

# THE FALLING OF THE RACIAL, ECONOMIC, SEXIST-GENDERED SEGREGATING WALL IN OCTAVIA BUTLER'S PARABLES

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## Abstract

In this article I will apply Daphne Hampson's Post-Biblical Perspective to investigate the metaphor of wall as the reflection of a humanist perspective in Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower* (2007a) and *Parable of the Talents* (2007b). This is done through focusing on the struggle of a black female reformer who, by introducing a religion called Earthseed, challenges the humanist understanding in the novels. This humanism is illustrated through focusing on the role of Christianity as a religious discourse that prioritizes certain sociocultural concepts and aspects. Introducing Earthseed, the protagonist develops a posthumanist perspective that is symbolized through the falling of the wall in the novels and offers new understanding of the sociocultural concepts and aspects away from the hierarchical order. Considering the novels as science fictions of neo-slavery, in this paper I discuss slavery as an encompassing concept of humanist understanding which gradual disappearance, along with the falling of the wall, signifies the emergence of posthumanist understanding in the novels. The aim of this paper is to explore Butler's success in illustrating different aspects of this posthumanist understanding.

**Key Words:** Octavia Butler, Daphne Hampson, *Parable of the Sower*, *Parable of the Talents*, posthumanism, wall.

## Introduction

*Parable of the Sower* (2007a) and *Parable of the Talents* (2007b) are futuristic science fiction novels that narrate the story of a young black girl who brings her collapsing dystopian society back to life. This social revival is done through the introduction of a religious belief called Earthseed that is successful in addressing and removing the reasons of the fall before which Christianity is silent.

Dubey discusses *Parables* as novels of black neo-slavery. Yet, according to her, unlike the most dominant trend of these narratives, slavery in these works is 'cross-racial or differently racialized' and is an extended metaphor that is not limited to the binary opposition of white/black (2013: 345). In this paper, I consider the reflection of this extended slavery in the *Parables* by focusing on the metaphor of the wall. This metaphor is discussed through considering the concept of ghettoism and how it is challenged by developing and applying alternative perspectives.<sup>1</sup> Going beyond the literal meaning of isolated neighbourhoods, ghettoism in the stories envisions a contextual weaving of economic, racial, sexual, and religious paradigms which, due to biological and doctrinal bigotry, are spatialized, degraded, and ignored. The alternative perspective that the stories take, challenge and deghettoize this humanist perspective by offering the posthuman concept of equality despite the differences.

Traditionally, and in the context of black literature, it is believed that the ideology of this humanist perspective resides in a modernist, masculine, and racial discourse which “animalized” the blacks and justifies it as a “divine plan.” According to Salih, the crux of this justification was that “in his infinite wisdom, God has diversified the human species according to varying degrees of intellectual capability” (2007: 108). The discourse assumed that in the divine design of creation, the closest animals to humans are orang-utans, which are a “race,” “kind,” or “type of man,” while negroes ‘are one step up; and from there “the human” ascends into lighter shades of complexion, and therefore more advanced degrees of “humanity” up to most “pure White”’ (2007: 108). It created an ideological hierarchy in which a particular “space” or “degree” between white man and orang-utan or ape was decided for blacks which, as a discriminated species in humanity, they were not “destined to pass” (2007: 108).

My argument in this article is that the speciesism within *Parables* is not exclusive to racial category. Going beyond the literal reflection of slavery, it includes economic, sexual, and religious dimensions. As a black writer, Butler in *Parables* envisions a posthumanist world beyond the discrimination that the racial humanist boundary forms. This posthumanist understanding is a perspective to elaborate on the affinity of what has been Othered by the humanist stand. Heffernan defines posthumanism as the understanding of Self as ‘fluid, contingent, and as contesting and rending the hierarchical binaries of nature/culture, self/other, male/female, human/nonhuman’ (2003: 118). She explains about what is human to make posthumanism understandable. Accordingly, she points to the natural understanding of being human as Christian, male, and white in which blacks, women, and Jews are labelled as abnormal (2003: 117). According to this understanding, whatever or whoever stands beyond white, Christian, masculine, human communities is peculiar and, therefore, the Other.

