

# OCTAVIA BUTLER'S - LILITH'S BROOD TRILOGY AND POSTHUMANISM

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Sveučilište u Splitu  
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Završni rad  
Octavia Butler`s Lilith`s Brood trilogy and Posthumanism

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## **Abstract**

The Xenogenesis trilogy asks a lot from its reader, in the sense of difficult themes, ambiguity of certain topics. It all comes from the writing from Octavia Butler, by how she sets up and provides many serious topics which are not easy to answer, or sometimes, even to read. The future holds much mystery, and, according to Butler, humans are going to fall, because of their own stupidity, greed for power and hierarchal order. The sense of being human is the core point and Butler offers a narrative towards which path could medicine go, that is, in the trilogy, the Oankali capabilities in changing the human and how that would affect the future of humanity. With the rapid advances in technology and medicine, Butler's narrative of the Oankali as an allegorical representation of human advances in technology, but also a representation of humans as a dominant species, should be seen as really plausible. How far is it possible to go until you are no longer a human being? The repercussions that come with certain decisions, and the backlash from the dissenters, it all has influence on the individual who goes in the way of change. Her writing moves humans away from the centre and introduces a symbiotic life which is not completely reciprocal.

Keywords: the Human Contradiction, infertility, posthumanism, hierarchy, free will

## Introduction

This paper will focus on the *Xenogenesis* trilogy from Octavia Butler, with the focal point being my claim that the Oankali, Butler's dominant alien species, function as a layered, allegorical representation of various forms of posthumanism, by which, through genetic engineering and other interventions, moves humanity further away from the traditional notions of human life. What this thesis explores, through the science-fiction of Octavia Butler, is the extent to which this posthumanism undoes humanity. For example, it could be argued, in a sense, that humans are already posthuman, for example the bacteria that are involved in the digestive processes within the human body, in which more bacteria cells than human cells contribute to the basic digestion necessary to life. In the narrative, the Oankali trade with humans, but on the level of genes, where both parties get something in return. Through Butler's exploratory fictions, this thesis considers the extent to which it is possible to reach a state where a human is one no longer, asking how far humanity remains, retaining a piece of itself, no matter how big the "trade" is? In this futuristic trilogy, everything revolves around trade between species. Many points arise from that as well, including, at times, the troubling loss of individual freedom of self-autonomy. But does humanity get more than it bargains for, to the extent it is annihilated, and what if the human population do not want the change that is given, especially the fact of being sterilized without any permission?

Butler's writing is unafraid to face the most troubling aspects of the posthuman, the notion that rejects the traditional ways of what it means to be a human. The trilogy imagines a scenario which moves away from anthropocentrism, in which humans no longer are the dominant species on Earth. In *Lilith's Brood* reproduction is one of the most emotive motifs. The humans in the *Xenogenesis trilogy* are unable to reproduce on their own which is a fundamental change that adds more to the main question of posthumanism in Butler's work and where do humans actually find themselves within the spectrum of the idea. Moreover, being sterile, dependent on the alien species to have some kind of child, which will not be entirely human, it creates tension and hate, from the human side because humans got sterilised without their own approval, which embedded a power struggle between the species. The narrative follows humans destroying themselves which lead to Oankali saving them. Although, it was not only

the action of saving humans involved in the process, humans were made to accept the Oankali and the only chance of having offspring was with Oankali themselves. Their freedom has been taken and are put into a position under the wing of the Oankali and Ooloi.

Furthermore, the aliens have put themselves in a position where they are, in fact, superior to humans, because of the mentioned, reproduction issue and their belief that humans are unable to live on their own, which leads to their justification that they are protecting humankind from the own mistakes. Earth has always been in constant hierarchical struggle, which resulted, in nuclear warfare which wiped the planet. However, who gave the alien species the permission to save the humans, which lead into infertile humankind, and which created resisters and those willing to accept the change?

Moreover, contradiction inside a contradiction, the fact that the Oankali imposed themselves over humans, because of, in their diagnosis, 'the Human Contradiction,' which by the Oankali side means that humankind would always succumb to failure, because of their hierarchal needs and intelligence. However, in one of Butler's ironies the Oankali put themselves over humans, as they are superior in every way, leaving humans powerless., Moreover, they are needed for reproduction, humans need to rely on them, which leads to a kind of hypocrisy. The Oankali ideology is that of believing the Human Contradiction, that humans constantly destroy themselves through their thirst for hierarchical power, which leads to their actions of not letting humans go on their own path. That raises the question of a double contradiction, they had put themselves as guardians of humans, but in sheer term of abilities, Oankali are above humans in every way, in a hierarchical way, superior. Although, they are not violent and do not want to kill, still the double contradiction, Oankali thinking that humans are unable to live on their own because of their Human Contradiction, meanwhile the Oankali led by their beliefs, exist above humans, in the pyramid scheme of hierarchy, is there and needs to be answered.

The characters portrayed all have a special place in the events of the trilogy: Lilith - "traitor" to humanity, first one to have an offspring with the aliens, accepted to live with the Oankali and Ooloi. Akin- breed of human and alien, but his end goal was to give resisters another chance. At last- Jodahs the final step in human-alien symbiosis.

How to conclude the trilogy, is the ending a "happy" one, or something more ambiguous, will be the last part focused on.

## **1. Posthumanism and connecting it with Lilith's Brood**

To further expand the central point that the Oankali are a representation of humanity, posthumanism as an idea needs to be looked at more closely in order to convey the notion of posthuman and to build on it the posthuman elements that Butler's work provides.

The term posthumanism is of crucial importance in analysing Butler's work, because of the decentralisation of the human population. No longer do they stand in the spotlight by themselves, they are no longer the dominant species. It can be argued that they are in the second plan, after the arrival of the Oankali. What in fact is posthumanism? From the name itself it is a move away from humanism, towards something no longer completely human. Towards a period where humans may no longer be recognised as what they used to be. As Braidotti offers more on the notion of decentralising human which expands on the term of posthuman itself.

The posthuman provokes elation but also anxiety (Habermas, 2003) about the possibility of a serious de-centring of 'Man', the former measure of all things. There is widespread concern about the loss of relevance and mastery suffered by the dominant vision of the human subject and by the field of scholarship centred on it, namely the Humanities. (Braidotti, 2013)

As humans had been for their entire history, the species that dominated over everything and always were in control are now questioned and could be seen as a former dominant species, which would certainly awake concern in humanity itself. Where would the human stand if not in the centre? As humanism celebrates humans on their own, an important fact is that the human body functions with different species in their body, bacteria, so, had humans always been alone in the centre. No, as they would not function without them, which leads on to the argument is closely followed with Butler's narrative, as it is seen that humans are no longer in the centre of things, because the Oankali take their role and humans now cannot live on their own.

Further, Feder's remarks offer other additional elements of posthumanism to be connected with the trilogy.

While the term posthumanism seems to suggest life beyond ideology, and sometimes more specifically human life beyond the current bounds of humanity, it also signals a renewed interest in the biological world, ideas of human animality and our kinship with other creatures (as we see in the field of animal studies), as well as new integrations and manipulations of information and biological technologies. (Feder, 2014)



As far as the posthuman ideology can go, it still needs to track back to the biological world, because of the alterations that can be done through technology, but also to shift the ideology that human is no longer a measure of all things. Which leads to Butler's narrative, where through biological technology humans alter themselves, with the help of the Oankali, whom provide them those changes, but not all are positive, which raises a number of question of ethics and morality.

Furthermore, Braidotti offers multiple remarks that are of use to this context of posthumanism and its fundamentals, in order to understand its ideas and how it can connect to the trilogy.

Feminists like Luce Irigaray (1985a, 1985b) pointed out that the allegedly abstract ideal of Man as a symbol of classical Humanity is very much a male of the species: it is a he. Moreover, he is white, European, handsome and able-bodied; of his sexuality nothing much can be guessed... (Braidotti, 2013)

For a term that should represent the whole of human population, it has some inclinations towards a certain group of people, to be precise European white men. Posthumanism could be a direct derivative from that humanist thought, to try include everything and everyone at the nucleus of creation, as the Oankali share the centre spot with humans in the narrative. With the introduction of new entities a new ideology needs to hold every entity together and posthumanism might be the solution. While the next remark argues the the perspective of posthumanism: "The posthumanist perspective rests on the assumption of the historical decline of Humanism but goes further in exploring alternatives, without sinking into the rhetoric of the crisis of Man. " (Braidotti, 2013) Even though the posthumanist perspective can go with the narrative of complete human downfall, it chooses to follow the ideas of alternatives that could occur. So, in the sense of *Lilith's Brood*, the posthumanism could be that humans no longer can survive on their own, so an intervention is made from the Oankali. That may provide the answer when does one stop being human. *Xenogenesis* revolves around removing humans from the centre, and biological changes that would be possible to advanced technology. Moreover, the reason being that humans are no longer their former selves, rather they are subjected to the will of the Oankali and the whole scale of to their existence shifts. 'Nomadic subjectivity,' a term which challenges traditional notion of identity which sees identity as something structured and stable, while nomadic subjectivity sees it as a more fluid and not a fixed term which expands the main argument, because it challenges the traditional sense of identity. Identity is fluid and it can change over a course of time, which can be strongly connected with Butler's work.

