

Meat Politics and Vegan Sensibilities: A Marxist Feminist Study of Animal Ecologies in Octavia Estelle Butler's *Parable Novels*

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Abstract

This interdisciplinary study traces meat politics, animal exploitation, and feminist-vegan sensibilities in Octavia E. Butler's parable novels in light of Carol J. Adams' and Carol Sanchez's works in the intersectional African-American Marxist feminist tradition. As part of canine studies, the main argument of the article hinges on the debate between Black ecofeminists and feminists for animal rights in conjunction with Black women's rights. Pertaining to address the racist, sexist, and anti-specist traditions of onto-epistemological explorations and environmental policies, the under-developed discussions on Black women's rights and animalities in conjunction to animal rights need further thought and discussion. Although Black ecofeminists actively advance various parallels between animals' and women's oppression in the American racially segregated patriarchal world, different aspects regarding women's humanness are generally ignored in this environment-friendly activism. While considering this flaw, the current study highlights the need of the Black feminist-vegan sensibilities in this textually evaluated qualitative analysis concerning the American community of color, especially under Trump's administration in the twenty-first century post-racial America. The key aspect of animalness versus humanness is the main trope of debate, while destabilizing patriarchal agency through women's empowerment and animals' separate status are highlighted. It is found that predator dogs apart from speciesism necessitate Black women's evacuation for their survival and protection from scavenging. In this case, Vegan Feminists promote empathy for muted animals in an anti-racist, anti-

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gendered, and anti-violence society, while calling for women's consideration as equal to men in their humanness and able to survive with equity-based human rights. This animalness versus humanness debate, nevertheless, criticizes the American capitalist system that marginalizes Black women for their closer relatability to animals as absent referents to replenish meat fetish. Therefore, this study endeavors to shed light on vegan food choices, animals' violent nature as symbolic of their exploitation, and Lauren as the feminist savior not only for enslaved Black women but also for animals. The paper aims to examine the feminists' role in challenging the slavocratic promotion of meat and shock collars as socio-political tools of oppression, which have been used to control both animals and women, thereby creating socio-economic, political, and racial impacts.

Keywords: Octavia E. Butler's Parable novels, veganism, Black ecofeminism, dogs' literary representation, animals' rights, meat politics, animal activism

Introduction

This interdisciplinary study is designed to comprehend the sensitivity towards animals specifically dogs, and capitalist meat politics in Octavia Estelle Butler's *Parable of the Sower* (1993) and *Parable of the Talents* (1998), thus, hinging concepts from environment studies, animal studies and African American literary works based on feminism. The parable works are the fictional and speculative accounts of 2024 and later years when an African American Lauren introduces a new religious belief of Earthseeds. Her concepts somehow seem impressed with Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Earthsea Cycle* (1968-2001), however, she wrote in Afrofuturistic distinct tradition of her own. Butler purposefully dismantles the White supremacy by describing the African American protagonist Lauren's activism, who builds a community called "Acorn". While the development of events not only unfolds many critical details about violence, mass killing, and burnings, it, nevertheless, highlights the parallel exploitation of animals and African American women by violent groups. Since a significant number of events and substantial happenings

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are mentioned by Butler, demonstrating women's sufferings using dogs' predation, the study is based on the critical aspect of the role of Black women and dogs as human and non-human identified or non-identified respective and distinct identities, and whether both are parallel to each other in oppression and marginalization or have their significant existence.

Ecofeminism, as a neologism, originated when a French writer and feminist, Françoise d'Eaubonne, raised her voice and initiated environmental activism to save nature. She, in her 1974 work, *Le Feminisme Ou la Mort*, called out women to protect the planet (Sharnappa & Alvares, 2016), as also done by Octavia Butler. The study argues that ecofeminist debates focus more on drawing a parallel between environmental degradation and women's oppression as the domination of men over nature and women, whereas women of color are completely ignored, which leads to multiple oppressive layers for them. Here, the need for Black feminism, bringing forth Black women as human individuals separate from non-human carnivorous animals, is highlighted as a gap. Signifying dogs in this study as a research gap also leads to Black canine studies. Since the study is more about canine dogs, therefore, feminism and canine studies in general are addressed here, for which Carol J. Adams' works are used for reference to examine feminism and animal studies debates. Adams asserts that animals are voiceless, whereas masculine human beings have exploited them. After giving voice to women, animals need to be represented too, which should not be ignored in the guise of ecofeminism. Despite Black ecofeminists, including Alice Walker, Sharon Patricia Holland, Kimberly N. Ruffin, and Jennifer M. James' activism through literature, the movement needs a profound understanding of speciesism.

Many Victorian and Romantic authors have mentioned animals, including sheep, dogs, whales, and cats, in their fiction. However, Octavia E. Butler gives references to dogs, sharks, and maggots owing to African Americans' similar marginalized experiences and the inhumane treatment they receive in a "post-racial" America. Apart from all the ecocritical aspects and environmentalism depicted in Butler's Afrofuturistic Parable

novels, animals, especially dogs, are portrayed as helpless and voiceless amidst the capitalist chaos. However, Lauren realizes the purpose of her life and overcomes the existential crisis by building her community and empowering female characters in her tribe. This struggle transforms her into a capable human being and a savior, adamant about protecting women from patriarchal and capitalist exploitation in Robledo, California, under the rule of a white man, Andrew Steele Jarrett.

