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Politics of Minor Literature: Decolonized Space and Posthumanism in *Xenogenesis* Trilogy

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Abstract | This essay examines the hierarchic structures present within Octavia E. Butler's *Xenogenesis* trilogy in order to explore the problematics of colonisation and subjugation along with the following generations of post-colonial subjectivity that lead toward a questioning of hybridization and originary voice. Consequently, this inquiry will be grounded within a broader theorization of place and space, in order to position the *Xenogenesis* trilogy within the literary space of minor literature—promoting a mode of action for minority voices within the major language of the coloniser. The text charts the paths of both individual and communal journeys, moving beyond simple understandings of self, identity, community, and place toward a more empowering recognition of and for the potential available in collective histories—toward a posthuman space where, "identity is not in the past to be found, but in the future to be constructed" (Hall 14).

Keywords | Space and Place, Minor Literature, *Xenogenesis* Trilogy, Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, Colonial Hierarchies, Hybridization, Post-Colonial Subjectivity, Posthumanism, Octavia E. Butler

"Alive! Still alive. Alive…again […] helpless, alone, and ignorant" (Butler 5). The opening lines of Octavia E. Butler's seminal *Xenogenesis* trilogy finds the primary protagonist, Lilith Iyapo, confined in a *space* of *nowhere*. Butler positions the trilogy around the central character Lilith, an African-American woman and mother to the descendant generations of the coming novels, who is awakened on an alien ship between the known world of the past and the new world to come. Consequently, the *Xenogenesis* trilogy[1] reverberates with the echo of the trans-Atlantic slave trade and the subsequent generations that must deal with the effects of a past they can never know nor escape. However, Butler's text is far from a reductive re-telling of the trans-Atlantic slave trade and middle-passage. The primary narrative conflict that remains throughout the trilogy begins with a contradiction—that of intelligence and hierarchic tendencies—and the want for power over others with the intelligence to do so. The question of *slaver* or *savior* remains throughout the novels, but Butler's text is in constant motion. As Gerry Canavan posits, Butler "made science fiction 'messy' – or, rather, showed how messy it had always been," offering that "there are no easy answers, no manifestos or utopias to be found within her pages" (15–16).

Consequently, it is with regard to these *spaces* of colonization, hierarchy, and generational motion and change that this essay will take a line of flight. However, it is not the intent of this essay to necessarily revise or offer a solution to the problematics of hierarchy but, in a rather Butlerian way, to posit the import of an active mode of questioning that sews the seeds of new possibilities within the problematic(s) of colonization and hierarchic tendencies through a close analysis of the three novels—*Dawn* (1987), *Adulthood Rites* (1988), and *Imago* (1989)—of the trilogy.

By exploring the generational descendants affected by the initial act of colonization, Butler situates the import of the act of questioning one's position, *place*, and *space* in-the-world as paramount. Echoing this sentiment, and acting as something of an epithet to this essay, Derrida offers, "[…] the question is such, and such the nature of my answer, that the place of the one and the other must constantly be in movement. If words and concepts receive meaning only in sequences of differences, one can justify one's language, and one's choice of terms, only within a topic [an orientation in space] and an historical strategy" (70). It is the act of *questioning* then, that will ground the over-arching inquiry into the problematic(s) of colonization and the potential for the generations that follow to speak toward new trajectories of *being-in-the-world*—toward the act of questioning one's own *place* and *space in-the-world*, as an ethical act of *care*. *Place* and *space* then will be differentiated and determined by *lived experience*. Broadly speaking, *place* will be shown to differ from *space* with regard to physicality and

[1]Of note, the *Xenogenesis* trilogy was rebranded in 2000 as *Lilith's Brood*, but this essay will continue to use the author's originally published title.

location. However, this is not an attempt to reduce *place* to mere locality, but rather to illustrate that *place* and *space(s)* coexist and overlap—that both *place* and *space* affect and are affected by each other—specifically that *space can* exist both inside and outside of *place*.

What remains is a question of *space*, *place*, and *perspective*(s); speaking to both the individual and the collective, the minor and the major, and the colonizer and the colonized. However, prior to an engagement with the simple, yet seemingly esoteric questions that drive the overarching critical considerations for this essay, a working differentiation between *place* and *space* must be constructed. The construction of this critical and conceptual model will enable a threshold or passage toward the metaphoric *spaces* of authorial *lived experience* and *embedded historicity* that are in motion both inside and outside of the narrative, speaking toward a consideration of the heterotopic *space(s)* of reflection, contestation, challenge, and subversion present within the *place* of the text. However, "the heterotopic site is not freely accessible […] Either the entry is compulsory, as in the case of entering […] prison, or else the individual has to submit to rites and purifications. To get in one must have a certain permission" ("Of Other Spaces" 26).

Consequently, for the purposes of this essay, as mentioned above, *place* can be understood as differing from *space* with regard physicality—it is the terrain upon which *space*(s) are in motion. In accord with this differentiation, Michel de Certeau in *The Practice of Everyday Life* offers *place* as "an instantaneous configuration of positions […] implying an indication of stability" (117). Andrew Merrifield similarly defines *place* as "the terrain where basic social practices – consumption, enjoyment, tradition, self-identification, solidarity, social support, and social reproduction, etc., are lived out […] *place* is where everyday life is situated" (522, italics added). Similarly, J. Nicholas Entrikin, suggests that "[f]or this reason our relations to place and culture become elements in the construction of our individual and collective identities […] that as individual agents we are always 'situated' in the world" (1, 3). Here, Entrikin is highlighting the relationship between "*place* and culture," or rather what will come to be realized as the relationship between *place* and *space*, as primary to individual and communal identity. Consequently, if *place* can be understood as the terrain, the ground on which one stands—where *life as such* unfolds—then *space(s)* must be considered as the social, historic, and cultural sphere(s) active and mobilized within a given *place*—as *life as such*.

