

Freedom, Choice and Achieving Self-Realisation in the Dystopian World of *Parable of the Talents* by Octavia Butler

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history

Received: October 14, 2021

Accepted: January 04, 2022

Published: January 31, 2022

Volume: 11 Issue: 1

Advance access: January 2022

Conflicts of interest: None

Funding: None

ABSTRACT

This study examines how the American science fiction author Octavia Butler (1947-2006) reflects the issue of how Olamina, the protagonist of *Parable of the Talents* (1998), attempts to establish a new religion, Earthseed, while changing her dystopian world. Butler is a distinguished novelist who brings to light the narrative on human life and challenges in a society where individuals are treated with discrimination and deprived of their rights, freedom, and independence, and takes a serious note of these topics by offering a representative portrait of the American society through her fiction. Here, we explore issues of human freedom, choice and self-realisation in a civil society by utilising a novel combination of the concepts of freedom and choice by John Rawls and Isaiah Berlin as well as self-realisation by Karl Marx as the fundamental elements to examine Olamina's belief, attitude and the act of making choices. Our findings reveal that Olamina becomes an assertive and independent woman through two stages of self-realisation, namely self-actualisation and self-externalisation: she finds her voice, succeeds in challenging her ideological social system and, at last, successfully spreads her new philosophical ideas to another part of the world. Through our original methodology of combining the concepts of freedom, choice and self-realisation, we found that Butler has skillfully depicted the social and technological evolutions which have caused the futuristic dystopias in 2030s California, and further illustrates the ways that characters can confront these changes if given the freedom and the autonomy to act and change their oppressive existence.

Key words: Choice, Freedom, Octavia Butler, *Parable of the Talents*, Self-realisation

INTRODUCTION

From the 18th century onwards, due to the advancement of social consciousness and individual choice, the issues of human freedom, choice and self-realisation have become the main topics for many novelists and philosophers who attempt to criticise the totalitarian system of society and depict the real situations of their time. Debates about freedom and choice were first highlighted by Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) who sought to examine the connection between freedom and equality in the civil society. His philosophical ideas and ideologies were often influential during the French Revolution (1789-1799), and still affect present-day debates on freedom. Social consciousness has been gradually developing in societies as the notion of choice became an important topic for philosophers, such as Rousseau and Daniel Defoe (1660-1731).

The concepts of freedom and choice were gradually developed by later philosophers and theorists, such as Isaiah Berlin (1909-1997), John Rawls (1921-2002) and David Gauthier (b. 1932), who have had influential contributions to political theories and the social sciences. Berlin and Rawls have attempted to define the nature of freedom and the scope

of freedom in which a fair, well-order society should give its citizen. In Rawls' view, in a just society, individuals have freedom or the choice to follow their desires, make their plans and formulate their conceptions of good but it does not mean the individuals' pursuit of their good interfere with the rights of others (Nagel, 1973).

More importantly, self-realisation is an expression that has been used in Western psychology, philosophy, and spirituality; and which is deeply connected to the concepts of freedom and choice. As Dimova-Cookson (2013) points out, individuals attain "freedom by living up to ... [their] rational nature, by gaining true knowledge [of himself] and structuring.... their lives according to it". In contrast, Karl Marx (1818-1883) defines the concept "as the full and free actualisation and externalisation of the powers and abilities of the individual" (Elster, 1986, p. 43).

The concepts of freedom, choice and self-realisation have been the focus of scholarship on contemporary fictions set in a dystopian world (Guo 2006, Humann 2010). More importantly, *Parable of the Talents* (1998) by Octavia E. Butler (1947-2006) has been classified as a dystopian novel where the author has depicted societal and political themes

and issues in the far distant future. The novel tells the story of a black female character who negotiates a weak government of America and institutional Christianity, and attempts to change her society through her new religion, Earthseed. *Parable of the Talents* has been the subject of a few studies which have examined the main issues in this novel, such as power (Lacey, 2008), speculative subjectivity (Bollinger, 2007), a reconstruction of African American history (Allen, 2009). Through her novel, Butler seems to urge readers to be aware of their surroundings and make them believe that they have the autonomy “to think and act to prevent possible dystopian future”, and, consequently, make a better future for themselves and other people (Stillman, 2003, p. 15). However, few critics have examined the concepts of freedom, choice and self-realisation in *Parable of the Talents*, which forms the research problem of our study.