Braidotti whom invented and expanded the idea, offers more on this sense; The nomadic subject is a branch of complexity theory and it promotes a continuing emphasis on the radical ethics of transformation. (Braidotti, 2013) Moving away from traditional thought about having a single identity and shifts the idea that identity is a constant stream, where the subject is always liable to change. *Xenogenesis* revolves around that concept, in order to fully get to the point of when does someone stop being human, because symbiosis with the alien can mean just a different form of identity, the human is still there. Therefore, a question which is crucial to make: "If posthumanism is ostensibly a turn away from the human and humanism, what is it a turn toward? " (Zalloua, 2019) It is a move to something known, but different, as humans are always in touch with different species, but in the narrative of *Xenogenesis*, humans become the inferior beings, where the Oankali represent the possibilities of tampering with advances in biological technology. To move the human from the traditional viewing, a human tampered with the "Other", in the case of *Xenogenesis*, a move towards a symbiotic life, where humans for the first time do not play a main part, they share the spotlight with someone more potent than them. It is quite plausible to assume that, through the posthuman perspective, humanity in *Xenogenesis* trilogy is on its way on becoming a different species, but before making such a conclusion, different aspects and meanings need to be looked at.

### **1.1 The essence of being human**

Would genetic engineering affect humanity to the point where they change completely and transcend into something like the Oankali? First of all, fundamentals of human behaviour and existence are important to address, because that could change too with the alteration of genes.

In order to further expand the possible answers regarding humanity and the point of how impactful do the changes have to be to alter a human in something different, what it means to be human needs to be looked at. Furthermore, is it impossible to change the human way of thinking or in fact, human way of life completely? Through improvements to the human body and genes, does the man stop being a man and transcends into something different or does a human always stay human, no matter the change?

Human behaviour consists of many questionable and negative decisions. Human nature in its foundation is flawed, struggle for power, greed, warfare throughout entire history. The shell of a human is easily breakable, susceptible to diseases which can easily end a life. Population is always separated, be that because of religion, political beliefs, or the gender question, there are always extremes, but complete uniformity cannot be achieved, which will lead up more in the part on the Human Contradiction which is brought up multiple times by the Oankali side. In one sense they are completely right, humans tend to be very destructive and always thirsty for power, but that certainly does not count for the entire population of humans, those causing the biggest problems are in the minority, but have a huge amount of power. Butler portrays realistically how the population would divide themselves, those pro for a symbiotic life, while others would rather die than to give themselves into that life. "Your bodies are fatally flawed. The ooloi perceived this at once. " (Butler, 2012) Not only is the mind of humans easily corruptible and succumbs to greed, the bodies are their barrier in achieving something even greater than ever in history. Cancer, various illnesses, easily wounded body ... The main part here are genes and genetics. Countless of times has a person "failed" at birth, by inheriting a certain genetic failure, which results in cancer or some other life threatening disease. In reality Butler's genetic engineering is still far away as scientists claim that it would be possible to protect from certain illnesses;

In future the move to prevent disease could involve targeted immunisation for babies whom testing has shown to be genetically susceptible, for instance to diabetes, but this hypothetical situation is years away. " However, the ability to cure cancer and enhance humans in every aspect of human endeavour is still not possible, referring to gene modification, tools and technology offer different help to humans. (Warren & Willmott, 2000)

Butler's work dives into the area of genetic engineering with humans being the subject of procedures, and how would the situation be when those actions are made without the human permission. If those changes one day could be made by humans, why does Butler introduce the Oankali, and make them live in symbiosis with humans? To show that humans simply cannot get over their negative aspects or to show that the next evolutionary step for humans is symbiosis with a more intelligent species. Vint expands on the idea of moral and ethical ground;

However, I believe that these more abstract debates about the relationships among identity, genetics, free choice, and destiny are precisely the terrain being fought over in discussions of genetic futures. Thus, Butler's work is extremely valuable for its ability to let us see the assumptions about the body that are informing contests over genetic technology. (Vint, 2007)

In part, in Butler's fiction this involves an exploration of the ethical and the humanist dimensions of scientific advance. Not being able to control what is done to your body strips you from any mode of freedom, that kind of action need to be permitted from the receiving side, anything else is a crime. Would genetic engineering change your identity and personality? Quite possibly, as Lilith gained strength, she probably felt more courageous and powerful, but also self-aware of how other are seeing her. Genetic engineering is a great tool for the future, as Butler showcases both sides of the idea; prolonged life and infertility. Most importantly is to have the permission of the subject and that they are aware of the changes that would happen. Butler tries to exhibit that humans would not be able to engineer themselves, rather that an intervention is required from another species in order to humans to develop further. Which could mean that humans would lose their humanity once interlinked with another race.

Moreover, Butler provides great insight on a theme that at the end of the 20th century seemed far away, but today it is a near reality. Genetic technology is in rapid growth, and whilst, not being on the same page as aliens doing the changes, the results would be pretty much the same, in first plan would be to remove diseases. However, does the removal of life-threatening aspects of life negate human life as it was known before? It certainly adds up to the posthuman idea, with no danger of contracting diseases, especially those without a cure, like cancer, humans would move towards the next evolutionary step, as illnesses would be a part of the past and the posthuman would be free of that. The relation of genetic testing to literary writing has been discussed by Sherryl Vint: "Genetic testing and biological manipulation are increasingly becoming a part of everyday life and consumer culture. Patented genetic interventions include Microsort, a process available at some IVF clinics that allows one to choose the sex of one's fetus. " (Vint, 2007) For Vint, this technology means that maybe fiction is in the process of becoming a reality. Even though some ideas are too far away from stepping into our world, you would think to yourself, are there going to be any boundaries in technology, but in human existence as well? Become a half-robot, prolonged life, remove diseases, choose the sex of a fetus... Where does that leave Butler's work? With the symbiosis of two species, it leaves

human in a new state of life, where humans leave the centre point of history and where they enter the posthumanism era.

Furthermore, the plot allows the reader to go even deeper; as two threads can be followed. The Oankali are a straight connection to future technology, but also a connection with the human dominance in present time. Which could mean there is a ceiling to which humans are still humans, and afterwards, turn into something different. Such a concern is crucial for Butler and her writing. Technology that can be used today is similar to the alien changes, everything that Butler writes in terms of technology and genetic engineering would be eventually doable. Of course, talking about the positive changes that can be done, the sterilization of the human race is certainly not positive. But were humans not in the same position as the Oankali when it comes to, as an e.g. dealing with animals? The Oankali did what they thought necessary, just as humans did many times, with animal populations and technical advances. Infertility was made with the reason being that creating life is an essential aspect of human life and Oankali grasped that ability and took it away, with the main reasoning being the inability of humans to live on their own, from their perspective. The background to the Oankali and Ooloi provides that humans are not the only "victims".

Regarding humankind, with all its flaws is still a strong species, that can be seen by Lilith herself which will be remarked later on. She wanted to commit suicide in one moment, but, her will to persevere was stronger, as, in much of the population. Additionally, through their existence, human life was never easy, the environment and climate knew no emotions, and being at fault to laziness, slow learning, cancer, etc. Do humans deserve such upgrades, because of their "bipolar" opposites inside the population, one focused on the ascension of the human race, while other give themselves into war?

With the involvement of genetic engineering humans would certainly start a path where the posthuman subjects would come to life, but in the narrative of *Xenogenesis* the way it was done needs to be discussed, first by following the reasoning behind it.

## 1.2 The Human Contradiction

The concept of the Human Contradiction is important in the Xenogenesis trilogy, to imply the reasoning behind Oankali actions, which could be connected to how humans for example, keep animals on farms in order they do not escape. However, it is not immediately introduced. Jdahya was first to mention the characteristics of the terms; "You are intelligent," he said. "That's the newer of the two characteristics,,// What's the second characteristic?" "You are hierarchical." (Butler, 2012) As Jdahya said humans are really intelligent, but combined with the need for hierarchical order it can lead to big problems, as it did in the novel. Intelligence combined with power can be a deadly combination. The term is used in the second part of the trilogy by Dichaan: "The Human Contradiction again. The Contradiction, it was more often called among Oankali. Intelligence and hierarchical behaviour. It was fascinating, seductive, and lethal. It had brought Humans to their final war. " (Butler, 2012) Butler main idea seems to be that humans really are, unable to live on their own, that they would destroy themselves again. Intelligence is not enough to save them, blinded by all the negativity they would crumble again.