Considering the religious justification as a defining aspect of this Othering, which is also pointed at by Salih, in this article I apply Daphne Hampson’s post-Christian feminist perspectives to show how Butler uses the metaphor of wall to substitute Christianity, as a humanist ministering system of segregation in *Parables*, with a new system which is attentive to posthumanist values. Doing so, *Parables* appear as novels with utopian features. Unlike the negative perspectives of Butler herself (Beal 1986: 14) and critics like Nilges who deny the possibility of constructive change in human societies (2009: 1332-52), these novels emerge as the narrations of a more inclusive understanding of social life that naturalizes difference.

## Theoretical Framework

Spatial consideration is an overriding feature in feminist theology. In this religious perspective, the trope of space is discussed as an excluding factor that banishes women from the sociocultural scenes of life. As Hampson argues, the history of Western art, language, and literature is shaped by the absence of women as agents and it is replete with masculine symbolism. The two trends have worked incessantly to subordinate women as objects before masculine power and will. The trends, Hampson emphasizes, are ‘the normal panorama of Western culture, depicting, we should note, almost equally scenes from the Bible and from ancient mythology’ (2002: 87). For Hampson, the preoccupation with the past is ‘the nub of the problem’ in Christianity (2002: 5). This obsession historicizes Christianity as the incarnation of God in Christ and, as she emphasizes, ‘[i]t cannot lose that reference so long as it remains Christianity’ (2002: 5). This creates a problem: the reference is always a reference to a past “patriarchal history” (2002: 5) where Jesus Christ as Son is united to God as the Father. This renders Jesus a role model whose presumed ideas and deeds shall be followed and strictly practiced. The focus of Christianity on a particular time, place, and person – ancient Palestine and Jesus Christ – and its attempt to credit everyone’s ideas and life based on similarity to these render Christianity to a spatial discourse where women are not subjective agents, and other sociocultural contexts are absent.

In the case of women, Hampson sees motherhood and obedience as the construction of the “ideal” images of womanhood in the spatial Christian discourse. This image, she believes, is ‘encapsulated in the Virgin Mary’ as mother (2002: 173) and recommended as the female role model by the church. This perspective assigns women with an inferior position which is defined in relation to the position of man as the embodiment of a male God. It conceptualizes God as the father, and ‘serves to legitimize the man’s understanding of himself’ as superior (2002: 174). The problematic point of the notion, which turns it into a target for feminist criticism, is its lack of ‘any sense of woman as an independent agent, the equal of man involved in a reciprocal relationship with him’ (2002: 174). Black womanhood does not stick to this idealization. Collins explains that ‘[i]n contrast to the cult of true womanhood associated with the traditional family ideal, in which paid work is defined as being in opposition to and incompatible with motherhood, work for black woman has been an important and valued dimension of motherhood’ (2002: 184). Disregarding the subject of money, the mere act of working for a woman is looked upon as unacceptable by traditional white American society because women are to be the embodiment of angles at home and not involved with public life. Mary is the best example of this role modeling. The Christian perspective, with its focus on Mary as Mother,

firstly, brings her down to an objective figure, 'whom the son needs her to be' (2002: 174) and secondly, freezes Christianity into 'a religion of a mother and her (boy) child' (2002: 175). The commitment to the belief reduces the power of woman to less than a perfect human; she is someone whose being is summarized in relation to her child (2002: 175).

Post-Christian feminism emerges as an agenda to change and challenge this exclusion. It is a discourse that overthrows preconceived sexist values of Christian theology, which is 'far from being a side-issue in this our secular age' (Hampson 2002: 88-89). This feminist theological perspective destroys the racial, economic, sexist-gendered segregating wall that has separated the Christian/non-Christian, white/black, and masculine/feminine worlds, and strives to provide an alternative one. In this article, I discuss *Parables* as the illustration of this alternative view based on Hampson's (2002) perspective.

### **Wall: The Falling of Humanist Understanding**

The wall is a major motif and metaphor in *Parables*. It is used in both literal and figurative forms: it is the visible defining part of the secluded communities in *Sower* and the invisible tool of segregation and division in both *Sower* and *Talents*. In other words, in *Parables*, the literal depiction of a wall masterfully symbolizes the ideological wall of racial, sexual, economic, and religious segregation or ghettoization.

The wall separates the internal world of Robledo, Lauren's Christian neighbourhood, from the outside world of "strange" others. The pressure of the dystopian conditions, both inside and outside of the walled community, leads to clashes which end in the falling of the wall and the consequent emergence of a new world. In fact, the clashes are the literal embodiment of struggle against isolation or, to put it into different words, ghettoism. The wall, as the protecting construction of this secluded habitat, is the metaphorical depiction of the running ideology of ghettoism. Therefore, to excavate the mechanism of ghettoism within the novels, it would be of great help to have a general investigation of the motif of the wall in the novels.