Butler believed in highlighting all major environmental issues and problems of Black people. Through her works, she brought forward the concept of a harmonized society called Acorn, where all races, classes, genders, ages, and talents were accepted without discrimination. This harmonization made Butler win several distinguished literary prizes. She became capable of registering her voice not only as an empowered feminist but also as an anti-racist, black writer with environmental and climate change sensibilities in the late twentieth century, promoting Black nationalism and aestheticism. Her work is a fictional representation of the world idealized by Marxist activists Claudia Jones and Angela Davis. While Marxist feminism certainly addresses women's cheap labor and issues of wages, those African American women who work in the meat or poultry industry face the exploitation parallel to animals' scrapping and food production. In *Sistah Vegan: Black Women Speak on Food, Identity, Health, and Society*, Patrice Jones writes, "In the U.S., how we treat food animals is reminiscent of how people of color were treated" (Jones P. , 2020, p. 27). Patrice, as an African American vegan feminist, notes that Americans have started consuming chicken and meat excessively. She refers to Andrea Smith's *Conquest* through which she explains the destruction of nature and Native Americans' identity as the imperial white race's main agenda. Decolonizing women of color and animals is certainly needed to secure the identity of both while countering sexual meat politics.

Through this study, I have prompted this idea of animals' rights and their identification as separate species from Black women as the main concern of many feminists. Though Black ecofeminism's key focus is to draw parallels between

environmental degradation and Black women's suppression, it, nevertheless, failed to achieve this goal (James, 2022). Feminism, on the other hand, brings forth women as human individuals separate from non-human entities, whereby declaring women capable of possessing agential power to assert their humanness, whereas animals are underrepresented. Instead of being eaten or violated as part of meat politics, owing to their apolitical, voiceless, and powerless position, they need to be assigned proper protection and rights. Thus, this study caters to the concept of sexual exploitation of African American women being considered as mere meat. This purposefully designed study, based on the intersectional approach, elaborates on the following questions:

1. How do the selected parable novels help to identify animals' degradation and silencing parallel to Black women's silencing?
2. How does African American women's existence in parable novels differ from that of animals, specifically dogs' agency and predatory capabilities?
3. In what ways does Octavia Estelle Butler highlight animals' violent as well as victim positions as part of meat politics to raise a feminist voice in their support?
4. How do Carol J. Adams' and Carol Sanchez's vegetarianism against capitalist sexual meat politics align with Octavia Butler's representation of veganism, and assign more power to women of color in America to decolonize and subvert these meat-eating oppressive structures?

Coloured Ecofeminism and Animals' Presence in Afrofuturistic Literary Works

Afrofuturism is defined by Ytasha L. Womack, who quotes Ingrid LaFleur's words in her work *Afrofuturism: The World of Black Sci-Fi and Fantasy Culture* (2013), as "an intersection of imagination, technology, the future, and liberation" (p. 108). She explains Afrofuturism as "a way of imagining possible futures through a black cultural lens" (Womack, 2013, p. 9). Further, this Afrofuturism is termed as a feminist project (Womack,

2013, p. 108) by Alondra Nelson in her groundbreaking work *Afrofuturism- A History of Black Futures* (2002). Nelson also assigns Octavia Butler a part of Afrofuturistic Trinity with the musician Sun Ra and George Clinton (Womack, 2013, p. 109). While studying Butler's Afrofuturistic post-apocalyptic work, the methodology needs to rely on all aspects of experiences of African Americans "to consider what is lost, forgotten, and erased when we refuse to dream otherwise in qualitative research" (Toliver, 2022, p. xxxiv).

Previous posthumanist, Afro-American, futuristic, and ecofeminist research mainly focused on drawing parallels between women's exploitation and nature's destruction as part of the anthropocentric project. This study, however, highlights animals' specifically dogs' representation as separate and identifiable while stressing the fact that women of all races need to be identified as human beings clearly distinguished on equitable terms in the post-racial patriarchal world. This concept makes this study unique as the politics of meat and capitalist white supremacy are the juxtaposed conundrums still underexplored in Butler's works. This study is significant in the ecofeminists' versus feminists' debate of women's identity as separate from ecological or environmental elements, and thus, provides grounds for an identifiable position for dogs as non-human canine creatures. The purpose of this research is to add to this debate through Octavia Butler's speculative fiction, in which she has given agential power to Lauren to promote women as peace builders and better administrators than the patriarchal, political, and capitalistic oppressive systems. Butler's female protagonist supports not only women of colour characters but also men and animals. Therefore, this study critically provides an evaluation of the feminist stance on animals' rights after their exploitation as predators used to subjugate women. This study thus critically focuses on women of color and animals as absent specie referents amidst sexual meat politics, which is the main epistemological research gap.

Several literary and fictional authors' works, including Ezra Pound's "The Seeing Eye" and "Meditatio," James Joyce's *Ulysses*, Gertrude Stein's "Letter All About Basket," William

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Faulkner's *The Bear*, Virginia Woolf's *Flush*, and Octavia Estelle Butler's Parable Novels, discuss meaningful canine existence. Some other African American authors who discuss dogs as friendly, protective, and comforting characters in their works include Alice Walker in *The Color Purple*, Toni Morrison in *Beloved* and *A Mercy*, Ernest J. Gaines in *A Lesson Before Dying*, Jesmyn Ward in *Sing Unburied, Sing*, Ralph Ellison in *Invisible Man*, James Baldwin in *Notes of a Native Son* and *Giovanni's Room*, Maya Angelou in "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings," and Angela Flournoy in *The Turner House*. Alice Walker in her essay *Everything is a Human Being* writes, "We must begin to develop the consciousness that everything has equal rights because existence itself is equal. In other words, we are all here: trees, people, snakes, alike" (Walker, 1981, pp. 3-7; June, 2020, p. 3), which highlights her complex food choices. Walker highlights a horse's suffering and pain in *Am I Blue*. This, as a subject of study, intrigues June to examine Walker's characterization and anthropomorphism in her ecofeminism. While contending about my argument, I criticize Black ecofeminists based on their anti-speciesism, which paradoxically equates Black women to animals as a part of nature.

