

Speculative Echoes of a Postcolonial World: Exploring Afro-futurism in Octavia Butler's "Parable of the Sower"

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أصداء تخيلية لعالم ما بعد الاستعمار: استكشاف الأفرو-مستقبلية في رواية "مثل الزارع" لأوكتافيا بتلر

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Abstract

This study explores Octavia Butler's "Parable of the Sower" through the lens of postcolonial theory, unravelling how Afro-futurism is reimagined and used to critique postcolonial realities in the novel. The hypothesis addresses how Butler employs Afro-futurism visions to challenge the dominant Western narrative of the future and focus on experiences, voices, and survival. The research conducts a detailed textual analysis of the novel. The study aims to contribute to understanding how Octavia Butler challenges the Western narrative of the future and how she emphasises the experience of black communities through her writings. Two central questions guide the investigation: How does Butler employ the futuristic elements in "Parable of the Sower" while embracing the post-apocalyptic genre? How does the novel challenge and reimagine the futures of marginalised black communities in society Keywords: Afro-futurism, Octavia Butler, Parable of the Sower, postcolonial theory, textual analysis, western narrative.

الخلاصة:

تستكشف هذه الدراسة رواية "مثل الزارع" لأوكتافيا بولتر من خلال عدسة نظرية ما بعد الاستعمار، وتكشف كيف يتم إعادة تصور الأفرو-مستقبلية واستخدامها لنقد حقائق ما بعد الاستعمار في الرواية. تتناول الفرضية كيف تستخدم بولتر رؤى الأفرو-مستقبلية لتحدي السرد الغربي السائد للمستقبل والتركيز على التجارب والأصوات والبقاء. يجري البحث تحليلاً نصياً مفصلاً لرواية "مثل الزارع". تهدف الدراسة إلى المساهمة في فهم كيف تتحدى أوكتافيا بولتر السرد الغربي للمستقبل وكيف تؤكد على تجربة المجتمعات السوداء من خلال كتاباتها. يوجه سؤالان رئيسيان التحقيق: كيف تستخدم بولتر العناصر المستقبلية في "مثل الزارع" مع تبني النوع ما بعد نهاية العالم؟ كيف تتحدى الرواية وتعيد تصور مستقبل المجتمعات السوداء المهمشة في المجتمع؟

1.Introduction: Afro-futurism, an intersection of African diasporic culture and speculative fiction, offers a creative and critical lens to explore postcolonial identities and futures. It challenges traditional narratives of history, culture, and technology by imagining alternative realities rooted in the experiences of Black people, often using speculative fiction as a medium to critique colonial legacies and reimagine a liberated future. Octavia Butler's "Parable of the Sower" (1993) stands as a pivotal work within this genre, blending themes of dystopia, environmental collapse, and spiritual awakening. Through the lens of Afro-futurism, Butler critiques the residual effects of colonialism, such as racial and economic oppression, and imagines alternative futures that resist these oppressive structures. In "Parable of the Sower", Butler introduces Lauren Olamina, a Black woman endowed with a prophetic vision of a new spiritual and social order called Earthseed, which offers a pathway out of the social and environmental ruins of a near-future America. As the protagonist journeys through a world ravaged by climate change, unchecked capitalism, and societal collapse, the novel echoes the experiences of postcolonial communities grappling with the aftermath of exploitation and cultural dislocation. Butler's work thus reflects what scholars like Mark Dery (1994) describe as Afrofuturism's central project:

reimagining futures for Black people that transcend historical oppression and embrace the speculative possibilities of technology, spirituality, and community. Through the speculative narrative of "Parable of the Sower", Butler critiques not only contemporary issues like environmental destruction and corporate greed but also the lingering effects of colonialism. As noted by scholars such as Madhu Dubey (2013), the novel situates Afro-futurism within a broader postcolonial discourse, where the speculative future becomes a site for reclaiming agency and reconfiguring cultural identity. This paper explores the intersections of postcolonial theory and Afrofuturism in Butler's novel, arguing that the novel presents a vision of resistance against colonial legacies by envisioning a future where marginalized communities can create new forms of social and spiritual life.

