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Hoda M. Zaki

Utopia, Dystopia, and Ideology in the Science Fiction of Octavia Butler

In an interview published in 1986, Octavia E. Butler stated that there was no "women's genre in science fiction" (Beal: 16). Women authors, she continued, wrote too many varieties of SF for their work to be labelled as one subgenre. Nor did Butler see herself writing utopian SF: "I've actually never projected an ideal society. I don't believe that imperfect humans can form a perfect society" (Beal: 14). I take issue with both of Butler's statements about her own writing. Like other critics of her work,¹ I maintain that Butler is part of the post-1970 feminist and utopian SF trend which emerged when writers who were deeply influenced by the second (1960s') wave of the women's movement began to use SF to explore issues from a feminist perspective. Collectively, these writers have published over a dozen feminist utopias and have attracted a great deal of critical attention.²

The present essay has two objectives. The first is to reveal the dynamic interplay of utopian, dystopian, and ideological elements in Butler's works in the effort to show how one example of popular culture, containing as it does many authentic utopian elements, also includes the less hopeful forces of anti-utopianism and ideology. My second aim is to examine Butler's position within this group of utopia-generating writers by comparing some of her assumptions to those found in the larger body of feminist SF utopias. The place that she occupies within this group is unique, for she alone brings to her fiction the experiences of being a black woman. Furthermore, her works chiefly differ from those of her Anglo sisters in that they embody an indirect critique of the liberal feminist imagination and politics expressed in contemporary feminist SF—a difference which, insofar as it is attributable to racial considerations, points to certain tensions existing between Afro-American women and the feminist movement.

1. Utopia. For centuries, political philosophers have debated the issue of what constitutes human nature. Often, the heuristic device of a "state of nature"—a pre-social and sometimes pre-political condition—was used to "prove" how certain qualities in humans were either the result of social conditioning or intrinsic to "human nature." Such expositions of the nature of "man" were intricately linked to some vision of political order; they

served to rationalize a particular set of social and political institutions. Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau, for example, each defended a core of human qualities to justify very different notions of the state and the public sphere.

Feminist philosophers have taken up this argument, specifically focusing upon the impact of gender on human thinking. They debate the question by investigating the extent to which gender is a social construction. As in the past, this discussion of "human nature" has a significant link to a vision of politics, and thus has far-reaching implications for feminist strategy and struggle. Differing views of the subject translate into differing critiques of the contemporary social order and differing images of utopia.

Two interpretations have emerged from the feminist debate on human nature: the essentialist and the materialist. The former argues for the primacy of female anatomy as the central and determining factor in shaping the female unconscious and conscious mind. The female body, in other words, is the locus of difference as well as the basis for unity and social change. The materialist interpretation, to the contrary, prefers to explain the oppression of women by focussing on the social and historical construction of gender and self (cf. Jones).

Butler joins the current debate by advancing her particular version of human nature and her particular vision of politics. Her views on both issues are logically consistent, and together serve as a critique of the contemporary social order and as the foundation for her utopian and dystopian vision. I will concentrate primarily on three of her more recent novels, *Clay's Ark* (*Ark*), *Dawn*, and *Adulthood Rites* (*Rites*).³

Ark is the fifth installment of the "Patternist" series, in which Butler traces the evolution of humans into three warring groups. It is her most dystopian work to date. In it she describes the destruction of late-industrial civilization. This destruction, begun by humans, is completed when an extraterrestrial organism is brought to Earth. Humans who survive the alien micro-organism become physically transformed and are no longer Homo sapiens. With *Dawn*, Butler begins her new "Xenogenesis" series by destroying Earth again, as it were, this time by nuclear war. The Oankali, extraterrestrials who happen to be on the scene when this occurs, salvage a few humans and begin the process of rehabilitating Earth. Technologically more advanced than humans, the Oankali's collective vocation involves the trading of genes between sentient species. They are both repelled and fascinated by the human genetic structure. From the perspective of these aliens, humans are fundamentally flawed as they are both intelligent and hierarchical, a lethal combination in the eyes of the Oankali. The Oankali are "driven" by their genetic structure to crossbreed with other life-forms, and they plan to colonize Earth in cooperation with the humans. After studying the individuals they have rescued, they appoint a black woman called Lilith to lead the humans in this collaborative effort. It is Lilith's problem in *Dawn* to convince others of her kind that the unequal relation-

ship between them and the Oankali will work to the humans' advantage. This proves to be an impossible task since the Oankali have transformed humans to the extent that two of the most intimate of acts, sexual intercourse and procreation, cannot be completed without their intervention.