The role of animals, especially dogs, in modernist literature is examined by Emily Van Wagoner, who discusses friendly dog characters in literary traditions. This human-animal equivalence is also observable in the Brontë sisters' works, especially *Wuthering Heights*. In all their fictional works, Charlotte, Emily, and Anne Brontë keenly mentioned their three dogs, Grasper, Keeper, and Flossy (Sunderland; DD Morse), not only as the fictional part of the plot to highlight love and security through these dogs but also admiration of this nonhuman support in the agricultural field. Karalyn Kendall-Morwick's literary work *Canis Modernis-Human/Dog Coevolution in Modernist Literature* is based on various aspects of dogs' depiction in modernist literature. Morwick quotes Temple Grandin's words, "Dogs and people coevolved and became even better partners, allies, and friends" (Morwick, 2021, p. 9). Subsequently, this partnership fostered human-dog relations. Morwick highlighted dogs' characters represented as the subconscious being of many protagonists and the symbol of human degradation as presented

in Samuel Beckett's works. She also discussed racism through Afro-American literature,

Thus, canine figures in modernist literature of the black Atlantic—for example, the mad dog in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and the Creole dog in the Francophone poetry of Aimé Césaire—illuminate how dogs alternately reinforce and undercut racial hierarchies within the category of the human. (Morwick, 2021, pp. 171-172)

Such depiction of dogs is also present in Octavia E. Butler's futuristic parable novels, which undercuts parallelism to women's oppression and murder. It significantly empowers animals as different elements of nature than Black women. Additionally, it promotes veganism and retaliates against women's subjugation and subjection to non-human equivalence in ecocritical studies, as feminists critically understand the binary of nature's debilitation and women's oppressed condition when termed equivalent to natural elements.

Afrofuturistic Literary Writings and Environmental Resistance

In the context of Octavia E. Butler's trilogy, in particular, Parween talks about the cosmos while destabilizing the Western epistemologies' binary dualism (Parween, 2022, p. 182). She speculates about the humans and non-human hybrids called constructs, who are the center of debate for the existence of a third species and the collaborative living of all on the new planet. This symbiotic relation probes the concept of the mutually interdependent life of humans and non-humans as Oankali in Butler's trilogy *Lilith's Brood*. The substantial works on Butler's speculative fiction also include Terry's research study on chronopolitics, including the concepts of time-lapse and time capsules as narrative temporality in *Kindred*, *Parable of the Sower*, and *Parable of the Talents* through Afrofuturism and Black Atlanticism. Through this research, Jennifer Terry underscores the details of Butler's writing as speculative and designed well to enunciate the liberated future of African

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Americans through prediction, projection of the future, and proleptic ideation (Terry, 2019). Her description of two hundred years of independence on “nineteen seventy-six”, and “Maryland’s Historical Society” in the novel’s epilogue also redirects readers toward its time-traveling technique for better understanding and relatability of the freedom movement and Afrofuturism, along with environmental change as toxicity in American history concerning the slave Atlantis.

Similar works explore ecocritical debates as Victoria L. Haynes contends that “Black queer works of speculative fiction, specifically in the climate fiction genre, present imaginative possibilities of confronting climate change by exhibiting three key elements: envisioning resistance, creating community, and fostering empathy and accountability” (Haynes, 2024) by analyzing Tenea Johnson’s *Smoketown* and Rivers Solomon’s *An Unkindness of Ghosts*. I agree with her novel argument; however, the binary of the human and non-human needs to be maintained while contending for basic rights, which I have discussed in this paper.

Subsequent epistemological studies on Butler’s works include Brandon Jones’s study, which focuses on the atmosphere not only of California but also of the Acorn mentioned in the Parable series. Jones summarizes “the mood and atmosphere share” in Parable novels in the abstract of her study as “an overriding sense of betweenness, of spatial ambiguity regarding position, materiality, and identity” (Jones B., 2020, p. 690). Commenting on Octavia Estelle Butler’s “ecofeminist perspective of highlighting the subjugation of both nature and women in a post-apocalyptic setting” (Tuzun, 2021, p. 51), Hatice Tuzun contends that God in Butler’s fiction lies “at the root of Lauren’s wider program of opposing and subverting hegemonic patriarchal conceptions of knowledge and politics” (Tuzun, 2021, p. 58). Though Lauren upholds both spiritual and feminist perspectives in her religious beliefs while maintaining balance and calling into question “all essentialist notions of divinity” (Butler, PS, 2012, p. 59), her community and the religion of Earth seeds not only presuppose a futuristic balanced community but also actualize it in the present temporal and spatial realm

without discrimination because of her extraordinary resilience and her cautious behavior. Hence, the key aspect asserted by the study signifies the reinforcement of gender, race, and class-based radical concepts to challenge the hierarchical framework and thought patterns (Tuzun, 2021, p. 66), bringing forward environmental revolutions as discussed in both parable novels. Tuzun's discussion of difference as significant for individual rights paves the way for this study to comprehend animals' speciesism as necessary for ecological maintenance against the inhumane treatment of animals.

Since Tuzun's work ignored animals' role in the research study on parable novels as major predating elements, I have selected this aspect, especially dogs' exploitation, in my contention regarding ecofeminists' activism of aligning women and animals in their discourse. This Afro-American ecofeminist representation of women as equivalent to nature in oppressed conditions has been questioned by coloured feminists and thereby been traced in this study for further exploration. This study raises the question of women of colour's debilitating conditions and their dehumanized killing as parallel to the killing of dogs in capitalist California.

Summing it up, the previous studies brought forward the significance of ecological balance as well as the rights of women and nature, both in debilitating conditions owing to men's political, social, and economic colonization in parable novels. Continuing this tradition of ecofeminism from Haynes' and Tuzun's works, the current study adds to the epistemological studies of feminists' voices about women's multiple marginalization, not addressed by Afro-American ecofeminism. The significance of meat and the associated sexual politics of exploiting animals, along with their killing of animals, specifically dogs, is studied in conjunction with African American women's oppressed and debilitated initial condition and their subsequent attainment of agency to subvert corrupt patriarchal structures as part of racial decoloniality. This power to enunciate their meaningful existence counters their animal equivalence.

