

**Re-imagining 'Woman' and 'Nature' in Octavia Butler's Xenogenesis
Trilogy**

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Introduction

Octavia Estelle Butler (1947-2006) is one of the most prominent Afro-American science fiction writers. Butler, as a black woman, is not only challenging male authors, but also feminist writers, by introducing marginalized concerns and oppressed voices in a field which is often described as male dominated, but definitely a white genre. As Ruth Salvaggio claims:

Butler's concern with racism and sexism is a conscious part of her vision. As she herself explains, a particularly "insidious problem" with science fiction is that it "has always been nearly all white, just as until recently, it's been nearly all male".¹

Butler's dissatisfaction with the current situation of racial minorities and women, and her longing for a world of gender and race equality, are expressed in a wisely universal voice with an almost Biblical tone. She addresses humanity as a whole, with the purpose of educating it. Randall Kenan praises Butler exactly for her expertise in handling style and uncomfortable issues:

I am really impressed by the way your characters often speak, almost epigrammatically, not to say that it is stiff dialogue, but you achieve a sort of majesty, particularly when you're talking about the human species; how we interact with one another. There is a lot of wisdom in what you have your characters say, without sounding didactic.²

Butler's rhetoric is based on considering all sorts of aspects and perspectives of an issue through conflicting ideas. Therefore, she can be read as essentialist and non-essentialist, utopianist and anti-utopianist.

Xenogenesis, Butler's post-apocalyptic vision depicts the aftermath of a devastating nuclear war: Earth is destroyed and uninhabitable; the remains of humanity, the few survivors, are saved and collected by an alien gene-trading species. The Oankali, realizing the potentials and the instability of the human race, initiate a rigorously supervised educational process and miscegenation to ensure the survival of both species, and to overcome the Human Contradiction. 'The Contradiction, it was more often called among Oankali. Intelligence and hierarchical behavior. It was fascinating, seductive, and lethal. It was brought Humans to their

¹ Ruth Salvaggio is quoting "Lost Races of Science Fiction", *Transmission*, Summer 1980, pp.17-18.

² Kenan, 502

final war'³. This frequently mentioned and described term is the central argument of the Xenogenesis trilogy, and, that of Butler's oeuvre, and therefore my work as well.

The focus of my paper will be the intertwined nature of power, race and sexuality, which has consequences in assigning gender roles, even to nature, and setting up patriarchal and feminist (literary) traditions. I will argue that Butler is using the patriarchal post-apocalyptic formula, the feminist tradition of revisionist mythmaking, re-creating old myths, such as the Genesis, or the Lilith myth, in order to re-imagine woman by assigning her new functions, and roles, and unifying the binaries by which she is described; and nature by relieving it from a feminine imagery which led to its exploitation, and showing two different definitions of nature, which affects the approach to it.

1. Re-imagining 'Woman'

The very title of the trilogy, Xenogenesis, suggests the revision of 'woman', and the artificiality of this process. Genesis is the appearance of something *other* than what was before, the establishment and fossilization of some sort of an order of things. Butler's Genesis is embedded into a post-apocalyptic narrative, which has significant implications on the analysis of the title and the three novels.

First, Berger suggests in *After the End: Representations of Post-apocalypse*, such narratives, paradoxically, tell us what happens after a cataclysm⁴. Therefore, Apocalypse is the antithesis of Genesis, the dissolution of the existing order, chaos. As Berger puts it:

Apocalypse is a semantic alchemical process; it burns and distills signs and referents into new precipitates. The study of post-apocalypse is a study of what disappears and what remains, and of how the remainder has been transformed. It is the study of the ideological and psychological fissions and fusions. The apocalypse would be the *definitive* catastrophe - not only final and complete but absolutely clarifying. It would unmistakably separate good from evil, true from false.⁵

The apocalypse is necessarily followed by a new genesis, as in the he Biblical apocalypses such as the Flood, or John's Revelation, which are all instrumental in some

³ Butler, 442

⁴ Berger, 6

⁵ Berger, 7-8

sort of an evaluation of the existing things, purification, and the emergence of a better state of existence.

The Biblical, and medieval texts on the Millennium can be contrasted with the modernist (e.g. T.S. Eliot, “The Wasteland”, Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*) and contemporary representations (e.g. Bradbury, *The Road*) of the apocalypse which tend to prefer the ‘Wasteland’ to the post-apocalyptic ‘Eden’. The order of the post-apocalyptic wasteland, ironically, goes back to Biblical beginnings, which means the establishment of a patriarchal order, based on hierarchy, and violence as its natural consequence. Post-apocalyptic narratives, thus, represent the overwhelming fear of chaos, the loss of essential commodities of an ordered and civilized life; and moral, psychological and often physiological degeneration; and the desire to recover from it. This idea features in many of Butler’s post-apocalyptic novels, such as two books from the Patternist series, *Clay’s Ark* and *Survivor*, or the Parable series, of which the very titles suggests Biblical themes, such as religion and reproduction. As in many post-apocalyptic narratives, the change in the order of things, or the change without an actual, fundamental change, therefore, ‘put forward a total criticism of the existing social order’⁶. For Butler this framework is even more: the Apocalypse is a chance for an alternative Genesis re-told from a liminal, marginalized point of view. The focalizer of the first Xenogenesis novel, *Dawn*, is an African-American woman, Lilith Iyapo, the second, *Adulthood Rites*, is about his construct, half-blood child, Akin, and the third one, *Imago*, is narrated by Jhodas, a third-gendered descendant of Lilith.

With this, I turn to the second point in the discussion of the significance of the post-apocalyptic and Biblical framework. Berger also points out the peculiar role of the *other*. As Butler mentions in an interview, her main inspiration for Xenogenesis was the anticipation of the “nuclear talk” during the Reagan era. As she puts it: ‘The American people put these idiots in positions of power – and they’re going to kill us! If people fall for this crap, there must be something wrong with the people!’⁷. On the one hand, the clash of her own critical views and the given political climate must have helped her to coin the term “Human Contradiction”, which I’m going to discuss in detail later, and on the other hand, to depict the aliens of her books.

Berger explains that Reagenist ideology was built heavily upon apocalyptic imagery, as a result of the political and social tension caused by the Cold War. In order

⁶ Berger, 7

⁷ Fry, 475

to assure America of its perfection and “good guy” status in the upcoming Armageddon, an impure moral category has to be created⁸. Berger writes the following about ‘the need to precipitate and re-precipitate, distill and re-distill the purity of the national moral categories’⁹: ‘again and again Sylvester Stallone, Bruce Willis, Sigourney Weaver must confront the *Other*, the *Alien*, the Terrorist’¹⁰ [italics mine]. Butler uses the Reaganist concept of the *other* in a different way. For her the aliens are not necessarily actual extraterrestrial entities, either benevolent or malevolent, not equivalents of communist countries, but those who do not fit in the conviction of a perfect society, thus, members of oppressed social, ethnical and sexual minorities. In that sense, therefore, the ‘xeno-’ prefix in the title, of course, can mean alien, and it can either denote the almost-God-like Oankali, who literally reconstruct all sort of species, and the devastated Earth itself; or, the ‘oppressed aliens’¹¹: women and, especially, women of color.

Therefore, the post-apocalyptic setting and the title’s connotations establishes the Biblical framework in which Butler re-imagines ‘woman’. Butler goes back to the Lilith myth in order to re-write it, and to reject the patriarchal gender stereotypes assigned to men and women by the Genesis. In addition, she abolishes the demonized first woman, Lilith’s, and her modern Afro-American namesake’s liminal and marginal social status by putting her in a power positions which were hardly available for women, especially, for women of color. *Lilith’s Brood*, the title of the omnibus edition of the trilogy in 2000, is even more straightforward in this sense. Metaphorically, it puts Lilith Iyapo in the position of Eve, a matriarch, and she and her progeny inherits a status which could mostly, if not only, be held by Adam’s brood.

The Xenogeneis/Lilith’s Brood trilogy is derived from the tradition of ‘revisionist mythmaking’ of women writers, Butler uses certain elements of the Lilith myth, and either gives them a twist, or, she introduces new elements to it. This way she can reflect on not only the original myth, and her own rewriting of it, but also on the drastic changes in the concept of woman in the process of revision and reconstruction. Since there are many parallels between the two stories, and the two Lilith figures, it is essential to know and explore the myth in comparison with the trilogy to better

⁸ Berger, 135

⁹ Berger, 135

¹⁰ Berger, 135

¹¹ Osherow, 69

understand in what sense Butler's Lilith Iyapo is a revolutionary counterpart of her ancient namesake.

