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Shifting Realities and Sowing the Seeds of a Better Future: Mestiza Consciousness and Conocimiento in Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower*[1]

Ceylan Ertung

> My "awakened dreams" are shifts.
> Thought shifts, reality shifts, gender
> shifts: one person metamorphoses
> into another in a world where people
> fly through the air, heal from mortal
> wounds. I am playing with my Self, I am
> playing with the world's soul, I am the
> dialogue between my Self and el espíritu
> del mundo. I change myself,
> I change the world.
>
> Gloria Anzaldúa

Gloria Evagelina Anzaldúa and Octavia Estelle Butler were two extraordinary women whose exemplary lives and visionary work have been a source of life-changing inspiration for many people across cultures. Both writers through their work advocated the eradication of rigid hierarchical binaries that divided people/s on the basis of race, class, age and sexual orientation. As lesbian women of color and working-class feminists living in the dominantly white, heteronormative, patriarchal United States, both emphasized the need for, in Anzaldúa's words, "a massive uprooting of dualistic thinking in the individual and collective consciousness . . . that would bring . . . the end of rape, of violence, of war" (*Borderlands* 80). In a similar vein, Butler underlined the need of redefining the asymmetrical

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social relations that constituted the root cause of society's ills: "the kind of hierarchical behavior that can lead to racism, sexism, ethnocentrism, classism and all the other 'isms' that cause so much suffering in the world" (qtd. in Sharp 304). Through their writing both writers have stressed the importance of self transformation and individual agency that would eventually bring about a global change.

Gloria Anzaldúa was a Chicana poet, writer and theorist who was the writer, editor and co-editor of many important works. In 1981 she co-edited the anthology *This Bridge Called My Back: Writing By Radical Women of Color* with the prominent Chicana feminist critic Cherrie Moraga and in 1987 she published one of her most acclaimed collection of writings *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. In 1990 she edited *Haciendo Caras: Making Face/ Making Soul* and in 2002 she coedited with AnaLouise Keating *This Bridge We Call Home: Radical Visions for Transformation*. In the twenty-three years since its publication, *Borderlands/La Frontera,* has become one of the most influential texts in academic circles, and the chapter "La Conciencia de la Mestiza," the most cited by scholars. As Sonia Saldivar-Hull also noted, soon after the publication of Anzaldúa's book in 1987, "border" became a fashionable metaphor used by many critics and scholars, and the text itself became a "transfrontera"—a transdisciplinary text, that has travelled between many disciplines (59,12).

Octavia Butler, on the other hand, was the first African-American woman to become a prominent writer of science fiction, a genre that had been predominantly white/male until the feminist insurrection in the early 1970s, and until Butler, feminist science fiction had been predominantly white female. As Ruth Salvaggio pointed out, Butler has a unique place within the field of science fiction for the way a white feminist science fiction character responds to a male-dominated world and "how Butler's characters respond to racist and sexist worlds" are thoroughly different (78). Butler's narratives are characterized primarily by her concern with gendered and racial difference and otherness, which she places at the center of her fiction. In an interview with Stephen W. Potts, Butler described her work as having at least three audiences: the science fiction audience, the black audience and the feminist audience (n.pag.). Among her most renowned books are *Kindred* (1979), *Wildseed* (1980) *The Xenogenesis Trilogy* (1987), *The Parable of the Sower* (1993) and its sequel *The Parable of Talents* (1998).

