

AFROFUTURISM: TECHNOLOGY OF SURVIVING AND CREATING NEW FUTURISTIC POSSIBILITIES IN OCTAVIA BUTLER'S *LILITH'S BROOD* TRILOGY

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ABSTRACT

In Octavia Butler's *Lilith's Brood* (2007), the intersection of the protagonists with technology creates new possibilities for survival in a futuristic world. Through *Lilith in Dawn*, *Akin in Adulthood Rights*, and *Jodahs in Imago*, this trilogy demonstrates how technology can create a more inclusive and equitable future and challenge dominant narratives about race and identity. Furthermore, the novels embody the principles of Afrofuturism, which envisions a future where Black people exist outside oppressive systems. Butler's *Lilith's Brood* presents a hopeful alternative vision of the future where marginalised individuals and communities can prosper. By utilising Womack's perspective of Afrofuturism, this study analyses Butler's *Lilith's Brood*, centring on the experiences and views of the characters while also considering the impact of technology and science on their future. Womack's Afrofuturism approach is rooted in the idea that Black people have always existed in a state of futurity, as they have had to imagine and create their futures in a world that has systematically denied them the right to shape their destinies. Through this approach, *Lilith's Brood* can be seen as a powerful commentary on the complexities of identity, power, and liberation and a compelling vision of the future. Overall, using Womack's Afrofuturism to analyse *Lilith's Brood* provides a nuanced and multifaceted understanding of Butler's work. By examining the protagonists' interaction with technology, readers can better appreciate the complexities of identity and power in a rapidly changing world.

Keywords: Afrofuturism; *Lilith's Brood*; Octavia Butler; technology; Womack

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INTRODUCTION

This paper investigates how the protagonists' use of technology contributes to advancing a new future identity in Octavia Butler's *Lilith's Brood* trilogy. The target characters are Lilith in *Dawn*, Akin in *Adulthood Rites*, and Jodahs in *Imago*. The investigation of the protagonists' interaction with technology to create new possibilities for survival in a futuristic world will be done by applying the concept of Afrofuturism, especially the Afrofuturism approach developed by Ytasha Womack. The paper will illustrate the significance of encouraging technology to improve African Americans' experiences and modify their bodies and lives to achieve preferable future social standing and to overcome the risks of misusing advanced technology. Thus, through the beneficial interaction with technology, African Americans' undesirable matters can be changed and eliminated to attain a better future.

Afrofuturism depicts a variety of ideas, including human utopia and dystopia, human transcendence, the impact of science and technology on social structure, future visions, altering the future to have a better one, and analysis of some novel subject matters. The Afrofuturists agree on improving the quality of life for future humans. They use imagination to open up infinite possibilities for reforming and eliminating undesirable social issues such as identity mutations. *Lilith's Brood* shows the vital role of the Afrofuturist aspects of Butler's protagonist in reforming the African American's future. Furthermore, the novels reflect human and technology interactions' negative and positive influences in improving African Americans' future.

The *Lilith's Brood* trilogy by Octavia Butler is a set of three post-apocalyptic, speculative fiction, which falls under the category of Science Fiction (SF) novels. The novels depict the positive and negative effects of using technology to change various aspects of human life. In the novels, humanity demonstrates that it is unworthy of living on Earth alone because its nuclear wars have rendered it uninhabitable. Afrofuturism is a method of reevaluating and updating African American culture by incorporating future ideas. Womack (2013) presents that "Afrofuturism combines elements of science fiction, historical fiction, speculative fiction, fantasy, Afrocentricity, and magic realism with non-Western beliefs. Sometimes, it is a total re-envisioning of the past and speculation about the future rife with cultural critiques" (Womack, 2013, p. 9). Afrofuturism is a medium of reassessing the importance of the African American image. It concerns "[w]orks of literature, film, art, and music that address the relationship of black people to science, technology, and humanism" (Ramírez, 2008, p. 186). Afrofuturism represents the plight of minorities and the battle to reinforce African American's freedom (Kim, 2017).

The representation of African Americans is highly complex in SF. As a result, various academics concentrate on various SF models. Thus, previous studies have discussed Butler's *Lilith's Brood* by exploring the influences of advanced technology on shaping African Americans' futuristic identity. For instance, Smith (2022) studies the possibilities of futuristic liberation of the blacks by focussing on Oankali's treatment and approach to dealing with human memory. Another example is where Osburn (2022) investigates the embodiment of *Lilith's Brood*, the epic storytelling in a post-apocalyptic world, and analyses the trilogy as an early work of Afrofuturism that explores a posthuman/alien world, highlighting marginalised identities and challenging ideological myths. Osburn's study locates the trilogy in a post-apocalyptic future that delves into the intersections of race, gender, and colonisation. However, Osburn neglects to deal with the protagonists' positive interaction with technology and their transhumanistic qualities.