Concurrently the aim of this paper is to explore the concepts of freedom, choice and self-realisation through a critical and in-depth analyses of Olamina’s beliefs, attitudes and, particularly, her acts of making choices concerning her social and political circumstances in *Parable of the Talents* by Butler. As such, we attempt to answer the following research questions which act also as our research goal: does Olamina, as the protagonist, reflect Rawls’s notion of freedom or autonomy in order to make moral choices in the technologically devastated world of the novel? Can she act and choose freely? Can she change the world around her? The other goal of our study is to examine Olamina’s process of self-realisation and the way it aids her advancement in society.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Science fiction has become a literary genre that allows many novelists to explore the possible consequences of social, scientific, and technological advances (SA Mirenayat 2017). Stillman (2003) highlights that in *Parable of the Talents*, the social and political problems resulting from some social changes in “a certain segment of American society” and, also, he points out these problems limit the lives and dreams of many people (p.15). Consequently, we may say that these changes deeply affect human freedom, choice, and self-realisation in people’s social and personal lives. Delany (as cited in Joo, 2011) points out, we should read “‘literature’ through the lens of ‘science fiction’ to estrange the real”. More significantly, freedom is the longest-standing ideals in the world, which has been the main focus for human beings. Human beings have always desired to know how they can get freedom and the ability to make choices. Berlin’s positive and negative freedoms might be considered as the most significant definition of the concept that assists present studies in literary and political criticism. In particular, Berlin proposed that an appropriate theoretical conception of freedom must have elements of both the negative and positive concepts of freedom since both aspects are required for a just society (Ikuenobe, 2016). For Berlin, there are always choices but, sometimes, it is agonising which means a decision takes a lot of time because it is difficult to make. In Berlin’s account, action is choice, and “[c]hoice ... [which is] conceived in a paradoxical way as ‘free commitment’ to a way

of life, is fundamental to any action – whether historical or moral” (Develennes, 2014, p. 897). On the other hand, Berlin argues that human beings have the free will and the ability to make choices even in an unfree society; yet, in those circumstances, they are forced to choose between intolerable alternatives. Some totalitarian regimes, for instance, restrict choices for some of the people so that they are faced with intolerable rather than agonising choices. This is because they have chosen their values and beliefs which “define them, depriving them of their choices” so that they cannot have the ability to choose their good choices, “and ultimately ends up treating them inhumanely (Develennes, 2014, p. 901).

Rawls, in his book, *A Theory of Justice* (1971), defines a just society that protects individual autonomy and justice. through decreasing economic inequality, social division and gender discrimination. Rawls, in his theory, defines the concept of freedom according to Kant’s idea of morality which is slightly different from Berlin’s. Wolff points out that “moral autonomy is a combination of freedom and responsibility; it is a submission to laws that one has made for oneself. The autonomous man, insofar as he is autonomous, is not subject to the will of another” (Wolff, 1998, p.14). For Rawls (1971), a free autonomous individual is interested in developing and practising two moral powers, namely a capacity for a sense of justice and a capacity for a conception of the good. Individuals are conceived as free and equal in their moral powers so that they can choose and act according to their sense of justice and conception of the good. Blake posits that individuals “are understood here as self-authenticating sources of value, able to give value to plans and allegiances through the free exercise of their moral abilities” (Blake 2001, p. 271).

Rawls, like Berlin, gives priority to liberty for making true choices and also points out that liberty is necessary if one is to be held responsible, in the moral sense, for one’s action. In other words, “citizens are regarded as free in that they are regarded as capable of taking responsibility for their ends”, so that they can pursue their particular conception of the good and can also revise and change this conception according to their logical beliefs if they so desire (Rawls, 1985, p. 243). Rawls’s conception of autonomy entails both Berlin’s negative and positive concepts of freedom; as Rawls points out, citizens might enjoy their freedom if there is an adequate system of liberties in the society. This is so that they are efficiently protected against interference, or from the actions of other human beings and the government, by “political and legal institutions” (Costa, 2009, p. 400).