The matter with the Human Contradiction is one deeply imbedded into human population. The most intelligent species, capable of achieving almost anything imaginable. Of course, that would be too perfect to exist. Pair that intelligence up with a need for hierarchal order, and the term arises itself. Uniformity is humankind's greatest enemy, such brain prowess, simply used to destroy the world because of conflict caused by different sides. The reasoning behind this idea is that Butler wrote about how Earth ended, by a Third World War, so the inability to unite all in one and go over some problems the diplomatic way caused humanity to collapse. It could be believable that the aliens really wanted to prevent any further conflicts and battles between humans themselves, thus, they imposed their culture and their way of life on to humanity. Which means that the posthuman subject could maybe not live on its own, rather in a commune with some other race.

Indeed, the Oankali turn from individualism could be seen as their turn to more of a communist society, as they always put the importance of the whole species, not on an individual. Thirst for power and the struggle of not being the one in charge brings humans to the extreme. Moreover, it is the main reason they are kept under the Oankali and Ooloi, so they would not implode, as

they did some time before. Therefore, the Human contradiction is always in Oankali thoughts when dealing with humans. In plenty instances does Butler show the dark side of humanity, those actions are interpellated with the story in the novels; "The first human that Lilith encounters following her isolation among the Oankali tries to rape her. The first group of humans that Lilith awakens and trains soon form competing cliques between those who believe Lilith's 'story' of aliens and those who believe she is lying to them." (Vint, 2007) After leaving Earth in ruins, does humanity deserve a second chance? The aliens saved people from certain death, but immediately after awakening some of them, huge problems come to fruition, rape and violence, amongst the biggest problems. As Titus, the first man which Lilith saw after waking up, tried to rape her; "They said you could stay here if you wanted to. And you had to go and mess it up!" He kicked her hard. The last sound she heard before she lost consciousness was his ragged, shouted curse. " (Butler, 2012) With this Butler shows the brutality of some individuals and further expands the idea why humanity needs the Oankali. By those actions that Titus tried to do, is it possible to stay against the aliens? Looking at the other decisions by the Oankali, it is still hard to decide what would be the best option, because some humans cannot simply be given the freedom to do anything. Butler's writing for those reasons makes it feel that it is too hard to decide what is right and what is wrong. Ambiguity at its peak, humanity getting a second chance at life, just to instantly show the darkest side of certain individuals. With Lilith being on the receiving end too many times. With those kinds of actions that humans are capable of doing, it could be seen why Oankali wanted to stay with them, which further commences the gradual loss of human and being under a system where the individual is no longer important as the whole of society, which could lead to the posthuman erasing the individual.

Moving on, the argument about who influenced the Oankali viewing of humans the most is important, because looking at wrong examples could lead to wrong conclusions, as Canavan argues;

The idea that the Oankali first learned about humans from the military madmen who destroyed the planet is a startling but undeveloped plot thread that threatens to cast the Oankali's entire way of thinking about human beings into doubt. Perhaps the entire theory they've developed of humanity as fundamentally broken is scientifically unsound, based on a very bad sampling error. (Canavan, 2016)

A mistake can always occur and any species can fall to that. Could it be that the Oankali made a mistake with giving too much attention to a smaller percentage of the population who caused the nuclear disaster? It could be plausible, but as Canavan writes, that part of the plot remains inconclusive. It can be seen that through science-fiction Butler raises philosophical questions concerning human civilization. Did the Oankali make a mistake, with connecting all humans with one another; not necessarily does every human need to be inherently evil. Kindness and benevolence are the other side of the coin. However, who would decide to trust a race which almost killed itself? Nonetheless, are the Oankali space saviours, why would they save a race so fundamentally flawed? In nature they are gene traders, they can manipulate the genomes which could result with unforeseen changes for humanity. The thing they really wanted from humans is mentioned dozens of times, they could make out of cancer something great and of use to them. Canavan Gerry also focuses on the idea, are humans irreparable so they need the Oankali to live in an "utopia"; "If their radical and totally nonconsensual interventions in human society are really to be thought of as a vision of utopia, it can only be so because humans are so horrifically and intrinsically broken as to be completely without hope." (Canavan, 2016) That the world is an utopia with the co-existence with the Oankali can be only seen in the through the viewing of Canavan, humans inherently broken they need a saviour, which through the reading of the novel and Butler's writing is quite plausible. The saving of humanity can be seen as a technical intervention, if the Oankali are seen as an allegorical depiction of humans, who use advanced technology, meaning that humans could eventually do the actions Oankali can do- Further, looking at the evidence given; destroyed Earth, almost wiped out the whole population by their own mistakes... Maybe humanity really needs the Oankali to stay with them, but the only event which could change that is the Mars colony, it is only said that it is progressing well, which would prove that maybe in fact, humans could still function on their own.

The question arises, are humans truly broken, according to Butler and her work? In this case, they needed salvation, although it came with unknown consequences, the fact is, they are alive thanks to the Oankali. Despite this, the future cannot be fully known, would the saved people continue to act as their predecessors or would they see the new light. Nevertheless, Butler offers her thought through the novel, but a concrete answer can not be found. Human nature is ambiguous, diverse, unique, combining that with a completely new species in a whole new way of life, the end result may extremely vary. Human Contradiction is a concrete term, but it does not allow definite result regarding if humankind would fight again or live in peace and harmony



after the Oankali intervention? The answers could only come by empiricism, that is, after saving humanity letting them live on their own, to see would they develop or fall into destruction again. Oankali thought people could not live by themselves, but later on, in the second part, the Mars colony is established, which will have a peaceful community.

The Oankali actions provide a concise image how humans can act when necessary, everything in order to keep society safe.

### **1.3 Infertility and free will**

If the Oankali are a depiction of humanity, they form a narrative of posthumanism as concept centrally in their hybrid cross-species procreation. The important thing is to consider is that of doing such changes without consent and what effect it has on the subject's mind, with posthumanism being more inclusive, offering no choice could mean that the posthuman subject still has work to do. To imply that the narrative needs to be followed through the perspective of humans in the work.

The biggest dilemma that Butler provides is the narrative concerning her that humans were made sterile without their consent. The whole point of life is to give life to your future offspring, but that being taken away would certainly cause outrage between the population. Even if they saved Earth, what reason does it give them to do such a life-changing decision. Complexity with birth-control can be adduced from Butler's work, as humans use contraception often, but when it happens against human will does it change the circumstances? As the Oankali took fertility away from humans. "“Have you done something to me? Am I sterile?” “Your people called it birth control. You are slightly changed. It was done while you slept, as it was done to all humans at first. It will be undone eventually. ” (Butler, 2012) Humans were for years using different means to stop pregnancy, so did Oankali really make a mistake in making everyone infertile? Definitely, yes. It is all a matter of choice and moment in someone's life. To give birth to a new life is a gift itself. While some do not want children in a certain part of their life, taking that possibility away is unforgivable.

Major changes were made while humans were still asleep in the unfamiliar chambers. Made infertile while being unconscious, on top of that, any chance to have children in the future, they would have to mate with the Oankali. Natural outcome from the human mind would be hate

and strong detesting towards the still unknown "saviours". Some would certainly accept if asked, the approach for a new way of life, but the majority would want to hold that traditional creation of a nucleus family. Haraway is interested with the pregnancy question herself: "Pregnancy raises the tricky question of consent, property in the self, and the humans' love of themselves as the sacred image, the sign of the same." (Haraway, 1989) Pregnancy is perceived as a product of love between two partners, which share full consent towards each other. Loving the offspring in the image of humanism, as it holding the human in the centre, almost as a sacred entity. In Butler`s work there was no consent and the child you would get if you joined the Oankali would be more like the alien species. It raises a question of love for your child in those circumstances, but Lilith shows that those who accept still love unconditionally their children, even if the child is half-human and half-Oankali. Influencing and changing how humans procreate would certainly lead to a further step towards becoming something else, something alike the Oankali themselves, as a fundamental part of living is creating new life.

