

REVISING BLACK FEMALE SLAVE IDENTITY, POST-COLONIALITY, AND
ETHNO-MATERNALISM IN OCTAVIA BUTLER'S *KINDRED* AND *LILITH'S*

BROOD

by

AMANDA DIBANDO AWANJO

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Dr. Keith Green

And approved by

Dr. Keith Green

Dr. Holly Blackford

Dr. Ellen Malenas Ledoux

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THESIS ABSTRACT

Revising Black Female Slave Identity, Post-Coloniality, and Ethno-Maternalism in

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Thesis Director:

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Within her novels, *Kindred* and *Lilith's Brood*, Octavia Butler uses the idea of ethno-maternity to explore the ways in which matrilineal relationships between black women can act as way to break free from white supremacist heteropatriarchal structures and allow black women full subjectivity. Between these two texts, Butler explores the ways in which ethno-maternity and a reliance on maternal memory both helps the black female body work through the trauma of remembering slavery, but also helps black women deconstruct the institutionalized gendered hierarchies of colonialism.

Scholar Eric J. Sundquist argues in “Frederick Douglass: Literacy and Paternalism,” that Douglass’ *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave* displays “rebellious literacy” that fights against the pacifying wishes of his patrons and uses his narrative creation to act upon the American ideal of self-reliance made radical only in its application to a black body (122-23). Sundquist states that “in a typically American gesture,” Douglass, “makes himself his own father”, thus realizing Sundquist’s term “ethno-paternalism” (124). Sundquist believes, “Douglass tapped in the energy of Romantic liberation and rescued the unfinished work of American freedom, imposing the mark of subversive uprising upon the face of the nation’s archetypal father. . . The instrument of self-fathering was language” (Sundquist 126). Douglass uses revisionist rebellious language within his text to connect himself with American identity in a way that calls forth American hypocrisy, while also staking his claims to freedom. This process, however, is highly linked to patriarchal lineage (Sundquist 124). Douglass is forced to constantly affirm his subjectivity by affirming his masculinity, he is forced to affirm his masculinity by affirming his white father and connection to white male subjectivity. Through this we are able to see ties to the work of the black power movement and the cultural scene encouraging freedom realized only through a reliance on patriarchal structures, lineage, and rhetoric that Octavia Butler was writing against. Deborah McDowell argues that Douglass’ obsession with finding and claiming his father figure, is representative of a hyper-masculine hyper-patriarchal biblical narrative of Adam and God, the ultimate origin story, in which connection to the father represents a definitive permanent history and knowledge of the self. She writes, “the myth inscribes

the name and law of the Father, while repressing the name of the mother” (McDowell 45).

Arguably Octavia Butler’s focus on maternal memory behaves as a focus on the lost mother figure within Frederick Douglass’ *Narrative*. This woman, known only to her son by her voice and whispers of her appearance, represents the seminally silenced figure within narratives of American slavery. Just as Harriet Jacobs’ must censor part so her slave narrative for her readers, so are the specific struggles to these women shadowed by their complex on-going intersectional struggles. If Frederick Douglass is able to call upon his white paternal figure, his indoctrination to literature and education long barred from women, and triumph in a physical altercation with his oppressor as tools to gain subjectivity, what are the tools made available for slave women and black women generally? As seen within the narrative of Harriet Jacobs, often a focus on children symbolizes a freedom-both Jacobs, herself, her mother and grandmother dedicate their lives to buying the freedom of their posterity from the institution of slavery. This focus on matri-lineage paves the way for the idea of ethno-maternity. Within her novels *Kindred* and *Lilith’s Brood*, Octavia Butler seeks to recreate the freedom narratives found within masculine narratives seeking to confirm their masculine identities through patriarchal lineage. Butler uses an ethno-maternity, carved out of the peripheral space female subjectivity is typically granted, to create a narrative arch in which her heroines look back into their own matri-lineages in order to find their own subjectivity. In Butler’s *Kindred*, this results in Dana reaching back through maternal memory ingrained in her body to work through the reverberations of slavery and its many traumas. For the character Lilith Iyapo in *Lilith’s Brood*, Butler further destabilizes patriarchal structures

by changing their center, instead placing Lilith and a new Oankali and human hybrid constructs, that serve as complete inversions of the text's "Human Contradiction" and humanity as a whole. Butler's inversion of Sundquist's ethno-paternity is a way to recenter narratives about black women and in doing so create black female subjectivity. The inversion of Sundquist's ethno-paternity is of particular importance to this project because, Octavia Butler's ethno-maternity behaves as a counter to institutionalized patriarchy, especially the two forms found within the works studied within this paper, *Kindred's* American chattel slavery and *Lilith's Brood's* colonialism. Within both text, Butler drives into the heroine's matri-lineage, and uses maternal shared memories and genetic abilities to give Dana and Lilith the necessary space to create a centralized subjectivity.

Kindred

Within Octavia Butler's *Kindred*, Butler explores the role of maternal relationships and memory to work through the trauma of slavery. By doing so, she provides a critique of cultural rhetoric within the 1970s' black power movement, which emphasized a decidedly masculinist understanding of black subjectivity within the black power movement. *Kindred's* main character, Dana, experiences flashbacks and extensive periods of immersion in slave-holding Maryland where she undergoes the everyday terrors of living under slavery. Her strategies for survival as an outsider yet an all too familiar insider provide the drama of the narrative. Ultimately, Butler uses the trauma and ancestral memory in a similar way to "re-memory" found in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, to craft Dana's contemporary body as a way to break down the gendered ways in which

American chattel slavery operated as a patriarchal institution, she simultaneously battles the patriarchal lens that followed black women long after they were legally freed.

Working through Butler's revised version of Eric Sundquist's "ethno-paternity", I read Butler's *Kindred* as a story that shows an "ethno-maternity" that links itself with the slave narratives of women like Harriet A. Jacobs to explore the oft silenced particular experiences of women within slavery and the slave trade. Thus, Butler's neo-slave narrative *Kindred*, works as a textual link to these intersectionally silenced voices during a time when the voices of black women were being further silenced by the federal government and within black power narratives of black subjectivity that often defined blackness through black maleness.

During the late 1950s and mid to early 1960s two reports were published that helped shape black revisionism of cultural understandings of slavery-these were Daniel P. Moynihan's *The Negro Family* in 1965 and Stanley Elkins' *Slavery: A Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life* in 1959. Moynihan's federally commissioned text focuses on how the elevation of the African American women as matriarchs disrupts the "natural" familial structure and thus completely stunts the growth of African American men and the entirety of the African American community. Elkins' text, proposes a "Sambo thesis", in which black masculinity was and remains in a state of emasculation in the face of slavery's paternalism traced through white masculinity and authority. As bell hooks notes in *Ain't I a Woman* both of these reports allude to the idea that "the most cruel and dehumanizing impact of slavery on the lives of black people was that black men were stripped of their masculinity . . . implies that the subjugation of black women was essential to the black males development of a positive self-concept"

(McDowell 41). Reactions to these texts sparked a black revisionism of slavery that mirrored “myth-making” in that proponents of black subjectivity sought to, “replace the Sambo myth of child-like passivity with a public persona of public derring-do with the myth of the male slave as militant, masculine, dominant, and triumphant” (McDowell 42). This myth making is seen culturally through the Alex Haley’s 1976 text and film “Roots”, as well as the creation and explosion of African American studies programs—the first at San Francisco State College in 1966.

Within this revisionism is the Black Power Movement’s rejection of the narrative of slavery as the beginning of the African American narrative. Scholar Mohammad Fuad Aljishi explores the ways this is explored in Alice Walker’s “Everyday Use”, a short story that features the struggle between sisters Dee, representative of black culture that distances itself from the painful past of slavery, and Maggie who represents black identity still connected to the near past of slavery. Aljishi argues that the black power movement views slavery as, “a painful memory of the past that should be abandoned” (Aljishi). Deborah E. McDowell argues that one way that this painful past is abandoned, avoided, and remade happens through centering Frederick Douglass’ 1845 *Narrative of the Frederick Douglass, An American Slave* as the central text of recreating black identity and the black past, a re-centering in the face of the damning rhetoric of Moynihan and Elkin’s reports. However, as McDowell also points out this implicitly implies that “the male subject is the racial subject” (40). As Frederick Douglass’ hyper-masculine and aggressive narrative becomes a seminal text for 1960s and 1970s academic and cultural rhetoric for the overthrow of white hegemony, the exclusion of women from this conversation keeps women away from these narratives of black subjectivity and allow the

perpetuation of patriarchy. The cultural need within the 1950s, -60s, and -70s for black revisionism reflected a need to contain the history of African American identity, from middle passage to post-bellum in a way that was digestible and in some ways distant.