Rites describes the recolonization of an Earth where the unequal relationship between the Oankalis and humans is still a central concern. Some humans, the "resisters," refuse to settle with the Oankali. Unable to procreate, they establish oppositional communities which have no children and therefore no hope. They resort to stealing children from the human-Oankali settlements. Lilith's son, Akin, is one such hostage; he becomes sympathetic to the resisters' plight and champions their rights. Here, as in her other novels, Butler debates the issues of power, unequal relationships between groups, and the constituent elements of human nature.

Butler believes that human nature is fundamentally violent and therefore flawed. The origin of violence, she suggests, lies in the human genetic structure, which is responsible for the contradictory impulses towards intelligence and hierarchy. These two conflicting impulses inevitably propel humans to wage war. In *Rites*, she calls this flaw the "Human Contradiction" (3:4:198), or simply, the "Contradiction" (3:9:225). Connected to this trait is an inability to tolerate differences, usually physical differences of race and gender. For Butler, there is a pervasive human need to alienate from oneself those who appear to be different—i.e., to create Others. Even when she describes the diminution of racial antagonisms among humans upon encountering a new extraterrestrial Other, she foregrounds how we seize upon biological differences between the two species to reassert, yet again, notions of inferiority and discrimination.⁴ For her, the human propensity to create the Other can never be transcended: the end of racial discrimination must coincide with the rise of some kind of similar discrimination based upon biological differences, which accordingly continue to play a role in future social orders.

Butler generally adheres to the notion that men are intrinsically more violent than women. It is true that her women characters occasionally commit violent acts (Anyanwu in *Wild Seed*, for example, often kills), and they sometimes exercise power in an arbitrary and authoritarian way (as Mary does in *Mind of My Mind*). But the violence that her female characters commit is done for survival and defense, either of the self or of the community.⁵ Males exercise power for other, less laudable, reasons. In *Rites*, Butler is especially clear about the intensity of the destructive genes peculiar to human-born males (1:2:9-10). As one Oankali says of males born of human women and Oankali males: "They bear more of the Human Contradiction than any other people" (3:4:198). To accept Butler's notion that males are genetically (i.e., inherently) more violent than women is to accept an essentialist view of human nature similar to that of some radical feminists, such as Julia Kristeva and Luce Irigaray. As I will subsequently show, it is also

connected to a problematic understanding of the subject which has roots going back to the women's movement of the late 19th and early 20th century.

Another characteristic of human nature as Butler sees it is its static quality, evinced in a human incapacity to change in response to radically altered conditions. The force by which humans are wedded to their biologically-determined natures and their inability to transcend it she makes clear in her "Xenogenesis" series. Even when extraterrestrials initiate change, humans continue to manifest the same qualities of violence, cruelty, and domination over others. In a crucial debate in *Rites*, Akin argues with his elders about the matter of human independence from the Oankali. He takes a materialist position: if humans were allowed to live in a new and harsh environment, they would be forced to cooperate and transcend "the Contradiction." The Oankali's response is one of informed skepticism: they know the human capacity for self-destruction is unavoidable. Their certainty, Akin realizes, "was an Oankali certainty. A certainty of the flesh. They had read Human genes and reviewed Human behavior. They knew what they knew" (3:11:234).

Butler's unmediated connections between biology and behavior have an implicit corollary: that abandoning the human body is a necessary prerequisite for real human alteration. This represents an essentially retrogressive view of politics (i.e., of collective human action), which she never sees as offering the solution to social or political problems. Her conditions for fundamental social change are such as to postpone it indefinitely.

How Butler portrays politics is intimately related to her vision of human nature as a biologically-determined entity. The public arena of politics, where dialogue and dissent occur, is nullified in most of her novels by her construction of permanent states of emergency, which pre-empt any full exploration of the moral and ethical dimensions of political decisions; there can be no room for real debate when the very survival of the individual or group is at stake. Furthermore, the relationship between ruler and ruled is never egalitarian for Butler, but is always a matter of dominance and submission consistent with her essentialist view of human nature.⁶ In *Dawn*, for example, the aliens unilaterally appoint Lilith to a leadership position. Since human nature is for Butler a known, finite, and unchanging entity, she cannot view human politics other than deterministically: not as an open-ended series of unfolding events latent with Possibility, but as a process whose result is foregone and predictable. For her, human politics is not an arena for the exercise of choice or freedom, and it offers no opportunities for the improvement of the human condition.