Lilith, in the Judeo-Christian mythology, is best known as the first woman, created with Adam. She refuses to serve Adam, in every sense of the word, questioning his superiority on the basis of their equal position in creation. Lilith, even when she is threatened by God to be severely punished, resists submitting herself to patriarchy. She, thus, leaves Adam, and lives in the desert and the Red Sea, which with their vastness symbolizes her 'freedom to move, act, choose and determine'¹², and endures her punishment.

This myth can be found in a *midrash*, a rabbinic interpretation of the Torah, and can be understood as the missing key to decipher the anomaly surrounding the creation of male and female. This lack might have issued in two opposing accounts of the above mentioned event. Osherow claims that 'Lilith's tale results from the ancient rabbis' attempts to explain the discrepancies between Genesis chapter one, in which we are told: "And God created the human species in his own image... male and female he created them', and Genesis chapter two, which recounts Eve's creation out of a rib of Adam's side'.¹³

The said *midrash* is an apocrypha's, Ben Sira's, meditation from 1000 C.E. This is thought to be the first written document featuring Lilith, but the story's origins are much older, and most probably there were other texts about her. During my research, I encountered different forms of this myth (see Appendix), which might be the result of different translations and interpretations of the original story, but unfortunately I am not in the position of judging it. Yet, the main features of the myth remained the same: Adam's (seemingly unjust) claim for his superiority and his forcing Lilith to 'lie beneath him', Lilith's refusal, her argument defending her independence, her uttering the 'ineffable name of God', and her exile.

In Version B it is claimed that '[God] used filth and impure sediment instead of dust or earth', therefore, Lilith is, by nature, associated with powers from below earth, with primordial and dark forces. This is discussed by Koltuv, who is following the traces of Lilith from her ancient origins to the Freudian meaning of her obscure figure to Lilith presence in contemporary literature, in *The Book of Lilith*. Koltuv argues, based on the Zohar, a book containing the fundamentals of Jewish spiritual philosophy,

¹² Osherow, 71 quoting Koltuv: *The Book of Lilith*, p. 22

¹³ Osherow, 70

the Kabbalah, that Lilith originates in the battling binary oppositions of Sun/Light and Moon/Darkness. The Sun and the Moon are fighting, and God separates them to end the skirmish. But God in so doing gives greater power and light to the Sun, while the Moon has to shrink and fade, and be in charge of ‘lower ranks’¹⁴ of creatures, those who fly and crawl. The Moon’s fury and indignation gives birth to Lilith:

[...] the Moon clearly feels herself to be diminished. God’s intervention in her lover’s quarrel robs her of her freedom of choice. As a result of the Moon’s diminishment, the husk of evil that is Lilith was born. It is said that Lilith has the body of a woman from head to the navel, but from the navel down she is flaming fire.¹⁵

Therefore, Lilith is coming from darkness, she is a moon spawn. She is the bearer of the traditional features of her *mother*, Moon/Darkness/Night, and she is formed by them. These features are sexuality and desire of all sorts, danger, (black) magic. Lilith’s fiery genitalia on one hand emphasizes profane and carnal nature, on the other hand, since fire and light is power, it suggests that her power over men lies in her sexuality.

What the Ben Sira versions keep from the origins of the Lilith myth is her power and sexuality. These aspects of the myth give the central themes of it, and are compressed in the expression ‘lie below’. This can either denote her refusal to submit herself to obey to patriarchal commands, or, her sexual freedom, which denies all sorts of coercion during the intercourse. It seems that Ben Sira’s Lilith myth is especially concerned with power relations and sexuality, which are seemingly necessarily intertwined, as it is clear from the discrepancy between the different versions concerning her punishment.

In Version A, she is told to accept her hundred children dying a day, and becomes punishment herself, by killing off the newborn, who are not defended by an amulet depicting the three angels, all connected to medicine, who brought God’s words to her. In Version B, she is claimed to be the lover of demons, and Satan himself which can be explained by Lilith’s origins and her complex cosmic connection to the demonic/satanic realm as it is elaborated by Koltuv. According to ‘an earlier work which antedates the Zohar by a few decades’¹⁶ God and Shekina are the male and female aspects of the same force, while

¹⁴ Koltuv, 3

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Koltuv, 7

Samael [Satan] and Lilith are said to have been born by an emanation from beneath the Throne of Glory [God and Shekina] in the shape of an androgynous, double-faced being, corresponding in the spiritual realm to the birth of Adam and Eve who two were born as hermaphrodites. The two androgynous twin-couples not only resembled each other, but both “were like the image of what is Above” that is reproduced, in a visible form, the image of the androgynous deity.¹⁷ [Added by me]

Thus, before Ben Sira’s mythmaking, Lilith related to God and the realm beneath Him crawling with demons. She seems to be equal not only to Adam, but with God and Satan, as well. This equality is definitely denied by all Ben Sira versions, and she is depicted as a threat to patriarchy.

Her power seems to be twofold, and her punishment separates her two threatening and intertwined qualities. She is on one hand an utterly independent, carnal creature. In her freedom of sexuality she embodies male sexual frustrations, such as being overpowered by a woman, or, the loss of masculinity. Osherow writes relying on Cantor’s “The Lilith Question” that ‘Lilith’s crimes “embody several crucial male fears” including impotence, loss of a female companion, and loss of the patriarchal line’¹⁸. On the other hand, she is also a potential mother. That means she has too much power over males: she can/could rule them either as their mother, or as their lover. In these versions her punishment deprives her of her basic drive to have children, and her power to snatch children from other people in her devastating desire for descendants, is limited by amulets. Lilith’s lost mothering capacity and function is given to Eve, who accepts to ‘lie below’ Adam, and becomes the mother of all humans. Eve shows some traits of Lilith in her disobedience and rebelliousness which gave knowledge to humanity. According to Koltuv, the snake who seduced Eve is none other than Lilith. However, there seem to be some overlapping features between the two women, Lilith and Eve are separated, and they became the antithesis of each other, as it is suggested by Cantor.¹⁹ As Osherow discusses:

The dichotomy present in depictions of women as *either* maternal *or* sexual reflects a larger anxiety toward women within our cultural heritage. As Nancy Chodorow explains in *Femininities, Masculinities*,

¹⁷ Koltuv, 7 quoting Patai: *The Hebrew Goddess*, p. 219.

¹⁸ Osherow, 70

¹⁹ Cantor, 45 quoted in Osherow, 76

Sexualities, maternal power is characterized by “reliability, nurturance and the capacity for comfort” (19914, 59). She further adds that the mother tends not to be portrayed “psychologically or... culturally as a sex object. ...[H]er sexual power is... denied.” (1994, 59)²⁰

Lilith’s story is often interpreted as women’s struggle for the sex/gender equality, and as she manages to preserve her freedom against the opposing force, she becomes an active heroine, and a feminist icon. The myth of Lilith has been “acknowledged most thoroughly by Jewish feminists. Beginning in the latter half of this century, and particularly in the 1970s, these women resurrected Lilith as the symbol of their movement”²¹. Ironically, the price of her victory, her losing her mothering function became a site of women’s oppression.

Lilith’s punishment, the schism between women’s sexuality and motherhood results in the liminality and marginality of women in societies since, in a sense, this rupture does not let them to reach adulthood. Liminality is a state of not belonging to any particular group of the society, waiting for a change in one’s status, which is acquired, achieved by a peculiar deed or event, a rite of passage as it was coined by Arnold Van Gennep. He classifies the following events as rites of passages which are all similar in their cyclical, periodical nature²²: ‘ceremonies of birth, childhood, social puberty, betrothal, marriage, pregnancy, fatherhood, initiation into religious societies, and funerals’²³. Considering these examples, it is clear that menstruation, sexuality and motherhood are all thresholds, liminal stages, these events separate a girl from an adult, mature woman, therefore, these events in that order gives social standing and position to a woman. Since the Lilith myth punishment separated sexuality from motherhood, therefore, it is impossible to leave the liminal stage. Turner claims that “the subject of passage ritual is, in the liminal period, structurally, if not physically, ‘invisible’”²⁴. Therefore, it has an enormous consequence: mothers could have been kept at the hearth, and the fallen women could have been cast out of proper society. This kind of liminality pushed women to the margins of the societies in which they were living.