Still, not all of the selected three novels together discuss Afrofuturism and the technologies of surviving in *Lilith's Brood*. A study by Cristina Cordova Paz (2020) highlights implicit bias in *Lilith's Brood*. It shows how identifying and addressing these biases can improve individual and community well-being. Here, Butler challenges the idea of human contradiction and proposes a strategy for evolution beyond it. Paz discusses the benefits of changing perceptions about differences for the world's happiness. Unfortunately, Paz's study does not provide an in-depth analysis of the protagonists' roles as modified humans in overcoming the contradictions of humans and reconstructing their future lives.

Also, there have been earlier studies about the fiction of Butler and the presentation of African American characters, which were based separately on one or two concepts of feminism, transhumanism, Afrofuturism, and identity. For example, Jennifer Pretzer's study (2018) examines how Butler's *Dawn* (1987) fits Heinlein's definition of SF in order to preserve a distinctly human identity in the face of genetic, social, sexual, emotional, and psychological manipulation and alien race domination. On the other hand, Kim (2017) examines the cultural aesthetics of Afrofuturism and how the posthuman world has enabled African American writers to re-configure and re-negotiate racial power in Butler's *Kindred* (1979). A dissertation by Jessica Lynn FitzPatrick (2017) is another example that shows how SF spatially revises the dimensions of social hierarchies, corrupt politics, the technologies of the future, and democracy.

Several Afrofuturistic literary studies have been conducted to investigate the future of African Americans. For example, Mark A. Tabone (2021) adopts the concept of Afrofuturism to analyse N. K. Jemisin's short story "The Ones Who Stay and Fight" (2020). It argues that Jemisin creates a world that embodies the "revolution of value" as well as the intersectional Black feminist praxis that underpins contemporary activist movements such as Black Lives Matter. Another example is Harris (2020), who investigates the protagonist N'Jadaka in Marvel's *Black Panther* (2018), "who fluctuates between three identities" to discuss the Afrofuturistic African American future identity (Harris, 2020, p. 278). Another study by Amandine H. Fauchaux (2017) argues the "intersectional approach to Afrofuturism that examines the complex and intricate relationships between race and sexuality, looking specifically into the works of Nalo Hopkinson as an exemplar of a feminist, queer-centered Afrofuturism" (Fauchaux, 2017, p. 563).

In summary, the previous studies have not investigated how humans and technology influence African Americans' future. It is argued here that the selected novels represent Butler's futuristic vision for surviving and a map for a better life for African Americans.

METHODOLOGY

In *Afrofuturism: The World of Black Science Fiction and Fantasy Culture* (2013), Womack depicts the meeting point of imagination, technology, the future, and surviving, in which SF and Afrocentricity are combined with revising the past and speculating on the future. Afrofuturism is a technique for self-healing and liberation. According to Womack, advanced technology can be used to create and sustain a better African American persona. African Americans can use technology to transcend the limitations of their physical bodies and imagine new futures. Afrofuturism is concerned with race and technology in this way, which frequently portrays black people as passive recipients of technological progress. As Butler said in the *Parable of the Sower*, "All that you touch you change. All that you change changes you. The only lasting truth is change" (Womack, 2013, p. 3). Thus, through the beneficial interaction

with technology, African Americans' undesirable matters can be changed and eliminated to attain a better future.

In this study, we adopt Womack's Afrofuturistic point of view. She posits that Afrofuturism envisions advanced technology being used to illuminate and transcend African Americans' identity imbalance (Womack, 2013). We will discuss the significance of the protagonists' wise use of technology to improve their experiences and modify their bodies and lives to achieve a better future social standing. We will analyse Lilith, Akin, and Jodahs' interactions with advanced technology to have a new beginning and a better life.

This study delves into Lilith, Akin, and Jodahs' journeys as they learn to embrace and utilise the Oankali's advanced technologies, exploring how it empowers them and challenges the assumptions about the role of technology in society. Ultimately, this discussion highlights how Butler's novels exemplify the Afrofuturist perspective of surviving and its potential to offer new perspectives on technology and its impact on identity formation and society. Also, this study focuses on the technological aspects of human life in the selected novels.

The analysis falls into three sections. The first section deals with Lilith's character and how technology is used to survive and create a new identity for African Americans. The second section discusses Akin's character by investigating the outcomes of the body enhancement technology affecting society's structure. The third section is devoted to analysing the character of Jodahs as the ultimate step of African Americans' use of advanced technology, which provides hope for a new beginning and a better life. Hence, one can think about Afrofuturism as a critical view to discuss African Americans' future.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Lilith – The Utilisation of Technology to Survive

Science and technology in Butler's *Dawn* are manifested as a double-edged sword. The term "technology" appears only once throughout the trilogy, in *Dawn*, and it sums up the protagonists' desires to employ technology: "There was a lot of work being done in genetics before the war. That may have devolved into some eugenics program afterwards. Hitler might have done something like that after World War Two if he had had the technology and if he had survived" (Butler, 2007, p. 143). Technology is a means of survival for Lilith and her human companion, Joseph, to escape the current situation, the capture of the Oankali. The novel's narrative here is like Hamilton's Afrofuturistic mood of thought, which displays the exploration of new possibilities for a safe environment to protect themselves (18). Butler refers to technology as a means of survival for Lilith and her human companion Joseph to escape the current situation, the capture of the Oankali. Nonetheless, she indirectly encourages patience and the waiting for new technology outcomes that will either be developed or modified: "I think our best bet now is to learn all we can. Get facts. Keep our eyes open. Then later we can make the best possible use of any opportunities we might have to escape" (Butler, 2007, p. 143). Similarly, Butler represents Oankali's approach in tasking Lilith to awaken some saved humans and select whom she awakes.