Although Anzaldúa and Butler produced different writing genres, they shared a common sensibility as writers. Both engaged in subversive use of multiple genres and defied traditional writing. In *The Borderlands/La Frontera* Anzaldúa code-switches between Spanish and English. The book also is an admixture of autobiography with history, poetry, theory, prose and myth, creating what Anzaldúa termed an autohistoria-teoria. She says: "Autohistoria is a term I use to describe the genre of writing about one's personal and collective history using fictive elements, a sort of fictionalized autobiography or memoir; an autohistoria-teoria is a personal essay that theorizes." ("let us shift" 578)

In a similar manner, Butler's *The Parable of the Sower* conflates the genres of science fiction, utopian and dystopian writing, diary, history, slavery narrative and poetry. The novel is the account of a fifteen year-old black girl's, Lauren Oya Olamina's experiences in a violent and chaotic California town, Robledo, in the year 2024. It is a bleak near future novel that magnifies and forecasts upon contemporary trends in America that were evident at the time when the novel was written, such as increase in crime, the rise of walled communities, an increase in illiteracy, synthetic drugs and drug addiction, and a growing chasm between rich and poor. Environmental abuse, global warming and the consequent climate change are also among the themes that are explored in the novel. The book spans a time of three years and is divided into two sections. The first part describes the difficult life of the Olamina family in Robledo, whereas the second section accounts Lauren's journey up North towards Canada after her family's death and how she spreads the seeds of her new religion/philosophy Earthseed to the people she encounters. The novel is made up of Lauren's journal entries and within the textual space of the journals that she keeps, Lauren not only records her own private history (autobiography) but also, while documenting the experiences of her community in the chaotic atmosphere of a mid-twenty-first century United States, theorizes the philosophy of Earthseed; a new religion/ philosophy that stresses "change" through poetic formulations: "All that you touch / You change. All that you change / Changes You / The only lasting truth / is change. God is Change" (3).

For Lauren God is a dynamic life force, not a static, omnipotent being. The stress she puts on change rejects the fatalism and determinism inherent in Christianity and other organized religions and invokes human action as the main impetus behind social transformation:

> There is hope in understanding the nature of God—not punishing or jealous, but infinitely malleable. There's comfort in realizing that everyone and everything yields to God. There's power in knowing that God can be focused, diverted, shaped by anyone at all. But there's no power in having strength and brains, and yet waiting for God to fix things for you. (Butler 66)

Lauren's invocation of human agency to give shape to the world inverts the human/divine positionality and undermines the Christian doctrine that everything in life happens through God's will. In her interpretation of the book of Job, which declares God as the omniscient and omnipotent Lawmaker and judge, Lauren sees a capricious God very much like Zeus of antiquity: "a super powerful man playing with his toys the way my youngest brothers play with toy soldiers" (Butler 14). Earthseed, gives individuals full control over their actions and destinies, elevating them from a position of mere playthings.

Earthseed as a form of belief or philosophy is in tune with Anzaldúa's radical "spiritual activism" which is perhaps her most all-embracing theory as it embodies all her theories. Contrary to traditional religion that relies on an outside force and rules, as AnaLouise Keating also notes, Anzaldúa's spiritual activism originates within the individual and synthesizes social activism with spiritual vision ("From Borderlands" 11). In Anzaldúa's words: "[o]ur spirituality does not come from outside ourselves. It emerges when we listen to the 'small still voice' (Teish) within us which can empower us to create actual change in the world" ("El Mundo Zurdo" 195). As Keating explains: "spiritual activism is spirituality for social change, spirituality that recognizes the many differences among us yet insists on our commonalities and uses these commonalities as catalysts for transformation" ("From Borderlands" 11).

In 1925, the Mexican writer, politician and philosopher José Vasconcelos, wrote an essay entitled "Raza Pura y Raza Mezclada," arguing

that the intermixing of all the different races of the earth would bring about a new kind of human: "a fifth race"—which he also called as the cosmic race—that would "embrace the four major races of the world" (qtd. in *Borderlands* 99). It is upon this conceptualization that Anzaldúa based her theory of mestiza consciousness, Anzaldúa said:

> En unas pocas centurias, the future will belong to the mestiza. Because the future depends on the breaking down of paradigms, it depends on the straddling of two or more cultures. By creating a new mythos—that is a change in the way we perceive reality, the way we see ourselves, and the ways we behave—la mestiza creates a new consciousness. (*Borderlands* 102)