Butler’s Lilith Iyapo is revolutionary for two reasons. First, Butler manages to unify the independent woman and the fond mother. Second, Lilith Iyapo is not only a woman, but a woman of colour, therefore she challenges typical western feminism,

²⁰ Osherow, 77

²¹ Osherow, 71

²² Van Gennep, 3

²³ Van Gennep, 3

²⁴ Turner, 6

which often forgets the oppression of women of color, and “female experience”, as a socio-political construction usually²⁵, includes the experience of white, middle class women, while Black, Chicana, Asian, etc. women appear as a “singular monolithic”²⁶ mass, without individual faces and voices. In so doing, Butler uses elements of Lilith myth and other Biblical stories, and the traditions of captivity and slave narratives.

The figure of Lilith, an ancient goddess of air and flying creatures, and the moon’s fiery fury, and a reflection of God and Satan, and the first woman, was, gradually, distorted by patriarchy, and turned into a demon, who is either a threat to male and female chastity and newborn babies; or, turned into a succubus, who has power over men’s and women’s dream, and causes them erotic dreams, and haunts them.

The same happens to Lilith Iyapo, her name and figure is distorted into something which evokes hate and/or fear. She accepts what the Oankali offer to her, because she cannot deny her basic mothering drives, but she does not agree with them on many matters. She leads the first project of Awakening people to be the first human group reinvented to the terraformed Erath. The Oankali teach her, enhances her physical and mental capacities, they give her privileges. She becomes less human and more alien, a mediator between the two species. The project has a catastrophic end, and her name becomes a curse among those who resist the Oankali. As it is clear from the following examples, her children are frequently reminded not to utter her name, or she is advised to change it:

‘Thought you should have changed it. It isn’t a very popular name.’²⁷

‘Listen Akin don’t say that name to anyone. It may not matter anymore, but don’t say it. [...] Because there are people here who don’t like your mother. There are people here who might hurt you because they can’t get at her.’²⁸

The original myth says that Lilith in her exile ‘engaged in unbridled promiscuity consorted with lascivious demons, and gave birth to hundreds of demonic babies, daily’²⁹. Considering her maternity there are many parallels between Lilith and Lilith Iyapo. First, Butler’s heroine loses her child in a car accident, thus, a child of her dies as Lilith’s children. Moreover, as God and Adam find it difficult to understand Lilith

²⁵ Haraway, *Cyborg Manifesto* eleje ref s

²⁶ Mohanty, 49

²⁷ Butler, 297

²⁸ Butler, 249

²⁹ Koltuv, 19

and accept her ways, Lilith Iyapo has to face the disappointment of her Nigerian husband's family, who wanted a Nigerian girl for their son. Therefore, Lilith Iyapo is rejected twice: as a black woman in the white-dominated world, and as an American woman, by other black people, because of the difference in their backgrounds.

Later on, as her ancient namesake, Lilith Iyapo herself, in a sense, becomes the lover of demons. Butler describes the alien Oankali as the bearers of demonic features: 'Medusa children. Snakes for hair. Nests of night crawlers for eyes and ears'³⁰. First, Lilith Iyapo, is scared and disgusted by their look, but, gradually, she accepts it, but to some degree she is always repelled by them. Later, she gets impregnated by Nikanj, her Ooloi mate, against her will, which evokes Adam's 'lie below me' ruling sexuality. She struggles with the thought that her child will not look like humans, and they will not be entirely humans, they will be the Other: "It's inside me, and it isn't human!"³¹, "But it won't be a human, she whispered. "It will be a thing. A monster."³² Again, her child is described as demonic baby. Yet, there are two discrepancies between Butler's myth and the two versions of the Ben Sira text: Lilith Iyapo's children will neither die, nor are they monsters.

While the first book, *Dawn*, reconstructs Lilith Iyapo as a strong, independent woman, a *parent* of her family and the settlers, based on the ancient Judeo-Christian myth, and captivity and slave narratives, *Adulthood Rites* and *Imago* depict her as a mother, yet her freedom and other functions and capabilities are not denied. In the following paragraph Lilith Iyapo appears in her wholeness, as sexually attractive woman, and as a fond mother breast-feeding her child:

Lilith amid the *menagerie*. He had liked her looks when he spotted her in the *garden*. She was an *amazon* of a woman, tall and strong, but with no look of hardness to her. Fine, dark skin. *Breasts high* in spite of all the children – *breasts full of milk*. He had never seen before a woman *nursing* a child. He had almost had to turn his back on her to stop himself from staring as Lilith fed Akin. The woman was not beautiful. Her broad, smooth face was usually set in an expression of *solemnity*, even *sadness*. It made her look *saintly*. *A mother*. Very much a mother. And *something else*.³³ [*Italics mine*]

³⁰ Butler, 43

³¹ Butler, 247

³² Butler, 247

³³ Butler, 285

The italicized words show her attributes as amazon, and as a mother. Her breasts appear not only as the symbols of her womanhood and sexuality, but also as organs to feed her children. The focalizer, here, is Tino, Lilith's future mate. It is exciting that the male gaze, which is usually described as oppressive, identifies the two basic roles of women, and unifies them. This way, Butler, I suppose, claims that men should not be seen as the obstacles of gender equality but as partners in the struggle for it.

Since Butler translates the iconographical darkness of Lilith into a black woman, therefore it would be impossible and "wrong to discuss Butler's Lilith with an eye only for the way a Hebrew legend shapes her"³⁴. Butler's and Lilith Iyapo's cultural heritage includes the slave narratives, and a traditional black female figure, or function, that is, the "sturdy black bridge"³⁵, as Federmayer calls it, between different identities, here, species. She also concludes in "Maternal Cyborgs: The Black Female World of the Xenogenesis Trilogy" that the significance of this kind of character is 'to sustain life as well as hope in their community'³⁶, even 'under the most adverse conditions'³⁷. Butler's allusions to slave narratives and the parallels between slave-heroines and Lilith are all instrumental in expanding female experience and the notion 'woman' itself, and the revision of it. In addition, as one of the main foci of the slave narratives is reading and writing, it gives a metalayer to Xenogenesis, reflecting on literature as a site of oppression and fighting against it; or, on phenomena such as the "revisionist mythmaking" of women writers, and the cyborg myth of Donna Haraway.

Lilith often feels subjugated and patronized when she is with the Oankali. She feels like an animal, a pet, or a slave to them. This imagery is recurring. Lilith and other survivors are captured and taken to a spaceship by the aliens. This is a direct reference to the white colonizers of Africa, and their methods of slave trading. It must be remarked, though, that the Oankali are not colonizers in the classical sense of the word, as they are offering a mutually beneficial exchange, for instance the cancerous cells that would kill Lilith are fascinating things for the Oankali.

Moreover, the Oankali seems to practice some sort of a parenting power, rather than one based on hierarchical-authorial position, which results in violence³⁸. First, they avoid violence; it appears only in case of justified self-defense. Second, they tend not use physical coercion. Yet, some of their chemical machinations, their emitting

³⁴ Osherow, 78

³⁵ Federmayer, 115

³⁶ Federmayer, 115

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ The distinction of two kinds of power will be further elaborated later on.

pheromones to enhance attraction, and gradually develops a kind of addiction between Oankali-human couples, which is sort of unconscious on the behalf of both parties. As Lilith often remarks that she cannot explain the nature or inception of her attraction towards Nikanj. Finally, since their power relies on the community, they put huge emphasis on learning and teaching each other in order to facilitate trade, and ensure survival – for both species. Therefore, it seems that the parallels between white colonizers and/or slave masters and the Oankali are not so obvious, but there are at least two major events when it is undeniable (the Paul Titus scene and the prohibition of writing). Contrary, humans, who are definitely overpowered by the intellectually and technologically more advanced aliens, are more often depicted as either slaves or animals. Of course, it does not necessarily mean that the Oankali are good, or what they are doing is right, or, they are offering a utopian solution. The Oankali and the humans are not equal in the sense that, as Federmayer remarks, it is the Oankali who ‘decide the rules’³⁹, and Lilith, and later, her progeny has to find ways to change this situation to a certain extent. Butler’s magnificent writing skills prevent her from judging and being didactic. She is rather creating continuously conflicting situations, and there are two of them concerning reproduction and writing, where the master-slave relationship of the aliens, and the humans is clear-cut.