Lilith is portrayed as a young black woman saved by the Oankali after the nuclear war on Earth. However, she is far from a mere survivor of the nuclear war; she is a vehicle for creating a new African American identity. The novel's opening sentences represent the viewpoint that the issue is constantly about surviving. Butler opens *Dawn* by attracting attention to Lilith's condition: "Alive. Still alive. Alive again" (Butler, 2007, p. 5). Butler points out the three modes

of Lilith's survival: being alive, sustaining life, and dying and becoming alive again. Furthermore, Butler connects Lilith's existence in the post-war world and continuity into the future throughout the novel and develops her character by relating the aspects of survival and technology together. In other words, the Oankali's technology saves Lilith's life, enables her to survive among the awakened people to complete her mission, and transforms her body into a co-creator of new life forms through her brood.

More importantly, to prepare readers for Lilith's extensive encounters with future possibilities of scientific and technological impacts, humans may be destructive in their use of technology. In the novel, humans' deeds on Earth have proven that they are unworthy of resuming control of their lives on the planet. Consequently, the Oankali do not trust humans and deprive them of advanced technology 'machines' on the new Earth from the beginning. Instead, humankind must learn how to use it for peace, building civilisations and not destroying them. The Oankali offer them hope for a better future for the saved human beings rather than regression to primitivism; in return, the rescued people must respect and learn the basics of human life for survival.

In *Dawn*, Butler shows how humans have destroyed the Earth through nuclear wars. Thus, Butler puts Oankali's views about using technology in contrast to those of human beings. In this regard, through Jdahya, the male Oankali whose duty is to make Lilith accept the Oankali lifestyle, Butler simultaneously puts us in the mood of comprehending the misuse of technology. She explains what the humans did to Earth and establishes the use of technology for the sake of surviving and eliminating: "As for how many humans are here: all of you who survived your war. We collected as many as we could. The ones we did not find in time died of injury, disease, hunger, radiation, cold" (Butler, 2007, p. 14). As a human who lived before the nuclear war, Lilith realises and experiences what has happened to humans on Earth and suffers the destructive ability of some people in misusing technology.

Science and technology bound the future of humanity. Butler refers to the abilities of sciences and advanced technology to change the human body through the ooloi. In the selected novels, the ooloi represents the capabilities of technology and what technology can do for the sake of humanity. Technology can either create disasters or civilisations, depending on humankind's manipulations. Thus, the future and technology are in humankind's hands to decide what role they play and what destiny to choose. Therefore, Lilith accepts Oankali's technology to attain liberation from the limitations of the previous body state. She wants to use the best bodily technologies to place African Americans in a better future status. It is precisely here that Butler reimagines African Americans' futures as being significantly different from the past and the present through the utilisation of survival technology.

The ooloi modifications to Lilith's genes solve many undesirable things for Lilith, such as overcoming undesirable biological limitations and improving her body. In the first place, the ooloi help Lilith's body rid itself of 'Cancer,' which has a history in the family of women. Jdahya tells Lilith that the modifications made to her body are to save her life and prevent her from having the same destiny as her relatives: "Her mother had died of cancer. Two of her aunts had had it, and her grandmother had been operated on three times for it. They were all dead now, killed by someone else's insanity" (Butler, 2007, p. 21).

Lilith's need for survival is evident throughout *Dawn*. In 'Womb,' the first section of the novel, Lilith wants to die and live simultaneously. However, the desire for liberation takes over, and Lilith agrees to deal with the aliens but refuses to participate in hybridisation. In 'Family,' the novel's second part, Lilith's fellow human, Paul, tries to rape her, but the Oankali save her.

The self-destructive forces of humans are strong and deeply coded in the human psyche. Thus, Lilith's body is enhanced to face such situations with the awakened people. In the 'Nursery' and the 'Training Floor,' the third and the fourth sections of *Dawn*, self-destructive forces take a full swing on both the human and Oankali sides. Then, the novel ends with an announcement of Lilith's pregnancy: "I have made you pregnant with Joseph's child. I would not have done it so soon, but I wanted to use his seed, not a print" (Butler, 2007, p. 246). The Oankali's technology ensures her continuation and survival as an African American fertile woman.

Lilith has no control over her body and reproduction, while the technology that initially enhanced her body was used to subdue her. Regardless of the Oankali aliens' stated intentions, the technology aimed at improving the human and alien conditions was essentially achieved contrary to the stated purpose. On the other hand, Lilith's intention to accept the body enhancements is mixed with the hope of offering her brood a better future identity.