Meat Politics and the Ecofeminist Debates on Animal Rights

While examining the eco-feminist stance on preserving animals' basic rights and relocating feminism to reflect on animalness in disjunction to Black women's rights, the study promotes vegetarian food choices to refocus on agricultural practices for better services to nature. Exploring the connection between meat consumption, masculinity, and misogyny as the real tropes of this research, Carol J. Adams describes meat eating as a conundrum for women as the amalgamation of White racism, anti-Semitism, homophobia, and misogyny. She writes, "Meat is a constant for men, intermittent for women" (Adams C. J., *Meat*, 2010, p. 48). According to her, women sacrifice to satiate men's desire and hunger, considering meat as men's property, which deprives women of their rights (Adams C. J., *Meat*, 2010, pp. 48-9). This sexism and capitalism lead toward racism too, when whites are preferred over other races when meat provision is limited. Adams writes: "Racism and sexism together upheld meat as white man's food" (p.53). This meat-eating practice, nevertheless, racializes and sexualizes both animals and women in a dysfunctional American society.

According to Carol Lee Sanchez, who herself belongs to a "women-centered or 'Gynocratic' equalitarian Pueblo cultures of the Southwest"—Lebanese American and a part of Laguna Pueblo New Mexico—the natural elements including earth, water, fire, air, sun, moon, and wind have deep impact on animals, plants, and human beings (Sanchez, 1995, pp. 209-10). With harmonious coexistence as the main teaching and practice of local Native American tribes, they live a balanced life with natural elements by reviving the existence of previous good features of nature through their cultural practices. They relive the concept of beauty and lessen the ugliness created by various capitalist pollutants. Though the existence of animals and their relationship with humans cannot be denied, Sanchez mentions her grandmother's and mother's cautions while going near stingy animals, wasps, bees, snakes, and spiders. She writes, "They won't bother you if you don't bother them" (Sanchez, 1995, p. 212). Cautions are never meant to create fear but rather to

highlight the existence of life as related to humans as an active part of nature. Similarly, these animals certainly have a key role to play in their capacity to preserve natural settings.

The cultural practices of these native tribes promoted agriculture as these vegetation and crops were necessary for survival. Many archeological studies also suggest that ignoring crop protection techniques and unbridled hunting practices led to the extinction of certain species as well as the onset of various disasters, which ultimately became a serious cause behind the perishing of these communities (Sanchez, p.214-5). Taking too much from Mother Earth and not replenishing the productive effort, while inflicting violence on women and other human beings, were also the main causes behind the destruction of ecological factors and the dismantling of these native tribes.

Sanchez further elaborates on the “giving up” or “giving away” (p. 224) of lives by non-human environmental elements including animals and insects for continuing and sustaining human life on Earth. This concept of “giveaway” also creates empathy among privileged human beings for the needy and the disabled to continue the process of life as a part of traditional Native American culture. She writes:

American Indians believe the universe and everything in it is “entitled to reverence and respect” because it exists. Thus the Tribal Principle of Relationship, that we are all related, is a natural extension of this belief. The Tribes teach that when we are disrespectful, irreverent, or abusive to the inhabitants of our environment, they will abandon us. They will no longer give themselves up for us if we disconnect ourselves from them (Sanchez, 1995, p. 224).

Analogous to this, Carol J. Adams vocalizes theological matters that animals are generically voiceless and even unidentified (Adams & Procter-Smith, 1995, p. 296) in contrast to women with inherent but muted voices without agency to assert their existence as human beings. When feminist debates are formulated, they accept Paolo Freire’s ideation in *Pedagogy of*

the Oppressed (1968), in which he declares animals as ahistorical and unaware of risk-taking and agential power, in continuation of the Aristotelian tradition of declaring animals as apolitical, owing to lacking language and the ability to speak and write like human beings. It demonstrates Adams' concept that animals cannot take on life, so they take lives to prove their effectiveness as able-bodied with territorial control. Owing to humans' agential power to take on life or change nature, as depicted by Marxist anthropocentric proponents, men and women are equal in this disposition and, thereby, different from animals. Adams writes: "The Marxist emphasis on production, reason, and (human) sociality is profoundly anthropocentric. In addition, it posits animalness as the antithesis of humanness" (Noske, p.77- 80; Adams and Procter-Smith, p.297).

Subsequently, this de-animalizing animal practice leads to meat-eating by humans, especially men. According to Carol Adams, this meat-eating practice changes animals from animal individuality to an indistinct and unidentified category of the mass term, "meat". This human-animal interaction is transformed into a food interaction (Adams & Procter-Smith, 1995, p. 298). Such camouflaged patriarchal hegemony onto women and animals based on the dichotomy of skilled and productive men versus unskilled and instinctual reproductive women and animals leads to the prevalence of hierarchical "dynamics of various human and animal groups (Nelson, p.208; Adams and Procter-Smith, p.299-300). In simple words, based on race, gender, and class, many Black and Hispanic women working in labor markets, especially animal farms, act as means of consumption along with animals as they scrape chickens and ultimately become sufferers of "carpal tunnel syndrome and other disorders caused by repetitive motion and stress" (p.300). Patrice and A. Breeze Harper describe similar exploitation of women. These women have no articulated voice to enunciate their oppressed condition owing to being stripped of any agential power, akin to animals. In other words, it becomes difficult to decide whether to protect human meat or non-human meat from consumption. Adams furthers her argument by writing:

As the title of the play *Children of a Lesser God* confers, deaf persons are experienced by the hearing world as not fully human, as illegitimate children of God. Consider these synonyms: dumb, mute, speechless, voiceless. These adjectives refer to the absence of speech. Dumb applies both to animals and in popular use conveys intellectual weakness. When we say 'I was speechless,' we mean 'I was powerless; I was helpless.' (p.302)

And this applies to women and animals both in their capacities (Adams C. J., Meat, 2010). Additionally, while elaborating on meat eating and vegetarian food choices, Carol Adams is of the view that.

