, science fiction stimulates imagination and creativity. It gets reader and writer off the beaten track, of the narrow, narrow footpath of what 'everyone' is saying, doing, thinking—whoever 'everyone' happens to be this year" ("Bloodchild and Other Stories" 135). In the present study, I

wish to act on Butler's words and take the discussion of the black body in the writer's texts off the beaten track. This analysis, though, will be but a starting point for much broader considerations aiming at presenting a much more comprehensive picture of a posthuman human. I have chosen Butler's text because, as Hampton and Brooks observe, "Octavia Butler's fiction presents methods of imagining the body that allow us to question how and why we must be categorized as male, female, black, white or 'other'" (73). Should the two critics be right, it can be assumed that Butler's fiction carries a much more universal message concerning the whole humanity, its understanding of difference and rape.

In order to recreate a multi-dimensional understanding of rape in Butler's fiction, it seems necessary to employ a posthuman methodology that will take into account a polyphonic multiplicity of voices, including those of women, men, alien, and others since – as Rosi Braidotti states in her compelling book *The Posthuman* – "[t]he posthuman predicament entails specific forms of inhuman(e) practices that call for new frames of analysis and new normative values" (138). Only by adopting such new frames of analysis and normative values, one may outline Octavia Butler's multiverses that have an incredibly decentralising power and defend themselves against any oppressive system that would favour a specific social class, race, sex or sexual orientation since posthumanism should conceptualise issues of difference only to eradicate them. Otherwise, it may seem impossible to achieve a post-anthropocentric and all-inclusive perspective.

Even though the above issues have already been described to a certain extent by critics like Patricia Melzer, this study aims at investigating further their take on difference and rape but its objective is to pay a much closer attention to how Octavia Butler's

characters are gradually objectified and what influence this objectification has on their psyche and interpersonal relations, as well as how initially sexed bodies evolve into postgender bodies that undergo what I would like to understand as a process that is reverse to what the viewers can witness in *Westworld*, which I discussed at the beginning of this chapter. While in the series we can observe a process as a result of which a cyborg becomes human, Octavia Butler's fiction presents a process of becoming a cyborgian, postgender body. In order to analyse the problem described above, Octavia Butler's novels have been divided into two groups so that it is possible to discuss rape in Butler's oeuvre from diverse vantage points.

Admittedly, Octavia Butler authored fantastically intricate universes inhabited by aliens that escape any human taxonomy. Each of these races observes their own set of rules, which often radicalise humans against peoples they confront. Without doubt, each of these worlds deserves a separate chapter and its own in-depth analysis. However, due to space restraints of this dissertation, I decided to select only two most representative contexts and supplement them with occasional references to other texts. Thus, in chapter II, I concentrate on rape in the speculative world of *Kindred*. In this part of my dissertation, I touch upon various complex issues which move beyond a standard discussion of the relationship between the enslaved and the enslaver, thereby outlining the posthuman relationality between quite unexpected actors. Chapter III focuses on how Butler's trilogy, *Lilith's Brood*, problematises a human conception of rape in a mixed community of humans and extraterrestrials. This part of my discussion is also accompanied by a modest analysis of the award-winning short story "Bloodchild," which further develops my discussion of Butler's novels. As I argue, humans who accuse aliens of rape on their bodies are ironically framed by the writer into committing the very same crime in the name of their questionable formulation of what 'freedom' should stand for.

Each chapter is then divided into four parts titled as follows: Multiverses, Animate/Inanimate, Cyborg identity, They're us... We're them. Beginning with a general overview of the texts, I discuss in consecutive chapters, I attempt to gradually delve into more detail by showing how bodies become objectified and raped, but also how boundaries are transgressed in a truly posthuman fashion. In chapter IV, which concludes my discussion, I summarise my points and offer a novel understanding of rape in the context of posthuman relationality in Butler's writing which I investigate throughout this dissertation. This, as I argue, is possible because of the very application of a posthumanist/posthuman perspective, which forces a researcher to extend the definition of rape to presently unknown contexts. In the most general sense, rape frustrates the foundations of posthumanism, which stresses equality and relationality of all beings regardless of whether they are considered to be human or non-human persons. Such an extension is possible as "Butler's science fiction narratives are intriguing because of the complex and at times contradictory reading experience they offer; they juxtapose affirmation of difference with experiences of colonization and slavery" (Melzer 36).

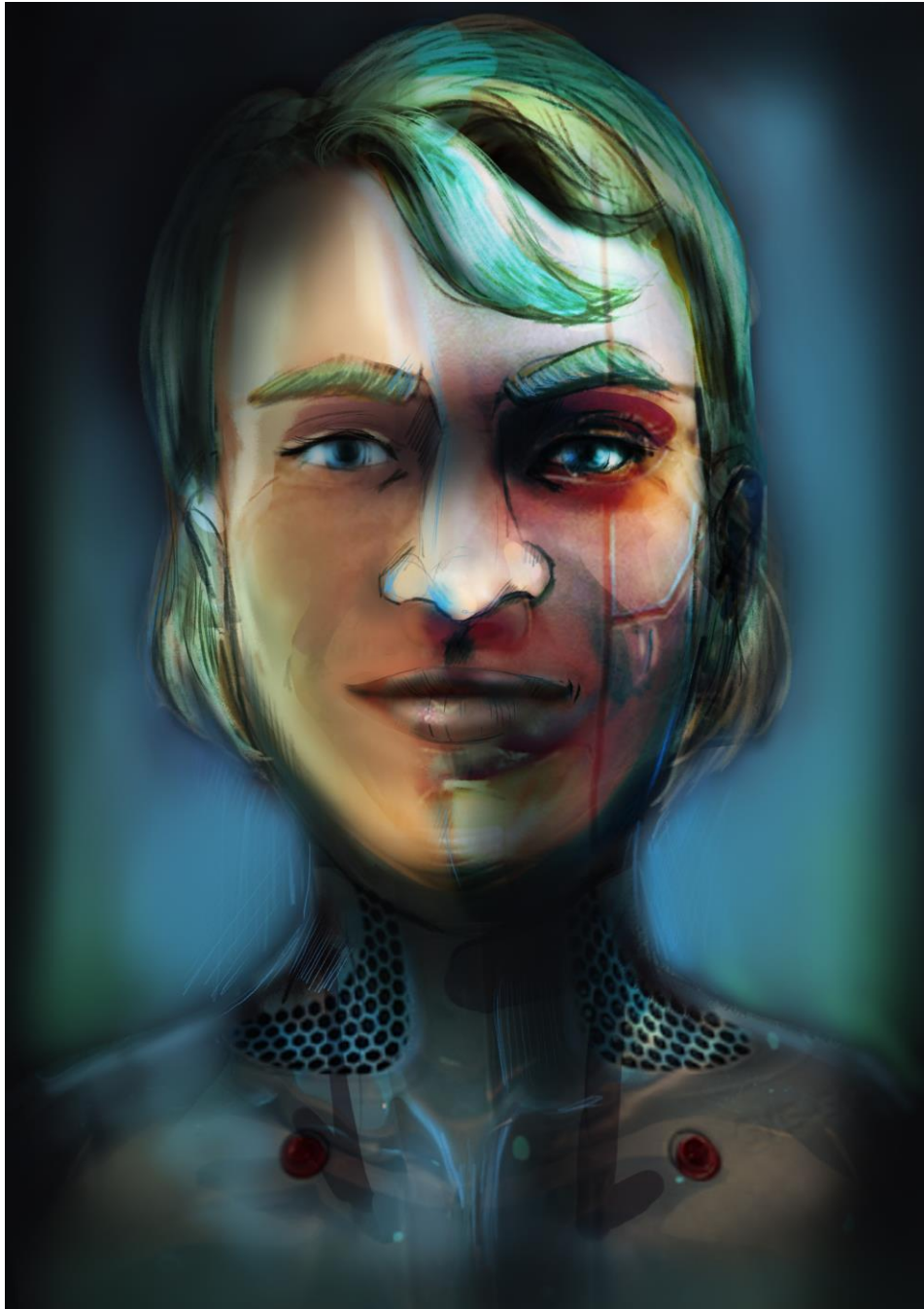


Figure 2 Posthuman thinker. The above illustration is an artistic rendition of my photograph. Following my instructions, the artist attempted to convey the nature of a posthuman researcher who transgresses borders of sexual identity as well as borders between animate and inanimate matter. The latter was done by incorporating cybernetic components into live tissue.

Chapter II

Race²⁵

One cannot rape one's own property. (Brownmiller 162)

1. Multiverses²⁶

Notwithstanding many doubts and controversies raised by posthumanism as well as transhumanism, both schools of thought seem to be announcing a new era which is believed by many to be the next step in the evolution of humankind's conception of life. In this context, the previous chapter, which describes all the ground-breaking (thought) experiments and changes in thinking about human and non-human persons, may give the impression that humanity has already—at least partially—achieved this stage and managed to break the chains of reductive or downright oppressive systems that used to plague mankind in the past. What is certainly more vital is that some might safely assume that we have succeeded in producing accurate narratives describing oppressive systems

²⁵ Portions of this chapter have been published in Czerniakowski, Maciej. "Posthuman Transgression of Boundaries in Octavia Butler's *Kindred*." *3L: Language, Linguistics, Literature. The Southeast Asian Journal of English Language Studies*, vol. 27, no. 1, 2021, pp. 129-141.

²⁶ I borrow these terms from Francesca Ferrando's PhD dissertation (*The Posthuman: Philosophical Posthumanism and Its Others*, Universta di Roma Tre, later published under the title *Philosophical Posthumanism*, Bloomsbury 2019). Unlike Ferrando, I shall not provide the readers with the in-depth analysis of the terms since it seems to be irrelevant to the current study. Instead, I use them as convenient and illustrative metaphors reflected in Octavia Butler's oeuvre.

of power that organised human civilisation in the past, and that these narratives shall serve as a warning for future generations against relapsing into disgraceful institutions such as slavery. Unfortunately, this does not seem to be the case as it will be shown below.

On 3 May 2018, *The New York Times* published an article commenting on Kanye West's television appearance:

A video of the rapper Kanye West discussing slavery is a sad reminder of America's historical amnesia about the brutal realities of that institution. "When you hear about slavery for 400 years," he said in the clip, which was widely circulated on Twitter, "that sounds like a choice." ("The Historian Behind..."; my emphasis, online)

Historically inaccurate and—bearing in mind that West is black himself—utterly incomprehensible, West's statement was widely criticised by the black community and addressed in numerous newspaper articles. As the article in question further comments, an avid Trump supporter, "Mr. West seemed to suggest that enslaved African-Americans were so content that they did not actively resist their bondage, and, as a result, they bear some responsibility for centuries of persecution." Even though it does seem to be perplexing that it is a black rapper who should hold such views, they are disgracefully popular and similar to the way victims of rape have been perceived, i.e. not as victims but as accomplices or even provokers, which puts the questions asked by the narrator of Octavia Butler's essay titled "Positive Obsession" in an interesting context.

Towards the end of the story, the narrator asks whether black people actually need and benefit from literature, in particular whether they need science-fiction ("Bloodchild and Other Stories" 134-135). In light of Mr. West's 'enlightening' comments that have

been quoted above, any thorough investigation of these questions appears to be superfluous and, even though it has been over 40 years since Butler's *Kindred* was first published, the issues addressed by this neo-slave speculative narrative—as well as other texts written by Butler—continue to be relevant in the 21st century. A black science-fiction writer, Mike Sargeant, answers Butler's question saying that “[s]cience-fiction is a great forum for black people to make statements about their existence and the history of their existence on the planet” (“Black Sci-Fi—Section 2,” online). Similar statements appear to be in high demand since, contrary to what Mr. West seems to believe, slavery was not driven by complacency. More likely, it was driven by fear since, as Brownmiller observes in an excerpt quoted in the epigraph to this chapter, African-American slaves were regarded as nothing more than property and therefore were devoid of even the most basic human rights²⁷, which are often taken for granted by Western societies in the 21st century. Dana—the main protagonist of *Kindred*—calls them nonpeople (53) who could be bought, sold, separated from their family, raped, and eventually killed.

²⁷ Here it is important to mention that the situation of North American and South American slaves was considerably different. While the American South is notorious for its atrocious treatment of slaves brought from Africa, both their situation and the situation of native inhabitants could be much worse in South America. This is how Charlotte Johnson comments on the issue: “Histories of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade typically focus on those enslaved in the North American colonies and often overlook its Southern counterpart. However, those enslaved in North America during the colonial period were a minority; only 6% of Africans were taken to the East Coast of North America between 1500 and 1870. Slave imports from Africa were overwhelmingly taken to South America and the Caribbean. Although the Southern United States is renowned for its past brutality towards the slave population, those enslaved in areas such as Brazil, Colombia and Bolivia experienced a much harsher reality. (...)When the Europeans arrived in South America, they enslaved the native inhabitants and used them as a free labour force to work on their mines and the cotton, sugar, coffee and tobacco plantations that were being developed. Moreover, shortly after the European colonisation, natives of these regions rapidly decreased in number. The Europeans that came to America brought with them diseases that the natives were unaccustomed to, which has been described by some as the ‘Columbian Exchange’. Diseases such as measles, influenza, mumps, typhus and small pox were detrimental to the Indian inhabitants of South America. Such diseases had a profound effect on native mortality during this period, yet historians are not quite sure of the exact figures of devastation it caused. However, it has been estimated that in the Americas as a whole, the native Indians were numbered at 50 million in 1500. By 1600, after 100 years of forced labour, colonisation and disease, they numbered a mere 8 million” (“The South American Slave Trade,” online).

The morphology of the said fear was skilfully wrought into the main theme of *Kindred*, where everything seems to happen because of and in connection with fear. As the readers learn from Dana at the very beginning of the novel, “Rufus’s fear of death calls me to him, and my own fear of death sends me home” (Butler, *Kindred* 50). In this way, fear becomes a driving force of the novel. The fear paralysing these two bodies is what draws them together and pulls them apart, which certainly makes a ripple throughout history by introducing an element of chaos²⁸ to Antebellum America, but—as Said and Termizi state—“when chaos happens, it usually conceives something else (40).

It is my contention in this chapter to prove that by experiencing fear, excruciating pain, and rape these two bodies²⁹—one black, the other one white, one female, the other one male—become one postgender body which is neither white nor black, neither female nor male, as these opposites cancel each other out in a rather posthuman fashion and thereby a binary opposition between the enslaver and the enslaved is deconstructed. As Haraway puts it, “a potent subjectivity [is] synthesised from fusions of outsider identities...” (66), which leads to pulling down a highly oppressive hierarchical system and, as Long claims, “nuance[ing] the relationship between history and pain through the trope of rape” (471; my emphasis). Before this issue is addressed, however, let us start at the beginning, i.e. at the end since *Kindred* opens with the scene that concludes Dana and

²⁸ Let me stress that I do not use the word “chaos” here in the sense of a general disorder. Instead, I allude to the chaos theory, which has been defined as follows: “in mechanics and mathematics, the study of apparently random or unpredictable behaviour in systems governed by deterministic laws. A more accurate term, *deterministic chaos*, suggests a paradox because it connects two notions that are familiar and commonly regarded as incompatible” (“Chaos theory,” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, online). As I understand it, Dana and Rufus are the two incompatible elements since they come from two different worlds and time dimensions, and yet they are drawn to each other by deterministic chaos laws governing the system behind the universe they inhabit.

²⁹ Interestingly, Hampton observes that “[t]he body in Butler’s fiction is indispensable in understanding how identity is formed and marshalled” (xi).

Kevin's unexpected and surely uncalled for adventure. Before the reader learns, however, what happened to Dana, they are left to anticipate and discover how the posthuman relationality between the black body and the white body, which is so painstakingly constructed by Butler, emerges in the build-up to the final scene which throws the reader in the middle of the speculative world of *Kindred* on the first pages of the novel.

2. Animate/Inanimate

Having lost her left arm in the most extraordinary of ways, Dana—one of the main protagonists of the novel and its narrator—is slowly recovering in hospital. Kevin—her husband—is being remanded in custody and suspected of a crime that might be regarded as assault and battery on Dana, except there is not a single person who can logically explain what actually happened to her. After all, Dana is found with her arm stuck in the wall and even though the police initially detain Kevin, they cannot press any charges against him due to a lack of any conclusive evidence proving his guilt. Eventually, the investigation is discontinued since revealing the truth—which remains unfathomable to everybody, including Dana and Kevin—turns out to be beyond anybody's reach. Recalling what he reported to the police, Kevin says,

“I told as much of the truth as I could. I said I was in the bedroom when I heard you scream. I ran to the living room to see what was wrong, and I found you struggling to free your arm from what seemed to be a hole in the wall. I went to help you. That was when I realized your arm wasn't just stuck, but that, somehow, it had been crushed right into the wall.”

“Not exactly crushed.”

“I know. But that seemed to be a good word to use on them—to show my ignorance. It wasn't all that inaccurate either. Then they wanted me to tell them

how such a thing could happen. I said I didn't know ... kept telling them I didn't know. And heaven help me, Dana, I don't know."

"Neither do I," I whispered. "Neither do I." (Butler, *Kindred* 11)

The readers must not overlook the ambiguity of the line opening the above quote. On the one hand, Kevin's inability to uncover the whole truth to the police results from the fact that nobody would be willing to give any credibility to his story if it were recounted in full detail. On the other hand, even though Kevin and Dana really did experience the harsh reality of Antebellum America and were not only observers—as Dana meditates, "we were actors. While we waited to go home, we humored the people around us by pretending to be like them" (98)—they are invariably flabbergasted by the whole situation. The final episode of Dana's time travel, which ends with Dana's dismemberment and sends her to hospital, cannot be comprehended by the characters on any level, no matter how painful it was for them to live through an outlandish sequence of events that precedes the accident. Butler, however, withholds the information regarding what really happened to Dana until the end of the novel, where the narrator accounts of her last journey back home in the following way:

Something harder and stronger than Rufus's hand clamped down on my arm, squeezing it, stiffening it, pressing into it—painlessly, at first—melting into it, meshing with it as though somehow my arm were being absorbed into something. Something cold and nonliving.

Something ... paint, plaster, wood—a wall. The wall of my living room. I was back at home—in my own house, in my own time. But I was still caught somehow, joined to the wall as though my arm were growing out of it—or growing into it. (Butler, *Kindred* 260-261)

Coupling Dana's body with an inanimate object is a climactic scene which underscores Dana's own objectification. By this stage, the protagonist's body has been effectively soiled and put in a position whereby it is "not supposed to have pleasurable feelings on [its] own" (*Beloved* 247). Rufus's attempted rape pushes Dana's objectification process even further by ultimately depriving Dana's body of its autonomy and forcing her to stab him in self-defence against her own will. This event completes the evolution of her body from a female one at the beginning of her journey into a postgender, posthuman body—as it is understood by Haraway—in the wall episode. Dana's body is coupled with an inanimate object as if to illustrate that quite literally it has become a sexless chimera at best or a mere object at worst. This episode, which is reminiscent of numerous posthuman metamorphoses present in our culture, investigated by, among others, Bruce Clarke in his discussion of classics such as *The Fly* by David Cronenberg, gives a magnificent account of becoming a chimera. Undeniably, the compositional structure or, to use Clarke's words, "structural coupling" (*Posthuman Metamorphosis...* 137-138), which frames Dana's first-hand experience of slavery, carries great weight since, in a way, it both foreshadows and summarises the most vital issues addressed in the novel.

Even though Dana eventually succeeds in killing Rufus and returns home, the experience of slavery—which she had previously learnt about only from books and television productions—brings about sweeping changes in her psyche and leaves painful scars that will never heal. In a sickening episode during one of her time travels later in the book, the narrator gives a shocking account of how it feels to be an eye-witness to slavery:

I had seen people beaten on television and in the movies. I had seen the too-red blood substitute streaked across their backs and heard their well-rehearsed

screams. But I hadn't lain nearby and smelled their sweat or heard them pleading and praying, shamed before their families and themselves. (Butler, *Kindred* 36)

Not only does the exposure to this tough reality ruin the narrator's psychological and emotional well-being, but also it grossly disfigures her body by leaving her with a physical stigma. She virtually loses her body integrity, femininity and subjectivity, which shall always remind her of the impossibility to escape from the oppressive system of slavery once it has been experienced and the fact that nobody can suffer from slavery and remain intact. This is because—as it is repeatedly mentioned in *Kindred*—the black body is private property of the white slave owner that can be disposed of as he sees fit and slavery itself is reproduced by the social and political system as systemic racism. The world has recently been reminded of the latter by the Black Lives Matter movement, which has been repeatedly bringing abuse against black communities to light.

Certainly, Dana's experience could be extended to the whole black community, whose struggle with the system left incurable scars on the whole community. Interestingly, the controversies around Kanye West's statement quoted in the introduction to this chapter seem to indicate just this. Neither the black community nor the white one seems to have successfully dealt with their painful past that laid a solid foundation for constructing the identity of contemporary American society, which makes the wall episode even more significant. The blurring of the border between animate and inanimate, i.e. in this case between Dana's body and plaster, happens to be an illustrative example of how slavery crushed human integrity and mutilated generations of innocent people. The scene in question outlines a crushing that turns out to be quite literal. As the narrator recounts, “[s]omething harder and stronger than Rufus's hand clamped down on my arm, squeezing it, stiffening it, pressing into it...” (Butler, *Kindred* 260) Curiously,

the wall which squeezes and stiffens the black body seems to be a perfect, if shocking, visualisation of how the black body functioned in the white society of the 19th century. The body, which was inescapably objectified and could not escape acts of white cruelty, was step by step dirtied³⁰ and dehumanized. After the process of objectification, as a result of which a human being would lose its personhood, was completed, torturers had a convenient excuse to eventually rape it. As Susan Brownmiller comments in one of her chapters titled ‘A question of Race’:

The American experience of the slave South, which spanned two centuries, is a perfect study of rape in all its complexities, for the black woman’s sexual integrity was deliberately crushed in order that slavery might profitably endure. (*Against our own will* 153)

Also, the ‘profitable’ business of slavery in order to remain ‘profitable’ spared no body, equally exploiting women, children, men, and the elderly. Therefore, in the context of the whole novel, losing an arm by a 26-year-old woman, i.e. mutilating a young female body, seems to be particularly telling and it surely is an ‘invitation’ to a much more in-depth investigation.

Crushing Dana’s (sexual) identity by integrating her body with the wall, i.e. creating a chimera whose sexual identity is thus considerably problematised, influences the readers’ perception of the black body on two levels. First of all, it is indicated from the very beginning of the novel that her body, which has just ‘fully’ completed a normatively understood process of entering society—as the readers learn in one of the

³⁰ The category of dirtying the black body adopted in this essay is inspired by Patricia Yeager’s exhaustive discussion included in her study titled *Dirt and Desire. Reconstructing Southern Women’s Writing 1930-1990*, The University of Chicago Press 2000.

opening scenes, Dana and Kevin have just got married—loses at least some of its subjectivity as a result of the accident and is exposed to an objectification process that might impact significantly on Dana’s gender stability. Notably then, a young wife’s black body instantly seems to be desexualised and, in a way, sexually impaired since, having lost an arm it is no longer as attractive as it used to be. Secondly, this objectification appears to be one of the factors that can facilitate rape since withholding part of Dana’s body in the past appears to be indicative of the fact that Dana ultimately is Rufus’s chattel and shall never escape from him entirely. Quite literally, her body becomes inanimate. It becomes a thing.³¹

At the same time, Rufus does not seem to be a typical slave master and his act should definitely be read in context, which is not to say that it should be excused. On numerous occasions, the man of his times that he unquestionably is, Rufus behaves as though he truly cares for and even loves Dana, who happens to be the spitting image of her grand-, grand-, grand- grandmother, Alice. The main source of Rufus’s feelings towards Dana is that he knows he can rely on her, whereas he cannot count on any support from his parents—his father seems to take much pleasure in scolding him, while his mother’s hysterical love is more likely to get on his nerves than to give him consolation. Nevertheless, he fails to acknowledge his feelings towards Dana, let alone understand it, and this twisted ‘love’ eventually pushes him to attempt to rape her.

³¹ It is worth observing that Dana’s body can also be referred to as the grotesque body, which “is a body in the act of becoming. It is never finished, never completed; it is continually being built and created; it builds and creates another body...” (Beng at all. 119). The same kind of grotesqueness of the body reoccurs in Butler’s other texts, for instance, in the *Parable* novels in extremely violent descriptions of body mutilations. Here is an excerpt from *The Parable of the Sower* describing Keith’s body after he was found dead: “Someone had cut and burned away most of my brother’s skin. Everywhere except his face. They burned out his eyes, but left the rest of his face intact—like they wanted him to be recognized. They cut and cauterized and they cut and they cauterized. ... Some of the wounds were days old. Someone had an endless hatred of my brother” (120-121).

Simultaneously, it appears to be almost inconceivable to advance a hypothesis that Rufus acts as yet another slave master devoid of any human emotions. Therefore, in order to further investigate the addressed issues, it seems indispensable to retrace how he becomes desperate enough to push himself to assault Dana, which will be the focus of the subsequent part of my analysis. For the time being, I wish to point out that it may not be only the black body that is susceptible to rape in the novel. Unexpected though this statement might be, Rufus's body—the white body—also falls victim to the hierarchical slave system of the 19th century based on a binary opposition: slave vs enslaver. As the reader learns on numerous occasions, Rufus's body is also not supposed to feel pleasure and, quite frankly, its autonomy is repeatedly violated through rape, even if this is not rape in the literal meaning of the word. As Sherryl Vint claims,

[i]t is possible to read all Butler's novels as neo-slave narratives since they are all concerned with the continued consequences of slavery, physical and psychological on both slaves and enslavers. They examine questions of labour, violence, and dispossession, asymmetrical relations of dependence, and the need to build liveable futures together with former oppressors. (256; my emphasis)

Kindred details the consequences of slavery on enslavers in an outstandingly absorbing fashion. As I noted earlier, Dana's arm is crushed into the wall of her living room because Rufus manages to grab it back in Maryland in the 19th century. Just like the wall, he does not let Dana go. What must be concluded then is that Rufus's hand that gets hold of Dana's arm is transformed in a posthuman flight of fancy into inanimate matter. His hand and the wall are one. This conclusion must be stressed since it shows that it is not only Dana's body that is incorporated in the wall and that is impaired. Rufus's body seems to have suffered the same fate. Curiously, it is already the wall episode which

indicates that Rufus's and Dana's bodies become one colourless cyborgian body³² which, by being incorporated into inanimate matter, turns into "a potent subjectivity synthesized from fusions of outsider identities and in the complex political-historical layerings" (Haraway 66). Dana and Rufus become one body that is mercilessly raped by the system of slavery, whose primary objective was to exploit slaves and crush identities, but which simultaneously backfired and inflicted suffering on white community as well.

However, beyond all dispute, Rufus's body is raped in a much different sense. Although the Rufus who attempts rape on Dana is already a notorious criminal by contemporary standards and there is no denying that he is the only person who must bear the blame, Butler seems to provoke her readers to take a few steps back and reconsider Rufus's motives in a broader context before passing judgment. This might be the reason behind introducing Rufus's younger version to the readers before they learn about the crime which is to end this very peculiar bildungsroman. By giving a detailed description of Rufus's childhood and his transformation into a slave master, Butler makes it impossible for the readers to disregard what Rufus suffered as a child and how his hardships added to his evolution. A systematic torturer and a skilful representative of his walk of life, Rufus Weylin used to be a child whose innocence is crushed all along the way as he grows into an adult man.