2. Literature Review The intersection of postcolonialism and Afrofuturism in Octavia Butler's novel has attracted substantial scholarly interest, particularly in examining how Butler envisions futures for marginalized communities, especially Black individuals, within a dystopian, post-apocalyptic framework. This literature review seeks to explore the significant scholarly discussions surrounding postcolonialism and Afrofuturism and their relevance to Butler's work, focusing on the ways in which her novel addresses systemic oppression, speculative futures, and the empowerment of Black voices. Postcolonial theory provides a crucial lens through which to examine "Parable of the Sower". Postcolonialism, as defined by Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (1995), critiques the lingering effects of colonialism and imperialism on formerly colonized nations and people. This approach often highlights the ways in which literature written by or about colonized populations reflects struggles for identity, autonomy, and survival within a context of oppression. In the novel, Butler's dystopian setting is steeped in the consequences of historical exploitation, inequality, and environmental degradation, which mirrors postcolonial themes of displacement and survival. Critics such as Paul Gilroy (1993) emphasize the concept of the "Black Atlantic," which explores the idea of migration, diasporic identities, and the impact of colonization on Black communities. Butler's portrayal of her characters' struggles for survival in a crumbling world echoes the postcolonial narrative of resistance against systems that perpetuate oppression. Moreover, the novel's depiction of a society ravaged by capitalist greed and environmental collapse highlights the relevance of postcolonial critiques in discussions of dystopian fiction. As Bressler (2012) explains, postcolonial literature often reflects the effects of imperialism on both the colonizer and the colonized with dystopian fiction providing a natural framework for exploring such themes. In the novel, the societal collapse results from the exploitation of natural resources and the disenfranchisement of vulnerable populations, resonating with postcolonial critiques of Western domination and exploitation. Afrofuturism, a term coined by Mark Dery (1994), examines how speculative fiction and science fiction, in particular, can be used to explore African American concerns in relation to technoculture and future imaginaries. Afrofuturism allows for the exploration of alternative futures for Black people, drawing on both past histories and futuristic possibilities to challenge dominant cultural narratives. In this context, "Parable of the Sower" has been analyzed as a significant Afrofuturist text, as it envisions a world where marginalized communities, particularly Black communities, are not only surviving but reimagining their futures. Lise Yaszek (2006) contends that Afrofuturism provides Black artists and writers with the tools to reclaim their narratives from histories of erasure and oppression. In Butler's novel, Lauren Olamina's Earthseed philosophy serves as a futuristic framework for reclaiming agency and reimagining human survival. Lauren's vision of humanity "taking root among the stars" (Butler, 1993, p. 102) aligns with Afrofuturist themes of transcending earthly limitations, whether they are imposed by systemic oppression, racism, or environmental collapse. This aspirational vision of the future contrasts with the despair commonly found in dystopian narratives, positioning Black communities not as passive victims but as active creators of new worlds. Scholars like Eshun (2003) argue that Afrofuturism works to recover "counter-futures" that resist the oppressive projections faced by the African diaspora. Butler's novel uses Lauren's character to articulate these counter-futures, where the future is shaped by adaptability, community, and the reclamation of spirituality. Critics have noted that Lauren's leadership and the Earthseed philosophy represent the possibility of constructing a new social order that centers on inclusion and collective survival, which challenges the dominant narratives of power and hierarchy that have historically excluded marginalized voices. In addition to Afrofuturism and postcolonialism, gender and race play critical roles in Butler's construction of her future world. Butler subverts traditional tropes in both science fiction and dystopian literature by centering a Black female protagonist, which challenges patriarchal and racial norms that have historically dominated these genres. Morris (2013) explores how Afrofuturist feminism in Butler's work reclaims the role of Black women in shaping futures, not just surviving them. Lauren Olamina's role as the visionary leader of Earthseed reflects this

reclamation, as she is not merely a survivor of the dystopian world but an architect of a new societal framework. Critics like Yaszek (2006) emphasize that Afrofuturist texts often explore the relationship between race, gender, and technological or spiritual transformation. Lauren's ability to envision and implement Earthseed, a philosophy rooted in adaptability and change, reflects Afrofuturism's focus on Black women as central to future-making. Lauren's leadership challenges traditional gender roles and highlights the importance of Black women's voices in speculative fiction, particularly as they relate to issues of survival, community-building, and future aspirations.