The wall has two facets for Butler. On the one hand, it symbolizes segregation with its economic, racial, sexual, and religious spatial dimensions. On the other hand, it represents Butler's consciousness of the symbolic role of the wall as a construction that guarantees the protection of personal life for a racial minority like blacks in the United States. Depicting this metaphor, Butler, turns to a posthumanist perspective. She introduces a black female reformer who develops an inclusive religious perspective called Earthseed in relation to sociocultural life. This religious understanding tackles the segregating stand and, at the same time, refuses the function of the wall as a protective tool in black peoples' context. In other words, Butler creates a female agent who shuns to be restricted by the spatial racial perspective, even the preferred black space in her case. The falling of the wall symbolizes the falling of the humanist understanding which tries to guarantee the superiority of any dominant master group or person or the self-isolation of any suppressed groups for protective purposes.

In the world that *Parables* represent, safety and personal life is not guaranteed by separating oneself from oppressive structures through undergoing the isolation imposed by oppressors. In this way, the protagonist of the *Parables* appears as a woman with strong mental and physical abilities who challenges the humanist view which debases the social groups other than rich, Christian whites as ape and bereft of true human intellect. I discuss the aspects of this challenge in this article.

Leon regards space as an essential trope of difference. In her *Movement and Belonging*, she notes that '[w]hen a rigid spatial boundary is erected, it becomes a location of difference, not positive difference but a fixed and limiting point of reference' (2009: 58). The metaphor of the wall plays the same role in *Parables*. The wall of Robledo symbolizes concepts of difference and separation. It acts like an obstacle which strengthens racial, sexual, economic, and religious ghettoism. In the social and personal life of Black Americans, the concept of difference has acted as an erected wall or boundary. It works as a racial demarcation which pins the blacks within a predefined location. Difference here is a restricting concept which defines, controls, and blocks the natural stream of black life as something nonhuman. In *Parables*, Butler depicts how the waves of sociocultural awakening break through this wall of difference. In the following, I discuss the aspects of this awakening.

### ***The Fall of the Wall of Race and Class Differences***

At the racial level, the wall of *Parables* skilfully reflects the struggle of black people to have something to protect them from the bitter experiences of the hardening social pressures on normal, human life of enslaved black families. Describing riding to see the outside of their walled community, Lauren the protagonist of the novels writes:

To us kids—most of us—the trip was just an adventure, an  
excuse to go outside wall. ...  
We rode past people stretched out, sleeping on the sidewalks, ...  
A woman, young, naked, and filthy stumbled along past us. ...  
Maybe she had been raped so much that she was crazy.  
...maybe she was just high on drugs. (Butler 2007a: 9)

In her shocking discussion on the counteraction of slavery and motherhood, Collins explains that white hegemony had severely problematized the very natural right of family life for slaves. In the contradictory context of slave-holding states, '[w]hites of all classes and citizenship categories had the legal right to maintain and, if needed, to work for pay,' while African Americans 'had great difficulty maintaining family and family privacy in public spheres that granted them no citizenship rights' (2000: 49). In response to this dehumanization, Collins explains, 'African notions of family as extended kin units' were recreated, and bloodlines 'were replaced by a notion of "blood" whereby the enslaved Africans drew upon the notion of family to redefine themselves as part of a Black community, consisting of their enslaved "brothers" and "sisters"' (2000: 49). This reaction acted as a protective mechanism that separated enslaved groups from white men and women, and 'stimulated the creation of an important yet subjugated Black civil society' (2000: 49). Attempting to establish a private and secure setting for themselves, black citizens expanded the width of their desired securing walls by developing neighbourhoods where they were related to and cooperated with people from their own race and social class.

