

# BUTLER'S PARABLES: A POSTHUMANIST CALL TO ADDRESS ECOLOGICAL IRRESPONSIBILITY

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## Abstract

This article explores the relationship between a posthuman representative of humanity and nature in Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower* (2007) and *Parable of the Talents* (2007). Using Rosemary Radford Ruether's feminist Biblical ideas, the article argues that the stories, as samples of science fiction, expose a posthumanist perspective where existence of human kind is defined based on a mutual, non-hierarchical relationship between human beings and nature. This article aims to explore the positive standpoint of science fiction towards the transformation of the human-nature relationship through an unothered perspective and, in this way, illustrate the potential for a more sustainable life on Earth. The relationship is investigated through an unorthodox theological perspective that confronts the institutionalized Christian concept of man as the true representative of God on Earth. In this way, the stories describe a fictional space in which the Christian concept of nature and woman as surrendered before male human kind as God's exclusive representative is substituted with an unorthodox theological perspective. This theological view is based on the recognition of a correlation between human and nature free from surrender. This article explores the entity of this correlation.

**Keywords:** Posthumanism, Biblical feminism, Octavia Butler, *Parable of the Sower*, *Parable of the Talents*, Rosemary Radford Ruether.

## Introduction

*Parables* deal with human-nature relationship. As science fiction, they illustrate a future world in two different phases. In the first phase in the *Sower*, life is represented by focusing on the concept of walled communities. Human life in this walled world is divided between the protected inside-the-wall and unwanted outside-the wall communities. This division is not limited to human kind, but includes the natural life as well. Environmental problems like pollution, climate change, the lack of energy and critical resources like water resulting from previous misuse, population explosion, hunger, and homeless people are prevalent in *Sower*. These conditions are worsened by the mismanagement of available resources. Lauren, the protagonist of the novels, points to the 'money wasted on another crazy space trip when so many people here on earth can't afford water, food, or shelter' (Butler 2007a: 17). This dystopian situation leads the protagonist to think of other spaces as a utopian Eden at the beginning of *Sower*: 'Mars is a rock-cold, empty, almost

airless, dead. Yet it's heaven in a way. We can see it in the night sky, a whole other world, but too nearby, too close within the reach of the people who've made such a hell of life here on Earth' (Butler 2007a: 21). This other world symbolizes the feminist wish to establish another world by solving the causes of problems on this world. The *Talents* embodies a struggle to create this other world in the second phase of the novels. At this phase, the novel provides a more caring system of thought which replaces the differentiating system reflected in *Sower* with a more inclusive one. To consider the human-nature relationship, this caring system does not Other nature, with its animate and inanimate elements, as something below the human being. Instead it creates integration between nature and human beings which, in turn, promotes harmony and well-being on Earth.

The harmony is achieved by a posthuman consideration to replace the exploitative Christian discourse of the domination of nature. Posthumanism considers the human being as a "subject" who 'comes to be by conforming to a strictly dialectical system of difference' (Wolfe 2010: 11-12). This dialectical system is based on the recognition of communication between divinity, human, and nonhuman worlds in a way which exceeds the fixed boundaries between divinity, as a "Transcendent" entity,<sup>2</sup> the human, and non-human world (Wolfe 2010: 6). The fixed boundary creates a hierarchical system in which God is the master of universe and the male human being is His true representative. The female human being stands somewhere between male human being and the natural world. (Hampson 2002: 6-9). Posthumanism challenges this hierarchy. Due to its egalitarian stand, which, unlike the orthodox Biblical perspectives, does not presume the hierarchical dominance of God on human and human on nature, Ruether's Biblical feminist perspective provides us with a useful tool to understand this posthumanism in *Parables*. This renders *Parables*, as samples of science fiction, worthy of serious consideration.

Traditionally, science fiction is regarded as 'a genre devoid of convincing characterization' because it is 'bound to foreground the imagined world, the action-adventure and the gadgets' (Jones 2003: 171). This is worse when it comes to women because science fiction is a masculinist genre which reflects human as man (Hollinger 2003: 127-134). However, in *Parables*, by introducing a black female protagonist, a different view of the humanity and its relationship with the outside world is represented. The aim of this article is to investigate this relationship.