Hortense J. Spillers' text, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe" also deals with the ways in which black female bodies are buried under meaning assigned by the oppressive power structure. Spillers writes, "the names by which I am called in the public place render an example of signifying property plus. In order for me to speak a truer word concerning myself, I must strip down through layers of attenuated meanings" (65). This is similar to what Dana must do in relation to her new space as a slave. Spillers deconstructs the ways in which gender roles are reified based on ethnicity within Moynihan's report. However, Spillers argues the double consciousness inherently connected to African American existence the gender understandings that Moynihan bases his theories on are baseless (67). Her focus on the ways on which the body of the captive writes an "American Grammar," focuses on the ways in which white American paternalistic captivity represents a Lacanian linguistic fall, and the racist rhetoric of Moynihan signals back to the silencing all captive bodies were forced to endure. Ultimately, all of the revisionist work done within the black power movement represents a pull towards creating a unique black voice in the face of the larger oppressive structure that seeks to define, name, and speak for African Americans. These reactions to the Moynihan and the Elkin reports suggest a larger effort to create oneself in direct and purposeful opposition to the dominant narratives. More importantly, they serve as a type of cultural self-parenting that mirrors Frederick Douglass' *Narrative of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave*, his final autobiography.

Ethno-maternity stands as a way in which Dana is able to inhabit and find freedom within the narratives that she is able to experience through Sara, Carrie, and Alice. Dana's slips into the past represent larger slip into the maternal memory of slavery. Connected to the past through her ancestor Alice, Dana moves backwards in time as a way to reconcile and reacquaint the contemporary with the particular struggles of slave women. In tandem, her movements through the past work as a dive into a maternal space in which Dana is able to deal the trauma of the memory of slavery. Dana's body serves as physical connector to the perceived freedom of Dana's contemporary moment to the plantation past. Through her time travel, Dana is able to bridge together and embody the transcending pain and memory of slavery that is engrained within the bodies of black folks. Her relationships with the other women are ways to *recover* them and the full representations and memories of them that exist outside of her contemporary space. Through the women, Dana is able to have a feminist remembering of slavery that prefaces individualized sexualized and gendered understandings of female slaves. Dana's indoctrination into this memory through the women-but most importantly-through Alice is the only reason she is able to survive at the end of the text.

Through Dana's time travel, *Kindred* becomes a tale of the power of recovered maternal memory to create subjectivity. While, Dana believes throughout the novel the action is happening in tandem with her experience, it is possible to read Dana and Kevin's slip into the past as literal steps into memory. More than simply "remembering" the narratives of her ancestors or even a dream narrative, Butler literally slips Dana neatly into her familial and ancestral memory. When constructing the text as instances of Dana's own traumatic memory laced within a larger narrative of maternal memory that serves as

a near balm within memory, Butler uses temporal shifts, pain, and maternal memories and relationships to express the way in which the conscious mind cannot process the overwhelming everyday experience of her ancestral past of slavery.

The structure of *Kindred* is complex, not just because it depicts a contemporary body delving into memory of her slave past, but also because it works as a text that depicts a subject working through a type of double trauma, shared ancestral trauma that comes through her living these experiences and also the trauma of retelling and working through her survival in direct juxtaposition to her slave ancestors. Butler works to tie all of the text's memories, both in Dana's experience as a slave and as a survivor of slavery, when she writes, "The trouble began long before June 9, 1979, when I became aware of it, but June 9 is the day I remember. It was my twenty-sixth birthday. It was also the day I met Rufus-the Day he called me to him for the first time" (13). Here Butler is situating Dana's journey through time into a larger narrative structure. The text implies that the memory of slavery is written into the fibers of Dana's body, in a way that is deeper than her matriarchal lineage. When Butler calls attention to the idea that, "the trouble began long before June 9, 1979, when I became aware of it, but June 9 is the day I remember," she is alluding to the reverberations of American patriarchal slavery that inform every aspect of Dana's life; family strife over her marriage to a white man, the role of institutionalized racism in the differences between success in her writing career and Kevin's, her own cultural misconceptions about slavery and slave women (her conversations with and attacks against Sara as a mammy figure). Dana's slips into memory are also used in the text to illuminate Dana's own contemporary experience. This happens throughout the text, moments where Dana's preconceived notions of

slavery smash hard against moments that show the institution and its participants (willing and unwilling) as nuanced and complicated, motivated and controlled by multiple narratives at once. Butler uses these moments to get at an intersectional showing of slave identity within the women- but also the complicated ways that relationships form within slavery.

The some of the scenes that do the most work to demonstrate and unpack Dana's preconceived notions are in her interactions with Sara. Sara is described as a "mammy figure" literally. Dana observes,

She had done the safe thing-has accepted a life of slavery because she was afraid. She was the kind of woman who might have been called a 'mammy' in some other household. She was 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-*the frightened powerless woman who had already lost all she could stand to lose, and who knew as little about the freedom the North as she knew about the hereafter.* I looked down on her myself for a while. Moral superiority. Here was someone less courageous than I was. (145)

This section is important because of the ways in which Dana is able to work through her culturally crafted understandings of both particular stereotypes of past women within the slave trade and her contemporary self within the antiquated space of the American slave trade. In this section of Dana's descriptions of Sara move through the lens of "the militant nineteen sixties" and into descriptions that convey an emotional and sympathetic connection between Sara and Dana. When Butler states, "*the frightened powerless woman who had already lost all she could stand to lose, and who knew as little about the freedom the North as she knew about the hereafter.* I looked down on her myself for a while. Moral superiority. Here was someone less courageous than I was," she allows Dana's memory of this particular moment to present the complicated way that Dana is making memory within this particular memory of herself and Sara (145). In Dana's entire

retelling of herself, she is working through the ways in which her travels through memory into her slave past have a bearing on her contemporary life. Even through the quotation introduced earlier, “The trouble began long before June 9, 1979, when I became aware of it, but June 9 is the day I remember,” Dana points to an understanding that her recount of her trauma within this situation is also informed by her contemporary moments prior to this moment in particular (Butler 13). This scene in which her definition of Sarah is both informed by Dana’s knowledge of the black power movement of the 1960s and her own empathetic understanding of an intersectional experience within slavery, say more about the ways in which Dana is crafting herself within recollective moments. These moments are also particular because they represent a trend that occurs throughout the novel, in which Dana’s recollection of the past-becomes a complex collaboration of memory, in which the nuances of identity are better explored and Dana’s emersion into the slave memory of her past informs her contemporary understandings and vice versa. This ultimately works to create a narrative in which Dana is able to use her reconciled and collaborative memories as a way to break from stereotypical understandings of the fixed roles of slavery, something I believe is important to Dana’s work to overcome the trauma of slavery.

This move to overcome the fixed roles of slavery and the ways in which adherence to these fixed roles inhibit overcoming trauma also happens with Rufus, perhaps especially with Rufus. In one scene, Butler writes, “He sounded more like his father than himself. In that moment he even looked like his father . . . I stood there for a moment longer, then went back to his desk and sat down. And he wilted. The look I associated with his father vanished. He was himself again-whoever that was” (213).

Dana's conceptions of Rufus change continually throughout the text, until the final shift at the end of the text. Dana's assumption that Rufus is the one she should be saving is perfectly in line with instincts ingrained within black women through the patriarchal system of slavery. In many ways Dana's tale has echoes of Harriet Jacob's narrative- as Dana moves in her past-even though she is following Rufus, her placement to him to similar to Alice's-however, it isn't until the end of the text that Dana realizes this. Even the idea that Dana's initial pull into the past comes from a call from Rufus demonstrates an ingrained servitude and a bodily ancestral remembrance of trauma. In the sentence, "The trouble began long before June 9, 1979, when I became aware of it, but June 9 is the day I remember. It was my twenty-sixth birthday. It was also the day I met Rufus-the Day he called me to him for the first time," Dana makes the initial convergence of her time travel with danger presented to Rufus' body, taking it as an automatic sign that it is her responsibility to privilege his body over her own, and his dominant narrative over Alice's. This is perfectly in line with the structures of American chattel slavery, which is built around a white male center, and the protection of the economic and social wellness and superiority of this center. This serves as a type of cultural parallelism, in which black women, unenslaved and enslaved exist within white supremacist society. This reading is in line with the understanding that this text serves as memory within memory, and that Dana's uses her narrative retelling and her own memory as ways to work through the trauma of the American slave past, but also the reverberating effects of the institution.

