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"Home as it was or home as it should have been": Constitutional Rights in Butler's not so Fictional World

Supervisor
Prof. Pia Masiero

Assistant supervisor
Prof. Nassim Winnie Balestrini

Graduand
Elena Milanese
854274

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The human tragedy is that people become enmeshed in structures of thought that prevent them from leading emotionally satisfying lives treating other people decently.
(Posner: 3)

Introduction

The idea for this project came to me some years ago, when I first read the novel *The Parable of The Sower* by Octavia Estelle Butler. The novel resonates with me, especially because of its unique way of representing the future; Butler's double aim of warning people of what might happen, and her necessity to teach history to face the future fascinated me. Her writing is very down to earth and makes very solid references to the times we live in. I found her particular way of dealing with the future very inspiring: I started noticing that her science fiction was not only fiction – it was more.

Her works, in particular the ones we analyze in this research (*The Parable of The Sower* and *The Parable of The Talents*) represent a bridge between the real world and fiction. It is in the light of this consideration that I developed my idea, that is, reading Butler's novels focusing on the juridical matter that she brings up. Being an African American woman living in the second half of the 1900, she experiences the whole civil rights movement, that, as we see in the first chapter of this research, basically reclaims the need for more equal laws and treatment for the African American community. This implies that Butler's life, like the life of all African Americans of that time, has been deeply shaped by the direction the law was taking in those years. This does not mean that we must find evidence of law in Butler's novels or in any other African American writer only because of their biographical experiences; in fact, this would be a superficial assumption. But if we focus on Butler's aim of teaching her community through her writings, as she claims in many interviews, this means that it is possible to delineate a meaningful link between her reality and her fiction. In particular, in this research we focus on pointing out the connections between Butler's science fiction and American Constitutional law. We analyze some relevant Amendments, specifically the First, Second, Fourth, Sixth, Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth, to discover how Butler employs the constitutionally protected rights which are at the center of these Amendments to reflect on the future of America. Considering all the elements we just talked about – Butler's experience as an African American woman, her aim of teaching her community and warn it about dangers that may appear again in the future – we can argue that in Butler's work we find evidence that the law represents for her an important backdrop against which to set her stories.

Shaw explains how law can be found in fiction and which role it plays:

> The law and literature relationship is, therefore, a particularly valuable locus for scrutinizing the wider impact of narrative on improving the cold abstractions of law in relation to its empathic response to

> suffering. The application of narrative empathy in legal reasoning encourages a sympathetic consideration of those circumstances which impact on socially marginal groups, against the stereotyping and stultifying effects of arbitrary rule formalism (Shaw: 2).

In this research we argue that Butler's novels can actively contribute to the juridical discourse by giving voice to the African-American community in the United States. To do so, we dedicate the first chapter to the depiction of how Butler's science fiction can be inscribed in the science fiction tradition of the late 90s and early 00s. We map the major trends of those years, and see how science fiction exited its crisis and entered the age of information. We see some of Butler's difficulties when she approaches the science fiction world, highlighting how black characters were perceived in fiction. Then, we see how her work can be classified as "critical dystopia", and why.

In chapter one we then move on to the historical context of Butler's childhood, until the first years of the new millennium when she died. We focus on the civil rights movement and on the laws that finally put an end to the legally justified discrimination against African Americans. We see how the civil rights movement deeply shape the faith of African Americans and how the legal issues it brings up are present in Butler's work, along with references to the Constitution.

Chapter two is divided into six sections, each one analyzing how the Amendments we listed above are represented in Butler's work. In the first section we analyze the First Amendment: we show how we can use the Amendment and the Supreme Court's "sincerity" test to define religion, and we present how we can apply that definition to Earthseed cult. Moreover, we consider how Butler introduces several different religions, and how they develop throughout the novels. Butler's main character, Lauren Olamina, invented a new way of living, namely Earthseed, that has the alleged capability to radically shape human civilization into something that could even explore the space and survive the profound changes required to live there. That religion is concerned with the idea of permanent change as the only answer, in opposition to eternal truths. It rotates around the idea of the inevitability of change, and the consequent need to be adaptable and versatile. As we learn in the first lines of the *Sower*:

> Prodigy is, at its essence, / adaptability and persistent, / positive obsession. Without / persistence, what remains is an / enthusiasm of the moment. Without / adaptability, what remains may / be channeled into destructive / fanatism. Without positive / obsession, there is nothing at all. (1)

And

> All that you touch / You Change. / All that you Change / Changes you. / The only lasting truth/ Is Change. / God is Change. (3)

If God is change, people must adapt to it. Religion takes a central place within the story, as we will see in chapter two.

The second section of the chapter is dedicated to the Second and Fourth Amendments; we choose to deal with their matter together because they both are dedicated to the concept of "protection", whether it is personal protection (arms) or protection from abuse of power by governmental officials. We see how Butler does not take a side in the debate on bearing arms, in fact, she limits herself on the representation of what happens in the case of people deciding to purchase the most advanced arms, or not.

In the third section we deal with the matter of the Sixth Amendment, that is, the regulation of a fair trial. In that section we show how Butler reflects upon witch fires and other forms of unfair trials. Again, she uses history to show which shape our twenty-seconds-away future can assume. After the third section we abandon the Bill of Rights, and we take on the analysis of three fundamental Amendments regulating civil rights: the Thirteenth Amendment, the Fourteenth Amendment, and the Fifteenth Amendment.

In section four we introduce the road that led to the ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment and how we can read Butler's work in relation to the history of the Amendment.

In section five we explain how Butler elegantly references the Fourteenth Amendment while dealing with the discovery of life in another planet, opening even more challenging questions.

In the last section of the second chapter, we show how Butler's work deals with the right to vote, that is, the right protected by the Fifteenth Amendment.

At the end of our journey into Butler's fiction and the Constitution, we dedicate chapter three to the unfinished books of the *Parable* series; in particular we present several plot lines that Butler was never able to conclude, and we explore the possible reasons of her writer block.

Chapter 1. The context

A word is not a crystal, transparent and unchanged,
it is the skin of a living thought and may vary
greatly in color and content according to
the circumstances and the time
in which it is used.
(Epstein, Walker: 111)

S.F. is escapist literature. Its readers/viewers
don't want to be weighted down with real problems.
War, okay. Planet-wide destruction, okay. Kidnapping, okay (...)
But the sight of a minority person? Too heavy. Too real.
And, of course, there again is the implication that a sprinkling of blacks,
Asians, or others could turn the story into some sort of racial statement.
The only statement I could imagine being made by such a sprinkling
would be that among the white, human people;
the tall, furry people (...) were also brown, human people;
black, human people, etc. This isn't such a heavy statement –
unless it's missing.
(Lost Races of Science Fiction: 2)

1.1 Science fiction genre and Octavia Butler's *Parables*

In this first section we first discuss how the genre science fiction developed from the 1980s to the present days in the United States, defining two essential patterns of change that characterized those years. We give particular attention to how Butler inscribed her work in this context.

During the last two decades of the century, science fiction assumes different characteristics. On the one side, the genre lives a glorification and a prosperous moment, but on the other side it becomes less and less incisive. This means, it loses its purpose to imagine different worlds and civilizations, and begins describing planets and situations recognizable from our present-day standpoint. As the

genre diffuses, the target reader is no longer an adolescent white man. Science fiction presented in the form of books acquires more visibility than the short stories found in magazines. Interestingly, many works are published in their written form only after they first appeared in other media (television, cinema); for example, the *Star Wars* series is owned by an enterprise that considers the written form as an "infomercial" for the product. These spin-offs focus on the advertising of the product.

Another factor – even more important – characterizes the development of the genre during the late decades of the past century. As Clute puts it, the genre is "ageing" (65). By saying so, he argues that there is a model of science fiction that refers to the genre as something that can be "understood as an entity that was born and came to maturity within the span of a human life" (Clute: 65). In fact, American science fiction begins to develop around 1925, it lives an early stage before the 1940s, and it finally reaches adulthood after 1940s, during the Eisenhower years. But, as time passed, and as the new century approaches, it becomes clear that science fiction was formed by dead documents and magazines. The genre was at a crucial point and it needed to develop into something new. Hence, it evolves into something complex and integrated into the world; by definition, the genre "differed from the world in order to advocate a better one" (ibid.). The genre becomes an institution, and it takes different directions; it continues to speculate about the future to please its audience, or it depicts complex worlds that are not to be easily understood. There are two patterns of change we can trace.

First, in his analysis Clute notices that there is a "decreasing resemblance between the world we inhabit and the future worlds advocated" (Clute: 66). This to say that during the 1980s, the genre is not telling the story of how the world might develop. Hundreds of science fiction stories fail to portray the world in its complexity; instead, they focus on the future of a particular world, the "industrialized Western world" (ibid.). In a way, this kind of science fiction is about the American Dream, and the dream is achieved by the control of nature thanks to technologies and science. This classic science fiction is made by tools, weapons, technologies, means, armies, etc... that are always to be seen; that is to say, what engages the story is meant to be visible, like the world science fiction described. Hence, most of the science fiction of the 1980s and 1990s can be seen as a "reluctant farewell" (ibid.) to that transformed world that the genre failed to predict and that we are now entering.

The genre confronts a crisis about the subject matter and the techniques of the genre itself. A lack of confidence in considering science fiction "as a tool for cognition and imagining" (ibid.) characterizes these late years, and produces one significant effect. Science fiction writers who started

their activity in the 1950s, that means, the pioneers of the genre who still are alive, keep writing, while the new writers, such as Butler herself, write less than what they were expected to.

In Butler's case, the problem is deeply connected with the turmoil of those years. When she starts approaching the genre, in 1965, she realizes that there was no black character in the stories, unless the character's "blackness" is somehow important for the development of the plot. She addresses this problem in her essay "Lost Races of Science Fiction": her teacher told her that the presence of black characters changes the focus of the story and draws attention away from the main subject. In 1979 Butler attends a workshop on science fiction, and when her teacher tells her the same concept she heard in 1965, that is, "in stories that seem to require black characters to make some racial point, it might be possible to substitute extraterrestrials – so as not to dwell on matters of race" (Lost Races of Science Fiction: 1) she understands that there is a problem of representation. Her critique is, if

> science fiction reaches into the future, the past, the human mind (…), other worlds and (…) other dimensions (…), is (it) really so limited, then, that it cannot reach into the lives of ordinary, everyday humans who happen not to be white?" and "Why have there been so few minority characters in science fiction? (ibid.)

Butler believes that the problem with black characters depends on the stereotyping, conscious or subconscious, that the writer adopts while introducing them. Why do black characters become problematic, why are they believed to alter the story and direct it on the racial issue instead of the writer's main point? If the writer treats black characters as human beings, with the natural variety of concerns, flaws, and hopes they have, this could create interesting developments for the minority character. Let's consider a woman: if the writer focuses on the stereotyping characteristics of femininity, the character appears empty. It is the same as focusing on a character's blackness; it will limit to producing a stereotypical person who is not going to make some significant point nor bringing something interesting to the story. According to Butler, it is really not recommendable to just substitute the problematic black character with extraterrestrials as her teacher suggested, because the solution relies on the humanization of the characters, no matter their skin color.

The problem with the representation of minorities in the genre roots in the fact that science fiction is a genre inhabited by white writers, who represents all of humanity. This problem leads to another one: "why there are so few black science fiction writers?" (Lost Races of Science Fiction: 3) Black writers find a lack of authenticity in this genre, because it is mainly populated by whites, where whites

have the power, and blacks are making their appearance occasionally. Butler argues that, for what she experienced in her life, the black community where she grows up does not spend time and money on science fiction conventions. But now there is a growing black readership; according to her analysis, "SF writers come from SF readers" and "few readers equal few writers" (ibid.).

Another possible reason she finds when it comes to the representation of black characters is what she calls "conscious racism" (ibid.), even if science fiction is not widely affected by it. She argues that racism is not evident, as that would be rejected, but it comes "concealed behind any of the questions against racism" (ibid.). The cause of this problem is found into custom, into simple habit. As we already said, science fiction has always been white and male until recently. Ironically, this genre, more than any other genre, deals with change (in technology, in societies, and science); but science fiction itself as a genre changes moderately, and Butler argues that the major changes came from open dissensions. At science fiction conventions people will still make sexist or racist jokes if they think they have a sympathetic audience; nobody likes to be told that their established way of doing things is wrong, and they do not like to be told that now they should share their exclusive universe with other people. Today it is not common to encounter people who strongly claims that the world is all white, but "custom can be strong enough to prevent people from seeing the need for SF to reflect a more realistic view" (ibid.). If people accept this kind of practice, they can also become more fanatic in their habits; to put it in Butler's words: "Whites who feel defensive about racist behavior may make racist bigots of themselves It's something for people who value openmindedness and progressive attitudes to beware of" (Lost Races of Science Fiction: 4).

This problem comes with another one, laziness, or ignorance. This to say, authors that have always written about all-white cosmos now are required to write about multiracial cosmos, and this option can make them feel vulnerable and uncomfortable. Why should they change what they have been doing all this time? They also may not know minorities very well, so how can they write about something they do not know? The problem ignorance brings up is that a writer may not be lazy, racist, or attached to a certain practice, and they can still ignore a social group.

Hence, what can a writer do in order to deal with the representation problem of an "unfamiliar subject" (ibid.)? In her essay Butler suggests to investigate about it, to talk with the people, and to take every opportunity they can find to learn about the matter. Some writers can avoid investigating by setting the stories into different times and places, where cultural differences are not that important anymore. Butler herself creates something like that in her *Patternmaster* series: in fact, the story takes place in a time where psionic ability is all that matters. People who develop that ability ends up in the

most powerful social positions, disregarding of their genre or their race. People who do not have enough competence of it, ends up slaves. In that world, it does not matter if the protagonist is a black woman, because the attention is not on her skin color.

As we saw, the problem of the genre Clute identifies during the 1980s, that is, a certain recessional mode, a doubt regarding the relevance of the genre in developing interesting speculation about the future, is complex; if we consider the problems Butler herself found at the beginning of her career, we can understand why. The genre is stagnating, but ready to develop into something new. The world is changing, and the genre needs to change accordingly. There is no space for stereotypical characters like the ones Butler recalls:

> One of the first black characters I ran across when I began reading SF in the fifties was a saintly old 'uncle' (I'm not being sarcastic here. The man was described as saintly and portrayed asking to be called 'uncle') whom Harriet Beecher Stowe would have felt right at home with. I suspected that like the Sydney Poitier movies of the sixties, Uncle was daring for his time. That didn't help me find him any more believable of feel any less pleased when he and his kind (…) were given decent burials. Times have changed, thanks heaven, and SF has come a long way from Uncle. Clearly, though, it still has a long way to go (ibid.).

After the 80s, science fiction runs on inertia. In the 1990s, the invention of the Internet radically shapes our perception of the world, and the genre, that does not predict a so radical change, falls into chaos; it is almost as the future outdated the genre. The answer to the unexpected change is given by Cyberpunk, a term coined by the science fiction writer Bruce Bethke in 1983. It is used to describe stories about "the information explosion of the 1980s, most of them picturing a dense, urban, confusing new world in which most of us will find that we have been disenfranchised from any real power" (Clute: 67). Cyberpunk creates a new future to worship, and it is criticized by many science fiction writers who believe that it represents a sort of abandonment of the classic science fiction story, which is true. This leads us to the next change inside the genre.

Science fiction has to rapidly adjust to the new world that is a reality now, otherwise it would have died, or become some peripheral appendix like commercial series. The genre does not anticipate the world of information, and this is a fact, hence now science fiction writers has to catch up quickly to describe a world that is already existing. The writers of the 1980s reshape the genre even if it is

not meant to live also in the twentieth century as it was; they expose it to a slow transformation into a genre that is now able to manage and understand the new world of information.

Cyberpunk introduces a new possible line for science fiction genre to develop, that is, the implementation of the internet and the era of information in science fiction stories. We can inscribe Butler's work in that perspective, because her *Parable* series takes place in a future that is not distant, but positioned very closely to our present era of information. What she does goes further; her work is also to be read in the light of her black woman experience, that is, her work contributed to that narration of black science fiction focused on the imagining of black future, written by a woman.

As Baccolini argues in her essay "The Persistance of Hope in Dystopian Science Fiction", Butler's work developed "dystopian strategies to come to terms with the decade's silencing and co-opting of utopia. This kind of writing, critical and ambiguous and mainly produced by feminist writers, has become the preferred form for an expression of struggle and resistance" (520). This means, she develops a utopia that is "maintained in dystopia", because the only area where there is the possibility to develop a feeling of hope is "outside the story: only by considering dystopia as a warning can we as readers hope to escape such a dark future" (ibid.).

Her work can be thought as "an intersection where feminism, science fiction, utopian and dystopian thinking, and postmodernism all come together" (Miller: 337). This approach is detached from earlier science fiction, that was characterized by a utopian approach; as Miller recalls in his essay, women science fiction is mainly to be considered utopian, or "literatures of estrangement" (336), and it constitutes a constant until our present days.

The trend comes to a standstill when it starts to address other topics, such as the "transformations of domestic spaces and duties through technology", that shaped the utopia mainstream narration. This causes science fiction to become a very intertextual genre, being a genre that now engages with the exploration of "possibilities for alternative and non-hierarchical definitions of gender and identity within which the difference of aliens and others can be accommodated rather than repressed" (Miller: 337). Butler's work is inscribed in this new postmodern genre, and what makes it unique is that it "exists within the tradition of feminist utopian writing and, at the same time, seeks to contest it" (ibid.). Being an African American woman, her life experience is different from the ones traditional white utopian writers have; her critique is broader and challenges not only "patriarchal myths", but also "capitalist myths, racist myths, and feminist-utopian myths" (ibid.). In a classic dystopian scenario, as argued by Baccolini, the memory is captured in an "individual and regressive nostalgia, but critical dystopias show that a culture of memory – one that moves from the individual to the

collective – is part of a social project of hope" (521). This means that critical dystopia, like in the case of Butler's novels,

> leaves its characters to deal with their choices and responsibilities. It is in the acceptance of responsibility and accountability, often worked through memory and the recovery of the past, that we bring the past into a living relation with the present and may thus begin to lay the foundations for utopian change (ibid.).

As Miller argues, Butler' *Parables* are "critical dystopias motivated out of a utopian pessimism in that they force us to confront the dystopian elements of postmodern culture so that we can work through them and begin again" (ibid.). But Butler's work is not limited to be just a critical dystopia narration. Fiction, as Miller claims, "displace(s) the hierarchical dualism of naturalized identities and subvert(s) the central myths of origin of Western culture with (its) longing for fulfillment in apocalypse" (338); these elements are found also in Butler's own work, where "new notions of identity and community are under construction"; her science fiction uses a sort of protocol that "require readers radically to rewrite stories in the act of reading them (…) to find an elsewhere from which to envision a different and less hostile order and relationships among people, animal, technologies, and land" (ibid.).

