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Taking Root Among the Living: Afrodiasporic Science Fiction in Octavia E. Butler's
Parables

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Taking Root Among the Living: Afrodiasporic Science Fiction in Octavia E. Butler's *Parables*

O presente trabalho em nível de Doutorado foi avaliado e aprovado, em 12 de dezembro de 2025, pela banca examinadora composta pelos seguintes membros:

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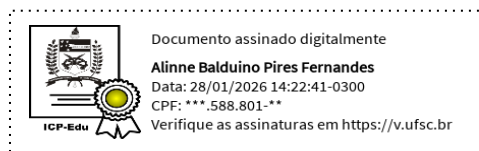
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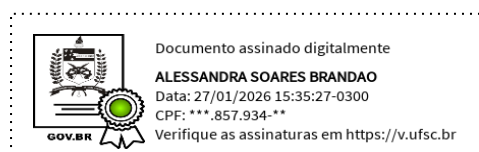
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What good is any form of literature to Black people? What good is science fiction's thinking about the present, the future, and the past? What good is its tendency to warn or to consider alternative ways of thinking and doing? What good is its examination of the possible effects of science and technology, or social organization and political direction?

(Butler, 2005a, p. 110)



Author Octavia E. Butler, 1986. Photo by Patti Perret. The Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens.

ABSTRACT

Octavia E. Butler contributed significantly to the science fiction genre, reshaping its boundaries through narratives guided by Black female protagonists. This dissertation explores *Parable of the Sower* (1993) and *Parable of the Talents* (1998) with the aim of examining how Butler's fabulation and speculative perspective engage with the African diasporic experience through an Afrofuturist lens. The objective of this research was to map how Lauren Olamina's forced migration journey across a dystopic 2024 United States mirrors narratives of Black diaspora. Furthermore, the study analyzes how the duology's Earthseed philosophy of *God of Change* emphasizes the essential role of ancestral knowledge in shaping a community of resistance against bigotry and religious persecution. The title *Taking Root Among the Living* reimagines the Earthseed Destiny, which is intended "to take root among the stars," in the context of *The Books of the Living*, the philosophical writings central to Butler's duology. While Olamina envisions humanity's destiny in the stars, this dissertation redirects that gaze toward the people living through the diaspora. Those who, in the midst of displacement and struggle, nurture the seeds of transformation in the collective survival, memory, and *fabulation* of the Afrodiasporic experience. In this manner, this dissertation argues that Butler's Earthseed philosophy mobilizes Change as a transformative force that enacts agency, offers hope, and reimagines diaspora not as displacement, but as collective becoming. The findings presented in this dissertation assert Octavia Butler's critical presence in science fiction and a central legacy in Afrofuturism, positioning her work and her concept of Change as essential for the fabulation of alternative futures.

Keywords: Octavia Butler; Afrofuturism; Earthseed; science fiction.

RESUMO

Octavia E. Butler contribuiu significativamente para o gênero da ficção científica, redefinindo seus limites por meio de narrativas guiadas por protagonistas negras. Esta tese analisa os livros *Parábola do Semeador* (1993) e *Parábola dos Talentos* (1998) com o objetivo de examinar como a fabulação e a perspectiva especulativa de Butler dialogam com a experiência diaspórica Africana sob uma lente Afrofuturista. O objetivo desta pesquisa foi mapear como a jornada de migração forçada de Lauren Olamina por um Estados Unidos distópico de 2024 reflete narrativas da diáspora negra. Além disso, o estudo analisa como a filosofia *Earthseed*, centrada no Deus da Mudança, enfatiza o papel essencial do conhecimento ancestral na formação de uma comunidade de resistência ao preconceito e à perseguição religiosa. O título “Taking Root Among the Living” reimagina o Destino de *Earthseed*, que tem como propósito “criar raízes entre as estrelas”, no contexto de *The Books of the Living*, os escritos filosóficos centrais à duologia de Butler. Enquanto Olamina vislumbra o destino da humanidade nas estrelas, esta tese redireciona esse olhar para as pessoas que vivem a experiência da diáspora. Aquelas que, em meio ao deslocamento e à luta, cultivam as sementes da transformação na sobrevivência coletiva, na memória e na fabulação da experiência afrodiaspórica. Dessa forma, esta tese argumenta que a filosofia *Earthseed* de Butler mobiliza a Mudança como uma força transformadora que promove agência, oferece esperança e reimagina a diáspora não como deslocamento, mas como um processo coletivo de pertencimento. Os resultados apresentados nesta tese afirmam a presença crítica de Octavia Butler na ficção científica e seu legado no Afrofuturismo, posicionando sua obra e seu conceito de Mudança como essenciais para a fabulação de futuros alternativos.

Palavras-chave: Octavia Butler; Afrofuturismo; *Earthseed*; ficção científica.

RESUMO EXPANDIDO

Introdução

Octavia E. Butler contribuiu significativamente para o gênero da ficção científica, redefinindo seus limites por meio de narrativas guiadas por protagonistas negras e por uma reimaginação crítica de poder, sobrevivência e comunidade. Esta tese analisa *Parábola do Semeador* (*Parable of the Sower*, 1993) e *Parábola dos Talentos* (*Parable of the Talents*, 1998) com o objetivo de examinar como a fabulação e a perspectiva especulativa de Butler dialogam com a experiência afrodiaspórica sob uma lente afrofuturista. O estudo mapeia como a jornada de migração forçada de Lauren Olamina por um Estados Unidos distópico de 2024 ressoa narrativas históricas e simbólicas da diáspora negra. Além disso, analisa como a filosofia Earthseed, centrada no princípio “God is Change” (o Deus da Mudança), enfatiza o papel do conhecimento ancestral na formação de comunidades de resistência à violência, ao preconceito e à perseguição religiosa. O título *Taking Root Among the Living* reimagina o destino de Earthseed — cuja formulação recorrente é “criar raízes entre as estrelas” — no contexto de *Earthseed: The Books of the Living*, conjunto de escritos filosóficos centrais à duologia. Enquanto Olamina projeta o destino da humanidade nas estrelas, esta tese redireciona o olhar para aqueles que vivem a experiência da diáspora: sujeitos que, em meio ao deslocamento e à luta, cultivam sementes de transformação por meio da sobrevivência coletiva, da memória e da fabulação afrodiaspórica. Argumenta-se, assim, que a filosofia Earthseed mobiliza a Mudança como força transformadora que promove agência, oferece esperança e reimagina a diáspora não apenas como deslocamento, mas como processo coletivo de pertencimento. Os resultados apresentados reafirmam a presença crítica de Butler na ficção científica e seu legado no Afrofuturismo, posicionando sua obra e seu conceito de Mudança como centrais para a fabulação de futuros alternativos e habitáveis.

Objetivos

O objetivo geral deste trabalho é analisar *Parábola do Semeador* e *Parábola dos Talentos*, de Octavia E. Butler, a partir da perspectiva da Diáspora Negra, investigando como a ficção científica da autora elabora uma fabulação própria sobre a experiência diaspórica e a converte em narrativa de mundos possíveis. Para isso, busca-se: (i) examinar de que maneira a trajetória de Lauren Olamina, em um contexto distópico dos Estados Unidos de 2024, aproxima-se de narrativas históricas e simbólicas da diáspora africana; (ii) identificar os elementos da ficção científica presentes na duologia que permitem uma leitura afrofuturista da experiência diaspórica e da imaginação de futuros possíveis e habitáveis; (iii) compreender como a centralidade da Mudança, princípio fundamental da filosofia Earthseed, reconfigura o arcabouço da ficção científica, mantendo uma postura crítica em relação ao passado e ao presente; (iv) analisar o papel do conhecimento ancestral na formação e na sustentação de comunidades diaspóricas ao longo da narrativa, de Robledo e Acorn à consolidação global de Earthseed; e (v) investigar como a mobilização da Mudança, por meio de Earthseed, opera como instrumento para reescrever narrativas de diáspora orientadas pela esperança, produzindo contribuições interpretativas e teóricas para os estudos de ficção científica e Afrofuturismo.

Metodologia

A metodologia deste trabalho baseia-se na leitura e no uso de *Earthseed: The Books of the Living*, livros de versos que aparecem ao longo da duologia, como ferramentas interpretativas centrais para a análise de *Parable of the Sower* e *Parable of the Talents*. A partir do mapeamento e da reunião de todos os versos de Earthseed presentes nas duas obras, foram identificados os conceitos mais recorrentes da filosofia de Lauren Olamina, especialmente aqueles relacionados à ideia de “God of Change”, o Deus da Mudança. Esses conceitos foram

articulados com elementos do Afrofuturismo e da experiência afrodiaspórica, permitindo relacionar a construção de narrativas de diáspora à imaginação de novas configurações de mundo. Dentre os ensinamentos mais frequentes, três ideias centrais foram selecionadas e desenvolvidas como conceitos metodológicos — “Seizing Change and Adaptability”, “Shaping Earth-seeds and Life-roots” e “Seeking Unfixed Destinies” — que orientam a leitura da duologia e estruturam, respectivamente, os três capítulos de análise.

Resultados e Discussão

Os resultados e discussões desta tese se organizam a partir da análise aprofundada da narrativa das Parables em diferentes estágios da experiência diaspórica, evidenciando como a ficção científica de Octavia E. Butler articula deslocamento, memória, resistência e imaginação de futuros. A leitura dos espaços simbólicos de Robledo, da migração rumo ao Norte e da fundação de Acorn revela a diáspora como processo marcado por trauma, vulnerabilidade compartilhada e adaptação, no qual a Mudança se torna condição para a sobrevivência coletiva. A consolidação de Earthseed em Acorn demonstra como a construção comunitária, ancorada em rituais, tradições e no cultivo do conhecimento ancestral, opera como forma de resistência afrofuturista frente à violência, à perseguição e à ameaça de apagamento histórico, possibilitando a preservação da memória e a continuidade da vida em contextos de dispersão forçada. Ao reinterpretar o deslocamento diaspórico por meio dos ensinamentos de *Earthseed: The Books of the Living*, a análise indica que a filosofia de Olamina funciona como declaração filosófica e chave metodológica para ler e produzir narrativas afrodiaspóricas orientadas pela esperança. O movimento final e intencional da partida da Terra amplia essa reescrita da diáspora ao projetar futuros possíveis e habitáveis, reafirmando a ficção científica afrodiaspórica como um campo capaz de reivindicar espaço para histórias negras persistirem, se transformarem e abrirem novos caminhos de leitura para o passado, o presente e o futuro.

Considerações Finais

As considerações finais retomam o percurso desenvolvido ao longo da pesquisa, reafirmando a relevância da obra de Octavia E. Butler para a ficção científica e para a construção de narrativas afrodiaspóricas e afrofuturistas. Ao contextualizar historicamente o gênero e suas exclusões — especialmente em relação a autoras negras —, o trabalho evidencia o papel central do Afrofuturismo na elaboração de narrativas comprometidas com experiências afro-americanas. Nesse sentido, a análise da duologia *Parables* demonstra como a noção de Change, formulada por Lauren Olamina, opera não apenas como eixo narrativo de transformação coletiva e resistência, mas também como chave de leitura para compreender o impacto de Butler na história da ficção científica. A trajetória da autora, marcada por persistência e adaptabilidade, ecoa os valores de Earthseed e consolida seu legado como força transformadora que ampliou os horizontes do gênero e abriu caminhos para que outras mulheres negras pudessem narrar seus mundos, seus futuros e suas possibilidades.

Palavras-chave: Octavia Butler; Afrofuturismo; Earthseed; ficção científica.

SUMMARY

1	INTRODUCTORY NOTES	15
2	<i>FUROR SCRIBENDI</i>: OCTAVIA BUTLER’S WORLDS OF SCIENCE FICTION	25
2.1	OCTAVIA BUTLER’S NOT SO SOFT SCIENCE FICTION: AFROFUTURISTIC FABULATION FOR POSSIBLE FUTURES.....	40
2.2	AFRODIASPORIC NARRATIVES AND OCTAVIA BUTLER’S AFROFUTURIST FABULATION	46
2.3	WANDERING VAMPIRES, ANCIENT AFRICAN SHAPE-SHIFTERS, TIME TRAVEL, AND A DYSTOPIC JOURNEY THROUGH THE UNITED STATES: A PILGRIMAGE THROUGH BUTLER’S FICTION	57
3	A METHODOLOGICAL PATH OF CHANGE: EARTHSEED AS AN AFROFUTURIST PHILOSOPHICAL PROPOSAL TOWARDS A SCIENCE FICTION DIASPORA CONSCIOUSNESS	64
3.1	SEIZING CHANGE AND ADAPTABILITY: LEAVING ROBLEDO AND TAKING THE ROADS NORTH.....	71
3.2	SHAPING EARTH-SEEDS AND LIFE-ROOTS: “EARTHSEED CONTINUES” 73	
3.3	SEEKING UNFIXED DESTINIES: TAKING ROOT AMONG THE STARS.....	76
4	PARABLES OF THE DIASPORA: “WE ARE EARTHLIFE PREPARING TO FALL AWAY FROM THE PARENT WORLD”	78
4.1	LIFE IN ROBLEDO AND THE GATED COMMUNITY’S ILLUSION OF SAFETY: LIVING IN-BETWEEN-WORLDS	80
4.2	THE BURNING OF ROBLEDO AND THE ESCAPE THROUGH UNKNOWN ROADS	91
5	“WE ARE EARTHSEED, THE LIFE THAT PERCEIVES ITSELF CHANGING”: COMMUNITY BUILDING, ANCESTRY KNOWLEDGE, AND EARTHSEED RESISTANCE.....	99
5.1	RISING FROM ITS ASHES: THE RISE AND FALL OF ACORN AND THE SURVIVAL OF EARTHSEED THROUGH MEMORY	101
5.2	MEMORY AND ANCESTRAL KNOWLEDGE AS EARTHSEED’S GREATEST WEAPON: LAUREN OLAMINA’S JOURNALS AND THE DOCUMENTATION OF UNTOLD STORIES.	106

6	TAKING ROOT AMONG THE LIVING: EARTHSEED AS A PHILOSOPHICAL STATEMENT TO READING AFRODIASPORIC NARRATIVES	120
6.1	SEEKING UNFIXED DESTINIES: OLAMINA’S NOMADIC LIFE AND THE GROWTH OF EARTHSEED AS A GLOBAL COMMUNITY	121
6.2	SPACE: THE UNTOLD DIASPORA	129
7	FINAL REMARKS	138
	WORKS CITED	146

1 INTRODUCTORY NOTES

Few authors have so profoundly reshaped the scenario they were inserted into as did Octavia E. Butler. Butler is considered a unique and essential voice in science fiction literature up to today, a Black female writer who is recognized for her commitment to exploring narratives that embrace the existence of female lives, Black experience, and sexual diversity. This dissertation elaborates on the Afrodiasporic narrative in Octavia E. Butler's *Parable of the Sower* and *Parable of the Talents*; thus, it is situated, in a broader sense, within the studies of science fiction literature, an area that is rich with its profound capacity for social commentary, speculative world-building, and continuous re-evaluation of humanity's past, present, and potential futures. Beyond the contextualization of Butler as a renowned science fiction writer, this dissertation also dialogues with studies of race and Black feminisms, specifically focusing on Afrofuturism and how its elements in *Parables* are built into a philosophical statement for reading the diasporic movement. This is achieved by analyzing *Parables*' science fiction narratives of displacement in tandem with the African-American diasporas, offering the necessary interpretive framework through which the complexities of Afrofuturism can be studied. The development of science fiction literature as a genre can be traced through a controversial historical trajectory, marked by divergent literary movements, social critiques, and ongoing discussions that challenge the very definition of the genre. A more focused historical framing and key moments in the genre will be covered in the next pages. Understanding these historical moments is relevant for grasping the contemporary debates and interpretive possibilities that shape the current studies surrounding science fiction and Afrofuturism.

Science fiction has long been a genre known for worrying about frontiers. Extrapolating the boundaries of human knowledge, the edges of technological discoveries, and the frontier of geographical and spatial limits. Attached to the idea of frontiers comes the interest in displacement. Science fiction often thrives on the exploration of what lies beyond what is known, whether that be the far corners of the universe, the limits of scientific understanding, or the rethinking of human identity. These frontiers are shaped by cultural anxieties, political imaginaries, and speculative desires. In navigating these shifting boundaries, science fiction not only plays with the challenges brought by the strangeness and conflictual aspects of these frontiers but also opens space for the imagination of possible and livable futures. Butler's works are prime examples of explorations, yet she fundamentally shifts the gaze from the frontiers of space to the urgent issues of her time.

Being interested in narratives that explore displacement, it was a web article called “Science fiction is the literature of refugees” (2008) that was the spark for the focus of this dissertation on the aspects of displacement in *Parables*. In the article, written by Charlie Jane Anders, author of “All the birds in the sky” (2016) and “Never say you can’t survive” (2021), she argues that the most widespread narratives in science fiction are the stories of displacement, where characters are either fleeing from planetary destruction, escaping from wars, or escaping from climate disasters. And I would add, from the interpretation of her text, escaping also from emotional, social, personal, and collective threats that arise from displacement, more specifically the African Diaspora in relation to this work. The link between science fiction and displacement has always been a point of interest in my relationship with the genre. In the course of four years, the inspiration from Anders’ text remained, but the understanding, through the research process, of my own interest in science fiction and in narratives of displacement has deepened, and an entire work was developed from this statement I have made.

This doctoral dissertation was developed and written in the space between the years of 2022 and 2025, which is a fact relevant to mention due to the symbology of *Parables*’ narrative being set to begin during the same period of time. The first book starts in 2024 and ends in 2027, while the sequence covers the years 2032 until 2035 and leaps forward in time to 2090 in its epilogue. These dystopian depictions of the 2020s written and published in the 1990s are surprisingly similar to the real-world 2020s, resonating with science fiction’s potential of *fabulation* about futures, as I will discuss later. When Butler imagined the 2020s in *Parables*, she depicted a United States torn by political persecution and a mass movement of migration to guarantee safety both from internal wars and climate disasters, but also from violent places and violent people. The real-world 2020s have not strayed far from that depiction, marked by wildfires, pandemics, and political fracture that, in the U.S. especially, is targeting immigrants, all of which make *Parables* look very familiar for 2020s readers. These similarities also make the experience of reading *Parables* in itself a kind of resistance to our times, relying on the books’ power to imagine ways out of the dystopia and forge livable and sustainable futures.

In *Parable of the Sower* (1993) and *Parable of the Talents* (1998), commonly referred to as the *Earthseed Series* or *Parables*, Butler offers a glimpse into a collapsing 2024 United States, extrapolating known problems such as state violence, social inequality, religious persecution, neo-slavery systems, forced migration, and environmental disasters. Spanning the near future years of 2024–2090, the two books speculate on a whole fictional world Butler created around the life of her main character, Lauren Oya Olamina. *Parables* begins with 15-year-old Olamina, a Black teenager, living in a gated community in a violently chaotic Los

Angeles area. In this degraded U.S. society marked by poverty, violence, drug abuse, natural disasters, and the rise of a conservative government, people struggle for ways of survival by walking north, searching for a safer life. *Parable of the Sower* is narrated by Olamina as she sees violence becoming even more threatening and prepares herself to go outside her protected neighborhood. Olamina prepares herself not only with a backpack (a survival pack with maps, tools, some money, canned food, and some raw seeds to eventually be germinated elsewhere), but also with a new consciousness to face and change that world she sees in ruins. It is through her writings during this period of crisis that she begins to articulate the fundamentals of her belief system, the Earthseed, which is articulated into poetry verses in *Earthseed: The Books of the Living*. Throughout the verses, the main idea of “God is Change” becomes a guiding principle of Earthseed, exploring, in general, the driving force that resides in the people and not in an external immutable God, as in Western notions of religion. Olamina and Earthseed are a metaphor for the creation of community, her writings anticipate that as, even alone, she envisions a “WE”. Although the book is written as Olamina’s entry journals and told from her perspective, Earthseed entries are never focused on an “I”. She was already projecting that her way out of that horrible scenario would only be possible if made collectively. It is through Olamina’s writing, through the Earthseed verses, that Butler projects a possible way of living. Writing as another form of displacement, of mobilizing people, and creating belonging. Writing as a personal obsession, as Anzaldúa puts it, as a *positive obsession*, for Butler. Writing being both unsettling and healing, and the action needed to produce power (Anzaldúa, 1987).

When Olamina is eighteen years old, her gated community is assaulted and burned down, and she is forced to head North in the company of two neighbors while dealing with her hyperempathy syndrome, a condition that makes her suffer from “both the pain and pleasure” that people around her feel (Butler, 2019a, p. 11). Olamina’s hyperempathy condition exposes her to even more dangers and challenges her to find alternatives in this violent context, where she is constantly vulnerable and tested by others who do not comprehend her heightened sensory abilities. Gloria Anzaldúa wrote that “pain is the way of life” (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 50), and it could not be more appropriate to dialogue with Olamina’s hyperempathy. Olamina does feel both pain and pleasure of the one she is visually connected to, which places her in a permanent conflictual space, one that she is constantly aiming to ameliorate so the dual forces are balanced. But, in a violent and collapsing world, pain is predominant. Pain and fear are two constants throughout Anzaldúa’s writing in *Borderlands* (1987); these feelings carry multiple meanings and are used to spark transformations and actions that enable a life in the “different worlds she inhabits” (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 20). Similarly to what Olamina experiences, Anzaldúa

writes about herself: “I sense the emotions someone near is emitting—whether friendly or threatening. Hate and fear—the more intense the emotion, the greater my reception of it” (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 39). Olamina fears hyperempathy, whether it is pain or pleasure, but, at the same time, it is this fear about something that is within herself that mobilizes her towards action, towards being an agent of transformation, which is translated in her *Earthseed*.

Olamina calls herself a “sharer”, despite knowing the scientific name of her condition:

To be a sharer is to feel the pleasure and the pain—the apparent pleasure and the apparent pain—of other people. There have been times when I’ve felt the pleasure of one of our “teachers” when he lashed someone. The first time it happened—or rather, the first time I understood what was happening, I threw up. (Butler, 2019b, p. 194)

Olamina’s relation with hyperempathy can also be considered a displacement of feelings and of the material relationship with her body, an unwilling movement of feelings from one body to another. However, she is conscious of the bilateral functioning of hyperempathy, of her vulnerability, and how it can be used against her. In order to survive, she is forced to learn to live in different worlds where “pain is the way of life”: “Sharers who survive learn early to take the pain and keep quiet. We keep our vulnerability as secret as we can.” (Butler, 2019b, p. 33). In her journey north through the highways, while described as “desperate refugees” (Butler, 2019a, p. 119), they make acquaintances, and Olamina establishes a relationship with Taylor Bankole, a much older man with whom she would later have a daughter. Followed by the large and diverse group that is formed during this migration, Olamina decides to settle with Bankole on his piece of land in Northern California. There, by the end of the first book, the group establishes Acorn, the first Earthseed community.

The sequence, *Parable of the Talents* (1998), is introduced by Larkin, Olamina’s and Bankole’s daughter, as she reads her parents’ journals and the Earthseed’s books. Larkin, who was taken from them as a child to be raised by a Christian family and was renamed Asha Vere, writes from the perspective of a kidnapped and adopted child as she learns about her biological parents’ history. Focusing on what happened to Acorn, the book describes the invasion of the community by the Crusaders, a group encouraged by the extremist Church of Christian America. The Crusaders were responsible for the slavery of the adults and the kidnapping of the youngest children to be given to Christian families. Earthseed became a symbol of evil for the new conservative government, whose followers acted violently in the name of religious values. After Acorn’s destruction and the escape of those who remained alive, Olamina returns alone to her journey through the roads, searching for Larkin and dedicating herself to the spread of Earthseed ideas.

By the end of the novel, in the year 2090, Earthseed is shown as a worldwide movement that provides education for its youth and aims to send scientists to establish a community on another planet. *Parable of the Talents* (1998) ends with 81-year-old Lauren Olamina watching her Earthseed fulfill its destiny by launching the first populated spaceships to “take root among the stars” (Butler, 2019a, p. 58). The motto “The destiny of Earthseed is to take root among the stars” appears frequently throughout the books. It appears to be ambiguous, as it means the leaving of Earth to colonize other planets, which is also a movement of displacement and settlement. But it might also mean constant movement, as the stars are on their perpetual journey through the universe.

The 2020s in *Parables* are about escaping, surviving the danger of the roads, and navigating unknown places while dealing with differences in a world taken by the chaos installed by a tyrannical Christian government. Octavia Butler builds a body of philosophical knowledge, Earthseed, through the depiction of survival in a lost-hope dystopia, but, beyond depicting the dystopia, she paves the way to reclaim spaces, both physical and intellectual spaces, as well as people’s space in history, especially Black people. Moreover, bearing in mind that *Parables* was the last of Octavia Butler’s writing and, significantly, the one in which the main character develops this philosophy concerned with guiding a way of living, I believe it might serve as a form of establishing her ideals. It stands as Butler’s written testimony of how she views science fiction and how she believes in the genre as a tool to propose different and alternative lenses to not only perceive what happens in the world but, most importantly, to create new forms of engaging with the world and to imagine new worlds. In doing so, Octavia E. Butler redefines the epistemological boundaries of science fiction through Black female subjectivities that imagine futurity as a site of diasporic memory and survival.

This research itself is, apart from an academic pursuit, a personal attempt to learn to perceive the world differently. This research was born from my obsession with science fiction, which led me to know and obsess about Octavia E. Butler. On a personal note, my interest in researching Octavia Butler primarily comes from my admiration of her books and her world-building in science fiction, where she demonstrates her imaginative force in creating very different worlds, dynamics, and species. Despite all my work being focused on *Parables* and its quite realistic depiction of society on Earth, I find Butler’s creation of other worlds and other species an inspiration as a writer of science fiction myself. However, my interest in the *Parables* duology comes from a bigger enthusiasm for dystopian narratives of displacement, narratives that approach the movement and the rebuilding of a society. I have always felt drawn to narratives concerned with escaping the dystopia and establishing a new sense of life in a post-

apocalyptic world. Still, my questioning of these narratives was often, why do people want to go back to how it was before the apocalyptic event? Why do they keep organizing themselves in the same old way, around the same failed institutions? These kinds of stories frequently fall on the loophole of going back to a previous point in their history and furthering the same old problems that led to their destruction. Why not take the opportunity to change? To construct new protagonism and write a new history instead of rewriting upon the remains of the previous one? *Parables*, besides having all those post-apocalyptic and dystopian elements I cherish in a story, is also constructed around the idea of change. Moreover, it plays an important role in inciting a reflection of today's issues through the lens of fiction.

Obsession has always been a frequent word in my vocabulary as a reader, not often well-defined or controlled, which led me to learn again from Butler and her *positive obsession*. A *positive obsession*, in her words, “is about not being able to stop just because you’re afraid and full of doubts. Positive obsession is dangerous. It’s about not being able to stop at all” (Butler, 2005a, p. 109). This quote, and her conceptualization of *positive obsession* as a tool for writing, is taken from the context in which Butler is commenting about authorship and what it takes to metaphorically survive in the science fiction/fantasy scenario where most recognized authors were white men. Persisting on writing in this scenario makes Butler’s writing a form of resistance, beyond her stories of resistance. As a Black woman author in a predominantly white and male genre, she embodied resistance through her presence in the science fiction and fantasy realm, reflected in her Black female protagonists. Beyond writing and researching for this dissertation, Octavia Butler became an even bigger inspiration for me as a reader and writer. As a writer, Butler’s passion for writing and her very practical manner of dealing with the act of creating are an inspiration of how writing can be possible. Butler wrote in her essays of how she would often wake up before dawn to be able to write before going to her full-time job or would write at lunch break to distance herself from the life in the factories; that in itself is also another form of resistance. While some more privileged authors speak of muses and inspiration, Butler spoke about the need to be consistent, to focus on the habit of writing, and to not let the desire for writing be erased by the hardships of everyday life. It was in her words about writing that I found encouragement in many moments to write my stories and to even write this dissertation. Beyond her fiction, she remains an inspiration of not letting the weight of the world crush and erase our stories. Despite success, stories must be told, and despite daily life often saying otherwise, writing must persist. Even and especially if they serve, initially, to satisfy the writer’s mind, because creating is, too, a form of resisting and being alive in and to the world. And I learned that obsessing about something you are researching is being forced to look at

wonders and flaws, which the science fiction genre has many of in both ways. While it poses as the genre of wonders and endless possibilities, it was flawed in failing to extend this treatment to all its writers. Then, I got here looking at science fiction's wonders and flaws and wanting to understand and explore more of the first. How science fiction, especially Butler's *Parables*, of course, has enabled more wonders, besides the flawed history the genre carries of being full of misogynistic and racist conflicts.

While writing this work, which I am calling *Taking Root Among the Living: Science Fiction Diaspora in Octavia E. Butler's Parables*, I have been guided to reading *Parable of the Sower* and *Parable of the Talents* through the lens of Black Diaspora. And here I am interested in Octavia Butler's own kind of *fabulation* upon the topic of experiencing diaspora and how her science fiction approaches it and turns it into a narrative of possible worlds. Achieving this main objective will provide crucial insights into how science fiction, more specifically Butler's Afrofuturist science fiction, can be a site for reimagining alternative futures while also being critical of the past and present.

Overall, this research seeks to address the following critical questions: in what ways does Lauren Olamina's journey through the dystopic U.S. resemble narratives of the African diaspora? What aspects of *Parables'* science fiction allow for the Afrofuturist reading of the diasporic experience and the envisioning of possible and livable futures? How does the duology's emphasis on change, the central concept of the Earthseed's philosophy, reshape the science fiction framework to allow for an Afrofuturist reading of the diasporic experience and the envisioning of possible and livable futures? What are the roles that ancestral knowledge plays in the establishment of fixed and mobile communities throughout the *Parables'* encompassing the gated Robledo, Acorn, and, finally, the globally established Earthseed? And ultimately, how does Earthseed mobilize change as a tool for rewriting narratives of diaspora through hope? These questions and their unfoldings aim at delving into critical aspects of *Parables'* narrative and yield science fiction interpretive and theoretical insights.

Although this dissertation is situated within science fiction studies and takes Afrofuturism as a central critical framework, its theoretical background for analysis is explicitly structured by Black feminist thought. In dialogue with Audre Lorde, Saidiya Hartman, Gloria Anzaldúa, bell hooks, Hortense Spillers, Alice Walker, Leda Maria Martins, Kenia Freitas, Ytasha Womack, Marlene Allen, among others, I treat the Afrodiasporic experience as inseparable from the politics of narration, embodiment, and community formation: how historical violence persists in the present, how survival is organized through collective care, and how imaginative practice can rearrange readings of possible worlds. This framework guides

my reading of Lauren Olamina's Afrodiasporic journey through a dystopian United States, my analysis of Earthseed's philosophy of Change as a tool for resisting and confronting domination while enabling the envisioning of possible and livable futures, and my emphasis on Earthseed as a politics of creation. In these terms, the Black feminist authors I engage do not simply accompany my close readings, they organize the dissertation's conceptual vocabulary and argumentative moves throughout the chapters that follow.

To develop upon the issues here mentioned, this doctoral dissertation is divided into six chapters. The first three theoretical chapters bring both theories and historical overviews needed to understand Octavia Butler's fiction, both in itself and in relation to science fiction and cultural history. The other three are chapters dedicated completely to the study of the books. Thus, in the remainder of this introductory chapter, I focus on a close study of Butler's history and influence within the science fiction genre. In the first part, I write about Butler's fiction and her history as a Black female author of science fiction. To discuss that, I bring an overview of the history of Black writers in the genre, highlighting their often erasure from traditionally recognized science fiction, while their presence was there from the beginning and not, as it is inaccurately assumed, from the popularization of Afrofuturism in the 1970s. In a second part, I discuss the relevance of Butler's fiction as a whole to science fiction concerned with social issues and philosophical questions, in addition to these kinds of stories being relevant to the creation of images that differ from the science fiction mainstream (which frequently looked down on Black and female writers), thus recognizing the importance of Afrofuturism for the genre's history.

The second chapter, entitled "Afrodiasporic Narratives and Octavia Butler's Afrofuturist Fabulation" is concerned with exploring how the theme of diaspora appears as a core concept in Butler's Afrofuturistic books, but most importantly in the *Parables* duology. These two initial chapters combined serve as a statement on how Butler explores the Afrodiasporic experience to actively construct new worlds and new futures.

The third chapter is concerned with the methodology used for this research. In "A Methodological Path of Change: Earthseed as an Afrofuturist Philosophical Proposal Towards a Science Fiction Diaspora Consciousness", I break down the construction of this dissertation's methodology. It is relevant that the methodology be explored in depth, as it was founded both in theories and on the Earthseed verses that appear throughout the duology. Here, I explain how I used the books within the books, the writings of Lauren Olamina, as methodological guidance to read the diaspora in *Parables*.

The close analysis of the books is contained within three chapters. So, the fourth chapter, “Parables Of The Diaspora: “We Are Earthlife Preparing To Fall Away From The Parent World””, deals with the mapping of key places and moments in *Parables*’s narrative: Robledo, the migration North, and finally Acorn, as symbolic stages in Olamina’s development and the growth of Earthseed. Drawing on theorists like Saidiya Hartman and Gloria Anzaldúa, the chapter explores how trauma, migration, and shared vulnerability shape collective resistance and hope through embracing adaptability and change.

In the fifth chapter, ““We Are Earthseed, The Life That Perceives Itself Changing”: Community Building, Ancestry Knowledge, and Earthseed Resistance”, I explore how Olamina’s philosophy of Change, Earthseed, officially established in their first community, Acorn, draws upon Afrofuturistic tropes to build a future-oriented way of life that would protect their memories from erasure in times of persecution. I focus on how their collective construction of memory through rituals, traditions, and the cultivation of ancestral knowledge enables them to survive enslavement and a second diaspora throughout the country.

In the sixth chapter, “Taking Root Among The Living: Earthseed as a Philosophical Statement to Reading Afrodiasporic Narratives,” I focus on the meaning of displacement itself, exploring *Parables*’ rewriting of diaspora in tandem with Earthseed teachings, arguing that Olamina’s books, *Earthseed: The Books of the Living*, are philosophical guides not only to reading Afrodiasporic narratives but also to creating these narratives of hope and livable futures. Here, I focus only on *Parables*’ ultimate diasporic movement, and the only intentional one of them, their departure from Earth to colonize other planets.

The final chapter draws upon the entire dissertation, tying up the discussion laid over during this doctorate, with the objective of reaffirming Afrodiasporic science fiction’s tool as a genre for overcoming obstacles and for reclaiming space for histories to live on. The final remarks also include a discussion of the implication of the findings for future research into this area, delving into the possibility of mapping Earthseed’s values and messages in all of Octavia Butler’s body of fiction, as the majority of her works revolve around narratives of diaspora, and the same messages contained in the compilation of Earthseed verses also seem to appear as guiding concepts throughout her other book series.

Throughout most of my life, I often mentioned that I loved science fiction books that dealt with post-apocalyptic and dystopian scenarios, especially those that had a plot revolving around migration and remote places. In general, I found, and still find, appealing the idea of being faced with unknown and inhospitable places and following the characters on a long survival journey. My favorite books, movies, and series are about this trope. I once believed I

liked these stories because of their dystopian aspect, but I came to learn, with the great help of reading, studying, and connecting with Octavia Butler's works, that what makes me truly enjoy this specific type of science fiction is the narrative about hope and the possibilities of change.

2 *FUROR SCRIBENDI*: OCTAVIA BUTLER'S WORLDS OF SCIENCE FICTION

Who was I anyway? Why should anyone pay attention to what I had to say? Did I have anything to say? I was writing science fiction and fantasy, for God's sake. At that time, nearly all professional science-fiction writers were white men. As much as I loved science fiction and fantasy, what was I doing? (Butler, 2005a, p. 109)

Octavia Estelle Butler is often referred to as the Grand Dame of Science Fiction, a genre to which her influence is immeasurable. Butler's compelling narratives with powerful social commentary broke barriers and challenged conventions within the genre and outside its imaginative and often fantastical boundaries. She has earned a place of reverence in literary scenarios due to the detailed exploration of race, gender, and power relations in her fiction. Butler's approach to the possibilities of the unknown is complemented by her extraordinary talent for blending the estrangement of science fiction with deeply human concerns. In a pair of essays called *Positive Obsession* and *Furor Scribendi*, Butler discusses the art of writing. She names her motivation and insistence to write a *positive obsession*, described as a cultivation of the obsession for writing, and the act of consistency in writing, part of her *furor scribendi*, an emotion of rage for writing (Butler, 2005a, p. 116). This concept would later appear as part of the Earthseed verses as well. For Butler, obsession can be a useful tool if it is a positive emotion tunneled towards one's goals. Her obsession with writing her worlds of science fiction enabled her to overcome timely imposed prejudices and to explore possible futures in her prolific writing legacy.

Born in 1947 in Pasadena in the state of California, Butler was the first science fiction writer and Black woman to receive the Genius Grant from The MacArthur Fellows Program in 1995. As a science fiction writer, Butler built fascinating fictional worlds and forged new and audacious routes for thinking. Butler became one of the most renowned female science fiction writers, despite the struggles and difficulties she faced in the context of the time of her first attempts at publication. Butler's writing career began in the 1970s and consequently is part of a period in which science fiction was being consolidated in literary history, adopting the aesthetic modalities of "mainstream" literature and valuing the novel format (Latham, 2011). At the same time science fiction would start being properly recognized in the literary sphere, it still carried many prejudices from its racist and misogynistic history, thus being criticized and questioned as a genre dominated by white male authorship. Butler was writing in a period in which changes and transformations were being established within the science fiction genre. These changes, which will be discussed in more detail in the next pages, led to a flourishing of socially conscious narratives in science fiction, such as Butler's racially concerned narratives.