What she denies to humans she invests in her description of alien societies: her aspirations for a more humane community, where consensus is reached through communication and dissent. Alien politics she portrays as being different from and superior to human political activity; indeed, Oankali decision-making (in *Dawn* and *Rites*) figures as utopian. Among

the Oankali, true consensus, non-hierarchical communitarianism, and truthful communication can be found. Adults communicate non-verbally by way of their tentacles, a mode of communication which does not allow for deceit or ambiguity; and they achieve consensus by totally coalescing with one another, after which they resume their separate individualities.

Although political theorists from Locke on have expressed reservations about it, the communitarian impulse borne of the merging of individuals with the group often figures as a desideratum in feminist utopian SF. Yet that impulse, as it exhibits itself in Butler's "Patternist" and "Xenogenesis" series, is problematic on at least two counts. One of these has to do with the non-verbal communication which serves as the means for resolving differences in points of view and thereby achieving unity. This, after all, is a human impossibility, given the nature of our language and how we use it. The other difficulty pertains to fusion via the creation of a group mind, as Butler depicts it in the Oankali—or as advocated, for that matter, by other feminist SF writers. It represents a notion of community which we would do well to approach with caution, as it resonates all too closely with certain ideologies inimical to individual freedom—e.g., fascism.

Is it possible, then, to describe Butler as utopian at all? Though the answer is not clear-cut, the question admits of an affirmative response for two reasons. First, she allows (unique) individuals occasionally to escape the grip of instinct and genetic structure on human behavior. Alanna in *Survivor*, for example, reaches out to other species and decides to make her life with the Terkohn tribe. Other characters, such as the infected crew of Clay's Ark, commit suicide rather than return to Earth and infect their fellow humans with the extraterrestrial organism killing them—an act of considerable self-control. Such examples, indicating that Butler has not completely written off the human ability to change for the better, thus leave open the possibility for utopia.

Second, the various alien societies that she constructs with such imagination and detail not only stand in the sort of political comparison to existing human social arrangements which is typical of utopias, but are also ideal in themselves. Such is the case with the Oankali social order described in *Dawn*, for instance. The Oankali live harmoniously in extended families; and they have developed a post-industrial technology—dependent upon genetic engineering—which makes work pleasurable for them. That technology, moreover, obviates class strife—in which regard, it is significant that Butler decides to link the Oankali organically to tools that are also sentient beings.⁷ Appropriating Ernst Bloch's methodology of seeing and decoding the latent utopian alternatives concealed in all cultural objects, no matter how regressive, and using his concept of cultural surplus, we can read Butler's works as expressing hope for unambiguous and truthful communication, for long life free of all diseases, for the elimination of racism and the tolerance of differences among people, for pleasurable

work, peace, and dignity, and for total social communion—all of them authentic and time-honored utopian wishes.

The presence of such yearnings, however, is very much compromised by the fact that their vehicle or agency is other than human. In certain respects, too, any utopian transformation that Butler envisions is far from being radical. Her conservatism surfaces in her description of sexual alternatives made possible by the Oankali: sexual pleasure involves eschewing all contact with human genitalia, and includes monogamy for the aliens. So, too, her utopianism is rendered passive (and even regressive) when she depicts the causes of human strife, leading to nuclear holocaust, as being beyond human control and political intervention. Furthermore, a concurrent dystopian tendency has become evident in her works, most clearly witnessed in *Ark*.