As we can see, her work is interesting because it explores new possible relations among not only people, but, as we just saw, among everyone and everything in the planet. Butler's way of addressing the genre coincides with a new literary awareness that is defined as "an intersection of imagination, technology, the future, and liberation" (Gipson: 84): Afrofuturism. In her *Parables* Butler's aims "to educate, share stories, fight oppressions, and help communities in need" (ibid.) which is exactly what Afrofuturism is about. I call Afrofuturism "literary awareness" because it is not to be considered a genre, in fact, it "incorporates numerous academic disciplines" and its texts develop a "resistance to canonicity" (Gipson: 87). This means, Afrofuturism consists in "the amalgamation of different genres and disciplines" (ibid.). We can define Butler's work to be Afrofuturistic because it is a "visionary fiction" about "social justice and community organizing play a role in forecasting Black futures (…) and an exploration of Black identity" (Gipson: 88). As we just saw, Afrofuturism rotates around the same concept Butler's develops in her *Parable* series, that is the depiction of "Black people building communities, innovating new technologies, rewriting dominant narratives, and escaping oppression"; Butler's work is even more inclusive, in the sense that she does not limit it to a narrative regarding

Black people; in fact, she considers also other minorities (see the ethical composition of Robledo and Acorn communities). Another reason why Butler's work can be considered Afrofuturistic, is because we can apply the same definition Gipson provided of Afrofuturism to Butler's work: a "vehicle for change, a tool for teaching and learning, and a method of community building" (ibid.). It is important to remember that Afrofuturism revolves around other concepts dear to Butler: social justice, self-determination, equality in the sense that it "looks to overcome the ways that society remains unequal" (Gibson: 101). As we just saw, Butler's science fiction is not to be considered only part of a single genre, in fact, it can be inscribed into a broader genre, that privileges an intertextual approach, such as the analysis of her work considering the American Constitution. We can say that her work, like Afrofuturism, is "about imagining different spaces and creative thought that doesn't put your identity in a box" (Gibson: 102).

After introducing the genre, describing why Butler's work is relevant and can be read within a broader movement, we can now go on with a more in-depth description of her *Parable* series, the story of an African American girl growing up in a near future U.S. society.

In the first novel, *The Parable of The Sower*, she uses the journal entries method to describe her critical dystopia, where an "intertextual web (…) draws on the substance and form of sources as varies as slave narratives, feminist fiction, survivalist adventure" (Moylan: 223). The result Moylan indicates in his essay is that Butler's society is positioned into a larger historical perspective. By doing so, she narrates the stories of diverse groups of individuals growing up facing the struggles that broken society presents them. The novel is set in a southern Californian suburb of the early twenty-first century. Butler's society is characterized by the presence of powerful transnational corporations: they destroy the social and natural ecology that sustained many capitalist stages. This socioeconomic crisis is described in *The Parable of The Talents* as an Apocalypse called "The Pox", which was caused by an accidental

> coinciding climactic, economic, and sociological crises. It would be more honest to say that the Pox was caused by our own refusal to deal with obvious problems in those areas. We caused the problems: then we sat and watched as they grew into crises. (...) I have watched education become more a privilege of the rich than the basic necessity that it must be if civilized society is to survive. I have watched as convenience, profit, and inertia excused greater and more dangerous environmental degradation. I have watched poverty, hunger, and disease become inevitable for more and more people (*Talents:* 8).

The U.S. exits the crisis deeply transformed; by the 2030, it had "suffered a major nonmilitary defeat. It lost no important war, yet it did not survive the Pox" (Talents: 14). What caused the Pox is a capitalist restructuring and conservative policies, that dominate during the last decades of the past century. In the 1980s the right-wing policies of reducing taxes, expenses, and the bureaucratic oversight made the national debit increase; this results in a weak executive, weak political power, and the military is now something like a national guard (ibid.). In this context, basic services such as water supplies and police are privatized and extremely difficult to get. The basic welfare (health, housing, education) does not exist anymore, and the social contract is canceled.

Without the protection of the state, without regulations, supports, or services, people are left unprotected and alone facing the big companies that are exploiting the lack of political power by taking advantage from it. Butler portrays the defeat of the society by describing the collapse of the middle class. It is gradually disappearing. Companies and corporations are now producing a dangerous new reality surrounded by social and environmental chaos; people are desperate to survive. In this world, "the postmodern corporate feudalism" (ibid.) shapes the new nightmare, where a new propertyless population still has to realize which are the dangers of this new economic model. The American Dream here is what keeps alive the people of a small walled town called Robledo, where the story is set. People there still live according to the past; they live in family groups, but they share a form of barter economy; in fact, they produce almost all of their goods, as they are not willing to exit their wall too often to buy supplies. Education is organized inside the small village, since the main school and churches are outside the wall and dangerous to reach. Hence, local volunteers teach, preach, and provide for the safety of the village. People here bear arms with them, according to the second Amendment; all the adults and the teenagers are trained to use guns.

An alternative to Robledo is given by Olivar, a coast city owned by a company, KSF, that, as the other companies are doing, focuses its efforts on the domination of water, power, and agricultural industries in abandoned areas. There, they build cities, and welcome people to move and work for them "in exchange of security, guarded food supplies and jobs" (Sower: 106).

Butler's work can be defined as a speculative science fiction focused on American communities of the near future, like *The Gold Coast* by William Gibson. Contemporary science fiction can be defined as "rapid technological development on all fronts" according to Robinson's definition; moreover, it that can "turn our entire social reality into one giant science fiction novel, which we are all writing together in the great collaboration called history" (Clute: 73). A suitable definition for

science fiction as a genre and in particular as Butler's genre, can be: science fiction is that set of stories that "argue the world; which argues the case of the world" (Clute: 78). Science fiction speculates on possible outcomes that have not happened yet in our realities. Moreover, by representing the world, science fiction "differs from the world"; it "demonstrates the continued usefulness of the trusted and tested toolkit of (itself)." It is "adherent to the underlying, shaping urgency of the genre." It "speak(s) to the future of the genre. To save the genre from the ground of instant habituation, as (it) seem(s) so clearly to demonstrate, the answer may be as simple as this: that the right way to figure sf is to write it" (Clute: 78).

We now move on to the contextualization of Butler's historical time, which is important for this research because it sets the stage that inspired her work and her message. In particular, we focus on the birth and development of the civil rights movement, putting particular emphasis on the major juridical cases that marked the second half of the twentieth century in the fields so dear to Butler (education in primis). We see how the civil rights movement finally turned into laws that are meant to clearly protect the equality of every American citizen regardless their race, religion, cultural background, education. We then talk about the two African Americans major political figures of those years, Martin Luther King and Malcom X, and see how their message impacts and shapes an entire generation of young African Americans, as Butler herself experiences.

Finally, we analyze the deeper sphere of Butler's life, seeing how the relationship with her mother changed her approach on life and on her texts; we also trace the trajectory of her major works.

1.2 Octavia Butler and the civil rights movement

No more running —from nothing.
I will never run from any other thing on this earth.
I took one journey and I paid for the ticket,
but let me tell you something:
it cost too much!
(Morrison:18)

But still I'm asked, what good is science fiction to Black people?
What good is any form of literature to Black people?
What good is science fiction's thinking about the present, the future,
And the past? What good is its tendency to warn or
To consider alternative ways of thinking and doing?
What good is its examination of the possible effects of science and technology, or social organization and political direction?
At its best, science fiction stimulates imagination and creativity.
It gets reader and writer off the beaten track, off the narrow,
narrow footpath of what "everyone" is saying, doing, thinking,
whoever "everyone" happens to be doing this year.
And what good is all this to Black People?
(Positive Obsession: 134-135)

To better understand why it is interesting to read Butler's science fiction with a focus on her take on law, we first need to explore the context where she grows up. Born in 1948 in an African American family in Pasadena, she starts breathing the social tensions of those years since she was a child. The African American community starts fighting back all the unfair laws that tried to confine them at the social edges. In this chapter we investigate some of the most important developments of the Civil Rights movement and the African American history during the second half of the XX century, when

Butler lived. In particular we notice that a tight bond is present between the destiny of the African American community, the fight for equal rights and the juridical powers.

In 1944 the *Smith v. Allwright* Supreme Court decision declared the "white primary" unconstitutional. This helped re-enfranchise black voters in Florida, Tennessee, and Texas, but Jim Crow – a "use of laws that prevented black people from going to the same schools and public places as white people" (Macmillan Dictionary) – was still ruling in the Deep South. That area was far from giving up restrictions on African Americans, so still millions of blacks were kept from voting.

It is in this context that Octavia Butler and many others lived. She grows up with her mother, and she sees her as an inspiration for surviving the harsh world of poverty and racial prejudice into which they were thrust. She recalls the sense of inferiority that has always plagued her mother, who was pulled out of school at the age of ten to go to work. Many of Butler's heroines are like her mother; women who struggled and compromised not because they are frightened but who made the best of no-win situations because they were heroes. Education was not guaranteed for African Americans, in fact, the struggle to bring equal treatment in schools was far from being solved. Some years before Butler's birth, when her mother was a youngster, the first movements against segregated education started to obtain their first results. In 1954 there was some progress in the desegregation of American society thanks to the Supreme Court's decision that, in 1954, "overturned the 'separate but equal' doctrine" (Hine: 569) in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka.* In 1950, the summer school in Topeka, Kansas, refused to admit Linda Brown (1943-). Her father, Oliver Brown, filed a lawsuit and testified in court that his daughter had to travel an hour and twenty minutes to attend a black school. To win the case, black lawyers started working in similar cases. In 1952 they prepared the *Briggs v. Elliott* case, that was the first legal challenge to elementary school segregation; it was the start of the foundations for a bigger case. On May 1954, the Court ruled unanimously in favor of the NAACP lawyers and their clients that a classification based solely on race violated the Fourteenth Amendment. After this decision, in 1955, the Supreme Court issued a second ruling known as *Brown II,* which addresses the practical process of desegregation. In particular, the Court stated that all states "should begin prompt compliance with the 1954 ruling and that this should be done with 'all deliberate speed'" (Hine: 574). The ambiguity of the word choice left a lot of space for free interpretation.

During the 1960, where the segregation and all the contemporary social problems made the future look blurred, Butler starts writing to imagine a different future, where she could live interesting and impossible lives. She starts writing as a teen, and starts sending her work to publishers very soon. Her

family was not especially supportive of her desire to make this her career. Her mother bought Butler her first typewriter, but she believes Butler should take up a career with a more practical basis that could support her – a secretary, or a nurse. Butler remembers her aunt once told her "Honey, Negroes can't be writers" (Elliott: 19). Butler faces the same hostility both when every member of her family encourages her to seek practical employment, and when she goes to school. Her teachers were unsupportive of her work, maybe because she suffers from a learning disability that at the time was not formally diagnosed. Her dyslexia made her a slow reader and slow writer; to learn, she has to study extra hours to keep up with her classmates; she develops a learning system that works better for her. For example, she uses audiotapes a lot. As a child, she was extremely shy. To better understand the problematics linked to her situation, and her family's concerns, we now explore the political events that characterized Butler's childhood.

Tensions were not over, as white moderates soon found themselves an extremist minority, determined to maintain white supremacy, and ready to resist the Court's decision. Councils used their power to intimidate African Americans who challenged segregation. The road to subvert Jim Crow[1] was still a long journey. During the early 50ies, also politicians used crude words to comment on the Court decision. For example, Mississippi Senator Eastland called the *Brown* decision "a monstrous crime" (Hine: 575). A Manifesto promoted by white southerners addressed the decision as "unwarranted exercise of power by the court, contrary to the Constitution" (ibid.). As a result of the resistance, by 1958 only 13 schools were desegregated, and by 1960 the number raised only at 17. Major improvements to the situation were possible only through Court decisions; in fact, segregation was still a reality far from being dismantled. On March 2, 1955, a 15-years-old Booker T. Washington high school student (Claudette Colvin), was arrested for refusing to give up her seat on a bus to a white woman. The WCP, "the Women's Political Council of Montgomery, Alabama, (…) sought to increase the political leverage of the black community by promoting civic involvement, increasing voter registration, and lobbying city officials to address racist policies" (in "Women's Political Council (WPC) of Montgomery").

This first episode together with the second one that took place on December 1, 1955 seeing Rosa Parks refusing to give up her seat in favor of a white man who boarded the bus, triggered a

[1] Jim Crow laws were a collection of state and local statutes that legalized racial segregation. Named after an insulting song lyric regarding African Americans, the laws—which existed for about 100 years, from the post-Civil War era until 1968—were meant to return Southern states to an antebellum class structure by marginalizing black Americans. Black communities and individuals that attempted to defy Jim Crow laws often met with violence and death. See more at https://www.history.com/topics/early-20th-century-us/jim-crow-laws

revolt. With her act of resistance Rosa Parks, a 43-years-old department store seamstress and civil rights activist, launched the Montgomery Bus Boycott, and inspired the modern civil rights struggle for freedom and equality. So, on December 5, of the same year the black community refused to ride the buses. They also founded the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA) to coordinate the protest; as president, they selected a young Martin Luther King, Jr. This event marked the beginning of King's role as a leader of the civil rights movement. He advocated the nonviolence with black Christian faith and church culture, to create a "unique ideology" (Hine: 580) well suited for the civil rights struggle. The success of the Bus Boycott was due to women: all the women who previously rode the bus to work, now refused to ride, and many helped organizing carpools with their white employers. The boycott lasted less than a year (381 days), but took 65 percent of the bus company business, forcing it to cut schedules and raise fares.

Eventually the economical reason was not the one ratifying the final victory. The real difference could be made only by the juridical power. Hence, black lawyers once again turned to federal government and filed a suit in the name of three black women. The Supreme Court in *Browder v. Gayle* ordered an end to Montgomery's bus segregation. The bus company agreed not only to end segregation, but also to hire African American drivers and to treat all passengers with equal respect. This was the first case of victory, and it set an example for future protests.

Butler's family experienced injustices like the one Rosa Parks experienced on the bus every day; when they advised Butler to choose a more suitable employment, they had that experience in mind. However, Butler's generation was different, because she has not entered the world of work when the civil rights movement starts to spread; that is to say, her early life was affected by the hope for a better future more than the lives of the previous African American generation. As a child, she suffers from social anxiety, and, on top of that, she is also very sensitive. She is deeply affected by comments others make about her, especially those comments coming from her family and friends. She writes science fiction to escape the world of race and gender oppression she sees around her; the tension between being a writer and being a black writer is always present and difficult to appease. During the college years, Butler experiences herself the debate over desegregation within the universities, as well as the rise of a certain power within the African American community thanks to the right to vote.

Between 1960 and 1963, the civil rights movement developed the techniques and organization that would finally bring America face-to-face with the conflict between the democratic ideals and the racism of its politics. The presidential election of 1960 gave a certain political power to the African

Americans; in fact, their ballot vote was crucial for Kennedy's victory. The newly elected president did help the cause of civil rights. Like Eisenhower before him, he acted decisively when governors challenged his authority. For example, on June 25, 1962, he filed a complaint of racial discrimination against the University of Mississippi. Similarly, in June 1963, he forced governor George Wallace to allow the desegregation of the University of Alabama.

On June 1961 Kennedy starts the Voter Registration Project, aiming to finally allow African Americans to register to vote. Hence, several registration movements start; for example, in Albany, Georgia, the movement expands from not only securing vote to the African American community, but also to finally obtaining a total desegregation of the town. Police is determined not to lose this fight, so they do not use violence against the protestors; hence, the protests do not obtain big media attention. Dr. King's intervention does not help, in fact everyone soon realizes that the new police tactic is working very well. Without any violent confrontation, the federal state would not make any intervention. This was probably King's greatest defeat, and it called into question the future of the movement.

It is clear that without the help of the federal government it is impossible to overcome the power of the local governments. To exit the stall, a new campaign was launched during 1963, on the occasion of the 100-anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation. The program of the new protest demands to guarantee employment opportunities for black workers in businesses, to finally desegregate schools, to improve services in black neighborhoods, and to provide low-income housing. The march takes place in Birmingham, Alabama, and Dr. King was soon arrested and jailed. While in jail, he writes the famous "Letter From Birmingham City Jail"[2], where he dismisses those who called for black people to wait. Reverent Wyatt Walker, one of the chiefs of the protest in Birmingham, states that Dr. King "emancipated black people's psyche. (He) threw off slave mentality. Going to jail had been the whip which kept black folks in line. Now going to jail was transformed into a badge of honor" (Harvard: 43).

The growing number of demonstrations convinced Kennedy to propose the strongest civil rights bill the country had yet seen; however, he could not overcome the southern block within his own party. To demonstrate support for Kennedy's proposal, the major civil rights associations organize a march on Washington. The march takes place on August 28, 1963, and it is called "Jobs and Freedom", but only after some days some white racists bomb a Baptist Church in Birmingham and killed four girls attending Sunday school. This event, along with Kennedy's assassination on

[2] Find the letter here: https://web.cn.edu/kwheeler/documents/Letter_Birmingham_Jail.pdf

November 22, 1963, set the stage for a real change. Kennedy's successor, Johnson, tells the nation he plans to support the civil rights bill as a memorial for the former president.

Hence, in 1964 the Civil Rights Act was passed. The act bans discrimination in places of public accommodation, including restaurants, hotels, gas stations, and entertainment facilities, schools, parks, playgrounds, libraries, and swimming pools. The act also bans the discrimination by employers and labor unions on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, and sex. It also allows government agencies to withhold federal money from any program permitting or practicing discrimination. This is particularly important for the desegregation of colleges and schools across the country. Now attorneys have the power to initiate proceedings against segregated facilities and schools on behalf of people who could not do so on their own. Finally, it creates the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission to monitor discrimination in employment. This is a huge victory, but the Civil Right Act of 1964 encounters white resistance in terms of voter registration. With the Voting Rights Act of 1965 finally the systematic exclusion of African Americans from politics is over. The sheriff in Selma, Alabama, works to block voter registration activities. Hence, a mass march from Selma to Montgomery began on March 7, 1965. The march becomes famous as "Bloody Sunday".

By the advent of the of the civil rights movement in the South, black residents in northern and western cities, thanks to the federal legislation, enjoy access to public facilities, schools, and jobs in more diverse economic sectors. In all regions, long after the victories of the civil rights movement many black individuals and communities still suffer the negative impact of discrimination and segregation. The future dictates the need for different techniques and new ways of thinking. When several Republicans are elected, such as the new Governor of California Ronald Reagan and Alabama Governor George Wallace, an opposer of desegregation, many black Americans start to look back at a more radical approach. They advocate different strategies as white violence escalated. People become disillusioned and doubt whether Dr. King's moderation, nonviolence, and universalism will secure freedom, justice, and civil equality. In 1965, after the Selma to Montgomery march, the Lowndes County (Mississippi) Freedom Organization is founded. This becomes the first political organization in the civil rights movement to adopt the symbol of the black panther. African Americans confront the "invisible" racism embedded in American economics, political, social, and educational institutions and challenge the opposition of white people to fair housing, environmental justice, and all policies that require a redistribution of power and resources. In such a context, also black churchmen start to condemn white religious groups for their complicity with racism, and demand

reparation for slavery. Black feminists develop a theology that calls for greater gender quality in the leadership of black churches and vehemently denounced sexism in the larger society. Hence, between 1963 and 1965 the National Council of Churches, which "unifies a diverse covenant community of 38 members and over 40 million individuals, 100,000 congregations from Protestant, Anglican, Orthodox, Evangelical, historic African-American, and Living Peace traditions" (in National Council of Churches) gives financial and moral support to the civil rights movement. The NCC sees the economic development of black people and their communities as the critical prerequisite to improve national racial relations. Its president, Payton, emphasizes the need for "a program of economic development to make civil rights real, in housing, employment, education and health care." It is in this context that Malcom X starts its ascent.

Malcom X was born in a modest family in Nebraska. Klan terrorists burned his family's home, and his father was murdered in 1938, when he was 13. His mother was committed to a mental institution, and he was separated from his siblings. Malcom first moved to a juvenile detention home, and lately he moved to Boston to stay with his sister. There he lives a street life, characterized by gambling, drugs, and burglary. He is arrested and sentenced to a 10-year prison term in 1946. During that period, he rejects his "slave name" and called himself Malcom X. He also embraces the Nation of Islam faith. In 1954, he becomes minister of Harlem's Temple Number Seven. He is a charismatic leader, and he refuses Dr. King's nonviolence and racial integration theories. In 1961 he starts publishing *Muhammad Speaks*, the official newspaper of the Nation of Islam. While talking about integration, he states:

> Few white people realize that many black people today dislike and avoid spending any more time than they must around white people. This "integration" image, as it is popularly interpreted, has millions of vail, self-exalted white people convinced that black people want to sleep in bed with them – and that's a lie! Oh you can't tell the average white man that the Negro man's prime desire isn't to have a white woman – another lie! (Haley).

