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Self through Remembrance Identity Construction and Memory in the Novels of Octavia E. Butler

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Self through Remembrance

Identity Construction and Memory in the Novels of Octavia E. Butler

By Teresa M. K. Egbert

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Bangor University
School of English
2016

For Elizabeth and Joseph Pearce

My amazing grandchildren

Main Thesis
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Summary

This thesis focuses on the roles of memory and identity in Octavia E. Butler's novels: *Kindred, Lilith's Brood*, *Parable of the Sower*, *Parable of the Talents*, and *Fledgling.* By using material from such diverse disciplines as philosophy, psychology, neuroscience, and sociology, I have treated the characters in Butler's novels as individual selves; selves narrated by a living Butler. In current identity studies, the thought is that the self is constructed through narrative; therefore, what better way to analyze individual characters and communities than through the narrative provided by Butler. These selves are, of course, fictional, but how often are the selves we present, even temporarily, to the world in a given situation a fictional construction.

We use many different critical tools to interpret and understand the world around us. While it is important to acknowledge the insightful implications of Butler's work in regard to African American, gender, and feminist studies, there are unexplored approaches to her writing that can contribute to understanding the intricacies of Butler's writing. This look at Butler's texts shows that by opening up the ways we traditionally look at certain texts we can gain a more multi-faceted view of those texts, which are sometimes viewed through a type of tunnel vision.

My discussion begins with a look at the theories used in the analyses of Butler's novels. First, I look at *Kindred* and a discussion of individual identities and how they are deeply connected to group affiliations, as well as history. Then I move on to how group identities are created and influenced by collective memories in *Lilith's Brood.* The *Parable* novels are the focus of my discussion on the construction of self through narrative. I end my analyses with a look at neuroscience and memory pathology through the amnestic protagonist of *Fledgling.*

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Introduction

Each American author, in his or her own way, presents readers with a lens through which to view a particular aspect of the American experience. Minority writers have used the power of literature throughout the nation's history to foreground issues unique to their cultural groups. African American women writers are no exception.[1] Since the 1970s these women have turned to non-traditional genres to critique contemporary society. Dana A. Williams points out that the African American women writing science fiction "have not only advanced the genre; they have changed the face of it."[2] And they use the distance allowed though the use of science fiction tropes to deal with sensitive issues of today.[3] Octavia E. Butler was the African American woman who pioneered this entry into what is traditionally viewed as a white, male genre.

Butler's 12 novels, numerous short stories, and essays have prompted a great deal of critical as well as popular attention. Much of the material about Butler's work centers on a set of related themes: power, race, gender, and slavery. Scholarly articles may focus on one of these ideas but inevitably intertwine the others into the argument. Mary S. Weinkauf claims that Butler's "books attack racism, sexism, hypocricy (*sic*), and class;"[4] whereas, Madhu Dubey focuses on "racial and class wars"[5] in her stories. Oppression and the power struggles to be free of it are the focus of many critiques of Butler's work as well. Oppression stemming from the history of slavery and patriarchy are key themes in the work of Stephanie Smith, Clara Escoda Agustí, Marlene D. Allen, Mildred R. Mickle, and Dee Henderson among many others.[6]

Power seems to be the link among all the ways critics have viewed Butler's work. Critics who focus on the power struggles in her tales tend do so in the context of power struggles between races and genders. Erin M. Pryor Ackerman claims that "Butler's fiction investigates...the complicated issues of power and prejudice;"[7] Lewis Call focuses on how "erotic power exchange and consensual slavery stand as vibrant alternatives to the ethically bankrupt forms of non-consensual power;"[8] Lauren J. Lacey points out that "Butler's

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[1] Mitchell and Taylor, 1.
[2] Williams, D., 84.
[3] Williams, D., 84.
[4] Weinkauf, 109.
[5] Dubey, 150.
[6] Smith, 391; Agustí, 352; Allen, 1354; Mickle 113; Henderson, 24.
[7] Ackerman, 24.
[8] Call, 276.

emphasis is on how her protagonists increase their power;"[9] and Sandra Y. Govan clearly argues that "the core at which all comes together in Butler's universe is the delineation of power."[10] For all these scholars, the navigation of power issues is the key to overcoming the racial and gender oppression depicted in Butler's tales.

The two main sources of power struggles, race and gender, in Butler's fiction lead many scholars to address the issues of domination and submission, and of marginalized others. Gender and race are united as a double cause for marginalization by those in power. Jenny Wolmack discusses how Butler's work "use[s] the science fiction metaphor of the alien to explore the way in which the deeply divisive dichotomies of race and gender are embedded in the repressive structures and relations of dominance and subordination."[11] Meanwhile, Michele T. Berger claims that Butler's work deals "with themes of human destruction, race relations, the ability of men and women to function interdependently, and the biologically and psychologically adaptability of the human species."[12] But unlike the critics who conflate race and gender oppression, Nancy Jesser clearly sees the two as separate categories with sex as a mostly stable "transhistoric category" and race a means of establishing "genetic kinship" and "shared histories."[13]

While it is important to acknowledge the insightful implications of Butler's work in regard to African American, gender, and feminist studies, there are unexplored approaches to her writing that can contribute to understanding the intricacies of Butler's writing. Reading texts by African American women only through the categories of race and gender risks denying the contributions possible through "alternative readings."[14] Mary Papke addresses Butler's work in particular when she claims that critics miss nuances in her texts by insisting on "a prescriptive set of parameters."[15] While race and gender are important parts of identity and play some determining role in autobiographical self-stories, they share that role with many other sources of self-identity.[16]

A person's identity is largely a product of experiences, perceptions, and memories, which cannot be understood outside a social context. The idea of the self as a social being is closely tied to ideas of memory, even as far back as John Locke:[17] One needs to remember

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[9] Lacey, 381.
[10] Govan "Connections", 82.
[11] Wolmack, 27.
[12] Berger, 52.
[13] Jesser, 58.
[14] Henderson, 17.
[15] Papke, 80 and 81.
[16] Holstein and Gubrium, 105 and 106.
[17] Whitehead, 56-57.

the past in order to have a continuous and consistent concept of the self through time. The ideas of memory and identity, then, offer another way to look at literature. Current work in the interdisciplinary field of memory studies acknowledges the link between literature and history and culture. Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning point out three approaches to this relationship: "(1) the memory *of* literature, (2) memory *in* Literature, and (3) literature as a medium of collective memory."[18] For them, the memory *of* literature highlights the "diachronic dimension of literature" and memory *in* literature focuses on how memory is represented in literature.[19] Their idea of literature as collective memory builds on the ideas of sociologist Maurice Halbwachs. My discussion of Butler's work will focus on the idea of memory *in* literature and how her characters develop identities by drawing on some of the major trends in memory and identity studies.

All of Butler's work deals in some way with memory and its relation to the identities of her characters. In *Lilith's Brood* the humans are desperate to maintain group identities rooted in their pre-war past. Dana, in *Kindred*, comes face to face with an American history she does not fully comprehend until she is forced to live it. Written as a memoir, the *Parable* novels foreground the ideas of identity construction through story-telling. And, the pathology of memory is explored through the amnesia of *Fledgling*'s protagonist, Shori Matthews. An analysis of Butler's characters reveals their motives and struggles to create and maintain a self-concept, or personal identity, that is in concert with their personalities and ideas about their position within the social structure.

Identity Construction

There are two philosophers who have had a major impact on contemporary western thought: René Descartes and John Locke. René Descartes (1596-1650), influenced by the Enlightenment idea of identity as "characterized by the emergence of individualism,"[20] proposed the theory (*cogito ergo sum*) that each person has his/her own base for knowledge. Therefore, Descartes found identity and the self within the context of present conscious thought.[21] John Locke (1632-1704), on the other hand, "found identity in the extension of consciousness backward in time."[22] Identity, then, includes the now as well as what a person

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[18] Erll and Nünning, 13
[19] Erll and Nünning, 13
[20] Woodward, *Understanding* 6.
[21] Kihlstrom, Beer, and Klein. 71.
[22] Kihlstrom, Beer, and Klein, 71.

can remember about the past; identity is continuum. Both of these ideas still influence Western thought.

Theories of the self from a social perspective involve an active, reflective, interpersonal self. George Herbert Mead (1863-1931) proposed a self that relies on the processes of self-reflection and imagination; individuals reflect on how they imagine others see them.[23] This self is socially interactive, has multiple identities, and allows for some agency in the formation of those identities. Mead's self is also integrated into the communication process and does not exist outside or before communication;[24]language, like pictures and gestures, is a system of symbols in which we first represent to ourselves then to others the sort of person we wish to be perceived as.[25] Since everyday life requires different presentations of self, Mead proposed a self with multiple identities, which are created in response to different social circumstances.[26]

Language plays a part in social constructions of the self. Language, as mentioned in connection with Mead's self, is a representational system that allows people to make sense of the world. A common assumption is that language is a neutral, value-free tool for expression.[27] However, social constructionism views language as "a directly formative influence on our thoughts and everyday assumptions about the world."[28] Language is also a key factor in the way we interpret the world.[29] Language and its attendant structure of meanings and values is the medium through which we experience the world.[30] A sense of continuity found through language "between the actions and events of the past, and the experiences of the present, would appear to be an integral part of personal identity."[31] Identity through language is a complex topic that has been approached from a variety of standpoints; all of which can be complimentary. Language can be used to indicate belonging or difference through the way people speak, the stories they tell, and the histories they claim.[32] Gender, ethnicity, and class identities are all constructed through language.[33]

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[23] Woodward, "Questions," 12.
[24] Woodward, *Understanding,* 8.
[25] Woodward, "Questions," 12.
[26] Woodward, *Understanding,* 9.
[27] Burr, 113.
[28] Burr, 119.
[29] Woodward, *Understanding*, 77.
[30] Morris, P., 7, 110.
[31] King, 2.
[32] Woodward, *Understanding*, 74; Burr, 120; Hall, S., 17.
[33] Woodward, *Understanding*, 79, 163.

Language is involved in the creation of identities that are constructed in relation to 'others.' An example of how this identity is constructed in literature can be seen in *Parable of the Sower* after a particularly brutal attack on Lauren's group while on the highway going north:

> "How many times did you die?" Mora asked me.
>
> "Three at least," I answered, as though this were a sane conversation. "Maybe four. I never did it like that before – over and over. Insane. But you look well enough."
>
> His expression hardened as though I'd slapped him. Of course, I had insulted him. I'd said, *where were you, man and fellow sharer, while your woman and your group were in danger*. Funny. There I was, speaking a language I hadn't realized I knew. (300)

Lauren participates in a conversation that would mean little to anyone who was not part of their small, socially outcast group of people who have hyperempathy syndrome. The words, of course, all make sense, but the symbolic meaning behind them is reserved for those of the 'in' group.

Erving Goffman (1922-1982) took the idea of a social self and defined it in theatrical terms. For Goffman, everyday life consists of performances of roles, or scripts, that are already written.[34] Goffman called the "pre-established pattern of action which is unfolded during a performance...a 'part' or 'routine.'"[35] These roles are performed for others, and as such, the performer "implicitly requests the observers to take seriously the impression that is fostered before them."[36] Multiple interactions between the performer and a specific audience, therefore, are likely to create a social relationship.[37] Goffman implies two senses of performance with his theatrical analogy. "First, it *presents* itself to others...The self is also dramaturgic in that it is *staged* to accomplish particular moral ends."[38] The self is accountable for its 'performances' because there is some agency in the way roles are acted out.

The theory that identities are formed in part by individual agency and in part by social circumstances is a practical approach. Individuals live in relation to other individuals and in relation to themselves. Even a hermit or recluse must define her/his identity in relation to the people she/he withdraws from, often by choice. In many cases, as performers of roles, we

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[34] Woodward, "Questions," 14.
[35] Goffman, 16.
[36] Goffman, 17.
[37] Goffman, 16.
[38] Holstein and Gubrium, 36, (emphasis in original).

ensure we practice what Goffman calls "audience segregation:" Different roles are reserved for different audiences made up of different individuals, often in different settings.[39] These identities are multiple and in flux, as well as constrained and denied by the very social circumstances in which they are executed.

Although social circumstances strongly shape identities, a certain amount of agency is involved in taking up those identities. Behaviors and decisions, which an individual makes, can produce opportunities to create a role,[40] such as choosing to go to college (taking up the role of student) or getting married (taking up the role of spouse). While an individual may move among his/her many identities it is common to occupy more than one of these identities at a time.[41] Individuals also have "freedom to determine [their] loyalties and priorities between the different groups to all of which [they] may belong."[42] When these groups compete for priority, the individual must determine "the relative importance to attach to the representative identities"[43] in the particular context. Thus, giving the impression that, at least in that situation, the identity expressed is the "most essential one."[44]

Individuals take up different identities and move into and out of identities as situations require, but they also lay down or put off other identities when they are no longer appropriate. A person is no longer a student after she/he graduates and enters the work force; however, it is possible to take up the role of student again if the person returns to school, at which time, the person may continue to occupy a work identity along with the re-assumed student identity. The flexibility of identities enables individuals to transition smoothly and appropriately from one social situation to the next.

Although there is agency involved in taking up or creating identities, there are also restrictions on which identities are available. These restrictions come from different influences. Culture, the law, religion, education, material wealth, and physical attributes are all examples of ways an individual may be restricted from taking up a particular identity. Amartya Sen explains that "whether we are considering identities as we ourselves see them or as others see us, we choose within particular constraints."[45] Even though the social movements begun in the 1960s have challenged and, in many cases, opened up space for new

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[39] Goffman, 49.
[40] Stets and Burke, 133.
[41] Stets and Burke, 132.
[42] Sen, 5.
[43] Sen, 19.
[44] Goffman, 48.
[45] Sen, 31.

identities,[46] social structures continue to constrain the process of identity formation. We must recognize that identities are "formed in a complex interplay between social structures and individual and collective agency."[47] For example, the identities available to an American woman are much different from those available to a Saudi Arabian woman, but not much different from those of a British woman.

Throughout *Kindred*, Dana must navigate the various identities available to her in both 1976 and in antebellum Maryland. In 1976 Dana is an independent woman who knows what she wants and how to work to get it. However, in her trips to the past, Dana must inhabit the loathsome identity of a slave. She must bury her liberated identity from 1976 and seem to be property, a role she must play in order to save her own life. Additionally, Dana's "autonomy and self-knowledge," as Sarah Wood points out, are "dangerous and threatening attributes to both the slave community and the white owners."[48] Because Dana is both influenced by her participation in the slave community of Weylin's plantation and exerts an influence over that same community, she must take into consideration how her actions affect their collective well-being.[49] But even in 1976 Dana must reluctantly accept societal ideas of identity when both her cousin and the police assume she is the victim of an abusive husband, for the truth would be too much for their modern sensibilities.

Affiliations and group memberships are not strictly defined in terms of communities, nor do we take up only one identity at a time. The home and work are also examples of groups we belong to; we can be a parent, child, student, employee, church member, registered voter, athlete, and so on, often at the same time. These multiple identities represent only parts of our selves that make up the whole. Each particular identity is "tied to aspects of the social structure."[50] The individual identity or identities in use are determined by the particular social context that a person is in. "A person has an identity...for each of the different positions or role relationships the person holds in society."[51] The shift from one or more identities into others happens with little effort or thought as a person interacts in ways appropriate to particular situations.[52]

If identities are formed in the context of social settings, then not only does the society one is born into influence the individual but the individual exerts an influence on that society.

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[46] Woodward "Questions," 34.
[47] Lewis and Phoenix, 147.
[48] Wood, 89.
[49] Mitchell, 62.
[50] Stets and Burke, 132.
[51] Stets and Burke, 132.
[52] Stets and Burke, 135.

The sociological approach "begins with the assumption that there is a reciprocal relationship between the self and society."[53] The self influences society by

> creating groups, organizations, networks and institutions... [, and] society influences the self through its shared language and meanings that enable a person to take the role of the other, engage in social interaction and reflect on one's self as an object.[54]

It is this reciprocal influence that determines the nature of the self and the possible identities available.

Even though everyone has multiple identities, some groups create essentialist descriptions of other groups in order to deny the diversity of individuals in those groups. Gail Lewis and Ann Phoenix define essentialism as "a process that treats groups as if they have a fundamental essence, and so exaggerates differences and reduces similarities between groups while understating differences within groups."[55] By seeing individuals in singular, essentialist terms of the group to which they belong, "much of importance in human life is all together lost, and individuals are put into little boxes."[56] This "illusion of singularity"[57] is a gateway to oppression of and violence against groups deemed inferior or of less value by the groups in the power position. This rejection of diverse identities requires that an individual be judged as part of a collectivity and denied the multiple identities that make her/him unique.[58] Groups in power positions have the ability to use these misdescriptions to foster violence against the devalued groups.

In some instances, one's membership in a particular group is given priority over any other identities. This idea of "community-based identity"[59] has been emphasized recently "in contemporary social, political, and moral theorizing, and [as] the dominant and compelling role of social identity in governing behavior as well as knowledge."[60] Forcing the issue of group membership in this way creates an attitude that the group is "a kind of extension of one's own self."[61] This leads to identities in conflict. Individuals usually identify with more than one group and have more than one role to play in various situations. These various associations may force conflict among the identities when one demands priority to the

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[53] Stets and Burke, 128.
[54] Stets and Burke, 128.
[55] Lewis and Phoenix, 126.
[56] Sen, xvi.
[57] Sen, 45.
[58] Sen, 45.
[59] Sen, 32.
[60] Sen, 33.
[61] Sen, 33.

exclusion of others. In addition, individuals' views of themselves and others' views may not correspond, which "may lead to conflicts in identities."[62] However, as Sen points out, these strong associations "need not obliterate – or overwhelm – other associations and affiliations;"[63] a balance can be achieved.

Butler beautifully shows this balance at the end of *Imago*. The people were wary of the new construct ooloi, but they were also eager to see what the maturity of the species would be like. The Oankali desire to embrace difference and seek out newness overrode their concern. Jodahs and Aaor were seductive in their difference. Some unmated Oankali and constructs were so eager to join the new community that they would be on shuttles as soon as they could arrange it. However, difference often leads to violence.

Even though imposed group identities might be irrational and seemingly arbitrary, they are important enough to cause conflict. These classifications are "made important through social arrangements...In other words, the social world constitutes differences by the mere fact of designing them."[64] These created differences are used as excuses to commit violence. "A strong – and exclusive – sense of belonging to one group can in many cases carry with it the perception of distance and divergence from other groups."[65] These unfounded beliefs are at the heart of many current conflicts. The violence is perpetuated "through the illusion of a unique...identity."[66]

The practice of groups assuming the superior position in defining identities treats 'others' as non-entities, or as having negative identities. Identity rests on the "production of meaning through positioning within a signifying structure of difference."[67] Stuart Hall explains "that it is only through the relation to the Other..., to precisely what it lacks,...that the 'positive' meaning of any term – and thus its 'identity' – can be constructed."[68] Because of this assumption of 'lack,' a group defined as 'other' "does not have identity in its own right, [and] it often acts as an empty space to be ascribed whatever meanings the dominant group chooses."[69] The construction of the 'other' and of difference is accomplished through language.

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[62] Lewis and Phoenix, 116.
[63] Sen, 37.
[64] Sen, 27.
[65] Sen, 1-2.
[66] Sen, xv.
[67] Morris, P., 101-02.
[68] Hall, S., 17.
[69] Morris, P., 14.

Language is used to name and define differences. In creating identities through difference, people define themselves, individually and in groups, as being different from others. Hall notes that "contrary to the form in which they are constantly invoked, identities are constructed through, not outside, difference."[70] Difference is marked by stating what we are and are not and by positioning ourselves within certain groups and not others.[71] For example, "[r]acial and social groups gain their sense of group identity by defining themselves against 'others' who are perceived as different.[72] This idea of 'otherness' sets up a situation in which 'otherness' is defined through paired terms that appear to be opposites; however, difference "often involves oppositions which are unequal."[73] Gender, racial, and social classifications contain definitions set up through opposites (heterosexual/homosexual, male/female, white/non-white, rich/poor) that characterize one group as superior to the other.

The resisters in *Lilith's Brood* not only perpetuate fear and hatred of the Oankali but of each other through their rigid adherence to maintaining differences. Curt kills Joseph in *Dawn* because Joseph heals faster than a normal human should (224). Akin is driven out of resister villages because of his skin color (*Adulthood Rites* 434). In *Imago,* the resisters flee to Mars in large groups to escape their proximity to the very different Oankali (526). Throughout the trilogy, violence among human groups and humans against trade groups is the normal way to deal with difference and the 'other' rather than the exception.

Collective and Cultural Memory

To take up and perform our identities we must remember what those identities are. To remember means that we have accomplished at least three things: acquired, retained and retrieved information,[74] or learned, stored, and used information. These three aspects of mental life are interrelated even though research focuses on different areas of information processing.[75] Researchers who study learning focus on acquiring information; those who study memory focus on storing and retrieving information; whereas, those who study performance focus on using the information.[76] When all works well, this information goes into making each person a unique individual with a unique combination of identities.

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[70] Hall, S., 17.
[71] Woodward, "Questions," 10, *Understanding*, 147.
[72] Morris, P., 14.
[73] Woodward "Questions," 33.
[74] Norman, 2; Tarpy, 472.
[75] Norman, 66.
[76] Norman, 66.

But memory is not just about the biology and psychology of how and where information is processed; memory is subjective and functional. A contemporary understanding of memory stems from the late eighteenth century concept of the subject as constituted by "a perceptual, emotional and intellectual centre from which the particularities of an individual's character and life are expressed."[77] Our subjective experiences make "our memories feel as though they belong to us,"[78] which "is a fundamental and perhaps singular feature of human memory."[79] Memory also puts the "past, present (and future) [into] sociocultural contexts."[80] Our subjective memories allow us to effectively live and interact in our daily lives as well as maintain a continuous sense of self.

The construction of self, and its attendant identities, is crucially dependent on the ability to remember. Self-concept (meaning-based) and self-image (perception-based) are types of self-knowledge "represented in the individual's memory."[81] In other words, the self is one's self-memories.[82] This self-knowledge is based on remembrances of the past.[83] Although memory can be inaccurate or patchy, "it forms the foundation for our most strongly held beliefs about ourselves."[84] It seems a paradox "that our sense of self...depends crucially on [the] fragmentary and often elusive remnants of experience."[85] Memories of our past, therefore, are "continually reproduced" so that our "sense of our identity is perpetuated,"[86] that we can know who we are.

Assuming social identities is closely linked to the acceptance of the groups' collective memories. This "is part of the process of acquiring any social identity, and familiarizing members with that past is a major part of communities' efforts to assimilate" members.[87] Personal memories, therefore, are constructed through the perspective of the group or groups to which the individual belongs.[88] However, when we move from group to group, we usually "change memories along with our points of view, our principles, and our judgments."[89] Eviatar Zerubavel points out:

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[77] Swanson, 111.
[78] Schacter, 37.
[79] Schacter, 37.
[80] Erll, 7.
[81] Kihlstrom, Beer, and Klein, 69, 71.
[82] Kihlstrom, Beer, and Klein, 71.
[83] Schacter, 40.
[84] Schacter, 7.
[85] Schacter, 40.
[86] Halbwachs, 47.
[87] Zerubavel, 3.
[88] Halbwachs, 40.
[89] Halbwachs, 81.

> Such a remarkable existential fusion of one's personal history with that of the communities to which one belongs also helps to explain the tradition of pain and suffering carried by American descendants of African slaves as well as the personal sense of shame felt by many young Germans about the atrocities of a regime that ended long before they were born.[90]

The societal frameworks in which we remember determine how we remember, and the particular frameworks used in remembering change based on the prevailing group identity or identities.

Individual memories, then, are closely linked to the social group or groups to which they are related. Even though personal recollections may be unique to an individual, group memories constitute the framework in which a person remembers.[91] This remembering is essential in the formation of identity and its relation to "self-image and the interests of the group."[92] The memories of an individual are a particular point of view of a collective memory based on that person's various group associations.[93] Halbwachs uses the family as a metaphor for how an individual's memories are shaped by the social group to which he/she belongs:

> each family member recollects in his own manner the common familial past. Their individual consciousnesses remain in certain respects impenetrable in regard to one another-but in certain respects only. Despite the distances among them that are created by opposition of temperaments and the variety of circumstances, they all shared the same daily life.

But these collective frameworks are not isolated. Each group exerts its own set of collective memories while also influencing how memories are recalled in relation to other groups an individual belongs to.

Closely related to the theory of collective memory is cultural memory. Whereas collective memory tends to encompass those things which living members of a group remember, cultural memory has the added dimension of the group's longer history. Cultural memory, from the perspective of the social sciences, focuses on the idea of "public memories" and their connection to "the creation of collective identities;"[94] this public remembering creates "a shared heritage."[95] Zerubavel calls the study of how communities,

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[90] Zerubavel, 3.
[91] Zerubavel, 2; Halbwachs, 182.
[92] Erll, 17.
[93] Halbwachs, 54; Whitehead, 129.
[94] Erll 58.
[95] Erll, 13.

rather than individuals, remember the past "a sociology of memory."[96] An important aspect of how communities remember the past is the fact that cultural memory is a "reconstruction of the past in the light of the present."[97] Erll elaborates on this idea by defining 'cultural memory' as "the societal construction of normative and informative versions of the past."[98] Group memories, then, are not objective recollections of past events, nor are they wholly subjective;[99] they lie somewhere along the continuum between the two poles.

Cultural memory also implies that human beings are social. Because we are social, we have the ability to take upon ourselves the history of the groups with which we identify as our own history, even if it happened before we were born.[100] The development of communication allowed for the sharing of memories and passing them on to others and, eventually, to later generations, long after the participants in the original event were gone.[101] The memories shared among the members of a group as a whole create a common past that each member can recall.[102] The idea of sharing a common past reinforces the notion of a common present that in turn reinforces a sense of connectedness.[103] Each group with which an individual identifies has its own collective memories thereby creating multiple histories for him/her.

Halbwachs separated history from collective memories on the basis of 'factual' content. For him, history is the acquired knowledge of facts and dates and collective memory is the interpretation of those facts in the interests of the group.[104] More recently, though, with the 'rewriting' of history to include marginalized groups, the constructed nature of history is evident. Memory is not a separate "domain of knowledge" but rather is "constituted through a historically specific cultural knowledge."[105] Cultural memory, then, is reinterpreted in each generation as the needs and aims of the group change.[106]

Dana and Kevin, in *Kindred*, are largely unaware of their histories, both as members of particular racial groups as well as the larger US history. Perhaps, as Anne Donadey suggests, the fact that they are orphans may explain this;[107] not only are they missing the most basic group that most people take for granted, family, but that disconnect may indicate a

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[96] Zerubavel, 2.
[97] Coser, 34.
[98] Erll, 30.
[99] Zerubavel, 2.
[100] Zerubavel, 3.
[101] Zerubavel, 5-6.
[102] Zerubavel, 4.
[103] Zerubavel, 63.
[104] Erll, 15 and 17.
[105] Swanson, 111.
[106] Whitehead, 4.
[107] Donadey, 68.

larger disconnect from the other social groups that they would normally have been associated with. As each encounter in the past stretches longer and longer, they become more aware of history's influence on the present.[108] In contrast to the long periods Dana and Kevin spend in the past, the time that they are away can be measured in minutes in 1976.[109] The disproportionate amount of time spent in the past throughout the novel clearly shows how much of the present is a product past events rather than contemporary ones.

While history is a potent influence on the present, we must also recognize that the reciprocal is also true: the present dictates which history we remember. History is not merely a record of everything that ever happened; it is a record of those parts of the past that we have decided was important enough to preserve.[110] Public memory, then, is not just about what we should remember but also "what we should essentially forget."[111] History is a society's cultural memory and as such "a reflection of its present interests, needs, and current levels of experience."[112] Cultural memory and history are less concerned with what actually happened in the past but how we choose to remember it.[113]

In *Lilith's Brood* and the *Parable* novels, a myopic view of the past focuses on 'the good old days' and disregards anything unpleasant. This nostalgic view of the past leads to violence. In *Parable of the Sower* the community at Robledo clings to the idea that things will get better soon and that there will be a return of the good times. This refusal to address the threats of the present leaves the community unprepared for the attack that destroys it. In the sequel, *Parable of the Talents*, militant followers of Jarrett attack anyone who is 'different' and does not fit into Jarrett's view of the present as a reconstruction of an idealized Christian past. This adherence to a twisted idea of the past leads to the destruction of the Acorn community and torture if its members. In *Lilith's Brood* the idea that the pre-war days were so much better than what the Oankali offer results in resistor violence not just against the humans, Oankali, and constructs in trade villages but also against each other.

How are history and cultural memories passed on? Indoctrination. Groups pass on their histories as "common knowledge…through socialization and culturalization" of their members.[114] Though there is some agency, the identities we create for ourselves are based in

[108] Donadey, 67.
[109] Crossley, x.
[110] Zerubavel, 2.
[111] Zerubavel, 5 and 27.
[112] Erll and Nünning, 11-12.
[113] Zerubavel, 2.
[114] Erll and Nünning, 17.

the culture to which we belong.[115] This indoctrination often leads to an "inability or unwillingness to resist" that history.[116] Butler was quite aware of the dangers of indoctrination when she wrote the scene in *Kindred* where slave children are making a game out of the practice of slave auctions. Kevin tells Dana that "the kids are just imitating what they've seen adults do...They don't understand." Dana replies. "They don't need to understand. Even the games they play are preparing them for their future" (99). This insidious indoctrination of slave culture left a large portion of the American population without a framework for self-identification when they were suddenly freed.

Religion is one of the ways group members are indoctrinated into a particular way of thinking and identifying. Claiming an affiliation with a particular religious group presupposes an agreement with the ritualized history the group promotes. Religion is less concerned with the actual historical figures and events than it is with reconstructing the past through "rites, texts, and traditions"[117] in order to maintain a particular world-view, as well as focusing a large group of like-minded people on a task much bigger than one person or even one generation.

The *Parable* novels are centered on religion. The backward-looking Christian America contrasts shockingly with the forward-looking Earthseed. Jarret, with his Christian America church

> wants to take us all back to some magical time when everyone believed in the same God, worshiped him in the same way and understood their safety in the universe depended on completing the same religious rituals and stomping anyone who was different. (*Talents* 19)

But even Earthseed is not immune to the formation of rites and rituals. They have developed rituals for funerals (*Talents* 58) as well as births (*Talents* 65). Lauren writes that "somehow, words are needed. Ceremony is needed" (*Talents* 65). And Asha, once she moves in with Marc, returns to the habit of attending church on Sundays, not because she believes, but because doing so "was like slipping into a comfortable old pair of shoes" (*Talents* 377).

Yet another way that collective identities are formed is through a group's literary production. Both history and literary studies rely on a tradition of written media. The institutions responsible for the transmission of texts control, among other things,

[115] Bruner, 223.
[116] Braid, 48.
[117] Halbwachs, 119.

"legitimization of political power" and a group's "value systems"[118] These canonical texts reflect how the group describes itself, but the canon will change over time as the group's identity changes.[119] The texts of cultural memory need to be "re-appropriated by later generations," which means that these texts are reinterpreted with each generation; thus, giving them updated cultural significance.[120] Literary texts in particular not only reflect the cultural memory of a group, they also give alternate narratives of the past and can transform those memories.[121] Wide-spread illiteracy, such as that represented in the *Parable* novels, precludes large portions of the population from even having that stability of a historically rooted cultural memory; all they know is what they experience first-hand.