3. Methodology The analysis of how this relates to the writing will be conducted qualitatively through a literary analysis and it will compare the intersections of Afrofuturism with postcolonial theory in Octavia Butler's the novel. Methodology consists of three parts: 1) text analysis; 2) theoretical framework; and 3) comparative analysis. This research focuses a closer reading of the novel, that make through Butler's narrative style and technique with the characters and themes. This paper will look into Lauren Olamina, the main character and her philosophy of Earthseed that would eventually become a guiding principle in the face of the savage socio-political and environmental devastation presented within the pages of this dystopian novel. We will focus on specific segments that highlight Butler's process in crafting an imagined future that serves as both a denunciation of colonial histories, but also contains the seeds for alternative forms of community and identity. This analysis will illuminate the language, symbolism and motifs that represent Afro-futurist values — resilience, change and spirituality.

4. Theoretical Framework This study is grounded in postcolonial theory, which provides a critical lens to analyze the historical, cultural, and political impacts of colonialism and imperialism on marginalized communities. Postcolonial theory emerged as a field in the mid-1980s, focusing on the effects of colonization on the cultures, identities, and literatures of formerly colonized nations. It examines the ways in which colonial power relations persist in contemporary societies, as well as how these dynamics are resisted and subverted through literature and other forms of cultural expression. Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin's *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* (1995) remains one of the foundational texts in this field, highlighting how postcolonial literature emerges from the struggle against the domination of one culture over another. In the context of literature, postcolonial studies are concerned with texts produced in formerly colonized nations, particularly those written in English, such as those from Africa, the Caribbean, and South Asia. This critical framework specifically excludes works that perpetuate Eurocentric viewpoints and narratives, often represented by white, male, and European perspectives. As Bressler (2012) notes, to be colonized is "to be removed from history," and postcolonial literature seeks to recover and reassert the histories and voices of those marginalized by colonialism (pp. 198–202). In this regard, the novel can be understood as a work that reclaims the marginalized narratives of African American and other postcolonial communities, situating itself within the larger tradition of resistance literature. Afro-futurism, a term coined by Mark Dery in 1993, serves as a key framework for this study. Afrofuturism combines elements of speculative fiction with African American history, culture, and identity to reimagine the future of the Black diaspora. Dery (1993) defines Afro-futurism as "speculative fiction that treats African American themes and addresses African American concerns in the context of 20th century techno-culture" (p. 143). By engaging with science fiction and fantasy, Afro-futurism enables African American writers and artists to reclaim their narratives and envision futures free from the historical burdens of colonization, slavery, and racial oppression. Through speculative narratives, Afro-futurism critiques the erasure of Black history and identity, while simultaneously providing imaginative possibilities for the future. The novel is an exemplary work of Afro-futurism that merges postcolonial critique with speculative fiction. The novel is set in a dystopian future where environmental collapse and social inequality have left America in a state of chaos. In this future, Butler's protagonist, Lauren Olamina, forms a new religion called Earthseed, which envisions humanity's destiny among the stars. Through this narrative, Butler critiques not only the environmental and socio-economic crises facing marginalized communities but also the long-standing effects of colonialism and racial exploitation. As Yaszek (2006) and Kahi (2006) argue, Afro-futurism allows Black artists to imagine futures that are not bound by the constraints of historical narratives that have erased or distorted Black identities. The themes explored—alienation, survival, and the quest for a new world—echo many of the concerns of postcolonial literature. As Dery (1993) notes in his essay "Black to the Future," Afro-futurism shares many of the same concerns as post-colonial literature, particularly in its focus on reclaiming narratives from the dominant, Eurocentric culture. Both postcolonial theory and Afro-futurism emphasize the importance of re-imagining identity, history, and culture in ways that resist and subvert colonial legacies. As Asim and