Malcom X attracts the attention of an increasingly disillusioned component of the black population. He dismisses the goal of racial integration; his critique of white capitalism and white supremacy find the approval of those who suffered white violence. His popularity soon becomes a problem for the chief of Nation of Islam; hence, after some tensions, Malcom decides to found his own organization: the Muslim Mosque, Inc. He also changes his name again in El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz. He repudiates

the Nation of Islam's theory that sees all white people as evil, and begins lecturing on the connection between the civil rights struggle in the South and the struggle against European colonialism in Africa. On February 14, 1965, he was killed as he was giving a speech in Harlem.

Butler did not feel at home either with Dr. King's ideas, nor with the radical, separatist Black Power movements; she was deeply suspicious of both approaches. In her *Patternist* series, she explores themes such as the cruelty of the mind, and the fascination of power, its seductiveness, and its misuse. Moreover, in her later series *Parable*, she makes her characters explore new worlds and colonize them, tasting their ability or not to adapt to their new circumstances. Her interests in these themes come from her studies at Pasadena City College, from which she gains an associate's degree in 1968. There, she studies African literature and African decolonial history, which plays a key role in the writing and the development of the dictatorship ruling the collapsing America of the *Parables*.

In many interviews she recalls a singular incident from her college days that would become the central philosophical insight of Butler's life; survival is not necessarily the same thing as defeating your enemy, or even fighting back or standing up for yourself, but simply means that you have continued into the future. This is how she explains what happened:

> When I got into college, Pasadena City College, the black nationalist movement, the Black Movement, was really underway with the young people, and I heard some remarks from a young man who was the same age I was but who had apparently never made the connection with what his parents did to keep him alive. He was still blaming them for their humility and their acceptance of disgusting behavior on the part of employers and other people. He said, "I'd like to kill all those old people who have been hiding us back for so long. But I can't because I'd have to start with my own parents" (Rowell: 51).

This echoes with her as the descendant of generations of black men and women who had managed to survive through centuries of enslavement and segregation. But the struggle to reach equality is not over.

After Malcom's death, the idea of founding a black political party became reality; the idea that ordinary citizens could elect their own leaders and achieve the goals they want was very appealing to the movement. So, after the November 1966 election, the Lowndes County Freedom Party selects a black panther as their logo. The party is meant to promote positive self-identity, racial pride, and independent political and economic power. Many protests and urban rebellions took place in the late

1960s, and the black community urged for an answer. Johnson tries to contain the chaos with what he called the "Great Society" during his election campaign of 1964. His concerns for the disadvantaged find an answer in the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964. Johnson's War on Poverty is the first government-sponsored effort to involve poor African Americans; for example, residents of poor neighborhoods were helped in finding jobs as community organizers, day care workers, and teacher aides. The program provides access to education, and critical resources to poor people, so that they would become leaders in their own communities and run for office. Johnson faces oppositions that are mainly embodied in local politicians. They are fearing that the federal government is subsidizing their opponents and undercutting their power, and they are especially threatened by programs that empower the previously disfranchised and dispossessed. Others are complaining, arguing that Johnson is rewarding lawlessness and laziness with handouts to the underserving poor. As it turned out, the nation's resources of those years are increasingly diverted into another war, the war in Vietnam. Johnson invests $10 billions for the War on Poverty, while his presidency spends approximately $140 billions for the Vietnam war. By the end of 1967, the nation seems to be heading toward total racial polarization, and Johnson situation is untenable. He has escalated the war in Vietnam without convincing many Americans it was worth fighting. Misleading claims about the progress of the war fortified the idea that he is not to be trusted. When on January 30, 1968, communist soldiers attach 36 of the 44 provincial capitals in South Vietnam, as well as the capital Saigon, where they reach the American embassy, the truth starts to come out. The effect this offensive has towards the psychology of the American public is that they start doubting what the administration told them about the war. On March 31, 1968, Johnson tells the nation he would halt the bombing of North Vietnam to encourage the start of peace negotiations; he is worn out by Vietnam, frustrated in his efforts to achieve the Great Society, and he became the object of an increasingly bitter criticism. Meanwhile, Dr. King was attached by many as well.

Within the country many white people consider him a threat and a black radical, while black people consider him too moderate. In 1966 Dr. King and several organizations set up operations in Chicago; he is confident he will receive the support of the city white liberals and the black community. Instead, Chicago Mayor viewed Dr. King suspiciously, but he treats him with respect and cautions the police not to use violence against him or the civil rights demonstrators. Because King's movement depends on creating confrontation, not much happened, until Dr. King marched into an all-white suburb. The Chicago protest reinforces two ideas that Dr. King already has in his mind: first, racial discrimination is more than a southern problem; he states that the hostility he

experienced in Chicago surpassed the one he felt in Birmingham, Alabama. Second, racial discrimination is inextricably intertwined with the country's economic structure. He begins to think more critically about the need not only to eradicate poverty, but also to end systemic economic inequality. In the fall of 1967, he announces plans for his most ambitious and militant project, a nonviolent "Poor People's Campaign". According to his plans, tens of thousands of poor people will descend on Washington to focus the attention of the public opinion on the disadvantages of the American society. He also wants a federally guaranteed income policy; he criticizes the Vietnam war and the president, stating that the president is more concerned about winning the war in Vietnam rather than winning the war against poverty. This turns Johnson against him and further alienated Dr. King from many of Johnson's black supporters, including the more traditionalist civil rights leaders who supported the war. Dr. King persists, and by 1968 he becomes one of the war's harshest critics.

In that same year, he tries to calm down a situation involving labor issues in Memphis. There was a strike of black sanitation workers, that, together with the local black community, boycotted downtown merchands. On that occasion a lot of violence is used, and Dr. King returns to Memphis to deliver what would become his last speech about the promised land. The next day he was murdered, and more than 125 cities experienced uprising. Within days of King's assassination, Congress passed the Civil Rights Act of 1968, proposed by Johnson two years before. This new law prohibits discrimination in the sale and rental of housing.

Meanwhile, black power and black art movements continue the struggle for freedom in northern and western cities, and where discrimination, high unemployment, and police brutality happen, for instance, in Los Angeles, Newark, Detroit, and other cities. During these years there is a revolutionary expansion of opportunities for black students and professors, and universities become centers of confrontation.

Times could be so bad that the only thing that seems right was to withdraw into misery, or to curl up in resistance. The living African Americans has derived from those who had found a way to stay alive within the system that was crushing them, doing whatever it took to survive. Butler sees her mother as an example:

> My mother was taken out of school when she was ten and sent to work. As a result, she basically knew how to clean houses and not much else. That's what she did for a living for most of my childhood. She would take me with her sometimes, when she didn't have a babysitter, and I would get to see her going in back doors, and I'd get to see her not pay attention, not hearing when things

> were said that ordinarily she'd respond to very vehemently. And I was embarrassed, I was ashamed (Burton-Rose: 197).

Butler's mother life experience provides her with an insight into the nature of survival, namely "an act of resistance, a triumph" (Canavan: 54). In Butler's works her characters choose to live, even if this choice means political or moral compromises within a monstrous or inhuman system. For example, in *Kindred*, Butler explores these themes by depicting a troubled survivor, who is alive after "slavery, despite slavery, but also because of slavery" (Canavan: 55). The story is a deconstruction of time travel and a revelation of the logic of power, privilege, and racial difference that deeply structures even a neutral idea like the fantasy of moving backward in time. In her stories, the evil of the past becomes somehow necessary for the present and the future. In the early stages of her writing career, Butler is intimidated by approaching stories about slavery, because this topic "promised to be painful and depressing", as she said to Mr. Elliott in the *Thrust* interview. In her next novel, *Wild Seed*, the topic reemerges, as the story is set in Africa. In the novel a secret competitor to white hegemony is revealed to exist alongside modernity's actually existing history of intergenerational slavery and forced reproduction. This can be considered as a novel speculating about white supremacy. The existence of a huge number of Africans with superpowers does nothing to stop, or in any way challenge, the slave trade. Nothing changes, and the implication is that this could just be the secret truth behind official history as it has actually happened.

The creative burst of 1983 set Butler at the top of her career. With the short story "Speech Sounds", she wins the Hugo Award for Best Short Story. The following year, she wins the Hugo, Nebula, and Locus awards with *Bloodchild*. Meanwhile, in the early 1980s, the idea of an imminent nuclear war is haunting Butler's mind, as she begins the *Xenogenesis* trilogy. That fear is intensified by the election of Ronald Reagan to the presidency, as she states in the interview with Mr. McCaffery, and Mr. McMenamin:

> I tell people that Ronald Reagan inspired Xenogenesis – and that it was the only thing he inspired in me that I actually approve of. When his first term was beginning, his people were talking about a "winnable" nuclear war, a "limited" nuclear war, the idea that more and more nuclear weapons would make us safer (23).

The Reagan administration's interest in strategic nuclear defense is also the subject of one of Butler's frequent letters to the editor of the *Los Angeles Times,* where she argues that no one should trust the false sense of security given by nuclear weapons, and that the topic is to be treated very carefully. In 1990 she sends another letter to *Essence* (monthly magazine for African American women)[3] about the lessons she has learned from the recent presidencies; she believes that people would pay any price for praise, reassurance, and an illusion of security, and that "it can be both expedient and easy to keep your enemies underestimating you" (ibid). The Reagan elections seems to Butler to be a part of the bad decision that cast a spell over the entire human race. In the same interview, Butler says that the Reagan election

> is when I began to think about human beings having the two conflicting characteristics of intelligence and a tendency toward hierarchical behavior – and that hierarchical behavior is too much in charge, too selfsustaining. The aliens in the Xenogenesis series say that the humans have no way out, that they're programmed to self-distruct (McCaffery and McMenamin: 23).

Butler's concerns come from what she sees going on during the Reagan presidency; welfare programs are reduced, and the overwhelming white Republican Party becomes increasingly entrenched in the South. The political landscape of the 1980s and 1990s is thus marked by a hardening of ideological conflict between liberal and progressive Democrats on one side and conservative, radical, Republicans on the other. During those years powerful conservative political organizations find home in the Republican Party. These groups oppose to equal rights for women, and want to interfere with their reproduction rights. Many white southerners oppose labor unions, and they join forces with white northerners who object to the tax burden they associate with welfare and entitlement policies. In this context, many African Americans invest symbolic importance in making Martin Luther King, Jr.'s birthday a national holiday. At first, Reagan resisted the idea, but then he has to give in to pressure from the African American community and their white allies. Hence, on January 20, 1985, the United States officially observe Martin Luther King Jr. Day for the first time.

But Reagan's presidency is also marked by the dismantling of the social welfare programs created during and after the New Deal and Johnson's Great Society. He halves federal grants to cities. As a result, poor neighborhoods inhabited by African Americans becomes unstable. Reagan advances a

[3] See the magazine website: essence.com

"trickle-down theory of economics"[4] (Hine: 679). He believes that if the wealthiest Americans get richer, their increase prosperity and the spending associated with it will percolate through the middle and working classes to benefit the poor. Unemployment statistics soon challenge this theory. By December 1982, the unemployment rate rises to 10.8 percent, and the rate for African Americans is twice that of white Americans.

Moreover, Reagan often cloaks his intent to undermine rights-oriented policies by appointing black conservatives to key positions. He tries to change the direction of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, but in this case he meets resistance. The commission is created in 1957, and it acts as a watchdog. It has no real enforcement powers, but some influence on public opinion. Soon after Reagan takes office, the commission starts issuing critical reports of its civil rights policies. As an answer to this, Reagan appoints new commissioners sympathetic to his perspective: he replaces the commission's chair with a black Republican. The vice chair, a black woman, was a respected civil rights activist and historian. In 1984 Reagan tries to remove her, but she resists the pressions. She becomes known as "the woman the president could not fire".

The Reagan administration claims to support what we might call "old civil rights laws", but opposes the "new civil rights laws". The old civil rights laws are developed between the *Brown* decision in 1954 and the Voting Right Act of 1965; they prohibit intentional discrimination, for example segregation in schools, informal discrimination in the workplace, or racial restrictions on voting. The new civil rights laws are concerned with discriminatory intents. For example, situations in which black children overall are disproportionately in all-black schools; or the workplace in a given company, compared with the community within its location, is disproportionately white or male, or elected officials in a multiracial state or municipality are disproportionately white. In all these cases discrimination is assumed. The remedy for such historical discrimination is labeled as "affirmative action". This is a "civil right policy or program that seeks to redress the effects of past discrimination due to race or gender by giving preference to women and minorities in education and employment" (Hine: 681). Many white Americans argue that it runs contrary to the concept of achievement founded on merit and amounts to a reversal of racial or sexual discrimination. Because the 1964 Civil Rights Act makes gender discrimination in employment illegal, white women are among the major beneficiaries of affirmative action. The debate over affirmative action not only led to racial polarization, but divides the black community. Before Nixon, Johnson has first used the term

[4] See: The "Trickle-down" Myth in Economic Development and Cultural Change

"affirmative actions" in a 1965 executive order that "required federal contractors to take affirmative action to guarantee that job seekers and employers are treated without regard to their race, color, religion, sex, or national origin" (ibid.).

Affirmative action in employment proves less controversial than affirmative action in college and university admissions. State higher-education institutions occupy the center of the problem both because they are narrowly bound by the Fourteenth Amendment's prohibition against racial discrimination and because they, far more than elite private institutions, are the gateway to upward mobility for many Americans, black and white, Asians, and Latinos. Admission offices tries to aid disadvantaged minorities and increase racial and cultural diversity on campus. Hence, they adopt different policies regarding admissions criteria. The case of *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke* reflects the white backlash to affirmative action. The medical school at the University of California, as a form of affirmative action, has set aside 16 of its 100 places in each entering class for disadvantaged and minority students. They are considered for admission in a separate system. A white student (Alan Bakke) sues the university for discrimination after it rejected his application. In 1976 the California Supreme Court rules he should be admitted, but the university appeals to the U.S. Supreme Court, which also rules in in Bakke's favor in 1978. Of the nine justices, five agree that the university violated Bakke's rights. Only one justice declares that affirmative action cases should be judged on the same strict level of scrutiny applied to intentional discrimination. All the other justices state that race-consciousness can be used in some circumstances to correct discrimination.

Because of its multiracial population, California becomes the center of the affirmative action storm. The number of African Americans and other protected minorities admitted to the University of California system drop, and the numbers at Berkeley, fall precipitously. In both California and Texas, administrators attempt to assure a diverse student body by offering admission to their top schools to all students in the top ranks of their high school class. The Supreme Court agrees that using race as a criterion in admissions procedures to create a different student body was a good practice, and disagrees when the universities decide to award points based on race as a criterion for admitting undergraduates. In the first case, *Grutter v. Bollinger*, the final decision states that universities can achieve racial diversity by having a diversified classroom. The equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment does not prohibit the law school's narrowly tailored use of race in admissions decisions. The belief is that the law school acts out of a compelling interest to obtain the educational benefits that accrues from a diverse student population and meaningful integration. However,

regarding the second case, *Gratz v. Bollinger*, the justice decides that the university crosses the line of what is permissible by giving points to black applicants.

It is in this period, the final acts of the civil rights movement, a journey that took African Americans from slavery to full citizenship, that Butler starts to develop the idea for the *Parable* series. Her plan is to write a series set on extraplanetary colonies funded by human explorers. Her antagonist is something she has never represented in her past novels. The environment itself takes an active role and becomes one of the antagonists within her story. The idea can be connected to the concept of Gaia, that describes Earth as a vital and organic totality; a living thing able to regulate itself the way our bodies do. In the first two novels of the *Parable* series we do not deal with the presence of other planets, but that is her idea for the following novels that she never managed to complete. Going back to the concept of Gaia, it says that the planet Earth seeks harmony and stability, and "wants" to keep her inhabitants alive and healthy. Unfortunately, beside the initial enthusiasm for her new idea, Butler will never manage to succeed and finish the series she had in mind.

> I'm researching now and playing with ideas, but I know by the way this feels that I've got something good it will probably have to be offered book by book because it will have no on-stage characters in common. Oh, but speaking of characters, have I got some juicy ones demanding to be heard. Like I said, fun, fun, fun. You see, this is what I'm like when I'm in love!" (from Tribute to Octavia E. Butler).

The literary object of Butler's new inspiration would define her next seventeen years of her career, the last of her life; it is also a period of frustration because of her inability to realize the full potential of her ideas, in fact, the *Parable* series remains unfinished.

To sum up, the legislative success of the civil rights movement, with the Civil Rights Act of 1964, of 1968, the Voting Act of 1965 are important steps in the long journey toward an egalitarian society. African Americans eventually do not create a third party, but they are able to elect an impressive number of black mayors. With this first stage, there is the rise of black elected officials at the local and state level, and foundations of a new era were laid. In this first post-civil rights movement phase, the black voting bloc sides with the Democratic Party, and pushes for politics that would strengthen their communities and secure what they recently achieved. The second phase, according to Hine, is characterized by the efforts of mobilized black communities and their leaders to make the black presence felt on the national level. The third phase witnesses both the rise of black conservatives and the election in 2008 of the first African American president. A fourth phase emerged after 2008, and

it characterized by contradictory impulses. More than 90 percent of black voters support Obama's reelection in 2012, but black progressives debate whether he has significantly improved the lives of black people. Many problems still remain open, such as the chronic economic distress, the deterioration of black communities, the social, health, and workplace concerns of black women, and the educational opportunities for black children.

Butler's work offers a perspective that links spiritual teaching and social consciousness; social justice nowadays represents one of the most important challenges to our consciences. As new technologies and corporate political policies makes it possible to accumulate wealth, the gap between rich and poor is increasing. This increasing gap sounds like a mockery to freedom, justice, democracy, and all the values America is found in. Bulter's work challenges circumstances; it can be thought as a quest for social justice, as it tackles issues such as racism, environmentalism, psychological research. Her motto in the *Parable* series is "change"; what happens if we read her work as a tool for cultural and institutional change?

Chapter 2. American Constitution within *The Parable* Series

We are Earthseed. We are flesh – self-aware,
questing, problem-solving flesh. We are that
aspect of Earthlife best able to shape God
knowingly. We are Earthlife maturing, Earthlife
preparing to fall away from the parent world.
We are Earthlife preparing to take roots in
new ground, Earthlife fulfilling its purpose,
its promise, its Destiny.
(Sower: 135)

2.1 The 1st Amendment: Freedom of religion in Lauren Olamina's world

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion,
or prohibiting people the free exercise thereof;
or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press, or the right
of the peaceably to assemble,
and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.
(U.S. Constitution, First Amendment)

In this section we summarize the context in which the First Amendment was written, and we see how its matter is a crucial point in the reflection inside Butler's *Parable* series. In particular, we analyze how religion plays a central role in the life of the characters, and how Butler uses it to shape the story. Within the *Parables* there are three main religions: the religion of Robledo, that is the traditional Christian religion directly brought in the story from our present time; Earthseed, that is a new cult founded by Lauren Olamina, with the aim to find new answers to the collapsing world, and Cristian America, glorified by president Jarret, that is a fanatic cult that opposes Earthseed and other minor

beliefs in the attempt to unify America under one religion. We argue that the First Amendment is violated by Jarret, also if Earthseed appears to pass the "sincerity test" and qualify to be a religion. Moreover, despite the aim to bring a new model that detaches itself from past social and religious structures, Earthseed qualifies as a traditional religion by following the criteria proposed by our nowadays Court; this allows us to argue that it fails its initial aim by proving itself to become a cult like any other one on Earth. Earthseed is not proposing a new social or religious structure to humanity, instead, it is bringing back past ideas that under the dictatorship had been muted.