The Storied Self

While all of Butler's texts deal in one way or another with memory and identity construction, they all also share one very important quality: All the main characters are trying to construct their own stories to articulate who they are to themselves as well as to others. Lilith tells her story in *Dawn* to try to make sense of the new, post-war predicament of the human species as well as her place in it. Similarly, her child Jodahs, in *Imago*, tells its story in an effort to define its place in society as the first of its kind. Lauren, through her journals, in the *Parable* novels, attempts to not only define and understand herself but also to explore and develop a new religion. In *Kindred*, Dana, who is a fiction writer, is uniquely positioned to tell her story, which even to herself sounds like fiction. And, in *Fledgling*, Shori must first discover her history before she can begin telling the story of her past. Within the narratives that Butler creates, her characters use narrative techniques to 'write' their own identities.

Our personal stories as well as those of the groups we belong to also use narrative to construct identity. Both literature and history use the ideas of "individual and collective memories" in a "constructivist approach to the past."[122] History, like remembering, is a "constructive, narrative process deeply imbued with...patterns of culture and ideology."[123] This has resonance with literary studies in that "it emphasizes the construction of meaning which, after all, is what narrative art is all about."[124] Narrative and interpretive practices are at the heart of the stories we tell ourselves and others in an attempt to construct our

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[118] Erll, 75.
[119] Erll, 75.
[120] Erll, 33.
[121] Erll and Nünning, 14 and 23.
[122] Gymnich, Nünning, and Sommer, 2.
[123] Erll, 39.
[124] Gymnich, Nünning, and Sommer, 2.

identities.[125] But those stories are always constructed within the "culturally available" structures that make them recognizable to our audiences.[126]

Like works of literature, what we choose to tell about ourselves is highly selective and stems from the teller's "subjective perceptions and values."[127] Like any good historian, Asha, in *Parable of the Talents*, makes an "effort to coordinate the historical record,"[128] and like any historian, she does this with her personal agenda driving the project. In the very opening of the novel she states: "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" (2). To do that, Asha uses the personal narratives created by Lauren, Bankole, and Marcus and weaves them together with her own story. And in *Lilith's Brood,* humans are asked to contribute to Lo's library and write down their "prewar memories for later generations. Everyone was asked to do that if they stayed even for a short while" (AR 305). The members of the Lo community also collected the life-stories of the Oankali and constructs (AR 305).

Not only is the past important in defining ourselves in the present, the present helps us to define our past. Memory articulates "the complex relationship between past, present and future in human consciousness."[129] Identity crises often occur at moments of dramatic change that "tear us from our past, as when we emigrate," have major surgery, or lose a close family member.[130] The key "to understanding how the past shapes the present" is acknowledging memory's limitations as well as its "pervasive influence."[131] Additionally, we cannot separate "ongoing events of our lives from what has happened to us previously."[132] Conversely, the past takes shape in the present through recounting past experiences; however, those memories are retold through present biases and intentions, as well as subsequent experiences.[133] In the present we create life stories that provide "narrative continuity between past and future."[134] These autobiographies are "a set of memories that form the core of personal identity."[135] It is important to remember, though, that the set of memories is constantly being added to and that the autobiography is revised in light of these additional experiences.

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[125] Holstein and Gubrium, 104.
[126] Holstein and Gubrium, 103. See also Erll and Nünning, 19.
[127] Morris, P., 65.
[128] Menne, 731.
[129] King, 11.
[130] Zerubavel, 38.
[131] Schacter, 7.
[132] Schacter, 5.
[133] Schacter, 9.
[134] Schacter, 93.
[135] Schacter, 93.

Like most stories, narratives of self often try to start at a beginning, or origin, of some kind. An origin story offers a sense of stability; "the idea of belonging, of home and of some authentic source of certainty...has appeal both for individuals and for those seeking to affirm a collective identity."[136] A linear narrative allows a person to express and understand her/his identity by offering a starting point for the story.[137] Childhood, family, and place of birth offer "a means of finding out some 'truth' about our own identity."[138] However, origin stories "may tell us more about present belongings than about the past it seeks to recapture, but such stories do represent a desire for making sense of who we are through piecing the past together."[139] We construct those stories by choosing which events from the past are "consistent with our present identity"[140] and leaving out those which contradict the self we wish to be.

Like all stories, autobiographies are a collection of episodes compiled to create the illusion of a continuous narrative. These self-stories reflect our "efforts to portray [ourselves] in a way that makes sense" within our "social and cultural context."[141] These self-narratives "strive to balance" a sense of autonomy with a sense of commitment to our social groups.[142] Additionally, the stories we tell tend to follow conventional narrative guidelines, even though those culturally moderated formats do not determine our individual storylines.[143] The cultural expectations of a narrative format are only a framework to organize our self-stories so that they are coherent and significant to ourselves and to others.[144] We must remember also that the audience, which changes as we go about our lives, also influences what we tell.

We do not just story our identities for ourselves as we wish to see ourselves; we create those identities so that others will perceive us the way we wish to be seen. To this extent, we use the tools of fiction to shape our life stories with "suasory purpose."[145] The current context of the telling highly influences how we put together our self-narratives.[146] So, for each social group to which we belong, we will tell the past events of our lives in different ways.

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[136] Woodward, *Understanding*, 136.
[137] Woodward, *Understanding*, 48.
[138] Woodward, *Understanding*, 48, 129.
[139] Woodward, *Understanding*, 45.
[140] Zerubavel, 53.
[141] Fivush and Haden, xiii.
[142] Bruner, 218.
[143] Holstein and Gubrium, 107.
[144] Fireman, Mc Vay, and Flanagan, 4.
[145] Fireman, Mc Vay, and Flanagan, 5.
[146] Holstein and Gubrium, 106.

No matter the reason for telling identity stories, they would not be possible without memory. In addition to constructing stories from memory, stories "reconstruct memory according to certain assumptions about the way it functions and the kind of access it gives to the past."[147] The assumptions about memory processes, functions, and the access it provides to the past work interdependently with the content of the memories to "construct a sense of identity."[148] The past is always reconstructed "through the lens of the present"[149] and through a social filter that allows for interpretation of the past, which "can only be made with what people know of a social world and their place in it."[150] Stories are told from an informed point of view of experiences that took place in a kind of innocence.[151] Because of this distance from and knowledge about the experience, we must remember that the narrating subject is not the same as the subject of the story.

Our autobiographies are stories, narrative constructions based on past events and experiences. These stories emerge from an "ongoing dynamic between time and memory."[152] Contrary to the complexities of reality, we often remember and recount the past with a "neat formulaic manner…, as we habitually reduce highly complex event sequences to inevitably simplistic, one-dimensional visions of the past."[153] However, these subjective interpretations of the past are what create our history; the narratives we tell about the past are more about the meanings they impart rather than the facts of the event.[154] Moreover, memory is social; "people normally acquire,…recall, recognize, and localize their memories" in society.[155] The groups to which an individual belongs (family, community, etc.), then, determine the frameworks for remembering.

Additionally, language is the means for telling stories, and identities are often expressed through narrative, or stories. Narratives, especially first-person narratives, provide a "link between the personal and the social in the formation of identities."[156] Stories about ourselves are "a means of making sense of ourselves…a story is what provides coherence."[157] How stories are constructed, rather than their verifiability, is what creates sense and unity.[158]

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[147] King, 2.
[148] King 2-3.
[149] Woodward, *Understanding*, 29.
[150] Woodward, *Understanding*, 29.
[151] King, 2.
[152] Schacter, 73.
[153] Zerubavel, 13.
[154] Schacter, 93.
[155] Halbwachs, 38.
[156] Woodward, "Questions," 30.
[157] Woodward *Understanding*, 28.
[158] Woodward *Understanding*, 28.

Through autobiographical narratives, individuals piece together the routine and disruptive fragments of everyday life into a coherent, meaningful sense of self.[159] In these stories, there is a "complex shifting relationship between past and present selves."[160] Construction of life stories involves selection of important or key moments while others are excluded from the narrative.[161] Identity is conveyed through deliberate choices on the part of the story teller.

While helping us make sense of our personal identities, narrative also helps us fit into the social structure in which collective stories are told. The story, then, requires interpretation of life events on the part of the teller as well as the audience.[162] It is at this point of communication that the personal and public meet. "Narrative can be used to explore the interrelationship between the personal and the social that forms the basis of identity."[163] Groups can understand their present identities through history narratives, group origin stories.[164] These stories can also be rewritten or retold and made into "versions that reverse and displace the hierarchical dualism of naturalized identities.[165] Marginalized groups retell stories in order to express the value of their identities as a group and as individuals.

The Physiology of Memory

In order for us to construct identities either as individuals or as part of the larger social structures we belong to, we must be able to remember. The physiological aspect of memory is just as important as the social aspect in that without one the other is not possible. Dependence on the brain's ability to remember is most sharply delineated when memory fails. Butler explores, both directly and indirectly, the social implications of the physiological failure of memory in her final novel, *Fledgling.* Shori, the protagonist, must cope with a catastrophic loss of her personal past after she is badly beaten and burned and her family is destroyed.

Memories are recalled in different ways, at different times, and for different purposes. They may be consciously recalled or involuntarily re-emerge.[166] Any object, word, smell, taste, sound can bring up a memory or serve as a departing point for reflection.[167] Memories are represented "in visual images, in stories, in conversations."[168] Although memory is

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[159] Woodward *Understanding*, 28-29, 30, 47.
[160] King, 3.
[161] Woodward, *Understanding*, 32.
[162] Holstein and Gubrium, 106.
[163] Woodward, *Understanding*, 29.
[164] Woodward, *Understanding*, 73.
[165] Haraway, 2294.
[166] King, 9.
[167] Halbwachs, 61; King, 9.
[168] King. 9.

generally reliable and does a "remarkably good job of handling the...demands we place upon"[169] it, at times it "can deceive us badly."[170] At other times, memory may become impaired, causing a loss of normal functioning and a loss of a sense of self. Brain damage can occur through infection, chemicals, or physical trauma. "Our personal memories distinguish us from one another; our communal memories bind us together."[171] Ideally, learning, memory and performance give us our sense of continuity and of self, and a breakdown in any one of those areas can result in a partial or total loss of self.

Ideally new information fits into an established mental framework that supports appropriate organization and storage. Memories, researchers theorize, go through three stages to be useful: the encoding stage (learning information), the retention stage (storing information), and the retrieval stage (recalling information and performing a response).[172] Without some form of organization, stored information would have no links or connections, thus rendering it useless. One theory is that of schemas. Schemas are self-contained "packets of knowledge"[173] that "contain both knowledge and rules for using knowledge."[174] Remembering then, involves both perceived knowledge and general knowledge working together to create a reconstruction of the past.[175] What we remember, though, tends to be what we want to remember for our own purposes.

Butler uses the idea of remembering for a purpose throughout her texts. In *Kindred*, Dana must work to bring half-remembered history lessons to consciousness in order to navigate her second trip to the past. Nikanj, in *Dawn*, insists that it can alter Lilith's brain chemistry so that she can recall everything and learn more efficiently. Lauren's journals in the *Parable* novels are her attempt to preserve what she thinks is important so that those events are not forgotten. Finally, in *Fledgling,* it is Shori's inability to remember anything about herself that forces her to learn about her history in order to rebuild her identity.

Memory is the place where acquired information is stored. Learning requires memory "because each execution of a learned reaction requires memory of the previous trial."[176] Additionally, forming associations and links among items is a major property of memory and seems to be at the core of remembering.[177] These associations allow people to "relate

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[169] Schacter, 3.
[170] Schacter, 7.
[171] Rupp, 11.
[172] Tarpy, 474.
[173] Norman 54.
[174] Norman, 52.
[175] Kowalski and Westen, 218.
[176] Tarpy, 472.
[177] Norman, 25.

different experiences...discover similarities...[and] use past experience as a basis for interpreting the present,"[178] thus providing continuity between the past and present and allowing for future planning. We do not remember everything we experience; rather we remember "fragments of experiences [which] in turn provide a basis for reconstructing a past event."[179] Furthermore, how we think about a situation and what we already have stored in memory effects what we remember;[180] "we are likely to remember what is most important to us."[181] These memories, though, are not free from subjective interpretation, but rather they are colored by "the meaning, sense, and emotions" of the past experience, as well as present events.[182] These memories are stored in long-term memory, the memory that persists over time.

Before a person can remember, or forget, she or he must learn. Definitions of learning can fall into two categories: either general definitions, which allow for learning to arise from any experience, or specific definitions, which refer to learning from purposeful and intentional situations. Jackson Beatty defines learning, generally, as "the storage of information as a function of experience, resulting in a relatively permanent change in behavior (at some level)."[183] On the other hand, Donald Norman's specific research focus on purposeful learning leads to a narrow and specific definition of learning. For him, learning refers "to the act of deliberate study of a specific body of material, so that the material can be retrieved at will and used with skill."[184] Whichever type of definition is used, for learning to be effective, it must be accessible.

To be accessible, information must be represented to the mind. First a stimulus must create a strong enough impression to become conscious in short-term memory. The information will be available for 20-30 seconds unless "the person makes a deliberate attempt to retain it by repeating" the information.[185] If the information is important it will pass to long-term memory[186] where it is stored as "representations of facts, images, thoughts, feelings, skills, and experiences."[187] Long-term memory is divided into several types, and the

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[178] Norman, 25.
[179] Schacter, 40.
[180] Schacter, 45.
[181] Schacter, 46.
[182] Schacter, 5.
[183] Beatty, 403-04.
[184] Norman, 3.
[185] Kowalski and Westen, 102.
[186] Kowalski and Westen, 197.
[187] Kowalski and Westen, 197.

more types of memory "used for storage, the more powerful the learning will be."[188] However, conscious recall of the information is not required for remembering; it may be indirectly remembered through performance.[189] At times, though, learning does not happen properly.

Forgetting is the other side of memory. The most devastating form of forgetting is amnesia. The two types of amnesia are anterograde and retrograde. In anterograde amnesia, a person forgets everything that occurs "after the onset of the brain damage."[190] Retrograde amnesia is the loss of memories "for events that occurred before the onset of the amnestic episode, but recall for subsequent experiences may be relatively undisturbed."[191] None of Butler's works deal with anterograde amnesia; however, retrograde amnesia is at the core of *Fledgling* and is also present in *Dawn* when Lilith objects to Nikanj tampering with her brain to improve her memory (76) and *Adulthood Rites* in reference to Tino's head injuries (331). The important thing to realize about amnesia is that it is not all-encompassing, "some components of memory remain intact."[192] For Shori this includes her memories about things, but nothing about her personal life, and her ability to process normally everything since she awoke in the cave. I will discuss the anatomy of remembering and forgetting more fully in the chapter on *Fledgling,* where it is most relevant.

The Personality behind the Person

Whereas the materials presented thus far have involved the sociological aspects of identity and memory's role in it, we need to also look briefly at the psychological ideas behind what makes us who we are. Personality is at the heart of that research. The meaning of 'personality' is elusive. We speak of people who have personality, of people who are personalities, of clothes, styles, and homes that have personality. Just about everyone agrees that people have personalities, but few of them can define what they mean by the term. Dictionary.com defines 'personality' as "the sum total of the physical, mental, emotional, and social characteristics of an individual, and the organized pattern of behavioral characteristics of the individual."[193] Psychologists have tried to define personality but even they cannot agree on what 'personality' means.

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[188] Sprenger, 57.
[189] Baddeley, "Psychology," 7.
[190] Beatty, 408.
[191] Beatty, 408.
[192] O'Connor and Verfaellie, 145.
[193] "Personality," n.p.

Each system or theory of personality has strong points as well as deficiencies. What personality consists of and how it develops are points of debate in the field of personality psychology. However, there is quite a bit of agreement among the theories as to the purpose of developing a personality theory and a shared basic concept of what personality means. Daniel Cervone and Lawrence A. Pervin explain that the purpose of personality research is to devise "systematic descriptions of universal human tendencies and differences among people"[194] and define personality as "psychological qualities that contribute to an individual's enduring and distinctive patterns of feeling, thinking, and behaving".[195] From this common ground, personality psychologists address the complex and fascinating topic of human personality. These theories can be grouped in any number of ways, but the categories used by Donald Pennington suit the purpose of this section. He separates personality theory into four main approaches: psychoanalytical, behavioral and cognitive, dispositional, and humanistic.[196]

The development of personality theory and research began with the psychoanalytic approach of Sigmund Freud (1856-1939). While psychoanalysis in general and psychoanalytic approaches to personality in particular have undergone significant changes and expansions, many of Freud's concepts are the foundation of psychoanalytic theories. Some theorists have added social factors into their theories, stressing the social and creative determinants of behavior.[197] While still others focused on cultural and interpersonal factors claiming that social situations cause conflict,[198] and all mental, psychological processes are interpersonal.[199] The belief that observable interpersonal behavior constitutes personality has resonance with the theories of the behaviorists.

Although behavioral and cognitive approaches vary widely and often disagree on how personality should be studied and understood, they are related by their concern with personality as a consequence of learning. Behavioral theories claim only observable and environmental experiences are relevant, whereas cognitive theories also consider mental processes.[200] Additionally, social-cognitive theory is "a theory of psychological systems that enable people to play an active role in the course of their own development."[201] The agency

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[194] Cervone and Pervin, 4.
[195] Cervone and Pervin, 8.
[196] Pennington, 3.
[197] Cervone and Pervin, 159; Hall and Lindzey, 120.
[198] Hall and Lindzey, 134, 137.
[199] Hall and Lindzey, 140.
[200] Pennington, 4-5.
[201] Cervone and Pervin, 451.

afforded the individual in social-cognitive theory differs radically from the determinism inherent in behaviorism.

Behaviorists see personality as arising from environmental experiences.[202] Behavior is formed through systems of rewards and punishments experienced in the environment, and differences in learning processes account for differences in behavior that are referred to as 'personality.'[203] Personality "is nothing but a collection of behavior patterns, and that when we ask about the development of personality we ask only about the development of these behavior patterns."[204] Although behaviorism dominated mid-20th century psychology, its inability to explain uniquely human tendencies – such as developing subjective meanings for experiences – and the rise of cognitive psychology pushed behaviorism out of favor.[205]

The personal construct theory goes beyond behaviorisms restrictions on observable behavior and takes into account people's ability to interpret their experiences. Personal construct theorists study people's subjective interpretations, or constructs, about their environment and propose that variations in personality stem from variations in constructs.[206] The ways an individual perceives similarities in events fit into a construct, which is an "element of knowledge"[207] or a concept used to interpret and organize the world,[208] similar to the idea of schemas in memory studies. They "are formed on the basis of observations of similarities among events."[209] A person experiences anxiety, fear and threat when experiences do not fall into a personal construct or when constructs are about to emerge or change.[210]

In *Parable of the Talents*, Octavia Butler presents us with the characters of Marcus Duran and Asha Vere, the protagonist's younger brother and daughter respectively, who cannot cope with these changes and react badly when forced to face these types of situations. Throughout the novel, they lash out against Lauren in various ways because her world view does not fall neatly in line with theirs. Asha feels threatened by her mother when it turns out that she is not the horrible person Asha wants her to be. And Marcus lies to Lauren and hides her daughter from her in an act of revenge when she refuses to fill Marcus's idea of the 'proper Christian woman' who bows to the men in her life.

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202 Hall and Lindzey, 488; Cervone and Pervin, 408.
203 Cervone and Pervin, 29.
204 Hall and Lindzey, 490-91.
205 Cervone and Pervin, 408, 409.
206 Cervone and Pervin, 29-30.
207 Cervone and Pervin, 447.
208 Cervone and Pervin, 419.
209 Cervone and Pervin, 448.
210 Cervone and Pervin, 448.

This attention to mental processes led to the development of social cognitive theories. Social-cognitive theorists still study personality in terms of mental processes; however, they also focus on social aspects of learning and self-regulation. Social-cognitive theorists explain behavior as a result of personal interaction with the environment and cognition.[211] Personality is seen as a processing system with highly organized and interrelated structures that interact with the social environment.[212] Four structures emphasize the core concept of personality: competencies and skills – the ability to achieve goals;[213] expectancies and beliefs – predictions and anticipations of the result of a particular action and situation[214] and ideas about the reality of the world in the present and probably in the future;[215] behavioral, or evaluative, standards – "criteria for evaluating the goodness, or worth, of a person, thing or event"[216] including evaluation of personal behavior and emotions; and personal goals – "desired future events that motivate the person over extended periods of time and enable the person to go beyond momentary influences."[217] Variations in personality, thus, are seen as variations in people's cognitive structures.

Behaviorists study outward actions that can be situationally manipulated, construct theorists focus on how individuals interpret the world, and social cognitive theorists focus on the social nature of behavior. However, each of the learning theories of personality focuses on the ways in which personality is displayed through acquisition and use of knowledge. They also explore why differences in personality exists. Dispositional theories, in comparison, search for common factors in personality.

Dispositional approaches to personality are often referred to as trait theories, since they propose that personality is comprised of characteristics, or traits, that people have in varying degrees. These traits account for how people behave and how each person is unique.[218] Cervone and Pervin define 'trait' as "a consistent style of emotion or behavior that a person displays across a variety of situations."[219] They are considered "continuous dimensions," so that a person possesses "more or less of a given trait."[220] Instead of trying to describe individuals, trait theorists try "to establish a personality taxonomy" that can describe

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[211] Cervone and Pervin, 450.
[212] Cervone and Pervin, 489.
[213] Cervone and Pervin, 489.
[214] Cervone and Pervin, 490.
[215] Cervone and Pervin, 458.
[216] Cervone and Pervin, 466.
[217] Cervone and Pervin, 490.
[218] Pennington, 3, 4.
[219] Cervone and Pervin, 10.
[220] Cervone and Pervin, 11.

all individuals.[221] In other words, they are trying to show, in a scientific theory, that traits are "organized in a hierarchical manner."[222] But how do people come by these traits?

For trait theorists, the answer lies primarily in a biological answer. They believe that traits are inherited,[223] like blue eyes or curly hair. Since traits do not fully develop until adulthood, early expressions of personality are referred to as temperament.[224] Temperament, intelligence and physique – all inheritable factors – work together to form personality.[225] However, Trait theorists do not rely solely on biological explanations of personality, they have also produced "evidence that personality develops across the course of life as a result of individuals' interactions with the social environment".[226] So, in the nature versus nurture debate, trait theories come in closer to the nature side. This tendency toward a biological basis of personality explains why traits appear to be stable over the long-term.

This partially explains why Shori Matthews in *Fledgling* still acts in much the same way as she did before her amnesia. Repeatedly, the people she comes in contact with from her pre-amnesia life claim that she is very much like she used to be. For example, when she tells Preston, "I don't really know how to be Ina" When he answers, "You do, I believe, even though you don't realize that you do" (152-53), Shori is surprised that Preston sees this in her behavior.

People tend to behave in predictable ways. This supports the idea that traits are consistent over time and across situations.[227] Personality, then, is consistency in an individual's patterns of behaving, feeling, and thinking.[228] This does not mean that people always respond in the same way in similar circumstances. Behavior shows variations because a trait may not be expressed in a given instance or multiple traits may interact to produce behavior that is not consistent with a single trait when considered by itself.[229] Biology, therefore, can explain why a person shows a generally predictable pattern of behavior, but environmental factors also influence behavior and help to account for variations in those patterns.

Whereas the approaches to personality already discussed focus on a particular aspect of the person, theories with a humanistic approach attempt to address the whole person.

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[221] Cervone and Pervin, 240.
[222] Cervone and Pervin, 242.
[223] Cervone and Pervin, 241.
[224] Tickle, Heatherton, and Wittenberg, 249.
[225] Hall and Lindzey, 264.
[226] Cervone and Pervin, 287.
[227] Cervone and Pervin, 236; Tickle, Heatherton, and Wittenberg, 234.
[228] Cervone and Pervin, 238.
[229] Tickle, Heatherton, and Wittenberg, 246.

These theories emphasize the "importance [of] a person's conscious, subjective experience of the world…[,] regard each person as attempting to understand themselves," and fully realize "their potentials and aspirations."[230] Three notable approaches are phenomenological, organismic, and existential. Phenomenology grew out of the human potential movement and "emphasizes an understanding of how people experience themselves and the world around them."[231] While phenomenologists acknowledge that some motives are biologically based, they believe that 'higher' motives are more important to personal growth and well-being. Organismic theory is closely aligned with Gestalt psychology and "may be regarded as the extension of Gestalt principles to the organism as a whole."[232] And the existential approach to personality is drawn from the philosophical existential movement and attempts to analyze the whole individual who is motivated to fulfill her/his potential. It combines aspects of both phenomenological and organismic theories. Existential psychologists are concerned with understanding the existence of the individual in terms of the human condition.[233]

All of the approaches to the psychology of personality either directly or indirectly favor a biological or environmental basis for personality development. Psychoanalytical and dispositional approaches lean heavily toward a biological explanation of personality; whereas, behavioral and humanistic theories tend toward an environmental explanation. Many psychologists look at biological explanations for personality because "it has long been known that the brain is related to personality."[234] The self, however, is nearly impossible to study outside the social context.[235] Yet, biological research not only "provides information about the role of genetics in personality, but also the role of the environment".[236] Historically, research has focused on either biology or the environment as causal factors, but recently the trend has been to explore the "interactions between genetic and environmental factors."[237] Biological research into the mechanisms of personality draws from several fields including neuroscience, molecular genetics, and evolutionary theory. On the environmental side of the debate, an individual's environment plays the biggest role in determining personality. The main environmental factors influencing personality are culture, class, family and peers.[238]

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[230] Pennington, 5.
[231] Cervone and Pervin, 189.
[232] Hall and Lindzey, 299.
[233] Cervone and Pervin, 217.
[234] Tickle, Heatherton, and Wittenberg, 249.
[235] Mischel and Morf, 23.
[236] Cervone and Pervin, 370.
[237] Cervone and Pervin, 14.
[238] Cervone and Pervin, 18-19.

Personality is the psychological force behind the social person. And Butler seems to have been aware of that as she created her characters. All of them act in ways that, after you get to 'know' them, are mostly predictable in the sense that they are consistent with the personality that Butler bestowed on them. Lilith is fiercely loyal not only to the human race but also to her new, blended family. Lauren does not just prescribe a new way of living, she lives her life according to the precepts of Earthseed. In contrast, her brother Marcus and her daughter Asha shy away from doing the hard things. And Shori, is 'still Shori' even though she does not always understand what that entails.

And on from Here

All the chapters that follow address, in one way or another, the ways that Octavia E. Butler masterfully created fully realized characters with personalities and identities of their own. While I take a different approach to each group of texts, the methods I use could easily have been paired with a different text except for *Fledging*, which is Butler's only story to deal directly with amnesia. I chose to look at the individual self, the collective self, the narrated self, and the forgotten self. And while these chapters only deal with a selection of her novels and none of her short stories, they give an overview of the different ways memory and identity play a part in all of Butler's fiction. The close readings I develop in each of the following chapters exemplify how the theories discussed in this introduction play out in Butler's fiction.

I begin with a look at the way individual identities are constructed through a look at Butler's most taught text, *Kindred*. Since the story directly deals with the history of slavery in the United States, that history directly affects the construction of identities of the characters. Dana and Kevin must navigate prejudices in both the past and the present that threaten to destroy the carefully constructed identities they are proud of. Kevin must face the fact of his privilege as a white male while at the same time try to understand Dana's position as a doubly marginalized black woman. Dana works to maintain her sense of an autonomous self with personal agency in a world, past and present, that wants to dictate to her who she should be.

I move on to *Lilith's Brood*, sometimes called the *Xenogenesis Trilogy*, and a discussion of collective identities. In the set of tales, the forward-looking, inclusive Oankali contrast with the backward-looking, divisive resister humans. The humans, who cling to things and traditions from the past, continue to create separate groups based on essentialist categories. This reductionist view of each other and of the Oankali leads to violence. On the

other hand, The Oankali, constructs and the humans who have joined them work to build villages that celebrate diversity and work together.

The *Parable* novels seems to be well suited to a discussion of the narrative construction of identity. Both novels, written as edited and published journals, closely resembles the life-writing that is currently in fashion. In the first novel, *Parable of the Sower*, we only get to see Lauren's perspective. We watch as she and her new religion grow together from unsure adolescents to confident young adults. In *Parable of the Talents,* we get the added voices of Bankole, Marcus, and Asha. It is Asha's narrative that ties all the parts together in this novel as well as providing a critical commentary on Lauren's journal.

In the last chapter I address the catastrophic loss of memory in Butler's final novel *Fledgling.* While the discussion of the neurobiology may seem like it does not belong in an analysis of a fictional work, it is important in that it shows just how aware Butler was of all the aspects of memory that go into making up a person. All the personal and collective identities a person may or may not have or want are not possible without the brain and its ability to process all the necessary information. Throughout the story, Butler shows that even through the dislocation Shori suffers as a result of her injuries, a fundamental part of herself is not lost. And so, we move on…

Chapter 1

Across Time and Space: Perception and Self-Definition in Octavia E. Butler's *Kindred*

Octavia E. Butler's *Kindred*, narrated by the protagonist Dana Franklin, is a story of discovery and identity. Dana is repeatedly pulled back in time from 1976 Los Angeles to nineteenth-century Maryland. She soon learns that in order to insure her survival in 1976 she must keep her ancestor Rufus Weylin alive long enough to father her family. The story is a complex examination of the experiences Dana and, to a lesser extent, her husband Kevin face in the past and present. Both characters must come to terms with a horrible time in US history and the damage it still exerts in the present. How they fit into the social cultures of both eras – Dana as an African American female and Kevin as a white male – will not only define their roles but also influence how they define themselves as individuals and as a couple.

Many critics focus on the subjects of race and gender, prominent themes in all of Butler's works, as foregrounded in *Kindred* because of the direct presentation of issues affecting much of the US without the remove of alternate realities offered by her other novels. Robert Crossley points out that Butler "has produced fables that speak directly or indirectly to issues of cultural difference."[1] Stephanie Smith calls Butler's work "complex, unsettling, interracial,"[2] and she goes on to say that "Butler casts an unflinching eye on racism, sexism, poverty, and ignorance."[3] *Kindred* clearly fits these descriptions, because interracial relationships and slavery form core points of the plot. Through the use of time travel, Butler allows Dana and Kevin to confront the realities of the nineteenth-century slave culture.

Because time travel is a prime vehicle for the plot, discussions of history and its implications are inevitable, even required, components of any analysis of Kindred. Scholars point out the pain in facing and attempting to come to terms with aspects of a national history that are violent and continue to damage the present. Dana is required "to embody and enact...personal histories and [her] national past."[4] The past for Dana, and the readers, is

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[1] Crossley, xi.
[2] Smith, S., 387.
[3] Smith, S., 391.
[4] Long, 460.

"invasive, disorienting, and excruciatingly painful, both physically and psychologically."[5] Violence initiates Dana's time travel; she is called to the past when Rufus's life is in danger and returns to the present when her life is in danger. Dana "ends up caught fast between [the] shifting plates"[6] of time as the violence and disfiguration she suffers in the past carry over into the present.