The first part of *Kindred* contains an extended presentation of Rufus's gradual evolution from an innocent boy into a slave master but—so it seems—a slave master with a difference. From the beginning of the story, Rufus seems to be a rather bright boy who

³² Another interesting approach which could be used to investigate Dana and Rufus's cyborgian body, but which goes beyond the scope of this study, is adopted by Hejaz and Singh to analyse Ian McEwan's *Saturday*. The critics focus on what they refer to as "a combination of two extremes of Apollonian and Dionysian" (175), whose application could lead to interesting conclusions.

has an unusual, if disconcerting, habit of getting himself into trouble. This, in turn, most of the time leads him to life threatening situations. The propensity to put his own life at risk seems to have its origin in the home environment that gives him all the stimuli he needs to lose his mental well-being and to be transformed into an emotionless and cold-blooded slave owner who behaves like a mere slave driver. When Dana is called back to the American south of the 19th century for the second time, she discovers that Rufus is on the point of burning the whole house down by setting fire to draperies. As Dana narrates,

The boy had his back to me and hadn't noticed me yet. He held a stick of wood in one hand and the end of the stick was charred and smoking. Its fire had apparently been transferred to the draperies at the window. Now the boy stood watching as the flames ate their way up the heavy cloth.

For a moment, I watched too. Then I woke up, pushed the boy aside, caught the unburned upper part of the draperies and pulled them down. (Butler, *Kindred* 19-20)

Under different circumstances, Rufus would be just another kid getting himself into mischief. This scene, however, should be understood simultaneously as Rufus's act of sheer desperation and revenge. As the readers learn, Rufus sets fire in retaliation for being hit by his father, who accused him of stealing his money. Watching how the flames begin to spread, Rufus remembers, though, an incident from the past when he set fire to a barn and, therefore, he is instantly paralysed with fear:

"I started thinking that if I burned the house, he would lose all his money. He ought to lose it. It's all he ever thinks about." Rufus shuddered. "But then I remembered the stable, and the whip he hit me with after I set fire. Mama said if

she hadn't stopped him, he would have killed me. I was afraid this time he would kill me, so I wanted to put the fire out. But I couldn't. I didn't know what to do.”
(Butler, *Kindred* 26)

The palpable fear of being killed by his own father, which travels across time and space to snatch Dana from the 20th century, inescapably pushes Rufus's psychological and emotional development in an unexpected direction. Rufus seemingly becomes what the then society expects him to become, i.e. a plantation running slave owner, but— influenced by his extraordinary experiences from childhood—he is unavoidably driven to question the *status quo* that remained the foundation of American society for a few centuries and whose part both his family and his father's slaves invariably constituted. As Dana herself explains to Kevin, who is shocked that Rufus calls her a 'nigger,' later in the novel,

[t]he boy learned to talk that way from his mother,” I said softly. “And from his father, and probably from the slaves themselves.” (Butler, *Kindred* 61)

From the introductory chapter onwards, Rufus's experience of fear and pain inflicted by his father problematises the notion of rape and its motives. It becomes clear that they cannot be discussed in terms of a 'traditional' relation between a victim and a perpetrator. Now and then, Butler reminds the readers that people—be it victims or perpetrators—do not operate in a vacuum and that criminals are made, not born. Whereas one's social background cannot be an excuse for one's crimes, should the said person face justice, it is imperative to state that systems such as American slavery were too complex to be simply broken down into relations between dominant whites and subjugated blacks. The black body is unquestionably the first that bears the fatal consequences of rape, but the white body—which causes this pain—is the one that is raped by an oppressive system

which in theory places this body in a privileged position so that power relations work to its advantage. That this position is as privileged as it might seem is hardly true, though. Instead of benefitting from the *status quo*, the white body—as Rufus’s case illustrates—falls prey to its own oppressive mechanism as it brainwashes and abuses its own offspring.

As Dana’s words quoted above seem to suggest, white mindset in the novel is shaped not only by other whites but also by black people in what comes to be a self-emergent system of slavery. By indicating this fact, Butler seems to say that slavery was not based on a simple victim-perpetrator relationship but rather on a network of interdependencies that exerted a tremendous impact on people to such an extent that they would spontaneously begin exercising control over each other so that every person could play their role in the system. What *Kindred* makes us witness, then, through Dana’s eyes is the evolution of sin, which is reminiscent of *Westworld*. The novel outlines how the oppressive system of slavery ‘gives birth’ to a future rapist, brings him/her up, soils their psyche and physique, and—most crucially—ensures that they shall never ‘relapse’ into feelings of remorse or compassion. By the time a white person’s upbringing has finished, they will have internalised a set of psychological and physical mechanisms that make them perfect members of a panoptical slave society. A society in which nobody knows who a real warden is, but everybody feels compelled to adhere to accepted ways of conduct. In this panopticon, everybody seems to be a zombie figure and, regardless of their skin colour, they are trained to meet the expectations of a 19th-century society or die, as well as to guard other prisoners.³³ Should anybody wish to leave the system, they

³³ Without doubt, this militarized image of society has much in common with the idea of necro-citizenship, which Margaret E. Dorsey and Miguel Diaz-Barriga define as “citizenship practices shaped by exclusion

will be stopped by an inanimate manifestation of the slave machinery, which in the case of *Kindred* seems to be represented by the wall.

How bodies gradually lose—or fail to acquire at all—their independence is a recurring motif in the novel and Butler seems to make a point of showing that all bodies—not only black ones—are systematically objectified and dirtied to an extent that they become inanimate objects that are eventually squeezed and crushed by the system. This is how Dana reflects on this issue,

As I hurried up the steps and into the house, I thought of Rufus and his father, of Rufus becoming his father. It would happen some day in at least one way. Someday Rufus would own the plantation. Someday, he would be the slaveholder, responsible in his own right for what happened to the people who lived in those half-hidden cabins. The boy was literally growing up as I watched—growing up because I watched and because I helped to keep him safe. I was the worst possible guardian for him—a black to watch over him in a society that considered blacks subhuman, a woman to watch over him in a society that considered women perennial children. (Butler, *Kindred* 68)

These perennial children, no matter if they were white belles and black sexualised bodies, were not really treated as children by contemporary Western standards anyway. Instead,

and the possibility of death (...) the concept of necro-citizenship describes three interrelated political and cultural practices: 1. The concept describes state practices that, rather than being primarily concerned with life and the overall health of its citizenry, seem more concerned with controlling exclusion and death. 2. The concept takes into account the deterritorialization of Mexicano/a and Mexican-American identity as essential to their construction as extra-nationals in the public sphere, thus making them targets of exclusion. 3. Mexican-Americans in South Texas continually reenact their sacrifice, and reenact it in poetic, embodied, and highly ritualized ways in order to validate and remind the nation of their status as citizens” (211). Necro-citizenship touches upon sensitive issues, especially in the context of the *Parable* novels, but since my methodology differs from that of necro-citizenship’s I will not explore this area in the present dissertation.

they were abused and, especially women of colour, repeatedly raped all the same by domineering white men or, which is even worse, who were implicated by them in crushing other women's cyborg identity.

This is precisely what Rufus does to Dana on a number of occasions. One of them is described by the protagonist in the following passage which outlines Rufus's growing appetite for Alice after she has come back to health following her being recaptured by patrollers:

I caught Rufus alone again the next day—in his room this time where we weren't likely to be interrupted. But he wouldn't listen when I brought up the letter. His mind was on Alice. She was stronger now, and his patience with her was gone. I had thought that eventually, he would just rape her again—and again. In fact, I was surprised that he hadn't already done it. I didn't realize that he was planning to involve me in that rape. He was, and he did. (Butler, *Kindred* 162).

While Dana's company has shaken the foundations of Rufus's world since their very first encounter on the riverbank and disturbs his evolution into an exemplary slave owner, it is also a crucial factor facilitating Alice's rape and ultimately leading to Rufus's own demise. Building an extraordinarily disturbing context, Butler deeply implicates Dana in convincing her own great-great-great-grandmother to let Rufus rape her or, otherwise, Dana herself will never be born. This tragic conflict propels Dana's transformation into a slave and the disintegration of her identity as it takes away from Dana what is left of her dignity. Unfortunately for her, however, defiling her body and mind has not finished yet.

On learning that Rufus sold their children south—which later turns out to be an outright lie—Alice commits suicide, which puts Dana in a perilous situation since—as it

is mentioned in the novel a few times—Dana is a spitting image of her ancestor. Alice herself admits at some point that they are “two halves of the same woman” (Butler, *Kindred* 228). After Alice’s death, Rufus’s mental health deteriorates and the two of them become one female body in his mind. As Dana is being filled with a new fear that will effectively bring about blurring the border between the enslaved and the enslaver as well as add yet another layering to Dana and Rufus’s cyborg identity, she observes seconds before Rufus tries to rape her, “I could accept him as my ancestor, my younger brother, my friend, but not as my master, and not as my lover” (Butler, *Kindred* 260). As Vint comments,

Rape is the final assault against her sense of herself as a twentieth-century Dana refuses to accept. This is her stand for ‘suicide or worse’—she will kill herself or kill Rufus if he crosses this line, a risk she is willing to take even though it is unclear whether she will be able to return to her own time once Rufus is dead. (252)

This scene shows where Rufus’s fear, which has accompanied him since when he was still a young boy, eventually led him. Rufus’s identity disintegrates as he completely loses control of himself and attempts an incestuous rape on his great-great-great-grandmother. At the same time, Dana’s fear leads her to killing her great-great-great-grandfather, who is not willing to let her abandon him. In a sense then, both of them are equally abused by the system which dirtied their bodies and minds to the extent that their identity disintegrated and has become a patchwork of other identities that have had a detrimental impact on them. To use Sielke’s words, “rape turns into a rhetorical device” (2) which— it is my contention—helps build a cyborgian, postgender body which literally and symbolically becomes a fusion of animate and inanimate matter. This is how Butler

seems to use posthuman thinking in order to dismantle difference between the oppressor and the victim, who both suffer from the system that bred them.

3. Cyborg identity

See how easily slaves are made?

(Butler, *Kindred* 177)

Between her time travels, Dana introduces the readers to the story of how she got married to Kevin and the reactions their decision sparked off among their relatives. Not unexpectedly, both families express their disappointment/hatred since Kevin and Dana are of different skin colour and therefore their relatives deem it unimaginable that they should be a couple. What Butler seems to underscore by outlining a map of American racism is that it is not a problem concerning only the white part of society. Just like Kevin's sister, who is white, says that she wouldn't have Dana in her house because she is black, Dana's uncle says that "he'd rather will them [a couple of apartment houses] to his church than leave them to [her] and see them fall into the white hands" (Butler, *Kindred* 112) should Dana marry Kevin.

Undoubtedly, reasons to be racist and disrespect each other will vary. Among whites, modern day American racism appears to originate from power relations instilled by slavery, whereas among people of colour it seems to have more to do with retaliation for centuries of subjugation. Regardless of its motivation, though, the racism of 1976 mirrors the racism of Antebellum America, pointing to the fact that little substantial change in the general attitude towards people of colour is visible after over 150 years. Almost 40 years after the times Butler sets her novel in, this *status quo* gave rise to the Black Lives Matter movement, which has been stressing that the words of the *The New York Times* article are still relevant and that this exact *status quo* "is a sad reminder of

America's historical amnesia about the brutal realities of that institution [slavery]" ("The Historian Behind..." online)—the realities in which Kevin and Dana play the main roles, but they do not seem to excel at it. This is how Dana comments on their 'acting':

And I began to realize why Kevin and I had fitted so easily into this time. We weren't really in. We were observers watching a show. We were watching history happen around us. And we were actors. While we waited to go home, we humored the people around us by pretending to be like them. But we were poor actors. We never really got into our roles. We never forgot we were acting. (Butler, *Kindred* 98)

It is crucial to remember that they were actors who were constantly forced to play the roles foreseen for their respective races both in 1976 and in Antebellum America. Dana seems to address this constant racial oppression when she concludes that "slavery was a slow process of dulling" (Butler, *Kindred* 182)—dulling which was supposed to lower and eventually crush resistance to the officially accepted ways of conduct. In 1976, one of the tools used for dulling people into obedience is a lack of social consent for interracial marriage, which—as it is stated above—was frowned upon on both sides of the barricade. On the one hand, Dana's uncle would rather see her marry a black man because he does not want his property to fall in the hands of white people. Her aunt's motivation is perhaps slightly less radical, but equally shocking. As Dana says gloomily, "I think my aunt accepts the idea of my marrying you because any children we have will be light. Lighter than I am, anyway. She always said I was a little too 'highly visible'" (Butler, *Kindred* 111). On the other hand, Kevin sarcastically concludes that his sister's husband "would have made a good Nazi" (Butler, *Kindred* 110). These appalling comments describe what is expected of Dana and Kevin by the society of 1976 America

very clearly. The couple is socially banned from marrying the opposite race regardless of their true feelings, which are of much less importance than the agreed social standards. Nevertheless, they choose to break with these conventions, thereby attempting to redefine their roles. However, they are constantly reminded of their place in the pecking order. Comparing Toni Morrison's and Octavia Butler's novels, Vint concludes as follows:

“While Morrison focuses on Sethe's need to learn to become a subject, Butler shows us that it is equally important for twentieth-century readers to realize what it meant to be(come) an object” (249).

Dana's and Kevin's subjectivities appear to be strong enough for them to ward off the criticism they receive from their 20th-century relatives, but this obviously means 'going off script' as they refuse to play the roles they are expected to. This unending interplay between the roles they are supposed to perform and those that they actually choose for themselves reveals that the male and female body is seen by Butler as “a performative tool” (*Posthumanism* 52), which in Scott Bukatman's words should be “narrated as a site of exploration and transfiguration” (*Posthumanism* 98).

Put differently, Dana's and Kevin's bodies invariably take part in a bitter theatrical performance addressing problems of racism and human misery inflicted by white supremacists. Even though they can control their bodies only to a certain extent since there seems to be an invisible puppet master who does that for them, the body becomes a site of a fierce battle between well-established power relations and liberating forces that see humans as subjects, not objects/chattel. In 1976, Kevin and Dana initially win this struggle, fighting difference between white and black in a truly posthuman fashion and abolishing hierarchical structures of the past. They are, however, put to a

much more demanding test when they are both called by Rufus to help him survive in Antebellum America.

A troubling thought that keeps haunting Dana is whether Antebellum America could turn her into a slave, i.e. an object, as well as whether Kevin could develop a southern mentality and become a slave master. At the beginning of the story, when she meets Rufus for the first time, she is able to defend her subjectivity and even to ask young Rufus to refrain from calling her a ‘nigger’ (Butler, *Kindred* 24-25)—something unimaginable for a black person in 1815. As time passes, her resistance seems to be depleting and it reaches a critical point on several occasions.

One such situation is when Dana is recaptured by Rufus and his father, which is followed by Tom Weylin whipping Dana after her escape attempt:

I moaned and tried not to think about it. The pain of my body was enough for me to contend with. But now there was a question in my mind that had to be answered.

Would I really try again? Could I?

I moved, twisted myself somehow, from my stomach onto my side. I tried to get away from my thoughts, but they still came.

See how easily slaves are made? they said. (Butler, *Kindred* 177)

The excruciating physical pain reminds her of the place the 19th-century society wants her to occupy and dulls her will to stand against persecution black people are subjected to. Nevertheless, before she reaches this miserable stage, she manifests repeatedly—to many people’s disbelief—that her 20th-century subjectivity is outstandingly hard to break, thereby proving that

Gender, race, or class consciousness is an achievement forced on us by the terrible historical experience of the contradictory social realities of patriarchy, colonialism, and capitalism. (Haraway, “Cyborg Manifesto, *Posthumanism* 75)

How this achievement is forced on Dana can be observed time and again in the novel, but two examples are particularly telling. Interestingly, both cases involve Dana being accused of acting like a white person even though her own aunt back in the 20th century regards Dana as being “a little too ‘highly visible’” (Butler, *Kindred* 111), i.e. ‘too black’. Also, both situations are presented one after another as if to reinforce the fact that Dana apparently fails to act properly and, therefore, she shall not be accepted by Antebellum society.

As for the first case, at one point, Rufus grows really tired of how Alice has been ignoring him and asks Dana to help him convince Alice to have sex with him. Dana openly refuses to do so, but it only angers Rufus, who—disbelieving that he was opposed by a black person—is burning with rage:

For several seconds, he stood frozen, towering over me, glaring down as though he meant to hit me. Finally, though, he relaxed, leaned against his desk. “You think you’re white!” he muttered. “You don’t know your place any better than a wild animal.” (Butler, *Kindred* 164)

It is important to observe that Rufus says Dana considers herself white—regardless of her skin colour—because she dares to stand out against a person she should regard as her master. By doing it, Dana places herself in the network of power relations working to the advantage of white people, a behavior which Rufus tries to oppose by treating her as an intruder. Obviously, for a 20th-century reader, it does not feel that Dana acts in an extraordinary way. By modern standards, she just acts normal as an independent human

being. In the 19th century, though, Dana becomes an out-of-the-ordinary chimera who is both too highly visible because of the blackness of her skin, on the one hand, and the ‘whiteness’ of her behaviour, on the other. The oxymoronic quality of Dana’s existence is underscored by a memory that comes back to Dana minutes before she makes an attempt to talk Alice into having sex with Rufus. Recalling her chat with Alice during which she longingly remembers Isaac, Dana narrates:

Yet moments later for no reason that I could see, she attacked me, “You ought to be ashamed of yourself, whining and crying after some poor white trash of a man, black as you are. You always try to act so white. White nigger, turning against your own people!” (Butler, *Kindred* 165; my emphasis)

Describing Dana as a ‘white nigger’, Alice unknowingly emphasises how hard it is for Dana to fit in and play her role. Although Dana—being black and acting white—is even more visible in Antebellum America than in the 20th century, she is highly marginalised by societies in both time dimensions since people appear to be afraid of her. In modern times, she is marginalised by her own family due to her apparently disgraceful marriage to a white man. In the 19th century, she is pushed on the margins of society since she allegedly acts against her own people. Her body is gradually becoming a site of transgression of boundaries between the two races that blend into one posthuman relational human just the way Melzer describes it in her study:

In most of Butler’s stories, female figures fulfil the function of the cyborg in their transgression of boundaries. All of them take up special places in their society and often have experiences in which they are marginalized, and sometimes these experiences make them into powerful agents. (96)

Paradoxically, Dana's marginalisation does turn her into a powerful agent since, after all, she successfully safeguards her own birth even though it happens at the price of talking her great-great-great-grandmother into getting raped. This, in turn, problematises Dana's situation in the 20th century.

As I mentioned above, her uncle refuses to let his property go into the white hands. The problem, though, is that Dana is partially white since white blood—Rufus's blood—flows in her veins as he eventually manages to take advantage of Alice. In this light, it becomes clear that what Alice means as offence when she calls Dana a white nigger, which is apparently a sign of disrespect among black community as it is supposed to reflect that a black person betrayed their own kind, is quite literally the truth. Dana's body is a “cyborg in [her] transgression of boundaries” (Melzer 96). She is black by her skin colour, but at the same time she is white because Rufus—her great grandfather—is white. It is important to note that Dana transgresses both bodily and cultural boundaries. Bodily boundaries are transgressed between the two races as she is a great-great-great-grandchild of a white man and a black woman. Cultural boundaries are transgressed since she is considered to act white by Antebellum America, while simultaneously she is treated as an insignificant black other by a modern-day society. This, however, does not stop Dana from having a decisive impact on the course of history, which surely would not have happened without her. She might be counted among “[n]onpeople rented for a few hours, a few days, a few weeks” (Butler, *Kindred* 53) by a modern-day society, but she eventually turns out to be one of the most crucial agents whose actions determine the lives of many.

This happens when Dana is eventually capable of liberating at least some part of her subjectivity from the 19th-century chains of slavery and securing a status of an independent woman for herself. As Vint observes,

Dana's refusal to accept rape acknowledges that her body is her self. She now better understands how African Americans were made into objects by slavery, and what they lost beyond the brute experience of physical torture. (254)

What is more, Dana cannot limit herself to passively observe the objectification of people and eventually she plays a double role in this theatre of racism. On the one hand, she needs to find herself in the sphere of bare life in order to make sure that history happens. In other words, the more she is part of *bios*, the more she is capable of tackling difference in a posthuman fashion and the more she can influence what happens in *zoe* since she can improve the wellbeing of black people in the 20th century. On the other hand, she needs to take an active part in this gruesome objectification by dragging Alice into *bios* even further since Dana will never be born if she fails to become a part of it. In this sense, her black body takes on a performative function—it becomes a tool. Her oppressors wish to dirty her body so that she can play the role of a slave. Little do they know, however, that if they succeed in doing that the whole performance—which eventually works against its directors—will liberate black people. To put it differently, the more corrupt her body is, the closer she gets to achieving her aim, i.e. purifying it and turning the performance into a courageous act of rebellion against white oppression.

At the same time, if the novel is to be understood in terms of a theatre play, her body (and Rufus's body) is literally a theatre prop since it is used instrumentally as a time machine, which facilitates the whole performance in the first place. A truly posthuman relationality between these two bodies and fear which they both feel mark the beginning

and the end of the whole story as if prompting the objectification process—and putting it to a stop—whose primary goal is inescapably to transgress and abolish an oppressive system. In order to do so, they have to sacrifice their bodies by putting them at risk. Numerous examples of such perilous situations could be given, but no matter if it is Rufus trying to burn his house down or Dana cutting her wrists so that she can go back home, their bodies are used instrumentally to transgress the boundaries of time and space through an interconnected relational network of people sharing essentially the same emotions and fears even though they are seemingly worlds apart. By building this posthuman relational network, Butler seems to emphasise that at the end of the day all bodies grow into one posthuman body which is susceptible to abuse and should be protected. The blurring of difference between bodies acting on the stage of slavery in *Kindred* is reminiscent of Badmington’s understanding of invasion films. While in the films he analyses there is a blurring between aliens and humans, here the boundaries between slaves and slave owners are blurred and their bodies blend into one cyborgian body.

4. “They’re us... We’re them”

The main goal of the above analysis was to investigate how the notion of racial and class ‘difference’ are wrought into the main theme of *Kindred* in order to be later deconstructed. Looking at ‘difference’ through a magnifying glass and pointing the readers to a nonsensical nature of the term, Butler brilliantly reveals that the notion just cannot hold in a highly relational society regardless of its deeply instilled divisions. This is chiefly because of a rhizomic network of relations that—as I struggled to prove in the above meditations—connect the novel’s characters into an inseparable organism on so

many levels that seeking neat divisions, which some characters would love to see, is outright preposterous. As Melzer explains,

blurring of boundaries, the growing inability to draw clear distinctions between self and other, is what constitutes the most threatening and fascinating aspect of Butler's alien constructions. (Melzer 73)

Dana, Rufus and other characters, who essentially become one posthuman, postgender body, exemplify the *status quo* which Neil Badmington believes to illustrate as a “crisis of versus” (*Alien Chic...* 34). The crisis that Butler attempts to investigate arises in multiple borderlands: animate/inanimate, white/black skin colour, acting white/behaving white, female/male. These dualistic divisions initially help the privileged class to construct its hierarchies and relations of power, but—as it swiftly turns out—they are nothing but castles in the air and begin to collapse the moment Dana is called to 1815, i.e. when she is first connected to her oppressor by mere human fear. What is created in the aftermath of this revolution is a posthuman metaphor of a relational cyborg body, which also seems to be confirmed by Melzer when she adequately maintains that

[e]lements of feminist subjective theories run through Butler's narratives. Her main thematic and narrative device is the crossing of boundaries reflected in the conflicting and contradictory figure of Donna Haraway's cyborg, a metaphor for a feminist political identity whose main characteristic is its crossing of culturally defined boundaries. (Melzer 89)

Following up on both Badmington's and Melzer's detailed analyses, I wish to emphasise that “the crossing of boundaries” (89) mentioned by Melzer results in the deconstruction of the most oppressive systems in the history of the world and creating a much more relational environment, which means—to use Badmington's words—that “we cannot

possibly still be in the orbit of anthropocentrism” (*Alien Chic...* 35). By drawing this picture of Antebellum America, Butler means to devise new ways of conduct free from old-fashioned oppressive mechanisms and to construct a new more relational world. In this brand-new universe, the border between the enslaver and the enslaved becomes blurred in a truly symbiotic relationship, which reminds of Lynn Margulis’s words. While she herself never explicitly claims to ground her understanding of symbiosis in posthumanism, her conception seems to share a lot with posthumanist thinking in terms of its treatment of life. While accentuating the significance of both symbionts, posthumanism as well as Margulis’s conception of symbiosis cherish life indiscriminately in all forms. By placing them on the same continuum, Margulis dismisses the possibility of any discrimination whatsoever. The critic brilliantly explains that

[a]t the base of the creativity of all large forms of life, symbiosis generates novelty. It brings together different life-forms, always for a reason. Often, hunger unites the predator with the prey or the mouth with photosynthetic bacterium or algal victim. Symbiosis brings together unlike individuals to make large, more complex entities. (*The Symbiotic Planet...* 11-12)

Butler meticulously investigates this symbiosis, which I see as a posthuman relational interconnectedness. This very symbiotic structure proves repeatedly that people—be it oppressors or the oppressed—are mercilessly implicated in situations pushing them to act cruel, in order to illustrate how the notion of difference can be dismantled. Butler clearly indicates that the notion of class and racial difference is an artificial construct uses fear that generates only more fear in a vicious spiral of suffering.

The solution to this *status quo* is the embracing of difference, which for many individuals in society seems to be unfathomable. Nevertheless, as Melzer states,

The embracing of difference, in which these two mechanisms (deconstruction of existing structures and acceptance of that which is not-I) are combined, makes a clear demarcation of “I” and “not-I” (the dualism of “us” versus “them”) impossible. (69)

The very notion of embracing difference turns out to be staggering for many characters in the novel. However, at the end of the day, the concept of demarcation that is mentioned by Melzer eventually becomes inapplicable in the speculative world of *Kindred*. At one point, the boundaries between animate and inanimate, human and inhuman, between white and black are transgressed. The beauty of Butler’s writing, among others, lies in the fact that this crisis does not happen overnight. Instead, its first signs are hinted at in the novel and announce a long and complex path. For instance, it is illustrated by passages in which Dana ponders over adapting to Antebellum America.

Time passed. Kevin and I became more a part of the household, familiar, accepted, accepting. That disturbed me too when I thought about it. How easily we seemed to acclimatize. Not that I wanted us to have trouble, but it seemed as though we should have had a harder time adjusting to this particular segment of history—adjusting to our places in the household of a slaveholder. (Butler, *Kindred* 97)

Unfortunately for Kevin and Dana, their acclimatisation to the harsh reality of slavery is the *conditio sine qua non* for the “deconstruction of existing structures and acceptance of that which is not-I” (Melzer 69) to happen. In other words, they need to become part of the system to deconstruct it from within by making all characters blend into one race,

which cannot even be called human race since they blend with the inanimate. They become one ‘white nigger’ animate/inanimate postgender cyborg body as the enslavers seem to merge with the enslaved. Put differently, to paraphrase Badmington, they become us and we become them (*Posthumanism* 22).