To do so, we first briefly describe the historical context in which the First Amendment was written, because it is fundamental to understand the reason why religion deeply affected Butler's work. In the United States, religion has always played an important role; in fact, 83% of the population declares to belong to a religious affiliation (Epstein, Walker: 312). If we look at American history itself we can easily realize that religion has been a constant since the very beginning; the first settlers are people escaping from European restrictions, and they are seeking a land to practice their own religion freely, like what Earthseed claims to do. It is interesting to notice that during the seventeenth century they start a European-like discriminating policy against people with a different religion, such as Catholics. In fact, Anti-Catholic laws were established, and a strict religious view was imposed to the colonies. Only two states, Maryland and Rhode Island, had a constitution where full religious freedom was guaranteed. The remaining colonies established state religions; for example, Puritanism was the official religion of Massachusetts Bay Colony, and in Virginia the official religion was Anglicanism.

After the Declaration of Independence, some more tolerant attitudes developed. For instance, some states, such as North Carolina in 1776, adopts a constitution that guaranteed a certain freedom of faith; that constitution says that everyone can worship according to his/her own conscience. However, other states, such as Delaware, adopts a more restricted constitution; it guarantees the right to worship any religion, but it also states that every state officer should be Christian. When the framers of the Constitution met in Philadelphia, the debate was still open and far from being solved. Benjamin Franklin himself suggests a preach session after a long and difficult meeting with the other delegates. They do not approve, because it could be offensive towards some people, and it could be seen as an act of desperation from the citizens. Eventually, the freedom of religion was mentioned in Article VI, saying that "no religious Test shall ever be required as a Qualification to any Office or public Trust under the United States" (Epstein, Walker: 313).

And yet, this solution is not satisfying to the most, because it does not address the matter "freedom of religion" directly. At the end of the congressional debate and state ratification process, they manage to find a suitable form to defend the right to freely worship any religion, and the first lines of the First Amendment of the Constitution are finally approved: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting people the free exercise thereof" (First Amendment, U.S. Constitution). The problem they face then, is the definition of the term itself; otherwise, how could the Court interpret those two first lines? The question can be tricky; for example, if a religion requires its observants to drink Champagne and eat caviar every day, what will happen if some of them are put in jail and the officers refuse to give them what they need to observe their religion? In this case, the prisoners can file a lawsuit to force the prison to provide them what their religion requires. They can claim that the government officials are depriving them of their rights to practice their own religion freely. Even if it appears clear that the prisoners may make up this religion just to obtain good food while in prison, the question this example sets is crucial for the matter. How can we define a religion? Since in the Constitution there is nothing concerning its definition, this task is assigned to the Court. Defining what can be considered or not a religion is useful for us because we can apply the same method the Court applies to define Earthseed, and consequently show how it evolves as religion.

In the mid twentieth century, American population increased the number of religious affiliations, so the question of what can be considered religion is brought up once again. One interesting case is the *United States v. Ballard* in 1944. Guy Ballard claims to have seen Comte de Saint Germain while hiking on Mount Shasta (Northern California) in 1930. This saint is supposed to have lived several centuries ago, and according to what Ballard claims, he says he chose Ballard, his wife, and his child, to be his messengers on Earth. Hence Ballard and his wife start the "I Am" movement, and ask the observants to give them money in exchange of wealth, happiness, and health. They raise a million of followers. But the government could not state that "I Am" is not a religion, so they initially accuse Ballard and his wife to fraud people. Eventually the Court has to address the question whether "I Am" is or is not a true religion. As Justice William O. Douglas states:

> Men may believe what they cannot prove. They may not be put to the proof of their religious doctrines or beliefs. Religious experiences which are as real as life to some may be incomprehensible to others. Yet the fact that they may be beyond the ken of mortals does not mean that they can be made suspect before the law. Many take their gospel from the New Testament. But it would hardly be supposed that they could be tried before a jury charged with the duty of determining whether

> those teachings contained false representations. The miracles of the New Testament, the Divinity of Christ, life and death, the power of prayers are deep in the religious conviction of many, If one could be sent to jail teaching false, little indeed would be left of religious freedom (Epstein, Walker: 317).

So, the key to solve this delicate matter is to consider a proper test to determine whether a religion is to be considered constitutionally protected or not. The test is not meant to check the truth of the doctrine, but the sincerity with which it is held. In the case of the prisoners asking for caviar and Champagne then, we can argue whether their religious view is held by sincerity or not.

We can apply this test to check whether Earthseed qualifies as religion or not. If it does, then Christian American fanatics deliberately violated the First Amendment, and the trial held in *Talents* – when Lauren Olamina sues the organization for their crimes – finds a new reason to be considered fair. To apply the sincerity test we first need to define the circumstances where the new religion was born, to check if people were actually in need of a new religion or not. Instead of depicting the whole community of Robledo, we can focus our attention on the analysis of two very different – and so representative – characters.

If we apply the sincerity test of the Court to Mrs. Sims and Keith's life choices, we can conclude that the criterion appears to be satisfied in the moment when they both take congruent action respecting their feeling of dissatisfaction and disillusionment connected to their former life choices. Mrs. Sims is a devoted Christian, who criticizes and looks skeptical at people who worship a different religion. She does not like her neighbors because they belong to the old generation of Chinese people who still is Buddhist: "'Idolaters', she would call them if none of them were around" (*Sower*: 19). But an event changes her perspective; Mrs. Sims is robbed, and after the robbery she loses all her belongings. To add more desperation to the case, her son's family dies because of a house fire. The causes could be several: "Maybe it was a vengeance fire set by some enemy of a family member or maybe some crazy just set it for fun. I've heard there's a new illegal drug that makes people want to set fires" (*Sower*: 20). After this tragedy, the old Mrs. Sims kills herself, despite her religion clearly states that "if you kill yourself, you go to hell and burn forever. She believed in a literal acceptance of everything in the Bible. Yet, when things got to be too much for her, she decided to trade pain now for eternal pain in the hereafter" (Sower: 21). Lauren Olamina starts questioning her whole belief system; does the old lady really believe in it after all? The religious vision of Lauren Olamina's ancestors is trembling as the world is changing quickly and demanding more and more from its inhabitants.

Another example of what triggered a need for a new religious system is represented by Keith, Lauren Olamina's brother. He escapes from the community, lives as an outlaw, and later dies. He sneaks out of the community gates with his mother's keys, and loses them to five outsiders. As a result, they manage to enter Robledo at night and steal from the village. Eventually Lauren Olamina and Keith's father discover it was all Keith's fault, and he obliges him to publicly confess in church. We will discuss the unusual trial in one of the following sections. What is important to notice is that, after a public humiliation Keith decides to leave Robledo and start a new life as outlaw, dedicating himself to illegal trades. Like Lauren Olamina, also Keith is trying to find a different way of living and answers to the problems of his time. Like his sister, he is able to detect the problems of their parent's "religious" way of living. In the community, religion, justice, and social practices are linked together, so there is no way of exiting it and still being accepted in the social group of Robledo.

> Dad stared at him in utter disgust. "You disobeyed," he said. "You stole. You endangered the lives and the property of everyone here, including your mother, your sister, and your little brothers." (…) Keith started straight ahead. "Bad guys come in even if they didn't have a key," he muttered. "They come in and steal stuff. It's not my fault!" (…) This morning sermon was on the ten commandments with extra emphasis on "Honor thy father and thy mother," and "Thou shalt not steal" (Sower: 82).

Despite being very different, Mrs. Sims and Keith both die because they realize what the world is becoming, and they cannot bear it anymore. Mrs. Sims realizes it after her robbery and after her son's family is set on fire in their house. The religion she worships for all her life failed her, but at the same time she could not change her religious view because of her life long hostility against people who worship a different god. Keith is raised according to his father's religion, but after the robbery accident he realizes that what they have been worshipping is not updated and that his dad would not reason with him, instead, he would punish him as his faith requires. In both cases there is a unique religious view, that is not expected to change. The situation then becomes problematic for the characters, because they do change, and so they develop an intrinsic need to explore new possibilities, to speculate about different answers and not to rely on the old religious texts that are not able to provide them with satisfying explanations.

The situation is more complex than it seems; within Robledo there are several religions coexisting, as we already saw (Richard Moss's religion, Buddhism and Christianity); so, at first sight we can think that the community respects the principle expressed by the first lines of the First Amendment;

this means, the right to freely choose which religion to worship is protected. This is true for the old religions, but when the characters try to develop something new, leave behind old religions, and explore new possibilities (Mrs. Sims kills herself, which is something her religion strictly forbids; Keith steals and gets involved into illegal activities) the community of Robledo is not tolerant anymore. The sacred Text speaks clearly; the ten commandments are to be respected and not to be questioned. Within the Christian community of Robledo, no tolerance is admitted; no one can live according to different "religious" rules even if they are desperate, and they cannot bear the weight of their lives anymore. "Religious" here is to be intended as the Court explained, in its wider meaning: it indicates "life choices". In this first section of the *Sower* Butler's narrative path is pointing at the identification of the circumstances that promote the development of a new religion. The two characters's lives (Keith and Mrs. Sims) can be considered as parables inside the parable – a simple story with a moral or religious purpose (Macmillan Dictionary). That is to say, they carry the important message, that serves as trigger for Lauren Olamina to think about different possibilities, about a new way of thinking the world. Their desperate need of new answers and new freedom will later make Lauren Olamina develop Earthseed. Given the reasons why Earthseed was developed, the sincerity test qualifies it as religion.

After introducing the sincere parameter in the *Ballard* decision, also another parameter helps the Court to define religion. The parameter is the conscientious objection to compulsory military service. Congress states that people can require to be exempted from military service if their religion prohibits them to participate in wars in any form. Congress definition for religious belief is "an individual's belief in a relation to a Supreme Being involving duties superior to those arising by any social human relation but (not including) essentially political, sociological, or philosophical views or a merely personal moral code" (Epstein, Walker: 319). By using this definition, members of a given religion that does not believe in war and prohibits its observants to give a contribution to it, can qualify for exemptions. For instance, Quakers. What is even more interesting for this research is the following question: what if someone does not belong to a traditionally organized religion, or does not necessarily frame his/her beliefs in relations to a supreme being? All in all, Earthseed does not introduce a supreme being as the first interpretations of the Amendment thought of it – a God represented by the major monotheistic religions.

The case *United State v. Segger* of 1965 provides a suitable example of how this problem can be solved. During the 1960s there was the Vietnam War, and several cases similar to this one are brought up to court. The justices considered whether a person who is not a member of an organized religion

could obtain an exemption or not. Segger claims he has the rights to obtain an exemption because of his religious beliefs, although he left the answer of his belief in a supreme being open. According to Justice Clark:

> Congress, in using the expression "Supreme Being" rather than the designation "God", was merely clarifying the meaning of religious training and belief so as to embrace all religions and to exclude essentially political, sociological, or philosophical views. (…) The test of belief "in relation to a Supreme Being" is whether a given belief that is sincere and meaningful occupies a place in the life of its possessor parallel to (…) the orthodox belief in God (Epstein, Walker: 320).

After some time, the Court starts considering the term "religious" instead. Court focuses now "on the sincerity (not to be intended as truth) with which someone (or one's religion) holds a particular view" (Epstein, Walker: 320). This means, religion can be extended into a particular lifestyle; that's why Buddhism can be considered a religion, even if it does not look like the most monotheistic ones.

We just proved that Earthseed qualifies to be considered a religion. According to this new perspective, does Earthseed still qualify? That is to say, does Earthseed provide religious life choices for its observers? To answer this question we first need to describe the religious situation of the community where Earthseed is born, namely Robledo, so we can see if there are other issues regarding religious life choices beside the ones we already described with Mrs. Sims and Keith.

If we analyze the composition of the community of Robledo where Lauren Olamina spends her childhood, we meet different ways of living according to other "religious beliefs", such as Richard Moss's organization. He lives inside Robledo, but he develops his own religion: "a combination of the Old Testament and historical Western African practices. He claims that God wants men to be patriarchs, rulers and protectors of women, and fathers of as many children as possible" (Sower: 32). Lauren Olamina is severely critical with this life approach, but she knows that "there's a lot of that kind of thing going on in other neighborhoods. Some upper-class men prove they're men by having a lot of wives in temporary or permanent relationships" (ibid.).

Another example is given by a symbolic character that can depict the past and the world Lauren Olamina desperately wants to change: her father. We learn from the very beginning of the *Sower*, when her father is introduced, that he is a reverend, and that because of the dangers of the world outside the wall of Robledo he educates his children at home. He teaches them to worship his God, and because he is born in the twentieth century, he shows many characteristics of the people of our

time. According to Allen, by giving such a contemporary representation of Lauren Olamina's father, Butler wants to underline our short-sightedness. Her father, Laurence, is stuck in a past that is over and that he is not able to change accordingly to what the world requires. An example of attachment to old traditions is given in the second chapter of the *Sower,* where we are introduced to a traditional ritual (baptism), that, despite all the difficulties, Laurence manages to organize in the church of his friend that still has a baptistery. The reader can notice from the very beginning of the chapter how Lauren Olamina's attitude towards this ritual is critical; she does not share the need for such ritual, and she does not understand why they should all risk their lives, go outside the wall and reach a church just to get baptism.

> We rode our bikes (…) this morning – me, two of my brothers, four other neighborhood kids who were ready to be baptized, plus my father and some other neighborhood adults riding shotgun. All the adults were armed. That's the rule. Go out in a bunch, and go armed. The alternative was to be baptized in the bathtub at home. That would have been cheaper and safer and fine for me. To the adults, going outside to a real church was like stepping back into the good old days when there were churches all over the place and too many lights and gasoline was for fueling cars and trucks instead of for torching things. They never miss a chance to relive the good old days or to tell kids how great it's going to be when the country gets back on its feet and good times come back (Sower: 7).

For Lauren Olamina the impact with her father's religious beliefs represents a crucial yardstick for the development of her own world view, that is, Earthseed. Early in the *Sower* she starts questioning the world she lives in, and the beliefs that regulate it. To her, the old Christian beliefs do not make sense anymore, and a new religion, a new approach to the world is needed, because the world itself is speaking to us in a way it did not do in the past, so we need new ways to answer to it.

> A lot of people seem to believe in a bid-daddy-God or a big-cop-God or a big-king-God. They believe in a kind of super-person. They believe in a kind of super-person. A few believe God is another word for nature. And nature turn out to mean just about anything they happen not to understand or feel in control of. (…) There is a big, early-season storm blowing itself out in the Gulf of Mexico. It's bounced around the Gulf, killing people from Florida to Texas, and down into Mexico. (…) That's nature. (…) Most of the dead are the street poor who have nowhere to go and who don't hear the warnings until it's too late (…) Where's safety for them, anyway? It is a sin against God to be poor?

> (…) One way or another we'll all be poor one day. The adults say things will get better, but they never have. (…) How will God (my father's God) behave towards us when we're poor? Is there a God? Deists like Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson believed God was something that made us, then left us on our own. "Misguided", Dad said when I asked him about Deists (Sower: 13).

As a sign of the definitive end of an era, there is the symbolical disappearance of Lauren Olamina's father. He is said to disappear into mysterious circumstances; his body, unlikely Keith's body, is never found. If we think of Lauren Olamina's father as the representation of the combination of the old religion and of the traditional, outdated way of dealing with the world, we can think of his disappearance as a warning. The old world, and the people that still believe in it, are destined to disappear, swallowed by a chaotic hostile new world, in the same way he disappeared. We can notice that in Lauren Olamina's journal, she says to be scared because of his dad's disappearance. The fear she feels is also the fear of being right in her beliefs and right in her thinking that the world needs dramatically different answers to the new questions it is bringing up to its inhabitants. By searching for her father, Lauren Olamina and the others realize that outside their wall the situation is even worse than what they expected it to be.

> Dad didn't come home today. He was due this morning. I don't know what that means. I don't know what to think. I'm scared to death. (…) Today a group of us, all armed, rode bicycles from home to River Street and down River Street to the college. (…) We checked side streets, alleys, vacant buildings, every place we could think of. (…) All of this on top of losing Keith… (…) I've never seen more squalor, more human remains, more feral dogs than I saw today. (…) We never found him. We found human bones and animal bones. We found the rotting corpses of five people scattered among the boulders. We found the cold remains of a fire with a human femur and two human skulls lying among the ashes. At least, we came home and wrapped our community wall around us and huddled in our illusion of security (Sower: 116-117-118).

In Lauren Olamina's father's death there is another symbolism that represents both the strong link between the community of Robledo and the past, and the bitter realization that a community rooted on that same past will not survive the world because it is not suited to do so. "Kayla Talcott began an old song. Others took it up, singing slowly, but with feeling: "We shall not, we shall not be moved…" (Sower: 120). The song recalls the civil rights movement, and it was inspired by a Biblical passage.

So, despite the community being rooted in the civil rights movement, as Moylan observes, eventually "they will be moved" (Moylan: 232).

After the many deaths the community suffered, the narration of the life within Robledo, the gradual falling apart of the community, and its social and religious beliefs merge into the definition of Earthseed. Lauren Olamina cannot bear more suffering and she is determined to start a new community; a completely new system that will give people back something they lost, such as a purpose for their lives, a new belief system that makes sense with the contemporary hostile world, and that does not only recall the good old days waiting for them to come back. Earthseed is a "belief system that she herself created – or, as she says, a network of truths that she has simply recognized" (Talents: 47). Lauren Olamina's god is

> a process or a combination of processes, not an entity. It is not conscious at all. "God is change," she says, and means it. Some of the faces of her god are biological evolution, chaos theory, relativity theory, the uncertainly principle, and, of course, the second law of Thermodynamics. "God is change, and in the end, God prevails" (Talents: 47-48).

Her religion roots in science, and it differs from the traditional religions because Earthseed does not consider the existence of a "Supreme Being", instead, God is said to be change, and the last Destiny of the observants of this new belief is "to take roots among the stars" (Sower: 199), as it is repeated throughout the novels several times. In her efforts to start something completely new and original, she still makes some references to the past. In the two novels Lauren Olamina makes a huge effort to detach herself and her belief from the past and from the planet Earth, as she wants to start from scratch in another galaxy. Her project becomes problematic when she starts using hierarchies and social models that reflect the ones we had in the past. For example, when she speaks about Earthseed with her skeptical fellow, she states that she learned from her father and from his books, that means, she learns from the traditional past. Will she be able to detach herself completely from that vision of the world? Thanks to a skeptical character, Travis Charles Douglas, Lauren Olamina can explain better what Earthseed is about

> "What did you analyze to get Earthseed?" "Other people," I said, myself, everything I could read, hear, see, all the history I could learn. My father is – was – a minister and a teacher. My stepmother ran a neighborhood school. I had a chance to see a lot."

> "What did your father think of your idea of God?"
>
> "He never knew."
>
> "You never had the guts to tell him."
>
> I shrugged. "He's the one person in the world I worked hard not to hurt."
>
> "Dead?"
>
> "Yes" (…)
>
> "How did you get your ideas about God?"
>
> "I was looking for God," I said. "I wasn't looking for mythology or mysticism or magic. I didn't know whether there was a god to find, but I wanted to know. God would have to be a power that could not be defined by anyone or anything."
>
> "Change" (…)
>
> "Change is ongoing. Everything changes in some way – size, position, composition, frequency, velocity, thinking, whatever. Every little thing, every bit of matter, all the energy in the universe changes in some way." (…)
>
> There's power in knowing that God can be focused, diverted, shaped by anyone at all. But there's no power in having strength, and brains, and yet waiting for God to fix things for you (…) God will shape us all every day of our lives. Best to understand that and return the effort: Shape God (Sower: 194, 195, 197).

