

New Belongings in a Changing World:  
Intersectional Readings of  
Octavia E. Butler's *The Parable Series* and Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West*

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All that you touch  
You change  
All that you Change  
Changes you  
The only lasting truth  
Is Change  
God  
Is Change

— Octavia Butler, *Parable of the Talents*

The apocalypse appeared to have arrived and yet it was not apocalyptic, which is to say that while the changes were jarring they were not the end, and life went on, and people found things to do and ways to be and people to be with, and plausible desirable futures began to emerge, unimaginable previously, but not unimaginable now, and the result was something not unlike relief.

— Mohsin Hamid, *Exit West*

## Abstract

This thesis explores narratives for new belongings in an ever-changing world, where the static seems desirable and safe, but also false. The protagonists in *Exit West* (2017) and *The Parable Series* (1993, 1998) are epitomes of transcultural identities fostered by forced or voluntary micro or macro migration. While the narratives are sites of resistance and refusal, the texts also advance possibilities of new affiliation and opportunity. *The Parable Series* negotiates the lives of migrants, whereas *Exit West* contends with the actual topic of migration. The two authors write about post-apocalyptic worlds with insurmountable problems; despite harsh realities, the changing world is where the protagonists have to make their homes. Mohsin Hamid has created a social commentary on Octavia E. Butler's farsightedness into the twenty-first century – the novels complement each other, and both painfully resonate with what transpires in our current world.

The dynamics of placemaking in the twenty-first century and beyond is examined through the lens of intersectionality, standpoint theory, the social system of kyriarchy, and the theory of diaspora space. Diaspora space conceptualizes the realities from which Butler and Hamid write their dystopian stories in an attempt to reconfigure 'home' forever in the making. Brah's (1996, 2012, 2017) theory of diaspora space spatializes the concept of intersectionality to show how individuals interconnect with space to form different identities with privileged or oppressed outcomes. By utilizing an intersectional standpoint analysis within a kyriarchy and diaspora space framework, I investigate interacting systems of oppression, privilege, and standpoints in *The Parable Series* and *Exit West*.

The analysis section of the thesis is framed as a heuristic teaching tool. It demonstrates and discusses an intersectional reading of fictional texts within the theme of migration to validate that intersectionality is not just about representing the mesh of socially and politically relevant differences, but that it is a pro-active tool used to overcome the social and political significance of existing differentiations. The method may increase recognition and appreciation of diversity – also amongst students in a classroom setting. It is my hope that this thesis will advance an awareness of the complex issues of migration, while concurrently elucidating how particular intersecting factors of gender, class, and race construct, enrich, or limit not only a fictional character but also a human being's lived experience concerning migration and belonging.

Keywords: intersectionality, kyriarchy, standpoint theory, diaspora space, migration, belonging, privilege, oppression, xenophobia, placemaking, transnationalism

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## 1. Introduction

This thesis sets out to explore narratives for new belongings in a changing world. The protagonists of the selected novels are epitomes of transcultural identities fostered by forced or voluntary micro or macro migration. While the narratives are sites of resistance and refusal, the texts also advance possibilities of new affiliation and opportunity. The authors think beyond nationality and the real world as necessary loci for models of analyzing how individuals interconnect with space and place to form different identities and to survive. This thesis considers individuals' resourcefulness in spite of, and because of, belonging.

The dynamics of placemaking in the twenty-first century and beyond will be explored through the lens of *intersectionality* and the theory of *diaspora space* in the following. Sociologist Avtar Brah's theory of diaspora space spatializes the concept of intersectionality to show how individuals interconnect with space to form different identities with privileged or oppressed outcomes. Diaspora space conceptualizes the realities from which Octavia E. Butler (1947-2006) and Mohsin Hamid (1971-) write their dystopian stories in an attempt to reconfigure 'home' forever in the making. Home is everywhere and consequently nowhere in particular. Butler and Hamid are representatives of the African diaspora and the Pakistani diaspora respectively. Butler's *Parable of the Sower* (1993) and *Parable of the Talents* (1998), henceforth *The Parable Series*, and Hamid's *Exit West* (2017) are narratives that consider the ambivalence and instability of migrant subjects set in the near future. The two authors transport the readers to worlds with insurmountable problems: religious wars, environmental disasters, refugee crises,

nuclear weapons (in)security, and the development of artificial intelligence for better or worse. In engaging with the novels, the reader is introduced to post-apocalyptic worlds, where conventional thematic patterns such as race, class, gender, and spirituality are questioned and challenged. Despite harsh realities, the ever-changing world is where the protagonists have to make their homes.