Further, the narrative provides that the only options are: stay without a chance to have kids or join with the Oankali so in a new symbiotic life, you can create completely new life. That kind of options most certainly influence an individual`s mind, and the individual can scorn as much as he/she would like, but the situation will remain the same. It is quite clear that after a while some will step forward and embrace the change. Lilith as the first and prime example. Nikanj impregnated her without her knowledge, but saying that in her genes he saw what she truly wanted. Haraway argues that Lilith from the moment she was chosen to be awakened was to have her carry a child; "It is a fatal pleasure that marks Lilith for the other awakened humans, even though she has not yet consented to a pregnancy. " (Haraway, 1989) Lilith was certainly chosen to lead the new groups of humans, but definitely they had other plans for her, as it got discovered in the ending of the first part when she was impregnated, which could be connected to how humans chose when animal breed, how many times in their lifetime, etc. which could lead to depiction of animality within humans, that even they could experience what they were doing, but more on Lilith in the latter chapter

For some the ultimate goal is to have their brood leave a mark on the planet or the future. In Butler`s trilogy Lilith is the main initiator of change between the two species. Even if not aware that she wanted it, it happened. She will give birth to a new form of life, for which she would be seen as a traitor for some, while for others a person that accepted the change and started moving on from the traditional life. Could it be that the Oankali serve the purpose to show humans their problems and that Butler projected them onto the Oankali. Struggle for power,

question of consent, control of life? They serve to show a different version of humans, as Oankali have connections with humans, both susceptible to mistakes, controlling life... Example of animal farms and in general the relation of humans towards animals; humans have put themselves as the dominant side, controlling their birth cycle and offspring, etc. It can be seen that exactly happened to humans in Butler's work. It shows that humans can be ignorant of certain situation, until they experience it on their own skin. Yet, some accepted the new way, while others did not, Canavan gives a captivating thought;

“statement that reads like something more than simple Stockholm Syndrome” —but Stockholm Syndrome, I have to say, is exactly what this sounds like to me. The Oankali—whether they “mean to” or not, whether they in some sense can be said to be innocent or unknowing—turn even love into their poison. (Canavan, 2016)

Attributing this to the Stockholm Syndrome could pinpoint the core of the circumstances. The Ooloi can directly sense what people need, by putting themselves into their nerve system with these alien tentacles. They certainly can enhance feelings and it could be possible that people fall for that, and agree to something they initially were indecisive about. Those who are subordinate in a society will always make them subject to influence from the higher ups. Some maybe wanted the changes deep in themselves, but with the knowledge that the Oankali can “manipulate” it is again a tough decision to say what is acceptable and what is not. Which leads to a point where all actions humans in the trilogy make, should be taken with severe caution, because of the possible interference of the Oankali with the human psyche. Hence, people who follow instructions rather thinking on their own they become "zombified", but that kind of person has no kind of identity, if it subject is just mindlessly following orders.

Freedom of choice is there in glimpses in the trilogy, but does everyone deserve it?. Options provided can simply push you to the one of the extremes, there is no in-between. Partake in the creation of the new world or refuse and join those who are fighting against the Oankali, the resisters. In the final part of the trilogy a huge discovery is made, which can shift the perception of the capability of the Oankali; "There was no more need for talk. They were fertile! Both of them. That was what I had spotted in Tomás—spotted, but not recognized. He was fertile, and he was young. He was young! " (Butler, 2012) Two mistakes that deconstructed all that the Oankali stood for, in the sense of being considered flawless creatures. Such discovery changes the entire perspective. Was it necessary to establish a colony on Mars, when there were fertile people walking on Earth without the Oankali knowing. The negative side of the fertility

Canavan argues; ; "they are stunned when one of their members (a fifteen-year-old girl later named, in mythological terms, as the "First Mother") becomes pregnant following a brutal gang rape. But she is able to give birth to multiple daughters and sons, who are themselves mutually fertile; " (Canavan, 2016) Regardless of the discovery of the fertile group, they would not be left alone. They would have to chose to join the Oankali or go to the Mars colony. Yet again, humans show how terrible their nature can be, even though fertile the children that are born came from pregnancy caused by rape which would cause unfathomable consequences on the mother.

Those action showcase how some groups would act even in the future. Through the posthuman lens would that mean some would not change not even under this kind of circumstances. It can mean that not every human has the prerequisite for moving forward in the light of a new era. Even if identity is in flux, how would those sick minds change, do the they even deserve to change?

The transformation of humans into posthumans through contact with the Oankali suggests a potential shift in biology, where humans might need to interbreed with another species. This would constitute a fundamental biological change, especially if looking at the Oankali as symbol for humanity.

With accepting the new way, a whole new set of changes come with it. Butler often writes about different gender situations with the aliens she introduces, be that in her work for e.g., *Bloodchild* or the *Xenogenesis* trilogy. She is especially preoccupied with a complete change from the traditional thought in the sense of sexuality and gender.

#### **1.4 Gender roles and sexuality**

To further expand the central point, gender roles are important to lay out, as the narrative provides a certain possibility for the posthuman as they have a third gender. As well as sexuality, because of the society perceived through the narrative, only heterosexuals would exist in that environment.

Traditional view of gender roles in terms of making a child is mostly, pretty clear; male and female partners engage in the activity to achieve pregnancy, but when needed through medical

procedures, IVF, pregnancy can be also achieved. However, the Oankali and Ooloi differ to the point where the whole balance known to man changes. Starting from the basis of their roles in creating new life and their whole appearance. "Lilith glanced at the humanoid body, wondering how humanlike it really was. "I don't mean any offense," she said, "but are you male or female?"" (Butler, 2012) Through their appearance it is almost impossible to see any differences between them. Humanoid creatures who are covered in sensory tentacles. Immediately it is seen that the whole paradigm shifts. Additionally, the fact that they need a group of three in order to get pregnant. Something that was the most intimate moment between two humans, now needs to be involved with a third alien partner. As Dunkley's chapter offers more insight;

Throughout the novel, their grappling with the ooloi, and the intermediacy of their borderland gender, remains a vital hindrance in their acceptance of the Oankali and their mission. Indeed, their inability to conform to a (specifically Western) two-sex model so far exceeds the horizons of imagination that the Humans find it too inconceivable, even for an alien species. (Dunkley, 2020)

Their whole ontological meaning is based on different values and how they mate is something not imaginable for humans. Especially can it be seen with men, who traditionally are seen as more dominant, the fact that they are letting a third entity perform join in and be the main role in it can seriously impact one's behaviour. Of course, it has to be mentioned that there is no physical activity when getting pregnant with the Ooloi, the alien puts the partners to sleep and through tentacles the process is done. Vint comments on sexual desire; "Descriptions of desire in the novels either emphasize the continuing desire of the heterosexual couple for one another (positing the ooloi as simply a conduit for this desire whose presence masks the existence of the other heterosexual couple on the other 'side') " (Vint, 2007) Pleasure was still left as an option to humans, that was not changed, so it was still possible to enjoy some thing as same as before. Important to mention is after someone pairs with an Ooloi their entire pleasure transcends mentally, with it as a mediator, they experience sexual pleasure, but with no real physical activity. The fact that pleasure was still there, like in the era before the Oankali, shows that humans were not letting go of all essentials that still made them human, but a shift from two partner intercourse to three, implies a move away from the traditional way of life.

Furthermore, the introduction of the Ooloi who are neither male or female would have an impact on the human worldview. "Looking at Kahguyaht, she took pleasure in the knowledge

that the Oankali themselves used the neuter pronoun in referring to the ooloi. Some things deserved to be called “it.” ” (Butler, 2012) Society based on two genders have their reality alternated when met with a civilization which has a neuter species. That may be the reason why masculinity, or better to say, whole term of heterosexuality is put to the test. Jackson Iman Zakiyyah gives remarks on sexuality and submissiveness; "Butler exposes and confronts (hetero)sexist, male anxiety about the specter of submission to the Other. Such submission often carries with it the specter of slavery and the annihilation of the self. " (Jackson, 2020)

Submissiveness for a heterosexual man is a little-known term, by introducing a whole new society and species, Butler tries to break that shell. She tries to expand boundaries of what is humanly possible and to show that being subordinate to the "other" does not necessarily result in slavery or the death of a man. To briefly touch upon Butler's work *Bloodchild*. Those boundaries are more tested and experimented upon, there heterosexuality, especially of a man, is trying to be removed completely. With a simple explanation how she achieved that, men are the ones who get pregnant in that novel, which implies even further alterations that could occur, that work shares some similarities with the *Xenogenesis* trilogy. Humans and a certain alien lifeform creating new life together. Butler switches the traditional conventions and power dynamics, with that new potential relations for the posthuman are achieved. Jackson offers more; "Similarly, Gan's "male pregnancy" is not an exploration of the feminine position but a feminized position—that of being subjected to the Other. Gan is not "feminine" because his body is an incubator.../" (Jackson, 2020) Through this position, Butler's writing may suggest that a male getting pregnant does not immediately result that he is in position in which women are. Rather that he can still retain his masculinity, the pregnancy would not influence that. The man would experience what it would be like to be subjected to something, in this case, to a certain "other".