Earthseed's community protects its observants' freedom of expression, and the protected rights of the American Constitution (right to be safe, right to bear arms…) as we can see also in the next sections of this thesis. Lauren Olamina claims to create something new by protecting fundamental rights that were already being pointed out by the American Constitution in the past. So why does she focus on the adoption of new faiths instead of on the building of a new lay society that can work for everyone despite their beliefs? The answer can be found in the words Butler used in her interview with Brown that we already discussed in the introduction to this chapter; she sees religion as the most influential and powerful force of all times concerning human beings. That is the reason why in her *Parable* series religion is the key to power balance, and that is why when the newly elected president Jarret starts his speech by talking about religion and bringing back the glorious past of the country, he means to say that now the power balance is going to switch toward the Christian American organization, that he supports; the time for tolerance is over as he prepares to massacre whomever tries to interfere with his path. What is interesting is that Jarret later complains that his opponents are not respecting the

"sacred constitution" (Talents: 142), as they are a threat for the peace and safety he wants to restore within the country. Lauren Olamina and Jarret both tend to mix religion and government because it is easier to rule people if they share common belief, moral, and life expectations. In his speech we can see how he justifies his political agenda with religion:

> "A strong Christian America," he said "needs strong Christian American soldiers to reunite, rebuild, and defend it." In almost the same breath, he spoke of both "the generosity and the love that we must show to one another, to all of our Christian Americans," and "the destruction we must visit upon traitors and sinners, those destroyers in our midst" (Talents: 136).

> President Jarret is still stirring up bad feelings over Alaska. (...) "These people want to treat all of Alaska as their own personal, private property. Can we let them get away with it? Can we let them cheat us, rob us, destroy our country, use our sacred constitution as waste paper? Can we forget that 'If a house be divided against itself, that house cannot stand?' Jesus Christ spoke those words 2000 years ago. President Abraham Lincoln paraphrased them in 1858. Was Lincoln wrong? Was – dare we ask it? Dare we imagine it? Was Christ wrong? (Talents: 142).

Lauren Olamina opposes this dictatorship, not because Jarret is building a dictatorship, but because he is still thinking in term of old schemes. Her criticism is wider; she claims a new possible destiny for humanity. She claims she can destroy the wheel of human history (that include but that does not limit itself to dictatorial periods) that brought back terrible moments of the past with a certain cyclic nature: Earhseed "will break the old cycle, even if it's only to begin a new one, a different one" (Talents: 322). But by creating her Earthseed religion and Acorn community, she is trying to impose a new cult like Jarret does with Christian America. She fails on her ambitious project of bringing humanity into a new stage, and the critique her daughter Larkin makes to her system in the *Talents* is every chapter harsher. Eventually, Earthseed becomes

> an unusual cult. It financed scientific exploration and inquiry, and technological creativity. It set up grade schools and eventually colleges, and offered full scholarships to poor but gifted students. The students who accepted had to agree to spend seven years teaching, practicing medicine, or otherwise using their skills to improve life in the many Earthseed communities. Ultimately, the intent was to

> help communities to launch themselves toward the stars and to live on the distant worlds they found circling those stars (Talents: 340).

It is interesting to compare Lauren Olamina's words from the beginning of the series, when she is just imagining Earthseed, and her words after she manages to establish her first Earthseed community. Earthseed later develops rituals that resemble mass; its ceremonies recall the traditional ones; it does not bring significant innovation as it still rests its foundations on a traditional structure. In fact, they still celebrate weddings, funerals, and holidays; the "gatherings" resemble Sunday school instead of a totally new concept.

> Ceremony is needed. (…) Once the welcoming was over, we moved on to the weekly discussion. Our Gatherings, aside from weddings, funerals, welcomings, or holidays celebrations, are discussions. They're problem solving sessions, they're times of planning, healing, learning, creating, times of focusing, and reshaping ourselves. They can cover anything at all to do with Earthseed or Acorn, past, present, or future, and anyone can speak. During the first Gathering of the month, I lead a looking-back-looking-forward discussion to keep us aware of what we've done and what we must do (…) And I encourage people to think about how the things we do help us to sustain purposeful religious community (Talents: 65-66).

Even if Lauren Olamina's initial aims were to detach her new cult from the past, she eventually falls into the same system she tries to break. Earthseed was born thanks to a sincere necessity for new answers, but it develops into a secular and very down-to-earth organization that does not resemble the spiritual quest that moved its creator in the first phases of the elaboration of the new faith. The communities now are well organized, and the life within them is not that terrible to justify the need to move to other planets. In the end, Earthseed becomes just another cult that managed to fix a broken society and gave to its observants a purpose and a place within a world that was on the verge of collapse. Eventually, Lauren Olamina does not succeed in her attempt to completely detach her cult from the past and from traditional social structures. In fact, her daughter Larkin, who represents the next generation, does not believe in Earthseed and chooses to stay loyal to a more traditional society, even if that very society did not provide her with a true family and true love. She chooses it despite following her natural mother into her spatial adventure. Marc, Larkin's beloved uncle, finds a suitable definition for Christian America, which is something at this point we can also apply to Earthseed:

> I believe in the power of religion itself as a great mover of masses. (…) Successful churches were (…) sources of influence. They offer people safe emotional catharsis, a sense of community, and ways to organize their desires, hopes, and fears into systems of ethics. Those things were important and necessary (Talents 278).

At the very end of *Talents* we find another signal of the problematic nature of Earthseed. Earthseed communities are finally approaching the launch of the first spaceship to colonize a new planet, and they named the rocket "Christopher Columbus" (Talents: 363). This sinister reference to European colonization confirms our hypothesis; by the end of the series, Earthseed turns out to be another organization very rooted in the planet Earth and in its history. It does not become a solution to all the problems, even if it does manage to improve many people's lives, and it does not represent a total break with the past, as Lauren Olamina wanted it to be. It does not justify the need for a new religion in the sense of the need of "new religious life choices", because eventually it fails in its innovation.

In Butler's *Parable* series, as we showed, religion is a key aspect of Lauren Olamina's life. In fact, we encounter three main models of religion, and the problems linked to them, within the series. First, we meet Lauren Olamina ancestors's religion, represented by her father. Secondly, we assist to the development of a new "religion" – it passed the sincerity test in a first phase, but it does not fit the "life choice" broader definition – called Earthseed, which claims to subvert the old Christian tradition and give people a more honest and coherent world view; thirdly, in *Talents* we encounter Christian America, an organization sinisterly similar to the Klan that claims to bring America back to the glorious past by the unification of the country under a unique religion. As the story comes to an end, Jarret's Christian America and his whole war policies are said to be bad "for business, bad for the U.S. Constitution, and bad for a large percentage of the population" (Talents: 351). In fact, under his regime the freedom to choose which religion to worship is abolished, and people who do not accept to convert and live according to the Christian beliefs are imprisoned, enslaved, tortured, and killed. Jarret policies are defeated, as he does not succeed to be reelected. While Earthseed spreads, Jarret popularity decreases and so does the popularity of Christian America, that is sued by "champions of the First Amendment" (Talents: 354). These open references to the American Constitution highlight the link between Butler's science fictional world and our contemporary world, proving once again that a link between reality and fiction is possible and that law played an important role for the development of her stories. In fact, it is through a legal trial that Lauren Olamina obtains

the money she needs to finally start her space projects. We discuss the representation of trials in Butler's *Parable* series in the section dedicated to the Sixth Amendment.

Before that, we focus on the Second and Fourth Amendments, that protect the rights of people to bear arms and to be secure in their own persons. We see whether the different community models proposed protect or not their inhabitants. Moreover, we argue that starting from Robledo, and then moving on with Earthseed, they both fail on their aim of protecting their community. Eventually only Christian America succeeds in this; being armed and employing the most technological tools made the difference. The next section illustrates Butler's answer to the debated question about the regulation of the possession of arms, and whether this played a role or not in the destruction of the communities.

2.2 The 2nd and 4th Amendment: Right of the people to be secure in their own persons

A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State,
the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed.
(U.S. Constitution, Second Amendment)

The right of the people to be secure in their persons,
houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures,
shall not be violated, and no Warrants shall issue,
but upon probable cause, supported by Oath or affirmation,
and particularly describing the place to be searched,
and the persons or things to be seized.
(U.S. Constitution, Fourth Amendment)

In this section we discuss the Second and Fourth Amendment, how they were first written and interpreted, and their relevance within Butler's series. In particular, in this section we show how the matter that is at the center of the two Amendments is portrayed in Butler's world. Starting with the Second Amendment, we notice that throughout the novel the right to keep and bear arms is not questioned by the characters, as all of them learn to use arms to protect themselves and their belongings. What emerges is Butler's subtle criticism; why do people need to arm themselves? If there is a reason, is it related somehow to the government organization of the defense of the single citizen? Does something fail in this process? Moreover, she shows us that even if people are trained to protect themselves and know how to use arms, they will still die, they will still see their houses set on fire, and Robledo and Acorn burned to the ground. We also see how Acorn resembles a military camp more than a religious community, because of the watches and the training its inhabitants have to do. The idea of a pure and renewed "city upon a hill" that Lauren Olamina and her fellows aim to fund does not even have the time to rise in the reader's mind. In fact, in the very moment Lauren Olamina and the others put their foot in Bankole's land, where Acorn will be built, they realize their ideal of peace and new life is corrupted by evidences of violence – Bankole sister's family skulls – that immediately mines every possibility of purity and new beginning and brings Lauren Olamina and her fellows back to their disturbing reality. In fact, the first thing they do in Acorn is the funeral of Bankole's family. The symbolic meaning of the funeral scene at the end of *Sower* can be interpreted

as a prophecy of the destiny of Acorn, which will not be to travel to the stars, as we have seen in *Talents*. After reading the organization of these two communities regarding the Second Amendment, we then proceed to analyze the Fourth Amendment and its representation within the two novels. The Fourth Amendment is interesting because it serves as a transition from the first two, protecting fundamental people's rights, and the sixth, that regulates how a fair trial should be set up. We see how in the novels within the communities, people are not safe from strong powers, and they are not safe from intruders who rob them all the time. We then interpret the Fourth Amendment regarding one of its aims, namely, the protection of the civilians against the possible abuse of power from the police. Eventually, we see how the police does not provide safety, and it is a rather useless leftover from a working social structure of the past.

We start the analysis once again from the community of Robledo, where Lauren Olamina's father, Laurence, plays a role of leadership. He is in favor of the implementation of arms in the daily life of the community, and he promotes the training of youngsters within the walls of the village. The necessity to learn self-defense comes from a lack of protection by the police.

> At neighborhood association meetings, Dad used to push the adults of every household to own weapons, maintain them, and know how to use them. "Know how to use them so well" he's said more than once "that you're as able to defend yourself at two A.M. as you are at two P.M." (…) "The police" my father told them "can't protect you. Things are getting worse. And as for you children… Well, yes, there is risk. But you can put your guns out of their reach while they're very young, and train them as they grow older. That's what I mean to do. I believe they'll have a better chance of growing up if you can protect them" (Sower: 34).

Lauren Olamina's father argues that the Robledo community needs to be protected and trained with guns. In fact, he "carries a nine millimeter automatic pistol whenever he leaves the neighborhood. He carries it on his hip where people can see it. He says that discourages mistakes" (Sower: 33). The debates whether it is better not to bear or to bear arms is open, but Butler wisely does not provide her personal opinion on the topic. She instead decides to leave the issue on the table and to portray what happens if someone carries a gun or not in the most realistic way possible: "Armed people do get killed – most often in crossfires or by snipers – but unarmed people get killed a lot more often" (ibid.).

Thanks to the words of Lauren Olamina's father, we can contextualize the debate and learn something more about gun regulation in Robledo and Acorn. Who defends guns ownership rights

claims that the Amendment protects the right of every person to keep and bear arms. Who supports gun control policies argues the contrary. The disagreement between these two positions continues without interruptions also in our contemporary political arena, as the ambiguity is essentially given by the amendment's wording (Epstein, Walker: 1276). The Second Amendment states: "A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed". During the years, two different interpretations are developed; the first one, that favors controls of gun ownership, highlights the first part of the Amendment. This means, "the amendment guarantees only a collective right of the states to arm their militias. No individual right to own firearms exists unless it is in conjunction with a state militia" (ibid.). We see this application in the Sower, and the characters are diffident towards it; when they are speculating about the possibility to move to Olivar, a corporate city, they are skeptical because they do not think that

> "there's any more future in Olivar that there was in our neighborhood. But at least in our neighborhood we had the guns." "For all the good it did us," Zahra muttered. "I know. But they were our guns, not hired gunmen. No one could turn them against us. In Olivar, from what Joanne said, no one's allowed to have a gun except the security force. "And who the hell are they" "Company people" (Sower: 151).

It is interesting to notice that nowadays this interpretation has little to no relevance, because it refers to the early years of the nation, while in Lauren Olamina's world it is still something they are dealing with. Back when the United States were formed, the single states do not have an army; the only way to answer for the emergencies is to call private soldiers, serving as a militia. Private soldiers are also bringing their own arms with them, because the states did not provide them; nowadays states do not need to call private armies anymore, because the role to defend citizens and to deal with emergencies is now up to the National Guard and to other government forces.

Lauren Olamina and her fellows are constantly exposed to a sort of private militia that defends private citizens, which means, it does not provide a service for the whole community, but defends only the interests and the people who are paying for it. Everything of some value is defended. Shops are protected by private guards that respect the shop owner's policies regarding how to deal with costumers. In the case of the shop Lauren Olamina and her fellows visit to get some essentials items to survive during their journey in the highway, they are surprised to notice that the guard will not take advantage of their power and steal their money.

> This morning Zahra took us to Hanning Joss, the biggest secure store complex in Robledo. We could get all we needed there. Hanning vendors sell everything from gourmet food to delousing cream, prostheses to homebirthing kits (…) We had to go to the complex one at a time, leaving two outside to guard our bundles – including my gun. Hanning, as I had heard many times on the radio, was one of the safest places in the city. If you didn't like their sniffers, metal detectors, package restrictions, armed guards, and willingness to strip-search anyone they thought was suspicious on the way in or out, you could stop somewhere else. (…) "Show your Hanning disc or money," an armed guard demanded at the massive gates. I was terrified that he would steal my money, but I showed the bills that I intended to spend, and he nodded. He never touched them. (…) Such a security conscious store wouldn't want its guards stealing the costumers' money. "Shop in peace," the guard said with no hint of a smile (Sower: 155).

If private guards at the shop behave professionally enough, the same cannot be said for all of them; in fact, Lauren Olamina is surprised to see how they treated them. In the majority of smalltown shops, guards are not that trained, and they tend to abuse their power: "the security guards in the stores were as well armed as the cops – shot-guns and automatic rifle, a couple of machine guns on tripods in cubicles above us" (Sower: 216) but

> some of the guards (…) weren't very well trained – or they were almost as power-drunk as the scavengers. They pointed their guns at us. It was crazy. Two of three of us walked into a store and two or three guns were trained on us. We didn't know what was going on at first. We froze, staring, waiting to see what was going to happen (ibid.).

Later Lauren Olamina reflects on what just happened "I couldn't help wondering how many accidents the crazy guards have with those guns. I suppose that after the fact, every accident was an armed robber with obvious homicidal inclinations" (ibid.).

The problem of the private militia is, as we just saw, that they tend to abuse their power, because there is nobody checking on their work. In the novels, we never meet one of those rich people who live in super safe areas, far away from the collapsing world. Butler keeps rich people at a distance, and only once in a while she talks about these people living in their castles, isolated from the others,

mainly to point out the social differences. If these people are busy living their peaceful lives, they won't check on what their private guards do, as long as they guarantee their safety.

Other considerations should be made for what is left of the government police that should guarantee safety to all people within the American soil. Police officers are distant, they do not provide actual protection to people, they do not intervene when a crime is committed, and the population is well aware to be alone when it comes to defend their lives and their belongings. After the first attack in Robledo, Lauren Olamina's father proposes to set up a night watch; some people argue that they should not rely on their own community for the defense of the village, but Lauren Olamina's father manages to persuade everyone that a watch is needed.

> "But… Can't we just call the police?" "For what? We can't afford their fees, and anyway, they're not interested until after a crime has been committed. Even then, if you call them, they won't show up for hours – maybe not for two or three days" "I know" "What are you going to say then? You want the kids to go hungry? You want thieves coming into the house once they've stripped the gardens?" (Sower:62)

The disappointment towards police forces is gradually increasing until the moment when Robledo is set on fire and the police just ignores the problem; this is a big evidence of a lack of the central government regarding security matters, that is, the government is not able to protect its own citizens. In a crucial moment after the Robledo fire, Lauren Olamina must confront the reality and realize that there is nobody left who can truly help her but herself and the few fellows she will learn to trust.

> I couldn't call the police. All the phones I knew of were slag. No strangers would let me use their phone if they had phones, and I didn't know anyone whom I could pay to call and trust to make the call. Most people would avoid me or be tempted to keep my money and never call. And anyway, if the police have ignored what's been done to my neighborhood so far, if such a fire and so many corpses can be ignored, why should I go to them? What would they do? Arrest me? Take my cash and their fee? I wouldn't be surprised. Best to stay clear from them (Sower: 146).

While Lauren Olamina and the others from Robledo walk in the highways, they see some policemen, and they avoid them, because at this point it is clear that they do not trust them anymore; moreover, they suggest that they may rob dead corpses, like any other scavenger

> A few miles along the highway, we saw some cops in cars, heading south toward what must now be a burned out hulk of a community with a lot of corpses. Perhaps the cops would arrest a few late-arriving scavengers. Perhaps they would scavenge a little themselves. Or perhaps they would just have a look and drive away. What had cops done for my community when it was burning? Nothing (Sower: 212).

Later in *Sower* we witness the problem of the uncontrollable spread of the pyro drug; what the central government decided to do is to is to restore the National Guard, but the idea is not that welcomed among the highway travelers: "the National Guard has been activated to restore order, and I suppose it might. But I suspect that in the short term, it will only add to the chaos. What else could another group of well-armed people do in such an insane situation" (Sower: 221).

With the police becoming every day more dangerous – "Cops had parked all along the shoulders of the highways, staring at us, some holding their shotguns or automatic rifle as though they'd love an excuse to use them" (Sower: 215) – the National Guard, and the private guards pretty useless for the guarantee of everyone's safety, our protagonists cannot but seek refuge into a second possible interpretation of the Second Amendment.

According to the Court, there is a second interpretation of the Amendment. It defends the interests of those in favor of bearing and keeping arms according to the second half of the Amendment; this interpretation highlights the right of the single person to own arms. This right protects and reinforces the right of the people to defend themselves if they engage in a fight with someone. If we consider the Amendment according to this second interpretation, it is still relevant nowadays, and it is very relevant in Butler's world as we just explained. As we already saw, the community in Robledo is trained to use arms and defend itself without the need to call the police. They also organize watches, to prevent robbers to enter the wall. In case of intruders entering the wall, the people in charge of the watch had to follow the protocol they agreed on in one of the village meetings:

> Mrs. Lincoln and Mr. Montoya followed the plan that the group of watchers had put together at their meetings. Without a word of command or warning, they fired their guns into the air two or three times each, at the same time, blowing their whistles full blast. They kept to cover, but inside the Moss house, someone woke up and turned on the rabbit house lights. That could have been a lethal mistake

> for the watchers, but they were hidden behind pomegranate bushes. The two thieves ran like rabbits (Sower: 65).