On the other hand, Marx believes that the capitalist communities govern individuals who are left with a little space for freedom or self-realisation and, just under communist community, human beings would have the opportunity to realise themselves. In Marx’s view, individuals can actualise and externalise their powers and abilities. Elster suggests that people realise themselves when they engage in the kind of activities, which enable them to develop their potential capacities (Elster 1986, p. 44). In the same vein, Ege and Igersheim (2008) note that individuals are able to develop their potentialities, virtual capacities, creativities and that in civil societies. Elster (1986) highlights that, based on Marx’s

definition of self-realisation, the notion has been divided into self-actualisation and self-externalisation. Self-actualisation, thus, involves:

A two-step process of transforming a potential into actuality. The first step is the development of a potential ability into an actual one; the second is the deployment of the ability... Self-externalisation is the process whereby the powers of the individual become observable to other people. By acting and speaking in the presence of others, the person makes the self-part of the public domain, with the risks and benefits that implies. The risk is that the self-image may be destroyed if it is not confirmed by others; the benefit, that it may achieve substance and solidity if it is so confirmed. (p. 44)

Bollinger (2007) notes that *Parable of the Talents* demonstrates the protagonist's freedom through her subjectivity or her ability to reconstruct a sense of self. The novel employs physiological connectedness to reflect the limitations between the self and others, turning to the body as a road for exploring intersubjective synthesis. For the analysis of the protagonist's subjectivity and intersubjectivity, Butler uses the term "sharer" which means "she experiences the pain and the pleasure of others" (Bollinger, 2007, p. 343). Bollinger believes that physiological experience allows the character to restructure her sense of self and her subjectivity since it brings her into major correlation with others who participates in that restructuring (Bollinger, 2007). In contrast, Stillman (2003) points out that dystopias limit the lives and change the dreams of the many people in *Parable of the Talents*, where the characters make a deep relationship with the natural world in which they "are natural beings who, like any animals, are subject to the natural laws of evolution" (Stillman, 2003, p. 29). For Stillman (2003), the characters, consciously and by choice, embrace evolutionary changes; they should accept that they are not superior to animals and the laws of nature, and they should throw themselves freely into a process of open, unpredictable changes.

In this study, we hypothesise that In *Parable of the Talents*, the characters are provided with an opportunity to act properly in the face of possible problems through an application of the theoretical concepts of Rawls and Berlin on freedom and choice. Olamina, in *Parable of the Talents* is viewed as a powerful character who criticises religious intolerance, freely expresses her mind and desires; and tries to change her world through spreading her new religion, Earthseed. The concept of change is considered as the main ideology of Earthseed that embraces a changing world and allows Olamina to help humanity.

OCTAVIA BUTLER AND *PARABLE OF THE TALENTS* (1998)

Octavia Estelle Butler (1947-2006) is the first science fiction writer who received the MacArthur Fellowship in 1995. Butler's science fictions are completely different from male-dominated science fictions, presenting strong female characters who form the course of social events. She is unique because her novels "examine the connections between the stories of a culture and the genre of science fic-

tion" (Hampton & Brooks, 2003, p. 70). So, she can provide vivid and realistic pictures of American society through her extraordinarily brilliant science fiction.

In the field of dystopia and utopia, Butler has produced a great number of science fiction that articulate various themes such as freedom, hierarchy, racial antagonisms, and gender discrimination. *Parable of the Talents* (1998) and its prequel, *Parable of the Sower* (1993), depict a dystopian near future to reflect their danger and to propose utopian possibilities. She sketches human's lives and relationships in different kinds of societies and, to some extent, international world (Stillman 2013). For Butler, change is the core principle of society in dystopias of the narrative in which the citizens work and interact with each other to change themselves and the world (Stillman 2013). The change will happen, human beings act to change their environment and bring about the result they want. From a different point of view, Lacey (2008) also points out the characters are surrounded with power in *Parable of the Talents*, which is very complicated, but they can respond to the power that has surrounded them. To respond to power, they become engaged in a constant process of adapting to the situation and changing; and the characters can develop their potential abilities and innate talents in what is called self-realisation.

Parable of the Talents narrates the story of Lauren Olamina in a socially and economically depressed northern California in the 2030s. It is recognised to be the masterwork of Butler as it attempts to address the cruel reality of 21st century America. Butler skillfully uses fiction devices in *Parable of the Talents* in order to underline the shifting workings of race and racism under late capitalism (Joo 2011). Butler's female protagonist is her voice to criticise the traditional system of California that does not protect individual freedom and liberty. Butler, through Olamina's beliefs, attitudes and the acts of choices, provides us with a good understanding of human challenges and difficulties in attaining their freedom and self-realisation in the real world.

