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*Araştırma Makalesi*

## READING THE VAMPIRE DIASPORA: HYBRIDITY AND DIASPORIC CONSCIOUSNESS IN OCTAVIA BUTLER'S FLEDGLING

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### Abstract

*This article by applying diaspora theories to Octavia Butler's vampire novel Fledgling (2005), will engender a critical engagement with the issues of difference and hybridity. By examining the oscillating relations between the hybrid vampire protagonist Shori, her human symbionts, and the vampire diasporic community, this study reflects on the complexity of the diasporic condition; especially, the conflicting claims of belonging where the celebration of hybridity can easily go hand in hand with ethnocentric articulations of nationhood. The focus of this paper will be threefold. The first part will unpack the historical scope of the vampire Ina diaspora, highlighting the three constitutive elements of diasporic experience which are dispersion, homeland orientation, and boundary maintenance. The second part sheds light on the problematic nature of Ina/human relationship termed as 'mutualistic symbiosis.' And the last part will interrogate the hybrid identity of Shori Matthews, questioning whether this cross-breed vampire with Afro-American human genes can really hold the potential for boundary-crossing and write her scripts of survival on the necessity of embracing diversity and change without being dichotomized by issues of national belonging and identity politics.*

**Keywords:** Octavia Butler, Fledgling, Diaspora, Hybridity, Ethnocentrism.

## VAMPIR DİASPORASINI OKUMAK: OCTAVIA BUTLER'İN FLEDGLING ROMANINDA MELEZLİK VE DİASPORİK BİLİNÇ

### Öz

*Bu makale, Octavia Butler'ın Fledgling (2005) adlı vampir romanına diaspora teorilerini uygulayarak, farklılık ve melezlik konularına eleştirel yaklaşımlar getirme amacını güder. Makale, romanın melez vampir kahramanı Shori, onun insan simbiyontları*

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*ve vampir Ina toplumu arasındaki sallantılı ilişkiyi irdeleyerek, diaspora deneyiminin karmaşıklığını, özellikle, birbiriyle oldukça çelişen ama aynı zamanda el ele gidebilen milli benlik ve melezlik aidiyet anlatılarını gözler önüne serecektir. Çalışmanın odak noktası üç yönlü olacaktır. Makalenin birinci kısmı, diaspora deneyiminin üç temel ögesini oluşturan dağılma, yurda yönelme, ve sınır koruma/sürdürme öğelerine odaklanarak vampir Ina diasporasının tarihsel boyutunu gözler önüne serer. İkinci kısım ise, “karşılıklı simbiyoz” olarak adlandırılan Ina/insan ilişkisinin sorunlu doğasına ışık tutar. Makalenin son kısmı ise Shori Matthews’un melez kimliğini irdeler. Afro-Amerikan insan genlerine sahip bu melez vampirin, ulusal aidiyet ve kimlik politikaları ikilemine düşmeden, sınırları aşım aşım kuramayacağını ve hayatta kalma senaryolarını çeşitlilik ve değişim üzerine kurup kuramayacağını sorgular.*

*Anahtar sözcükler: Octavia Butler, Fledgling, Diaspora, Melezlik, Etnosentrizm.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

In their introductory article in *Theorizing Diaspora*, Braziel and Mannur (2003) lay bare the fact that contradictory, interdisciplinary, and varied usages of the term diaspora have made it very hard to map out the term’s borders and its multiple referents. In connection to this, they assert that “diaspora studies will need to move beyond theorizing how diasporic identities are constructed and consolidated and must ask, how are these diasporic identities practiced, lived, and experienced?” (Braziel & Mannur, 2003, p. 9). Such a question foregrounds the effects and consequences of diasporic consciousness rather than its reasons and underlying historical motives. In prioritizing the ‘here and now’ experience rather than the different historical processes of each and every diaspora, Braziel and Mannur (2003) asks us to look at the immigrant, the refugee, the expatriate not as people who are stuck between the “double-gaze of here/home” (p. 9), but as hybrid personalities who adopt aspects of the host culture and rework, reform, and rearticulate this in the background of their own cultural heritage. As one critic claims, “dispersion, once a liability, is now a value to be put into play” (Waldinger, 2008, p. Xvi). Thus, various critics by alluding to diaspora more as a positive transnational movement (Appadurai, 2003; Basch, Schiller & Blanc, 1994; Hall, 2005) have tried to untangle the term from its pejorative political typologies, concentrating more on it as a social and cultural process. Stuart Hall (2003), in his widely quoted article “Cultural Identity and Diaspora,” claims that the defining characteristic of diaspora experience is its “recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; . . . a conception of ‘identity’ which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by hybridity. Diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference” (p. 244).