Butler holds a prominent position within a small minority of black women who write in the science fiction genre. She began to write at a young age, creating radical interventions in what had been a white male-dominated genre. Several of her novels incorporate traditional elements of science fiction, such as aliens and post-apocalyptic societies; although, in reality, her fiction goes beyond genre boundaries tracing thematic patterns of race, class, gender, and ethnicity (Hampton xiii). The stories depict women of color in traditional male roles, as Butler's black heroines make sacrifices to protect the survival of families and communities. Thus, Butler is emphasizing that black women should take the lead in changing the world and in preventing the collapse of humanity. The strong-willed heroine Lauren Olamina of *The Parable Series* is one example; Olamina is both dreaded and admired for her contagious spirituality and her supernatural abilities. The parallels between Butler's fictional world depiction and our actual current world problems are unsettling; Butler was an avid reader of news of her time (*Sower* 339), and she let her imagination create the future.

Hamid grew up living in the United States and Lahore, Pakistan. Currently, he divides his time between New York, London, and Lahore. Hamid claims that his connection to many countries and the tensions that these affiliations create fuel his writings (Sibley 13). His work bends genre and form, experimenting with multiple narrative voices, innovative structures, and magic realism. Like Butler, Hamid writes of a new world where traditional notions of race, class, and gender are challenged. *Exit West* tells the love story of the tender and reserved Saeed and the independent and sensual Nadia, citizens of an unnamed country on the verge of falling apart. They decide to flee when they discover doors that open in random places around the world. Hamid's story is real, surreal, and resembles fairy-tale magic, painting a dystopian portrait of what might be imminent in the near future.

To some extent, Hamid has created a social commentary on Butler's farsightedness into the twenty-first century – the two novels complement each other, and both painfully resonate with what transpires in our current world. Olamina asserts that since “change is the only



inescapable truth, change is the basic clay of our lives. In order to live constructive lives, we must learn to shape change when we can and yield to it when we must. Either way, we must learn and teach, adapt and grow” (Butler, *Sower* 336). *Exit West* and *The Parable Series* discuss how individuals find belonging in an ever-changing world, where the static seems desirable and safe, but also false.

*The Parable Series* traverses the lives of migrants, whereas *Exit West* contends with the actual topic of migration – the two novels represent sort of a bottom-up, top-down approach respectively to the theme of migration. It is my hope that this thesis will advance an awareness of the complex issues of migration. Concurrently, I hope to elucidate how particular intersecting factors of gender, class, and race construct, enrich, or limit not only a fictional character but also a human being’s lived experience concerning migration and belonging. In the following, I intend to build the foundation for an intersectional reading protocol in literary analyses by combining the theory of intersectionality with standpoint theory, the social system of kyriarchy, and the concept of diaspora space. To analyze Butler and Hamid’s works and to display ‘doing intersectionality,’ I formulate these central questions, (see 3.6 *Creating a Reading Protocol for Teaching Intersectionality*, 5.1.4 *Intersectional Analysis – Olamina*, and 5.2.4 *Intersectional Analysis – Saeed and Nadia* for how to conceptualize the questions in a lesson):

How do the migrants in the texts negotiate their transcultural identities, seeing that they inhabit different spaces at different times regarding intersections of race, class, gender, (dis)placement, (dis)ability, and religion? Do the protagonists find new ways of belonging and if so, what are they?

Furthermore, to support the thesis question, I intend to answer these sub-questions, while ‘doing intersectionality’: What is the impact of gender in the texts? What role does race play in the texts? How is class described in the texts? How are disparities with regard to migration compounded by intersections of class, race, and gender? How are class, race, and gender intersections depicted in the novels’ dystopian societies? What is the value of community in the texts? What role does spirituality play in the survival of the protagonists? Literature as social commentary: Do the two authors encourage activism or change in regard to migration and belonging? If so, what type of change or activism do they suggest?

## 2. Methodology

Although several attempts have been made to incorporate intersectionality into literary analysis, cultural studies courses, and educational practice in general (see e.g. Bell, Dill and Zambrana, Jones and Wijeyasinghe, Kentoff, Landry, and Naples), I believe it is essential to craft a comprehensive reading protocol for how to implement intersectionality in English literature courses and for curriculum development in general. Thus, this thesis will focus on intersectional readings of fiction as a means to conduct textual analysis in a classroom setting. Integrating the abstract ideas of intersectionality to a teaching context is challenging, which may seem ‘somewhat ironic’ as applying theory to practice is an essential principle of intersectionality (Jones and Wijeyasinghe 12). For the past decade, numerous approaches to intersectionality that vary by “discipline, epistemology, methodology and conceptualization” have been suggested (Naples 566). The theory of intersectionality has become a leading paradigm in women’s studies, African American studies, ethnic studies, and similar fields (Grzanka xvii). Moreover, it is an essential tool for social work practice, research, education, and policymakers. It has been called a political and intellectual movement, but as May states, “Being widely talked about does not necessarily signal changed social, philosophical, or institutional relations” (94). In this thesis, I seek to validate that intersectionality is not just about demonstrating the interplay of socially and politically relevant differences, but that it is a pro-active tool used to overcome the social and political significance of existing inequalities. The method may increase recognition and appreciation of diversity – also in an English literature classroom context.