Working for a better future and ensuring continuity by using technology has played a significant role in influencing relationships between humans on the one hand and humans and technology on the other. Human beings should use scientific inventions and advanced technology to increase humanity's value, get unique qualities to eliminate undesirable ones, and give worthiness to humankind to protect their existence and identity. For these reasons, Lilith adapts to the technology of the Oankali to survive and produce a new identity for the African Americans. Thus, she agrees to have Akin, the outcome of the ooloi's genetic engineering technology.

Lilith appears to be at risk of avoiding and misusing science and technology. Butler illustrates the hazards of interaction with technology and what can happen to the protagonist's life and her people if they do not employ it properly. This view becomes clearer in comparing these threatening features of misusing technology to cancer; Butler cautions that "intelligence does enable you to deny facts you dislike. But your denial doesn't matter. Cancer growing in someone's body will go on growing in spite of denial" (Butler, 2007, p. 39). Butler's protagonist works with the Oankali to eradicate any misfortunes of technology; otherwise, there is no chance for a better future for humankind. Butler points out Lilith's positive interaction with technology through the image of cancer. In the narrative, Lilith appears to have symptoms of cancer. This disease caused pain in her family. She might not be able to change the past and the present, but she can certainly change how she relates to the past and present pains. If cancer symbolises significant harm that Lilith's ancestors experienced and identified with, the struggle against the illness has become a part of the identity of Lilith's ancestors. Although the disease is not Lilith's, she has taken it from her family and integrated it as her own. That illness has been navigating her life, while the pain from the unhealed suffering is growing and threatening to take over her life. In this respect, the role of alien technology is critical, as thanks to the Oankali technology, Lilith learns how to prevent cancer from happening. Thus, a future free of racism and violence may appear impossible to disempower African Americans because it would be unattainable. Therefore, innovative technology enables Butler to shift perception and retrieve the free agency of African Americans, making an enhanced African American persona possible and desirable in the future. The concept of Afrofuturism is used as a platform for reimagining the world where the past continues to live through life experiences but does not negatively determine them.

Accordingly, Lilith's positive interaction with the Onakali technology and acceptance of body modifications release her from the compulsion to repeat the past. Lilith releases the negative charges attached to cancer by absorbing cancer, and she is liberated from the

compulsions emerging from the disease. Through the depiction of Lilith, Butler enables African Americans to free themselves from the compulsions of racism and ultimately from de-marginalisation in society.

The removal of cancer from Lilith's body is a sort of bodily upgrade the ooloi apply to prepare Lilith for a healthy and well-constructed brood; cancer "would have killed me (Lilith) if the Oankali hadn't done some work on me ..." (Butler, 2007, p. 294). The ability of the ooloi to change, reverse the effects of a deadly filthy disease, and reform Lilith's genes makes her able to have healthy children. Therefore, Butler creates Lilith's brood to be different from ordinary human beings, ready to encounter the harshness of nature and establish new entities due to their modified bodies. The genetic manipulation of sperm to create a new generation of African Americans represents hope for new possibilities. They will represent the powers of advanced technology and the possibilities of changing their future. The technology of manipulating sperm is similar to 'artificial insemination.' Lilith agrees to have her son in this way because she has the prospect of being in a better world that will represent optimism for a better future for humanity. In addition, her modified brood will be ready to reform human relationships and initiate a uniquely African American future identity.

Akin - The Outcomes of Future Technology

This section looks at the representation of African Americans' future identities through Akin's connection with technology in the context of Afrofuturism; specifically to discover how the protagonist utilises technology to solve social problems like inequality, instabilities, and unrest to achieve future identity liberation. Akin in *Adulthood Rites* shows that technology can build a new African American future by constructing Akin and establishing his importance. Akin is the first male-born construct of Lilith and Oankali aliens, and represents the exploration of different outcomes of the technical advancements of the body on social structures. In this manner, the novel's narrative reflects how advanced technology can transcend an individual's identity and shape his future, as claimed by Adeniyi (149). His enhanced body has been attributed to his leadership role in bringing together the races in conflict. However, he seems to be taking over leadership in transitioning to the new hybrid race because of his unique characteristics.

Akin's interaction with technology is so different from that of his mother. As discussed in the previous section, Lilith's interaction with technology is related to the desire to survive. Until the end of the novel, it is mixed with imagining a better future for her brood. In the case of Akin, the notion of technology and its application grows as the novel's events progress and expand with the growth of the story and Akin's importance. Thus, Akin's role and technology utilisation are interrelated. Imaginatively, Butler creates the four worlds in *Adulthood Rites*, Lo, Phoenix, Chkahichdahk, and Home, to reflect the protagonist's interaction with technology for a better future for his people.

The representation of technology in Lo is noticeable through Akin himself. He is a constructed human – Oankali male. He is a prototype male of genetic engineering technology. By introducing a male protagonist, Butler seeks to make a balance for utilising the power of technology. Human males are referred to as the source of destruction in the trilogy because they cause wars; as stated in the background of *Dawn*, they are child kidnappers, resisters, leaders, trouble makers, dispute sources, and weapon manufacturers in *Adulthood Rites* and *Imago*.