Lilith, after her awakening, is introduced to an Oankali family who are supposed to learn how to behave with humans, and teach her the Oankali ways, in order to prepare themselves for the actual gene exchange and cohabitation. During this period, Lilith is completely powerless and treated as a child. Federmayer even associates Lilith’s development in *Dawn* to Rousseau’s *Sophie*, an infamous conduct book to teach girls how to become good wives and fond mothers⁴⁰. She is put together with an *eka*, an Oankali child who has not yet developed its sex, yet later will be Lilith’s ooloi (third gendered) mate, to teach each other and learn from each other. In the beginning there are all sorts of communication problems and misunderstandings between Lilith and Nikanj because they hardly speak each other’s language. Nikanj, quite insensitively, treats Lilith as a pet, showing her off to its friends, who have never seen a human before. This incident is utterly humiliating and enraging for her, and recalls the examinations of slaves: ‘[they] poked and probed her exposed flesh’⁴¹ and she felt

³⁹ Federmayer, 107

⁴⁰ Federmayer, 111-112

⁴¹ Butler, 57

‘nothing more than an unusual animal’⁴². Since the children, who have nothing childlike in them, want to watch her strip, and ‘investigate her hair’⁴³, which is, basically, in every culture a symbol of sexuality, the scene can be read as slave women’s sexual abuse by their white masters.

The animal metaphor is recurring, expressing her utmost fear of losing her agency and human status, or, more precisely, that she will never be able to recover it, and the augmenting stress caused by her growing sense of powerlessness. She is becoming exactly like a caged animal. Since the Oankali in their arrogance or ignorance of human nature frequently denies to answer many of her question if they find them uncomfortable, as parents usually do, and she only knows that the Oankali are *gene-traders*, and that ‘she was intended to live and reproduce’⁴⁴. Yet, she is wondering whether she is ‘an experimental animal’⁴⁵ to them, a mere participant of ‘a captive breeding program’⁴⁶.

The Paul Titus incident is the worst and the most severe case in which the animal metaphor occurs. It is not only an instance of power and sexuality presented as being intertwined, but also the most striking parallel between slave narratives written by women and Lilith Iyapo, as Tucker explains, referring to Amanda Boulter, Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*⁴⁷. Paul Titus is a black man, who was awakened way before Lilith, and spent most of his life with the Oankali. Lilith is introduced to him, as she wanted to talk to someone of her people. The Oankali had a hidden interest in this reunion of two representatives of the human species, as they wanted to experiment with human sexuality: ‘His family thought you should mate with him [...] They believed you would share sex with him’⁴⁸. The meeting almost necessarily goes wrong: Paul initiates sexual intercourse with Lilith, which is not at all welcomed on her part. She resists, shouting ‘animals get treated like this. Put a stallion and a mare together until they mate, then send them back to their owners. What do they care? They’re just animals!’⁴⁹. She got beaten up severely, and almost raped.

The role of power, here, is twofold. First, it is Paul Titus’s violent, abusive power, based only on his physical strength, which is used to express his superiority in his

⁴² Butler, 57

⁴³ Butler, 57

⁴⁴ Butler, 60

⁴⁵ Butler, 60

⁴⁶ Butler, 60

⁴⁷ Tucker, 173

⁴⁸ Butler, 98

⁴⁹ Butler, 95

sexuality. Rape, is the clearest expression of patriarchal power, a dominating power, and a major experience of black women during slavery. Second, is the Oankali's parenting power, which manifests itself in interference, and healing up Lilith's wounds. Yet, obviously, they were responsible for the wounds, as they set up this kind of trap for Lilith, and their intervention was slightly belated. The fact that Titus argues that sex would be as a form of rebellion, or resistance against the Oankali, suggests in his view, power and sex cannot be separated. Actually, what Titus argues here, is similar to the arguments of the second wave feminists who claimed that there is power in sexuality. Considering this, he sees clearly that the Oankali use sexuality as a device of coercion: they prevent humans to reproduce in the traditional way; therefore, they have to choose the Oankali, if they want to survive as a species.

This event is mirrored, and can be seen as a turning point in the plot. From this time on, Lilith Iyapo is changing, changed. The Oankali gives her all bigger muscles, better memory, and power to open and close the walls with chemical stimuli, everything which makes her capable of *mothering* the first group of awakened people. Therefore, she is more and more artificial, constructed, "the sturdy black bridge", arching not only between the Oankali and the humans, but also between the two sexes.

There is another significant factor of the depiction of human-oankali relationship in terms of slavery. The best evidence for slave narrative is Lilith Iyapo's insisting of being provided with paper and pencil to facilitate her *learning the Oankali language*, arguing 'this isn't anything dangerous'⁵⁰ and she is denied 'It is not allowed. The people [the Oankali] decided that it should not be allowed'⁵¹. As Tucker explains:

Given the prominence of literacy and freedom as a theme in early African-American autobiographies and throughout the tradition of African-American literature, Lilith's inability to access tools of writing, initially prohibited by the Oankali, seems to secure the link between Xenogenesis and slave narratives.⁵²

Slaves had to learn their masters' language but they were not allowed to learn how to write, as literacy was considered to be a privilege of white patriarchal society, while oral cultures were primitive. Therefore, literacy was a commodity, an indicator of status in society and power, and was guarded well. Henry Louis Gates, quoting a 1740 South Carolina statute, argues that 'learning to read and to write, then, was not only difficult;

⁵⁰ Butler, 62

⁵¹ Butler, 62

⁵² Tucker, 173

it was a violation of the law'⁵³. Writing became a site of oppression and the symbol of freedom at the same time. Authors of slave narratives from Frederick Douglas to Harriet Jacobs emphasize that literacy is the main argument for the abolition of slavery since it testifies that there is no difference in white and black intellect, as it was used to claim for long time, by giving an account of their learning to write. As Gates claims that these authors 'all rendered statements about the direct relationship between freedom and discourse as central scenes of instruction and as repeated fundamental structures of their larger rhetorical strategies'⁵⁴. The same patterns can be found in women's literature.

The re-imaginaion of woman and the artificiality of this process lies in language, and its products: writing and literature. As I already argued that language we use is a patriarchal technology, 'male privilege'⁵⁵ which created binaries as the ideology of inequality of the sexes. Women cannot write in a language which tries to silence them and make them invisible, as Ostriker further elaborates in *Stealing the Language*. They are, therefore, constantly searching for a language and new forms of writing more accessible to express their experience.

Writing and literature, here, too, can be understood as either a site of oppression, as it is made perfectly clear in Joanna Russ's *How to Suppress Women's Writing*; or as a method of *de*-construction, and *re*-construction of oppression. The latter procedures shed light to the dark side of human nature, and the malfunctioning of societies, diagnosing the problems, and offering alternatives, solutions. Also, it gives an opportunity to the oppressed groups to create some sort of a counter-culture, a unique voice to articulate their experience, as they are mostly excluded from mainstream, canonized literature. The ability and skill of writing became a matter of life and death to oppressed groups, such as sexual and/or racial minorities. The theme of the significance of writing, and the freedom of it, is present in black literature and feminist texts as well.

Xenogenesis is no exception: Butler consciously uses several literary traditions from slave narratives to the age-old 'mythmaking' of women writers which became especially popular in the field of science fiction. Harold Schweizer writes in his Introduction to Ostriker's *Feminist Revision and the Bible*: 'Biblical revisionism is as old as Genesis. Equally ancient, if symmetrically suppressed and silenced, has been

⁵³ Gates, 17

⁵⁴ Gates, 17

⁵⁵ Ostriker, *Stealing the Language*, 211

woman's claim to change, "the indictment served on her in Paradise"⁵⁶. Women science fiction writers had to face the difficulty of creating heroines who are different from typical science fiction women based on patriarchal clichés, who are either depicted as objects, the prize of the hero for doing something extraordinary, or, the intelligent alien villains who must die in the end, and gives them agency, and plausible plot, as it is suggested in Russ's "What can a heroine do?". As Osherow claims:

Lilith should appear in science fiction is not at all surprising. In a genre in which women generally take the form of the alien other, Lilith is right at home: she's immortal, powerful, strong, feared, sexual, and *midrash* tells us she can fly. It is perhaps ironic that stories associated with the future should so heavily feature reproductions of an ancient female.⁵⁷

Lilith Iyapo, through Lilith and the slave narratives, became the rebellious reconstructions of the patriarchal stories, told in the 'stolen language', from a very peculiar female point of view, that of the black woman's perspective.