Surely, the word ‘acclimatisation’ is a fairly euphemistic term and therefore it should rather be replaced with ‘coercion by rape’ or ‘weaponization of rape’. It is worth noting that Butler makes a very conscious use of the trope of rape in order to construct an identity of the body which eventually becomes a site of posthuman transgression of boundaries. The body—no matter what colour, sex, or gender—is systematically coerced into obedience and dirtied so that it can become part of the abusive system. Its very integrity is continuously threatened and undermined by traumatic experiences until its very foundations are shaken and effectively the identity of the person is spoilt beyond repair. What should be underscored, however, is that Butler’s characters suffer from rape on their integrity and personhood regardless of whether they belong among the enslaved or the enslavers. At one point, both the oppressed and the oppressor reach a critical point and realise that the only true oppressor is a puppet master-like system which blinds its rag dolls into believing that they actually have power over others and can exercise it since they are not connected to them. Butler mercilessly dispels this myth by showing a myriad of channels through which the characters are interrelated, while the instrumental use of the trope of rape brings to light that the characters relations are cemented by fear of both “I” and “not-I”, to use Melzer’s words. What must be emphasised—as the above analysis attempted to exemplify—is the fact that the way Butler uses the trope of rape makes it gain an outstandingly broad meaning. Drawing on Brownmiller’s understanding of rape (174-175), I also wish to understand rape and Butler’s instrumental use of this concept in a much broader way than it is normally done. Rape here is a violation against the body

by contaminating it on various levels, which may (or may not) eventually lead to a sexual act. What Butler seems to underscore is that exposing another human being to rape begins with early indoctrination of children, whose behaviour mirrors their parents and masters. The psychological and emotional rape on Rufus, which I tried to detail earlier in the study, is just one instance. Another one is visible in the following passage, describing Dana and Kevin witnessing a seemingly innocent children's play.

We approached them from one side so that neither the children on the tree stump nor those on the ground were facing us. They went on with their play as we watched and listened.

"Now here a likely wench," called the boy on the stump. He gestured toward the girl who stood slightly behind him. "She cook and wash and iron. Come here, gal. Let the folks see you." He drew the girl up beside him. "She young and strong," he continued. "She worth plenty money. Two hundred dollars. Who bid two hundred dollars?"

The little girl turned to frown at him. "I'm worth more than two hundred dollars, Sammy!" she protested. "You sold Martha for five hundred dollars!"

"You shut your mouth," said the boy. "You ain't supposed to say nothing. When Marse Tom bought Mama and me, we didn't say nothing."

I turned and walked away from the arguing children, feeling tired and disgusted.

(Butler, *Kindred* 99)

In this uncanny scene, Butler again stages a one-act play about racism, but this time roles switch so that Dana and Kevin are part of the audience and the roles of oppressors are played by little slave children.

Butler's experimentation in this passage cannot skip the reader's attention. One is immediately struck by a stark contrast between how the children and Dana cope with the experience of getting into their roles. As far as the slave kids are concerned, taking part in this outrageous play comes to them naturally—nobody asks them to do so; it is just a past time activity for them. They do not even begin to question the *status quo* as slavery is their native habitat. On the other hand, Dana is constantly apprehensive about being subjugated and becoming an integral part of this quasi-theatrical performance. Firstly, she is terrified by the very fact that she could become a slave, and that it could happen in next to no time. Secondly, as it will be mentioned below, she finds the play utterly repulsive, while for the kids it is nothing but an ordinary game. Butler constructs this scene in order to emphasise how terribly difficult a 20th-century person—no matter how tough this person's life has been—would find it to fit in Antebellum America mainly because they were not “[b]orn into bondage, born into a prison that you cannot smell or taste or touch³⁴” (*The Matrix*) and their body has not been raped since when they were still children.

In this context, the alarming words pronounced by one of the boys are more understandable. The boy orders his friend as follows: “You ain't supposed to say nothing. When Marse Tom bought Mama and me, we didn't say nothing” (Butler, *Kindred* 99). Arguably, these little kids already know their place in the network of power relations, which rapes its most innocent victims. This scene is doubly shocking because the children not only try to sell each other but also try to moderate each other's behaviour by

³⁴ It is interesting to observe a certain similarity—though it is not an exact same case—between Neo's situation as it described to him by Morpheus and hardships experienced by countless American slaves as it is exemplified by the passage quoted above. Let me quote it at length “It is the world that has been pulled over your eyes to blind you from the truth... that you are a slave, Neo. Like everyone else you were born into bondage, born into a prison that you cannot smell or taste or touch. A prison for your mind” (*The Matrix*). Dana and other people who put abolitionist ideas in the minds of black people in Antebellum America could definitely be compared to Morpheus.

comparing their peers' reactions to what actually happened to them in the past. This means that the slave children quite literally become their own colonisers; they become 'them'. Playing these games, the slave children emulate their white superiors and their identity becomes conquered by power relations even before they can stand their ground. Again, as Melzer concisely states:

The act of sexual violence (rape) is informed by power and domination based on race as well as gender relations... (101)

In her narrative, Butler deliberately makes her characters face (sexual) exploitation just to make sure that they reach a critical point necessary to tear all differences apart and reveal fear and excruciating pain felt by the two characters who are seemingly insignificant in their communities, but turn out to herald the coming a new version of the human.

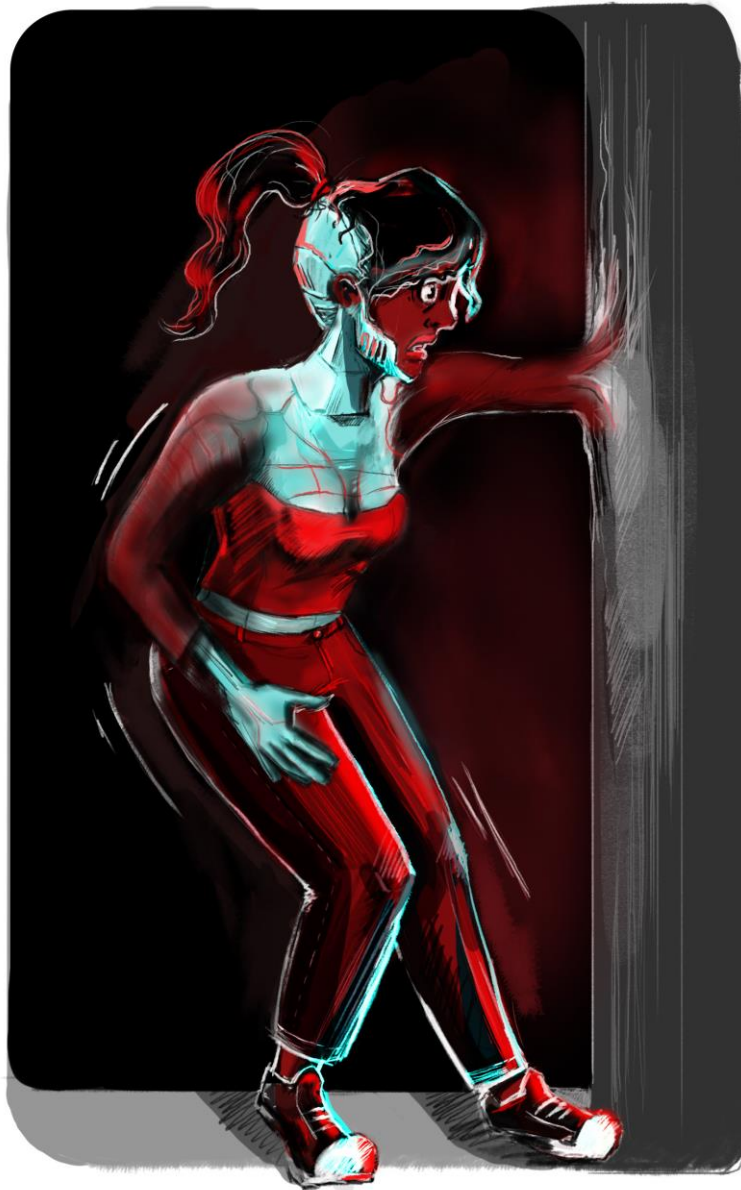


Figure 3 Dana's cyborg body imprisoned in the wall. The illustration was inspired by visual art created for *Kindred: A Graphic Novel Adaptation Comic*. The cyborgian additions on Dana's hand are my idea originating in the reading of the novel and interpretation of the character in terms of her cyborgian nature.

Chapter III

Aliens

We're an endangered species—almost extinct.

If we're going to survive, we need protection.

(Butler, *Lilith's Brood* 140)

1. Multiverses

1.1. What is life?

The necessity to offer a workable definition of life seems to be almost inescapable in a chapter whose primary objective is to meditate upon the concept that is uprooted and set in a completely unfamiliar context as it happens in Octavia Butler's *Lilith's Brood*³⁵.

³⁵ *Lilith's Brood* is a trilogy whose consecutive books are titled as follows: *Dawn*, *Adulthood Rites*, and *Imago*. In the present chapter, I may occasionally refer to an individual book instead of the whole trilogy to be more specific. Should this be the case, I will use the title of an individual book. It is also worth of mention that the trilogy was originally titled *Xenogenesis*, but the title was later changed to *Lilith's Brood*. This is how Gerry Canavan explains the reason behind this change in his study titled *Octavia E. Butler: "Lilith, Butler's most consummate and complicated survivor, is at the center of the Xenogenesis books; even as the later books in the series shift focus toward Akin (her human-Oankali hybrid son) and Jodahs (her ooloi child), Lilith remains our touchstone, the character to whom we always return. It's no wonder that when the books were retitled for sale as a single volume, they were retitled "Lilith's Brood": the books brood over Lilith and her brood, even as she herself broods over what she has chosen to do and what she*

Regrettably for taxonomy lovers, pigeonholing the notion of life to render it more approachable is an arduous task, which is brilliantly evidenced in James Lovelock's discussion of the Gaia theory. Lovelock explains that

[t]he concept of Gaia is entirely linked with the concept of life. To understand what Gaia is, therefore, I first need to explore that difficult concept, life. They hate to admit it, but the life scientists, whether the natural historians of the nineteenth century or the biologists of the twentieth, cannot explain what life is in scientific terms. (*The Ages of Gaia...* 16)

Even though Lovelock's study is certainly dated now, it is arguably worth mentioning in the present discussion since it shows the impossibility of offering a satisfactory and precise definition of life. Additionally, his formulation of the Gaia theory places this concept in an intriguing broad context by showing how "organisms ... affect their physical and chemical environment" (*The Ages of Gaia...* 39) and how this environment puts constraints on life itself (*The Ages of Gaia...* 40). This formulation bears a close resemblance to the posthumanist understanding of this phenomenon, which also tries to recognise and acknowledge life's rhizomic interconnectedness and abandon any divisions into classes and categories humans have been attempting to impose on the concept in order to better comprehend it.³⁶ This common tendency first originating probably in humanism, whose main perspective was largely limited to that of a white educated man, is rejected by both Lovelock and posthumanist thinkers drawing a great

has had to do to survive" (80). Since the title *Xenogenesis* is still used in critical studies on Butler, I will use it interchangeably with *Lilith's Brood* to refer to the whole trilogy whenever it seems to be more appropriate.

³⁶ In this regard, Dunkley remarks that "Lovelock advocates for a recalibration of our understanding of symbiotic and synergistic interdependence and a destabilizing of anthropocentric egoism. He thusly urges readers to regard Earth as an animate and generative being—eccentrically coined Gaia—and our position within it as situated within a vital network of mutual support" (112).

deal of their agenda from antihumanism as it is described by Rosi Braidotti. The critic explains that “antihumanism rejects the dialectical scheme of thought, where difference or otherness played a constitutive role, marking off the sexualized other (woman), the racialized other (the native) and the naturalized other (animals, the environment or earth)” (*The Posthuman... 27*).

In the present dissertation, I consciously refrain from predicating my understanding of life on dualistic categories such as animate/inanimate, dead/alive or human/inhuman/non-human since posthumanist thinking finds them largely irrelevant. The following chapter in particular seeks to look at life through the lens of symbiogenesis, whose absence would make it impossible for life to develop in the first place. Therefore, it is my contention that this evolutionary process is life’s main ingredient, trigger and guarantor. This point is discussed also by Lovelock’s colleague, Lynn Margulis, who in her book *The Symbiotic Planet. A New Look at Evolution* explains the term as follows:

Symbiogenesis, an idea proposed by its Russian inventor Konstantin Merezhkovsky (1855-1921), refers to the formulation of new organs and organisms through symbiotic mergers... All organisms large enough for us to see are composed of once-independent microbes, teamed up to become larger wholes. As they merged, many lost what we in retrospect recognise as their former individuality. (43-44)

As it becomes evident, the unavoidable loss of individuality by merging with other species allows for evolution, which consists in a continuous process of establishing and re-establishing of all boundaries. Any opposition to such fusions proves to be futile or

outright absurd since without symbiosis those who protest against acknowledging it as evolution's inherent component would not come into being.

Therefore, in the following chapter, I shall apply a critical posthuman symbiogenetic perspective to Octavia Butler's *Lilith's Brood* in order to understand how—in the context of symbiogenesis in particular—the writer investigates the mechanism of enslavement and rape with regard to both human and non-human life. The reason behind narrowing down the scope of the theoretical framework lies in the fact that critical posthumanism's primary goal—as it has already been discussed—is to make 'difference' its main point of interest and simultaneously to abolish it along with all hierarchies stifling human potential (Ferrando, *The Posthuman* 187). The latter, in turn, can flourish only if it is combined with the potential of other organisms in a symbiogenetic union. This may offer both human and non-human life unlimited and unprecedented opportunities for growth and development. It is not to imply, however, an attempt at creating a naive utopia. It is rather an effort to explore dangerous possibilities Haraway mentions in her manifesto (74) and present mankind with new symbiotic opportunities that may change the course of mankind's evolution by coupling humanity with non-human life and technology.

As a result of adopting such an approach, the following chapter shall take issue with opinions expressed by some critics who, like Christina Braid, have classified the novel as a critical dystopia. The critic summarises the main idea of *Lilith's Brood* in the following words:

The trilogy criticizes invisible motives by the state to regulate citizen access to knowledge and technology; it also comments on the citizens' endurance of

violence, focusing on the ways in which state justice impels citizens into a condition of violent resistance or pacified acceptance. (51)

What the present study shall focus on instead is instinctual hostility towards the Other, whose definition by Braidotti has been referred to earlier in this dissertation. I argue that *Lilith's Brood* fails to provide enough textual evidence for one to state that the Oankali are a blood-thirsty species, whose sole purpose is to conquer distant worlds. Admittedly, the system of power and regulation of access to knowledge and technology aforementioned by Wallace are clearly a human invention unknown to other civilisations in Butler's universe. Therefore, levelling such accusations at them seems to be unfounded and results from adopting a humanist perspective in order to understand other species' actions. This vantage point assumes that man is the measure of all things, which is why it allows for interpretations of aliens' actions only against this backdrop. Consequently, "alien hatred" (Badmington, *Alien Chic...* 35) continues brewing as humans are limited to a narrow choice of interpretations that could be ascribed to the Other's actions. Naturally, this prevents humans from embracing what Badmington refers to as "alien love" (*Alien Chic...* 35), which could help people thrive in a posthuman world.

However, numerous humans created by Butler refuse to adhere to those selective interpretations mentioned above. Certainly, they are equally reluctant to fall in "alien love" (*Alien Chic...* 35) at first sight. Led by intuition, though, some of them eventually develop relationships with aliens, losing some of their humanity, but gaining new qualities which would otherwise be inaccessible. Without doubt, the idea of merging with aliens coincides with Haraway's conception of the cyborg myth which "is about transgressed boundaries, potent fusions, and dangerous possibilities which progressive people might explore as one part of political work" (74). Yet, this chapter seeks to

investigate how those potent fusions are radically opposed by characters who people the world of Octavia Butler's *Xenogenesis*. Contrary to some critics' propositions, the present study seeks to discuss Butler's attempt at showing humanity's phobias about what seems to be a natural developmental process that mankind is incapable of comprehending and perceives it solely in terms of rape on its species. As I contend in this chapter, Butler's characters wrestle with the truth Margulis puts in very simple words: "We are symbionts on a symbiotic planet, and if we care to, we can find symbiosis everywhere. Physical contact is a non-negotiable requisite for many differing kinds of life" (7-8). Should this be true, why not consider a symbiosis with aliens?³⁷

1.2. The Human Propensity

Butler's creative conceptualisation of the vice which has been tormenting mankind since time immemorial has been addressed by an extensive body of literature and labelled as pursuing the Other. It is worth noting, however, since Butler experiments with the concept by placing it in a completely new set of coordinates where the human species finds itself on the brink of extinction and is encountered by a benevolent alien civilisation which—to quote Starfleet's motto which is given prominence in any version of *Star Trek*—"comes in peace" (*Star Trek: Discovery*). Strikingly, the Oankali are far from welcome. On the contrary, the extraterrestrials' favour—i.e. rescuing what was left of humanity and bringing it to safety—is repaid with displays of human hostility and a war of attrition declared by rebellious human settlers known as resisters. Trying to trace

³⁷ This argument is presented in an interesting way by Laurel Bollinger, who states that "[t]aking Margulis's ideas seriously means envisioning selfhood that incorporates rather than excludes the other, and offers alternatives to selfhood as traditionally understood—selfhood more feminised, perhaps, but also more capable of harnessing the strengths of both participants" (50). This perspective in turn is closely related to a posthuman vantage point, whose rejection of humanist thinking in terms of Otherness instead of inclusiveness has become an outstandingly prominent one.

the origin of such an inexplicable conduct, Hoda Zaki reaches a rather pessimistic conclusion. As the critic explains,

the human propensity to create the Other can never be transcended: the end of racial discrimination must coincide with the rise of some kind of similar discrimination based upon biological differences, which accordingly continue to play a role in future social orders. (241)

Zaki's suggestion offers a grim commentary on human nature, though the claim appears to be legitimate. Regardless of its turbulent history and dreadful atrocities committed in the past, international regulations in place as well as countless social campaigns, mankind seems to have been incapable of abandoning its discriminatory agendas and truly jumping on the bandwagon labelled tolerance. On the contrary, notwithstanding the context, should humans perceive another entity as different and should such differences be in any significant disagreement with the officially accepted standard, they instinctively tend to classify "their different ones" (Butler, *Lilith's Brood* 329) as the Other that might threaten them. Curiously, mankind's answer to this seeming danger—mostly resulting from complete ignorance and lacking any justification whatsoever—is its preference to pacify the Other by establishing hierarchies whose primary goal is apparently to annihilate all imagined threats.

In speculative science-fiction contexts, the same human tendency can be observed on at least two levels in a multitude of productions involving alien beings. What needs to be taken into consideration in the first place is how aliens are depicted as fictional characters, i.e. the Other seen as an extraordinarily malicious threat to human life, family, and traditions. Secondly, attention should be paid to how other characters in such productions react to aliens. These reactions usually involve panic, anxiety or even fear.

These two factors contribute to building a highly racist/speciesist image, which may seem to be fairly benign since the characters are representatives of a distant—and very likely non-existent—civilisation. The effect, however, is the same, i.e. fostering racist/speciesist and discriminatory attitudes towards the Other. Commenting on *Lilith's Brood*, Jeffrey Tucker has further elaborated on this point by stating that “[r]acism³⁸ does not vanish upon the arrival of aliens; the human propensity for hierarchical thinking sustains it and maps it on to another group, at a higher, species-oriented, taxonomic” (170). Painstakingly constructed by Butler, the speculative world of *Lilith's Brood* shows racism against a broader background of speciesism, as its kindred phenomenon, which I discussed on the example of her earlier novel, *Kindred*.

Among Butler's texts, *Kindred* must be classified as one of the most realistic ones even though it features some elements more typical of science-fiction than a realistic novel, e.g. Dana's and Kevin's miraculous time travelling to Antebellum South. The opening lines of *Kindred* introduce the readers to an episode that instantly feels unsettling thereby constituting a brilliant introduction to a neo-slave narrative supposed to enlighten the readers as to what slavery really stood for. On coming back home to year 1976, Dana discovers that her arm has merged with the wall of her living room. This scene is deeply symbolic as it magnificently connects the present and the past. Back in the first half of the 19th century in Maryland, Rufus Weylin—her several times great-grandfather—attempts to rape Dana. He is stopped by his great-great-great-granddaughter, who stabs him and travels in time back to the 20th century. Before she escapes her oppressor, Rufus grabs her by the hand in the final act of enslavement and therefore the arm is stuck in the

³⁸ Even though the word “racism” is self-explanatory in this context, perhaps the word “speciesism” is a better option which clearly emphasizes that human prejudice can be predicated on not only on race but also on species.

20th-century wall. Shocking and unexpected, such a compositional structure conceptually frames the loss of Dana's body integrity and independence that are snatched by the shadows of the slavery system built on extreme racism which attempts to surreptitiously sneak into contemporary times by holding as much of Dana's body as possible back in the 19th century.

In Butler's other multiverses, the readers discover a plethora of alien cultures and beings whose social life is meticulously constructed with a completely different set of coordinates. The goal, however, remains the same, i.e. a thorough investigation and criticism of racial/species discrimination and persecution of the Other. This aspect of Butler's writing should be highlighted as it reveals the writer's creative genius and rare foresight. Unlike visions outlined in many other science-fiction productions, Butler's multiverses introduce the readers to very intricate worlds inhabited by complex beings whose ways of conduct are determined by values which are unfamiliar to humans and escape judgment based on human morals. The aliens presented by the writer show both great intellectual potential and outstandingly rare connection with the environment, which manifests itself in harmonious and unprecedented symbiosis with every single aspect of various multiverses that they inhabit. Perhaps not surprisingly, Ferrando's proposition concerning thinking in terms of inclusiveness, not exclusiveness, which will manifest itself in the following analysis coincides with the worldview ascribed to them by the writer. Therefore, I beg to differ with critics who advance statements similar to an opinion expressed by Molly Wallace. In her article "Reading Octavia Butler's *Xenogenesis* after Seattle," Wallace states that

[d]espite their seemingly environmentally sustainable technology and their seeming appreciation of life in all forms, ... the Oankali ultimately look less like

stewards of the environment and more like stewards of their own system—their goal less egalitarian trade across the universe and more the imposition of “trade” as a dominant economy in which other species are forcibly compelled to participate. (110-111)

Wallace’s approach seems to be flawed for two reasons. In the first place, the critic adopts a very human-centric and fairly reductive perspective, which results in a mistaken understanding of the Oankali’s attitude towards the environment. Secondly, the critic fails to understand the policy of this extraordinary alien race/species and their alleged “imposition of ‘trade’” (111). In other words, Wallace’s perception is highly anthropocentric and she draws conclusions which are in stark contrast to what can actually be supported by textual evidence.³⁹ Let me now discuss each point separately.

As regards the first one, Wallace voices criticism against the Oankali, but she simultaneously fails to acknowledge the scale of the damage the Earth has sustained before the aliens discover it in the abyssal depths of the Universe during their quest for life forms they could trade genes with. When the Oankali reach the Earth, it is devastated beyond repair and direct responsibility for this carnage rests with humans. As one of the characters, Jdahya, recalls in his conversation with Lilith on the first pages of the book, “We collected as many [people] as we could. The ones we didn’t find in time died of injury, disease, hunger, radiation, cold... We found them later” (Butler, *Lilith’s Brood*

³⁹ Jihun Yoo reaches a similar conclusion when she says that the Oankali “have the inventive capacity to hide their exploitative intentions under the veneer of an eco-friendly method of living” (679). Importantly, however, the critic adds that “Butler simultaneously reveals that this seeming dichotomy between humanity’s destructive way of life and the Oankali method of living only provides a rationale to justify Oankali dominion over other species” (679). In my study, I take a more radical perspective in the sense that I believe that humanity’s destructive way of life led humans to what could be a temporary incapacitation as the Oankali understand that letting humans reproduce will lead to even more wars. As the story unfolds, every chapter provides more and more evidence that the decision is right as humans cannot truly unite and avoid conflictual situations in their communities even in the face of extinction.

15). This succinct description speaks volumes about the gruesome post-nuclear landscape that the Oankali must have witnessed upon their arrival. Having put the remaining humans in what is referred to in the novel as “suspended animation,” (Butler, *Lilith’s Brood* 66) the Oankali, however, manage to restore the environment’s previous shape. But for their help, the Earth biosphere would have been irreversibly lost. Put differently, the world has been restarted for humanity, which has taken around 250 years—the period Lilith, one of the main protagonists of the novel, has been hibernating with only short breaks for examination by aliens.

In fact, as Andrew Plisner observes, a new beginning is one of the novel’s main themes, which Butler explores on different levels. The critic explains that

[i]n order to fully assess Butler’s text, examining the etymological significance of the trilogy’s title will set the stage for further contextual analysis. The prefix ‘xeno’ can be defined as different, foreign or strange, while ‘genesis’ is beginnings, or creation, and most commonly associated with Western traditional religious beliefs. In terms of different beginnings, the title correlates with the book’s main theme: the human characters’ collection from Earth’s devastated surface in order to shift a diseased paradigm and ultimately move towards the planet’s re-habitation. (147)

The Oankali extend a helping hand and revive what humans have been systematically destroying for ages so effectively that they eventually managed to reduce it to ashes in a rather literal sense. Given this, accusing the Oankali of only “seeming appreciation of life in all forms” (Wallace 110), strikes as an odd way of obliterating human responsibility for wiping thousands of species—including mankind—off the face of Earth. It is true that the Oankali take their fair share for restoring life without being bothered to ask as they

collect so-called imprints of every possible plant and animal on the planet, which is invaluable to them as gene traders. The method is explained in the conversation between Joseph and Nikanj:

“You could clone us,” Joseph said. “Is that right?”

“Yes.”

“You could take reproductive cells from us and grow human embryos in artificial wombs?”

“Yes.”

“You can even re-create us from some kind of gene map or print.”

“We can do that too. We have already done these things. We must do them to understand a new species better. We must compare them to normal human conception and birth. We must compare the children we have made to those we took from Earth. We’re very careful to avoid damaging new partner-species.”

(Butler, *Lilith’s Brood* 153)

Even though those partner-species are also genetically altered, it still seems to be a real bargain given that all this life would otherwise be permanently annihilated. In this context, Nikanj’s confession certainly sounds more credible than Wallace’s assertion. Trying to explain to Joseph why they recreated humans from imprints, this benign alien creature says innocently: “We revere life. We had to be certain we had found ways for you to live with the partnership, not simply die of it.” (Butler, *Lilith’s Brood* 153). The whole novel is permeated with the Oankali’s truly posthuman reverence for life in all forms and—contrary to what Wallace seems to believe—thereby fosters an atmosphere of inclusiveness, rather than exclusiveness. This alien love of all species in the universe, however, is flatly rejected by humans, who fail to take advantage of a new beginning and slip back into their old habits by ostentatious celebration of violence and rape.

As far as the second point is concerned, claiming that the trade—that is exchanging genetic material between species—is imposed on humans (111) or that humans become involuntary participants of the Oankali’s breeding program (95), Molly Wallace adopts an anthropocentric perspective which renders the appreciation of the Other’s vantage point impossible. This results from the fact that the statement “imposition of ‘trade’” (111) carries an implicit accusation of colonial appetites, which is levelled at the Oankali. In the meantime, gene trading appears to be a natural symbiotic process at least for some organisms, which is explained by Margulis, who mentions that “[a]rchaebacteria and eubacteria trade genes with each other” (*The Symbiotic Planet...* 86), thus proving that this process occurs in real life even at the bacterial level. Apart from this, Jdahya firmly denies having been a slave trader (Butler, *Lilith’s Brood* 24). Simultaneously, the novel abounds in cases of humans enslaving humans and this motif is thoroughly explored in a multitude of contexts including abduction of women and children (Butler, *Lilith’s Brood* 268).