Moreover, a bodily modification intervention from Oankali aliens is required. By genetically modifying those born as males like Akin, Butler introduces another male-dominated

society in the future that uses technology to restore balance to the post-war world society of *Adulthood Rites*. Compared to the previous human males, Akin is the most advanced construct because the Oankali solved the unsolved problem of the “human-born males” (Butler, 2007, p. 254).

Therefore, to understand Akin’s interaction with technology, one must be aware that Akin represents the advancement of technology, physically and intellectually. He is the outcome of body enhancement technology. In this respect, Butler suggests that wise males with balanced actions use technology wisely to create a new society and establish better future chances. Moreover, due to his enhanced body, during Lilith’s breastfeeding, he causes pain to his mother because sucking milk “was a lot like being stabbed with a hot, blunt needle” (Butler, 2007, p. 256). Thus, he learns not to cause pain to others: “He would share any pain he caused. Best, then, to be careful and not cause pain” (Butler, 2007, p. 257). Akin’s recognition for avoiding being a doer for any suffering will drive him to avoid bringing pain to others. As a result, the outcomes of Akin’s interactions with people will be sources of peace and societal harmony.

In addition, Akin’s improved memory stores information about his surrounding environment and the resisters. He is supposed to deliver information to Nikank to avoid harmful encounters with the resisters and plan for what is helpful for them. Based on Womack’s expansion of Dery’s definition of Afrofuturism, the imaginative stories of SF are intertwined with looking back and predicting the future. Thus, the future is built from the past. Accordingly, Akin’s avoidance of causing pain and storing information about the environment and past human sufferings will shape his personality to imagine and detect suitable plans.

Therefore, in *Lo*, technology has corroborated the concept of a two-edged sword. To illustrate, male humans use their knowledge to make weapons to fight each other, fight back against the Oankali, threaten the settlers of trade villages, and kidnap constructed children. On the other hand, Akin uses his qualities and knowledge to study humans and clarify the confusion of humankind’s contradiction. In this respect, Butler exposes the readers to such controversies through Tino’s comments about what happens to the people of his village: “Then in one week, two guys and a woman hung themselves. Four others just disappeared. It would hit us like that—like a disease that one person caught and spread” (Butler, 2007, p. 280). Although Tino accuses the Oankali because they deprived the resister of so many rights, for instance, sterilised them, the Oankali did not kill them and wanted to ensure a healthy and civilised human generation.

The part of *Lo* ends with Akin’s knowledge about “human anatomy” because Tino needs immediate medical care, or he will die (Butler, 2007, p. 310). Butler asserts Akin’s knowledge about the human body’s needs to stay alive. Butler’s declaration comes after Akin witnessed the manipulation of natural sources, such as wood, to hit Tino. At the same time, his knowledge places him as a positive representation of technology to improve the quality of the human condition. His interaction with technology aims to show the impact of technology on society. The humans, child thieves, use their knowledge to make use of wood and to produce weapons: “So the sticks were guns” (Butler, 2007, p. 308). Therefore, to represent a positive interaction with technology, Akin applies his knowledge from observations to practical aims, namely creating a better futuristic view and not a destructive one. In doing so, Akin stands for a promising African American person who can build a better future for his people.

In *Phoenix*, technology outcomes are linked to the pre-stage of technology and scientific observation to apply technology wisely. In this sense, technology’s effects meet Afrofuturism’s imaginative mind through Akin’s futuristic considerations. Throughout his remarks, he wants

to find solutions to problems that can be found in the future so that the African American person can influence the environment around him and, in the end, establish the world he wants to live in. Thus, Akin is shown in this section of *Adulthood Rites* to demonstrate the positive outcomes of utilising technology.

His observations are conducted in two stages. The first one is his twelve days with the kid thieves. The second stage is represented in his three-year settlement with Phoenix villagers, especially the couple Tate and Gabe. In this regard, Butler uses her imagination to compose twenty-three chapters on the future of humankind to enlarge the observation process and provide a practical outcome.

Butler uses a contradictory picture in Phoenix: how technology can harm and benefit humans' lives. Technology helps Tate eliminate Huntington's disease, which should have killed her years ago (Butler, 2007). Tate's genes are improved through Akin's diagnosis of Tate through his sensory tongue. Unfortunately, she has a faulty gene that affects her health. By treating her, Akin observes human anatomy. There are no doctors, medical technology, or laboratory in Phoenix to do a test. Akin tests her genes to see if she is healthy. His action brings positive results to give Tate hope to continue with her life since the disease will not be passed over to her children.