DISCUSSION

Olamina is portrayed by Butler as an independent female character who has to make important decisions in the dire circumstances of the novel where she seems to similarly reflect Rawls's notion of autonomy, or freedom. She tries to battle against inequality and injustice in the totalitarian society of a male leader called Jarret. Olamina must make a series of difficult decisions, including whether to spread her own belief system, Earthseed, in order to change her world, whether to sacrifice her family by choosing Earthseed or whether to revive the Acorn community after its demolition by The Crusaders, Jarret's supporters. More importantly, in the case of all situations, Olamina is required to act or not to act with the benefit of autonomy needed to really make a choice.

In *Parable of the Talents*, Butler introduces her characters as intelligent creatures who have the autonomy to "intentionally influence their functioning and immediate circumstances" (Chen, 2015, p. 77). As once, she says that human beings have the potential to shape and change their lives, and even to shape God (Butler 1998, p. 1). In this sense, we realise

that Butler values human agency and autonomy in *Parable of the Talents* as the protagonist, Olamina, can make decisions according to her free will and to create her own destiny.

OLAMINA'S QUEST FOR FREEDOM AND CHOICE THROUGH RAWLSIAN AND BERLIN PHILOSOPHY

As a powerful woman, Olamina determines to develop new tactics in response to the dystopian society in which she and her people live. So, she makes the effort to develop her community, Acorn, based on new principles which are completely different from the totalitarian ideology. The community is created on communal existing which respects cooperation and sharing among society. The principles of her religion, Earthseed, promote the idea of change and improvement among members of the community. As Olamina states in her book *Earthseed: The First Book of the Living*:

“All that you touch
You Change.
All that you Change
Changes you.
The only lasting truth
Is Change.
God
Is Change”. (Butler 1998, p. 3)

Butler, here, shows that change is the core principle of society in the context of the narrative, and human beings have the freedom, or autonomy, to change their world and make their destiny which can be referred to as Rawls's concept of autonomy or freedom. According to Rawls (1971), free autonomous individuals can act and choose according to their conception of the good while Butler also values human agency and selfhood where the characters always respond and react to what is happening around them. In this sense, Stillman (2013) highlights that in, *Parable of the Talents*, the characters accept the inevitability of the change in the world so that they act together efficiently and try to change themselves and the world.

In many scenes in the novel, Olamina shows her autonomy in making choices in the face of different circumstances. Olamina's important decision is to fight against traditional regime, institutional Christianity and spread her own religion, Earthseed. To change and improve her society, she strengthens herself with purpose and gradually develops Acorn's community and Earthseed because she believes that Christian America is created around conceptions of inequality and discrimination. Jarret, the leader of Christian America, wants to take back the people to the last time when there was no religious tolerance and everyone believed in the same God, namely Christianity (Butler, 1998, p.19). Olamina also claims that Jarret and his supporters kill people and abolish communities at the stake for being witches, where a witch “tends to be a Moslem, a Jew, a Hindu, a Buddhist [or] may also be an atheist, a ‘cultist,’ or a well-to-do eccentric” (Butler, 1998, p. 19). By creating Earthseed, Olamina can pursue her desires and make her destiny: to defeat hierarchy and racial antagonisms, gender discrimination in America and also to send a group of people to the stars (Butler, 1998, p. 404). We argue, here, that she has real and effective ca-

pacities to develop and pursue her conception of a good life, which reflect Rawls's notion of autonomy.

In another evidence from the novel, Olamina is forced to go through morally complex situations in which she must make choices. For instance, when she is persuaded by her husband to move to Halstead, a small town, isolated from Christian America, she refuses to leave Earthseed. Although she really loves her husband and her daughter and is very attached to them, she cannot give up Earthseed and her people. Olamina, nonetheless, remains steadfast in her refusal, adamant that “if I can't live to see it succeed, then maybe Larkin can” (Butler, 1998, p.181). She feels responsible for her people and sacrifices her child by choosing Earthseed. Here, Olamina is truly given a choice in the strictest sense of the word, where she can decide because she possesses the autonomy to act or not to act. She is conceived as free and equal in her moral powers in which she is able to give values to her plans and allegiances through the free exercise of her moral abilities. This idea fits into the views by Rawls as he states that a person is morally autonomous if s/he acts deliberately according to his/her moral principles. In the novel, Olamina feels responsible for her people where she sacrifices her child and chooses Earthseed. On the other hand, here, she encounters difficult moral choices, and is forced to choose between her family and community in what Berlin calls agonising choices. According to Berlin, sometimes individuals are forced to choose between difficult or agonising alternatives which make them think about their choices deeply or sometimes defer their decisions.