One of the most exciting feminist science fiction myths is Donna Haraway's cyborg myth. According to Haraway 'a cyborg is a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction. [...] Contemporary science fiction is full of cyborgs [...] who populate a world ambiguously natural and crafted'⁵⁸. The analysis of Lilith above shows how the phallogocentric binaries are deconstructed and unified in Lilith's identity. Lilith becomes a self and other (woman and alien), a mixture of natural and artificial through the Oankali's gene engineering technology, a mother and a sexually attractive and active woman, a black woman who is rejected by her Nigerian husband's parents, a slave and a *parent* (as a form of power position) at the same time, an animal and an intellectual being. She, thus, can be described as a cyborg.

The cyborg myth adds a fascinating metalayer to the trilogy, and 'revisionist mythmaking'. The "Cyborg Manifesto" claims that cyborgs are born from patriarchal, phallogocentric tradition, such as militarism and capitalism, and state socialisms⁵⁹ but through transgressing all sorts of boundaries and potential fusions of binaries, cyborgs became new, independent entities, who are 'unfaithful to their origins'⁶⁰. The same can

⁵⁶ Ostriker, *Feminist Revision of the Bible*, 15

⁵⁷ Osherow, 71

⁵⁸ Haraway, 149

⁵⁹ Haraway, 151

⁶⁰ Haraway, 151

be argued of feminist science fiction and the rewriting of ancient texts. The old myths come from patriarchal interests; they were formed by them, to be at their service. They excluded and silenced women by creating a language which can hardly describe the female experience. The revisionist mythmaking is the denial of origins, embracing and fusing binaries, and creating new stories for new heroines – cyborg stories for cyborgs.

Now, I would like to turn to the revision of gender roles, and power positions. What makes the reconstruction of woman and her functions, in the first place, is the very fact that the notions ‘man’ and ‘woman’, and the stereotypical gender roles are all artificial constructions of society and culture. Leibowitz in “Perspectives on the Evolution of Sex Differences” challenges the concept that physical features, which are obviously distinguish the two sexes, do not necessarily affect the psychological qualities, thus, it is just a ‘commonplace belief that anatomy is destiny’⁶¹. One of her main arguments is that:

Cross-cultural data on the sexual division of labor very quickly dispelled the idea that men (or women) are unable to do some tasks assigned women (or men) in our culture. Knitting, weaving, and cooking sometimes fall into the male province, while such things as pearl diving, canoe handling, and housebuilding turn out to be women’s work in some settings.⁶²

This problem appears in *Xenogenesis*, as well. Lilith Iyapo is appointed by the Oankali to *parent* a group of people who are planned to be reintroduced to the new, dangerous planet Earth: ‘I believed that because of the way human genetics were expressed in culture, a human male should be chosen to *parent* the first group. I think now that I was wrong’⁶³. The Oankali, who recognized the deadliness of the Human Contradiction, conclude she is perfect for the task for two reasons. First, Contradiction seems to affect men more than women; therefore, men are more violent. As Zaki claims, ‘in [*Adulthood Rites*], Butler is especially clear about the intensity of the destructive genes peculiar to “human-born males”. As one Oankali says of males born of human women and Oankali males: “They bear more of the Human Contradiction than any other people”’⁶⁴. Men in the prewar world, led by their power-seeking drives, used their intelligence to institutionalize a phallogocentric language, which is built on

⁶¹ Leibowitz, 20

⁶² Leibowitz, 20

⁶³ Butler, 111

⁶⁴ Zaki, 241

binary opposition, such as male/female, dominant/submissive, and through established texts solidify gender roles, which makes the existence of an entirely patriarchal society's existence and flourishing. Up until the very consequence of these drives and tendencies, a nuclear war, destroyed the planet. As Joanna Russ puts it:

Our traditions, our books, our morals, our manners, our films, our speech, our economic organization, everything we have inherited, tell us that to be a Man one must bend Nature to one's will – or other men. This means ecological catastrophe in first instance and war in the second. To be a Woman, one must be first and foremost a mother and after that a server of Men; this means overpopulation and the perpetuation of the first two disasters. The roles are deadly. The myths that serve them are fatal.⁶⁵

Lilith does not want to hold this position, thus, her mindset is not (or, at least, less) polluted with hierarchical thinking, than that of the male candidates for the mission.

Second, synchronic collaboration with the Oankali and her “learn and run” resistance gives her the peculiar positions of “the insider and the outsider”⁶⁶ which is supposed to help her in her mediating and parenting tasks. As Wolmark puts it: “the narrative suggests that it is her marginality, articulated in terms of both gender and race that has become her strength”⁶⁷.

From the Oankali's choice of “leader”, it is quite clear that they distinguish between two types of power. One of them is violent and derives from ancient, animalistic, carnal drives and relies almost entirely on strength. The interest of such power is to rule alone, or, at least to share it with the least number of potential rivals. The *other* type power, to which I will refer to as parenting power, is a nurturing one, which is based on the community of mutual rights, responsibilities and similar actions. This one is exercised by the Oankali, and is definitely closer to women's ideals. For instance, as Russ argues in *To Write Like a Woman* female, or all-female utopias tend to prefer communal, or even tribal communities and vast areas rather than big cities.

The Oankali, completely alien to the hierarchical thinking, are avoiding even on a verbal level to imply the binaries of dominating and dominated. They do not use the verb ‘lead’, ‘rule’, or ‘master’ which necessarily have an agent and object, therefore it implies a certain power relationship mostly grounded on physicality and violence. The

⁶⁵ Russ, 93

⁶⁶ Wolmark, 32

⁶⁷ Wolmark, 32

Oankali use the verb ‘parent’ instead, and that assigns Lilith Iyapo to a completely different task, ‘to teach, to give comfort, to feed and clothe, to guide them through and interpret what will be, for them, a new and frightening world.’⁶⁸ Therefore, Lilith is set up as a mother, a matriarch, which redefines her relationship with the group, and suggests that her *power* has not much to do with her strength and charisma, or violence, because it lays in the community’s mutual interest in survival, shared experience and struggle, thus, cohabitation. As Hannah Arendt writes in *Human Condition*,

The only indispensable material factor in generation of power is the living together of people. [...] For power, like action, is boundless; it has no physical limitation in human nature, in the bodily existence of man, like strength. Its only limitation is the existence of other people, but this limitation is not accidental, because human power corresponds to the condition of plurality to begin with. For the same reason power can be divided without decreasing it.⁶⁹

Lilith is sharing her power with her lover, an Asian-American Joseph, and together they attempt to establish ‘the family as a model for social structure, but the un-owned, non-patriarchal family, headed by nobody’⁷⁰. This ambition fails miserably, leading to several homicides, and attacks against the Oankali. The root cause is the group members’ xenophobia and misogyny, all of them coming from the Human Contradiction. The chain of tragic events is a reminder that, though, ‘violence can destroy power, it can never become a substitute for it’⁷¹.

Ironically, what the Oankali do in order to ensure Lilith Iyapo’s success as a *mother*, leads to her failure. However, they do not want a leader, a man, in that position, but a parent, a mother, they drastically change Lilith Iyapo which disables her to be part of the group she is supposed to parent.

Anyone Lilith Awakened might get the idea – almost certainly would get it – the moment Lilith opened a wall or caused new walls to grow, thus proving she had abilities they did not. The Oankali had given her information, increased physical strength, enhanced memory, and an ability to control the walls and the suspended

⁶⁸ Butler, 111

⁶⁹ Arendt, 201

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Arendt, 202

animation plants. These were her tools. And every one of them would make her seem less human.⁷²

The reason behind these changes is that the Oankali want her to be able to defend herself against those who do not accept her authority. As it turns out she needs such abilities and skills, as some of the males, who, according to Zaki⁷³, tend to be more violent and hierarchical in the Xenogenesis trilogy, keeps provoking, challenging and attacking her.