Whenever discussing her writing, Butler frequently pointed to science fiction as a genre that accompanied her as a reader and young writer throughout her life. She frequently remarked on how she nourished herself with science fiction stories since early childhood. Thus, her attachment to the genre was not only a matter of choice but of passion. In her words, “I went on writing science fiction because I enjoyed it. I enjoyed reading and hearing about science. I enjoyed finding out what was real, or at least what everybody assumed was real then and what wasn’t. I enjoyed trying to understand how the universe worked” (Rowell; Butler, 1997, p. 54). Butler also used to praise the genre’s freedom of creation, she argues that “a science fiction writer has the freedom to do absolutely anything. The limits are the imagination of the writer” (Butler, 1986, p. 16). Despite her pride in being a science fiction writer, Butler did not hide the questions and difficulties of being a Black female author in the science fiction scenario. In another interview, she acknowledges the struggles with the attempts of publication and with the classification of her novels; she comments on the limiting aspect of sticking to the genre’s publication constraints while having a diverse audience: “I knew I had three audiences at least [...] the science-fiction audience, the Black audience, and the feminist audience” (Potts; Butler, 1996, p. 336). It is through the imaginative creation of her worlds of fiction that Butler was able to explore both her passion for science fiction and align with her acknowledged audience’s interests, resulting in science fiction deeply rooted in exploring racial and feminist concerns. In this manner, it is noteworthy how important these three audiences are in encouraging Butler to explore literature as a place of belonging. With the establishment of a dialogue with her readers’ reality by mobilizing ideas and promoting a community based on belonging, Butler was capable of carving out and establishing her unique space within science fiction writing.

Butler’s literature, then, becomes extremely relevant due to its intersectional dialogue with creating a sense of belonging for these audiences. In bell hooks’ notion of belonging as constructing “identity and community on the basis of openness, shared struggle, and inclusive working together” (Hooks, 2008, p. 163). Butler was able to create a literary space that evokes a sense of belonging, as articulated by hooks, a multifaceted concept that encompasses individual identity, collective experience, and the structures of power and privilege in society. A space for acceptance, where “should difference enter the world of beloved community it can find a place of welcome, a place to belong (Hooks, 2008, p. 164)”.

Octavia Butler’s writing career is marked by twelve awards and recognitions of science fiction, among them the Nebula Award of 1999 for Best Novel, given to *Parable of the Talents* (1998). Despite her doubts displayed in this chapter’s epigraph, Butler proved conscious about what she was advocating with her Black female protagonists and African-American informed

narratives, as well as narratives that explore sexual diversity. Even though the science fiction genre and its earlier history's tendency to neglect social concerns may have presented challenges, she remained committed to establishing possible worlds of science fiction. The reason her fiction is mostly regarded as depicting power relations and strong Black female characters facing adverse situations is answered by her own words: "I began writing about power because I had so little" (Davidson; Butler, 1981, p. 32).

Overall, Butler's works explore the human desire for belonging and the search for community, reflecting on how these desires are shaped and influenced by systems of power, particularly those structured around race and its intersections with gender and class. Through her dystopian and speculative narratives, she envisions worlds in which hegemonic notions of power are challenged, reversed, or reimagined. The feminist and racial gestures in her literature also highlight the construction of a community around these audiences. Moreover, the power of which Butler writes is not the power attributed to the white; it is a potency that works as an inspiration and a power of resistance within her stories. This is not the power of oppressors and oppressed, but rather a power that is rooted in resilience, adaptability, and community. It is a power that not only challenges traditional Western notions of power, the power of the white, as Gloria Anzaldúa writes about, but is also a power to shape her own destiny. Anzaldúa writes of a position of action to fight against and also disentangle from this dominant power, arguing that "a counterstance locks one into a dual of oppressor and oppressed" and that "all reaction is limited by, and dependent on, what is reacting" (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 78). Departing from their experience as Black women of dealing with power, distancing from this reactive mode, and gathering such power as an active mode is what Anzaldúa and Butler do with their writing, and "the possibilities are numerous once we decide to act and not react." (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 79). By constructing this power, Butler creates a space for her narratives and contributes to the genre by forwarding characteristics of a power that traverses frontiers and opposes any form of racism. In Anzaldúa's words lies the relevance of Butler's writing about creating an active alternative of power, as "nothing happens in the 'real' world unless it first happens in the images in our heads" (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 87).

Butler often spoke of her fascination for the science fiction genre, a genre that is defined by Darko Suvin as the "literature of cognitive estrangement" (Suvin, 1979, p. 4). Gerry Canavan and Eric Link, in their opposition to strictly defining what is science fiction, argue that science fiction narratives "in general denote a very broad category of aesthetic enterprise that posits some discontinuity with the empirical world" (Canavan and Link, 2019, p. 7). Similarly, in a

preface to Butler's short story "Speech Sounds," science fiction writer Isaac Asimov recognizes the genre as devoted to possibilities, as he comments:

Actually, science fiction is committed neither to marvels nor to disasters. It deals with possible situations. It tries to draw a rational and self-consistent society, different from ours, which may be better, even much better, than our society; or worse, even much worse; or better in some respects and worse in others. The point of the story, then, is how people live and react in such societies. (Asimov, 1983)

Regarding the social relevance of the genre, Sherry Vint argues that science fiction "is part of the field of ideology and as such can work not only to comment on cultural politics of the current moment but also to intervene in and change this moment" (Vint, 2007, p. 20), highlighting the potential for science fiction productions to offer commentary on and engage with social realities.

Beyond her popular title of Grand Dame of Science Fiction, Butler has been regarded as one of the most influential names within Afrofuturist literature. The term Afrofuturism, coined by Mark Dery in 1993, originally referred to the speculative fiction¹ that is concerned with "African-American themes and addresses African-American concerns in the context of 20th century techno-culture" (Dery, 2008, p. 8). The term Afrofuturism, then, was initially intended to denote the characteristics of the literature pertaining to the African-American experience that Black authors, including Butler, were producing in the decades preceding the 1990s. These works would later be acknowledged as belonging to Afrofuturism and as works that promoted Black narratives' recognition within the history of a genre (science fiction) that, at the same time, creatively enabled Afrofuturistic narratives but also erased them from its conventional account of history. Despite its strong initial connection to science fiction, Afrofuturism can be considered more than a genre and more as a framework that spans multiple art forms beyond literature.

Complementary to Dery's definition, Ytasha Womack broadens the understanding of Afrofuturism by describing its social role:

Whether through literature, visual arts, music, or grassroots organizing, Afrofuturists redefine culture and notions of blackness for today and the future. Both an artistic aesthetic and a framework for critical theory, Afrofuturism combines elements of science fiction, historical fiction, speculative fiction, fantasy, Afrocentricity, and magic realism with non-Western beliefs. In some cases, it's a total reenvisioning of the past and speculation about the future rife with cultural critiques. (Womack, 2013, p. 9)

De Witt Kilgore argues, "Afrofuturism can be seen as less a marker of Black authenticity and more a cultural force, an episteme that betokens a shift in our largely unconscious assumptions

¹ A discussion on the use of "science fiction" or "speculative fiction" is made further in the chapter.

about what histories matter and how they may serve as a precondition for any future we may imagine” (De Witt Kilgore, p. 564, cited in Lavender, 2016). In the context of science fiction and Afrofuturism, Hortense J. Spillers comments on Butler’s influence as an African-American female writer of science and speculative fiction, whose narratives approach the possibilities of escape from a troubled reality. Spillers argues that the works written by Butler and other authors within Afrofuturism are of extreme importance to promote a criticism toward traditional science fiction and to establish a “new path to consider other worlds that illuminate the one we inhabit” (Spillers, 2008, p. 5).

A detailed examination of the processes of transformation of the genre throughout the twentieth century in North American fiction will prove crucial for comprehending and delving into the context of Octavia Butler’s fiction. The changes that happened to the science fiction genre are well described by the notion of genre as a process, established by Steve Neale. Neale speaks of genres as “processes of systematization” (Neale, 2021, p. 71) instead of being fixed systems with strict rules. This understanding of genres being not only a repetition of codes but of a range of differences that constructs meaning through each work’s own combination of signs. The outcome of this notion of a process-based approach is that definitions of genre “are always historically relative, and therefore historically specific” (Neale, 2021, p. 96).

Understanding genre as a process, as Neale suggests, and the importance of historical contexts and historical processes to its construction allows us to look at the established periods of science fiction differently, those that are discussed in detail further on in this chapter; thus, an in-depth analysis of these periods is provided on the next pages. Within this interpretation, it is important to look at how literature, in this case, reacts to its historical context and the means by which its productions can be able to think of the present’s conscience. Not only does literature respond to changes in history, but it can also be an act that creates new social realities at the same time that it affects and is a part of the very historical processes it is meant to reflect. Speaking of a genre that was consolidated throughout the twentieth century, it is essential to bear in mind how some historical contexts parallelly affect the transformation of the genre, from historical facts, such as the wars, to social movements, such as feminism, and more specifically here, Black feminisms and their intersectional frame of references within the U.S. historical context. These social movements influenced the literary and artistic production, provoking changes that continuously allowed room for women and Black writers to be empowered and, in turn, inspire even further changes. These historical processes that inform our understanding of genres help build a form of literature that is more inclusive, broad, and interested in strengthening the same forces that helped it come to be.

Genres are indeed primarily classified based on a pattern, but the broadening of their understanding through historical processes makes it even more noticeable the malleability of genres, especially science fiction, which has lived through so many scientific, technological, and sociological transformations, which happened fast in a relatively short period of time. Thus, excess of definition is indisputably an act of exclusion; the more defined a genre is, the more it leaves works out of its reach. In this way, understanding genre through temporalities, its changing historical contexts, and hybridization is crucial to seeing literature as a manifestation of ideas in movement. This lens also makes counterproductive a search for codes and origins in the genres, i.e., science fiction's origin and its characteristics. However, since my objective in the following pages is to propose a rereading of the genre's history as it is commonly told, I felt the need to somehow linearly trace science fiction development to bring to light the accounts of science fiction history that are frequently left behind. Hence, the importance of stressing that I see this approach as necessary due to science fiction being known as a very niche-specific genre, initially mostly constituted of white male authors, and often openly racist and misogynistic, and, most importantly, for being a genre that appears to have reluctance to change these patterns.

In Neale's notion of processes, there is a problem in defining a linear story of science fiction, the origin of the genre, or the first work, as that would be a study that might take us back to mythology, as argued by Roberts (2016), that searching for the beginning of a genre such as science fiction is problematic, since such a chronological attempt could trace the genre back to mythological narratives, which have already, in their own ways, speculated about other worlds, technologies, and societal transformations. Black authors have made noteworthy contributions to science fiction throughout the whole history of the genre, and it is imperative to acknowledge their significant contribution to science fiction history, not only regarding the period in which discussions on Afrofuturism began to appear and Black people became protagonists in this history, but also during the rise of science fiction, especially in the context of the United States. The understanding of the development of Afrofuturism in science fiction literature, however, may be subject to debate. Despite the tendency of commonly constructed narratives to point out science fiction's emergence as being marked by white male writers in the 1920s, and usually attributing the 1970s and the period known as New Wave as a time in which both women and Black writers started engaging in science fiction writing, it is worth noting that Afrofuturistic narratives were being developed in tandem with science fiction (Yaszek, 2006). Black writers' science fiction can be traced back to the turn of the 20th century.

Thus, in this account of science fiction history, I aim to explore how Afrofuturist literature has developed simultaneously with the so-called traditional science fiction, contributing to science fiction literature from the late 19th and early 20th centuries and not only in the second half of the 20th century, when socially interested narratives were encouraged in science fiction with the New Wave movement.

Although this research talks about science fiction, it is not my objective to develop a genre-based analysis of Butler's books nor to examine the structural elements that define science fiction as a literary category. I depart from the understanding that Octavia E. Butler is already canonical within science fiction, thus, the genre classification here serves as a contextual framework. Therefore, my intention is not to apply a rigid genre lens to Butler's duology, but rather to consider how, as a fundamental figure within the genre's history, her work reflects and engages with the inherent challenges and tensions of science fiction, particularly those arising from its historical configurations — a topic that will be discussed in depth here. Butler's works, and most significantly *Parables*, can be found within the blurred intersections of science fiction, speculative, and dystopian fiction, strongly redefining the possibilities of centering the human dimension in speculative narratives. This human-centered perspective transforms speculation itself into a form of critical fabulation, which in turn deepens the potential of Afrofuturist and Afrodiasporic narratives.

The history of African-American storytelling in the U.S. both parallels and intersects that of science fiction, and the presence of Afrofuturistic productions was already spotted in the 19th century along with the birth of science fiction (Lavender, 2019; Shephard, 2019). Isaiah Lavender III, a scholar dedicated to Critical Race Theory and Science Fiction, argues that “as a historical phenomenon, Afrofuturism emerges in parallel with its sister genre, science fiction, at the dawn of modernity, in response to the singular risks and possibilities afforded by industrial capitalism” (Lavender, 2019, p. 565). The origin of Afrofuturism in the U.S., as explored by Yaszek, can be traced back as far as the origins of traditional science fiction, since works that would later be acknowledged as having the characteristics to be considered Afrofuturistic began to appear in the middle of the 19th century. Complementary to this fact, and referring to the narratives of diaspora, W. Andrew Shephard comments that “it is impossible to construct a full history of the African diaspora's participation in the speculative tradition; however, considerable strides have been made in recent years to reprint and recuperate speculative works by black authors from the beginning of the genre” (Shephard, 2019, p. 101).

Shephard points to Martin Delany's *Blake, or The Huts of America* (1859) as being one of the first works published by an African-American writer, and Frances E. W. Harper's *Iola Leroy* (1892) the first Afrofuturist work written by a Black woman (Shephard, 2019, p. 102). Delany's novel was first published in magazine serialized forms in *The Anglo African Magazine* from January to July 1859 and in *The Weekly Anglo-African* from November 1861 to May 1862. *Blake, or The Huts of America* was reprinted only in 1970, coincidentally with the rise of the New Wave. Developing along with, if not before, the known mainstream white science fiction literature, the fiction written by Black authors was already marked by its use of speculation. Shephard also mentions how the turn of the century and its highly racist ideology², brought literature anchored in white supremacy to popular culture, such as Thomas Dixon's *The Clansman* (1905) and later its film adaptation by D. W. Griffin's as *Birth of a Nation* (1911). In response to this openly oppressive and violent scenario, Black writers would publish, and "black speculative visions proliferate during this time period – particularly of utopias" (Shephard, 2019, p 103). The turn of the 20th century is then marked by Black utopias and names such as Frances E. W. Harper, Edward A. Johnson, Paul Laurence Dunbar, Alice Dunbar-Nelson, and Sutton E. Griggs with his politically concerned narratives, which "tenaciously grappled with the race question" (Shephard, 2019, p. 105).

The 20th century and its events, specifically World War I and II, would establish very well-defined stages in the history of science fiction as a literary genre, a history in which Butler plays a meaningful role. The rise of speculative and science fiction stories in the late 19th and early 20th centuries led to a popularization of the genre, especially in North American science fiction, which is marked by the Pulp Era. The Pulps were especially popular in the USA³, Pulps were known as stories published in a series of niche-marketed magazines (Roberts, 2016). Adam Roberts highlights the cheapness of the magazine format as one of the reasons Pulps became popular, as the name suggests, and comments on its importance to the growth of science fiction as a genre, highlighting how the "pulp idiom, and its huge popularity, remade SF"⁴ (Roberts, 2016, p. 256).

Despite their widespread popularity and their crucial role in shaping popular culture, pulps were not immune to elitist criticism arguing against their literary value (Westfahl, 1999),

² In a footnote, Shepard explains that he is referring to "the nadir of American race relations", known as "the period which began with the end of Reconstruction in the South and lasted into the early twentieth century, during which racism in the United States was at its worst" (Shephard, 2019, p. 103).

³ See Adam Robert's *The History of Science Fiction* (2016) for a thorough account of European and post-Revolutionary Russian pulp magazines.

⁴ Science Fiction is often shortened to SF.

standards that were themselves usually rooted in white elitist ideals. Gary Westfahl highlights a commentary from Swedish science fiction writer Sam J. Lundwall in which he states that Americans “had stolen” European science fiction literature, “transforming it and vulgarizing it and changing it beyond recognition” (Lundwall, 1977, p. 201, cited in Westfahl, 1999). Elitist criticism was not limited to coming from traditional literature but also from within the science fiction genre’s main figures, such as Frederick Orlin Tremaine, one of the editors of the magazine *Astounding Stories*, who commented that readers of science fiction were themselves an elite group, “members of that inner circle who see and understand a vision that is beyond the ken of the vast multitude” (“Looking Ahead,” 1936, p. 155, cited in Westfahl, 1999), going against the very premise of the pulps to be popular and the creator of *Astounding Stories*, Hugo Gernsback, who had often stated that the aim of his magazine was to serve a mass audience. This kind of divergence also resonates with the lack of recognition for Black and female writers in early twentieth-century science fiction.

Regardless of such divergences, “the pulp magazines of that era remained the genre’s most widely read, influential, and accessible publications” (Westfahl, 1999, p. 191). Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, magazines such as *Wonder Stories* (1929), *Amazing Stories* (1926), and *Astounding Science-Fiction* (1930), were symbols of the science fiction genre, with the last two still being published in 2025. Later, in 1983, Butler would also be part of science fiction magazine history when her short story “Speech Sounds” was first published⁵ in *Isaac Asimov’s Science Fiction Magazine* (also still being published in 2025) with an introduction to the short story by Asimov himself. He praises Butler’s writing and her ability to convey hope even in an “all-but-destroyed society”. However, looking beyond these white-dominated magazines, which became most popular in the U.S., Black writers were already publishing science fiction in the magazines *Colored American Magazine* (1900) and *The Crisis* (1910), the first being mostly edited by a woman, Pauline Elizabeth Hopkins, and the last by W. E. B. Du Bois (Shephard, 2019, p. 108).

While the Pulp era is recognized as the period that flourished science fiction stories and contributed to the establishment and popularity of the genre, it mostly favored the publication of white male authors. Despite having women and Black authors contributing to the growth of science fiction during Pulps, their recognition only happens much later with the New Wave. As highlighted by Jane Donawerth, “some well-known women SF writers – Anne McCaffrey,

⁵ Butler had two other short stories that first appeared in science fiction magazines. “Bloodchild”, which was also published in *Isaac Asimov’s Science Fiction Magazine*, in 1984; and “The Evening and the Morning and the Night”, first published in 1987 in the *Omni Magazine*.

Judith Merrill, and Kate Wilhelm, for example – got their start in the magazines, but are best known for their later paperback novels and collections” (Donawerth, 2019, p. 233). Broadening the discussion to gender, Donawerth discusses how women, despite being a minority, managed to publish in the Pulp, but they never got the recognition of their peers, or were awarded with science fiction prizes (which continued until Anne McCaffrey won a Hugo Award, only in 1968). The recognition of Black authors is also an issue during this period. Mark Bould stresses that “African Americans have written SF since the late nineteenth century, but it is generally accepted that they did not contribute to SF’s specialty magazine and paperback tradition until Samuel R. Delany [in the 1960s]” (Bould, 2019, p. 396). The erasure of Black writers, however, according to Bould “is hardly accidental, as SF was shaped by, often embraced and sometimes championed racial and colonial ideologies” (Bould, 2019, p. 396). However, the concomitant growth of science fiction and African-American based narratives counts with the contributions of W. E. B. Du Bois *The Comet* (1920) and *Dark Princess* (1928), and the influential George Schuyler’s *Black No More* (1932), which imagines a future where a scientific process turns Black people white, disrupting the U.S. racial dynamics. The writings of Paul Laurence Dunbar and his wife, Alice Dunbar-Nelson, were also essential for the growth of works written by Black authors in the first decades of the twentieth century (Shephard, 2019).

The Pulp magazines and the development of science fiction in cinema and other media helped to establish science fiction as a popular genre in the 1930s. The 1938 radio adaptation of H.G. Wells’s *War of the Worlds*, narrated by Orson Welles in the U.S., marks the movement of the science fiction genre into its second wave, the Golden Age. This adaptation of Wells’s 1898 novel is a comical fact in science fiction history, since its transmission provoked mass panic because the audience thought that the description of the alien attacks was a report of a real alien invasion. Roberts argues that this radio transmission is “symptomatic of the degree to which SF was achieving a societal penetration, the extent to which many people at least in the USA were starting to believe that the topoi of SF were real rather than fantastical” (Roberts, 2016, p. 283). The transformation brought by other media, especially cinema, television, and radio, demonstrates how genres, history, and economy are intertwined (Neale, 2021). Regarding North American science fiction, it also meant how the fears and concerns of the United States as a nation were being translated into historical moments of the genre as well as its aspirations. This capacity to blur the line between reality and fiction is precisely where science fiction can intersect with the horror genre and the idea of fear, be it individual or collective. By drawing upon the framework of invasion and conflict, science fiction thus solidified its role not as a genre that serves as a cultural mirror reflecting the fears in the face

of global instability and war. This is evident in *Parables*, where the depiction of society is also a mirroring of social horrors, a narrative that exposes the fears of war with the terror of U.S. collapse. In *Parables*' U.S., the struggle for survival amidst internal wars, oppression, and religious extremism becomes the norm.

The 1940s were a decade of double importance, where Octavia Estelle Butler was born in 1947, and a decade of expansion of science fiction literary recognition, which was later acknowledged as The Golden Age (1940 - 1960) period. The Golden Age is commonly known for the works of John W. Campbell, Jack Vance, Robert A. Heinlein, A. E. van Vogt, and Isaac Asimov. Some of them are acknowledged inspirations to Octavia Butler (Roberts, 2016). It was also during this period that Ralph Ellison published *Invisible Man* (1952), regarded as one of the fundamental novels of Afrofuturism, and William Melvin Kelley published the award winner *A Different Drummer* (1962) (Shephard, 2019, p. 113). However, as explored by Roberts, the Golden Age was a controversial period in science fiction because it favored one particular writing style, what would later be called 'hard science fiction'. The establishment of a division within science fiction, namely the 'hard' and the 'soft', is in accordance with Bould's earlier observation on the traditional science fiction racial and colonial roots, as it highlights the difficulty of science fiction in embracing narratives motivated by social discussions, such as those of race, gender, and sexuality.

This division can be readily discerned in the frequently made comparison between the second and the third wave of science fiction in the US, the Golden Age (1940 - 1960) and the New Wave (1960 - 1970), during which Butler would begin publishing her novels:

Thus, if the Golden Age was dominated by "hard" science fiction (in which the emphasis is on particular technologies and on scientific accuracy), the New Wave signaled a turn toward "soft" science fiction, which is more character driven and more concerned with the social and political ramifications of technological developments than with the technologies themselves. (Booker and Thomas, 2009, p. 11)

While the works praised by the Golden Age were regarded as being rooted in the sciences, the New Wave and its social concerns caused a disturbance in the science fiction scenario regarding its own internal prejudices. Gary Westfahl discusses how this division is not well-founded due to its dual thinking and to the impossibility of classifying all science fiction as either 'hard' or 'soft'; he ultimately condemns using these adjectives as criticism or praise (Westfahl, 2008). Similarly, Veronica Hollinger emphasizes how "science fiction purists" have regarded only 'hard' science fiction as the real science fiction, diminishing the science fiction "openly committed as each is to a particular politics", such as the works written by Black writers, feminists, lesbians, and gays (Hollinger, 2008, p. 245).

Octavia Butler herself has criticized the distinction between hard and soft science fiction when she commented on the fact that her novel *Kindred* (1979) was criticized by some science fiction book reviewers who implied that the novel was a “lower genre” of science fiction because the time travel was not scientifically explained (McCaffery, 1990). To what she ironically criticized the hard science fiction defenders: “what’s usually important to the hard SF people is the logic of what they’re dealing with; as a result, some of them fail to develop their characters – I call this the ‘wonderful machine school of storytelling’ approach” (McCaffery, 1990, p. 66). In another situation, Butler wittily addressed these authors as “old-time science fiction writers,” “who were more concerned with the wonderful machine than with the people who were supposed to be having something to do with the machine” (Rowell and Butler, 1997, p. 69).

Shaken by the diversity embraced by science fiction’s possibilities, the Golden Age gave space to the so-called New Wave of science fiction during the 1960s and 1970s, characterized as a period in which experimentation was immensely encouraged. The New Wave is marked by the distancing from the magazines and the traditional ‘hard’ science fiction narrative structure, and, due to its character of experimentation, this period encouraged fiction concerned with psychological and social themes. Some acclaimed names of the New Wave were Ursula K. Le Guin, J. G. Ballard, Samuel R. Delany, and Octavia Butler. It is valuable to emphasize the significance of Samuel R. Delany, whose authorship and stories centered on Black characters and race issues are frequently lauded alongside Butler’s legacy for their major contribution to shaping Black science fiction and later, being held as examples and inspirations of Afrofuturism in contemporary literature. In most interviews, when Butler is asked about being a Black writer and her influences, she often mentions Delany as being the only Black author she would have known for a great part of her life (McCaffery, 1990; Kenan and Butler, 1991; Rowell and Butler, 1997). Delany was also notable for being her teacher in a science fiction writers’ workshop at Clarion⁶ (Rowell and Butler, 1997).

While Butler had commented only briefly about Delany’s legacy as a source of inspiration as a Black author in her early career and later their shared acknowledged influence on science fiction, Delany has been more open about discussing race issues in the science fiction context. In the essay “Racism and Science Fiction”, Delany condemns the “unintentional” segregation of Black writers at literary events and conventions. He mentions that, besides his satisfaction and privilege of being placed side by side with Octavia Butler and other writers

⁶ Clarion Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers’ Workshop, at the University of California San Diego.

such as Nalo Hopkinson on many literary occasions, he noticed those groupings as a generalization of Black writers and of African-American science fiction. Delany points to their diverse characteristics: “Butler and I are very different writers, interested in very different things,” and he goes on to argue that the fact that they were frequently placed together, or with other Black authors, was part of a racist and oftentimes also sexist system (Delany, 2000, p. 410). He ultimately criticized how most science fiction events would just place Black writers in the same room instead of promoting a panel on race issues and science fiction. This placement of Black authors together, therefore, carries a complex, layered meaning that Delany rightly identified as a form of institutional racism: it uses their presence as a performative sign of diversity and promotes an erasure of their characteristics as writers by uniting their different aesthetics into a monolithic “Black science fiction.” Moreover, it also enables more marginalization by placing any discussions about race at the periphery and results in the invisibility of intersectionality by flattening the distinct experiences of a Black woman, like Butler, and a Black gay man, like Delany. The purposeful separation of Black authors, then, made practically impossible a genuine, critical engagement of race issues with science fiction, something that the genre so urgently needed.

Coincident with the experimentation aspect and fiction concerned with social issues, it is in the New Wave that a significant number of works that later would be regarded as Afrofuturistic appear, not only in literature but as the socially concerned artistic and aesthetic movement that Dery was committed to defining in 1993. Afrofuturistic music is marked by Sun Ra and Jimi Hendrix productions, which “developed a range of science-fictional conceits” (Bould, 2019, p. 400). The comics were also a medium in which Black characters were consolidated, such as Marvel’s Black Panther (1966), Falcon (1969), Luke Cage (1972), and Blade (1973), among others. And DC’s John Stewart/Green Lantern (1971), Bumblebee (1976), and Black Lightning (1977) (Bould, 2019), all of those of which would be represented in cinema in contemporaneity. Besides the prominence of Delany’s novels, the works of John M. Faucette’s *Crown of Infinity* (1968) and *The Age of Ruin* (1968), as well as Charles R. Saunders’s *The City of Madness* (1974) and its sequels, and Steven Barnes’s first novel, *Moonglow* (1974), were highlights of the New Wave and of the simultaneous development of Afrofuturism. Despite the presence of Black writers and their acknowledged success, and the New Wave’s experimentation and fostering of diverse themes within science fiction works, Bould claims that it is observable how the New Wave in general avoided thinking about race. He argues that “white-authored works struggled to imagine people of color in their color-blind futures” (Bould, 2019, p. 398), which converges with Delany’s commentary about the treatment

of Black writers in this period. While Bould disclaims a failure of imagination from white authors, this critical assessment underscores that Afrofuturism's project is not simply about creating futures, but also about righting the exclusions of the past and fostering imaginative spaces in the present.

The often-made comparison between the Golden Age and the New Wave, and the uses of 'hard' and 'soft' science fiction, resulted in genre discussion throughout the New Wave period. Writers such as Judith Merril started using the term speculative fiction, arguing that speculative fiction opens space for a more thorough understanding of science fiction's reach, as opposed to the history of limiting ideas perpetuated by those who needed to separate scientifically based works from socially guided ones. The first use of the term "speculative fiction" is commonly credited to writer Robert Heinlein, who, in 1947, used it to define his fiction in an essay entitled *On the Writing of Speculative Fiction*. In the years between 1959 and 1969, Merril discussed this definition in the anthologies *Year's Best SF* edited by her, and also in her column in *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*. In essence, she believed that, in contrast to the limiting science fiction scenario, speculative fiction better captured the breadth and depth of the genre's possibilities by embracing works that explored not only scientific and technological advancements but also the social, cultural, and philosophical implications of those advancements.

The discussion between the waves and 'hard' and 'soft' science fiction then, with time, established the term 'speculative fiction' to become a broader genre that embraces science fiction and other subgenres. Marek Oziwicz defines speculative fiction as "an umbrella term encompassing the more fantastical fiction genres, specifically science fiction, fantasy, horror, and supernatural fiction" (Oziwicz, "Speculative Fiction", 2017). According to John Clute and Peter Nicholls (1993), "the term [speculative fiction] has been useful precisely because it allows the blurring of boundaries, which in turn permits a greater authorial freedom from genre constraints and rules" (Clute and Nicholls, 1993, p. 1145). This definition complies with Oziwicz's exploration of the term as an umbrella for various kinds of fiction, including that of dystopia, under which some of Butler's fiction are also categorized⁷.

⁷ Regarding the literary genres' nomenclature and its somewhat messy history, it is important to note that here the terms "speculative fiction" and "science fiction" will sometimes be used interchangeably. Primarily, I rely on recent discussions that either work with genres and subgenres mobility and intersections or establish speculative fiction as an umbrella term under which subgenres such as science fiction are located (e.g., Booker, 2013; Oziwicz, 2017; Canavan and Link, 2019). Secondly, and of utmost importance, the preference for mostly using science fiction, the term Octavia E. Butler herself used when referring to her fiction and to her publication history.

When questioned about her preference for referring to her work as speculative fiction instead of science fiction or fantasy, Butler's response demonstrates her comprehension of the publishing challenges and her acknowledgment of the limitations of genres' strict definitions:

No, actually I don't. Most of what I do is science fiction. Some of the things I do are fantasy. I don't like the labels, they're marketing tools, and I certainly don't worry about them when I'm writing. They are also inhibiting factors; you wind up not getting read by certain people, or not getting sold to certain people because they think they know what you write. You say science fiction and everybody thinks Star Wars or Star Trek. (Kenan and Butler, 1991, p. 495)

Butler demonstrates a great understanding of the publishing sphere and of the relevance of the existence of the genre "within the context of a set of economic relations and practices", as explored by Neale's genre studies (Neale, 2021, p. 71).

In another interview, addressing the creative process of writing *Parable of the Talents*, Butler acknowledges the speculative tone of the narrative by labeling the book as "an if-this-goes-on story," however, stressing that it was not a prophecy. Butler comments that *Parables* "was a cautionary tale, although people have told me it was prophecy. All I have to say to that is 'I certainly hope not'" (Butler, 1998, n.p.). A contemporary of Butler, fantasy writer Ursula K. Le Guin also posed against this understanding of science fiction as prophetic narratives, saying that "science fiction is not predictive; it is descriptive" (Le Guin, 2003, p. 2). In a preface to her 1969 Hugo Award-winning book, Le Guin then establishes her definition of science fiction as metaphor:

All fiction is metaphor. Science fiction is metaphor. What sets it apart from older forms of fiction seems to be its use of new metaphors, drawn from certain great dominants of our contemporary life—science, all the sciences, and technology, and the relativistic and the historical outlook, among them. Space travel is one of these metaphors; so is an alternative society, an alternative biology; the future is another. The future, in fiction, is a metaphor. (Le Guin, 2003, p. 5)

The "future as metaphor" idea also emphasizes the power of storytelling to offer alternative visions of the future and of the past, thus inspiring critical reflection and social change to reshape the present.

Still discussing science fiction, in the essay *The Carrier Bag of Fiction*, Le Guin explores how stories were always told from the hero's perspective, and thus, stories were full of adventures, hunts, swords, and brave and dangerous deeds, and how there is no space for others in the hero's story. The name of the essay alludes to the unheroic people who gathered seeds and fruits and always stayed in the background of the hero's story or appeared only in relation to his story. Le Guin explores this idea of a bag, a container of the most compelling and human stories. Stories about people, not about heroes. Talking about her writing, she mentions that she brings her bag packed with various things of great or of no importance, a bag "full of

beginnings without ends, of initiations, of losses, of transformations and translations” (Le Guin, 1988, p. 8). She comments on avoiding the heroic undertaking of science fiction narratives, arguing:

If, however, one avoids the linear, progressive, Time's-(killing)-arrow mode of the Techno-Heroic, and redefines technology and science as primarily cultural carrier bag rather than weapon of domination, one pleasant side effect is that science fiction can be seen as a far less rigid, narrow field, not necessarily Promethean or apocalyptic at all, and in fact less a mythological genre than a realistic one. It is a strange realism, but it is a strange reality. (Le Guin, 1988, p. 8)

She completes by arguing that,

Science fiction properly conceived, like all serious fiction, however funny, is a way of trying to describe what is in fact going on, what people actually do and feel, how people relate to everything else in this vast sack, this belly of the universe, this womb of things to be and tomb of things that were, this unending story (Le Guin, 1988, p.8).

The reading of the future as a metaphor, provided by Le Guin, implies that the future in science fiction is not attempting to predict what will happen; instead, the future is constructed as a metaphorical and symbolic space to explore and comment on the present. Le Guin invites us to recognize these imaginative narratives as powerful tools for understanding and reshaping our present reality. This concept finds a compelling connection with Afrofuturism’s emphasis on challenging and deconstructing historical narratives while envisioning more inclusive, diverse, equitable, and livable futures.

Le Guin finishes her essay by stating that “still there are seeds to be gathered, and room in the bag of stars” (Le Guin, 1988, p. 9), a choice of words and phrasing that beautifully connects with *Earthseed*. Which leads me to conclude this section by stressing the relevance of science fiction as being such an important artifice of analyzing both present and past through metaphorical futures, presents, and pasts. Octavia Butler’s narratives rely on creating worlds of science fiction that corroborate with such metaphorical exploration of reality, more specifically, the African-American themes explored through the critical lens of Afrofuturism.

2.1 OCTAVIA BUTLER’S NOT SO SOFT SCIENCE FICTION: AFROFUTURISTIC FABULATION FOR POSSIBLE FUTURES

Butler’s works represent strength and solid sources of African-American fabulation science fiction. Contributing to the gradual improvement of science fiction as a genre more open for social discussions, encompassing questions of race and gender, Butler has been regarded as one of the most influential Black female writers in the second half of the twentieth century. Her works starring by Black females indirectly contributed to Afrofuturism and its

growth from an initially African-American art form to a global language that enables people to talk about the relations of science, technology, and race across centuries, continents, and cultures (Yaszek, 2015). A language with a capacity to “provide the imaginative grounds for change” (Lavender, 2009, p. 192) and, as defined by Yaszek, “is not just about reclaiming the history of the past, but about reclaiming the history of the future as well” (Yaszek, 2006, p. 47).

Octavia Butler achieved her first novel publication in the last years of the New Wave. However, she was certainly part of this period known for its encouragement of experimentation, since she began writing short stories much before the publication of her first book, which makes her both New Wave and “the most prominent African-American woman in the history of the field [science fiction] and the post-New Wave” (Harris-Fain, 2015, p. 41). Butler’s first publication was *Patternmaster* (1976), the first book of the *Patternist series*, followed by *Mind of My Mind* (1977), *Survivor* (1978), *Wild Seed* (1980), and *Clay’s Ark* (1984). The stand-alone novel *Kindred* (1979) was written and published in between the series. In the 1980s, Butler published *Dawn* (1987), *Adulthood Rites* (1988), and *Imago* (1989), composing the *Lilith’s Brood* series, formerly known as the *Xenogenesis* trilogy. In the 1990s, the short story collection *Bloodchild and Other Stories* (1996) was first published⁸, as well as *Parable of the Sower* (1993) and *Parable of the Talents* (1998), composing the *Parables* or Earthseed series. The vampire story *Fledgling* (2005b) was Butler’s last publication while alive, followed by the posthumous publication of the short story collection *Unexpected Stories* (2014), which includes “Childfinder,” the first story Butler sold as a professional writer, in 1970, to be part of an unreleased anthology (Bradford, 2014). Butler’s four-decade presence in the science fiction scenario inspired Black writers, and especially Black female writers, as well as strengthened and forwarded science fiction’s concern with exploring issues of race, gender, and sexuality. Her works became valuable symbols of Afrofuturist fiction, where race can be reconstructed “within a range of powerfully imagined worlds and communities” (Wheeler, 2013, p. 229).

Adam Roberts highlights four significant changes in science fiction from the seventies until contemporary times: the historical changes and how science fiction left its Western tradition and began being explored by different cultures; the changes regarding gender discussion; the changes brought by the influence of Critical Race Theory; and the changes caused by studies on sexuality (Roberts, 2013). Roberts also comments on a contradictory fact that was observed in the 1980s and 1990s in the advancement of science fiction as a genre. These decades were both marked by the steadily growing number of novels in the genre and

⁸ There are two editions of *Bloodchild and Other Stories*: the first, published in 1996, and the second, published in 2005 with the addition of two more short stories. The edition often cited in this work is the second.

were also regarded as the period in which the novel “stopped being the prime mode of SF” (Roberts, 2016, p. 421), opening space for science fiction’s presence in the varied media of the turn of the millennium. At the same time that science fiction novels continued to increase, the genre also lost its identity as primarily a literary form because of its cultural expansion in the visual media. Cinema, technology, and special effects became the perfect scenario to develop science fiction concepts. In this manner, some of the most influential science fiction stories of that era, such as *Star Wars*, and famous adaptations like *Blade Runner* (adaptation of Philip K. Dick’s *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968)) were no longer being told on the printed page, but on the screen. This can also be observed in the genre’s revival in 21st-century cinema and streaming platforms. A fact that was responsible for taking Octavia Butler’s *Kindred* to the screens in the 2022 TV adaptation by FX Productions.