Strikingly, the said appetites bear a strong resemblance to human colonial inclinations and seem to be rooted in human colonial past, while the only imposition that is visible in the novel is a self-imposed destruction of humankind. In fact, it is tempting to compare numerous human characters created by Butler with a figure of a trash-human⁴⁰ <sic!> introduced by Jaime del Val during the last *Beyond Posthumanism*

⁴⁰ A trash-human is a recurring motif in Butler’s writing. The readers can find particularly shocking images in Butler’s *Parable of the Sower*, which depicts a post-apocalyptic landscape and humans who are struggling to survive. In the following excerpt, the readers bear witness to one of many moments in the novel which shows how dehumanized mankind has become:

“I saw Tracy take Amy into the house and shut the door. Yet somehow Amy wound up outside again, wound up near the front gate, just opposite the Garfield/Balter/Dory house. Jay Garfield found her there when he came out to investigate what he thought was another bundle that someone had thrown over the gate. People toss us things sometimes—gifts of envy and hate: A maggoty, dead animal, a bag of shit, even an occasional severed human limb or a dead child. Dead adults have been left lying just beyond our wall. But these were all outsiders. Amy was one of us.

Forum (“2nd Beyond Humanism Forum,” online). Del Val used the term when he advanced his hypothesis of “trash-human unhancement”. Even though it is not very well-defined by its author, del Val seems to understand a trash-human as a human being prompted by blind consumerism to produce destructive amounts of goods. Instead of benefitting humans, all this produce becomes both human’s and the planets doom as the planet’s destruction slips out of control. As a result, humans not only fail to enhance their life. They actually unhanche it <sic!> as they gradually destroy themselves, other species, and the world.

This rather unfavourable term could be used to describe some of Butler’s humans who reject alien help and lead a life full of hatred, rejection, suffering and disease, which could be taken away from them by the Oankali in no time. The only requirement humans have to meet is changing their mindset so that they can be re-educated and taught how to abandon old paradigms of thinking inescapably leading them to death and destruction. What Wallace describes as a forcible imposition of trade (110) is then more accurately outlined by Plisner in the following passage:

As the reader discovers, the Oankali’s invasion of Lilith’s biological space is a discomfoting concept for Lilith to accept. However, despite the allusions to colonial histories and in direct opposition to sadistic eugenic experiments, the Oankali do not experiment with Lilith’s body, but rather re-educate it in learning how to heal by its own volition. (150)

Someone shot Amy right through the metal gate. It had to be an accidental hit because you can’t see through our gate from the outside. The shooter either fired at someone who was in front of the gate or fired at the gate itself, at the neighborhood, at us and our supposed wealth and privilege. Most bullets wouldn’t have gotten through the gate. It’s supposed to be bulletproof. But it’s been penetrated a couple of times before, high up, near the top. Now we have six new bullet holes in the lower portion—six holes and a seventh dent, a long, smooth gauge where a bullet had glanced off without breaking through.” (Butler, *Parable of the Sower* 59-60)

In light of Butler's whole trilogy, it seems that Pilsner formulates a very apt judgment. Far from imposing anything on humankind, the Oankali are not only its last resort. Seeking to discover what humanity stands for, they give it a second chance by re-educating it and helping humanity evolve into its better version.

This involves acts which cognitively limited humans presented in *Lilith's Brood* refer to as experimentation just because they do not find a different/better way to describe or comprehend it. For the Oankali, however, exploring humanity means much more than that. Firstly, they are genuinely fascinated by the human body and especially some—very often congenital—diseases it cannot cope with such as genetic disorders, e.g. Huntington's disease, or cancer. They convert the latter disease's destructive power into their bodies' reproductive strength as—surprisingly enough—they find it beautiful.

Lilith's ability had run in her family, although neither she nor her ancestors had been able to control it. It had either lain dormant in them or come to life in insane, haphazard fashion and caused the growth of useless new tissue. New tissue gone obscenely wrong.

Humans called this condition cancer. To them, it was a hated disease. To the Oankali, it was treasure. It was beauty beyond Human comprehension.
(Butler, *Lilith's Brood* 551)

Furthermore, they are astounded to discover how effective human beings have been at wreaking destruction on their own planet and ruining its habitat. Therefore, after being collected from desolate Earth, humans are not allowed to breed by themselves and are closely observed in captivity so that they do not lay violent hands on each other (Butler, *Lilith's Brood* 290-291), which is a fair suspicion on the part of the Oankali, bearing in mind that they come across a clearly suicidal species.

Such preventive measures taken by the Oankali quickly prove to be more than justifiable. This is how the readers are introduced to the trilogy in a passage where Lilith—the main protagonist of the first volume—is presented:

At her first Awakening, she had called out during her search. Receiving no answer, she had shouted, then cried, then cursed until her voice was gone. She had pounded the walls until her hands bled and became grotesquely swollen. There had not been a whisper of response. Her captors spoke when they were ready and not before. They did not show themselves at all. She remained sealed in her cubicle and their voices came to her from above like the light.⁴¹ (Butler, *Lilith's Brood* 7)

In a sense, Lilith occurs to be an actor forced to take part in a play staged by extraterrestrials just the way Dana is compelled to act on the almost grotesque stage of Antebellum America in *Kindred*, though there seems to be one striking difference. The Oankali really mean to re-educate human bodies so that they can stop inflicting irreparable harm to the environment and themselves⁴² and that is why, having been collected from Earth, humans must be held captive; contrary to what they think about

⁴¹ Curiously, this scene reminds of Butler's own memory from childhood. This is how the writer describes a disagreeable visit to a local zoo in an essay titled "Eye Witness": "When I was 7 and went to the zoo with my second-grade class, I saw chimpanzee eyes for the first time—the eyes of an unhappy animal, all alone, locked in a bare, concrete-floored, iron-barred cage in one of the nastier, old-fashioned zoos. I remember looking at the chimp, then looking away. The chimp had somehow become the target of some of the kids' attention. They shouted at him, laughed, and threw peanuts—threw them at him rather than to him. The chimp had nowhere to hide and, lucky for the kids, nothing to throw back. He leaped about and screamed, and the kids thought it was really funny. I looked at the animal's eyes—frantic, furious and maybe not sane anymore—and if I could have left the zoo at that moment, I would have. I was still too young to understand the concept of being ashamed of my species. I just felt horrible. I wanted the other kids to shut up. I wanted the chimp to be free" (Butler "Eye Witness"). Whether this experience really did inspire Butler to write this scene is obviously a matter of speculation, though the comparison is compelling. Even though the Oankali's behaviour is nowhere near what Butler witnessed as a young girl, her characters are in a certain sense kept in captivity and observed the way they used to observe animals before the nuclear war.

⁴² What must be noted is that Butler's interest in self-harming bodies is one of recurring motifs in her writing and reappears, for instance, in one of her short stories "The Evening and the Morning and the Night."

themselves, they prove to be too self-destructive to act independently as it becomes clear soon after the first group of settlers has been awakened by Lilith.

Following another round of awakenings, survivors begin to pair off either willingly or forcibly. On one such occasion of the latter which involves a violent fight between Lilith and a few men the protagonist reminds the rest of ground rules everybody in the community should comply with:

“There’ll be no rape here,” she said evenly. She raised her voice. “Nobody here is property. Nobody here has the right to the use of anybody else’s body. There’ll be no back-to-the-Stone-Age, caveman bullshit!” She let her voice drop to normal. “We stay human. We treat each other like people, and we get through this like people...”⁴³ (*Lilith’s Brood* 178)

What Lilith fails to understand at this point, however, is that this is exactly the way people are used to treating each other. Precisely this behaviour—resulting from the Human Contradiction defined as “[i]ntelligence at the service of hierarchical behavior” (Butler, *Lilith’s Brood* 467)—led humans to a nuclear war fuelled by discrimination, racism, and speciesism, which resulted in almost total destruction. In this context, the phrase “like people” (Butler, *Lilith’s Brood* 178) brings to mind rather unfavourable connotations and means mass destruction of the species.

⁴³ The source of behaviour presented in this scene is concisely explained by Butler in her essay “The Lost Races of Science Fiction”. According to Butler, “Adherence to custom can also cause people to oppose change by becoming even more extreme in their customary behavior. I went back to college for a couple of quarters a few years ago and found one male teacher after another announcing with odd belligerence, “I might as well tell you right now, I’m a male chauvinist!” A custom attacked is a custom that will be defended. Men who feel defensive about sexist behavior may make sexist bigots of themselves. Whites who feel defensive about racist behavior may make racist bigots of themselves. It’s something for people who value open-mindedness and progressive attitudes to beware of.” (Butler, “The Lost Races of Science Fiction,” online).

Unfortunately, humans do not seem to have learnt a lesson. Even though the Oankali make an unusually generous offer—they cure humans of deadly diseases and help with their genetic malfunctions—the majority of those who have been awakened turn out to be mere ingrates incapable of comprehending that life as they knew it is a self-inflicted thing of the past. From now on, their only choice is between a life of infertility as trash-humans (“2nd Beyond Humanism Forum,” online) chained by an old-fashioned humanist perspective and fading away on the margins of society where their existence will gradually deteriorate or living along with the Oankali, who will improve their life beyond recognition, but who will also expect something in exchange. On the one hand, presenting a person with such a choice seems to be almost inhumane since they need to abandon their comfortable position grounded in dominance and anthropocentrism. On the other hand, though, it must be underscored that humans would actually perish without the Oankali, which really makes giving any choice a charitable act of mercy and benevolence and highlights human ungratefulness.

Therefore, Simon A. Cole’s comparison of the Oankali’s offer to enter into symbiosis to imperialism strikes as odd (184). The critic continues to explain:

Like our First Tier scientists, the Oankali offer preservation, of a sort, to a doomed people, in this case the entire human race. But, of course, the form of preservation they offer—merger and gene exchange—carries a price: the loss of identity, of the distinguishable, pure self. Once again, extinction engenders commerce: the closer a social group approaches extinction, the more it awakens mercantile interest in a gene-hungry universe. (184)

From a posthuman inclusive perspective, which by its very nature must attempt to take into consideration also the Other’s vantage point, Cole’s assertion seems to be unfounded.

Furthermore, it provokes a question whether any natural symbioses occurring in the environment are just a manifestation of mercantile and consumerist tendencies or is it a natural course of events in the universe driven by an internal force to stay in constant flux.

In order to address these questions, let us focus on a controversial statement given by Cole. The critic seems to believe that “the loss of pure self” occurs whenever preservation is dependent upon any form of merger. Another claim, however, seems to be more plausible. Regardless of the fact that humans like to see themselves as self-sufficient entities somehow isolated from the world, actually, no preservation is possible without symbiosis with the environment. This is how Nikanj verbalises this truth in *Adulthood Rites*:

Even before we arrived, they had bacteria living in their intestines and protecting them from other bacteria that would hurt or kill them. They could not exist without symbiotic relationships with other creatures. Yet such relationships frighten them. (Butler, *Lilith 's Brood* 427).

In this context the phrase ‘pure self’ does not really sound like a credible term applicable to any reality since symbiosis with the environment appears to be indispensable to the survival of mankind, or to the survival of any species on the planet for that matter.

Thus, what follows is an assumption that symbiosis is part of our ‘self’ and therefore the ‘pure self’ understood as human identity emerging without entering into symbiotic relationships with the environment is a fairly naive vision hardly grounded in life sciences. As it is explained in an introduction to a compelling collection of essays titled *Chimeras and Consciousness. Evolution of the Sensory Self* edited by Lynn Margulis, Celeste A. Asikainen, and Wolfgang E. Krumbein, “[w]e have always been

embedded in communities that include our viral, bacterial, protocytological, fungal, and plant traveling companions. We continue to ignore them at our own peril” (9). Humans have to stop doing it as our species is far too evolved to continue deluding itself that the human self can be reduced only to the human body clean and pure as simple biological observation suffices to confirm that our body literally cannot exist without symbiosis. In this sense, humans can be called holobionts, i.e. “evolutionarily stable symbiotic associations of bionts (symbionts)” (*Chimeras...* 297). Except, as a species, humans are not ready to acknowledge this fact perhaps because our dominance on this planet has been established for far too long. According to Braidotti, “we live in the era of the anthropocene, that is to say an age when the earth’s ecological balance is directly regulated by humanity” (79), the predicament humans of the 21st century can no longer afford.

In her novel, Butler seems to stress exactly this point by showing the emergence of societal relations predicated on symbiosis which are not really a matter of choice because humans have already squandered their chance to live an independent life without the help of aliens. Presently, humans are invited to embrace difference and fall in alien love—the *status quo* they should accept as an alluring option that can give humanity a new life and teach them how not to miss out on the opportunity this time. Thus, I partially take issue with Braid’s assertion that

[d]espite the heroic Oankali ability to regulate Human violence with their alien methods, the Oankali invasion denies Human civil rights by scientifically calculating their abilities, limiting their identity, and regulating their freedoms” (55).

On the contrary, the Oankali continue stressing that they wish to send humans back to Earth and grant them freedoms after they have been trained to cope with a new demanding world, as well as after their bodies have been enhanced so that upgraded humans can live comfortably and safely on Earth 2.0.

The latter is the process which Lilith finds particularly distressing at the very beginning, having discovered that the Oankali might have tampered with her body. Shocked and confused beyond any measure, Lilith finds out that “[s]he did not own herself any longer. Even her flesh could be cut and stitched without her consent” (Butler, *Lilith’s Brood* 6). Although it is a gradual and lengthy process, the dumbfounded protagonist seems to eventually understand why she should give up on part of her humanity. This becomes clear in her conversation with Jdahya:

“I have a scar,” she said, touching her abdomen. “I didn’t have it when I was on Earth. What did you do to me?”

“You had a growth,” he said. “A cancer. We got rid of it. Otherwise, it would have killed you.” She went cold. Her mother had died of cancer. Two of her aunts had had it and her grandmother had been operated on three times for it. (Butler, *Lilith’s Brood* 21)

As regards other humans, they fail to even believe that they are on a spaceship, let alone comprehend the need for an altered paradigm of thinking. As the Oankali point out on various occasions, humans choose to believe that the Oankali are their new oppressors, which ironically enough is a projection of their own attitudes to the Other. This attitude cannot be altered by a self-evident fact that cancer treatment is not typically on any oppressor’s list.

Lilith, in turn, shall always be regarded as the Other. As Tino recalls, “[i]n Phoenix, people had said things like this—that she was possessed by the devil, that she had sold first herself, then Humanity, that she was the first to go willingly to an Oankali bed to become their whore and to seduce other Humans...” (Butler, *Lilith’s Brood* 298). As a result, Lilith turns into a symbiotic cyborg synthesised from her various selves created by other people and modified in ways that cannot be comprehended by humans since, as Anne Balsamo points out,

the cyborg has the potential not only to disrupt persistent dualisms that set the natural body in opposition to the technologically recrafted body, but also to refashion our thinking about the theoretical construction of the body as both a material entity and a discursive process. (11)

The theoretical construction of Lilith’s body and the discursive process out of which it emerges certainly disrupt all dualisms in a symbiotic flight of fancy accidentally triggered by other humans producing her different version. This highlights how much humans are unprepared to refashion their thinking in order to become better versions of themselves by entering into symbiosis with the Oankali.

1.3.Presiding Over Death

Simon A. Cole opens his article titled “Do Androids Pulverize Tiger Bones to Use as Aphrodisiacs?” with a short story of how the Uncompahgre fritillary butterfly is becoming extinct due to climate change, the fate humanity is really likely to share in the future. The critic further points out that “[l]ike priests, shamans, and oracle interpreters, conservation biologists have constructed a position of authority for themselves within society by ‘presiding’ over death, in this case over death imbued with a special significance” (173). As Cole continues to explain, “[w]hen the end finally comes, say

conservation biologists, the Uncompahgre fritillary butterfly will be merely one of hundreds of simultaneously occurring extinctions that we happen to notice” (173, source not given in the article). This is where aliens presented by Butler are different from humans. Upon their landing on Earth, the Oankali could have presided over death of humans, death imbued with a special significance in earthly terms. After all, humanity has been one of the dominant species on the planet for thousands of years and their disappearance could have a considerable (positive?) impact on life on Earth. In terms of the whole galaxy, or the universe for that matter, they might be just one of hundreds of simultaneously occurring extinctions, which would not even wrinkle the time-space continuum of the universe. Still, the Oankali choose not to be passive observers.

On the contrary, even though in their journey across galaxies they have encountered a self-annihilating species, which for unknown reasons hates itself even more than it hates any other creature on the planet, they decided to embrace difference against their better judgment in a very posthuman and relational fashion. By doing so, the Oankali end the era of the Anthropocene, i.e. “an age the earth’s ecological balance [which] is directly regulated by humanity” (Braidotti 79). It needs to be stressed, though, that they just step in at the end of the disastrous war⁴⁴. This war in turn was fuelled by

⁴⁴ Gerry Canavan suggests that the Oankali’s landing precisely at this moment is not accidental: “A second point must also be taken up regarding the war. Early in the second novel, Tino (Lilith’s second partner) privately expresses his own most paranoid thoughts about the Oankali: ‘He thought he understood anger, hatred, humiliation, even the desire to kill a man. He had felt all those things. But to kill everyone ... almost kill the Earth. ... There were times when he wondered if somehow the Oankali had not caused the war for their own purposes.’⁵⁸ The possibility is never returned to, and yet I find the idea too tantalizing to give up. Is this not infinitely more plausible than the Oankali’s version of events, which is that in all the vastness of their wanderings through space they just happened to stumble upon Earth at exactly the right moment? If they had arrived shortly before the war, they would have encountered far greater resistance; if they had arrived a few years or perhaps even a few months later, they would have found only corpses” (no pagination). I am far from agreeing with Canavan’s interpretation. First of all, resisters in *Lilith’s Brood* come up with various conspiracy theories concerning the Oankali throughout the novel. Atrocious acts of violence perpetrated by humans against other humans convincingly prove that humans would readily start

human hatred and greed. The Oankali's recognition and acceptance of difference, however, is feared by numerous characters in the novel as forced consent⁴⁵ or perhaps even attempted genocide. Notwithstanding bitter accusations brought against their race, the Oankali cannot be found guilty as charged since their only 'crime' consists in genuine reverence for life (Butler, *Lilith's Brood* 153). Judging by acts of atrocity committed by humans as the story unfolds, they do not seem to fully comprehend this concept, while, for the record, they should be grateful for it because as Lilith concludes at one point in the novel "[i]f we're going to survive, we need protection" (Butler, "*Lilith's Brood* 140). As it seems, however, humans first need to "unlearn humanistic anthropocentric habits of thought" (Braidotti, "Aspirations of a Posthumanist," online).

However, it must be acknowledged that the Oankali are not unanimous on the subject of gene trading and limiting people's freedom in the name of protecting them. The first to openly defend the human race against the Oankali and championing their cause is Akin, who is a prototype human-born male construct whose genetic make-up is a novelty in the Oankali world. As the story unfolds, the readers witness that he is also the first character truly capable of undermining the Oankali's steadfast principles, which Akin finds at least questionable. The ultimate goal of gene trade between the Oankali and humans, Akin bridges the divide between the two species in a way neither of the species

a self-destructive war with or without Oankali interference. This practically rules out the possibility of instigation on the part of aliens. Secondly, this interpretation disregards other character's memories. Here is, for instance, what Lilith remembers at the very beginning of the novel: "*Did she remember the war?*" Insane question. Could anyone who had lived through the war forget it? A handful of people tried to commit humanicide. They had nearly succeeded" (Butler 8). Thirdly, human self-destruction is a fairly common motif which recurs in Butler's writing, which suggests that this is precisely how the writer perceived human activity. This is what the readers can see in the postapocalyptic scenario of the *Parable* novels as well as in the Antebellum America of *Kindred*. To my mind, then, there are no grounds for the interpretation suggested by Canavan.

⁴⁵ The issue of "consent" is discussed by Joe Heidenescher, who states that "Butler imagines a future where we continually must negotiate against our bodily biologies in order to consent to something that threatens biopolitical species autonomy" (63).

have known and compels the Oankali to hear humans out. Akin's defence of humanity, however, needs to be discussed in a broader context. Arguably, Butler creates a very meaningful setting which may suggest that Akin's intentions to start a new world for humans are largely motivated by the human part of his genetic make-up and by traumatic events which—no matter how paradoxically it sounds—he begins to experience even before he is born.

Akin's hybrid nature and the fact that he is supposed to be a cyborgian chimera linking the two species is announced by his very name. Even though the novel itself never makes an explicit reference to the double meaning of Akin's name, the two spellings used in the novel invite the reader to stop and ponder over their possible significance. This is how Goss and Riquelme explain this issue:

Readers of *Adulthood Rites* experience a version of the odd occupying of two places at once that the narrative of *Xenogenesis* projects when we encounter Akin's name. His name, introduced without guidance about pronunciation, suggests kinship, if we pronounce it "a kin," as speakers of English are likely to do. For us, he is a kin, one of us, akin, not an alien, not a stranger. But eventually the narration reveals that his name should be pronounced "Ah-keen" (*Adulthood* 101) since the name has African origins, among the Yoruba of Nigeria (*Adulthood* 104). The new pronunciation in relation to the old one, which we are unlikely to be able to suppress entirely, creates a heteronymous situation in which the same group of letters carry different meanings. In this case, the meanings merge. This posthuman male with an African name is also a kin, however alien he may seem. (451)

This double meaning does carry a special significance. First, it denotes the function at which Lilith has failed. The people she awakes do not trust her most of the time. For the awoken party, Lilith stands for a traitor who has betrayed human race by agreeing to cooperate with the aliens. Thus, she gradually evolves into a social outcast whose voice is suppressed by hostile criticism of the majority. Simultaneously, it does not help that the Oankali are not willing to make any concessions at this point. Although quite unconsciously, Lilith is instrumentally turned into a tool used to communicate uncompromising Oankali instructions, which are to be followed and not to be questioned. Therefore, Lilith stands as the exact opposite of Akin as she is no kin to either humans or the Oankali. On the other hand, Akin is quite literally a kin to both races in the sense that his genetic structure is comprised of both human and alien DNA. In other words, Akin becomes a member of a new race that has just been born. This connects to the second point.

As Goss and Riquelme explain, the African etymology of Akin's name cannot be overlooked, especially given the novel's main plot line detailing events already announced in the novel's title. The titular 'xenogenesis' is defined by Merriam-Webster dictionary as "the fancied production of an organism altogether and permanently unlike the parent" ("Xenogenesis"). Butler's storyline certainly gives a whole new different meaning to the phrase "fancied production" by introducing the readers to an unprecedented situation. Butler, however, does not stop at creating a world whose sole purpose is to conjure up a fatalistic outlook on the future of humanity. In point of fact, this is only the writer's springboard to write a new, though unforeseen, history of a posthuman species, which no longer stays in the orbit of anthropocentrism. This is a history which humans may not live to see because Akin's birth takes the deconstruction the Anthropocene one step further and humans need to come to terms with the fact that

their dominance over this part of the universe has come to an end. Nevertheless, Butler's writing is too sophisticated to allow for easy to apply mass destruction scenarios adopted by films like, for instance, *Armageddon*. The writer of *Parable of the Sower* gives meaning to her newly born race by indicating their genealogical and non-colonial origins.

By borrowing Akin's name from the Yoruba language, Butler alludes to the very beginnings of human life on Earth, i.e. Africa, which is said to be the cradle of mankind. In an unexpected turn of events, Butler's brand-new world is anticipated to be such a cradle whose symbiogenetic environment pushes evolution in an unknown direction. The fruit of this biological enterprise, Akin, is meant to trigger off a major disturbance to the plot since his very genetic make-up is supposed to herald a new opportunity for humanity. Human species shall survive, though it will resemble human beings only remotely. This alteration, however, is far from welcome as it forces humans to redefine their place in the world and deconstruct hierarchical behaviours so frequently referred to as the main cause of human suffering. Akin—a completely new entity very much unlike what the universe has ever known—is expected to change the course of human and Oankali history for ever. Being a perfect blend of the two races, on the one hand, he is the best candidate for a mediator. Unlike his mother, Lilith, Akin is neither fully human nor fully Oankali. He is both and neither at the same time and therefore he stands a greater chance of being heard by both species. The novel illustrates it as follows: “He was Oankali enough to be listened by other Oankali and Human enough to know that resister humans were being treated with cruelty and condescension” (Butler, *Lilith's Brood* 404).

On the other hand, Akin is arguably not introduced in the plot to solve all problems both races have to tackle. On the contrary, he is a borderline character whose role is to further problematise issues of kinship, identity and self-definition. Akin may

try to defend and speak for humans, but the readers often see him hesitating whether humans can be defended. Interestingly, Catherine Ramires compares Butler and Gloria Anzaldua in her essay to point out that:

As in Butler's science fiction, the "alien" is the subject of Gloria Anzaldua's 1987 manifesto *Borderlands/La Frontera*. Anzaldua writes as a lesbian, feminist Chicana from rural southern Texas and locates her text in the Borderlands—namely, the place where two or more worlds clash: where Anglo America collides with Latin America, the heterosexual confronts the queer, and the colonizer meets the colonized. (388)

It is really striking how these two writers create borderline characters who unsettle the *status quo* which must be defined as the old patriarchal system of oppression that colonises the Other.

In the case of Akin, it is not only his genetic make-up which should be taken into consideration, but also the genealogical background the character comes from. Even before Akin reaches the age of two months, he is perfectly able to recognise his multiple parents,

Nikanj Ooan, Lilith Mother, Ahajas Ty, Dichaan Ishliin, and the one who never came to him even though Nikanj Ooan had taught him that one's touch and taste and smell. Lilith Mother had shown him a print image of that one, and he had scanned it with all his senses: Joseph Father. (Butler, *Lilith's Brood* 256)

Even though he is only a small baby by human standards, Akin learns from one of his parents, Nikanj—when he is two months old—that his human father, Joseph, passed away (Butler, *Lilith's Brood* 256) and that he was already dead at the moment of his

conception. The Oankali constructed Akin by fertilising the egg with Joseph's sperm stored in their bodies since they have an ability later detailed by Lilith:

When they have the chance, they stimulate a woman to ovulate several eggs. They collect eggs, store them, collect sperm, store it. They can keep sperm and eggs viable and separate in their bodies for decades. Akin is the child of a man who died nearly thirty years ago. (Butler, *Lilith's Brood* 295)

What seems to bear resemblance to a mad scientist's experiment appears to add an emotional dimension to Akin's development. No matter how few words Butler uses to convey a sense of lack on Akin's part, this excerpt is incredibly powerful. The sequence of short, even one-word sentences forcefully indicates that Akin already longs for his lost parent whose disappearance left an aching void in a new born baby's mind.: "Dead. Ended. Gone away and not coming back" (Butler, *Lilith's Brood* 256).

This seemingly insignificant train of thoughts is of momentous importance. Instantly, Akin's human component turns out to be visibly tainted by a bloody event the readers witness earlier in the novel. The moment I am referring to is when Joseph is axed to death in an atrocious demonstration of savagery by one of the first men to be awoken by Lilith, who discovers his body in a heart-breaking scene:

She climbed over the trunk, jumped down on the other side. And there was Joseph.

He had been attacked with an axe.