## Theoretical framework

In 1967, Lynn White started a controversial discourse by his published speech, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis." In this speech, he challenged dominant Western power relations which, according to him, were constituted by an ideology based on an anthropocentric Christianity. This human-centeredness was the main reason for the inability of Christianity to 'respond to the environment and the marginalized' (Parsons 2011: 1). In the speech, White argued that though we are in a post-Biblical age, a time when the majority of Christian assumptions go unheeded or refuted, the nucleus of the techno-scientific identity of Western civilization is the same Christian axiom of the superiority of humans over nature (White 1974: 3). According to him, this belief, unlike the main pillars of Occidental scientific heritage, has no roots in the Greco-Roman or Oriental past, but in Judeo-Christian theology (White 1974: 3). Based on this view, in the order of creation, nature had not a tenable 'reason for existence save to serve man' (White 1974: 6). He argues that this mentality has penetrated into the secular scientific era of Western technological progress and, in an undemocratic process, has demolished the idea of respect for the rest of creation (White 1974: 5). This perspective led to ecological crisis which the dominant Christianity due to its human-centeredness was incapable of addressing. Consequently, White

concludes that '[m]ore science and more technology are not going to get us out of the present ecologic crisis until we find a new religion, or rethink our old one' (White 1974: 5).

Feminist theologians were attracted by this new ecotopian debate. They related the debate to their feminist assumptions of theology to substitute what they saw as the uncaring side of masculine mastery of the world. These theological concerns attempted to either reconcile Christianity with human-nature relationship, or dispatch canonical Western religious tradition, trying to excavate canonical texts for ignored passages or alternatively to search for new interpretations. The prominent example of this category is Rosemary Radford Ruether with her feminine concept of God as "Gaia."

Ruether is a Christian feminist who calls for the investigation of the deep layers of Christianity to reveal its egalitarian stand and acknowledgment of the inter-dependency of creatures in the universe. Discussing the apparent hierarchical nature of Christianity, Ruether in *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* points to the biases which have been imposed on the "true" Christianity via 'developing institutional minister' (1993: 123). According to her, the institutionalized version of Christian theology followed by bishops has authoritatively closed all other considerations of Christ as the ongoing Logos of God who 'is speaking now' (Ruether 1993: 121), historicizing him as 'the center of history' (Ruether 1993: 124). This historicizing has had pernicious effects on other members of this ideological hierarchy. It previsions the ideal human in the form of a man who, as the incarnation of God, represents Him as the centre of creation. He is assumed as the revelation of 'God's "last word" and "once-for-all" disclosure' and, therefore, prefigures an obligation of the priority of reference to an old model of human-centred masculinity to judge the true and harmonious order of creation (Ruether 1993: 122). This surface, Ruether believes, has different deep layers which reveal Christianity's potential to address woman and nature on equal terms with dominant masculinity.

Ruether asserts that this surface is due to the gradual influence of the deep masculine anthropocentric Judaeo-Greek background of Christianity. She believes that, during the expansion of Christianity, this ideological background coupled with a search for an everlasting God and resulted in a philosophy which debased body and nature because of their affiliation with death and change. In this understanding, woman as the embodiment of physical matter and productivity was affiliated with nature. Simultaneously, the male half of creation, following the Greek mythological model of male consciousness, was raised 'to the same transcendent status as God', embodying mind and intellectuality (Ruether 1993: 78). Succeeding this belief, true salvation was only possible by denying body and its exclusive features of sexuality and maternity. Only in such a case, would a woman be able to 'become male spirit "equal to the male"' (Ruether 1993: 80). The natural offspring of this mentality has been the demonization of nature as the fallen form of culture.