In spite of mentioned evidence, there are still areas that would indicate something different. To elaborate, all of the first awaken people had been a certain age, mostly speaking English and for the theme of sexuality, all of them had been heterosexual. Which would show that the Oankali had a certain agenda in terms of their influence and actions. Canavan noted on this thought;

The Oankali's chosen candidates for Awakening are all healthy, under fifty, English speaking;// they are all, apparently, straight and cis-gendered//The Oankali's vision of

the future may be less sexist and less racist than our present, but it is more homophobic and transphobic. (Canavan, 2016)

This may be a mere coincidence, but with Butler and her writing, every word has a certain meaning, and characteristically, it is something ambiguous, in the sense why were only heterosexuals awakened. Why would the aliens care if someone was homosexual or queer? If their whole point is to help rebuild society on Earth, it is said that they fully studied every single human saved. Could it be possible that the best potential had heterosexuals or was it just pure coincidence? This could lead to a different future with less queer society, but this can be considered as pure speculation.

Furthermore, Lilith chosen as a leader of the new movement can certainly be seen as a power of the female role. How she carefully chose who to wake up, trained with them, helped them in any sense needed, but still was considered a traitor by some. Lost her husband as a consequence. Could it be that Butler wanted to show the burden of the feminine position? Lilith is the main protagonist in the first part, but without her there would be no Akin or Jodahs, crucial characters in the next parts of the trilogy.

## **2. Oankali and Ooloi**

To further understand how may the Oankali present humans in the posthuman sense, they need to be explored more, in order to show why that could be the case. Also, how humans perceive them, which could show how humanism would react to posthuman subjects.

On the fundamental scale the aliens are dissimilar to humans mostly regarding their looks and appearance, humanoid creatures with their skin completely covered in tentacles. Butler seems intended to induce revulsion in her reader;

Yet it was true that he had no eyes. She could see now that there were only dark patches where tentacles grew thickly. The same with the sides of his head where ears should have been. And there were openings at his throat. And the tentacles around them didn't look as dark as the others. Murkily translucent, pale gray worms. (Butler, 2012)

The way Butler describes the Oankali portraits how their difference affects the human subject. A creature with no eyes and ears, covered with tentacles. As if they are some kind of amphibian

and not a humanoid creature which can communicate and think like a human can do. Butler wants to show how hard it is for humans to get used to something that different, if it is even possible to achieve that. Also, the initial revulsion towards their appearance shows an aspect of irony, as their offspring will more and more look like the Oankali. However, Oankali did not always look like that, as they constantly merge with other species, and as it is said in the trilogy; "Every gene trade brings change. " (Butler, 2012) Not only does every trade they do change their appearance, it is also done because they gain a certain benefit. Furthermore, in the sense of evolution, humans and Oankali are intrinsically different. Humans evolved through adapting to their environment, while the Oankali through gene change shift their existence to new plains. They travelled through galaxies, lived in different worlds and met various intelligent species, while humans stayed monogamous, in terms of planet and mating partners.

The background to the Oankali and Ooloi provides that humans are not the only "victims". Haraway also wrote on Butler's work with her focusing on the constant change of the Oankali: "Their own origins lost to them through an infinitely long series of mergings and exchanges reaching deep into time and space, the Oankali are gene traders. " (Haraway, 1989) Humans were not the first subjects of the Oankali, which Butler introduces in her work, which opens up different questions. Were all mergings and trade successful? Why do they impose themselves even though some do not want them there? How do they not lose themselves in the constant merging? Humans after only trading with them had started losing their own essence and main features; appearance, physical power, ability to reproduce, etc.

They constantly mix themselves with the native species, but without consent of the other. They impose themselves on to the subjects and convince them it is for their own good. Humans convicted on an eternal symbiotic life, without being able to do anything except join them or fight. Space travellers, gene trades, a household of three, they are different, but are they evil or genuinely want to bring humanity on the right track? Canavan gives a comment coming from Butler herself; " and when Juan Williams asked her on NPR if the Oankali are "evil," she replies, somewhat aghast, "Oh, no! No. No. No. No." (Five no's!) As her explanation goes on, however, it seems perhaps better to say that what Butler means to assert is not that she doesn't write about evil..." (Canavan, 2016) Butler herself says that they are not evil, but their actions may suggest otherwise. Forcing humans to live in symbiosis with them, making them sterile etc. Of course, the positive changes and enhancement of human abilities cannot be neglected. What is ultimate goal for the Oankali? It does not appear anywhere; it is only said that after a while Earth itself is going to crumble, and humans together with the Oankali will go live on a



new planet. " "Jesusa! Listen." When she had settled into an angry silence, I told her what would happen to the Earth, what would be left of it when we were gone. "Nothing will be able to live on what we leave," I said. " (Butler, 2012) Earth will be left in ruins, humans forced to move or either join the aliens. Of course, to mention, by that time the Mars colony was established. Still, the options were extremes of the spectrum. Regardless, some chose to accept and some chose to fight against that system.

A number of times did the Oankali went through changes in their existence and had always lived in symbiosis with the other species. Is that the future that expects humanity? Destroying themselves just to get saved and "forced" to live with a completely unknown species to them. The posthumanistic thought, are the likes of Lilith or her lover Joseph the same humans they were or something new and different. Evil or not, the Oankali forced humans to change, giving them no options than to join them, which caused many, like Lilith, to succumb to them which led to abandoning the old ways, and gaining a new identity. But is that identity still human? That is going to be discussed through the main characters in a later chapter.

Another factor that should be mentioned is that of; are Oankali aware of race? Vint expands on the race side of the idea; "The surviving humans come from a variety of racial and/or ethnic (and ideological) backgrounds, but these classifications..." " (Vint, 2007) Vint comments are certainly true, once on Earth and in the future parts of the trilogy, people of different races and languages spoken can be found. A lot of the times, the characters introduced are from areas and regions that are typically seldom mentioned. That the choosing of the first people was done with extreme care is something that is left to the individual reading experience. It could be possible that only heterosexuals were chosen for some certain reason, but is hard to conclude that, because the alien species were never shown as discriminating towards something. That kind of behaviour could be explained by a term reproductive futurity, coined by Edelman, which entails that a group`s or individual`s future is inextricably linked with the ability to have children, as the term further expanded by Edelman could lead to a deeper understanding of the Oankali; "This conservatism of the ego compels the subject, whether liberal or conservative politically, to endorse as the meaning of politics itself the reproductive futurism that perpetuates as reality a fantasy frame intended to secure the survival of the social in the Imaginary form of the Child. " (Edelman, 2004) The political thinking behind the idea is producing offspring regardless of your current state, it does not matter. Just like the Oankali wanted children with humans, they got them, regardless if someone really wanted it or not it happened. Additionally, that may be the further reasoning why none of the queer community has been awakened, they

had been left out in order to fulfill their, Oankali needs. The implication that the actions of the Oankali come from the thinking of continuing the lineage of the species by having offspring. They disregard everything else in order to achieve that.

Oankali could be shown in that way purposely, to show how some political parties act, that the Oankali are doing something already known to humanity.

## **2.1 Saviors or slavers**

Further insight on the Oankali actions will show how the narrative connects them and humans even more.

The trilogy itself provides both sides and makes intrinsically difficult to decide where to stand. Thus, it is important to go in depth and see the actions of the both sides, and see for yourself where do you stand? Everything already discussed will leave the readers on two sides; pro and against. Authors mention have two opposite sides considering this topic, as Canavan holds them accountable, while Vint considers they did nothing which hurt humans.

Even when Butler told they are not evil, some would argue the opposite, as Canavan does; "But against the pro-Oankali critics I must suggest instead that in fact the Oankali do almost nothing but harm the humans, in almost literally every possible way. First there is the level of psychological manipulation..." (Canavan, 2016)

Certainly, there are reasons to join either of the sides, pro or against the Oankali, because the situation itself is ambiguous. Seeing all the actions taking place, is it necessary to stand on off the sides, or can it be considered that their intervention was required, but , there must be a selfish reason involved, if they were really Samaritans, they would have saved humankind and left, but following their way of life, they imposed symbiotic life on Earth. Which adds up to humans and their conquests within their own species. Additionally, they left out crucial information a lot of the times, Lilith was in confinement for a long time. While others believe

they did nothing to harm humans. Vint holds that side; "The Oankali never mistreat the humans in any way – in fact, they saved them and their planet from the consequences of a human-caused nuclear war – yet many humans fear and resent the Oankali. " (Vint, 2007)

Physically they did not hurt or harm anyone, on the contrary, humans were the ones who inflicted pain on them. It has to feel like there was some mental manipulation by the Oankali side and because of that reason their actions need to be questioned. Humans can undeniably be seen as the negatives and a lot of the times they are exactly that, but the Oankali are not without flaws either, or being led by negative motifs.