The crumbling of Robledo in *Sower* vividly shows the failure of making oneself out of reach. The erection of the walls in that community has no other benefit than the gradual disappearance and loss of influence in social life. As it is represented in the first half of the *Sower*, people within the walled Robledo are fully self-sufficient. They produce their food, have their religious ceremonies within the community, and use the wall as a mechanism to defend themselves from the looting rampant outside; they avoid any form of unnecessary contact with the outside world. *Parables* are the products of a time when hot debates about social rights in America were on the air. Butler's focus on the wall as the determiner of the private and public sphere recalls the privatization of public spaces as well as segregation in a particular period of American history. Over decades after this period, social discrimination, or segregation and hyper-segregation in more exact terms, were focused concepts among the black activists. The gist of the arguments was that segregation, especially its *de facto* form, or "The New American Apartheid" as Randall G. Sheldon (2004) terms it, persists in American life (<https://zcomm.org/znet/>).<sup>2</sup> Sheldon argues that though formal segregation is illegal in constitutional terms, discrimination is still exerted by whitewashed institutionalization and practice. According to him, the policy is applied by limiting the access of racial minorities, especially blacks, to job opportunities, the civil services, quality education, political rights, availability of affordable housing and the use of facilities in public spaces. The aiding tools of this engineering are legal loopholes, which prepare a bed to manipulate laws based on the geographical settling of social groups (<https://zcomm.org/znet/>). A familiar phenomenon in this case is "redlining." Still practiced, it is the intentional denying of social services such as insurance and health care for the residents of a particular area by increasing costs and, thus, reducing their chance to receive the services on equal terms with the members of the ruling race and social class. Any attempt to tackle this problem by developing private spheres is, in fact, to practise the aim of the same policy of ousting the unwanted. Having this understanding, Butler develops *Parables* as enlightening pamphlets which promote the integrated and extra-neighbourhood sense of identity. Describing the essence of her belief and ideal society, Lauren the protagonist in her *Books of The Living* writes:

We are all Godseed, but no more or less  
So, than any other aspect of the universe,  
Godseed is all there is—all that  
Changes. Earthseed is all that spreads  
Earth life to new earths. The universe is  
Godseed. Only we are Earthseed. And the  
Destiny of Earthseed is to take root among  
the stars. (Butler 2007a: 77)

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

Hierarchicalism demands the existence of superior and inferior ranks based on preferred differences. But when all is considered as Godseed it means that these differences, as argued by posthumanist perspective in the Introduction, will not be looked at as justifications for Othering.

The “universalism” has theological as well as racial aspects. It challenges what Griffin distinguishes as the “tribalistic” dualism of “us” and “them” (1989: 58). This “tribalism” embodies an Othering of the unwanted “them,” being dismissed as ‘agents of the inherently evil empire’ who ‘would not, in other words, be understood as equal creatures with equal interests and equal rights to exercise their own freedom’ (1989: 134). Griffin believes that this is a bipolar, particularly American, perspective which separates ‘God’s *really* chosen people’ (1989: 133), who are assumed as White American Christians, from others. Millhiser (2014) explains this understanding by elaborating on its racist Evangelical background.<sup>3</sup> He argues that one strong excuse that these Evangelists offered to justify their hold on segregation was its implementation by God as a “divine order”; when God created people in different races and colours and placed them in different continents, it was against His will to bring these people together (“When ‘Religious Liberty’ Used To Justify Racism” *thinkprogress.org*). Following this perspective was the understanding that whites were the best and purest Christians and, therefore, ranked above others. The “universalism” in *Parables* refutes this “tribalism.” The repeated Earthseedian notion of God as “change” in the novels and Lauren’s reference to all creation as “Godseed” deghettoize God from the monopolization of the White Christians in the novels. The God of Earthseed is a being who is available for all at every social and theological level. In *Talents Bankole*, Lauren’s husband, writes: ‘Some of the faces of her god are biological evolution, chaos theory, relativity theory, the uncertainty principle, and, of course, the second law of thermodynamics’ (Butler 2007b: 46). These descriptions create a sense of a God who is not a supernatural entity outside of creation and in particular contact with his chosen messengers, but an entity working through natural phenomena. Unlike the foundation of Christianity as a religion revolving around a particular historical figure, Jesus of Nazareth, Earthseed does not characterize itself by attachment to a person ‘who stood in different relationship to God than do other human beings’ (Hampson 1991: 8). The God of Earthseed does not prioritize a particular group of people as his chosen one, and does not prefigure Himself as someone in need of special mediums like priests and saints to connect His creation to Him. As a posthuman heroine, Lauren dodges the fundamentalist and divisional theistic consideration of rightfulness by underlining ‘the sense of kinship’ that is ‘created by the belief that we all have a common divine source, live in the presence of a common reality, and have a divine goal’ (Griffin 58). Lauren’s notion of ‘We are all Godseed, ... The universe is Godseed’ (Butler 2007a: 77) reflects this understanding.