Therefore, the analysis section of this master thesis will be framed as a heuristic teaching tool. I wish to develop, test, demonstrate, and discuss an intersectional approach to fictional texts with themes of migration and belonging, as well as suggest a method of teaching intersectionality in intermediate and high-level English literature courses. By including the theory of intersectionality as an innovative part of textual analysis, it becomes evident how not only real-life individuals but also fictional characters continuously negotiate their multiple and converging identities, perpetually linked to structures of power and oppression. My intersectional framework draws on the work of leading race scholars Patricia Hill Collins, Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, and on sociologist Helma Lutz’s work.

Furthermore, I wish to propose a reading protocol for standpoint analysis as a pocket edition of the theory of intersectionality. Achieving a standpoint is crucial for the understanding

of one's location in the social order of any given society. By incorporating standpoint theory (see e.g. Patricia Hill Collins, Sandra G. Harding, and Caresse A. John) into the theory of intersectionality, we may understand that even if a person is dually marginalized (such as woman and migrant), she can move among a variety of communities and groups. In contrast to understandings derived from battling only one kind of oppression, intersecting systems, such as diasporic positions, "can produce distinctive oppositional knowledges that embrace multiplicity yet remain cognizant of power" (Collins, "Fighting Words" 8). By combining intersectionality and standpoint theory with themes related to diaspora, (dis)placement, and migration, I will attempt to remove intersectionality somewhat from its solely feminist core and incorporate the concept of kyriarchy. The term was coined in 1992 by feminist theologian Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and is understood as covering all forms of inequality for all groups of people while acknowledging that an individual may both benefit from and be oppressed by the system simultaneously (*Feminist Biblical Studies*).

Migration or similar concepts such as border crossing, outsider-within, and nomadic consciousness, involves countless political, economic, social, and cultural variables; the border remains a contested location that is amplified with raced, classed, and gendered articulations. I intend to consider diaspora space, inspired by sociologist Avtar Brah's theories, within an intersectional frame, examining the protagonists' position with respect to intersecting attributes of gender, class, and race in their searches for belongings. Furthermore, space and place are fundamental parts of identity construction when intersections of class, gender, and race are studied. The creation of space and place accommodates what an individual is, was, and is supposed to be, and it characterizes his or her belonging in a community. Communities are the arenas where everyday practices stratify, marginalize, and celebrate the lives of its inhabitants. The framework of diaspora space allows for an untangling of how hyphenated identities make sense of their place in the social world.

This thesis is organized as follows: In the theory section, I attempt to lay the groundwork for a reading protocol combining the theory of intersectionality and standpoint theory. This will be done within the framework of kyriarchy to include all forms of inequality for all groups of people. The concept of diaspora space will help locate and define the place and space where the intersections and border crossings take place. In the analysis section, I analyze, compare, and

discuss Butler and Hamid's texts from the proposed theoretical groundwork aiming towards demonstrating the usefulness of the reading protocol for intersectional analysis laid out in the theory chapter. The last section concludes the findings and reflects upon the idea of 'doing intersectional analysis' in a classroom setting. I end my thesis with an exploratory consideration of migration, belonging, and placemaking in the twenty-first century and beyond.

### 3. Theory

In the following, I intend to build the foundation for an intersectional reading protocol and the thesis' literary analyses by linking the theory of intersectionality with standpoint theory, kyriarchy, and diaspora space. An intersectional standpoint analysis within a kyriarchy and diaspora space framework will aid an investigation of standpoints, privileges, oppression, injustices, and exclusions of the three protagonists in *The Parable Series* and *Exit West*. Moreover, by accentuating intersectionality, both teachers and students in an English literature classroom will be equipped with the skills to examine how society's power dynamics might influence their beliefs.