Dana's shifts in time deny the Western view of history as linear. The past intrudes on the present, demands attention, and makes its influence clear. In *Kindred* Butler shows "a causal relationship between the events of the past and their influence on the present."[7] According to Marc Steinberg:

> Butler points to ways in which past and present become interchangeable..., [and she] assumes a non-Western conceptualization of history...in order to demonstrate ways in which certain forms of race and gender oppression continue into the twentieth century and beyond.[8]

Butler contrasts past and present in *Kindred* in order "to explore directly the history of American slavery and its effects on African-American consciousness."[9] Personal and national history merges with the reality of the present in the cyclical quality of time that Butler portrays in *Kindred.*

Additionally, scholarship on Butler closely links oppression to history and the body; in turn, the body is linked to race and gender. Lucie Armitt links the past to the present when she claims "that the contemporary owes a profound debt to the past"[10] and that *Kindred* "rework[s] historical material relating to previous centuries from a late twentieth-century standpoint."[11] Robert Crossley notes that Butler's stories "speak to issues, feelings, and historical truths arising out of Afro-American experience."[12] Telling Dana's story, according to Gregory Hampton, allows Butler to establish a "subtext consisting of body politics, and a critique of the agency attached to the black female body."[13] Furthermore, Lisa Long directly links history to the body when she equates the trauma of remembered/relived history with rape, even though in *Kindred* Dana is not actually raped but, rather, defends herself from rape

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[5] Long, 464.
[6] Armitt, 12.
[7] Donadey, 67.
[8] Steinberg, 467.
[9] Richard, 119.
[10] Armitt, 41.
[11] Armitt, 12.
[12] Crossley, xvii.
[13] Hampton "*Kindred,*" 114.

twice. For Long, "Dana's...rapability dictates the plot"[14] of *Kindred* and highlights the sexual vulnerability of female slaves.

Postcolonial readings of the novel also intertwine history and the body. Anne Donadey argues that Butlers addresses the "question of the contemporary legacy of traumatic national pasts and the treatment of women's agency and desire under situations of extreme violence."[15] Writers in a postcolonial situation "feel the necessity of rewriting the past because the dominant versions of history have left blanks, gaps, and misrepresentations."[16] Thelma Shinn Richard claims that Butler sees "the body as the site of oppression."[17] This intersection of history and the body is closely tied to the ways in which identities are constructed in *Kindred.*

Discussions of assigning genre to *Kindred* are bound up with history as well. Armitt simply calls *Kindred* "genre fantasy"[18] that allows the reader to "enter, with Dana, a very separate world of nineteenth-century slavery and, like her, leave it behind at the end of the text."[19] Other discussions are decidedly more complicated. *Kindred* is non-traditional science fiction, according to Hampton, that "presents a version of a time travel narrative in which memory and imagination are the most important means of transportation."[20] Hampton also calls the novel a slave narrative and historical novel. However, for Crossley, the time travel is less important than "the autobiographical voice of the modern descendant of, witness to, victim of American slavery."[21] He points out Butler's adaptation of "the form of a fantastic travelogue to a restoration of the genre of slave-memoir,"[22] and how *Kindred* is a "contribution to the literature of memory every bit as much as it is an exercise in the fantastic imagination."[23] Scholars often favor the comparison of *Kindred* to the slave narrative.

The relationship of *Kindred* to the slave narrative is often foregrounded at the expense of other genres. Steinberg admits that assigning genre to the novel is difficult but, then goes on to say that "Butler's novel looks to the antebellum slave narrative form"[24] and that it assumes "the form of the slave narrative."[25] Additionally Ashraf Rushdy labels *Kindred* as "a

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[14] Long, 464.
[15] Donadey, 66.
[16] Donadey, 66
[17] Richard, 122.
[18] Armitt, 80.
[19] Armitt, 81.
[20] Hampton "*Kindred,*" 115.
[21] Crossley, xi-xii.
[22] Crossley, xii.
[23] Crossley, xiv.
[24] Steinberg, 467.
[25] Steinberg, 468.

novel of memory"[26] and that Butler "writes one novel which represents both primary forms of the narrative of slavery."[27] Angelo Robinson explores an even more specific niche, romance within the slave narrative genre. He "investigate[s] the reality of black romance during slavery through the literary genre of the twentieth- and twenty-first-century neoslave narrative."[28] Is *Kindred* science fiction, fantasy, historical novel, travelogue, fictional autobiography/memoir, romance, or slave narrative? The answer is that *Kindred* is all of these and more. The novel might also be read as psychological suspense, quest, and coming of age. *Kindred* defies categorization because it tells a good story without regard to artificially defined boundaries.

Parents, Environment, and Personality

Personality influences the ways in which identities are taken up and how subject positions are played out. Additionally, the social forces that delineate which identities are available to different members of a particular cultural group are the same ones that influence personality development. In *Kindred*, as in her other novels, Butler creates characters that display multifaceted personalities. Even her secondary characters, such as Tom Weylin, show evidence of well thought out individuals instead of stock, flat portrayals. Butler reveals these personalities through character action and interaction as well as observations and comments by third parties.

Characters' personalities influence the choices the characters make. The strong personalities present in *Kindred* have not gone unnoticed in analyses by other scholars. For example, Hampton notes that Dana is "an overtly empowered, sexual, and complicated female heroine,"[29] and Sandra Govan describes Rufus as "selfish, childish and unstable."[30] Yet, personality is mostly of secondary importance in these analyses and used for the purpose of supporting other avenues of study.

Kindred offers an opportunity to study character personalities from two perspectives. In the instances of Dana, Kevin, and Tom Weylin, personality is only discernable through actions/interactions and observations because the novel only portrays them as adults. In this instance traits are the most useful analysis of personality. Rufus, however, is a different case. Dana's visits to the past show Rufus's growth from early childhood into manhood allowing

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[26] Rushdy "Families," 136.
[27] Rushdy "Families," 136.
[28] Robinson, 40.
[29] Hampton "*Kindred,*" 114.
[30] Govan, "Homage", 94.

for an expanded analysis that includes genetic and environmental influences on his personality. The following look at the major personalities in *Kindred* are far from comprehensive, rather they focus only on some of the important aspects of each character.

As protagonist/narrator, Dana is a logical place to start. There is actually much less about Dana's personality than Tom's and Rufus's personalities, most likely because, as she tells her story, she focuses more on her choices and their consequences and thus reveals more of her identities. Therefore, what we see in Dana's personality are traits that express themselves consistently over time;[31] these traits strongly influence her actions in the novel. Dana is independent, intensely private, logical, easily angered, and yet caring.

Her need to be independent is clear throughout the novel, such as when Kevin offers to support her financially. Dana is touched by the gesture but does not quit the temp agency:

> The independence the agency gave me was shaky, but it was real. It would hold me together until my novel was finished, and I was ready to look for something more demanding. When that time came, I could walk away from the agency not owing anybody.[32]

Her need to not owe anybody stems from her past. Dana points out that her aunt and uncle who raised her taught her that "people who loved me could demand more of me than I could give – and expect their demands to be met simply because I owed them" (109). This childhood/young adult experience shaped her convictions and her behavior.

Angelyn Mitchell acknowledge Dana's independence. She notes that Dana is "[s]trengthened by…her personal responsibility, her free will, and her self-determination"[33] as well as "individualistic and self-reliant."[34] Late in the novel, Dana feels that she is losing herself in the past and all that being a slave entails. She walks away from Margaret Weylin's insistent calling and heads away from the main house, because "just for a while, [she] needed to be [her] master. Before [she] forgot what it felt like" (221). Throughout the novel Dana finds moments to be alone or deliberately disobeys her 'masters' to reestablish her autonomy.

Closely related to her independence is Dana's sense of privacy, a trait Kevin also has. They closely guard their inner selves, even from each other. During their courtship, they avoid any discussion of family except to share that they are orphans (55) until Kevin proposes. Dana tells readers "that we had never talked much about our families, about how

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[31] Cervone and Pervin, 236.
[32] Butler, 108-09. [All other references to *Kindred* in this chapter are given by page number in the text.]
[33]Mitchell, 64.
[34] Mitchell, 65.

his would react to me and mine to him" (109). Both of them had "avoided a substantial conversation about their homes, their origins, the lives that should be familiar to them."[35] Unable to share, Dana's writing serves as a way for her to deal with her intensely personal thoughts:

> Sometimes I wrote things because I couldn't say them, couldn't sort out my feelings about them, couldn't keep them bottled up inside me. It was a kind of writing I always destroyed afterward. It was for no one else. Not even Kevin. (252)

Dana "consciously nurtures her private self,"[36] but she and Kevin finally learn by the end of the novel how to share some of their inner selves with each other. However, the tendency to be private remains.

Yet underneath the shell of privacy Dana has constructed, is a woman capable of intense emotion and caring. She is frequently roused to fits of anger and rage at cruelty directed towards others and herself. Dana wants to retaliate against Margaret Weylin's slap across her face; her temper flares when Tom Weylin cannot be civil to her; and she confronts Rufus when he sells some slaves (93, 200, 222, 238). It is Rufus who arouses her anger the most, because she cares about him, by his treatment of the slaves. He can make Dana angry "enough to try to kill him" (180), which she finally does at the end of the novel.

Her anger is carefully balanced, however, by her caring nature. On her first trip back in time, she "reacted to the child in trouble" (13) before satisfying her curiosity about what had happened to her. While trying to revive the child, she pushes the mother away and focuses on her self-appointed task of saving him (14). Additionally, she is initially incapable of doing serious harm even in an attempt to protect herself. During her struggle with the patroller on her second trip to the past, she cannot make herself cripple the man:

> I raised my hands to his face, my fingers partly covering his eyes. In that instant, I knew I could stop him, cripple him, in this primitive age, destroy him...But I couldn't do it. The thought sickened me, froze my hands where they were. I had to do it! But I couldn't... (42)

Dana's twentieth-century values are often at odds with the realities and necessities of nineteenth-century Maryland. Even so, she does the best she can to help the slaves she comes to care about, although it puts her in vulnerable positions.

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[35] Schiff, n.p.
[36] Mitchell, 65.

Along with the traits he shares with Dana, Kevin displays some traits of his own. His open-mindedness creates an atmosphere that in the twentieth century is admirable, but gets him into trouble in the nineteenth century. Although he cannot comprehend what is happening to Dana, after her first two trips to the past, he listens without interrupting, all the while trying to stay neutral (15, 46). On the Weylin plantation, Sarah the cook is able to recognize Kevin's difference from other white men; she tells Dana, "Your husband…He'd get in trouble every now and then 'cause he couldn't tell the difference 'tween black and white" (150). Dana confirms for Sarah, and the readers, that Kevin has possessed this trait for some time, and that it was one of the reasons that she married him.

However, for all his open-mindedness, Kevin still acquires traits common to men in the late twentieth century. Ashraf Rushdy calls these "residual aspects of his patriarchal thinking."[37] Kevin equates 'wife' with ownership when he tries to explain his relationship with Dana to Rufus. Rufus asks, "Does Dana Belong to you now?" and Kevin responds "In a way…She's my wife" (60). While they are still dating, Kevin expects Dana to type pages for him on request because secretarial-type tasks were often delegated to women. After the third time she refuses Kevin, he tells her to leave, and she does. However, he backs down from his position when Dana returns the next day and refuses him yet again (109).

Because traits are generally consistent over a lifetime, a person may change his attitude regarding one situation; however, the general tendency remains. Kevin's disposition to keep an open mind allowed him to change some of his expectations of Dana though not necessarily his tendency toward patriarchal thinking. Kevin's inability to accept that Dana's possible rape, first by the patroller and finally by Rufus, would be violence against her personally but rather an attack on her as his property shows his ingrained and mostly unchangeable attitude toward women in general. He is in this way a product of his society.

Social-Cognitive theories of personality explain why a person is 'a man of his time.' The ideas behind these theories emphasize "the social origins of behavior and the importance of cognition (thought processes)."[38] For social-cognitive theorists, the social experiences of a person over a lifetime influence the development of the personality structures.[39]

While societal norms partly influence Kevin, Tom Weylin is exceedingly influenced by his society. He behaves just as a slave owner would be expected to act. Dana recognizes

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[37] Rushdy "Families," 149.
[38] Cervone and Pervin, 450.
[39] Cervone and Pervin, 489.

that the things he does, though barbaric by twentieth-century standards, is normal in nineteenth-century Maryland:

> [Tom Weylin] wasn't the monster he could have been with the power he held over his slaves. He wasn't a monster at all. Just an ordinary man who sometimes did monstrous things his society said were legal and proper. (134)

Additionally, Tom was not well educated, which was also normal for non-professionals during that time. He had learned enough to manage the plantation but little else. This fostered a sense of inferiority, especially around people who were better educated. Nigel tells Dana, "Marse Tom Already don't like you. You talk too educated...He don't want no niggers 'round here talking better than him" (74). Tom also fears Dana because of the inexplicable way Dana appears and disappears.

We cannot assume, however, that only social factors influence behavior; we must also account for the biological/genetic factor. Personality traits or the tendency toward particular ways of behaving and thinking are a combination of the social and the genetic.[40] Tom's personality is full of anger and violent tendencies. It is these that he passes on to his son. Tom's anger easily takes over his reason and sensibility. When Dana threatens to stop helping Rufus if she is beaten again, Tom reacts with instant anger. "His eyes widened, perhaps in surprise. Then he began to tremble. [Dana] had never before seen a man literally trembling with anger" (201). As Tom's yells at Dana he is gasping for breath, possibly from illness as Dana suspects but also likely from the rage. He threatens to flay her alive if anything happens to Rufus. Although Dana's aunt had said similar things when she was a child, "it had never occurred to [her] that anyone could make such a threat and mean it literally as Weylin meant it" (202).

Tom's anger requires an outlet though, and he is prone to taking out his anger on slaves, including Dana. After Tom and Rufus catch Dana when she attempts to run away, Tom kicks Dana in the face to 'assist' Rufus in holding her (174). He also takes his anger out on his son. After Rufus shows Dana the scars of his back, he tells her, "I remembered the stable, and the whip he hit me with after I set that fire. Mama said if she hadn't stopped him, he would have killed me" (26). Tom's violent treatment as well as the genetic predisposition he passes on to young Rufus fosters the same short temper and violence in the boy.

But for all Tom's less than pleasing traits, he has one admirable quality - integrity. It is the one thing Rufus admires about him. Tome Weylin "cares as much about giving his

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[40] Cervone and Pervin, 14.

word to a black as to a white" (181). Rufus, however, has little of his father's integrity; it is the less desirable traits he inherits from his father.

Environment, upbringing, and genetics all work together to make Rufus the unstable, violent, and selfish man he becomes. Environment is a crucial factor in personality development.[41] Environment leads to many similarities, especially among members of the same social and cultural groups, while also contributing to "individual differences and individual uniqueness."[42] Rufus is very much a product of his environment in regard to his class and social standing. Dana remarks early in the novel, during her second trip, that even as a boy of eight or nine Rufus's "environment had left its unlikable marks on him" (23). As he grows up, Rufus displays the expected attitudes and behaviors of a Southern slave holder.

In two separate articles, Govan notes how class and social status affect Rufus. She refers to Dana's attempts to teach Rufus enough "respect, responsibility and compassion"[43] as doomed to failure, because "all the accepted social norms mitigate against the possibility"[44] of success. Dana is unable "to prevent [Rufus] from adopting the behavioral patterns of his class and race."[45] Shortly after Rufus inherits the plantation, he sells several slaves, and he initially tells Dana that it is because they are his property before admitting that his father had arranged it before his death. Dana, in her frustration, vents her feeling to Carrie:

> He's no good. He's all grown up now, and part of the system. He could feel for us a little when his father was running things – when he wasn't entirely free himself. But now, he's in charge. And I guess he had to do something right away, to prove it. (223)

Rufus has become the typical slave owner who treats his slaves like property without any consideration for anyone but himself. Long, using nearly the same words,[46] echoes Dana's comment to Kevin that Rufus may "never be as hard as his father was, but he's a man of his time" (242). But not only class and social standing dictate Rufus's behavior; his upbringing, his family environment, mold his personality.

Throughout the novel, similarities between Rufus and his father are presented; however, there are also similarities with his mother that are often ignored. Rufus appears to be picking up his father's violent tendencies, even as a boy. During the wagon ride back to

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[41] Cervone and Pervin, 16.
[42] Cervone and Pervin, 18.
[43] Govan "Connections," 86.
[44] Govan "Homage," 89.
[45] Govan "Connections," 86.
[46] "Though Rufus is less physically brutal that his slaveholding father, he is no less a man of his time" (Long, 473).

the plantation, after Rufus breaks his leg, Luke compares father and son when he cautions Dana that "Marse Tom can turn mean mighty quick…So can the boy, now that he's growing up" (68). But, Margaret, Rufus's mother also has a short and violent temper. Though brief and subtle, the few incidents Dana records show that Rufus inherits his temper from both parents. Margaret slaps Dana for sleeping in Kevin's room (93), and, when she catches Dana sitting on a wooden bench to tie her shoe she "screamed and raged as though she had caught [Dana] stealing her jewelry" (128). While Rufus may have genetically inherited the tendency of a short temper and violence, "having parents with similar traits may also create an environment that encourages the expression of that trait in their children."[47] In other words, Rufus was doomed from the start.

Rufus not only acquired behaviors through the influence of his environment but also by actively choosing to copy particular behaviors of others. Social cognitive theory explains that "people learn new patterns of behavior by observation, or 'modeling,' even in the absence of reinforcement."[48] Rufus chooses to copy many of Tom's less admirable behaviors. He treats his mother the way he sees his father treat her; he even takes on his father's look:

> Rufus turned his head and looked at [his mother]. The expression on his face startled [Dana]. For once, the boy looked like a smaller replica of his father…He spoke quietly now as Weylin sometimes did when he was angry, "You're making me sick, Mama. Get away from me…" (104)

He also uses threats to control others "a lesson he no doubt learned from his father" (169). And, like his father, Rufus requires an outlet for his violence.

Rufus's violence has many triggers – spite, frustration, anger, and love. After Rufus's fight with Isaac, Sarah tells Dana, "I've seen him pick a fight just out of meanness" (132). He strikes out at Dana verbally through most of the novel, but toward the end, he becomes physically violent. Rufus hits her for the first time when she confronts him about selling Sam. Additionally, Dana tells Rufus after Alice's suicide, "You wouldn't hurt me until something frustrated you, made you angry or jealous. You wouldn't hurt me until someone hurt you" (256).

The worst violence Rufus commits is against those he loves. He rapes Alice repeatedly and finally tries to rape Dana at the end of the story. Dana notes that Rufus loved Alice; it was "a destructive love, but a love, nevertheless" (147). His cruelty toward Alice is

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[47] Tickle, Heatherton, and Wittenberg, 250.
[48] Cervone and Pervin, 451.

mostly apparent after he had been drinking; Alice would come down from Rufus's room "with her whole face swollen and bruised" (169). Like his father, Rufus had grown "into a violent slave master,"[49] but unlike his father, he never learned personal integrity. Rufus's selfishness and violent tendencies negate any possibility of him becoming an honorable man.

Possession and Self-Possession of Black Bodies

Even though identities are often considered the result of assigned or assumed subject positions, these subjectivities are always created within the context of a physical body. Physical bodies "clearly offer limitations to what is possible, to the identities to which we might like to lay claim."[50] Gender, race, and (dis)ability are a few of the physical factors that influence identity. The body is the place where the personal and the social intersect, and there are times when "corporeality [is] more important than at others."[51] By focusing on gender and race in relationship to other identities, Butler shows the ways physicality determines the identities available to the characters in *Kindred*.

Butler makes clear the importance of physical identities by beginning and ending the novel with explicit mention of the disfigurements Dana acquires in the past. The novel's first line – "I lost an arm on my last trip home. My left arm" (9) – is echoed on the last page – "I touched the scar Tom Weylin's boot had left on my face, touched my empty left sleeve" (264). Kevin too is scarred by the past. When they are finally reunited, Dana notes that Kevin "looked more than ten years older… [and] there was a jagged scar across his forehead" (184). By highlighting the physical horrors of the slave culture, Butler shows that "slavery entails the idea that a body can be constantly vulnerable and subject to abuse,"[52] and, oddly, that "being physically disabled by the past…is also curiously enabling as it allows both Kevin and Dana to acknowledge their heritage."[53] Paradoxically, the hurts inflicted by the past are the means of healing in the present.

The ante-bellum belief that blacks were somehow less human than whites offered the white ruling class an excuse to continue the brutal practice of slavery. This is a result of the idea, promoted at the time and still holding on today despite scientific data to the contrary, that different races were in fact different species (polygenism).[54] Dana is a twentieth-century woman whose "time and place… [identify her] as a black woman writer and a human

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[49] Smith, S., 391.
[50] Woodward *Understanding,* 104.
[51] Woodward *Understanding*, 133-34.
[52] Hampton "*Kindred*,"108.
[53] Wood, 95.
[54] Zerubavel, 69 and 70.

being."[55] However, during her travels to the nineteenth century, she experiences and observes "exactly how humans were magically turned into beasts."[56] After Dana saves Rufus from Isaac's beating, she has to remain in the background "while the doctor asked Weylin whether [she] had any sense or not and whether [she] could be trusted to answer simple questions accurately" (136). In relating the scene, Dana only presents the doctor through her filtered retelling of the conversation not through his direct words:

> The doctor asked his questions. Was I sure Rufus had had a fever? How did I know? Had he been delirious? Did I know what delirious meant? Smart nigger, wasn't I? I hated the man…He guessed I could go now; he had no more use for me. (137)

Butler shows how Dana maintains her twentieth-century agency while outwardly submitting to the belittling treatment through the "complex use of indirect and free indirect speech and first- and third-person pronouns."[57] Dana keenly feels the loss of the respect and freedom she enjoys in 1976.

In the nineteenth century hierarchy of bodies, white men held all the power and black men and women were property. During the period of slavery, "black bodies were not recognized in law or general custom as possessed of value other than goods to be bought and sold."[58] This reality nearly breaks Sarah when Margaret Weylin "wanted new furniture, new china dishes, fancy things…So she made Marse Tom sell [Sarah's] three boys to get money to buy the things she didn't even need" (95). The lives of slaves existed only in "the account books that identified them as units of value, [and] the invoices that claimed them as property."[59] Slavery, by focusing on the physical worth of the black body, negates any possibility for a black person to be a person.

Because of these ante-bellum views, Dana's twentieth-century identities are a liability to her physical safety in nineteenth-century Maryland. Her individuality disappears "under the function of the female slave, sexualized object at the mercy of the white master."[60] During her second trip to the past, Dana faces this reality for the first time. She knows that to "slaveholders and patrollers [she] was just one more nigger, worth so many dollars" (179). When a patroller returns to rape Alice's mother, he sees no real difference between her and

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[55] Hampton "*Kindred*," 112.
[56] Hampton "*Kindred*," 106.
[57] Donadey, 71.
[58] Hampton "*Kindred*," 105.
[59] Hartman, 3.
[60] Loichot, 44.

Dana. "He views Dana as property to be sold and consumed."[61] Before the patroller attempts to rape her, he tells Dana "I wonder what your worth" (41). However, his priority is violent consumption of a black female body (any black female body) not the financial worth of that body. This first substantial encounter with the past violently shows Dana how blacks, particularly black women, were stripped of their humanity.

Dana struggles with the idea of being a possession and a sexual object in the past and with maintaining her own autonomy. But the echoes of white male 'owners' are evident in her present also. In both the past and the present, Dana must come to terms with "the ways in which she might be considered an object of possession."[62] Twice Kevin needs to know if *his* wife – understood as *his property* – was raped, violated, by another man, an act he considers a personal attack. Both times, Dana has to reassure him that she was not raped (45, 245). After Dana assures Kevin that Rufus did not rape her, she tells him:

> I'm not property, Kevin. If I have to seem to be property, if I have to accept limits on my freedom for Rufus's sake, then he also has to accept limits – on his behavior toward me. (264)

Not only is Dana asserting her self-possession in regard to her person in the past, she is also indirectly reminding Kevin that she is not his property either.

Slaves, however, were considered nothing more than property with no control over their identities, and black women were exceptionally vulnerable because they were also sexual slaves. This lack of control is in direct contrast to the power contemporary women have over their bodies. This bodily authority "is closely related to the agency that we can or cannot exercise over our identities. For women, this concerns the choice *not* to be a mother, as well as the circumstances in which they can be a mother."[63]Female slaves, on the other hand, did not have that control. They became the means of increasing the wealth of the white owners through forced reproduction. Adam McKible asserts that "Octavia Butler consistently delineates pregnancy and birth within the socioeconomics of slavery."[64] Because Tom Weylin regards his slaves as financial assets, he refuses to give Isaac a pass to see his free wife Alice. After Dana breaks up the fight between Isaac and Rufus, Alice explains: "Mister Tom said for him to choose a new wife there in the plantation. That way, Mister Tom'll own

[61] Thompson, Carlyle, 116.
[62] Steinberg, 469.
[63] Woodward *Understanding,* 132.
[64] McKible, 228.

all his children" (40). He would not have owned Alice's children because children of black women followed the status of the mother.

Sexual slavery for black women, though, was not just about breeding more slaves; it was also about being used sexually by white men. Black women were regularly passed from one white male to another. Tom Weylin treats his house slave Tess in just this way; "[he] had tired of her as a bed mate and passed her casually to [Jake] Edwards" (182) the overseer. Fortunately for Dana, she is protected from the sexual violence most slave women lived with because of Kevin's presence during her third trip to the past. On the Weylin plantation, Kevin's role as Dana's master protects her from the other men, yet, ironically, like any female slave, others perceive Dana as "[Kevin's] property, and her body was his to use and consume in whatever manner he decided."[65] Later, in Kevin's absence, Rufus, whose sexual attentions are focused on Alice, protects Dana, until Alice kills herself.

Dana is safe from sexual violence while Rufus has both Dana and Alice, because in his already unstable mind, Rufus conflates both women into a single person with two bodies. This conjoining is "an example of the historically monolithic way of defining black female identity,"[66] since slavery was founded on the practice of refusing to acknowledge that blacks had any individuality or subjectivity. Alice is well aware of Rufus's mental merging of her and Dana. After Rufus remarks, "You really are one woman. Did you know that?" Alice tells Dana, "I know what he means. He likes me in bed, and you out of bed, and you and I look alike...Anyway, all that means we're two halves of the same woman – at least in his crazy head" (228-229). For Rufus, "Alice represents the corporeal side of the split woman,... [while] Dana is Rufus's kindred spirit, his intellectual and spiritual partner."[67] Feeding Rufus's misbegotten blending of the two women is the white culture that consistently denied individuality to blacks and saw them as interchangeable.

Unlike Dana, a visitor from the twentieth century, however, Alice is caught in the slave culture which affords her little opportunity for self-expression. Slavery offered "few possibilities for self-definition,"[68] and motherhood under slavery denies Alice the opportunity for self-possession. To maintain her sense of self, she must "separate her body from her spirit."[69] When Dana tells Alice, "It's your body." Alice replies, "Not mine, his. He paid for it didn't he?...Whether it's right or wrong, the law says he owns me now" (167). When Rufus

[65] Thompson, Carlyle, 118.
[66] Mitchell, 60.
[67] Loichot, 43.
[68] Mitchell, 62.
[69] Mitchell, 61.

finally goes too far in his attempt to dominate Alice by seeming to sell her children, she asserts her will and takes control over the body Rufus owns. With her mind and body reunited as a whole person again, Alice takes the ultimate step to self-possession by committing suicide, thus being forever out of Rufus's control.

Now, Rufus no longer has a complete woman in two bodies; one piece has been violently removed from his life. He must, therefore, compensate for his loss, and he turns his physical desire onto Dana in an attempt to recreate a whole woman in one body. He wants her "to take the place of the dead" (259). With Alice gone, he sees her as "capable of fulfilling all his needs."[70] Shortly before he tries to rape Dana in an attempt to get what he wants, Rufus tells Dana, "You were one woman…Two halves of a whole" (257). However, Dana refuses to accept Rufus's confused perception.

When Rufus turns to Dana as Alice's replacement and the finally united whole women he envisions, Dana must choose between being subsumed into the 'slave woman' identity or to assert her right to be her own person. Dana is tempted to submit to Rufus when she "realized how easy it would be for [her] to continue to be still and forgive him even this" (259-260). But, her sense of self and personal autonomy is too important to allow her to accept "his definition of her as chattel, [and] Dana refuses to relinquish her right to self-definition."[71] Dana knows that the only way to assert her physical and sexual authority over her own body is to kill Rufus.

Dana's need to retain control over her own body provides the motivation for finally plunging the knife into Rufus's side. Dana reasons: "A slave was a slave. Anything could be done to her…I could accept him as my ancestor, my younger brother, my friend, but not as my master, and not as my lover" (260). Dana quickly acts on her needs and kills Rufus after a short struggle. By refusing Rufus, Dana "resists the reduction of female bodies to available and oppressed sexual identities."[72] Thus, killing Rufus not only allows Dana to maintain her physical autonomy and self-control, it is also her "way of maintaining her self-esteem and psychic wholeness."[73] Ironically, by asserting her personal integrity she is physically disfigured when she returns to her present.

[70] Govan "Connections," 87.
[71] Mitchell, 59.
[72] Loichot, 44.
[73] Mitchell, 59.

Individuality and the Slave Community

Despite the white belief that blacks were interchangeable, without individuality, and nothing more than property, slaves created communities and extended families. These communities provided mutual support and an opportunity, however limited, for individuals to develop and express their unique identities. Within these communities, family is a fragile and unstable group because of the possibility of "the sudden removal of its members through either the calculated strategy or the mere whim of their white controllers."[74] Though the community of slaves is also broken by the removal of its members, the size of the community and mutual support of its members help the community "patch itself back together, drawing from its common suffering and common anger a common strength."[75] Butler stresses the importance of community within the slaves' culture through Dana's "complex social and psychological relationships with the community of black slaves she joins."[76] Dana understands that to survive she must become part of that community.

While Dana understands this need to 'fit in,' Kevin does not. He automatically 'belongs' wherever he goes in the nineteenth century because of his gender and race. Dana tries to explain to him her need to play the part of the slave:

> I have to make a place for myself here. That means work. I think everyone here, black and white, will resent me if I don't work. And I need friends. I need all the friends I can make here, Kevin. (79)

Here, Dana's "appreciation of social forces [can] be seen at work."[77] Because Dana is aware of the "social implications of [her] actions"[78] relative to her current situation, she desires to belong to and be accepted by the slave community. Although she is not one of Weylin's slaves, she "learns to accept her communal responsibility."[79] In looking for a place to belong, Dana identifies with the slave community and is in turn accepted by them.

The slave community becomes a surrogate family for the one that rejected her in the twentieth century. Because Dana keenly feels the absence of family in 1976, she "is hungry for the extended family she discovers in the past."[80] On her fourth trip to the Weylin plantation, Dana is eager to "see what the years had done" (126) to the slaves she has come to

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74 Crossley, xviii.
75 Crossley, xviii-xix.
76 Crossley, xviii.
77 Coupland, 106.
78 Coupland, 106.
79 Mitchell, 67.
80 Long, 169.

care about. When she finally arrives at the plantation and is reunited with her friends, Dana is able to move seamlessly back into the community. Nigel notes the ease with which she is able to re-join the group: "You go away for six years…then come back and fit right in. It's like you never left" (203). Dana has found a place to belong and a group to identify with in an alien place and time.

Some of the female slaves she befriends become significant in her life. These women "play an important role in enlarging Dana's understanding of herself and of black women."[81] She learns about the power of breaking up families as a way to control slaves from Sarah who loses all but one child. She also learns from Sarah how to prepare food in the cookhouse. These newly learned abilities allow Dana to take over preparing dinner, though less efficiently, for Sarah when Carrie goes into labor and needs Sarah's mid-wife skills. Yet, it is not until Dana comes to know Sarah and the other slaves that she is able to overcome her myopic, twentieth-century ideas about slaves in general and slaves in Sarah's position in particular.