Butler’s fiction and her Afrofuturist themes inspired a generation of Black writers, especially women, such as Nalo Hopkinson, Tananarive Due, Nisi Shawl, Colson Whitehead, Nnedi Okorafor, and N. K. Jemisin (Lavender, 2019). According to Lavender, the diverse origins of these authors require the rethinking of Afrofuturism as a “globe-spanning tapestry of creative voices and aesthetic practices linking historic African-American, contemporary black Atlantic, and pan-African authors together in provocative new ways”, which demonstrates how Afrofuturism’s power “purposefully subverts the prevailing power narratives of white SF” (Lavender, 2019, p. 569). In “Venus in Two Acts”, while discussing the act of writing the untold and the unknown, Saidiya Hartman approaches historical archives and develops a writing method with the aim “to represent the lives of the nameless and the forgotten, to reckon with loss, and to respect the limits of what cannot be known” (Hartman, 2008, p. 4). Through what she addresses as critical fabulation, a writing method she indicates as an act of reimagining the lives and experiences of the often-ignored historical figures: “The method guiding this writing practice is best described as critical fabulation. ‘Fabula’ denotes the basic elements of story, the building blocks of the narrative” (Hartman, 2008, p. 11). From this method, she delves into another mode of writing about the gaps in history and how to tell these “impossible stories”. For Hartman, this writing acts as a counter-history written with the aid of critical fabulation, as she gives Butler’s *Kindred* as an example of this critical fabulation. She argues that such a form of writing is constructed “by playing with and rearranging the basic elements of the story, by re-presenting the sequence of events in divergent stories and from contested points of view [...], to displace the received or authorized account, and to imagine what might have happened or might have been said or might have been done” (Hartman, 2008, p. 11). Thus, it is a written counter-history that is “a history of an unrecoverable past; it is a narrative of what might have

been or could have been; it is a history written with and against the archive.” (Hartman, 2008, p. 12).

Regarding the development of Afrofuturism in literature, Yaszek explores how the growing number of Afrofuturistic works as well as the increasing numbers of anthologies published about it indicate “how literary Afrofuturism has developed across both time and space — and both within and without the science fiction tradition” (Yaszek, 2006, p. 43). She continues by arguing that regardless of Afrofuturism existence beyond the genre, one of the main forms of projecting Black futures in literature is “by adopting the tropes and narrative techniques of science fiction or by writing from an Afrodiasporic perspective from within the science fiction community” (Yaszek, 2006, p. 43). In Delany’s words,

science fiction is a tool to help you think; and like anything that really helps you think, by definition it doesn’t do the thinking for you. It’s a tool to help you think about the present — a present that is always changing, a present in which change itself assures there is always a range of options for actions, actions presupposing different commitments, different beliefs, different efforts (of different qualities, different quantities), different conflicts, different processes, different joys. It doesn’t tell you what’s going to happen tomorrow. It presents alternative possible images of futures, and presents them in a way that allows you to question them as you read along in an interesting, moving, and exciting story (Delany, 1984, p. 34).

For Yaszek, the Afrofuturistic power of these Black writers’ narratives lies in how “they [Butler and Hopkinson] actively draw upon Afrodiasporic history and culture to tell complex and sometimes contradictory stories about how and why race relations might continue to matter in the future. In doing so, they also contribute to the ongoing development of science fiction itself” (Yaszek, 2006, p. 55). Instead of trying to fit Afrofuturism within science fiction, Yaszek emphasizes the relevance of recovering its own history, as well as the relevance of relying on Afrodiasporic future story-telling traditions in order to “learn more about how Afrofuturism transforms science fiction and other modes of technologically engaged literature today” (Yaszek, 2006, p. 58)

An important contributor to the studies of Afrofuturism in Brazil is Kênia Freitas. Freitas states that “Afrofuturism follows a living and changing concept” (Freitas, 2017, p. 126, my translation). Freitas has been working with Afrofuturism in the context of Brazilian Black cinema; however, her considerations about literature, often mentioning Octavia Butler, are invaluable to this study. In an introduction to *Afrofuturismo: Cinema e Música em uma Diáspora Intergaláctica* (2015), Freitas mentions the “double trauma” that permeates Black narratives: the trauma of slavery in the past and of persecution in the present, traumas that are both individual and collective. She argues that Afrofuturism in the form of new narratives is

the “empowerment over trauma. Multiplicity over fragment. The fantastic about erasure. No longer just the real, but the hyper, the super, the beyond⁹” (Freitas, 2015, p. 6, *my translation*).

Freitas departs from Tavia Nyong'o's notion of afro-fabulation and Saidiya Hartman's concept of critical fabulation (Barros and Freitas, 2018; Freitas, 2020) in order to bring a contextualized discussion of fabulation as narrative strategies into Brazilian cinema and art performances, locating Brazil in the contemporary discussion of Afrofuturism. Her work focuses on understanding Afrofuturistic productions in relation to temporalities, as well as exploring these fictions' power of fabulation/*fabulação*. Freitas complements Dery's questioning of the lack of Black authors in science fiction by asking, “how (and if) the dystopian speculative fictions of the present can envision the existence of Black futures beyond the end of the world?”¹⁰ (Freitas and Messias, 2018, p. 407, *my translation*). Freitas discusses the relevance of fabulation, arguing that these “fiction of imagined possibilities, of speculation” open space for fabulation and reimagination not only of the future, but also of the past and the present. Regarding this non-linear temporality, Freitas suggests approaching Afrofuturistic narratives as a “short circuit, a mixture, a temporal re-orientation of past, present and future”, arguing that “it is precisely from the fabulation, recreation, reinvention of a deliberately erased past that the speculative narratives of Black futures and presents happen”¹¹ (“Afrofuturismo: Um curto circuito temporal”, *my translation*).

Freitas and Laan Mendes de Barros, in discussing the function of fabulation, argue that it is “more than just an identity or thematic shift” that should promote the rethinking of “the concept of fabulation from a Black epistemological perspective (in creation and reflection on it) allows us to glimpse the founding elements of a field of creation of Black diasporic and decolonial aesthetics” (Barros e Freitas, 2018, p. 106). Freitas also discussed Black narratives that are based on “several possibilities of non-essentialized Black existences,” which focus “on the plenitude of non-univocal experiences” (Freitas, 2018, p. 168). Yaszek comments on the way Black futures are successfully conceived; she mentions Octavia Butler's and Nalo Hopkinson's works as contemporary examples of fiction that aim beyond simply representing Black people in their novels and giving them protagonism, producing what she calls “technicolor versions of traditional science fiction stories” (Yaszek, 2006, p. 55). Likewise,

⁹ In the original: “O empoderamento sobre o trauma. A multiplicidade sobre o fragmento. O fantástico sobre o apagamento. Não mais apenas o real, mas o hiper, o super, o além.”

¹⁰ In the original: “como (e se) as ficções especulativas distópicas do presente podem vislumbrar a existência de futuros negros para além do fim do mundo?”

¹¹ In the original: “É justamente a partir da fabulação, recriação, reinvenção de um passado deliberadamente apagado que as narrativas especulativas de futuros e presentes negros se constituem”.

when talking about the kind of images of Black people that need to be portrayed in order to overcome oppression, Freitas discusses the problems of stereotypes in representation and mentions that it is needed to “think [of images] of collectivity or profundity, a dimensionality of these Black characters and of these Black people in the future” instead of images that are placed to “almost fit a share of representation, that is picturesque”¹² (Freitas, 2019, *my translation*). What is aligned with Chimamanda Adichie’s famous talk in which she discusses the issues of stereotypes being that they are incomplete, “they make one story become the only story” (Adichie, 2009).

Similarly, Samuel Delany comments on the importance of which images will be created for a future and how they are a way out of an established narrative:

We need images of tomorrow; and our people need them more than most. Without an image of tomorrow, one is trapped by blind history, economics, and politics beyond our control. One is tied up in a web, in a net, with no way to struggle free. Only by having clear and vital images of the many alternatives, good and bad, of where one can go, will we have any control over the way we may actually get there in a reality tomorrow will bring all too quickly (Delany, 1984, p. 35).

What these authors explore is Afrofuturism as a literary movement that is not only related to the presence of Black people in the narratives’ protagonism and also to the presence of Black writers, but also that these stories should be rooted in African culture and history. As posed by Yaszek and other scholars, one of the aspects of this culture is the approach to Afrodiasporic narratives. Thus, the importance of looking at Afrodiasporic themes in these narratives is in line with Yaszek’s definition of Afrofuturism as “a popular aesthetic movement centered on seemingly fantastic tropes such as ‘the encounter with the alien other’ and ‘travel through time and space,’ Afrofuturism holds the potential to bring the Afrodiasporic experience to life in new ways” (Yaszek, 2006, p. 47). For this reason, exploring the Afrodiasporic experience in the past, present, and future narratives allows the perception of reading the science fictional diaspora in *Parables* as Butler’s creation of new possibilities of existence, while reclaiming histories, confronting presents, and envisioning possible and better tomorrows.

¹² In the original: “Você pensa numa coletividade ou de uma profundidade, uma dimensionalidade desses personagens negros e dessas pessoas negras no futuro [...] quase cumprindo uma cota de representação, assim, pitoresca”.

2.2 AFRODIASPORIC NARRATIVES AND OCTAVIA BUTLER'S AFROFUTURIST FABULATION

*To survive,
 Let the past
 Teach you—
 Past customs,
 Struggles,
 Leaders and thinkers.
 Let
 These
 Help you.
 Let them inspire you,
 Warn you,
 Give you strength.
 But beware:
 God is Change.
 Past is past.
 What was
 Cannot
 Come again.
 To survive,
 Know the past.
 Let it touch you.
 Then let
 The past Go.*

(Butler, 2019b, p. 373)

Parables is deeply rooted in historical narratives of displacement, and Lauren Olamina's journey is guided by the knowledge of those who came before her. Old road maps, her parents' stories from before the gated community, her father's books, and further in the narrative, from each individual experience shared in the Earthseed gatherings. In a matter of referencing the past, the displacement in *Parables* is closely connected to the history of migrations within the United States. To explore Butler's diasporic science fiction, the struggles Olamina faces from the escape of her gated community to the struggles through the roads and temporary places she encounters before and after Acorn, it is interesting to map out this very complex history of migration of African-American populations, be it forced migrations or not. The movement of Black people, especially the women, is relevant to interpreting Butler's detailed narrative of Olamina and of Earthseed overcoming barriers that keep repeating themselves in history, as argued by Marlene D. Allen when commenting about the boomeranging of African history (Allen, 2009). Thus, to discuss the displacements in *Parables* and Lauren Olamina's experience with the diasporic experience in the collapsing U.S. scenario, it is imperative to explore the history of migrations of the African-American populations within the United States due to the segregation established by the slave period. Issues that appear in *Parables* as a repetition of history, but that are not perpetuated, instead, are reworked so possible and alternative futures

happen beyond the boomeranging of African history, as Allen presents the concept of ‘boomeranging’ as referring to an event that repeats itself throughout history. Thus, by this repetition, such events perpetuate the same historical problems. Allen argues that what Butler does with *Parables* and the Earthseed foundation is a form of breaking with this boomeranging of history. Olamina’s journey and the Destiny can be read as an attempt to learn from the past and to construct a different and better future. According to Allen, throughout Olamina’s life, she sees many boomeranging of human history, especially regarding the different types of slavery described in the novels. Allen argues that *Parables* establishes the problematic events but, at the same time, offers alternatives for characters and readers to be taught by them. It is precisely this process of learning from and re-imagining history that requires approaching *Parables* through the lens of Afrofuturism.

Afrofuturism, as asserted by scholars like Lavender and Yaszek, provides new perspectives on the Afrodiasporic experience and points to the necessity of bringing the Black Diaspora into the analysis of *Parables*. Therefore, reading Lauren Olamina’s eighty-year journey through this lens places the duology within Afrofuturist discourse, where African American cultural and historical themes are mobilized not merely as background but as speculative strategies for actively fabulate alternative trajectories of history and envisioning possible futures. While Lavender and Yaszek, within a science fiction studies context, assert the importance of reading the Afrodiasporic experiences in new ways, I rely on authors such as Stuart Hall, Paul Gilroy, and Edouard Glissant to approach the Black Diaspora’s consequences in different places and temporalities.

Stuart Hall contributes to diaspora studies by discussing the complex nature of cultural identity and the experiences of diasporic communities. According to him, “in the diaspora situation, identities become multiple” (Hall, 2019, p. 207). Hall conceptualizes diaspora beyond the notion of a detached population in an imperial and hegemonic “form of ‘ethnicity’”, instead a diaspora experience “defined, not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of ‘identity’ which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by hybridity. Diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference” (Hall, 1990, p. 23). Hall stresses the way reading diaspora is constantly interpreting Africa and what Africa can mean after diaspora, but most importantly the way ““Africa” provides resources for survival today, alternative histories to those imposed by colonial rule, and the raw materials for reworking in new and distinctive cultural patterns and forms. In this perspective, “survivals” in their original form are massively outweighed” (Hall, 2019, p. 228).

For Hall,

The dosed conception of diaspora rests on a binary conception of difference. It is founded on the construction of an exclusionary frontier and depends on the construction of an “Other” and a fixed opposition between inside and outside. (Hall, 2019, p. 212)

The mentioned construction of otherness and exclusion can be spotted in Olamina’s constant persecution and hostility in the face of the fundamentalist government, which poses a threat to her and her community’s welfare due to their differences. The establishment of ‘insides’ and ‘outsides’ spaces is also a common ground for Earthseed people and the whole West Coast population, as shown in the fleeting movement north. The opposition created with these spaces will be further explored in the following chapters. This will serve as guidance to understand Olamina’s dual position in the world regarding both her relation to the inside and outside of her communities, but also to read her hyperempathy syndrome.

Paul Gilroy’s *The Black Atlantic* (1993), considered an influential work on the studies of the slave trade and part of theoretical innovations related to post-colonial theories and their critique of Western enlightenment. In this study of the historical process of diaspora, Gilroy develops further W. E. B. Du Bois concept of double-consciousness, arguing that the diasporic experience or diasporic consciousness emerges as a form of rootless cosmopolitanism, which is developed into the state of not belonging. Gilroy speaks of a worldly identity, one that is endless and rootless, born from the experiences of diasporic Black people across the Atlantic. This between-spaces is where diasporic experiences are constructed, which results in a transnational and fragmented identity born out of the lack of belonging. In sum, the Black Atlantic, as a concept, speaks of the movement of the Black people around the world and the unifying experience of displacement while building a notion of belonging from not-belonging, a belonging that is related to places as well as to the movement of displacement itself. In this sense, my approach to Gilroy’s not-belonging does not contradict bell hooks’ formulation of belonging, cited earlier on this dissertation; rather, it names the structural estrangement that conditions diasporic life and against which “beloved community” must be built (hooks, 2008, pp. 163–164). Especially in *Parables*, belonging and not-belonging thus appear as intertwined dynamics: displacement produces fractured identities, yet it also enables new forms of affiliation and collective meaning forged within diasporic between-spaces.

Another contribution to the diaspora studies is Edouard Glissant, in *Poetics of Relation* (1997), sheds light on cultural plurality and diversity in his critique of fixed identities, which culminates in the book’s main concept of relational identities. Glissant uses the concept of errantry, or the errant, to describe the conditions of forced diaspora. Anchored in Deleuze and

Guattari's rhizomatic thought, Glissant established the errantry as opposed to *roots*, given its symbology implying a unitary origin, criticizing the universal and monolingual on the self and the world. Errantry, in the light of the rhizome, has a "desire to go against *the* root," (Glissant, 1997, p. 15) and represents simultaneous movement in various directions. Being this non-monolithic formation of identity, errantry is produced in relation to the Others. For Glissant,

one who is errant (who is no longer traveler, discoverer, or conqueror) strives to know the totality of the world yet already knows he will never accomplish this— and knows that is precisely where the threatened beauty of the world resides (Glissant, 1997, p. 20).

As much as Gilroy, Glissant's concept of errantry embraces movement, while "root is monolingual," "errantry is a vocation only told via detour," a "desire to go against the root". (Glissant, 1997, p. 15). Against an absolute root and its notion of fixity, errantry is found in fluidity and in the openness to the unknown, which is the basis of Glissant's relationality and its focus on the interconnectedness of cultures and peoples. Glissant's concepts connect precisely with Olamina's confrontation of the roads and the meaning the walking towards the North has on the growth of Earthseed. She becomes the one who is errant and learns to grow in between the detours and movements that she is needed to take.

Another concept to enrich the displacement discussion and to foster an Afrodiasporic approach in narratives is that of using the alien abduction in comparison with the slave trade abduction. This connection was first made by Mark Dery in *Black to the Future*, the same text where he coined the word Afrofuturism. Dery argues that African-Americans are the "descendants of alien abductees; they inhabit a sci-fi nightmare in which unseen but no less impassable force fields of intolerance frustrate their movements; official histories undo what has been done; and technology is too often brought to bear on black bodies" (Dery, 2008, p. 180). Similarly, Lavender argues that Afrofuturism goes "beyond authorial intent in re-appropriating science-fictional tools like alien abductions or pocket universes to offer cultural critique and liberation" (Lavender, 2016, p. 191). He exemplified such uses of the alien abduction metaphor in writing about the life of writer Solomon Northup:

Whereas most alien abduction tales are questionable hearsay at best, featuring little gray men or some such concoction, Solomon Northup's account is beyond contestation: lured away by the false promise of work made by two white men, drugged, chained, beaten, whipped, tortured, shipped to New Orleans, renamed, repeatedly sold, and finally returned home, free but different, after an incredibly heartrending journey (Lavender, 2016, p. 195).

Departing from Dery's metaphor of alien abduction, Kodwo Eshun complements this reading of the Black experience in line with science fiction by commenting on slavery:

All the stories of alien abduction, all the stories about alien spaceships taking subjects from one planet and taking them to another, and genetically transforming them, Greg is really saying [...]

well, look, all those things that you read about alien abduction and genetic transformation: they already happened! How much more alien do you think it gets than slavery, than entire mass populations moved [...] and forcibly dematerialized? It doesn't really get much more alien than that (Kodwo Eshun in J. Akomfrah's *The Last Angel of History* (short film), at 24'20').

Eshun is emphatic of the absurdity represented by the enslavement of Black people and the blindness to the connection of alien stories and the past of the U.S. He goes on to assert this connection by saying that “slaves survived the science-fictional reality of early America” (Eshun, 1998 p. 00-06). Regarding the diaspora, Eshun argues that “Afrodiasporic subjects live the estrangement that science-fiction writers envision. Black existence and science fiction are one and the same” (Eshun, 2003, p. 298).

The connection between Afrofuturism and Afrodiasporic narratives is indissoluble, given the latter's being a source for the Black history and experience Afrofuturism is nourished with. Thus, knowing such history and approaching possibilities of reverencing while attempting to rewrite it is important so we do not let it become just another boomeranging of history, in Marlene D. Allen's concept. The acknowledgement of history is one of the main pieces of advice given through Earthseed. While Olamina's Destiny of taking root among the stars and populating other planets is pointed out by many as an impossible, science fictional, and even delusional idea, she is, through the verses, always indicating that hers and Earthseed's roots are well-grounded in hers and her people's ancestral history:

*To survive,
Know the past.
Let it touch you.
Then let
The past Go.*

Spanning across centuries from the 15th to the 19th, the Atlantic slave trade was sustained by the colonization and exploration of the Americas and, later, with the maintenance of the Americas' slavery systems. It was in the 17th century when the African Diaspora began to be related to the soon-to-be United States of America. The story of the slave trade and the subsequent migration of African Americans, from slavery to the present day, is a complex and varied one that reveals the difficulties, aspirations, and perseverance of Black Americans in the United States. Literary expressions of these periods appear both in North America, and in Central and Latin American Literature. Maryse Condé's *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem* (1986), which explores the Black women's presence in the historical witch trials of Salem in the late 17th century, is one example. Another example is *The Hanging of Angélique: The Untold Story of Canadian Slavery and the Burning of Old Montreal* (2006) by Afua Cooper, a book that

delves deep into the life of Marie-Joseph Angélique, an enslaved woman who lived in 18th-century Canada. *Homegoing* (2016) by Yaa Gyasi is another Black woman's literary expression that covers this period, starting in the late 18th century in Ghana and spanning over 200 years into the present-day United States.

In 1808, the newly established United States prohibited the importation of enslaved Africans. Nevertheless, slavery remained a strongly held institution within the country. Harriet Jacobs's autobiography, entitled *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861) describes Jacobs's life as a slave and her escape in the mid-19th century. The book exposes the brutal realities of the institution of slavery, particularly as experienced by enslaved women. The formal ending of slavery, however, did not prevent the African-American population from suffering from the remnants of slavery and of the division between North and South, stimulated by the Civil War. Ira Berlin argues,

But the destruction of slavery was neither easy nor direct. Rather than surrender to the slaves' new demands, slave holding planters and their allies answered threats with fresh constraints. As planters prepared to defend slavery on the field of battle, black people faced greater restrictions and still harsher punishments (Berlin, 2022, p. 326).

Despite the slave trade being officially prohibited by law, this inhuman system continued to occur in the period that followed until the abolition of slavery. Accounts of the slave trade in literature by Black women are well represented by the non-fiction *Barracoon: The Story of the Last Black Cargo* (2018) by Zora Neale Hurston. Based on interviews with the last living survivor of the transatlantic slave trade, *Barracoon* provides an invaluable first-person account of this experience and the lingering effects on the descendants of those who were enslaved. From the late 19th to 20th century, African-Americans navigated the era of Jim Crow legislation, which was marked by racial segregation and systemic discrimination within society. The racial segregation between the U.S. southern and northern states culminated in the 1861 American Civil War, mostly incited over the issues regarding slavery (Berlin 2010; 2022). During this period, networks of secret routes and safe houses were disguised all over the United States territory during the early to mid-19th century.

Known as the Underground Railroad, these routes were used by African-American slaves to escape into northern free states and Canada with the aid of abolitionists and allies (Foner, 2016). In *Gateway to Freedom: The Hidden History of the Underground Railroad*, Eric Foner discusses how these routes “should be understood not as a single entity but as an umbrella term for local groups that employed numerous methods to assist fugitives, some public and entirely legal, some flagrant violations of the law” (Foner, 2016, p. 25). The Pulitzer Prize

winner, *Underground Railroad* (2017), by Colson Whitehead, blends historical fiction with elements of magical realism to tell the story of these escape routes and refuge points in the U.S.

During the years of 1861 to 1865, the Civil War took place within the United States. The conflict was primarily motivated by the issue of slavery, and the war's configuration resulted in the division of the United States into Northern states, the Unionists, and Southern states, the Confederates. The Union, led by President Abraham Lincoln, aimed to safeguard the nation's unity and end slavery, whereas the Confederates fought for the South's independence and the perpetuation of slavery. The Emancipation Proclamation of 1862, followed by the thirteenth amendment of 1865, with the Union's victory, formally ended slavery in the United States. Nevertheless, the abolishment of the slavery system did not guarantee the cessation of inhumane segregation of the Black population (Berlin, 2010; 2022). The hideous system of Jim Crow laws persisted until the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s.

The African Diaspora also comprises the displacement of the Black population within the U.S. due to the country's complex history of slavery and segregation. After the abolishment of slavery in the United States in 1865, a significant number of African Americans relocated from the rural South to the urban North and West. This was in search of better economic prospects and to escape the arduous conditions of segregation and discrimination. This period, commonly referred to as the Great Migration, spanned from the early 20th century until the 1970s (Lemann, 1992). Although racism and economic inequality persist, African Americans face challenges in accessing education, housing, and employment. For Nicholas Lemann, this mass migration period is of utmost importance to the shaping of the U.S. demography, as well as its impact on the African-Americans' lives. Lemann posits that the Great Migration significantly influenced the advancement of the civil rights movement and brought to light the racial disparities and injustices that persist in American society. For Lemann,

The black migration was one of the largest and most rapid mass internal movements of people in history—perhaps the greatest not caused by the immediate threat of execution or starvation. In sheer numbers it outranks the migration of any other ethnic group—Italians or Irish or Jews or Poles—to this country. For blacks, the migration meant leaving what had always been their economic and social base in America and finding a new one (Lemann, 1992, p. 12).

In *The Making of African America: The Four Great Migrations* (2010), Ira Berlin divides this larger event into smaller parts and points to the existence of four Great Migrations of African-Americans that happened in the U.S. history. According to Berlin, the first great migration was the Middle Passage and the “forcible and violent” deportation from Africa, mostly during the 17th and 18th centuries. The second great migration (1910–1940) would be the displacement of enslaved African-Americans from the Atlantic seaboard to the southern

interior of the United States in the first half of the 19th century. The third great migration would be the displacement from the rural South to the urban North during the middle decades of the twentieth century (mid-1940s to 1970s). A fourth and most recent migration would involve the arrival of African Americans from various parts of the globe to the 21st-century United States. This new wave of immigrants and their descendants contribute to the diversity and complexity of the African-American community (Berlin, 2010). Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* (2013), which won the National Book Critics Circle Award, is an example of both narrative and author experience with this diverse immigrant movement mentioned by Berlin.

The presence of Black women in these histories of migrations is of utmost importance. Lisa K. Boehm, commenting specifically on the Great Migrations period, asserts that the migrations were movements predominated by women (Boehm, 2009, p. 4). In a more general commentary, Darlene C. Hine and Kathleen Thompson explore the presence of Black women in America, arguing that they were the crucial role in building a community, and "because of this emphasis on community and the skills learned in these organizations, black women became the foundation of the Civil Rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s" (Hine and Thompson, 1998, p. 13). They go on arguing that, within the conflicts of slavery and migrations, "the strength of black women, again and again, has been drawn from other black women. The development of a community is one of the most powerful of all survival skills, and it is a skill that black women have mastered" (Hine and Thompson, 1998, p. 107). Despite the distances and the duration of the journeys, Hine and Thompson comment, Black women's "cultural and emotional migration was a long process. And it was often one they undertook alone" (Hine and Thompson, 1998, p. 295).

For Octavia E. Butler, the migrations' influence was not just historical but sadly personal. According to Butler's biography by Ibi Zoboi (2022), Octavia Margaret Butler, Butler's mother, who was a great encourager in her life, had a close relation with slavery and the segregated scenario; she was one of the many Black women to migrate towards the North and its broader opportunities. Margaret was "[b]orn in 1914 on a Louisiana sugarcane plantation; she too was part of this mass migration, relocating with her family to Southern California, joining the exodus of hundreds of thousands seeking better opportunities and a reprieve from the oppressive Jim Crow South" (Zoboi, 2022, p. 11).

Regarding these escape scenarios, they also point to the tone of resistance in the artistic expressions of Black women, arguing that "they passed on from generation to generation values that made life possible and worth living. They turned survival into an art and a form of resistance to oppression" (Hine and Thompson, 1999, p. 98). Women's literary accounts of the

African Diaspora and migratory movements are plenty. From historical fictions to the science fiction of Octavia Butler and beyond with contemporary writers. Histories and stories that relate to the African Diaspora, or to the migrations, are examples of what Hine and Thompson comment on as the resistance present in the artistic expression of Black women. *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (2006) by Saidiya Hartman explores generations of displacement and consequences of the African diaspora and of slavery. According to Womack, Hartman explores the feeling of being “trapped in a racial paradox” (Womack, 2013, p. 34), and the presence of the alien abduction metaphor, discussed above, is also present in Hartman’s narrative, as when she writes about being forced “to acknowledge that I didn’t belong anyplace” (Hartman, 2006, p. 4). Hartman approaches what Hall called the construction of otherness when she tells how she felt being called *obruni*, stranger or foreigner, in her attempts to recover her history:

The domain of the stranger is always an elusive elsewhere. I was born in another country, where I also felt like an alien and which in part determined why I had come to Ghana. I had grown weary of being stateless. Secretly I wanted to belong somewhere or, at least, I wanted a convenient explanation of why I felt like a stranger. (Hartman, 2006, p. 4)

Beyond bringing the alien metaphor to explore her experience in Ghana, Hartman’s writing, concerning history and archives, is full of temporal and spatial displacement, as she aims at fulfilling her need to vindicate memories lost and forgotten. The struggle in fitting, described by Hartman, can be paralleled with Gilroy’s between-spaces of not-belonging:

Was it why I sometimes felt as weary of America as if I too had landed in what was now South Carolina in 1526 or in Jamestown in 1619? Was it the tug of all the lost mothers and orphaned children? Or was it that each generation felt anew the yoke of a damaged life and the distress of being a native stranger, an eternal alien? (Hartman, 2006, p. 130).

The power of rewriting untold stories and writing new possibilities is in tandem with what I have been discussing regarding the intertwined threads of science fiction and diasporic narratives. Lavender argues that “interpreting slave narratives through an Afrofuturist lens demonstrates how such science-fictional metaphors can operate as technologies of resistance” (Lavender, 2016, p. 200). Thus, the tools offered by Afrofuturism, fabulation, and science fiction creations are able to come up with new possibilities for Afrodiasporic narratives, stopping the perpetuation of the boomeranging of history, rewriting history and untold stories, and placing Black community’s resistance, such as Olamina’s, on the focus of what the future holds. A future that respects and acknowledges the Afrodiasporic movements and aims at keeping displacing the future towards Hall’s diasporic diversity, Gilroy’s not-belonging, and

Glissant's *errantry*, and even to the unknown, rather than reproducing colonial and imperialist configurations.

Science fiction, and certainly Octavia E. Butler's influence, had continued giving Black authors the means to explore Afrodiasporic narratives and to reimagine history. Displacement and migration continue to be themes very much explored in the imaginary of science fiction, and mostly within Afrofuturism. Among the science fiction successes of contemporary author Nnedi Okorafor, *Binti* (2015) explores the departure of her main character, a young Black woman, to study at a University on another planet, facing a literal alien environment. Hugo award winner *The Fifth Season* (2015) by N.K. Jemisin is another example of the current success of science fiction written by Black women. Nicky Drayden's Afrofuturistic *The Prey of Gods* (2017) South African robotic populated fantasy scenario exploring migrations, is another example of Black women's literature expression and Butler's legacy. *The Deep* (2019), winner of the Lambda Literary LGBTQ Science Fiction/Fantasy/Horror Award, is a book written by Rivers Solomon, with contributions from Daveed Diggs, William Hutson, and Jonathan Snipes. It explores the historical knowledge of the Middle Passage to construct the fantastical story of water-breathing descendants of African slave women who died in the ocean during the transatlantic trade. *The Water Dancer* (2019) by Ta-Nehisi Coates, well-known for his work of rewriting the 1966 hero Black Panther into contemporary times (Narcisse, 2016). The book mixes history with fiction to explore the story of a young enslaved man journeying north to escape slavery with the aid of the Underground Railroad system. Migration is also approached in dystopian scenarios, such as Derrick Bell's short story *The Space Traders* (1992). The story explores aliens' contact with the United States, offering the country valuable resources in exchange for their Black population. This provokes a migration and slavery debate, informed with the legal knowledge from Bell's career as a lawyer, legal scholar, and civil rights activist.

Afrofuturism and science fiction offer a diverse and engaging exploration of the migration experience from the perspective of Black authors, even though the stories vary in period of time, genres, and approach to the historical contexts. The consequences of the forced displacements caused by the slave trade, followed by the migrations across the U.S., and the movement North in search of escaping the terrible conditions of Southern slavery may serve as historical inspiration to Afrofuturism. Whether picturing a journey North or exploring the transatlantic passage, Afrofuturist stories that approach the theme of migration are plentiful and often integrate the themes of historical context with African ancestral knowledge. More contemporary examples of this are Nnedi Okorafor and Nisi Shawl's fiction and the short story

“Légendaire” (2013), by Kai Ashante Wilson (who was an Octavia Butler scholar at the Clarion writing workshop in San Diego in 2010), besides the interplanetary narratives of Nalo Hopkinson’s, especially *The Salt Roads* (2003). The book explores the captivity of an African water goddess by the Caribbean slave trade, while she uses her power to help other enslaved people escape.

As explored by Yaszek and Lavender, the works of Afrofuturism are deeply concerned with the historical and emotional tapestry of the African diaspora. Afrocentric narratives are frequently constructed to revisit themes such as the slave trade, the migrations and their consequences, and the unfathomable sense of displacement that numerous African descendants have experienced throughout history. These narratives are devoted to building a bridge between past traumas and future possibilities, through science and speculative fiction, and their power of fabulation. It is not surprising that Octavia E. Butler holds a significant role in this movement, given her pioneering works that intertwine history, science fiction, and hope.

In parallel with these histories of migration of the Black population within the United States, *Parables* challenges and reimagines another movement aiming at reaching the North, in a mirroring of the Great Migrations. Beyond the resemblances to the history of enslavement in the United States, the inquiry, “Why not go south? Or anywhere other than north?” emerges as a significant aspect in the interpretation of the narrative, revealing Butler’s potential intention to mirror history and reiterating the notion of “boomeranging” that Allen posits. The notion of the North as a secure and improved location is a more intricate aspect that indirectly reflects a Western (European and North American) conception of the world, whereby the Southern Hemisphere is omitted from any potential for improvement (which encompasses Central and Latin America as well as a portion of the African continent). Butler employs these historical facts to reimagine the disentangling from the “boomeranging of history,” offering a potential future that is not a repetition of history but a rewriting of a new world, built and improved upon the knowledge of the one before. Throughout *Parables*, the North loses its safety, and places lose their meaning, as the people who make these places dangerous are pointed out, and, further in the narrative, by removing the centrality of Olamina’s story from the U.S., as Earthseed is described as having spread to other countries, including Brazil.

2.3 WANDERING VAMPIRES, ANCIENT AFRICAN SHAPE-SHIFTERS, TIME TRAVEL, AND A DYSTOPIC JOURNEY THROUGH THE UNITED STATES: A PILGRIMAGE THROUGH BUTLER'S FICTION

The science fiction of Octavia Butler is committed to her *positive obsession* with imagining varied possibilities for living on Earth, or in other worlds, as much as she is truthful in exploring humans' reactions to unsettling situations. In her fourteen published works, Butler further expands the Afrofuturistic potential of science fiction, thereby establishing it as a genre that is destined for imagining futures and reimagining the past and present. Butler explores diverse scenarios, from *Parables'* Earth-centered dystopia to vampire stories in *Fledgling* and symbiotic relationships with extraterrestrials in more than one work. Despite the variety of themes and settings that permeate her works, she is constant in exploring issues of race and in maintaining her protagonists as Black female characters.

A constant that can be spotted throughout her work is the presence of displacement and migration within the narrative, which converges with Yaszek's claim that Afrofuturistic productions are rooted in an Afrodiasporic past and its narratives. From *Kindred's* temporal displacement of the time travel to Earthseed's goal of leaving Earth and the establishment of the Mars colony in *Xenogenesis*. Butler's characters are constantly in motion, whether on Earth or on other planets, in the present, future, or past. Migration, a common trope in traditional space-travel science fiction, acquires new meanings in Butler's socially concerned science fiction narratives, demonstrating how "Afrofuturism sees in sf's motifs of abduction, displacement, and alienation a fitting metaphor for black experience" (Lavender, 2009, p. 189).

When questioned about the significance of science fiction for African-Americans, Butler responded with a series of rhetorical inquiries that underscore the efficacy of science fiction in promoting the exploration of alternative and future possibilities:

What good is any form of literature to Black people? What good is science fiction's thinking about the present, the future, and the past? What good is its tendency to warn or to consider alternative ways of thinking and doing? What good is its examination of the possible effects of science and technology, or social organization and political direction? (Butler, 2005a, p. 110)

Butler's fiction is filled with explorations of diasporic narratives and marked by a commitment to searching for new possibilities and new places, as she has commented, in a hopeful tone, that "there is nothing new under the sun, but there are new suns" (Canavan, 2014).

The idea of survival coupled with the notion of the end of the world permeates *Parables* in different ways. The novels' scenario is, indeed, very indicative of a point of no return in a decaying world. Violence, disorder, and people in psychological distress due to the state of their

society. A world in which survival is the daily system. The end of the world can be approached from different perspectives. When Grace Passô, in *República/Republic*, a short film made during the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic, directed, scripted, and starring herself, states that “*O teu Brasil acabou e o meu nunca existiu!*”¹³ she was constructing a forthright critique, stating that the world they refer to never existed for the Black people, a population that was dehumanized and whose mass deaths were never accounted for or considered relevant. Passô’s line dialogues with Achille Mbembe, when he states that “for a large share of humanity, the end of the world has already occurred” (Mbembe, 2019, p. 29) due to what he calls “death worlds,” spaces with such low living conditions whose population can barely survive (Mbembe, 2019). The characters in *Parables* are consistently dehumanized throughout the narrative by the Christian American discourses and practices, with the aim of perpetuating and sustaining slavery systems. Maria Lugones, in her discourse on the coloniality of gender, explores the functioning of the hierarchical system and its role in the dehumanization of marginal populations through epistemic violence, homogenization, and erasure (Lugones, 2008; 2010). Dehumanization, as defined by Lugones, is “the process of active reduction of people, the dehumanization that fits them for the classification, the attempt to turn the colonized into less than human beings” (Lugones, 2011, p. 75). The scenario of a collapsed and disordered United States in Butler’s 2024 dialogues directly with Mbembe’s *death worlds*, Butler describes a country where the majority of the citizens are dehumanized and forced into a survival mode, attempting to survive in a death-world, an apocalypse that already happened.

In this manner, Olamina’s Earthseed foundation becomes not just a survival strategy but a resistance to the sentenced life, a resistance built through a community dedicated to restoring the full humanity and agency of those systematically denied it by the *death worlds*. In Butler’s duology, Olamina guides herself toward a different future with Earthseed, a future built over the foundations of Afrofuturism. Young Olamina, within her gated community walls, had already acknowledged the end of her world as she knew it — a decaying world compared to the one her parents before her had seen. But she insists on projecting her beliefs to another world, one in which her survival and of her peers is guaranteed, that is what she proposes in saying that “the destiny of Earthseed is to take root among the stars”. Olamina grows up witnessing a spatial run, and she discusses with her father her view on that possibility:

“Space could be our future,” I say. I believe that. As far as I’m concerned, space exploration and colonization are among the few things left over from the last century that can help us more than

¹³ “Your Brazil is over and mine never existed!”

they hurt us. It's hard to get anyone to see that, though, when there's so much suffering going on just outside our walls. (Butler, 2019a, p. 22).