2. Dystopia. Rather than approaching the notions of utopia and dystopia as incompatible opposites, I would suggest that a more valid analysis can be found in a relatively recent article by Søren Baggesen. He introduces the provocative distinction between two kinds of pessimism: utopian and dystopian. Utopian pessimism occurs when dystopian elements in a text are depicted as occurring in, and caused by, specific historical forces. This type of dystopianism is open-ended in its materialism. Dystopian pessimism, on the other hand, assumes that dystopia is inevitable because its origins are ontological or otherwise metaphysical. In this view, the reasons proposed for social degeneration cannot be successfully countered because they are transcultural and transhistorical; pessimistic dystopias are thus close-ended and idealistic.⁸ Baggesen's analysis presents a new way of looking at the overlapping boundaries between utopian and dystopian thinking, and suggests that while dystopian pessimism remains anti-utopian and conservative, open-ended dystopias are essentially progressive.⁹

Many dystopian texts serve to warn readers about impending catastrophes; they are involved in what Sheldon Wolin, in a discussion of one function of political theory, calls "posting warnings." These texts in effect warn that if certain social trends go unchecked, the future will exhibit certain specific undesirable qualities. As Wolin writes: "a warning is usually made by a person who feels some involvement with the party or persons being warned; a warning, in short, tokens a commitment that is lacking in [scientifically neutral] predictions" (p. 13). Thus, the overt pessimism of a specific dystopia is often belied by the covert utopian hope that readers will change the trajectory of their society. Such dystopias, then, are intimately connected to utopias in offering oblique hope to the reader.

It seems evident, in the context of Baggesen's and Wolin's arguments, that Butler's dystopianism is pessimistic not because Earth and its civilizations are almost lost, but because the causes of catastrophe are depicted deterministically as unavoidable. For this reason, her critiques of human violence and prejudice are not traced back to their particular social or

political foundations. Her dystopianism is therefore anti-utopian in its deterministic definition of human nature. It may be that Butler's sensitivity to the increasing conservatism of the contemporary social and political order, which has made substantial inroads upon Afro-American communities sooner and more systematically than others, has led her to adopt a position of pessimistic, or anti-utopian, dystopianism.

3. Ideology, Feminist Utopias, and Racial Estrangement. To understand the ideological contents of Butler's novels, it is useful to place them within, and compare them to, the post-1970 subgenre of feminist SF which was informed by the second wave of the women's movement. Chronologically, Butler belongs to this generation of writers; and inasmuch as her works have many similarities to, as well as some differences from, that tradition, their ideological content can best be understood in its context.¹⁰

The women's movement of the 1960s, '70s, and '80s influenced a number of women writers to explore Movement ideas and theories in their SF. The long and sustained connections between women SF writers and their utopian output on the one hand, and the Movement's political theories and practices on the other, has been well documented by Sarah Lefanu. Women writers framed their critiques, demands, solutions, and strategies in light of the Movement's political struggles. One of the key debates in the women's movement and in women-authored SF involved efforts to define human nature. Other issues included concerns about the impact of technology on the environment, about child-rearing, about relationships between the sexes, about power, especially in connection with language, and about various notions of family and community.

Taken as a group, feminist utopias appear to share a number of significant political characteristics. One of the most obvious is their elaboration of a basic model of community: a cooperative society which emphasizes the organic nature of its ties and the overriding importance of the common good, enjoys a high degree of unity and cohesion, and is liable to no serious tension between the individual and the larger community. Often these societies represent a conflation of the public and private spheres: personal relationships are foregrounded and less attention is given to descriptions of reorganized economic and political institutions. Many utopias which nostalgically depict agrarian societies show a late-capitalist concern for the ecology. Given the common origin of these texts, it is not surprising that they exhibit similarities in their visions of utopia, their criticisms of existing society, and their suggestions for alternative social and political institutions. Many of the ideals expressed in these works fall fully within the utopian tradition (cf. Geoghegan and Ollman).

It is possible to discern, inhering within the feminist agenda described in these utopias, a number of notions which may once have had revolutionary potential, but which have been coopted by a flexible and tenacious

ruling class to negate the opportunities for genuine, radical, social change and to legitimate its position of power. Although there is more than one ideologically-suspect concept in many feminist SF utopias—for instance, a concept of leadership which is often ascriptive and non-democratic (cf. Zaki)—I shall focus here on comparing the views of human nature proposed in many of these feminist utopias with that depicted in Butler's works.