On the other hand, the modern scientific era, having undergone a process of secularization, started to 'reclaim the earth as his true home and the sphere of his control' (Ruether 1993: 82). Modern science claimed that it 'exorcises the devils from nature and reclaims nature as the realm of human knowledge and use' (Ruether 1993: 82). In this way, scientific reconsideration of nature disinterred the "universal reason" pervading nature, and cleared up '[t]he rationality of the deist God, immanent in nature's laws' (Ruether 1993: 82). However, despite the hopes, the outcome of this mentality appeared to be the mathematical formulation of natural laws, which turned them into objectified knowledge under the control of man as knower. It marks an era of sexualized scientific obsession with nature that led to the emergence of a "male mind" asserting 'its transcendence over nature' (Ruether 1993: 83). Under such circumstances, the promising hope of knowing and recognizing the mechanism of nature as the source and teacher of a balanced life turned to a disappointing 'manipulation of material nature' (Ruether 1993: 83). The manipulation,

along with 'European capitalism and colonialism' (Ruether 1993: 83), worked to expand the 'technological domination of nature, purchased by increasing domination over the bodies and resources of dominated people: women and workers in industrialized countries, slaves and exploited races in the vast new lands being conquered' (Ruether 1993: 83). The final draft of such a scientism was the replacement of its egalitarian intentions by a hierarchicalism which made 'women, workers, peasants, and conquered races the image of dominated nature in contrast to the Euro-American male, the true bearer of transcendent consciousness' (Ruether 1993: 83).

To explain the aims of feminist environmentalists to challenge the masculine mastery of creation, Parson points to men's self-assumed "God play" role. Men, she explains, undertake the role to escape mortality. In this way, they exert androcentrism as a divine norm of power to incorporate 'women, the poor and vulnerable, animals and nature' (Parsons 2011: 5). Parsons emphasizes that the logic of this policy for a man is 'to create for himself a semblance of safety' (Parsons 2011: 5). Ruether in her "Ecofeminism - The Challenge to Theology" traces the root of this fear to mortality, androcentrism, and Augustinian Genesis commentaries, recognizing it as an established ecclesiastic tradition. According to her, the Augustinian heritage considered Eve as the initiator of 'disobedience to God' and Adam as a 'generic man' who, in 'assenting to her prompting, ... conceded to his lower self' (Ruether 2012: 26). According to this view, the woman is the cause of falling into sin and, consequently, is condemned to have an inferior nature and status. The punishment of this sin has been the 'loss of original immortality that was the gift of union with God' as well as 'free will that allowed them to choose God over their sinful self-will' (Ruether 2012: 26). Due to this exegetical understanding, 'women are punished for their special fault by coercive subjugation' (Ruether 2012: 26). This attitude helps men to transgress their natural position in the hierarchy of creation and guarantee their hold using religious justification. Feminist environmentalist theology confronts this philosophy with a converging alternative understanding that is based on certainty and not fear. This alternative philosophy not only eliminates the mythology of the fall as the result of woman's faulty nature, which also is considered as the cause of mortality, but, as Butler embodies, highlights the position and role of woman by attaching her to nature as the origin of life.

To reconcile the human and nature, Ruether explores both the Old and New Testaments. In this investigation, she recognizes traditions and 'normative principles of Biblical faith which, in turn criticize and reject patriarchal ideology' (Ruether 1993: 23). She refers to some of these examples and emphasizes that under the oppressive social context which was created by economic and political powers, these passages have been silenced or interpreted in ways which justify the authoritative dominance of the powers. What she offers is the reinterpretation of these texts by referring to evidences from Biblical texts. Some of the examples she offers are the 'denunciation of oppressive economic and political Power' (Ruether 1993: 24) in parts of the Prophets like Isa. 10-2, Amos 8:4-6, where God 'is seen not as the one who represents the powerful, but one who comes to vindicate the oppressed... to judge those who grind the face of poor, those who deprive the widow and the orphan,' or Jesus' preaching in the synoptic tradition in Luke 4:18-19 (Ruether 1993: 25). Another sample which Ruether mentions is Paul's letter to Galatians. Ruether believes that in the letter, Paul extends the 'vision of a new social order' to include overcoming of the all 'relations of sex, race, and class of human divisiveness' in Christ (1993: 26).

In these sample texts, the 'prophetic God is seen overthrowing unjust society by turning it upside down' (Ruether 1993: 25). This divine intervention, in Ruether's argument, 'not only judges the injustice of the present social order but comes to create a new social order that will truly be in keeping with the divine will' (1993: 25). She acknowledges this determination in Jeremiah's speech (Jer. 31:22), where he speaks of an era 'when a new thing will be created on the

earth: the woman will protect the man' (1993: 25). According to Ruether, this is not a mere reversal of roles; rather it is going 'beyond the critique of the present order to a more radical vision, a revolutionary transformative process that will bring all to a new mode of relationship' (1993: 30). All these examples reflect a prophetic vision of change running through the Bible.