Akin becomes essential for the community of Phoenix – the post-war awakened humans. He can help them to develop themselves and build a new civilisation that is peaceful and integrative despite the diversity of race and gender. In other words, their hierarchy is modified for practical purposes. Akin uses his knowledge to see “the new intelligence put at the service of ancient hierarchical tendencies” (Butler, 2007, p. 378). However, there are signs of fighting and manufacturing guns, like the raiders who come to Phoenix “to steal metal” to manufacture guns (Butler, 2007, p. 402). Yet, the proper application of technology by individuals like Akin can be an example of how to prevent such consequences. In addition, there will be a chance to avoid harmful productions that can cause cancer, like many prewar human industries generate poisonous materials like plastic. These damaging outcomes of technology are another way to kill people and destroy their lives, similar to guns (Butler, 2007).

The third part of *Adulthood Rites* is named after the Oankali's world, home, and spaceship. ‘Chkahichdahk’ represents the practical embodiment of Oankali's advanced technology. Akin will need to go there and learn more about their technologies. Of equal importance, Butler depicts Akin's intentions as a human and the practical application of knowledge to his mother. Akin has become more devoted to humanity and focused on the needs of the people of Phoenix, especially after realising that the rescued Earth will eventually expire (Butler, 2007). Therefore, technology appears to be the solution for these people because the Oankali use technology to save and preserve the rescued human after the nuclear war. Then, they make the Earth inhabitable again. Hence, Akin needs to learn about that technology to find a way to help the awakened people. For this reason, Lilith advises him to go to their world and discover what can be used to rebuild human civilisation (Butler, 2007). In this sense, the outcomes of interacting with technology refer to another chance for humans to exist, but they must use it wisely.

At Chkahichdahk, Akin begins to study to get beneficial technological outcomes. Although he dislikes being with the ooloi, his tendency to learn for the sake of saving humans pushes him forward to acquire knowledge. Akin wants to “learn something that would be useful to the resisters” (Butler, 2007, p. 447). In this way, he can persuade the resisters to accept the presence of improved humans like himself due to his constructive acts. Accordingly, Akin will

liberate the African American persona from the dilemma of being othered. In doing so, Akin considers the futuristic outcomes of technology interaction. In this respect, Butler's protagonist demonstrates the Afrofuturistic sense of unchaining the minds to speculate about the future (Womack, 2013). Akin's learning process is not limited to getting information but "understanding" the functions, meanings, reasons, and effects of animals and plants on human life (Butler, 2007, p. 456). He focuses on each detail given to him by his teacher, Akjai, to help rebuild a new human civilisation without any destructive machines. He is ready to do whatever it takes and needs to convince the resisters about employing technology for valuable purposes. Furthermore, his distinction as an improved human will not stand in his way; instead, he will persuade the resisters that to achieve their emancipation, they must change. (Butler, 2007).

Therefore, technological outcomes are not evident through surviving and rebuilding a new world or rebuilding Earth only. It is a matter of changing their contradictions. For this reason, a new identity is needed for a new beginning in a new world. The resisters must adapt to being qualified for a third chance alone, away from the Oankali, or, if possible, from any other external influence to establish a functional interaction with technology (Butler, 2007).

The novel's last part, 'Home,' highlights the importance of positive interaction with technology and human adaptability. Throughout the events of this part, one can see that humans are doomed to destroy their Earth and themselves. The negative outcomes of human interaction with technology are evident through the Phoenix guns. The villagers manufacture guns to protect themselves from the human raiders. The raiders threaten the people more than the Oankali (Butler, 2007). The outcomes are proved to be losing the sense of humanity towards each other and demolishing their promising new world. As a result of the villagers' conflict, Phoenix is burned down by raiders and is seen as a smoke cloud (Butler, 2007). Nevertheless, the spark of hope for a better future is still with Akin.

The positive outcomes are shown with Akin's help in modifying Tate's genes to heal her from disease. The knowledge he has from the ooloi helps him to make changes to Tate's body so that her organs will be able "to repair themselves" (Butler, 2007, p. 489). Besides, with his knowledge from the ooloi and his abilities, he can help humans stop killing each other and establish a new, liberated life on Mars (Butler, 2007). Furthermore, Akin's ideas for the Mars colony and immigration represent significant changes for humans. If humankind pleads with the cause of the Oankali, preventing them from having children as they like, they can move to Mars and have children there because Earth will no longer be livable.

To summarise, Butler aims to reflect technology's positive outcomes through its users' manipulation and practical aims. Besides, it is a double-edged tool that can be used for beneficial or destructive ends.

Jodahs – A New African American Identity

Jodahs's interaction with technology in *Imago* differs from that of Lilith and Akin. Lilith, as a human, has a limited connection to technology. Her interactions with it are bounded by her knowledge and the resources given to her by the Oankali. She is forced to adapt to the Oankali's technology. Akin's interactions with technology are like his mother, Lilith. However, he understands and knows the possibilities and the capabilities of Oankali's technology better than his mother. Akin manages to use his advanced technology to communicate with the resisters. Meanwhile, with Jodahs, Butler exceeds the limits of what is usual and known in the worlds of *Dawn* and *Adulthood Rites*. She portrays Jodahs with a different form of biotechnology outcomes to show the emergence of a new African American identity. In the sense of

Afrofuturism, Butler “stretches the imagination far beyond the conventions of our time and the horizons of expectation, and kicks the box of normalcy and preconceived ideas of blackness out of the solar system” (Womack, 2013, p. 16). Moreover, the narrative of the novel presents Afrofuturism as an optimistic and curative approach to African Americans’ past and present problems because it can offer hope for a better future and encourage the imagination to seek liberation from traumatic influences (Bagnall, 2021, p. 8). It is worth mentioning that Bagnall illustrates the impact of Butler’s trilogy as a pioneer Afrofuturist who looks for freedom and the liberation of the African American future life (47).