In *Parable of the Sower*, Butler, like Anzaldúa, stresses the importance of the breaking down of paradigms; of embracing difference as a means to change the conditions of hate and violence and explores "the way in which deeply divisive dichotomies of race and gender are embedded in the repressive structures and relations of dominance and subordination" (Wolmark 27). Furthermore, the ultimate principle of Lauren's religion of Earthseed is "to take root among the stars," to spread humanity to other planets and galaxies; hence to create a cosmic race made up of people from different backgrounds. By calling this new consciousness a female consciousness—*una conciencia de mujer,* —Anzaldúa also underscores the feminist essence of her revolutionary theory. As she clarifies:

> The struggle of the mestiza is above all a feminist one. As long as hombres think they have to chingar mujeres and each other to be men, as long as men are taught that they are superior and therefore culturally favored over la mujer, as long as to be a vieja is a thing of derision, there can be no real healing in our psyches. (*Borderlands* 104)

Anzaldúa's dedication to the feminist cause is also evident in the fact that throughout her oeuvre, she challenges and rewrites many Mexican and Chicano myths and historical narratives that portray women and female deities under a pejorative light. Therefore, *Malinche, Coatlicue, La Llorona* and *La Chingada* among others, are given prominent roles in her theories.

Similarly, in her fiction, Butler creates strong black women who challenge traditional feminine roles and overcome exceptionally difficult situations. Lauren in *Parable of the Sower,* is not an ordinary black female character. At the age of twelve she begins theorizing Earthseed, she is a preacher and a teacher by sixteen and a visionary/prophet by eighteen. With her quasi gigantic figure she also challenges the norms of the stereotypical, fragile woman. Her vision that gives shape to a revolutionary religion, her strength of mind and will to power that enable her to endure/ survive and instil hope in the other members of her community, make her an extraordinary character that defies not only sexism and racism but also ageism. Lauren is a survivor who inspite of the nightmarish reality of her existence is able to find the courage to follow her dream and bring about a new form of community that does away with all the divisive labels and celebrates diversity. As Cherrie Moraga, another Chicana feminist of Anzaldúa's generation, once said, "It is in looking to the nightmare that the dream is found. There, the survivor emerges to insist on a future, on a vision, born out of what is dark and what is female. The Feminist movement must be a movement of such survivors, a movement with a future" (474).

Both Anzaldúa and Butler shared a holistic worldview that would be transformative of all the unjust structures that trap people within constricted worldviews of "us" and "them," preventing them from seeing the interconnectedness of all people. Through her theory of "nos/otras" Anzaldúa has offered an alternative to this dichotomy of self/other. As AnaLouise Keating explains "nosotras" is the Spanish word for the feminine "we" which points to a collective group identity or consciousness. By way of dividing this word into two Anzaldúa points not only to the collectivity that the word implies but also to the divisiveness that exists in society in the form of "nos" (us) and "otras" (others). By drawing the two words together, by bringing "us" and "them" closer, Anzaldúa's theory in Keating's words "makes possible forms of unity that do not demand sameness but rather posit commonalities" ("From Borderlands" 10).

Similar to Anzaldúa's theory of nos/otras, in *Parable of the Sower*, Butler introduces the metaphor of the "hyperempathy syndrome" or "sharing," a condition which makes her protagonist Lauren somatically experience all the physical sensations, pain and pleasure of the others around her. Through this metaphor Butler deconstructs the opposition between the self and other for through the corporeal sensations one shares

with the other, the other becomes embodied within the self. As Patricia Melzer explains:

> As a physical mechanism that prohibits the disconnection and alienation from others, sharing represents the painful and pleasurable process of crossing differences and actually experiencing the other's world beyond a mere willingness to understand it. Sharing blurs and shifts boundaries and discloses a stable, autonomous identity to be a myth—sharing becomes a symbol against the binary construction of self and other and thus constitutes a crucial metaphor for re-defining social relations in Butler's narratives. (11)