The 'prophetic critique of society' which Ruether emphasizes, is discernible in both Testaments. What it implies is a 'critique of the perversion of Biblical faith itself into a religion of cult and rote, particularly when religion is used to sanctify unjust power and to ignore God's agenda of justice' (Ruether 1993: 26). Tracing the 'Hebrew prophetic critique of religion,' Ruether clarifies its renewal in the 'ministry of Jesus,' as revealed in passages like Matt.23:23. Based on the view, she even considers Jesus' crucifixion as the consequence of the 'confrontation with falsified religion at the right hand of oppressive political power' (Ruether 1993: 27). Ruether (1993) reinterprets this prophetic vision of renewal as the precise explanation of 'The Word of God.' She emphasizes that it is the dynamic and liberating Biblical tradition that, confined within the oppressive socioeconomic context of Hebraic prophetic tradition, was stripped of ideological mystifications by the writers of the New Testament, and is now being extended by feminist theologians to include 'the oppressed of the oppressed' that is women and 'women of the oppressed' and nature consequently (Ruether 1993: 32).

The clarification pointed above locates Ruether within the tradition of change. Though Ruether believes in the very heritage of the Bible as the source of a constructive change in Western culture yet, she believes that the current dominant and institutionalized Christianities are inappropriate frames of thought to establish an inclusive doctrine of unity and equality and, therefore, are in dire need of change. What she recognizes in the original teachings of Jesus, as the reformer of Hebraic religious tradition and the saviour of all creation, seeks to cast a new light on the life of humanity and rebuild it with a new sense of universal interrelation.

### ***Parables: an attempt to embody a feminist ecotopia***

Highlighting ecological concerns, *Parables* address Christian justification as a self-righteous discourse through depicting an obsessively self-centred community. Then, they continue by picturing a new community and system of mutual interaction where no interaction is based on the unilateral recruiting of the rest for the benefit of self. Acorn, Lauren's established community, represents a liberating point of view which opposes the 'human-centeredness of Western Christianity' (Parsons 2011: 1). Practicing Earthseed as a nature-friendly religion, Acorn challenges a 'male-centred, anti-God and anti-culture theology existed for many of the same reasons' and normalized as the 'Christian assumption of separateness in the creation' (Parsons 2011: 1-2).

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

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

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

their bikes, staring at her. What wonderful religious thoughts they would be having for a while. (Butler 2007a: 7-9)

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

The exclusion is not limited to unwanted human beings. It includes the natural world also. In fact, it is one of the aspects of the conflict between orthodox Christian and unorthodox theological – non-Christian here – perspective in the *Parables*. The same Christian pattern of seclusion is practiced in the Christian camp in *Talents* where people are not only separated from the outside world, but also from the natural scenery around them under the pretext that connection to nature is linked with heretical beliefs: ‘Our teachers had made us cut down the older trees for firewood and lumber and God’ (Butler 2007b: 253).

From an ecological perspective, Butler’s *Parables* reflect her consideration of what pure scientism and traditional Christian privileging of human over nature, away from the interdependency of knower-knowee relation in human-nature relation, may create on Earth. Her focus on environmental problems reflects feminist theological questioning of the ‘hierarchy of human over nonhuman nature as a relationship of ontological and moral value’ (Ruether 1993: 85). It considers the side effects of the unilateral modern technological scientism being ‘passed along to the public in the form of pollution of soil, air, and waters’ (Ruether 1993: 84). According to Ruether, one of the main aims of feminist theology is to encounter humanity with the disappointing consequences of its deeds to help us to understand that we ‘cannot violate the ecological community without ultimately destroying our own life system’ (1993: 89). Recognizing the theological sensitivity about the sacredness of the entire chain of life, away from the tendency to subjugate one category under another, would be of great help to internalize the ecological sensitivity. As Ruether discusses, orthodox forms of Christianity traditionally have abstained from this sensitivity. On the contrary, their highlighted values and teachings reveal their inability to address the sensitivity.