The gestalt shift in which vegetarians see meat as death and meat eaters see meat as life influences the receptivity of each group to information that suggests associations between meat consumption and disease. Vegetarians see vegetarianism as giving life and meat as causing death to the consumers. (Adams C. J., Meat, 2010, p. 196).

In this manner, both patriarchal hegemony and eating meat are equivalent to diseasing and disabling women and killing animals as a part of unnatural processes. The way a man butchers an animal is similar to how he tortures and suffocates women. To loosen this patriarchal noose, Carol suggests that "any feminist animal defense position must challenge what has been labeled as "natural" by the dominant culture" (Adams & Donovan, Beast, 1995, p. 101) only then the hegemonic power structures can be broken and the cycle is reversed.

This paper, therefore, draws on Butler's work to explore the exploitation of women and animals to assess the conferred agency onto women and declare their existence as non-negotiable while proving animals as separate natural elements and not equal in any capacity as a criticism on previous scholarly works. The selected Parable novels are analyzed based on the politically violent acts, and women's reactions after the dogs' attack, and later enslavement by Jarrett's corrupt machinery. Lauren's journal writings reflect the factual record of a fictional

community, Acorn. Butler demonstrates various political, ecological, social, and cultural practices to articulate the systemic oppression and violent attacks on black women through dogs.

Black Women and Voiceless Animals: Destabilizing Oppressive Patriarchal Structures

In her parable novels, Butler mentions sexually exploited Black women who throw their babies into trash because of their impoverished and helpless situation; the little girls are, in turn, killed by dogs: “They were always getting sick. Some of them were born sick. They had sores all over or big things on their eyes—tumors, you know—or no legs or fits or can’t breathe right. … All kinds of things. And some of the ones who lived were dumb as dirt” (Butler, PS, 2012, p. 158). The political force of Andrew Steele Jarrett reduces women to the status of animals and strips them of their identity. Butler highlights “Tongue-cutting” and “silencing women” (Butler, PT, 2012, p. 88) as the strategy to dispel the chance of a litigation process. Forced prostitution and enslaving these women, along with young kids and boys, is a part of sexual meat politics where women are bartered. Jasbir K. Puar opines on a similar maiming technique in her notable work *The Right to Maim: Debility, Capacity, Disability* (2017), the tactic to keep them alive. Conjunctively, the collared human beings are equated to pet animals, specifically collared dogs, to signify their identity as “taken” or “bought” as commodities without any historical or humanistic voice. Such dehumanizing practices demolish the civilization agenda of dystopian America, where, as mentioned in *Parable of the Talents*, politicians and significantly the fictional Presidential candidate Andrew Steele Jarrett raise the slogan *Make America Great Again* (Butler, PT, 2012). Their spatial and temporal practices reveal their dystopian future of dehumanizing Black women and animals and promoting rigorous slavery in post-racial America. To address marginalization, Gloria Anzaldua’s notion of the mestiza consciousness and inbetweenness, offering women’s metaphorical presence as a snake in a literary primitive tradition, aligns well with Sharon Patricia Holland’s assertions on Black relatability with animals

as described in her notable work *An Other: A Black Feminist Consideration of Animal Life*. However, these aspects contrast well with my assertion, based on which I decided to rely on and criticise the works of Carol Sanchez and Carol J. Adams. Nonetheless, Derridean negative Zootheology and Jacob J. Erikson's assertions effectively work as the corrective to the ecological view of the human-animal relation; these concepts are applied to women more than men to relate them to animality and meatness of animals as part of slavocracy.

When Lauren understands Jarrett's pro-Christian, pro-racist extremist groups and their political agenda, she decides to promote Earthseed religion through her visionary thinking, insightful leadership, and resilience to promote equal rights for all, irrespective of class, race, gender, and human/nonhuman distinction. She promotes the plantation of earthseeds to signify vegetarian habits instead of killing and eating animals, especially carnivorous animals. She sows seeds while remembering her dead relatives as the Native practice followed by people of ancient roots. However, powerful White political groups demolish these vegetarian structures, declaring them a threat to their sexualized meat politics.

Butler suggests that environmental disasters hit the country because of their wrong social and political choices. The dystopian country privileges the powerful and subjugates the poor further. The destruction of animals, human beings, and natural elements results in various environmental disasters.

There's a big, early-season storm blowing itself out in the Gulf of Mexico. It's bounced around the Gulf, killing people from Florida to Texas and down into Mexico. There are over 700 known dead so far. One hurricane. And how many people has it hurt? How many are going to starve later because of destroyed crops? That's nature. Is it God? Most of the dead are the street poor who have nowhere to go and who don't hear the warnings until it's too late for their feet to take them to safety (Butler, PS, 2012).

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Previously, Tracy's and Uncle Derek's child Amy, who was born after constant sexual violence and rape by her maternal uncle Derek, destroys the building by burning it. Butler mentions, "She spends most of her time playing alone in the dirt. She also eats the dirt and whatever she finds in it, including bugs" (Butler, PS, 2012). Amy, as a scrawny kid, burns the garage to appease her violent nature. Her aggressive and resistive nature reflects the patriarchal sexual violence imposed on her biological mother to mentally control her actions and discipline her as part of a biopolitical anthropocentric and pro-racist agenda. As depicted by Carol Adams and Carol Sanchez, such dehumanization is meant to isolate women and de-escalate them from their human status to animalistic nature through constant pressure, raping, and forced slavery. They work in capitalist anthropocentric projects where neither God nor animals are present to protect her. Rather, women become instruments to scrape animals as machines.