The structure of Dana's travel through maternal memory work as literal disruptions of her surroundings. On her first visit back in time, Butler writes,

kneeling in the living room of my own house again several feet from where I had fallen minutes before . . . with residual terror that took all the strength out of me . . . the threat was gone but it was all I could do to keep my teeth from chattering . . . There was an ache in my back and shoulders where Rufus' mother had pounded her fists, and Kevin hadn't helped. (14-15)

This moment disrupts Dana's narrative, in the sense that her conversation with Kevin is disrupted, but also this moment begins the long list of physical and emotional traumas that incur from Dana's time travel. Based on this moment, "there was an ache in my back and shoulders where Rufus' mother had pounded her fists," we begin to understand that these visits to the past will not just interrupt the regularly scheduled programming of her life, but will also disrupt her body, something morbidly foreshadowed in the beginning sentences of the novel, "I lost my arm on my last trip home. My left arm. And I lost about a year of my life and much of the comfort and security I had not valued until it was gone" (9). This serves as one of the rules for time travel, within the text damage done to the body in the past, affects the body in the present. In two instances within the text, it is pain or the threat of physical death that brings Dana back to the present. This however, does not last the more time that she spends in the past. In one particular instance, Butler writes, "Pain dragged me back to consciousness. At first, it was all I was aware of every part of my body hurt. Then I saw a blurred face above me . . . I scrambled away, kicking him, clawing the hands that reached out for me, trying to bite, lunging up towards his eyes. I could do it now, I could do anything" (43). In this particular instance of pain, Dana's reaction to Kevin is connected by her memory of pain and the lasting effects of pain from her fight with the patroller. This positions the important connections between pain and memory within the text, but also survival and memory, Dana's reaction in the above scene shows an instinctual reaction that is out of line with Dana's usual steady and at times placid voice.

This continues throughout the novel, for examples in the scene in which Dana is whipped,

I acted like was a wild woman. . . I was totally beyond reasoning. I had never in my life wanted so desperately to kill somebody . . . He beat me until I tried to make myself believe he was going to kill me. I said it out loud, screamed it, and the blows seemed to emphasize my words. Surely, he would kill me if I didn't get away, save myself, *go home!* (177)

Dana relies on the rule of pain as an escape into her own time based on her time travelling experiences previous to this one in the text. However, as she also notes in this scene, "It didn't work. This was only punishment, and I knew it. Nigel had borne it. Alice had borne worse. Both were alive and healthy. I wasn't going to die" (176). This moment is also important because I believe it serves as the beginning of Dana's shift from behaving as if she were outside of these experiences. In an earlier section of the novel, "The Fall", Dana describes the happenings of the plantation as drenched in performativity. Feeling uncomfortable with the ease in which she is able to inhabit her role, she states, "Kevin and I became more a part of the household, familiar, accepted, *accepting*. . . How easily we seemed to acclimatize . . . I never realized how easily people could be trained to accept slavery" (97-101). Comparing this moment to the scene in which she is being whipped earlier, Dana's close relation to the plantation serves to show the ways in which her pain further connects her to the narratives of the slaves around her and the forces her to move outside of her supposed role as an actor in the play about slavery.

When Dana and Kevin first travel back in time to the Weylin plantation, they remark on the performativity of slavery. The narrator writes,

Time passed. Kevin and I became more a part of the household, familiar, accepted, accepting. That disturbed me too when I thought about it. How easily we seemed to acclimatize. Not that I wanted us to have trouble, but it seemed as though we should have a harder time adjusting to this particular segment of history . . . we had had a remarkable easy time. I was perverse enough to be bothered by that ease. (97)

Dana's realization of various levels of performativity occur throughout the text, however this moment in particular highlights the ways in which Dana herself is able to perform something previously thought to be completely foreign to her. Kevin and Dana's ability to somewhat blend in as a slave and slaveholder, along with the responsibilities and public personas therein is particularly disturbing for Dana because the basis of the controlling black cultural rhetoric at the time, focused on the ways in which black identity in the 1950s through 1970s completely differed from the slave identity of the past. Dana's education and subjectivity are out of context within her enslaved space on the Weylin plantation. Thus, as she learns throughout the text, she must relearn her own identity by learning how to survive in this new space. Dana's lesson is slow but effective. Butler writes, "The ease. Us. The children . . . I never realized how easily people could become trained to accept slavery", in conversation between Dana and Kevin, Butler uses Dana's unease with their ability to survive and blend, with reader's and character's twin desires for their survival.

Dana and Kevin must pantomime a master and slave relationship in the 1819 narrative because that was the only cultural imagining of a relationship between a white man and a black woman. When Dana first realizes the depth of Rufus's feeling towards Alice, she states, "I was beginning to realize he loved the woman-to her misfortune. There was no shame in raping a black woman but there could be shame in loving one" (124). The relationship between Alice and Rufus is a foil to the relationship between

Dana and Kevin. Both relationships are completely informed by the time periods they occur in. As Rufus states, “If I lived in your time, I would have married her. Or tried to” (124). This is important because it shows the ways in which captivity works to completely change the slave body, as Hortense Spiller argues in “Mama’s Baby. Papa’s Maybe”. However, while their bodies represent the same white man and black woman combination, their relationships literally mean different things rhetorically because Kevin does not have a claim over Dana’s body. Dana’s marriage to Kevin, despite the lack of language and precedent for it during Rufus and Alice’s time, is one marker of their difference from their surroundings. Butler is careful to situate Dana’s autonomy with a tale in the beginning of the section titled, “The Fight”. With multiple moments like Dana refusing to type Kevin’s manuscript and get rid of her books when they contemplate moving in with each other, Butler cements Dana complete freedom in her relationship with Kevin. However, Dana’s relationship with Kevin despite all the ways in which it is different from the master-slave narrative of Rufus and Dana/Alice, is still controlled by ways in which their bodies are understood through the structures of racism. This is seen in the ways Dana’s family and the slaves of the Weylin plantation react to Dana’s relationship with Kevin.

In Dana’s first experience of time travel she disappears into memory right as Kevin reaches in to touch her, later when she arrives back in contemporary California, shoulders aching with the ghosts of Mrs. Weylin’s fists, she describes Kevin as not helping (Butler 14-15). Despite the literal and legal differences in their relationship, the realities of race and the large history of sexual, physical, and emotional abuse haunt them, Dana states,

“I had moved into Kevin’s room, after all. And though that would be perceived as Kevin’s doing, I could be made to suffer for it . . . Kevin and his room were left to me. . . they gave me a chance to preserve a little of 1976 amid the slaves and slave-holders . . . Margaret (Weylin) slapped me across the face . . . ‘You filthy black whore!’ she shouted. ‘This is a Christian house!’” (Butler 93).

Here, Butler both shows how the relationship between Dana and Kevin is particular to their contemporary time period, in which Dana can “preserve a little of 1976,” and the ways that nineteenth century Maryland is only able to see one particular narrative. For Dana and Kevin, this performance is survival however, it comes with after effects within their relationship. After being reunited after five years apart, Kevin and Dana have a difficult time adjusting to their contemporary time period and each other. After five years Dana remarks on rooms within their home, “They were big comfortable rooms that reminded me a little of the rooms in the Weylin house. No. I shook my head denying the impression. This house was nothing like the Weylin house” (195). On Kevin, she states, “He pulled away from me and walked out of the room. The expression on his face was like something I’d seen, something I was used to seeing on Tom Weylin. Something closed and ugly” (194). For both of them, Kevin in particular, the five year long separation in the slave-holding Maryland acted as a full on confrontation of the which they are more than just acting out parts within a play, but rather dealing with the histories and racial traumas that act as the backbone for 1976. For Kevin, this also becomes a moment in which he is able to confront his own white privilege. Dana describes Kevin looking at a picture of himself and standing in front of a mirror, “He looked old now; the young face had changed more than could be accounted for by the new lines in his face of the beard” (195). Through these moments, Butler blends the two realities in a way that bursts open the ways that the worlds connect and collide and provides urgency to the ethno-maternalism within the text.

However, in Alice's relationship with Rufus, Butler acknowledges the relationship is to the detriment and misfortune of Alice. This signifies the ways in which freed and enslaved black bodies were forced to understand relationships to each other and to the white bodies around them. In the above scene with Weylin, Dana's discomfort comes from a perceived blending of the nature of her relationship with Kevin, with the perverse relationship between Rufus and Alice. I believed Dana's discomfort comes from the blurred spaces between her identity as a free woman in 1976 and her identity as a slave woman to 1819. In the last section titled "The Rope", Dana formally squares off with Rufus as he attempts to replace Alice's vacancy after her suicide. Butler writes, "They should be your children now,' he said . . . 'You were one woman,' he said. 'You and her. One woman. Two halves of a whole'(257). Rufus' ability to blend Alice and Dana is another form of silencing for both women. In the case of Dana specifically, Rufus is completely erasing her subjectivity and her identity. By conflating her with Alice, Rufus pulls the entire weight of white supremacist heteropatriarchy down onto the narrative of Dana's body. This moment is important to the text because this serves as Dana's epiphany, Dana states, "A slave was a slave. Anything could be done to her."