It seems that Butler is concerned with the same idea. Earthseed verbalizes similar distrust in the ability of institutionalized Christianity to respond to anxieties resulting from ecological problems. The distance of Lauren’s philosophy and established community from that of her father’s Christian neighbourhood and Jarret’s Christian America, respectively, reflects this distrust. Lauren substitutes these reflections of Christianity with a new doctrine more cognizant of the human-nature relationship. In both *Sower* and *Talents*, there are no direct or indirect references to any attempt by authorities, peculiarized as Christian, to change or eliminate the sources of the problems that have afflicted their societies; there is no evidence of attention, planning, or investment in eco-related areas like farming and forestry that would be effective in developing the living conditions of stricken humanity. Instead, there are references which denote the carelessness of Lauren’s early paternal community and the hostility of later Christian America’s troops towards her environmental activities. Explaining her training in shooting, Lauren in one of her early notes writes:

Most of us have practiced at home with BB guns on homemade targets or on squirrel and bird targets. I’ve done all that. My aim is good, but I don’t like it with the birds and squirrels. Dad ... insisted on my learning .... He said moving targets would be good for my aim. I think there was more to it than that. I think he wanted to see

whether or not I could do it—whether shooting a bird or a squirrel would trigger my hyperempathy. (Butler 2007a: 37)

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

In the beginning, the ineluctable sense of rivalry with the rest of creation is taught and implanted in her nature: 'The blow, though still soft, was a little harder with squirrels and sometimes rats than with birds. All three had to be killed, though. They ate our food or ruined it. Three-crops were their special victims: Peaches, plums, figs, persimmons, nuts ...' (Butler 2007a: 38). Nevertheless, this understanding does not remain fixed. As the story unfolds, Lauren increases and deepens her understanding of interdependency and respect for the rest of creation. This understanding is visible in the reduction of violence in *Talents* which, in *Sower*, is committed under the guise of 'adapt to your surroundings or you get killed' (Butler 2007a: 182). In fact, at this stage, Butler envisions the maturity of a feminist eco-justice seeking mind to show that '[c]onverting our minds to the earth cannot happen without converting our minds to each other' (Ruether 1993: 91). In other words, the stability and peace which surrounds Lauren's community in *Talents* is the peak of a gradual development of a caring perspective. This perspective works to lessen and finally stop the violence targeting the lives of human beings. It is achieved by focusing on the sustainability of this peaceful life through productive activity of cultivating and caring for land. It envisions a reciprocal relationship of respect between human and nature which reduces the need for violent competition for survival, especially in hard times.

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

I looked and saw maggots being used to string wire behind several of our homes, up the slope. As I watched, they smashed through our cemetery, breaking down some of the young trees that we planted to honor our dead. The maggots were well named. They were like huge insect larvae, weaving some vast, suffocating cocoon. (Butler 2007b: 199)

The comparison touches the masculine/feminine friction at two points simultaneously: denouncing masculinity as the destructing agent of environment, and showing how it achieves this function through separation and bordering symbolized by the image of the cocoon. On another occasion, Butler directly confronts masculine consumptive nature, which exerts its authority through religious clothing, with feminine productivity, so that femininity and nature converge as one marginalized entity:

And we work in the fields ... . We're feeding livestock and cleaning their pens. We're turning compost, we're planting herbs, we're harvesting winter fruits, vegetables and herbs, clearing brush from the hills. We're expected to feed ourselves and our captors. They eat better than we do, of course. ... we owe them more than we can ever pay, ... because they're teaching us to forsake our sinful ways. They keep talking about teaching us the meaning of hard work. They tell us that we're no longer squatters, parasites, and thieves. (Butler 2007b: 212)

The religious wording here naturalizes the taming of both nature and this fallen community – in the view of the Christian captors – which is organized around a feminine heretic misconception. Simultaneously, it reverberates what Ruether in her “Ecofeminism –The Challenge to Theology” recognizes as the traditional Christian discredit of femininity, seeing it as a source of sin and an entity in constant need of repentance. It is completely predictable that this Christian installation will be twinned with harsh violence. Any feminine attempt to preserve one’s own space in this sexist hegemony will receive severe punishment: ‘I’ve earned myself more than one lashing by saying that my husband and I own this land, that we’ve always paid our taxes on it, and that we’ve never stolen from anyone’ (Butler 2007b: 212). Clearly, the reason behind this rampant severity is the fear of losing a position of mastery.