In *The Production of Space*, Henri Lefebvre posits that *space* is neither a material object nor an empty or static vessel; *space* is not a thing. Rather, *space* "subsumes things produced and encompasses their interrelationships in their coexistence and simultaneity" (73). *Space* then, quite simply, speaks to relations. If *place* can be conceived as the material object or "ground," *space* is the flow that passes within and without, above and below—both inside and outside of that constructed *place*-ness. As De Certeau posits, *space* is "composed of intersections of mobile elements […] modified by the transformations caused by successive contexts" (117). For Merrifield, space is "alive," "it embraces the loci of passion, of action and of lived situations" (523).

Further, Lefebvre offers that these interrelationships, as coexistent and simultaneous—specifically under capitalism—are hierarchically fragmented within a

space of power relationships whereby, "[e]verything that is dispersed and fragmented retains its unity, however, within the homogeneity of power's space; this is a space which naturally takes account of the connections and links between those elements that it keeps paradoxically, united yet disunited, joined yet detached from one another, at once torn apart and squeezed together" (365–366). Space then, as interrelationships and hierarchically fragmented power relationships, speaks directly to subjectivity—toward a phenomenological perspective of multiplicities, accounting for both socio-cultural-histories and individual lived experiences—both determining subjectivity and being determined by subjective experience, both the genesis and the exodus of an ontological being-in-the-world.

If it can be accepted then that De Certeau, Merrifield, Entrikin, and Lefebvre are speaking to *place* as the physical environment of our living experience in-the-world, and *space* as the subjectivities and perspectives of lived experience and socio-cultural histories, then for the purposes of this essay, *place* can be understood as both the literal narrative setting of the text and the geographic location of its production—referring to both the generic positioning and authorial location—as the *place* or terrain of *lived experience*, where life as such unfolds. *Space* then is life as such, both inside and outside of the text, both the protagonists and antagonists of the literal narrative as well as the *lived experience* and *embedded historicity* of authorial and generic *place*.

As a result, the conceptualization or imagining of *space* as such opens a passage for a renewed and enriched consideration of subaltern voices, by way of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's notion of minor literature. Minor literature, much like Lefebvre's differential *space*, speaks to the experience of difference within a given place, to a type of discrimination based on difference. Consequently, minor literature and minority voices are both part of the homogenous whole and simultaneously fractured from it—both "inside and outside" (Lefebvre 355). As a result, the text as minor literature will be posited as the *connector* between an individual and collective enunciation, between experiences of *place* and *space*—as Derrida's "la brisure"—both a breach or separation between the two as well as a hinge that links both the past-present and present-future, the individual and the communal (66–67). The *space* of minor literature then speaks to the necessity of a political reading, experimentation, and activation for Butler's *Xenogenesis* trilogy, prompting the overarching question that drives this essay, which asks: How does the work chart the paths of both individual and communal journeys, moving beyond simple understandings of self, identity, community, and place, toward a more empowering recognition of and for the potential available in their collective histories—toward a space where, as Stuart Hall suggests, "identity [individual or communal] is not in the past to be found, but in the future to be constructed" (14)?

However, before proceeding with Butler's trilogy, it must be understood that in *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, Deleuze and Guattari posit that minor literature is not a lesser literature, nor the literature of a minority language, "it is rather that which a minority constructs within the context of a majority language," both a part of the major language and separate from it—a fragmentation that is both inside and outside the homogenous whole (16). However, Gregg Lambert in his recently published *The People are Missing: Minor Literature Today* (2021) elaborates, offering that the minority voice within a major language is not limited to syntax, to a type of creolization or pidgin version of the major language, but rather that, "a minority [is] defined by the absence of a state-

form and territorial location, that is, a distinctive political identity" (Lambert 116). Accordingly, the major language as such can be understood as speaking to the larger socio-historic-cultural sphere or *place* of power and governance. Minor voices and minor literature then can be understood as a *space* of action, politics, and collectivity for the author and the broader collective voice(s) of their respective group, operating both within and separate from the majority sphere of political, social, and economic power and dominion. Minor literature speaks to subaltern voices and diasporic experience. Consequently, the author, according to Christopher Warnes is "ambivalently positioned both inside and outside metropolitan culture, they could neither accept the terms of Western cultural hegemony nor reject them entirely" (41).

Therefore, because minor literature is both inside and outside the major language, it can neither wholly submit to the major language nor can it exist as fully separate. As a result, minor literature is "insistently political; it constructs out of the reigning deployments of power" (Barnett 552). Minor literature then, much like Donna Haraway's cyborg writing, "is about the power to survive, not on the basis of original innocence, but on the basis of seizing the tools to mark the world that marked them as other," whereby "cyborg authors subvert the central myths of origin in Western culture," specifically the fallacy of transcendental signification, as if there was an origin of origins, universal for all narratives and lived experience (2215). However, minor literature is not limited to a point of entry for the text but speaks more broadly toward a potential line of flight away from majoritarian nationalism without reducing minority groups, as Lambert offers, into "ethnic minorities or nationalist subgroups that […] fall prey to nationalism, populism, tribalism, religious fanaticism and racism" (113–114).

In order to ground the concept of minor literature, Deleuze and Guattari posit that there are three principles that all minor literatures presuppose: [1] there is a *deterritorialization* of the major language (*Kafka* 16), whereby a group of hierarchically organized relationships (differential *space*) within a given terrain or territory (*place*) are reorganised, creating new contexts, relationships, and new sensibilities. Meaning that minor literature, and consequently the act of deterritorialization, does not function to represent the minor voice within a majority language, "but rather constructs a real thing that is yet to come, a new type of reality" (*Thousand Plateaus* 142). As a result, the act of deterritorialization challenges or rather changes the territory of the majority language, reterritorializing it (the major language) into new contexts; it is an act of deconstruction and appropriation, subversion and revolution, thus enabling the second and third principles: [2] that "everything in them is political" and [3] "everything takes on a collective value" (*Kafka* 17).