In another example in the novel, Olamina must, again, make a choice and decide when Acorn transforms into Camp Christian, her husband, Bankole is killed, and her daughter, Larkin, is abducted by Christian America, which is an active religious movement with many local branches. The destruction of Acorn by Christian America Crusaders makes Olamina understand that “Acorn is too small, weak, and local to be an effective response to contemporary problems” (Stillman, 2003, p. 24-25). So, she decides not to revive Acorn after she and some of her friends escape from the Christian Camp. She finally comes to understand that she and her followers can pursue Earthseed as a religion and a way of life even without Acorn. Here, we suggest that Olamina shows her full autonomy and pursue her desire, Earthseed. Although Olamina does not have many choices, her important decision changes her life and the future of humanity. At the end of the narrative, Olamina is impressively successful. By 2090, Earthseed has become the main religion in America, which supports education through institutions, grants and other assistance, and which is sending men to the stars, to live in space.

Our analysis shows that Olamina reflects Rawlsian autonomy in which she, as a free autonomous individual, has the moral power to choose and pursue her conception of good. As recalled earlier, she, for instance, can decide what to do in order to defeat the totalitarian regime of America and, consequently, establishes her own ideological system, Earthseed, which promotes the idea of change and improvement among people. She is also able to command respect as well as responses from her community in regards to what happens around them. More importantly, the portrayal of Olamina's act of making choice shows that she almost al-

ways possesses the autonomy and freedom to make choices according to her free will and true desire in the face of dire circumstances in the novel. Yet, sometimes, she is forced to choose between difficult or agonising alternatives which is referred to as Berlin's agonising choice.

OLAMINA'S JOURNEY OF THE TWO STAGES OF MARX'S SELF-REALISATION: SELF-ACTUALISATION AND SELF-EXTERNALISATION

Self-realisation has a significant role in an individual's life as it gives individuals a kind of self-awareness to actualise and to develop their potentials. In this section, we aim to analyse how Olamina achieves the two stages of self-realisation through self-actualisation and self-externalisation, and the way they aid her advancement. Butler's portrayals of Olamina and other female characters in the novel reflect the very real situations of women in the male-dominated world of the novel and the ways women are raped and discriminated against by men, and when they are deprived of their natural rights. As Olamina says: "A woman who expresses her opinions, 'nags', disobeys her husband might have her head shaved, her forehead branded, her tongue cut out ... [or] she might be stoned to death or burned" (Butler 1998, p. 50). Olamina also criticises racial antagonisms, social inequality and slavery that are promoted by Jarret and his followers. She also points out "Jarret's Crusaders have joined Cougar and his friends in the game of collaring [black] people and grabbing their kids" (Butler 1998, p. 298), and "the country is bleeding to death in poverty, slavery, chaos, and sin" (Butler 1998, p. 156). In this cruel and unfair circumstances, she struggles for a good degree of freedom and self-realisation in the society, in order to change patriarchal tradition and hierarchical system of society. Olamina believes that every human being is born with a special potential and talents as she says:

"We are born
Not with purpose,
But with potential". (Butler 1998, p. 361)

Butler seems to suggest, here, that we need to become aware of our instinctual talents and potentials. In this sense, Shields (2015) points out that "[i]t is almost always through the development and exercise of native [or innate] talents that we become aware of the extent and type of talents we have ..." (p. 56). So, when we get "some level of self-knowledge, including the knowledge of our innate talents", we can develop our talents and abilities to a certain extent that Shields calls sufficient self-realisation which, in turn, is required in Rawlsian autonomy (Shields, 2015, p. 56). As recalled, Marx also believes that humans can develop their potentialities and talents. Here, Marx defines self-realisation "as the full and free actualisation and externalisation of the powers and abilities of the individual" (cited in Elster, 1986, p. 43). In Elster's view, for Marx, self-realisation contains two processes: self-actualisation and self-externalisation. Elster suggests that humans realise themselves when they engage in the kind of activities that enable them to develop their potential capacities.