This occurs again when Dana finds the lines between performance and reality completely erased, "Once-God knows how long ago-I had worried that I was keeping too much distance between myself and this alien time. Now, there was no distance at all. When had I stopped acting? Why had I stopped?" (221). Dana uses her distance to protect her from the horrors of the slave space, this links her to the revisionist rhetoric of the black power movement. However, as she begins to spend more time in 1819 than 1976, the protections, affirmations, and distinctions she makes are stretched and weathered by

her experience of slavery. One thing that makes the distance that Dana seeks to maintain impossible is the amount of time spent inhabiting the cruel antiquated space of slavery. As those around her label her constantly with labels of protection and hurt, Dana's own narrative of herself becomes more complicated. After Dana is caught and beaten after running away, she realizes that her identity just like her body within this place is at constant risk,

What had Weylin said? That educated didn't mean smart. He had a point. Nothing in my education or knowledge of the future had helped me to escape . . . Would I really try again? Could I? . . . I tried to get away from my thoughts but still they came. *See how easily slaves are made?* They said. I cried as though from the pain of my side . . . 'I'll try again,' I said to her. And I wondered why I was saying it, boasting, maybe lying. (177)

Here, Butler conflates the pain of Dana's physical beating with the mental and emotional pain of Dana's potential loss of self. Deborah McDowell speaks about the ways in which Frederick Douglass' narrative uses the bodies of slave women within his text as a means for the eroticization of corporal punishment. When Butler applies an internal dialogue geared towards freedom, but also full of nuances and complex emotion, Butler is able to de-eroticize the beatings of women, allowing the female slave body to be more than just a body but also present a whole consciousness. Pain continues to serve as a way that Dana is connected to the narrative, and to others. Later in a scene in which Rufus exiles Dana to the fields, Dana's pain connects to a female field slave, "I met the woman who had been working toward me and she whispered, 'Slow down!' Take a lick or two if you have too . . . The woman in my row explained, 'He always hard on the new nigger'" (213). This scene in particular is important because of how much Dana's pain and trauma informs her connection to the women, in a scene of intense brutality- the women's shared experiences

and the wisdom of the experienced field slave allow them to forge a connection-no matter how tenuous. Reading pain within this text is important for a variety of reason, one of the most important maybe the way in which pain serves a way to connect Dana to the time travel. The pain of her experiences do not allow her to work through the varying moment in the text as a bystander, from the first trip to the last, Dana's body is in the line of fire.

Working through the text's use of Dana's pain and trauma as means of solidifying Dana's connections to the world she is traveling to, requires looking to the most obvious connection between Dana and the world of slavery, Alice. Butler's *Kindred* highlights the relationships between women. While Dana's time travel is superficially focused on danger to Rufus's body, her interactions within Sarah, Carrie, and Alice inform her experience in a way that is more formative than her experiences with Rufus. Dana's initial assumption, that her purpose in traveling back in time was in order to save Rufus, completely affirms the patriarchal structures of slavery. This assumption focuses Dana around Rufus, making her a periphery character within her own narrative, a trend that characterizes slavery and the patriarchal white supremacy that lies beneath it. I believe that Butler does this as a way to further explore the ways in which Dana steps into memory. Working through matri-lineage between Alice and Dana is way for Butler to explore that ways in which the connection between these women, a type of connection that sustains itself through time is one that creates a narrative that is counter to the narrative that the institution of slavery seeks to blanket black women's bodies with. This type of narrative which silences black female intersectional struggles, is personified at the end of the text, with Rufus' reference to the two women as "two sides of the same coin," effectively molding the two women into one whole identity. This serves a narrative tool

employed by Rufus to further control Alice even after death, through the control of her ancestral line as represented through Dana. With Dana's freedom and loss, Butler depicts an ancestral remembrance of the specialized brutal trauma of slavery, mixed in with the silencing of slave narratives- thus, the novel's occasion for speech is an important narration of maternal ancestral memory which gives voice to the twin traumas written in the bodies of the slaves and their ancestors.

Suzanne Scafe deconstructs the ways in which auto-biography is informed by gender identification and mother/daughter relationships. Scafe references the "sliding I", in which the identity of the narrator becomes almost inextricably connected to the other I of the narrative (whether mother or daughter). This understanding of the connections between mother and daughter in slave and neo-slave narratives is important because it is a direct move against the paternalistic institution of slavery and patriarchal understandings of freedom. Rufus constantly refers to the Alice and Dana as two sides of the same coin, and literally begins to view them as the same character at the end of the text, cementing the ways in which black bodies are completely commoditized and stripped of personal identity at this time. Scafe's notion of the "sliding I" directly relates to Dana's reassurance of an individual Subjective identity with the slave past through her relationship with matriarch Alice. In the section entitled "The Fight", Alice, a free woman runs away with her slave lover Isaac, from the man who wants to own her, Rufus. Once she's caught Dana is put in charge to heal and nurse Alice back to health, this reflects the way that the text's manipulation of time results in Alice's descendent parenting her. In one scene in particular Dana is forced to reveal to Alice the events of her capture, in an exchange that begins with the simple question, "Am I a slave too?"

(157). Alice made weak and infantile by the brutality of her punishment for running away with Isaac, is made child-like in this instant. This is punctuation not only by her confusion and physical weakness but also a reference to her own mother when she states, “‘Mama said she’d rather be dead than be a slave,’” (157). In this scene and others throughout the text, Dana becomes a sounding board for Alice’s rage and resentment at her situation. In these scenes Dana is muted in the face of Alice’s rage, and silent at her threats. Later on in the scene described above Butler writes,

‘Doctor-nigger,’ she said with contempt. ‘Think you know so much. Reading-nigger. *White-nigger!* Why didn’t you know enough to let me die?’ I said nothing. She was getting angrier and angrier, shouting at me. I turned away from her sadly, telling myself it was better, safer for her to vent her feelings on me than on anyone else. Along with her shouting now, I could hear faint cries of a baby”(160).

In this scene, Dana behaves almost as a sort of maternal figure in the face of Alice’s wildness. Alice’s abuse, wildness, and sadness do not stop here, they continue throughout the text with Dana working as a wall between Alice and the rest of the world. Dana’s maternal behavior towards Alice is motivated largely by their familial connection. Dana needs Alice to live so she can produce the children that serve as her descendants. Laced within Dana’s care of Alice is a sort of cold inevitability that acknowledges the intersectional space of the slave woman. Dana’s role in convincing Alice to go willingly to Rufus, posits her as an agent within the institution that forwards it and doesn’t question that singularity of the narrative. This scene is also important because, Dana’s silence in the face of Alice’s rage finally allows her ancestor who was permanently silenced by slavery to give voice to her rage. Alice’s wildness is also seen in Dana. While, Dana feels she must act to ensure that Rufus and Alice produce the children that begin her direct familial line- Dana reacts with the same wildness when faced with the sexual and non-

sexual violence that Alice and the other slave women are faced with. In this way, Alice's preceding sexual and emotional traumas all work to set up a system in which Dana is able to compare her own struggles and find strength. I believe that Alice's rage works as her voice and the only way that she is able to find a semblance of subjectivity. Immediately after she becomes aware of her new predicament after running away with Isaac, Alice falls into a state of disbelief, despair, and then an unpredictable rage. Butler describes it as, "I wanted to pull her back from the edge of a cliff. It was too late though. She would have to take her fall . . . She opened her mouth, then frowned . . . Why am I a slave?" (157). Her fall into slavery, is also readable as a fall into rage, and perhaps into a linguistic space in which Alice's language can only be described through her anger at her sudden loss of subjectivity. At this moment of loss Nigel and Carrie welcome a new baby Jude, Dana observes, "Along with her shouting now, I could hear the thin faint cries of a baby" (160). This shows the role of lineage (though in this case not familial) in the text moves between the free female subject and female slave. A common argument for abolition rests in the dangers and unique horrors of women separated from children, this is a theme that drives the narration forward in texts written by slave women like Harriet Jacobs and the fictional character Sethe. As Dana hears a child crying over the sounds of Alice screaming- the passage forces the reader to think back to a child-like Alice remembering advice from her mother, "'Good to marry a freeman. Mama always said I should . . . Mama said she'd rather die than be a slave'" (156-57). This is important because matri-lineage works as a direct opposition to the patriarchal institution of slavery. This works to show the ways in which Alice's maternal memory, from her own mother serves as due warning and a harsh foreboding to the reality of her re-enslavement.

Maternity and lineage become confused in this instance because Dana acts as a mother figure to Alice in this particular section. This stage of mothering and nurture to her ancestor confuses the linearity of genealogical lines, which can be read as a further deconstruction of the patriarchal institution of slavery. This also pulls on Scaffie's "Sliding I", placing Dana in the wizened role that chronological understandings of time would argue is meant for Alice. Butler does this to show how both women are able to provide the other with important information. For Dana- Alice represents an archetype and mold for entirely new structures of slavery for Dana, through Alice-Dana is able to work through and gain a true understanding of her relationship with Rufus and to the pain and trauma of slavery. In conjunction, Dana is able to give visibility and voice to Alice's unpredictable and unspeakable rage. This does more than simply further the narrative that the women were "two halves of a whole" (256). Painting Dana and Alice as matriarch and descendant living out and through the same traumas and Dana's final push against Rufus' desire to completely erase her identity becomes a push against the same type of physical and identity death Rufus forced on Alice. Dana, like Alice, finds a way to negate her subjectivity and status as a free woman rather than fold her into the fabric of slavery, sexual abuse, and captivity.