Butler's support for the notion of disparate human natures resulting from biological differences is an ideological element which her works share with many Anglo-American feminist utopias. This belief assumes that women have natures dissimilar from men's; and it is expressed in any feminist utopia which depicts women as ontologically nurturing and pacifist and their thinking as nonlinear and circular. It is important to note that this characterization of women's nature is not new, and was probably never a radical concept. As Jean Elshtain points out, the leadership of the first women's movement (at the turn of the century) adopted, for tactical purposes, the idea that women had different, and morally superior, natures. Historically, this notion was formulated and utilized by men to exclude women from the public arena, and it thus developed into an ideology of difference. As it was integrated into the first wave of the women's movement, this ideology permitted that movement's leadership to claim suffrage rights in order that women might "cleanse" and "purify" the arena of politics; but, ironically, what the suffragists accepted and perpetuated was male hegemony (cf. Elshtain: 51-60).

Works such as Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland* (1915), although separated from contemporary feminist utopias by more than 50 years and by a vastly different political landscape, share with post-1970 texts many of the same assumptions about gender differences. It is ironic that the ideology of gender difference, which owes its construction to forces inimical to women's equality, has once again been incorporated into the feminist movement. By espousing the view that women are "naturally" nurturing, strong, and pacifist, these utopias perpetuate an idealist and regressive view of human nature and politics. Butler, in describing her heroines as nurturing, freedom-loving women who employ violence only for the sake of survival, shares with other feminist SF writers the same truncated assumptions about women's and men's natures even though she does not place gender concerns conspicuously at the center of her novels.

There is one important difference between Butler's works and those of her Anglo sisters, however, which points to what can only be described as a failure of the liberal imagination of feminist SF, and by implication, of the second women's movement. Butler's novels contain an implicit and internal critique of and rebuke to one aspect of liberal feminist ideology: its claim to speak for all women, regardless of class or color—a claim founded upon the assumption of a transhistorical and transcultural, *engendered* unity of all women.¹¹ Apart from Butler, Dorothy Bryant's *The Kin of Ata Are*

Waiting for You (1976), Sally Gearhart's *The Wanderground* (1979), and Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976) pretty well exhaust the examples of SF by American women writers who depict futures where populations are not entirely white or where characters of color are portrayed in weakened circumstances (cf. Farley: 243); and as Robert Crossley points out, this has been true of the entire genre since the 1940s. All Butler's novels, on the other hand, contain people of diverse races as well as cultures—Africans, Afro-Americans, Anglo-Saxons, and Asians, for example—who function as major characters and whose racial diversity Butler celebrates.

The failure of the feminist imagination that Butler in effect reveals, while it is probably unintentional, is instructive in that it points out the essentially liberal, or non-radical, critique many feminist writers offer of the inequitable, racially discriminatory order of contemporary post-industrial capitalism. In their depiction of all-Anglo utopias, feminist SF writers neither criticize racial discrimination nor anticipate a future which would correct the wrongs of a fundamental social, political, and economic injustice. It might be added that the omission is all the more unaccountable in view of the fact that many of the white women involved in the US Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and '60s subsequently used their experiences and its philosophical framework as the basis for promoting women's rights.¹²

Butler's works thus constitute an implied critique of much feminist SF utopian writing, and at the same time represent a more democratic and egalitarian movement in this body of fiction. Her works serve to racially estrange her readers from their environs, and they thereby strengthen and enrich the feminist utopian tradition in SF. The inclusion of characters of color, however, does not in itself signify a radical overhauling of this form of writing, as my discussion of Butler's pessimism has I hope made clear.

In the final political analysis, Butler's vision of the future is a peculiar mix of utopianism, anti-utopianism, and ideology. Expressing as they do many utopian hopes and desires, her works contain a muted critique of the current political order. Yet in denying the possibility of change through political and collective human action, she softens her critique and situates her utopia beyond human reach. This is not to say that the utopian, anti-utopian, and ideological dialectics found in Butler are peculiar to her novels alone. Recent articles by H.-J. Schulz and Carl Freedman, for instance, perhaps indicate a shift towards a more critical evaluation of SF, whose utopian dynamic theoretical discourse has by and large up to now portrayed as being predominant. As more research on the dynamics of ideology and utopia in SF is carried out, the generic act specific to SF—whether the genre be defined as presenting social alternatives or as incorporating Utopia by virtue of its explicit anticipation of the future's ontological pull—can be interrogated with greater specificity. The existence of anti-utopian forces both in the social order and in texts like Butler's leaves the outcome of that reappraisal in doubt.

NOTES

1. Here I have in mind the studies by Shinn, Foster, and Friend; the most comprehensive survey of Butler's works so far is Ruth Salvaggio's essay.