Through the metaphor of the hyperempathy syndrome Butler is trying to convey the message that in a world where everyone is a sharer, the gulf between self and other would no longer exist and irrational and unjustified violence would disappear. Thus, Lauren writes in her diary:

> If hyperempathy syndrome were a more common complaint, people wouldn't do such things. They could kill if they had to, and bear the pain or be destroyed by it. But if everyone could feel everyone else's pain, who would torture? Who would cause unnecessary pain? (Butler 102)

Similarly, in one of her earliest writings Anzaldúa had underlined the interrelatedness and interconnectedness of life forms:

> I can't reconcile the sight of a battered child with the belief that we choose what happens to us, that we create our own world. I *cannot resolve* this in myself. I don't know. I can only speculate, try to integrate the experiences that I've had or have been witness to and try to make sense of why we do violence to each other. In short, I'm trying to create a religion not out there somewhere, but in my gut. I am trying to make peace between what has happened to me, what the world is, and what it should be. ("La Prieta" 209)

Through her condition Lauren becomes what Anzaldúa terms a "boundary crosser," a *nepantlera,* "transforming the small 'I' into the total self" (105). Nepantla and nepantleras are terms Anzaldúa had introduced in *Borderlands/La Frontera*, which she further elaborated in "now let us shift . . . the path of conocimiento . . . inner work, public acts" published in *This Bridge We Call Home: Radical Visions for Transformation* in 2002. AnaLouise Keating explains:

> In Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa's writings, "nepantla"—a Nahuatl term meaning "in-between space"—indicates temporal, spatial, psychic, and/or intellectual point(s) of liminality and potential transformation. During nepantla, individual and collective self-conceptions and worldviews are shattered. Apparently fixed categories—whether based on gender, ethnicity/"race," sexuality, economic status, health, religion, or some combination of these elements and often others as well—begin eroding. Boundaries become more permeable, and begin to break down. This loosening of previously restrictive labels and beliefs, while intensely painful, can create shifts in consciousness and opportunities for change. (*EntreMundos* 1)

These shifts in consciousness happen through a process of seven stages, or seven rites of passage one has to go through in order to go from "deconocimiento"-ignorance, to "conocimiento"-knowledge or consciousness. It is important to note here that these stages do not necessarily follow a linear, chronological line nor are they clearly separated from each other. As Anzaldúa states: "Together the seven stages open the senses and enlarge the breadth and depth of consciousnes, causing internal shifts and external changes. All seven are present within each stage, and they occur concurrently, chronologically or not" ("let us shift" 545). As AnaLouise Keating further explains:

> Conocimiento is a holistic epistemology that incorporates self-reflection, imagination, intuition, sensory experiences, rational thought, outward-

> directed action, and social-justice concerns. With her theory of conocimiento, Anzaldúa expands the potentially transformative elements of her better-known theories of mestiza consciousness and la facultad described in *Borderlands/La Frontera*. Like them, conocimiento represents a nonbinary, connectionist mode of thinking; it, too, often develops within oppressive contexts and entails a deepening of perception. ("From Borderlands" 10)

The remaining part of this paper will be tracing the seven stages of conocimiento in the physical and spiritual journey Lauren embarks upon in *The Parable of the Sower* as she, too, undergoes several painful experiences through which she creates her holistic philosophy of Earthseed and forms the all inclusive community of Acorn.

The textual future of the *Parable of the Sower*, presents the reader with a United States on the verge of total collapse. Public services have become ineffective; the police and fire departments are expensive and inefficient; the illiteracy rate is extremely high since children are no longer sent to school because of the violence in the streets. The country is ravaged by tornadoes and hurricanes, the waters are polluted and the east coast is struggling with a measles epidemic while there is a cholera epidemic in the midwest. It has not rained in six years in Robledo and the consequent shortage makes water extremely expensive. People are forced to live within walled communities and on the rare occasions that they venture outside the walls of their community—to go to Church or out in the fields for target practice—they have to go armed and in big groups. As break-ins are common, every household has at least two guns and the young begin their gun training as soon as they turn fifteen. Those who dare to go outside the walls on their own are either killed, like Lauren's father and brother Keith, or tortured, raped and enslaved like her brother Marcus.