Despite this, Alice's suicide serves a shock to Dana's senses. Throughout the text the violence that Rufus could do to her body and the ways in which he could hurt and silence her are buffered by the presence of Alice. In a myriad of ways, Alice's body as serves a wall between Rufus' complete narrative and physical control it is, after all, through Alice's memory that Dana is able to experience and deal with her pain and trauma. Alice kills herself because she thinks her children have been sold- she kills

herself, when she believes that her children are going to be further indoctrinated within the system of slavery, thus, Dana's declaration of "personhood" and narrative and physical control over her body at the end of the text becomes all the more powerful. In the ending pages after Alice has committed suicide, in Dana's fight with Rufus Dana channels Alice's old rage against him. Rufus says to Dana, "when you sent Alice to me that first time, I saw how much she hated me, I thought . . . she'll kill me . . . But if I lived, I would have her. And, by God, I had to have her. . . You're so much like her, I can hardly stand it." (257). These final steps towards Dana's epiphany at the end of the text, seem to foreshadow what happens in the next pages. In these moments as Dana begins to contemplate and ready herself for violence, she is able to act in way that Alice cannot. Due to Dana's dual relationship with the future, her final moments with Rufus become a realization of Alice's empowering rage, that in turn empowers Dana. Just as Alice's rage allow her a voice, so does Dana's rage at the Rufus' sexual assault. As she states after her first whipping, "this was only punishment, and I knew it. Nigel had borne it. Alice had borne worse. Both were alive and healthy. I wasn't going to die," her pain connects her to her ancestral maternal memory, and it is only through that acknowledgement of the strength and survival and kinship of these women that Dana is able to push past pain to the acknowledgement, "I wasn't going to die" (176). Her finally realization about Rufus that allows her to burst out of her memory state into a place of possible reconciliation and subjectivity (176).

When Dana realizes at the end of the text, "I could accept him as my ancestor, my younger brother, my friend, but not as my master, and not as my lover. He had understood that once", she calls attention to the ways that she is seeking to subvert and

move against Rufus' desire to control her body (260). Dana also states, "He could drive me to a kind of unthinking fury. Somehow, I couldn't take from him the kind of abuse I took from others. If he ever raped me, it wasn't likely that either of us would survive" (180). In that effort to break free from Rufus' control, Dana pulls from Alice's voicing-creating rage to ensure her own maintained subjectivity. Dana's "unthinking fury" directly mirrors Alice's wildness after being re-enslaved is a step back into her own subjectivity, and one of her first steps out of the maternal memory that protects her from Rufus' complete narrative control throughout the majority of the text. Dana's push back towards her own narrative control is seen directly after Alice's funeral when she, "went away to the library where I could be alone, where I could write. Sometimes I wrote things because I couldn't say them, couldn't sort out me feelings about them, couldn't keep them bottled up inside me . . . It was for no one else" (252). Dana's act of writing the unspeakable serves as a tool for expressing her trauma without Alice's maternal memory there as a guide, this creation of a written document just for her shows her own carved space and tints of Douglass' rebellious literacy. This is only heightened with her final declaration and realization, "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). This declaration shows Dana rejecting the ways in which Rufus' seeks to control her body. This moment comes before Dana stabs Rufus and in her efforts to get away from his grasp loses in her left arm in "something cold and nonliving" (261). I believe that this scene shows Dana physically separating from the narrative and life that Rufus represents, the "cold and non-living" thing that severs her arm is also the

journey through the brutal violence of slavery and the brutality that Rufus sought to further recreate on her body.

In this way Dana's violent move away from her ancestor's rapist and her would-be rapist, represents a move towards freedom that is distinctly feminine. In *Beginnings*, Edward Said states, "in dealing with a distant past the mind prefers contemplating a strong seminal figure to sifting through realms of explanation" (McDowell 38). Here, Dana becomes the strong figure, distinctly 'she' instead of 'he', Dana's narrative fully rethinks the usually invisible ties between subjectivity and masculinity. Dana provides a doorway to healing the divide between the feminine and revisionist. As she flees Rufus, Dana loses her arm, this image of loss circles the text as both the first and last image of the work. Like Maggie's burn scars in "Everyday Use" and Sethe's ripped and ridged back in *Beloved*, I believe that Dana's amputation represents an acknowledgment and acceptance of the painful past of slavery. In the epilogue as she and Kevin go to see to Weylin plantation, her scar and the absence of her arm show the ways in which her contemporary existence and body are still connected to slavery. This ultimately cements the powerful rhetoric of the neo-slave and the slave narrative as survival text. Dana's missing arm, her ability to thwart Rufus' attempts to rape her and detain her in 1819, and her ultimate survival once again reflects a survival through maternal memory as way to create a space of subjectivity for Dana and a space for healing within the space of the trauma of slavery. Such a maternal move through collaborative memory, that redefines traditional patriarchal neo-slave narratives, and places contemporary emphasis on female survival.

Lilith's Brood

Octavia Butler creates a universe of “ethno maternity” wherein her heroine Dana, shifts Eric Sundquist’s ideas on “rebellious literacy” to a radical recreation of maternal memory to embrace and recreate her past in order to reaffirm her existence and subjectivity. Throughout *Kindred*, Butler presents a time loop in which the contemporary black body reaches backwards into the dark past of slavery to give voice to the voiceless and reimagine black slave bodies and narratives as central rather than peripheral subjects. However, Butler’s characters in *Kindred* is distinctly humanoid. The narratives plot lines and the bodies inhabiting them are based in the human experience and thus bound by the rules and structures of humanity. The structure of the neo-slave narrative operates to complicate contemporary views on the relationship between now and the perceived antiquated space of slavery. In this way, *Kindred* delivers the requirements of its genre. Her text, *Lilith's Brood* (originally titled *Xenogenesis*) does something similar, in way that furthers the neo-slave narrative’s desire to complicate further complicate a particular space of racial oppression, by using the frame of a colonialist tale and complicating and restructuring it. Also, at the heart of ethno-maternity lies a challenge to domineering structures, in Lilith’s re-centering within the text as a point of origin for a new species, she is ironically calling on the same hierarchies that would have oppressed within the “Human Contradiction”. Similar to *Kindred*, *Lilith's Brood* works within the power structure to craft a space through shifting the shared experiences and memory, in this case genetic memory through cancer, to create a space in which the black female body is centralized and empowered.

Octavia Butler's work *Lilith's Brood* works as a way to ponder through the "Human Contradiction", and to create a space for Lilith's centralized female subjectivity. Through the text, Butler challenges and blurs the lines of the definition of a traditional human subject. This deconstruction of the subject, sets the ground work for Butler larger project within the text, to create a space in which Lilith Iyago is able to rise as a creator of a new world and a new type of subject. Similar to Dana in *Kindred*, Lilith is connected to a larger maternal memory through trauma and her body. However, this text characterizes the connection through shared genetic mutations through the women in her family-cancer. Lilith's body maternal memory work shift the text completely around her, setting her up as the point of origin for new constructions of humanity.

Xenogenesis is a collection of three novels *Dawn*, *Imago*, and *Adulthood Rites* first published 1987; this collection was renamed *Lilith's Brood* in 2003 (Lennard 8-9). Scholar and Editor John Lennard, cites the title change as a publisher choice to lean more toward the religious overtones of *Lilith's Brood* instead of the scientific connotations of *Xenogenesis* (Lennard 9). The three novels within the series focus on humanity after a nuclear showdown between nations that leaves the planet uninhabitable. The crux of the series practically follows Lilith's and the other human's awakening on the Oankali alien ship and their reintroduction to earth, on a larger level the novel focuses on the complex relationship between the ooloi and the humanity down to the microcosmic gene level to the cultural interactions between these two highly distinct beings. The novel begins with *Dawn*, with a razor sharp focus into the character Lilith and her initial moments of leadership mandated by the Oankali within a human camp aboard their ship. In these initial moments, Butler sets up the character Lilith to be the leader of this new form of

humanity. While this is occurring, Butler decenters the traditional narrative placement of man in the text as the patriarchal center as well as the privileging of a human narrative, through her use of the Oankali and the ooloi.