The essence of Olamina's thought is to fabulate ways to survive in the ending of the world she is in but also to promote renewals that allow new worlds to begin and be sustained. As the future Earth, in which Earthseed is made of "the many Earthseed Communities that she [Olamina] established or encouraged in the United States, Canada, Alaska, Mexico, and Brazil" (Butler, 2019b, p. 393), is a renewed world, the purpose of leaving Earth to establish extraterrestrial communities is also an attempt to leave behind a world that was once made unlivable to them and to begin a whole new world born from their Earthseed perspective. On another train of thought, Denise Ferreira da Silva states that these Black experiences encourage the end of the world as we know it (Ferreira da Silva, 2019), a world that has to end while it produces dehumanization and oppression. It is needed to "envision Black futures — or otherwise, the end of the world"¹⁴ (Freitas and Messias, 2018, p. 404, *my translation*). Olamina plants the seeds to populate these Black futures and to overcome the ending of the world as she knows it, encouraging a better world to come.

Butler's short story production, published in *Bloodchild* and posthumously in *Unexpected Stories* (2014), "explore the possibility of a different tomorrow in the best Afrofuturist way, where the future, combined with science, technology, and black themes, demonstrates a maturing humanity overcoming man-made social obstacles like race, ethnicity, and gender at least potentially" (Lavender, 2019, p. 574). Some plots seem to be set in the same world or approach the same themes as her longer narratives, such as the trope of telepathy in "Childfinder," which would later appear as the main theme in the *Patternist* series. As well as the Godly-given power of change in "The Book of Martha," which might recall *Parables'* God of Change, likewise, the human symbiotic relationship with the T'lic in "Bloodchild" may be put in parallel with the human and Oankali genetic trade in *Xenogenesis*. In addition, Butler's two standalone novels, *Kindred* (1979) and *Fledgling* (2005), are examples of the range of creativity of her science fiction. In *Kindred*, the narrative follows Dana, a Black woman who is timely transported from her home in the 1970s California to the Antebellum South. *Fledgling* is the story of a girl who discovers she is, in fact, a genetically modified 53-year-old vampire, and in the discovery of this "otherness" the novel explores the line between human and non-human.

¹⁴ In the original: "vislumbrar futuros negros — ou senão, o fim do mundo".

Most of Butler's published works are part of book series. The bulkiest one, the *Patternist* series, a story originally written in a non-linear sequence, is composed of four volumes¹⁵: *Wild Seed* (1980), *Mind of My Mind* (1977), *Clay's Ark* (1984), and *Patternmaster* (1976). The four volumes were also published in an omnibus edition, in the chronological order of the events, as *Seed to Harvest* (2007). The *Patternist* series shares with *Parables* the characteristic of covering a long period of time. The beginning of the story follows an immortal shape-shifter, Anyanwu, from her centennial life in the African villages to the North-American colonies. She meets Doro, an immortal body snatcher born in Egypt whose intention is to have as many descendants as possible to form a society of people with special powers, such as his and Anyanwu's. The series covers centuries of their history, their sons' and daughters', reaching to outer space and back. Finally, depicting a faraway future where humanity is divided into the dominant Patternists, the Clayarks, and the enslaved mutes, humans without any special abilities.

Xenogenesis, also known as *Lilith's Brood*, also approaches similar themes regarding displacement and the possibility of leaving Earth as part of its plot. In this trilogy, Lilith, a Black woman, was saved, cured, and kept in a centuries-long induced sleep by the Oankali, a species of male and female beings covered in writhing tentacles, and the sexless Ooloi, who travel the galaxy searching for mating species. Their advanced technology and biological abilities are used to restore a nuclear war damaged Earth, save the remaining humans, and demand that they reproduce with the Oankali, resulting in human-constructs, hybrid children. Thrown into a restored wild Earth guided by Lilith, the first group of humans to repopulate this environment divided themselves into those who agreed with the Oankali's proposals and those who rebelled against them. In this agreement, humans benefit from Oankali's superior genetic abilities, such as DNA manipulation, curing of incurable diseases, and bodily enhancement and modification through biological manipulation. Those who do not conform to the Oankali's presence are given the chance to live in a human colony on Mars. The trilogy explores Lilith's journey on this new Earth, dealing with human prejudice and Oankali's demands while building a new civilization.

In *Parable of the Sower* (1993) and *Parable of the Talents* (1998), as presented earlier, Butler offers a glimpse into a collapsing 2024 United States, extrapolating known problems such as state violence, social inequality, religious persecution, neo-slavery systems, forced migration, and environmental disasters. Besides, *Parables* depicts a United States that has experienced the effects of climate change, marked by the withdrawal, privatization, and

¹⁵ Originally, the *Patternist* series was also composed of *Survivor* (1979), which was taken out of print after its first publication, as requested by Butler who disliked the book's relevance to the series (Canavan, 2016).

monetization of the basic functions of government, where violence is plentiful and police services are costly, restricted, and often corrupt, and “the state has abandoned both its traditional monopoly on violence and its biopolitical interest in population-level health and safety” (Yaszek, 2015, p. 214). Yaszek explores the dissociation of society into what she calls micro-collectivities, which are means of trying to survive by attempting to establish their own micro-organizations and order. The creation of these micro-collectivities starts with the gated community in Robledo, but it also happens on the run:

Robledo is one of uncountable numbers of micro-collectivities that California has become. The walled communities, online universities, and company towns have no state-fantasy holding them together anymore. Their authority is their own. On the road, those micro-collectivities bump up against each other as thieves, refugees, zealots, addicts, and declassed former landowners swarm northward in clan-like bands. By the middle of the novel, Lauren’s family is scattered or dead, the wall breached, the tiny community burned, and Lauren herself set down the road. (Yaszek, 2015, p. 214)

Isiah Lavender defines *Parable of the Sower*, specifically, as an Afrofuturist literary work that “presents in alarming fashion decaying public education systems, escalating energy, food, and water expenses, unimpeded violence and crime, drug addiction, homelessness, deregulation of minimum wages, global warming, drought, failing religions, and a dismantled space program, among many other disasters” (Lavender, 2019, p. 573). Octavia Butler’s science fiction emphasizes the transformative power of Afrofuturism to change this scenario and highlights the intricate tapestry of the Afrodiasporic experience. With her Afrofuturistic fabulation, Butler combines futuristic elements with historical and cultural contexts to show how marginalized groups struggle, succeed, and dream. The remarkable skill she displays in blending social commentary with imaginative narratives highlights the importance of Afrofuturism as an essential genre for reimagining and shaping our perception of the past, present, and future. Butler’s Afrofuturist literature continues to inspire and empower generations, forging new frontiers in the realm of science fiction and amplifying the voices of the marginalized.

Lauren Olamina undergoes a multifaceted journey, one that is both about displacement and belonging, she explores what bell hooks describes as making “connections between geographical location and psychological states of being” (Hooks, 2008, p. 26). The displacement of Lauren Olamina begins much before the actual burning of Robledo. While still inside her gated community, she was always mentally preparing to leave and to survive as violence increased exponentially and the illusion of protection within Robledo was uncovered. Olamina grows up not only being taught about the violence that threatens them from the “outside” world but also learning about firing guns and defending themselves even before her

father goes missing. In the static place of her gated community, Olamina already envisions movement, she knows that the little protection her community manages to keep will not last, and she prepares. She knows the roads are dangerous and many do not survive there, but at the same time, she lost her father and had seen her brother being burned alive for being the one who knew how to read. Her displacement begins as fabulation and education. She reads about surviving in the wild, about plants, and most importantly, about the reality of the outside. Despite the preparation of backpacks full of supplies and maps, Olamina is not prepared for what comes with the roads, but she is prepared for changing it regardless of the situation.

The refuge seeking that appears in Olamina's story is Butler's Afrofuturistic attempt to explore the theme of displacement that permeates African-American history, especially the migrations within the United States. Re-reading the past through science fiction allows the reassessment of historical facts through Afrofuturistic fabulation. Moreover, notions of what is dystopian or science fictional narratives vary throughout time, and by reimagining the past and present, these narratives can assume "control over the means of language, over representation and interpellation, is a crucial weapon and strategy in dystopian resistance" (Moylan, 2000, p. 149). Butler commentary on the antagonist of dystopias is informative of how she sees the space for transformation in the way she writes:

I find utopias ridiculous. We're not going to have a perfect human society until we get a few perfect humans, and that seems unlikely. Besides, any true utopia would almost certainly be incredibly boring, and it would be so overspecialized that any change we might introduce would probably destroy the whole system. As bad as we humans are sometimes, I have a feeling that we'll never have that problem with the current system (McCaffery, 1990, p. 69).

Butler's dislike of utopias and their air of perfection is evident in *Earthseed's* philosophy of Change as well as in her frequently categorized dystopian stories. While utopia refers to a system of order and harmony, where, in Butler's words, change would be harmful. *Earthseed* experiences success not through perfection, but rather through adaptation, transformation, and the embrace of change as a guiding force, in contrast to the rigid concept of utopia. Walking between the utopia/dystopia dichotomy, *Parables* seeks an escape from that initial negative and dangerous dystopian society, but at the same time, it does not project a perfect and utopian future. Instead, Olamina and *Earthseed* emphasize the importance of change as a transformative force to survive, escape, and forge paths of possibilities. Butler and African-American voices can redefine their historical narrative through the speculative nature of science fiction, granting them renewed agency to be and to make changes.

Butler's critique of utopia stands as an insistence on the power of change. Change is the key to enabling possible futures and to surviving, as read in the *Earthseed* verse that opens this

chapter. “Let the past teach you”, it reads, “inspire you”, “to survive, know the past”. Parables employs Change to give characters agency to transform their reality, to give them tools of survival as a practice of learning from the histories and experiences of the African diaspora. Memories of displacement, oppression, and resilience become a tool for imagining and shaping alternative futures. Change, then, can also be considered an engagement with the lessons of the past, using them to learn and adapt while moving forward and paving new, alternative ways.

3 A METHODOLOGICAL PATH OF CHANGE: EARTHSEED AS AN AFROFUTURIST PHILOSOPHICAL PROPOSAL TOWARDS A SCIENCE FICTION DIASPORA CONSCIOUSNESS

I am Earthseed. Anyone can be. Someday, I think there will be a lot of us. And I think we'll have to seed ourselves farther and farther from this dying place. (Butler, 2019a, p. 78)

Given the evolution of Earthseed throughout the novels and its rich philosophical undertones, analyzing the *Parables* necessitates a unique methodology informed by the concepts Lauren Olamina introduced in the Earthseed verses. The methodology guiding this dissertation draws inspiration from some of the most salient terms found within the Earthseed: Books of the Living. A central concept acts as a foundation, encompassing the other four. I perceive Earthseed's philosophy as cyclical, constantly revisiting and reinforcing common points while simultaneously unveiling new horizons and opportunities. The pivotal concept here is that of Change ("God is Change"), a notion strongly emphasized in Lauren Olamina's writings. Departing from this central idea are four intertwined concepts essential to Earthseed: Seed, Shaping, Adaptability, and Destiny. After the analysis of the Earthseed verses, as will be further explained in this chapter, these four concepts were mobilized and condensed into three methodological concepts to guide the analytical chapters. The craft of this methodology, then, is based on constructing the methodology through the fiction, taking these books within the books as investigative and interpretive tools. Lauren Olamina creates and grows Earthseed, and its motto of change, as a form of navigating her dystopian world. The construction of the methodology emerges from an interpretation of the writings in *Earthseed: The Books of the Living*, which appear scattered through both *Parable of the Sower* and *Parable of the Talents*.

Lauren Olamina's first attempt at creating what she would later call the Earthseed was to question her father's God, which is primarily the notion of the white God. Being the daughter of Reverend Olamina, Lauren stops believing in the God that her father preaches about and baptizes her, a God that is the resume of a Western notion of Christianity. The detachment from this white and Western idea of a God can also be read as an attempt to move away from ideas of control and submission. While, on one hand, the white idea of God is based on notions of a hierarchical obedience, fear, and punishment, Olamina, confronted with the dreadful reality of her country, can no longer believe those are synonyms of hope. On the other hand, her God of Change is the opposite, equalizing God, people, and nature and highlighting the power and freedom to change. Her God does not come as a deity,

But this thing (This idea? Philosophy? New religion?) won't let me alone, won't let me forget it, won't let me go. Maybe... Maybe it's like my sharing: One more weirdness; one more crazy,

deep-rooted delusion that I'm stuck with. I am stuck with it. And in time, I'll have to do something about it. In spite of what my father will say or do to me, in spite of the poisonous rottenness outside the wall where I might be exiled, I'll have to do something about it. (Butler, 2019a, p. 26)

The universality and individualistic notions of the white God, who is claimed to be omnipotent and who knows everything that will ever happen, take Lauren into another interpretation of God. Distancing from the white God, Earthseed preaches that God is Change: mutable, unpredictable, and without foresight. This God does not command history from above but is shaped by every act, every choice, and every transformation enacted by the people. To follow such a God, then, it is needed to recognize that nothing is fixed, that survival depends not on obedience to power but on learning to shape change as it shapes us.

Moreover, in denying the white God, Olamina is also opposing a God that is intrinsically known as the "God of slavery," a notion that emerges from the historical entanglement of Christianity with the enslavement of people, especially considering how European colonizers historically used religious authority to justify and maintain racialized systems of domination. The notion of a white god was also reinforced by Christian history of depicting Jesus and the saints as white in European art, which later was spread with colonization. With that comes the notion of the white God as a social instrument of control and punishment, a God that requires obedience. Olamina denies this God, also because she knows pain. Hyperempathy makes her oppose a deity whose power relies on obedience, suffering, and blind submission.

The idea of God of Change, then, is born out of the notion of a collective power, a God within people and their communities.

All the rest of Earthseed is explanation—what God is, what God does, what we are, what we should do, what we can't help doing. ... Consider: Whether you're a human being, an insect, a microbe, or a stone, this verse is true.

All that you touch,

You Change.

All that you Change,

Changes you.

The only lasting truth

Is Change.

God

Is Change. (Butler, 2019a, p. 79)

Beyond that, Change stands as creative potency that enables them to fabulate. While the white god is considered the creator and owner of people's history and destiny, Olamina's god enables every individual to act upon their lives and change their course.

Being restricted to her parents' and her gated community's knowledge, Olamina comments on her concept's originality limitation, arguing that she feels the need to create, but if her idea happens to already exist, she would follow it:

I've finally got a title for my book of Earthseed verses—Earthseed: The Book of the Living. There are the Tibetan and the Egyptian Books of the Dead. Dad has copies of them. I've never heard of anything called a book of the living, but I wouldn't be surprised to discover that there is something. I don't care. I'm trying to speak—to write—the truth. I'm trying to be clear. I'm not interested in being fancy, or even original. Clarity and truth will be plenty, if I can only achieve them. If it happens that there are other people outside somewhere preaching my truth, I'll join them. Otherwise, I'll adapt where I must, take what opportunities I can find or make, hang on, gather students, and teach. (Butler, 2019a, p. 125)

When she decides to call it *The Book of the Living*, she is also enacting change. The living are in constant exchange with the world. They inhabit the present and look for the future, in constant change and adaptability. Olamina leaves the gated community and starts gathering people throughout the roads and later on at Acorn. She undergoes much questioning of her belief system; some people are genuinely curious to understand, but a few others find it crazy how she dares oppose Christianity and decide to leave Acorn. When questioned by one of Earthseed newcomers what 'God is Change' means, Olamina states, "It means that Change is the one unavoidable, irresistible, ongoing reality of the universe. To us, that makes it the most powerful reality, and just another word for God." (Butler, 2019b, p. 72). Their most powerful reality is the one where they can change the conditions of those who faced displacement, persecution, and violence, just as the Earthseed people did.

"A God that is not male or white, or even a human look-alike" (Butler, 2019b, p. 148), Earthseed preaches a God that is within each person's actions and active engagement with life, which enables believers to act upon their conditions and change them. After all, "change is part of life, of existence, of the common wisdom" (Butler, 2019a, p. 26). Earthseed also preaches a belief system that does not rely on relationships of dependency or mastery of one over another. At Earthseed Gatherings, even though some of the older members gain the title of Shaper, everyone is welcome to speak, question, and preach, even the children. There is no control over bodies, emotional bribery, or fear of punishment, as Lauren Olamina stresses; her God just is part of reality and the fruit of people's good deeds: "My God doesn't love me or hate me or watch over me or know me at all, and I feel no love for or loyalty to my God. My God just is" (Butler, 2019a, p. 25).

Earthseed's attempt to distance itself from the image of a Western monotheistic white image of God appears in other books that approach the Black experience. The idea of God in Earthseed can be read in parallel with the concept of God articulated in *The Color Purple*, by

Alice Walker, in which the main character, Celie, also goes through a reinterpretation of God throughout her life. While the epistolary novel begins with Celie addressing “Dear God” in her letters and prayers, as the narrative progresses, she stops addressing God and writes down her sister’s name, who is apart from her for many years but who, unlike God, will be able to understand and identify with Celie’s struggles as a Black woman.

I don't write to God no more, I write to you. [...] The God I been praying and writing to is a man. And act just like all the other mens I know. Trifling, forgetful and lowdown. [...] Let 'im hear me, I say. If he ever listened to poor colored women the world would be a different place, I can tell you. (Walker, 1985, p. 200)

Taught to believe and pray to the Christian God, later on, Celie is faced with Shug Avery’s interpretation of God, one that will also change her whole perspective about life: “I believe God is everything, say Shug. Everything that is or ever was or ever will be. And when you can feel that, and be happy to feel that, you’ve found It” (Walker, 1985, p. 203). Shug teaches Celie to embrace the idea of a God that is in life’s details, such as the color purple, a God of joys instead of a God of fear:

Well, us talk and talk bout God, but I'm still adrift. Trying to chase that old white man out of my head. I been so busy thinking bout him I never truly notice nothing God make. Not a blade of corn (how it do that?) not the color purple (where it come from?). Not the little wildflowers. Nothing. (Walker, 1985, p. 204)

As much as Celie comes to realize how distant the kind of prayers she was taught were disconnected from her reality, Olamina also starts to question her father’s God because of its lack of commitment to the “real” people and their crumbling society’s problems: “The adults say things will get better, but they never have. How will God — my father’s God— behave toward us when we’re poor? Is there a God? If there is, does he (she? it?) care about us?” (Butler, 2019a, p. 15). Same as *Earthseed* constantly reassuring the importance of collective existence, Celie’s movement to writing to her sister instead of an imaginary being also denotes the reinforcement of shared experiences and collective effort, here especially among women. The relationships Celie has with them, both her friends and lover, have the power to change her and her reality, rather differently from God’s. Thus, there is also the movement of detaching from a universal idea of God to a personal and collective meaning in a belief system.

Just as Olamina’s concept of God of Change, Celie’s idea of God becomes one that is not prescriptive; rather, it is merely a description of life itself, nature, and its elements. To engage in a meaningful dialogue with the ideas presented in these works of fiction, I bring the concept of God as understood by Baruch Spinoza, due to its proposition that detaches God’s image from the Christian tradition. Spinoza defended the idea that God is everything that exists

in the world: “[t]hat eternal and infinite being we call God, or Nature, acts from the same necessity from which he exists.” (Spinoza, *Ethics*, Part IV, Preface, 2000). In sum, for Spinoza, nature is the same as God, a force of infinite power that is and creates everything around it. Moreover, he understands God as infinite and immanent, meaning that nothing can exist outside of him. Therefore, we and everything are part of its nature.

XVIII. God is the indwelling and not the transient cause of all things.

Proof—All things which are, are in God, and must be conceived through God (by Prop. xv.), therefore (by Prop. xvi., Cor. i.) God is the cause of those things which are in him. This is our first point. Further, besides God there can be no substance (by Prop. xiv.), that is nothing in itself external to God. This is our second point. God, therefore, is the indwelling and not the transient cause of all things. (Spinoza, *Ethics*, Part 1, XVIII, 2000)

While Celie questions the white man behind the God she worshiped for most of her life, Olamina also questions the deity’s persona: “Maybe God is a kind of big kid, playing with his toys. [...] But what if all that is wrong? What if God is something else altogether?” (Butler, 2019a, p. 16). Spinoza offers an understanding of God that is contrary to any anthropomorphic attempt to envision a God. As explored in the excerpt below, we are within God as we are within nature:

We are immersed in divine nature, swimming in that which necessarily is and could not be otherwise. The world lacks nothing, nor is it seeking perfection. This is true for us: there are no sins or imperfections, good or evil, sin or merit; it is up to us, then, within our finite nature, to find other natures that adjust, harmonize with ours, increasing our power. (“God [or Nature]”, Trindade, 2018, *my translation*)¹⁶.

Apart from the main idea of an indwelling God, understood as the world and manifesting itself through the world, Spinoza’s considerations also rely upon human action in this God-world, and stress the importance of simply being: “No one can desire to be blessed, to act rightly and to live rightly, without at the same time wishing to be, act, and to live – in other words, to actually exist.” (Spinoza, *Ethics*, Part IV, Prop. XXI., 2000).

To exist is the capacity to affect and be affected, to act in the world; essence is a degree of power, conatus that strives to remain in existence; all existence is, by the guarantee of natural causes, necessary, since it is an expression of a certain degree of divine power. Essence is power. We are bodies, limited in extension and duration, modes, as Spinoza would say, but the modes are in God. This means that to affirm my power is to affirm what is divine in me. To take part in power is to express what is of God in you, to be an active cause in the creation of the world. (“Spinoza: the power of being”, Trindade, 2014, *my translation*)¹⁷

¹⁶ In the original: Estamos mergulhados na natureza divina, nadando naquilo que necessariamente é e não poderia ser de outro modo. Não falta nada ao mundo, nem ele está buscando perfeição. Isso vale para nós: não há pecados nem imperfeições, bem nem mal, pecado nem mérito; cabe então, dentro de nossa natureza finita, encontrar outras naturezas que se ajustem, se harmonizem com a nossa, aumentando nossa potência. (“Deus [ou a Natureza]”, Trindade, 2018).

¹⁷ In the original: Existir é a capacidade de afetar e ser afetado, é agir no mundo; essência é um grau de potência, *conatus* que se esforça para permanecer existindo; toda existência é, pela garantia das causas naturais, necessária, já que é expressão de um grau certo de potência divina. Essência é potência. Somos corpos, limitados em extensão e duração, modos, como diria Espinosa, mas os modos estão em Deus. Isso significa que afirmar a minha potência

Understanding God through a perspective such as Spinoza's, or Olamina's, or Celie's, allows a detaching from an idea that not only preaches hierarchical obedience and fear but also one that is based on erasing both individual and collective agency, transferring any goodness in the world to an abstract, superior, and powerful entity that must be pleased unceasingly. When Olamina creates a God that is change, and constantly equates people to God, she is using such potency to express the godly within. To give people agency. Therefore, she is able to take action in the world and to create rather than being labeled a creation that must live a life under rules. As Olamina preaches:

Belief
Initiates and guides action—
Or it does nothing. (Butler, 2019a, p. 47)

With these ideas in mind, I explore how the development of the main idea of “God of Change” in Olamina's *The Books of the Living* can be used metaphorically to relate to the construction of diasporic narratives and to the active construction and envisioning of new world configurations. Thus, by using *Earthseed* verses to imagine and fabulate possible worlds and using metaphors from within *The Books of the Living* to inform the reading of the duology, I developed key concepts derived from the most frequent teachings to appear in Olamina's philosophy. Gathering all the *Earthseed* verses and reading from these excerpts as the books within the books, I mapped the main concepts that permeate these writings. The building of this methodology also takes into consideration the connecting of the concepts present in *Earthseed: The Books of the Living* with Afrofuturist elements that refer to the Afrodiasporic experience and that propose new paths and detours for a reinterpretation of the past, present, and Butler's proposition of possible Afrofuturist futures. These concepts are aligned with a reading of diasporic narratives and are used by the characters to promote the *Earthseed* Gatherings and the maintenance of Acorn, initially. Later, they sustain Olamina's global influence with the *Earthseed* Communities and throughout the fulfillment of the Destiny.

Departing from a mapping of all the verses of *Earthseed: The Books of the Living* that appear throughout the two novels and from the gathering of the most mentioned concepts among Olamina's manifold teachings. I chose three of these most frequent ideas to build them into methodological concepts that will enlighten this reading of the duology and that will serve as guidance for each chapter presented ahead. The concepts of “Seizing Change and

é afirmar o que há de divino em mim. Tomar parte da potência é expressar o que há de Deus em você, ser causa ativa na criação do mundo. (“Espinoza: a potência do ser”, Trindade, 2014)

Adaptability”, “Shaping Earth-seeds and Life-roots”, and “Seeking Unfixed Destinies” came out of this metaphorical reading of *Earthseed: The Books of the Living*. Each of these concepts was conceived from an interpretation of specific passages and will be connected to the diasporic experience in *Parables*. These concepts and their respective constructions will be presented with more depth in the dissertation, along with detailed explanations of how they will be used as interpretive tools.

In *Parables*, Lauren Olamina creates and grows Earthseed as a form of navigating her dystopian U.S. scenario. From her main motto of “God is Change”, she develops a philosophical statement that guides herself and the community she establishes through a northward migration and through the personal and collective journeys they face in the course of the books. Departing from Lucía Egaña Rojas idea of methodology as fiction, with a biography, a body, and an identity¹⁸ (Rojas, 2012), *metodologias subnormales*, as enunciated by Rojas, or an “undisciplined and malicious methodology”¹⁹, as complemented by Jota Mombaça. By exploring this methodological path from within the duology’s proposition of philosophy, considering all its main routes and detours, it might serve as a compass to elucidate the intricacies of displacement, migration, and diasporic experience.

Olamina’s Earthseed, rooted in the premise that God is the embodiment of change, offers an alternative prism through which we can interpret the fluid dynamics of migration, both in a literal and metaphorical sense. When viewed through an Afrofuturist lens, the narrative transcends its fictional realm, resonating with real-world struggles of diaspora, colonialism, and the ceaseless quest for belonging. Building upon Rojas’ conception, methodology itself assumes an identity, character, and narrative. It becomes imperative to critically engage with *Earthseed* verses not merely as a fiction within a story but as a teaching of the power of adaptive belief systems in confronting change. The “undisciplined and malicious methodology” posited by Mombaça further enhances this reading, inviting readers to challenge the conventional paradigms of analysis and, instead, to immerse themselves in the experiences and transformative potentialities that the narrative showcases.

Before moving on to the exploration of these guiding concepts and to the exposition of how they function as tools for analysis, I would like to go back to Butler’s idea of *positive obsession*. *Positive obsession* is briefly present within the *Books of the Living*, when Lauren

¹⁸ “Una metodología es siempre una ficción. Como una biografía, un cuerpo, una identidad/A methodology is always a fiction. Like a biography, a body, an identity (my translation)” (ROJAS, 2012, p. 1)

¹⁹ “Por uma metodologia indisciplinada e maliciosa. E que não deixe de ser desleal ao cânone acadêmico/For an undisciplined and malicious methodology. One that must not fail to be disloyal to the academic canon (my translation)” (Mombaça, 2016, p. 344)

Olamina writes: “Without positive obsession, there is nothing at all” (Butler, 2019b, p. 143). In another circumstance, Butler writes an essay about her writing style, arguing that what guides her is a fury to write (*furor scribendi*), a *positive obsession* that works as “a way of aiming yourself, your life, at your chosen target. Decide what you want. Aim high. Go for it.” (Butler, 1996, p. 106). Therefore, I would also like to construct this methodology bearing in mind a *positive obsession* for change, the fundamental concept within Lauren Olamina’s *Earthseed*, which she aimed her life at. She initiates her writings stating that “God is Change” with a *positive obsession* for something initially unknown to her, but that made her eager to act. Change is the core of everything *Earthseed* related. Consequently, change will permeate the other concepts and mingle with their meanings and their functions. Change is a choice, while it can also be forced by different situations. Change is a *positive obsession* at the same time that it can be a challenging feeling caused by forced and unwanted situations. “The only lasting truth is change,” says Olamina (Butler, 2019a, p. 79). Change is the most powerful force of Olamina’s God, of *Earthseed* people, and their individual and shared experience. Change is both negative and positive and allows one to choose paths, to act, to aim high, and to become a creative force, as Olamina did.

Taking all this discussion into consideration, the three concepts mentioned (“Seizing Change and Adaptability”, “Shaping Earth-seeds and Life-roots”, and “Seeking Unfixed Destinies”) will each guide one chapter of analysis, as explored in the next pages.

3.1 SEIZING CHANGE AND ADAPTABILITY: LEAVING ROBLEDO AND TAKING THE ROADS NORTH.

This first concept aims at serving as an approach to reading Olamina’s journey as she loses her home and starts heading North through the highways. Throughout *Parables*, she faces numerous adversities that require a call for change, both in her perspective through *Earthseed* and in her experiences as she is taken out from the safety of Robledo. Thus, it also comes aligned with a call for adaptability, implying movement in a multifaceted way. “Seizing change and adaptability” shall encompass the way Olamina’s ideas of change and adaptation appear on many occasions through the *Earthseed* writings, such as the following call for action: “Seize change. Use it. Adapt and grow” (Butler, 2019b, p. 24). To uncover these aspects in the narrative, I depart from a verse that explores the geographical sense of displacement, first and foremost, but that also opens space for an approach to *Earthseed* as a guide to new and unforeseen situations, besides the passage’s strong reference to biblical symbolism:

The child in each of us

Knows paradise.
 Paradise is home.
 Home as it was
 Or home as it should have been.
 Paradise is one's own place,
 One's own people,
 One's own world,
 Knowing and known,
 Perhaps even
 Loving and loved.
 Yet every child
 Is cast from paradise—
 Into growth and destruction,
 Into solitude and new community,
 Into vast, ongoing
 Change.

(Butler, 2019b, p. 106)

Being cast out of paradise, metaphorically reading the Bible's symbology, indicates leaving a place of origin and a place of belonging. When Olamina writes that "Paradise is home," she at the same time creates this imagery of being cast out from home, an event of facing solitude and new places and communities. Being cast out of one's own world is an experience she will face twice with Robledo and Acorn. However, according to her verse, everyone is cast out of home/paradise, for it is an unreachable place, and everyone will, eventually, be facing "vast, ongoing change". The understanding of a movement of "seizing change and adaptability" works as a call for looking at how *Earthseed* informs their adaptation to displacement and to how one can navigate the changes and adapt to survive hostile places and environments. Thus, with this concept, I must look at *The Books of the Living's* potential of exploring the multiple aspects of adaptability in this diasporic scenario. Focusing on both individual and collective adaptation to the ongoing changes Olamina refers to, from Robledo to Acorn and to the stars, passing through countless detours on the run.

In another passage, Olamina expresses the need for action, implying the manipulation of "change":

Act.
 Alter the speed
 Or the direction of Change.
 Vary the scope of Change.
 Recombine the seeds of Change.
 Transmute the impact of Change.
 Seize Change.
 Use it.
 Adapt and grow.

(Butler, 2019b, p. 108)

Through the proposition of “Change” as a very malleable concept, enhancing the already powerful meaning of the word, Olamina encourages people to have agency towards their lives and their survival. “*Recombine the seeds of Change*”, she insists, can be read as a form of constructing mechanisms of adaptation, of questioning systems of race and gender, and of attempting to overcome adversities. Merging these two concepts, change and adaptability, that are frequent in *Earthseed*, is an understanding that they are inseparable in Olamina’s writings, as much as they are essentially similar. Both suggest the embracing of inevitable differences and the overcoming of the adversities changes might bring. Though I am at using these tools across the whole analysis of the books, “seizing change and adaptability” are mostly connected to the first part of Olamina’s narrative of diaspora and the migrational movements, the loss of home/Robledo, and the facing of the highways as a place to be conquered and survived, not to mention the characters’ personal and emotional journeys and their quests for confronting the uneven power dynamics of their society.

Adapt and endure.
For you are Earthseed,
And God is Change.

(Butler, 2019b, p. 73)

3.2 SHAPING EARTH-SEEDS AND LIFE-ROOTS: “EARTHSEED CONTINUES”

Earthseed is the people, before being an idea, as stated extensively by Olamina through her writings: “We are Earthseed”. The Books of the Living play with the symbology of seeds and roots as they encourage the building of communities, as stated by Olamina, “Earthseed is all that spreads Earthlife to new earths”, which leads me to the concept of “Shaping Earth-seeds and life-roots”. As much as Olamina and the *Earthseed* people were, at some point, forced out of their homes into the chaotic roads, they shaped a different life for themselves with *Earthseed*.

There is a duality in the reading of seeds and roots, both fixed and mobile, and that they actually represent the same thing in different stages. Nurturing offspring in a chosen or in a possible place and also spreading new seeds to be taken elsewhere and continuing the lineage, of whatever it may be. Seeds are life in their primal and final stage, beginning, maturing, and growing, and finally giving seeds to be reborn again. Metaphorically reading, there is a sense of communal responsibility and kinship that makes *Earthseed*. A sense that is based on the materiality of the community building, the kids’ school, Bankole’s hospital, but also the notion of embodiment of such community, their essence goes beyond what can be destroyed because they are *Earthseed* itself. When they burn down their own community to escape from the

enslavement of the Christian American Crusaders, and people are again divided and vulnerable to the roads' violence, Olamina states that Acorn was gone, but "Earthseed continues".

WE are earthseed. WE are flesh—self aware, questing, problem solving flesh. We are that aspect of Earthlife best able to shape God knowingly. We are Earthlife maturing, Earthlife preparing to fall away from the parent world. We are Earthlife preparing to take root in new ground, Earthlife fulfilling its purpose, its promise, its Destiny. (Butler, 2019a, p. 150)

Lauren Olamina entitles herself and the ones who adopt her philosophy as Earthseed, those who accept the power of Change. As a concept in construction, the word *seed* plays an important role throughout the duology, both literally and metaphorically. There are many readings of the seeds and Earth Seeds, and its presence is also implied in Olamina's Destiny. It is also a circular concept: the seeds, life, and roots. It brings Olamina's philosophy down to Earth, in a natural sense, in the cultivation mode. Seeds appear to have manifold meanings for Olamina, she leaves Robledo with a backpack full of plant seeds to guarantee her survival. The same seeds that are being used as a trade coin in that decaying society, the Acorn seed that is planted and gives the name to her first established community. Seeds can be read as symbols of growth, maturing, and transformations. Seeds are a symbol of the future, while they also represent a part of something gone, buried, or taken away. An old place of origin to go back to and new beginnings of multiplication and spreading of possibilities.

Seeds as a biblical concept are also significant when reading the possible meaning behind the books' names. The use of two biblical parables to name the duology offers another layer of interpretation. One very relevant aspect is Olamina's rejection of her father's idea of god, a god that, besides the experience of her Black community in Robledo, is shaped around a white idea of God. With Earthseed, she attempts to initially personally escape this god as she realizes its uselessness in helping her face and understand the violent world she knew at that moment. This same idea of God will persecute her, metaphorically and literally, throughout the narrative, with the rise of the Christian American to the presidency and in the way the Christian Crusaders antagonize and vilify Earthseed and Olamina.

On the one hand, the biblical "Parable of the Sower", which appears at the end of the book, explores the importance of fertile ground for seeds, in its context meaning God's words. It tells the story where seeds were left in varied soils, but only the one that fell in fertile ground succeeded in germination. However, taking it into this reading of Earthseed being the people, it is possible to highlight Butler's intention of exploring the idea of places to grow, of validation, and of migration. And of being in a favorable environment to be themselves and to share and multiply their knowledge to build community. On the other hand, the biblical Parable of the

Talents, which appears by the end of the second book, talks about the act of sharing and spreading God's words. In the parable, where three servants received a talent (monetary unit) to take care of, the one who kept the talent hidden and well-kept was penalized, while the two who made exchanges and multiplied the talent gained more than the initial amount. In Olamina's parable, sharing is the core of Earthseed and their lives in the community—the sharing of knowledge, of ancestral wisdom, of daily life events, of moments of joy, and of mournful occasions. Besides, Olamina's hyperempathy being called by herself as 'the sharing' also emphasizes the value she gives to living in this communal arrangement, of being Earthseeds and to creating their roots in kinship and diversity.

Another possible implication of the word choice of parables in the two titles is, first, the idea of a parable as a narrative structure that uses allegories and metaphors to convey meaning. The second aspect is the parabolic structure in relation to the mathematical figure. A U-shaped curve, also possible in its upside-down form ($\cap$), a figure that can also be used to read narrative structures, such as the escalation, climax, and conclusion of a Greek tragedy or the opposite in a comedy. In this sense, it is possible to explore how Olamina experiences a series of parable-shaped moments in *Parables* that both collaborate with her growing as the Olamina of the future, widely known for being the woman behind the name Earthseed. The pattern repeats itself in the narrative, Olamina's phoenix metaphor being present in both moments, the burning of Robledo and the destruction of Camp Christian, originally Acorn — the first Earthseed community:

In order to rise
From its own ashes
A phoenix
First
Must
Burn.
(Butler, 2019a, p. 153)

This quote opens the chapter in *Parable of the Sower* in which Robledo is burned down, and it also appears in *Parable of the Talents* when they burn Camp Christian. In order to rise, they needed to burn first, and after that always came the spreading of new seeds and the nurturing of roots in this renewed soil.

Thus, the concept of “shaping Earth-seeds and life-roots” then will serve as a guide to reading cultural heritage and ancestry, as well as places of origin. Which might help with the reading of questions of race within the story, as well as the ancestry in the sense of exploring the refugee aspects of the kidnapped children of Earthseed, especially Olamina's newborn Asha Vere. Through her Earthseeds, Olamina also approaches an idea of immortality that is closely

connected to ancestry and community building. A nurturing of seeds and preparing them for journeys, a growing of roots and taking care of their blossoming. A cycle that is about the impact of one's life, their actions, beliefs, and the legacy they leave behind.

Take comfort.
Each move toward the Destiny,
Each achievement of the Destiny,
Must mean new beginnings,
New worlds,
A rebirth of Earthseed.
Alone,
Each of us is mortal.
Yet through Earthseed,
Through the Destiny,
We join.
We are purposeful
Immortal
Life!

(Butler, 2019b, p. 235)

3.3 SEEKING UNFIXED DESTINIES: TAKING ROOT AMONG THE STARS.

Olamina starts her journey through the highways searching for a safer place in the North; in the meanwhile, she is faced with another life threat as Acorn is destroyed by the Christian Americans, leading them to the roads again. It is clear, however, that Lauren's perspective was never one of merely surviving the chaos and finding comfort in building a community. Earthseed was concerned with promoting its Destiny, and *Parables* ends with the completion of the Earthseed's Destiny, the launching of Earthseed's spaceships to populate and explore new worlds, "to take root among the stars", which is so much explored within the *Books of the Living*:

The Destiny of Earthseed
Is to take root among the stars.
It is to live and to thrive
On new earths.
It is to become new beings
And to consider new questions.
It is to leap into the heavens
Again and again.
It is to explore the vastness
Of heaven.
It is to explore the vastness
Of ourselves.