The universal tendency within Butler’s novels is also illustrated by the coexistence of the multiracial Christian and Earthseedian communities in the second half of *Talents* (2007b). In *Talents*, the destruction of Acorn, Lauren’s Earthseedian community, and its turning into a Christian camp brings Lauren to the understanding that ‘Acorn is too small, weak, and local to be an effective response to contemporary problems’ (Stillman 24-25). This understanding leads her to expand her interactions, preaching, and enlightening to, first of all, her neighbourhood, and then national and international levels. Concomitant with this aspect of “universalism” is Butler’s avoidance to construct the traditional frame of black safe havens in her novels that is a tradition prevalent in black literature embodying the tendency for creating safe black communities.<sup>4</sup>

To embody “universalism,” Butler imagines Earthseed as an alternative understanding of community. She achieves it by resorting to a black tradition: learning. This reflects Butler’s inclusive literary perspective that encompasses black tradition while she avoids constructing her works as exclusive expressions of black concerns. . Notably, she does so through mixing two traditions of oral and textual communication by referring to textual heritages and reciting poems:

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

Then we buried our dead and we planted oak trees.

Afterward, we sat together and talked and ate a meal and  
decided to call this place Acorn. (Butler 2007b: 328)

Here, the black tradition of ‘oral modes of communication’ (Dubey, 1999: 113) is highlighted through the physical presence of Lauren as author and the recitation of the songs and poems along with the talks. References to written texts like the Bible and Books of The Living recall the Western tradition of prioritizing writing over speech.<sup>5</sup> The

Recitation of these textual heritages together with songs and poems embodies the postmodernist argument about the orality of the written text.<sup>6</sup> It helps Butler to highlight the connection and unity of black and white cultural heritage in shaping Earthseedian community.

On the other hand, writing to develop the social conditions through the engagement with a wide range of problems has been a powerful tradition in black literature. It is related to the life-saving power of fiction that 'emerges as a recurrent motif in African American Women's novels published from the mid nineteenth' (Dubey 2009: 150). This delimitation shifts the focus of Lauren's teachings to include not only blacks, but also the other racial categories. Allen writes:

Like her role as writer/teacher, Butler's novels are filled with characters who write and teach others; from Dana Franklin in *Kinred*,...; to Lauren Olamina, [who] creates a religion, Earthseed, that is founded upon the principle of equal access to education in a futuristic society where only the wealthiest Americans are formally educated. (2009: 1354)

The metaphor of the wall in the stories embodies an exclusive monopoly of education which falls in the novels. In *Parables*, the direction of knowledge is from a black girl towards a mixed multiracial assembly the majority of whom are whites. In *Sower* (2007a) Lauren is depicted teaching the children of her community while she reads on everything she can access to enhance her knowledge:

"Have you read all your family's books?"  
 "Some of them. Not all. ... Books aren't going to save us."  
 "Nothing is going to save us. If we don't save ourselves, we are dead. ... use your imagination." ...  
 "Go home and look again. ... use your imagination. Any kind of survival information from encyclopedia, biographies, anything that helps you learn to live off the land and defend ourselves. Even some fiction might be useful". (Butler 2007a: 59)

In the history of slavery, there have always been strict prohibitions on the education of black people. In an ironical vision, Butler in *Parables* portrays an alternative America where the majority of whites are enslaved by multinational firms and, due to poverty, are deprived of education. Early in *Talents*, we read a note from Bankole: 'I have watched education become more a privilege of the rich than the basic necessity that it must be if civilized society is to survive' (Butler 2007b: 8). The monopolization of money in this society has led to the emergence of a bipolar social structure of rich and poor where education has become exclusive for the well-to-do class. In this alternative America, multinational industrial factories exploit the majority of poor white Americans. It is an emaciated society where services are available at high costs and illiteracy is widespread. When Lauren starts her mission, unlike the past racial preceding, she does not monopolize literacy within racial walls; she is committed to expand knowledge by bringing down the wall of racial discrimination. This represents the utopian aspect of *Parables* which seeks to construct a non-hierarchical world.