In the text, Jodahs uses his body to interfere directly with Oankali’s technology. This enables him to access and manipulate technology in ways that Lilith and Akin could not.

It is interesting to note that Jodahs’s body is planned and docile, and every aspect of IT’s body was designed and manipulated into existence; as such, IT has a perfect body. However, Jodahs’s perceptions and thoughts raise the question of whether it is possible to reduce one’s identity to one’s body despite the intention and purpose of such practice (Butler, 2007). Butler reminds us here that “Oankali and constructs love new things” (Butler, 2007, p. 268).

The character of Jodahs is a portrayal of the ultimate transhuman and posthuman. He can read the human organism’s genetic code and understand its functions (Butler, 2007). Jodahs is not only a human-Oankali construct but an ooloi refusing to conform to gender labelling and categorising. He represents the final stage that transcends the boundaries of human limitations. Jodahs is the third and final stage of the evolution of Lilith’s brood – African Americans giving hope for a new beginning and a better future. This is only possible because Jodahs is the third stage of bodily improvement after Lilith and Akin. He is neither normal human nor Oankali in the traditional sense, neither normal human male nor female. With the ability to access creative power comes the ability to create a new world and new identities liberated from the compulsion of eternal recurrence.

Butler mainly focuses on Jodahs’s ability to heal people to reimagine the future life, change the social structure, and embrace diversity. As a result, the outcomes of healing people will assist them in continuing to live and starting a new life distinct from the one they had before his healing operations. For instance, he helps Marina Rivas to be able to have children and start her new life on Mars. Besides, he heals Joao’s leg and helps him join the shuttles to Mars. In addition, Jodahs fixes the siblings, Tomas and Jesusa, genetic disorders and helps them to be in good-looking shape. Moreover, he heals people with different illnesses and other undesired body matters that point out the influence of the new African American identity due to the positive manipulation of technology. As Womack states, “[j]ust as the actions in the present dictate the future, imagining the future can change the present” (Womack, 2013, p. 44). Through Jodahs’s technology to heal people, one can imagine different futures and new possibilities.

Jodahs’s assistance helps his fellow villagers feel in control of their lives because he offers them hope to coexist with each other. In the same way, Jodahs’s healing liberates them from the oppressive social norms that affect their productivity and being active members of their societies. Throughout *Imago*, there is the articulation of the fantasy of ultimate control, including self-control, mirrored in the characteristic of Oanakli aliens to constantly push and expand the boundaries of what is in their power and what is outside their control. In this regard, Butler portrays Jodahs’s strong ability through the manipulations of the human bodies. He is to eliminate human contradiction and suffering.

Jodahs changes the gene trade resisters' social structure by reversing the human contradictions of hierarchy and intelligence. Jodahs asserts that human hierarchical tendencies should not govern intelligence because "Intelligence is relatively new to life on Earth, but your hierarchical tendencies are ancient. The new was too often put at the service of the old" (Butler, 2007, p. 530). In this respect, Butler presents a new way to view human contradictions in *Imago*. It differs from *Dawn* and *Adulthood Rites*; hierarchy and intelligence are the primary sources of human doom. Jodahs changes the way of human thinking so that the old tendencies will not be in the service of the new ones. Instead, the new tendencies will rethink the consequences of the ancient directions of human desires. For this purpose, what matters is how one thinks, not looks. So many humans look like humans but do not behave like humans. Jodahs's thinking encourages the people of Tomas and Jesusa to support him and considers Jodahs a prisoner rather than an Other or an alien. The acceptance of the villages to be healed by Jodahs demonstrates the growth of the other's personality and his influence on social restructuring. As a result of improved health, the people of Tomas and Jesusa will begin a new life.

Jodahs offers a new version of future liberation for the human identity. Individual differences in the Jesusa and Tomas community vanish due to his positive use of technology. The people of Jesusa and Tomas become ready to make an accurate prediction about their future and go to the Mars colony. After Jodahs healed them, they planned for their future and liberated themselves from the constraints of the past and their physical state (Butler, 2007). They can normally exist as male and female. They have been given a new way to connect based on mutual understanding and a desire to reproduce. After healing, they are free of the empathy they feel for each other due to their disorder shapes and the need to reproduce in the hope of having disordered children.