She is alienated because of her otherness which makes her less powerful. As Arendt writes: ‘And whoever, for whatever reasons, isolates himself and does not partake in such being together, forfeits power and becomes impotent, no matter how great his strength and how valid his reasons.’⁷⁴ Her rejection as a parent forces her into the position of a leader. While men struggled even to a woman’s parenting power, her position of a parent, they do not even try to accept her in the position of a leader. By putting so much emphasis on the group, and Lilith’s struggle by meditating between conflicting ideas, ideals, sexes, and species, Butler manages not only to dramatize the dynamics of a community, or a society grounded on power relationships, which implies violence and exclusiveness, but also the alienation and experience of exclusion from power of women and women of colour in a white-dominated patriarchal world.

What Lilith is not able to accomplish in *Dawn*, she manages to do in *Adulthood Rites*, which focuses of her progeny, and the finally established human-oankali settlement, Lo, and the resisters’ colonies. Lo is, basically, a *kibbutz*, where people are equal, they share work and food. Lo is inhabited by the extremely complicatedly structured human-oankali families. Such families consists of a human couple, and an oankali couple, both heterosexual, of which Butler is often critized, though, she do not reject homosexuality, in general, it just does not feature in the trilogy. The fifth, and the most important member of the family is the third gendered ooloi, who constructs children from the genes of the family members in its special organ, and inseminates the female ones with her sensory arm. It is often referred to as sexless, but it definitely have sexual desires, preferences. For instance, Lilith ooloi child, Jodash turns out to be a shape shifter, who can change its appearance and sexual orientation to please its mates.

This family is exciting for two reasons. First, it reconstructs gender roles by giving the same significance to the mother and the father. Therefore, motherhood is not

⁷² Butler, 120

⁷³ Zaki, 241

⁷⁴ Arendt, 201

a site of oppression, a submissive role at the service of the needs of patriarchy. Men and women are taught the same way, so both of them feel an urge to parent and they both share the power coming with it. Chodorow argues in the *Reproduction of Mothering* that mother's mothering is not merely a biological factor, but a convention, and a tradition of 'Western industrial society'⁷⁵ as well. She claims that men and woman share the parenting ability since the early mother-infant relationship 'generates a basic relational stance and creates potential parenting capacities in everyone who has been mothered, and a desire to recreate such a relationship as well'⁷⁶. Butler emphasizes the two sexes' ability of parenting, and the importance of the presence of both of them in the children's life. The balance of the parents' sexes, and their parenting function in the family's life, as the parenting responsibilities are shared, too. Tino, Lilith's human male mate is severely wounded, her Oankali male mate worries:

It had been good to have a Human male in the family. It had been a balance found after painful years of imbalance [...]. He had been born to work with a Human male parallel – to help raise children with the aid of such a person, and yet he had to limp along without his essential other. How were children to learn to understand the Human male side of themselves – a side they all possessed whatever they eventual sex.

The female utopia of 'the family as a model for social structure, but the unowned, non-patriarchal family headed by nobody'⁷⁷ is achieved, but not without flow. It is true that there is equality between the sexes as the gender roles are not assigned according to the sexes. Still, the family is not without a "head", the ooloi, the third gender rules, and makes the important decisions in the family's life. They also make decisions on a higher level by non-verbal communication and later speak to their families what is going to happen. Their not-openly-stated distinguished position is due to their enhanced genetic, chemical and biological capabilities and capacities. They are the ones, who execute the gene trading from choosing the right subjects, to actually helping the mothers to give birth to their children. Therefore, power, gender roles, sexes and sexuality is still a seemingly inextricable knot.

Still, Butler manages to show the different sexes and the stereotypical gender roles in situations where the prewar and the postwar practices in assigning gender roles

⁷⁵ Chodorow, 91

⁷⁶ Chodorow, 91

⁷⁷ Russ, 136

are conflicting. For instance, Lilih, a black woman is put into the position of leader, which is completely alien to her prewar possibilities and opportunities as a result of her gender and race. Or, men, who are depicted as violent cavemen, apart from a couple of good examples, such as Joseph or Tino, Lilith's mates, in the position of a fond father, which is not necessarily familiar to them, in the sense that in the classical prewar families the *pater familias* was the provider of goods, not the one, who changed the baby.

2. Re-imagining Nature

Before discussing how Butler re-imagines 'nature', in parallel with 'woman', it is vital to understand how these two concepts are related together. First of all, the female body with its cyclicity and fertility is claimed to be closer to nature than that of the male body, which is seemingly less affected by it, or, at least, the relationship is less clear cut and discussed. Kate Soper in "Naturalized Woman and Feminized Nature" shows the overlap of the two concepts:

If we ask, that is, what accounts for this coding of nature as feminine – which is deeply entrenched in Western thought, but has also been said by anthropologists to be crosscultural and well-nigh universal – then the answer, it would seem, lies in the double association of women with reproductive activities and of these in turn with nature.⁷⁸

If women as a result of their bodily and social functions are identified with the non-human nature, the ultimate other, then, the anthropomorphized nature appears to be female. Therefore, "naturalized women" are described in terms of nature's phenomena, while nature, in return, is compared to women, and is determined by the feminine ontological framework, the female archetypes. Nature in many languages is feminine, and Western culture definitely uses a very specific female imagery to describe nature, and its connection to it. Western thinking usually gives nature either the unfortunate female stereotypes of the victim-virgin just about to be deflowered, or the wilderness, the woman to be tamed, or the fond, nurturing mother. Carolyn Merchant in *Death of the Nature* gives examples for these roles in the American culture, and 'provides historical documentation for the claim that that the domination of women and of nature

⁷⁸ Soper, 139

have shared roots in the logic of science and capitalism, an intertwining of economics and rationalism'⁷⁹.

The result of the above discussed closeness with nature, and women's liminal position between society and nature, is that women through their activities become "mediator[s] between the natural and the cultural"⁸⁰. I have already elaborated on Lilith Iyapo's mediating function in the previous part. Lilith is not only a "sturdy black bridge" between the Oankali and the remnants of humanity awakened to an uncanny world, but between the Oankali and human settlers and nature itself. She has to teach them how to behave in their new environment. She can do so for the very same reasons she has been chosen "to parent": because of her femininity, motherhood and otherness. The Earth recovered by the Oankali is different from its prewar state: it is wilderness, full of new, alien species introduced by the Oankali. This landscape, unlike the colonized American landscape, which is described by Anettey Kolodny "as a maternal "garden," receiving and nurturing human children,"⁸¹ can hardly be interpreted as a nurturing mother, or the garden of Eden. Therefore, this function shifts to Lilith.

Considering the close relationship of the concept of 'woman' and 'nature, it is not a coincidence that so many women writers are concerned with nature and ecology. Joanna Russ in "Recent Feminist Utopias" detects and enumerates the common features of feminist science fiction/speculative fiction, she claims that ecological thinking is present in every novel she analyzed (none of Butler's works mentioned). Feminists writers' and Butler's preoccupation with ecology-mindedness might be explained by the ecofeminists' proposal that the 'social and economic structures [responsible for gender inequality] also produced wide-scale environmental damage, then women could, in some sense, "share" this experience and were therefore better placed to argue on nature's behalf'⁸². Yet, Russ criticizes the discussed works because they do not 'go beyond the problems of living in the world without disturbing its ecological balance into presenting their characters as feeling a strong emotional connection to the natural world'⁸³. Butler is not less concerned with nature, but she definitely goes beyond that.

Butler's awareness of environmental problems and protection, and several ecological movements offering different approaches to nature are apparent in *Xenogenesis*. In the previous part I argued that Butler revises the concept of 'woman'

⁷⁹ Gaard, 28

⁸⁰ Soper, 140

⁸¹ Kolodny, 172

⁸² Buckingham, 147

⁸³ Russ, 137

by challenging patriarchal gender roles, unifying the scattered functions or archetypes of woman, and by putting her in power position. Butler rewrites the Genesis and Lilith myths, from the point of view of the marginal character' of these stories that of the woman's. The new myth created containing Biblical, post-apocalyptic, colonial and slave narratives becomes a cyborg myth, and establishes liminality and marginality as the core of the identity.