However, the traditional diasporic model, firmly rooted in a conceptual homeland and fixed origins, brings us back again to the hotly debated issue of

whether diasporic identities can really continue in time as ‘hybrid’? For as Anthias (1998) suggests, diasporic spaces have the power of endorsing not only transformation and change but also the building of quite rigid boundaries: “The perception of diasporas as breaking ‘the ethnic spectacles’ with which the world was previously viewed, may vastly underestimate the continuing attachment to the idea of ethnic and therefore particularist bonds, to a new reconstructed form of ethnic absolutism” (p. 567). Kalra, Kaur & Hutnyk (2005) also pinpoint the problem of an either/or mentality that looks at diasporic identities as moving closer in time to ethnic absolutism or global transnationalism; since, in reality, both exist in diasporic belonging: “The potential for erasing ethnic and national ties is inherent within the notion of diaspora but in practice what often occurs is both syncretic cultural formation and re-enforced ethnic and nationalist ties within the same diasporic space” (p. 33). Similarly, Avtar Brah (1996) in her much-quoted book *Cartographies of Diaspora* emphasizes the importance of these two types of affiliation (that of ethnic absolutism or global transnationalism) stating that the “historical and contemporary elements” of diasporic consciousness must be “understood not in tandem, but in their dia-synchronic relationality” (p. 187). Thus, thinking of diasporas as distinctive social spaces that enforce essentialist notions of cultural identity, or, the exact opposite, as “non-normative starting points for a discourse that is traveling or hybridizing in new global conditions” (Clifford, 1999, p. 306) overlooks not only the unique dialogical process inherent in each and every diaspora, but also the possibility of looking at diasporas as projects of a new world order by which nationalist formulations coexist with hybridized ones so that optimum survival of (un)bounded groups can be ensured.

In order to shed light on this diasporic consciousness by which essentialist notions of cultural identity can go hand in hand with non-normative hybridized constructions, I have chosen to analyze a science fiction vampire novel *Fledgling* (2005), written by Octavia E Butler. By delving into Butler’s speculative ‘vampire diaspora,’ I hope to illustrate how diasporic spaces can easily endorse hybrid as well as essentialist narratives of belonging and selfhood. Consequently, the focus of this paper will be threefold. Picking up on Roger Brubaker’s (2005) analysis, I shall, first, reflect on how the Ina/vampire diasporas in *Fledgling* display the three constitutive elements of diasporic experience which are dispersion, homeland orientation, and boundary maintenance. Then, I explore the vampire/human relationship (described in the novel as mutualistic symbiosis) as a metaphor that problematizes the existing power relations between the self and the Other, home and the host, the colonizer and the colonized. And finally, I examine the competing and oscillating relations between the three parties; the hybrid vampire protagonist Shori, her human symbionts, and the vampire diasporic community. By addressing the multiple interplays between them, I question whether this cross-breed vampire with Afro-

American human genes can really hold the potential for boundary-crossing and write her scripts of survival on the necessity of embracing diversity and change without being dichotomized by narratives of national belonging and identity politics.

## **MAPPING THE HISTORY OF THE INA DIASPORA**

### **In Search of Roots and Routes**

In Octavia Butler's vampire novel *Fledgling*, readers come across a familiar yet estranged world where a colony of vampire-like species (who call themselves the Ina) tries to survive in diasporic vampire communities scattered in the margins of nation-state human geographies. Living in secluded homelands and "organizing their communities to look like human villages" (Butler, 2005, p. 240), these vampiric species survived by remaining invisible and discreet as well as rigid and pure in their livelihood practices.

According to *The Book of the Goddess*, the three-volume *Ina Bible* written ten thousand years ago in the Ina language, the Ina is created by a great mother goddess who "gave [them] Earth to live until [they] became wise to come home to live in paradise with her" (Butler, 2005, p. 73). Similar to the Jewish Zionist tradition, the religious Inas see the earth as a temporary place of trial and error from which they would eventually return "back to paradise" (Butler, 2005, p. 193). On the other hand, for the non-religious Inas, home resides in outer-space, in another planet:

*There's a recently developed belief among some of our younger people that the Ina landed here from another world thousands of years ago. . . Actually I [Iosif] think we evolved right here on Earth alongside humanity as a cousin species like the chimpanzees. Perhaps we're the more gifted cousin.* (Butler, 2005, p. 73).

*There was a time when Ina believed that paradise was elsewhere in this world, on some hidden island or lost continent. Now that this world has been so thoroughly explored, believers look outward either to the supernatural or to rather questionable science.* (Butler, 2005, p. 193).