It ultimately comes down to a couple of question, which Canavan lays down; "Are the Oankali humanity's saviours or its executioners? Do they represent a deviation from the colonial and imperial history that has made human history such an existential horror, or do they rather represent the ultimate perfection of the colonial enterprise? " (Canavan, 2016) With the belief that humans are independent and can live endlessly on their own would imply that the alien species is definitely the human master or executioner. However, the situations and the background need to be interlinked, the planet would have decayed without the help of the extraterrestrial life. This directly leads to the term of the Human Contradiction and are the Oankali and Ooloi in fact, right, about their decisions and influence.

Through the posthuman perspective the Oankali can be seen as a necessary step which humans need to go through, that the question of slavers or saviours is not important. They arrived because humans needed them, to change, to ascend from the traditional ideas of humanity. However, through that lens, humans would hardly be humans anymore. It would be a new world, where each generation goes even further, until a point, as in the case of *Lilith's Brood*, an entity like Jodahs is created, which defied the boundaries and established itself as a final step in evolution.

Moreover, going simply with the lore of the books, the Oankali, it could be concluded, they saved humanity, no further investigation needs to be led. Saving someone should be done as an act of kindness, where you do not want anything in return. Whereas, the Oankali continued to act upon humans, and made them go through alterations that would force the population to a point where it is impossible to return. When it comes to the point where the conclusion about the Oankali, slavers or saviours, who is in the right? Both sides to a certain degree, if you stand against or pro Oankali you are not wrong to a certain extent, but the fact is, you need to take into account the whole picture, every action that was done. Although, even then it is extremely

difficult, but the fact that they imposed their way of life and forced infertility to humans may certainly prevail over some minds.

## 2.2 Symbiosis

Life in symbiosis, in the extent of the narrative, shows the possibility of posthuman era where two very intelligent life forms work together, but in the context of the story and the main claim, it needs to be looked into deeper to show what would it mean to accept that life, which leads to further decentralisation of humans.

Symbiotic life is another term of great importance in Butler's work, solely because of the plot. It is one of the main threads of the story, which could be seen as Butler's try to show that humanity cannot function on their own in the future. A collapse of society is inevitable, humanity needs to be saved and they cannot do that on their own. Help is needed and it arrived from outer space. Firstly, to define the term;

Symbiosis, any of several living arrangements between members of two different species, including mutualism, commensalism, and parasitism. Both positive (beneficial) and negative (unfavourable to harmful) associations are therefore included, and the members are called symbionts. (Britannica, 2023)

The different types provide an argument to discuss, which type of symbiosis is involved in Butler's work. Considering what the Oankali did and provided for humans and what they get from them it should fall in the category of mutualism. Both sides, symbionts, have something to gain from that type of relation. Oankali saved humans and in return they got new abilities, by curing cancer;

We already have much of what we want of you. Your cancer in particular." "What?" "The ooloi are intensely interested in it. It suggests abilities we have never been able to trade for successfully before." "Abilities? From cancer?" "Yes. The ooloi see great potential in it. So the trade has already been useful." (Butler, 2012)

One of humanities greatest enemies and the Oankali managed to cure it quite quickly and in return improve themselves. A trade that for certain is considered for both parties, but the events revolving around the mentioned infertility etc. can not be justified in any way by their side.

The behaviour shows that in everything they do, revolves around trade, and getting something in return. As mentioned, they traded on innumerable occasions. Their symbiotic life could be

seen as their "characteristic", as they did it with previous trades. Additionally, the connection with their ships is conceived in the same way;

There is an affinity, but it's biological—a strong, symbiotic relationship. We serve the ship's needs and it serves ours. It would die without us and we would be planetbound without it. For us, that would eventually mean death." "Where did you get it?" "We grew it." "You ... or your ancestors?" "My ancestors grew this one. I'm helping to grow another." (Butler 34)

It seems that they stay in a symbiotic relation because it is completely necessary for both sides. However, the only thing connecting them with humans is their need of human beings in order to procreate, which, again, was imposed by themselves on humans. It creates an environment where one side is not completely satisfied. Thus, the mutualism in this case can be further questioned, but primarily and regarding the facts, it should be considered mutualism; "Mutualism, association between organisms of two different species in which each benefits." (Britannica, 2023)

The initial interaction granted them both a positive return, the further relation strays away from that kind, to be exact, with the resisters who fight against, while those who accept the system gather the "benefits" of the relation. Braidotti offers more insight what symbiosis does; "It is a transformative or symbiotic relation that hybridizes and alters the 'nature' of each one and foregrounds the middle grounds of their interaction." (Braidotti, 2013) In the chapter she talks about going above the Anthropocene into the "zoe", life in its non-human aspects (Braidotti, 2013) through integrating themselves into each others life it is only logical that they would influence each other, but to find the middle ground, in Butler's work is non-existent. The Oankali do not want to let up, and humans either give in or run, middle ground is achieved only with some. Symbiosis changes both parties involved, thus, humans would never be completely same as before. Also, they would be involved in future trades with newly found species, meaning, even further alteration and new identities, where the traditional human would be just a mere memory. Symbiosis could mean throwing away the idea of being alone in the centre of things, and embracing the possibility of two life forms existing together.

Moving on to the title of the trilogy itself, which is also symbolic as Zakiyyah remarks;

Xenogenesis is defined as the production of offspring that are entirely and permanently unlike either parent. It is a form of (re)production that produces offspring that fail to

reproduce the parents. In other words, xenogenesis is novel speciation rather than genetic variation within a species. (Jackson, 2020)

Accepting the co-life will have the most impact on future offspring. Even though, they like to peddle with genes, as quoted, by the title it can be said that the point of the books is based on the posthuman sense of procreation, but putting the human in contact with the Other, can be seen as something different to traditional, humanistic viewing.

Peddling with genetics does occur, but within the extent where they use it to design future offspring. In that sense, novel focuses around the offspring and their evolution, which can certainly be seen. Lilith an enhanced human, Akin who was a step forward in the evolution, one amongst Lilith children who will prove as a friend of humanity, and Jodahs a final step in the evolution, but also a proof that even the Oankali can make a mistake. The last chapter of the paper will be focusing on them and how they represent the steps towards the future.

### 3. Development of humanity

In order to understand the gradual change to becoming like the Oankali, the characters of *Xenogenesis* need to be further explored, to prove that humans are on their way to becoming altered.

The last thread of thoughts will be focusing on humanity and their progress in the story. To be more precise, on the main protagonists of the story and how their paths influenced the story, but also, how they impacted on the whole universe of the *Xenogenesis* trilogy. Moreover, from the first moment of reading, you are immersed through the eyes of the main character of the certain part.

Lilith as the first step in the progress of the novels, is of extreme significance. She is the reason why more people had been awakened and she was acting as a real leader, but every leader has its usurpations, which Lilith felt on her skin. However, the main reason she is so important is the fact that she had the first construct-child with the Oankali.

Akin the main character of the second part, offspring of Lilith, had the most influence by humans and that is why he was so persistent with the idea of establishing a colony on Mars. He grown up with humans and almost got treated as an ordinary human child. There the nature of some humans is easily visible. Some move on and try to accept Akin as a human being, while others do not. Which still did not unsettle Akin, it continued with its plan.

Jodahs the final step, the culmination of the trilogy. A mistake that even the Oankali did not expect, an offspring of human and Oankali turned into an Ooloi. It is a proof that no species or entity is without its flaws. Also, it raises a question; is the Oankali's genetic engineering viable, if such errors could occur?

Nevertheless, all are of crucial part to the topics discussed and will prove as an example of all of them, a culmination to the discussion. In the following chapters every they will be gone through more in depth to showcase the connection between them and the topics gone through.

### 3.1 Lilith

Lilith is a prime example of a human who accepted changes that would lead to a new altered way of life. Her actions are important as through them it can be seen how humans would react if someone only used them for breeding. Also, through Lilith starts the process of posthuman hybrid humanity in the trilogy as her impregnation leads humanity further to the Oankali.

The structure between further development is created on the foundations of the relation of Lilith with the Oankali. How she first reacted to the Oankali and their progression are important in realising why Lilith did certain things and why she was the first one with a construct child.