(Butler, 2019b, p. 275)

When Olamina stresses the purpose of Earthseed, she never points to a fixed target or goal, instead, she mentions that their aim is "to take root among the stars". She knows the power of her philosophy and its importance in shaping one's life purpose with education and

community effort. The reading of Olamina's life project can be read as a destiny of mobility, an unfixed destiny, a refuge in the stars, which are themselves in perpetual movement in a mobile, expanding, and ever-changing universe.

Olamina is aware of the stars' perpetual movement and their symbolism, she writes,

Changes.
The galaxies move through space.
The stars ignite,
burn,
age,
cool,
Evolving.
God is Change.
God prevails.

(Butler, 2019a, p. 225)

The thought of renewals is central to *Earthseed*, "each achievement of the Destiny," Olamina writes, "must mean new beginnings, New worlds, A rebirth of *Earthseed*" (Butler, 1998, p. 197). This perspective of perpetual movements and ongoing changes allows me to connect the message behind the destiny to how these vulnerable characters in this dystopian diaspora shape and reshape their destinies, challenging the oppressive system and forging possibilities for themselves and their future. While unfixed in its final geographical destinies, the well-defined destinations of *Earthseed* are education, self-development, knowledge building, and community value.

Earthseed: The Books of the Living is committed to its people, the ones living in the present and able to shape reality; the verses play with the words "seeds," "roots," and "destiny", in a suggestion of a circle of life based on the shaping of self and change. These concepts propose both growth and the existence of community based on kinship, a potential inherent in every Earth-seed life. This cyclical perspective returns the idea of immortality through communal life and the sharing of life experiences and stories. Thus, the opportunity of using this idea of "seeking unfixed destinies" to explore *Earthseed* as a philosophical statement for reading the diasporic narrative and the forging of possible futures in *Parable's* Afrofuturist and science fictional world-building.

4 PARABLES OF THE DIASPORA: “WE ARE EARTHLIFE PREPARING TO FALL AWAY FROM THE PARENT WORLD”

This chapter will focus on Olamina’s time in Robledo, the gated community where she grew up, while listening to stories of how the city was before they had to live in such a protective manner as to survive the spreading violence. It is in the fragile time in Robledo that Olamina questions her reality and her father’s beliefs, where she reaches the conclusion that she does not agree with the God that her father preaches about. This leads her to formulate the first verses of Earthseed and to create her God of Change. Her time in Robledo, however, is interrupted by the invasion and destruction of her gated community, leading her to escape through the roads amidst the violence and the unknown of the mass migration North.

When tracing the journey Olamina experiences in *Parables*, it is possible to point to two fixed moments intertwined with the migrations. Those moments are her period in Robledo and Acorn, which is later invaded and transformed into Camp Christian. These places offer different perspectives on Olamina’s life regarding the development of Earthseed and a metaphorical walk towards a possible and livable future. Thus, they will be the guidance to take me through *Parables* narratives and delve into Earthseed’s Afrodiasporic elements. They also mark different moments in Olamina’s life. Each of these moments are instances of her growing up towards the global leader we see her becoming in her late age of eighty years old by the end of the duology. On one hand, Robledo shows 15-year-old Olamina, guided by some of her adolescent worries, while wondering about the measures of survival in the violent country she lives in but is still unfamiliar with because she grew up isolated in a gated community. On the other hand, Acorn comes with early twenties Olamina, in love with Taylor Bankole and with her Earthseed community starting to grow, guided by her very optimistic vision for a better future among all the chaotic roads they have just left behind. Finally, Camp Christian and the exact contrast of Acorn, where Olamina is faced with the murder of Bankole and the kidnapping of their child while being enslaved by the Christian Crusaders. These places represent substantial changes for Olamina, thus, each of them is differently responsible for triggering her towards the search for and the creation of possibilities of survival.

Parable of the Sower can be described as the book in the duology that speaks of adaptability and growth. Even the biblical parable that inspires the narrative’s name can be read from a perspective of adaptability to the environment. In *Sower*, Earthseed is finally put into practice after Olamina was constantly threatened and placed in in-between-worlds situations in her journey towards the North. Olamina becomes one of the countless people on the roads who are escaping their burned-down cities, attempting to survive the chaotic mass migration and its

violent threats, and still dreaming of a safe place to live and relocate. Saidiya Hartman, in *Lose Your Mother*, explores the complex emotions and psychological states of the notion of escaping as a means of resistance and survival. In the chapter entitled “Fugitive Dreams,” she outlines the strategies employed by those who were able to escape enslavement, coping with the constant threat of recapture and the feeling of being alienated from their original communities while building a community of kin with those who lived the shared experience. Likewise to Hartman’s study on African diaspora narrative, Olamina’s journey is marked by escaping and building a fugitive dream with Earthseed. The passage below resonates with Olamina’s journey, since she and the Earthseed people bond through their shared lived experiences, both from having lived on the run and from having survived the different kinds of slavery that traverse *Parables*:

And the dreams of what might be possible were enshrined in the names of these towns and villages founded by fugitives: safe at last, we have come together, here where no one can reach us anymore, the village of free people, here we speak of peace, a place of abundance, haven. Like communities of maroons and fugitives and outliers elsewhere, **their identity was defined as much by what they were running from as by what they were running toward.** (Hartman, 2006, p. 225, emphasis added)

Olamina escapes the attack in Robledo, survives the many threats of the roads, filled with robbers and scavengers, and, in a more personal manner, she escapes being identified and targeted for her hyperempathy syndrome. She is constantly escaping the dangers of her world and yet dreaming of the founding of her heaven, which will be guided by Earthseed. The metaphorical meaning of the diaspora of losing one’s mother, in Hartman, can also be applied to Olamina’s journey, as she loses her home, Robledo, the only example of community she had had due to their isolated gated-neighborhood life. She lost her whole birth family and is forced to continue the journey alone. Olamina also loses her mother twice, which is dealt with in detail along with Hartman’s concept in the next chapter. Later on, she will lose her community again, and her own family as well as her family of kin, as Bankole is murdered and Larkin is taken captive by the Christian American. Olamina is more than once forced to leave her place and her people. She is forced into places of not-belonging, forced into change and adaptation in order to survive. She is forced to embrace change as an inevitable aspect of life and to seek adaptability, as my methodological concept suggests, to survive the in-between worlds she is placed in by the forced migration.

4.1 LIFE IN ROBLEDO AND THE GATED COMMUNITY'S ILLUSION OF SAFETY: LIVING IN-BETWEEN-WORLDS

The neighborhood wall is a massive, looming presence nearby. I see it as a crouching animal, perhaps about to spring, more threatening than protective. (Butler, 2019a, p. 5)

The gated community where Lauren Olamina was raised plays an important role in shaping her notions of reality. For most of her life, Lauren was part of a community that was established in the safety of a gated neighborhood. In the midst of a chaotic and violent South California, hers and other families managed to keep a relatively safe space where the basics of life were guaranteed, such as food cultivation and education for the children. In the course of growing up in this community and being forced to leave it upon its destruction, Olamina goes through moments of preparation and adaptability. She was growing older and realizing her gated community would not be able to hold on for much longer because of the increasing violence of the outside, knowing that each day more and more communities like theirs were invaded and burned down. In this sense, the people in the community have always been living in-between worlds, referring back to Gilroy. Olamina, specifically, has been put in this in-between worlds, both for her social status and her hyperempathy syndrome, as I will develop further in this chapter. Led by the thought of looking at this period of Olamina's life through the concept of "seizing change and adaptability," this chapter will cover two major moments, approaching their symbolism as to a diasporic narrative being written in a 2024 United States of America. These two moments are Lauren Olamina's life in the gated community and her escape from the burning of Robledo to take the journey in the mass migration towards the North. In the beginning of this escape, she is all by herself; only after surviving the chaos of the invasion night does she reunite with two survivors of the gated community.

Lauren Olamina lives a dual life: inside and outside the gated neighborhood, Christian beliefs and Earthseed, fear and security (or at least the sense of security in the gated community), knowledge and alienation from the world, the community's expectations of her, and what she expects for her own future. The oppression in this scenario of a violent society also works both ways. While the outside threatens the gated community with robbery, fires, and violence, their apparently superior and secure life is a threat to those outside who could never dream of having a house, much less a functional community where food is enough and people are kind to each other. Life in Robledo's community is, as Butler explained in an interview, "loaded with symbolism. People are walled in but they're clearly going nowhere, in spite of the fact that they're surviving as long as they do. Their way of life is going nowhere. What they're

doing is trying to hold on until the good-old days come back” (Butler, “Sci-Fi Tales”, 1994). Among the older, there is fear of accepting the threats and dangers, which is noticed by Olamina, resulting in one of her last discussions with her father before he goes missing during one of his ventures outside. Reverend Laurence Olamina, acknowledging their problems, tells Lauren that she should not look down into the abyss, when one friend ratted her out for speaking about the imminent danger and the need to prepare to leave Robledo:

“You’ve just noticed the abyss,” he continued. “The adults in this community have been balancing at the edge of it for more years than you’ve been alive.”
I got up, went over to him and took his hand. “It’s getting worse, Dad.”
“I know.”
“Maybe it’s time to look down. Time to look for some hand and foot holds before we just get pushed in.” (Butler, 2019a, p. 66)

While her father guarantees that they have been preparing them, the younger, for the future, with their gun target practice and the development of security systems and rounds, Olamina still thinks that they need to know more about the possibility of everything falling apart. Despite her father attempting to tranquilize her and being the one whose Bible preaching was the spark to the beginning of her deviation into creating her own belief system, his advice during this abyss conversation would later become the basis of Earthseed: “It’s better to teach people than to scare them, Lauren” (Butler, 2019a, p. 65), Reverend Laurence Olamina advises her, and then completes, “talk to them about classes, not about Armageddon” (Butler, 2019a, p. 67). The value of education will guide Olamina’s beliefs: in Robledo’s community, she would teach the younger ones; in Acorn, one of the most important parts of their community was the school, where they kept the books they gathered, and the children were educated; later on, when Earthseed grows to be a global movement, their goal was to educate their young ones and send them to college so they could contribute to the achievement of the Destiny. Not to mention the influence of her father and her stepmother in the shaping of Olamina’s view on education, as both were university professors. Teaching was one of the last things her father did before he died/disappeared on his way back from campus:

He left home one day to go to his office at the college. He taught his classes by computer, and only had to go to the college once a week, but even once a week was too much exposure to danger. He stayed overnight at the college as usual. Early mornings were the safest times for working people to travel. He started for home the next morning and was never seen again. (Butler, 2019b, p. 6)

Education, then, poses as one of the most significant changes Earthseed can offer and, through that, transform people and their lives. Olamina inherited from her upbringing the understanding that education has the potential to alter one’s reality and that, despite living in a crumbling and violent society, it cannot be overlooked or undervalued. Moreover, Reverend Laurence

Olamina knew that their community would be at greater risk if they were to go outside because they were majority Black and Latino, which made them even more vulnerable, that is why they thought they should stick together and hold on as much as they could inside Robledo.

Lauren's curiosity and questioning nature enable her to see Robledo's decadence, with the increasing number of attacks and crimes. The already isolated situation of their community is increased when they lose the only TV signal they had and when the once occasional invasions become frequent and more violent. Lauren realized it was a matter of time before they lost the small guarantee of security their community had. Her younger brother, Keith, rebelled and decided to live outside among criminals and drug addicts, which led to his brutal murder, followed shortly by the disappearance of her father. In this sense, for Lauren, life in Robledo becomes a life of learning and preparing, moreover preparing for what they do not know how to prepare for. Prepare for the new and unknown places she knows she will need to escape to, or else struggle to survive. In one of her first writings about her God of Change, she acknowledges the need to find other places:

God is Change, and in the end, God prevails. But God exists to be shaped. It isn't enough for us to just survive, limping along, playing business as usual while things get worse and worse. If that's the shape we give to God, then someday we must become too weak—too poor, too hungry, too sick—to defend ourselves. Then we'll be wiped out. There has to be more that we can do, a better destiny that we can shape. Another place. Another way. Something! (Butler, 2019a, p. 76)

The life they had in Robledo is also a dual one. While the gated community means that they are far more protected than the people who live in open-air houses, or even who have the streets and abandoned buildings as their home, it also means that they are trapped in a dead-end street. Daily life's normalcy in the community is masked with their church service, the school Olamina teaches the younger ones, the kids playing, and people's common worries; however, they are living in a fragile bubble:

We hear so much gunfire, day and night, single shots and odd bursts of automatic weapons fire, even occasional blasts from heavy artillery or explosions from grenades or bigger bombs. We worry most about those last things, but they're rare. It's harder to steal big weapons, and not many people around here can afford to buy the illegal ones—or that's what Dad says. **The thing is, we hear gunfire so much that we don't hear it.** [...] I mean, I love it. It's home. These are my people. But I hate it. It's like an island surrounded by sharks—except that sharks don't bother you unless you go in the water. But our land sharks are on their way in. It's just a matter of how long it takes for them to get hungry enough. (Butler, 2019a, p. 50, emphasis added)

The way the community is described, often as an island surrounded by sharks, as in the excerpt above, or a “walled fish-bowl cul-de-sac” (Butler, 2019a, p. 12), highlights how Olamina sees it as a fragile bubble ready to be perforated by the surrounding pressure. In this bubble in-between worlds, they belong at the same time they know they do not, as the pressure

becomes higher. This duality in their living is also described in the way places, not only communities, are described as walled and un-walled. There are mentions of the existence of walled estates, something described as similar to an old feudal city or even to the slavery period: “one big house and a lot of shabby little dependencies where the servants lived” (Butler, 2019a, p. 9), walled residential areas, such as Olamina’s, and walled clinics and other venues. On the one hand, the wall and its isolation mean that these bubbles, these islands, are needed to stay safe and maintain a daily sense of normalcy. But on the other hand, they are also the spark that attracts people from the much poorer outside into sacking and dismantling these walls.

In the imminent scenario of violence, life in the gated community is one of insecurities. While they never had trouble finding what to eat and drink, due to the community’s effort in planting and sharing what they could, people were frequently afraid of the invasions and the burnings. Afraid of everything they tried to keep outside their gates. When Olamina goes outside to search for her father’s body, she is once more taken aback by the vision of bodies and bones and fires in almost abandoned and dirty, chaotic streets. Upon their unsuccessful search but safe arrival back to the gated community, she writes, “At last, we came home and wrapped our community wall around us and huddled in our illusions of security.” (Butler, 2019a, p. 133).

Reverend Laurence Olamina was someone trusted for knowledge and advice in their community, and even in the darkest moments he attempted to maintain his people’s beliefs and hopes about resisting behind the walls. On the one hand, he believed in defending their place of origin, the place they own and belong, which means that, in an imminent diasporic situation, he aims to protect his children until the runaway is inevitable. He says, “This is my home. Beyond taxes, I don’t owe a penny on it. You and your brothers have never known a hungry day here, and God willing, you never will.” (Butler, 2019a, p. 82). Lauren, on the other hand, was secretly preparing to escape by herself. She did not count on the company of her family or even her boyfriend, Curtis. She tried to approach them discreetly, but seeing their resistance to accepting the fact that their community was no longer safe, she realized in advance that she would be alone in her journey. The moment Lauren Olamina comes to this realization, she questions herself about what it would mean, in her world, to distance herself from her origins, to grow and develop what she believes to be true:

In my Earthseed notebook, I’ve written,
A tree
Cannot grow
In its parents’ shadows.

Is it necessary to write things like that? Everyone knows them. What do they mean now, anyway? What does this one mean if you live in a cul-de-sac with a wall around it? What does it mean if you're damned lucky to live in a cul-de-sac with a wall around it?
(Butler, 2019a, p. 82)

Olamina gradually realizes that life in Robledo also equals living in a survival mode. An established survival mode, considerably privileged within the community's walls. By acknowledging the need to be prepared for confronting the chaotic world beyond the walls, Olamina writes what composes the verse of Earthseed that opens the first book: "without adaptability, what remains may be channeled into destructive fanaticism." (Butler, 2019a, p. 2). Adaptability is the guiding concept in her life as she grows up in Robledo and, later on, struggles to survive the walk North. She is faithful to her own advice, as she adapts in every way possible, from knowing the places outside she had never been to, learning how to trust the people along the road, and also traveling disguised as a man in order to feel safer. She also attempts to be overly attentive and adapt her hyperempathy to the unpredictable scenarios the roads posed.

Despite all the external aspects that put Olamina and her community in the said survival mode, Lauren's hyperempathy not only constantly places her in a survival mode, but also those who are around her. As she constantly points out, the sharing of others' pain is capable of leaving her incapacitated and at worst, unconscious, a risk she cannot take in the dangerous outside. In Robledo, her father protected her hyperempathy from the community, only the family knew about her condition, and her brothers were taught to keep it a secret. Later, when her family is gone, and she is starting to build her own road-family with Harry and Zahra, she realizes they need to know so they can better protect themselves from her vulnerability:

They deserve to know that I'm a sharer. For their own safety, they should know. But I've never told anyone. Sharing is a weakness, a shameful secret. A person who knows what I am can hurt me, betray me, disable me with little effort. (Butler, 2019a, p. 178)

Hyperempathy, as Olamina has described, makes her feel the pain and the pleasures she visually witnesses. It is not physically harmful but fills her brain with the feelings of pain and pleasure. The sharing, as it is often called, being the consequence of drug abuse during pregnancy, is not rare in such a chaotic world. The sharers become easy targets because, beyond worrying about the imminent threats of the roads, they are also vulnerable to the incapacitation hyperempathy can cause. As the metaphor highlighted by some authors in the previous chapters, the sharers are even more an alien in new territory. Olamina, born and raised within the walls of the gated community, had not only to learn to survive the new and threatening environment but also to learn to navigate it with her heightened senses for pain and pleasure.

The metaphor of the “alien in new territory,” as applied to the sharers, suggests a deeper condition of being perpetually on a threshold, both physical and mental. Then, a reading of hyperempathy through the lens of Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands* might be helpful in highlighting the complexity of such a condition. In discussing life in the borders and the hyphenated, *mestiza* identity, Anzaldúa makes parallels between the inside and outside, exterior and interior, as if her body and mind were physically and mentally being affected by a dual, or even multiple, life. She writes,

But the body is smart. It does not discern between external stimuli and stimuli from the imagination. It reacts equally viscerally to events from the imagination as it does to “real” events. (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 38).

Hyperempathy can also be described as visceral reactions to events. The pain is not real, as the pain the others are suffering, it is a mental projection of pain triggered by the visual contact. It is, literally, as the name suggests, as close as one can imagine empathy should be: the ability to understand and share the feelings of another being.

Anzaldúa mentions the development of a faculty to overcome these situations of oppression and vulnerability. According to her, the faculty can be better described as a sense, or perception, without conscious reasoning, a “capacity to see in surface phenomena the meaning of deeper realities” (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 38). The faculty

[...] is an acute awareness mediated by the part of the psyche that does not speak, that communicates in images and symbols which are the faces of feelings, that is, behind which feelings reside/hide. **The one possessing this sensitivity is excruciatingly alive to the world.** Those who are pushed out of the tribe for being different are likely to become more sensitized (when not brutalized into insensitivity). Those who do not feel psychologically or physically safe in the world are more apt to develop this sense. (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 38, emphasis added)

By acknowledging the chaotic state of society, Olamina knows that pain is what she would most encounter when leaving towards the North: “I’m supposed to share pleasure and pain, but there isn’t much pleasure around these days” (Butler, 2019a, p. 12). Once she leaves Robledo, she is “excruciatingly alive to the world,” and that would also reflect on her writings and on Earthseed. When dealing with the sight of pain, Olamina is placed in a liminal space between the real world’s pain happening outside her and the invisible and interior pain her mind produces on her body. She is, as Anzaldúa states, caught between the worlds:

Pain makes us acutely anxious to avoid more of it, so we hone that radar. It’s a kind of survival tactic that people, caught between the worlds, unknowingly cultivate. It is latent in all of us. (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 39)

Olamina's survival tactics go beyond sheltering herself from the world's threats, she also needs to shelter herself from the pain inflicted on all those around her. Pain, then, is the way of her life, she is either suffering from it or attempting to avoid it at any cost.

The sharing also speaks much of how hyperempathy dialogs with collective experience and community survival. It is Olamina's "shamanic state," as in Anzaldúa's concept, inherent to her being, a sense that forces her to feel what others feel. To inhabit the others' place. She is unable to detach herself from this sixth sense, her only option other than to suffer from the sensation is to embrace it and not let it consume her. In this shamanic state, she can change beyond her perception of reality, as Anzaldúa writes, "I change myself, I change the world." (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 70). While trapped in this predicament of suffering from unexpected events, it also helps her build a stronger sense of collective protection and trust, more so when Earthseed receives other sharers, people who Olamina can fully comprehend. Their condition is also a dual force in Earthseed, as they both weaken and strengthen the community. Olamina, for instance, helps everyone but is unable to help the wounded or even to let Bankole have his clinic in their house because she would be affected by the ones in pain. Sharers are considered to be easy targets on the roads. Thus, they have to trust each other and the community, since they can fall behind as they witness pain or even put other people in danger when exposing their condition. In a place where people take advantage of vulnerability, demonstrating that you are a sharer is to put yourself in the target.

Olamina and the other sharers would always perceive the clash between the inside and the outside in their own flesh through hyperempathy. The conflict between the internal and external, the real pain and the mind-created, the fear and the hopes. Living with hyperempathy on the run also enabled Olamina to master it, to take some control over the uncontrollable part of her body. She learned to live with the possibility of being strongly and unwillingly affected by others and developed her own sharer-faculty. Olamina grows bold and fearless while Earthseed is attacked and her faith is persecuted because she truly believes in the power of change she preaches. She is empathetic and believes in others and in their community. She overcomes the fears that walk hand in hand with pain.

Something pulsates in my body, a luminous thin thing that grows thicker every day. Its presence never leaves me. I am never alone. That which abides: my vigilance, my thousand sleepless serpent eyes blinking in the night, forever open. And I am not afraid.
(Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 51)

Just as Anzaldúa states that the faculty, the presences within oneself, and the inner consequences of being in between worlds lead to mastering fear, Olamina, because of hyperempathy, was also unafraid and never alone.

It is also possible to read Olamina's hyperempathy as a condition that enabled her to reassess how she connects with the world. Despite being the bane of her safety, it makes her see her society and the violence and unceasing threats from a different perspective, as Lauren reflects in the passage below:

It's beyond me how one human being could do that to another. If hyperempathy syndrome were a more common complaint, people couldn't do such things. They could kill if they had to, and bear the pain of it or be destroyed by it. **But if everyone could feel everyone else's pain, who would torture?** Who would cause anyone unnecessary pain? I've never thought of my problem as something that might do some good before, but the way things are, I think it would help. **I wish I could give it to people. Failing that, I wish I could find other people who have it, and live among them. A biological conscience is better than no conscience at all.** (Butler, 2019a, p.115, emphasis added)

Hyperempathy becomes a threat in a world where mere empathy is lacking. The roads are full of people who aim to survive, and that may mean surviving at any cost, they are also full of drug addicts, scavengers, robbers, and killers. Harry and Zahra will question everyone's behavior at the beginning of their journey and take time until anyone can be trusted to walk by their side. Olamina, being the one who is affected by the others, is more open to observing and spotting people who are as harmless as they are. Her empathy, beyond the syndrome, makes her open to helping others, even though these others might weaken the group. For example, the first people to join them are a couple and a newborn. Olamina does not care that groups with children and elders are more susceptible to being attacked and robbed. She aims at having good people by her side, be they weak or strong. Thus, in this in-between-worlds created by hyperempathy, a place for bonding also flourishes among the many disadvantages of being a sharer.

Returning to the topic of places, people either live in the illusory safety of the gated communities, or they manage living outside among the growing threats of violence, poverty, and criminality. Although, in this apparently hopeless scenario, a third option of living and attempting to survive appears, worse than any of the other modes of living, it is described by most as a new kind of slavery. The city of Olivar is an enterprise by a big company that takes families to live and work in a condition of a gated and protected city. A city that will serve as a big factory. Cory, Lauren's stepmother, seeing the difficulties they go through in attempting to live and take care of four children, expresses her wish that some big company like Olivar's KSF

would take over Robledo and transform it into a similar profit-focused enterprise, but she is also aware of the reason companies are not interested in them:

Robledo's too big, too poor, too black, and too Hispanic to be of interest to anyone—and it has no coastline. What it does have is street poor, body dumps, and a memory of once being well-off—of shade trees, big houses, hills, and canyons. Most of those things are still here, but no company will want us. (Butler, 2019a, p. 120)

Olivar attracts families with the promise of safety, despite being based on profiting from the vulnerability of society. For those in Robledo, and Southern California in general, safety is a ticking bomb ready to explode, and regardless of what choice they made (going to Olivar or not, taking the roads North or staying), people were, at some point, being forced to leave. Gated communities were more than often forcefully dismantled by the invasions and the burning caused by the pyro addicts, addicts to a “new illegal drug that makes people want to set fires” (Butler, 2019a, p. 23). They attacked them, believing they were privileged for having so much that was lacking for the outsiders, who mostly lived on the streets and abandoned facilities. Later, on the roads, as Lauren sees violence increasing, it becomes even more evident that being inside the gated community would not mean any more safety than being outside. She writes, “Almost all of the smaller communities we'd passed had been burning and swarming with scavengers. It was as though the quake had given yesterday's quiet, plodding paupers permission to go animal and prey on anyone who still lives in a house” (Butler, 2019a, p. 240).

Those who left their houses before the attacks for choosing Olivar were also forced to this decision given the threats and insecurity. Even Cory was tempted to consider accepting Olivar as a safe solution, arguing that there the kids would have proper school and then a job in the company when they grew older, to which Laurence Olamina answers, “Don't hope for it, Cory. There's nothing safe about slavery” (Butler, 2019a, p. 121). Always aware of his country's history, he continues, “This business sounds half antebellum revival and half science fiction. I don't trust it. Freedom is dangerous, Cory, but it's precious, too. You can't just throw it away or let it slip away. You can't sell it for bread and pottage.” (Butler, 2019a, p. 122). The desperation is such that Cory insists on considering Olivar, even knowing that if she and Laurence worked there, it would still be less money than what Laurence made alone teaching at the college. They still will have to pay rent and expenses. But despite the odds, the danger over her family is so alarming that she considers it as a possibility. Lauren comments on the precarity that they would live if they accepted going to Olivar, “when you add everything up, it's clear that with the six of us, they couldn't earn enough to meet expenses. It might work if I could find a job of some kind, but in Olivar they don't need me. They've got hundreds of me,

at least—maybe thousands.” (Butler, 2019a, p. 120). Her remark also implies the vast young workforce that has sold their freedom in exchange for a livable place away from violence. The ones who fled and decided to migrate to safer places know that anywhere is better than Olivar and the similar enterprises are an “old company-town trick” to get people to be in debt to the company, “debt slavery,” as Olamina later describes. These migrating people also were forced by the unbearable situation their place of origin was in. Many of the people who Lauren encounters along the road also demonstrate their disgust towards the work-cities and their imprisonment arrangement. This means that most people prefer to face the dangers of the roads than to be submitted to the power of the big companies.

Commentaries about slavery are made in many aspects of the narrative, Olivar being one of the most relevant ones, as it is called a modern form of slavery. It criticizes companies that aim to profit even during times of crisis, forcing people and their children to work off a debt that they cannot help building up. While the United States is being described as decadent, chaotic, and lawless, a place where people are running from, the few glimpses of other countries demonstrate that it is a global decadency. “There are plenty of wars going on around the world now” (Butler, 2019b, p. 80), Olamina writes in a 2032 journal entry, before describing many conflicts happening through the continents. Nearby, it can be perceived with the tension between Canada and the U.S. and also the mentioning of factories using slave labor in Canada, showing it is not much different from where they are. Other instances of their life are submitted to this reinvention of modern slavery, such as the slave collars that are used to keep people, mostly sexual slaves, obedient. These are the same collars the Christian American would use on Acorn’s people when the community is invaded. But before all that, Olamina and her growing community became a shelter to many people who had been taken or raised as slaves, most of whom were also sharers. Olamina mentions how her brother viewed people like her: “My brother Marcus once said what good slaves sharers would make.” (Butler, 2019a, p. 300), at this point Marcus was still a child, which makes his comment particularly concerning. The submission of hyperempaths to the tortures and pains their own brains inflict on them would, in this reasoning, make them more docile under the threat of violence. They cannot see violence or are incapacitated, therefore, their chances of revenge or escape are diminished if not null. “So we become the crew of a modern underground railroad” (Butler, 2019a, p. 292), Olamina says later on about welcoming formerly enslaved people into the Acorn community. In another moment, Emery, one of the newcomers who had been a debt slave to her employers and had her children taken from her, talks about how people value more the sharers:

“Sometimes,” she continued, “sometimes they pay more for people who have it [hyperempathy]. Especially kids.”
 “My god,” Bankole said. “This country has slipped back two hundred years.” (Butler, 2019a, p. 305)

In her intense experience on the roads, Olamina becomes more than used to seeing people, especially women, children, and sharers, being sold and negotiated in small towns. When they can be set free, there is not a doubt that Earthseed will provide them shelter and a community if they decide to stay. Earthseed then is shown to have become a safe-haven for those vulnerable beyond their homeless vulnerability. In a conversation with Bankole about the growing of the community and the acceptance of new people whose past was marked by slavery, Olamina recognizes in them those open to change and to have their individuality in Earthseed: “if we can convince ex-slaves that they can have freedom with us, no one will fight harder to keep it.” (Butler, 2019a, p. 293).

The concept of seizing change and adaptability resonates strongly with the experiences of the diaspora, as individuals are often forced to leave familiar environments and rebuild in new, often hostile, contexts. Lauren Olamina and all those who were forced to leave their places were forced to adapt to the uncertainties of escaping and walking the roads. Lauren recognizes the need for change, even before catastrophe strikes, demonstrating the foresight and perseverance required by diasporic communities. As Lauren sought a vision of a better future outside of her crumbling world, those in the diaspora continuously adapt to new challenges, balancing survival and transformation in their personal and collective journeys and confrontations. There is a clash of worlds in *Parables* society, all of them suffering from the decadent lifestyle, reckless state, and opportunistic companies, yet each one of them attempting to survive on their terms and often conflicting with one another. There are inside and outside worlds, but Olamina is always in the limbo due to her hyperempathy, and this is reflected in Earthseed. She is constantly being pulled out of and exposed to another place, a different outside. She is aware of how the future awaits her with changes and the constant need to adapt. In Robledo, she had already accepted the need to move, to change:

He built this bunch of houses into a community. And now, he’s probably dead. I wouldn’t let them bury him, but I know. I’m no good at denial and self-deception. That was Dad’s funeral that I was preaching—his and the community’s. Because as much as I want all that I said to be true, it isn’t. *We’ll be moved, all right. It’s just a matter of when, by whom, and in how many pieces.* (Butler, 2019a, p. 136)

Olamina is, in many ways, forced into change and adaptation. While she had come to the conclusion that “a tree cannot grow in its parents’ shadows,” after a conversation with her father, one of her later verses stated that,

Yet every child
Is cast from paradise—
Into growth and destruction,
Into solitude and new community,
Into vast, ongoing
Change. (Butler, 2019b, p. 106)

The gated community in Robledo, with all its flaws and dangers, was also a symbol of paradise for those fortunate enough to have it, or at least an illusion of paradise. Both Robledo and, later on, Acorn were paradises in a failing world. They were places in which Olamina could count on family, in the first, and on her family of kin in the latter, a paradise where she could be herself about her hyperempathy. Once she was protected by her father, and then she would offer protection to the other sharers like herself. Paradise as it could be, away from the imminent threats of violence and slavery. However, as in the Earthseed verse, every child is cast out of paradise into vast ongoing change. And change, in Olamina's philosophy, is the only lasting truth.

4.2 THE BURNING OF ROBLEDO AND THE ESCAPE THROUGH UNKNOWN ROADS

"Last night, when I escaped from the neighborhood, it was burning. The houses, the trees, the people: Burning." (Butler, 2019a, p. 153)

Olamina has a constant dream about fire that anticipates many losses and new beginnings in *Parables*. Fire has numerous meanings in this narrative, one of its uses is as a symbol of attentiveness. The pyro addicts burn places as a distraction to commit robbery and crimes, and, on the roads, wherever a fire is spotted, they walk away from it because it means trouble and danger. Thus, fire was the first announcement of the fall of her gated community. Lauren watches her family home and belongings being torn into ashes when she comes back after succeeding in surviving the night of the attack. She sees people sacking her community's houses, and she acts as one of them to retrieve her family's money from the hidden places. She comments about actually feeling like one of those people from whom her community so often tried to shield themselves: "I am one of the street poor, now. Not as poor as some, but homeless, alone, full of books and ignorant of reality." (Butler, 2019a, p. 156).

While in their communities, they were protected by their families and able to be among people they trusted. One of the main challenges in facing the death-worlds of the road-walking was dealing with the racist and sexist aspects of the roads. "I was thinking of traveling as a

man” (Butler, 2019a, p. 171), Olamina tells Harry and Zahra her original plan, given that she was not counting on having any company and that her height and bigger body would allow her to be easily read as a man. Despite being safer as a man and within the company of two people from Robledo, they still would face the judgment for being a Black man, a Latina, and a white man. Zahra, who had lived on the streets before, explains, “Mixed couples catch hell whether people think they’re gay or straight. Harry’ll piss off all the blacks and you’ll piss off all the whites. Good luck” (Butler, 2019a, p. 171). Society’s decline is also shown through these prejudiced readings and the dehumanization of people.

The illusion of safety in the gated community is also brought in different moments of the escape narrative, as when Lauren comments on how they were, somehow, unprepared for the long journey ahead: “Some people had tents, and several had built fires. We settled in against the remnants of a small building. We were always, it seemed, looking for walls to shield us” (Butler, 2019a, p. 205). The highways and roads end up becoming a character in Olamina’s life, as the experiences lived on them turn out to be the greatest of changes and call for adaptation that she faces when thrown into the outside world. Aside from the crowd of people heading in the same direction, the paths and detours, villages, and landscapes are active in interaction with the group. Violence itself is also traveling North, and, at moments, it appears that it is not only metaphorically coming after them but also physically approaching them, demonstrating that there was no possibility of turning back to where home once was to them:

Today or tomorrow should be a rest day, but we’ve agreed not to rest. Last night was full of distant shooting, explosions and fire. We could see fire behind us, though not in front. Moving on seems sensible, in spite of our weariness. (Butler, 2019a, p. 245)

Shootings and attacks are also common characters in their journey North, to such an extent that at some point they become ordinary in their nightly routine of stopping to rest before taking the roads again:

The shooting started and stopped, moved away, then came back. I was on watch, so I had to stay alert, but in this storm of noise, nothing moved near us except the trees in the evening breeze. It looked so peaceful, and yet people out there were trying to kill each other, and no doubt succeeding. Strange how normal it’s become for us to lie on the ground and listen while nearby, people try to kill each other. (Butler, 2019a, p. 269)

Despite the challenges, Olamina describes the experience of walking the highways as both fascinating and frightening:

But I’ve never walked a freeway before today. I found the experience both fascinating and frightening. In some ways, the scene reminded me of an old film I saw once of a street in mid-twentieth-century China—walkers, bicyclers, people carrying, pulling, pushing loads of all kinds. But the freeway crowd is a heterogenous mass—black and white, Asian and Latin, whole families are on the move with babies on backs or perched atop loads in carts, wagons or bicycle baskets, sometimes along with an old or handicapped person. Other old, ill, or handicapped

people hobbled along as best they could with the help of sticks or fitter companions. Many were armed with sheathed knives, rifles, and, of course, visible, holstered handguns. The occasional passing cop paid no attention. (Butler, 2019a, p. 176)

The highways and roads become the dwelling for a population that has been forced to inhabit it. They had to know it as their home, or else they would not be able to survive. Being in this mass of people was dangerous. On the one hand, Lauren describes how weakened people were hurt and sacked, and even though most people were suffering the same problems, nobody would risk their lives for a stranger. On the other hand, distancing from the crowd, or the “river of people,” as Olamina calls it, was even more dangerous. Each move or change of path had to be calculated so as to avoid any unwanted attention and to protect themselves as best as they could:

We walked down to the freeway—the 118—and turned west. We would take the 118 to the 23 and the 23 to U.S. 101. The 101 would take us up the coast toward Oregon. We became part of a broad river of people walking west on the freeway. Only a few straggled east against the current—east toward the mountains and the desert. Where were the westward walkers going? To something, or just away from here? (Butler, 2019a, p. 176)

This heterogeneous river of homeless people, one in which “almost everyone was filthy” (Butler, 2019a, p. 177), is often described by Lauren as “desperate refugees” trying to protect themselves from “the encroaching sea, the crumbling earth, the crumbling economy” (Butler, 2019a, p. 119), not to mention the need to protect themselves from others. In facing this environment, they need to operate in constant vigilance and trust in one another, since even the trivial quest of getting water becomes an operation of survival, as Olamina describes:

There aren’t enough water stations. That’s why water peddlers exist. Also, water stations are dangerous places. People going in have money. People coming out have water, which is as good as money. Beggars and thieves hang around such places—keeping the whores and drug dealers company. Dad warned us all about water stations, trying to prepare us in case we ever went out and got caught far enough from home to be tempted to stop for water. His advice: “Don’t do it. Suffer. Get your rear end home.” (Butler, 2019a, p. 201)

Her late father’s advice, despite being true, has no value in the world her daughter is living in after taking the roads. She, as much as the others, has no home to go back to. No place to call safe or to rely on its people for refuge. All they can do is to adapt to their new reality and to trust one another, and work so they become themselves their mobile notion of home, one that would be strongly endorsed by Earthseed:

Earthseed is being born right here on Highway 101—on that portion of 101 that was once El Camino Real, the royal highway of California’s Spanish past. Now it’s a highway, a river of the poor. A river flooding north. (Butler, 2019a, p. 223)

As mentioned before, the first people to be invited to walk along with the three of them are Travis and Natividad Douglas, a mixed couple — Travis, who is Black, and Natividad, who is Latina, with their newborn, Domingo. The family is vulnerable for being with such a young child. In the frequent attacks and need for defense of the roads, a child can not only be a delay in their movements but also be the target of abduction. Olamina observes them for a while when she, Harry, and Zahra camp by the beach to sleep. She looks for allies, and in this search she spots people who are not threatening to them. This leads her to gather more people like them, vulnerable, Black, Latino, children, but who could pose a possibility of taking care of each other. At this camping site, after watching the family for a while, having felt some connection to them, Olamina saves Domingo from a dogs' attack. The animals have become wild and lost their loyalty to humans, acting as their true nature in the search for food. Grateful for Olamina's fast defense of the newborn, the Douglas family became the first to walk with them, the first strangers in their Robledo small group of survivors, and consequently the first to listen to and to accept Earthseed. So, it is when the group gets bigger and can better defend themselves that Olamina has time to write down the words and verses that would later compose *Earthseed: The Books of the Living* and dedicate herself to her journal's entries:

I felt alone between the two couples. I let them talk about their hopes and rumors of northern edens. I took out my notebook and began to write up the day's events, still savoring the last of the chocolate. (Butler, 2019a, p. 211)

In the excerpt above, she hints again at the idea of paradise search, mentioning the Douglas family's and Harry and Zahra's hopes of finding Edens in the North.