Whether they evolved on earth as a cousin race of the humans or were sent by a Goddess, or came from a different planet, 'home' for the Ina was never a 'lived experience' of locality. According to Shori's father, Iosif, the first ancestors of the Inas were nomads wandering in the region of Mesopotamia, in the banks of Tigris and Euphrates where the world's civilization. Later they moved north and west to Russia, Ukraine, Romania, Hungary, the region popularly known by humans as Transylvania, the "vampire country" (Butler, 2005, p. 136). But because the Ina had to feed on blood to survive, they had to learn to live discreetly alongside the human. They "thinly spread among human tribes and family bands" (Butler, 2005, p. 194) and blended into stationary farming human communities. Unfortunately, shortly

after their first contact with the human, the Inas, like the American Indians also suffer an epidemic illness of mass proportion and are almost vanished to the point of extinction:

*. . . We were weak and sick. I don't know why . . . I think some of us were writing to leave behind some sign that we had lived, because it seemed we would all die. . . . We died in great numbers than we could afford. It got harder and harder for us to find mates. Then, gradually, we began to heal. Perhaps we had simply undergone a microbial winnowing. The illness killed most of us. Those left were resistant to it, as were there children. (Butler, 2005, p. 195).*

The Inas, after overcoming miraculously the ghastly effects of the “Ina-specific” epidemic confront other major problems that result in the widespread dispersion of their communities. One of the biggest threats to Ina survival is the racism and xenophobia of humans who “driv[e] out or kill” (Butler, 2005, p.136) Inas for their tall, ultra pale, “vaguely menacing, spidery” (Butler, 2005, p.150) looks. Moreover, Ina’s long life span and enduring youth also make it very dangerous for Inas to stay in one place for a long time. Becoming easy targets of human envy and animosity, the Inas face torture, exploitation, and violence:

*Some humans wanted to know how we could live so long. What secret magic did we possess to avoid growing old? . . .*

*Suspicious about us grew out of control now and then down through the ages, and we had to run or fight, or we were tortured and murdered as demons or as possessors of valuable secrets. Sometimes they hacked at us until they thought we were dead, then buried us. When we healed, we came out of our graves confused, mad with hunger. . . . (Butler, 2005, pp. 195-96).*

Other threats that precipitate the spatial dispersion of the Inas are the wars, persecutions, and genocides in human history. Some families like the ancient Romanian Petrescu family, whose history dates back to two thousand years, are completely wiped out by the Nazis and the Communists during both World Wars (Butler, 2005, p. 219); while others migrate to different countries building new families and households. The greed, acquisitiveness, and aggressive arrogance of humans become valuable lessons that make Inas realize that they have to fight for their survival. Witnessing ‘imminent death’ as both a perpetual observer and experiencer, results in the Inas developing a kind of ‘siege’ mentality akin to the Jews. Being deterritorialized, they begin to uphold blood relations and alliances as one of their fundamental values. In case of feuds and disputes between family members and communities, the Ina resort to their ancient legal system that requires the convergence of thirteen powerful Ina families to form a “Council” and resolve

the issue in hand and reinstate justice, tranquility and peace. In this respect, The Council of Judgment, with its thirteen representative households, very interestingly, brings into mind the fledgling government of the United States of the 18th century, formed by the first thirteen colonies under the Articles of Confederation.

To ensure the conversation of their race, the Ina build segregated communes where they can feel free and safe and conceal their identities. To a certain extent, these unnoticeable vampire enclaves by way of reinforcing symbolic boundaries help the Ina to maintain a distinctive collective identity. Bound to one another through blood, custom, and law rather than national territory, each Ina commune respectively begins to resemble a 'stateless power,' a political unit of power that asserts and sustains the social and cultural boundaries of kinship across time and space and reflect an "ethnonational collectivity" (Amit, 2002, p. 264). Eventually, Butler's vampire communities fulfill the three criteria that Roger Brubaker (2005) in his article "The 'diaspora' diaspora" lists as the three defining features of most diasporas. The history of the Inas, their long years of forced migration and suffering meets Brubaker's first criterion, the dispersion of space, "... Forced or . . . traumatic . . . [or] any kind of dispersion in space, provided that the dispersion crosses state borders" (2005, p. 5). The constant desire of the Ina to return to their roots, their original homeland -sacred or extraterrestrial, meets the second criterion: an "orientation to a real or imagined 'homeland' as an authoritative source of value, identity and loyalty" (Brubaker, 2005, p.5). And, finally, the legal system, religion, and social codes and practices that bind all the dispersed Ina families throughout the world illustrate, a non-territorial polity, an essentialized belonging that correlates with the third criterion of "boundary maintenance" which involves the "preservation of a distinctive identity" in a host society through "self-enforced endogamy or other forms of self-segregation" (Brubaker, 2005, p. 6).