Unlike Nilges' (2009) idea, Butler portrays Lauren's policy as not repeating the same cycle of oppression. One important feature which Nilges ignores about Lauren's established community is the free exchange of information. It lets members of the community expand their awareness and knowledge by sharing experiences. There is no reference, direct or indirect, in the novels to suggest the silencing of others by Lauren. As she recommends her community:

To benefit your world,  
 Your people,  
 Your life,  
 Consider consequences,  
 Minimize harm  
 Ask questions,  
 Seek answers,  
 Learn,

Teach. (Butler 2007b: 61)

The community welcomes the expressed visions, experiences, and understanding and, in a more tangible way, uses them. What is of importance is that in this world the focus on training is not an absolute value in itself. Following Lauren's teachings in the *Parables*, the community considers the sharing and practicing of new lessons, gained from their experiences, as the shaping factor of social revival. In other words, it defines and values education within a contextual perspective. Lauren does not erect a wall around education to render it exclusive for a particular group and strengthen her superiority as a centralized figure in the novel. In *Parables*, education is a cooperative activity which accomplishes its aims by functioning within the aspects of social life, whether political, economic or religious.

Lauren uses training as a weapon to rebel against economic monopolization. Butler started writing during the post-civil rights era. She wrote *Parables* when much had not passed from the time when the segregation policy banned blacks from entering public spaces such as schools, churches, working places, army, and alike as identical with whites; they were expected to be restricted to particular places chosen for them. During this time, the explicit law of *de jure* and the inexplicit ideology of *de facto* segregation manipulated blacks as second or third-class or "separate but equal" citizens. The policies were devices that perpetuated the violation against the rudimentary right of blacks to choose the place and rank of their work and, consequently, the place and quality of their life and education. This kept blacks permanently poor. The first half of *Sower* represents the expanded form of this segregation through the walled Robledo. Robledo in *Sower* is an embodiment of inner-city black ghettos, while the outside guarded residential areas of the rich families typify traditional rich, white, and suburban residences. Yet, distinction of rich and poor is not limited to white and black dichotomy in *Parables*. As the training is a tool for realizing awareness for all, the economic justice and recovery resulted from it includes all social groups.

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

The deputies all but ignore Bankole's story... . They wrote nothing down, claimed to know nothing. ... they doubted that he even had a sister, or that he was who he said he was. So many stolen IDs these days. They searched him and took the cash he was carrying. Fees for police services, they said. He had been careful to carry what ... would be enough to keep them sweet-tempered, but not enough to make them suspicious or more greedy. (Butler 2007a: 316)

Representing a middle-class community, Robledo reflects the same intention of its residents to safeguard a level of security by privatizing an affordable number of facilities within strictly protected walls. In other words, the walled community imitates the same system that the rich class has preserved. Through the destruction of Robledo, Butler vividly shows the inefficacy of this restrictive policy: 'Last night, when I escaped from the neighbourhood, it was burning. The houses, the trees, the people: Burning' (Butler 2007a: 153).

From the very beginning of *Sower*, the reader observes Lauren's developing doubts about the effectiveness of the wall. What happens to Robledo confirms her view. In this way, Butler clearly shows that the best way to conquer social problems is not to isolate self, but to work with others to fight with the causes of these problems through practical sustainable ways. In her Acorn as an example of an egalitarian community, Lauren does not take advantage of the dire economic needs of asylum seekers. She accepts them, provides them with necessary knowledge for survival, notably practical education, and works with them on land: 'So this morning, I was ready for a day of walking, thinking, and plant collecting with friends. ... we were heading for a place that we knew. It was a burned, abandoned farmhouse ... where we'd spotted some useful plants' (Butler 2007b: 27). As represented here, she is not a master searching to make use of the labour of others. Acorn is a micro-model of a macro world. In this micro-model, the community gives no priority to racial categories or economic class. On the contrary, in its interaction with the surrounding world, it practises a corporative way of life.