Saidiya Hartman has stated that "Diaspora was really just a euphemism for stranger" (Hartman, 2006, p. 215), in the sense of displacement and the feeling of being perpetually out of place. This definition captures the essence of individuals who are scattered far from their homeland and grapple with the complexities of identity, belonging, and survival. In Olamina's and in the stories of the people in the Earthseed community, this feeling is echoed powerfully. Hence, her pursuit of community and the development of a different approach to thinking about life through Earthseed illustrate both the hardship and the hopes of the people living in the diaspora. They navigate unknown landscapes and situations while forging connections that go beyond geographical boundaries. Earthseed's teachings, born in the middle of Lauren's diaspora, dialogue with the need for adaptability and change in order to survive and create ways of belonging in a constantly shifting world.

In this mobile community, walking toward an uncertain target in the North, they are slowly building a resistance front both to their individual and collective safety and to their

personal challenges and insecurities. Even before they settled into an organized community, they were already a community of kin. Eventually, they rely on the inside to cure the damages done by the outside. Olamina's Earthseed verses will be essential in developing this kinship and in encouraging them to reflect on their power of action and change. Not only to envision a future of hope in that apparently hopeless society but also to be the action in the construction of those futures.

In one conversation with a newcomer to their traveling group, when confronted with questions about the meaning behind her God of Change, Olamina is asked: "What do you pray to?", to which she answers, "Ourselves, what else is there?" (Butler, 2019a, p. 238). In essence, Olamina's words and verses are solely about enabling people to acknowledge and to believe they have agency in their lives and in their futures, in shaping their lives. Reading Olamina's journey as an Afrofuturist reading of the diaspora means that Earthseed enables them to rewrite their story. Despite all the obstacles they would face, such as the persecution from the Christian Americans and the villainization of Olamina and "her cult," Earthseed prevails and can create a better future for them. As Olamina walked the highways, Earthseed was slowly leaving her to reach the others, becoming positivity and purpose among their despair, something that bonded them, apart from their shared struggles. When Earthseed stopped being Olamina's ideas and became written verses, spread and consumed by the surrounding ones, they overcame the sense that they were once strangers who shared similar pasts and obstacles, they found affinity and empathy through Earthseed's collective purpose.

Purpose
Unifies us:
It focuses our dreams,
Guides our plans,
Strengthens our efforts.
Purpose
Defines us,
Shapes us,
And offers us
Greatness. (Butler, 2019b, p. 135)

Earthseed, as an action within their growing community, becomes an answer to dealing with the inside and outside conflicts, each affecting the other mutually. Whether it is the collective survival, or their dream of finding home, the goals become one as they realize they have established a group, united not only by their situation but also by a collective power of change. Earthseed is about collective experiences, it preaches that "we are Earthseed", "we are change", and Olamina's account of the events in her journals also often focuses much more on them than on her individual and personal struggles:

We'd followed I-5 to a small city outside Sacramento, away from the worst of the sprawl, but there were still plenty of poor people around—local paupers and refugees like us. (Butler, 2019a, p. 281)

They became themselves Earthseed, and then they shared more than the unfortunate aspects of their lives on the run for survival. They shared common dreams of shaping their futures and officially establishing the community they had been building on the roads. This dialogues with Hartman's description of the feelings of loss and desire of the "fugitive dream":

The unknown territory to which they were heading, as if freedom were a city waiting for them in the distance, acquired texture and detail in their imaginations, so a place they had never set their eyes on became tangible and then their own. At the end of one of these roads, the haven would be waiting. With each step taken it became more vivid. The crumbling blow-away soil cushioned the soles of their feet, their eyes traveled the length of the horizon, and all that vastness made them feel anchored in the world. **They envisioned the houses they would build and tried to decide whether a dome or flat roof would be better, earth or straw.** (Hartman, 2006, p. 225, emphasis added)

Their dreams of a safer place in an unknown land, Canada or only somewhere North, were just projections of a belief of safety they heard from others. There was no guarantee that they would find the so-called better place. With Bankole owning a piece of land and accepting all those people in it, their hopes became actions toward the building of their place.

"We can build a community here," I repeated. "It's dangerous, sure, but, hell, it's dangerous everywhere, and the more people there are packed together in cities, the more danger there is. This is a ridiculous place to build a community. It's isolated, miles from everywhere with no decent road leading here, but for us, for now, it's perfect."

[...]

"Anything we build *anywhere* is a target", Zahra argued. (Butler, 2019a, p. 319)

Just as Robledo and so many other communities have been burned down, so were Bankole's family and their property taken down to ashes and bones. There is nothing left when they reach the place. Then, what would be the first established Earthseed community has its beginning with a burial and a ceremony to honor all their dead, Bankole's family and both in their former homes and the ones they lost on the way North through the violent path they escaped.

The Earthseed: The Books of the Living are first used in the celebration of the dead. Dead people, dead places, and a dead past. Acorn is born when they finally reach Bankole's land and decide to establish themselves as a group and rebuild the place. The choosing of the name after an acorn seed tells much of Lauren's past. She learns the importance of acorns to Robledo from her father, who told her how the knowledge from his books about plants helped their community. Since acorns were not used by most people, they were a very cheap source of food compared to other seeds and nuts.

“Most of the people in this country don’t eat acorns, you know. They have no tradition of eating them, they don’t know how to prepare them, and for some reason, they find the idea of eating them disgusting. Some of our neighbors wanted to cut down all our big live oak trees and plant something useful. You wouldn’t believe the time I had changing their minds.” (Butler, 2019a, p. 64)

Still back in Robledo, when Lauren is preparing her survival backpack, she stores many seeds, nuts, and dried fruits, and acorns are plentiful among them. The making of acorn flour and bread was one of the things her father had introduced to their community, and she would take it with her. While on the run, faced with the possibility of running out of acorns, Lauren reflects on the meaning acorns carry:

Soon we’ll run out of it and we’ll have to survive on beans, cornmeal, oats — expensive stuff from stores. Acorns are home-food, and home is gone. (Butler, 2019a, p. 180)

However, as they establish themselves on Bankole’s property, they decide to call the place Acorn, and instead of using the few acorn seeds left to make them food, they plant them in honor of their dead.

So today we remembered the friends and the family members we’ve lost. We spoke our individual memories and quoted Bible passages, Earthseed verses, and bits of songs and poems that were favorites of the living or the dead.
Then we buried our dead and we planted oak trees.
Afterward, we sat together and talked and ate a meal and decided to call this place Acorn. (Butler, 2019a, p. 328)

Acorn was born with the homage to the dead, and it is, somehow, a rebuild of Robledo and so many other communities that were burned down. A rewriting of the history that ended in the past, of the things Lauren and many of them left behind once they took the roads North. The newly born community is based on their companionship and the trust they acquired along the road, and most importantly, it is based on Earthseed. The reading of the verses and the gathering of the people to listen to them had started timidly in their camping stops along the journey, but when Acorn is born, a very strong Earthseed tradition is born with it, which will be thoroughly analyzed in the next chapter as one of Earthseed’s powers of resistance.

Lauren encourages everyone to participate equally and share their feelings and histories,

“Any words, memories, quotations, thoughts, songs. ... My father had a funeral, even though we never found his body. But my three youngest brothers and my stepmother had nothing. Zahra saw them die, or I wouldn’t have any idea what happened to them.” I thought for a moment. “I have acorns enough for each of us to plant live oak trees to our dead—enough to plant one for Justin’s mother, too. I’m thinking about a very simple ceremony. But everyone should have a chance to speak. Even the two little girls.” (Butler, 2019a, p. 327)

The symbolic act of planting the seeds is the first tradition in a series of acts and rituals that would become habits through the life of Acorn, among the weekly gatherings and the sharing of songs, memories, and thoughts. Earthseed becomes the core of the community, serving as guidance, words of wisdom, and hope in many moments of one's life. Acorn, then, is born as a community of purpose, where most of them, homeless and refugees, could call home.

**5 “WE ARE EARTHSEED, THE LIFE THAT PERCEIVES ITSELF CHANGING”:
COMMUNITY BUILDING, ANCESTRY KNOWLEDGE, AND EARTHSEED
RESISTANCE.**

Once or twice
each week
A Gathering of Earthseed
is a good and necessary thing.
It vents emotion, then
quiets the mind.
It focuses attention,
strengthens purpose, and
unifies people.

(Butler, 2019a, p. 214)

Lauren Olamina did not always have a specific plan to guide her regarding Earthseed, but her purpose had always been to unite people and to build a community, a form of organization that resembled what she knew all her life in the gated Robledo. While life on the roads proved difficult for her and those who gathered along on the journey North, the establishment of a community proved to strengthen them as people. At the same time, it also weakened them in the face of a tyrannical Christian government, which aimed to classify people either as Christians or heathens. The founding of Acorn, the first Earthseed community, was but the beginning of the most dreadful moment in Olamina's life. Acorn grows to be considered a heathen cult, a threat to the Christian government, which aims to erase every aspect of history and memory of the people they target, turning them into good, well-behaved Christian Americans. Acorn and Earthseed though, prove that what they have created is stronger than any momentary destruction in the name of intolerance and fascism. When Acorn is invaded by the Christian crusaders and turned into a camp of slave labor and religious indoctrination, it is Earthseed that provides survival.

Living a journey of fear from Robledo to Acorn, Olamina saw countless times what people were able to do to survive. Yet, she chose to trust people and offer them a group to belong to amidst the masses of violent and desperate people. “We are Earthseed, the life that perceives itself changing,” Olamina states in one of the Earthseed verses, anchoring her beliefs in the benefits of acknowledging change. She was already breaking with the vicious behavior of not trusting anyone and trying to survive without the help of a community of kin. Acorn, then, became the home of anyone committed to respecting the community's social rules and to thinking about survival collectively. In *Lose Your Mother*, Hartman constantly challenges the idea of belonging as something related to heritage, instead she provides an understanding that

the foundation, shaping, and transformation of a community are based on communal experiences, struggles, and the reimagining of kinship in a world shaped by displacement and exile.

Newcomers were welcome. It didn't matter that they weren't kin or that they spoke a different language, because genealogy didn't matter (most of them couldn't go back more than three or four generations, anyway), building a community did. If the willingness to receive new arrivals and foreigners was what it took to make a world different from the one they had left, then so be it. So they put down their roots in foreign soil and adopted strangers as their kin and intermarried with other migrants and runaways, and shared their gods and totems, and blended their histories. "We" was the collectivity they built from the ground up, not one they had inherited, not one that others had imposed. (Hartman, 2006, p.225)

Although unrelated, this passage describes Acorn in a beyond-perfect manner, as the assembled group from the highways grows to be an organized community that accepts all those in need of a place to belong. From orphaned children to sharers. Despite its chaotic surroundings, Acorn grew to be self-sustained from food they harvested, to be formed by school classrooms, a library, a medical clinic, and comfortable spaces for people to live. As Olamina tells one of her newcomers, "Acorn is a community of people who have saved one another in all kinds of ways, [...] Acorn is home." (Butler, 2019b, p. 173).

When Olamina welcomes the teenager Dan Noyer after the death of his parents and the abduction of his younger sisters, she explains to him the function of the community:

Everyone works here, kids and adults. You'll help in the fields, help with the animals, help maintain the school and its grounds, help do some building. Building homes is a communal effort here. There are other jobs — building furniture, making tools, trading at street markets, scavenging. You'll be free to choose something you like. (Butler, 2019b, p. 71)

Besides, she emphasizes that the younger ones are as equally responsible for the function of the community as the adults. No one's knowledge is discarded or underestimated because of their age, opinion, or culture. She invites him to share anything that he knows well enough to teach to the younger kids, after all, "one of the first duties of Earthseed is to learn and then to teach" (Butler, 2019b, p. 71). The communal life in Acorn was also beyond caring only about what happens in Acorn. People in Earthseed are seen genuinely worried about each other's personal struggles, for instance, when they commit to trying to find Dan's kidnapped sisters. Olamina eventually finds one of them after looking extensively for the girls at slave seller points.

Acorn is described as a community that means more than a shared space of living. The bond they create through Earthseed is what strengthens them, through the building and acknowledging of ancestral knowledges, which will turn out to become Earthseed's greatest

power of resistance. In this chapter, I will delve into how Earthseed's organization around rituals, ceremonies, and oral tradition, added to the community's reliance on ancestral knowledge, is what enables them to keep their memories alive in a world determined to erase them. Through their tradition and values, they shape themselves into Earth-seeds, ready to be spread beyond, and, despite geographical limitations, they are Earthseeds and have life-roots, carrying the power of change wherever they go, with their memories and their ancestral knowledge as resistance mechanisms.

5.1 RISING FROM ITS ASHES: THE RISE AND FALL OF ACORN AND THE SURVIVAL OF EARTHSEED THROUGH MEMORY.

Today is Arrival Day, the fifth anniversary of our establishing a community called Acorn here in the mountains of Humboldt County. (Butler, 2019b, p. 5)

Acorn might have started as a place in which some sense of safety was offered to the wanderers of the highways, but, for Olamina, Acorn always meant the beginning of the sowing of Earthseeds. Acorn meant the possibility of putting into practice what she had, until the moment, only dreamed about or written about in the form of tentative verses. They were already a community even before they settled on Bankole's land. The shared experience of traveling together and protecting one another, while being gradually introduced to Earthseed by Olamina, was enough to create bonds among the people. When Acorn was established, all those who decided to stay had already accepted and believed, to some extent, in Olamina's Earthseed's sayings, which allowed Acorn to become a community organized around Earthseed's values. A community committed to enforcing a cooperative and organized life in a world where any kind of empathy and order was lacking. One of their organization's most significant values, which is shown to be passed on, is Earthseed's rituals and ceremonies.

Guided by the verses written by Olamina, Acorn held ceremonies for almost every important event in one's life. Ceremony is needed, as Olamina states when they welcome the children born in Acorn:

They're good words. Not good enough to welcome a child into the world and into the community. No words are good enough to do that, and yet, somehow, words are needed. Ceremony is needed. (Butler, 2019b, p. 62)

Words are needed, and words will become the center of Earthseed's power. It will be the foundational aspect for the development of their feeling of belonging. Leda Maria Martins, in *Performances do Tempo Espiral* (2021), when discussing the importance of oral tradition and ancestral knowledge, states that "word is also power" (p. 95). The cultivation of traditions and

rituals, as I will discuss later in this chapter, is fundamental for the strengthening of their sense of community, their geographical belonging in Acorn, and their communal belonging as Earthseed. The ceremony is needed, especially when they start growing with the birth and adoption of children in Acorn, including Olamina and Bankole's daughter. Words become, even more, a manner of officializing and passing down the sense of belonging to the following generations.

It makes us more truly a community, somehow, now that so many of us have had children here...now that I've had a child here.
Larkin Beryl Ife Olamina Bankole,
We, your people
Welcome you.... (Butler, 2019b, p. 172)

The organization of the community around the Gatherings can also be read as the ancestral presence of Reverend Lawrence Olamina, who, in Robledo, also managed to keep a whole community together with his weekly preaching. Those preachings provided them with hope amidst the chaotic outside. Although, differently from her father, Lauren never had the intention of being the center of the meeting. Unlike her father, she was not a Baptist preacher. In Acorn, she did not have a bigger role that differentiated her from the others. Despite being initiated with a reading of verses, the Earthseed's meetings, or the Gatherings, were spaces for the community to share, to dialogue, and to expose ideas. The whole community, without exception, even the kids, was welcomed to talk and to express their thoughts. They would be treated with as much respect as an adult. Specific events required a certain kind of previously established ritual, but the Gatherings were, as the name suggests, a moment of being together:

Our Gatherings, aside from weddings, funerals, welcomings, or holiday celebrations, are discussions. They're problem-solving sessions, they're times of planning, healing, learning, creating, times of focusing, and reshaping ourselves. They can cover anything at all to do with Earthseed or Acorn, past, present, or future, and anyone can speak. (Butler, 2019b, p. 63)

The Gatherings are depicted as their most important ritual, not only because of their consistency and frequency, unlike other celebrations, but also due to the fact that it was where people would connect and share any kind of trouble they were facing. Gatherings were also where they could really know each other, engage in conversation, and share interests. When Acorn is described as a home for around sixty people, Gatherings are often defined as being a discussion about the community's questions and needs, followed by tasting the food they cultivated on their land, and engaging in a series of activities led by different people and their varied likes and abilities:

When the Gathering was over, we shared a Gathering Day meal. We spread ourselves around the two large rooms of the school for food, indoor games, talk, and music. At the front of the room near the podium, Dolores Figueroa Castro was planning to read a story to a group of small

children who would sit at her feet. Dolores is Lucio's niece, Marta's daughter. She's only 12, but she likes reading to the younger kids, and since she reads well and has a nice voice, the kids like to listen. For the adults and older kids, we were to have an original play, written by Emery Mora, of all people. She's too shy to act, but she loves to write and she loves to watch plays. Lucio Figueroa has discovered that he enjoys staging plays, shaping fictional worlds. Jorge and a few others are hams and love acting in plays. Travis and Gray provide any needed music. The rest of us enjoy watching. **We all feed one another's hungers.** (Butler, 2019b, p. 70, emphasis added)

The said hunger, highlighted in the excerpt above, dialogues directly with the notion of belonging. Those people who, in the past, had their communities destroyed and then became wanderers trying to survive alone or in small groups of people now had a place in which they were able to finally feed each other's human necessity for life in community. A life in community that not only offered them a bit of safety to enjoy aspects of life that were neglected during the survival-mode required to live on the roads but also prepared them for what they would face in the future.

Another aspect that made Gatherings important is how it is shown to be one of the reasons people choose to stay and be part of the community. People felt at ease with how Gatherings meant that knowledge and relevance were never seen hierarchically at Acorn. Despite Olamina's role in creating and writing the central idea of Earthseed, people were trusted and respected to show their views of the world and to question anything. Such was their freedom of speech that when Olamina finds and rescues her brother Marcus, whom she buys from sexual slavery and welcomes him to Acorn. He preaches from the Bible at the Gathering and questions every aspect of Earthseed and Olamina's God of Change. He was free to preach what he wanted, but he was also faced with plenty of questions and arguments from Acorn's people, who were, at that point, already well acquainted with Earthseed ideas.

"Think of the Gatherings you've attended," I said to him [Marcus]. "Name even one that didn't involve questions, challenges, argument. It's our way. I did warn you. Anyone can be questioned on any subject they choose to teach or advocate. I told you that we were serious about it. We learn at least as much by discussion as by lecture, demonstration, or experience." (Butler, 2019b, p. 156.)

Acorn's people defend Earthseed from Marcus's attempt to invalidate it through the Bible. This moment anticipates how Earthseed was already very independent of Olamina. They were all Earthseed and demonstrated that when Earthseed's value and truthiness were questioned. Her brother, then, decides to leave Acorn, and later he is known to become a priest of the Christian American Church, the same Church that would persecute Lauren and her "heathen cult".

Despite the outstanding relevance of the Gatherings, funeral rituals were beyond symbolic in Acorn because of the act of burying of seeds to be planted in honor of the dead. In

the rituals, the seed is mixed with the body's ashes and sowed into the community garden. It is a ritual not exclusively of funerals, as Olamina describes it: "We do this in memory of our own dead, present and absent" (Butler, 2019b, p. 52). She planted seeds in the name of each of her family members that she never had deaths confirmed, she even had one for Marcus before reuniting with him. The ritual, then, can be considered an honoring of memory, remembering the dead, and also in the name of memories from a life past with those loved ones. Having these rituals, being symbolically and physically connected to the land, made them strengthen once more their sense of belonging:

The little girls planted their seedlings under our guidance, but not with our help. The work was done by their hands. Perhaps the planting of tiny trees in earth mixed with ashes doesn't mean much now, but they'll grow up knowing that their parents' remains are here, that living trees grow from those remains, and that today this community began to be their home. (Butler, 2019b, p. 53)

After the funeral ritual for two little girls' family, recently rescued and welcomed into Acorn, Olamina reflects on the importance of the rituals to their environment: "Here, one can still have orchards and groves. Here, life can still come from death." (Butler, 2019b, p. 55). The rituals, ceremonies, and citing of Earthseed verses are, ultimately, what makes them a community that survives even its own material destruction. Acorn was but a place for the first Earthseed community, which, as stated countless times by Olamina, is made of people: *we are Earthseed*. In a direct citation to the biblical parable that inspires the second book's name, Olamina emphasizes her desire to use Earthseed as her power to transform people's lives by using her talent, her gifts, and her abilities to do good in her world. She says, "My 'talent,' going back to the parable of the talents, is Earthseed. And although I haven't buried it in the ground, I have buried it here in these coastal mountains, where it can grow at about the same speed as our redwood trees" (Butler, 2019b, p. 17).

Regarding the rituals and ceremonies, Leda Maria Martins describes how Europeans/colonizers who reached the Americas established a dichotomy between oral tradition and the written word, emphasizing the highest value of the former in Western society. This is read by Martins as an attempt to erase knowledges that were considered unwanted or heretical by them (Martins, 2021, p. 34), e.g., African and Indigenous knowledges. Trapped in this Western logic is the African culture, predominantly spread through oral tradition, as stated by Martins: "African cultures transferred to the Americas found in orality their privileged, although not exclusive, way of producing knowledge"²⁰ (Martins, 2021, p. 36, my translation).

²⁰ In the original: "As culturas africanas trasladadas para as Américas encontravam na oralidade seu modo privilegiado, ainda que não exclusivo, de produção de conhecimento"

Opposing this Western notion that privileged written knowledge, Martins delves into the significance of the oral tradition and the rituals based on ancestral knowledge to develop her concept of *oralitura*:

Conceptually and methodologically, *oralitura* designates the complex texture of oral and corporal performances, their functioning, the processes, procedures, means and systems of inscription of the knowledge founded and founding of corporal epistemes, highlighting in them the transit of memory, history and worldviews that are processed through corporealities. **And it also alludes to the writing of this knowledge, as performative inscriptions and erasure of the dichotomy between orality and writing.**²¹ (Martins, 2021, p. 41, my translation, emphasis added)

Oralitura is within Martins's development of the concept of *tempo espiralar*, spiral time, an understanding of time that opposes the Eurocentric, fixed, and linear reading; instead, it departs from the African and Indigenous perspective of time. For Martins's spiral time, past, present, and future are interwoven and acting upon each other dynamically. Spiral time sheds light on new forms of conceiving cultural memory, identity, and experiences. *Oralitura*, then, is placed as one of the aspects of how this non-linear time operates, by both affecting and being affected by the past. Hence, the relevance in discussing oral tradition and ancestral knowledges. The rites, rituals, and ceremonies are also central in constructing this spiral time. Martins states that,

As a form of thought, rites are fertile collections of mnemonic reserves, kinetic actions, patterns, and residual cultural procedures recreated, restored, and expressed in and by the body. Rites transmit and institute aesthetic, philosophical, and metaphysical knowledge, among others, whether in their symbolic framework or in the modes of enunciation, in the apparatuses and conventions that shape their performance.²² (Martins, 2021, p. 47, my translation)

Moreover, memory is key in the importance of knowledge creation and transmission through people and generations. Martins's concept of time is not one that advances linearly but travels through memories and experiences that are felt and spoken by the bodies who live them, these memories become "means of creation, transmission, reproduction and preservation of knowledge." Besides, for Martins, "what is repeated in the body and in the voice is an episteme." (Martins, 2021, p. 149, my translation).

²¹ In the original: "Conceitual e metodologicamente, *oralitura* designa a complexa textura das performances orais e corporais, seu funcionamento, os processos, procedimentos, meios e sistemas de inscrição dos saberes fundados e fundantes das epistemes corporais, destacando neles o trânsito da memória, da história, das cosmovisões que pelas corporeidades se processam. E alude também à grafia desses saberes, como inscrições performáticas e rasura da dicotomia entre a oralidade e a escrita."

²² In the original: "Como forma pensamento, os ritos são férteis acervos de reservas mnemônicas, ações cinéticas, padrões, procedimentos culturais residuais recriados, restituídos e expressos no e pelo corpo. Os ritos transmitem e instituem saberes estéticos, filosóficos e metafísicos, entre outros, quer em sua moldura simbólica, quer nos modos de enunciação, nos aparatos e convenções que esculpem sua performance."

Bearing this discussion in mind, I would like to approach how such a dichotomy of written and spoken word is also dismantled by Earthseed. Despite being an avid reader and writer, Olamina does not prize her writings over the community's uses of oral tradition. Words are spoken and spread, and the centrality of Earthseed lies in the Gatherings, meaning that although the verses are contained in *The Books of the Living*, they are required to be brought to life by the people, the living. Moreover, Earthseed is born as an oral tradition. While traveling the roads, Olamina had but a few written verses about her God of Change, she would talk about it, about her ideas, with the new people as she grew her confidence in them. In this sense, Lauren values both the oral and written tradition of Earthseed, her writings of *The Books of the Living* are a register, a documentation of Earthseed as a philosophical approach. But the books and the verses are nothing if not shared and put into practice by the community. Through the cultivation of ceremonies and rituals guided by Earthseed verses, they are enmeshed in a complex process that, at the same (spiral) time, creates, spreads, and accesses ancestral knowledge.

The Word, either written or spoken, is power, and power comes in both empowering and destructive ways. Besides their internal organization, Acorn and Earthseed were also spread through the words of nearby people and villages. They become known for their community and, consequently, persecuted for the same reasons. Acorn rose as a threat to the oppressive Christian American government, but Earthseed survived because of their rites and ceremonies and knowledges strong enough to preserve their memory.

5.2 MEMORY AND ANCESTRAL KNOWLEDGE AS EARTHSEED'S GREATEST WEAPON: LAUREN OLAMINA'S JOURNALS AND THE DOCUMENTATION OF UNTOLD STORIES.

In Earthseed, there is no promised afterlife. Earthseed's heaven is literal, physical—other worlds circling other stars. It promises its people immortality only through their children, their work, and their memories. (Butler, 2019b, p. 43)

While *Parable of the Sower* covers Olamina's at first individual growth and survival journey, it also depicts her gradual construction of Earthseed as a community during the migration North, ultimately settling with her people in Acorn. *Parable of the Talents* already starts as a communal book, with entries from Marcus and Bankole, but most importantly, Larkin's introduction to each chapter as she reads the journals of her parents. We no longer read only Olamina's accounts of the events but also Larkin's impressions of her mother and father through the memories contained in their journals.

Earthseed lived through written and spoken words, equally valued by Olamina, both forms enabled the ideas to be spread and become the most valuable tool for resistance. Oppression in Earthseed's scenario operated the same as spotted by Martins regarding Europeans/colonizers; it was revealed to be guided by a profound attempt to erase memories. A series of erasures happen after Acorn is invaded. The first erasing to occur is the changing of names, Acorn becomes Camp Christian. A clear reference to the Nazi concentration camps, in Christian America the camps were places to educate the heathens through forced work, violence, and religious indoctrination.

Camp Christian was made of every attitude condemned by Earthseed: the violence, the enslavement, the murder. While in the past they were randomly targeted on the roads for being wanderers and refugees in a chaotic mass of panicking people, when the Christian Crusaders orchestrate the invasion of Acorn, it means they are persecuted for what they are and for the threat they represent to the oppressive government that had just risen to power. Acorn began to be seen as a "cult," and their non-Christian beliefs and actions put them into the target to suffer from enslavement and abuse, all in the name of religion. Being kept captive and tortured by people who believed they should be cured of heathenism and learn how to become good Christian people.

The invasion of Acorn was a violent one, they were surrounded by tanks and had no time to attempt escaping. Some Earthseed people died in this very first moment, and later the remaining people were forced to dig their graves and bury them. This is how Olamina learns of Bankole's death. Those left alive were put in slave-collars, a device that was not uncommon in their society, they had seen it in small towns, especially being used by people who were sexually enslaved. The collars, also called choke chains, are described as electronic devices that, when activated by the owner, "delivered shocks and sometimes damaged or killed people. [...] They're programmed to resist being removed or destroyed by delivering jolts of pain severe enough to cause unconsciousness" (Butler, 2019b, p. 80). They learn at that moment that Acorn was only a place, and the place meant nothing without Earthseed traditions. Olamina writes, "Earthseed lives. Enough of us know it and believe it for it to live on in us. Earthseed lives and will live. But Jarret's Crusaders have strangled Acorn. Acorn is dead." (Butler, 2019b, p. 213). In fact, even in the horrors of Camp Christian, the learnings from Earthseed would be the encouragement they needed to survive another day and keep surviving. Their community was relatively new but showed itself to be strong enough to fight for themselves and for their beliefs.

One of the first acts of the Christian Crusaders in Camp Christian was to forbid any kind of intellectual expression; they were forbidden to write and read. Women and men, always separated, were made to work on the land all day long to make it a bigger Camp, but Olamina managed to save some scraps and a pencil and wrote after dark. They burned Acorn's written registers, marriages, births, and deaths certificates, their library, the children's drawings, paintings, and everything they collectively built during those six years of Acorn. The only burning Olamina and her people did in Acorn was to burn their dead instead of burying them because the corpses' decomposition could attract wild dogs, who were as dangerous as wolves. They might have burned their dead, but they did everything to keep their memories alive. The purpose of the Crusaders was the opposite, burning every vestige of memory, both collective and individual, from the people and from the place itself. Memories were burned for the sake of erasing a community that extremists considered unworthy of being in a Christian America.

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. They've burned our books and our papers. They've burned all that they could find of our past. It's all ungodly trash, they say. (Butler, 2019b, p. 209)

The physical torture, in Olamina's words, was beyond being a punishment of the flesh, it was also a form of corrupting the mind and, therefore, the memories. Olamina writes, "I knew almost nothing about hate until this thing was put around my neck" (Butler, 2019b, p. 225). The community had already been erased literally from the maps when Camp Christian was formed, no one dared approach where Acorn once was. They had their histories burned and their families and kin torn apart in the name of religious reeducation. On top of all these sufferings, the physical violence was also an attempt to make them forget about themselves. Olamina writes:

Being lashed hard several times is enough to induce temporary coordination problems and memory loss. [...] After surviving Robledo, I knew that strangers could appear and steal or destroy everything and everyone I loved. People and possessions could be snatched away. But somehow, it had not occurred to me that...that bits of my own mind could be snatched away too. I knew I could be killed. I've never had any illusions about that. I could be disabled. I knew that too. But I had not thought that another person, just by pushing a small button, then smiling and pushing it again and again... (Butler, 2019b, p. 224)

Olamina's description of confusion and trauma after being lashed or electrocuted by the slave-collar offers a powerfully disturbing image of how the Crusaders' "reeducation" system systematically targeted mind and memory, not only the body. It was so extreme that suicides happened in Camp Christian, and those who endured the pain further did so by sacrificing a part of themselves. They would never be the same afterward. This metaphorical loss of memory as a result of violence and physical abuse might also be read as an attempt to erase who they were in essence and make them accept Christianity as an allowance to exist.

In this camp of violence, however, their memories of Earthseed and of their shared experiences were their most valuable tool for resistance. The memories of their lives before and the comfortable and truthful life they built in Acorn were motivation enough to fight against Camp Christian. The Earthseed people build their bond through memories, they were all at some point victims of loss who were trying to survive the also violent scenario of the highway-walking. Just like Olamina, many of them were made of their experiences and their parents' and families' experiences passed down to them, be they good or bad. They, Earthseed, were strongly built upon their ancestral knowledge, their rituals, and that was their tool for resisting their toughest times.

According to Martins and her concept of Spiral Time, “our experience of the present depends on our knowledge of the past”²³ (Martins, 2021, p. 40, *my translation*). She goes on to complete that “the ancestor is, therefore, waves and radiations, collections of memory, accumulation of temporalities”²⁴ (Martins, 2021, p. 60, *my translation*). The importance of ancestry for Black people is even more relevant since “Black cultures look upon these knowledges that are dispersed and manifested through a prism of formulations and forms that govern *oralituras*, their means and modes of veridiction, their strength of permanence and Presence.”²⁵ (Martins, 2021, p. 67, *my translation*). In this sense, metaphorically and literally fighting for their memories is fighting for their histories and their ancestors'. Being erased by a Christian fundamentalist group would mean that the boomeranging of history would happen again, in Allen's (2009) concept, the history would repeat itself. And the purpose of Earthseed is to not let that happen, is to advocate for change.

Earthseed stands as guidance for building a community of resistance through rituals, oral tradition, and ancestral knowledge. In Martins's concept, the oral tradition, the performances, and the rituals are all means to strengthen the relationship between the people and their ancestors:

In the circuit of tradition, which preserves the ancestral word, and in that of transmission, which reactivates and moves it in the present, the word is breath, utterance, diction, event, and performance, an index of wisdom. This knowledge becomes an event not because it has crystallized in the repertoires of memory, but mainly because it is reissued in the performance of the singer/narrator and in the collective response. The oral word exists in the moment of its expression, when it articulates the contiguous syntax through which it is realized, fostering the

²³ In the original: “nossa experiência do presente depende do nosso conhecimento do passado”.

²⁴ In the original: “O ancestre é, assim, ondas e radiações, acervos de memória, acúmulo de temporalidades”

²⁵ In the original: “As culturas negras se espelham nesses saberes que se dispersam e se manifestam por um prisma de formulações e de formas que regem as oralituras, seus meios e modos de veridicção, sua força de permanência e de Presença.”

kinship between those present, the ancestors, and the deities.²⁶ (Martins, 2021, p. 93, *my translation*)

Regarding memories, Lauren Olamina's journals are, in a first moment, an attempt to avoid her history being erased, and, later on, they also become a record of all the lives and losses that passed through Acorn. Olamina's aim is also to tell their stories. From the day she was forced to escape Robledo, she documented not only her life and her feelings but also the stories of people around her—families, orphaned children, adults, sharers or not. From the moment they became Earthseed, Olamina's stories became a collective one. A story of people from different backgrounds relying on community to survive as a group. Moreover, in a chaotic, anti-education society, erasing memories also means erasing relationships and dismantling community:

All of our young children are gone. All of them. From Larkin, the youngest, to the Faircloth boys, the oldest, they've vanished. Now we are told that our children have been saved from our wickedness. They've been given "good Christian homes." We won't see them again unless we leave our "heathenism" behind and prove that we've become people who can be trusted near Christian children. (Butler, 2019b, p. 205)

When the children are taken by the Crusaders to be raised by good Christian families, they are all renamed, and their history in Acorn is erased: "So children who had already lost their homes and their parents or guardians had also had their sisters or brothers and their own names taken from them." (Butler, 2019b, p. 286). Just like the erasure that happens in the process of colonization discussed by Martins, as highlighted a few pages back, the children are given Christian names.

Larkin Beryl Ife Olamina Bankole is renamed and given to Christians as Asha Vere, a name derived from a Christian video-game character. In this sense, Larkin, as much as her biological family, is a child of the diaspora. She was a few months old when she was taken away from her people and from her culture. Olamina fears she would not recognize Larkin if she were to find her: "With all that, how will I find Larkin? How will I ever find my child? [...] But is Larkin anything like the Larkin I remember anymore? How can she be? Babies grow and change so fast." (Butler, 2019b, p. 286). In addition, the inspiration for Larkin's Christian name is almost a foreshadowing of her adulthood future, in which she would meet Lauren and have

²⁶ In the original: No circuito da tradição, que guarda a palavra ancestral, e no da transmissão, que a reatualiza e movimenta no presente, a palavra é sopro, hálito, dicção, acontecimento e performance, índice de sabedoria. Esse saber torna-se evento não porque se cristalizou nos repertórios da memória, mas, principalmente, por ser reeditado na performance do cantador/narrador e na resposta coletiva. A palavra oral existe no momento de sua expressão, quando articula a sintaxe contígua, através da qual se realiza, fertilizando o parentesco entre os presentes, os antepassados e as divindades.

difficulty in accepting the famous Earthseed leader as her mother and deny understanding her life-long commitment to the Earthseed communities. In one of her entries, she writes about her story and her name:

I was cared for at the Pelican Bay nursery for several months. [...] Also, there I was given my name: Asha Vere. Asha Vere was the name of a character in a popular Dreamask program. Asha Vere was a tall, beautiful, Amazon-like Black Christian American woman who ran around rescuing people from heathen cults, anti-Christian plots, and squatter-camp pimps. I suppose someone thought that naming me after such an upright character might stifle any hereditary inclination in me toward heathenism. So I was stuck with the name. (Butler, 2019b, p. 217)

Asha Vere, the tall, beautiful, Amazon-like Black Christian American, is an antithesis of Lauren Olamina, a tall, strong, Black woman who fights for the right of everyone to own their lives through Earthseed, and rescues whoever is in need to escape a world that is not welcoming. Lauren and Larkin's estranged relationship evokes a double meaning for Hartman's concept of losing one's mother. Larkin loses her origins when she is kidnapped by the Crusaders, she loses the opportunity to know her own story and her own people. She also literally loses her mother. Despite being a newborn, she is deprived of the chance to be with and to actually know Olamina. Besides, it could be stated that she lost her mother twice, since her adoptive mother is described as someone who never liked her, to the point of turning a blind eye to her husband's abusive behavior towards Larkin.