## **THE INA VAMPIRES**

### **The Domineering or the Dominated?**

Building segregated communes that can protect them from the social and physical contamination of the human world is not sufficient for the well-being and protection of Butler's diasporic vampires. Dependent on human blood and companionship and not being able to live off by "casual hunting" (Butler, 2005, p. 276) or "grazing" (Butler, 2005, p.170), the Ina realize that to survive they need physical intimacy and the emotional companionship of their host species. For without human contact, the Inas willow and gradually die. Joan Braithwaite, an elder female Ina mother, points out to Shori why the human symbiont is an indispensable part of Ina life:

*'We need our symbionts more than most of them know. We need not only their blood, but physical contact with them and emotional reassurance from them. Companionship. I've never known even one of us to survive without symbionts. We should be able to do it ---survive through casual hunting. But the truth is that that only works for short periods. Then we sicken. We either weave ourselves a family of symbionts, or we die.'* (Butler, 2005, p. 276).

Eventually, to include the humans into their extended families and involve them in their life, the Ina insert and feed the human with their powerful hypnotic saliva, addicting them to a life-long term of dependency, usually without their will. The relationship between the human and the Ina is described by Shori's father, Iosif, as one of "mutualistic symbiosis" (Butler, 2005, p. 69). He explains that humans who are bitten by Inas become addicted to a powerful narcotic agent found in Ina saliva that can result in death in case of withdrawal:

*They [humans] die if they're taken from us or if we die, but their death is caused by another component of the venom. They die of strokes or heart attacks because we aren't there to take the extra blood cells that our venom encourages their bodies to make. Their doctors can help them if they understand the problem quickly enough. But their psychological addiction tends to prevent them from going to a doctor. They hunt for their Ina –or any Ina until it's too late.* (Butler, 2005, pp. 79-80).

Besides its addictive quality, Ina saliva also has antiseptic and healing agents that provide human symbionts longevity and a boosted immune and circulatory system. In return for being "fed" and "loved" (Butler, 2005, p. 133), the Inas offer their syms the possibility to live between 170 to 200 years (Butler, 2005, p. 69). Respectively, Shori's father Iosif defines the Ina/human relationship not on parasitical terms, as one of the consumer and the consumed, but as one of a mutually beneficial interdependence: "We can't magically convert humans into our kind. We do keep those who join with us healthier, stronger, and harder to kill than they be without us" (Butler, 2005, p. 69). Similarly, Brook, the human sym of Iosif explains to Shori that Ina-sym relationships depend on intimate physical contact:

*You need to touch your symbionts more. . . You need to touch us and know that we're here for you, ready to help you if you need us. . . And we need to be touched. It pleases us just as it pleases you. We protect and feed you, and you protect and feed us. That's the way an Ina-and-symbiont household works, or that's the way it should work.* (Butler, 2005, p. 183).

The parasitic practice of living off human blood is transformed into a more lenient one of give and take from which the humans also profit. Even so, Butler continues to cast doubt on the alleged seductive appeal of Ina venom –namely in its

frequent association with reciprocal benefit. In reality, it is a one-sided dependency from which the Inas greatly benefit and the humans cannot escape. The humans who are bitten by the Ina, usually without their will, turn into “human syms” who, if not bitten die a painful death. If bitten, they fall into a euphoric state of love and seek continuously their Ina’s compassion, devotion, and sexual intimacy. Within this symbiotic relationship, the feelings of the human toward the Ina fluctuate between love and hostility, attraction and repulsion. Sooner or later, the humans realize that they have unwillingly become human symbionts, confined and immobilized without a chance of escape:

*‘They take over our lives,’ Brook said. ‘They don’t even think about it, they just do it as though it were their right. And we let them because they give us so much satisfaction and . . . just pure pleasure.’*

*Wright grunted, ‘We let them because we have no choice. By the time we realize what’s happened to us, it’s too late. . . . By the time Shori asked me-or rather, by the time she offered to let me go –I was very thoroughly hooked, psychologically if not physically.’ (Butler, 2005, pp. 167-68).*

As both Brook and Wright clearly explain, whether the humans like it or not, whether they want it or not, by definition they are dependent on their Inas psychologically and physically. For after a few feedings, the human must give up his/her old life, family, and loved ones and begin life anew in these diasporic enclaves where surviving entails adaptation to Ina social practices, norms, and traditions. The Ina try to lessen the feeling of alienation and exile that their symbionts feel by letting them “hold jobs away from the community, and even live elsewhere part time” (Butler, 2005, p. 78). Some Inas even support symbiont marriages so that they can rear their own children.