Hamilton (2000) have noted, Afro-futurism allows for the exploration of alternative histories and futures that challenge the oppression and marginalization faced by African Americans. Moreover, Afro-futurism extends beyond literature to encompass a wide range of cultural expressions, including music, visual arts, and education. Artists like Sun-Ra and later musicians, visual artists, and writers of the Black Speculative Arts movement, have drawn on African culture and space-age imagery to explore themes of liberation, resistance, and cultural reclamation (Dery, 1994). These artistic movements offer new ways of understanding the relationship between race, technology, and the future, and have inspired scholars such as Eshun (2003) and Morris (2013) to view Afrofuturism as a form of resistance against the oppressive cultural narratives that have historically devalued Black experiences. In this study, postcolonial theory and Afro-futurism are combined to analyze the ways in which the novel challenges colonial and racial narratives, while also imagining new futures for marginalized communities. The study will examine how Butler's work engages with themes of alienation, environmental collapse, and the search for a new identity, all through the lens of postcolonial and Afro-futurist thought. By applying this theoretical framework, the study will not only contribute to the understanding of Butler's work but also to broader discussions of how literature can serve as a tool for resisting and reimagining the postcolonial world.

5. Discussion Butler's "Parable of the Sower" (1993) presents a speculative vision of a dystopian future that aligns with the principles of both postcolonial theory and Afrofuturism. By merging the socio-political concerns of post-colonialism with the speculative elements central to Afro-futurism, Butler critiques the environmental, social, and racial inequalities that are remnants of colonial and imperial systems. The novel's exploration of survival, spiritual evolution, and community-building within a collapsing world reflects both the impact of historical oppressions and the potential for future liberation.

a. Post-colonial Themes: Resistance and Reclamation The post-colonial dimension is evident in its depiction of marginalized communities grappling with the legacies of exploitation, environmental degradation, and social inequality. The protagonist, Lauren Olamina, experiences firsthand the racial and economic oppression that mirrors the struggles of postcolonial societies. Lauren's journey is one of reclaiming agency, as she resists the structures that seek to dominate and destroy her community. As Bressler (2012) notes, postcolonial literature often focuses on the struggle to reclaim identity and history after being "removed from history" by colonial powers (p. 198). Lauren's creation of the Earthseed philosophy is a metaphor for the postcolonial subject's reclamation of self, history, and future. In the novel, Butler offers a vision of community that is rooted in collective survival and mutual support, mirroring postcolonial calls for solidarity among marginalized groups. For example, Lauren's efforts to build a diverse community of survivors reflect the postcolonial struggle to forge new identities and social structures in the aftermath of colonial disruption. As Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (1995) suggest, postcolonial literature is often concerned with the creation of alternative social orders that resist the dominance of Western, colonial ideologies. Lauren's Earthseed philosophy offers such an alternative, envisioning a future in which humanity transcends its earthly struggles and reaches for the stars—a metaphor for liberation from the constraints of historical and colonial oppression.