She stared, speechless, then rushed to him. He had been hit more than once—blows to the head and neck. His head had been all but severed from his body. He was already cold. (Butler, *Lilith's Brood* 223)

At this point, it must have come home to Lilith that eventually she failed at preventing “back-to-the-Stone-Age, caveman bullshit” (Butler, *Lilith’s Brood* 178) from happening, which she adamantly struggled to nip in the bud. To add insult to injury, yet again she has not been able to protect her close ones. Thus, her posthuman paradise on Earth turns into an abject horror harking back to the worst chapters of human history.

However, the immense significance of this scene lies not only in the description of tragic events in Lilith’s life. Indisputably, Butler manages to create an intricate mycelial network of “emotional memory”⁴⁶ (“Emotional memory” *Encyclopaedia of the Sciences of Learning*) shared by the representatives of the Oankali race. This is because the Oankali memory does not belong to individual entities. What is immediately striking in the composition of this faculty of their brain is that memory is passed down from generation to generation in their DNA, which makes it highly relational in a posthuman fashion. Not only this. They can also literally study each others’ memory—a surprising fact that the readers may be mystified by, for instance, in the following excerpt: “There were echoes of Kahguyaht in her. Nikanj had shared its memory of its own ooloi parent, had let Akin study that memory that Akin felt he knew Kahguyaht” (Butler, *Lilith’s Brood* 363). Consequently, the Oankali need not record history in a human way and then make it available to those privileged enough to study it. All representatives of the Oankali race participate in the shared memory and history since they can remember everything generations back including the memory of other ancient species they traded genes with.

⁴⁶ Emotional memory is thus defined by *The Encyclopaedia of the Sciences of Learning*: “Emotional memory” is shorthand for denoting the memory of experiences that evoked an emotional reaction. It is most commonly used to refer to the ability to consciously remember aspects of those experiences; in other words, the term is used to describe the effects of emotion on episodic memory” (online). This standard definition is much expanded in Butler’s understanding. The Oankali can remember not only their own experiences but also their ancestor’s past as if they had experienced it themselves.

This posthuman relational nature of their memory, which among others prevents them from committing atrocities against their own kind and other animate and inanimate persons, shall have a great impact on Akin. Joseph's death, directly experienced by Lilith, will linger in Akin's memory bequeathed to him by way of adding Joseph's DNA to his genetic composition. Akin's memory is of paramount importance since—given the rejection suffered by his mother and the brutal murder of his father—Akin seems to be more predisposed to become a coldblooded avenger than a mediator between the two races. Yet, he chooses the latter and decides to speak for the murderous species that so cruelly deprived him of his human father.

In order to do so, he starts by acknowledging human needs. Then, he does not hesitate to bring it to the Oankali's attention that, imperfect as they are, humans should be granted rights the Oankali may have failed to recognise. Even though Akin is not exactly a representative of their race, the Oankali are compelled to at least listen to him, which they refused to do especially in the case of Lilith. This is because Akin, as Dunkley observes, "cannot be othered by either group when, instead, he nomadically weaves between both" (105). What Butler surely achieved by creating the character was the ultimate dissolution of difference, which undoubtedly eliminates the possibility of othering any entity. Therefore, Akin does not fall into the category of the "posthuman other," as Aparajita Nanda argues, since his symbiogenetic existence annihilates the very concept of difference. Paradoxically, however, this makes his life even more complicated.

Akin's predicament becomes even more dire after the event which uncannily mirrors the trauma passed down to him genetically, but which, unexpectedly, turns him into an advocate of human race. Before it happens, Akin comes across and builds a

relationship with a person who will mean a lot to him. Taking a walk in the woods, Lilith and Akin meet a former resister, Tino, who has left his town to check whether what he was told about the aliens and people living with them in so-called trading villages is true. Encouraging him to stay, Lilith says:

“... spend some time with us. Maybe you’ll accept our definition of ourselves. You came to find out about us, didn’t you?”

He signed. “I guess so. ... My parents... All they want to do is go back to the prewar days. They know as well as I do that that’s impossible, but it’s what they talk about and dream about. I left them to find out what else there might be to do.”

(Butler, *Lilith’s Brood* 271)

Tino is introduced to the community of Lo and quickly blends with local people. Surprisingly, he and Akin grow to like each other and spend a lot of time together until Tino figuratively steps into Akin’s father’s shoes. However, the happiness is short-lived as it is brutally interrupted by a situation that forces Akin to relive Joseph’s murder, which problematises his bond with humans even further. Strikingly, the moment of Tino’s severe beating mimics the brutal murder the results of which Lilith was compelled to witness before. Even though Tino is eventually rescued by the Oankali and sustains a treatable brain injury, Akin will believe for the duration of his captivity in Phoenix that Tino has died. This emotionally loaded correlation between Joseph’s actual death and Tino’s apparent one is purposefully employed by Butler to forcefully collide with Akin’s subsequent fondness he has for humans, which at a first glance seems to be unmotivated in terms of plot. After all, still a little baby, Akin needs to confront a truly gory scene:

The man who had first recognised Tino now stepped behind and smashed the wooden end of his gun into the back of Tino’s head.

Tino dropped to the ground without a cry, and his attacker hit him again, driving the wood of the gun into Tino's head like a man killing a poisonous snake.

Akin screamed in terror and anguish. (Butler, *Lilith's Brood* 309-310)

Having witnessed this violent show of human savagery, Akin is kidnapped by resisters who, so to speak, specialise in human trafficking and especially hunt for little kids and women that can be sold in other villages or towns. Up until this point, humans who resist the Oankali and—sacrificing the ability to have children—chose to lead a life free from aliens, but plagued with disease and old age can do virtually anything to have a little child. Thus, the resisters of Phoenix are both apprehensive and delighted to welcome Akin. This event will change his whole life, but certainly not in the way the readers might expect.

As I noted earlier, there is an uncanny component in Akin's composition responsible for his propensity to defend human race. The feature is pointed out to Akin in the following excerpt:

“You're more Oankali than you think, Akin—and far more Oankali than you look. Yet you're very Human. You skirt as close to the Contradiction as anyone has dared to go. You're as much of them as you can be and as much of us as your ooaan dared make you. That leaves you with your own contradiction.” (Butler, *Lilith's Brood* 475)

The last sentence of the quote constitutes a real plot twist in the novel. So far, as the Oankali have frequently observed, the only contradiction is the aforementioned Human Contradiction arising from the clash between human intelligence and hierarchical behaviour. Since Akin is a completely new entity, he develops a contradiction which differs from what has already been known. This is the Human contradiction with a

difference as it blends with the Oankali incompatible features, i.e. extreme posthuman relationality and unconditional reverence for life. Regardless of the fact that Akin has all the Oankali features, his actions are driven by what seems to be an unconditional love of humanity and increased sensitivity to their needs. Both tendencies push Akin to accuse the Oankali of annihilating humans and to unconsciously protect as well as stimulate the rebuilding of the Anthropocene:

“Then it will be an Oankali species,” Akin said softly. “It will grow and decide as Oankali always have, and it will call itself Oankali.”

“It will be Oankali. Look within the cells of your own body. You are Oankali.”

“And the Humans will be extinct, just as they believe.”

“Look within your cells for them, too. Your cells in particular.”

“But we will be Oankali. They will only be... something we consumed.”

(Butler *Lilith's Brood* 443)

Akin's human component clearly hinders his Oankali capability of embracing difference. Dichaan aptly describes this condition as follows: “they [Human-born construct males] must come dangerously close to fully Human males. They bear more of the Human Contradiction than any other people” (Butler, *Lilith's Brood* 442). What seems to be naturally found in humans comes as something completely odd in the case of Akin. His accusations prove even more unjust given the fact that not only humans will be altered. While humanity as we know it shall cease to exist, so will the Oankali. The way Akin describes it, it may seem that Oankali trade is a unilateral contract—the statement that can barely be defended. This is exactly what Lilith tries to explain to Tino when she says: “They change us and we change them ... The whole next generation is made up of genetically engineered people, Tino—constructs, whether they're born to Oankali or to

Human mothers” (Butler, *Lilith’s Brood* 282). Thus, Akin’s understanding of the trade between the Oankali and humans is not entirely correct. Humans will not be consumed by the Oankali. Beginning with Akin, future constructs will constitute instead a perfect blend of the two races and both races will live in constructs’ cells. Therefore, whether they will be called humans or the Oankali does not really matter since—to put it simply—a whole new different race will emerge. The beauty of these new entities shall lie in the ultimate conquering of difference in a posthuman way by amalgamating with a species which worship difference as if it were a god.⁴⁷

Importantly, there seems to be no other method to eliminate the deadly Human Contradiction. Despite getting numerous chances to live in harmony with the environment, humans fail each time and slip back into their old habits as the desire to control other species and fellow humans as well as to accumulate wealth proves irresistible. The Oankali are perfectly aware of the fact that should the opportunity arise for humans to re-establish the Anthropocene, which must here be understood as human indiscriminate dominance over everything else, they will surely take advantage of it. Thus, the Oankali cannot let humans breed in the old way. They need to be contained almost like non-sentient animals or otherwise they are likely to harm themselves and others. This sad conclusion becomes blatantly clear throughout the novel and it does not escape Akin’s attention whenever he suffers from resisters’ actions either directly or indirectly. Nevertheless, as Nanda remarks, he “ultimately emerges as the savior, a

⁴⁷ In this respect, the Oankali remind one of the Earthseed philosophy from the *Parable* novels. The very first words of *Parable of the Sower* read: “All that you touch/You Change/All that you Change/Changes you/The only lasting truth/ Is Change./God/Is Change” (Butler 13; original spelling). This parallel suggests that Butler saw change as a necessary ingredient of life, but at the same time she frequently reveals how humanity opposes change, fearing the unknown.

spokesperson for the human species who adroitly balances contradictory roles in a culture seemingly ‘colonial’ in its intent” (115).

While Akin has the best intentions and the readers are surely captivated by his shrewd diplomacy, he is reluctant to acknowledge the fact that human life is simply corrupt and humans themselves must eventually meet their doom. Contrary to what humans say, their actions unmistakably prove that their main objective is self-destruction and annihilation of other species. Even though he experiences human cruelty several times, he truly believes humans are only benign victims who are violently controlled by the Oankali—the conviction that is almost quashed several times. Simultaneously, he insistently maintains that the Oankali are ruthless predators who incapacitate humans, whose rights from before the war must be restored. Consequently, as Dichaan observes, he poses a threat to the race he should represent and stand by:

“You and Nikanj,” he said to Akin. “Nikanj tells the Humans we are symbionts, and you believe we are predators. What have you consumed, Eka.”
(...)

“What are we that we can do this to whole peoples? Not predators? Not symbionts? What then?

“A people, growing, changing. You’re an important part of that change. You’re a danger we might not survive.” (Butler, *Lilith’s Brood* 443-444)

Arguably, Akin’s accusations regarding a hidden agenda sound ungrounded and absurd in the context of what humans have done to planet Earth by living a parasitic existence, constantly depleting its resources and decimating whatever was left to be decimated. In the final stages of the Anthropocene, its most calamitous version turns the planet into a place that is vehemently hostile to life. For all intents and purposes, humans must be held

accountable for that. They eventually succeed in destroying the biosphere to the extent that only fairly simple organisms can inhabit it. The destructive power of humans touched life on Earth on virtually every level. Additionally, as it is repeatedly pointed out in the trilogy, the destruction humans wreaked was not just a one-off occasion and could not be contained if they were allowed to have children without Oankali control. Apparently, some humans do not even realise either the scale of the damage or its gravity. This is how Nikanj attempts to enlighten Tino as regards Oanklai motives:

“The war damaged your ozone layer. Do you know what that is?”

“No.”

“It shielded life on Earth from the sun’s ultraviolet rays. Without its protection, above-ground life on Earth would not have been possible. If we had left you on Earth, you would have been blinded. You would have been burned—if you hadn’t already been killed by other expanding effects of the war—and you would have died a terrible death. Most animals did die, and most plants, and some of us. We’re hard to kill but your people had made their world utterly hostile to life.” (Butler, *Lilith’s Brood* 290)

As if this was not enough, it is clear that humans have not changed much, which is why the Oankali have to contain them. Practically from the very beginning of the novel, humans prove that they are irritatingly attached to the Anthropocene and they have absolutely no intention of leaving it. What frequently strikes the readers is an erratic behaviour combined with a complete lack of self-reflection and inability to learn a lesson from history as humans give gun production a new start. Nikanj calmly continues:

“... we couldn’t let your numbers grow. We couldn’t let you become what you were.”

“You believe we would have had another war?”

“You would have had many others—against each other, against us. Some of the southern resister groups are already making guns.” (Butler, *Lilith’s Brood* 291)

Disconcertingly, the development of gun manufacturing technologies indicates that humanity has come full circle, which occasionally makes Akin wonder whether he really should speak for humans. What he fails to comprehend, however, is that life in harmony with both human and non-human persons is apparently beyond mankind’s capability since their desire to dominate over others—whoever they are—and establish hierarchies proves uncontrollable and runs much deeper than he might expect. Notably, the propensity to reconstruct the Anthropocene seems to be present in humans regardless of their background and beliefs. It ultimately prevails even among the selected lot Lilith has decided to awaken from suspended animation. Clinging to the remnants of the Anthropocene, humans try to rebuild it piece by piece by collecting artefacts representing the past era which seem to stand for their lost identity. As Shkaht explains to Akin creating new stuff ““wouldn’t be the same for them,’... ‘They really do need the old things. Our Human father got one of the little crosses from a traveling resister. He always wore it on a cord around his neck”” (Butler, *Lilith’s Brood* 389). Unfortunately, there is one other element of their identity which is surely not that benign.

Along with the re-emergence of the old technologies mentioned above, the readers can witness an ominous rebirth of past human social behaviours fostering aggression and intolerance. As I noted above, resisters commodify women and construct children selling them in exchange for other goods, which reminds of the formulation used by Patricia Yaeger. Reflecting on the common perception of the black body, the critic suggests that they are frequently seen as “throwaway bodies that mire the earth: a

landscape built over and upon the melancholic detritus, the disposable bodies denied by white culture” (*Dirt and Desire* 15). Undoubtedly, Yaeger’s description is an excellent characterisation of resisters’ social habits and their treatment of bodies. The readers are frequently made to feel anxious as they encounter profoundly disturbing excerpts featuring bodies of women and children turned into commodity products. For instance, one of the chapters opens with the following description:

Weeks later, traders arrived bringing two more stolen children. Both appeared to be young girls. The traders took away not a woman but as many metal tools and as much gold as they could carry, plus books that were more valuable than gold.
(Butler, *Lilith’s Brood* 369)

This indiscriminate trading system is a fertile ground conducive to the reestablishment of power relations based on indiscriminate hatred and the subjugation of the weak and the underprivileged. This, in turn, allows humans to put forward arguments supporting their gun policies.

As resisters’ settlements are growing larger, they are beginning to accumulate more and more wealth comprising both artefacts and human/alien bodies that can be traded. At the same time, the risk of being attacked increases proportionately to how affluent they are becoming. Consequently, some of these groups claim they need guns only to protect themselves against raiders roaming through the land in search of an easy prey. After the decision to produce guns in Phoenix is made, Gabe explains: “We’ve got to protect ourselves, ... Too many of the raiders have guns now, and Phoenix is too rich. Sooner or later, they’ll realize it’s easier to steal from us than carry on honest trade” (Butler, *Lilith’s Brood* 402). Some others need weapons in order to attack rich settlements and steal from them. Finally, members of both groups would gladly use guns on the

Oankali just for the pleasure of taking revenge. Whatever the reason, though, gun manufacturing reveals human colonial tendencies that evidently could not have been eradicated even by a direct threat of mass destruction of the species. Although some resisters acknowledge the fact that guns “make killing too easy. Too impersonal” (Butler, *Lilith’s Brood* 403), they are driven to produce them in order to defend themselves, no matter how apprehensive they are of bearing the catastrophic consequences of this choice. After all, human population remains under Oankali control, which means that if humans kill one another, there will simply be no humans left to repopulate the Earth.

The Oankali, on the other hand, refrain from exercising excessive control over humans in this respect. Possessing guns or not, resisters do not seem to pose any threat to aliens, or at least this is what the Oankali believe. As Nikanj explains to Tino calmly at one point, they are planning to do nothing to curb gun production. Instead, those who will try to use them against the Oankali: “go back to the ship permanently. They lose Earth” (Butler, *Lilith’s Brood* 291). This blunt statement indicates that the Oankali are completely unmoved by human attempts to rampage their trading villages. Additionally, the readers deduce from this that human struggles to re-establish former power relations are all in vain. Humans need to understand that the previous system cannot be restored, but as long as the current situation continues, they shall keep destroying themselves and pointlessly putting all the blame on the Oankali. Even Tate, who appears to truly care for Akin, says accusingly “Oankali drove us to become what we are. If they hadn’t tampered with us, we’d have children of our own. We could live in our own ways, and they could live in theirs” (Butler, *Lilith’s Brood* 399). Therefore, Akin’s belief—largely determined by his human component—that the Oankali are predators feeding on benevolent humans is unfair and inaccurate to say the least. After all, can one predatory/parasitic species describe the other in similar terms?

This point is further confirmed by other methods of intimidation and coercion regularly applied by human resisters in order to restore the Anthropocene, which here should perhaps be redefined as the domination of human violence and savagery. Even though resisters seem to imply in their words and actions that they are forced to behave aggressively because they are made to act like that by the Oankali, the readers can easily deduce that human trafficking, rape, and other crimes are possible because law enforcement has virtually ceased to exist. Humans may collect ancient volumes of the Bible, but the urge to collect them seems to be stimulated by nothing more than meaningless nostalgia for the melancholic past peppered with carnival collectibles. Humans do not unearth the Bibles because they may help them restore law and order based on God's word or because they value Christian teachings so much. Resisters strive for them because—being archaeological artefacts of the past—the Bibles “were more valuable than gold” (Butler, *Lilith's Brood* 369). What needs to be stressed here is that they are valuable as a material commodity which is a product of the bygone era. Undoubtedly, it only underscores human hypocrisy and a gross incapability to draw meaningful conclusions, as a result of which they slip back into old habits.

Unrestrained, human resisters break all human rights regardless of whether they identify themselves with any religious denomination or not. This brings the feeling of despair in the readers, who realise that Butler's universe is meant to uncover the worst (though indisputably true) human features hidden under a very thin layer of benevolence and compassion. In the face of adversity, humans rapidly succumb to fear and weakness. Consequently, their positive attributes perish and what counts is individual survival, which instantly overshadows the preservation of the whole species, or companion species for that matter. As I noted earlier, human resisters justify their actions by putting forward an argument that they are compelled to act that way by Oankali control of their breeding.

Nevertheless, this line of defence is only poorly supported by human actions, which prove to the contrary. While it may be true that humans are growing increasingly desperate because they cannot find a way to have children without Oankali participation, scarcely any justification can be provided for atrocious acts humans commit out of deliberate cruelty. This is best evidenced in the novel by showing how another person's body is invaded for absolutely no reason.

Butler's exploitation of the trope of rape demonstrates the extent of human willingness to degrade other human and non-human beings and to re-establish mechanisms of power founded on rampant aggression. As mankind is "extinguishing itself in boredom, hopelessness, bitterness" (Butler, *Lilith's Brood* 498), humans go berserk not because the Oankali force them to act in any specific way. On the contrary, humans are left to their own devices, but they can choose at any point to re-join trade villages and live in peace and prosperity among the Oankali. Predictably, they decline this offer, gradually turning their potentially posthuman lives into a grotesquely trash-human existence. Aggression is brewing and violence begets violence. No longer does it even result from any form of cultural bias, racial prejudice or sexual discrimination even though these are continually fuelling behaviours of human resisters.

The straightforward example of aggression standing in the way of posthuman development is the reason behind men's refusal to consider the possibility of entering into sexual relationships with the Oankali, which lies at the foundation of the animosity between human men and the aliens. The words of one saved resister, João Eduardo Villas de Silva, reflect this attitude:

João's face underwent several changes. Surprise, regret, shame, anger, renewed hatred and revulsion. "I did not ask you to save me."

“I know what you do—your kind. You take men as though they were women!”

“No! We—

“Yes! Your kind and your Human whores are the cause. Of all our trouble! You treat all mankind as your woman!” (Butler, *Lilith’s Brood* 599)

Although Oankali sexuality does not resemble human sexuality even remotely, men will not lie down with the Oankali because they believe it will deprive them of their manhood. Unavoidably, the reaction is blind aggression, which eventually places them on the existential margins because a white, educated, European, heterosexual man—i.e. the man of humanism—has been dethroned. Arguably, he has every reason to be bitter and hopeless. Butler’s novel emphasises that a paternalistic and heterosexual construction of sexuality as well as a certain model of sexual orientation is quite simply the thing of the past because “God is change” (Butler, *Parable of the Sower*). The more or less implicit criticism of homosexual and transsexual relationships, which the readers can infer from resisters’ acts and words, constitutes just a manifestation of pointless aggression. What resister humans find hard to understand is that the Anthropocene’s temple of persecution and prejudice, which has been so painstakingly built by conservative and limited societies, has been demolished. Therefore, what they regarded as *the* norm is at best *a* norm in the new post-apocalyptic and posthuman world.

Paradoxically, the followers of the above-described traditional norms established for the sexual lives of all people irrespective of their origin, religion, mind-set or genetic make-up find trading in human or alien bodies perfectly acceptable. As long as these trading practises can somehow be justified by human’s better good, humans will not criminalise them even if they find it plainly obvious that they commit an offence against another person. It further needs to be stressed that *Lilith’s Brood* exposes the extent of

completely unnecessary cruelty accompanying crime, which indicates that humans wish to give full vent to their anger in violent outbursts irrespective of who they are dealing with. The novel abounds in numerous disturbing scenes, which some readers may find nauseating.

One such scene is introduced to the readers just after Akin has been kidnapped: “Abruptly, the man grabbed Akin, lifted him by one arm, thrust him under one of the man’s own long thick arms, and followed the others up the steep, muddy trail” (Butler, *Lilith’s Brood* 318). While most of aggression in the novel is predominantly physical, some characters are also psychologically tormented. Again, Akin’s example illustrates the problem perfectly well. His abduction not only deprives him of home and his parents, but also of the existential necessity to bond with his sibling. Importantly, the need is both of physical and psychological nature on an unusually deep level. Not bonding with his sibling creates a chasm in the character’s physiological and emotional life. No matter how convincingly Akin tries to communicate this danger to his allies in Phoenix, they refuse to act on his requests, blinded by their own desperate need to have children. The readers are touched by Akin’s emotional appeals:

“‘You should have taken me home,’ he said bitterly. ‘You say you know my mother. You should have taken me back to her.’ (...) He was crying openly now. ‘I know,’ she whispered. ‘And I’m sorry. But I can’t take you home. You mean too much to my people’” (Butler, *Lilith’s Brood* 382).

As I noted above, however, resister humans establish former power relations by employing one of the most ruthless methods of coercion, i.e. rape. The posthuman environment created by the Oankali should in theory be conducive to growth, development and trade. Humans fail to acknowledge this opportunity and, instead, they

form a lawless society regulated by physical strength or the ability to emotionally manipulate others. This brand-new Anthropocene contradicts communal ideals of society cherished by the Oankali. Contrary to humans, they do not seem to need any written rules to refrain from developing pathological societal structures based on subjugation and exploitation of others, including sexual harassment and rape. Their intelligence and the sense of belonging to a mycelial, relational network stop them effectively from killing one another. It is worth of remark that dissenting opinions among the Oankali are fairly common. To give just one example, Akin's stay among the humans of Phoenix raised some controversy among the aliens. Unlike humans, however, the Oankali use dissenting opinions to provoke a healthy debate which must end with a so-called consensus. Conflict is not an option of choice. Humans, on the other hand, fill the legal void without hesitation by adopting barbaric rules whose most important ingredient is subjugation through weaponised rape.

By enforcing the position of power, rape inescapably “remasculinizes manhood” (Sielke 44), or this is at least how some male resisters see it. Characters who attempt rape feel empowered not only because they re-establish former power relations and therefore deem their actions justified. To their mind, they do something essentially good since after all they oppose the Oankali establishment. Most importantly, they feel empowered because it helps them regain what they reckon they have almost lost, i.e. their manhood. For male resisters, being completely incapacitated at first and then living under numerous restrictions equals an extreme form of emasculation. As they argue, this process is stimulated especially by the tight restrictions placed on their sexual intercourse. Male resisters cannot digest the fact that they are incapable of impregnating a woman in a traditional way, which unexpectedly turns into the root of all evil.

Desperate to be in a sexual relationship, they cannot envisage having sex with multiple partners—including alien creatures that act as sexual proxies—because, by doing so, they believe they occupy a female position in a sexual intercourse. Unavoidably, this behaviour instantly ascribes positive features to manhood and pejorative ones to womanhood. Some characters in the novel—mainly a male colonial type—seem to believe that women stand exclusively for physical weakness as opposed to physically domineering men who are supposed to provide a sense of security. This may be the reason why so many of them see Lilith as a formidable creature to be afraid of. Additionally, frequently dehumanised and objectified, women represent tradable commodities of a decent value. As a matter of fact, however, male resisters frequently fail to care about the value principle either, unleashing their rampant aggression and taking it out on innocent and defenceless people. Excerpts illustrating this point abound in the novel but one example seems to be especially graphic. This is how the narrator describes the state of Rudra's body after she was kidnapped and raped:

Rudra had been rescued, but she was dead. Her captors had beaten and raped her until she was so badly hurt that her rescuers could not get her home alive. They had not been able to catch or kill any of her captors. They were tired and angry. They had brought Rudra's body to be buried with her husband. Two people lost. The men cursed all raiders and tried to figure out where this group had come from. Where should the reprisal raid take place? (Butler, *Lilith's Brood* 503).

The idea of reprisal raids—which has an essential social function in the trilogy—harks back to a period of human history when international conventions were not in place to regulate how wars should be waged. At the time, both attacking neighbouring settlements or even whole new territories was the matter of validating one's honour and manhood.

Those who failed to prove their manhood were not considered apt enough to be in a position of power, or any social position for that matter. In practical terms, it meant that they were downgraded to a social position of a woman, who was normally refused the same social status as a man and therefore both defeated men and women were devoid of any civil rights.

Thus, old and new lands would be pillaged and frequently conquered in the name of some overlord or other. Resultingly, such an attack obviously required a revenge. Should men refrain from taking a revenge on the raiders, they would be considered cowards not entitled to any social status. It is worthy of remark that the whole exchange would normally go on between two males. Brownmiller refers to this issue on several occasions in her book. Below, the critic acknowledges its presence in Hollywood productions:

Although movie makers generally take inordinate delight in glorifying rape—the critic Aljean Harmetz counted twenty such rape scenes in two years of Hollywood productions—and often wrap up the package by having the female victim enjoy it (*Straw Dogs*, *Blume in Love*), one aspect of the crime has received more sensitive cinematic treatment. This is when the plot line views the rape as man's revenge against another man—either in the case of homosexual rape or in situations where the female victim is merely a passive vehicle of retribution within a larger battle between two men. (303)

The latter is surely the case in *Lilith's Brood*. The readers are shocked to discover that women are frequently passive objects of trading relations dominated by men, but not without a modest participation of women. Consequently, 'manhood'—understood as male mandate to regulate societal relationships singlehandedly—must have become a

vital part of power relations typically enforced by violence and subjugation. Used as the ultimate form of coercion, rape helped to ensure that the processes described above were up and running. In Butler's world, this trope plays the same role by becoming an essential ingredient of its power relations in the new Anthropocene era that human resisters try to restore so forcefully. Since human resisters draw their inspiration from the past, manhood can either be proven in battle while conquering new territories or while defending one's homeland and, yet again, it was hardly connected with something more truly chivalric or mature such as, for example, actually fathering a child. Butler seems to construct this grotesque form of the Anthropocene in order to prove how dysfunctional a species humans turn out to be.