"It is a literature that produces an active solidarity […] if the writer is in the margins […] this situation allows the writer all the more possibility to express another possible community and to forge the means for another consciousness and another sensibility" (*Kafka* 16–17). Meaning that, according to Lambert, for a work of minor literature to exist, the artist/author must have the capacity for an *idea* that coincides with, or is supported by a people or cultural group willing and able to accept and embrace this *real thing yet to come* or *new type of reality*. As Lambert posits, "it is only when [these] two powers encounter each other in a work that the idea has actual existence," that the "artist or writer must merge with the objective idea of the people who must recognize it as their own idea" (119–120). Lambert here speaks to the import and knowledge of the

external limiting structures (spatial and temporal) that delimit and frame any creative act within a context of engagement—from where does one speak, and with what voice. As a result, minor literature speaks toward heterotopic *spaces*—which according to Michel Foucault is "a sort of simultaneously mythic and real contestation of the space in which we live" ("Of Other Spaces" 24).

However, Deleuze and Guattari, in their desire to establish "the conditions of the [creative] act" deny "the *fact* of individual enunciation in their axiom that *there are only collective assemblages of enunciation* […] avoiding the need for any dialectical mediation between the individual and the collective" (Lambert 122). Lambert notes and has offered significant regret in this regard, in that "readers have failed to apply their concept [minor literature] to all literature and not only works written by minorities, thus reattaching the category of the subject as 'the connector' in the relay to collective enunciation" (123). In this way, Lambert highlights minor literature as speaking toward a heterotopic "system of opening and closing that both isolates them and makes them penetrable" ("Of Other Spaces" 26). Foucault offers, "We are in an epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and the far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed. We are at a moment, I believe, when our experience of the world is less that of a lifelong developing through time than that of a network that connects points and intersects with its own skein" (22). These Juxtapositions "of the near and the far […] of the dispersed" speak to heterotopic *spaces*, offering something of an echo to Deleuze and Guattari's *space* of minor literature as being "something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites […] are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality" ("Of Other Spaces" 24). Consequently, in Lambert's regret and call for an actualization of Deleuze and Guattari's conceptual framework toward all literature, we find evidence and potential for the subject (work/text) to act as a *material-force* or *place* of transmission—a passage between the past and present, between *place* and *space*(s)—that continues to produce effects into the future. It is the hinge or heterotopic *space* that represents, contests, and inverts differential experiences, connecting the individual and collective enunciations toward a more empowering recognition of and for the potential available in shared socio-historic-cultural journeys.

In turning toward our *material-force*, the *Xenogenesis* trilogy, it is found that Butler is an African-American female author writing within the genre Science Fiction—a genre which, according to Butler in an interview with Gerry Canavan, "since its inception has been, as she put it, 'nearly all white, just as until recently, it's been nearly all male'" (Canavan 15). Butler completed the *Xenogenesis* trilogy during the late 1980's, a time when the genre, according to Thulani Davis of the Village Voice,[2] "lacked the richness and possibilities she sought in her own life: futures in which living black cultural communities survive, grow, and influence the world around them" (De Witt and Ranu 353). Davis argues that the genre "commonly create[s] futures in which white men thrive and dominate" (De Witt and Ranu 353–354). As a result, Butler chose to *write herself in*—speaking from a *space* of lived experience—both inside and outside of the whole, a

[2]De Witt and Ranu, are summarizing from Thulani Davis's 1983 essay in the Village Voice, "The Future May Be Bleak, But It's not Black" pp. 17–19.

minority voice writing within the majority language of Science Fiction,[3] writing as though it were happening in her neighbourhood. Butler challenges and subverts the majority language of Science Fiction that has traditionally spoken to an "imperiled white masculinity" and conquest, toward what De Witt and Ranu posit as a *space* more akin to both her individual and collective cultural experiences, highlighting "the difference that a writer's unique social and historic embodiment can make in her work" (355). By *writing herself in*, Butler adds an imaginative engagement and testimonial authority that enriches her work with a renewed intimacy and more comprehensive modes of contact.

By situating Butler's text as minor literature, and in accord with De Witt and Ranu's position, the text can be seen to function as an act of deterritorialization by speaking to Butler's own *space* of both lived experience and socio-cultural histories that deconstruct the primitive territory of Science Fiction toward the reconstruction of new sensibilities and things *yet to come*, creating new realities and possibilities for the collective voice that Deleuze and Guattari favour. Consequently, Jeffery A. Tucker posits that Butler's text informs "the construction of the subject position from which Butler writes, and enables an assertion and celebration of intra- and extra- textual and cultural diversity that the novel and its author endorse" (171). As a result, Butler's text becomes the *connector* or "la brisure," between the individual and the collective, encouraging a mediation between the two that Lambert champions with regard to all literature, minor and major. In moving forward then, to the *place* of the text, we find that the *Xenogenesis* trilogy presents a narrative of an initial rupture, abduction, colonization, and subjugation; and the consequent generations of resistance, hybridization, and creolization that follow. The *space* of the trilogy is one of movement, dislocation, change, and survival. Narratives of hierarchic authority are present from the beginning to the end, but as Canavan offers, "there are no easy answers, no manifestos or utopias to be found within her pages" (15–16).