2. Examples of this criticism would include: *Women and Utopia: Critical Interpretations* (Lanham, MD: 1983), ed. Marleen S. Barr & Nicholas D. Smith; *Future Females: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Barr (Bowling Green, OH: 1981); "Visions of Utopia," in Rohrlach & Baruch, eds., pp. 203-400; *Extrapolation's* Spring 1982 special issue on "Women in Science Fiction"; and the special issue of *Women's Studies* entitled "Feminism Faces the Fantastic" (1987), ed. Barr & Patrick D. Murphy.

3. To date, Butler has published nine novels—*Patternmaster* (1976), *Mind of My Mind* (1977), *Survivor* (1978), *Kindred* (1979), *Wild Seed* (1980), *Clay's Ark* (NY: St Martin's, 1984), *Dawn* (NY: Warner, 1987), *Adulthood Rites* (NY: Warner, 1988), and *Imago* (1989)—and five short stories (for some of which she has won Hugo and Nebula awards): "Crossover," in *Clarion*, ed. Robert S. Wilson (NY: New American Library, 1971); "Near of Kin," in *Chrysalis* 4, ed. Roy Torgeson (NY: Kensington, 1979); "Speech Sounds," in *Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine* (Dec. 1983); "Bloodchild," *Ibid.* (June 1984); and "The Evening and the Morning and the Night," in *Omni* (May 1987).

4. In *Rites* Butler mentions that a village of anglophones discriminated against Akin, the young black man (3:3:190). Most of the human hostility, however, is directed towards the Oankali, who because of their tentacles, are called "worms" (2:9:104). Butler illustrates human intolerance by describing the efforts of some humans to amputate tentacles belonging to two young Oankali-human children to make them look "normal" (2:14:129, 2:15:131, 2:17:146-150).

5. Butler's portrayal of women being violent has elicited some comment. Mary S. Weinkauff considers Butler to be among the most "interestingly violent" SF women writers today. Weinkauff sees violent activity in woman-authored SF as a reflection of "feminist anger of the anti-ERA period." According to her, Butler's women characters use violence to achieve power in order to establish unity and peace—a conclusion with which I cannot agree. Lefanu also notes the violence of Butler's characters, and regards it as challenging familiar notions of gendered behavior (p. 99).

6. Salvaggio's discussion also focusses on the political themes in Butler's work. As she would have it, Butler's authoritarian vision of politics is confined only to male behavior, such as Doro's actions in *Wildseed*, while her women characters exercise power differently from the men. This is an assessment that I cannot accept. In my view, Butler fails to convince her readers that the outcomes of her heroines' political activities are salutary. She shows her heroines engaging in activities whose outcomes are guaranteed to produce inequities—thanks in part to her consistently setting the parameters of political and social activity in such a way as to negate the possibility of any other eventuality. The fact that the characters in her novels are oblivious to injustice and a lack of freedom in women-generated policies is not enough to convince a reader to overlook the

quality of politics being proffered.

7. In *Dawn* Butler strongly hints that a utopian future could be possible if humans would only acquiesce to their biological and political dependence upon the aliens, since only then would they be able to transcend their flawed genes. But she reneges on this position in *Rites*, where she describes with some sympathy the few humans who refuse this merger. Her forthcoming novel was supposed to describe a human community struggling to create a better society in the absence of the ubiquitous Oankali. But her latest work, *Imago*, does no such thing. This should not be surprising, since the elaboration of such a society necessitates a synthesis on Butler's part of certain inconsistent views that she holds.

8. A similar point was made by Daphne Patai in her discussion of anti-fascist dystopias and Merritt Abrash in his appraisal of Clarke's *Childhood's End*. See Patai's "Orwell's Despair, Burdekin's Hope: Gender and Power in Dystopia," *Women's Studies International Forum*, 7 (1984):85-95, esp. p. 93, and Abrash's "Utopia Subverted: Unstated Messages in *Childhood's End*," *Extrapolation*, 30 (1989):372-79.

9. Baggesen's analysis is also useful in helping explain how some SF writers can alternate so easily between writing utopias and dystopias. For example, SF author Kim Stanley Robinson noted that he was at one point writing "...in three different directions: the post-holocaust novel,...the dystopian novel,...and the...utopian novel" (p. 64). In light of Baggesen's ideas, such seemingly divergent activity is understandable as the differences between utopias and open-ended dystopias become negligible.