For the sake of self-preservation, the Ina cannot harm their syms and due to their ‘life value,’ one way or the other, the Inas are bound to “safeguar[d]” their syms from “physical harm” (Butler, 2005, p. 194). Even Milo Silk, the racial purist responsible for the complete annihilation of Shori’s family, does not endanger the mental as well as the physical well-being of his syms. He only uses them as weapons, spies, and human tools. Moreover, considering that the Inas underwent a “microbial winnowing” (Butler, 2005, p. 195) that drove them to the verge of extinction, it would be not so surprising to think that the Inas will do anything for the conservation of their race.

Consequently, the Ina/human relationships that are described as “mutual symbiosis” actually function as an apparatus of hegemonic power, producing and regulating Ina and human social life. In the diasporic space of the Ina, the human is produced and reproduced as a colonial subject through a discourse of mutuality,



compassion, and benefit. Rather than the mind, the power of the body, desires, and emotions have become the power practices used to procure the consent of the Other. The control of human symbionts takes place through the dismantling of human morals and reason. By means of their relaxing and euphoric saliva, Inas offer their symbionts the fantasy of perfect love and pure irresistible sexual satisfaction. They use their saliva to ‘discipline’ the human so they can regulate and determine their actions according to their own needs. For instance, love-making becomes an action regulated by the degree of nutrition and amount of Ina hunger, and the pleasure taken from it depends on whether it’s a full or a half meal. In a way, for the Ina, whose chemical physiology perceives everything as a result of heightened sensorium, the human body and its senses become the controlling monism of power. In this new space of exile, the symbionts are offered more intense and satisfying ways of doing and feeling that can revive and invigorate their dull lives. Unconstrained from human norms and values, they feel free to practice polygamy, bisexual, and even pedophilic relationships. Thus, the human symbionts eager to taste the sexual joy the alien Inas are ready to offer, feel content about their condition and do not question or want to question their submissive role. The desires of the human body once unleashed easily appropriate the space of reason, and eventually lead to a fatal attraction. In the words of Wright, the vampire in a very short time becomes a craved demigod: “. . . ‘I think the scariest thing about all this so far is that all three of those symbionts seem genuinely happy . . . Old Iosif told them they were living in the best of all possible worlds, and they bought it because as far as they’re concerned, he’s God” (Butler, 2005, p. 93).

Nonetheless, for the Ina as well as the human, these open relationships and sexual encounters do not signify transgression or a crossing of the boundary to the Other. For the Ina, the human still remains to be a sym, a valuable livestock that must be carefully looked after, protected, and pleased so that he can always be available as a fresh blood donor and sexual partner. And the human, no matter how jealous, over-protective, or dependent he is and no matter how strong his craving is, still continues to view the Ina as the alien Other. Theodora Harden, Shori’s sym nicely describes her situation as, “I moved to Mars. . . Now I’ve got to learn how to be a good Martian. Who better to teach me than the other immigrants?” (Butler, 2005, p. 234).

To that end, describing such an asymmetrical Ina/human relationship as one of mutual symbiosis, perhaps, only serves to soothe the conscience of the Inas. Their domination over the human is resolved in what I can term a ‘bio-ethical’ way. For these new vampires do not kill but control, do not force but invite, do not prey but look after. In a way, mutual symbiosis becomes a form of bio-power by which humans turned into willing donors and lovers, ensure the health and well-being of the Ina race.

## **HYBRIDITY AS A CONTESTED SPACE**

### **Shori Matthews and the ‘Pain of Unbelonging’**

Shori’s unique hybridity gives her immense power and superiority over her kind making her the only non-nocturnal Ina who can function during the day; nevertheless, her community’s response to her crossbreed identity wavers between two poles. The younger generation who is more tuned into science and technology is fascinated by Shori and her human traits, seeing her as the “new improved model” (Butler, 2005, p. 126). Her closest relatives, the Braithwaites, also regard her as a “treasure” (Butler, 2005, p. 220), as “an asset to any [Ina] community” (Butler, 2005, p. 220). Shori is even considered as a “celebrity” among the Inas who come from various continents of “South America, Europe, Asia and Africa” (Butler, 2005, p. 84) to see her.