### Ecological knowledge: nature and sustainable life

On another level, the confrontation between the female environmentalist and masculine exploitative nature is the confrontation between the concepts of life and death in the novels. Recognizing the theological sacredness of nature as the origin and provider of life necessities, Lauren’s religion plays on the concept of revival by connecting to nature. It is obsessed with nature as a source which has an innate potentiality for reviving itself and the other if this other is in harmony with the rest of creation. Released from the tensions of the early phases of Lauren’s movement in *Sower, Talents* distinctly develops the notion of equating nature and life. In this equation, life and death are unified through nature:

We give our dead  
To the orchards  
And the groves.  
We give our dead  
To life. (Butler 2007b: 5)

The notion of referring to nature is repeated over and over in the novel: ‘Today we gave the Noyer children oak seedlings to plant in earth that has been mixed with the ashes of their parents’ (Butler 2007b: 56). Here, again, Butler equates nature with life or, to put it better, with life-giving or reviving force. When the ashes are mixed with growing oaks, it means that they are given an evergreen presence or life. This revival is done through attachment to nature which, as I already explained, is assumed to embody the feminine essence. This imagery has a second layer.

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



This characterization resides on the mythological conception of woman as the grain gatherer and natural healer as well.<sup>3</sup> In this myth, woman is considered as a knowledgeable person whose knowledge comes from association with nature. Embodying a new healer, Lauren fulfils her mission by clarifying the necessity of a constructive productivity. Through this clarification, she teaches her followers to have a healthy and peaceful existence by engaging with the world not 'as a resource for consumption and self-assertion, but as a part of greater living identity' (Clark 2011: 2). This instruction renders Lauren a posthuman healer whose religion and the society originating from it rewrite and reinterpret the holy book of creation from a more responsive and receptive approach where 'language is not about the world, making it its object or representation,' but '[w]ords respond to "speak to the world and to the expressive presences that, with us, inhabit the world"' (Clark 2011: 51).

The connection between the concepts of knowledge and land-related activities reverberates in some passages of *Talents*. Lauren's reference to the education of three Mexican-Korean children in her group verbalizes the notion as the headline of her mission: 'we're teaching them to read, write, and speak English because that will enable them to communicate with more people. And we're teaching them history, farming, carpentry, and incidental things' (Butler 2007b: 29). According to the reference, in this new community, awareness of the connection between human life and nature, concretized through focusing on activities like carpentry and farming, is necessary for an unstressed and normal life. It demonstrates the practical way through which Lauren challenges 'the inability of some human cultures to create sustainable ecosystems' (Ruether 1992: 53).

Ruether relates this inability to human beings' ignorance of the interrelation of life and death. Based on her argument, human culture has permanently ignored that the 'death side of the life cycle is an essential component of that renewal of life by which dead organisms are broken down and become the nutrients of new organic growth' (Ruether 1992: 53). Putting the focus of her teachings on the mutuality and not the hierarchicality of the human-nature relation that highlights nature's life-giving state, Lauren introduces a philosophy of life based on equality. Performing a religious ceremony like burying the dead members with planting seeds not only symbolizes the constant renewal of life, but also underlines the sacredness of natural life and its role in maintaining the nonstop renewal of life. This role is further emphasized by describing the educational programs Lauren offers to the learners. Mixing the theoretical and literal teachings with the practical skills like farming and carpentry helps these new learners to understand the extent their life depends on nature. It lets them learn how to make use of nature in a productive way that provides their needs and, at the same time, guarantees the sustainable growth of nature as the first ring in a chain that secures the sustainable life of humanity on Earth.