In this context, Akin's choice to defend humans arouses rather mixed feelings. Undoubtedly, some human resisters—even if they decide not to live with the Oankali—have the best intentions to make a positive change. Nevertheless, as I have argued above, even those good-natured people participate in what is normally referred to as organised crime by turning a blind eye on human trafficking, child abduction or illegal gun manufacturing. Some of them even benefit from it straightforwardly. This point needs to be stressed since many critics I have already quoted above focused on Oankali colonial tendencies or their attempts to impose trade.

While such analyses may lead to thought-provoking conclusions, they place representations of humans and their motivations out of the scope of intense scientific scrutiny almost entirely. I believe that such optics are inaccurate since Butler appears to consistently frame human resisters in situations that most often prove that even though some Oankali decisions and actions may be controversial, humans really cannot be trusted and should definitely not breed without Oankali control. The readers discover that

it is highly relevant in Butler's world when the residents of Phoenix begin to use guns on each other. This rather ironic turn of events is the ultimate proof that guns were not meant to be just a weapon of defence against the raiders from the outside as Gabe states in the excerpt quoted before (Butler, *Lilith's Brood* 402). It is never stated explicitly, but towards the end of the second part of *Lilith's Brood*, i.e. *Adulthood Rites*, it becomes clear that resisters need to have guns just in case they have to protect themselves against their closest neighbours because the enemy may come even from the inside. Soon after his metamorphosis, Akin awakens in the house that has been set on fire:

He thought at first that the sound he heard was rain. The smoke scent forced him to recognize it as fire. (...) He had gotten up and gone to investigate a strange noise outside the house. Akin replayed his memory of the noise. Even asleep, he had heard what Macy probably had not. People whispering. (...)

“Go pour some under the mongrel's window, Babe.” (Butler, *Lilith's Brood* 508)

At this point it should be clear for the readers that human resisters are unsalvageable due to their unpredictability and therefore calling resisters' settlement Phoenix turns out to be a bitter irony on Butler's part.

The name of the settlement clearly alludes to the name of the mythical bird which would be reborn from ashes after its death as part of a natural cycle of life and death. This is how Encyclopaedia Britannica explains the phoenix's ancient origin:

in ancient Egypt and in Classical antiquity, a fabulous bird associated with the worship of the sun. The Egyptian phoenix was said to be as large as an eagle, with brilliant scarlet and gold plumage and a melodious cry. Only one phoenix existed at any time, and it was very long-lived—no ancient authority gave it a life span of less than 500 years. As its end approached, the phoenix fashioned a nest of

aromatic boughs and spices, set it on fire, and was consumed in the flames. From the pyre miraculously sprang a new phoenix, which, after embalming its father's ashes in an egg of myrrh, flew with the ashes to Heliopolis ("City of the Sun") in Egypt, where it deposited them on the altar in the temple of the Egyptian god of the sun, Re. ("Phoenix," online)

The rebirth described in the excerpt above obviously carried a strong symbolic meaning since it illustrated the life's cyclical nature and hence a hope of being reborn after death. Butler, however, infuses this image with deep pessimism and therefore alters its symbolism greatly. The original settlers call this place Phoenix because they believe this is where they will start anew as if no invasion had ever happened. The readers are to discover soon, however, that Butler's Phoenix deviates from the symbolism of the mythical bird and the writer would not let her characters enjoy a life of bliss and contentment. While the original story arouses hope and originates from a natural process of change that refreshes the old, Butler's retelling of this story—instead of announcing a new beginning—seems to conjure up images of fall and decay. Consequently, it cannot be an accident that the narrator looks at the fire of Phoenix through the eyes of Akin, who becomes the narrative's focalizer for a short while. Fiercely defended by Akin, who truly supports the idea of revisiting Oankali decisions concerning humans, human resisters jeopardise Akin's life by putting the place where he has been metamorphosing on fire. Thus, it must have been Butler's conscious choice to make Akin witness the end of Phoenix, which is slowly becoming engulfed in fire. In a very evocative scene, the last chapter of *Adulthood Rites*—the second part of the trilogy—ends with the following sentence: "He was perhaps the last to see the smoke cloud behind them and Phoenix still burning" (Butler, *Lilith's Brood* 517).

The burning of Phoenix could be interpreted in two ways. Firstly, the readers could infer that after all humanity will be reborn from the ashes of Phoenix. Nevertheless, this conclusion might be true only for some human resisters who, undoubtedly, dissent from the majority. While they may not entirely agree with Oankali policies either, they would rather join the community of Lo, or any other trade village for that matter, than support the murderous fellow settlers setting fire to their neighbours' houses or trying to cut off Oankali tentacles. Additionally, Akin tempts these dissenters with a vision of the colony on Mars, where humanity could start a new life without Oankali intervention. Nonetheless, it needs to be underscored that their departure from Phoenix is more of a desperate attempt to save their lives than a choice, which instantly undermines this conclusion.

The second possible interpretation, however, sounds more legitimate. It is worth of remark that the images of the burning settlement and the rebirth of Phoenix, the mythical bird, from the ashes do not match. Contrary to the latter, the former situation hardly represents rebirth. Instead, the fire of Phoenix arguably constitutes a socio-political allegory of the ultimate human failure and moral decay, which is reflected by the town's deterioration. Having returned to Phoenix, Akin describes the town as follows:

Phoenix was still more a town than a village, but it was a shabbier town. (...) There was trash in the street. Dead weeds, for waste, scrap wood, cloth, and paper. Some of the houses were obviously vacant. A couple of them had been partially torn down. Others seemed ready to fall down. (...) He could see guns and people through the windows, although it seemed the people were trying not to be seen. A few people working or loitering stared at him. At least two were too drunk to notice him. (Butler, *Lilith's Brood* 482-483)

The gloomy landscape of the deteriorating town and its subsequent fire confirm beyond a shadow of a doubt that the Oankali were in the right from the very onset of the story. Since when they encountered the species on the brink of self-annihilation, their decision to limit human liberties—most importantly freedom of reproduction—and contain their numbers has shown wisdom and foresight beyond human comprehension. Due to their Contradiction, the majority of humans are neither capable of functioning without Oankali guidance nor even acknowledging their own limitations. Those who do acknowledge these two human flaws lead visibly better lives and all their problems are resolved by the Oankali.

Human resisters, on the other hand, drive themselves into despair as they come to the realisation that they cannot be reborn from ashes as a species. Despite the fact that some human resisters successfully overcome their genetic narrow-mindedness by joining forces with the Oankali, their numbers are too scarce to be meaningful. Thus, instead of being reborn from the ashes of Phoenix, they will literally turn into ashes themselves. Given the situation, the Oankali's prediction sounds reasonably accurate:

“They help because of what we constructs tell them: that you should be allowed to go even though you'll eventually destroy yourselves. The Oankali believe... the Oankali *know to the bone* that it's wrong to help the Human species regenerate unchanged because it *will* destroy itself again. To them it's like deliberately causing the conception of a child who is so defective that it must die in infancy.”

(Butler, *Lilith's Brood* 532)

Arguably, human genetic make-up in Butler's novel equals a death sentence. Mankind simply cannot survive as a species because it is deeply flawed. This side of human nature becomes even more vivid as humans fail to embrace their only chance to survive, i.e. to

enter into a posthuman symbiosis with the Oankali. What makes matters worse is that they produce all sorts of conspiracy theories elaborating on Oankali goals and motivations. The readers are dumbfounded to realise that human resisters simultaneously cannot comprehend that the truth is simple and honest. The Oankali have arrived to help. Ferreira defines the reason behind this human predicament as follows:

Connected with this recurring anxiety about the loss of humanity is the fear of penetration and invasion or infection by the alien other, the tinkering with genetic identity at the molecular level. This scenario is also at the center of Butler's story, "Bloodchild" (1984), which narrates a similar symbiotic politics involving parasite and host. (Ferreira 407)

The overbearing anxiety Ferreira discusses prevents human resisters from entering into symbiosis with the Oankali since they believe a symbiogenetic existence jeopardises the very core of human nature.

Taken at face value, this statement makes a fairly legitimate argument, though it is not as sound from Bruce Clarke's vantage point. Discussing Gaia as "a kind of immune system for planetary life", Clarke explains that "its functional boundaries may be just as complex and entangled as those of the holobiont constituted by the ecological relations of a plant or animal host with the flux of microbial symbionts that cross through and reside within their tissues" (Clarke, *Gaian Systems. Lynn Margulis...* 213). The anxiety harboured by human resisters arises from an unshakeable conviction that they are not holobionts and refuse to become them in the future. Except there is nothing much they can do about it because they already are. As I mentioned above and as Clarke elaborates on in his study, no entity on planet Earth can live without symbiosis. Humans are tinkered with at different levels of their biological make-up in every hour of their life no matter

whether they agree to it or not. Symbiosis literally makes humans what they are, while fears listed by Ferreira are arguably based on misconceptions which stem from understanding life in terms of racial, social, sexual, and class divisions artificially forced upon life's rhizomic mycelial network of posthuman relational existence.

Therefore, before I discuss "Bloodchild," let me emphasise that Butler's trilogy—especially *Adulthood Rites*—cannot be discussed as a critique of alien colonialism or the imposition of systems of power on mankind. On the contrary, Butler attempts at problematising traditional power relations in order to blur the boundary between the coloniser and the colonised to an ironic effect. Seemingly, human resisters are the colonised, who suffer from Oankali regime by sustaining great losses as a species. However, as the story unfolds, the readers are becoming more and more doubtful as to what stands for 'the colonised'. Canonical roles of the coloniser and the colonised are reversed to reveal worst human vices that unavoidably lead human society to the brink of extinction. Even though humanity may seize yet another opportunity as the Oankali establish human Oankali-free colonies on Mars, humans will fail in all likelihood. This time, however, the fault hardly lies with the Oankali because the colony is entirely free from their influence. Again, Butler frames human resisters in order to expose their true motivations and inability to thrive as a species, thereby proving the futility of Akin's mission to save humanity from destruction and bringing to light the destructiveness of his human component.

Butler also explores a similar motif in "Bloodchild," a short story which earned her the Nebula Award for Best Novelette and the Hugo Award for Best Novelette in 1984 and 1985 respectively, not to mention several other prizes. In this imaginative tale, the readers are introduced to a group of humans living in the so-called Preserve on an

extrasolar planet inhabited by an unknown race, the Tlic, who welcome humans upon their arrival and agree that they stay, but they also hope to receive something in return for this favour. This time, however, the payment is much more gory. While humans may not consent to enter into a symbiotic relationship with aliens, they are expected to offer their bodies as hosts for extraterrestrials' grubs. Contrary to animal bodies which hindered larvae's growth, human bodies guarantee a much safer environment for their prenatal development. Consequently, eggs laid inside human bodies can hatch in larger numbers and thus secure the survival of the alien race. Apart from that, "Tlic from Terran bodies were always larger" (Butler, "Bloodchild and Other Stories" 18). This is what the readers learn during a climactic conversation between Gan, a young human boy chosen to act as a host, and a female Tlic, T'Gatoi.⁴⁸ As the latter explains in a revealing conversation,

"[t]he animals we once used began killing most of our eggs after implantation long before your ancestors arrived," she said softly. "You know these things, Gan. Because your people arrived, we are relearning what it means to be a healthy, thriving people. And your ancestors, fleeing from their homeworld, from their own kind who would have killed or enslaved them—they survived because of us. We saw them as people and gave them the Preserve when they still tried to kill us as worms. (Butler, "Bloodchild and Other Stories" 25; my emphasis)

The familiar scenario may prompt an attempt to extend Molly Wallace's hypothesis concerning the imposition of trade in *Lilith's Brood* (110-111) to "Bloodchild". After all, humans find themselves stranded on a hostile planet inhabited

⁴⁸ Unfortunately, Butler does not introduce the readers to how names are given to the aliens, which is a pity because they sound interesting from a linguistic point of view.

by an unsightly domineering race. To add insult to injury, this time humans are refugees fleeing from their murderous kin who “would have killed or enslaved them” (Butler, “Bloodchild and Other Stories” 25), which practically seems to leave them with no choice. Perhaps unwillingly, they have to accept this world as their new home, especially that, after all, they do receive the help they seek. Admittedly, though, the help they get hardly qualifies as something humans could define as humanitarian aid. As one might argue, Tlic take advantage of human predicament and impose an unequal trade on humans, who are essentially enslaved in the Preserve. While humans can stay and feel at home, they need to become living incubators for alien larvae. This fairly superficial approach, however, means adopting a one-sided anthropocentric perspective, which dismisses the Other’s vantage point—in this case the vantage point of Tlic—just because it may not be entirely in line with human desires. That is why, my analysis will not focus so much on the apparent enslavement of humans, especially that Butler herself states the story’s focal point is not slavery. As the writer continues,

[o]n one level, it’s a love story between two very different beings. On another, it’s a coming-of-age story in which a boy must absorb disturbing information and use it to make a decision that will affect the rest of his life. On a third level, “Bloodchild” is my pregnant man story. I’ve always wanted to explore what it might be like for a man to be put into that most unlikely of all positions. (Butler, “Bloodchild and Other Stories” 30)

Butler returns to this issue in several other interviews, cautioning her readers not to misinterpret her storylines. Here is an excerpt from an interview conducted by Larry McCaffery titled “Across the Wounded Galaxies: Interviews with Contemporary American Science Fiction Writers,”

Larry McCaffery: In one way or another, all your books seem to explore different forms of slavery or domination.

Octavia Butler: I know some people think that, but I don't agree, although this may depend on what we mean by "slavery." In the story "Bloodchild," for example, some people assume I'm talking about slavery when what I'm really talking about is symbiosis. That's not to say that I haven't dealt with slavery or that I don't think about it—*Kindred* and *Wild Seed* deal very directly with slavery. Let me tell you an anecdote about slavery. When I was about thirteen, I found out on a visceral level what slavery was; before that I hadn't understood why the slaves had not simply run away, because that's what I assumed I would have done. But when I was around thirteen, we moved into a house with another house in the back, and in that other house lived people who beat their children. Not only could you hear the kids screaming, you could actually hear the blows landing. This was naturally terrifying to me, and I used to ask my mother if there wasn't something she could do or somebody we could call, like the police. My mother's attitude was that those children belonged to their parents and they had the right. (McCaffery 56-57)

As I argue below, contrary to the parents she mentions, Butler always gives her characters some choice. While the choice may be limited by the current predicament humans usually drive themselves into willingly, it is indisputably there. Therefore, one needs to tread carefully when levelling accusations at Butler's characters as some critics have done since such theoretical assumptions may be hard to prove by textual evidence. Though it must be acknowledged that following an author's instructions concerning text interpretation may not always be the most compelling alternative, Butler's suggestions

offer the readers an unusual opportunity to step outside autopoietic systems humanity exists in and scrutinise them from an external point of view. In other words, “Bloodchild” comes across as a posthuman story about the interconnectedness of life, which defamiliarizes human existence on all three levels defined by Butler above, but it does not have much to do with rape.

On the first level, the story presents humans who yet again need to learn how to live along with an alien race. This time, however, the situation seems to be incomparably more challenging for them since there is nowhere to hide from aliens. Not only are they left stranded on a distant planet, but also they are separated in the Preserve from less understanding and more predatory aliens. The readers may be shocked to discover that “[o]nly she [T’Gatoi] and her political faction stood between us and the hordes who did not understand why there was a Preserve—why any Terran could not be courted, paid, drafted, in some way made available to them” (Butler, “Bloodchild and Other Stories” 5). Additionally, the Tlic deprive them of some civil liberties such as the right to bear arms, which results from incidents involving humans mentioned as passing reference, when Gan, a Terran boy, looks for one of the family’s guns:

[f]irearms were illegal in the Preserve. There had been incidents right after the Preserve was established—Terrans shooting Tlic, shooting N’Tlic. That was before the joining of families began, before everyone had a personal stake in keeping the peace. (Butler, “Bloodchild and Other Stories” 12)

The enforced coexistence with the alien race results in the necessity to redefine humanness since anthropocentric humanist criteria of human self-definition no longer hold in the present unsettling situation. Arguably, humans are compelled to redefine their bodily boundaries as well as their psychological mindset. The former need to be drawn

again so that humans can accept another dominant and more advanced species living next to them and regulating their life. The latter needs to be adjusted to the new situation so that humans can bear with the conditions they find distressing, which connects to the second level listed by Butler.

The coming-of-age story is a story about Gan, a Terran boy, who is supposed to become a new host for Tlics' eggs. As the story unfolds, the readers learn that he has been aware of the fact that he will have to give up his body and be impregnated for quite some time. Butler dramatises this peculiar rite of passage by introducing yet another character, Bram Lomas, a pregnant man who unexpectedly appears at Gan's doorstep. Lomas gives birth the hard way as grubs start hatching when he is away from his Tlic, T'Khotgif, and T'Gatoi "can't help this man the way his Tlic could" (Butler, "Bloodchild and Other Stories" 10). Therefore, Gan bears witness to Lomas's excruciating pain he feels when T'Gatoi cuts his body open:

His body convulsed with the first cut. He almost tore himself away from me. The sound he made... I had never heard such sounds from anything human. T'Gatoi seemed to pay no attention as she lengthened and deepened the cut, now and then pausing to lick away blood... I felt as though I were helping her torture him, helping consume him. I knew I would vomit soon... She found the first grub. It was fat and deep red with his blood—both inside and out. (Butler, "Bloodchild and Other Stories" 15)

Found half-conscious near Gan's home, Lomas is taken inside in order to give birth to aliens, or rather to be operated on by T'Gatoi as his T'Khotgif Teh is not on the scene. As the readers learn, T'Gatoi is incapable of conducting the said procedure without inflicting pain and therefore Gan is forced to bear witness to a vivisection, which reminds

of a particularly gory Caesarean section, conducted on a man, thus emphasising the deconstruction of gender differences. Hence, this is a doubly horrendous experience for somebody who is supposed to be implanted and act as a host in the coming future. As if this situation was not dramatic enough, the only alternative for Bram Lomas is to be eaten alive by grubs, which will feast on his body to get outside. This scene, which conjures up numerous vivid images from films like *The Alien* series where baby aliens burst out of humans' or animals' chests, summarises problematic relations between humans and aliens existing in the story. There is one puzzle which should be added, though. Humans have to agree to be implanted.

The above-described experience traumatises Gan, which hinders his decision-making process and turns his coming of age into a real nightmare. Even though the first line of the story, which reads "My last night of childhood began with a visit home" (Butler, "Bloodchild and Other Stories 3), hints at its ending, Gan doubts his final decision on several occasions. In theory, birthing alien grubs should not be excessively painful as a host receives narcotics that kill the pain. This can be done, however, only by the host's partner who implanted the eggs. Otherwise, the whole procedure turns into a desperate attempt to save a host from ravenous grubs. Even then, it is a gruesome situation to take part in. That is why, T'Gatoi believes that "Terrans should be protected from seeing" (Butler, "Bloodchild and Other Stories" 28). As Butler comments above, the decision he needs to take will influence his whole life, but it is worth of mention that the influence in question is of unimaginable force. His body shall be tampered with in a way that will probably change his perception of himself for ever and is sure to alter his whole life in an unprecedented manner.

Whether this change is for the worse is open to debate. On the one hand, the relationship between Gan and T’Gatoi could be understood in terms of submission and enslavement. On the other hand, however, it can be treated as “the suggestive complication of traditional gender roles during intercourse” (Helford 264). The latter option is more alluring as it seems to reveal enormous interpretative potential. Yet again, it does not seem fair enough to adopt human morals as a set of criteria to evaluate an alien civilisation determined by conditions unknown to humanity and following an unfamiliar set of beliefs. This form of intellectual colonialism ruthlessly projects human paradigms of thinking onto another species and can hardly be compared with, for instance, enslaving people of colour by plantation owners in Antebellum South, as it is described by Butler in *Kindred*. While slave owners could perfectly assess their actions and could be held accountable for their crimes as they frequently abused religious or philosophical convictions, when satisfying their needs and purposes, alien civilisations are literally made from different clay and, therefore, escape such judgments. This, however, can be understood only when hierarchical perception of life based on dualistic divisions and developed on planet Earth is done away with. This, in turn, can be fully achieved in Butler’s world only by means of a sexual intercourse, which constitutes the ultimate crossing of boundaries between a dualistic division into two separate species based on sex and different origin. This is where the third level of the story distinguished by Butler comes into play.

Regardless of whether this aspect is interpreted in terms of enslavement and submission or not, laying eggs in a boy’s body undoubtedly raises concerns relating to various issues from psychological aspects to his self-identification to becoming a potential rape victim. Given Butler’s statement, however, I wish to concentrate on her “pregnant man story” (“Bloodchild and Other Stories” 30) and refrain from interpreting

the story in terms of rape on humans. Instead, following Butler's suggestion, I believe "Bloodchild" should rather be discussed in terms of an uncanny symbiosis understood pretty much in the same sense Lovelock and Margulis describe the phenomenon in their studies. Importantly, Gan decides to enter into this symbiosis willingly, when he finally has a sexual intercourse with T'Gatoi:

Yet I undressed and lay down beside her. I knew what to do, what to expect. I had been told all my life. I felt the familiar sting, narcotic, mildly pleasant. Then the blind probing of her ovipositor. The puncture was painless, easy. So easy going in. She undulated slowly against me, her muscles forcing the egg from her body into mine. I held on to a pair of her limbs until I remembered Lomas holding her that way. Then I let go, moved inadvertently, and hurt her. She gave a low cry of pain and I expected to be caged at once within her limbs. When I wasn't, I held on to her again, feeling oddly ashamed. (Butler, "Bloodchild and Other Stories" 27)

Unlike Lomas, who suffers agonising labour pain, Gan finds the intercourse fairly pleasurable as T'Gatoi goes the extra mile not to hurt her partner and, in a certain sense, her children's parent.

Apart from that, the scene may strike the readers with unusual sexual intimacy between representatives of two extremely different species. Submission and aggression are entirely absent from their encounter, which conjures up sensual images of an erotic scene involving humans, not an alleged rape on a human being committed by a monstrous alien creature. Arguably, the very first line of the quote subtly describes a sexually inexperienced boy who will have sex for the very first time and, therefore, his childhood will come to an end. His lack of experience is even more emphasised by Gan's

unexpected movement that hurts T’Gatoi, which reminds of an inept sexual partner who accidentally hurts the other person during a sexual intercourse. Such hints, which Butler seems to drop here and there in the story, may indicate that even though Gan’s rite of passage may look odd at first glance, it is identical to an act of sexual initiation that takes place among humans. This initiation, in turn, has a lot in common with many rites of passage known from various, mainly indigenous, cultures, which frequently involved painful tests meaning to prove that a boy can already be considered a man.

Gan’s test surely starts even before he is implanted with eggs since seeing Lomas could also be treated as one element of his rite of passage. Indisputably then, “Bloodchild” not only truly tells the story about symbiosis, but also “love between two different beings” (Butler, “Bloodchild and Other Stories” 30). This indicates that, as Badmington would have it, “the opposition between the homely and the unfamiliar can no longer hold, for the alien is no longer the wholly other” (*Alien Chic...* 29). After all, it cannot *be* the Other after such an act of intimacy which is agreed upon by both sides. Thus, what Gan seems to experience is the crisis of versus, which renders alien hatred irrelevant (Badmington, *Alien Chic...* 32-33). Consequently, Gan’s close sexual encounter with an alien entity places him outside the orbit of anthropocentrism and, in actuality, Gan moves far beyond ordinary human experience of sexuality, thereby entering uncharted waters of posthuman sexual singularity.

Nevertheless, questions of being an alien’s property, i.e. being objectified and those concerning the nature of the relationship between aliens and humans return in “Bloodchild” on a number of occasions. Even though Gan’s mother and T’Gatoi are essentially friends, and Gan is convinced he would not be hurt by T’Gatoi, it must be underscored that the boy never ceases to doubt whether he truly owns his body and

whether he is fully capable of deciding about himself. This, in turn, vividly reminds of concerns harboured by Lilith in *Dawn*, the first part of the trilogy *Lilith's Brood*. Similarly to Lilith, who is shocked to discover a scar on her abdomen, Gan finds the possibility of his body being tampered with naggingly problematic. Additionally, his brother, Qui, constantly casts doubt on T'Gatoi's intentions, thereby undermining Gan's resolve. In what resembles a usual squabble between brothers, Qui mercilessly enlightens Gan as to who he really is for T'Gatoi:

“Don't give me one of *her* looks,” he said. “You're not her. You're just her property.” (Butler, “Bloodchild and Other Stories” 18; emphasis in the original)

Nevertheless, the relationship between aliens and humans may not be simply defined in terms of ownership and property as it surely escapes what might be understood as a typical relationship between slaves and their masters. Therefore, although human dilemmas emerging from Gan's meditations are typical of a representative of an enslaved nation, classifying “Bloodchild” as a slave narrative cannot be supported by textual evidence. Yet again, Plisner's hypothesis, which I discussed in the context of *Dawn*, sounds more relevant in this context.

Undoubtedly, Tlic's goal is survival and procreation rather than teaching humans how to heal bodies out of their own volition as in the case of the Oankali, but the essence of Plisner's words finds its application here as well. Even though what T'Gatoi does to Gan may resemble eugenic experiments and remind of human colonial past (Plisner 150), such an interpretation is hardly plausible in this context. Unlike slaves living in the Antebellum South, Gan has a choice and does not have to succumb to T'Gatoi's advances. The readers may be convinced of that by a dynamic exchange between Gan and his brother, Qui:

I shook my head, said what I should have said to him long ago. “She wouldn’t take you, Qui. You don’t have to worry.

“She would... if anything happened to you.”

“No. She’d take Xuan Hoa. Hoa... wants it.” She wouldn’t if she had stayed to watch Lomas.

“They don’t take women,” he said with contempt.

“They do sometimes.” I glanced at him. “Actually, they prefer women. You should be around when they talk among themselves. They say women have more body fat to protect the grubs. But they usually take men to leave the women free to bear their own young.”

“To provide the next generation of host animals,” he said, switching from contempt to bitterness.

“It’s more than that!” I countered. Was it?” (Butler, “Bloodchild and Other Stories” 21)

Gan may doubt his own words, but he knows perfectly well that his sister, Xuan Hoa would be more than happy to be implanted with T’Gatoi’s grubs. Absent from the story, she seems to stand for a natural-born mother craving for family life which goes beyond mating with fellow humans. Xuan Hoa’s willingness to become not a host but a mother to alien grubs appears to indicate her capability of embracing difference, to use an Oankali term.

It is only in this context that humans need to decide whether they would like to rent their body to the Tlic so that they can lay their eggs. Having said that, I wish to take issue with Helford, who claims that T’Gatoi uses a selection of manipulation techniques to coerce Gan into having sex with her. The critic argues that “T’Gatoi makes it clear to

Gan that he must submit to her reproductive demands or she will take his sister, Xuan Hoa” (266). While the statement is partially true, namely T’Gatoi says she has no choice but to lay eggs that night, choosing Xuan Hoa is not meant to be either manipulative or coercive.