The concept of being forced to live behind walls is another metaphor that Butler uses in the novel to highlight the boundaries between self and other, the inside and the outside, representatives of the dualistic hegemonic paradigms that, she, like Anzaldúa, challenges throughout her novel. Hence, after a while it becomes clear that even building walls (actual and

metaphorical) cannot protect people from outside threats, and Lauren's community is completely destroyed by a group of pyromaniacs and Lauren is amongst the few survivors in her community.

The destruction of her home and family would constitute the first stage of conocimiento Anzaldúa terms as "el arrebato . . . rupture, fragmentation . . . an ending a beginning" (*This Bridge We Call Home* 546). El arrebato in Spanish is an outburst of anger or passion, but for Anzaldúa it is a concept that goes beyond its literal meaning. It is a lifechanging experience that disorients one leaving them vulnerable, defenseless; shattering irrevocably one's sense of reality about the self and the world at large. Anzaldúa writes:

> Every arrebato—a violent attack, rift with a loved one, illness, death in the family, betrayal, systematic racism and marginalization, rips you from your familiar "home". . . you feel like an orphan, abandoned by all that's familiar. Exposed, naked, disoriented, wounded, uncertain, confused and conflicted, you're forced to live en la orilla—razor-sharp edge that fragments you. ("let us shift" 546-7)

After witnessing the destruction of her family and most of her community and having been physically assaulted herself (due to her condition during the attack she has also felt every blow on others) Lauren writes in her journal: "Now I have to go home. I don't want to. The idea scares me to death. It's taken me a long time just to write the word: Home. . . . No matter. I have to go and see. I have to go home" (157-58). Same evening she also writes: "I have to write. I don't know what else to do. I am jittery and crazed. I can't cry . . . I have to write. There is nothing familiar left to me but writing" (158).

In "let us shift" Anzaldúa stresses the fact that every arrebatimento; every rupture bears the seeds of a new awakening; a clearer form of consciousness: "every paroxysm has the potential of initiating you to something new, giving you a chance to reconstruct yourself, forcing you to rework your description of self, world and your place in it (reality)" (547). El errabato being only one of the stages in the path toward conocimiento, it heralds the nepantla stage or that stage of being "torn between ways" (547).

Anzaldúa also stresses the importance of writing as an "archetypal journey home to the self" where one crosses a bridge "to the next phase, next place, next culture, next reality" and that "home" that one is willing to return to is nothing but that bridge itself "the in-between place of nepantla; and constant transition, the most unsafe of all places" ("let us shift" 574). The aftermath of the attack on her community constitutes the nepantla stage for Lauren; which no matter how painful it might be, also is "the only place where change happens" ("let us shift" 574). Lauren writes in her journal: "In order to rise / From its own ashes / a Phoenix / first must burn" (Butler 153) and together with two survivors from her old community, Travis and Zahra, starts her journey up North toward Canada, which constitutes the third phase in the path towards consciousness, "the coatlicue state" which Anzaldúa further explains as that of "desconocimiento and the cost of knowing" ("let us shift" 550) which is also the most "hellish" phase of the journey:

> Now you sag against the bridge rail and stare at the railroad tracks below. You swallow, tasting the fear of your own death. You can no longer deny your own mortality, . . . You listen to the wind howling like Llorona on a moonless night. Mourning the loss, you sink like a stone into deep depression, brooding darkly in the lunar landscape of your inner world, abandoned to a maelstorm of chaos, you dream of your own darkness, a surrealist sueno of disintegration. ("let us shift" 551)

Throughout their journey Lauren and her two friends witness countless horrors: decapitated bodies, the rape of women and children, riots, arson, murder, and half-eaten corpses. Butler is very graphic in her description of one particular scene which in its nightmarish surreality haunts Lauren:

> The picture of them is still clear in my mind. Kids the age of my brothers—twelve, thirteen maybe fourteen years old, three boys and a girl. The girl was pregnant, and so huge it was obvious she would be giving birth any day. We rounded a

> bend in a dry streambed and there these kids were roasting a severed human leg, maneuvering it where it lay in the middle of their fire atop the burning wood by twisting its foot. As we watched, the girl pulled a sliver of charred flesh from the tigh and stuffed it into her mouth. (250)

It is important to note that the cannibal party is comprised of one girl and three boys; Lauren also had three brothers, and they are about the same age. She acknowledges their similarity in terms of their ages but does not establish any further affiliation with the girl and herself. This is an act of desconocimiento—that of wilful ignorance, as Lauren, in Anzaldúa's words, "overwhelmed, . . . shields [her]self with ignorance, blanking out what [she doesn't] want to see" ("let us shift" 551). Anzaldúa explains that periods of being lost in chaos occurs when one is between "stories" before the shift from one set of perceptions and beliefs to another occurs and that "the knowledge that exposes [one's] fears can also remove them. Seeing through [the] cracks makes [one] uncomfortable because it reveals aspects of [one's self] (shadowbeasts) one [does] not want to own" ("let us shift" 553).

Cannibalism, another metaphor of boundary transgressing, is significant on multiple levels. On the one hand it metaphorizes the breakdown of civilization/culture and its dissolution into nature; its deterioration into the primitive. On another level; it has the same function with the metaphor of the hyperempathy syndrome, in that it constitutes the ultimate and most violent form of bodily transgression: the incorporation of one's body by an "other," underpinning the fluidity of bodily boundaries and of an essential unitary self. Cannibalism is a constant metaphor in Butler's fiction and as Morse explains, in cannibalistic fantasy "the introjected object is occluded and destroyed, only in order to be assimilated and transformed by the host" (qtd. in Sands 3).

The dismembered limb and its consummation by the group from which Lauren particularly tries to distance and distinguish herself : "We don't hunt people. We don't eat human flesh" (252), epitomizes the abject as explained by Julia Kristeva in *Powers of Horror*. On a literal level, Lauren is terrorized as she witnesses an act of cannibalism because it literally "hovers at the . . . edges of [her] existence" (Kristeva 2), as a person living in that society, she can any time be reduced to a piece of limb to be devoured by anonymous others, or she can be reduced to that state of primitiveness where she becomes the devourer herself. On a figurative level, the corpse,

the severed leg of a human being whose identity is indistinct is "the most sickening of wastes . . . a border that has encroached upon everything" (Kristeva 2), reminding the watchers of their own corporeal mortality, forcing them to look into the abyss where all meaning collapses (Kristeva 2).

The metaphor of cannibalism, which articulates "the primal horror of absorption into the other" (Sands 7), is a reworking of Butler's explorations of the boundaries between the self and other, outside and inside. The transgressive act of cannibalism points to the collapse of order and difference between "I" and "not I," and threatens the disintegration of the subjecthood Lauren and her friends are trying to establish. On a different level, it is also a threat to their consciousness, to their "knowing" and "live" selves. As Ann Folwell Stanford observes:

> Dismemberment also becomes dys-memory, the sense of being utterly cut off from any memory of something beyond the self's immediate hungers, but Lauren's vision for a better world, for something different from what she and her family experienced in Robledo and that she experiences beyond, includes a *community of memory*. (206 emphasis added)

In the fourth stage towards conocimiento which Anzaldúa calls "the call . . . el compromiso . . . the crossing and conversion" one pulls oneself from the depths of desconocimiento, or of despair and wilful ignorance, and becoming aware of the multitude of possibilities for change and transformation one has within herself, begins a process of rebirth or in Anzaldúa's words of "creating new pathways" ("let us shift" 556). As Anzaldúa states:

> On the path ahead you see otro puente, a footbridge with missing planks, broken rails. . . . Adelante, la Llorona whispers: "You have a task, a calling, only you can bring forth your potential." . . . Loosening your grip on the known and reaching for the future requires that you stretch beyond self—and culturally imposed limits. By now you've found remnants of a community—people on a similar quest/path. ("let us shift" 557)

Throughout their journey, Lauren and her two friends are constantly on the lookout, treating everyone else as suspicious as "[o]n the street, people are expected to fear and hate everyone but their own kind" (131). However, on their journey they meet new people who are also on the run for a better future and by hearing their stories they learn to trust them and welcome them into their community. They come to realize that what they "share [with these people is] a category of identity wider than any position or label" ("let us shift" 558). And this recognition of shared identity constitutes the fifth phase in Lauren's journey towards conocimiento, which Anzaldúa defines as the phase of "putting Coyolxauhqui together . . . new personal and collective 'stories,'" which is a phase of active transformation not only on a personal but also a social level.

The new members of the group are men and women from different racial and economic backgrounds. Among the new members of the group are a mixed family; Travis Charles Douglas, an African American, his Hispanic wife, Gloria Natividad Douglas and their baby Dominic whom Lauren and her friends save from a band of robbers. They are next joined by Taylor Franklin Bankole, a fifty-seven-year-old doctor whose wife had been killed by drug addicts that broke into their house in search of prescription drugs. Allie and Jill Gilchrist are two sisters who were forced into prostitution by their father and are saved by Lauren who pull them out of the debris of a house after an earthquake. Next to be included in the group is Justin Rohr, a three-year-old boy whose mother was shot to death; he is soon adopted by Allie whose own son of the same age was beaten to death by her father because he was crying too much. A half Japanese half African woman Emery Tanaka Solis and her daughter Tori Solis who are escaping from a large business corporation that has made them into slaves are the next to join the group. Seeing how famished the two are Lauren offers them two of the five sweet pears that she had been keeping for herself, setting an example to the other members of the group who also start sharing their food with the newcomers. The last to join the group are Grayson More a black Latino and his daughter, Doe. In time, these thirteen people of different ages and mixed racial heritage become not only a new family for Lauren, but with their differing but equally painful stories become catalysts in reminding her of her calling in spreading her religion of Earthseed and establishing her community that would live on the principles of Earthseed.

Soon, despite the age difference romance flourishes between Lauren and Taylor Bankole, Bankole tells Lauren that he owns three hundred acres of land in the coastal hills of Humboldt County, where his sister lives with her family. He wants her to leave the group, marry him and settle on the land he owns. Lauren, thinking it might be a suitable place to begin her first Earthseed community, accepts his proposal on the condition that the group also comes with them.

Anzaldúa describes the penultimate stage in her theory of conocimiento as "the blow up . . . a clash of realities." She says that in this stage "you take your story out into the world, testing it. When you or the world fail to live up to your ideals, your edifice collapses like a house of cards, casting you into conflict with self and others in a world between realities" ("let us shift" 545). In a way this stage encompasses all the other stages within itself since putting one's story out into the world renders it vulnerable to attacks and contradictions which results in a clash of realities and values that may cast doubt on one's own sense of spiritual and emotional equilibrium which may in turn cause a rupture:

> You overlook the fact that your self-image and history (autohistoria) are not carved in stone but drawn on sand and subject to the winds. A threat to your identifications and interpretations of reality . . . [that] threaten[s] your sense of what's "real" when it's up against what's "real" to the other. But it's precisely this threat that triggers transformation. ("let us shift" 566)

The "blow up" in the novel happens when a man tries to kidnap Tori and attacks Emery. In the ensuing skirmish Lauren shoots the attacker dead and while the group tries to fight off the rest of the gang, Jill is killed trying to protect Tori from gunfire. Upon Jill's death, her sister Allie is devastated and Lauren comforts her by hugging her and saying without words: "*In spite of your loss and pain, you aren't alone. You still have people who care about you and want you to be all right. You still have family*" (Butler 277).