Hartman's metaphor of the mother is also applicable to Lauren Olamina, who, besides losing her place of origin, also lost her mother, who died during childbirth. It is as if both Lauren and Larkin had to be detached from their origins to become who they were. Moreover, Lauren also lost her mother twice, first when her biological mother died and then when her stepmother, Cory, was killed in the invasion of Robledo. Just like she is to Larkin through her journals, Lauren's biological mother, whom she never met, is mostly a memory that her father shared with her, but she is always present in Olamina's life. Olamina loses her mother and dreams about her. In the opening chapter of *Parable of the Talents*, Olamina dreams that she is back at Robledo, that her family is safe, until the dream "begins to become a nightmare" and people start vanishing in the order that they did in her real life. Although, differently from what happens in the reality, her mother is in the dream, Olamina describes that an unknown woman enters the house:

She is a stranger.
She is my mother.
She is the woman in the one picture my father gave me of my biological mother. [...]
But the picture was still ruined. All I had left was the memory of it. And here was that memory, sitting next to me. (Butler, 2019b, p. 8)

Lauren reflects on the presence of her mother in the dream and the fact that her mother was the reason she was a hyperempath, a sharer. Her condition's blame was, more specifically, the side effect of her mother's use of Paracetco during pregnancy, a drug designed for treating Alzheimer's but which was used by healthy people to deepen their focus and increase their brain's performance. Differently from Larkin's relationship with her, Lauren does not seem to blame her mother or to wish to be apart from her, as Larkin does due to her despise of Earthseed:

I reach out to my mother. **No matter what she's done, I want to know her.** But she won't look at me. She won't even turn her head. And somehow, I can't quite reach her, can't touch her. I try to get up from my chair, but I can't move. My body won't obey me. I can only sit and listen as my father preaches. (Butler, 2019b, p. 9, emphasis added)

In this symbolic dream, Lauren's father is preaching the biblical parable of the talents, and right after he delivers the message of spreading and multiplying gifts, her family starts disappearing, and Lauren awakens in Acorn, where she was doing exactly what the parable talks about. Through Earthseed, she also follows her father's steps: "My father loved parables—stories that taught, stories that presented ideas and morals in ways that made pictures in people's minds. [...] Because he believed stories were so important as teaching tools, I learned to pay more attention to them than I might have otherwise." (Butler, 2019b, p. 10). Her dream or nightmare, after all, was a subconscious message to keep on feeding the community and investing her gifts in her people. She might have lost her mother and her family in both a literal sense and in Hartman's sense, but she was nurturing her own family of kin.

Going back to Lauren and Larkin's estrangement, their relationship can also be read through one of the biblical parables, the Parable of the Sower, as it is possible to draw a parallel between Larkin's upbringing and her later behavior of avoiding and despising Lauren. Away from her people, Larkin was the seed that fell into unfruitful soil. Different from Lauren's upbringing in a family that encouraged and taught her, Larkin's adoption's whole purpose was purely to erase her past and turn her into a good and obedient Christian. This way, Larkin's losses are without a possibility of recollection, she has no past to rely on. Larkin's only past is with a family who was there to "save her" from her real past. Another significant aspect of Larkin's behavior is Lauren's brother, Marcus. Marcus met Larkin when she was 19 and had left her parents' home. She went after Marcus, who had become a famous priest that toured the country with his discs and preachings. Marcus knew who she was and told Larkin that he knew her parents, he lied to her that they were dead. From that point on, he treated Larkin as a niece, gave her a home, took her to his church, and offered her financial help and education, but never

told her anything about Olamina. Larkin discovered her mother by herself after having researched a little about Earthseed:

By then, I was 34, and I wanted very much to meet her. My friends and Uncle Marc's housekeeper had told me how much I looked like this charismatic, dangerous, heathen cult leader. I had paid no attention until, in researching Lauren Olamina's life, I discovered that she had had a child, a daughter, and that that daughter had been abducted from an early Earthseed community called Acorn. (Butler, 2019b, p. 393)

Later, Marcus would tell Larkin that he found her when she was just three years old, but seeing that she was being taken care of by a good Christian family, he felt that he could not interfere. In her impressions of her mother's journal entries, when she writes about her life and reflects on her mother's, Larkin does not demonstrate any resentment toward Marcus; on the contrary, she often writes about how different she found out he and Olamina are and how much she loves her uncle, while she cannot feel anything for her mother. Such as in the following commentary, her perspective of when Marcus preaches at Acorn's Gathering and is confronted by the people:

She had a truth that she wanted to teach and an outer-space Destiny that she wanted taken seriously and someday fulfilled. And it's obvious from her treatment of Uncle Marc that she was very territorial about the whole thing. I don't know whether Uncle Marc ever realized how she set him up to fail and to make a bad first impression with her people. (Butler, 2019b, p. 151)

Most of these negative remarks about her mother and Earthseed demonstrate how Larkin had fully absorbed the Christian values, a fulfillment of the Crusaders' attempts to erase Acorn and Earthseed from her. Besides that, she would always be encouraged by Marcus to ignore, despise, and forget about Earthseed and their "heathen" communities, since they were non-Christian movements. As the following quote demonstrates, Larkin was watching some news about the Earthseed attempts to send people into outer-space, and she comments about it with Marcus:

"Are they serious? Interstellar emigration? My god, why don't they just move to Antarctica if they want to rough it?" And he surprised me by making a straight line of his mouth and looking away. I had expected him to laugh.
 "They're serious," he said. "They're sad, ridiculous, misled people who believe that the answer to all human problems is to fly off to Alpha Centauri."
 I did laugh. "Is a flying saucer coming for them or what?"
 He shrugged. "They're pathetic. Forget about them." (Butler, 2019b, p. 377)

However, an important role of Earthseed's and Olamina's oral and written tradition is the constant recording of memories and experiences, which enabled Larkin to know her mother and her father through their journals, mostly Olamina's journals, which Larkin assembles in a collection after her mother dies. They finally met when Larkin was in her thirties, Olamina was already world famous, and Earthseed was a huge without-borders movement. Despite their

blood-bond, they never became close. From Larkin's readings of such intimate writings and thoughts, it becomes clear that her estrangement from Olamina comes from Earthseed and her mother's attempt to change the world.

I have wanted to love her and to believe that what happened between her and me wasn't her fault. I've wanted that. But instead, I've hated her, feared her, needed her. I've never trusted her, though, never understood how she could be the way she was—so focused, and yet so misguided, there for all the world, but never there for me. I still don't understand. And now that she's dead, I'm not even sure I ever will. But I must try because I need to understand myself, and she is part of me. I wish that she weren't, but she is. **In order for me to understand who I am, I must begin to understand who she was. That is my reason for writing and assembling this book.** (Larkin in Prologue, Butler, 2019b, p. xiv, emphasis added)

The emphasis on the quote above makes it clear that, even though Larkin had the chance in life, her interest in her mother is posthumous, bringing up once more the concept of losing one's mother and growing from loss. Moreover, throughout Larkin's remarks about the passages she reads in Lauren's journals, it can be implied that maybe she believed if Earthseed did not exist, all the persecution of Acorn would never have happened, and perhaps she would not end up in a Christian family with an uncaring mother and an abusive father. She writes about her biological family:

He and my mother met during the Pox when they were both homeless wanderers. [...] He couldn't keep my mother safe of course. No one could have done that. She had chosen her path long before they met. His mistake was in seeing her as a young girl. She was already a missile, armed and targeted. (Butler, 2019b, p. 5)

Larkin again demonstrates the assimilation of Christianity when she keeps seeing Earthseed not only as a negative organization and Olamina's attitude as irresponsible and dangerous, but also as a threat to herself and her importance in her mother's life. She questions herself: "I wonder what my life would have been like if my mother had found me. I don't doubt that she would have stolen me from the Alexanders—or died trying. But then what? How long would it have been before she put me aside for Earthseed, **her other kid?**" (Butler, 2019b, p. 292, emphasis added).

Despite their differences, both of them use writing to communicate their feelings and to create new possibilities to survive a struggling reality. Lauren, on one hand, starts writing back in Robledo when she is faced with the knowledge and desperation that her community would not hold for much longer. Larkin, on the other hand, writes and creates fictional worlds where she can be someone else. Someone whose history was not erased and robbed from her, so she created stories:

I wrote about having different parents—parents who cared about me and didn't wish always that I were another person, the sainted Kamaria. I didn't know at this time that I was adopted. All I had was the usual child's suspicion that I might be, and that somewhere, somehow, I might have

beautiful, powerful “real” parents who would come for me someday. [...] Instead of living in shabby, patched-together old Seattle with its missile-strike scars, we lived in a big corporate town. [...] I read a lot. I watched people and I eavesdropped. I got a lot of the ideas from kids whose parents let them have nonreligious Masks and books—bad books, we called them. In short, I tried to do what my biological mother hated, but couldn’t help doing. I tried to feel what other people felt and know them—really know them. (Butler, 2019b, p. 327)

It is noticeable that Larkin also feels as if she lost and would always lose her mother to Earthseed, so she distanced herself from Lauren. “I was her weakness. Earthseed was her strength. No wonder it was her favorite.” (Butler, 2019b, p. 292). Lauren’s journals contain plenty of entries of her talking to Bankole about Earthseed and how she believed it to be greater than her life. Lauren never retreated in fear, she was fully dedicated to and believer of Earthseed. She declined a better life in a village where Bankole was offered a position of physician because she was unable to leave her community in exchange for more safety only for Bankole and herself. After all, the village was just a community like any other, but Acorn was Earthseed. Earthseed, where lies all Larkin’s problems with her mother: “If my mother had created only Acorn, the refuge for the homeless and the orphaned...If she had created Acorn, but not Earthseed, then I think she would have been a wholly admirable person.” (Butler, 2019b, p. 60).

Beyond the losing of beloved people, the losses of the places are also intrinsically connected to the erasing of memories. In each place lost, past lives were also lost, not only in the loss of the materiality that composed memories, as Olamina lost everything that belonged to the Robledo house—childhood memories, pictures, documents—but along with the feeling of losing a place of belonging, she also lost the place where many memories were made. With the burning of Robledo and also, later on, the burning of Acorn, she lost the metaphorical kind of memory that inhabits a well-known, familiar place, the feeling of having a place she could return to. But, again, Acorn was only a place. Before being Acorn, it was already Earthseed for those people who got together while wandering the danger zones of the highways. Earthseed was themselves and, therefore, could not be destroyed or erased. Earthseed was never a geographical settlement. While memory erasing was one of the biggest threats to those targeted by the fundamentalist government, the production of memory through shared experiences, ceremonies, Gatherings, and oral tradition was the preservation tool for Earthseed, the survival of their memories, and the memories they carried from their ancestors.

Memory lives on in many forms, and the short life of Acorn was able to demonstrate that Olamina’s philosophy was bigger than a community’s organizational system. Earthseed was within them all as shared wisdom to carry and to pass on. The role of recuperating memory in narratives of diaspora is connected to the idea of oral tradition and the passing on of stories.

For Hartman, it is a movement back to give stories and naming of the dead, as in *Venus*, and trying to fill the blanks within history after the loss of a place to belong. For Martins, the movements of stories and the relationship to memory are both in the body and in the ancestral knowledge that permeated such body; all that comes from this diasporic relationship is unique wisdom that bonds past, present, and future.

A body, a time, a gesture of memory. The chords of ancestry create supplements that cover the many gaps, voids and ruptures forged by the abyssal diasporas, something that takes the place of something that seemed inexorably submerged in the crossings, but that is perennially transcreated, reincorporated and restored in the cadences of its otherness, inscribed under the sign of reminiscence and presence in the curvilinear spirals of time. A knowledge, a wisdom.²⁷ (Martins, p. 214)

When Olamina writes about her community and her people, which are so thoroughly described in her journals, she is also giving those people, some of them uneducated and illiterate, a part in the story she was telling the world. She is both being nurtured by and nurturing ancestral knowledge. Earthseed stops belonging to her when her words reach others, “words are power,” as Martins put it, and words are movements of accessing knowledge, ways of surviving in the diaspora. Similarly to Martins and Hartman, Anzaldúa explores the manifold power in living in between-worlds and resisting with and through the communal rituals, the performances, and the body that gives life to these words:

My “stories” are acts encapsulated in time, “enacted” every time they are spoken aloud or read silently. I like to think of them as performances and not as inert and “dead” objects (as the aesthetics of Western culture think of art works). Instead, the work has an identity; it is a “who” or a “what” and contains the presences of persons, that is, incarnations of gods or ancestors or natural and cosmic powers. (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 67)

She continues, arguing that,

For only through the body, through the pulling of flesh, can the human soul be transformed. And for images, words, stories to have this transformative power, they must arise from the human body—flesh and bone—and from the Earth’s body—stone, sky, liquid, soil. (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 75)

In a world committed to erasing unwanted memories and identities and to harming bodies that inhabit them, the act of invoking words and rituals, words that travel through the individual flesh, the communal body, and outside, is a powerful resistance method to keeping memories and people alive. While Anzaldúa writes from the dual, in-between place of the border, Olamina writes from the many literal and metaphorical borders that are built in *Parables*

²⁷ In the original: Um corpo, um tempo, um gesto de memória. Os acordes da ancestralidade criam suplementos que revestem os muitos hiatos, vazios e rupturas forjados pelas abissais diásporas, algo que se coloca em lugar de alguma coisa que parecia inexoravelmente submersa nas travessias, mas que é perenemente transcriada, reincorporada e restituída nas cadências de sua alteridade, inscritas sob o signo da reminiscência e da presença nas curvilíneas espirais do tempo. Um saber, uma sapiência.

through the rise of violence and intolerance. She is the epitome of crafting resistance with her bare hands, to guarantee she would at least have a chance of surviving. About living on the borderlands, Anzaldúa writes, “I want the freedom to carve and chisel my own face, to staunch the bleeding with ashes, to fashion my own gods out of my entrails” (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 22). While Olamina’s in-between worlds are not quite the same, she also needs to fashion her god out of her entrails because no god known to her is enough for facing the inhuman world into which she was born.

Anzaldúa’s work challenges the conventional perception of the world and relies on a series of paradigms of change and transformation. One of the images she constructed to illustrate the clash of the knowledges validated by the world with the “unwanted knowledges” is the Shadow Beast, which she defines as a hidden part of people who need to survive hostile places: **“To avoid rejection, some of us conform to the values of the culture, push the unacceptable parts into the shadows.** Which leaves only one fear—that we will be found out and that the Shadow-Beast will break out of its cage.” (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 20, emphasis added). While Anzaldúa writes it as a provocation to being queer, the allegory of a beast that lives in the shadows, hidden so it will not be apparent to the world, which despises it, can also be read in different contexts.

There is a rebel in me—the Shadow-Beast. It is a part of me that refuses to take orders from outside authorities. It refuses to take orders from my conscious will, it threatens the sovereignty of my rulership. It is that part of me that hates constraints of any kind, even those self-imposed. At the least hint of limitations on my time or space by others, it kicks out with both feet. Bolts. (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 16)

For Olamina, her whole life needs to be in the shadows so that she may survive. From her hyperempathy to her Earthseed, she passes through different stages of embracing her Shadow-beast until embracing it as the rebel of change, stepping out of the shadows, assuming its true form, and confronting the world. This way, Olamina’s shadow-beast is her power, her ancestral knowledge, her hyperempathy, and her truth, Earthseed. It is what nurtures her power of Change.

The destruction of Acorn is a symbolic acknowledgement that nothing is more important than their freedom, and, beyond that, it also demonstrates how they have shaped Earthseeds to live whenever they could survive and spread the Change’s knowledges throughout their lives. When they were held captive in Camp Christian, the collars made it impossible for them to escape; the few who tried, or who acted disobediently, were choked to death. Since the devices were electronic and there was a powerhouse that connected them all to the controllers, it was due to a thunderstorm and a power outage that they could rebel against the Crusaders, who,

then, had no control over the collars. They kill the Crusaders and set fire to the houses and to their bodies. They set fire to the place that they built from scratch, to the places that were once home to hope and kinship. However, the memories from Camp Christian were enough to erase that, too: “We burned Acorn. No. No, we burned Camp Christian.” (Butler, 2019b, p. 258), Olamina writes in her journal along with the description of the night they were all able to escape:

So, once more, we watched our homes burn. We went into the hills, separating from the last of the other inmates, who went their own ways back to the highway or wherever else they might want to go. From the hills, for a time, we watched. Most of us had seen our homes burn before, but we had not been the ones to set the fires. **This time, though, it’s too late for fire to be the destroyer that we remembered. The things that we had created and loved had already been destroyed. This time, the fires only cleansed.** (Butler, 2019b, p. 259, emphasis added)

The burning of Acorn is an entirely different scenario from all the burnings and invasions most of them saw back in their homes, or of a time back on the roads. Acorn needed to be set on fire because it was already dead when Camp Christian was installed. The only survivor was Earthseed, and Earthseed could be rewritten from Acorn’s ashes, as long as they wanted. The seeds were in the shared knowledge, in the acceptance of Change, in each survivor that kept alive the teachings of *The Books of the Living* and was seeding the ideas further. *Earthseed: The Books of the Living* has stated that “in order to rise from its own ashes, a phoenix first must burn” (Butler, 2019b, p. 257). Olamina goes through two moments of destruction, two fires, two homes lost, and too many loved ones lost. The difference between Robledo and Acorn is that Acorn is the real phoenix. Robledo was attacked, and there was nothing but good memories of a beloved community being burned. Acorn needed to be burned. Acorn was burned to cleanse from Camp Christian, not only to destroy, they burned it to let Acorn free from being the shell of a brutal past, to rise again renewed.

In a mirroring of Robledo’s history, after the burning of Acorn, those who remained from the community were spread through the highways again:

I sent my people away. We survived slavery together, but I didn’t believe that we could survive freedom together. I broke up the Earthseed community and sent its parts in all directions. I believe it was the right thing to do, but I can hardly bear to think about it. Once I’ve written this, perhaps I can begin to heal. I don’t know. All I know now is that I’ve torn a huge hole in myself. I’ve sent away those who mean most to me. They were all I had left, and I know I may not see them ever again. (Butler, 2019b, p. 264)

Earthseed goes back to its origins, to being an idea spread by word of mouth on the highways and villages. This time, however, it is not being born in a chaotic diaspora towards the North searching for survival. This second time it has already risen from its ashes. Earthseed is being spread by each Earthseed person who survived slavery and who had faith in a better world of

Changes. Earthseed would spread, through oral tradition, into many destinies after they were all separated into the roads again, this time looking for their children and not for a safe-haven North. Earthseed would be spoken and passed on until they could be reunited again in communities of Change to create and nurture more memories and value their ancestral knowledges. Valuing Earthseed's life.

"We have lived before
 We will live again
 We will be silk,
 Stone,
 Mind,
 Star,
 We will be scattered,
 Gathered,
 Molded,
 Probed.
 We will live,
 And we will serve life.
 We will shape God
 And God will shape us
 Again,
 Always again
 Forevermore."

(Butler, 2019b, p. 56)

6 TAKING ROOT AMONG THE LIVING: EARTHSEED AS A PHILOSOPHICAL STATEMENT TO READING AFRODIASPORIC NARRATIVES

“We are a beginning,” I said, thinking as I spoke. “It’s as though Earthseed is only an infant like Larkin—‘one small seed.’ Right now we would be so very easy to stamp out. That terrifies me. That’s why we have to grow and spread — to make ourselves less vulnerable.” (Butler, 2019b, p. 175)

The greatest objective stated by Olamina throughout her life is that Earthseed needs to be spread. In the same way as seeds, it must be cultivated and disseminated to become widespread and numerous. Olamina was always bold enough to assume Earth would never be enough, that Earthseed’s future would be to cross the final frontier with space travel and inhabit other planets. The Destiny, Earthseed’s ultimate goal, was to take root among the stars. Before that, however, a bigger earthly objective needed to be done: Earthseed had to be rooted among the living, among the people, so it could be taken elsewhere. Therefore, Earthseed was never a movement or a fixed place; it was always its members, the people who make it alive and continually growing.

Olamina once dreamed of an organized community that would gradually grow both in size and in number of people. From this community would eventually derive many other small communities that would grow and go through the same process. Her rather utopian expectations were met with an extremely different outcome with the destruction of Acorn, showing that change was indeed the inevitable driving force of life. Earthseed struggled but survived. Because Earthseed was always the people, any place could be an Earthseed community as long as Earthseed people were there to sow their seeds and to keep living the truth of Change. When the survivors of Camp Christian decide they will separate themselves to avoid attention from the still-tyrannical government and to search for their abducted children, Olamina demonstrates that she is really living the truth of Earthseed. On one hand, she writes that the night before separating themselves, they wept together like tired children; on the other hand, she comments about how dividing themselves was not as hard as expected. They were prepared to live a reality moved by change and to shape it:

And yet in spite of my fears for my friends, my people, in spite of my longing to hold together a community that must divide, all this was easier than I had thought it would be—easier than I thought it *could* be. We’d all worked so well together for six years, and we’d endured so much as slaves. Now we were dividing ourselves, deciding how to go our separate ways. I don’t mean that it was easy—just that it wasn’t as hard as I expected. God is Change. I’ve taught that for six years. It’s true, and I suppose it’s paved the way for us now. **Earthseed prepares you to live in the world that is and try to shape the world that you want.** (Butler, 2019b, p. 271, emphasis added)

Focusing on the diaspora they face post-Acorn, this chapter is dedicated to exploring the manifold aspects of Earthseed's Destiny, from Olamina's life of preaching Earthseed to the symbolism of achieving the Destiny and launching the Earthseed colonizing spaceships. The spreading of a godless god, of a way of thinking that prioritizes community and the people, and that allows people to enact their power of change, of actively shaping the world that they want. Therefore, demonstrating Earthseed's role in making possible a rewriting of the diasporic movement in *Parables* through its Afrofuturistic elements. Moreover, delving into its power of fabulation to think about how *Parables*' ending might stand as an Afrofuturistic message of hope to science fiction narratives of the diaspora.

6.1 SEEKING UNFIXED DESTINIES: OLAMINA'S NOMADIC LIFE AND THE GROWTH OF EARTHSEED AS A GLOBAL COMMUNITY

My mother, when I finally met her, was still a drifter. She was immensely rich—or, at least, Earthseed was immensely rich. But she had no home of her own—not even a rented apartment. She drifted between the homes of her many friends and supporters, and between the many Earthseed Communities that she established or encouraged in the United States, Canada, Alaska, Mexico, and Brazil. And she went on teaching, preaching, fund-raising, and spreading her political influence. I met her when she visited a New York Earthseed community in the Adirondacks—a place called Red Spruce. (Butler, 2019b, p. 392, *Larkin commenting on Olamina's life*)

When Earthseed's people burned Camp Christian and freed themselves, they did not return to a starting point; instead, they were aware of being small but strong seeds who were able to start new beginnings. All of them carried the knowledge and the transformative power of the God of Change. Being Earthseed, they were deeply changed, and they would inevitably change others, making the truth of what Olamina wrote years before: "All that you touch, You Change. All that you Change, Changes you. The only lasting truth Is Change. God Is Change". Earthseed, then, is spread literally through its people's existence and their actions in the world, through generations, through their traditions and preachings, and through Olamina's efforts in making their Destiny happen.

The search for the kidnapped children leads them into another kind of diasporic movement. They needed to separate, first and foremost, to merge into the villagers and avoid drawing attention to themselves as ex-captives who had killed the Christian American Crusaders. Beyond that, they also needed to spread because they believed that their children were taken to different places and families, probably far away from where Acorn was. Not knowing where the children were taken, they had to look for them in as many places as they could. So they separated and headed to different counties and states. The children's diaspora

led them into their own, getting back on the dangers of the roads and living again in a nomadic way, walking through the highways, this time with different purposes.

Olamina never settled in a specific place of her own, as Larkin's words in the opening quote of this chapter stated. She was always Earthseed, from the leaving of Robledo and the start of the changes in her life until the reaching of the Destiny with her dead body being taken to space. She lived a nomadic life of changes. After Camp Christian and the disintegration of the Earthseed group, Olamina takes the roads once more. This time, for the first time, completely alone. Not even in her first escape was she alone, as Harry and Zahra immediately found her in the chaos of the burning of Robledo. Alone, vulnerable, and with the aim of searching for Larkin, Olamina finds herself again drawn to the need of spreading Earthseed. Differently from Harry and the other Earthseed people, Olamina first stayed near the place where former Acorn was established. She wandered through the commerce villages and small towns, where once she denied settling with Bankole for a safer life if that meant leaving Acorn behind. Homeless Olamina guarantees her survival by making herself look "poor and male" and getting money by offering people small services such as teaching, reading, writing, and gardening.

Still disguised as a man, she starts going to the Christian American Center, where meals were served for the poor, in order to try to get information about the abducted children. She was unsuccessful in that regard, but it is there that she found her brother Marcus, preaching there as a well-respected Christian American priest. Just as in her previous encounters with Marc, he dismisses her and does not believe in anything she told him about Camp Christian. Beyond referring to her and Earthseed once more as cultists, he physically hits her when she tells him they killed the Crusaders who kept them captive. Having established, before dividing themselves, a place to leave messages among Earthseed people, she says, "I wrote a note, warning the others to avoid the CA Center in Eureka. I wrote that Marc had been there, but that he wasn't to be trusted. He isn't to be trusted." (Butler, 2019b, p. 314). Later in life, Olamina would confirm her suspicion of distrust when she learned Marcus hid Larkin from her throughout her whole life. Regarding the pre-established places for message exchanging, it also symbolizes their communal effort even when separated, sharing experiences scattered since their dispersal.

Being isolated for two years, Olamina gradually realizes that the society she sees after escaping Camp Christian is not the same as the one she saw when Acorn was growing. It had not improved exponentially, but supporters of Jarret's fascist government became fewer yet very extremists. She also describes how the masses of people walking on the streets have

considerably decreased: “there are more and more vehicles on the road during the day now. Walking is becoming more dangerous.” (Butler, 2019b, p. 387). Moreover, she also discovers that the Camps were not something endorsed by the majority of Jarret’s supporters, nor were they legal. They were kept secret by those fanatic supporters who entitled themselves Crusaders and attacked any groups that were not Christian.

What was done to us was illegal, by the way. We’ve learned that much. No new laws have been made to okay any of it. But, as Day Turner said long ago, a lot of people are convinced that cracking down on the poor and the different is a good idea. There are now a number of legal cases—Hindus, Jews, Moslems, and others who have managed to avoid being caught when Crusaders came for them. But even among these people, young children who are taken away are not often returned. (Butler, 2019b, p. 287)

Of their children, only Justin Gilchrist is found by Olamina in one of the villages. He was one of the oldest children, almost a teenager. He grew up in Earthseed, and thus, he was not brainwashed into becoming a good Christian American child. Justin is the one who tells Olamina that the kids’ names were changed and that the siblings were separated. He says, “They said...they said you were all dead. I believed them at first, and I didn’t know what to do. But then I saw how they would lie whenever they felt like it. They would say things about us and about Acorn that were nothing but lies. Then I didn’t know what to believe.” (Butler, 2019b, p. 283). Through their message points, Olamina arranges that Justin is reunited with Allie, the woman he adopted as his mother in Acorn.

Even during the period when Olamina is walking from village to village, working and trying to find information about Acorn’s children, she never fully abandons Earthseed. On the contrary, she would use the opportunities she had to spread her ideas, once more planting the seeds of Change:

The truth is, when I taught reading, I used a few simple Earthseed verses. This is what I did in Acorn, and I did it automatically in Georgetown. Strange to say, no one objected. People sometimes looked puzzled, sometimes disagreed or agreed with enthusiasm, but no one complained. Some people even seemed to think that what I read was from the Bible. I couldn’t bring myself to let them go on thinking that. “No,” I told them. “It’s from something else called *Earthseed: The Books of the Living*.” And I showed them one of the few surviving copies—retrieved from one of the caches. Since I’ve been calling myself Cory Duran, no one connected me with the strangely named author, Lauren Oya Olamina. (Butler, 2019b, p. 293)

When not disguised as a man, Olamina introduced herself by the name of her stepmother, Cory Duran, in the hopes of drawing the attention of her brother Marcus and also to avoid drawing attention to her name after Acorn’s persecution.

By the time Olamina takes the roads again, it has been eight years since the fall of Robledo, the peak of social violence and disorder. The society after Camp Christian, however, is one that is gradually rejecting the religious fundamentalist and tyrannical government that

had gradually risen since before Olamina's birth. That shows to be one of the reasons why Earthseed would later be embraced by so many people: it symbolizes actual changes and progress after so many years of political oppression, social inequality, and inhuman conditions of living. Earthseed offers a form of regaining agency and power amidst any situation; through Earthseed, life can be changed and shaped. There lies Olamina's need to get back to preaching *The Books of the Living*, after some time away from her people and from her purposeful writing:

God is Change. I wrote the words, then settled back to think about that. I find that I haven't thought much about Earthseed in the past few months. I believe its teachings helped me, helped all of us to survive Camp Christian. [...] I sit here now, trying to think, to plan. I must find my daughter, and I must teach Earthseed, make Earthseed real to as many people as I can reach, and send them out to teach others. (Butler, 2019b, p. 295)

The loneliness of the roads and the recognition of Earthseed's role in keeping them alive in Camp Christian might have been the encouragement for Olamina to decide to start again. A different approach, a change in plans, but always with the same goal in mind: to grow Earthseed and fulfill its Destiny of taking root among the stars. Whereas once Acorn was the symbol of an established place known for receiving and embracing people from all backgrounds, after its destruction, Olamina realized they could not be a fixed place on the map anymore. It would be an easy target. To grow, Earthseed needed to move and to reach new people and new places.

I must find at least a few people who are willing to learn more, and who will be willing to teach what they've learned. I must build...not a physical community this time. I guess I understand at last how easy it is to destroy such a community. I need to create something wide-reaching and harder to kill. That's why **I must teach teachers**. I must create not only a dedicated little group of followers, not only a collection of communities as I once imagined, but a movement. I must create a new fashion in faith—a fashion that can evolve into a new religion, a new guiding force, that can help humanity to put its great energy, competitiveness, and creativity to work doing the truly vast job of fulfilling the Destiny. (Butler, 2019b, p.295, emphasis added)

When Olamina states that she must teach teachers, she is also reenacting the power of ancestral knowledge, which played an important role in Acorn. Teaching and learning were the basis of their communal relationships; besides, the knowledge passed on by those who put themselves in the position of teachers, or “shapers,” as they are called in Earthseed, passed on through the people and down generations. Thus, teaching can also be read as one of the greatest tools that enhance the strength of Earthseed's traditions.

Heading North once more, Olamina reaches Portland, where she comes to learn that is where her brother Marcus had gone. Just like the first time on the roads, Olamina started gathering people. First, Nia Cortez, the lady she worked for as a gardener, can be said to be the first Earthseed converted by Olamina after Acorn. And then her “good traveling companion,” Len, “an avid reader with an active mind” (Butler, 2019b, p. 341), who would become

Olamina's first helper in the mission of teaching other people. They decided together that the safest way to start Earthseed again was to speak to groups in their houses, door-to-door, like some other religions did in the past, leading discussions and teaching the truths of Earthseed.

Through the Elfords and their friends and the friends of their friends, we've received invitations to speak all over town in people's homes and in small halls. I've found that in each group there is one person, perhaps two who are serious, who hear in Earthseed something that they can accept, something they want, something they need. These are the ones who will make our first schools possible. In Acorn, it was no accident that the church and the school were the same. They weren't just the same building. They were the same institution. (Butler, 2019b, p. 386)

With the support of Nia, Len, the Elfords, and other people that welcomed her in Portland, Olamina starts spreading again the Earthseed's verses, and when the world seems to have managed to silence enough Jarret and the Crusaders, *The First Book of the Living* is published online, with the help of Olamina's new supporters. The book was published worldwide with free access, and sent specially into the "nets that are intended to interest American universities and the smaller free cities where so many of those universities are located". At that, Olamina writes, "I believe that I've finally done it. I believe that my life has finally educated me enough to enable me to make a real start at planting Earthseed" (Butler, 2019b, p. 388). The publishing of the Earthseed's verses marks a turning point in Olamina's life and in Earthseed. By making her books and verses available to the public, Olamina takes another step in trusting fully in her creation. While she once needed to build confidence in someone before introducing her "God of Change," now she boldly made Earthseed available to the world, completely vulnerable but also wholly independent.

Even with the publishing of the book, instead of turning her attention to attempting her involvement in a reenactment of Acorn, Lauren Olamina continues on her nomadic life of preaching Earthseed to as many people as possible. Just like Earthseed, she is in constant movement and change. She described how she has been a nomad in poverty and continues being a nomad in richness and under the safety of being recognized for her work.

I've been traveling. That's nothing new for me, but this is different. This time, thanks to the book, I've been invited by university groups and others, and paid to travel, paid to speak—which is a little like paying ice to be cold. And I've been flying. Flying! I've walked over most of the West Coast, and now I've flown over the interior of the country and over much of the East Coast. I've flown to Newark, Delaware; Clarion, Pennsylvania; and up to Syracuse, New York. Next, I go to Toledo, Ohio; Ann Arbor, Michigan; Madison, Wisconsin; and Iowa City, Iowa. (Butler, 2019b, p.390)

Olamina is able to reach not only new people but also her old people, having them be part again of what they started creating with so much effort in Acorn. Olamina's recognition brought her first Earthseed people, who were scattered and struggling, a new sense of safety. An allowance

to finally exist in their truth of Change. She was recognized and paid to lecture and conduct Earthseed workshops, and most importantly, as she puts it, “And we’re being welcomed, listened to, even taken seriously by people who are hungry for something to believe in, some difficult but worthwhile goal to involve themselves in and work toward” (Butler, 2019b, p. 390).

An additional significant symbol of the signs of overcoming the decadent society is being able to teach and reach the universities. I mentioned previously in the methodological chapter that the books’ names being parables can be, among other readings, also paralleled with the meaning of the parabolic format in a narrative, of a curve that reaches its peak and then goes back to what it was before. On one hand, when *Parable of the Sower* begins, Olamina’s father and stepmother, who were university scholars, demonstrate the downfall of this institution in the face of the religious fundamentalist government. On the other hand, when Olamina and her people free themselves from the Crusaders and start to navigate the world post-Jarret, the education institutions seem to have become trusted again. They are established once more as essential elements of a functioning society, enabling Earthseed to receive the recognition as a valid, resourceful, and respectable knowledge material worth to be spread.

So I’ve begun to reach people. I’ve reached so many people from Eureka to Seattle to Syracuse that I believe that even if I were killed tomorrow, some of these people would find ways to go on learning and teaching, pursuing the Destiny. Earthseed will go on. It will grow. It will force us to become the strong, purposeful, adaptable people that we must become if we’re to grow enough to fulfill the Destiny. (Butler, 2019b, p. 390)

The young Olamina, who refused to settle in a small town where Bankole had been offered a job because she would rather not leave Acorn, seems too distant from the older Olamina that did not settle in any of her world-widely spread Earthseed communities. As she mentions, “Whatever happens, as long as I’m alive, I won’t stop working, preaching, aiming people toward the Destiny. I’ve always known that sharing Earthseed was my only true purpose” (Butler, 2019b, p. 391). Lauren Olamina was the sower of seeds and the bearer of talents. She truly accepts change when she realizes that she should reach people instead of staying in one fixed community; thus, in this manner, her nomad life also symbolizes a dedication to “vast ongoing change.”

By the end of the *Parables*, we know that the Earthseed’s Destiny would be fulfilled. Earthseed had become a powerful global community and organization and would send their first spaceships to colonize the unknown. What started with a forced diaspora towards the North continued to become a movement that reached Earth and beyond. This Global Earthseed can be read in tandem with Hartman’s notion of the fugitive dream, when she states that “the fugitive’s

dream exceeded the borders of the continent; it was a dream of the world house” (Hartman, 2006, p. 233). The world house, however, had become smaller for the greatness of Earthseed, leading them toward other worlds, “to live and to thrive on new earths,” while still honoring their ancestral Earth:

Today’s shuttles have been loaded with cargoes of people, already deeply asleep in DiaPause—the suspended-animation process that seems to be the best of the bunch. Traveling with the people are frozen human and animal embryos, plant seeds, tools, equipment, memories, dreams, and hopes. **As big and as space-worthy as they are, the shuttles should sag to the Earth under such a load. The memories alone should overload them.** The libraries of the Earth go with them. (Butler, 2019b, p. 404).

Olamina is shown to be eighty-one years old when the Destiny is fulfilled. She writes about how her old age would have been a problem for her to go alive on the spaceships, she would be more of a burden. However, after her death, she wishes her ashes would be taken on the first ship that departs toward the stars:

I couldn’t have watched this first Departure on a screen or in a virtual room or in some personalized version beneath a Dreammask. I would have traveled across the world on foot to see this Departure if I’d had to. This is my life flying away on these ugly big trucks. **This is my immortality.** I have a right to see it, hear the thunder of it, smell it. (Butler, 2019b, p. 404, emphasis added).

The idea of immortality for Earthseed has never been one of living forever after death, but one of passing down the knowledge of Change. One that contributes to the development of the younger generations and is compromised in building an environment that recognizes people’s worth and efforts and collective action towards the improvement of communal life, instead of relying on a transcendental deity that would judge their worth before coming to their aid. This way, Olamina’s body going to space is a symbol not only of Earthseed’s maintaining its funeral rites created in Acorn but also of establishing Earth as their origin, as the birth of their traditions. What they would develop in the future colonies would not come from anywhere but from their ancestral home because they are Earth-seeds, after all. In this manner, Lauren Olamina’s final destiny is to keep on with the Earthseed traditions, to become one with new soils: “Let them someday use my ashes to fertilize their crops. Let them do that. It’s arranged. I’ll go, and they’ll give me to their orchards and their groves.” (Butler, 2019b, p. 404). Just like the tradition initiated at Acorn, where they would plant acorn seeds in the soil mixed with their deads’ ashes, she would also be given into new lands. So, her life would literally and metaphorically be present in those new beginnings and new lives. Her immortality. Moreover, Olamina’s body being taken to other worlds is a continuity of her nomadic life dedicated to Earthseed and to the fulfillment of the Destiny. Her whole life was spent focusing on making her truth heard, understood, and lived.

We give our dead
To the orchards
And the groves.
We give our dead
To life.