Set roughly 250 years in the future after an apocalyptic event on earth—an event of humanity's own doing—the remaining humans are involuntarily "rescued" and displaced from their known world to an "otherworldly" space-craft (where they remain for the first novel), only to be genetically modified, hybridized, and later re-integrated with a *posthuman* earth. The remains of humanity are now the minority in an alien world that they are both a part of and separate from. The alien *Oankali*, as they call themselves, look like bipedal sea mollusks and are covered with tentacles. They are "gene traders" who seek difference and intend to inter-breed with the remaining humans to create a new hybrid species between the two. The remaining humans have been genetically altered with heightened immune systems, extra strength, and increased lifespans, but their ability to reproduce (in the normal human way) has been removed due to what the *Oankali* refer to as humanity's contradictory aspects of intelligence and hierarchic tendencies—the want for power over others and the intelligence to do so. However, it is this contradictory aspect of intelligence and hierarchic tendencies that becomes a quantifiable difference for the *Oankali* to their own supposed value of life, qualifying them to rule, govern, and

[3]It should be noted that Science Fiction is spoken of as the majority language, but more broadly, it could be said that Butler, as an African-American female author, is a minority voice in the English language. As Deleuze and Guattari note when talking on Kafka, "this [minor literature] can be compared in another context to what blacks in America today are able to do with the English language" (17).

subject humanity to their own accord: "They need us now. They won't have children without us. Human sperm and egg will not unite without us" (Butler 245).

Of interest however, regardless of the very plain language that speaks to planetary destruction and colonisation, Canavan notes that "much of the academic criticism on the novel […] has taken the *Oankali's* side of the debate," whereby the *Oankali* "seem on the surface to be quite compatible witnh the postmodern, postcolonial politics of difference" (83). As examples, Canavan cites Donna Haraway's presentation of the *Xenogenesis* trilogy as an "ironic salvation history," Nolan Belk's focus on "vegetarianism" and suggestion that the "goal" for the *Oankali* is "to work for the betterment of life," and Nick DiChario's characterization of the *Oankali* as "non-hierarchical, non-violent, very cooperative" which Canavan offers is "probably the 'intended' reading of the novel" (83). However, it is the intention of this essay not to take one or the other side, but rather to activate the *space(s)* the work speaks to, producing a dialogue that effectively engages with the inevitable "becoming" that generational distance from an originary moment inevitably produces.

Regardless of the *Oankali*'s claim to adore all life—to the point of vegetarianism—their logic of a "flawed human nature" speaks to a type of enlightenment rationality whereby they create a dominion by way of *same-ness*. Meaning, the dominant power exudes control over the subaltern (or minority) *other* through and by a way of difference, whereby those who do not exhibit the *same* priorities as the ruling class, are considered beneath and need ruling. The *Oankali* speak directly to a colonial mindset whereby they are quick to "critically ascertain the other with little attempt to recognize the other" (Léger 92–93), speaking to a language of colonial subjugation and the inability to see the *other* as a unique cultural group. The remaining humans of the *Xenogenesis* are told "it will be done our [Oankali] way. Not yours" (Butler 74). By the end of the first novel, the reader learns that some of the remaining humans have been returned to earth, but Lilith, the primary protagonist of the first novel and *mother* to the coming hybrid generations, remains on the interstellar ship. Given the option of a painless death presented as a "gift," "[i]f you want it," Lilith choses the future, she chooses to survive (Butler 43–44). However, this survival comes with a high price, which in reality is an act of *extreme violence*. Given a *choice* to die, presented as a *gift*, the *Oankali* violently thrust upon Lilith by way of her *choice* to survive, as Canavan notes, the "inducement to accept anything that follows as the result of her own 'choice' to live" (85). The price Lilith pays for such a choice is the repeated presentation of "eroticized rape" (Canavan 85): "Your body said one thing. Your words said another […] This is the position […] Be grateful" (Butler 190). She is later told that she has been impregnated in the *Oankali* way, without consent. Lilith learns that she will bear the first hybrid children, and is told by Nikanj, her *Oankali* captor, that, "Your children will know us, Lilith. You never will" (112). In the final pages of the first novel Lilith is told, "[o]ur children [*Oankali* and human hybrid] will be better than either of us" (247).

Lilith experiences a violent displacement and rupture from a known world, and consequent subjugation by a foreign body that impregnates her against her will. She is raped and offered no consolation but an expectation of "motherhood" and is told that it is what *she* wanted, that she is "ready," that "nothing about you but your words reject this child" (247). Jeffery A Tucker posits that "although she does develop affection for her offspring, 'Lilith's response to her pregnancy echoes the ambivalent feelings of these

women slaves whose pregnancies were the result of forced mating's or rape'" (30). *Dawn* and Lilith speak to a world of forced acceptance and non-consensual adaptation, to survival, to the subjectivities of a colonised and enslaved people, to a world of rape and utter dependence, to the history and legacies of the trans-Atlantic slave trade and its lineage for African-American diasporic experience(s).

Though the first novel, *Dawn*, speaks toward the major language of earlier Science Fiction, that of an alien invasion, colonialism, and conquest—a genre criticized by Ursula K. LeGuin as having a "habit of casting the future as the 1880s British Empire"—the *Xenogenesis* trilogy refuses to set the stage for a grand rebellion by the remains of humanity (qtd. in De Witt and Ranu 354). Rather, according to Sharon DeGraw, Butler challenges "the traditional (white, male) Western concept of heroism which requires unconditional resistance to 'tyranny' no matter the cost, in this case, individual death and/or extinction as a (human) race" (6). He posits that, by casting an African-American woman, Lilith Iyapo, as the primary protagonist of the novel, Butler speaks to "the importance of patience, of understanding the oppressor, and of compromise to ensure the survival that one day might lead to freedom, independence and equality" (6). DeGraw suggests that "[a]s an African-American woman, Butler's experiences may shape her feminist expectations and more broadly her belief in the possibility of progressive social change" (6).

Despite DeGraw's statement speaking to a rather antiquated notion of feminine passivity, her position can perhaps be better understood as speaking to Butler's metaphoric restructuring of the middle-passage and the trans-Atlantic slave trade, which constituted the capture, enslavement, and forced movement from a known world to a new world, whereby the captives were at the absolute mercy of their new rulers. This "middle passage" as Charles Piot suggests, echoing Paul Gilroy in the *Black Atlantic*, is a *place* where "time stopped and started again" (158). It is a *space* that Butler speaks to in order to use "historical imagery of the Middle Passage to convey physical as well as metaphysical shifts that extend beyond the past and into the present and future" (Lillvis 80).