Lilith's Brood follows the traditional tenets of a narration of colonization. The text is easily read as a text presents a post-colonial/colonial look into the complicated relationships found within the colonized space. These complications are found within the psyches of both the colonizer and the colonized, the biological differences found between the Oankali and humanity, and within the surviving human race as they work through various loaded understandings of what assumptions lay under what they consider the part of humanity that they should protect. Butler's *Lilith's Brood* deconstructs and illuminates of various human constructs. From the ruins of these constructs come the Oankali-human constructs. Within this text, Butler pulls on Julia Kristeva's theory on abstraction in conjunction with ethno-maternity, and the alien and other-worldly to pull apart and investigate the binaric categories hidden behind and within human identity and thus the destruction that lead to the wars that ended humanity.

The "Human Contraction" serves as one of the text's underlying main conflicts, a tension that lies within the genetic mismatched found within humanity. This contradiction operates as a justification for Oankali rule, the explanation for the humanicide that ended the world, serves as the reason why total societal and cultural structuring is necessary in order for Lilith to move into a spot of a fully realized being. Oankali Jdahya states, "You have a mismatched pair of genetic characteristics. Either alone would have been useful. . . .But together are lethal. It was only matter of time before they destroyed you" (38).He further explains,

You are intelligent . . . You are hierarchal . . . We saw it in your closest animal relatives . . . It's a terrestrial characteristic. When human intelligence served it instead of guiding it, when human intelligence did not even acknowledge it as a problem, but took pride in it or did not notice it at all. . . That was like ignoring cancer. I think your people did not realize what a dangerous thing they were doing. (39)

These contradictions situate the nuclear apocalypse as inevitable. The “Human Contradiction” works as a type of Freudian death drive, pushing humanity towards its inevitable destruction. In this case, the actions of the “Human Contradiction” are mapped into both the planet Earth and all of its species inhabitants. Jdahya’s comment, “it’s a terrestrial characteristic,” bounds the fight between intelligence and the hierarchal power structures into the very fabric of the Earth. In this way, the inhabitants of Earth become parts in the larger machine of the planet—destined by their genetic make up to recreate the same cycles and continue a never-ending path towards inevitable death. This contradiction works as a type of super structure and super narrative that imposes itself both visibly and invisibly over everything. In this way the work of the Oankali, their goal of saving humanity becomes more than a narrative in salvaging a planet and its people after a disaster, and more about reworking and thus, eliminating this contradiction from all of humanity. This is noted in the exchange between Lilith and Jdahya when Lilith demands to know the price of humanity’s salvation. Jdahya replies,

We trade the essence of ourselves. Our genetic material for yours. . . We acquire new life—seek it investigate it, manipulate it, sort it, use it. We carry the drive to do this in a miniscule cell within a cell,” to which Lilith responds, “I understand your words, your meaning, though. . . it’s as alien to me as you are. (41)

This passage is interesting in relation to what a hybridization of humanity actually means. In his own research regarding *Lilith’s Brood*, Eric White leans on the notion that the creation of a whole post-man category will result in an entity that highlights humanity’s connection to the animalistic and the terrestrial. However, in the case of the blend of the

Oankali and humanity, this blend necessitates the end of humanity on a cellular and genetic level and the reinstitution of a completely new body. This complete restructuring of humanity also reads as a restructuring of the heteropatriarchal structures that inform human behavior and attitude. In this way, hybridization creates a centralized space for her. Through the ruins of the “Human Contradiction,” Butler uses Lilith’s body and genetic history as a tie between an antiquated terrestrial past to human-Oankali future. This works well with Butler’s larger project of ethno-maternity because Lilith’s body, her genes and her central placement within the narrative all work to embody a rebellious literacy that calls out the often silent hierarchies and place firmly in the line of questioning, investigation, and deconstruction. This leaves a narrative that gives the main character, Lilith Iyapo space to become not just a subject, but an origin.

In his article, “The Erotics of Becoming: ‘Xenogenesis’ and *The Thing*,” White talks about the ways in which Julia Kristeva’s theory of abjection, articulated in her work *Powers of Horror*, is a way to describe anxiety surrounding the deconstruction the binaric structures that make up culture and identity. White leans on Kristeva’s theory of the abject in his critical study as a way to explain the ways in which texts within science fiction react to “the erosion of ‘Man’ as a plantively ontological category” (394). This erosion of man is a distinct category creates an anxiety that is indicative of a larger anxiety within Culture of the complete replacement and erasure of all the binaric structures that make up language and thus form the bricks of Culture. On this White writes, “the blurring of the boundary between Culture and Nature occasions anxiety about the validity of other hierarchically paired terms including the ‘mind’/‘body’ and ‘male’/‘female’ binarisms” (394). Through the deconstruction of Man as a center, a

transcendental signifier, of language, the structures that worked around that center can be broken down or repositioned. As White implies, “this situates Butler’s work into the space of “‘Man ’ as putatively ontological category” (White 394). Through this centering of human in the center of the tale, even as Butler deconstructs popular understanding, the structures and hierarchies attached to the human experience and the creation and maintenance of “Man” stands in the background. The limitations to this physical medium are expressly linked in the ever present socially and culturally constructed world surrounding humanity. Thus, while Butler uses *Kindred* to revise the slave narrative and black female identity and subjectivity in relation to the slave narrative, ultimately it is still a revision. This scratch-out mark and insertion of Dana’s full womanhood does not in anyway change the intersectional structures of race, class, and gender that Dana faces daily both in the her ancestors slave past and in her free 1970s present. *Lilith* is allowed a complete reimagining of her world. By adding a post- human extraterrestrial element into the narrative, Butler decenters the human narrative and allows for a further deconstruction of the power structures that line the walls of human culture. As black science fiction and Afrofuturism work as resistant texts to larger narratives that seek to blot out black bodies and narratives, Butler’s use of the extraterrestrials and the post-humanist hybridity within her text alludes to a larger goal within Afrofuturist texts to reimagine ways that black identity has in an impact on space and the ways in which space can change the black body.

Throughout *Lilith’s Brood*, Octavia Butler uses the alienness of the Oankali as a large part of the reason that they are so abhorred. Their intense visible and cultural difference serves as a complete counter to human and terrestrial culture. In regards to the

new bodies of the Oankali and human hybrids as well as Lilith's own positioning as a cross cultural being, Kristeva's abjection theory becomes vital to broadening our understanding. Abjection includes, "intense feelings of revulsion, disgust, fear, and contempt provoked in the subject when it encounters phenomena that disturb identity, system, order . . . (that do) not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite" (White 396). These feelings are connected to a figure or even that serves as a source of disruption of current paradigms and hierarchies, these disruptions shake foundational binaries loose and muddy the necessarily clear boundaries between binaries. The fear of abjection is wrapped up in the same fears that inform biblical abominations (397). As Eric White points out, the concept of abomination focuses heavily on the perceived pollution of a pure human experience, in which the human body becomes a holy site. This fear of "pollution" and hybridity also represents the placement of man in a centralized and heightened position and points to the dangerous other as the source for abjection. Within Kristeva's understanding of abjection is Lacanian look into the use of the abject to create a full self. This is seen in her understandings of how the 'I' is created.

The subject who confronts the abject experiences a recurrence of the moment of crisis when the infant first separates itself from its original environment in order to begin the difficult task of constructing its own distinct identity. 'Abjection' thus pertains to the inaugural space of what will eventually become an 'I', the first fragile and precarious emergence of order out of chaos, structure out of indifferenciation, and permanence out of turbulent fluidity. (396-97)

As seen in the quote above, the horror of abjection also represents the horror of becoming, the harsh move from the maternal fluidity of the imaginary into the harsh binaric structures of a patriarchal place. Because the fall into the law of the Father represents a fall into hierarchy, the transition moves from a space of the deconstruction of

meaning and “entropy” into a place of meaning creation. To create a binary within the Oankali sit on the side of the imaginary and the humanity sit of the side of the Lacanian law of the Father seems too simplistic, after all the Oankali while condemning hierarchy in humans, use various tools of manipulation to ensure human bonds with the ooloi and human cooperation overall. I do, however, believe that Butler uses the Oankali to capitalize on the instance of abjection in the text to raise Lilith to the position of an earth mother and near goddess figure, who is as notorious as her namesake.

Ultimately, Butlers uses *Lilith's Brood* as a way to expand her project of female subjectivity and ethno-maternity within *Kindred*, through the decentralization of man and man-made culture and replacing it with a new human-Oankali culture. This is seen Kristeva's abject theory with the human anxiety over the sexual and biological fluidity that the Oankali represent, as almost literal depictions of the Imaginary-which is in sharp opposition to the highly hierarchal and rigid space that has defined humanity's experience up until this point. While, the culture that the Oankali create through forced hybridization is a form a imperialism that ultimately seeks to completely remix humanity, Butler uses the relationship between the Oankali and the humans, particularly through Lilith's sons, to affirm the extraterrestrial hybridity necessary to create a world free of what the Oankali call, humanity's great contradiction, hierarchy and great intelligence.