Once Dana begins to see slaves as individuals, she is able to acknowledge her prejudiced perceptions. Dana looks down on Sarah, the cook, as a weak woman who sold out to her white owners. Dana describes Sarah as "the kind of woman who would be held in contempt during the militant nineteen sixties. The house-nigger, the handkerchief-head, the female Uncle Tom" (145). Dana admits that she "looked down on her…for a while. Moral superiority. [Sarah] was someone even less courageous than [she] was" (145). However, Butler depicts Sarah "not as a hollow stereotype,…but rather as an individual fighting to survive."[82] Through exposure to the realities of slavery, Dana comes to understand that Sarah's "apparent acceptance of humiliation…masks a deep anger."[83] Dana overcomes her misunderstanding and distain for slaves like Sarah as she begins to see Sarah as a person and acknowledge her individuality.

But communities can also be a source of rejection and danger. Like any community, the slave community on the Weylin plantation has members that were not above hurting other slaves out of a desire to gain favor or just for spite. Sarah warns Dana, "You do what you want to do – or think what you want to do. But you keep it to yourself" (144), and a short time later, Sarah cautions Dana again. Dana, however, fails to take the warnings seriously enough, because her twentieth-century life did not prepare her for such a blatant display of

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[81] Mitchell, 68.
[82] Wood, 91.
[83] Crossley, xiv.

hatred. Another slave betrays Dana when she tries to run away in order to find Kevin; Liza's malice shocks Dana:

> I had never had a serious enemy – someone who would go out of her way to get me hurt or killed...But here was a woman who hated me and who, out of sheer malice, had nearly killed me. (178-179)

The distress over the betrayal and guilt for her failure are more painful for Dana than the physical hurt from her whipping after she is captured.

However, slave communities survived by caring for their own. Because Dana has become part of the community and cultivated friendships, the community takes care of her as one of its own members, even from another member. Carrie and Alice return Dana's kindness to Alice and care for Dana's battered body. Alice tells Dana, "Just rest...Carrie and me'll take good care of you as good as you took care of me" (177). While Dana is still bed ridden and recovering, Alice, Tess, and Carrie exact revenge on Dana's behalf by giving Liza a beating of her own, and scaring Liza enough to keep her in line, at least for a time.

Misreading Relationships

Intolerance and misunderstanding go beyond the time barrier, though. In the twentieth century, Dana and Kevin face opposition to their relationship from society in general as well as their families. Old customs and beliefs foster a continuation of "traditional inequality" through conservative conformism.[84] The overriding power of classification of race denies any other possibility for identification;[85] this group identity fosters division and hatred.[86] This is clearly evident in the reactions to Dana and Kevin's relationship.

The misreadings that weave through the novel begin in the prologue. As Dana comes out of the fog of drugs and pain, she "suddenly realized that [the police] were trying to blame Kevin for 'hurting' [her] arm" (9); they are convinced that Kevin is responsible for Dana's maiming. Kevin is also implicated in the beatings Dana has received in the past. When Dana's cousin assumes that Dana's "white husband, Kevin, has beaten her,"[87] she tells Dana, "I never thought you'd be fool enough to let a man beat you" (116). The marks caused by her beatings in the past are believed to be from spousal abuse,[88] because of Kevin's race and gender and because Dana is 'his' wife.

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[84] Sen, 9.
[85] Sen, 11.
[86] Sen, xv.
[87] Long, 466.
[88] Long, 466; Steinberg, 469.

Through opposition to their relationship, Butler shows how past prejudices and injustices influence the present. Buz's comments to Dana and Kevin about writing "some poor-nography together" (54) and "chocolate and vanilla porn" (56) are crude expressions of prevailing ideas about African Americans. Because Dana is the target of Buz's comments, not Kevin, "degrading myths and stereotypes about black sexuality in general, and black female sexuality in particular"[89] are implied. Although Dana and Kevin have a loving relationship, their "marriage is still not fully sanctioned in a large, progressive, and cosmopolitan city in late twentieth-century."[90] Additionally, because Dana and Kevin are committed to each other as a couple, they become alienated from their biological families.

Dana's aunt and uncle and Kevin's sister all oppose the interracial relationship. These characters "send home the message that mutually consenting heterosexual relationships between blacks and whites are deviant and, hence, should not be encouraged but, in fact, discouraged."[91] Dana expects disapproval, and she tells Kevin, "I'm afraid my aunt and uncle won't love you" (110). Dana's aunt can accept the marriage because "any children [they] have will be light skinned" (111), and although she "doesn't care much for white people…she prefers light-skinned blacks" (111) because they are not as visibly different in white society. Dana's uncle, on, the other hand, cannot accept the marriage.

Dana's uncle takes her marriage to a white man as a personal betrayal, and by extension a racial betrayal. Dana tells Kevin, "He's sort of taken this personally…it's as though I've rejected him…He wants me to marry someone like him – someone who looks like him. A black man" (111). Her uncle's reaction is common among African Americans, especially during the 1960s and 1970s. A black person who married a white person was perceived "as a self-hating individual and a traitor to the Black race."[92] Comparing Dana and Kevin's healthy relationship to Rufus and Alice's violent one emphasizes the basis for these beliefs.

In turn, Kevin's sister rejects him because he wants to marry someone who is not white. Dana cautioned Kevin to be prepared for his sister's reaction to the news. She told Kevin, "'brace yourself…She might surprise you,'…[but] he wasn't ready for his sister's reaction" (110). Kevin's sister's response to his and Dana's marriage is a mirror of Dana's uncle's reaction. She felt as though Kevin were stepping out of bounds by crossing the racial

[89] Foster, 149.
[90] Steinberg, 468.
[91] Foster, 148.
[92] Thompson, Carlyle, 110.

barrier. Kevin's sister refused to meet Dana or have her in the house, would not allow Kevin into the house if he married her, and quoted "clichéd bigotry at [him] for wanting to marry [Dana]" (111). The reactions of Kevin's sister as well as Dana's aunt and uncle hint "at a 20th-century racism and a desire for separatism that is a residual effect of 19th-century slavery."[93] Intolerance and criminalization of interracial romances were expected in the nineteenth century; however, it is appalling in late twentieth-century Los Angeles.[94]

Despite all the opposition to their marriage, Dana and Kevin's relationship with each other is the healthiest and most stable one presented in the novel. This is a unique portrayal of a marriage because Dana and Kevin go against family and community expectations to pursue the relationship, and because it is an interracial relationship that works. Dana and Kevin provide each other with the identity of 'a couple' and they find an emotional 'home' in each other's presence. After Dana returns from her first foray in to the past, wet and shaken, they "sat there together in the floor,...Kevin with his arm around [her] calming [her] just by being there" (15). Kevin's "grudging acceptance" (47), after Dana's second trip and her encounter with the patroller, gives Dana relief and an anchor to her own time. This second occurrence of the unexplainable leads Kevin and Dana to affirm their mutual need for each other. She tells him, "I need you here to come home to," and he replies thoughtfully, "Just keep coming home...I need you here too" (51). Their mutual need for each other supersedes their need for emotional support from other sources.

Dana and Kevin's relationship is also a physical one. In *Kindred,* Butler provides "a rather unconventional portrayal of a black female-white male sexual relationship."[95] When Dana is finally reunited with Kevin on the Weylin plantation they cannot keep from touching each other. She sees Kevin, drops the laundry, and stumbles to him. As soon as he recognizes Dana, "he was off the horse and over the laundry yard fence, pulling [her] to him before [she] could take another breath" (183). After they finally return to 1976, Dana initiates sex to complete their reunion when Kevin would hold back out of concern for her pain. She encourages him to come to bed with her. "He did. He was so careful, so fearful of hurting [her]. He did hurt [her], of course. [She] had known he would, but it didn't matter" (190). Their physical relationship is an extension of their emotional one. For Dana and Kevin,

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[93] Wood, 93.
[94] Steinberg, 468.
[95] Foster, 143.

having sex, and affirming their mutual attraction to one another functions as a way for the novel to foreground the dynamics of mutual respect and care that characterize consensual desiring relations.[96]

Dana and Kevin identify with each other as two parts of a small but whole family unit, relying on each other for emotional and physical fulfillment.

In order to function in the nineteenth-century, however, Kevin and Dana need to adapt their behavior to what society expected, which meant concealing their true relationship and assuming roles consistent with nineteenth-century customs and beliefs. Because society expects "coherence among setting, appearance and manner,"[97] Kevin and Dana must conform to the "stereotyped expectations"[98] of the situation and "incorporate and exemplify the officially accredited values of the society."[99] They do this in an effort to not only be believable members of nineteenth-century, Southern society but also to ensure their physical safety.

Because of his race and gender, Kevin is automatically assumed to be a "figure of authority;"[100] whereas, Dana was assumed to be a slave. She learned early that blacks "were assumed to be slaves unless they could prove they were free" (34). Although the young Rufus knows that Dana is not a slave, he points out that for Dana to play the part of Kevin's property is the only believable story they can tell. He tells Dana and that it is "better than saying you're his wife. Nobody would believe that" (65). Not only is Kevin's 'ownership' of Dana more believable, he "was probably better protection for [Dana] than free papers would have been" (59). The roles of Kevin as owner and Dana as slave also provide Dana with a way to explain her presence.

Because nineteenth century whites could not conceive of a mutually loving relationship between a white man and a black woman, both Tom and Margaret Weylin treat Dana as though her sexual relationship with Kevin was only about her fulfilling Kevin's sexual needs. They discount any possibility of a deeper, mutual relationship. Tom's reaction to meeting Dana leaving Kevin's room one morning made Dana feel "almost as though [she] really was doing something shameful, happily playing whore for [her] supposed owner" (97). Tom's reaction is indulging and amused, because he frequently gets his sexual gratification from his female slaves. Margaret's reaction, on the other hand, is violent. When she confronts

[96] Foster, 160.
[97] Goffman, 25.
[98] Goffman, 27.
[99] Goffman, 35.
[100] Wood, 92.

Dana as to her sleeping arrangements, she "slapped [Dana] across the face…[and calls her a] filthy black whore" (93). Here, as throughout the novel, Dana' relationship with Kevin is misinterpreted, because society, past and present, cannot comprehend and mutually loving, interracial relationship.

Difference and the Individual

In the nineteenth century, whites perceived blacks as interchangeable and blacks believed all whites were the same. They rarely acknowledged each other's' individuality, but Dana is an anomaly. Dana's self-possession marks her out as noticeably different while she is in the past. Sarah Wood states that Dana's "voice, her ability to read and write, her clothes and even her posture mark her out as different."[101] Her differences often cause misreading and misunderstanding on the part of those she comes in contact with. Dana's difference, however, also helps her see and understand differences among the people she meets on the Weylin plantation.

Clothing is one of the initial indicators of identity. In the twenty-first century, clothing can mark, among other things, a person's social status, group membership, cultural background, or religious affiliation.[102] But in the nineteenth century simply wearing pants or a dress was important in distinguishing male or female identity. For Dana, wearing pants in 1976 is quite normal, but in the past, it becomes an issue. On the Weylin plantation Dana let the blame for her attire fall to Kevin because:

> It was probably easier for the people here to understand a master too poor or too stingy to buy me proper clothing than it would be for them to imagine a place where it was normal for a woman to wear pants (71).

However, before Dana was known as "the woman who dressed like a man" (114), her pants caused misinterpretations of her gender identity.

Dana's gender identity is most dangerously a problem on her first trip to the past. Because of her pants, Dana is taken for a male slave while she is saving the child Rufus from drowning. On her second trip to the past, Rufus tells her, "You were wearing pants like a man …He [Rufus's father] thought you were a man too – and that you were trying to hurt Mama and me" (23-23). Because of her 'male' attire, Dana was logically "perceived as one thing: a dangerous black male."[103] After Dana learns that she is in 1815, she understands the mistaken

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[101] Wood, 89.
[102] Woodward "Questions," 12; *Understanding*, 74 and 105.
[103] Hampton "*Kindred*," 110.

identity based on her clothing, and by her third trip, with Kevin this time, her pants merely cause mistrust. Nigel made "no secret of the fact that he didn't find [them] all that trustworthy. 'How come you're dressed like a man?' he asked" (60) Dana. Throughout the novel Dana's pants are a problem to one degree or another[104]

After the initial visual impression, the voice provides clues to an individual's identity. Vocabulary, dialect, and accent can be important markers that indicate education, social class and location. In *Kindred* speech patterns set Dana apart from both the black and white folk. A young Nigel tells Dana she talks funny and asks, "People in New York talk like you" (73)? He is trying to put Dana's difference into relationship with something he can identify as does Rufus when he asks, "Where do you come from?...You sure don't talk like anybody I ever heard" (61). Dana's speech differences immediately alert those she meets in nineteenth-century Maryland that she is different, not local. Her educated speech and odd accent make Tom Weylin uneasy. Kevin tells Dana, "Weylin doesn't like the way you talk" (80). Dana's way of talking frequently causes tension with both the whites and blacks on the Weylin plantation.

But Dana's speech patterns are not the only ones highlighted in the novel. Dana uses Rufus's speech patterns to identify where she might be and to understand him. On Dana's second trip to the past, she notices that Rufus's "accent was unmistakably southern" (21). The South, like many places, has a "strong sociolinguistic distinctiveness within a principal language zone,"[105] in this case the United States. Nikolas Coupland explains "that regional provenance is imprinted onto vernacular speech"[106] and that part of language variation "happens 'naturally' within 'speech communities.'"[107] This describes why, after 5 years in the nineteenth century, Kevin "had a slight accent...Nothing really noticeable, but he did sound a little like Rufus and Tom Weylin. Just a little" (190). In the United States, the "social meaning of southerness is a consequence of its contextualization."[108] This regional uniqueness is highlighted in the novel where speech patterns of nineteenth-century Maryland are placed in opposition to twentieth-century Los Angeles ones.

Dana's attire and speech coupled with her keen sense of self mark her out as different from both the blacks and whites. Both groups accuse Dana of trying to be to be white. At one

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[104] Guy Mark Foster points out that "passages where Dana's wearing pants instead of dresses and skirts become a point of contention for other characters appear on the following pages: 23, 29, 41, 60, 71, 73-74, 114, 118, 166, and 171" (163).
[105] Coupland, 123.
[106] Coupland, 121.
[107] Coupland, 122.
[108] Coupland, 123.

point, Rufus warns Dana about her behavior, "You're like Luke in some ways...Daddy always said he thought he was white" (138). Later, he finds her behavior unacceptable and lashes out at Dana, "You think your white!...You don't know your place any better than a wild animal" (164). But, whereas the whites treat Dana as trying to be above her station, many blacks see her as trying to get in good with the white folk.

This perception leads to distrust and hostility toward Dana on the part of other blacks. Isaac immediately is suspicious of Dana because of her speech. He tells Alice, "She sure don't talk like no nigger I ever heard. Talks like she been mighty close with white folks – for a long time" (119). Although Alice defends Dana to Isaac, later in the novel she, in turn, accuses Dana of wanting to be close to white people, specifically Kevin:

> You ought to be ashamed of yourself, whining and crying after some poor white trash of a man, black as you are. You always try to act so white, White nigger, turning against your own people (165).

For Alice, as for most slaves, whites possessed no individuality, they were all alike: brutal slave owners.

Dana is caught between two worlds and two times; in the past, she must save her white ancestor and live as a slave while suppressing her twentieth-century attitudes and trying not to lose her individuality. She eventually does come to understand why the other slaves see her as a traitor. After Dana tells Carrie, "I guess I can see why there are those here who think I'm more white than black" (224), Carries rubs Dana cheek. Because Dana does not understand her gesture, Nigel explains, "She means it don't come off, Dana,...The black. She means the devil with people who say you're anything but what you are." (224). Lisa Yaszek explains that

> Dana's rich and complex identity as a black woman "don't come off" just because she has had to make hard choices that are themselves neither wholly black nor white; instead, that identity is informed by those choices.[109]

Because Dana cultivated a friendship with Nigel and Carrie, they can recognize Dana's uniqueness and treat Dana as an individual that plays many roles when others only see one aspect of her.

Between Here and There

In addition to the physical and social forces that influence identity, location, or a sense of place, also plays an important role in establishing identity. Home and the idea of a home

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[109] Yaszek, 1062.

are usually used to create a sense of security and of belonging.[110] Home can be a place "to which origins can be traced,"[111] such as the Weylin plantation for Dana, or a "desired point of return,"[112] as in Dana's desire to return to1976 and the house she shares with Kevin. The day before Dana's time travels begin, she and Kevin move from a rented "apartment in Los Angeles to a house of [their] own a few miles away in Altadena" (12). The act of buying a house is the beginning of their attempt to create a space or location they can call home.

The newness of the house, however, prevents Dana and Kevin from feeling at home there after their extended stays in the nineteenth century. After Kevin returns to 1976, he wanders through the house trying, not very successfully, to re-acclimate himself to the time and place. In the kitchen, he slams "the oven door and stalks away shaking his head. 'Christ,' he muttered. 'If I'm not home yet, maybe I don't have a home'" (190). After witnessing this scene, Dana acknowledges feeling the same:

> I had been home to 1976, to this house, and it hadn't felt that homelike. It didn't now...The time, the year, was right, but this house just wasn't familiar enough. I felt as though I were losing my place here in my own time (191).

Furthermore, Dana's more intense and familiar associations with the Weylin plantation color her perceptions of the 1976 house. She sees the bedrooms they turned into offices and the rooms remind her of rooms in the Weylin house. She had to consciously deny "the impression. This house was nothing like the Weylin house" (193). Yet, at the beginning of the novel, this house was the home she wanted to return to.

When Dana saves Rufus the first time, she returns almost immediately to her own time and place, but the second visit is more protracted. After putting out the fire Dana recounts:

> I waited to go home. My first trip has ended as soon as the boy was safe...I realized I wasn't going to be that lucky again...I had no money, no idea how to get home (20).

While she made her way to the house occupied by the child Alice and her mother, Dana kept "praying to go home" (34). Dana's longing to return to her 1976 home is less about stability and certainty, but "more about the desired and the location."[113] Dana craves the reassurance

[110] Woodward *Understanding*,161.
[111] Woodward *Understanding*, 136.
[112] Woodward *Understanding*, 136.
[113] Woodward *Understanding*, 72.

of home and 'knows' that if she "could go home…everything would be all right" (50). Soon however, the past starts to intrude on her present home.

As Dana awakens to the realities of 1976 and the realization that Kevin is still in 1819, her memories of the Weylin plantation interfere with her perceptions in Altadena. When she recalls a field hand being whipped, Dana becomes "strangely disoriented" (115) and thinks Rufus is calling her again, but she realizes "[she] wasn't really dizzy – only confused. [Her] memory…suddenly seemed to have no place here with [her] at home" (115). Carlyle Thompson points out that struggling "with the Weylin plantation being her home in the past and the disruption of her home life in Los Angeles makes [Dana] psychologically homeless."[114] The idea of home "crosses the boundaries between the real and imagined and between the past, present, and the hoped for future."[115] The breakdown of those boundaries for Dana left her "caught between his home and [hers]" (115). As the past becomes more real for Dana and Kevin, the Weylin plantation becomes more of a home than their house in 1976.

When Dana first sees the Weylin house in the daylight, she meets another reality that is quite different than the fantasies created by modern media. The house "wasn't white. It had no columns, no porch to speak of…It was a red-brick Georgian Colonial, boxy but handsome in a quiet kind of way" (67). Richard points out that "Kevin and Dana realize that they come to think of the Weylin plantation as home, even while they hate and resist it."[116] During one conversation, after Dana and Kevin are back in 1976, they admit to each other the feeling of home the plantation offered them:

> "But in all my traveling, do you know the only time I ever felt relieved and eager to be going to a place?"
>
> "I think so," I said quietly…
>
> "It was when you went back to Maryland," I said. "When you visited the Weylins to see whether I was there…I felt it the last time Rufus called me. I've got no love at all for that place, but so help me, when I saw it again, it was so much like coming home that it scared me" (192).

Even though the Weylin plantation feels like home, Dana and Kevin are aware of the dangers the place poses.

Home is not always a place of security and safety; it may be a dangerous place. For Dana, the nineteenth-century plantation was a constant threat to her physical safety, but it is a

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[114] Thompson, Carlyle, 123.
[115] Woodward *Understanding*, 72.
[116] Richard, 122.

place where she felt a belonging. It is where her family came from, a source of her 1976 identity. "Starting points and sources," Woodward notes, "are linked to the idea of 'home' as the place it all began."[117] She goes on to say that "[h]ome may connote security and safety," however; "it may be a place of risk, danger, and violence."[118] Yet with all the dangers, the plantation was home, a community, where Dana knew her place and felt the security of fitting into her place. Often Dana had to remind herself that she "was in a hostile place. It didn't look alien any longer, but that only made it more dangerous, made [her] more likely to relax and make a mistake" (127). The hard life and challenging work on the plantation, and in the nineteenth century in general, made that life more real for both Dana and Kevin than their relatively easier lives in the twentieth century.

In 1976 Los Angeles, Dana and Kevin find that their house and life seem more like a dream; it cannot match the "sharper, stronger reality" (191) of Rufus's time. On the Weylin plantation, the

> work was harder, the smells and tastes were stronger, the danger was greater, the pain was worse...That was a stark, powerful reality that the gentle conveniences and luxuries of [their] house, of *now*, could not touch (191).

Kevin expresses these same feelings after his return to 1976 when he recognizes that "everything is so soft...so easy" (192) and that being in the house in 1976 feels like "just another stopover" (193). Although Kevin and Dana are both caught between two eras, for Dana the Weylin plantation is more of a home because "the past is where her...origins lie, it is a source of self-knowledge, yet it is haunted by the unhomeliness and incomprehensibility of that origin."[119] At the end of the novel, Dana is earnestly trying to reconcile her past and present homes and building a new, shared home with Kevin.

Conclusion

Through her time travels Dana gains an understanding of her family history, national history, and herself. The history lessons are protracted during her time in the past but are only minutes or hours in the present. Dana's vaguely remembered academic, sterilized encounters with the past did not convey the realities of the slave culture. Dana recognizes that books did not prepare her "for the first-hand experience of slavery...[nor] taught her why so many slaves accepted their condition."[120] Dana's experience of slavery, however, corrected the

[117] Woodward *Understanding*, 48.
[118] Woodward *Understanding*, 48.
[119] Schiff, n.p.
[120] Crossley, xx.

deficiency in her book-learning and served to "illuminate her past and freshen her understanding of those generations forced to be nonpersons."[121] Ashraf Rushdy places *Kindred* in a fictional movement that "produce[s] the conditions of historicity by reconstructing the past to endow the present with new meaning."[122] Butler shows "how the bonds of the past become the very means to freedom...in the present."[123] For Dana history is the key to liberation.

African Americans, however, are not the only ones who need to come to terms with the violence and oppression of slavery. *Kindred* demonstrates how "slavery determines the value of black and white bodies in nineteenth-century ante-bellum America and continues to influence their value in the twentieth century."[124] If whites as well as blacks try to remember the past, healing is possible. For Donadey *Kindred* is a

> collective re-membering of the past across generations in order to suggest a possible collective healing and national reconciliation that must pass through the repressed of culture and history in its violence.[125]

But, the healing process is painful. Both blacks and whites must face the past and acknowledge it, because "slavery played a 'foundational role [...] in creating and giving meaning to white identity.'"[126] By the end of the novel, Butler presents a possibility for healing. Dana and Kevin's relationship is stronger because they understand each other and themselves better through openness and dialogue about the past.

Understanding themselves in the context of history forces both Dana and Kevin to reevaluate their own identities and the identities of those with whom they come in contact; they see the plurality of possible identities instead of the destructive perception of a single, all-encompassing one. Many scholars focus on how Dana comes to terms with her past and 'mixed-blood' background. The past, then, is the key to identity. Butler makes clear "the necessity of remembering the past as a way of comprehending the present and developing a coherent sense of a historically defined self."[127]

But the past can never be fully relived. Dana returns to the present "scarred by a past that is both hers and not hers, written onto her body, but lived fully by others."[128] What Butler

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[121] Crossley, xiii-xiv.
[122] Rushdy, 136.
[123] Hampton "*Kindred*," 107
[124] Hampton "*Kindred*," 105.
[125] Donadey, 76.
[126] Rushdy, quoted in Donadey, 68.
[127] Rushdy, 139.
[128] Armitt, 81.

does accomplish through Dana's time travels is show "individual slaves as people rather than as encrusted literary or sociological types."[129] Notably, "Butler's effort to recover something of the experience of nineteenth-century ancestors…was a homage both to those women in her family who still struggled for an identity and to those more distant relations whose identities had been lost."[130]

The past not only provides meaning for Dana about her own family history but also that of the nation. Along with Dana, readers are forced to notice a part of US history that is often downplayed and yet exerts a profound influence on the present. Dana and Kevin both struggle to maintain, create and assert their personal identities in a culture that only allows Kevin, a white male, that privilege. Dana must fight against the forces that would strip her of any individuality. The experiences in the past, however, allow Dana and Kevin to more fully realize their identities in the present even in a culture that still displays the residual prejudices from the past.

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[129] Crossley, xiv.
[130] Crossley, xiii.

Chapter 2

We Are: Collective Identity in *Lilith's Brood*

Lilith's Brood, also called the *Xenogenesis* trilogy, is the single-volume collection of *Dawn* (1987), *Adulthood Rites* (1988), and *Imago* (1989). After humans have nearly made themselves extinct through nuclear war, the gene-trading Oankali rescue the dying remnants of humanity. *Dawn* is the story of Lilith Iyapo, the Oankali choice as leader, teacher, and "Judas goat" (D 67) [1] for the group of humans she is to awaken. Her 'job' is to "Awaken no fewer than forty" (D 115) human beings and get them "ready to meet the Oankali" (D 115). She then must take them to the training area, a mock replica of the Amazon basin where they will eventually live, and teach them how to survive 'in the wild'. Lilith continues to make a unifying appearance in the second and third novels, which are about her children. *Adulthood Rites* switches perspective to Akin, one of the first human-born male construct children. He is kidnapped by resisters and left among them, by consensus of the Oankali and construct adults, to learn about them and ultimately to decide their fate. In *Imago*, Jodahs becomes the first construct ooloi. It represents the adulthood of the construct species, and it must learn to control its abilities while simultaneously proving to adult Oankali and constructs that construct ooloi are not a threat to be neutralized.

Before I look at what scholars have said about *Lilith's Brood,* I want to look at what Butler herself has said. In several interviews, she refers to Ronald Regan and his administration as partially inspiring her post-apocalyptic musings. In many interviews, Butler referred to the Regan administration's rhetoric about "winnable nuclear war and limited nuclear war,"[2] which led her to consider that "if people believed this there must be something wrong with us as human beings."[3] This, added to "news about captive breeding projects, prompted Butler to pursue a theory in which human intelligence is put at the service of hierarchical behavior."[4] Butler tells Larry McCaffery and Jim McMenamin:

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[1] All references to *Lilith's Brood* will be marked by the particular novel's initials and page number, i.e. (D 67) refers to *Dawn,* page 67 in *Lilith's Brood.*

[2] Bleiler, n.p.; See also: Brown, 183; Fry, 128; See, 40; McCaffery and McMenamin, 23.

[3] See, 40. See also Fry, 128; Thompson, Clifford, n.p.

[4] See, 40-41.

> ...that's when I began to think about human beings having the two conflicting characteristics of intelligence and a tendency towards hierarchical behavior – and that hierarchical behavior is too much in charge, to self-sustaining.[5]

Butler defines hierarchical behavior as "simple one-upmanship in any form."[6] And since that is the older tendency, "our hierarchical tendencies ... tend to focus and drive our intelligence."[7] Therefore, Butler begins the trilogy "after the end of the horrible nuclear war in which we've one-upped ourselves to death."[8] Butler says "that Ronald Reagan inspired Xenogenesis – and that it was the only thing he inspired in me that I actually approve of."[9]

Though Butler herself restricted her comments to what inspired her to write the trilogy, scholars have written extensively on *Lilith's Brood*, often focusing on the first novel, *Dawn*, and its main character, Lilith Iyapo. The ideas of Oankali colonization and Haraway-style cyborgs make frequent appearances in *Xenogenesis* scholarship, but scholars approach the series from different views, such as genetics and biology, evolution, post-colonialism, the body, and identity.

The Oankali are gene-traders, and the idea of genetics is a key issue throughout the trilogy. Though scholars acknowledge the Oankali ability to manipulate DNA, discussions involving genetics often focus on Lilith and the human genome. Jessie Strickgold-Sarah examines the language and metaphors of genetics, concluding that they are "fundamentally dystopian in their vision of total genetic control over the individual self,"[10] which leads to "unsettling visions of biological determinism."[11] Biological determinism also features prominently in articles by Nancy Jesser and Adam Johns. Jesser looks at "biological essentialism as it relates to the genetic body, articulating key differences in her biologism with regard to race and sex."[12] Johns sees "Human nature" in the *Xenogenesis* trilogy as "fairly fixed: men tend towards self-destructive hierarchical violence that leads to tremendous suffering among women."[13] These scholars tend to see "human nature [as] violent, hierarchical, and different for men and women"[14] and to claim that "the plot relentlessly reinforces certain sociobiological notions of essential and 'natural' male and female through

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[5] McCaffery and McMenamin, 23.
[6] Fry, 124.
[7] Fry, 128.
[8] Fry, 129.
[9] McCaffery and McMenamin, 23.
[10] Strickgold-Sarah, 414.
[11] Strickgold-Sarah, 414.
[12] Jesser, 36.
[13] Johns "Pseudoscience," 100.
[14] Johns "Pseudoscience," 103.

the concept of biological 'tendency'."[15] But through it all, the human characters remain obsessively attached to their flawed genetic makeup.

Closely related to genetic readings of the trilogy are those concerned with evolution. In a second article, Johns adds an evolutionary component to his biological discussion of *Lilith's Brood*:

> Lilith's xenophobic dread, followed by her forever incomplete recovery from it, is practically a textbook demonstration of both the biological roots and biological limits of mind and culture: she cannot easily adapt to the Oankali, because the forces of natural selection have not produced a human mind or culture which can readily adapt to them. Tolerance of difference is learned slowly and painfully, whereas tendencies such as xenophobia and the fear of snakes are hardwired.[16]

In other words, evolution has genetically programed humans to fear difference. It is this fear of difference that is at the heart of Jae Roe's argument. However, it is not just the fear of the other but more precisely the fear of the hybrid that is central to *Lilith's Brood.* Roe argues that "interspecies breeding is used to represent our fear of difference, which ultimately turns out to be not the fear of the other but the fear of the hybrid."[17] He uses Lilith as an example of the difficulties humans encounter "because of the psychological resistance to the idea of becoming something other than ourselves."[18] Roe concludes that the options presented in the trilogy leave us no choice but to "evolve into something other than ourselves."[19] Rachel Greenwald Smith, on the other hand, despairs of humanity's ability to change. She points out that "human beliefs in what constitutes autonomy and progress lead to the precise repetition of previous stages of human development with no evidence of learning from past mistakes."[20] She does however see hope in the evolution "of an entirely different species with an uncanny capacity for both self-knowledge and connection to others."[21] This human fear of the hybrid is not only a component of *Lilith's Brood*; it is also evident in some scholarship.

Post-colonial readings of *Xenogenesis* reflect the very real fears and concerns in the wake of European imperialism. In two separate articles, Aparajita Nanda links the Oankali with colonial Europeans. In "Re-writing the Bhabhian 'Mimic-Man'", Nanda claims "the

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[15] Jesser, 41-42.
[16] Johns "Becoming," 388.
[17] Roe, 291.
[18] Roe, 300.
[19] Roe, 306.
[20] Smith, R, 556.
[21] Smith, R., 557.