### ***The Fall of the Wall of Sexual and Gender Differences***

Another aspect of the metaphor of the wall in the stories covers the concept of sexuality. The notion of privacy in citizenship is not just limited to racial and economic considerations. As Silbergleid elaborates, the case is completely

susceptible to cover sexual and gender-related aspects. According to her, '[b]y denying women the traits of an individual, then, the sexual contract divides civil society into public and private spheres, allowing for both productive and reproductive prosperity; in this formulation, sexual difference is tautologically invoked to account for the gendered nature of citizenship' (1997: 158). In this masculine conceptualization of individual citizenship, 'one's ability to own property and head a family and subsumption of wives in coverture' is socialized as the natural norm of identity and citizenship (1997: 158). As Lauren refers to it in her diary, the primary criterion of membership in Robledo was to have property or a house. It guaranteed the ability to form and manage a family in such a place. For example, Moss, having a *harem*, was granted membership to house his wife and concubines (Butler 2007a: 36-37). Here is also showcased Butler's consciousness to challenge the priority given to masculine sense of ownership as a natural principle of citizenship. In *Sower* Butler openly discusses masculine polygamy as a form of slavery that is socially accepted because of the financial power of men:

The Mosses don't come to church. Richard Moss has put together his own religion—a combination of the Old Testament and historical West African practices. He claims that God wants men to be patriarchs, rulers and protectors of women, and fathers of as many children as possible. He's an engineer for one of the big commercial water companies, so he can afford to pick up beautiful, young homeless women and live with them in polygamous relationships. ... Some middle class men prove they're men by having a lot of wives in temporary or permanent relationships. Some upper class men prove they're men by having one wife and a lot of beautiful, disposable young servant girls. Nasty. When the girls get pregnant, if their rich employers won't protect them, the employers' wives throw them out to starve.

Is that the way it's going to be, I wonder? Is that the future: Large numbers of people stuck in either President-elect Donner's version of slavery or Richard Moss's. (Butler 2007a: 37)

Traditionally, science fiction is considered a literary genre in which sexuality does not have a tenable role, at least before the 1960s. Rarer than that, the 'critical attention to the issue has been close to non-existent' (Pearson 2003: 151). This absence meant the absence of women in a genre that, being naturally defined in sexual terms, embodied an androcentric perspective which equated human with man. It was based on the argument that science fiction's 'ostensible subject matter – science and technology – were inherently masculine endeavours' (Merrick 2003: 241). Despite this justification, Merrick stresses that the presence of women in science fiction has been unavoidable, whether 'actual, threatened or symbolically represented (through the alien, or "mother Earth" for example)' (2003: 241).

It was the writers of the 1950s who took the first steps to reconcile feminist considerations with science fiction.<sup>7</sup> They were female science fiction writers, who did what they could to 'make women "visible" in science fiction through a focus on female characters, or writing from ... "the woman's point of view"' (Merrick 2003: 246). The trend, according to Merrick, was castigated 'both at the time and in later feminist critique,' for being highly simplistic (2003: 246). In an attempt to cover the defect, the 1960s female writers of the genre provided depictions of 'more complex characterizations,' where there were 'portrayals of women as fully "human" rather than "female men," or complementary adjuncts to, or reflections of, the masculine' (2003: 246). The movement led to the "absent" and the "multiplying" tradition of the 1970s. This extremist tradition sought female equality through a 'construction of a society where men are absent' (2003: 248), or the celebration of 'all kinds of gender/sexual difference' (2003: 249). *Parables* reveal Butler's conscious response to this context by considering the 1980's tradition of 'dystopian vision,' reflected in 'role reversals and worlds which split men and women into separate societies' (Merrick 2003: 249). Apparently, the 'move away from "androgyny"' (2003: 249) of the 1980s was a reaction against the radical visions of the previous decade. One important feature of this decade was the recognition of communication – 'traditionally seen as a female attribute – ... as a "science,"' to expand the scope of 'the conventionally "masculine" narratives of "hard" sf' (2003: 250). These conventional narratives focused on technology as an exclusive masculine field; the 1980s tradition moved forward 'to include areas considered "unscientific" in Western technoculture' (2003: 250) into the scientific half. These features show that, in line with posthumanist understanding, postmodernist science fiction distances from



the modernist assumptions of science fiction as an escape, masculine, white genre. In *Parables*, we have an African American woman as the protagonist who succeeds in fulfilling the role of a saviour by being involved with science: "Space could be our future," I say. I believe that. As far as I'm concerned, space exploration and colonization are among the few things left over from the last century that can help us more than they hurt us' (Butler 2007a: 20). Later, in the end of *Talents* a spacecraft launched by Earthseedian community takes the first group of these people for interstellar navigation. This characterization is based on a posthumanist understanding that does not "animalize," to use Salih's term, what is physically different from a white masculine hero. As this, postmodernist science fiction works to widen the scope of social understanding, tolerance, and harmony by recognizing difference not as other, but part of self. We have the reflection of this acceptance at the lucid representation of sexuality in postmodernist science fiction.