After the destruction of Robledo Lauren Olamina and some fellows are forced to leave the area and move somewhere else, seeking a new place where to settle. During their migration along what was left of the Californian highways, they keep organizing watches at night, to guard their belongings and protect themselves from the other walkers. We find the same night watch organization also once they settle and found Acorn; the night watch is a necessity because intruders can attack them every minute. In a passage resembling the one we just read, Butler describes the attack of Acorn by some robbers:

> The watchers were Gray Mora and Zahra Balter. Zahra was the one who spotted the intruders, As she described it to me later, she saw two people running, staggering, sometimes seeming to hold one another up. If not for the staggering, Zahra might have fired a warning shot, at least. (…) There were five people chasing the staggering runners – or, with her night- vision glasses, she could see five. She kept looking for more. (…) Zahra put her rifle in automatic and fired a short burst across the path of the two front runners. They stopped (…) Then all five were shooting (Talents: 147).

Until this point of the narration, the attack seems similar to the one of Robledo; people are shooting each other with their guns. But after some lines we are introduced to a new technology, the truck, that represents the technological innovation in the story. The technological development in the *Parables* is applied to the arm industry, as communities manage to produce and get arms every time more efficient and refined. The truck works with a sophisticated technology that allows it to automatically detect human life and shoot in that direction. It can also tell to its driver whether the target is still alive or dead. In Butler's description, the truck assumes humanoid characteristics (smell), which adds a sinister connotation to the whole focus of the technological advancement on the development of lethal arms issue.

> Once we were sure, we pointed out to the truck and let it open up on them. Along with the truck's ability to "see" in the dark via infrared, ambient light, or radar, it also has very good "hearing", and an incorrectly designated sense of "smell". This last is based on spectroscopic analysis rather than an actual smelling, but it is a kind of chemical analysis over a distance. (…) When the truck began shooting, I left the forward monitors to Harry. I didn't need to see anything that might make me

> useless, and the truck didn't need any more help from me. (…) The intruder nearest to Zahra was dead. According to the truck, he was no longer changing the chemistry of the air in his immediate vicinity in a way that indicated breathing, and he wasn't moving. Once the truck was stopped, its ability to detect motion was as good as its hearing. Put the two together and we could detect breathing and heartbeat – or their absence (Talents: 149).

At the end of the attack the Acorn community wins, and the following day they find what is left of the intruders; the narration focuses on the description of their belongings, that appear to be only some guns. "The intruders' guns are, like our own, good-quality, well-cared-for automatic rifles with laser sites. One is German, one's American, and the three newest are Russian" (Talents: 154). Their technological arms were not enough to defeat the truck Acorn has.

Until this moment we saw that the key to survive, or at least to have some chances to survive, is the possession of the most advanced arms. In the case of Robledo, the village is set on fire by drug addicts called pyromaniac – people who enjoy setting things on fire. We won't consider this case in this section because it does not deal with proper arms. What interests us more is the destruction of Acorn, because it happened with the employment of a sort of evolution of the truck, the so called "maggot":

> A maggot, nicknamed for its ugly shape, is something less than a tank, and something more than a truck. It's a big, armed and armored, all-terrain, all-wheel-drive vehicle. Private cops and military people use them, and people with plenty of money drive them as private cars. Maggots can go almost anywhere, over, around, or through almost anything. (…) Several small local towns have one or two for their cops or for search in the hills. But the things are serious fuel eaters – expensive to run (Talents: 170).

Acorn is attacked by seven of these lethal machines, and of course they have nothing enough powerful to protect themselves with; "only our truck guns would have even a ghost of a chance of stopping a maggot, anyway. Seven of the damned things!" (Talents: 170). Then, a harmful gas begins to spread, and it immobilizes the people of Acorn. The gas is described by Lauren Olamina as "terrible", and as something that "took away most of my ability to move, but left me wide awake, able to hear and see, able to know that my people were being collected like driftwood, being carried or dragged away by uniformed men" (Talents: 171). Again, who owns the most advanced arm wins. It seems that the

destiny of Lauren Olamina and her people is to settle, grow a village, and then perish because of an external stronger attack – that is what happened in Robledo and in Acorn.

This trajectory is what Butler imagines when it comes to talk about arm regulations; if the central power leaves some gaps in the process of defending their citizens, people will start to organize themselves with arms and private guards. After this first step, that is, the almost total arming of the population, there is another danger. Likely there will always be someone, one day, coming with a more advanced arsenal, ready to destroy what we built. It would have been interesting to see how Butler would develop this trajectory – lack of security, building of a private arsenal, fights within the territory to control it and the people – once Earthseed colonizes the space; this is a story line she never developed, probably because this is a very controversial topic that demands a very careful analysis, whether we decide to stand with advocates of the individual's right of bearing and keeping arms or we prefer a more centralized control of the weapons. As we showed, she does not take sides, instead, she focuses on pointing out why people gradually decided that the best solution to protect themselves was to purchase arms and learn how to use them.

We just saw how Acorn is destroyed because of the Christian American fanatics' better arsenal (maggots), and as we have already seen in this section the police and any other government force is not able to protect their citizens. In this case, the government and the Christian American organization coincide; this means, we can argue that the people who invade and destroyed Acorn are government's people, as they are said multiple times to represent the president himself – "Jarret's Crusaders" (Talents: 189). Police brutality, and later on the "new police" identified in Jarret's people, violate the Fourth Amendment and its aim to protect citizens against "physical intrusion into constitutionally protected areas" (Epstein, Walker: 1548). In fact, if the police search a place without a warrant, whatever evidence they find, it cannot be brought to court. This last passage regarding the validity or not of the evidence is not relevant for our analysis, because in the case of Butler's world, there is no jury, no trial, no justice as we know it. Nevertheless, it is still interesting to highlight the Fourth Amendment, because the right it protects is not even considered in Butler's dystopia, and it just disappears into the problematic society she depicts. The Christian American camp is not a place ruled by democracy. So far, we considered three fundamental Amendments of the Bill of Rights; the First, the Second, and the Fourth. If the first two represent the Constitution, and contribute to develop Butler's narrative by pointing out some problems and challenging Butler's characters to solve them, we notice that the right protected by the Fourth Amendment appears secondary because the more we enter the world of Christian America, the more we will see how the Constitution is negated. This is

specifically true when it comes to the organization and regulation of fair trials, (Fourth and Sixth Amendments), and to civil rights (Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments). These last three Amendments do not belong to the Bill of Rights, and they address the delicate topic of race that finally found a fair regulation with the Civil Rights Acts passed during the second half of the last century. In Butler's world, these rights last only for some decades, because she predicts a return of slavery in the first years of the new millennium.

In the next section we will briefly talk about the implications of the Sixth Amendment in the *Parable* series; we focus on the definition of fair trial, and see how Butler uses it in her Post Apocalypse society. In particular, we consider how revenge plays a key role in Butler society.

2.3 The 6th Amendment: Fair trial and impartial jury in Butler's world

In all criminal prosecutions, the accused shall enjoy the right
to a speedy and public trial, by an impartial jury of the State
and district wherein the crime shall have been committed,
which district shall have been previously ascertained by law,
and to be informed of the nature and cause of the accusation;
to be confronted with the witnesses against him;
to have compulsory process for obtaining witnesses in his favor,
and to have the Assistance of Counsel for his defence.
(U.S. Constitution, Sixth Amendment)

In Butler's Post Apocalypse world there is not that much space left for trial regulation. There are no impartial juries, no trials. The accused won't be defended by a lawyer, or by someone with any legal background. Butler does not dedicate that many lines to the description of trials, but in the two novels there are some interesting references to this matter that specifically prove what we just stated: in Butler's Apocalyptic scenario trials are not equal or fair. Trials are not based on what the Sixth Amendment states, that is, the regulation of a fair trial; instead, they are regulated by religious beliefs or popular beliefs. In this section, we see how Keith is charged of committing a crime and how the trial was held; then, we see how Jarret used popular beliefs to justify some homicides.

After Robledo is set on fire, Lauren Olamina and some fellows start wandering towards north, and, while Earthseed starts to develop its principles, the group speculates also about justice, and how they should judge people in that new and extremely dangerous environment:

> "You think you can take care of yourself out here, and maybe you can. But think what a stab wound or a broken bone would mean out there: Disablement, slow death from infection or starvation, no medical care, nothing." He looked at me as though he wasn't sure he wanted to know me anymore. "What, then?" he asked. "Everyone's guilty until proven innocent? Guilty of what? And how do they prove themselves to you?" (*Sower*: 162).

Lauren Olamina and her fellow travellers start questioning their concept of justice after the destruction of Robledo and the consequent falling apart of their previous social organization. In Robledo the concept of justice was defined by what the Bible said was right. The laws they adopted were taken from the Bible, for instance: "Thou shalt not kill" (*Sower*:164), and "Thou shalt not steal" (*Sower*: 154). Trials are held inside the church, as we can see in Keith's case; he steals his mother's keys and went outside the walls, then loose the keys to some thieves that come in at night and steal some rabbits. Justice and law, as we just saw, are very tight in Robledo:

> Keith had to confess what he had done this morning at church. He had to stand up in front of the whole congregation and tell them everything, including what the five thugs had done to him. Then he had to apologize – to God, to his parents, and to the congregation that he had endangered and inconvenienced. (…) Dad stared at him in utter disgust. "You disobeyed," he said. "You stole. You endangered the lives and the property of everyone here, including your mother, your sister, and your little brothers. If you were the man you think you are, I'd beat the hell out of you!" (…) This morning's sermon was on the ten commandments with extra emphasis on "Honor thy father and thy mother," and "thy shall not steal" (*Sower*: 81-82).

Keith has to go through a trial that strictly regulates what he has to say (he was just allowed to confess his crime, not to defend himself), and he is then judged by the local religious authority, that happens to be his own father. During mass, he accentuates some Biblical passages related to Keith's case, to humiliate him even more in front of the whole community.

The fact that he is judged inside the church means that in Robledo religion and justice are deeply connected, they are the same thing; this means that the justice model is based on a rudimental imitation of the trials we recall from the early American history, when the colonies were set up in the North Eastern coasts. Back then, Puritans lives were strictly regulated by religion, as we all know. Trials were conducted according to what the Bible considered sin or not, that means, if someone sins, they also should be condemned and punished by the public authority and not only spiritually (*The Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne is a very good example of how trials were set up at the time).

In *Talents* Butler's depicts several problems of the futuristic society, and even if the one that interests us in this section is left in the background, it is still very relevant if we consider it in the light of what we just said about trials and religion. President Jarret starts a huge witch hunt in the country,

burning the presumed witches at the end of every hunt. When Marcus is telling Lauren Olamina what he would do if he meets again the men who owned him as a slave, he makes a sinister comparison:

> I'll stake all three of them out and I'll burn them – like Jarret's people do with their so-called witches. (…) I saw that done once – a burning. Sargent – my second owner – did it to a woman who tried to kill him in his sleep. She was a beautiful woman. Sargent and his friends wiped out her family to get her, but then he slept with her before she had learned the rules. (…) The next day, (…) he staked the girl out naked and made us all gather wood and stack it around her and on top of her with just her head showing. Then he made us watch while he… while he burned her" (Talents: 120-121).

The eerie revival of witch hunt from the past is very significant because it shows once again Butler's ability of bringing back historical elements and mixing them with a post-Apocalypse society. The revival of these kind of practices is something that the Sixth Amendment prevents; religious beliefs are not to be mixed with public secular trials, otherwise the consequences can be dangerous. In Keith's case, he decides to run away from his community and later he dies. In the case of the witches, they eventually face the same faith because they are burned by their captors. Hence, in both cases the person that suffered an unfair trial is dead. But what happens if somehow these people managed to survive? According to what we find in Butler's novels, we can argue that those who manage to survive seek revenge.

Revenge is a topic that Butler introduces in two more cases; eventually people seeking revenge will still end up dead, which is a bitter evidence of the fact that probably seeking revenge is not an answer, even if those who seek it suffered an injustice. When Acorn is captured by Christian America, there was no process, no trial. Jarret's people arrive and destroy everything in the name of their faith, thanks to their advanced technological weapons. A former slave named Gray Mora immediately understands the situation, and decides that he is not going to be captured again. He lived a lot of injustices during his life, and he decides that this one was too much for him to bear.

> Had never worn a collar, but he had spent his childhood and young manhood as the property of people who treated him not quite as well as they treated their cattle. They had taken his wife from him and sold her to a wealthy man who had seen her and wanted her. (…) Her new owner made casual sexual use of her and then somehow, by accident or not, killed her. When Gray heard about that, he took his daughter Doe and broke free. He never told us exactly how he got free. I've always

> assumed he killed one or more of his masters, stole their possessions, and took off. (…) But this time, there was no escape. And yet Gray would not be a slave again. (…) Knowing Gray, I suspect he did something to cause the explosion. I believe he chose to die. He is dead (*Talents*: 172-173).

He takes revenge by not allowing these people to enslave him; choosing to die was his revenge. Similarly, we find that Emery Mora, Gray's new wife, chooses to die after some days of captivity. According to Jarret's Crusaders, women of the Acorn community are not officially married, because no Christian minister celebrated the wedding. This means, they "have been living in sin – 'fornicating like dogs' " (*Talents*: 190). Hence, a Crusader "dragged Diamond Scott off to his cabin last week and raped her. She says he told her it was all right. He was a man of God, and she should be honored. Afterwards, she kept crying and throwing up" (ibid).

Emery Mora decides that the situation is unbearable, and she decides to take actions:

> She took revenge for what happened to her husband and for the abduction of her two little boys. She seduced one of the Crusaders – one of those who had moved into her own cabin. She convinced him that she was willing and eager to sleep with him. Then sometime during the night, she cut his throat with a knife she had always kept under her mattress. Then she went to the Crusader sleeping in her daughters' room and cut his throat. After that, she lay down in her bed beside her first victim and cut her own wrists. The three of them were found dead the next morning. Like Gray, Emery had taken substantial revenge (*Talents*: 190).

Gray and Emery decide to die in order to protect themselves from further abuses; their acts are desperate, because there is no one protecting them from the violence of the new regime. After what happened to them, they lost every hope in justice, and they seek individual revenge even if this means sacrificing their own lives.

After assisting to an unjust punishment – a woman was trying to steal food from another one, who threatened her with a knife; they were both punished – Lauren Olamina tells us a bitter truth about the reality she and her fellows are condemned to live in: "Both victim and victimizer were treated like equally guilty. (…) Christian American officials made themselves judges, juries, and, when they chose to be, executioners. They didn't waste any effort trying to be fair" (*Talents*: 286).

In the next section we explore what happens to people who manage to survive this corrupted juridical system and exit captivity.

2.4 The 13th Amendment: "I couldn't see what was he doing until he fastened the slave collar around my neck"

Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude,
except as a punishment for crime whereof the party
shall have been duly convicted,
shall exist within the United States,
or any place subject to their jurisdiction.
(U.S. Constitution, Thirteenth Amendment Section 1)

In this section we see how slavery is represented in the *Parable* series. It is interesting to approach the Thirteenth Amendment with Butler's idea of history, so that we can find a key to explain her raising this topic in her novels. If slavery was a problem of the past, solved by the ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment, and later on definitively silenced by the civil right movement, why does Butler use it again in her *Parables*? What is the need that justifies the use of a historical fact in her futuristic novels? In this section we answer these questions by providing Butler's original position regarding how history should be read, providing examples from the novels. We analyze a new form of slavery Butler talks about, sex slavery.

In her essay about the "boomeranging" of history, Allen argues that in the *Parable* series present, past, and future overlap. The same idea is expressed by Robert Butler in his work, stating that "Robledo becomes a frightening metaphor of America in gridlock, a world that closely resembles the nineteenth century plantation that trapped Frederick Douglass and the twentieth-century ghetto that immobilized Bigger Thomas" (135). This is something we find in Butler's work, justified by the chaotic situation and the total lack of control of the American government on its citizens. In Butler's work slavery is represented in a unique form; in fact, it does not only regard African Americans and the slavery of the early history of the United States, but it regards everyone. Everyone is in danger of being enslaved, no matter of their skin color, education, or religion. As Robert Butler says, "slavery has been universalized to include all ethnic and racial groups in all regions of the country. All America has become a massive plantation, a gigantic ghetto" (136). As Allen argues, the causes of the enslavement revival are given by two main forces; first, she mentions the "twentieth century capitalism", and then the "technological advancement" (Allen: 1356). By saying "twentieth century

capitalism" Allen means the problematic dehumanization of the defenseless social strata, who risk exploitation, as African Americans were exploited before the Civil War.

In the *Parable* series slavery appears several times, and has different representations: there is slavery as we all know it, characterized by free work generally provided by black people or Latino, and a new form of slavery, sex slavery. The new slavery model does not regard only women/girls, but also men/boys, as we can see in the case of Lauren Olamina's brother Marcus. He is captured by a slave owner, and only later in *Talents*, Lauren Olamina manages to encounter his owner, make a deal with him, and buy his brother back. She finds him while she is searching for another person from her community, Dan Noyer's little sister, who is suspected to be kept imprisoned by a pimp in Georgetown. Slave owners control their victims by putting on their necks a collar that can be remotely controlled by the belt the owner wears. In the description of the pimp, we can notice that Butler says that his skin color does not provide a significant clue on his ethnicity, because "he could have been a pale-skinned Black man, a Latino, or a dark-skinned White" (Talents: 93). This means, he could be everyone, like everyone can end up enslaved.

> Today I found my brother Marcus. (…) On our way home we were going to meet with a man who had contacted us through friends in Georgetown, claiming that he had one of Dan's younger sisters, and that he would sell her to us. The man was a pimp (…) That is, a man who puts slave collars on little children and rents their bodies to other grown men. (…) Dolores directed us to a tall, lean, ugly man dressed completely in black, and working hard to look contemptuous of the world in general and George's Café in particular. (…) He wore, aside from his black pants and shirt, an impressive pair of black leather boots – no expense spared – and a wide heavy leather belt decorated with what I first thought were jewels. It took me a moment to realize that this was a control belt – the kind of things you use when you're moving around a lot and controlling several people through slave collars. (…) I bought my brother. No shooting, no fighting, not even much cussing. In the end, Cougar smirked, took his hard currency, and released Marcus from the slave collar (Talents: 88-96).

After he is released, Marcus finally manages to talk to his sister about the time he spent as a slave, and what he says is something that evokes the memories of African American slaves that we all know about.

> They can torture you with it (collar) every day. Every goddam day. And you never have any marks to mess you up and drive down your price, and you never die of it! Or most people don't die of it. Some are lucky. They have heart attacks or strokes and they die. But the rest of us live no matter what. And if we try to find some other way to die, to kill ourselves, they can stop us. The guy with the control unit can play you the way Mama used to play her piano (Talents: 120).

While depicting the people who are dead, for example Lauren Olamina's mysterious mother, Butler calls them "beloved ghosts" (Talents: 20), making a not so cryptic reference to Toni Morrison's masterpiece *Beloved*, which is a novel dealing with the wounds of the past. The ghosts they refer to are in both cases ghosts of people the main characters never knew, which emphasizes the feeling of being haunted by a sort of blurred presence that can represent the past sufferings of African American slaves as a whole. Like in the case of Morrison's protagonist, also Marcus will be haunted forever with the terrible experience that slavery represents. His experience resembles what antebellum slaves must have gone through, and he eventually decides to change his name into "Marcus Duran" instead of "Marcus Olamina", because he says "I don't really know how to be Marcus Olamina anymore (…) It's more like Marcus Olamina was my childhood name. I'm not that kid anymore. I'll never be him again" (Talents: 121-122). The consequences that enslavement caused to enslaved people are well known, and what we have just recalled in Marcus's case is one of them, namely, a traumatic difficulty in dealing with the brutal experience, and the consequent efforts of denying their previous identity. What is interesting to notice is that in Butler's dystopia the matter is projected in the future; it is not a story set in the antebellum era or in the first years after the Civil War. As Allen argues, "Butler depicts her futuristic United States as the ultimate manifestation of the African America notion of history as a repetitive cycle" (1358), which means that Butler is grasping the connections between past and future, marking our present as a sort of trajectory in itinere. As Dubey argues in his analysis of the neo-slave narrative, "the dominant form of slavery that exists in the future world of the novel – debt slavery to multinational corporations – sounds half antebellum revival and half science fiction" (357). We find these very words also in Butler's novel, when Lauren Olamina comments upon the new constructions of corporate cities: "something *new* is beginning – or perhaps something *old* and nasty is reviving" (emphasis added, *Sower*: 105).