Oankali evoke the European traders when they made their initial forays into establishing a colonial empire."[22] And, in "Power, Politics, and Domestic Desire in Octavia Butler's *Lilith's Brood*," Nanda argues that "Octavia Butler picks up the theme of colonial oppression and subjugation."[23] Rebecca Holden is less militant in her argument, though she still claims "the Oankali commitment to their own view of how things are and the 'truth' of genetic codes leads them to become imperialistic colonisers of the remaining remnants of humanity."[24] Molly Wallace, by contrast, acknowledges the shortcomings of the humans though she still sees the Oankali as colonizers:

> The humans are in many ways unsympathetic, spending much of their time trafficking in women and murdering each other, and though they can rightly blame some of their post-contact behavior on the position in which the Oankali have put them, this interstellar imperialism does not explain the nuclear war from which the Oankali so generously rescued them.[25]

She sees the Oankali as colonizers, but also adds the qualification that the humans are not without blame.

For some scholars, the body and embodiment become the focus of discussion. For Gregory Hampton, the body "is indispensable in understanding how identity is formed and marshaled"[26] and "becomes a boundless edifice for the articulation of difference."[27] The "narrative of embodiment, focusing especially on the creation of genetically altered and thus hybridized peoples and communities"[28] in *Lilith's Brood* addresses "conflicts concerning self and Other, sameness and difference,"[29] according to Marilyn Mehaffy and Ana Louise Keating. Additionally, Mehaffy and Keating see the body as central to communication in Butler's novels:

> The narrative embodiments of her fiction advocate a therapeutic reclamation of that flesh as a primary site and signifier of knowledge and communication, both personal and collective, both material and narrated.[30]

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[22] Nanda "Re-writing," 115.
[23] Nanda "Power," 773.
[24] Holden, 51.
[25] Wallace, 122.
[26] Hampton *Changing,* n.p.
[27] Hampton *Changing,* n.p.
[28] Mehaffy and Keating, 73.
[29] Mehaffy and Keating, 73.
[30] Mehaffy and Keating, 49.

Because of the importance of the body, therefore, "[s]poken or written language is frequently inadequate for communication."[31] Nolan Belk condemns the Oankali because "[t]hey focus so much on body knowledge that they ignore personal identity when it comes to decisions."[32] Also, he points out "that in order to "think"-use mind-based intelligence-the humans will have to separate themselves from the aliens."[33] In other words, the body gets in the way of the human need for a mind-based, cognitive, view of the world.

Both the body and the mind come into play in discussions about identity. Christina Braid echoes Belk's argument when she claims that the Oankali and Constructs imply "an absolute understanding of Humanity that is scientifically sound" and that is "based on the encyclopedic genetic knowledge aliens have gathered about the Human self."[34] This body-knowledge, according to Braid, "is at odds with the actual truth of Human identity and being."[35] Because of their focus on genetics, the Oankali deny "Human civil rights by scientifically calculating their abilities, limiting their identity, and regulating their freedoms,"[36] and prevent the Oankali from sensing "the depth of suffering caused by this loss of Human individuality and lifestyle."[37] In stunning contrast, Erin Ackerman applies "Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's concept of 'becoming' to" *Lilith's Brood*.[38] The "shift in subjectivity" and the "new communal ethics" the Oankali urge on the Humans is necessary for them to overcome their "inherent distinctions and valuations that accompany" their "hierarchy of molar identities."[39] However, it "is precisely the subjectivity they are least willing to surrender."[40] Ackerman contends that the problem arises because "the stable maintenance of a human identity is one most humans, and particularly men in Butler's narrative, view as essential to their subjectivity."[41]

All of these reading of *Lilith's Brood* deal with identity in one way or another, though it is not necessarily in the foreground of their discussions. I will build on these identity-related ideas by discussing the collective identities constructed in the trilogy rather than individual ones. These group identities give members a sense of belonging, a means of self-

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[31] Mehaffy and Keating, 59.
[32] Belk, 382.
[33] Belk, 383.
[34] Braid, 55.
[35] Braid, 55.
[36] Braid, 55.
[37] Braid, 56.
[38] Ackerman, 25.
[39] Ackerman, 27.
[40] Ackerman, 26.
[41] Ackerman, 27.

definition, and the comfort of sameness. Throughout the trilogy there is conflict between the us-versus-them attitude of the humans, most notably among resister humans, and the all-inclusive attitude of the Oankali. The construction of group identities is also at odds in the trilogy. The humans build collective identities through collective memories based on places, things, and stories; whereas, the Oankali build collective identities through collective memories based on biology.

The Places and Things of Self

The places we come from, where we are, and where we are going all play a part in informing how we identify ourselves and others. Place can be vast like a continent or small like a particular room, anywhere we can physically relate to. Places help us identify with the past through historical monuments, scenes from important life events, or even a town we used to live in. Places form an important part of collective memories that allow groups of people to identify with each other and mark themselves out as different from others. In *Lilith's Brood*, Earth becomes the ruin, the place of memory, that brings the surviving Humans in contact with their past.

As a site for memory, Earth functions as the marker for an idealized past, as well as the place on which new memories will be created. For the Humans who are repopulating Earth, it is both a "vehicle for collective memories"[42] and a site of pilgrimage that provides a basis for "social cohesion"[43] and brings "communities into closer 'contact' with their collective past."[44] The Oankali, however, do not tell humans that emigrate to Mars or remain in resister communities that "the Earth [they] knew would not be here – for more than a few centuries" (I 531); when the descendants of Oankali and Humans leave Earth, they will leave behind "less than a corpse of a world…small, cold, and as lifeless as the moon" (AR 365).

Identities are often constructed around the idea of a place of origin. The returning Humans claim, rightfully, that Earth is the origin of Humans, as opposed to the unknown origins of the Oankali. This deep connection with Earth as a 'Human' place helps the Humans, especially the resisters, "articulate identities," and this location of "beginnings tells us quite a lot about how they perceive themselves."[45] Earth-as-origin, then, reinforces the idea that to be Human one must be from Earth, thus creating a rift not only between Humans and Oankali, but also between Humans that resist and those who join 'trade' villages. The

[42] Carrier, 40.
[43] Carrier, 40.
[44] Zerubavel, 42.
[45] Zerubavel, 101.

resisters identify so strongly with Earth before the war, that their identities are "constructed in relation to the place [they] have come from [rather] than the place [they] might be going to."[46] Their idealized view of pre-war, pre-Oankali Earth is a core piece of their collective identity as 'humans' which drives their hatred for the Oankali and the humans that join the trade villages.

Even when the Humans are still on the Oankali ship, they try to create a 'Human place' to give themselves a sense of security. The lack of any personal belongings from the past make it especially difficult for displaced survivors of war and natural disasters to psychologically cope with and recover from what has happened.[47] Identifying with a place to create a sense of belonging comes from the "desire for roots and some sense of authentic origin;"[48] however, "the essentialism that appears to accompany this idea" may not provide "the security and feeling of groundedness that people may seem to want."[49] This lack of possessions and a place to call home lends to the disquiet among the human survivors the Oankali have rescued.

Identifying a 'home' and belonging to a community based on the idea of roots or origins creates the violent us-them division between Curt and his followers and the Oankali with the Humans who have sided with them at the end of *Dawn*. Curt tells the ooloi "This a human place! ...It's off limits to you and your animals" (D 227). Though he spoke to the gathered ooloi, "He stared at Lilith, held his ax ready" (D 227). Curt denies Lilith identification with the Human community as well as a claim to their shared origins. Lilith herself recognizes her exclusion from the community on the last page of the novel.

> At least she would get another chance with a human group. A chance to teach them...but not a chance to be one of them. Never that. Never?
>
> If she were lost, others did not have to be. Humanity did not have to be. (D 248)

She sees a clear separation between those who will become resisters and those who choose to join the Oankali, and feels guilt for her choice until Akin establishes the Mars colony at the end if *Adulthood Rites*.

As the trilogy progresses, it becomes clear that Earth is best thought of as a beginning, a starting point for emerging identities. New communities, new family structures, new

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[46] Woodward *Understanding,* 72.
[47] Zerubavel, 44.
[48] Woodward *Understanding,* 137.
[49] Woodward *Understanding,* 137.

species all point toward place as somewhere to go. After Curt murders Joseph, Joseph becomes a link between past and future:

> 'Shall we pick him up on our way back and have him sent to Earth?' it [Nikanj] asked. 'He can end as part of his homeworld.'
>
> Bury him on Earth? Let his flesh be part of the new beginning there? 'Yes,' she whispered. (D 224)

It is Nikanj, the alien, who acts more 'human' by offering Lilith the comfort of returning Joseph to his place of origin. He sees, though he does not fully understand, the human need to link with a place of origin or home to create a sense of self. However, Lilith's response is not a turn to the past, as Nikanj offers, but a joining of earth and human flesh signaling a turn to the future and possibility. Ironically, Curt's essentialist thinking and irrational behavior mark him out as more animal-like and lead to his forfeiture of earth. By committing murder, he has denied himself the very thing he most identifies with – Humanity and Earth as its symbol.

In addition to being a site for memory, pre-war Earth ruins provide items as repositories for memory. This is especially important in *Adulthood Rites* because the mountain excavation camp acts as both a site for memory that is "well suited to contain memories – to hold and preserve them"[50] and a source of items of memory that can be traded with other resister groups. The relics that the resisters trade provide a portable, tangible, link to the past.[51] The resister group from Phoenix that excavates the ruins not only believes that preserving pre-war items is their responsibility, but it is also their responsibility to preserve the culture associated with those items.

Akin, at the camp with two other construct children who had been stolen, does not understand the need of the humans to preserve their history because all of Oankali history is preserved within the actual, biological memories of the people. He wants to know why the resisters do not just "paint new pictures and make statues from wood or metal" (AR 389). However, Shkaht, who is older that Akin and has lived among humans longer explains that "It wouldn't be the same for them…They really do need the old things." (AR 389). What the construct children cannot understand is that the humans have a need to preserve the past as a way of establishing a coherent, continuous identity.

The transformation of junk into treasure is readily apparent in the attitude of the excavators from Phoenix. Many of the items that the resisters find, clean, and trade would

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[50] Casey, Edward qtd. in Whitehead, 10.
[51] Zerubavel, 43 and 44.

have been considered disposable and not worth preserving at the time of their creation. Zerubavel argues that it is the "sentimental connection to the past that makes such antiques so precious."[52] Tate tells Akin, who is cleaning a piece of mosaic, "That's beautiful... There was a time when I would have thought it was cheap junk. Now, it's beautiful" (AR 407). These things act as indicators of human origins, a connection to their pre-war identities as 'pure' humans.

This re-use of pre-war things to develop, or redevelop, a cultural identity that is 'purely human' is necessary for the resisters. The items from the ruins help establish a collective memory that is built on old "cultural forms" that the resisters "work into new contexts."[53] These relics "allow them to live in the present while at the same time literally 'cling' to the past."[54] The trade in these goods promotes "collective memory as the creation of shared versions of the past," as well as "memory of the individual [operating] within the framework of a socio-cultural environment."[55] During a discussion of the dangers of trading plastic items, Tate tells Sabine: "The only place that has enough of it to be a real danger is right here. Other people need things like this – pictures and statues from another time, something to remind them what we were, we are" (AR 389). Tate understands the power of the items that they excavate to establish a collective identity for the resister humans, create common ground among them, and give them a sense of continuity.

Common stories also give a sense of continuity; the stories that the resister humans tell become the new myths of their new culture. Like all myths, they have their origins in reality. The myth most often referred to in *Lilith's Brood* is the myth about Lilith. The resistors, even before leaving the ship, begin to attribute to Lilith only one characteristic: the betrayer. By denying her other identities, the group of resisters creates a misdescription aimed at creating a target for their hatred of an unacceptable situation.[56] This "singular classification" of Lilith is intentionally "grossly confrontational in form and implication."[57] The stories they tell about her become less about the truth and much more about their own fears and insecurities. In analyzing stories, it is important to understand that "[n]arrative does not merely capture aspects of the self for description, communication, and examination; narrative constructs the self."[58]

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[52] Zerubavel, 44.
[53] Coupland, 107.
[54] Zerubavel, 43.
[55] Erll, 15.
[56] Zerubavel, 7.
[57] Zerubavel, 45.
[58] Fireman, McVay, and Flanagan, 5.

The misrepresentation of Lilith begins on the training floor in the first novel *Dawn*. Lilith understood that this misrepresentation of herself was likely and "that she must struggle not against nonhuman aliens, but against her own kind" (D 149). Before the humans even met the Oankali, some "were afraid of her – afraid she was not human, or not human enough" (D 180). After the fight on the training floor between the resisters and the ooloi, the resister humans decided "they could not trust one of their own who seemed too close to aliens" (D 238). Their attitude mirrors that of Gabe's: "he remained stubbornly angry. He was helpless in a situation he found intolerable. Someone must be to blame" (D 240). This helplessness and anger fuels the distorted recollection of Lilith as a figure of contempt.

By the time Akin is born in the second novel, *Adulthood Rites*, the myth about Lilith among the resisters has evolved into something with religious connotations; for the resisters "the image of Lilith is resurrected as monstrous."[59] The stories the resisters construct about Lilith get so warped that she is portrayed as barely human. Lilith explains her position to Tino the first night he comes to the Lo village:

> ...they decided I had betrayed them to the Oankali...So now...they assume I have horns. Some of the younger ones have been taught to blame me for everything – as though I were a second Satan or Satan's wife or some such idiocy. (AR 297)

While she spoke, Tino remembered what people in Phoenix had said about Lilith. They said "she was possessed of the devil" and sold herself and humanity to the Oankali in exchange for "the right to stay on the ship and for...powers" (AR 298). This is the myth of Lilith that is perpetuated through the trilogy; this is the resisters collective memory of Lilith "that substantiates their preferred understanding of 'reality' in this disordered and disorienting new world."[60]

The distortion of the recent past is how the newly emerging human society needs to modify the framework of its collective memory[61] to be in line with their collective goals and beliefs. These narratives constructed around her tell us more about the storytellers and their conditions than they do about Lilith.[62] According to Marianne Hirsch and Valerie Smith: "What a culture remembers and what it chooses to forget...are intricately bound up with

[59] Wood "Subversion," 89.
[60] Wood "Subversion," 89.
[61] Halbwachs, 134.
[62] Holstein and Gubrium, 103.

issues of power and hegemony."[63] The stories resisters tell about Lilith are about their desire to establish a collective identity distinct from, and superior to, the humans in trade villages.

Not only is the myth of Lilith dangerous to the woman Lilith but it is also dangerous to her children. When Akin is kidnapped and eventually ends up in Tino's village of Phoenix, Tate warns him about the dangers of being Lilith's son: "Listen, Akin, don't say that name to anyone else. It may not matter anymore, but don't say it... Because there are people here who don't like your mother. There are people here who might hurt you because they can't get at her." (AR 349). Akin is not only in danger because he is Lilith's son, but also because he is the embodiment of Lilith's rejection of "the sanctity of an unsullied human life."[64] Although Akin looks mostly human, both he and the resisters know he is a construct and, therefore, a symbol of the extinction of humans as a species.

It's the Difference That Counts

Fear and hatred are other unifying aspects of Human identity. Even though Humans in the trade villages feel guilt over their part in the extinction of the Human race as a species, they accept the blending of Human and Oankali in order for both species to grow into something new. The resisters, conversely, feel that the species must remain separate and, more importantly, different. Fear and hatred of difference leads to a fear of losing any aspect of being human, an obsession with remaining 'purely' human, and a reliance on appearances as a marker of humanity. As Zerubavel points out, "the semblance of social continuity is far more compelling when it involves an element of biological continuity."[65] The loss of that biological difference that the Oankali represents is unbearable for the resisters.

The essentialist classifications that the resister humans assign to groups increases violence and misunderstanding. This communitarian thinking assumes that "one's identity with one's community must be the principal or dominant...identity a person has."[66] The resisters then ascribe attributes of traitor and destroyer to those in trade villages and to all Oankali, and they use these attributes to incite violence against them.[67] They also do this among themselves, fighting each other because of perceived racial and ethnic differences. Treating acts of violence against another group as a response to the group's alleged aggressions "puts the blame for the cycle of violence on the other side."[68] In this way, the

[63] Hirsch and Smith qtd. in Whitehead, 13.
[64] Wood "Subversion," 90.
[65] Zerubavel, 56.
[66] Sen, 33.
[67] Sen, 7.
[68] Zerubavel, 100.

resisters blame the Oankali for the destruction of the human race and completely disregard the facts that humans had tried to commit humanicide through nuclear war only 250 years earlier and that the Oankali are the only reason humanity and the Earth survived.

From the early pages of *Dawn,* this fear of difference colors what the Humans do and think. Lilith is no less affected by this fear than any other Human, but she is able to conquer her fears. When Lilith first learns of the trade, she is horrified and insists that the Oankali will "finish what the war began" (D 42). Paul Titus echoes her words when Lilith asks what price he paid to stay aboard the ship:

> "The price...is just the same. When they're finished with us there won't be any real human beings left. Not here. Not on the ground. What the bombs started, they'll finish." (D 92)

These reactions sum up the real horror that humans face in the *Xenogenesis* trilogy: "the imminent destruction of the human race as they know it."[69] Stagnation and sameness are preferable to forced evolution and diversity.

The fear of becoming other, blending with the alien, is what drives the humans to resist. What matters to them "is that human identity be maintained, and this desire leads to the fear of those who are different, those who are – and must remain – other than ourselves."[70] When the Oankali come into the great room and meet the recently awakened humans for the first time, Peter's violent reaction, even in his drugged state, causes his own death. Joseph, who has already met and started to accept Lilith's Oankali mate Nikanj, expresses his fear and anger over the trade and Lilith tries to reason with him:

> "Peter was right," he said angrily.
>
> She frowned. "Peter? Right to try to kill? Right to die?"
>
> "He died human! And he almost managed to take one of them with him!"
>
> She looked at him. "So what? What's changed? On Earth we can change things. Not here."
>
> "Will we want to by then? What will we be, I wonder? Not human. Not anymore." (D196)

Joseph's fear of not being 'purely' human himself and of having only partly human children makes him reckless and angry. This is the same fear that, later, on the training floor, causes Curt to kill Joseph. Curt sees Joseph healing un-humanly quickly and assumes, correctly, that

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[69] Outerson, 446.
[70] Roe, 298.

Joseph has been 'tampered' with by the Oankali; therefore, in Curt's view, Joseph is no longer human. He tells Kahguyaht, "We didn't kill a human being… We killed one of your animals!" (D228).

After the Humans that Lilith had awakened and trained are sent to Earth without her, Nikanj tries to console her by telling her that it has made her pregnant. Even though Lilith has accepted the Oankali as a people, she is still afraid of the trade and its implications for humanity's future. She reacts with horror to Nikanj's news:

> …She pulled at her arms, but it would not let her go. "It will be a thing – not human." She stared down at her own body in horror. "It's inside me, and it isn't human!"…
>
> "You'll have a daughter," it said…
>
> "But it won't be human," she whispered. "It will be a thing. A monster." (D 246-47)

Eventually Lilith recognizes and overcomes her fear and revulsion and bears many construct children. In *Adulthood Rites*, she tells Akin "Human beings fear difference…Humans persecute their different ones, yet they need them to give themselves definition and status." Lilith goes on to urge Akin "to go the Oankali way. Embrace difference." (AR 329).

To the humans, physical difference is just as important a marker of identity as genetic difference. Molly Wallace points out that a primary component of the humans' xenophobia is "a fear of alien morphology."[71] The different Oankali DNA is not the main problem, Wallace argues, but the fact that "the Oankali *look* like they have different DNA."[72] Throughout history, humans have used physical difference as a means of delineating certain social groups; skin color, ethnicity, and physical handicaps are just a few of the differences humans have used to create in-groups and out-groups. These physical "assumptions about identity, which are related to our own bodies and those of others, offer security."[73] Physical appearance is so important to the humans that they like Akin because he looks like them. At the salvage camp one of the women says, "No tentacles… So human. So beautiful" (AR 385). Though he says nothing, Akin understands that "these people liked him simply because he looked like them" (AR 385).

The importance of physical difference, appearance, is a constant theme throughout the *Xenogenesis* trilogy. Jessie Strickgold-Sarah believes one of Butler's 'favorite questions' is

[71] Wallace, 106.
[72] Wallace, 106. Emphasis in original.
[73] Woodward *Understanding,* 105.

about "how much the body determines the self."[74] This, she argues, assumes "that the physical body does determine the self, and that physical difference must produce difference and identity."[75] Being the same as or different from a group is essential in creating not only a personal identity but establishing the collective identity within which that identity can be played out. As Sen points out:

> A strong – and exclusive – sense of belonging to one group can in many cases carry with it the perception of distance and divergence from other groups. Within-group solidarity can help feed between-group discord.[76]

These differences are often based on physical appearances as well as symbols of difference such as clothing and language.[77]

We can see this play out in *Adulthood Rites* on several occasions. After Akin has been kidnapped, one of the men is concerned about his ability to talk and understand language "better than a normal kid his age" (AR 341). Another kidnapper replies, "It's better than being without eyes or ears or nose...It's looks that are important" (AR 341). Later when a pair of construct girls are brought into the village, they are treated much worse than Akin because they look more alien. The resisters in Phoenix "valued them, fed them, sheltered them, but they did not like the girl's tentacles – would not deliberately allow themselves to be touched by the small sensory organs" (AR 374). Soon after the girls arrive in the village their difference prompts Neci Roybal to try and convince other villagers "that the girls' tentacles should be removed now...so that they would look more Human, so that they would learn to depend on their Human senses and perceive the world in a Human way" (AR 376). This is just one of many instances throughout the trilogy that physical difference leads to the possibility of violence.

It is not just the resisters that are concerned with physical appearance; humans in the trade villages are also guilty of disliking others for their physical appearance. After Akin is born Lilith is concerned for his safety because he looks so human. She knows that:

> They'll resent him for not being completely Human and for looking more Human than their kids. They'll hate him for looking much younger than he sounds. They'll hate him because they haven't been allowed to have sons. (AR 258)

[74] Strickgold-Sarah, 419.
[75] Strickgold-Sarah, 419.
[76] Sen, 1-2.
[77] Woodward "Questions," 33.

The other humans in Lo also react with dislike to construct children who do not look human enough. Margit tells Akin that the humans

> "blame me for not looking like them. They can't help doing it, and I can't help resenting it. I don't know which is worse – the ones who cringe if I touch them or the ones who pretend it's all right while they cringe inside." (AR 264)

Because of Margit's looks these humans "pity her or condemn her or laugh at her" (AR 265). Even Lilith reacts with disgust when her own child, Jodahs, allows its "body do whatever it wants to" (I 591). She tells Jodahs, "I wish you could see yourself through my eyes. Deformity is as bad as illness" (I 591). Because Jodahs has the ability to let his body morph, Lilith believes it should try to maintain a 'normal' appearance. When Jodahs does not, she expresses her disapproval.

The resisters struggle to maintain a physical and genetic difference from the Oankali and the constructs. They refuse to accept the Oankali, their trade, and the resulting construct children, though they occasionally kidnap the most human looking construct children in a misguided effort to have children of their own. The resisters need to remain apart from the Oankali and to maintain a group identity as a pure, separate, unique species. According to Woodward, "People have a strong personal investment in [group] identities, even to the extent of being willing to die for them."[78] These humans "resist interspecies breeding...because what must be maintained is difference."[79]

Not only are the resisters willing to die for species purity, they are also willing to kill for it. Lilith tells Nikanj, at the end of *Dawn*, not to be "too obvious about helping them get away... Otherwise people who decide later to come back seem to be obeying you, betraying their humanity for you. That could get them killed" (D 246). She continues to explain that those who run "will think the human species deserves at least a clean death" (D 246). Later in *Adulthood Rites*, in a deserted resister village, Akin's captors come across a log entry that "says the Oankali should be killed – that to join with them is against God" (AR 339). The irrational fear of difference leads these humans to reject logical improvements to the human species.

The resisters remain stubbornly attached to their 'pure' human genes. By rejecting the trade, they reject

[78] Woodward "Questions," 24.
[79] Roe, 297.

> the extraordinary biological enhancements to health, strength, and intelligence [and]...elect to remain antiquely human, restricting themselves to the brutishly limiting human gene pool.[80]

In *Adulthood Rites* Tate tries to explain to Akin the resisters' desire to have children as a way to avoid extinction, not extinction of the parents but extinction of the human species. She tells him, "It would mean we weren't [becoming extinct]. Our kids would be Human like us." (AR 403). Akin, at the time, is unable to understand Tate, because he sees humans as not becoming extinct because they are part of all constructs, just as Oankali are not becoming extinct for the same reason.

As Akin grows and learns more about the resisters, something he can do because he looks so much like them, he makes it his mission to fight for a human Akjai group, a group that will preserve the differences Humans need to maintain. The Oankali and adult constructs come to a consensus to leave Akin among the humans "so that he could learn them as no adult could, as no Oankali-born construct could, as no construct who did not look quite Human could" (AR 474). He comes to understand the humans in a way "no one except other Humans" (AR 474) can. Because of this, "he was intended to decide the fate of the resisters" (AR 474) and comes to believe that they should be allowed to have another chance, to keep their uniqueness as a species.

Ironically, Akin finds an ally in his Akjai teacher aboard the ship. This ooloi – "not bred to interact with humans, is physically alien, with an enormous, caterpillar-like body – ultimately takes up the argument on his behalf, arguing that it, too, would be a resister if it were human."[81] The Akjai explains to Akin that an Akjai group for humans is a cruelty because it believes that the humans will eventually destroy themselves (AR 475). However, it fights for a human Akjai group because, as it tells Akin, "All people who know what it is to die should be allowed to continue if they can continue" (AR 471). Ironically, the most un-human of Oankali, the most different, is the one who takes up Akin's fight and convinces the people that there must be a Human Akjai group, though the resister humans never learn of this.

The Mars colony is already established by the time Jodahs is born and meets humans who are trying to get there. Because of his brother Akin's work, Jodahs is better able to

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[80] Bleiler, n.p.

[81] Johns "Pseudoscience," 103.

understand the need humans have for a purely human group. He asks a female emigrant to Mars to stay on Earth and join a trade village. He argues,

> I understand that Humans must be free to go… I'm Human enough for my body to understand. But I'm Oankali enough to know that you will eventually destroy yourselves again. (I 530)

The woman and her male partner even though confronted with the logic derived from a study of human history and human genetics that the humans will eventually destroy themselves again respond "by privileging freedom in the short-term over species life in the long-term."[82] The man tells Jodahs, "We'll be free-us, our children, their children… We'll be fully Human and free. That's enough" (I 531). Even though Jodahs feels as most Oankali and constructs do about the eventual self-destruction of the Human species, it is "human enough to understand what" (I 637) the humans are trying to do. Jodahs tells Jesusa that its brother "began the Mars colony because he understood the need of Humans to live as themselves, not to blend completely with the Oankali" (I 638). The constructs understand even though their Oankali parents cannot; thus, they are sympathetic to the humans who want to go to Mars.

By the end of the trilogy, the humans that come in contact with the new construct ooloi begin to change their opinions about them and about joining with the Oankali. This is in part because the new ooloi are shape shifters; the culmination of the unsuppressed, combined attributes of both species. Nikanj foresees this ability when it explains to Lilith:

> Our children will be better than either of us… We will moderate your hierarchical problems and you will lessen our physical limitations. Our children won't destroy themselves in a war, and if they need to regrow a limb or to change themselves in some other way they'll be able to do it. (D 247-48)

Throughout *Imago* Jodahs shape shifts almost unconsciously to please the humans he is closest to, the ones he sees as potential mates. When Jodahs is caring for Joao, it takes on a female-seeming shape that is pleasing to him. When Joao is finally ready to depart, he tells Jodahs that he has not changed his opinion about ooloi "only changed my feelings toward you" (I 603). Because "shifts in self-definitions or self-evaluations can occur without conscious awareness or intention,"[83] Joao's beliefs and values, which he thought were rigid and unchangeable, changed during his time with Jodahs and its family. A large part of the

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[82] Smith, R., 556.
[83] Devos and Banaji, 170.

reason Joao changes his attitude toward Jodahs is that it does not look different, does not look Oankali.

It is the abilities of the construct ooloi that enable all the humans in Jesusa and Tomás's village to choose to join Oankali/construct families rather than emigrate to Mars. Wallace notes that the humans "have joined the Oankali, not because they have overcome their xenophobic fear of difference, but because the Oankali no longer look different."[84] Nikanj understands this and tells Jodahs, "I don't believe we would have had many resisters if we had made construct ooloi earlier" (I 607). Additionally, at the end of *Imago*, Francisco a village elder who was convinced he wanted to go to Mars changes his mind:

> "You've done this to me," he said. "I would have gone to Mars… I can't even hate you," he whispered. "My God, if there had been people like you around 100 years ago, I couldn't have become a resister. I think there would be no resisters." (I 740)

The construct ooloi's ability to change shape and, thus, relieve the fear humans have of those who are physically different, paves the way for smoother relations between the two species.

It is not only the lessening of the fear of difference in appearance that eases the way for relations between the two species but also the establishment of the Mars colony, the ability for humans to go on as humans. Before Akin fought for and won the right for humans to establish a colony on Mars to live and reproduce as humans wholly separate from the Oankali, humans in trade villages felt guilty over their choice to live among the Oankali and have children. Lilith understands that

> they're in this with us… And with their own biology driving them, they can't not blend with us. But some of what makes us human will survive, just as some of what makes them Oankali will survive. (AR 282)

Even so, "Lilith sometimes hated herself for working with the Oankali, for having children who were not fully human" (AR 360).

And later when Tino joins the trade village Lo and becomes part of Lilith's family, he feels that "to get what [he] wanted, [he] betrayed everything [he] once was" (AR 425). Tino tries to explain his feelings of betrayal to Dichaan:

> "I'm a traitor to my people. Everything I do here is an act of betrayal. Someday, my people won't exist at all, and I will have helped their destroyers. I betrayed my parents…everyone." (AR 424)

[84] Wallace, 107.

John Lennard questions "by what laws, to what body, in violation of what oath or obligation, has Tino been treacherous?"[85] Tino, like Lilith and the other trade village humans, chooses health and parenthood over the pointless sterile existence of the resisters.

It is the Mars colony that finally lets trade village humans like Lilith and Tino to let go of their feelings of guilt and betrayal. Lilith explains to Jodahs "that Tino did not truly let go of his resister beliefs until the Mars colony was begun and his people could escape the Oankali" (I 562). While Nikanj says of Lilith that "she did not stop trying to break away until one of [Jodahs's] brothers convinced the people to allow resisting humans to settle on Mars" (I 562). Rebecca Holden sums this up nicely when she says that the Mars colony "makes it possible for many of the other humans in this community to choose to say on Earth…without betraying…the rest of humanity and thus themselves."[86]

Conclusion: "Your children will know us."

For the Oankali, collective identity is not situated outside the individual, it is part of the genetic makeup of their society. Memory for them is literally biological and shared. Early on in *Dawn*, Lilith asks Nikanj to destroy the genetic print the Oankali have of her. He explains that "It's a memory,…a complete memory carried by several people." (D 99) It is a gene map that is biologically encoded into Oankali memory, "not some kind of mechanical recording or written record." (D 99). Nikanj later examines "memory records of thousands of males" (D164) when looking for a human mate that Lilith might choose. Akin, in *Adulthood Rites*, "kept within himself a memory of genetic patterns or a few dormant cells from each sample" (AR 410) he came across during his long hike with Gabe so that he could share them with Nikanj when he returned to his family at Lo. When Jodahs finishes his final metamorphosis, he receives all of Nikanj's genetically encoded memories as the final step of becoming an adult ooloi (I 692). This ability to connect and share genetic memories is the basis for the Oankali version of government.