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

Bankole's aim of relocating to Halstead is to establish a more secure and providing location for his family. It reflects a masculine, possessive instinct. His family symbolizes the personal space of his life, where, as his household, he strives to safeguard his seed as well as headship. Lauren observes the root of this anxiety by pointing to her alternative perspective: 'If I went to Halstead, the seed here might die' (Butler 2007b: 177). Here, Lauren uses agrarian imagery to elaborate on two dimensions of her mission. On the one hand, 'seed' stands as a metaphor for the

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

I want us to go on growing, becoming stronger, richer, educating ourselves and our children, improving our community ... I want to send our best, brightest kids to college and to professional schools so that they can help us and in the long run, help the country, the world, to prepare for the destiny. ... They'll teach, they'll give medical attention, they'll shape new Earthseed communities within existing cities and towns and they'll focus the people around them on the Destiny. (Butler 2007b: 176-177)

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

It may seem that this kind of predestination, using a top-down approach, embodies a kind of masculine seclusion. But, the difference is that Lauren does not impose her ideology through a supremacist separation. She shares them, argues about them, and lets the others know about all of her beliefs. She has won her community by clarifying the principles of her thinking and, as emerges in the next stages of the novels, changes and adapts herself with changing conditions. The theme of destiny in the novels refers to this change. Lauren's repeated concept of God as change throughout the novels works to clarify on this mentality:

Change is the one unavoidable, irresistible, ongoing reality of the universe. ... the most powerful reality, and just another word for God. ...

Inexorable God  
Neither needs nor wants  
Your worship.  
Instead,  
Acknowledge and attend God,  
Learn from God,  
With forethought and intelligence,  
Imagination and industry,  
Shape God  
When you must,

Yield to God.  
 Adapt and endure.  
 For you are Earthseed,  
 And God is Change." (Butler 2007b: 75-76)

Recognizing multiplicity and creativity in the creator-creature relationship gives this theistic perspective the potency to reduce the misusing of divine-granted power and agency as religious justification to rule and subordinate particular target groups. As this embodies, Lauren does not change the nature of her message. Away from masculine strictness, she avoids sticking to fixed frames.

Moving side by side with the others, and not maintaining a hierarchical role, she practices a lively model of democratic environmentalist feminism. Observing this sensitivity, her struggle to preserve Acorn as her residence is the embodiment of a feeling free from possessive fear. It is the realizing of a settlement based on knowing, believing, connection, and simulation; a compensatory option to unite oneself as part of a whole instead of separating oneself as the representative of God or the best of all.

## Conclusion

Lauren's focus on human-nature relationship in the *Parables* is related to her concept of God. God as a capable and changeable entity works with the very notion of relatedness, destiny, and the eco-theological imagery in the novels. In fact, it is a postmodern deposing of His transcendence over creation and levelling His position with the rest of creation in a democratic theological organizing.<sup>4</sup> The natural result or the tacit aim of this outing is to desacralize masculinity as the incarnated image of God and level man with the rest of creation. Lauren as a posthuman female version of St. Francis of Assisi, whom White calls the 'patron saint of ecology' (1974: 6) does this. She casts her new seeds of production, equality, accessibility, protection and respect for the rest of creation. As generous and supportive as the Earth, she extends her protection to cover all creation – symbolized through her hyperempathy in sharing the pain of others – via recognizing the non-hierarchical connection of human-nature as the key for sustainable life on Earth, and teaching it.

From this perspective, *Parables* are the embodiment of change. The change, on the one hand, demonstrates the separation of the writer from the main body of science fiction, where traditional separatist male heroes have created ideal societies through underlining differences. Butler's black heroine is a harbinger of a new version of science fiction where gender stereotypes are challenged. On the other hand, this challenge is not limited within solely human-centred circles. Butler in *Parables* narrates a story based on a theological ground which revitalizes ecological concerns and strives to establish an egalitarian society based on a non-hierarchical connection between human being and nature.

## Endnotes

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<sup>2</sup> A transcendent monotheism believes in an Almighty God who, "set over against" universe, exerts His power unilaterally, beyond the natural, causal system of universe (Hampson 2002: 244).

<sup>3</sup> See: John Zerzan, "Patriarchy, Civilization, and the Origins of Gender," *The Anarchist Library*, accessed 5 September 2015, <http://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/john-zerzan-patriarchy-civilization-and-the-origins-of-gender.pdf> & Jeanne Achterberg, *Woman as Healer* (Massachusetts: Shambhala Publications, 1991).

<sup>4</sup> For more information please refer to: David Ray Griffin, *God and Religion in the Postmodern World: Essays in Postmodern Theology* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1989).

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