Jodahs embraces the cultural and genetic diversity of the Oankali desire to achieve an effective gene trade (Butler, 2007). Here, Butler values cultural diversity in a futuristic sense, which corresponds to Womack's (2013) claim about the relationship between cultural diversity and the emergence of Afrofuturism. Therefore, accepting the villagers – the people of Jesusa and Tomas, to be retreated by Jodahs is a sign of accepting the other and the body modifications because the results indicate well-being. Butler aims to give an optimistic view of the new life and identity for African Americans. This is achieved through Jodahs who shifts the frontier of human contradictions and regenerates the understanding of intelligence and hierarchical tendencies to prevent repeating past conflicts. Through applying his technology, Jodahs's character becomes capable of envisioning a new future with balanced hierarchical tendencies that improve the quality of human life and the value of their being. Thus, Jodahs's utilisation of technology reflects the Afrofuturistic sense of a free-thinking future human nature understanding to create a balanced future (Womack, 2013).

Furthermore, to initiate a new life, everything has to be unique. Accordingly, Butler creates Jodahs as a special nuclear family member. For the first time in her Trilogy, Butler introduces us to one united family, which is something new in the narrative of *Lilith's Brood*. Jodahs' family's actions to protect him demonstrate the abolition of hierarchy since his parents would rather go into exile than stay in Lo and fight. However, Jodahs's Oankali parents have the power to win any battle against human resisters (Butler, 2007). They agree to take the risk and accept the consequences of keeping their son with them and not giving him up to go somewhere else.

There is a strong relationship between a new world, a new existence, and a new identity that is not only for Jodahs but also for those around him. This is particularly emphasised in the final paragraph of the novel:

I chose a spot near the river. There I prepared the seed to go into the ground. I gave it a thick, nutritious coating, then brought it out of my body through my right sensory hand. I planted it deep in the rich soil of the riverbank. Seconds after I had expelled it, I felt it begin the tiny positioning movements of independent life. (Butler, 2007, p. 746)

Here, Butler refers to the strong relationship between the creation of new life and the creation of new identity through Jodahs's physical and mental efforts to produce this image of seeding. The planted seeds indicate the creation of new life. Jodahs suggests finding happiness by taking care of the new identity that has been formed due to the new life. Furthermore, this newly seeded life exemplifies the value of independence, especially after a long struggle to find a suitable environment to plant it in, ensuring its long-term survival.

Imago's end is significant for at least three reasons. Firstly, *Imago* ends with the message of hope and independent life compared to *Dawn* and *Adulthood Rites*. An independent life could mean a new life liberated from past patterns. The new independent life is a growth of awareness about the reality of our existence. Secondly, the frame of the events of *Imago* is opposite to that of *Dawn* and *Adulthood Rites*, which could be interpreted as Butler's intention to avoid an apocalyptic and pessimistic end.

On the contrary, the future is not gloomy; there is a seed of hope. Whereas the framework patterns of *Dawn* and *Adulthood Rites* lead to a pessimistic end, the events require learning how to survive and be at peace through the decisions and actions chosen by the characters. Thirdly, the relationships without hierarchical power structures are reintroduced in *Imago*, whereby reproduction, among other things, is a matter of free will and not oppression. Finally, and most importantly, it provides a potential framework for how different races can embrace their differences and coexist, evolve, cooperate, and unite in diversity. Thus, Jodahs's identity is the metaphor for unity in diversity, accepting others and their difference. He becomes value added instead of value lost because he values the suffering of the past and the results for the future.

CONCLUSION

Butler's *Lilith's Brood* trilogy is a critical work that explores African Americans' future identity in the SF world. Through the characterisation of Lilith in *Dawn*, Akin in *Adulthood Rites*, and Jodahs in *Imago*, the impact of advanced technology to construct an African American futuristic persona for survival is revealed. Butler uses different approaches and mechanisms to explore the theme of surviving the African American future identity through positive interaction with imaginative technology. One of the main themes of the trilogy is exploring different ways of creating harmonised relationships between other races based on mutual understanding, respect, co-existence, and mutual evolution via imagining positive interaction with technology. The protagonists must use technology to improve their quality of life and fully understand its limitations to prepare for a better future.

We have examined Butler's chosen protagonists through Womack's concept of Afrofuturism. I hope Hopefully, this study will add new perspectives on the use of advanced technology to the future of African Americans. We propose that Afrofuturism provides a unique

perspective on the role of technology and culture in shaping the future of African Americans, as well as a powerful means of empowerment and survival for African Americans.

We have used Womack's Afrofuturism concept to add to the discussion of the protagonists' interactions with technology in the selected novels and challenge notions of technology and its relationship to African American futuristic culture. The discussion also aids in providing an in-depth analysis of future African American identity requirements.

SF books unquestionably play a part in shaping the future of humanity. This study sought to clarify some of the most contentious issues surrounding the future of African Americans. This study has investigated the technologies of surviving in Butler's *Lilith's Brood*, adopting the lens of Afrofuturism. Unfortunately, it does not examine the posthuman qualities of the protagonists. Thus, future researchers can explore the aspects of posthumanism in Butler's novels.

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