Piot furthers the import of this "originary moment" as having as much constitution toward the formation of African diasporic culture(s) as the "heterodox identities that result from cultural mixing" (158). However, it is this "cultural mixing" that Gilroy prioritizes in his attempt to sever African-American or black Atlantic culture from the "primacy of connection that has long been posited between black America and Africa [re-reading] black expressive forms and the works of North American black intellectuals in a transoceanic, transnational perspective" (qtd. in Piot 158). While *Dawn* speaks to Piot's position of the middle passage as an "originary moment," *Adulthood Rites* and *Imago* will begin to sever (as Gilroy posits) the connection to a past that has been lost, speaking toward a trans-species perspective and new identities that can no longer strictly be linked to a past which can never be known.

Consequently, Butler speaks toward the import of authorial locale, lived experience, and embedded historicity. Gerry Canavan offers that Butler once said, "If we are interested in stories about brutal invaders who come in technologically advanced ships from far away, who kidnap, murder, rape, and enslave, we do not need to look to outer space; that is already Earth's actual history" (15). This is a sentiment echoed by

John Rieder, positing that it is not just the "fevered imagination of science fiction writers but rather the bare historical record of what happened to non-European people and lands after being 'discovered' by Europeans and being integrated into the capitalist world economy from the fifteenth century to the present" (374). For the African slaves who moved to the *new world*, much as the remaining humans in the new *Oankali* earth, this was not a battle to be won, but one that was lost before it began. Lilith and the remains of humanity are left with little choice, merely to survive or die. However, the *Xenogenesis* trilogy is far from a reductive future oriented retelling of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. With Butler's trademark ambiguity, the second and third novels move beyond the loss of an ancestral homeland and identity, a *space* of *nowhere*, and rather speaks toward the creation of new identities that are the effect of such an act, as *now here*.

Adulthood Rites, the second novel of the trilogy, introduces Lilith's first male Human-*Oankali* hybrid child named Akin—a name that speaks to his mother's human heritage, a Yoruba word meaning "hero." Within the English language "akin" means to be of relation or similar in character, almost the same but not quite. Akin exists between and within worlds, with relation (social and genetic) to both the Humans and the *Oankali*. Born into this new world, never knowing a human world prior to the *Oankali*, nor an *Oankali* world sans humanity, Akin operates in a *space* of overlap and eccentricity both within and outside of each. Much as Lillvis describes Caribbean and American black subjectivity for the generations that came after the trans-Atlantic slave trade, Akin and his fellow Human-*Oankali* hybrids, "did not pre-exist the colonial act, but were literally the creation of that act" (Wynter, qtd. in Lillvis 101).[4] To the same degree, as W. E. B. Du Bois posits with regard to the "double-consciousness" of African-American experience in an emancipated America, Akin is "born with a veil" and "ever feels his two-ness […] two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body." Akin's journey speaks to "[t]he history of the American Negro […] this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self [and] in this merging he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost" (Du Bois 2–3).

Within the second novel, we find Lilith and her brood in a village on Earth occupied by several "new" families, each composed of two humans (male and female) and two *Oankali* (male and female) with a third-sexed (neither male nor female) *ooloi Oankali* at the center. The *ooloi* are the gene manipulators, with the ability to carry out reproduction between species, occupying a *space* of hierarchic privilege amongst both the Human and the *Oankali*. Regardless of his new-ness and difference, the humans of the new Earth are drawn to Akin. "He's beautiful […] He looks completely Human" (Butler 254). However, soon after the second novel begins, Akin is kidnapped by resisting humans due to their own inability to have children and the fact that he still looked more human than *Oankali*. Following his abduction, Akin is sold by his captors to a resister village. Given no choice but to accept his position as *property*, Akin *chooses* to acquiesce as an act of survival, echoing Lilith's own *choice* of survival in *Dawn*. Akin experiences a middle-passage in his own right (though in something of a reversal of Lilith's experience)—he is dislocated from his known world and subjected to new identities. Consequently, there is an interesting shift in the narrative speaking to

[4]Here, Lillvis is citing Wynter with regard to the translation of Glissant, in her "Beyond the Word of Man: Glissant and the New Discourse of the Antilles." *World Literature Today*, vol. 63, no. 4, Autumn 1989, pp. 637–48.

perspectives of something lost, and a bifurcation of time and *space* that the middle-passage commands in both regards. Akin is the product of both the original middle-passage as well as a second middle-passage of his own abduction. Consequently, and perhaps even more so than Lilith, Akin occupies what Édouard Glissant refers to as a "liminal temporality" whereby he "must chart alternative postcolonial chronologies in order to understand not only […] time but also […] identity" (qtd. in Lillvis 100).

Having been told only the *Oankali* perspective of the *rescue* and *salvation* of Humanity—of the necessity of *trade* as being *natural*—Akin, via his abduction, experiences the loss of control and non-consensual exploitation of another living *being* for *trade* (monetary or genetic) that was subjected onto the Human race by the *Oankali*. Though fearing for his life, Akin witnesses simultaneous acts of kindness and violence, attraction and repulsion, love and fear, contradiction and ambiguity. Akin is conflicted by these "resister" humans he was told to fear—these humans that "could be dangerous" (Butler 264).

Left to live among his human captors, Akin learns that the *Oankali* "want him to know the humans […] they want him to learn so that later he can teach" (Butler 376–379). Here, Akin's position, as subjugated onto him by the *Oankali*, resonates toward the colonial mimic man—what T.B. Macaulay suggests as "a class of interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern […] a mimic man raised through our […] School […] a corps of translators […] employed in different departments of Labour" (qtd. in Bhabha 128). Macaulay's mimic man, according to Homi Bhabha, is seen less as an individual, but as a tool, "[h]e is the effect of a flawed colonial mimesis"[5] (128). Left alone with the humans that he was taught to *fear*, Akin sees his human captors as a walking contradiction of love, fear, hatred, and kindness, making him wonder, "[w]ho among the *Oankali* was speaking for the Humans? […] that it might not be enough to let Humans choose either union with the *Oankali* or sterile lives free of the *Oankali*? […] He was *Oankali* enough to be listened to by other *Oankali*, and Human enough to know that resister Humans were being treated with cruelty and condescension" (Butler 404).