Instead of the traditional government that humans know, Oankali reach decisions through consensus. Butler explained in an interview that Oankali "come together by way of the nerve systems of their various ships and appendages, and they get a consensus; that's how they make decisions."[87] During Akin's stay on the ship he participates in a smaller version of this type of communication when two Akjai ooloi blend. The Akjai "seem completely

[85] Lennard, n.p.
[86] Holden, 55
[87] Mehaffy and Keating, 63.

blended, one nervous system communicating within itself as any nervous system did" (AR 453-54). He began to understand that this is "what adults achieved when they reached for a consensus on some controversial subject" (AR 453). However, during this blending, the Oankali do not lose their individuality:

> No matter how closely he was joined to the two ooloi, he was aware of himself. He was equally aware of them and their bodies and their sensations. But, somehow, they were still themselves and he was still himself. (AR 455)

In this way all Oankali and constructs "periodically [link] up to form a single nervous system in order to deliberate on matters of general concern."[88] It was in this way that the Oankali formed the consensus to leave Akin among the resisters so that he could learn about them, for the Oankali decisions reached by consensus are binding.[89] Because Akin's parents did not agree with the consensus to leave him with the resisters, they felt extremely alone, and others were "surprised that [they] didn't accept the general will" (AR 414).

This blending happens on a much smaller scale in the family unit. To create and maintain a sense of community and thus maintain their identity, "Oankali require physical contact."[90] When Akin's close sibling is about to be born, all of the mates gather together to participate in the birth. Ahajas "needed all her mates near her, touching her, needed to be able to link into them and feel the parts of her child that had come from them." (AR 331). This created "a network of family into which each child should fall" (AR 332). This interconnectedness goes "beyond loving into [a] deep biological attachment", what Lilith calls "physical addiction to another person" (I 679).

The first families of Oankali and Humans consist of a male and female Oankali, a male and female human, and an ooloi. In future generations, once there are no more unmated humans and Oankali, a complete family "will be a female, an ooloi, and children. Males will come and go as they wish" (AR 260) But the constructs will not feel deprived. It will be normal for them (AR 260). Lennard finds the "Oankali family structure…absolute,…without room for sexual variation or individual eccentricity."[91]This is mainly because Oankali and constructs are literally constructed by the ooloi at the genetic level. They are born with genetics that are programmed to exhibit certain traits. However, just like with humans, a tendency toward a certain trait does not guarantee that the trait will actually be expressed in

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[88] White, n.p.
[89] Lennard, n.p.
[90] Ackerman, 38.
[91] Lennard, n.p.

the individual. Jodahs notes that some construct children change their apparent sex, and that they usually know "long before their metamorphosis that they felt more drawn to become the opposite of what they seemed." (I 533). This happens to Akin's close sibling who changes from apparent female to male and to Jodahs itself who changes from apparent male to ooloi.

The genetic engineering of their children, however, does not produce constructs who are all alike. Each person has his, her, or its own likes, dislikes, desires, thoughts, experiences, each of them unique. If they were all the same, they would not need to make decisions based on group consensus, nor would there be those who disagree with a consensus as in the case of Akin being left with the resistors to learn about them.

Throughout the trilogy, the humans and the Oankali strive to understand one another but always miss the mark because of their inability to perceive things differently. The humans cannot understand the Oankali way of reading genetics or communicate on a sensory level as completely as Oankali and constructs can. And the Oankali cannot understand the way humans think even though, as Kahguyaht says, "We've studied your bodies, your thinking, your literature, your historical records, your many cultures" (D 32). The constructs will be able to understand both the humans and the Oankali; The Oankali realize this and look forward to it.

Akin begins the move toward understanding by fighting for the humans' right to an Akjai group. Tate urges him to learn as much as he can about the humans but also cautions him that he will "have a few more things to learn about the Oankali, too" (AR 406). He makes the Oankali see that humans are more than just their biology where the humans cannot. Even when Tino tries to explain this to Dichaan, Dichaan says, "The resistors don't seem very complex – except biologically" (AR 423). "[U]nlike the other Oankali and constructs who know the humans' bodies, Akin knows their thinking. Akin's life with the resistors reveals to him the depth of their 'human' identities."[92] Therefore, he is able to make the Oankali and other constructs understand the complexity of humans apart from their genetics. He accomplishes what 'flawed' humans cannot.

By the time construct ooloi appear in the last book, constructs have a better understanding of humans as well. Jodahs reminds Aaor that it has "to let them be human…Sometimes they need to prove to themselves that they still owned themselves, that they can still care for themselves, that they still have things – customs – that are their own." (I 696-97). The constructs begin to learn that humans "could not easily accept being totally

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[92] Holden, 55.

dependent" (I 555). The Oankali could not understand this but "simply accepted it as best they could and were pleased to see that…constructs understood". (I 555). As Jim Miller observes:

> Thus, by the end of the trilogy, the humans have lost the worst elements of their xenophobia, and the Oankali have come to recognize the importance of individual autonomy.[93]

The constructs begin to understand both humans and Oankali and share that understanding with them. And, while the humans and Oankali cannot begin to understand each other in the same deeply meaningful way, they learn enough to accept each other. By the end of the trilogy the humans, the Oankali, and the constructs have a place to be themselves.

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[93] Miller, 342.

Chapter 3
Identity construction through Narrative in the *Parable* Novels

To get along with God,
Consider the consequences of your behavior

Earthseed, The Books of the Living (*S* 86)

Parable of the Sower and *Parable of the Talents* tell the story of Lauren Olamina and the founding of her 'new' religion, Earthseed. In *Sower*, told only through Lauren's journals, we meet a young Lauren. The story takes us from the gated, but barely surviving, community of Robledo, through its destruction and Lauren's journey north to end with the establishment of Acorn. During the journey north, Lauren not only struggles to survive; she also begins to collect followers and build the foundation of her first Earthseed community.

Talents picks up five years after the end of *Sower*. Acorn is now a self-sufficient community that is growing. The difference in *Talents* is that the story, while still mostly told through Lauren's journals, is mediated by her daughter, Asha Vere. Asha assembles Lauren's journals and elaborates on them with her own writings as well as excerpts from her father's and uncle's writings. The story follows Lauren through the destruction of Acorn, the enslavement of its people, and Lauren's efforts to find her daughter and rebuild Earthseed.

These tales are set in the near future and are Butler's extrapolation of current events and trends in the 1990s. In an interview with Butler, *Essence* magazine points out that these tales "seem to be taking social-policy mistakes…to their logical conclusion."[1] Butler explains in another interview that the idea in the *Parable* novels:

> is to look at where we are now, what we're doing now, and to consider where some of our current behaviors and unattended problems might take us. I considered drugs and the effects of drugs on the children of drug addicts. I looked at the growing rich/poor gap, at throw away labor, at our willingness to build and fill prisons, our reluctance to build and repair schools and libraries, and at our assault on the environment. (*S* 337)

And the future she sees is quite grim. She tells H. Jerome Jackson that "there isn't anything in there that can't happen if we keep on going as we have been…And the horrible thing is some

[1] McHenry, 80.

of them are happening already anyway."[2] We only need to turn on the television or pick up a newspaper to see the truth of that statement.

The disturbing future that Butler presents in these novels has led scholars to look at them as utopian/dystopian or apocalyptic stories. Although Butler claims that "these are not dystopic books,"[3] the arguments for reading them in such a way are compelling, even a bit frightening. Both James Miller and Rebecca Wanzo call them critical dystopias that critique contemporary US socio-economic situations.[4] And for Donna Spalding Andréolle the dystopia is created by "the implosion of American society."[5] Miller also argues that the dystopia is created by a need for domination and 'others' to dominate.[6]

These scholars, along with Madhu Dubey, see Earthseed as a solution to the dystopia presented in the novels. Wanzo argues that Butler "constructs a utopian community and conceives of alternative worlds as a solution to dystopian circumstances,"[7] and Andréolle sees Earthseed as "the rebuilding of a new civilization on the ruins of the old."[8] Dubey goes further in discussing *Sower* saying that "modern science, technology, and reason [are] the necessary instruments for opposing and constructing alternatives to urban dystopia.'[9] While these scholars look at both the utopian and dystopian aspects of the novel, there are others that argue strongly that the *Parable* novels explore a possible future utopia.

The utopian arguments focus mainly on *Sower* and the Earthseed community Acorn. Mostly these discussions look at social conditions for utopia. For Clara Escoda Agusti, in Butler's utopia

> an equal distribution of goods and work can ensue; one which is not based on an essentialist perception of the sexes and races, but on a perception of any subject as a site of creative differences that enriches the group.[10]

Similarly, Jerry Phillips argues that Acorn is a "hopeful experiment" that is

> a statement of faith in one (utopian) tendency of modernity: its existential undoing of all forms of chauvinistic particularism, the way it obliges the subject to come to terms with ever-widening possibilities of human identity.[11]

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[2] Jackson, H., n.p.
[3] Shawl, 172.
[4] Miller, J., 254; Wanzo, 75.
[5] Andréolle, 115.
[6] Miller, J., 261.
[7] Wanzo, 75.
[8] Andréolle, 115.
[9] Dubey "Folk," 117.
[10] Agusti, 359.
[11] Phillips, 309.

According to Kate Schaefer, *Sower*

> can be read as a utopian manifesto or as a realistic look at what might be involved in building a better way of living, and how much that better way might cost to gain, as a mystical founding document for a future religion or as a hardass rejection of any religion that depends on the invisible or the irrational.[12]

Unlike these arguments for a social basis of utopia, Adam Johns takes a bio-deterministic view of utopia. For him, the *Parable* novels

> explore new notions of utopia, accepting as their starting point the belief that human behavior and human life are deeply, if not totally, determined by the human genome.[13]

He goes on to claim that hyperempathy syndrome "is likely a positive evolutionary adaptation, which will lead to enhanced reproductive success for the strongly communitarian sharers."[14]

A similar way of looking at these novels is as post-apocalyptic stories. Ingrid Thaler calls *Sower* a "didactic-moral narrative" which uses the biblical imagery of the apocalypse[15] to teach its lessons. Whereas Hee-Jung Serenity Joo limits the extent of the apocalyptic destruction. She argues that instead of a worldwide demise, the *Parable* books depict "only and specifically the demise of the U.S. as a first world country" and that the "scenario of apocalypse can…be seen as…the U.S. becoming a third world nation."[16] While the arguments for utopian/dystopian and apocalyptic critiques hold some merit, I prefer to read the setting as a valley between the peaks, similar to the Great Depression of the early twentieth century. Though, given the environmental factor, the era portrayed seems quite grim, indeed.

An approach to the *Parable* novels that more closely relates to my discussion of Butler's novels is the analysis of community among Earthseed members. After Lauren's community of Robledo is destroyed, she quickly begins to build another, even though she is unaware that she is doing it at first (*S* 340). As she walks north with all the other refugees, she begins "to reach out in spite of her fear, to choose the best people she can find and bring them together" (*S* 340). Peter G. Stillman compares Lauren's community-building to Jesus;

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[12] Schaefer, 182.
[13] Johns "Time," 395.
[14] Johns "Time," 404.
[15] Thaler, 71.
[16] Joo, 283.

on her journey, Lauren "gathers about her a small group of...wanderers...who appreciate the solidarity, protection, and friendship the group offers and the message of Earthseed."[17] Stillman goes on to describe the Earthseed community as "a collective project based on the conscious interdependence and agreement of its members, who must know, trust, and be able to work with each other for shared purposes."[18] The idea of the community as a collective is echoed by Mathias Nilges who writes that the Earthseed community is "based upon a new understanding of individual and collective existence."[19] Finally Lauren J. Lacey, whose main argument deals with the uses and abuses of power in Butler's work, sees community as "central to Butler's conception of how to cope with power."[20]

All of these analyses of Butler's novels are thoughtful and well-argued. The thing all of these analyses have in common is their focus on the society portrayed in the novels. I suggest that it is the stories told within the story of each novel that resonate with the stories we tell every day in order to create and present ourselves to the world. The stories we tell not only describe who we are, but they also construct our selves in the telling.[21] This ability to represent ourselves to others gives us some agency in how our identities are perceived.[22] Life stories integrate and organize fragmented events from our past to create a coherent, multi-faceted present identity.[23] We often turn to our families as the beginning of those stories, especially as we age or face major life events.[24] In *Talents*, Asha begs for stories about her family when she meets Marcus for the first time (354), and Lauren's death prompts Asha to assemble Lauren's journals and write her own life story in response to them (3).

The narrative patterns that Butler uses to construct the memoirs of the characters in these novels reflect the ways we construct our identities through the stories we tell. We use familiar narrative conventions to create our autobiographical selves.[25] And we analyze "our collective narration of the past" the same way "we examine the structure of any fictional story."[26] Inversely, literary representations of memory represent cultural concepts of memory.[27] Memory can "serve as an interdisciplinary interface" between literature and

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[17] Stillman, 23.
[18] Stillman, 22.
[19] Nilges, 1332.
[20] Lacey, 390.
[21] Fireman, McVay, and Flanagan, 5.
[22] Woodward "Questions," 13.
[23] McAdams, 193; Woodward *Understanding*, 100; Schacter, 9.
[24] Schacter, 279.
[25] Erll and Nünning, 12.
[26] Zerubavel, 13.
[27] Erll and Nünning, 23; Erll, 79

culture.[28] Therefore, fictional life-stories can be read using the methods of narrative identity construction.

Through their writing both Lauren and Asha construct personal identities shaped by what they want them to be as well as what they want the world to believe they are. From the very beginning of *Talents*, Asha states that assembling the memoirs of her mother and writing her commentary on them is an act of identity construction. Because they are written as memoirs, both the *Parable* novels demonstrate Butler's deep understanding of the power of narrative to construct enduring personal identities.

Self through Storytelling

> ...Self is thought, memory
> belief. Self creates. Self destroys. Self
> learns, discovers, becomes. Self
> shapes. Self adapts. Self invites its
> own reasons for being...
>
> *Earthseed, The Books of the Living* (*T* 235)

The art of autobiography is a conscious act to reconstruct life events in order to create an identity that is consistent with a particular purpose, a willful act of presenting to the world a carefully designed persona. According to Norman Denzin, autobiography, either oral or written, gives coherence and continuity to the self through narratives and the ideologies that underlie them.[29] These narratives, however, are often consciously constructed with an agenda;[30] such is the case with Asha's autobiography, interwoven with the writings of her mother, father, and uncle, in *Parable of the Talents*. Once the self is constructed through narrative, even if only internally to the self, it is something that is actively lived.[31] It is, therefore, necessary to then communicate the self to others in a social context. In practice, the narrative construction of self is an integral part of communicating it.[32] This constructed, narrative, representation of the self provides "endless possibilities for who we are and what we can be."[33]

But in order to construct these narratives we must remember the events that we experienced. These remembrances are automatically a text revised through the lens of the

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[28] Gymnich, Nünning, and Sommer, 2.
[29] Denzin qtd. in Holstein and Gubrium, 106.
[30] Fireman, McVay, Flanagan, 9.
[31] Holstein and Gubrium, 10.
[32] Holstein and Gubrium, 70.
[33] Holstein and Gubrium, 3.

present need.[34] Autobiography, then, is a narrative of memory that has "undergone considerable revision at a conscious level."[35] These revisions may intentionally involve a manipulation of the past, not just a re-evaluation of the experiences.[36] Asha's agenda of trying to vilify Lauren is apparent in the particular descriptions she uses of people and events, as well as in her selections from the writings she has collected. Butler has effectively used two forms of autobiographical narrative, memoir and personal journal, in a fictional account of one woman's journey to fulfill her Destiny and another woman's attempt to understand her relationship to that woman. Butler succeeds in creating believable character identities throughout these two novels because she creates believable memory texts, self-narratives, for the characters.

Because formalized self-narratives are considered literary works as well as memory texts, it is reasonable use the same reading approach to a fictional memoir. Anne Whitehead emphasizes the idea of autobiography as "an important part of memory."[37] Additionally, literary works can represent "individual and collective memory...... by coding it into aesthetic forms, such as narrative structures, symbols, and metaphors."[38] Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning describe literature "as a way to represent individual memory" with narrative texts bearing "a special affinity to memory."[39] The link between "autobiographical memory and self also highlights individual differences" through the ways in which each "individual constructs a life narrative" under the influence of "the larger cultural framework."[40] The blurring of the boundaries between fiction and nonfiction, therefore, allows for the reading of a fictional autobiography in the same way we might read a nonfiction autobiography.

Memoirs constitute a type of historical document. These memory texts serve to document the writer's "cultural and developmental history"[41] in addition to a coherent self-identity. In *Parable of the Talents*, then, the documents that Asha collects represent not only the individuals who wrote them but also the culture and history surrounding their lives. As a historian, Asha would be more than cognizant of the historical importance of those memoirs. Additionally, she would be aware of the constructed nature of historical documents, even as she manipulates those documents for her own agenda.

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[34] Kuhn, 189; Erll, 8.
[35] Kuhn, 189.
[36] Gymnich, Nünning, Sommer, 3.
[37] Whitehead, 10.
[38] Erll, 79.
[39] Erll and Nünning, 21-22.
[40] Fivush and Haden, viii.
[41] Fivush and Haden, xiii.

In the beginning of *Parable of the Talents*, Asha writes: "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" (*T* 2). From the outset, Asha acknowledges that she is "assembling" the book, in other words, she is selectively creating a narrative that she hopes will justify her own vision of herself in relation to her mother. Since important life changes often act as the impetus for self-reflection, it is reasonable to assume that the death of Lauren Olamina creates the identity crisis that leads to Asha's 'book.' Asha has now lost the opportunity to learn about her mother from the primary source; she must now rely on what others have said and written about her as well as Lauren's own writings. Jeff Menne calls Asha the "curator of a more heterogeneous group of texts"[42], and as the curator, Asha will be the one to choose what gets displayed.

Each narrator creates a view of Lauren and the events during her life consistent with his or her own world-view. Bankole's memoir, *Memories of Other Worlds*, sees Lauren, her life, and his own life through the lens of an older, more conservative generation. The title of his memoir is a clear indication of his nostalgic wish for the past. Similarly, the title *Warrior* clearly sets the tone for Marcus's view of himself and his world-view; he is at war with the society that has tried to beat him down. Marcus needs to be the conquering hero, and to that end, he joins the militant Christian America Church. Lauren's writings are just as revealing. *Earthseed, the Books of the Living* is the closest thing that the Earthseed community has to a sacred text. Again, the title reflects Earthseed's focus on the living members of the community rather than in some afterlife or past history. Lauren's diaries have been collected and then compiled, most likely by herself and the Earthseed community, under the deceptively simple title *The Journals of Lauren Oya Olamina*. Though the title hints that this is a collection of personal thoughts on various subjects, a diary, the journals are actually a chronical of the birth of a new religion, another type of sacred text for the Earthseed community.

Asha makes clear in the prologue that her sympathies lie with her father rather than her mother. She claims to be "glad to have known him through his writings" but "not glad to have known her through hers" (*T* 2). Asha admits that Lauren is a part of her but wishes that she were not (*T* 2). Through these statements, we learn that Asha prefers a more conservative way of life and has trouble comprehending a life full of change and of challenging the status quo. Lauren, to Asha, is a power-hungry cult leader who "was supposed to be seductive" (*T*

[42] Menne, 730.

381), and Asha must resist that seductive nature. Because Asha is conservative, almost fearful of change and difference, she is uncomfortable with the fact that Lauren actively seeks and uses power.[43]

Fear, Change, and the Fear of Change

> God is Change
> And hidden within Change
> Is a surprise, delight,
> Confusion, pain,
> Discovery, loss,
> Opportunity, and growth.
> As always,
> God exists
> To shape
> And to be shaped.
>
> *Earthseed, The Books of the Living* (*T* 92)

Asha is unable to act for herself in any way that might upset her status quo; she is afraid of difference and change, especially if it means she must move outside her comfort zone. She wants to hide from the reality of life's harshness. This is evident in her choice of profession: dreamask creator. She even started to escape through these video games as a youth. Singing in the choir is an escape as well; in the choir, she can lose herself in the music that she enjoys, get out of the house more often, and avoid being near Madison and his roaming hands (*T* 349). Additionally, she gets safe recognition in the choir. Those times that she is confronted with change, or a need to move beyond her comfortable bubble, she becomes hostile and defensive. She then blames her 'bad' feelings on the person who is involved in the situation. Her memoir often casts Lauren as the scapegoat.

By contrast, Lauren wants to live in 'reality' and deal with what the world offers and work to make those situations come out in her favor. Her goal is to recognize change, be proactive in dealing with it, and adapt to the situation. She feels that this is the best way to have some measure of control over the direction of her life. [44] In this way, change is a way to power[45] and empowerment, whereas, stagnation leads to passivity and obliteration.

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[43] Lacey, 385.
[44] Gant-Bitton, 138.
[45] Lacey, 384.

The first step in dealing with change for Lauren is the ability to recognize it. From the beginning of *Parable of the Sower*, we see her willingness to recognize change and face it. In her journal entry of August 17, 2024 Lauren writes:

> Everyone knows that change is inevitable. From the second law of thermodynamics to Darwinian evolution, from Buddhism's insistence that nothing is permanent and all suffering results from our delusions of permanence to the third chapter of Ecclesiastes ("To everything there is a season...."), Change is part of life, of existence, of the common wisdom. (*S* 26).

Change is so important to Lauren that it becomes her god and the god of her new religion Earthseed. Ellen Peel points out that Change is not some supernatural entity but "often seems more like 'reality,'" because the teachings of "Earthseed [exhort] people to face facts, no matter how grim or frightening."[46] Earthseed is the outgrowth of Lauren's "need to confront reality."[47]

Though Lauren and those of the Earthseed community are, for the most part, willing to face the reality and the changes it brings, she admits that they "fear change as much as anyone else does" (*T* 68). But in order to cope with its inevitability they "talk about change at Gatherings to ease [their] fears, to desensitize [themselves] and to consider consequences" (*T* 68). In other words, they are proactive about their futures and dealing with what might come. Lauren explains this to Travis on the journey north out of Los Angeles County. She tells him, "that there is no power in having strength and brains, yet waiting for God to fix things for you or to take revenge for you" (*S* 220). Asha even grudgingly admires Lauren's beliefs when she writes:

> I don't suppose she was really any more prepared for sudden changes than anyone else, but her beliefs helped her cope with them, even take advantage of them when they came. (*T* 92)

Butler, herself, affirms this view in an interview published as part of *Sower*. She states that Lauren "believes that our only dependable help must come from ourselves and from one another...She learns to be an activist" (S 340). It is Lauren's ability to anticipate change and plan ahead that determines her ability to control her future and ensure her survival.[48]

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[46] Peel, 57.
[47] Lacey, 387.
[48] Gant-Bitton, 123.

Lauren's ability to plan ahead saves her life many times, the first major example is during the destruction of the Robledo neighborhood. When the community was attacked, she took the time to gather her clothes and emergency pack that she had prepared. Even though these extras steps caused her to be the last one out of the house, the training she had given herself left her with food, clothing, and even a little money (*S* 161), which all ultimately helped her to survive outside the walls of Robledo. Once on the road with Harry and Zahra, the other two survivors, she knows she must adapt and take what opportunities she can to survive (*S* 125). She tells Harry, who is nearly immobilized with the shock of the sudden change, "Out here, you adapt to your surroundings or you get killed" (*S* 182). Lauren knows and follows the basic "scientific principle that a species must adapt and change in order to ensure its survival." [49] To this end, she and the other Earthseed members "engage in a constant process of adapting and becoming."[50]

In contrast to the forward-looking philosophy of Lauren, are the people of Robledo in *Sower*, and then Asha and Marcus in *Talents*. Lauren's step-mother denies the need for deadly force that her father claims he will use to defend his family. Lauren calls Cory's response "denial personified" (*S* 70). It is a neighborhood full of this type of "fearful passivity [that] dooms the community."[51] The people of Robledo refuse to adapt to the changing world and instead look to the past and hope for a return of the good times.[52] Even the members of Earthseed can succumb to the temptation of denial; The Mora family and a few others say that because "we can't change the stupid, greedy, vicious things that powerful people do, we should try to ignore them" (*T* 81).

Even as a child, Marcus feared change so much that the future scared him to the point where he "couldn't see any future" (*T* 109). Even after Lauren finds and rescues Marcus, he denies the need to face change. He tells Lauren, "You can't change everything in your life all at once. You just can't" (*T* 115). Additionally, just reading a copy of *Earthseed, the Books of the Living* visibly upsets him (*T* 129). In an attempt to undo some of the pain caused by all the sudden terrible changes he has gone through, Marcus decides to preach on Gathering Day (*T* 147). He wants to recapture a happier, more stable period in his life. Asha, who spends her entire adult life with Marcus, is just as fearful of change.

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[49] Allen, 1359.
[50] Lacey, 380.
[51] Jos, 413.
[52] Allen, 1359; Thaler, 81; Dubey, 108-09.

Asha needs to preserve the status quo and her small, consistent, unthreatening world. To this extent, she, like her Uncle Marc, habitually denies the truth and import of experiences that threaten her carefully constructed self-image. Though she comes to live with Marc only as an adult, Asha finds a kindred spirit in him; they both have an overpowering need for "order, stability, safety, and control" (*T* 111). Marcus finds this comfort in Christian America but only "by ignoring or rationalizing [their] brutal excesses."[53] Asha even writes about Marc's denial of Christian America's, and Jarret's, brutality and is, at the same time, complicit in the denial:

> Jarret's people covered their 'mistakes' with denial, threats, more terror, and occasional payoffs to the bereaved families. Uncle Marc researched this himself several years ago, and he says it's true – true and sad and wrong, and in the end, irrelevant. He says Jarret's teachings were right even if the man himself did wrong. (*T* 396)

They must put the blame on one man to maintain the illusion of security and stability. For Marc and Asha, it is all about excuses so that they can preserve their own self-esteem and the comfortable status quo.

In the phenomenological theory of personality promoted by Carl Rogers, this type of denial is a 'normal' part of maintaining a consistent self-concept. Experiences that may threaten the perception of self-consistency – a stable self-image – and a "congruence between perceptions of the self and experience" may result in "defensive processes such as distortion and denial."[54] Butler clearly understood this defense mechanism and used it to good effect when constructing Asha and Marc. When Asha confronts Marc "whether there was any possibility that this woman [Lauren] could be my mother" (*T* 396). He is scared that the life he has created with her will be changed, and any change for Marc is unbearable. He responds with excuses that he hopes will placate Asha:

> "I'm sorry," he said to me as soon as he saw me. "I was so happy when I found you after you left your parents. I was so glad to be able to help you with your education. I guess…I had been alone so long that I just couldn't stand to share you with anyone." (*T* 404)

Even here, Marc denies Lauren as Asha's mother; when he says 'parents', he is referring to the Alexanders, her adoptive parents. This half-excuse, half-apology also hints at the fact that

[53] Jos, 411.
[54] Cervone and Pervin, 189.

after he discovered where Asha was, as a baby, after she had been taken from Lauren, Bankole, and the Acorn community, he did not want to share her with Lauren. He had every intention of keeping Asha from learning about Lauren and keeping Lauren from finding Asha.

When Asha and Lauren finally meet, Asha cannot accept Lauren as her mother because it would mean that her life with Marc would have to change, and she would need to acknowledge that Marc was responsible for their separation. Therefore, she denies the lies that Marc told to both Lauren and herself to preserve her comfortable, predictable life. Even though Asha desperately needs to believe what she says, the excuses she gives Lauren sound hollow:

> "He doesn't hate you," I said [Asha]. "I'm sure he doesn't. I've never known him to hate anyone. He thought he was doing right."
>
> "Don't defend him," she whispered [Lauren]. "I know you love him, but don't defend him to me. I loved him once myself, and see what he has done to me – and to you."
>
> "You're a cult leader," I said. "He's Christian American. He believed-"
>
> "I don't care! I've spoken with him hundreds of times since he found you, and he said nothing. Nothing!"
>
> "He doesn't have any children," I said. "I don't think he ever will. But I was like a daughter to him. He was like a father to me." (*T* 403)

Asha wants the stability and peace of her life with Marc even if it means believing in those hollow excuses, accepting Marc's lies, and denying that he is responsible for her separation from her mother. She loves him "no matter what he had done" (*T* 404).

Because Asha cannot blame Marc for what happened, she must blame Lauren. Even though Asha reads and includes dozens of Lauren's journal entries talking about the search for her daughter, Asha still must see Lauren as the wrong-doer. Woven throughout her narrative, Asha plays the 'if only'/ 'what if' game: *If* Lauren had agreed to go to Halstead; *if* she had lived a normal life; *if* she had looked harder; *if* she had wanted to find me, *if* she had actually found me, then I wouldn't have had a miserable childhood and Uncle Marc wouldn't have had to rescue me (*T* 137, 184, 206-07, 294, 355, 402). Asha blames her abduction and Lauren's inability to find her on Lauren's obsession with Earthseed[55] rather than on the brutality of Christian America zealots and Marc's deceit.

[55] Peel, 57.

As Asha leaves her first meeting with her mother, she unequivocally chooses Marc over Lauren. When Lauren calls her Larkin, Asha realizes "that she had called me by the name she had given to her baby daughter so long ago. 'Asha,' I said, looking back at her. 'My name is Asha Vere'" (*T* 403). Notice here that Asha does not say 'given to me so long ago' but uses instead the pronoun 'her' as if she had never been Larkin. At this point, Asha consciously cuts her connection with Lauren.

A Way of Life

> Partnership is getting, taking,
> learning, teaching, offering the
> greatest possible benefit while doing
> the least possible harm. Partnership
> is mutualistic symbiosis. Partnership
> is life.
>
> ...Only in
> partnership can we thrive, grow,
> Change. Only in partnership can we
> live.

Earthseed The Books of the Living (*T* 135)

Lauren has always had to work for what she gets; she scrimps and saves her money and educates herself. She loses every home she tries to establish, eventually choosing not to have one. Her first home in Robledo is unsafe and the community often has to deal with intruders bent on hurting them and their property; eventually the community is destroyed by a drug-crazed gang and the ensuing looters. She is then homeless while she makes her way north, and on the way, she collects people who eventually become her new 'family'. They settle on Bankole's property, and though they have some measure of security, they must still fight to protect themselves. Eventually, this home is also destroyed. Lauren again loses her family and must travel the unsafe roads. Finally, she decides to establish a base from which to work and return to when she needs rest, information, and community. Every one becomes her extended family and welcomes her when she comes, but she cannot stay in one place too long before she gets restless and needs to move on.

Asha, in comparison to Lauren, is spoiled. She was taken at as an infant and put into an orphanage run by Christian America then adopted by the Alexanders. Even though the

Alexanders are indifferent to her, just wanting her to grow up obeying them and the precepts of Christian America, she always has what she needs and does not know what it is like to need for anything. She has schooling, food, clothing; all her physical needs are taken care of in a comfortable way. She moves from one secure, if unloving, household with her parents to a temporary home with a nice lady to her uncle's home. She never has to worry about where she will live, where her meals will come from, or for her safety. When she moves in with Uncle Marc, she has the full run of his large home, his extensive income, and more education. She also becomes well off in her own right when she becomes a successful creator of dreamasks. These differences form the core of Asha's inability to identify with Lauren.