As this tale depicts the Oankali colonization of earth, with their crop of choice being humanity's genetic make-up, Lilith's placement as the center of the text is extremely important. In *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and the Colonial Conquest*, Anne McClintock explores the complicated role of women within the colonial space, stating, “imperialism cannot be fully understood without a theory of gender power” (6).

As she argues, colonization works hand in hand with white heteropatriarchy, the language of dominance and control stems from the same rhetoric that Edward Said points out in his work, *Orientalism*. She argues that colonial power stems specifically from a control over the bodies of the women within the colonized society, this stands to reason when understanding the ways in which imperial patriarchy and localized/regional patriarchy can be layered on the bodies of colonized women. The ultimate show of dominance becomes usurping the patriarchal power structure within one of your own, thus leaving colonized women within an intersectional space where their bodies are twice used as tools of micro- and macro- cosmic dominance. McClintock states, through the “transmission of white, male power through control of colonized women” there is “the emergence of a new global order of cultural knowledge and the imperial command of commodity capital” (3). McClintock’s ideas are extremely interesting when unpacking *Lilith’s Brood*, because of the ways that Oankali position Lilith in the role of creator of the genetic and reproductive commodities that the Oankali seek. This also interesting when thinking about the name of the text, *Lilith’s Brood*- Lilith is the reproductive center of the text as well as the text’s narrative origin.

When Lilith first awakens and meets Jdahya, she is similar to the infant in Kristeva’s observations about the trauma point in creating a new identity in the face of the abject. When she awakes she is in the fetal position and her thoughts and memories are scattered. Butlers writes, “Alive! Still Alive! Alive...again . . .Lilith Iyapo lay gasping, shaking with the force of her effort. Her heart beat too fast, too loud. She curled around it, fetal helpless” (5). In relation to Jdyhya she experiences what she calls “a true xenophobia,” the alien’s appearance is decidedly un-human. In fact, Lilith often

references his appearance with Medusa, in a clear connection between the abject and the abomination. In this new space, Lilith is awarded a job, “‘You’ll awaken a small group of humans, all English-speakers and help them learn to deal with us. You’ll teach them the survival skills we teach you” (32). However, as a black woman Lilith Iyapo anticipates the push back and eventual overthrow she receives from the group. Lilith’s identity as a black woman endangers her in all of her interactions with humans. For instance, her first interaction with a human male after being awoken ends in his attempt to rape her (Butler 95-96). Within the nursery she opens to retrain humans, The white men in the group chip away at and question her authority, and promptly reinstate a heteropatriarchal society, in which sexual assault is still a danger and the even number of men and women pair off into heterosexual groups. Even in the deep recesses of outer space Lilith’s human body still carries the intersectional space of a black woman, a space that while understood in human terms will seemingly always signify the same things, “‘they won’t trust me or want my help. They’ll probably kill me. . . You don’t understand them as well as you think you do” (Butler 112).

The sexual, gendered, and race identity politics that play out within the nursery that Lilith is given charge of represent the crux of the intelligence/ hierarchy binary within humanity that the Oankali identify. In Lilith’s leadership of the nursery she frequently implores the group to behave more humanely and to resist the urge to fall into a primordial order, after the attempted rape of a woman within the group Lilith shouts to the group, “‘Nobody here is property. Nobody here has right to use anyone else’s body. They’ll be no back-to-the-Stone-Age, caveman bullshit. We’ll treat each other like people, and we’ll get through this like people” (178). Here we see Lilith’s privileging of

an idealized understanding of humanity. However, as the politics of the nursery point out the weight of contradiction looms over every human action, and allows age old binaries to control the actions of the group throwing them into a cycle of violence and chaos. Through the nursery section of the *Dawn*, Lilith's allies, from Nikanj to Joesph, urge her to "lead" them, however as Lilith foreshadows before she awakens anyone in the group- the nursery experiment will fail for the same reasons that, "they won't trust me or want my help... they'll probably kill me" (112). Lilith's identity as a black woman completely informs her interactions with the human group and humans in general that the Oankali cannot anticipate because of their alienness. Just as when Lilith responds to their larger plans with, "it's just as alien to me as you are," the same can be said for the Oankali understandings of how the Human Contradiction works, this shown when Nikanj witnesses Joesph being called a homophobic slur, "'What is a faggot?'" it asked. She told it. 'But they know he's not that. They know he's mated to you'" (Butler 39,160). All this works to show the ways in which humanity is entrenched on a basic level to hierarchy.

Of the novels' three books it is the first one, *Dawn*, that focuses explicitly on Lilith and her experiences with the Oankali and the humans. Lilith's initial moments on the ship are characterized by loneliness and alienation, things that are only intensified once Lilith becomes aware of the Oankali. Within her first interaction with the Oankali Jdahya, Butler writes,

'You're one of the few English speakers who never considered she might be in the hands of extraterrestrials.' 'I did consider it,' Lilith whispered. 'Along with the possibility that I might be in prison in an insane asylum, in the hands of the FBI, the CIA, of the KGB' . . . She was not afraid. She had gotten over being frightened by 'ugly' faces long before her capture. The unknown frightened her. The cage she was in frightened her. She preferred becoming accustomed to any number of ugly faces to remaining in her cage. (12)

This scene is important because Butler uses it to lay a great deal of groundwork into how we can read the developing relationship between Lilith, Jdahya, and the rest of the Oankali and the ooloi. Lilith's lack of fear when faced with "ugly faces" seems a reference to both her identity as a black woman who is well aware of the effects of marginalization, as well as a reference to the "humanicide" that occurs in the war that destroyed humanity. In her first musing about the war, Lilith states, "Could anyone who lived through the war forget it? A handful of people tried to commit humanicide. They had nearly succeeded" (8). Lilith's initial indifference to "ugly faces" along with the direct naming of government institutions points to the institutionalized structures that the Oankali paint within the Human Contradiction that they cite as the reason for humanity's downfall. Understanding what McClintock says about the ways in which female bodies are used within colonization, Lilith's perception of "ugly faces" is even more complicated because of her complicated positioning to colonialism as a black woman in America, a sure descendant of a colonialist and enslaved past. Lilith's indifference to the threat of "ugly faces" thus, can also be read as her own understanding of prejudice and its effects. Her fear of the cage she is in along with the unknown speak to the extreme powerlessness of Lilith's situation within the scene, with the alien presence- her previous understandings of institutionalized and individual level oppression may not apply. This of course, proves to be true as Butler explains and unpacks the Oankali.

While it is clear that Butler is using the well-used frame of colonialism within science fiction to explore the relationship between the Oankali and humanity, I firmly believe that Butler inverts the frame's heteropatriarchy connected to colonialism by creating a colonizer that stands in direct opposition to hierarchy and behaves towards

humanity with tenderness, sensuality, and curiosity that make it difficult to paint them in broad strokes as the uncomplicated colonizers. In the afterword to her short story, “Bloodchild,” Octavia Butler writes, “It amazes me that some people have seen ‘Bloodchild’ as a story of slavery. It isn’t. It’s a number of other things, though. On one level, it’s a love story between two very different beings” (Butler 20). The short story “Bloodchild” shares a great deal of similarities with Butler’s *Lilith’s Brood*, in fact in the afterword, the author reveals she got her inspiration for the short work while touring Peru researching for *Lilith’s Brood*. Butler’s use of love to describe the relationship dynamics within “Bloodchild”, is easily related to the human and Oankali and ooloi relationships within *Lilith’s Brood*. Part of Butler’s inversion of the typical heteropatriarchy connected to structures of colonialism is in her creation of beings who exist traders and sharers throughout the universe and beyond, not to mention colonizers that abhor violence and treats their human cargo with some mixture of trepidation and love. Even this language separates them from the human structure of colonization. When asked what they trade, Jdahya answers “‘Ourselves.’ ‘You mean...each other? Slaves? ‘No . . . Ourselves’” (24). This serves as another scene, in which Lilith applies a “humanoid” system of oppression that the Oankali defy. In addition to this, the colonizing heteropatriarchal structure is almost characterized by the way the culture of the “metropolis” adopts a space for the colonized culture, but the space is still controlled by the dominant culture. In a National Public Radio essay, Butler writes about *Lilith’s Brood*,

I wrote a novel called *Dawn* in which extra-solar aliens arrive, look us over, and inform us that we have a pair of characteristics that together constitute a fatal flaw. We are, they admit, intelligent, and that's fine. But we are also hierarchical, and our hierarchical tendencies are older and all too often, they drive our intelligence—that is, they drive us to use our intelligence to try to dominate one another . . . what can we do about it? What can we do to improve ourselves? Of

course, we can resist acting on our nastier hierarchical tendencies . . . can make a greater effort to teach children to resist their hierarchical impulses and beliefs. (NPR)