Akin is rescued after years amongst the humans and returns to the extra-terrestrial ship, choosing to speak for the humans and gains support. However, he soon realizes that the generations to come "will be an *Oankali* species […] and the Humans will be extinct […] something we consumed […] What are we then that we can do this to whole peoples? Not predators? Not symbionts? What then?" (Butler 443). He is told quite simply that the *Oankali* are "[a] people, growing, changing" (444). Akin speaks to the heart of colonization as an act of consumption, presenting a language that acknowledges humanity's right to live as they are. However, when the *Oankali* leave Earth, they leave behind only a husk of a planet. His only success is in the consolation that the humans who will not pair with *Oankali* mates will be sent to a colony on Mars, but they will ultimately die, even with their reproduction restored. Without question, Akin acknowledges and accepts that the humans will not survive, that they could only hope for a "long, slow death." Akin is told by an older, earlier form of his *Oankali* brethren that

[5]Here, Bhabha is referring to both: T.B. Macaulay, "Minute on Education," in *Sources of Indian Tradition*, vol. II, ed. William Theodore de Bary, New York, Columbia UP, p. 195; and Mr. Thomason's communication to the Church Missionary Society, September 5, 1819, in *The Missionary Register*, 1821, pp. 54–55, as a limited perspective of the "anglicized" colonial subject's role in the colonial empire.

"it is cruelty. You and those who help you will give them [humans] the tools to create a civilization that will destroy itself as certain as the pull of gravity will keep their new world in orbit around its sun" (475). Yet, Akin chooses to speak for humanity.

Testifying to the flaws of the colonising body, Akin speaks to the words of V.S. Naipaul, and the positions of ambivalence as being caught in a world between worlds as "reminders of the corruption that came so quickly to the new" (Bhabha 128). Akin, speaking for Humanity, reminds us by way of Bhabha, in the words of Sir Edmund Crust, "A fundamental principle appears to have been forgotten or overlooked in our system of colonial policy – that of colonial dependence. To give a colony the forms of independence is a mockery; she would not be a colony for a single hour if she could maintain an independent station" (qtd. in Bhabha 125). Though Akin chooses to speak for the resisting humans who will not pair with *Oankali* mates, to the right of the individual and community to be able to live *as they are* or *as they choose*, he still concedes that they must go to Mars, refraining from telling them the whole truth that when the new hybrid *Oankali* species leaves Earth, "what was left behind would be less than the corpse of a world," that "[t]he salvaged Earth would finally die" (Butler 365).

Though speaking toward the requisite heroism of earlier Science Fiction, Akin acknowledges and readily admits humanity's ultimate doom—speaking and acting by way of his *Oankali* heritage—he is deciding the destiny of an entire cultural group. However, in contrast to the majority language of traditional Science Fiction, Akin the hero fails in his attempt at salvation of humanity by way of his own subjectivity and socio-historic-cultural sphere of influence. Caught between two groups, Akin cannot help but accept the logic of his *Oankali* heritage. Akin, as a middle-man of history and a new being in a changing world, accepts the situation as it is with no hope of a return to an ideal origin. His is not the voice of an absolute resistance to tyranny at any cost, but the voice of something changing—a translator between the coloniser and the colonised, a new being in a changing world. Much like Lilith before him, Akin chooses to survive, maintaining the hope for a better future-not-yet, while simultaneously accepting the futility of such an act.

Akin, as is shown with Jodahs in the third novel, speaks to Butler's own lived and socio-historical-cultural *space* as a generational descendant of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. However, both are detached from the initial rupture and origin echoing Édouard Glissant's ideations of "*transversal subjectivity* [which] like Deleuze and Guattari's rhizomatic structure of knowledge releases the individual from 'the linear, hierarchical vision of a single History,'"[6] whereby "subjects experience multiple, intersecting histories that interrupt the lasting power of a colonial past" (qtd. in Lillvis 101, italics added). Their subjectivity is not a *space* of dislocation but rather the effect and product of that dislocation and rupture. In an interview with Charles H. Rowell, Butler offers that her mother and her mother's mother were born on a plantation in Louisiana and that her grandmother "chopped sugar cane, and she also did the family laundry, not just her own family but the white family for whom they worked. She washed clothes in the big iron pots with paddles and all that" (Rowell 50). However, Butler herself was born in Pasadena, California, and she stated that "I never went to a segregated school or lived in a segregated neighbourhood, so I never had the notion that black people, or any other

[6]Lillvis, here is citing Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*. 1989, p. 66.

ethnic or cultural type, made up the world" (qtd. in McCaffery 57). Both Butler and Akin (as well as Jodahs, as is shown in the third novel) were born into a world of diversity and cultural over-lapping. In her characteristically ambiguous fashion, when speaking toward her own history as a generational descendant of the African slave trade to America, Butler highlights that she was raised in a non-segregated community. Much like Akin, Butler resides both inside and outside of the majority language of the socio-cultural dominant power—both a part of and separate from the dominant regime of power—consequently enabling the ability to speak to and for multiple cultural groups, the major and the minor.