On the other hand, Fromm (1976) also points out that human realisation of the self is accomplished by the realisation

of her personality, by the active expression of her emotional and intellectual potentialities. In the novel Olamina accomplishes her potential talents and abilities by doing some important activities. We may say here, then, that self-realisation is the key to freedom because, through self-realisation, Olamina freely expresses her nature and potentiality. This finding hence corresponds to a view by Fromm who states that "positive freedom consists in the spontaneous activity of the total, integrated personality" (Fromm, 1976, p. 257), a view also expressed earlier by Yogi as follows:

"As long as the mind does not function with its full potential and is not in a position to use all the faculties it has, its freedom is restricted. Therefore, the first important step in making the mind really free is the full unfolding of its potentialities". (Yogi, 1966, p. 234-235)

It is important to state, here, then that positive freedom is equal to Rawls's autonomy. For Fromm, as for Shields, self-realisation is key to autonomy and freedom. For developing her freedom and self-realisation, Olamina goes through a lot of difficulties during her life. First, she is determined to fight against institutional Christianity and traditional communities, such as Jarret's belief system. To do so, Olamina not only attempts to keep Acorn's community united and powerful but also encourages her people to cope with the constant changes around them. Here, Olamina attains the power and ability to express herself as an autonomous woman and transforms as she finds a voice in a totalitarian system not only as a woman but as a free human. Here, we find that Olamina has experienced the stage of actualisation resulting in the development of her desire and assertive identity. In this stage, Olamina shows her growth and maturity which comes with her self-realisation to promote a great response and reaction to the activities happening around her. In support of Marx's conception of self-realisation, Rawls points out that individuals from early childhood to adulthood constantly continues to develop their skills in the pursuit of their desire which is considered as a major element of self-realisation. Olamina is also introduced as a female character who is so eager to learn and develop new skills as once she asserts that she does not have the skills which are needed in making Earthseed a way of life (Butler 1998, p. 364). She also points that "My 'talent,' ... is Earthseed (Butler 1998, p. 21). We may argue, here, that Olamina comes to realise that her talents and ability is her religion, Earthseed, that she has created.

Secondly, she is determined to achieve self-actualisation: "to teach... Earthseed and make Earthseed real to as many people. [she] can" (Butler 1998, p. 296) and, at last, she establishes Earthseed in other parts of the world such as "the United States, Canada, Alaska, Mexico, and Brazil (Butler 1998, p. 395). To spread Earthseed, Olamina "drifted between the homes of her many friends and supporters, and between the many Earthseed Communities that she established" in any part of the world (Butler 1998, p. 395) and makes a speech for them. At the same time, she sends out "believers who have missionary inclinations—send them in family groups to begin Earthseed Gathering Houses in non-Earthseed communities" (Butler 1998, p. 176). At this stage, she has the opportunity to externalise her potential

powers and abilities –her ability of leadership - in which she not only become part of the many Earthseed communities but also achieves the benefits of their cooperation and friendships that create a kind of solidarity between her and her communities.

As evidenced by the earlier analysis, Olamina has experienced the two stages of self-realisation; resulting in the demonstration of her autonomy and assertion in the social and political domains. Olamina engages in some difficult activities that aid her to know herself and her capacity, and, more importantly, through exercising and actualising her talents, she attains autonomy and freedom to negotiate the tyranny of America and institutional Christianity and to create a new religion, Earthseed. As her talents improve and progress, she becomes an assertive and powerful woman who is determined to voice her mind and desire, and, at last, she can spread Earthseed and make a home for her people among the stars (Butler 1998, p. 358). This example corresponds to the view by Lacey (2008) that Olamina not only develops ways of coping with power that surrounds her but also changes her world for the better. This means that, based on Butler's portrayal of Olamina, our findings support Rawls's conception of autonomy that, in a just society, human beings have the full autonomy to make their own plans of life and follow their conceptions of good, and, besides, demonstrate the interconnections between autonomy and self-realisation. This means that, if human beings become aware of their talents and try to improve them, they have the autonomy and freedom to pursue their desires and make their own destiny.