The more traditional and older generation, on the other hand, represented by the Silks and Dahlman families, see Shori’s hybrid nature not as a potential resource but as an undesirable element that must be eradicated for the preservation and maintenance of a pure white Ina society. Milo Silk, the 541-year-old Ina, who believes in the racial superiority of the Inas, sees Shori as a genetic deformation, as a dirty dog (Butler, 2005, p. 248) whose racial fusion is contaminating the whole Ina race. In fact, Milo Silk disregards Shori’s Ina identity completely and considers her as a threatening presence who if not stopped will absorb, consume, and destroy the whole Ina society:

*We Ina are vastly outnumbered by the human beings of this world. And how many of us have been butchered, in their wars? They destroy one another by the millions, and it makes no difference to their numbers. They breed and breed and breed, while we live long and breed slowly. Their lives are brief and, without us, riddled with disease and violence. And yet, we need them. We take them into our families, and with our help, they are able to live longer, stay free of disease, and get along with one another. We could not live without them.*

*“But we are not them!”*

*“We are not them.”*

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*“Nor should we try to be them. Ever. Not for any reason. Not even to gain the day; the cost is too great.”* (Butler, 2005, p. 298).

Milo, in his attempt to defend the diasporic Ina species against what he considers to be the occupying multiplicity, volatility, and barbarity of the host

humans, replicates the binary constructs of colonial discourse that has given rise to such atrocities. His putative moral superiority makes him perceive the hybrid Shori as impure, inferior, lawless, and animal-like: “Murdering black Mongrel bitch. . .What will she give us all? Fur? Tails?” (Butler, 2005, p. 306). Thus, from the viewpoint of Milo, the Ina community must protect its one true self, its one shared culture from the contamination of the Other, the human. At first glance, Milo’s highly racialized discourse that describes the Ina in terms of fixity, purity, and homogeneity may lay starkly in contrast with the transnational diasporic experience asserted by Hall, and others, that equate diaspora with mobility, adaptation, and intercultural interaction. However, when one looks closer, one understands that the construct of racism is in fact a by-product of such a mobility and interaction. For racism as a phenomenon is not peculiar to the Ina culture, but initially a feature that has been appropriated by the diasporic communities (like the Silks and the Dahlmans) residing in racist human nation-states. The apathetic and devaluating words of Katherine Dahlman’s, the eldest of Dahlman Ina household residing in the United States best exemplifies this case: “You want your sons to mate with this person. You want them to get black, human children from her. Here in the United States, even most humans will look down on them. When I came to this country, such people were kept as property, as slaves” (Butler, 2005, p. 278). Moreover, the remarks of Wells Gordon, also, indicate how racism was in fact a trait gradually appropriated rather than inherited: “Ina weren’t racists. . . Human racism meant nothing to the Ina because human races meant nothing to them. They looked for congenial human symbionts wherever they happened to be, without regard for anything but personal appeal” (Butler, 2005, p. 154). As Wells Gordon clearly indicates, within the vampiric Ina culture, race was never a signifier of anything, let alone be a signifier of differentiation. Consequently, Milo’s speech that downplays humans as barbaric and inferior, his constant effort to reinscribe the theme of ‘sanguinity’ in the system of Ina law (a theme that begins to lose its significance with the presence of Shori), can be seen as a by-product of human racist ideologies that have been gradually internalized during centuries of Ina-human contact. Vijay Mishra (1996) in her article, “The Diasporic Imaginary,” describes the heavy influence of host cultures in the formation of diasporic communities;

*What the community undergoes is a process of social semiosis whereby the tribe from a particular ‘homeland’ interacts with other cultures over a long period of time to produce diaspora. Against the fictions of a heroic past and a distant land, the real history of diasporas is always contaminated by the social processes that govern their lives. (p. 18).*

Being not able to thrive outside the history of racism, some Ina households reproduce the racial constructs and antagonisms they have become a target of, making racist slurs and discourse thinking rampant in their communities. In other

words, the Ina not only appropriate human names suitable to the countries they settle (like Preston Gordon, Zoe Fotopoulos, Alexander Svoboda, or Vlademir Leontev) or learn the human language, not “bother[ing] to teach their children to read Ina any longer” (Butler, 2005, p. 221) or adapt to the “the rapid change and transformation of global culture,” but also retain racist practices of exclusivism and purification.

Furthermore, as the novel unfolds, the reader realizes that in the shaping of Ina character and interests, it is not only the racist ideologies that are in play but also the very old but still powerful mercantilist human forces. Surprisingly, throughout the centuries, most of the Ina families gradually learn to master the regulating ‘invisible hand’ of free-market capitalism, turning their communities into self-sufficient successful economic enterprises. While some families like the Morarius, the Dahlmans, the Marcus, and the Svobados run businesses that cater to tourists, others like the Andres, Nagys, and Akhmatovas profit from real estate transactions. And still others, like the Leontyev’s, operate their own local business, like owning a canary or a frozen food plant factory. Overall, except for a few families who resist putting a “show of human normality” (Butler, 2005, p. 240), the Inas have become successful key players of the capitalist market economy.