b. Afro-futurism and the Reimagination of the Future Afro-futurism, as defined by Dery (1993), is a speculative mode that allows African American artists and writers to reimagine the future through a lens that centers Black experiences and concerns. Butler's novel engages deeply with Afro-futurist themes, particularly in its use of speculative fiction to explore the possibilities of a future shaped by Black spiritual and social innovation. Lauren's Earthseed represents a radical departure from the traditional religious and social structures that have failed her community. This reflects the Afro-futurist desire to break free from oppressive pasts and imagine new, empowering futures. The novel's setting, a near-future America devastated by environmental collapse and social breakdown, allows Butler to explore the consequences of the historical exploitation of both natural resources and marginalized peoples. Yaszek (2006) explains that Afrofuturism uses speculative fiction to critique the historical and cultural erasure experienced by Black communities while simultaneously offering new possibilities for future liberation. In this context, Earthseed is not just a spiritual path but a vision of an Afro-futurist future, where marginalized communities reclaim their destiny through innovation, resilience, and mutual care. Lauren's journey, and her belief that "God is change," embodies the Afro-futurist belief in the ability to reshape both the present and the future. This concept of "becoming" resonates with Eshun's (2003) argument that Afrofuturism is concerned with creating "counter-futures" that resist the oppressive legacies of colonialism and white supremacy. Butler imagines a future where Black individuals and communities not only

survive but also actively shape the world around them, using their lived experiences and spiritual traditions to create something new.

c. Afro-futurism and Post-colonialism: Reclaiming Identity One of the novel's central Afro-futurist themes is the reclamation of identity through narrative and imagination. Lauren's development of Earthseed is a process of self-redefinition, in which she rejects the oppressive systems of the past and envisions a future where her community can thrive on its own terms. As Nelson (2000) and Mayer (2000) suggest, Afro-futurism provides a space for imagining alternative futures that empower Black communities by reclaiming their histories and identities. Lauren's vision of a future where humanity takes to the stars—escaping the damaged Earth to form new societies—represents this Afro-futurist aspiration to transcend historical limitations and achieve liberation through self-determination. The novel's emphasis on community-building also ties into both post-colonial and Afro-futurist frameworks. Lauren's insistence on creating a diverse, inclusive community reflects postcolonial calls for solidarity among marginalized groups, while her focus on spiritual and technological evolution aligns with Afro-futurist ideas about reclaiming technology and progress for the benefit of Black communities. As Morris (2013) notes, Afro-futurism offers a way for Black individuals to imagine themselves not just as survivors of oppression but as creators of new, dynamic futures. Lauren's role as a leader and visionary reflects this transformative potential, as she guides her community through the chaos of the present toward a hopeful future.

d. The Role of Environmental and Social Collapse Butler's portrayal of environmental collapse in the novel can also be viewed through a post-colonial lens, as it reflects the exploitation of natural resources and the marginalized communities most affected by environmental degradation. The novel critiques the destructive effects of unchecked capitalism and corporate greed, themes that resonate with post-colonial critiques of the ways in which colonial powers have historically exploited both people and the environment for profit. Lauren's world is one in which the consequences of this exploitation have come to fruition, with social inequality and environmental collapse becoming inescapable realities. This environmental collapse also serves as a metaphor for the collapse of colonial systems, with the novel's characters forced to find new ways of living and organizing society in the wake of this destruction. As Musing (2021) explains, Afro-futurism often involves imagining alternative worlds and futures that challenge the oppressive narratives of mainstream culture. Butler envisions a future where marginalized individuals must not only survive but also rebuild and reimagine their communities in the face of overwhelming adversity. Octavia Butler, the science fiction author widely revered for her portrayal of a rich dystopian world like our own, utilizes this mixing of sounds and genres in the novel to blend post-apocalyptic tropes with futuristic exploits to subversively comment on the near future consequences of our contemporary soul-crushing societal dynamics while simultaneously offering audiences hope through potential escape routes for marginalized Black communities. Set in a dystopian America devastated by climate change, neoliberalism, and societal collapse at the level of human visibility, the book is both a warning about these systems as well as a haunting representation of existing hierarchies. Imagining a world on the verge of failure opens an avenue to consider how those at the margins can reclaim their future by enabling them to become adaptive, resourceful and spiritually inventive. These components of the future are utilized most intricately by Butler in her main character Lauren Olamina and her radically new philosophy surrounding humanity's survival, Earthseed. This final thought of Earthseed—that God is change—encapsulates the heart of Afro-futurism; that Anticipatory Grief need not be an incomplete cycle where old oppressions define our futures, when transformative relationships with everything evolve around a systemic and orthopraxic embrace of adaptive practices (Butler 1993: p. 3) This parallels what Yaszek (2006) describes as Afro-futurism binary—it helps black communities rise above past trauma and constraints by depicting futures where they can. This theme of empowerment and reclamation, particularly for Black individuals and communities historically omitted from narratives about progress and the future, is reflected in Lauren's journey from a small somewhat isolated enclave — historically literally tied to the land by white patriarchal power structures — to the formation of an Earthseed. The crumbling law and social order of the novel's post-apocalyptic world also reflect wider postcolonial themes of displacement and perseverance within oppressive systems. For instance, Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (1995) persuasively argue that postcolonial literature deals with the legacy of historical oppression or displacement and the search for alternative modes of being. The society of scarce resources with the powerful preying on the weak Butler describes is rooted in the historical experiences of colonized and oppressed peoples. The book proposes that even in this broken world, people came together and created their own futures; especially in the black communities within this ready state. The way in which Lauren builds a