Moreover, Lauren shoots birds and squirrels, but later halts owing to the innocent creatures as speciesism. Butler notes: "Besides, just because I can shoot a bird or a squirrel doesn't mean I could shoot a person, a thief like the ones who robbed Mrs. Sims. I don't know whether I could do that. And if I did it, I don't know what would happen to me. Would I die?" (Butler, PS, 2012). However, she never liked dogs owing to their ferocious nature. Butler writes: "We had a target practice today, and for the first time since I killed the dog, we found another corpse. We all saw it this time—an old woman, naked, maggoty, half-eaten, and beyond disgusting" (Butler, PS, 2012, p. 73). This depiction of killing the dog and later finding an old black woman dead represents the rampant violence in dystopic American society, where these Black women are considered equivalent to animals, both worthless. These dogs metaphorically replicate prevalent racism in society owing to the inhumane comparison drawn by white supremacists. Though many Black people pet dogs for security, their unconscious relatability to these voiceless creatures mar their ability to articulate the imposed sexual violence on their ordinary Black bodies.

Through her writing, Butler promotes vegetarian practices by destabilizing meat-eating habits, evident in her food choices, including peaches, brought by Zahra. The criminal acts of stealing associated with women are another such event of equating them with animals who have never learned civilization. Preferring fruits, soy, and vegetables over dead animals is what feminists highlight as a fact that African Americans, the tribal Pueblo, and Mexican Americans have always preferred as their main staple. Many men, characterized by Butler, prefer fruits and vegetables to animals' meat, which is a significant step towards subverting hegemonic structures through men who have understood the worth of women as human beings. Butler writes through her male character, "Couldn't I just roast this potato in your coals?" an old man asked, showing us a withered potato" (p.148). Therefore, to destabilize the powerful white patriarchal system, she uses men as agents of power to support her animal rights stance. However, the difference lies here in drawing a line between animals and women, where even dogs are used as instruments to threaten women's lives and sexual exploitation.

Animalness versus Humanness in Parable Novels

Carol J. Adams' insight into canine politics and animal rights owing to their wild nature, and incapability to take on life, highlights the challenge they face to build productive means for themselves due to which they take others' lives. Animals cannot do business like humans; they cannot set up, manage, and administer labor politics in anthropocentric capitalist economies to secure their domination. These apolitical animals are not only victims of human economic projects but also an instrument in supporting them in spreading fear of their wild nature. Through this fear, they become more ferocious and unreachable. This creates a dichotomy, built on animalness as the antithesis of humanness.

Butler further describes a Black woman's desire more than men to own a home as an integral part of a civilized society. It certainly describes women's position as distinguished human beings, contrary to what animals assert as their territory:

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I mean, I love it. It's home. These are my people. But I hate it. It's like an island surrounded by sharks—except that sharks don't bother you unless you go in the water. But our land sharks are on their way in. It's just a matter of how long it takes for them to get hungry enough (Butler, PS, 2012, p. 44).

Shark, as a violent and predatory metaphor, represents Jarrett's political group. When these animals, who are victims of human atrocities, become powerful enough to attack women, they become a problem. The wild existence of these sharks and dogs illustrates this fact. Since dogs are supposed to be the saviors and friends of human beings owing to their friendly nature, when they attack human beings, they scavenge them mercilessly. Butler mentions a similar kind of dog that eats children in California, and this butchering is guided and supported by the patriarchal agency as they are responsible for feeding them.

This animalness is totally in contradiction to the humanness that compels a human being to protect another weak human being as a giveaway of life strategy. However, patriarchy enforces apathy amidst all chaos and animalism. Lauren writes in her journal entry, "A team I wasn't with found a living child being eaten by dogs. The team killed the dogs, then watched, helpless as the boy died" (Butler, PS, 2012, p. 110). Understanding the brutality through the pain of Michael Mallette's death by mauling in Florida, or Kingsley Wright's or Lea Freeman's death, are some real-life examples in America. These attacking dogs are devoid of any feelings or empathy for the wounded human, due to which they cannot be termed as terrorists. These dogs have no intuition or idea of integration of sympathy or designing any strategy to enslave weak human beings, as these are simply muted and controlled by their owners: "dogs might not know enough to be afraid of guns" (Butler, PS, 2012, p. 154) owing to their lesser mental capabilities. Therefore, these are violent and harmful for poor human beings who are under great stress.

'Dogs,' I said... The woman was screaming and beating at a dog with her hands. A second dog was dodging the man's kicks and going for the baby. Only the third dog

was clear of the family. I stopped, slipped the safety, and as the third dog went in toward the baby, I shot it. The dog dropped without a sound. I dropped, too, gasping, feeling kicked in the chest. It surprised me how hard the loose sand was to fall on. At the crack of the shot, the other two dogs took off inland (Butler, PS, p.171-2).

For Butler, killing such dogs is necessitated to avoid further human loss apart from speciesism, if these dogs are incapable of providing any economic or monetized benefit. Humanizing dogs as friends for the sake of protecting their rights in dystopic America, as the temporal and spatial fictional reality is not humanly possible, as it leads to further human loss or debilitation, which can be proved through the statistical data revealing the millions of mauling cases in various American states, including all races. Further, these dogs are incapable of working as labour and also, when taken as pets, are not paid monetarily, but rather fed and taken care of.

Therefore, Butler's stance on ecological preservation, as well as understanding various animals' ferocious nature and categorizing them accordingly, is also necessary to understand the Black ecofeminist project in a better way. The feminist debate, however, works here to cater to the needs of the time and brings forth the worth of carnivorous animals and their preservation. Circumventing the killing of dogs to evade victimization through these predatory patriarchal pawns is also a part of the feminist subverting agenda. Becoming capable enough to shoot them right in time is a necessary skill needed by women, which they are required to learn. Butler writes about Moss girls, who, despite reservations on their excursion outside home boundaries, learn to use guns. However, understanding dogs' support for nature as a necessary evil also demands the avoidance of their killing.

Deanimalized Animals and Meat-Eating Practices

The camouflaged slavocratic practice of the American patriarchal system is unearthed after ascertaining the fact that dystopian nations suffer due to their sexualization of meat. For

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survival, they use animals as their food instead of relying on farming. They torture, butcher, and skin animals. These animal farms also become part of business and despite Marxist assertions of equality among men and women, labor proportion suggests more women as slaves or labor force, especially Black women. These novels signify impoverished Black people who either become food for dogs, or they eat dogs owing to their assigned power.