At the end of the novel, Shori wins her case against the racist Milo and has him and his family persecuted according to Ina laws. Her unique difference becomes accepted as an enriching, strengthening diversity and, thus, is ‘appropriated’ for Ina survival. Being a biological hybrid, Shori has the potential to become a “bridging” person offering a new synthesis. However, to act as a negotiator between the Ina and the human culture proves to be very difficult for Shori. She has to combat not only racist and chauvinistic Inas like Milo Silk who arraign the myth of purity against Shori’s hybrid self but also her ambivalent feelings towards her mixed heritage.

At the beginning of the novel, without the memory of a past, the act of determining who is ‘us’ and who is ‘them’ does not carry any significance for Shori. Her amnesiac state helps her to perceive the humans unbiased and without the overlay of her cultural past, and as a result, in the beginning, Shori tries to perceive herself through human eyes. However, as the novel gradually progresses, Shori’s genuine spontaneous feelings towards Wright and her human symbionts begin to be replaced by her desire to find the “familiar, welcoming place” (Butler, 2005, p. 138) that is erased from her memory and life. Not wanting to confront the feeling of “absolutely nothing[ness], emptiness” (Butler, 2005, p. 138), Shori, as time passes, becomes more and more in tune with Ina customs, eager to gain from her elders what she has lost in memory. It is only when Shori is in the position to chart the trajectory of her past, can she move forward in time. But once Shori embarks on her journey to self-discovery, her trajectory takes on a life of its own making. In conflict with herself and her surroundings all the time, she becomes a person making sense in

translation. Ultimately, the narrative model that begins to form the bedrock of Shori's new sense of subjectivity rests upon the realization that she is an Ina and the humans are her symbionts. Her readiness to make sense of her surrounding via Ina standards and categorizations is evident in her cold and patronizing response to her once dearly treasured human lover Wright, when he tries to caution her of the offensive "sym" labeling of humans:

*Sym Wayne?' Wright said, frowning, 'Is that how you say it, then, when someone is a symbiont? That's what happens to our names? We're sym Shori?'*

*'You are,' I said.*

*'Something you remembered?'*

*'No. Something I learned from hearing people talk. (Butler, 2005, p. 261).*

Unable to reconcile her Ina and human side in a satisfactory formula, or to borrow Stanley Fish's words, the "claims of difference and community" (1997, p. 385), Shori waivers between two poles. At times, we see a concerned Shori responsive to the needs and demands of her symbionts, treating them with respect and dignity, taking them out to picnics, conversing with them, trying to understand their true feelings to Ina social practices and norms. And at other times, we see a Shori who does not hesitate to use her venomous control over her symbionts so that they do whatever is requested. Shori's statements to Celia, "I inherited you from my father's family. You're mine" (Butler, 2005, p. 130) and her unpremeditated summoning of Wright and other humans as "syms," as possessions devoid of any personality or emotion reflect a feeling of paternalistic ownership reminiscent of Inas' hegemonic practices and mindset. Shori's domineering reactions and inculcated responses make it evident that she not only upholds Inas over her symbionts but also has chosen to make sense of the world through their eyes. Moreover, throughout the Council of Judgment, Shori's constant concern is not whether the Inas will acknowledge her human empathetic side but whether they will accept her as their kin.

Apparently, due to Shori's intense desire to be approved and acknowledged by her Ina community, her spontaneous attempts to create democratic spaces where human symbionts can co-equally interact with the Ina species, will likely, in the long run be replaced by her aspiration to meet the culturally assumed standards of Ina society. Each crossing will lead her away from her liberal humane self and more into the intertwined vampiric relations of family, class, and community. As Stanley Fish nicely puts it, "the trouble with stipulating tolerance as your first principle is that you cannot possibly be faithful to it because sooner or later the culture whose values you are tolerating will reveal itself to be intolerant at that same core" (1997, pp. 382-83).