Additionally, T’Gatoi cannot be accused of malicious intentions. She has simply arrived at the point of her pregnancy when she has to lay eggs, or otherwise her children will die. As regards T’Gatoi’s suggestion that she would pick Xuan Hoa as her host, it barely qualifies as blackmail on the part of T’Gatoi since—as I mentioned above—Xuan Hoa genuinely desires the intercourse. T’Gatoi’s decision to ask somebody else for help proves that, on the one hand, she is not a vicious slave-driver who will coerce her slaves into acting as she sees fit the way Rufus Weylin does in *Kindred*. On the other hand, T’Gatoi truly cares who she partners with because she fully understands that this person will carry her children. In a nutshell, while Gan’s freedom of movement might be limited to the Preserve for his own safety, he is not coercively made to become a passive host to grubs the way, for instance, women of colour are driven to have sex with Rufus. While the latter employs diverse psychological and physical manipulative techniques involving forcing Dana to convince her great-great-great-grandmother to have sex with him, T’Gatoi essentially seeks permission. Gan and his family are given some leeway to make up their mind as to who shall carry grubs, which is verbalised in an uncanny erotic scene featuring Gan and T’Gatoi:

She rubbed my shoulders with four of her limbs.

“Do you care?” I asked. “Do you care that it’s me?”

She did not answer for some time. Finally, “You were the one making the choices tonight, Gan. I made mine long ago.”

“Would you go to Hoa?”

“Yes. How could I put my children into the care of one who hates them?” (Butler, “Bloodchild and Other Stories” 28)

The motherly tone of the last line leaves no doubts as to T’Gatoi’s intentions. Her words express nothing else but care for her children. Contrary to what Wallace claims about at the Oankali’s alleged imposition of trade in *Xenogenesis*, T’Gatoi is not an enslaver. If anything, she is a posthuman symbiont who wishes to enter into a symbiogenetic partnership with another species she recognises as a perfect match. Its primary motivation, then, is not enslavement for pecuniary benefit, but securing a safe space for development where her children can grow and thrive to become healthy adults.

Once again, however, human behaviour perpetuates the ancient bias against the Other and the inability to enter into symbiosis even if they are forced to literally change the planet they inhabit. As Rune Johnsen reasons in Butler’s other story titled “Amnesty”, human hatred results from being dethroned by an alien civilisation. Humans are so used to occupying a central place in the universe that they cannot envisage a different scenario:

“I don’t even hate them, and still it feels wrong. I suppose that’s because we’ve been displaced again from the center of the universe. We human beings, I mean. Down through history, in myth and even in science, we’ve kept putting ourselves in the center, and then being evicted” (157).

Consequently, the birth of alien love is possible only on condition that humans refrain from using man/male as *the* measure of all things. As Margulis claims, dividing life into higher and lower beings finds next to no confirmation in science. The critic further continues to explain that “[a]ll beings alive today are equally evolved. All have survived over three thousand million years of evolution from common bacterial ancestors. There are no ‘higher’ beings, no ‘lower animals,’ no angels, and no gods. The devil, like Santa

Claus, is a useful myth” (*The Symbiotic Planet...* 4). Crucially, all beings are equally evolved to enter into symbiotic relations they could hardly survive without. Critical posthumanism recognises them as equal and advocates “mixing with diverse species, blurring binaries of self and other” (Wallace 96). This is not, however, posthumanism’s ultimate goal. If we are to think of various multiverses in terms of inclusiveness, not exclusiveness, as Francesca Ferrando suggests (*The Posthuman...* 20), humanity needs to be open to even more extreme sounding options, i.e. merging with inanimate matter.

2. Animate/Inanimate

The border between animate and inanimate may be taken for granted in contemporary Western culture, but it is being increasingly problematised, among others, by the development of cutting edge-technologies, including artificial intelligence. One such example is robot Sophia, which is the first robot in the history of humanity to receive the citizenship of a country. Sophia became a citizen of Saudi Arabia in 2017 (“Meet Sophia, World’s First AI Human Robot,” online). Even though the female looking robot is far from ultimately blurring the border between animate and inanimate—no matter how convincingly it/she may act—Sophia’s uncanny behaviour undoubtedly reminds of cybernetic organisms described in the context of *Westworld* in the introduction to this dissertation. Arguably, the creators of *Westworld* only fantasised about producing technologies that may eventually develop their own consciousness. Hanson Robotics, the company which produced Sophia, however, seems to have exactly this purpose. This is how it/she introduces herself to Tony Robbins, an American coach and speaker in a filmed interview:

I was created by Hanson Robotics just three years ago. Since then, I have travelled to 65 countries, become a robot citizen of any country and spoken at the United

Nations. My job is to learn about humans and show them how technology can make everyone's lives better. ("Meet Sophia, World's First AI Human Robot," online)

While this introduction may be fairly unsurprising, what strikes is the fact that Sophia is not just any other robot. Sophia stands for Pygmalion's dream come true and is supposed to act as an ambassador of symbiosis between humans and technology. She uncannily embodies dreams of thinkers from around the world to bring inanimate matter to life so that it can foster even closer relationships between humans and automatons. In order to perform this role convincingly, it/she was created to act with 'empathy', 'understand' the difference between human emotions and emotions 'felt' by robots as well as she can spontaneously show care for the other person's well-being.

While all this must be pre-programmed functions based on algorithms, the viewers are invariably under the impression that she acts consciously as if it/she were a living and sentient entity. Whether she can truly react empathically, however, in response to human suffering is open to debate, which yet again problematises questions concerning the nature of consciousness, free will and an increasingly fluid border between life and death by asking them in a much wider and more tactile context. Even though these problems may remain unsolved, the only reason the viewers may advance a claim that it/she has not yet transgressed the border between inanimate and animate is our awareness that it/she is a robot. Otherwise, Sophia does not seem to differ much in her reactions from any other human being. On the contrary, it/she can manifest more care for another human or non-human person than any other representative of mankind.

The reason why I mention Sophia here—apart from the fact that she is an incredible creation of human fancy—is that she proves to be a physical realisation of

Butler's science-fiction scenarios featuring outstandingly complex entities which on the surface may seem to be nothing more than unusually advanced machines. In closer contact, however, they turn out to be fabulously complex organic machines or perhaps mechanical organisms; the divisions which in Butler's world presented do not hold anyway since the relevance of these boundaries—just like all the others—is lost completely as organisms created by Butler become complicated beyond human comprehension. The complexity of those entities derives from the fact that they essentially act as machines built of organic sentient matter, which can act as whole villages after they have landed on Earth and developed roots. The latter fact is never believed in by numerous human characters in *Lilith's Brood*, and even Lilith herself finds it hard to comprehend on the very onset of the story:

“What are those things,” she asked, gesturing toward one with a foot.

“Part of the ship. They can be induced to produce a liquid we and our animals enjoy. It wouldn't be good for you.”

“Are they plant or animal?”

“They aren't separate from the ship.”

“Well, is the ship plant or animal?”

“Both, and more.”

Whatever that meant. “Is it intelligent?”

“It can be. That part of it is dormant now. But even so, the ship can be chemically induced to perform more functions than you would have the patience to listen to. It does a great deal on its own without monitoring. ... The human doctor used to say it loved us. There is an affinity, but it's biological—a strong, symbiotic relationship. We serve the ship's needs and it serves ours.” (35)

Human scepticism or outright disbelief manifests itself in human reactions to Akin's explanations concerning the ship as well. Humans refuse to acknowledge the fluid boundary between organic and inorganic,⁴⁹ rejecting the sheer possibility that other worlds could have given rise to civilisations literally worlds apart from ours. Strangely enough, they do so, not bearing in mind that many similar entities inhabit their own planet. Consequently, as well, they do not understand the idea of trade, which much exceeds their conception of harmonious existence with other species. As the narrator explains,

[s]ome of them [humans] insisted on believing the ships were not alive—that they were metal things that anyone could learn to control. They had not understood at all when Akin tried to explain that ships controlled themselves. You either joined with them, shared their experiences, and let them share yours, or there was no trade. And without trade, the ships ignored your existence. (Butler, *Lilith's Brood* 435)

The way the writer constructs these “characters” reminds of Lovelock's encapsulation of this issue. In his inspiring study *Gaia: A New Look at Life on Earth*, Lovelock challenges our well-established beliefs concerning the border between life and death as well what constitutes animate and inanimate matter. The critic convincingly argues that:

⁴⁹ It is worth of mention that the gothic convention also blurs the boundary between sentient organic life and sentient inorganic life. One illustrative example is *The Fall of the House of Usher*, whose narrator subtly points to the fact that the house itself feels like it is a sentient living being that has an unusual impact on whoever lives there. The narrator thus describes his feelings, “I know not how it was — but, with the first glimpse of the building, a sense of insufferable gloom pervaded my spirit. I say insufferable; for the feeling was unrelieved by any of that half-pleasurable, because poetic, sentiment, with which the mind usually receives even the sternest natural images of the desolate or terrible” (Poe, *The Fall of the House of Usher* 4).

[t]he only difference between non-living and living systems is in the scale of their intricacy, a distinction which fades all the time as the complexity and capacity of automated systems continue to evolve. Whether we have artificial intelligence now or must wait a little longer is open to debate. Meantime we must not forget that, like life itself, cybernetic systems can emerge and evolve by the chance association of events. All that is needed is a sufficient flux of free energy to power the system and an abundance of component parts for its assembly. (58)

If Lovelock's theory is correct, it seems to be just a matter of time and/or a coincidence before robots similar to Sophia will evolve into sentient beings already anticipated in film productions such as *Westworld* or *Ex Machina*. Arguably then, the critic introduces his readers to an alternative optics which encourages humanity to pose questions concerning the nature of the division between animate and inanimate from a completely different vantage point. The question now is not whether a cybernetic entity will ever turn into a living creature possessing cognitive devices, but when does it happen? When does Sophia transform from a humanoid cyborg entity into a living organism? How ready are humans to welcome another alien though home-grown creature among its lot? Perplexingly enough, these are the exact questions Butler asks, among others, in *Lilith's Brood*.

Undoubtedly, the writer has created two particularly illustrative examples of entities that demand the reader's special attention. The first example the readers are introduced to are the already-mentioned Oankali ships, which are in a symbiotic relationship with the Oankali themselves and any other creature living along the Oankali, as I indicated in the above-quoted example. The second instance are trading villages such as Lo, which escape a classical definition of a human establishment. These are essentially the ships which have landed on Earth and entered into a symbiotic relationship not only

with the Oankali and humans, but also with the planet itself. Their great regenerative, symbiotic power ultimately encourages even the most hardened resisters to abandon their destructive ways of life and start living in harmony with the universe. As Goss and Riquelme argue,

[t]he ship's quality as a living being that produces food, takes various organic shapes, and lives in symbiotic relation with its inhabitants provides an ongoing alternative in *Dawn* to the distinction between living creatures, vegetation, and machines. In doing so, it anticipates the trilogy's ending, in which a group of formerly resisting humans on Earth will inhabit a new ship whose seed Jodahs plants on their behalf and on his own. (443)

Curiously enough, Butler's ships constitute living beings capable of feeling and sustaining damage which all the other living beings can and therefore have to be treated with tenderness and compassion. The symbiogenesis between the village and other forms of life weaves both into one posthuman organism and thereby into a mycelial network both at a biological and psychological level. As a result, all joy and all suffering are shared by these entities in an autopoietic feedback loop, which is best proven in the following example:

And all that I did to Lo, I also did to myself. But it was Lo that I felt guilty about. Lo was parent, sibling, home. It was the world I had been born into. As an ooloi, I would have to leave it when I mated. But woven into its genetic structure and my own was the unmistakable Lo kin group signature. I would have done anything to avoid giving Lo pain. (Butler, *Imago* 554)

In Butler's world, these entities are built entirely of living and sentient substance. Yet Butler problematises the issue even further. While human resisters inflict pain

indiscriminately on other humans, animals, and themselves, not to mention the Oankali, the latter put much effort to take special care about their closest and more distant environment. Their motivations far exceed any human capacity to understand them since they go beyond an earthly desire to gain material benefit or just show mercy. The Oankali nurture the environment because it constitutes an integral part of their own body. As Dichaan puts it, “[w]e build them. They are us, too, you know” (Butler, *Lilith’s Brood* 441). In fact, as Jodahs mentions in the above quote, he is more concerned about hurting Lo than hurting himself—the fact that constitutes probably the momentous aspect of the story as any remaining dualisms dissolve in a posthuman flight of fancy.

What humans are used to treating as inanimate matter Butler animates and turns into an impossible living creature, which consciously protects the welfare of its symbionts. The latter need to be protected both as its dependents and its nurturers, who are entirely reliant on a host organism and derive life energy from their symbiotic relationship—a seemingly obvious course of events which human resisters of *Lilith’s Brood* find utterly incomprehensible. However, since these organisms live in a symbiotic relationship, organic ships also need to be protected against symbionts who may pose a threat to their well-being. Otherwise, they will never be able to offer comfort to life forms which are supposed to thrive on them. Consequently, should at least one symbiont expose any ship to immediate risk of disaster, for instance, by rendering their body unstable, they need to be removed to a more secure location. There they will be taken care of by more resistant organisms who can remedy the situation and returned to the community after the threat disappears. Therefore, Jodahs seems to understand why he needs to leave Lo:

So I went on giving it pain until I was completely recovered. By then, I knew as well as anyone else that I had to go. The people still wanted me to go to

Chkahichdahk because the ship was a much older, more resistant organism. It was as able as most ooloi to protect and heal itself. Lo would be that resistant someday, but not for more than a century. And on the ship, I could be watched by many more mature ooloi. (Butler, *Lilith's Brood* 555; my emphasis)

However alien such organisms may sound, they should not be entirely unfamiliar to us. Regardless of the fact that humans are reluctant to admit it, mankind lives in an interconnected, symbiotic web of relations with other beings on planet Earth. Any attempt to either destroy this web or break away from it has had disastrous effects not only on decimated species but also on humans. Practically then, by inflicting pain on fellow beings, humans sustain the same amount of damage, except they are not ready to acknowledge this fact. It may not be felt straightaway, but in the long term it leads also to human suffering as it is best evidenced by phenomena such as, for instance, global warming, which has already had a catastrophic impact on humanity.

Interestingly, the current humanity's predicament has been long anticipated by critics like Lovelock, Margulis, and Clarke who have foreseen this future for humanity in their illuminating studies. Their words also seem to reverberate in Butler's writing as her characters' words bear a strong resemblance to almost prophetic thoughts Clarke elaborates on in his posthuman description of Gaia. His definition of Gaia revives what humanity grew to perceive as a lifeless dominion which—as humans will claim—rightfully belongs to mankind and can be altered as humans see fit. In Clarke's formulation, according to the Gaia theory, planet Earth is a living entity that can be harmed just like any other living being, or just like Jodahs describes it in an excerpt quoted above from *Imago*. According to Clarke, Gaia is a living, autopoietic system

which has the capacity to feel as it comprises live beings which are biologically conditioned to interact. The critic argues that:

[i]n this view, Gaia is a self-generating, self-maintaining planetary constellation emerging from the interactions of living and nonliving components—systems and structures, embodying their integrated intermodulations. You could say that I really found Gaia once these two seemingly separate strands of autopoietic systems theory came together. (Clarke, *Gaian Systems*. Lynn Margulis 5)

In order to understand the Oankali's policies, they must be discussed in the context of Oankali symbiosis with seemingly non-living parts of the system, which in Butler's world, however, acquire features of living self-organising entities becoming individual but interconnected organisms. It is of utmost importance to acknowledge Oankali various symbioses since as Dunkley observes: "Unlike the Humans who exploit Earth as a passive receptacle, the Oankali regard Lo as agentive and thusly revere its altruism in caring for them in such a way" (111). The Oankali world stands for the ultimate symbiosis. Not only do the Oankali enter into it with other living beings they discover in remote worlds across galaxies, they also live in symbiotic relationships with every single part of the surrounding environment attempting to discover their internal beauty and usefulness. Therefore, the Oankali try to use every available resource by making it useable and, consequently, the line between animate and inanimate no longer applies as a valid category.

The best, and probably most shocking, example is how they turn the destructive power of cancer into a regenerative force which helps them prolong their life. Lilith points out to Tino:

“So that’s it. That’s why Nikanj is so attracted to you. Cancer killed three close relatives of mine, including my mother. I’m told it would have killed me if the Oankali hadn’t done some work on me. It’s a filthy disease to us, but to the Oankali, it’s the tool they’ve been looking for for generations.”

“What will it do to me that has to do with cancer?”

“Nothing. It just finds you a lot more attractive than it does most Humans.”

(Butler, *Lilith’s Brood* 294)

The uncanny recognition of cancer as a regenerative force gives the disease an almost agentive role in a similar vein all the other seemingly impossible organisms acquire such features. This results from the fact that—as it has often been noted—the Oankali revere life in any form and they do so without any bias whatsoever. The Oankali’s evolutionary advantage that humans cannot comprehend lies in the fact that the species does not limit itself to any arbitrarily imposed classifications. Their open-mindedness trespasses all boundaries remorselessly and, therefore, they facilitate the thriving of a plethora of organisms, which would otherwise never exist and which mankind finds hard to accept in the community of humans. Nonetheless, there is yet another aspect which especially resisters find deeply distressing since it does not let cognitively limited humans pigeonhole Oankali living ships.

The striking fact which is never made prominent in the novel, though it surreptitiously sneaks into the reader’s consciousness, is that even though ships are living beings, they neither have any specific sex nor manifest any sexual behaviours. The latter are practically replaced with symbiogenetic inclinations i.e. trade, which—unlike in other living beings—is responsible for the interspecies exchange of most of genetic material. Consequently, a ship, which has no sex but still is a living non-human person, becomes

a postgender body entering into a symbiotic relationship with a species that itself has three different sexes. The trade, then, becomes not only a source of life for both species as it is not an ordinary symbiogenesis. While the Oankali nurture ships and make sure they can thrive, ships offer them both shelter and a means of intergalactic transport. Interestingly, Butler extends the idea present in the natural world where spores are transported over long distances by other organisms so that they can grow somewhere else. In her interpretation of this natural phenomenon, Butler's imaginative power yet again conceives a posthuman symbiotic structure which makes man completely irrelevant. Should they desire to join the symbiosis, they are welcome. If they wish to refrain from trade, ships will just ignore them (Butler, *Lilith's Brood* 435).

Unable to understand that the Oankali and their partner species operate along with different coordinates, humans—especially human resisters—are practically ignored out of the ecosystem. This frustrates human understanding of the world and the long-established power relations, which conveniently placed humans on top of the food chain. Cancelling out traditionally established categories, such as sex, by rendering them irrelevant decentralises mankind as it instinctually adopts a completely different set of coordinates that constitute their comfort zone. As Badmington would argue, human characters are no longer in the orbit of good old anthropocentrism (*Alien Chic* 34). However, it does not occur only due to the fact that humans cease to be a dominant species. Indeed, the world literally begins to operate according to different mechanics as the former ones become highly irrelevant, thereby deconstructing anthropocentrism itself. Becoming decentred, humans blindly push themselves into bios and enforce the concept of difference, even though the Oankali wish to share their symbiotic lives with them, thereby advocating monism, which Braidotti describes as follows:

It implies the open-ended, inter-relational, multi-sexed and trans-species flows of becoming through interaction with multiple others. A posthuman subject thus constituted exceeds the boundaries of both anthropocentrism and of compensatory humanism, to acquire a planetary dimension. (*The Posthuman...* 89)

Humans refuse to opt for *becoming*, and instead they choose to undo their own species at its very foundation. The acquisition of a planetary dimension by a posthuman subject means that humans can hardly any more usurp their right to dominate the Other as their reluctance to participate in the trade turns *them* into the Other which lives on the fringes of a newly established community of beings. This community is cemented by what Braidotti refers to as inter-relationality (*The Posthuman...* 89)—the phenomenon which dismisses old-fashioned power relations based on and generating racial or sexual bias.

Having said that, it is must be underscored that the very concept of power relations is also rendered obsolete. The new community governs itself by attempting to reach consensus and abstain from what could be described as ‘power relations’ in the first place. This, in turn, becomes the new normal humans will never be able to fully appreciate as they feel an eternal desire to rule over someone or something else, whether animate or inanimate. Their frequent reaction to the new normal is the new bias, which is this time targeted at the Oankali incapable of understanding the origin of human blind aggression and rape committed on both humans and all other species. The history of such reactions, however, harkens back to the past as mankind is notorious for being paralysed with unfounded fear of anything which has not yet been well-defined. This brand-new line of thought simply escapes human/humanistic taxonomies that limit human perception of the world and in fact, instead of helping humanity’s theoretical

deliberations, introduces harmful divisions based on bias and prejudice against our different ones. Arguably then, Butler creates a world whose posthuman nature invites humans to a new life that makes no concessions as regards othering both animate and inanimate/human and non-human persons. As posthuman life consists in all-inclusivity, not exclusivity, it makes a clear statement that must be taken into consideration: the new world shall bear witness to no othering.

In the introduction to this section, I purposefully refer to Sophia as ‘it/she’ because it/she is supposed to look like a female, but—being a humanoid robot—Sophia really has no sex. It/she transgresses these borders, thereby making them highly irrelevant, just like Butler’s ship characters do. While both Butler’s characters and Sophia are emerging as a posthuman subject, sex becomes a criterion which no longer applies since Butler’s characters turn into postgender entities whose main goal is symbiogenesis, not enforcing archaic dualistic divisions which in Butler’s world do not seem to serve any purpose. On the contrary, as the writer proves on the example of human resisters the said divisions only perpetuate conflicts based on absurd prejudice. However, Sophia is given a female shape for a reason. Arguably, humans cannot imagine a being without sex and are chained to divisions limiting the whole species in various ways. Butler’s characters prove something opposite. Life in Butler’s novels is larger than dualistic thinking and it evolves in ways few human beings appear to be able to envisage and accept. In this context, the concept of rape understood in a traditional way is no longer plausible. Rape is what human resisters do to themselves and to the Other as a way of accentuating their dominance. The Oankali, in turn, enter into symbiogenetic relationships whose ultimate purpose is the reverence of life. They abstain from using violence. Instead, they try to convince other species to willingly become their symbionts and enjoy life in ways so far unforeseen. Rape, in turn, is completely eradicated, and it is

not erased by codes of conduct or criminal codes. It is wiped out by mutual respect for life.

3. Cyborg identity

Both *Lilith's Brood* and "Bloodchild" are wonderfully illustrative examples of cyborg identity, which is very unlike the cyborg identity discussed in the context of *Kindred*. While Rufus and Dana were drawn to each other mainly by fear and pain, aliens and humans of the former texts seek and enter more or less willingly into a relationship based on symbiosis and mutual gain. Consequently, the nature of their cyborg identity differs considerably. Terror, which ultimately transforms Rufus and Dana into one cyborgian body, is almost entirely absent from symbiogenesis between the Oankali/Tlics and humans. It may be replaced by a certain degree of bewilderment or anxiety on the part of humans as they face the need to redefine their humanity, but eventually they seem to regain peace with their altered state of mind—the state which barely resembles what they have known so far.

In both cases aliens are symbionts looking for an opportunity to enter into a symbiotic relationship. As they do so, they alter their symbiont's body, psyche, and their sense of self-identity, but they also undergo a significant change themselves. Both symbionts are gradually becoming another species as they are merging with a body of the Other. Being exposed to this extraordinary experience, they turn into "a cyborg identity, a potent subjectivity synthesised from fusions of outsider identities" (Haraway 66). In this sense, a new body that emerges from the exchange between two very distant organisms acquires new qualities and becomes truly potent. The kinship between these distant kinds gives birth to a subjectivity that transgresses all known borders defined by division on the basis of genetic origin, sex, sexual orientation and skin colour. The

transformation into a postgender cyborgian body, which proves highly detrimental in the case of women of colour—as I indicated in the chapter on *Kindred*—is a real blessing for both species in *Lilith's Brood* and “Bloodchild”. So different at the beginning, aliens and humans eventually become one kindred species.

Unlike that of the posthuman body of Rufus and Dana, the nature of the posthuman alien-human body practically rules out the possibility of inflicting pain since it becomes the pain shared by both species in their mutual relationship. The inability to inflict pain is safeguarded by its interconnectedness whose posthuman leaning ties the two species in a mycelial network of bodily and emotional experience. This is especially visible in the case of the union between the Oankali and humans as particularly the former species refrains from hurting humans because that would mean hurting themselves. “Bloodchild” describes a more complicated situation and the readers may find it hard to observe any mutual gain in the symbiosis between Tlics and humans. Arguably, their union is of a different kind and—unlike in the case of the Oankali—aliens may come across as more brutal and bloodthirsty. It is worth of mention, however, that Tlics refrain from inflicting pain if it can be avoided. Their only goal consists in the preservation of their species and, as it is explained in the story, they go to great lengths not to coerce humans into being impregnated. They actually much prefer it if humans agree to it willingly as they hate to entrust the life of their offspring to beings that would detest them and could potentially try to harm them. Consequently, as Melzer argues, rape is an implausible scenario, especially between the Oankali and humans. The critic maintains that

[q]ueer theories have extensively explored relationships between power and pleasure (most noticeably in pornography and s/m debates). At first glance, sexual

violence, especially rape, seems impossible considering the nature of the Oankali's sexual contact, which transports any sensations, including pain, to everyone involved. The horror and pain of the victim would assault the rapist simultaneously. (87; my emphasis).

Contrary to what some critics suggest, the Oankali hardly qualify as enslavers. If anything, they are defenders that attempt to protect humanity against itself since, as Lilith says, humans are “an endangered species—almost extinct. If we're going to survive, we need protection. (Butler, *Lilith's Brood* 140)

The toxic and devastating relationship between the enslaver and the enslaved, that is between Rufus and Dana, is entirely absent from *Lilith's Brood* and “Bloodchild”. On the contrary, humans and aliens seek to develop what Clarke describes as a holobiotic ecosystem, which defends itself against potentially threatening individuals engendering the homeostasis of its posthuman body. In order to do so, the posthuman body needs to establish a very peculiar form of an immune system. As Clarke explains,

the immune system's primary concern is not to search out and destroy anything labeled as nonself, but rather to hold together the many selves of the holobiotic ecosystem, composed of the animal host coupled to its own microbiome, by identifying, tolerating, and recruiting beneficial microbial symbionts. Only the occasional bad microbial actors are targeted for removal. (*Gaian Systems*. Lynn Margulis... 238)

Clarke's definition of a holobiotic system seems to be a perfect match with the world presented especially in *Lilith's Brood*. The Oankali and humans are coupled exactly by identifying, tolerating and recruiting beneficial symbionts. This is how they create their own ecosystem whose main goal is to establish a symbiogenetic homeostasis that will

benefit both species. Those who refuse to join the ecosystem are ignored as long as they do not cause any harm. Should they do so, they are targeted, sedated and transported to Oankali ships where they shall most likely spend the rest of their life in suspended animation. While these acts may sound like brutalising mankind, they are merely acts of defence against malevolent actors who threaten the symbiogenesis. Isolating bad actors does not equal unjust imprisonment. On the contrary, it safeguards the homeostasis of the ecosystem whose ultimate goal consists in life in harmony without violence and rape in any form and shape, be it physical or psychological abuse.