Though the past remains present for both Butler and her protagonists of the second and third novels of the trilogy, theirs is a *space* already separated from an origin. If *Dawn* speaks to a history of the trans-Atlantic slave trade and new subjectivities forced upon a disenfranchised people by a colonising regime, *Adulthood Rites* speaks to the inevitable hybrid generations and the social *space*(s) that follow in the wake of such a disruption. Akin speaks to the ambivalence and double-consciousness of a generation that has no choice but to be affected by both a past they can never return to and a present they cannot escape, speaking to a generation of African-American experience(s) that follow the emancipation of slavery, struggling to situate themselves in a world of segregation, caught between the world of coloniser and colonised, belonging fully to neither yet affected by both.

Butler's approach of w*riting herself in*, much like Akin's want to speak for humanity, echoes Hélène Cixous' position that, "By writing herself, woman will return to the body which has been more than confiscated from her, which has been turned into the uncanny stranger on display" (Cixous 1946). Though speaking to feminist theory and writing practices—which are very much a part of any discussion of Butler's oeuvre—Cixous' idea of returning to the body which has been confiscated speaks to Akins' plight for a humanity that has been dislocated from who they are, returning them to their body(s). Similar to Cixous' call for female (minor) voices to write themselves as they are, to recognize that "my body knows un-heard of songs" (1943), so too does Akin choose to speak/write humanity into *Oankali* discourses beyond a rationality of interpretable difference that the voice humanity speaks with should be acknowledged. Though Cixous speaks specifically to the female voice, both she and Akin call for the import of minority voices and minor literature as a political and collective agency that must be acknowledged.

Consequently, the second and third novels of the trilogy speak to a *double vision* or *double-consciousness* and *ambivalence* of a second (and third) generation that cannot help but disrupt the authority of the coloniser. Bhabha offers, "[t]he menace of mimicry is its double vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority" meaning that the social *space*(s) and effects of overlapping cultural influence can no longer be accounted for within a binary dialectic between two poles positing a *place* between, but rather accounts for a *space* of movement that can deconstruct the major territory, consequently activating a body politic and collective enunciation for that minor *space* (129).

In the third and final novel of the trilogy, *Imago*, we are introduced to Jodahs, another descendant of Lilith and the first human-*Oankali ooloi*—the third sex, neither male nor female—the gene manipulators and the controlling body for reproduction. With

Jodahs, we have the completion of the new species that is both human and *Oankali*, but neither human nor *Oankali*—much like Akin. Jodahs is something new, but more so, bringing to this new species an autonomy that is no longer reliant on the colonizing *Oankali* for reproductive capabilities. While Lilith speaks to the initial rupture and loss of origin and Akin (caught in a space of in between-ness) chooses to speak for humanity's right to exist *as they are,* Jodahs speaks to new life, toward a new paradigm that while connected to both cultural groups is bound by neither. Jodahs represents both the inclusion of and departure from the binary relationship between humans and *Oankali*, offering a threshold toward the future, echoing Stuart Hall's position that began this exposition suggesting that, "identity [individual or communal] is not in the past to be found, but in the future to be constructed" (14).

Consequently, Jodahs's journey speaks toward motion, to adaptability and becoming. As a result, the bulk of the novel is invested in Jodahs metamorphosis—a time of sexual maturity. Throughout the metamorphosis, Jodahs's appearance changes, growing more head and body tentacles, looking more like *Oankali.* Reflecting on the changes occurring in its body, Jodahs states,

> "[S]omething was growing between my hearts […] Every construct had some version of it […] the *Oankali* organelle […] We were what we were because of that organelle […] *Ooloi* said we *were* that organelle – that the original *Oankali* had evolved through that organelles invasion, acquisition, duplication, and symbiosis […] Yashi, the *ooloi* called their organ of genetic manipulation." (Butler 543–544)

The interest of this passage is that Jodahs and the larger *Oankali* have already been colonised by this organelle called "Yashi" and consequently are both the products of and the producers for this continual colonisation. However, through the mating with humanity, this organelle, at full maturity would allow Jodahs to "be able to change […] to create new forms, new shells for camouflage" (547). "That's why the Humans are such a treasure. They've given us regenerative abilities we had never been able to trade for before […] Humans called this condition cancer […] To them, it was a hated disease" (551).

What becomes evident within these two small passages is the overarching ideations of diasporic movement and becoming that drive this essay and broader positioning of questioning one's *place, space,* and perspective. While *Dawn* speaks to an initial rupture and *Adulthood Rites* to a *space* of "in-between-ness" and speaking for a voiceless *other, Imago* and Jodahs testify to the inevitability of change and motion, as always already present. Paul Tiyambe Zeleza posits, specifically with regard to the African diaspora, "simultaneously a state of being, and a process of becoming, a kind of voyage that encompasses the possibility of never arriving or returning, a navigation of multiple belongings" (41). Consequently, Jodahs, even more so than Akin, exhibits a *transversal subjectivity* or *transversality*, "floating free, not fixed in one position in some primordial spot, but extending in all directions in our world through its network of branches" (Glissant qtd. in Lillvis 101). Jodahs is a continuation of this process, physically manifesting change and adaptability as a part of his very being.

Though unknowingly, a perpetuation of the initial colonisation by *Yashi* and Jodahs's genetic disposition and ability to change (by way of the *Yashi* and humanity's cancer) speaks toward a subjective space of malleability, to what Lambert (by way of Immanuel Wallerstein) offers toward an understanding of "peoplehood" as being "in no sense a primordial stable social reality, but a complex, clay-like historical product" (Lambert 115). Jodahs has the ability to empathise with his potential mates, physically shifting its appearance to appeal to their wants, desires, and needs. Jodahs is told by an ooloi, following an encounter with a potential mate, "you look like her you know […] Your body has been striving to please her. You're more brown now – less grey. Your face has changed subtly. You look like a male version of her […] We fit ourselves into our mates' kin group. You may fit in better than most of us" (Butler 588).