A human who woke up first detesting the Oankali, but gradually started to enjoy their company. A prime example of a person who tried to pursuit both ends, help and stay with humans, but also with the Oankali. Lilith`s journey is filled with a lot of turning points, dire situations and immense change of her as a person. From the moment she was awoken her entire world changed. Forced to communicate with a new species who had taken her away without consent. It starts with the fear of the unknown; " "I don't understand why I'm so ... afraid of you," she whispered. "Of the way you look, I mean. You're not that different. There are—or were—life forms on Earth that looked a little like you." " (Butler, 2012) Xenophobia could certainly overwhelm an individual in that kind of situations and Lilith as a victim of it. Even though they were slimy creatures with tentacles similar to some earthy sea animals, Lilith was scared. As time progressed Lilith eventually got used to the new surroundings and caused the Oankali to trust her more. Which is important to show that the posthuman subject accepted everything and everyone, no longer was there fear of unknown. Especially was the trust seen when she was asked to help Nikanj`s metamorphosis; "It wants me to help it through its metamorphosis. // It proves you can be trusted, too. They'll be grateful and you'll be a lot freer." (Butler, 2012) Metamorphosis was quite important for the Oankali as it was their way of growing and developing, and Lilith, being tasked to help, surely proved that they started trusting her a lot more. Metamorphosis could become a regularity in the posthuman subject, as witnessed in the trilogy by the offspring Akin and Jodahs.

The next event that changed her was choosing the first person to wake up, as that was the project she was chosen to lead. Which could have resulted in her changing her mind completely



about the Oankali with the new human society forming around her. Influenced by the encounter with Titus, she chose to wake up a female first, even though a man Joseph was of big interest to her; Lilith's first impulse was to Awaken Joseph Shing—Awaken him at once and end her solitude.// Tate Merah first. Another woman. No sexual tension. (Butler, 2012) Thus, the encounter with Titus showed how cruel and barbaric human beings can be, which the Oankali knew. Moreover, how that behaviour impacts the victims and results in Lilith questioning herself who to wake up first. For certain the events that shaped Lilith the most were the groups splitting up, those against Lilith and the Oankali and those who stayed with Lilith. Which caused bloody conflicts and death of Lilith's lover Joseph. Additionally, it led to Nikanj's decision of impregnating Lilith.

She had stopped listening. Nikanj's words were incomprehensible to her. Joseph was dead—hacked to death by Curt. It was all some kind of mistake. Insanity.// You ... what?" "I have made you pregnant with Joseph's child. I wouldn't have done it so soon, but I wanted to use his seed, not a print. (Butler, 2012)

The events caused Lilith to fall into despair, but Nikanj felt that and saw what her body needs, a child. Which marks Lilith's moving even closer to the Oankali. Actions of humans like Curt who killed Joseph add further proof to Oankali and their perceptive of the Human Contradiction. From a person who was afraid of them and did not want nothing to do with them, to having their offspring is a drastic turn. Impregnation of Lilith was a necessary step for the Oankali, to achieve complete connection with humans, which was inevitable for their way of life. Also, she was content and happy that she had done that. which could further prove the Stockholm syndrome narrative or the fact she was happy to accept the new changes. "As it happens, I did have to. I had two construct kids by the time they brought me down from the ship. I never had a chance to run off and pine for the good old days! " (Butler 237) She embraced the change, the new way of life and shown that humans can find themselves together with the Oankali, which gave her comfort, unlike what she experienced with people like Titus or Curt. Lilith's pregnancy opens up multiple discussions about the situation. Parker remarks about Lilith and the lack of given information about the situation; "Although Lilith comes to terms with such information, the lack of information she receives from the Oankali becomes a repeated pattern, notably as Nikanj impregnates Lilith without her knowledge or consent; it only informs her of her pregnancy after the impregnation is complete. " (Parker, 2020) Further proving a sense of reproductive futurity.

On multiple occasions were the Oankali talking half-truths, not letting Lilith know something to the full extent. Her pregnancy comes to her as a revelation, but only after it is done. If Nikanj knew her body desired that, why wouldn't it ask her anything? Lilith was left to deal with the consequences, where Parker additionally argues; "Lilith is denied the choice to choose motherhood in two ways: she neither has the opportunity to decide whether or not she wants to be impregnated by Nikanj, nor does she have a choice to refuse "joining" with the Oankali. " (Parker, 2020) Because of the situation she was in she could not react, nor did she had any say in any of events happening. Moreover, even if she had a choice to choose, a rejection would mean complete sterilisation for her, so, in a way she was forced to have construct children with the Oankali. Canavan sees this as the final step of the Oankali towards completely winning her over; "What little we hear from her in the next two novels about the missing thirty years suggests that the Oankali's final aggression against her has been successful in pacifying her. " (Canavan, 2016) Which is certainly in one sense true, she had multiple more children afterwards, and she wanted to more and more resisters join the new human-Oankali society. Which meant she was a catalyst, in a way, to further speed up the process of human change.

Moreover, Lilith's strength can be seen when she was offered a way out: "She is also offered, once and only once, the opportunity to kill herself rather than to go forward, by grasping onto an Oankali stinger; " (Canavan, 2016) Lilith not committing suicide is of great importance, as she is the "patient zero". Without her body and mind the initialisation of change would not occur, only until the Oankali found someone with the same mindset as Lilith. There is always a certain hope in humans, hoping for the best, even if the situation looks dire. Lilith chose to live, there was something in her that wanted her to fight and seeing within herself that she can help whole of humanity. Under Lilith, some fought, some hoped, some in the end got what they wanted, thanks to Akin.

Although, Lilith was involved in controversial situations the results that followed needed to happen. As Lilith's offspring whose actions shaped some major plot points. Also, shown that a term like the Human Contradiction was not perceived the same with the Oankali and their future construct children, as Akin lead the way in that sense.

Through the idea of the nomadic subjectivity, Lilith can be seen as her identity changes. Shaped by the environment, the Oankali, by fellow humans... Her identity was under constant change, until settling down with the Oankali, which could imply that even in that state Lilith and other humans who accepted change are still humans, only their identity changed. But, are they the

last versions of traditional humans? It is plausible to assume that, as Akin and Jodahs gain more of Oankali characteristics and start losing the human ones.

### **3.2 Akin**

Akin is a result of change that started with Lilith, but his alteration from humans does not show the complete change from human to Oankali, as it is lead by beliefs to help humanity. If Oankali allegorize posthuman humanity, Akin serves the purpose of connecting the two, the human and posthuman.

Akin is the middle ground of the narrative, as its appearance is more like an Oankali, but its identity sits strong with the human society.

Akin's role in Butler's writing is to show optimism in her trilogy. Humans feared that the construct children are not going have the same appearance as humans, but more like the Oankali. Additionally, it caused them, especially the resisters, to not trust the construct children, as they were completely alien for them. Therefore, Akin is a light of hope for those wanting to go back to the old human ways, even though Akin is a hybrid of the two species, not a human completely. Akin situation was a bit different; it looked a lot like a normal human being, but his tongue was the thing revealing it; "He said Akin's tongue looked like a big gray slug, but somehow this did not seem to bother him. " (Butler, 2012) Resisters were constantly kidnapping children in some hopeful state to find a completely human child, Akin fell victim to kidnapping as well. "Thus, as it happened, Akin was alone with Tino when a party of raiders came looking for children to steal. " (Butler, 2012) He grew up with only humans, which certainly had an impact on its perception of life itself. That was the reason he was really fond of humans and why it fought for the idea of a new colony. As Vint expands on that thought;

While the body is important to understanding our identity, social experiences shape and change us as well. Akin gains his pivotal role as spokesperson for the Resisters not through sharing genetic material with humans – as do many other Oankali-human children born before him – but through his experience of human culture during the time he lives in a Resister settlement after being kidnapped. (Vint, 2007)

The narrative from the alien side was always the same, humans are either going to make new life with us or they would not at all, and their mindset could not be moved. Akin was a sort of an attorney for the resisters, it really pledged that they are capable of new life on their own. Akin showcases that some entities, even not completely human, act like it more than a lot of humans themselves. With Akin, Butler had shown that future generations in some terms are improvements from their predecessors, as not a single Oankali wanted to give in to Akin's idea, it required a lot of time to negotiate the idea.

Akin was seen as wandering too much near the line of the Human Contradiction;

You skirt as close to the Contradiction as anyone has dared to go. You're as much of them as you can be and as much of us as your ooaan dared make you. That leaves you with your own contradiction. It also made you the most likely person to choose for the resisters —quick death or long, slow death." "Or life," Akin protested. "No." "A chance for life." (Butler, 2012)

Their thoughts are that it is madness what Akin is doing, that he will eventually be backstabbed, because some cannot be trusted. A trait that humans more than regularly showed. Nonetheless, Akin believed, as he felt a big bond towards the resisters, as Vint remarked that social experience influences an individual and can change the person completely, regardless of their roots. In the end, Akin was successful; "In less time than they probably realized, some of them would be aboard shuttles headed for Mars, there to watch the changes begin and be witnesses for their people. " (Butler 438) Without Akin that project would never be conceived and realised. That was its purpose, to help those for whom he thought deserve a second chance, even if meant being susceptible to those who want to hurt it. Additionally, its self-criticism is crucial in order to see that the alien and their offspring can see the faults in their actions; " "What are we that we can do this to whole peoples? Not predators? Not symbionts? What then?" "A people, growing, changing. You're an important part of that change. You're a danger we might not survive." " (Butler, 2012) To criticise yourself is important in becoming a better self, which is important to the narrative, so the reader can see that the Oankali can be similar

to humans. Akin as a construct of human and Oankali tries to become the better from both sides.