Then, the question becomes: does the integration of Shori's dual heritage, her hybridity, necessarily imply that the Ina will acknowledge and learn to appreciate the difference of their symbionts? In other words, can Shori's physical hybridity, put an end to the indifferent domination exercised by the consensual 'we' and develop a sensibility that can bridge both the human and the vampire, the self and the other, the host and the settler at the same time? At the end of the novel, Shori's victory which closes with the "dissolution of the Silk family" (Butler, 2005, p. 305) and the decapitalization and burning of Katherine Dahlman, may have destabilized the dominance of the Silk and Dahlman families and their practices of racial exclusion; nevertheless, the dialectically generated colonialism within the Ina communities continue to exist. Milo's inability to declare Shori as a common enemy only illustrates the general acceptance of Shori's unique difference as an enriching and strengthening trait, as a valuable asset that should be appropriated for Ina survival. It does not, however, eliminate nationalist sentiments regarding Ina lineage and genealogy. In other words, during the Council, Shori's utmost efforts to prove to the Ina that she is one of them may have freed her from being positioned as the racialized Other. Nevertheless, her liberation from such a position does not illustrate whether the human symbionts will be freed from their position of servitude. After acquiring sufficient financial resources, Shori will also try to build her own household, marching her own prodigious expansion of human syms. While it's obvious that Shori will treat her syms with more flexibility and tolerance, she will not treat them as equals either. The wiping of her entire bloodline together with her unique hybrid state may have turned her into the ardent fighter she is; nevertheless, when it comes to conceiving the world beyond Ina perceptions, she fails considerably. In this respect, Shori's hybridity resembles what Jan Pieterse (2012) describes as an "assimilationist hybridity that leans over towards the center, adopts the canon and mimics the hegemony" (p. 575). As a result, her unique hybrid nature rather than providing a new model for existence becomes meaningful only in terms of its 'use' and 'value,' operating more as a precious DNA code from which a strong vampire race can be created and less as a cultural value that can encourage difference and diversity. In this respect, Shori's hybrid identity will allow to a certain extent a restructuring of the diasporic Ina community but not a total transformation.

## CONCLUSION

In her modern science fantasy novel *Fledgling*, Octavia Butler through the utilization of religion, history, and popular vampire lore as well as parts and parcels of colonial history and oppression constructs the history of the Inas against the development of human civilizations making Ina communal experience resemble that of diasporic communities. By constructing a world of distinct and superior human-looking vampire species who try to preserve and maintain their livelihood in a mono-

human world, Butler transports us to an imaginary time and place where we can understand what it means to be the Other regardless of race, gender, or culture. The experience of diasporic people, and, especially, the stages of seclusion, displacement, and ethnic cleansing is projected from both sides since both the human and Inas undergo assimilation and exile, intolerance and domination; the humans experience this in the secluded Ina communities whereas the Inas in human nation-state territories.

Nevertheless, even though, the Inas for centuries have fallen prey to racial discrimination and violence, in the name of mutual benefit, they do not hesitate to produce and reproduce the social structures within which colonial power dominates. The only difference is that the Inas exert their power locally inside their diasporic communities rather than nation-states. Moreover, these diasporic species may have appropriated many cultural elements from their human hosts, their language, economic system, and some may even have built deep bonds with their human symms, but when it comes down to ethnic and national identity, the Ina cannot free or even loosen themselves from the fixed, bounded, rooted conceptions of home, community, and tradition. In fact, the oscillating competing and contending relations between the hybrid Shori and her diasporic community, her 'pain of unbelonging', and her constant desire to fit in, demonstrate the difficulty of merging the 'national' and the 'hybrid' in one single identity.

In this respect, Shori's hybrid identity should not be correlated as most critics have argued with subversion or transgression. In the 'vampire diaspora,' Shori's hybrid nature does not develop into an alternate power, bringing a sweeping change to the nature of Ina- human relationship. On the contrary, her unique hybrid nature is meaningful to her diasporic community only in terms of its functionality. Therefore, Shori's biracial make-up will be tolerated as long as it serves as a safety valve, safeguarding and enabling vampire life without endangering its hegemonic social make-up. Over time, Shori's hybrid traits will gradually be domesticated and rearticulated by the Ina community so that it can fit in more or less harmoniously with the dominant sense of order and continuity. This brings into mind Avtar Brah's fascinating remark about the contested nature of diasporic spaces where "multiple subject positions are juxtaposed, contested, proclaimed or disavowed; where the permitted and the prohibited perpetually interrogate; and where the accepted and the transgressive imperceptibly mingle even while these syncretic forms may be disclaimed in the name of purity and tradition" (1996, p. 205).

Butler by creating a world of diasporic vampires, by investing them with a sense of distinctiveness and common history, and by having them exert dominion and control over their human symbionts, makes us realize that diasporic communities, in fact, may not be the paradigmatic Other of the nation-state, for both

nation and diaspora can become 'life-consuming threats' if they endorse a rhetoric of racial purity and absolutist nationalism. As readers, we enter a world that resonates with the title of Nina Auerbach's (1995) popularly known work, *Our Vampires, Ourselves*: a world where the "evil incarnate" resides not outside but within the practices and discourses of a dominating community whose "regimes of truth" revolve around what Etienne Balibar has termed as the "stigmata of otherness" (1991, p. 18).

Consequently, Fledgling not only becomes a personal critique of our humanity and our intolerance of the Other, but also a potent political and cultural critique of the discourse of domination and ethnocentric articulations of nationhood and diaspora that serve to "kill" rather than celebrate hybrid conceptions of ethnic subjectivity.

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