According to Dubey, in Butler's novels the depiction of and speculation about slavery is projected in the future rather than being a mere account of what happened in the past. It is interesting to notice that even if Butler's speculation is articulated in the future, the situation she describes, namely the

enslavement of the minorities represented by the Acorn community, is a phenomenon that has its causes deeply rooted in the past. Dubey insists on this point, arguing that "continuing evidence of black poverty should be seen as a result of the legacy of slavery and racism which persisted long after the formal abolition of slavery" (358). The problem Butler highlights is that slavery is not over because of the laws that have been passed; slavery can assume different aspects, and it can potentially involve everyone. As sociologist Kevin Bales argues in his study about the new global slavery, "the great majority of contemporary slaves are bonded labor whose status differs from that of antebellum US slaves in that they are disposable temporary workers rather than permanent owned property" (Dubey: 538). The idea is evoked in *Parable* when Lauren Olamina reflects about the work conditions of her time: "the workers are more throwaway than slaves. They breathe toxic fumes or drink contaminated water or get caught in unshielded machinery… It doesn't matter. They're easy to replace – thousands of jobless for every job" (*Sower*: 291).

How was legally possible to consider another human being chattel? If Butler is telling us that there is a risk of going back to something very similar to what slavery was, as we just saw, it is interesting to first investigate the path that led American colonies to the establishment of slavery in the first place. We now contextualize North American slavery to better understand Butler's warn; the same process that made slavery possible can be applied again in history. Antebellum slavery as we know it was not a process invented overnight, and the European colonizers of the time had to find a justification to what they were doing, that is, to rationalize this inhuman habit. Some justified it with theories regarding racial inferiority and many more, but what we are going to analyze here is the legal justification slave owner applied thanks to the collaboration of legislators, and how the label they put on black people was very hard to be removed. According to sociologist Bergesen's analysis of the phenomenon, "when the African trade emerged, the Anglo-American colonies lacked a legal conception of the rights and duties of slaves" (8); they first solved this problematic by considering this new labor force as "servants". This first solution is a failure, because being a servant means having a contract with a master, with specific duties. Of course, this is not the case of slaves. In fact, "slaves were acquired through a third person, had no rights in law, and gained none from contract" (8), so the only solution slave owners and legislators saw, was to define slaves as chattel. The consequences to this statement are that their master was now their owner, and these people become personal property. Moreover, it is important to remember two more things: being a chattel means that all the future generations were to be treated as chattel themselves, and being a property means that a person was now collocated outside "the guaranteed rights of free men" (ibid). Some of the

implications of these statements are: "slaves could be bought and sold, and they were subject to the whims of their owners (…) Slaves could not own or inherit property, engage in contract, write wills, or even give or receive gifts" (ibid). So far, the analysis of what is a slave and Marcus situation in Butler's world find correspondence. But there is another aspect to consider; in Butler's novel Marcus eventually becomes free again; specifically, he is set free by his sister because she manages to buy him. If we shift our attention to what has legally defined a slave to how slaves become free, that means, full citizens, we can understand better the value of the Thirteenth Amendment; in fact, exiting the status of North American slave and entering the status of full citizen was the most difficult process of the whole American continent. In Latin America this process was less complicated; there were several occasions when a slave could claim his/her freedom. For instance, "slaves could force their owner to free them if they could reimburse their original purchase price" (Bergesen: 10). Moreover, there is an institutional mechanism made to set slaves free. "A slave could be set free if it was determined that he was unduly punished. A slave who had ten or more children could claim freedom, and slaves could marry nonslaves and have free children, because children of a free mother were freed" (ibid). This means, the status passage in South America was easier. In North America there was no such institutional mechanism, and the system did not consider the passage possible. As a consequence, the most useful tool for slaves was manumission, that allowed owners to set their slaves free. Slaves could not purchase their freedom. This scheme is present also in Butler's novel; Marcus does not buy his freedom. He, as the other sex slaves, would have never been able to do so, because the idea is not even contemplated. It is only through an economic transition that he can be given to a new owner. When Lauren Olamina purchases him, she does not break the system; she uses its rules to obtain what she wants, that is, his brother's freedom, but at the eyes of the slave owner she is now Marcus's owner, and he is still a slave: "he had offered me the collar and a control unit – at added cost" (Talents: 96). Technically he is still not free. The only solution for him is to reinvent his identity; in fact, after changing his name, he also drastically changes his life, closes himself in the past, and starts preaching as Christian American reverend.

As we saw, manumission was the only legal way to be freed. Even if slave owners could do everything they wanted with their slaves, they could not give them freedom. In fact, states law strictly regulated this matter: "to manumit a slave, to set one free, invariably required the approval of the larger political order. In Mississippi, Alabama, and Maryland manumission by will was prohibited, and in South Carolina, Georgia, Mississippi, and Alabama manumission was valid only with the consent of the state legislature" (Bergesen:11). Why is this matter so delicate? What is the real reason

why slave owners had full power on their subjects but the power to set them free? Again, the answer is found in a problematic legal issue, that is, the definition of the freed slave. If a slave is freed, s/he become citizen, because there are no other legal categories. This was problematic because the whole system of the time revolved around the idea that a slave is not a person, it's a property. If we melt the two categories of property and citizenship together, the whole system collapses. "*The slave-citizen boundary remains ritually guarded with severe manumission laws*" (Bergesen: 12): the states could not risk to see their system falling, so they have to strongly affirm the difference that exists between who was a person and who was not. In fact, all the activities slave owners are involved into, such as selling, buying slaves, are not crossing this line, whereas the issue of freedom is.

In the case that a state allows slave owners to free their slaves, a new set of questions concerning the definition of the new slave appeared. What is the legal positioning of these former slaves? And how to consider them full citizens? If the manumission issue is treated by the states, these questions need a broader and more authorial approach. In fact, an answer to the problem is found in three constitutional Amendments, first of all, the Thirteenth Amendment. "Since the status 'slave' was an institutional identity, it could only be reconstituted by institutional authorities" (ibid.). When the system based on slavery collapsed after the Civil War, also the slave category collapsed. When Jarret's tyranny falls apart, also his categories fall apart, and people that were once considered outsiders and dangerous such as people with different religions, now find expression in a new society. The issue, as Butler warns us, is not that simple, as former slaves do not formally achieve full equality until the passing of the civil rights laws. History thought us that former slaves and contemporary African Americans are still fighting to remove that first label white colonists put on them centuries ago. If in the past an entire economic system and a whole set of states was based on that label, Butler cannot but ask her readers what can happen if new forms of slavery occur.

The neo-slavery Butler imagines in her *Talents* is "something new. Or something old" (Talents: 23), because the justifications of what is going on, that is, the justification of new forms of slavery recalls the antebellum scheme that saw slaves as property and not as people, as we saw in Marcus's case. When reflecting on this topic, Butler through Lauren Olamina's voice lists evil organizations that somehow managed to give birth to a perverse logic that justified slavery:

> Did the Ku Klux Klan wear crosses – as well as burn them? The Nazis wore the swastika, which is a kind of cross, but I don't think they wore it on their chests. There were crosses all over the place during the Inquisition and before that, during the Crusaders. So now we have another group that uses

> crosses and slaughters people. Jarret's people could be behind it. Jarret insists on being a throwback to some earlier, "simpler" time. (…) These days when more than half the people in the country can't read at all, history is just one more vast unknown to them (Talents: 23).

In Acorn, Lauren Olamina and her fellows see their lives shaken by the arrival of Jarret's Crusaders. How do these people justify what they were doing? And who are they? After a month of prison, Lauren Olamina asks herself how the enslavement of her community could have been possible, also in terms of legality of their actions.

> I don't know whether the actions of these so-called Crusaders have any resemblance of legality. It's hard to believe they might – stealing the land and freedom of people who've followed the law, earned their own livings, and given no trouble. I can't believe that even Jarret has so mangled the constitution as to make such things legal. (…) How could a vigilante group have the nerve to set up a "reeducation" camp and run it with illegally collared people? (*Talents*: 194).

It is interesting to see how the group of neo-slave owners justifies their actions: "We at Acorn were told that we were attacked and enslaved because we were a heathen cult" (*Talents*: 194). This means, they justify their oppression with a religious explanation. It is something different from what we saw before regarding the justification of antebellum slavery; the people in Acorn are to be punished because of their religious beliefs, and reeducated according to what the Crusaders believed. Butler is not addressing slavery as she did when she explored Marcus' case, in fact Lauren Olamina and her community become slaves not because they are objectified, but because of their beliefs. Moreover, she repeatedly asks through Lauren Olamina if people know about these "reeducation camps", stressing the fact that nobody cares of what is going on, which is a harsh critique on the collective responsibility.

> Most people don't know about the camps (…) People don't realize how free poor vagrants are being treated, but he's afraid that even if they did know, they wouldn't care. The likelihood is that people with legal residences would be glad to see a church taking charge of the thieving, drug-taking, drug-selling, disease-spreading, homeless free poor (Talents: 209).

The problem is that these reeducation camps do not only take criminals away from the streets and punish them; they take all sort of undesirable people and deprive them of their freedom. These camps are meant to brainwash every person who expresses a different belief system, along with thieves and criminals. All of this happens with the complicity of the police and the other people, as we just saw, who do not care of what is going on. Moreover, there is a group of people within the society who supports this cause, with the help of the police:

> They make the cops arrest us or run us out of town. (…) They call us names and wish somebody would do something to make us disappear. And now, somebody is doing just that! (…) There are plenty of people who would think the Church was doing something generous and necessary – teaching deadbeats to work and be good Christians. No one would see a problem until the camps were a lot bigger and the people in them weren't just drifters and squatters. As far as we of Earthseed are concerned, that's already happened, but who are we? Just weird cultists who practice strange rites, so no doubt there are nice, ordinary people who would be glad to see us taught to behave ourselves too (Talents: 209-210).

It is interesting to notice that Marcus, once freed, does not accept Earthseed and Acorn as his religion and home. Instead, he decides to go back to the main Christian American church, the very church that later will imprison and enslave his sister and that was the very religion of the people who enslaved him in the first place. He may decide to do so because, having being enslaved, he understands that he does not want to go back to that stage again, so him, like many former slaves in history, did what it was needed to survive and to stay away from the danger of being enslaved again. His behavior is not criticized in Butler's novels; his attitude reminds of the same attitude Butler's mother had towards the world. She would just keep her place and not aspire to something better; she was already grateful not to be enslaved like her ancestors. That attitude, as we saw in the previous chapter, was deeply criticized by the new generation of African Americans; Butler does not criticize it, in fact she has always been grateful for what her mother did – humiliating jobs, etc. – for the sake of the future of her own daughter. It is in this context that we can appreciate better the value of the Thirteenth Amendment, but what emerges even more clearly is that even if now slavery is formally abolished, the law alone is not enough to prevent these kinds of perverse mechanisms to happen – making undesirable people disappear on the basis of their beliefs, or ways of living. In fact, as we already saw, the civil rights movement took a lot of time and efforts in order to obtain some changes in the

system, and, in our opinion, will take even longer to make an effective change in people's minds – that is, removing the labels African Americans have been affixed with throughout the centuries (through stereotypical representations, etc.).

The neo-slavery Butler imagines for her *Parable* series is broader, because it affects not only African Americans, but also Asians and Latinos; we encounter an example of the multiethnicity of slaves in the *Sower,* when Lauren Olamina and her fellows start their journey towards North California: "the crew of a modern underground railroad", that is "a heterogeneous mass – black, and white, Asian and Latinos" (158). As Stillman argues, these people evoke "Mexican immigrants illegally crossing the border into the United States as much as it does the fugitive slaves of the antebellum period" (358). Butler imagines a new form of inequality for the capitalistic age. If race is somehow still important, as Dubey argues in his essay, the town is "too poor, too black, too Hispanic" to gain the attention of the big corporations that are essentially buying the country. Moreover, he claims that Butler's analysis "exceeds the binary black-and-white logic that helped rationalize antebellum slavery" (ibid).

It is interesting to notice that if in the past legal power needed to define what a slave was and what it became after being set free, a similar speculation happens also in Butler's work. She tries to define the new, free people from her dystopian future by proposing a new definition through Earthseed. As Stillman argues, "the Earthseed group presented in Parable (*Sower*) has been acclaimed as an exemplar of 'post-identity politics' (…) a sketch of what could be the emerging alliance politics of the 1990s (…)" (Dubey: 359). Earthseed proposes a "postmodern politics of difference" (ibid.) that provides an alternative to the direction our world is taking. As Dubey states, "Parable (*Sower*) sharply limns the political-economic system that needs to be challenged in the present" (ibid.).

What Butler points out in her warning about a possible return of slavery are the issues capitalism may give rise to in our immediate future. She imagines a "contemporaneous system of labor exploitation" (ibid.), and we can find an example of this in Olivar. In the devastated and uncertain world Butler depicts, Olivar is a corporate city that can represent salvation to some people, but to others, like Lauren Olamina herself, represents only a new form of slavery. Olivar is

> just one more beach/bedroom suburb of Los Angeles, small and well-to-do. It has a little industry, much hilly, vacant land, and a short, crumbling coastline. Its people, like some here in our Robledo neighborhood, earn salaries that would once have made them prosperous and comfortable. (…) It's

> an upper middle class, white, literate community of people who once had a lot of weight to throw around. Now, not even the politicians it's helped to elect will stand by it (*Sower*: 105).

Despite resembling a prestigious neighborhood, made by white literate once wealthy people, Olivar is a place that has a problem; its position so close to the ocean provided many expenses to its inhabitants to prevent the "encroaching sea" to destroy everything. The city requires too much money to be kept safe from the surrounding environment, so its people "after many promises, much haggling, suspicion, fear, hope, and legal wrangling" decide to sell it to a company, privatizing the entire land. "The voters and the officials of Olivar permitted their town to be taken over, brought out, privatized" (Sower: 106).

Olivar is a place where slavery is revisited; Butler's neo-slavery novels approach the matter with the aim to "reveal about the working of race in the post-civil rights period" (Dubey: 360). It is interesting to notice that even if slavery is revisited, it does not mean that the whole slavery institution as it was built in the past has been forgotten. In fact, references to the "old" can be found throughout the whole novel. We provide such an example in the description of how Olivar works: "that's an *old* company-town trick – get people into debt, hang on to them, and work them harder. Debt slavery. That might work in Christopher Donner's America. Labor laws, state and federal, are not what they were once. (…) There is nothing safe about slavery" (Sower: 107) and "this business sounds half antebellum revival and half science fiction" (Sower: 109). As we just saw, the new town works thanks to the exploitation of their inhabitants. Butler explains her reader the reasons why people in Olivar will end up slaves:

> at the end of the program it was announced that KSF was looking for registered nurses, credentialed teachers, and a few other skilled professionals who would be willing to move to Olivar and work for room and board. The offer wasn't put that way, of course, but that's what it meant. (…) Room and board. The offered salaries were so low that if Dad and Cory both worked, they wouldn't earn as much as Dad is earning now with the college. And out of it they'd have to pay rent as well as the usual expenses (*Sower*: 107).

If people, like the ones in Olivar, decide to give up their freedom in order to be safe, it means that there is a lack of jurisdiction that is now filled by the people of the company that acquired the city. That is, the gap that the government left is filled by private companies that pursue their own interests.

If the government and the police worked as they should, people would not be forced to turn to third parties to ask for their rights to be safe. Safety in Butler's world is something we already talked about in the previous section regarding the Second Amendment, but as we can see the issues Butler introduces in her novels are all intersected.

After this analysis on the different kinds of neo-slavery Butler presented, we now move on with the definition of the Fourteenth Amendment and its representation in the *Parable* series.

2.5 The 14th Amendment: "The house, the trees, the people: Burning

All persons born or naturalized in the United States
and subject to the jurisdiction thereof,
are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside.
No State shall make or enforce any law
which shall abridge
the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States;
nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property,
without due process of law;
nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.
(U.S. Constitution, Fourteenth Amendment, Section 1)

In this section we consider the Fourteenth Amendment in regards of its aim of safeguarding basic civil rights, for instance, providing federal protection for "life, liberty and property" and "due process of law" (Bergesen: 5). We focus on the new set of labor laws that are introduced in *Sower,* and we show how these laws contribute to destroy the Amendment's aim. In fact, by passing the laws we are going to talk about, president Donner speculates on the life of the poorer social strata in order to make higher profits. He does not realize that the capitalistic economic model is failing, and he supposes that by destroying individual freedoms and rights they will somehow go back to a better era. The introduction of these laws, that aim to the dismantlement of some basic rights, will eventually push people to act desperately to protect themselves in the best way they can. Moreover, we see how in *Talents* the discovery of some organism in Mars brings this discussion to another level, putting the rights protected by the Amendment in a broader context, and questioning their efficacy.

We just saw in the previous section how privatization of cities (Olivar) caused people to enter a spiral of debt that basically condemned them to work almost for free for the company. One of the conditions that made the downfall possible is to be found at the very beginning of *Sower*, when Donner is elected. The new president believes in the privatization of businesses to bring back wealth in the country. For example, as soon as he came into office, he sold the space program aiming to reach Mars to a private company. Moreover, he finds a solution to the lack of work: he believes that by "suspending" some restrictive laws, people will go back to work. In particular, he

> hopes to get laws changed, suspend "over restrictive" minimum wage, environmental, and worker protection laws for those employers willing to take on homeless employees and provide them with training and adequate room and board. What's adequate, I wonder: A house or apartment? A room? A bed in a shared room? A barracks bed? Space on a floor? Space on the ground? And what about people with big families? Won't they be seen as bad investment? Won't it make much more sense for companies to hire single people, childless couples, or, at most, people with only one or two babies? (…) And what about those suspended laws? Will it be legal to poison, mutilate, or infect people – as long as you provide them with food, water, and space to die? (*Sower*: 24).

Lauren Olamina's suspects sound prophetic if we consider that later in the series some forms of neo-slavery occur, as we saw in the previous section. What Butler is pointing out here is that the spiral of gradual subtraction of some Constitutional protected rights is not fast; the community of Acorn is not enslaved because of something that happened overnight. People gradually started that path of privatization and depravation. People's responsibility in this matter is something we analyze in the next section, when our discussion will move to the Fifteenth Amendment.