In this part, I claim that Butler does the same with nature which is inseparable from womanhood and femininity in the Western cultural context. Therefore, the first step in the revision of nature is freeing women from the concepts and ideologies that made 'female' or 'feminine' dangerous and pejorative adjectives, and lead to the synchronic exploitation of women and nature itself. While the first book of the trilogy, *Dawn*, is devoted to the reconstruction of women, especially of women of color, the second novel, *Adulthood Rites*, is more concerned with, first of all, the re-writing of the cultural myths of nature, creating a cyborg identity for nature itself, and, then, contrasting the resisters pre-war ideologies with the Oankali's nature narrative.

Donna Haraway in "A Manifesto for Cyborgs", building her argument on Hilary Klein, claims that

both Marxism and psychoanalysis, in their concepts of labour and of individuation and gender formation, depend on the plot of the original unity out of which difference must be produced and enlisted in a drama of escalating domination of woman/nature. The cyborg skips the step of original unity, of identification with nature in the Western sense.⁸⁴

The cyborg identity deconstruct and then reconstruct Western concepts like gender, race, or sexuality. Lilith and women are revised in terms of Haraway's cyborg manifesto, and are not bound by patriarchal ideologies and stereotypes any more. Woman's "twin concept", nature, can be described by the cyborg features, as well. In Butler's *Xenogenesis* trilogy it is freed from feminine imagery, it is not even anthropomorphized. Nature's hybridity, otherness and its paradoxical artificiality is obvious from Lilith's description of the alien 'the alien vastness'⁸⁵ in the spaceship:

There was so much space out there. The colors she had seen were thin, hair-like leaves and round, coconut-sized fruit, apparently in

⁸⁴ Haraway, 151

⁸⁵ Butler, 30

different stages of development. All hung from great branches that overshadowed the new exit. Beyond them was a broad open field with scattered trees – impossibly huge trees – distant hills, and a bright, sunless ivory sky. There was enough strangeness to the trees and the sky to stop her from imagining that she was on Earth. There were people mowing around in the distance, and there were black, German shepherd-sized animals that were too far away for her to see them clearly - though even in the distance the animals seemed to have too many legs. Six? Ten? The creatures seemed to be grazing.

Nature is natural, and, at the same time, it is all constructed and operated by the chemical process of the Oankali who are cyborgs themselves. Nature is standing in itself, but in relationship with society, it creates and recreates itself independently from Western cultural myths. At this point, I would like to claim that it applies for “both natures”. Soper in “The Idea of Nature” distinguishes between the actual, existing nature, and our concept of it, tracing this idea back to Cicero’s *De Natura Deorum*, in which he differentiates “an inherited non-human nature and a nature constructed through human activity”⁸⁶.

Soper further elaborates that there are three kind of ecological discourses⁸⁷ of nature which are the following: “metaphysical”, “realist”, “lay”. In Soper’s terms “metaphysical” means that nature is the concept of non-human, which serves to determine what is human, accordingly. “Realist” refers to “the structures, processes and casual powers that are constantly operative within the physical world, that provide the objects of study of the natural sciences”⁸⁸. As opposed to these two, “lay” means the everyday discourse and observations concerning nature. She mentions that “when Green Movement speaks of nature, it is most commonly in this third sense”⁸⁹. The three senses, layers of the concept of nature are all revised by Butler through the comparison and contrast of the patriarchal human resister and the Oankali’s cyborg approach. In the following I would like to discuss the second novel, *Adulthood Rites*, in detail with special attention to the ideological and more pragmatic issues behind ‘nature’.

The focalizer, Akin, Lilith’s first male construct child, is abducted by the Resisters who cannot reproduce without the Oankali, but long for healthy, human-looking

⁸⁶ Soper, 124

⁸⁷ Soper, 125

⁸⁸ Soper, 125

⁸⁹ Soper, 125

children. Akin is, then, taken to Phoenix, one of the biggest and wealthiest resister colonies, and traded for some women. He spends a long time with the humans, which awakens his human-side, and he not only feels sympathy for them, but he also learns from them, and tries to teach them in return. Gradually, in a way, he becomes the leader of the resisters, and manages to negotiate a human-only colony on Mars with the Oankali.

Human history seems to be cyclical, a loop, basically, and it is symbolized by the name of the resister colony, Phoenix. God gives humanity Eden to serve and protect it. The Fall prophesizes hard work for men in the desert to pursue the ideal Garden which eventually destroys Earth. Then, they regain Earth just to leave it scorched, in fire and ashes, and start new life on Mars – most probably to destroy it, too. *Adulthood Rites* is not only Akin's narrative of growing up, living up to the expectations assumed by his name, which in Nigerian means 'hero boy', but also the story of humanity's maturing into responsible adults, who can fulfill their God-given task to serve and protect nature.

Butler in *Adulthood Rites* through the two colonies depicts two opposing approaches to nature, without judging, without pretending to provide ideal alternatives: one that is familiar to us in being human-centered and Eden-seeking; the other denies Eden, and in their view nature is free of gender and religious connotations, the habitants live in partnership with nature, producing no waste at all. It seems utopistic, but Butler makes dubious arguments: this way seems to be sustainable, which is, in a sense, yet, it destroys Earth, as the living-spaceships feed and grow on Earth material. The first one is obviously represented the resister colony, Phoenix, while the latter is the implied in the Lo scenes.

The resisters insist on living the same way as before the war – repeating the same mistakes. After being reintroduced to Earth, they start to build comfortable houses, cities, mines and manufactures, hoarding commodities. They are not far from reaching the prewar standards of Eden which is 'the enclosed shopping mall decorated with trees, flowers, and fountains in which people can shop for nature at the Nature Company'⁹⁰.

It is worth comparing the description of Earth, which emphasizes the great diversity of geographical forms, and flora and fauna, and other forms of life, with the resisters settlement, which is depicted as a colonizer/settler town from the 18th – 19th century America. While nature is wild, and full of life, a living in a network, in which

⁹⁰ Merchant, 153

every participant has its place and function, and they are affecting each other accordingly, Phoenix is described in terms of quantity, and human activity to exploit nature, and to gain more goods and wealth. Here are the relevant descriptions:

“Wild. Forests, mountains, deserts, plains, great oceans. It’s a rich world, clean of dangerous radiation in most places. The greatest diversity of animal life is in the seas, but there are a number of small animals thriving on land: insects, worms, amphibians, reptiles, small mammals. There’s no doubt your people can live there”⁹¹.

But Phoenix was also the richest resister village they knew of. It sent people into the hills to salvage metal from prewar sites and had people who knew how to shape the metal. It had more woman than any other village because it traded metal for them. It grew cotton and made soft, comfortable clothing. It raised and tapped not only rubber trees, but trees that produced a form of oil that could be burned in their lamps without refinement. And it had fine, large houses, a church, a store, vast farms...⁹²

The resisters are maintaining the prewar patriarchy and anthropocentrism. While women are objectified into the most valuable currency, the same happens to nature, it is described in terms of goods, and economic value. Men are in the center; they are active and aggressive in taming the wilderness and make it civilized, while nature and women have no agency and are exploited.

The ideology behind it is the misinterpretation of the Biblical Genesis story, which sets the differences and inequalities between man and woman, humanity and nature, and gives one power over the other. Walker-Jones argues that the narratives on Eden are traditionally interpreted in negative terms, while feminists and ecofeminists tend to give it a new reading: “[they] rejected the sin and punishment paradigm and moved to a human growth, maturity, or emergence paradigm”⁹³. This paradigm shift is crucial, since the paradigm that forces the feeling of loss results in the so-called “recovery narrative” which is the white male myth of hard work recreating Eden on Earth, organized by the ‘subplots’ of ‘Christian religion, modern science, and

⁹¹ Butler,

⁹² Butler, 345

⁹³ Walker-Jones, 272

capitalism'⁹⁴. Merchant criticizes the recovery narrative for being declensionist and negative, arguing that 'the end result is a poorer state of nature than in the beginning. The valance of woman and nature is bad. Here men become the agents of transformation. They became saviors, who through their own agricultural labor have the capacity to re-create the lost garden on earth'⁹⁵.