10. With regard to this tradition of feminist SF utopian writing, the texts I have in mind would include the following: Marion Zimmer Bradley's *The Shattered Chain* (1976) and *The Ruins of Isis* (1978), Bryant's *The Kin of Ata Are Waiting For You*, Suzy McKee Charnas's *Motherlines* (1978) and *Walk to the End of the Earth* (1974), Suzette Haden Elgin's *Native Tongue* (1984) and *The Judas Rose* (1987), Katherine V. Forrest's *Daughters of a Coral Dawn* (1984), Gearhart's *The Wanderground*, Sandi Hall's *The Godmothers* (1982) and *Wingwomen of Hera* (1987), Piercy's *Woman...*, Rochelle Singer's *The Demeter Flower* (1989), Joan Slonczewski's *A Door into Ocean* (1986), Sheri S. Tepper's *The Gate to Women's Country* (1988), James Tiptree, Jr.'s "Houston, Do You Read?" (1976), and Monique Wittig's *Les Guérillères* (1969).

The similarities which warrant placing Butler firmly within that tradition include: strong female characters and heroines; the need for new and extended family structures; a communal approach to childcare; the elimination of cities and governments; and the desirability of creating modes of production which do not threaten the environment.

11. This assumption has caused a number of black feminists to decry the white and middle-class bias of the mainstream feminist movement and to argue for black women feminists to put forth a perspective unique to them. See for example, Patricia Hill Collins, "Learning from the Outsider: The Sociological Significance of Black Feminist Thought," *Social Problems*, 33 (Oct./Dec. 1986):S14-S32; Barbara Smith, "Toward a Black Feminist Criticism," reprinted

in *The New Feminist Criticism* (see entry for A. Jones below), pp. 168-85; *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave: Black Women's Studies*, ed. Gloria T. Hull, Patricia Bell Scott, & Barbara Smith (Old Westbury, NY: 1982); Paula Giddings, "The Women's Movement and Black Discontent," in *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America* (NY, 1984), pp. 299-324; Deborah H. King, "Multiple Jeopardy, Multiple Consciousness: The Context of a Black Feminist Ideology," *Signs*, 14 (Autumn 1988):42-72; and Frances E. White, "Listening to the Voices of Black Feminism," *Radical America*, 18 (1984):7-25.

12. See Sara Evans, *Personal Politics: The Roots of Women's Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement & The New Left* (NY, 1979).

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RÉSUMÉ

Hoda Zaki. *Utopie, dystopie et idéologie dans la science-fiction d'Octavia Butler.*—Parmi certaines idées concernant la nature humaine et la politique promulguées par Octavia Butler, on retrouve la notion que la nature humaine est violente et déterminée biologiquement. Cet écrivain pense que la politique ne peut pas participer à l'amélioration de la condition humaine; ce sont ses œuvres utopiques qui traitent de sociétés "étrangères". Les composantes idéologiques de ses écrits l'apparentent à de nombreux travaux féministes des années 70 qui sont de nature profondément libérale malgré l'élément utopique. Butler et ces féministes partagent les mêmes idées en ce qui a trait à la nature humaine. Ces notions ont pour origine l'idéologie de la différenciation des sexes qui fut élaborée à la fin du 19^e siècle par les adversaires de l'égalité des femmes. Cependant, il y a dans ses œuvres une distanciation raciale qui est absente de la plupart des écrits de science-fiction et de science-fiction féministe, c'est-à-dire des personnages de race noire entièrement formulés. Cet élément est à la fois un enrichissement et une réprimande pour l'idéologie féministe libérale et pour la science-fiction. (HMZ)

Abstract.—Octavia Butler advances notions of human nature and politics which include the belief that human nature is violent and biologically determined. For her, politics is incapable of improving the human condition. Her works are especially utopian when she describes alien societies. The ideological elements in her works link her to many other 1970s' feminist SF works which, although utopian, are essentially liberal. Butler shares with them similar views on human nature, views which are rooted in an ideology of gender difference developed in the late 19th century by opponents to women's equality. Her works, however, contain one element of racial estrangement not found in most SF and feminist SF: fully developed characters of color. This inclusion at once enriches and rebukes liberal feminist ideology and SF. (HMZ)