When Asha writes about her parents, we see the comfortable yet cold childhood she had. She tells us that "Kayce didn't really want [her]" but adopted her because she was afraid no one else would want the "grim, stone-faced" child who was "plain as a stone" (*T* 221). The problem with Kayce, as Asha saw it, was that Kayce was "more rigid and literal minded than any human being with normal intelligence should have been" (*T* 278). And, more importantly, Kayce was the dominant force in the family. Madison Alexander, on the other hand, quietly agreed with whatever Kayce said (*T* 245). Though he managed to feel Asha up regularly, and tried to spy on her in her bedroom and the bathroom, Madison was afraid of Asha, especially after she broke a classmate's jaw (*T* 331).

Asha was never really a daughter to the Alexanders; they did not want a daughter. Adopting an orphaned child, rescued from a heathen cult, was their duty. Their intention was to "raise [Asha] properly and save [her] from whatever depraved existence [she] might have had with [her] biological parents" (*T* 222). Once Asha learned the Alexanders' version of the Christian America 'rules', life was predictable and relatively safe:

> Quiet was good. Questioning was bad...Stupid faith was good. Thinking and questioning were bad...Once I learned that, my childhood was at least physically comfortable. (*T* 265)

What Asha learned from the Alexanders was to do her duty and not challenge the status quo, be invisible and conform. As an adult, these lessons stay with her. Asha writes about their old age:

> I sent them money when they were older and in need, and I hired people to look after them, but I never went back to them. They did their duty towards me, and I did my duty towards them.

This ingrained way of thinking makes it nearly impossible for Asha to connect with Lauren whose outlook is to question and challenge and to learn from what she discovers.

Because of her unpleasant family life, Asha retreated into a fantasy world where she dreamed up different life scenarios. She begins her secret, fantasy life as a child as she loses herself in Christian-America-approved dreamask scenarios. While she "dreamed of doing great, heroic things," her true objective was to "hide, vanish, make [herself] invisible" (*T* 265). Asha hated her home life so much that she began to fantasize that she "might have beautiful, powerful, 'real' parents who would come for [her] someday" (*T* 327). To that effect, she began to create her own dreamask scenarios when she was twelve (*T* 325). Mostly she "wrote about having different parents – parents who cared about" her (*T* 327). Eventually, she got what she thought was her dream come true: The beautiful, powerful, respected preacher, Uncle Marc, rescued her.

For Asha, Marc was the embodiment of her childhood fantasies. Here was a man with fame, wealth, power, and respect in an organization she understood, and suddenly, "one of the best-known men in the country was [her] uncle" (T 353). Along with all the physical comforts his considerable money could buy, he paid for her college education and set her up with her own dreamask studio in one of his houses. This last allowed her to continue her virtual fantasy life as she finally "had the freedom to create pretty much anything [she] wanted to" (*T* 378). Even after Asha became a successful dreamask creator and was financially stable, she continued to live in the house Marc had given over for her personal use (*T* 378, 402). This arrangement allowed them the illusion of being a family while each maintaining separate lives.

Even though Asha tended to retreat from the harsh realities of the world through her work, she satisfied her need for human connection by being an active member of the Christian America church. At first, she returned to the church because Marc made it a condition of his support. After Asha left the Alexanders' house at 18 she stayed away from the church, but she soon realized that she missed the community of having the human connection with family and church. She "missed the life [she] had grown up with" and "was so lonely" (*T* 378). Asha had lost her faith in religion by then, but realized that "church wasn't only a religion. It was a community" that she wanted to be a part of. It was a safe place to connect with others.

Like the church community Asha participated in, Lauren's Earthseed community was a place where people could come together. Unlike Asha's together-but-apart association with the Christian America church community, Earthseed was a community of individuals who relied on and supported each other. For Lauren and Earthseed the idea of community meant so much more than 'spending time together'. Community meant caring for one another and

working together; it meant family. The idea of family is most clearly seen in the adaptation Lauren makes to the "usual godparent-godchild relationship" (*T* 66); families are joined together in a mutual commitment for the responsibility to help raise the child. This commitment is not mandatory, but once made, the commitment is a serious one. The seriousness of that commitment reflects the Earthseed idea that the children are the core of the community. For Lauren, "A community's first priority is to protect its children" (*S* 321).

Contrary to the homogeneity of the Christian America community, Earthseed is a successful blending of many different types of people. They all bring their unique talents to the community and use them to forward the aims of the group. Earthseed is a "mixing and matching" (*T* 43) of all sorts of people united "by a common set of practical objectives,"[56] and "their shared resolve to move toward a better future."[57] That better future is the Earthseed Destiny, but on the way to that Destiny, members of Earthseed must apply the lessons to life on earth in the here-and-now (*T* 156). "It's about learning to live in partnership with one another…[and] with our environment" (*T* 358-59). James Miller defines the Earthseed community as

> …a cooperative, communal society based on human dignity, respect for difference, and the constant need to adapt to present circumstances for the good of the group.[58]

It is this sense of interdependence that allows Earthseed members to maximize individual talents for the betterment of the group, and, as a result, Earthseed provides personal purpose, direction and fulfillment. Lauren understands that people "are hungry for something to believe in, some difficult but worthwhile goal to involve themselves in and work toward" (*T* 392). That is part of the purpose of the Destiny.

Members of Earthseed have an essential responsibility to the group. Lauren sums this up when she tells Bankole,

> The essentials…are to learn to shape God with forethought, care, and work; to educate and benefit their community, their families, and themselves; and to contribute to the fulfillment of the Destiny. (*S* 261)

As a result of this vision the community works together at tasks that are "both necessary and purposeful."[59] Yet, for those who have not fully embraced the teachings of Earthseed, the

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[56] Dubey, 112-113.
[57] Dubey, 113.
[58] Miller, 259.
[59] Lacey, 389.

group "never [asks] more of them than that they do their fair share of the work to keep the community going and that they respect Earthseed" (*T* 32). This is an important point to remember, because, as Asha points out, students who agreed to accept Earthseed-sponsored scholarships were to repay the community by using their skills to give back seven years of service to "improve life in the many Earthseed communities" (*T* 379). This implies that recipients need not be Earthseed members, though it is likely that many were. After seven years, these non-members were free to take their skills and what they learned to other non-Earthseed communities.

The Destiny, the purpose, of Earthseed – to take root among the stars – was the impetus for many advancements in science and technology. In several of her entries, Asha admires what Earthseed does. She praises them for being "a 'team' that stood together to meet challenge when challenge came" (*T* 63), for financing "scientific exploration and inquiry, and technological creativity" (*T* 379), and for providing educational opportunities from grade school through college (*T* 379). Lauren insisted that every Earthseed member, adult or child, learn to read and write "and to acquire a trade" and Asha believes this was sensible (*T* 24).

Yet, neither Asha nor Marc can admit to themselves that the Destiny is benefitting people now, on earth. Marc tells Lauren, "The country is bleeding to death…This is the time to work for our salvation, not to divert our attention to fantasy explorations of extrasolar worlds" (*T* 156). He wants his Christian God to save everyone, and for him, God's current savior is President Jarrett. Later, When Asha is researching Earthseed, she asks Marc if he thinks they are serious about interstellar emigration, and he replies, "They are sad, ridiculous, misled people who believe that the answer to all human problems is to fly off to Alpha Centauri" (*T* 380). Even after she has repeatedly written about the benefits of what the Earthseed community is doing, she still insists that they are "a rich organization spending vast sums of money, time, and effort on nonsense" instead of helping the poor, suffering, and hungry on Earth (*T* 380). She accuses Lauren of mistaking the fantasy of Earthseed and its Destiny as reality (*T* 47). Asha sees Lauren as an uncaring, power-hungry cult leader who wastes resources on a pipe dream.[60] Rather, the Destiny is more a quest for and sharing of knowledge and the improvements to human life that knowledge brings.

For members of the Earthseed community, knowledge was key to survival. Not only was it important to educate the younger generations, but sharing knowledge and experience

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[60] Lacey, 385.

helped the community to fill in individual gaps in knowledge, thus allowing them to adapt easier to new situations. [61] Asha admits that "[one] of the most valuable things they traded with one another was knowledge" (*T* 23-24). What Asha cannot understand is the urgency of education and acquiring knowledge. Whereas Lauren had to struggle educate herself, Asha is handed an education. She had the opportunity to get a standard education as a child, and then as an adult, Marc provides everything she needs to get an advanced degree. This causes Asha to be so casual about her education that she does not even finish her Ph.D. until she is 32 (*T* 378). The near indifference Asha has toward education creates a lack of intellectual rigor and an inability to identify with those who actively and aggressively seek knowledge; she does not make the connection between the accumulation of knowledge and survival.[62]

Conclusion

> 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.
>
> *Earthseed, The Books of the Living* (*S* 214)

The personal writings made into public documents establish the social identities of both Lauren and Asha. We see their fears, hopes, goals, successes, and failures. We also see how those things go into making each of them who they are. Lauren records in her journals her near-daily recollections of what she sees as important. Eventually she publishes them, along with Earthseed verses she has written. This is her attempt to publicly announce 'this is who I am and what I believe.' On the other hand, Asha's memoirs show how she defines herself not as a self-possessed individual, but rather in relation to those she comes in contact with. Lauren emerges as a self-confident, driven, powerful woman; whereas, Asha assumes the role of victim. The memoirs, as published texts, become part of the cultural history of their time.

As texts of memory, the materials that Asha collects become another vehicle by which the cultural memory of Earthseed is transmitted. Often times, places of memory are the

[61] Stillman, 23.
[62] Marotta, 49.

"vehicles for collective memories underpinning social cohesion," [63] but for Earthseed, this is not feasible. Their intent is to leave Earth, thus abandoning any connection with places of memory. Earthseed must find another way to transmit their "discrete cultural traditions."[64] One way they do this is through their 'sacred' texts: *Earthseed, the Books of the Living* is the collected verses that Lauren wrote to communicate the truths of the religion, and *The Journals of Lauren Oya Olamina* is Lauren's surviving personal writings. Together they form the material objects by which the collective memory of the Earthseed community is transmitted. [65] Because Asha has assembled a book that blends these two texts with Bankole's, Marc's and her own, these three texts will now become part of that tradition as what might be considered supplementary texts.

Additionally, cultural memory is transmitted through social interactions[66], and in the case of Earthseed, this happens during their weekly gatherings. It is the common practice in Earthseed to have weekly gatherings at which verses from *Earthseed* are discussed and questioned, rituals of welcoming and funeral rites are a performed, and any pressing concerns on the community are debated. This serves to "bind the community together into a purposive whole."[67] Thus, as a cohesive unit with a shared purpose and tradition, they reach the next step in achieving the Destiny. That is where *Parable of the Talents* leaves us, heading for the stars:

> 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. (*T* 406)

[63] Carrier, 40.
[64] Dubey, 105.
[65] Erll, 22.
[66] Erll, 21-22.
[67] Dubey, 118.

Chapter 4

What She Remembers: Memory, Amnesia, and Personality in *Fledgling*

Nowhere in Butler's novels is the concept of memory more important as a central theme that in *Fledgling*. Shori Matthews, the protagonist, is a 53-year-old amnesic who also happens to be a vampire. She is a hybrid, genetically crossed with human genes to give her the ability to function during the day. However, Shori's severely damaged memory does not leave her helpless. Even though her memory of her past is gone, all the other types of memory function normally. These intact parts of her memory enable her to survive and begin the rebuilding process. Shori uses different areas of the brain involved in memory, and different types of memory to survive and to gain insight into her former identity and personality.

The themes addressed in Butler's other works – race, power, gender, etc. – are the lenses through which scholars are starting to look at *Fledgling*. Ali Brox argues: "Racial discourse becomes the means through which the Ina/human species conflict is articulated".[1] Stephanie Smith writes that *Fledgling is* "a darkly erotic story of the family and race crisis that led to the extermination of her family and her near-fatal injuries, a story in which sexual and racial politics are distinctly at hand".[2] Butler's vampire, according to Susana M. Morris, considers "how race, sexuality, and intimacy can function in potentially progressive ways."[3] The genetics of racism features in the work of both Laurel Bollinger and Melissa J. Strong. For them Shori's very hybridity is cause for some Ina to deny the fact that she is Ina at all; they want to keep Ina blood 'pure.'[4]

Alan Davis and Sandra Govan take a subtler approach in their reviews of *Fledging*. Davis's review brings up Shori's amnesia in relation to the vampire lore developed by Butler throughout the book and claims that "Shori's process of reconstructing her memory (and her racial memory) is the right perspective to give readers whatever lore Butler decides to

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[1] Brox, 396.
[2] Smith, S., 389.
[3] Morris, S., 147.
[4] Bollinger, 345; Strong, 27.

incorporate into her mythology" (173).[5] However, he insisted on adding a parenthetical that draws attention to the issue of race in the novel. And Govan, in her review, tells us:

> "Shori's terrible predicament and the losses she suffers, allow Butler to direct our attention subtly to the themes and issues interwoven into her best tales - power, community, kin, mutuality, education, values, moral and immoral behaviors, and relationships among women as well as relationships between men and women."[6]

Though more restrained in their approaches to race and gender power struggles, both Davis and Govan still focus on those recurring themes in Butler scholarship.

In contrast to the social subjectivities discussed by these scholars, Gregory Hampton focuses on Shori's corporeality. He places the body at the center, the point from which racial and gendered identities begin.[7] In his 2008 article "Vampires and Utopia," Hampton argues that the Ina are unsettled because "Shori's hybridity will translate in to a change of color."[8] It is not just the change in DNA that has the traditionalist Ina concerned, it is the fact that future generations of Ina will look different. Hampton addresses the ideas of memory more directly in his 2012 article "Lost Memories". In this article, he discusses how memory is written onto the physical body and "that a body without memory is temporary" because the "body experiences events" and "absorbs meaning."[9]

Because of Shori's memory loss, issues of identity are inevitable components to discussions of race, gender and power in *Fledgling.* I intend to make memory the main focus of this discussion. The narrative Butler weaves demonstrates just how aware she was of all facets of memory. To portray a believable amnesiac, Butler had to understand, even if only in general terms, the biological, psychological, and social aspects of how memory should work and how it can fail. She also shows her grasp of the integral part memory plays in identity construction.

Ina Physiology

Although Butler implies that the anatomy of humans and Ina are nearly identical, Ina are more physically enhanced than humans. The deviations from what we would consider 'normal' in regard to Shori's physical and mental injuries, and how she heals, can be

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[5] Davis, 173.
[6] Govan, "Review" 43.
[7] Hampton *Changing*, n.p.
[8] Hampton "Vampires," 80.
[9] Hampton "Lost," 277.

attributed to their superior physiology Readers discover the differences in the hints and pieces as well as by direct comparisons just as Shori and Wright learn. An early comparison Shori makes is to her teeth. She sees nothing odd about her teeth until she compares them to Wright's and sees that hers are "sharper, but smaller," and her "canine teeth…were longer and sharper than his" (18).[10]

These differences in the teeth are necessary for Ina to survive and take nourishment. Shori has a flash of memory when she answers one of Wright's questions: "All I need is fresh human blood when I'm healthy and everything's normal. I need fresh meat for healing injuries and illnesses, for sustaining growth spurts, and for carrying a child" (19). Iosif confirms this a week later when he tells Wright, "we have much longer lives than humans. Most of us sleep during the day and, yes, we need blood to live" (63). Iosif also explains to Wright that even at 53, Shori is still a child. She will go through "one more important growth stage…Her child-bearing years will begin when she's about 70 [and] she should live about 500 years" (64).

In addition, Ina strength and senses are more enhanced. They can "see in the dark" (39) and hear and smell things that humans cannot. When Shori leaves the cave she "scented a doe…stalked her, killed her, ate as much of her flesh as [she] could…[and] took part of the carcass up a tree" (6). Later in the story after the Gordon's community has been attacked, Daniel Gordon calls to Shori. While still in her house, she "had heard him even though he had not left his house and he had known that [she] would hear him" (178).

Ina also heal faster than humans do. Wounds that would kill a human or at the very least leave them disfigured or disabled are 'serious wounds' that they fully expect to heal. Shori's broken skull heals, the burns over her whole body (which would have been fatal to a human) heal without scars. This healing took place in a matter of a couple of weeks. Ina can also regrow body parts. Katharine Dahlman is judged guilty of having Shori's symbiont, Theodora, murdered. By Ina written law, she must "have both [her] legs severed at mid-thigh" (303). Shori finds little comfort in this punishment because "in a year or two, she would have legs again and be fine" (303).

At the beginning of the novel, Shori wakes into pain, unable to function physically or mentally. We know that she has serious head injuries from the very first page of the story

[10] In keeping with the idea of memory as recollections of the past and to stay true to the novel's first person narrator, most quotes from *Fledgling* are in the original past tense.

when she assesses the damage and notes, that it "hurt to move" (1), and her "head felt crusty and lumpy and...almost soft" (1). She is also blind.

As her body heals, Shori thinks more coherently and her mental functions begin to return. Once she leaves the cave, she relearns how to walk and move her body, she recognizes objects around her, she remembers how to feed and clothe herself, and she finds her way to the ruin of her family's community. However, her memory of who she is does not heal; her life before waking up in the cave is a blank. In other words, she has amnesia.

Amnesia

Damage to the brain, particularly to the frontal or temporal lobes can cause retrograde amnesia, which is the extensive loss of pre-incident memories:[11] "Simply put, amnesia is the loss of long-term declarative memory."[12] Declarative memory is the memory of things we can intentionally call to mind. People with such encompassing loss of declarative memory, however, still retain some unimpaired components of memory.[13] Shori's amnesia is a "relatively pure form-a loss of past events with little evidence of other cognitive impairment."[14] When she meets the Leontyevs for the first time, Konstantin asks, "'You don't remember...anything?'" and, Shori replies,

> "Not people or events. I remember language. I recognize objects. Sometimes I recall disconnected bits about myself or about the Ina in general. But I've lost my past, my memory for my families, symbionts, friends" (207).

Later, when the Council of Judgment questions Shori about the extent of her memory loss, Katherine Dahlman says,

> "I'm sorry to ask you about things that may be painful to you...but what do you remember about your mothers and your sisters?"
>
> "Nothing," I said. "Nothing at all..."
>
> "You recall no names? Nothing?"
>
> "Nothing." (242)

Shori is able to easily recall new information but remembers nothing of her past:

Damage to the front part of the brain often causes a loss of personal memories but leaves general knowledge intact.[15] The soft, lumpy areas on Shori's head could indicate

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[11] Rupp, 65.
[12] Beatty, 408.
[13] O'Connor and Verfaellie, 145.
[14] Beatty, 408.
[15] Shimamura, Wheeler et al, in Kowalski and Westen, 207-8.

damage to this area. The DSM-IV[16] states that "[i]ndividuals with amnestic disorder are impaired in their ability to learn new information or are unable to recall previously learned information or past events."[17]

Amnesia may also result from "[p]sychic trauma [that] involves intense personal suffering."[18] People who experience a traumatic event dissociate as the event is happening.[19] The experience, and its survival, can create a gap for the event "at the expense of simple knowledge."[20] Dissociative amnesia is a psychologically recognized disorder "characterized by an inability to recall important personal information, usually of a traumatic or stressful nature, that is too extensive to be explained by ordinary forgetfulness."[21]. Preston has just this theory as a partial reason that so much of Shori's memory is gone. He tells her:

> You should have been, by all reckoning, only a husk of a person, mad with grief and rage or simply mad.... I wonder if that's part of why your memory is gone, not just because you suffered blows to the head, but because of the emotional blow of the death of all your symbionts, your sisters, and your mothers—everyone. You must have seen it happen. Maybe that's what destroyed the person you were (267).

The same traumatic event that ripped Shori's entire life away from her is also partly responsible for tearing away her memories; her mind just cannot process the catastrophic loss.

Shori's amnesia puts her at a steep disadvantage. Her memory loss represents a complete loss of identity; without a personal history, she cannot define who, or what, she is. Because she cannot create a mental representation of herself, she has no self.[22] Also, Amnesia is an invisible disability, and because of the Ina capability of perfect recall, Shori is marked as different and her people use it as an excuse "to exclude her from the Ina race."[23] She must relearn about her history and rebuild her sense of self.

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[16] *Diagnostic and Statistics Manual of Mental Disorder IV*. It is the primary diagnostic resource compiled by the American Psychological Association (APA).
[17] DSM-IV, 172. Amnestic disorders "are characterized by a disturbance in memory that is either due to the direct physiological effects of a general medical condition [In Shori's case, brain trauma] or due to the persisting effects of a substance"
[18] Caruth, "Preface" vii.
[19] Putnam in Van Der Kolk and Van Der Hart, 168.
[20] Caruth, "Trauma" 7.
[21] DSM-IV, 519. "The essential feature of the Dissociative Disorders is a disruption in the usually integrated functions of consciousness, memory, identity or perception" (DSM-IV 519)
[22] Kihlstrom, Beer, and Klein, 69.
[23] Hampton "Lost," 269.

Shori struggles to survive while learning about herself, her kind, and her position within the Ina and human cultures. In the beginning of the story she does things because it 'feels right.' Afterwards, she analyzes her actions to try and discover more about herself. When she first meets Wright, she does not know what she wants from him, but after she bites his hand, she knows. Shori then takes a bite into Wright's neck and takes enough blood "to satisfy a hunger [she] hadn't realized [she] had until a few moments before." (12). Her brief contact with her father's community and her stay at the Gordon's community create an environment for Shori to begin relearning about Ina ways. She asks questions and reads books. She learns how to build a family of symbionts and interact with them, and at the same time, she learns how to live among Ina.

Anatomy of Memory

Memory happens in the brain. Researchers believe the brain makes permanent physiological changes to store long-term memories. Brain structure can alter by strengthening existing neuronal connections at the synapses. In other words, how the cranial neurons behave toward each other changes when learning takes place and new long-term memories are formed.[24] The brain also changes with learning by creating new connections between neurons: the cells grow new dendrites (Figure 1). This "new synaptic growth…strengthens connections between neurons."[25] These two alterations in the brain work together to produce learning and store the information as memories for retrieval and use at a later time. The third process, the creation of new neurons, is a very recent discovery.[26] But where are these memories processed?

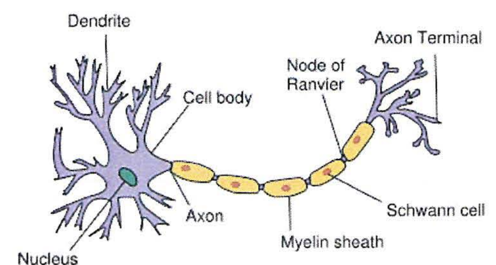

Figure 1: A neuron - the main sell type of the central nervous system. Creative commons license.

[24] Beatty, 431.

[25] Beatty, 431.

[26] For several reasons, scientists believed that it was impossible for new neurons to propagate in the adult brain (Beatty 432). "There is new, very strong evidence that the primate brain *does* manufacture new nerve cells in adulthood in precisely those brain regions that are likely to store newly learned information" (emphasis in original) (Gould, et al. in Beatty 432).

The most primitive parts of the brain, the hindbrain and midbrain, process information first. Information passes through here to other parts of the brain for use and consolidation into memories (Figure 2). The major parts of the hindbrain include: the medulla oblongata, which is responsible for the automatic regulation of "vital physiological functions;"[27] the cerebellum, which is "involved in movement...[and] in learning and sensory discrimination;"[28] and the reticular formation, which is "most centrally involved in consciousness and arousal."[29] Among other things, the midbrain processes orientation "to visual and auditory stimuli."[30] This is the area of the brain that helps coordinate movement in relation to sensory stimuli. Because of this, damage to higher brain structures may result in a sense of blindness while still eliciting a response to visual stimuli. At the very beginning of *Fledgling*, the processes of the midbrain help Shori locate food in the cave even though she is blind and badly injured; she thinks, "I should be able to locate the creature by the noise it was making. Then...maybe I could catch it and kill it and eat it." (2).

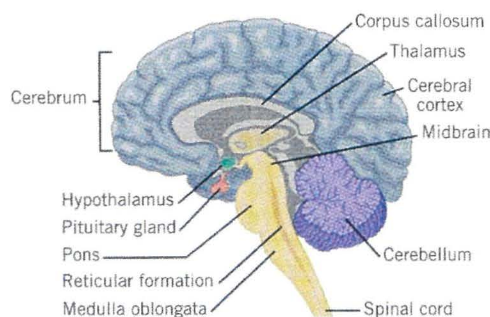

Figure 2: The Hind- and Mid- Brain (Kowalski and Weston, 78).

Whereas the functions of the hind- and mid-brain are largely automatic and function outside conscious control, the functions of the sub-cortical forebrain, though still mostly automatic, are much easier to observe by the behaviors they cause (Figure 3). Some parts of this area are the hypothalamus, thalamus, the basal ganglia, and the limbic system-which includes the amygdala and hippocampus. Shori's behavior clearly shows the workings of these brain areas.

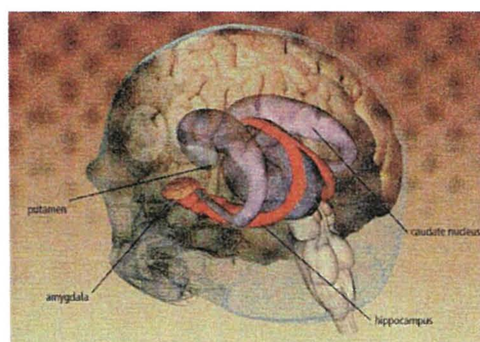

Figure 3: The Sub-Cortical Forebrain (Kowalski and Weston, 80)

First, the hypothalamus, located just forward of the top of the midbrain, assists in regulating many behaviors, "including eating, sleeping, sexual activity, and emotional experience."[31] Shori's sexual encounters show a unique trend in regard to her relationships with humans. Even though she cannot remember ever having sex with anyone, and she looks like an eleven-year-old girl, her body responds in a way that makes her know

[27] Kowalski and Westen, 79.
[28] Kowalski and Westen, 79.
[29] Kowalski and Westen, 79.
[30] Kowalski and Westen, 79.
[31] Kowalski and Westen, 82.

that she is capable and ready for a sexual encounter with Wright Hamlin on the night they meet. To his shock, she tells him, "'I'm old enough to have sex with you if you want to'" (21).

Working closely with the hypothalamus is the thalamus, located above the midbrain and hypothalamus. It processes "incoming sensory information and transmits the information to higher brain centers,"[32] where it is used to perform higher order mental tasks. The use of sensory input is clear throughout the story as Shori uses her enhanced senses to make judgments and decisions. At the ruin of her father's community, she is investigating a house she had not entered on her previous visit and finds the remains of a symbiont that had been "burned to ash and bone" (98). She examines the place, "trying to recognize the scent, realizing that [she] couldn't because it was the wrong scent, that of a dead male whom [she] had not met… [in a] house [she] had not entered" (98).

The parts of the brain do not work independently but rather in parallel, such as in the processing of sensory input and sensing it as an emotional experience. For example, the first time Shori feels rain after waking in the cave, she feels the rain "falling from the sky, gently pounding on [her] skin" (3). The thalamus processes the sensation and transmits the feeling so her higher brain functions can recognize it as rain. At the same time, her hypothalamus helps her decide that she likes the feel of the rain on her skin. (3)

Another part of the sub-cortical forebrain is the basal ganglia structures. They "have been linked to various forms of *nondeclarative* memory, particularly 'procedural' types of memory that depend on a motor act for their realization." [33] This is also the area of the brain that is involved in snap decisions and initial impressions that we seem to make without consideration. Shori does this when she meets Wright, she does not know what she is looking for or where she is going; her "memory was so destroyed that [she] didn't even know what [she] wanted from him, but his scent pulled [her] into the car with him" (123). She decides to go with him based on the judgment and first impression of his scent.

And, working in conjunction with the other parts of her sub-cortical forebrain, her basal ganglia produce a positive response to her father when she sees him for the first time after her trauma. She "liked his voice at once, and he smelled…safe somehow…his scent made [her] feel safe, although [she] couldn't say why" (61).

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[32] Kowalski and Westen, 82.

[33] Tranel and Damasio, 41. Emphasis in original.

The last major part of the sub-cortical forebrain is the limbic system. Its major parts are the septal area, whose functions are unclear, the amygdala and hippocampus.[34] "The amygdala is crucial to the experience of emotion,"[35] and plays "an important role in emotional memory."[36] When Wright wants to take Shori to a hospital, her body automatically slips into a protective mode using memories that she does not have access to. She knew that "[t]here would be a lot of people all around" and that frightened her. She could not remember why, but her body gave her the physical signs that it remembered. Wright argued that doctors might be able to help her. But the "idea of going among them" scared her (9). "When Shori meets her father, the loss of her memory prohibits a strong emotional response to what should have been a joyful reunion."[37] And as Iosif remembers his mates, Shori's mothers, and "deal[s] with his obvious pain" (74), she "found that [she] almost envied his pain. He hurt because he remembered" (74).

Remembering is a large part of who we are and what we can do. "The hippocampus plays an important role in committing new information to memory"[38]. It holds 'information during the process of memory consolidation elsewhere."[39] The hippocampus "is [also] the file cabinet for factual memories."[40] It appears to have "an unlimited storage capacity for more information."[41] It is clear by her actions and responses that Shori's hippocampus functions correctly after her head injuries. At one point, when Daniel Gordon is explaining the procedures for the council, he asks, "'Will you remember what I say? Do you have any trouble remembering new things?' 'None at all,'" she responds (221). A short time later as she prepares to go into the council, she asks Preston to tell her about the members so she will know them. She informs Preston, "If you tell me about them now, I'll remember what you say" (227) He replies, "I don't doubt it" (227), implying that he believes her innate Ina ability of perfect recall in not impaired.

But where does all that stored information get used? Higher mental functions take place in the cerebral cortex, which has "two hemispheres, each of which has four lobes"[42]: the occipital, parietal, temporal, and frontal lobes (Figure 4). It has two areas.

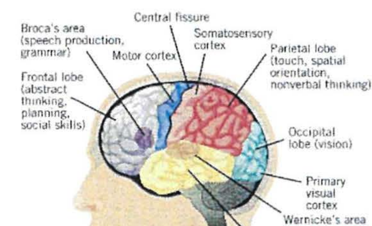

Figure 4: The Cerebral Cortex (Kowalski and Weston, 83)

[34] Kowalski and Westen, 82.
[35] Kowalski and Westen, 82.
[36] Tranel and Damasio 43.
[37] Govan, "Fledgling" 43.
[38] Kowalski and Westen, 82.
[39] Beatty, 410.
[40] Sprenger, 450.
[41] Sprenger, 51.
[42] Kowalski and Westen, 86.

The primary areas "usually process raw sensory data,"[43] and the association areas "are involved in complex mental process such as perception and thinking."[44]

The occipital lobes, located at the back of the brain process visual data. The first indication that Shori suffered damage to her occipital lobes comes during her first moments of consciousness. She "couldn't see [her] own hands as [she] held them up in front of [her]. Was it so dark then? Or was something wrong with [her] eyes? Was [she] blind" (1)? After she ate her first meal and slept again, and she started to heal. "When [she] awoke, [her] darkness had begun to give way, [She] could see light again" (2). Shori believes that her eyes had been damaged, but it is probable that the massive head injuries damaged her occipital lobe.