Further, at the end of the narrative Olamina's position "develops into almost mythical status, that of a High Priestess or a mother to All" (Melzer, 2002, p. 43). Here, we argue that Olamina's portrayal manifests an assertive female leader who has the sufficient capacities and talents to voice her mind and attracts the attention of many people and societies: after escaping from Christian Camps, Olamina is determined to spread Earthseed to the whole world because she knows that it is not beneficial to rebuilt Acorn. She then she starts "traveling and speaking steadily" for people in order to find more believers to Earthseed (Butler 1998, p. 395). By developing and deploying her power of speaking and teaching Earthseed, Olamina succeeds in attaining a great number of Earthseed believers in the whole world such as "the United States, Canada, Alaska, Mexico, and Brazil" (Butler 1998, p. 395).

At this point, we suggest that Olamina has the agency and autonomy to make her plans of life again when she does not give up her ideals and goals for spreading Earthseed to other parts of the world. Olamina's ability of speaking and her leadership also demonstrate her self-realisation and assertion. More importantly, our findings show that, despite voicing her political views, achieving her goals and not submitting to a totalitarian regime, the development of Olamina's abilities and talents can be ascribed to the two stages of self-realisation, namely self-actualisation and self-externalisation. More particularly, as Olamina experiences the first stage of self-realisation that is self-actualisation, she becomes aware of her potential talents and can use them. When

she starts to deploy her talents, for instance, she speaks her mind and spread Earthseed, her talents become observable to other people in which she makes herself part of the society as she enters the second stage of self-realisation, namely self-externalisation. Besides, when she attains sufficient self-realisation, she achieves the capacity to choose, revise and pursue her conception of good which is called autonomy or freedom.

CONCLUSION

Our analyses of the portrayal of Olamina have addressed the study's aims of examining the character's challenges and difficulties in making choices in a dystopian world of America. Furthermore, our analyses, through the application of the concepts of freedom and choice by Rawls and Berlin, and the concept of self-realisation by Marx, have helped to reveal that Olamina, as an African woman living in technologically and politically devastated world, is portrayed as manifesting her full autonomy and powers through her ideas, attitude and the act of making choices. This is because Olamina criticises the dominant social norms or totalitarian system of society, and try to change the oppressive existence through spreading her new religion, Earthseed. She has gone through morally complex situations in which she makes choices in order to protect her community, Acorn, and her religion Earthseed. Olamina's self-realisation and autonomy are further improved when she is determined to teach and spread Earthseed to not only the whole country but to other parts of the world. She drifts and communicates between the many Earthseed communities and her supporters in other parts of the world that assist her to achieve a higher level of self-realisation among her people as she exhibits her social and political views.

Subsequently, we found that Olamina's portrayal of freedom and choice are evident in the novel: Olamina's effort to battle the weak government of America and institutional Christianity, and to develop Acorn's community and Earthseed, thereby clearly show her autonomy and ability to pursue her free will and desire. In addition, she exhibits a degree of autonomy as she reacts and responds to the changes occurring around her. She, as an assertive woman, attains the ability to make choices and to make decisions even in morally difficult situations. Besides, the process of self-realisation is apparent in Olamina's portrayal by Butler: Olamina's success in spreading her ideas and religion, Earthseed, to the whole world, therewith demonstrates the development of her potential abilities and powers. As Olamina experiences the first stage of self-realisation, that is self-actualisation, she becomes aware of her potential talents and, hence, uses them. She is inherently aware that her important potential talents are her leadership and her new ideology, Earthseed; so, she can use her abilities whenever she wants to. When she starts to deploy her talents, she speaks her mind and spreads Earthseed; thus, her talents become observable to other people in which she makes herself part of the society as she enters the second stage of self-realisation, namely self-externalisation. This conclusion then reflects the research goals of our study.

The originality of this study lies in our methodology of the literary framework combination of the concepts of free-

dom and choice by Rawls and Berlin as well as self-realisation by Marx. Our novelty, in terms of methodology, has resulted in a critical and in-depth analyses of the protagonist's belief, attitude and the act of making choices, which reveals an examination of the characters' challenges and difficulties in attaining freedom. This study, however, is limited to Butler's portrayal of Olamina in *Parable of the Talents*. Future research thus can be conducted on other selected characters in other fictions by Butler, such as Olamina in *Parable of the Swore* (1993) or Dana in *Kindred* (1979). In addition, more research might explore the concept of freedom and submission through Rousseau's concept of masochism and could also usefully explore Kant's idea of freedom and choice in post-apocalyptic fiction.

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