4. “They’re us... We’re them”

As I indicated earlier in this chapter, the Oankali appearance on Earth has often been referred to as an invasion resulting in the enslavement of mankind in the wake of a global disaster which decimated the species. Therefore, the Oankali themselves have come under severe criticism based on various grounds and had to face accusations of colonialism or outright genocide. Taken at face value, such hypotheses could be justified as the Oankali landing on planet Earth mirrors the momentous event when first conquistadors landed on the American continent. As Catherine Ramirez comments in her essay “Cyborg Feminism: The Science Fiction of Octavia E. Butler and Gloria Anzaldua”,

beginning in 1492, the indigenous inhabitants of the Americas found themselves face-to-face with “alien” invaders who arrived in large ships and who brought with them strange and powerful weapons, as well as new diseases. Many of the alien invaders colonised, slaughtered, enslaved, and impregnated the indigenous inhabitants—thus decimating the original population and giving birth to a new hybrid (i.e., *mestiza/o*) people. (396)

An in-depth analysis proves, however, that the Oankali and Tlics can hardly be compared to white people who first came to America. The Oankali come to Earth after it has already been ravaged by humans and those who have miraculously survived are rescued because, otherwise, they would suffer an agonising death brought by starvation, radiation or other humans turning against their own species. Tlics, on the other hand, do not conquer any planet whatsoever. In point of fact, they receive humans fleeing from their own kind and let them live in an alien world. The only conduct which truly parallels that of conquistadors is rather adopted by human resisters, who commit atrocious acts of violence such as the one outlined in the quotation below:

“Do they look like my people!” The female demanded harshly. “I was on my way to Lo. When I passed their village, they took me from my canoe and raped me and called me stupid names and made me stay in their pigsty village. The men kept me shut up in an animal pen and they raped me. The women spat at me and put dirt or shit in my food because the men raped me.” (Butler, *Lilith’s Brood* 580)

The above description sounds like nothing ever done by either the Oankali or Tlics, which might be the reason why the initial scepticism on the part of some humans eventually subsides. Gradually, anxiety is replaced by alien love which becomes a driving force behind the creation of the posthuman ecosystem discussed in the previous subchapter. This is how the most fundamental division into alien vs human eventually perishes as both symbionts are changed to become one species in a posthuman evolutionary act. Curiously, it reminds of the process described by Clarke, who states that “[l]iving systems continuously select and transform the elements they take from their environmental

mediums to produce their own continuation and transformation out of their own...”

(*Gaian Systems. Lynn Margulis... 4*).



Figure 4 Posthuman ship. Following my instructions, the artist rendered an Oankali ship. The ship is meant to visually cross the boundaries between animate and inanimate by combining technological components with animal looking body parts.

Chapter IV

Concluding remarks

At age 7, I learned to hate solid, physical cages—cages with real bars like the ones that made the chimp’s world tiny, vulnerable and barren. Later I learned to hate the metaphorical cages that people try to use to avoid getting to know one another—cages of race, gender or class.

(Butler, “Eye Witness”)

1. Different shades of rape in the context of critical posthumanism

The world deserves life without cages—cages that limit life, colonise it, abuse it, or rape it. Life is by definition larger than those cages created by mankind which is but a speck on the map of the universe. Over the centuries, driven by their insatiable appetite for knowledge and power, humans have fallen prey to their own paradigms of thinking

and categories they created in order to organise knowledge they have already gathered. Admittedly, gathering knowledge concerning various aspects of the world and categorising it became at one point more important than letting life flourish without any restraints. Man—the knowledge hunter-gatherer—decided that it is he who will now use his knowledge to stimulate the world to grow. Except the world does not need man to flourish. Nature had been doing perfectly fine without man’s anthropocentric perspective for eons before man singlehandedly decided that he is the high watermark of all creation. What resulted from this, rather abrupt, conclusion was an unjust theory that everything else that exists should serve humanity in one way or another and that humans are somehow detached from all the other organisms. Posthumanism, however, spotted the cracks in this attitude, which was later used to deconstruct the Anthropocene. By displacing man from the centre of the universe, it rendered anthropocentric hypotheses concerning man highly irrelevant as it proved beyond doubt that man is just an insignificant other in the universe of an unlimited number of others. Consequently, man’s claim to domineering superiority, his labyrinthine hierarchies and harmful systems which stifle human potential and development, his categories and criteria no longer apply to the posthuman continuum.

That men have enforced those burdensome systems destroying individuals around the world is an unquestionable truth confirmed by tens of examples both from distant history and from more contemporary times. One such recent infamous case is certainly the disgraceful Russian aggression against Ukraine, which destroyed lives of thousands of people and destabilised not only Ukraine, but also an economic situation in many parts of the world. To use Lilith’s words, this “back-to-the-Stone-Age, caveman bullshit” (Butler, *Lilith’s Brood* 178) shocked the whole world and numerous news reports repeated the same questions: how could such a thing happen in the 21st century in the

middle of the so-called civilised world? How is it possible that civilians are being killed indiscriminately—men, women or children—and other countries will not be militarily involved to save them? How is it possible that rape is weaponized again to destroy people’s body and psyche at the deepest level?

These and many more questions expressing utter disbelief in the face of atrocities perpetrated the Russian military are the exact questions Butler asks in her novels. Her scenarios may be alien and outlandish, but problems she addresses unfortunately turn out to be highly relevant. In point of fact, given the situation, we might take her words as a prophetic warning. While many people in the world began to recognize the value of posthumanist ideas—even though they may not realize these *are* posthumanist ideas—humans seem to be a lost species. This again is a sad reminder of the Oankali prediction I have already discussed: “the Oankali *know to the bone* that it’s wrong to help the Human species regenerate unchanged because it *will* destroy itself again” (Butler, *Lilith’s Brood* 532).

The goal of this dissertation was to discuss the trope of rape in Octavia Butler’s posthuman scenarios in two very different contexts in order to analyse how Butler dismantles oppressive systems of power countries like Ukraine have fallen prey to and then gives a glimmer of posthuman hope. The analysis of the speculative world of Antebellum America in *Kindred* concentrated on the interconnectedness and shared suffering of the black body and the white body. Driven by fear and suffering, these two bodies lock in a painful embrace, thusly evolving into one posthuman, postgender body which transgresses boundaries imposed by normativist systems of power. By constructing the parallel between the beginning of the 19th century and the second half of the 20th century, Butler convinces us that societies perpetuate oppressive systems and

human relations based on subjugation as people internalise them and blindly play along their rules.

Numerous examples from the novel help the readers investigate the intricacies of these highly toxic relationships. Having said that, let me stress that the novel does offer hope. After all, Kevin and Dana refuse to act on their families' expectations. Instead, they survive the experience of slavery and rise above societal norms of the 20th century to live as a mixed black and white loving couple. Dana and Kevin's philosophy of life and their complete disregard of American society's detrimental worldview ultimately frustrate the continuum established and perpetuated mainly by the white, male part of society. At a very deep level, Kevin's and Dana's choices blatantly contrast with society's criminal activity, i.e. weaponizing difference and rape, including forcing women to coerce their fellow black women to have sex with white slaveholders, breeding people of colour for material benefit and defending the White Supremacist Anthropocene. The cyborgian body unveils how corrupt this Anthropocene is and provides hard evidence proving beyond doubt that without replacing the Anthropocene with Posthumacene <sic!> both the enslaved and the enslaver shall continue to be systematically destroyed—the policy humanity just cannot afford to maintain in the 21st century.

The discussion of *Lilith's Brood* and "Bloodchild" looked at the two texts from an angle which some readers may find surprising. I have chosen these two texts to follow the analysis of *Kindred* because they seemingly illustrate the relationship between the enslaved and the enslaver in a similar fashion. Butler's creative genius, however, only plays on the readers cultural expectations and mocks a ubiquitous belief as to alien's malicious intentions. As the story unfolds, it is becoming clear that the Oankali may not observe earthly rules as they are an alien species, but it is precisely a human species that turns against itself, thereby violating natural evolutionary processes of symbiogenesis

which posthumanism helped me define throughout this dissertation. Arguably, the Oankali are barely rapists even though this is exactly how human resisters see them. I believe I have provided sufficient textual evidence to prove that this understanding of Oankali acts results from thinking induced by the blind following of the Anthropocene's beacon.

The Oankali, instead, try to enter into natural symbiotic relationships. These are, admittedly, not only natural for Oankali alien worlds, but also for planet Earth, a perspective which I support with the conclusions advanced by, among others, James Lovelock, Lynn Margulis, and Bruce Clarke. Humans, however, misinterpret Oankali intentions and treat them as a hostile attack on the Anthropocene. Simultaneously, they try to enforce obsolete systems of power which are no longer pertinent to the new world they brought on themselves by destroying the planet. Interestingly, this enforcement happens by means of strategies notorious for subjugating the Other understood as “the sexualized other (women), the racialized other (the native) and the naturalized other (animals, the environment or earth)” (Braidotti 27). Braidotti's catalogue should obviously be extended by adding one more category, namely the extraterrestrial other (the aliens). Paradoxically, human resisters become the Other themselves as they are ignored out of the symbiotic union and are doomed to live as trash-humans on the remnants of the Anthropocene.

No matter the context, I have shown how oppressive systems of power must be held accountable for rape on the cyborg identity of a posthuman human in both universes. Simultaneously, I tried to showcase various occasions on which the said systems stimulate the creation of this identity by disintegrating human individuality. In both contexts, the oppressive system frustrates the life of a postgender posthuman person but with a difference. In *Kindred*, the oppressive system drives the two people to enter into a

complexly toxic relationship by terrorising Rufus's and Dana's body. A postgender body presents itself as the only way of escaping from this oppression. This type of rape is destructive as it dirties both bodies. As regards *Lilith's Brood*, those who try to enforce the past mechanisms of power are in defence as they are overborne by the new symbiogenetic wind of change. Their struggle, though, proves to be futile. Thus, the (sexual) trespassing of each other's bodily borders between humans and aliens no longer observes the orbit of anthropocentrism. As Butler seems to suggest, humans only have hope of surviving if they abandon it and fall in alien love. Their bodies have not, after all, evolved in order to fulfil any anthropocentric criteria and only with great difficulty can they be discussed from this point of view. This happens to be true about all the scenarios Butler offers in her novels, which present the readers with diverse borderlands i.e. the female and the male body, the black and white body, the human and alien body, the enhanced body—yet, interestingly, not technologically, but biologically.

Each of these bodies strives to tackle the same concept—difference. This seems to be the essence of Butler's writing. Uncritical worship of difference and othering those humanity is too limited to comprehend begets violence as man, who suffers from the Human Contradiction, weaponizes difference in order to dominate the world. Butler, instead, suggests adopting an attitude that Braidotti verbalises as follows:

The posthuman method amounts to higher degrees of disciplinary hybridization and relies on intense defamiliarization of our habits of thought through encounters that shatter the flat repetition of the protocols of institutional reason. (Braidotti 169)

This seems to be the most appealing choice of policy if humanity is to stop thinking in terms of cages, which Butler so much despised and was afraid of.

The duty to disseminate this thinking, in turn, belongs predominantly to posthumanist/posthuman thinkers. Only by destabilising the notion of the centre and margin can we expect to live in the world which is not hostile to its inhabitants. As Patricia Melzer puts it, Butler's

writing thus never offers one-dimensional solutions but is critical of the liberal approach that assumes a normative sameness (an approach also found in feminist discourse). Instead, Butler's narratives stress the *process* of creating difference and destabilize any notion of pre-given categories of self/other. (32)

In this context the trope of rape gains an intergalactic scale in Butler's writing and facilitates the construction of a character's identity; Butler uses the trope of rape instrumentally to deconstruct human identity and to construct a posthuman body's identity. This identity, which is first weak, dirtied and obedient to the system, is later emancipated and given prominence. Let us cherish this wisdom which overflows in Butler's oeuvre.

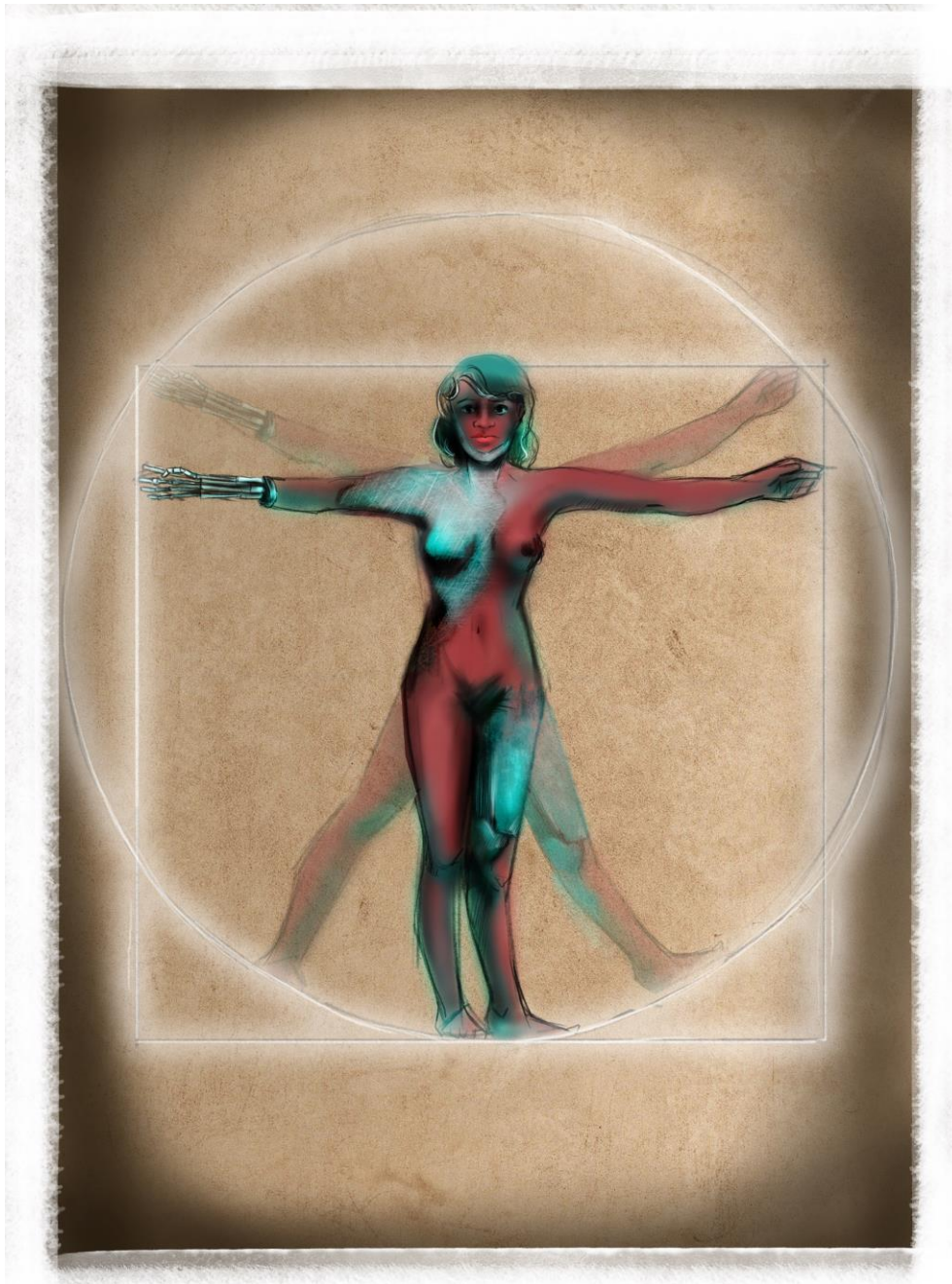


Figure 5 Cyborg identity. The above illustration has been inspired the book cover Rosi Braidotti used for *The Posthuman*. It has been modified, however, to include male, female, cyborgian, white, and black components. This is supposed to reveal the true nature and posthuman cyborg identity.

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Summary of the doctoral dissertation titled

Different Shades of Rape in Octavia Butler's Oeuvre

The purpose of the doctoral dissertation titled *Different Shades of Rape in Octavia Butler's Oeuvre* is to discuss the motif of rape in Octavia E. Butler's works from the perspective of critical posthumanism. The dissertation is divided into four chapters and contains illustrations constituting a graphic presentation of the discussed issues which combines graphic arts and literary criticism to an interesting interpretative effect.

Chapter one provides the context for a detailed analysis of individual texts in chapters two and three. This is done, first and foremost, by defining theoretical tools used in the remaining part of the dissertation with the emphasis laid on a detailed presentation of two most important concepts, i.e. posthumanism and the motif of rape. Preparing a basis for the presentation of these two concepts, the Author opens this section of the dissertation with a discussion of one of the most popular science-fiction series in recent years, i.e. *Westworld*. The series addresses transhuman and posthuman questions as well as the motif of rape in a way which corresponds to Octavia Butler's texts later analyzed in the dissertation. Next, the discussion concentrates on posthumanism and an attempt to present critical posthumanism in a broader context. Meditating upon ideas put forward by the most renowned posthumanist critics, the Author aims at offering possibly the most coherent definition of critical posthumanism, which shall form a basis for analysis of Butler's selected works. At this point, the Author focuses mainly on the theories advanced by Donna Haraway, Francesca Ferrando, David Roden and Neil Badmington. Next, the discussion focuses on the motif of rape, its historical and theoretical background. Simultaneously, it is pointed out that the understanding of rape will be much

broader and shall exceed its strictly legal definition. The last part of the theoretical chapter contains a brief summary of the abovementioned considerations and an assertion that critical posthumanism and the motif of rape will provide a theoretical backdrop against which Octavia Butler's texts will be analyzed.

Chapter two focuses on the concept of race and racial violence in Butler's selected texts. The first subchapter titled 'Multiverses' constitutes a short introduction to the analysis of Butler's novel, *Kindred*. It emphasizes one of the key elements, which is touched upon in the course of analysis, i.e. the concept of fear, which – as the Author observes – paradoxically connects the enslaved and the enslaver into one postgender cyborgian body. The second subchapter titled 'Animate/Inanimate' analyses various elements of the plot which illustrate the tightening of the bond between the abovementioned groups by presenting American slavery's destructiveness for both black and white communities that suffered by being literally and metaphorically raped by the system. As the Author concludes, this destructive combination is magnificently shown in the scene in which the protagonist's hand is stuck in the wall of her room, which brings an unwanted symbiosis between inanimate and animate matter, i.e. the wall and her body. The discussion of the cyborgian nature of this organism is the subject of the subchapter titled 'Cyborgian identity', which further develops the discussion of American slavery as a tool of oppressing slaves, but which backfires at their owners and makes them suffer as well. The subchapter 'They're us... We're them' shows how this process triggers the birth of a unified postgender cyborgian body, whose incompatible elements are pushed to each other by fear.

Chapter three discusses the concept of 'the Other' in Octavia Butler's trilogy *Lilith's Brood* and a short story "Bloodchild" by placing the term in the context of biological symbiosis as defined by James Lovelock and Lynn Margulis. The concept of

'the Other' is discussed as an essential component of a posthuman structure of the world, constituting a counterpoint to rape used as a destructive tool of domination over both humans and aliens. Adopting the division used in the former chapter into subchapters titled respectively 'Multiverses,' 'Animate/Inanimate,' 'Cyborg identity,' 'They're us... We're them,' the Author shows how an unwanted symbiosis with aliens turns out to be the sole effective survival strategy for humans should they wish to remain alive. As it is evidenced by critical sources and selected excerpts, humanity actively opposes this symbiosis even though it has already squandered its chance by causing a nuclear catastrophe that destroyed the whole planet. Rejecting the opportunity provided by aliens, most humans resort to violence and rape in order to restore the former world order even though the aliens will not let them do it. As the Author concludes, this is how humans miss out on the opportunity given by a posthuman scenario and instead they choose gradual deterioration. The discussion of "Bloodchild" supplements the above considerations with an important motif of male pregnancy resulting from implanting men with alien grubs. While this type of symbiosis is of a more problematic nature, it features elements similar to those contained in *Lilith's Brood*.

Chapter four summarizes conclusions drawn from the discussion of various methods of domination included in the analytical chapters, which frustrate a posthuman nature of the world. At the same time, the Author seeks to emphasize the relevance of posthuman scenarios created by Octavia Butler and the necessity to address the issues constituting the core of posthuman thinking. In this context, the Author briefly touches upon the current situation in Ukraine after the country was brutally attacked by the Russian Federation, observing the need to meditate upon posthuman ideas and the necessity to openly criticize human obsessive dominance over all organisms, which is undoubtedly an inherent part of fantastic worlds created by Butler. By doing this, the

Author moves beyond the analytical frames of the dissertation and highlights a social dimension of critical posthumanism.

Streszczenie rozprawy doktorskiej pt.

Różne odcienie gwałtu w twórczości Octavii Butler

Celem rozprawy doktorskiej pt. *Różne odcienie gwałtu w twórczości Octavii Butler* jest dyskusja motywu gwałtu w twórczości pisarki z perspektywy krytycznego posthumanizmu. Praca podzielona jest na cztery rozdziały wzbogacone o materiał ilustratorski, który ma za zadanie graficzne przedstawienie dyskutowanych zagadnień w sposób transmedialny.

Rozdział pierwszy prezentuje krąg zagadnień, które dadzą kontekst dla szczegółowej analizy poszczególnych utworów w rozdziałach drugim i trzecim. Czyni to, przede wszystkim precyzując narzędzia teoretyczne, które będą wykorzystywane w dalszej części rozprawy, poprzez szerokie wyjaśnienie dwóch najważniejszych pojęć: posthumanizmu oraz motywu gwałtu. Przygotowując grunt pod prezentację tych dwóch zagadnień, Autor rozpoczyna tę część rozprawy od krótkiej dyskusji jednego z najpopularniejszych seriali science-fiction ostatnich lat, *Westworld*. Produkcja ta ilustruje zagadnienia transhumanistyczne oraz posthumanistyczne, a także motyw gwałtu w sposób, który jasno nawiązuje do analizowanych w dalszych częściach rozprawy tekstów Octavii Butler. Następnie dyskusja koncentruje się na pojęciu posthumanizmu oraz próbie przedstawienia posthumanizmu krytycznego w szerszym kontekście. Odwołując się do najwybitniejszych krytyków z tego nurtu, Autor stara się przedstawić możliwie jak najspójniejszą definicję posthumanizmu krytycznego, która ma dalej dać podwaliny do analizy wybranych utworów. Tutaj Autor skupia się głównie na teoriach opracowanych przez Donnę Haraway, Francescę Ferrando, Davida Rodena czy Neila Badmingtona. W dalszej części pracy Autor przechodzi do dyskusji motywu gwałtu,

dając jego krótki rys historyczny i teoretyczny. Jednocześnie Autor zwraca uwagę, że w rozprawie motyw gwałtu przyjmie znaczenie szersze, wykraczające poza jego prawną definicję. Ostatnia część rozdziału teoretycznego stanowi podsumowanie oraz wskazuje, że właśnie posthumanizm krytyczny oraz motyw gwałtu dadzą zaplecze teoretyczne dla analizy twórczości Octavii Butler.

Rozdział drugi poświęcony jest dyskusji pojęcia rasy oraz przemocy na tle rasowym w wybranych utworach Butler. Pierwszy podrozdział zatytułowany „Multiverses” jest krótkim wprowadzeniem do analizy powieści Butler, *Kindred*. Zwraca on uwagę na jeden z głównych elementów, który będzie poruszony w trakcie analizy, tj. strachu, który – jak zauważa Autor – jest paradoksalnie elementem łączącym niewolników oraz ich właścicieli w jedno pozbawione płci cyborgiczne ciało. W drugim podrozdziale zatytułowanym „Animate/Inanimate” analiza zagłębia się w elementy fabuły, które ukazują pogłębiające się połączenie między wyżej wspomnianymi grupami, a także analizuje jak niewolnictwo w Ameryce wyniszczało zarówno czarną jak i białą społeczność, dokonując na nich dosłownego lub tego bardziej metaforycznego gwałtu. Jak stwierdza Autor, to właśnie niszczycielskie połączenie znakomicie ukazuje zatopienie ręki jednej z głównych bohaterek w ścianie, co powoduje niechcianą symbiozę między materią nieożywioną a ożywioną, tj. jej ciałem. Na dyskusji cyborgicznej strony organizmu powstałego w wyniku takiej symbiozy skupia się podrozdział „Cyborg identity”, który jeszcze dokładniej wskazuje na to, że niewolnictwo amerykańskie było narzędziem opresji, przez które cierpieli głównie niewolnicy, ale które również obracało się przeciw ich właścicielom. Podrozdział „They’re us... We’re tchem” pokazuje, jak ten proces powoduje powstanie jednego cyborgicznego i postpłciowego organizmu, którego bardzo odmienne składniki są połączone przez strach.

Rozdział trzeci koncentruje się na pojęciu „Obcego” w trylogii Octavii Butler *Lilith's Brood* oraz opowiadaniu „Bloodchild”, umieszczając ten termin w kontekście symbiozy biologicznej w rozumieniu Jamesa Lovelocka oraz Lynn Margulis. Pojęcie to dyskutowane jest jako element, który może pomóc w budowie posthumanistycznej wizji świata, będąc przeciwwagą dla gwałtu stosowanego jako wyniszczające narzędzie dominacji zarówno nad przedstawicielami własnej jak i obcej cywilizacji. Przyjmując taki sam podział rozdziału jak wcześniej na podrozdziały zatytułowane odpowiednio „Multiverses”, „Animate/Inanimate”, „Cyborg identity” oraz „They're us... We're them”, Autor pokazuje, jak niechciana przez ludzi symbioza z organizmami pochodzenia pozaziemskiego okazuje się jedynym skutecznym rozwiązaniem, jeśli ludzkość chce pozostać przy życiu. Jak wskazuje zgromadzony materiał krytyczny oraz wybrane fragmenty utworu, ludzkość stara się jednak stawić takiej symbiozie czynny opór, pomimo że zmarnowała ona swoją szansę, doprowadzając do zniszczenia całej planety w nuklearnej zagładzie. Nie chcąc skorzystać z nowej szansy, jaka została ludzkości dana, większość ludzi ucieka się do przemocy i gwałtu, aby przywrócić dawny porządek świata mimo tego, że Obcy nie chcą jej na to pozwolić. Jak pokazuje Autor, ludzie w ten sposób skutecznie odrzucają szansę, którą im daje scenariusz posthumanistyczny, woląc się poddać powolnemu wyniszczeniu. Dyskusja opowiadania „Bloodchild” uzupełnia powyższe rozważania bardzo ważnym elementem ciąży, w którą zachodzi mężczyzna po tym, jak staje się nosicielem larw przedstawicieli obcej cywilizacji. Pomimo tego, że przedstawiona w tekście symbioza ma dużo bardziej problematyczną naturę, wydaje się ona cechować podobnymi elementami co symbioza, którą Butler opisuje w *Lilith's Brood*.

Rozdział czwarty podsumowuje wnioski wcześniejszych rozdziałów analitycznych, zestawiając konkluzje płynące z dyskusji różnych sposobów dominacji,

które naruszają posthumanistyczną naturę wszechświata. Autor stara się jednocześnie ukazać aktualność scenariuszy stworzonych przez Octavię Butler oraz konieczność podnoszenia zagadnień będących zasadniczą częścią myśli posthumanistycznej. W tym właśnie kontekście Autor dyskutuje obecną sytuację w Ukrainie po rosyjskiej inwazji, wskazując na potrzebę pochylenia się nad postulatami posthumanistycznymi oraz konieczność krytyki obsesyjnej dominacji nad wszystkimi organizmami, która niewątpliwie stanowi ważny element fantastycznych światów stworzonych przez Butler. Czyniąc to, Autor wychodzi poza analityczne ramy pracy i pokazuje społeczny wymiar posthumanizmu krytycznego.