multicultural and collaborative community also illustrates the postcolonial challenge to construct new identities and social arrangements in the wake of colonial breakdown. Butler subverts tropes of dystopian fiction by placing a young Black woman at the center of this new world. The novel takes a very different approach — at its heart, upending standard white male-led narratives of apocalypse where restoration has only one face to translate their words and guide efforts. Instead, Lauren's race and gender are part of who she is as a leader with a vision who envisions a future that will include those historically excluded from the systems of power. According to Morris (2013), Afro-futurism helps Black people envision themselves as more than just survivors; it allows them not only to survive but also to act by imagining new, vibrant futures. Interestingly, the futurist reading of Lauren in Butler also fits with this concept: Lauren rejects old hierarchies because Earthseed demands that marginalized peoples work to shape society (Darowski). This reclamation of the future is central to Afro-futurism's approach to counter ethnocentric constructs that reinforce inequitable systems. I also argue that the futuristic elements of Butler, such as Lauren's belief that humans will eventually be able to plant themselves truly "among the stars" (Butler, 1993: p.102), still capture Afro-futurism's wish for this futurity to reflect an ichnography far beyond what currently exists both laterally and temporally. Nelson (2000) and Eshun (2003) argue that Afro-futurism does indeed give agency back to Black communities by allowing space for imagining a future where they are not defined by historical erasures or present oppressions. Lauren's vision of an off-Earth future is a strong metaphor for this desire, representing the chance to escape and transcend her current world full of the colonialism, racism and ecological destruction that now envelopes it. In Butler's case, the post-apocalyptic genre complements her Afro-futurism, enabling her to contest prevailing narratives of marginalized peoples and their future. Butler is redefining the roles of Black communities in our futures by placing a Black woman at the top of a dystopian world. To cite Dery (1993), Afro-futurism reclaims speculative fiction to fill the void left by a history that silences and marginalizes black voices while offering up potential new futures. This is exactly what the novel does by illustrating how even a world built to eradicate minority groups cannot destroy agency and choice, as Lauren and her community take back control in more ways than one. Indeed, Butler is not simply using this fictional and dystopian lens to critique her contemporary socio-political milieu but it also serves as a way to imagine what happens when marginalized communities take back their power — what would utopia look like. In doing so, Butler forces readers to reconsider sag plausible methods that would allow for continued existence and dominance in a world that is just as familiar and frighteningly similar to our own oppressive structures

6. Conclusion In "Parable of the Sower", the novelist weaves together elements of post-colonial theory and Afro-futurism to critique the ongoing legacies of colonialism and racial oppression while imagining new futures for marginalized communities. The novel's exploration of survival, community, and spiritual innovation reflects both post-colonial concerns with reclaiming history and Afro-futurist aspirations for creating empowering futures. By blending these two frameworks, Butler offers a vision of the future where Black communities are not only liberated from their past but also empowered to shape their own destinies.

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