The misinterpretation of the Biblical Genesis story is responsible for the said inequalities which makes exploitation not only a right of men but a God-given task. God gives Earth to men to serve and protect it, not the other way around, and that the Fall is a necessary 'adulthood rite' of humanity, which makes it capable of fulfilling its task. In this positivist interpretation women's and the snake's agency is not denied and sinful. The woman and the snake, representing nature, are cooperating to give the garden and technology and science to humanity, such as agriculture.

Modern science is based on the patriarchal will to rule. The knowledge provided by the Fall is distorted by men, and is now at the service of men, maintaining their myth and power by finding scientific explanation to the rightness of exploitation of nature, and giving better and bigger (or, if it is needed, smaller) tools for doing so. Science and technology 'hasten the recovery project'⁹⁶ as they categorize to understand nature in order to tame its seeming disorderliness, which is, in fact, a complex and self-sustaining system.

Capitalism, according to Merchant, is this will to order nature: 'a movement from desert back to garden through the transformation of undeveloped nature into a state of civility and order'⁹⁷. Civilization is needed for producing objects from nature's raw material, while the exchange and the profit is what keeps civilization existing, and evolving into even bigger and deadlier forms. This derives from the fact that nature's and society's relation is often compared to metabolism. As Littig explains, 'according to metabolic views, the natural environment/nature is connected to society by means of material flows [...and they] try to quantify the material and energy flows between social system and its environment'⁹⁸. Therefore, nature is simply translated into currency, and commodities, into the language of human hybris.

All of the three subplots are present in *Xenogenesis* in one peculiar scene. Akin is participating in the resisters' salvaging memories from the past. On the excavation site

⁹⁴ Merchant, 133

⁹⁵ Merchant, 133

⁹⁶ Merchant, 136

⁹⁷ Merchant, 136

⁹⁸ Littig, 48

he finds a plastic card creating Jesus Christ. Since his drives suggesting to ‘taste’ everything, therefore, mapping chemical, biological and physical characteristics of a given object of entity, he is doing so and gets sick at once, and explaining his experience by the structure of plastic which is not in one bit natural. The following quotations are showing what Akin feels and thinks:

[The picture was made of a material] Akin did not understand.⁹⁹

Akin went to the door and spat outside several times, spat away pure pain as his body fought to deal with what he had carelessly taken in.¹⁰⁰

The reference to religion is obvious. It refer to Akin’s role as Redeemer in the negotiations for Mars colony. Religion is used to maintain the patriarchal order, and to give a new desert to humanity in order to make it into a Garden. The Oankali gives them a new planet, but doubt that people can cope with Human Contradiction, and survive without destroying another planet. Plastic represents the greatest and the deadliest achievement of science and technology that it could create something out of nothing natural, therefore, gives validation and boost to them. Capitalism makes the card found by Akin a product, a commodity to be exchanged for other commodities. Its value is given by its religious connotations and the scarcity of plastic on new earth.

From all the above it is clear that Phoenix represents prewar ideologies and tendencies, which lead to nuclear war, and later on in the trilogy to the destruction of the resister city itself. Butler shows how sustainable the anthropocentric, metabolistic concept of nature is, and our place and function within its. The warning that we are heading to a desert instead of a garden is expressed in the settlers’ infertility and frustration over the (non)existence of the next generations.

Butler offers an alternative, the Oankali alternative, which is more sustainable, and all in all a better solution as it is fixing the flaws in western recovery narrative, but she does not dare to claim that the Oankali way is the best. Carolyn Merchant in “Reinventing Eden: Western Culture as a Recovery Narrative” tells ‘a Penobscot Indian story’¹⁰¹ of the development of agriculture. It says that it was draught and famine, and the world was a chaotic desert. A maiden married a man, but she later had a lover, a snake. The woman to ‘alleviate her husband’s sorrow’¹⁰² sacrifices herself. The man has

⁹⁹ Butler, 388

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Merchant, 132

¹⁰² Merchant, 132

to kill her in a brutal manner: he chops her, drags her body through a forest, and when her flesh comes out of the bones, he buries her in a clearing. The woman appears to him, and teaches him, and his people ‘how to tend, harvest, and cook corn and smoke tobacco’¹⁰³. Merchant explains the story as an ‘ascencionist and progressive’¹⁰⁴ narrative of female agency which transforms the land of scarcity into a garden of plentitude (Eden). She claims that both woman and nature are described in positive terms since ‘they bring bountiful gifts’¹⁰⁵, in addition, the reunification of them, thus, death, results in a new life, and ‘results in a higher good’¹⁰⁶.

This ascencionist and progressive narrative has many parallels with Xenogenesis, in many ways. Lilith Iyapo succumbs to a snake-like, third gendered alien lover, and sacrifices her humanity to the new species, and through this unification, she gains knowledge, which she passes on to her fellow survivors (learn and run), and her progeny. She is concerned with education and agriculture: she maintains gardens and provides food for her people, as the ‘Corn Goddess’¹⁰⁷ in the Indian story. In the beginning of Xenogenesis, Earth is a nuclear desert. The Oankali reconstructs most of it, but there are territories where the radiance is so high that life is impossible. They use the life forms they found on the surface, and introduce some new species; therefore, Earth becomes an uncanny place, familiar, yet dangerous and alien at the same time. Humans have to learn how to survive in the new environment, and how not to harm it. And Lilith, as I argued above, is absolutely instrumental in it.

This narrative differs from that of the resisters’ story. While the resisters insist on the maintenance of anthropocentrism and God-given right and power to rape it, tame it, or exploit it as its pretentious children, the Oankali has no God(s) and myths to define Genesis which could create binaries as humans/animals, natural/artificial, self/other. The Oankali believe in genes, and are committed to gene trading, they embrace nature, bend it, and let it to bend them, and thus, they are living in partnership with it.

The partnership is clearly expressed in the Oankali’s relationship to their spaceship, which is a living thing, which gives food to those who live inside of it, and it feeds on the minimal waste the Oankali produce. Their literal and ecological metabolism is so efficient that they do not need to defecate. The Oankali in partnership with their environment refuse domesticate animals for culinary purposes but change

¹⁰³ Merchant, 132

¹⁰⁴ Merchant, 132

¹⁰⁵ Merchant, 133

¹⁰⁶ Merchant, 133

¹⁰⁷ Merchant, 133

their genes to achieve a function which is beneficial for both parties. They also modifies plants to use them in many ways, but the new function is always serves the survival of both species. Since there is such a strong partnership, a real attachment between the Oankali and their environment, they are not distanced from it by their civilization, they do not need define their relationship through different ideologies.

The Oankali narrative has nothing to do with religion, science and technology and capitalism. The Oankali has no Eden and wilderness either. Nature is not defined in terms of these notions. It is an equal trade partner. The balance between the partners is the most important factor of this relationship, because the system cannot be expressed with a pyramid with humanity on the peak, but a network, in which everyone and everything is connected, and affected.

Conclusion

In my paper I argued that Butler by mapping the intertwined relationship of power, gender roles, sexuality and nature manages to explore patriarchal traditions and stories, and create a new complex myth for women and nature. The new myth introduces a new form of practicing power, the *parenting*, which depends on community and partnership, and assigns new gender roles for both sexes. Butler unites the binaries of sexuality and mothering in the figure of Lilith Iyapo, therefore, neither of these ‘functions’ are subjugated to patriarchy and neither of them becomes a site of oppression. Besides the Judeo-Christian myth, Lilith is also formed by black literary traditions. Through these, she becomes a bridge, a mediator between species, races, and sexes. Slave narratives, and their focus on literacy provide an opportunity to read the novels as metatextual pieces, reflecting on patriarchal literary traditions and the counter-texts. Butler’s focus on fusing binaries and the traditions of mythmaking makes the trilogy a cyborg story. Cyborg theory, instead of the Biblical Genesis, is applied to nature as well, which frees it of its sexualized imagery, which is used to deprive nature from its power, and make it subject to exploitation. Humanity’s relationship to nature changes, from domineering to parenting, which creates partnership between them resulting in a sustainable quasi-symbiosis. Butler, thus, re-imagines woman and nature by turning patriarchal texts upside-down without being didactic, or aggressive.

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