Above the occipital lobes are the parietal lobes. They are "involved in the sense of touch, perception of movement and location of objects in space."[45] Even in her blindness, Shori is able to identify things she is touching and that she is lying down. She tells readers, "I clutched at whatever I was lying on.... Gradually, I understood that I must be lying on the ground-on stone, earth, and perhaps dry leaves" (1) Shori's ability to identify things by touch indicate that both sensation – the process of gathering "information about the environment through sense organs – and perception – the process the brain uses to "organize these sensations" – are unimpaired. [46]

Located at the sides of the brain are the temporal lobes. Parts of these lobes "are important in hearing, language, and recognizing objects by sight."[47] This area, which appears to be less damaged, allows Shori to hear before she is well enough to see. She is able to identify sounds and determine what made them. She "heard something coming toward [her], something large and noisy, some animal" (1-2). Her ability to recognize things she sees and to understand and use language gives further evidence that her temporal lobes remained mostly undamaged. As she wanders through the woods, she has "to look at...things, let the sight of them remind [her] what they were called" (3). She "was remembering things...perhaps because [she] saw [them]" (5). And, when Wright speaks to her the first time, it takes her a moment to recognize that the sounds were language, then it "clicked into place... [and she] understood" (7-8). She "couldn't remember ever speaking at all. Yet it seemed that [she] knew how" (8).

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[43] Kowalski and Westen, 86.
[44] Kowalski and Westen, 86.
[45] Kowalski and Westen, 86.
[46] Kowalski and Westen, 102.
[47] Kowalski and Westen, 86.

The frontal lobes, located in the front of the cerebral cortex, "perform a variety of functions, such as coordinating and initiating movement, attention, planning, social skills, abstract thinking, memory, and aspects of personality."[48] This is where everyday thinking takes place. Shori is able to use all these functions even though large parts of her conscious memory are missing. Shori quickly and efficiently coordinates her movements when she catches Wright's "wrist, squeezed it and yanked it away from [her] arm…[She] thought [she] could break his wrist if she wanted to" (10). However, she refrains from doing him any serious harm even though she has no idea of her relative strength to his.

Sensory input can overwhelm the mind if we do not choose what to ignore and what to pay attention to. Shori sifts through various sounds as she patrols the Gordon community. She listens to the activities around her and distinguishes what the symbionts are doing in different places. At one point, she "wandered back toward the house, [and she] found [herself] paying attention to a conversation that Wright and Brook were having there" (161). When the conversation ends, Shori returns her attention to the community at large, listening for intruders (163).

Planning is another type of everyday thinking that takes place in the frontal lobes. It includes forming an intention, making a plan for accomplishing the task, and executing the task. Shori makes plans when she "realized that to avoid hurting Wright, to avoid hurting anyone, [she] would have to find several people to take blood from" (15), and she executes that plan when "one by one, [she] collected them" (26)

Types of Memory

The different parts of the brain are interdependently involved in memory, but there are different types of memory. According to Jackson Beatty, "we depend on a number of different types of memories with very different functions."[49] Some scientists differentiate between the types of knowledge stored and the way the knowledge is expressed (Figure 5). They divide the types of knowledge stored into declarative memory, "memory for facts and events,"[50] and procedural memory, "'how to' knowledge of procedures or skills."[51] And they divide the way that knowledge is expressed into explicit and implicit memory, "Explicit memory involves

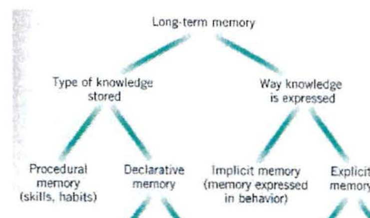

Figure 5: Distinctions in Long-Term Memory (Kowalski and Weston, 205)

[48] Kowalski and Westen, 86.
[49] Beatty, 404.
[50] Kowalski and Westen, 204.
[51] Kowalski and Westen, 204.

the conscious retrieval of information:"[52] knowledge stored as declarative memory. "Implicit memory refers to memory that is expressed in behavior but does not require conscious recollection:"[53] knowledge stored as procedural memory.

It is, therefore easier to make a simplified hierarchy as Beatty and Sprenger do (Figure 6). First, procedural memory becomes non-declarative memory for clarification. Then, declarative memory equates to explicit memory and non-declarative memory to implicit memory. Explicit memory is subdivided into two categories: semantic and episodic memories. Implicit memory is subdivided into automatic, procedural, and emotional memories. When memories are stored in more than one category, "they become even more powerful."[54]

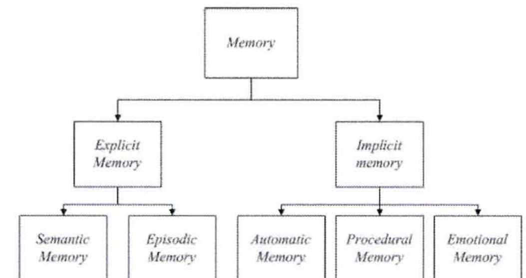

Figure 6: A Simplified Hierarchy.

The first of two divisions, explicit (declarative) memory, "refers to those things that one can bring to mind and declare."[55] Both Beatty and Rupp explain that explicit memory is essentially the memory of knowing *what* or *that*.[56] "Episodic and semantic memory are two different forms of declarative memory."[57] "'Episodic memory' refers to memory for specific events, including memory for when and where events occurred. 'Semantic memory' refers to memory for facts, including general knowledge about the world."[58] "[E]xplicit memory appears to depend crucially on a system linking the hippocampi with the temporal and frontal lobes."[59]

Semantic memory is what supplies the generic data that we need to function. It is "meaning related"[60] and therefore "commonly defined as referring to knowledge of language, concepts, and facts that do not have a specific time or location."[61] "[C]onceptual knowledge about the world"[62] resides in semantic memory and, therefore, is crucial "because it constitutes the knowledge base that allows us to communicate, use objects, recognize foods,

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[52] Kowalski and Westen, 206.
[53] Kowalski and Westen, 205.
[54] Sprenger, 62.
[55] Beatty, 405.
[56] Beatty, 405; Rupp, 24.
[57] Manns and Squire, 81.
[58] Manns and Squire, 81.
[59] Baddeley, 4-5.
[60] Beatty, 405.
[61] Kopelman, 192.
[62] Snowden, 293.

react to environmental stimuli, and function appropriately in the world."[63] Patients with amnesia often keep their semantic memories; "their general word knowledge and knowledge of word meanings remains intact."[64]

When Shori entered Wright's cabin, she "looked around and immediately recognized that [she] was in a kitchen. Even though [she] could not recall ever having been in an intact kitchen before, [she] recognized it and the things in it" (17). Shori's semantic memory provides her with information when Theodora tells Shori about working in a library, and Shori "wondered what work was done in libraries, then knew" (38). This type of memory "constitutes a body of *general knowledge*... [it is considered] the memory of *knowing*" (emphasis in original).[65] Shori has no problem knowing general facts.

Semantic memory "must be stimulated by associations, comparisons, and similarities."[66] For this reason it may fail to produce the information in a timely manner or even at all. On the other hand, when the brain work properly and has adequate stimulation, the information becomes available without difficulty. Shori remembers information by association when she is walking along the road at the beginning of the story. She "had walked on it for some time before [she] remembered the word 'road,' and that lead [her] to [her] remembering cars and trucks, although [she] hadn't yet seen either" (7).
Associations often trigger memories for Shori as she sees and does things. Physical marks in a meadow also trigger memories. She associates the marks with a helicopter:

> I found marks on the ground, marks that were wrong for a car or a truck. There were two of them—long, narrow indentations too narrow and far apart to be tire marks. The word helicopter occurred to me suddenly, and I found that I knew what a helicopter was. I had a picture of one in my mind—clear bubble, rotor blades on top, metal structure sweeping back to the tail rotor, and two long runners instead of wheels. (41-42)

Shori is also able to determine that another Ina had been at the ruin by comparing the new scent to hers and Wright's scents. She samples the scent and realizes, "[i]t's a different scent-more like [her] than like [Wright] even though he's male" (41).

In contrast to semantic memory, episodic memory "is the personal memory for events in one's past."[67] Episodic memory "refers to a person's recollection of past incidents and

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[63] Snowden, 293.
[64] O'Connor and Verfaillie, 145.
[65] Beatty, 405.
[66] Sprenger, 51.
[67] Beatty, 405.

events, which occurred at a specific time and place…[T]he terms 'autobiographical' and 'episodic' are often used interchangeably."[68] Shori's amnesia robs her of this "sense of self."[69] This missing part of herself causes her distress:

> All of my life had been erased, and I could not bring it back. Each time I was confronted with the reality of this, it was like turning to go into what should have been a familiar, welcoming place and finding absolutely nothing, emptiness, space. (132)

And when talking to Margaret Braithwaite she says, "I've forgotten almost everything I spent fifty-three years learning" (212).

Researchers suggest that episodic memory has some "invisible components"[70] that have "evolved as specialized adaptations."[71] One of the most important specializations is memory that deals with location. We remember some information because it is related to a place.[72] Shori has some spatial memories from before the attack, though they are vague and unclear. When she first gets to the ruin of her mothers' community, she expects to find food but remembers nothing about the place (5). However, most of her spatial memories are gone with the rest of her episodic memories. Iosif takes her back to his community and into his house, a place that should be comfortable and familiar to her, but she does not remember the house or the people she knew there (71, 76).

Yet, her spatial memory for new events functions normally. Using her perfect recall, she can reconstruct the events of her first waking moments and analyze them by visualizing the cave. She "went back again, to [her] memory of the cave…[She] thought about the animal and its odd behavior" (27). She relives and re-sees what happened in the cave and realizes to her grief and horror that what she "had killed…and eaten…in the cave had not been an animal. It had been a man" (27), her brother's symbiont Hugh Tang. While Shori's explicit memory, most especially her episodic memory, is missing large amounts of data from before the attack, her implicit memory appears to be mostly unharmed.

Implicit memory, or non-declarative memory, is all the memory systems that are not declarative.[73] This is the type of memory that happens outside of our conscious control and "is evident in skills, conditioned learning, and associative memory."[74] "Anatomically, the

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[68] Kopelman, 192.
[69] Beatty, 405.
[70] Sprenger, 52.
[71] Tarpy, 512.
[72] Sprenger, 52.
[73] Beatty, 405.
[74] Kowalski and Westen, 206.

various types of implicit memory appear to reflect different parts of the brain, depending upon the structures that are necessary for the relevant processing."[75] Procedural and automatic memory are closely related and are stored in the cerebellum[76], whereas emotional memory is stored in the amygdala.[77]

Procedural and automatic memory "can run on autopilot."[78] Automatic memory is also called conditioned response memory).[79] The memories are triggered by certain stimuli and the stimuli regularly produce the same memories. In other words, it is an input equals output type of memory. Long after a person quits smoking and the physical addiction is gone, certain social situations will trigger a response that make the ex-smoker want a cigarette. This is not because of a physical need for the cigarette but years of conditioning that this type of situation always involved smoking. Similarly, children struggle to learn their multiplication tables, but after they are memorized, seeing or hearing "3x3" automatically produces the memory "9". The same memory should present itself when repeatedly presented with the stimulus "3x3" even in later life.

Procedural memories are more complex. This part of explicit memory "refers to changes in performance that result from experience, but which are not accessible to, or available in, conscious recall."[80] The memories may "form without conscious effort" but "at other times…are 'residues' of prior conscious knowledge and strategies, which have become automatic and highly efficient"[81] like tying a shoe. Procedural memories are of processes[82]; sometimes this is called muscle memory.[83] For example: "skilled performers do not need to concentrate on their actions."[84] "The expert appears to do the task automatically."[85]

Many of Shori's actions appear to be automatic throughout the story. As she leaves the cave and starts walking, she does not know where she is going. But she heads straight for the ruin of her mothers' community. Shori wonders how she "had known to [go] there" (5):

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[75] Baddeley, 7.
[76] Tranel and Damasio, 42; Sprenger, 52, 53; Rupp, 77.
[77] Tranel and Damasio 33; Sprenger 54
[78] Rupp. 24.
[79] Jensen in Sprenger, 53; Kowalski and Westen, 206.
[80] Tranel and Damasio, 27.
[81] Kowalski and Westen, 205.
[82] Sprenger, 53; Beatty, 406.
[83] Rupp, 24; Sprenger, 52.
[84] Norman, 60.
[85] Norman, 89.

> [The] houses were close to the cave where I had awakened. I had gone straight to them from the cave as though my body knew where it was going even though my memory was gone. (34)

She is also using procedural memories when she feeds. The first time Shori takes Wright's blood, she does it in a knowing way. She knew after it was over that she had done it correctly. She relies on her body's actions and responses to lead her:

> He had enjoyed it-maybe as much as I had. I felt pleased, felt myself smile. That was right somehow. I'd done it right. That meant I'd done it before, even though I couldn't remember. (12)

After she collects more humans to sustain her to avoid hurting Wright by feeding on him too often, she recounts: "I didn't understand it, but I had done it in a comfortable, knowing way. I had done it as though it was what I was supposed to do" (26).

The last major type of implicit memory is emotional. The amygdala stores emotional memories and "[contains] all sorts of experiences that [make] you happy or sad or any other feeling you can name."[86] And sometimes we do not even have factual memories to explain the emotional memories.[87] Many things can trigger emotional memories such as the smell of a certain perfume that causes happy memories. Shori experiences these types of emotions over and over again and because her episodic memory is gone she usually cannot put factual memories to the emotions.

The first time she has an emotional memory is when she sees the burned ruin. Her emotions override her hunger and she chooses to investigate the ruin first (5-6). She experiences other emotions when she sees Theodora's office. Unlike the exacting neatness in the rest of the house, Theodora's desk "was the most disorderly mass of stuff [she] had run across, and yet it all looked-felt-familiar" (89).

Some emotional memories can be dangerous because "[the] brain always gives priority to emotions."[88] When this happens stress hormones may be released and people may make decisions that they would not normally make if they were thinking rationally. When "emotional memory takes over, you may lose all logic."[89] Just prior to the second night's meeting of the Council of Judgment, after Shori found out about Theodora's murder, she talks to Preston. He tells to her:

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[86] Sprenger, 54.
[87] Sprenger, 56.
[88] Sprenger, 54.
[89] Sprenger, 54.

> Think about why this was done, Shori. You were very much in control of yourself last night. If your memory were intact, you wouldn't have been, you couldn't have been so calm as you sat in the same room with the people who probably had your families killed. I don't think you were expected to be calm. I think the Silks and perhaps the Dahlmans expected you not only to look unusual with your dark skin, but to be out of your mind with pain, grief, and anger, to be a pitiable, dangerous, crazed thing (265).

The Silks, who ordered the attacks on Shori's families and the Gordons, were likely counting on Shori's loss of emotional control to help them win in the Council of Judgment.

Even at the beginning of the story, Shori loses her logic to emotion when Wright wants to take her to a hospital. She "panicked. [She] unfastened the seat belt that he had insisted [she] buckle and pushed aside the blanket [and] turned to open the car door" (10). She tries to jump out of his moving car in order to escape what she fears. Later, as Shori searches for other human to feed from, she is faced with her fear of guns, of being shot, when she enters Theodora Harden's bedroom the first time:

> I…knew suddenly that there was a gun in the room. I smelled it. It was a terrifyingly familiar smell. I almost turned and ran out…I stood still until my fear quieted. I would not be shot tonight (25).

Shori "recalled being shot once before…[She] remembered the hammering of the bullet" (24) and the intense pain. But she remembered nothing else about being shot.

Personality and Identity

Kowalski and Westen point out that "[m]emory is so basic to human functioning that we take it for granted."[90] When faced with Shori's massive memory loss, her father "can't even pretend to understand what it's like… [for her] to be missing so much of [her] memory" (74). However, these memories "help us make decisions, affect our actions and reactions, and determine our course in life."[91] Studies show that patients with bilateral damage to the frontal lobes "demonstrated severe impairments in autobiographical memory retrieval."[92] These autobiographical memories "supply evidence of what we believe ourselves to be."[93] For

[90] Kowalski and Westen, 193.
[91] Sprenger, 62.
[92] Kopelman, 190.
[93] Rupp, 9.

Shori, all these memories are gone. She is "not only empty of a past, but lack[s] a foundation upon which to build a future."[94]

The night before the Council of Judgment began, Konstantin and Vladimir Leontyev, the fathers of her mothers arrived. They were confused when Shori introduced herself as someone they had never met before even though they have known her from birth. Shori explains that she has amnesia and that "If I knew you before, I'm sorry. I don't remember you now" (207). She goes on to tell them, "I'll have to get to know you all over again. And you'll have to get to know me. I can't even pretend to be the person I was before the injury" (208). Not only are Shori's fathers, brothers, mothers, and sisters dead, but because of the memory loss, her living family is gone to her as well.

From the very beginning of the novel, Shori is determined not to remain impaired or defenseless. She knows that knowledge is the only way to rebuild her identity as well as to become productive not merely surviving. Butler creates mystery and anticipation by building a plot in which both Shori and the reader discover who she is at the same time.[95] This also provides a way for Butler to present her unique version of vampire lore as a mission of discovery rather than in lengthy passages of uneventful exposition. Shori's search for knowledge and self-discovery begins as soon as she has conscious thoughts, because, as Hampton argues, "the body begins to generate memory and identity instinctually."[96]

As she walks naked through the rain, she remembers a social behavior that she must have been taught but does not know why or by whom. "Being naked had seemed completely normal until [she] became aware of it. Then it seemed intolerable" (4-5). More indicators of Shori being a social creature begin to appear when she meets Wright Hamlin. Until she sees him she did not know how desperately she wanted contact with another person. She "felt almost as hungry for conversation as [she] was for food" (9). And when she and Wright return to the ruins the first time, Shori gets excited about finding a new scent, a male of her own kind. She hopes the visitor "may be [her] relative" and "may be able to tell [her] about [herself]" (41). Not only does she want to establish a social context for herself, she hopes that she can start rebuilding some of her past.

But not everything she knew is lost. While Shori's episodic memories are gone, her implicit memories reveal much about who she is. Her interactions with Wright help her to

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[94] Rupp, 9.
[95] Lacey 381. See also Smith, S. 388.
[96] Hampton "Lost," 277.

begin "understanding who and what she is and is not."[97] Wright simply asks her name and Shori "opened [her] mouth to answer, then closed it" (9). Her body responds to the question as if it were natural to answer and that it should have an answer. However, she realizes that the expected information is missing. A short time later, in Wright's house, Shori says, "Give me a name" (13). This is her first conscious step to building a new identity.

Even before Shori relearns the hows and whys of being with symbionts, she behaves in ways that show she learned the lessons long before her amnesia. After she bites Wright in the car the blood on his hand makes her "unable to think of anything else" (11). She knew instinctively "hands weren't as good for getting blood as wrists and throats were" (11). Though Shori "wanted to bite him again," she "didn't want him afraid or angry. [She] didn't know why [she] cared about that, but it seemed important" (11). Shori cannot remember why earning Wright's trust was necessary, but her reactions to the situation clearly indicate prior learning. Otherwise, she probably would have given in to the blood-lust and hunger, but instead of letting the blood-lust take over, she continues to lick the wound on Wright's hand.

Treating humans in such a way to keep them safe also seems to be a lesson Shori has remembered even without conscious knowledge of it. It also shows that she is a caring person. She 'knew' that she "would have to be careful about taking blood from him. [She] understood – or perhaps remembered – that people could be weakened by blood loss" (15). Later, at the Gordon compound, Hayden tells Shori that Ina females

> "learn early to be careful of what they say…It's one of their first and most important lessons. I believe that's a lesson you've remembered in spite of your amnesia." (195)

It is clear to others that Shori cares about protecting those she bites whether they are her symbionts or not.

Even her physical responses elicit half-formed memories when a learned behavior makes her "intensely uncomfortable" (53). The first time Shori bites a man that had been bitten by someone else his reactions bring back an idea, though not a full memory. Iosif had bitten Raleigh and given him instructions to guard the ruins and not talk about what had happened to him. When Shori bites him three times, he "should have been eager to tell" (53) her what she wanted to know. When she reasons out what must have happened, Shori "began to feel ashamed" and "as though [she] owed Raleigh and apology" (53). After the attack on the Gordon's compound, Shori bites one of the attackers and then has to guide him through

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[97] Hampton, 269.

the interrogation. Though Victor was one of the people who had killed her families and tried to destroy her and the Gordons, she still felt compassion toward him. She tells him, "You do your best for us, and I'll do my best for you" (179). She ponders her actions and reactions and concludes that "[w]hoever [she] was before, it seemed [she] had strong beliefs about what was right and what wasn't" (54).

Yet, all of her personality is not gone with her memories. Some of who she was is evident in her behavior, both to herself and to others. It is clear that even though her memory from before waking in the cave is severely impaired, her present memory is fine. And she refuses to be treated as though she is still defective in some way. When Shori asks a question regarding the Council of Judgment the Gordons "look at [her] as if [she'd] said something very stupid" (194). She lets her annoyance with their attitude show. During her first conversation with the Leontyevs, they assume that the Gordons had found her. Shori replies angrily, "I found them…Only my memory of my life before I was hurt is impaired" (208). As much as she hates not knowing things that any Ina should, Shori hates being treat as stupid much more.

She is ignorant not stupid. Shori knows this and is grateful for all the knowledge she can acquire. Shori's search begins the first day she spends at Wright's house. She asks him straight out, "Can you get information for me?...About memory…and about vampires…Maybe there are bits of truth mixed into the movies and folktales" (28). During a conversation with Daniel Gordon she tells him, "'So much of my memory is gone that I'm grateful for any knowledge. I need to know the consequences of what I do'" (185). She is desperate to learn about who and what she is.

In a discussion with Preston, Shori claims to know nothing about being Ina. He responds, "You do, I believe, even though you don't realize you do" (152). And during the Council proceedings he advises her to "do this according to custom…You, more than anyone, must show that you can follow our ways…You must seem more Ina that [*sic*] they" (266). Shori is concerned that she doesn't have the information to follow Ina ways, but Preston assures her, "You know enough. When you don't know, ask." (266). The Council members who favor the Silks or are undecided would use any breach of etiquette as evidence that Shori is not Ina because of her modified DNA.

Conclusion

Memory is a complex thing that is dependent on the proper functioning of the brain. While people often take their memories and thoughts for granted, memory helps them survive

every day. Having self-knowledge and the ability to construct a personal history are crucial to the development of a "self-concept and self-image."[98] Our personal history provides a way to "exist in the present."[99] As Zerubavel points out, "maintaining a continuous identity is virtually impossible without the essentially 'adhesive' act of memory."[100] Our memories make us who we are.

The memories left to Shori help her not only survive, but begin building her new life, protect her new family, save the Gordons' community, and face the Council of Judgment. While she does not have access to any episodic or self-referencing semantic memories,[101] she has other types of memory available to her that help her survive. The procedural memory that guides "actions (motor or mental) [to] achieve some goal"[102] enable Shori to act appropriately to unfamiliar situations and then learn from what she does. Different aspects of memory "operate concurrently at multiple levels of awareness,"[103] and self-expression is possible through implicit means.[104]Shori acts like she knows what she is doing and then later uses her logic and reasoning to sort out what happened. She learns from everything she does because her mind is empty of episodic memories.

Shori may not know explicitly how to be Ina, but integral parts of her culture are still there in her implicit memory. Shori's interactions and intimacy with her symbionts highlight how naturally she behaves like other Ina. The Ina always take a few drops of blood whenever they are intimate with their symbionts. Early on in her relationship with Wright, Shori recounts that she "only took a few more drops of his blood while [she] enjoyed sex with him" (37). Several more times throughout the book, there is mention of different ways in which she takes small amounts of blood from her partners simply for pleasure.

Additionally, Shori has no problems sharing intimacy with her female symbionts, and they also enjoy being with her. The Ina appear to have no gender biases when it comes to symbionts. Their attraction to symbionts lies more in what their enhanced senses tell them rather than what the body looks like. Wright is truly upset with this idea when he learns that Shori will collect other symbionts and share with them the intimacy that he has come to enjoy and need. He demands to know if Shori had sex with the others she has been taking blood from, clearly not happy to share her (84). And then is shocked to realize that she "swings

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[98] Kihlstrom, Beer, and Klein, 72.
[99] Hampton "Lost," 266.
[100] Zerubavel, 40.
[101] Kihlstrom, Beer, and Klein, 72.
[102] Kihlstrom, Beer, and Klein, 72.
[103] Mischel and Morf, 24.
[104] Mischel and Morf, 23.

both ways" (85). Shori on the other hand is "startled and confused" (85) because she does not see them as male and female, but rather just symbionts with whom she wishes to share intimacy.

In kind, the human symbionts lose their gender biases in regard to their Ina. Shori's encounter with Theodora gives the first evidence of this in the novel. After Shori goes to Theodora a few times, Theodora kisses her and Shori recounts: "After a moment of surprise, I kissed her back. I held her, and she seemed very comfortable in my arms" (38). Later in the book when she has taken over the symbionts of her dead father and brother, she shares a highly charged sexual encounter with Celia. She tells Celia, "I know how to take my pleasure with you…Will you teach me to pleasure you?" (248).

By the end of the novel, Shori is well on her way to becoming a knowledgeable, not just capable, Ina. She has a solid foundation in her new family of symbionts, a plan to reeducate herself, and a commitment to mate from the Gordon sons. She would rebuild the Matthews family and start building bonds with other Ina families, beginning with the Braithwaites who thought she would "make a damn good ally someday" (310).

Conclusion

This look at some of Butler's novels is far from comprehensive. However, my endeavor was to show how a new perspective can open up texts that are sometimes burdened with an overwhelming focus on a particular aspect or for a particular agenda. Octavia Butler was an African American woman writer who wrote about strong black female protagonists. But her stories are about more than racial and gender oppression. They are about humanity: what we are, where we are headed, and who we can potentially be.

I chose to look at collective memory and group identities, individual identities within social structure, narratively constructed identities, and stolen identities. The novels I chose are not the only configuration I could have chosen to explore these ideas. This just happens to be the way I was inclined to look at the stories of my favorite storyteller. I could just as easily have talked about the narrative nature of identities in *Kindred*, or the collective identities in *Seed to Harvest*, which is the collected Patternist novels (*Wild Seed, Mind of My Mind, Clay's Ark,* and *Patternmaster*). Even though the ways in which I address Butler's texts in the first three chapters easily applies to *Fledging*, this novel uniquely lends itself to a discussion about catastrophic loss of memory and identity.

Butler wrote in the afterword to "Near of Kin" that it "has nothing to do with my novel *Kindred*."[1] She claims it is just a story inspired by her Bible reading: "A sympathetic story of incest."[2] But, there are similarities that go much deeper than the titles. In each text, the protagonist needs to learn about her history to understand who she is and where she came from. And for each of them, the history is hidden in shame and denial. Dana must come to understand and accept the realities of slave culture, the shameful acts of rape that Rufus commits which produce her ancestors, and the fact that her family record has left out the information that Rufus is white. The narrator in "Near of Kin" is trying to figure out who she is in relation to the rest of her family after her mother dies. She feels abandoned by her mother and without any family continuity until her uncle admits to being her father.[3] The narrator of "Near of Kin" can also be compared to Asha in *Parable of the Talents;* both characters are struggling to understand themselves in relation to mothers who were unable to care for them.

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[1] Butler *Bloodchild*, 85.
[2] Butler *Bloodchild*, 85.
[3] Butler *Bloodchild*, 82.

In *Mind of My Mind*, Mary struggles against Doro and his demands in an effort to assert her individuality. She may not face the widespread slavery of antebellum Maryland but she is a slave to Doro and his breeding program. Both Mary and Dana, in *Kindred*, must constantly strive to build and defend an autonomous self-image. Mary eventually escapes Doro's domination when she kills him in a battle over her refusal to obey. She makes Doro "a member of the Pattern. A Patternist. Property. Mary's property."[4] Then she consumes him. This mirrors Dana's escape from Rufus when she kills him rather than succumb to the fate of most female slaves.

Every one of Butler's protagonists struggles with issues of self-definition. Anyanwu, in *Wild Seed*, must figure out how to avoid being overrun by Doro's demands and the control he has over her; Lauren must define herself in relation to her budding religion; Lilith must come to terms with being the 'mother' to a new species; Shori must relearn what it means to be Ina at the same time she learns what it means to be herself. The depth of Butler's characters reflects the complexity of our everyday lives and our everyday struggles to maintain a consistent self-concept in a world that continually wants us to be something other than we are.

Instead of discussing the collective identities in *Lilith's Brood*, I could have discussed the collective nature of Ina communities. Ina live in clearly defined ways; male families and female families live in separate but close-knit groups that include their symbionts. These groups closely resemble the trade villages in *Lilith's Brood*. Just as mates in Oankali families become physically bound to their ooloi, the symbionts in *Fledgling* are bound to their particular Ina. In both cases, this bond is mutually beneficial. The humans live much longer and healthier lives; their mates share incredible sensual pleasure; and the stable family group gives them the freedom to develop their interests.

The genetic 'purity' of the group is also challenged in both novels. In *Lilith's Brood*, it is the humans who are concerned with species purity and react violently to the gene trade with the Oankali. The roles are reversed In *Fledgling*. Conservative Ina are violently opposed to the genetic experiments that the more forward-thinking Mathews family conducted. The Silks are horrified that the 'purity' of the Ina race is tainted by the miniscule addition of human DNA to their genome, which gives Shori her dark skin and the ability to function during the day. Both the resisters and the Silks choose genetic purity and stagnation over the

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[4] Butler, *Seed to Harvest, 450.*

potential improvements and evolution of their races. The us-them divide in both novels leads to violence and suffering because of essentialist thinking.

Butler also explores the idea of genetic difference in a less overt way in *Seed to Harvest.* Eli, who brings back an alien microbe in *Clay's Ark*, struggles to keep his community of infected humans separate from the rest of humanity in an effort to avoid contaminating them. His efforts fail and chaos ensues at a national level. The damage has created a type of post-apocalyptic landscape in the far future of *Patternmaster.* In this novel, the Clayarks have mutated into a distinct species and they clash violently with the remaining humans, both groups trying to control the area that was once Southern California.

Like Lauren in the *Parable* novels, Butler has other characters who are writers. Like Butler, herself, these characters turn to the art of writing to create identities for themselves as well as for others. Dana and Kevin in *Kindred* define themselves as writers even when they need to work other jobs in order to eat. And Martha from "The Book of Martha" is a novelist. In this short story, God asks Martha to make one change to "help humankind to survive its greedy, murderous, wasteful adolescence."[5] It is her creative power as a writer that allows her to come up with the solution: Each person will find happiness in his or her own dreams. It is a sign of Butler's own creative power that she created a utopia that is individually tailored.

We cannot put literary characters into an fMRI machine any more than we can sit them in a therapist's chair. However, they reflect what we know about being human, even if the characters themselves are not. Well-developed characters can make us see ourselves in ways that can at times be very real indeed. Sometimes we come to know them even better than we know some of the people that are closest to us. That is the power of good writing. As a representation of the issues, challenges, fears, and hopes of the 'real' world, literature tells the stories we need to remember, to understand, and to live. So, it only makes sense that the tools we use to look at the world around us should be the same tools we use to look at the worlds talented authors create.

We use many different critical tools to interpret and understand the world around us. Since the civil rights era, we have actively developed ways to deal with issues of gender, race, ethnicity, culture, class, disability, and even consumerism. All those ways of looking at what is going on in our everyday lives have made their way into our study of literary texts. Memory studies is no exception. Because memory studies is such a highly interdisciplinary field, I am surprised it has taken as long as it has to bring literary studies into the family. I

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[5] Butler *Bloodchild*, 192.

hope this look at Butler's texts shows that by opening up the ways we traditionally look at certain texts we can gain a more multi-faceted view of those texts, which are sometimes viewed through a type of tunnel vision.

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