Active and positive reflection of dissident sexual norms has been rare in science fiction of the pre-1980s. Science fiction texts that had the theme of sexuality up to recent history have 'been vastly outweighed by the number of stories which take for granted the continued prevalence of heteronormative institutional practices – dating, marriage, the nuclear family and so on' (Pearson 2003: 150). This is changing from the 1990 onward. References to alternative sexual acts in *Parables* are few. Still, the references put them in confrontation with strict and normative Christian sociocultural codes and, in this way, embody a struggle for representing ignored social groups.

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

Other people find other comforts. Mary Sullivan and Allie  
combine their blankets and make love to one another late at night.  
... I heard them at it. They aren't the only ones who do it, ...  
    'Do we disgust you?' ...  
    I looked at her, surprised. ... 'Do you love my friend?' ...  
    "Of course I do!"  
    I managed a smile, ... 'Then be good to one another,' I said.  
'And if there's trouble, you and your sisters stand with us, with  
Earthseed.' (Butler 2007b: 223-224).

As the excerpt reveals, the heroine, notably, and those women following her, refuse to act based on the traditional roles dictated by Christian norms of womanhood and motherhood. Of course, it is not to say that they strictly oppose the norms. Rather it emphasizes that Butler is consciously refusing to dramatize her narration in a way that masculine heteronormative Christian norms demand. In Butler's representative world of *Earthseed*, heterosexuals have a tolerant coexistence with those who have non-heterosexual interests. This imagery mirrors a consciousness towards alternative sexualities in science fiction that flourished through emerging conceptual disciplines such as queer theory and provided 'new ways of looking at sf' (Pearson 2003: 159). This reconciliation of science fiction and sexuality reflects a common sense where both share 'a dystopian view of the present and a utopian hope for the future, a hope that will be, at the very least, a place where we do not automatically kill what is different' (2003: 159).

## Conclusion

To summarize, the metaphor of the wall in *Parables* represents a multifaceted literary figure. Butler uses this figure to reflect her considerations about the different forms and aspects of segregation in a spatialized context. The context juxtaposes examples of fictional neighbourhoods, which are reflections of real models. In the first half of *Sower*, Butler depicts a walled neighbourhood that struggles to preserve its social order and peace through attachment to Christian norms. Fear and anxiety from what may come from the outside world has blocked any innovation and motivation for change in this community. The wall, in this sense, symbolizes self-made, mental barriers which need to be eroded for improvement to take place. In such a context, the falling off the walls and development of a new sense of community based on the teachings of Lauren, a black female reformer who approves coexistence, symbolizes the acceptance of non-identical people, places, and ideas as part of self. At first, this highlights the role of a woman who does not follow what Hampson discusses as the dominant understanding of true womanhood as motherhood in Western culture (2002: 173). Lauren emerges as a strong woman who is capable of leading her followers through ashes of a destroyed

civilization towards a calm and peaceful life through the recognition of difference. This acceptance guarantees the evolvement of a social order that does not restrict itself to reproduce fixed values associated with a particular time, place, and person (old Palestine and Jesus Christ) which Hampson discusses as Christian codes in Western culture (1991: 7-8). This "historical" perspectives, as Hampson terms it (1991: 7), ghettoizes the sociocultural groups who do not fall within this categorization. Assumed to indicate the necessity to expand the concepts of self, home, nation, and religion, the metaphor of wall successfully reflects Butler's struggle against this ghettoism and, under the light of expanded education, offers a view of a better world.

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## Notes

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

2. For further information refer to: Sheldon, Randal G., and William Bud Brown. 2002. *Criminal Justice in America: A Critical View*. 1st ed. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Sheldon, Randall G. 2004. "The Imprisonment Crisis in America: Introduction." *Review of Policy Research* 21(1), pp. 5-12.

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

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

4. For further explanation refer to: Dubey, Madhu. 1999. "Folk and Urban Communities in African-American Women's Fiction: Octavia Butler's Parable of the Sower." *Studies in American Fiction* 27(1), pp. 103-28.

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

6. Jacques Derrida's *Of Grammatology* discusses this understanding in detail:

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

7. Individual female science fiction writers like Clare Winger Harris or Gertrude Barrows Bennette had started their writing much earlier.

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