Akin is an integral part of the trilogy, without it a new reality cannot be imagined. In the posthuman era, Akin is a proof that an offspring of two species can act better and honourably, unlike a big number of human beings. Furthermore, Akin is an example of symbiotic reproduction, it goes beyond its initial identity, over Oankali values, to imply that, no matter the physical alterations, a human way of thinking would always in part remain in the posthuman future.

### **3.3 Jodahs**

Through Jodahs, a final change occurs, that even surpasses the thinking of the Oankali. In Butler's exploratory thought, this could imply how far the posthuman can go, in the sense of gradual and complete change. Also, to imply that some subjects would surpass the norms, which would further connect the Oankali and human, as both are flawed.

Jodahs is an example of a final, unexpected evolution, which shows how far can one's body, mind and identity go.

The third and final protagonist, Jodahs acts as entity which became what no one expected, a human born Oankali that turned into an Ooloi. Through Jodahs it is uncovered that the Oankali are not without flaws either, that they can make mistakes, just like humans. That kind of revelation comes as a surprise after two parts of the trilogy where the Oankali are seen as flawless creatures. Additionally, the third part acts as a deconstruction of the earlier parts. (Canavan 93) Discoveries made in the final part result in the reader seeing the Oankali differently. Firstly, Jodahs becoming an Ooloi; " "What is it?" my Human father asked. My mother looked at Nikanj. When it did not speak, she said, "Jodahs ... Jodahs is becoming

ooloi.” ” (Butler, 2012) It was an event that no one could have anticipated, because it was not meant to happen, but it did. It came from carelessness of Nikanj, even the Ooloi commit mistakes. It changed the narrative, an Ooloi supposed to be a flawless creature. Now with Jodahs becoming an Ooloi a known fear had risen; "The people are going to have to change the old agreement before more accidents happen. The next one might be a flawed ooloi.” ” (Butler, 2012) The flawed Ooloi would be exiled to the ships to stay in confinement, yet no one wanted that for Jodahs, because it was believed everything will be fine with it, even in the unexpected circumstance. Parker offers insight on the aspect of difference in the Oankali; "From Dawn to Imago, the Oankali evolve from a group that thrives on difference to a group that embraces differences that they have become accustomed to. " (Parker, 2020) Oankali who brought up the Human Contradiction and constantly reminded humans of their flaws, now have to deal with such a mistake that they cannot simply ignore. They are no longer thriving on the difference between the species, they have to accept it.

Further, on Earth a group of humans is discovered, who are still fertile, meaning Oankali made another mistake. Jodahs know that those people could not be let alone, they would have to choose a certain option. It shows that event he Oankali are flawed, meaning that no subject is without faults and no matter how far someone evolves and changes, perfection is not achievable.

Jodahs has a big role to play, it has to decide how to act, and to choose its own path. Nikanj tells Jodahs all the it could be capable of, influencing humans through genes, giving them back cancer etc. (Parker, 2020), Jodahs does not do anything that Nikanj mentions, regarding the negative possibilities. That narrative follows the thought the future generations, regardless are they completely human or constructs, they lead the path to positive change. Additionally, Jodahs is the connection between fertile humans and a new way of life, away from Earth. With the planet eventually succumbing to its degradation, Jodahs has a final role to do. Jodahs big part is in that of planting a seed for a new ship to grow; "The majority decided that as long as we stayed where we were, anyone who wanted to join us could do so. "Plant a town," they told us. "Prepare a place. People will come." ” (Butler, 2012) With the knowledge that Earth will eventually become a desolate ruin, people have no other choice than to join or leave on to the colony. As Jodahs is chosen to pick a new settlement where the ship is going to grow, and he chose the place where they found the fertile group. In the end, all sides could be satisfied; humans could live on their own on Mars or could join the Oankali co-life. Nevertheless, thanks

to Lilith, Akin and Jodahs the narrative followed a humanity on the brink of extinction to life on Mars and new version of humans, as they mix with the Oankali.

That kind of story progression shows that Butler believed in alien life who could help society and not cause havoc amongst humanity, while helping them to thrive. Jodahs actions and existence imply that a human identity will always in part remain, as it tried to reason with the fertile humans in a positive manner. Also, it could be an example of human`s final step, evolution into a neuter body which identity can still be altered from time and environment. From Akin and Jodahs it is certainly made to seem that human lineage ends there, but how they think and act, especially Akin, shows that may be all human characteristics are not lost. Nevertheless, looking at the whole picture, humanity is evolving, by their will or not, they are becoming something different. With the birth of Akin, humanity changed. It is certainly not completely lost, but those events started the inevitable change.

### **3.4 The meaning of the Mars colony**

The Mars colony is an example of a part of humanity who did not wish to be changed. In order to expand on the claim, a brief overview of the colony and its meaning of posthuman are needed.

Establishing the colony was one of the plot points that went against the narrative. The whole of first part and most of the second the belief from the Oankali side is the same; humans cannot live on their own, they need to stay in symbiotic life to stay alive. The origin of the change could be connected with Lilith. Her behaviour showcased to the Oankali how humans can act, not necessary always evil. More importantly she chose to live with them.

Akin came as her successor and worked further to the solution of the problem with humans who wanted to go to the old way of life. Through Akin the plan came to fruition, as thanks to it the colony plan was approved.

What does the colony actually mean?

A side of humanity that always existed, union of people ready to survive together, rather than fight themselves for reasons not worth it. It shows a rise of new life on traditional terms, the life on the colony would be hard, but it would be worth it. Some remarks are made about the progression of the colony; "That`s good if they want to go to Mars. That`s safe." " (Butler, 2012) It is clear the environment on Mars is harsh, but from the evidence it is progressing, and

more importantly, it is a safe place. It shows that humans can work together, contrary of what the Oankali believed. Also, it shows the integrity of people, risking safe life with the Oankali to fight the environment on an uninhabited planet to live as their predecessors. Even though in Butler`s work the world almost ended through warfare, there is still a part that believes in the good of humanity, and that even in the posthuman state, some fundamental values remain, as it is seen with Akin or Jodahs.

Two final thoughts follow the conclusion of the narrative. Firstly, humans who stay with the Oankali change as well as their offspring, progressively more. Although, humans who go on Mars will surely as well change, but may be not to that extent. As previously said, identity changes by different factors, moving to another planet is an extreme change in environment, which would force humans there to evolve. Both threads imply a different posthuman subject, but Butler`s work does not offer definite answers and it is left to the reader to decide.



## Conclusion

The *Xenogenesis* trilogy offers many points to discuss, with the main one being Oankali serving as an allegory to humans themselves. The posthumanist idea shows the move from the Anthropos being in the centre to it sharing the position with a new species. Moreover, where the human is inferior to the alien and it depends on them. It expands on the posthuman ideas of decentralisation of the human being and biological changes that can happen with advanced technology.

The narrative of the Oankali and their thought about humans and their contradiction show how a new species could perceive humans, and how plausible their take may be. Also, Butler's work gives insight how the new introduced life, is not completely benign.

The question of infertility is an integral part of the trilogy. The posthuman era could certainly look like something from Butler's work. It shows the nature of humans, some willing to accept the new life, while others cannot cope with it, so they fight to achieve old order. Being made infertile without your approval or awareness raises the question about future technology and genetic engineering, because in a certain period of time, a lot of possibilities will be available to an individual.

Sexuality and desire are also affected in Butler's work. When the only way to procreate is with the Oankali included in the action could completely change the human mind. Additionally, offspring that no longer look human, moves away fundamentally from humanism and focuses on a new look on life.

Butler's ideas and writing prove difficult to conclude with certainty. Every plot thread has arguments to hold the pro and against of something. That is why the trilogy is ambiguous, even though humans are put through a great deal, seeing what they did balances the scale to chose which side to join.

Nonetheless, the trilogy proves as an example of what humanity could achieve, through biological changes. Through the posthuman lens it can be imagined how the world works without humans being in the centre. The question raised discussed innumerable times, but the conclusion would be similar, not enough proof to certainly prove one side, and that is why ambiguity fits right in with Butler's work.

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