There are always a few groups of homeless people and packs of feral dogs living out beyond the last hillside shacks. People and dogs hunt rabbits, possums, squirrels, and each other. Both scavenge whatever dies. The dogs used to belong to people—or their ancestors did. But dogs eat meat. These days, no poor or middle-class person who had an edible piece of meat would give it to a dog. Rich people still keep dogs, either because they like them or because they use them to guard estates, enclaves, and businesses. The rich have plenty of other security devices, but the dogs are extra insurance. Dogs scare people (Butler, PS, 2012, p. 36).

Eating dog meat is mentioned in *Parable of the Talents* (p.117) as a practice of impoverished people when they run out of food stocks. This de-animalizing practice to eliminate animal voice or their key role in the environment is ignored, considering them the staple for difficult times. Negotiating and masking dogs' friendly role in subjugating women makes them more ferocious and predatory, which also compromises their animalness as unpaid animalized labor.

Moreover, when humans eat meat, they resemble cannibals in their habits. This uncontrolled need to eat meat as a transformation into hedonistic sexual pleasure becomes a part of their nature. Such cannibalistic habits symbolize forewarning in fictional works about the approaching apocalypse. However, humans' meat-cooking practice before eating is unnatural and therefore suggests that human beings are not designed to eat raw meat as animals do. This distinction also creates a demarcation between animals and human beings, whereas the cannibals in

Butler's fiction crosses this boundary too as a hint towards the animalness of human beings. Butler tries to destabilize white men's meat property by citing an anecdote of a Black woman cannibal who eats raw meat before any man of the tribe as an act of resistance.

The sexual pleasure sought through meat-eating practice changes into bartering meat and then, subjecting women to this bartering and sexual violence through prostitution. Notwithstanding Black women's non-availability as meat for eating purposes, Black ecofeminists relate their oppression to animals' oppression and killing or use as meat in the consumerist America. Butler writes about finding Dan's kidnapped sister and purchasing her from her slaver, "The man was a pimp, of course—"a livestock man, specializing in lamb and chicken" as one of the euphemisms went. That is, a man who puts slave collars on little children and rents their bodies to other grown men" (Butler, PT, 2012, p. 82). His use of shock collars to control women by inflicting pain and electric shocks visibly articulates the animalistic treatment given to women in post-slavery America. It, nonetheless, equates their status to collared dogs under the possession of the elitist and privileged group of the American capitalist society, thus making them "absent referents" (Adams C. J., Meat, 2010, p. 17). Butler's symbolism dialectically reverberates and reflects the political brutality and desire to maintain power through sexualized meat politics. However, it never suggests Black women's meat-eating practice or gives any hint of it.

Disrupting Patriarchal Meat Politics and Confronting the Fear of Feminist Agency through Animal Symbolism

When Kate Millett describes sexual politics as the agenda of a misogynistic American patriarchal system to promote sexism and to domesticate women, Carol Sanchez, Carol J. Adams, and Octavia Butler enlighten women through their writings about meat-eating as more of a colonizing practice for women and animals. Although many women consider meat a staple, eventually they prefer to remain vegetarian as they are disgusted by eating dog meat, especially due to hot flushes and hormonal

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imbalances (Jones P. , 2020). However, some dairy animals, fish, or sheep meat are considered edible and biblical as mentioned in the *Parable of the Talents* and also by Carol Adams in her works, making them more of Pescatarians. This new power through food choices assigned to women sacks agential power from the capitalist elites, making them incapable of further colonizing women. Feminists, through this newly attained empowerment, raise their voices for the oppressed animals. Butler writes:

So I preached from Luke, chapter eighteen, verses one through eight: the parable of the importunate widow. It's one I've always liked. A widow is so persistent in her demands for justice that she overcomes the resistance of a judge who fears neither God nor man. She wears him down. Moral: The weak can overcome the strong if the weak persist. Persisting isn't always safe, but it's often necessary (Butler, PT, 2012, p. 111).

The feminist struggle to create value for women is evident from these narrations in parable novels. Preserving animals, nonetheless, resonates with serving nature. According to Butler, women are aesthetically well-developed. Butchering animals does not correlate with their nature. This is evident when a male character asks a beautiful woman about it: "handle a dead animal, skin it, butcher it, treat its hide to make leather. I wanted to know how to do it, and that I could do it without getting sick" (Butler, PS, 2012, p. 153). For this inhumane act of killing or butchering, animalistic instincts are required, which are present more in butcher men than women as also noted by Adams and Sanchez. Such vehement and torturous nature of men is evident from the patriarchal system through which they impose their laws practicable for women only as they are already forcefully muted.

Lauren transforms black women into independent humans to articulate their concerns and desires in the Earthseed community "Acorn", where there is no meat politics. Acorn also represents security amidst a thorn-like packed structure where intrusion and transgression are not easily possible. Lauren's concept of plantation is significantly preferred in Acorn, "We had beans

cooked with bits of dried meat, tomatoes, peppers, and onions" (Butler, PS, 2012, p. 181). Therefore, the food choices also make it evident that the majority of Earthseeds' followers were vegetarian. Emery's choices and her traditional practice of "give away" make it more practical for vegetarians to take vegetarian food. "It sold fruit, vegetables, nuts, and smoked fish. We all had to buy a few things, but Emery squandered too much money on pears and walnuts for everyone. She delighted in passing these around, in being able to give us something for a change" (Butler, PS, 2012, p. 257).