The seventh and final phase in Anzaldua's theory of conocimiento is that of "shifting realities . . . acting out the vision or spiritual activism." This stage emphasizes the bringing together of the outside and the inside, the self

and the other; and embracing and "honor[ing] people's otherness" ("This Bridge We Call Home" 4), whereby creating a space of connectionism: "In the seventh [stage], the critical turning point of transformation, you shift realities, develop an ethical, compassionate strategy with which to negotiate conflict and difference with self and between others, and find common ground by forming holistic alliances" ("let us shift" 545).

When Lauren and her group arrive at their destination, they find the place burned down to ashes and Bankole's sister and her family killed. As the novel ends the party holds a memorial service for their dead, plants oak trees in place of tombstones and names the place "Acorn." The community of Acorn is similar to Anzaldúa's conception of El Mundo Zurdo; The Left Handed World. For Anzaldúa, El Mundo Zurdo represents affinity among people who come from a variety of different backgrounds. In spite of their difference from each other, the inhabitants of El Mundo Zurdo forge commonalities and develop alliances that enable them to work together with the aim of bringing about revolutionary change. Anzaldúa says: "I believe that by changing ourselves, we change the world, that travelling the El Mundo Zurdo path is a two-way movement—a going deep into the self and an expanding out into the world, a simultaneous recreation of the self and a reconstruction of society" ("La Prieta" 208) . As AnaLouise Keating further explains:

> El Mundo Zurdo represents relational difference, communities based on commonalities (not sameness). Anzaldúa insists that the inhabitants of El Mundo Zurdo are not all alike; our specific oppressions, solutions, and beliefs are different. Significantly, however, "these different affinities are not opposed to each other" but instead function as catalysts, facilitating the development of new, potentially transformative alliances. (*Entremudos* 9)

In its simplest definition *Parable of the Sower* is a coming-of-age story not only for its protagonist Lauren but for a whole community of people who, through their experiences, recognize the value of friendship and kindness at a time when the world around them is disintegrating, and violence and hatred prevail. By looking beyond their apparent differences

in terms of age, race and gender, the members of Acorn are able to establish a community that is based on sharing and mutual understanding. However, since the basic principle of Earthseed is change, Butler in this novel, and also in its 1998 sequel *Parable of the Talents,* makes it clear that the journey towards creating an all inclusive and peaceful community is a never-ending process and that there would always be outside threats and oppositions one will have to battle. When by the end of *Parable of the Talents*, a spaceship is about to be launched into space, fulfilling its destiny of taking root among the stars, Lauren makes one last entry in her diary emphasizing yet again the importance of human agency in giving shape to the world:

> We learn more and more about the physical universe, more about our own bodies, more technology, but somehow, down through history, we go on building empires of one kind or another, then destroying them in one way or another. We go on having stupid wars . . . but in the end, all they do is kill huge numbers of people, maim others, impoverish still more, spread disease and hunger, and set the stage for the next war. We can choose: we can go on building and destroying until we either destroy ourselves or destroy the ability of our world to sustain us. Or we can make something more of ourselves. We can grow up. (*Talents* 321)

Racism and xenophobia, that have been major strands in American history overtly and covertly since its foundation are the two major issues Butler explores in the novel. For Butler, like Anzaldúa, survival and hope of a peaceful future depends on a community of mixed heritage made up of individuals who support and stand for one another. Both Anzaldúa and Butler see difference as an enriching contribution to the community, not a cause for segregation and violence. It is through sharing and sticking together that humanity has a chance for a future. Lauren writes: "Embrace diversity / Unite- /Or be divided / Robbed / ruled / killed by those who see you as prey. Embrace diversity / or be destroyed" (176). Or in Anzaldúa's words:

We are ready for change.
Let us link hands and hearts
together find a path through the dark woods
step through the doorways between worlds
leaving huellas for others to follow,
build bridges, cross them with grace, and claim these puentes our "home"
si se puede, que asi sea, so be it, estamos listas, vamonos.

Now let us shift. (576)

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