Consequently, Jodahs as a product of the product (ad infinitum) of the originary colonising act of the *Yashi* can no longer be viewed in the terms of his *Oankali* predecessors. Jodahs is becoming something new, though tied to a past he cannot escape and can never truly know. Jodahs is becoming what *is* instead of trying to be what *was*, appealing to the subjective desires of its potential mates, further evinced by a resister human in the closing pages of the final novel who states, "My god, if there had been people like you around a hundred years ago, I couldn't have become a resister. I think there would be no resisters" (740). However, unlike its predecessors that came in technologically advanced ships that took Humanity as its prisoner by demanding cooperation or death, Jodahs has the newly acquired ability to appeal to the subjective *spaces* and desires of its potential mates. On being asked, "Are you man or woman? […] you appear to be a young woman […] too thin perhaps, but very lovely," Jodahs reflects, "I wasn't surprised this time. My body wanted him. My body sought to please him […] I had grown breasts myself, and developed an even more distinctly Human female appearance. I neither directed my body nor attempted to control it […] It's easier to do as water does: allow myself to be contained, and take on the shape of my containers" (Butler 598–612). Jodahs's subjectivity and malleability speaks toward a posthuman diasporic identity that is fluid—a "being in a state of constant transformation that indicates the intimacy of past, present, and future temporalities as well as 'self' and 'other' identities […] 'a heterotopic self' situated in 'an equally fluid environment' that 'not only encompasses the subject but passes through it'" (Lillvis 3, 102). Its physical manifestation can consequently be paired with Haraway's "cyborg" as "this chimeric monster, without claim to an original language before violation, that crafts the erotic, competent, potent identities of women of colour" (2214).

Though still perpetuating the initial colonising act of the *Yashi*, Jodahs is less restricted by a centre-peripheral dialectic of difference and authority. The remaining humans that Jodahs encounters continue to be repulsed by the colonising *Oankali* but are drawn to Jodahs. Though not necessarily becoming one with the marginalized human resisters, Jodahs chooses, or is able to adapt to their desires, *caring* for humanity: "I smiled, liking him. It seemed I couldn't help liking the people I seduced" (723). Jodahs is no saviour, but speaks to a *space* of overlap beyond hybridization, planting the seeds of "independent life" (Butler 746), establishing, new relationships and sensibilities for a new species. Jodahs's *space*, or *being-in-the-world* is directly tied to a relational subjectivity, exemplifying what Lillvis posits as a "shift from power structures based on difference to systems rooted in posthuman solidarity" (9).

Unlike his *Oankali* predecessors, Jodahs chooses not to violently oppress humanity, but rather chooses to become more like them in order to activate new possibilities and futurities, recognizing the *space* of over-lap not as a colonizing body, but in an acknowledgement of the *spaces* at play within the *place* of the new Earth, speaking to the seeds of an "independent life" that is bound by neither a center or a peripheral perspective, but rather the acknowledgement and appeal to both voices that are simultaneously inside and outside of that *place* of consideration, acknowledging the *spaces* and movements that pass within.

Jodahs becomes the connector or Derrida's "la brisure," a rupture or distance from the colonising *Oankali* and the colonised Humanity, but too, a connecting apparatus—a hinge—encouraging motion between the two as a bilateral highway and *space* of dialogue that occurs within the "place-ness" of this new world. In opposition to the domination exhibited by the colonising *Oankali* of *Dawn*, Jodahs speaks to the language of minor literature, whereby, "[t]he genetic idea of the artist or writer must merge with the objective idea of the people who must recognize it as their own idea," preparing "the way for the confidence to create their own laws […] to become self-legislating subjects, no longer subjugated by an external authority to the status of being a minority" (Lambert 119–120). Jodahs states, "We represented the premature adulthood of a new species. We represented true independence – reproductive independence – for that species, and this frightened both *Oankali* and constructs" (Butler 742). As the trilogy comes to a close, Jodahs speaks toward a line of flight away from the previous generation's binary dialectics, but remains within a minority *space*, both inside and outside of the majority languages of Humanity and the *Oankali*. Less restricted by a centre-peripheral dialectic of difference and authority, Jodahs is not necessarily becoming one with the historically marginalized other, nor fully submitting to the dominant regime of power. Jodahs speaks toward what Lillvis posits with regard to black posthumanism's *multiple consciousness* as "viewing the self from outside the system of signification altogether" (81), allowing "the subject to understand and potentially surmount this alienation. Viewing identity as part of but separate from the system of signification corresponds with the posthuman imperative to blur dividing lines but celebrate distinctions between temporalities and subjectivities, an imperative reflected in posthuman constructions of identity and solidarity" (Lillvis 81).

Within this context or *space* of Lillvis' black posthumanism, Jodahs can be seen as echoing Lilith's words: "They change us and we change them […] I don't like what they're doing […] But they're in this with us […] some of what makes us Human will survive, just as some of what makes them *Oankali* will survive" (Butler 282). Speaking toward new futurities and identities (individual and communal) that *are not in the past to be found, but in the future to be constructed*, Jodahs echoes Haraway's position that argues for the "*pleasure* in the confusion of boundaries and for *responsibility* in their construction […] in the utopian tradition of imagining a world without gender, which is perhaps a world without genesis, but maybe also a world without end. The cyborg incarnation is outside salvation history […] the cyborg has no origin story" (2191, italics in original). With no origin story, one must create new identities in the present-future, challenging, contending, and subverting Western narratives of linearity and colonisation toward a posthuman subjectivity with multiple belongings and connectivity. Though Jodahs and the Human-*Oankali* hybrid generations are in many ways a continuation of

the *Oankali* rupture and colonization of humanity, it is the choice to speak for the voiceless other, along with the adaptability and concern for the needs and desires of humanity that was missed by the original colonizing regime that speaks to the potentials of new, unknown futurities—a *space* where worlds and identities can be created anew. Consequently, it is the questioning of *space* both inside and outside of any given *place* that takes priority. Much in line with Butler's characteristic ambiguity, eccentricity and mobility are paramount for our new worlds. Far from *nowhere,* Jodahs and posthumanism is *now here*.

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