The Humboldt community prefers to sow plants and vegetables and avoid targeting animals, as the bloodshed of animals is the bloodshed of nature. Black women are the easy targets of animals owing to their weakness. Dogs are eventually taken as either the spies of powerful elites or guards by some affluent people who can afford meat for them. Disjunctively, inside Acorn, people sow seeds for vegetables to seek sustainability in food. Agricultural farming becomes their power as well as a source of averting natural disasters and extremities. The plants they grow are diverse:

Most of it is summer stuff—corn, peppers, sunflowers, eggplant, melons, tomatoes, beans, squash. But I have some winter things; peas, carrots, cabbage, broccoli, winter squash, onions, asparagus, herbs, and several kinds of greens. ... We can buy more, and we've got the stuff left in this garden plus what we can harvest from the local oak, pine, and citrus trees. I brought tree seeds too: more oak, citrus, peach, pear, nectarine, almond, walnut, a few others. They won't do us any good for a few years, but they're a hell of an investment in the future (Butler, PS, 2012, p. 264).

As far as the protection of Acorn is concerned, Earthseed people build fencing through "agave" plants. Butler describes it: "It was one of the large, vicious varieties of agave, each plant an upturned rosette of stiff, fibrous, fleshy leaves, some of them over a meter long in the big parent plants. Each leaf was tipped with a long, hard, dagger-sharp spike, and for good measure,

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each leaf was edged in jagged thorns that were tough enough to saw through human flesh" (Butler, PS, 2012, p. 290). Thus, Lauren's attention to detail, insights into a neutral political system, and knowledge about women's role in development support her community in the long run, even during Jarrett's political attack on Acorn and his enslavement of all Earthseed inhabitants.

Lauren Oya Olamina also highlights the plight of women in various other parts of America and the world. She considers herself successful in building a neutral community that respects women and other identities. She wants to systematize and spread her religious beliefs to provide relief to all the oppressed as they are already muted just like Dan's sisters and other Black women who are forced to do prostitution as part of a patriarchal silencing project. Despite all vulnerabilities, the difference between humanity and animalness pushes many people to not preserve their plants by sacrificing human lives.

Around here, if you don't guard a fruit tree and shoot a couple of people to prove you mean it, they'll tear off all the fruit, then cut down the tree for firewood. I won't let my boys kill people to save trees and plants, but I really miss oranges and grapes and things (Butler, PT, 2012, p. 85).

Notably, the overgrown and uncontrollable poverty and hunger are the real problems of the age. Such methodical strategies of the political elite to assert their power cannot be countered easily; however, a thorough systemic understanding of strategies to counter them through seeking agency is necessary. Securing plantations is also a huge challenge, which Butler highlights. Stopping someone from eating their grown vegetables and fruits is traditionally and ethically inhumane. Feminists have raised their voices for the protection of vegetation as well as farming and plantations to secure not only wildlife but also climate conditions. This systemic movement run by feminists is different than ecofeminists, who only focus on parallels of humans and nonhumans instead of identification of each species and focus on

equity rather than equality. Emery Mora is among such Black women who were debt slaves in the twenty-first century:

[A] legally indentured person bound for her family's unpaid debts. The debts were accumulated because she worked for an agribusiness corporation that underpaid its workers in company scrip instead of money, then overcharged them for food and shelter so that they could stay in ever-increasing debt. It was against the law for the company to break up families by selling minor children away from their parents or husbands from their wives. It was against both local and federal law, so it shouldn't have happened. Just as what's happened to us now shouldn't have happened (Butler, PT, 2012, p. 161).

Despite all legal and feminist laws to protect women from exploitation, Butler's futuristic characters, even in 2032 and onwards, suffer because of extreme lawlessness and exploitation of women, along with environmental factors. However, Lauren takes steps and daringly saves her people and region from environmental degradation. Her subverting efforts highlight that men in power keep trying to exploit women and animals for their sexual and anthropocentric benefits as part of their capitalist pursuits: "When men have absolute power over women who are strangers, the men rape. And we're collared" (Butler, PT, 2012, p. 168). Despite all these sufferings, feminists are keen to seek power to not only protect themselves and attain identity but also to identify animals more than their meat identity as a significant part of nature and capable of being protected.

Conclusion and Recommendations

As is evident from the analysis above conducted through the lens of Sanchez's and Adams' critical feminist-animal theoretical concepts, women, despite all subjugation and sexual exploitation in the dystopian or more specifically the UStopian America, are hopeful of their identification as human beings separate from animals or dogs. In this context, against the Spinozian tradition of declaring animals and humans as similar and not distinct, Black women demand an anti-racist, anti-sexist, anti-specist, and

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anti-class identity by reclaiming their future through Afrofuturistic literary works. For this activism, they need to raise the slogan “Make American Environment Great Again”. This purpose is also served in Butler’s parable novels and highlighted in this research through the animals versus humans debate in a feminist tradition. Feminists of colour not only work for women in their activism but also support animal rights. However, this support is distinct from their de-animalized and more humanized animal identity, as discussed by many posthuman philosophers, including Donna J. Haraway. These animals are not equivalent to human beings; rather, they have their own nonhuman rights, which are dependent on their victim or violent nature and their species identification, for which an equity-based evaluation is necessary.

Moreover, many vegetarian feminists prefer farming vegetables and fruit trees to promote their vegan feminism as compared to meat food obtained by killing animals to restore nature through agricultural practices. Although these practices may not be enough to avoid the apocalypse, they make the earth a bearable place amidst scientific revolution and speculative return of technologized collared slavery. It, nevertheless, hints towards the apocalyptic Covid-19 that lasted for approximately two years and brought havoc in the world, especially in America. Various movements, including *Black Lives Matter* and *#MeToo*, on social media platforms opened our eyes. Vegan feminists have also raised their voices for animals and highlighted meat politics to subvert and dethrone the hegemonic and misogynistic powers. The lethal policies designed by the exploitative administration to subjugate and discipline various human bodies, nevertheless, point toward the post-racial apocalypse that Butler mentioned in her futuristic work. Although the raised voice has been heard, the policies still need to consider African Americans and other women of color as human beings with equity-based socio-political and economic representation instead of the meat politics of being essentialized as a woman or an animalized Black or simply a part of destructible animal nature.

Farheen Shakir

Abbreviations Used in this Article

PS: *Parable of the Sower*

PT: *Parable of the Talents*

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