(Butler, 2019b, p. 380)

Parables present many points of narratives being repeated. Some of them were mentioned here in the fourth chapter, such as the mirroring of the burning of her communities resulting in her diasporas through the U.S., first Robledo and later Acorn. Beyond those, there is another repetition, one recurrent dream throughout Olamina's journey that I would like to read as a foreshadowing of her successful future. Lauren Olamina dreams of fire and flying serve as a foreshadowing of the fulfillment of the Destiny, symbolizing the spaceship engine's launching fire and flight toward Earthseed's unknown destination in the vastness of the stars. The fire, read in relation to space travel, is present in many stages of the journey: launch, entrance to the atmosphere, and landing. Besides that, the stars themselves are in a constant state of "burning".

The first entry in Olamina's journal in *Parable of the Sower* begins with a vivid description of a dream. In this entry, she is taken further to a second part of a recurring dream that, until then, had always ended before she knew its complete outcome: "I had my recurring dream last night. I guess I should have expected it. It comes to me when I struggle—when I twist on my own personal hook and try to pretend that nothing unusual is happening." (Butler, 2019a, p. 3). In her dream, 15-year-old Olamina describes that she is learning how to fly, to levitate her body, and to control the forces that make her change directions. Reading it as a foreshadowing of the Destiny's accomplishments, the manner in which she describes this dream can be connected to her journey with creating and growing Earthseed. She goes on describing the flying experience:

No one is teaching me. I'm just learning on my own, little by little, dream lesson by dream lesson. Not a very subtle image, but a persistent one. I've had many lessons, and I'm better at flying than I used to be. I trust my ability more now, but I'm still afraid. I can't quite control my directions yet. (Butler, 2019a, p. 4)

She levitates in a room, still unable to control her directions, in an attempt to move her body towards the doorway, where "cool, pale light glows from it". The surrounding walls are burning, the fire spreading toward her body, as she feels it being consumed by the heat. This is where

the dream had always ceased, then she describes how she does not wake up as in the other times and is taken to the rest of the dream:

This time I don't wake up all the way. I fade into the second part of the dream—the part that's ordinary and real, the part that did happen years ago when I was little, though at the time it didn't seem to matter.
Darkness.
Darkness brightening.
Stars.
Stars casting their cool, pale, glinting light. (Butler, 2019a, p. 4)

In the second part of the dream, she is watching the stars with Cory, that is why she describes it as ordinary and real. Yet, the flying toward the doorway full of stars with lights glowing from it can be a foreshadowing of her future, of when she and Earthseed would be finally able to cross the threshold toward the Destiny. Fire had carried many meanings throughout Olamina's life and nomadic journey through the country; it meant destruction, but it also meant freedom and new beginnings. Her dreams of fire and flying were always aiming her toward a real heaven. Olamina and the Destiny are one; they both, in the end, would take root among the stars, they would thrive among the living.

Lauren Olamina aims for the stars, and she is not satisfied until her Earthseed can reach beyond Earth, to actually become Earth-seeds being spread everywhere, beyond the reach of Mother Earth, which can be read as another stance of losing one's mother, this time, the mother planet. The stars, as celestial bodies, also stand as her metaphor for change, given that the stars are always moving, the universe is in a constant expansion, and nothing is static, only to the limited human eye. Functioning also as ancestral symbols, the stars we watch from Earth are always in the past. When we look at the sky, we see something that already happened in the universe. Looking at the starry sky is akin to gazing into the past. It works as a kind of natural time machine. The lights that shine are already the past, but they are also the present and will be the future, in the shortness of the human life span. Stars' lights endure even after their death, casting light into the paths of those who are left seeking guidance in them.

6.2 SPACE: THE UNTOLD DIASPORA

“Space?” he said. “Mars?”
“Beyond Mars,” I said. “Other star systems. Living worlds.” (Butler, 2019a, p. 222)

Throughout history, science fiction has been a genre that has demonstrated a commitment to exploring frontiers, such as the limits of human knowledge, the boundaries of bodies and machines, technological and scientific advancements, and geographical speculation, be it through subterranean cities or underwater civilizations. In terms of frontiers, outer space

stands as a unique and recurrent trope due to Earth's history of space exploration programs in the late 20th century, those who are also present in *Parables* narrative. As a believer in the importance of such programs, Lauren Olamina and her supporters build the foundation for the Destiny to happen through the Earthseed communities. Their main goal was to reach Earthseed's immortality, to spread their seeds and move forward with their truth of Change. Earthseed promised them heaven through their own lives, memories, and teachings, a heaven that, according to Olamina "really exists, and you don't have to die to reach it" (Butler, 2019a, p. 222), which, ironically, she does. With the fulfillment of the Destiny, Olamina launches Earthseed into a perpetual diasporic movement. In many other science fiction works, Earth is merely the beginning, the original planet, and the birthplace of humanity, often forgotten after millennia of space exploration. In *Parables*, in Earthseed, Earth is the embodiment of ancestral wisdom, knowledge, and home.

The Destiny dialogues with the numerous possibilities that space discovery might bring into discussion. In Canavan's (2014) research on the abandoned draft for a third Parable novel, there is the epigraph chosen by Butler to begin it: "There is nothing new under the sun, but there are new suns" (Canavan, 2014). When Olamina says their aim is to take root among the stars, there might be a hint of a controversial opinion regarding Earth's value as a planet and social organization. However, Earthseed's way of life demonstrates that Olamina is not hopeless about Earth; even after so much suffering, she does not diminish Earth's importance. After all, Earthseed's communities were made possible here by their change made down on Earth. What she aims for is the total acceptance of the Earthseed beliefs, to become intergalactic Earthseeds; regardless of where they are spread, they have the same origin and the same power of Change. Moreover, they are capable of building their own future in unknown circumstances, in new lands; whether on Earth or among the stars, they have agency to shape themselves to be anything they want to be. They shape lives, wherever they are located.

Among the stars, Earthseed is both able to carry their Earth inheritance and to build new ones. When Olamina aims for the stars, she aims to guarantee that Earthseed people would be able to tell their own stories, that they would survive and thrive in new soil. Acorn taught them in the worst way possible that one isolated group is easily put in target, but spread communities scattered everywhere compose a greater and stronger front. Their belief in Earthseed also means that they will cherish their rituals and traditions and live beyond their material life on Earth, or wherever they might reach.

One of the greatest misreading of Olamina is that she is often accused of believing in a utopian idea while the world around her was crumbling and in need of a down-to-earth solution

to immediate problems. When, in reality, Olamina's creation of Earthseed was an attempt to escape the dystopian scenario she was born into and was forced to learn how to survive, but not an escape that seeks the extreme opposite. Rather, an escape that seeks the equilibrium of a healthy society. Olamina's Destiny was never about a utopian idea but about an attempt to try out different challenges. As discussed in the second chapter, utopias are closed systems that are incapable of accommodating any form of change, adaptation, or unconstrained ideas. Consequently, the spatial travel serves to further reinforce Earthseed's commitment to the pursuit of knowledge through Change, as well as its determination to uncover, challenge, and write untold narratives, rather than relying on a utopian model. Besides, there is a sense of both power and vulnerability in leaving a homeland, be it the family home, city, country, or planet. It is an empowering act in acknowledging the capability of doing such a deed, but it is also filled with uncertainties and vulnerabilities, often fear, of facing the unknown. The endless possibilities and vastness of the unknown of space take us back to *fabulation*.

Reading the Destiny as a demonstration of *fabulation* allows us to explore how the open possibilities are related to the Afrodiasporic experience described in *Parables* and the use of the power of Change to rewrite their history. *Fabulation* and Change operate the same way. The power of *fabulation* is present in Olamina's journey from the beginning; the start of Earthseed is fueled by *fabulation*, by the necessity of seeing a possible future in a life doomed to succumb to the threats of the outside. The ode to Change in itself is also a belief in *fabulation*. Believing in change as the ultimate truth of life is using *fabulation* to imagine and reimagine possible scenarios. There lies the whole point of Earthseed as a way of life and as the understanding of a reality that can change, that can challenge established rules, and oppose systemic oppressions.

The anti-utopian perspective is something that guides the resistance of the Afrofuturist *fabulation* of possible worlds in dystopian and post-apocalyptic contexts. Butler's Afrofuturist *fabulation* in *Parables* is more than an exercise of imagining futures and reimagining past and present, it also stands as a call to reevaluate our priorities and situations and reorganize around the importance of community, communication, education, and empathy, values often forgotten in dystopian contexts. In this context, Earthseed becomes not only the language of resistance but a way of life that guides people into the building of possible and livable futures and presents:

If the Earthseed Destiny is to have any meaning beyond a distant mythical paradise, Earthseed must be not only a belief system but a way of life. Children should be raised in it. Adults should be reminded of it often, refocused on it, and urged toward it. Both should understand how their current behavior is or isn't contributing to fulfillment of the Destiny. By the time we're able to send Earthseed children to college, they should be dedicated not only to a

course of study but to the fulfillment of the Destiny. If they are, then any course of study they choose can become a tool for the fulfillment. (Butler, 2019b, p. 386, emphasis added)

The promise of an undiscovered place also reinforces the idea that Change is the only constant in their life, and with change everything is possible. By seeking unfixed destinies, Earthseed also pursues change, the endless possibilities for living, mobile communities, and a future that would depend on their actions and efforts—a heaven that will be theirs to shape: “A unifying, purposeful life here on Earth, and the hope of heaven for themselves and their children. A real heaven, not mythology or philosophy. A heaven that will be theirs to shape.” (Butler, 2019a, p. 261). When Olamina equates her philosophy with the materiality of the real world, offering them the real heaven to be shaped, she not only criticizes the mainstream religious systems, but she also strengthens the idea that action is needed to operate change. Consequently, Earthseed, when interpreted as a life-guiding philosophy, enhances the already powerful tool of Afrofuturism by fostering speculation and imagination concerning the future, thereby establishing a lifestyle that guarantees its people a chance at writing their destinies.

Socially interested science fiction and Afrofuturistic narratives, at their core, are built from the foundational pillars of science, education, equality, and change, not merely as thematic elements but as the very engine for creating worlds. These principles become the driving force that enables characters and societies to move past the struggles posed by dystopia. In this reading of diaspora, *Parables*, instead of passively enduring displacement, focuses on its *fabulation* ability to envision and inspire an agential and conscious move toward change. This empowers individuals and communities to actively reclaim and transform both existing and new spaces. This promotes a future built on deliberate adaptation, growth, and hope, rather than the imposed suffering of dystopia. Earthseed, seen through the science fiction lens, stands as the power of escaping from dystopian scenarios of diaspora to create an agential and conscious move toward change and constructively occupying old and new spaces.

The embrace of the space travel motif and the purposeful conquest of other worlds can be read as an attempt to rewrite history. The space travel in *Parables* is also a reference to the metaphor of Black people having always been depicted as the alien, as mentioned earlier in the discussion offered by Dery, Lavender, and Eshun. However, here in *Parables*, the metaphor is not one of Black people and minorities being compared to aliens due to a socially constructed difference and racist observations. Through the accomplishment of the Destiny, Olamina and Earthseed place themselves as the alien ones, those who came from another place. They are the active participants in this spatial exploration. They are the observant and not the observed, the ones who set the rules and not those who are subjugated to them. Through the *fabulation* made

possible by Earthseed and the Destiny, they are the ones acting upon their lives and wishes; they are not constrained to a metaphor that diminishes them. Instead, they are equipped with the knowledge that they, too, can conquer and rightfully inhabit other worlds.

The said worlds can be both literal, through the space exploration, or metaphorical. Earthseed not only becomes a way of life, but also a way of persisting in a death-sentencing world. A dystopian society where the norm is to live on the run, trying to adapt to the unknown, trying to guarantee their survival. They are being chased and persecuted for being who they are. Death worlds, in Mbembe's words. Olamina and the Earthseed people face all kinds of threats during Jarret's government; they are threatened for being other and Christian American, for being Black, Latino, or Asian—even worse, if they are demonstrating to be a mixed-race couple, they are also endangered for being homosexuals and for being disabled. In a society where any trace of vulnerability becomes a reason for having a life labeled as unworthy, Earthseed is a home for those who seek not only survival but also the reclamation of their life and their experiences, despite their origins.

We're you name it: Black, White, Latino, Asian, and any mixture at all—the kind of thing you'd expect to find in a city. The kids we've adopted and the ones who have been born to us think of all the mixing and matching as normal. Imagine that. Bankole and I, both Black, have managed to mix things up age-wise. He's always being mistaken for my father. When he corrects people, they wink at him or frown or grin. Here in Acorn, if people don't understand us, at least they accept us. (Butler, 1998, p. 39)

Jarret's religious fundamentalist government operates through the establishment of Mbembe's death-world. The necropolitical state established by Jarret and reinforced by the racist society transforms its citizens into refugees attempting to survive in a dystopian diaspora. A multifaceted diaspora, enacted by a series of factors, from climate disaster and violence to the declared persecution of people considered different and unwanted. The persecution of their existence is prior to the election of the fascist government, but it increases with the election of a supporter of intolerance:

Jarret supporters have been known, now and then, to form mobs and burn people at the stake for being witches. Witches! In 2032! A witch, in their view, tends to be a Moslem, a Jew, a Hindu, a Buddhist, or, in some parts of the country, a Mormon, a Jehovah's Witness, or even a Catholic. A witch may also be an atheist, a "cultist," or a well-to-do eccentric. Well-to-do eccentrics often have no protectors or much that's worth stealing. And "cultist" is a great catchall term for anyone who fits into no other large category, and yet doesn't quite match Jarret's version of Christianity. (Butler, 1998, p. 15)

In addition, Jarret's election is the reason the migrations increase and why people seek refuge. Olamina's opinion of the future country governed by some tyrant such as Jarret already

demonstrates an understanding of the violence and attempts to eliminate those judged to be inferior:

I've saved the worst news item for last. The election was on Tuesday, November 2. Jarret won. When Bankole heard the news, he said, "May God have mercy on our souls." **I find that I'm more worried about our bodies.** Before the election I told myself that people had more sense than to elect a man whose supporters burn people alive as "witches," and torch the churches and homes of people they don't like. (Butler, 1998, p. 85)

Through an inflamed discourse of "making America great again," Jarret blames the decadence of the U.S. society on people's characteristics that are anything but Christian. In one of his discourses, he says, "We are God's people, or we are filth! We are God's people, or we are nothing!" (Butler, 1998, p. 85).

While the fascist government and its supporters rely on the idea of being "God's people" to commit crimes in the name of making their country good again, which meant, in their logic, getting rid of the people who oppose them in any way. Olamina's Earthseed stands as the opposite idea: "God is Change" offers an acknowledgement of the necessity to change and transform, to always move forward and towards improvement. Instead of seeking stability in a static deity, Earthseed finds power in the very process of transformation, adaptation, and movement. Once again, this philosophical take on the Earthseed way of life rewrites the diaspora as not just a geographical journey, but the possibility of changing histories and destinies. Through Earthseed's Destiny, they can write their stories in the "unwritten space" to rewrite and reclaim human narratives. Their final act of displacement, the literal and metaphorical departure from Earth, unlike a good deal of established canon science fiction narratives, is not sparked by a destructive force or necessity to leave Earth to survive. Instead, it is encouraged by a conscious and deliberate decision, a shared planned goal of taking their communities' values and ideas forward. In this manner, the achievement of the Destiny is the very engine of world-building and the making and remaking of history.

The outer space exploration in *Parables*, as a bigger concept, carries a complex meaning. First and foremost, in the sense of writing untold stories, referring back to Hartman, space stands as both a challenging unwritten space, one that is both vast of uncertainties and welcoming of new stories to be told and others to continue. The space can be considered a blank page, devoid of human history, and as such, it may serve as a platform for humans to write their true history. However, it will never be detached from human earthly history. Despite its unwritten and unknown nature, space has been a site for human imagination long before any kind of space exploration was attempted. It is an unwritten page where human hopes, fears, and ambitions are projected. It's possible. Space provides both room for new histories and for

continuing and rewriting of existing human narratives. A new pilgrimage, migration, exile, settlement, or pursuit of truth may result from the discovery of the stars. In this way, Earthseed's positive depiction of spatial exploration provides a profound and powerful reinterpretation of the concept of diaspora.

In general, the diaspora experience can be defined as the struggle to maintain identity in a foreign land, forced displacement, and loss. It is often a story of fragmentation and longing for a lost home. However, when viewed as a reimagining of diaspora, Earthseed can be interpreted as a deliberate and conscious decision to further their knowledge and to forge new homes, to "take root among the living". The Destiny is not about returning to a mythical homeland but about creating new homes. Through the active work to make Earthseed reach its goal of settling communities elsewhere, Lauren Olamina, who was once subjected to more than one forced migration, reframes diaspora from an involuntary state of displacement to an active act of creation. The Earthseed community is not just surviving, it is actively preparing for a future in which humanity is no longer bound to a single notion of belonging. Within Earthseed, "home" is not a geographical location but a set of beliefs and a shared purpose. Their diaspora is about "seeding" new worlds, and through their people's ancestral knowledge, traditions, and rituals, their new "home" is a concept to be built and carried with them.

Regarding ancestry, when teenage Olamina starts writing about her philosophy and names the book of verses *Earthseed: The Book of the Living*, she mentions the inspiration in the existence of the Tibetan and the Egyptian Books of the Dead. It is interesting the contrast of this inspiration, since the so-called Books of the Dead are, in sum, a collection of funeral rites texts intended to assist a dead person's journey through death and into the afterlife. Earthseed, as *The Book of the Living*, takes the opposite responsibility of assisting one throughout their life. Earthseed, through all its teachings, verses, rituals, traditions, and focus on individual and collective action, becomes a philosophical approach to reading Afrodiasporic narratives. It enables people living in the diaspora to embrace the power of Change and to write their way out of violence and oppression. Enables them to own their past, present and futures, despite their displacement and despite the place they are.

Olamina dedicates her life to the success of Earthseed, which is, in her mind, the way of life needed to be independent and to survive. To guarantee their survival not only on Earth, regardless of whether it is dystopic, but also in any location they may encounter during their journey across lands or their travel toward the stars. Earthseed is the knowledge that enabled Olamina to endure the numerous diasporas that occurred in her life, and it evolved into the philosophy that would govern new communities in their diasporas across the vast unknown of

space. Earthseed, born as an alternative to the Christian beliefs Olamina was raised into, grew to be more than verses about life and change but a whole guiding concept for living in community. A community that thrives on collaborative effort, education, and traditions that enforce each individual's transformative power both in the community and in themselves. On a broader scale, their transformative influence on the living world.

When watching Earthseed launch its first vessels, Olamina writes:

I know what I've done. I have not given them heaven, but I've helped them to give themselves the heavens. I can't give them individual immortality, but I've helped them to give our species its only chance at immortality. I've helped them to the next stage of growth. They're young adults now, leaving the nest. It will be rough on them out there. It's always rough on the young when they leave the protection of the mother. It will take a toll—perhaps a heavy one. I don't like to think about that, but I know it's true. Out there, though, among the stars on the living worlds we already know about and on other worlds that we haven't yet dreamed of, some will survive and change and thrive and some will suffer and die. Earthseed was always true. (Butler, 2019b, p. 403)

Her description of their real heaven, the immortality of humans as a collective, as the children leaving their mother's shadow to keep on their legacy, is, in sum, a deed achieved through the traditions of Earthseed. She also references the biblical Parable of the Sower and affirms that “some will survive and change and thrive and some will suffer and die,” demonstrating her acknowledgement that Earthseed was not perfect, that some people might not be able to live, as many people were not back in Acorn, yet they were always Earthseed. Earthseed was never flawless, since it was human, though it was always true.

The Destiny as the untold diaspora can be interpreted as a metaphor for the potential for *fabulation* that is present in *Parables* Afrofuturistic narratives. Despite every obstacle and the many persecutions, Olamina and the Earthseed people endured and were capable of rewriting their stories and changing the direction of their future. Instead of passively responding to the dystopic and violent scenario, they acted upon their futures. Olamina gave voice to herself in a world where she was supposed to be silent and where she was the victim of attempts of silencing. The Destiny reinforces the ideas of seizing change and adaptability: when characters are displaced, they are forced to confront new realities, new challenges, and new perspectives. The familiar is stripped away, and they must adapt. This process of adaptation is, in itself, a form of conscious world-building. The society they create or establish, the new technologies they develop, and the new belief systems they forge are all born from their displaced existence. While leaving Earth with the purpose of establishing Earthseed communities, they become themselves both Earth-seeds and Life-roots, passing on their truth, rituals, traditions, and earthly and ancestral knowledge.

Earthseed in its truthfulness to the living, to the human life, and to being a refuge to the homeless and deserted, stands as a consistent expression of Afrofuturism. Earthseed is the *fabulation* in *Parables*. It paves the way of constructing a way of life that embraces every possible scenario, that embraces change as its guiding force. Change is the action needed in many big and small events. The challenge of accepting change is frequently expressed through phrases such as “we cannot change that” and “there is no changing what is done.” At the same time, only through change can something be challenged. Earthseed demonstrates, first and foremost, that change is to be nurtured and trusted because it is what makes things possible. It demonstrates that it is possible to overcome the struggles of dystopia, not only through survival, but by fostering a way out by creating hope. When Earthseed stands as a guiding concept for the survival of the minority, who are not only mostly Black and Latino but were openly persecuted and enslaved, it becomes an Afrofuturist philosophical approach to life.

Ultimately, by crossing the final frontier of space, Earthseed finally embodies its name; they become carriers of Change and ready to land in new soils and, if fortunate, to grow. If not, to adapt and change. Olamina’s Earthseed boldly goes where no one has gone before, and that was only possible through Change. Through the acceptance of the possibility of living without fixed destinies. The forging of possible and livable worlds is hardly the result of a utopian model or a dystopian rule. On the contrary, it is often a world in the process of being built and in a constant state of accepting changes, a world that is constantly in movement, as the only possible way to imagine freedom and resistance to systems of domination. The act of purposeful displacement is what brings this world into being. The displacement as a construction of possible worlds and livable futures is the core of Change. The essence of Earthseed. It relates to when Afrofuturism exposes the need to change how the world looks at science fiction narratives and how these Afrofuturistic narratives can redefine culture and notions of Blackness in the future, and how it can reimagine futures and rewrite stories. Thus, the unwritten space diaspora, the rewriting of diaspora as an achievable Earthseed goal, and the concept of displacement as an active force of history making are all interconnected. They represent the core promise of Afrofuturistic science fiction in Butler’s *Parables*: to use the vastness of the unknown to explore the endless possibilities for being in the world and to imagine not just other worlds, but other worlds that are made for and by minorities and Black people. Worlds that do not merely accommodate them, but that are forged, transformed, changed, and improved by them.

7 FINAL REMARKS

By reading *Parable of the Sower* and *Parable of the Talents* through the lens of Afrofuturism and focusing on the Afrodiasporic experience, this work was able to explore the nuances of Octavia Butler's take on science fiction, particularly her Black feminist reimagining of power, survival, and community, through which she interrogates gendered and racial hierarchies while envisioning futures grounded in resilience, transformation, and collective care. *Parables* speaks directly to the contemporary moment; beyond the confluence of the 2024 time setting, the duology echoes varied issues relevant to the contemporary world, especially the U.S., where the novels' themes resonate with the country's historical and ongoing tensions around racism, xenophobia, and economic inequality. While also invoking ancestral time and the enduring weight of past experiences, it suggests that in Butler's work, dystopia is never solely about the future but also a return to the unresolved violences of the past—a reminder that what appears as speculative often mirrors the historical realities of oppression, survival, and resistance that continue to shape the present. Exploring Butler's vision of a dystopic world that is transformed through change and hope, while the world itself seems to be falling into the dystopian genre, is both an encouraging and hopeful reading. Despite the horrors and unacceptable events placed in Butler's narrative that might resemble anything from 2024 reality, she offers *Earthseed* as a means for readers to engage actively with Change, to imagine and enact the transformations they seek.

Specifically, this dissertation has analyzed Octavia Butler's *Parables* and the duology depiction of a dystopian diaspora in the U.S., demonstrating how the *Earthseed*'s philosophy of Change transforms the Afrodiasporic narrative and narratives of hope, enabling the rebuilding of better futures, and the reimagining of the past and present. The story of Lauren Oya Olamina, a young Black woman, centers on her refusal to conform to her collapsing society. From a young age, she committed to building her attempt to improve the future, to act upon the changes needed to move forward from a collapsing society to a community of collective effort in making life possible for Black people like her, for women, for Latinos, for the religiously persecuted, the immigrants, and any other who was not welcomed in the U.S. preached by the religious fundamentalist government. Olamina's God of Change, then, enacts change as a political force, one that gives people the ability to both resist and confront. This dynamic recalls Anzaldúa's proposition of disentangling from the dual positions of oppressor and oppressed, instead, taking agency to both act and react, and to assert the power they possess. Change empowers them with the agency to rewrite their destinies, drawing on Saidiya Hartman's notion of "critical

fabulation,” which reclaims the imaginative space of the archive to reconstruct lives erased or silenced by history. Operating through past, present, and futures, Change also enables them to envision alternative ways of living and to act in favor of the creation of better lives, both individually and collectively. Change gives them, ultimately, the freedom to be and to do as they wish, to own their histories, and the knowledge that despite the situation, change always prevails.

This transformative capacity of Earthseed’s philosophy is fundamentally linked to the political potential of literature itself. Beyond this work, I am interested in the potential of literature to change realities. Far from saying it from a utopian or even naive point of view, I mean the capacity art possesses of not only transforming social realities but also the reality of the people who read it: back to Olamina’s “all that you touch, you change”, and in return it changes you. I firmly believe in the power that literature possesses of affecting people, enabling them to reimagine reality and use it to empower themselves with a political potency that arises from this encounter with the text. In relation to *Parables*, this is precisely what happens once Olamina writes her philosophy and the verses of Earthseed reach other people. The power of Change and the political potency resulting from it transform their comprehension of the world. That is what literature does; it also operates through change and transformation. As reader and writer, I continuously fall into the genres of science fiction, speculative fiction, fantasy, and horror. All those that offer endless possibilities for creation and transformation. I found out, in researching Octavia Butler and *Parables*, that even in genres that were supposed to be about transformations, much change was needed, and that change is always needed if that means the constant embracing of new voices, varied perspectives, and endless forms of imagining the world and possible worlds so that works of literature can be a force of resistance and renewal. I believe that there lies the significance of this research: Butler’s *Parables* serve as a paradigm shift in the way we perceive Afrodiasporic narratives; they evoke change through Afrofuturism, leading into a change in literature, and as Butler is read, ongoing change is unfolding. Change is unavoidable, necessary, and welcomed, the guiding principle of Butler’s philosophy at its core:

All that you touch,
You Change.
All that you Change,
Changes you.
The only lasting truth
Is Change.

(Butler, 2019a, p. 3)

This link between political potency and Change finds its most explicit manifestation in Olamina's unique condition. As the fundament of my argument, I return to the image of Olamina's Hyperempathy²⁸. Having explored Olamina's condition within the narrative of *Parables*, I now advance the reading of her and hyperempathy as a metaphorical embodiment of Black women's collective experience. As previously explored in depth, hyperempathy is a congenital condition imposed on Olamina. She is born with it and must learn to navigate the world with such a heightened, almost violent, sense of others' feelings. She experiences the pain and pleasures of others as her own. Hyperempathy functions as a fictional condition that, by embodying the power of literature explored above, provokes a reflection on interconnectedness, particularly among women, and more precisely, Black women. It can be understood as the condition of being a *sharer*, of being hyper aware of the world. It is both political and spiritual: it simultaneously grants Olamina strength and exposes her utmost vulnerability; it is at once cruel and compassionate. The condition, therefore, is defined by its paradoxical nature: it is inherently political because it embodies the collective experience, and profoundly spiritual because it requires a transformation of self that draws upon this very pain. Hyperempathy obliges Olamina to inhabit a politics of pain; however, she is not subjugated by her condition, but uses it as a creative power. She transforms reaction into a politics of creation. It is from this politics of pain that Earthseed is born. Hyperempathy thus dictates her action, not her reaction, becoming the lens through which she comprehends and transforms her world within the boundaries of being a sharer. Unlike mainstream science fiction's typical narrative of disability and cure-seeking, Olamina never once sought a cure or tried to numb the pain; instead, she fully embodied hyperempathy as an intrinsic part of herself and as her lens for understanding the world.

Through Olamina, Butler allows for the rethinking of hyperempathy as a concept that encapsulates a collective female, and specifically Black women's, experience. Beyond the *Parables* narrative, Olamina, as *sharer*, illustrates how the intense labor of empathy and care is disproportionately imposed upon Black women's bodies and subjectivities, affecting both their

²⁸ Although hyperempathy in *Parables* can be read through the lens of disability studies, this dissertation did not aim to provide a comprehensive disability analysis. My focus is on the Afrodiasporic experience and on how Olamina's representation of embodied difference, one that is lived under conditions of racialized and gendered violence, organizes questions of care, kinship, and collective survival, and how these dynamics inform the emergence of Earthseed. In addition, when describing hyperempathy, I mostly retain the vocabulary and descriptive terms the novels themselves employ. Any language of risk or vulnerability concerns the social and material dangers and violence of the dystopian world Olamina lives in, rather than disability itself, and it should not be read as reinforcing an ableist framing of disability as deficit. I read hyperempathy as both an embodied condition within Butler's narrative and a conceptual figure that helps name the politics of feeling, care, pain, and vulnerability that the text centers, attending to how Butler mobilizes embodiment as a site of knowledge and world-making.

material and mental selves. I turn to Audre Lorde to demonstrate how hyperempathy stands as an invitation to seek deep connections. In “The Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power”, Lorde locates women’s power in the acknowledgement of desire, exploring the erotic/the desire as a political and creative force that inhabits everyday activities and functions as a catalyst for revolutionary change. Lorde’s focus is on the feeling and desire of the erotic, and the force that emanates from this can be directly paralleled with Hyperempathy. For both Lorde and Olamina, the emotional intensity becomes a source of power that resists the corruption of oppression, as Lorde writes that “in order to perpetuate itself, every oppression must corrupt or distort those various sources of power within the culture of the oppressed that can provide energy for change” (Lorde, p. 53, 1984). Hyperempathy thus becomes a powerful mechanism for political action against oppression.

By embracing hyperempathy, Olamina embraces the intensity of her strongest and collective feelings. This mirrors Lorde’s definition of erotic power as that which is “providing the power which comes from sharing deeply any pursuit with another person. The sharing of joy, whether physical, emotional, psychic, or intellectual, forms a bridge between the sharers which can be the basis for understanding much of what is not shared between them, and lessens the threat of their difference” (Lorde, 1984, p. 56). Both are assertions of women’s life force, creative energy, and function as ways for women to reclaim, in their own language, their history, dancing, writing, loving, working, and whole lives. Just like the erotic, hyperempathy calls for a blurring of the spiritual and the political, providing the deep connection and bridge-building inherent in the ‘sharing deeply’ that Lorde describes. Lorde’s “sharing deeply” names the very power of Butler’s sharers: hyperempathy turns feeling into an embodied bridge that forges kinship, a collective capacity to live with others through difference, and to transform that proximity into mutual care and survival. This internal power allows for genuine change because, as Lorde argues, recognizing the erotic gives us “the energy to pursue genuine change within our world.” Moreover, this power is inherently “female and self-affirming in the face of a racist, patriarchal, and anti-erotic society” (Lorde, 1984, p. 59). By drawing motivation and empowerment “from within,” the erotic ensures that acts against oppression become integral with the self (Lorde, 1984, p. 57).

Armed with hyperempathy, Olamina transforms pain into action. Though she is oppressed, she becomes the source of her own transformation, and the supporting pillars of her community. Hyperempathy initially presents an overburdening vulnerability, but Olamina refuses to be defined by it. Like the Erotic in Lorde’s essay, hyperempathy is transformed into a nurturing force, one rooted in her affiliation with other women, especially those Afrodiasporic

women with whom she shares knowledges and experiences. This kinship, forged by hyperempathy, enables a shift from mere reaction to active engagement. Embodying her hyperempathy, being a sharer, and fully feeling and changing the world around her, Olamina illustrates how the necessary labor of women, whether emotional, organizational, or physical, sustains humanity through times of crisis. Ultimately, Olamina's hyperempathy is the vital force driving her to create Earthseed and to firmly believe, defend, and sow the seeds of her God of Change, enabling, then, the collective transformation of embodied awareness into emancipatory political power:

Belief
Initiates and **guides action**—
Or it does nothing.

(Butler, 2019a, p. 47, emphasis added)

In both Lorde and Butler, love becomes a radical act of resistance—an alternative to domination and fragmentation, a means of imagining and enacting new forms of collective life. Through this lens, Olamina's Earthseed communities embody Lorde's vision of the erotic as power: a force that reclaims the capacity to feel deeply, to connect meaningfully, and to build, through those connections, the possibility of transformation. Hyperempathy articulates relations grounded in kinship, love, embodiment, and imagination, an understanding of self that privileges feeling not as opposed to reason, but as the very source through which transformation, both personal and collective, becomes possible.

The recurrent use of "We" in *The Books of the Living* underscores the importance of this communal body, one that relies not on external systems but on the shared experiences of the people in the community.

God is Change.
We must find the rest of what we need
within ourselves,
in one another,
in our Destiny.

(Butler, 2019a, p. 245)

The necessity of finding "what we need in one another" exemplifies how hyperempathy fosters the transformation of individual emotional intensity (the pain, the pleasure, the love) into a collective-nurturing power of action, ensuring that a community of love and care is the way humanity succeeds.

Within this notion of interconnectedness, this work was nurtured by the contributions of Black feminist writers who, like Butler, articulate transformation through feelings, creativity,

and embodied knowledge. Here, I use Black feminist thought to name an intellectual and political tradition that theorizes from the lived intersections of race, gender, and power, and that treats embodied knowledge, affect, and imagination not as secondary to analysis but as modes of critique and world-making. In this sense, Black feminist thought offers the conceptual grammar through which vulnerability can be read as knowledge, feeling as method, and fabulation as political practice, precisely the configuration that *Parables* renders through hyperempathy, Earthseed, and community building. Audre Lorde, Saidiya Hartman, Gloria Anzaldúa, who each approach different aspects of what it means to live and theorize from the intersections of race, gender, and imagination. My analysis is also indebted to the critical Afrofuturist fabulation of Kênia Freitas and the science fiction studies of Ytasha Womack. Extending these insights into the speculative, their work show how Black women's Afrofuturist fiction refocuses Black female subjectivity at the center of narratives of world-building. Together, the authors discussed throughout this dissertation constitute a body of Black feminist thought that reclaims vulnerability as knowledge, emotion as tool, and imagination/fabulation as political act. In dialogue with them, Butler's Olamina, and the hyperempathy force she embodies, claims space within a Black feminist tradition that mobilizes survival, connection, and transformation as acts of collective power and becoming. Olamina's philosophy is one within the Black feminist thought, it is within this context that Butler's Afrofuturism takes root, articulating politics of *fabulation* grounded in Change through the collective care and livable worlds full of possibilities. The Afrofuturist *Parables* emphasizes *fabulation* as a form of world-making and transformation. The God of *Change* that governs Earthseed enables this action, and Olamina's hyperempathy expresses the embodied manifestation of her own philosophy, a dual sensorial condition that encourages her to transform feelings into action, to fully connect herself to the community. In the end, Olamina's philosophy resonates in both theory and practice. *God is Change* invites us to root our futures, as she does, in one another.

Having established the core argument through Olamina's philosophy, I turn now to briefly review the scope of this dissertation and the legacy of Butler's contribution to the field. In the first chapters, I made an account of science fiction's history and its treatment of both female and Black authors, more specifically. A thorough reading of Afrofuturism's relevance for the creation of narratives interested in African-American themes. This account of the genres and movements in which Octavia E. Butler navigated as a writer was important to better highlight the great extent to which she has impacted the writing of science fiction. She has influenced other Black women to follow her steps and write their perspectives of the world and of what the world can be and has not been for Afrodiasporic people.

Thus, Olamina's notion of Change can be taken as a guiding force to change not only *Parables'* dystopia into a story of collective transformation and resistance. It also serves as a force to read the changes that *Parables* meant to science fiction history as an Afrofuturist duology. As mentioned throughout this dissertation, Butler's history as a writer of science fiction was one of persistence and adaptability, key concepts in *Earthseed*; she was herself the example of persistence in an area that lacked and often belittled Black authors, even more so Black women. Butler's grit and determination in telling her stories and, consequently, in changing the authorship reality for her and the future for more Black women in the science fiction and fantasy genre is in itself an application of *Earthseed's* values.

Finally, reflecting on this work, as I finish my dissertation, which has focused so much on the concept of Change, I inevitably feel changed by the work I have done and by Butler's fiction, and also feel a sense of hyperempathy that serves as an affective bridge, blurring the boundaries between my scholarly position and the urgent political realities Olamina confronts, thereby reshaping my own commitments to intersectional research and practice. Literally and metaphorically touching Butler's *Parables* changed me, and I believe I am left with more questions than before, which is, in my view, always a good sign. Researching is change, after all. Nothing is left unaltered after the act of reading, questioning, interpreting, and, most importantly, imagining. Thus, after reading not only *Parables* extensively but Butler's whole body of fiction, I became interested in more than the potential of *Parables'* God of Change. I find myself now interested in the potential of *Earthseed* as a concept that traverses Butler's fiction in its entirety. For further research, I would very much enjoy tracing *Earthseed's* philosophy of Change as a foundational concept in the development of her other stories. I would look for how all Butler's Black female protagonists are guided by the values of the God of Change and how it enables them to fabulate new realities. Moreover, the idea of Change and Afrodiasporic stories can also be traced back to her earlier book series.

The last entry of Lauren Olamina's journals begins with one impactful statement: "I know what I've done," right before she narrates that the first *Earthseed* spaceships are being sent to space, fulfilling their Destiny of taking root among the stars. She closes the duology with the same sentence. This sense of closure, of looking back and assessing the trajectory of her work, resonates with me as I conclude this dissertation. This is my destiny, for now. I find myself reveling in the feeling of knowing I worked with what I love, with topics I am passionate about. Even in academia, it is not always enough to bring my critical skills and theoretical frameworks. Passion and a willingness to envision and accept change are essential. Beyond the boundaries of this dissertation, Olamina's teachings will keep echoing within me:

Kindness eases Change.
Love quiets fear.
And a sweet and powerful
Positive obsession
Blunts pain,
Diverts rage,
And engages each of us
In the greatest,
The most intense
Of our chosen struggles.

(Butler, 2019b, p. 41)

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