Here and in the afterword to “Bloodchild”, Octavia Butler expresses a desire to supplement domination and hierarchal narratives with relationship and love. She writes of the main character Gan in “Bloodchild”, “could I write a story in which a man chose to become pregnant not through some sort of misplaced competitiveness to prove that a man could do anything a woman could do. . .write a dramatic story of a man becoming pregnant as an act of love—choosing pregnancy in spite of as well as because of surrounding difficulties” (Butler 20). Lilith’s relationship with her ooloi Nikanj is characterized by tenderness and understanding. Similar to the action in “Bloodchild,” *Lilith’s Brood* focuses on the close interpersonal relationships between the Oankali and the human, as wells as the Oankali and ooloi shunning of violence as ways to destabilize human reliance on narratives of hierarchy to understand and navigate the world around them, but also to complicate the colonialist narrative the alien force would traditionally represent. Butler shows them as oppressors filled to the brim with a type of alien specific-white man’s burden, who sterilize and force change on the remains of humanity in their efforts to save them from a problem found within their physiology, or as Jdahya states, “Your bodies are fatally flawed. The ooloi perceived this at once. At first it was very hard for them to touch you. Then you became an obsession to them. Now its hard for them to leave you alone” (Butler 38). However, by positioning of Lilith and the cancer found within Lilith’s matri-lineage as the insidious substance, she cements humanity’s importance to the Oankali. In *Imago*, Lilith’s son Akin reflects,

Lilith, my birth mother. Every child in the family had heard that story. One of Nikanj’s sensory arms had been severed from its body, but Lilith allowed it to

link into her body and activate several of her highly specialized genes . . . Lilith's ability had run in her family, although neither she nor her ancestors had been able to control it . . . To them, it was a hated disease. To the Oankali, it was treasure. It was beauty beyond Human comprehension . . . Nikanj might have died without Lilith's help. .then we wouldn't exist- we, the children Nikanj had constructed gene by gene, chromosome by chromosome. (Butler 552)

This moment within the text is important because here, an actual member of her "brood" describes Lilith in a highly mythicized way. Also, here the text frames Lilith and the cancer passed through the human women within her family as a completely life-giving. Lilith serves as this ultimate maternal figure, situated within a power found within women in her family. This is also important because, as is referenced often throughout the books, cancer means different things to the Oankali and humanity. Here, Butler posits that within the highly heteropatriarchal space of the earth, cancer-this thing that the text so clearly situates with Lilith and the women in her family-is hated. While the Oankali describe it as "beauty beyond Human comprehension"(552). This serves as a deepening of the decentering of man as an ontological category by replacing the hierarchical narratives that characterize traditional human and extraterrestrial relationships with the tenuous, tender, and confusing relationships between the Oankali, the ooloi, and humanity. Butler furthers this by putting Lilith's family: her mother, grandmother, and aunts before her and her countless children at the center of the text.

Using Anne McClintock's positioning of the black female body's relationship to power structures, we can understand Lilith's role within the text. Through the constant deconstruction of man as an ontological category throughout the text, Butler clears a space for Lilith to step through as a subject. However, Butler still frames the narrative within a larger allegory to colonialism. I believe Butler does this in order create a text whose focus on deconstruction, uses colonialism to eventually deconstruct all

heteropatriarchal categories within the text. The Oankali presence allows a space in which Lilith, indirectly, is able to do violence to the hierarchal structures of masculinity in a way that allow her to ascend to the status of a subject. This is seen particularly through gender, through the metamorphosis of one of Lilith's son into an ooloi, the non-sexed being within the Oankali that control reproduction. By following this path of deconstruction through Lilith's sons, their furthered indoctrination into racial/genetic/sexual hybridity serves as markers for the ways in which the heteropatriarchal world, characterized by "ugly faces" and humanicide in Lilith's time are shifting. Through our understanding of the text as a narrative exploration and deconstruction of heteropatriarchal imperialism, the particular type of genetic and reproductive violence done to Lilith's body is interesting, mostly because the cancer within Lilith's heritage serves as the key to the connection between the Oankali and their human partners, and the new world that they are able to create. The cancer is inextricably tied to Lilith's materi-lineage, "Her mother had cancer. Two of her aunts had had it and grandmother had been operated on three times for it. They were all dead now, killed by someone else's insanity. But the family 'tradition' was apparently continuing. 'What did I lose along with the cancer?' she asked softly. 'Nothing.'" (21) Lilith's cancer almost serves as a locking device between the Oankali and the humans. The Oankali use the language of "trade" to characterize their interactions with other species. Butler use of trade within the text is interesting because of the ways in which economics influenced earthly imperialism. Also within this exchange, where the Oankali name themselves and their intentions as "traders," there is some degree of foreshadowing into Lilith's existence within this "trade" and how this changes her. Through the text, Lilith emerges as a cross-

cultural character, who becomes hybridized not only physically but also through her liminal positioning between the Oankali and the humanity. This can be directly seen within her gardening practices in *Imago* and with her rallying to humanity in *Dawn* to use the new Earth, Lo, as a way to find subjectivity away from the Oankali. Despite her love and familial connections to the Oankali she states in *Imago*, “‘As much as I’ve loved my gardens,’ she said, ‘I never raised them just for myself or for us. I wanted to the resisters to take what they needed,’” and Akin notes, “‘They still feel guilt, feel as though they’ve deserted their people for aliens . . . No Human could see the genetic conflict that made them such a volcanic species” (562).

However, with Lilith’s ultimate acceptance of Oankali and the introduction of Akin to *Imago* and *Adulthood Rites*, we see Butler work to create a post-‘Man’ hybridized space in which these hierarchies are eliminated. Through the characterization of Akin, Butler literally reconstructs masculinity and humanity and makes a literal post-‘Man’ man that challenges the terrestrial-deep hierarchal characteristics of humanity in an effort to create an Afro-futurist space that is able to support Lilith as a subject in the way that terrestrial Earth, the colony on Mars, and humanity cannot.

As Kristeva and White suggest trauma and abjection are necessary to changes within power dynamics. Like *Kindred*, Butler opens up the space for black female ascension to the center of the text and into a throne of subjectivity with trauma. Before Butler settles in with the idea of deconstructing heteropatriarchal fear of difference that coat the human interactions with the Oankali and the Ooloi in *Dawn*, Butler presents the trauma as is. Lilith is asked to remember the ways in which her previous world had come to its destruction. Butler writes, “‘Could anyone who had lived through the war forget it?

A handful of people tried to commit humanicide. They had nearly succeeded . . . Humanity in its attempt to destroy itself had made the world unlivable. . . 'Is there anything left on Earth?'” (8, 15). The total breakdown of earth is important because it sets up a space in which there can be a total breakdown of the invisible structures that held up the Heteropatriarchy that supported the “Human Contradiction”. While the Earth has been remade by the Oankali, the planet exists as a shade of its former self, recreated from Oankali enhanced genetic and molecularly hybridized recreations of plants and animals. This new world exists literally as a completely new thing, made in the image of human-made Earth as a way to comfort the nostalgic humans more than for practicality. Butler writes, “They will have to be especially careful because some of the things they ‘know’ aren’t true anymore. There are new plants-mutations of old ones and additions we’ve made. . . Your Earth is still your Earth, but between the efforts of your people to destroy it and ours to restore it, it has changed” (33-34). Here, Butler points to the new hybridized Earth as a place that is situated in the middle temporally of the end of the ‘Man’ and the beginning of a new era in which humanity is genetically and culturally changed. As Jdahya states, “some of the things they ‘know’ aren’t true anymore,” this points to the complete shift in human knowledge which was rooted in humanity’s placement in the center and concrete laws about place and species identity to a existence in which both the humans and their home planet are unquestionably permanently changed. The earth that Lilith and the other humans find themselves on in the second book, *Imago*, features landscapes that move with the touch of the hands of humans who have accepted bonds with the Oankali’s ooloi and those children born from these unions. This earth and the inhabitants that the Oankali want to ideally populate it with, represent

a totalized hybrid identity that meshes humanity into an entity that is completely new, and perhaps unbalanced. This is seen in the way that the human-Oankali hybrids are named “constructs” throughout the text. They exist as genes cherry-picked from humanity and the Oankali. In this new space of Lo, in which the Oankali seek to undue the hierarchy found within the “Human Contradiction,” the naming of their hybrid children as constructs is important because it highlights the ways in which the combination of the Oankali and Lilith’s genes are essentially creating a new world order. And while the skeletons of domination are clearly still present- this new space is a space in which the black female body is central, integral, and mythical. As Eric White mentions in his article, entropy is a necessary part of the creating a space that can support any type of post-human/post-‘Man’ identity (White 393). In *Lilith’s Brood*, the rot found within the “Human Contradiction” works to bring about the larger dismantling of humanity and its planet, creating a space for Lilith to move to a centralized and deified position as a subject and a point of origin.

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