The discussion regarding the rights protected by the Amendment can be put in a bigger context if we consider not only Earth; in fact, Butler brings the speculation to another planet when introduces Donner's decision to sell the space exploration program to a private Euro-Japanese company. He justifies this choice by saying that space exploration "should be done for profit, and not as a burden on taxpayers" (*Talents*: 81). Lauren Olamina is critical with this approach, in fact, she believes that "there is so much to be learned from space itself and from the nearby words" (ibid.), such as the new discovery of life in Mars. Some multicellular organisms are found on Mars, and Lauren Olamina's thoughts go to the company that now have full power upon these creatures and over the entire planet Mars. With this example Butler shows us that an entire planet is under the control of a single organization, that has full powers over their inhabitants. Lauren Olamina foresees a dark future for these organisms; if these organisms will be somehow useful for the company, "they'll be lucky to survive at all. I doubt that environmental Terrestrial laws will protect them. Those laws don't even protect plant and animal species here on Earth. And who would enforce such laws on Mars?" (*Talents*: 82). That is to say, who protects the new discovered organisms? A company whose only concern is its income? The situation resembles the one in Olivar we described in the previous section; despite the company that bought Olivar promises to give protection to its inhabitants, will it really do so also if it goes against its economic interests? In the same way, will the company that bought the space

program provide protection for Martian inhabitants even if it goes against their interests? Moreover, how will they regulate life in Mars? Will the same "Terrestrial laws", as Lauren Olamina calls them, apply to the planet, or will new laws be formulated? The main risk is that, if new laws will be applied to the planet, they may be made up to protect the company's interests and not to preserve the environment explorers found in Mars.

In Butler's futuristic world people do not feel safe; in fact, due to the precarious economic situation and social collapse, people are getting every day more frustrated and angrier. This causes an escalation of violence that culminated with the setting on fire of random houses, just to manifest people's deep annoyance:

> People are setting fires to get rid of whomever they dislike from personal enemies to anyone who looks or sounds foreign or racially different. People are setting fires because they're frustrated, angry, hopeless. They have no power to improve their lives, but they have the power to make others even more miserable. And the only way to prove to yourself that you have power is to use it. (…) "My God," Cory said when the radio report was over. And in a small, whispery voice, she quoted from the Book of Revelation: " 'Babylon the great is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils. (…)' " (*Sower*: 128).

It is this lack of safety that convinced desperate people to give up their freedom, as we saw in the previous section, and accept to live in company-owned cities such as Olivar. We can see how people do not feel protected by the government, and in the passage we just quoted we can feel a sense of deep desperation that is generating hate and angriness. The escalation of violence will reach its apex with the setting on fire of Robledo.

In this section we saw some examples that showed us the importance of the Fourteenth Amendment, and some speculations about its application or not. To fully understand the next section, it is important to keep in mind that people do have a responsibility regarding the collapse of their society; in the next section we explore how the population reacted, or not, when they are asked to express their opinion, and to take a clear position in regards of politics.

2.6 The 15th Amendment: Having a voice

The right of citizens of the United States to vote
shall not be denied or abridged by the United States
or by any State on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.
(U.S. Constitution, Fifteenth Amendment, Section 1)

What happens when people deliberately decide to give up this right and wait for things to happen instead of taking actions? This last section on our journey within the representation of the American Constitution in Octavia's *Parables* argues that the world ends up collapsing because people do not take actions when they have the right – and the duty – to take it. We consider the past generation, once again represented by Lauren Olamina's father, and then move on to Lauren's decisions for the future of her Acorn community.

Within the small village of Robledo, Lauren Olamina's father has the public role of reverend. He preaches, and through his sermons he lectures adults and youngsters on the correct behavior they should observe. If we consider him as the spiritual and political expression of the village, we find a problem in his way of behaving. He harshly criticizes the candidate for the presidency Donner, but eventually, when he is supposed to vote, he refuses to do so, like the majority of the people in Robledo:

> Most people have given up on politicians. After all, politicians have been promising to return us the glory, wealth, and order of the twentieth century ever since I can remember. That's what the space program is about these days, at least for politicians. Hey, we can run a space station, a station on the moon, and soon, a colony on Mars. That proves we're still a great, forward-looking, powerful nation, right? (…). Dad decided not to vote for Donner after all. He didn't vote for anyone. He said politicians turned his stomach (Sower: 18-24).

The problem of this attitude is that if people give up their right of expressing their opinion, other people will eventually decide for them. This sinister apathy regarding politics that we find in the first pages of *Sower* appears also later in *Talents*, as Lauren Olamina adopts the same nonchalance when she is asked to take actions and firmly oppose the regime Jarret is building.

When Jarret is elected and starts his strict policies, there is nobody who could oppose him, but the little free communities that could organize themselves and try to oppose his policies. In the novels there is not that much about other communities rebelling, but we do know that the community of Acorn does nothing to stem Jarret's policies, but wait. That is why they end up destroyed and enslaved; the consequences of not taking actions can be catastrophic. As Moylan argues, "Earthseed does not contribute to the admittedly liberal political opposition to Jarret" (241). In fact, several times within the *Talents* the community discusses Jarret policies, and identifies his "Christian America" as a fanatic organization that sooner or later somehow affects also their reality. Despite the disturbing premises, they still opt to not do anything, and focus on the Destiny of Earthseed, which appears blurry and distant. This means, the Acorn community, under the guidance of Lauren Olamina, decides to focus their efforts towards a very distant future instead of trying to actively contribute to improving their present. After giving birth to her daughter, Lauren Olamina is confronted by Bankole, her partner, about their future. He suggests that now that they have the responsibility of a child, they should move to a safer place. Lauren Olamina does not intend to leave her dream of spreading Earthseed and later fulfill the Destiny. She does not care about Jarret or about the recent news of the destruction of other communities, and she decides to focus on her cult. It seems that she finds her serenity only when she speculates about the Destiny of Earthseed.

> "He's dangerous. His being President is going to make a difference, even to us. I'm sure of it".
> "We're nothing to him, so small, so insignificant –"
> "Remember Dovetree."
> Dovetree was the last thing I wanted to remember. So was that state senate candidate that Marc mentioned. Both were real, and perhaps both meant danger to us, but what could I do about either of them? And how could I let the fear of them stop me? "This country is over 250 years old" I said. "It's had bad leaders before. It survived them. We'll have to watch what Jarret does, change when necessary, adapt, maybe keep a little quitter than we have for a while. But we've always had to adapt to change. We always will. God is Change" (Talents: 163).

Nonetheless, the Acorn community distinguishes itself from the past generation, and they all vote when they are asked to express their preference regarding the candidates for the presidency. "The election was on Tuesday, November 2. Jarret won (…) We all voted" (Talents: 83). The problem arrives later, after Jarret's election. It seems that after that, a sense of hopelessness pervades Acorn,

and Lauren Olamina and her fellows lost the hope of making a difference. They decide to survive, waiting. We can argue that if in a first stage of the novel she still tries to take active part into politics and tries to reason with the old system (elections), after being defeated, she does not want to be part of it anymore. In fact, her efforts are all focused on the achievement of the Destiny, even though, as we can see from the following passage, it is blurry. Lauren Olamina finds more reassuring to focus on it, instead of opposing the ideology that wants her defeated:

> I worry that I might not be able to make Earthseed anything more than another little cult. (…) It could happen. Earthseed is true – is a collection of truths, but there's no law that says it has to succeed. We can always screw it up. *I* can always screw it up. There's so much to be done (*Talents*: 164).

In her post-Apocalypse world, Butler does not deny the right to vote to her characters, but she does not even increase their interest in politics. She warns us in a way and shows that there are only two possible ways. We can either choose to take actions and vote, or we can act passively and ignore the world we live in. If we choose the second option, like the people of Robledo and the Acorn community, we will be destined to be dominated.

Butler's trajectory is pessimist, because despite her characters decide to vote, and to defend their community with the best possibilities they have, they won't be able to succeed. Even if they are not passive from the very beginning, after their defeat and consequent enslavement, they decide, under Lauren Olamina's guidance, to turn their back to the planet Earth and their inhabitants, and focus on a new place where to live freely.

Lauren Olamina's attitude of gradually detaching herself from the real world is then questioned again when she sees that the world is actually changing; after Jarret's gradual defeat, she sees hope again for her people and for her project, so after suing and winning the trial against the Christian American organization, she uses the money to fulfill Earthseed Destiny and build a rocket to explore the outer space. This vision is criticized several times by Lauren Olamina's daughter, because she does not believe her mother was able to understand the situation she was putting the Acorn community in – in fact, the community was enslaved.

Butler gives to her characters the right to choose, yet Lauren Olamina decides to close herself in Acorn and to not pay attention to what is going on outside, refusing to take actions and openly contrast what Jarret is doing to the country. Before the Earthseed community understands its mistake, they will be enslaved, tortured, raped, killed. All of this would have been avoided if, as Larkin suggests,

they would have moved to a safer place, to a bigger community, where they would have a better chance to survive to Jarret. As Larkin points out,

> Should she (Lauren Olamina) have left Acorn and gone to live in Halstread as my father asked? Of course she should have! As if she had, would she, my father, and I have managed to have normal, comfortable lives through Jarret's upheavals? I believe we would have. (…) If there are sins in Earthseed, shortsightedness, lack of forethought, is the worst of them. And yet shortsighted is exactly what she was. She sacrificed us for an idea. And if she didn't know what she was doing, she should have known – she who paid so much attention to the news, to the times and the trends. As an adolescent, she saw her father's error when he could not see it – his dependence on walls and guns, religious faith, and a hope that the good old days would return (Talents: 127-128).

Lauren Olamina highlights the importance of taking actions through the Earthseed motto "God is change", and furthermore, the need to constantly change and adapt to new situations, that is, being aware of one's environment and actively react and adapt to it and take the most out of every situation. Despite the motto and the good intentions, as we saw Lauren Olamina does not listen to Bankole's warnings, and she leaves Acorn in the hand of faith. The inevitable consequence is the destruction of Acorn, like what happen in Robledo, and the consequent enslavement of its people.

Chapter 3. The unfinished third book and the future of the Parable series: *The Parable of the Trickster*

Parable of the Trickster is the trickster of the Parable books;
the solution in the distance we can recognize, but can't see clearly,
always hovering just out of our grasp.
("The Third Parable" in Strange Martian)

There's nothing new
under the sun,
but there are new suns.
(Trickster, Epigram)

In this chapter we discuss the third novel of the *Parable* series that was never finished nor published. We also point out the topics she wanted to develop also in the other books of the *Parable* series. The information we have about her unfinished works comes from her notes donated to the Huntington Library in Pasadena. Her notes are available under special request only to scholars fulfilling the library requirements. Nonetheless, it was possible for us to find this information[1] and summarize them in this last chapter, to finally end this journey into the law and the literature of the *Parable* series.

Butler wrote countless possible starts of the novel. At the time she decided to write *The Parable of The Trickster*, she was suffering from the writer's block, and she was suffering from some medical conditions that frustrated her. All the texts we can find at the Huntington Library in San Marino are focused on the character named Imara, who is the guardian of Lauren Olamina's ashes. She is her distant relative. Imara lives in one of the Earthseed colonies in the universe; what makes her and the other's colonizers's story interesting is that they are nostalgic, and they hoped they never left Earth. Their world is called "Bow", and it is gray and dark. The name "Bow" comes from rainbow, since the planet offers some rarely occurring rainbows. The colonists cannot go back to Earth, or contact

[1] We found the information regarding Butler's unfinished work thanks to archive materials "OEB 1-8000, Octavia E. Butler Papers" at Huntington Library, San Marino, California.

it. All they have is what the first colonists brought with them, in the first place all the Earthseed doctrine. From this scenario, different plots are developed.

In some texts, the colonizers are gradually going blind, in others blindness is sudden; in some others, people all begin to go insane and to suffer mad rages, or fall into comas. In another, they start killing each other for no apparent reason. In some others they develop telepathy which becomes sinister when they realize they cannot shut it down; in this story women develop the ability and gain power, while men cooperate aiming to get their power back. In other versions blindness and telepathy were linked; for example, Imara becomes able to read other's people minds as she gradually loses sight. In another version Imara is in charge of solving the first murder within an Earthseed community; in a version of this story Imara is the one who is murdered, but she realizes that being dead she can come back as a ghost and haunt other people's bodies. In some version Imara is a sharer like Lauren Olamina, in others the people who suffered from the hyperempaths condition were not allowed to travel to other worlds, or they find a cure for the condition. Sometimes the planet Bow is inhabited by dinosaurs-looking animals, some other times it is just inhabited by the colonizers and some grass. Butler also provides a description of the social order and the jobs this new population does. She focuses on how the society is regulated, and how they solved disagreements. However, she soon abandoned her project: the blindness plots were all abandoned after José Saramago won the Nobel prize with his novel *Blindness* in 1998.

The final aim of the *Parable* series was to narrate the actual history of the human race, and to see how human beings eventually become a sort of myth. Butler imagined four more parable books: *Parable of the Trickster, Parable of the Teacher, Parable of Chaos*, and *Parable of Clay*. The names derive from one of Lauren Olamina's poems: "God is Pliable – / Trickster / Teacher / Chaos / Clay" (Sower: 22). As we can notice, there is a shift from the Biblical sequence of names (Sower, Talents, Trickster) to an Earthseed sequence (Teacher, Chaos, Clay). According to what Butler left us, *Sower* is the retelling of the story of how God's farmer throws the seeds, and only a few land on the good soil. *Talents* is about the unfairness of God's justice (again the theme of justice emerges). The Biblical parable that inspired *Trickster* was probably the Parable of the Unjust Stewart. In the parable the master says to his servants that they need to have a talk, because someone told him the steward is wasting his money. But before the master fires him, the steward goes to everyone he knows is in debt with the master, and uses his authority of "legal proxy" to clean all the debts. The steward did that because he thought that some other houses would appreciate his work and take him with them. The master himself is impressed by the steward job, so he decides to take him back and forgive him.

> He also said to the disciples, "There was a rich man who had a manager, and charges were brought to him that this man was wasting his possessions. And he called him and said to him, 'What is this that I hear about you? Turn in the account of your management, for you can no longer be manager.' And the manager said to himself, 'What shall I do, since my master is taking the management away from me? I am not strong enough to dig, and I am ashamed to beg. I have decided what to do, so that when I am removed from management, people may receive me into their houses.' So, summoning his master's debtors one by one, he said to the first, 'How much do you owe my master?' He said, 'A hundred measures of oil.' He said to him 'Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty.' Then he said to another, 'And how much do you owe?' He said, 'A hundred measures of wheat.' He said to him, 'Take your bill, and write eighty.' The master commended the dishonest manager for his shrewdness. For the sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light. And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth, so that when it fails they may receive you into the eternal dwellings.
>
> "One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much, and one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much. If then you have not been faithful in the unrighteous wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches? And if you have not been faithful in that which is another's, who will give you that which is your own? No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money" (*Luke 16:1-13).*

According to the parable we just talked about, another central point of *Trickster* would have been the balance between the survival of the body and the survival of the soul. How would the Earthseed colonists survive their new planet, that is, their promised land? Who would they become and which sort of deals would they make? Butler suggests that the four novels should be set in different planets, to show how different the Earthseed colonies could be from each other, and how they would develop according to the environment they would be living in. She never manages to tell us more about the development of the colonies. Sometimes the planet Bow itself was the Trickster, as in some versions Trickster is the name of the planet itself. People in Bow would deal with dictatorship (as we saw in *Talents*), catastrophic ecological scarcity, and creepy children that, being born in a new planet, were

a new human species. She links the fact of being a new human species to her own life experience; she was born in the late 1940s, so she is only four generations away from slavery. She embodies herself a new humanity, a new way of defining African Americans, and her definition is totally different from the definition past generation employed. Achieving Lauren Olamina's dream and settling into another galaxy, Earthseed's communities do not solve our earthly problems, but they only bring them to the outer space. They are spreading the problems we already have and widening the confrontation with problems the new worlds brings up. Basically, the problems are just translated into another world; the fundamental question she never manages to answer is how to build a better world starting from the same immature and fragile human essence.

Butler is not optimist regarding the future of humanity; she thinks human beings are driven by self-preservation, and that evolution made that clear. Human beings, according to her, are short sighted, narcissistic, and evil. In the *Sower* Lauren Olamina represents an exception of this unhappy description, but in *Talents* we soon realize that she is not perfect, as we are exposed to her selfish, fatal, and sometimes fanatic side: she is willing to sacrifice everything to achieve the Destiny. All in all, that is Larkin's biggest critique to her mother. She was willing to sacrifice even her daughter in order to achieve the Destiny.

> She found sources of money and directed them into areas of study that brought the fulfillment of the Earthseed Destiny closer. She sent promising students to universities that helped them to fulfill their own potential. / All that she did, she did for Earthseed. (…) Earthseed was her first "child", and in some ways her only "child" (Talents: 362).

The extrasolar colonies Butler imagines are meant to give humanity the chance to start over a new colonization, a new history. It is the chance to consider solidarity rather than selfishness. The optimistic and pessimistic view she has towards human nature is captured by the epigram she chose for *Trickster*: "there's nothing new under the sun, but there are new suns." The new planet she imagined, Bow, was a place where humanity was not condemned; people there could still choose. They could either decide to struggle and work together, trying to figure out a better way of living, or choose to stay alone and die, like she foresees will happen to the humanity left in the planet Earth. The problem is that Butler never managed to even start the novel, probably because of her medical condition and her probably not too big hope for the human race to be able to change.

Conclusion

In this research we showed how in Butler's *Parable* series there is evidence of how Butler's work can actively contribute to the juridical discourse by giving voice to the African-American community in the United States. By doing so, Butler makes her readers think about fundamental rights that if not protected would cause a social collapse.

It was interesting to consider the causes that prevented Butler to finish her series. In the final chapter we saw that the next novels of the *Parable* series would have taken place into some extraterrestrial colonies, which would have meant a definitive split with Earth and its regulations as we know them. Butler's gradual loss of hope regarding the ability of human beings to change and stop destroying each other contributed to the eventual failure of her writing expectations.

We showed how Butler's two novels *The Parable of The Sower* and *The Parable of The Talents* can be considered in a constant dialogue with our real world, and in particular the legal world, and her not-so fictional futuristic world. We provided evidence of this in chapter two, when we analyzed the Amendments through dedicated sections, underlining primary texts quotations and useful materials to support our thesis. Moreover, we discussed Butler's work also by considering the historical process that lead to the Amendments' ratifications.

To start our journey into the world of reality and fiction we first introduced the science fiction scenario of the late 90s, and we showed how Butler's work can be inscribed on that trajectory. Her novels belong to the "critical dystopia" stream, which focuses on the critique of a dystopia in order to change the world and make it a little bit better – in Butler's case this is possible through the implementation of the Earthseed cult. By doing so we understood why Butler's science fiction is interesting, that is, which original elements she brought to the stage; we read these focusing our attention on the legal implications surrounding the events of the protagonists' lives. We also highlighted some difficulties Butler encountered when she first approached the genre, to show the reader another evidence of the fact that her experience of being an African American woman contributed to shape her works.

To show better how her life was deeply affected by the time she lived in, that is, the civil rights movement, we dedicated the second section of chapter one to the contextualization of her life within the main developments of the movement; we focused our attention on showing how every step towards equality was made possible only thanks to the passing of equal laws that finally destroyed

the segregation system. Chapter one helped us understand how the link between Butler's work, that is a fictional work, and the Constitution, that belongs to our real worlds, has been possible.

In chapter two we saw how some selected Amendments of the American Constitution have been useful to better understand Butler's work. In fact, we saw how Butler dealt with the concept of religion, and how it was possible for us to apply to her fictional religions the legal definition of what religion is. Moreover, we saw how Butler speculated about the arm issue without telling us what she thinks of the issue; in fact, her novels depict a clear image of what our future could be if we decide to take a certain path instead of another one. She does this also as regards the right to vote; Butler never tells us to vote or not to vote, but she tells us what may happen if we do it or not do it.

The core and the peculiarity of her novels that we tried to portray in this research in the clearest way possible is Butler's speculation, that tries to answer to the question "what if" in relation to the rights protected by the Constitution. Thanks to the analysis of the novels and of the Amendments the aim of this research has been reached, and we were able to see the links between the regulations that rule our lives and Butler's fiction.

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