#### 3.1 Intersectionality

Rooted in Critical Race Theory and Black Feminism, the theory of intersectionality is continuously developing. Intersectionality is a "method and a disposition, a heuristic and analytical tool" (Carbado et al. 303). While giving the impression of being methodologically disorganized, the theory likewise seems to have numerous definitional predicaments. However, there is an agreed upon consensus that the theory deals with power relations and social inequalities, namely how different types of discrimination interact. The term intersectionality refers to the critical understanding that race, class, gender, ethnicity, nation, ability, sexuality, religious belief, age, and so forth function not as separate exclusive entities, but as equally constructed manifestations that repeatedly shape complex social discriminations (Collins, "Intersectionality" 1). Succinctly put, intersectionality is attentive towards experiences at the intersections of race, gender, class, et cetera. These intersections signify complex social locations and merged identities, and one can concurrently belong to both privileged and oppressed groups; thus, intersectionality sanctions the examination of both privileged and oppressed positions. Moreover, intersectionality may help explain oppression as it might, quite literally, seem

different to everyone. Herein lies another challenge, “Intersectionality needs to be doubly explored, on the level of the narrator and on the one of the analyst” (Lutz 11). Recognizing the oppression and privilege of both analyst and narrator (author) becomes a vital aspect of the methodology, as different standpoints result in different understandings. Lastly, an intersectional framework should contain considerations of “historical, cultural, discursive and structural dimensions that shape the intersection of race, class, gender, sexuality, national and religious identity, among other identities” (Naples 567). This means that an intersectional analysis must study intersecting categories such as gender, class, and race in the specific historical and cultural context in which they are articulated. I intend to base my intersectional analysis on the abovementioned aspects in the explorations of migration and belonging.

By engaging in an intersectional analysis, exploring the complex issues of race, gender, and class in Hamid and Butler’s texts about migration and belonging, I hope to contribute to the ever-growing multidisciplinary scholarly field of intersectionality, well aware that I am detaching some of the theory from its original core.

### 3.2 Intersectionality and Standpoint Theory

In the eighties, feminist scholars in philosophy, sociology, and political theory (see e.g., Patricia Hill Collins, Sandra G. Harding, Nancy C. M. Hartsock, and Dorothy E. Smith) established feminist standpoint theory with an onset in Marxist ideology and applied it to the studies of women and minorities. I have taken the bold move to disregard the feminist aspect when I write ‘standpoint theory.’ I do this in an attempt to explain that standpoint theory, in reality, may cover all genders and all races in marginalized positions. This approach ties in with the theory of kyriarchy, which I will discuss in the following chapter.

Overall, standpoint theory investigates the different ways in which individuals understand experienced situations and their positions in society. The theory views society as hierarchically constructed and investigates how privileged groups exert power by oppressing other social groups. The contrast between privileged and oppressed, or marginalized, groups is essential in standpoint theory, mainly because achieving a standpoint requires constant intellectual reflection on one’s social position about other groups’ positions (John 96). A person’s perception of a situation is influenced by the person’s position in society. Individuals can be members of several groups simultaneously in which they may or may not achieve standpoints; for instance black,

white, male, Christian, or a mixed-race Christian man. However, how various forms intersect will have the strongest impact on the standpoints of the individual. Thus, a standpoint is “an understanding of one’s individual location in the social order as part of and shaped by that order’s social ... context” (96), meaning that a standpoint is achieved within the individual *and* the collective frame.

The theory operates with three levels in relation to achieving a standpoint. The first level, requiring self-awareness and the ability to self-define, involves the individual achievement of a standpoint. The individual level of a standpoint is accomplished through an examination of one’s location, the roles which society makes available, and how these roles can be assumed or contested. The second level involves the collective achievement of a standpoint, covering the ability to define in relation to others, an awareness of how one is oppressed and privileged, and the questioning of the power relations that maintain and produce oppression and privilege (John 96). When the individual attains this level, a standpoint is achieved, since one becomes aware of the groups with which one shares both power and oppression as well as from which groups one is excluded. The two first levels are most commonly attained and spoken of, but a third level is possible if, after a progression from the individual level to the collective level, one chooses to become an activist in a collective or engage in group resistance to overcome the oppression with which one is faced.

Achieving a standpoint involves a critical assessment of one’s location and an investigation of questions such as ‘Who am I?’, ‘Have I been oppressed?’, ‘Have I oppressed others?’ (John 113-4). In the fictional world as well as in the real world, a character’s self-deception prompts the readers to ask these questions about the protagonists but also prompts the readers to ask themselves the same questions (114). This way, in one’s search to overcome and understand the intersections of oppression and privilege and in one’s search for commitment concerning oneself and one’s surroundings, standpoint theory works as a pocket edition of the theory of intersectionality. A combination of the two theories turns into a sophisticated tool to expose the complexities of both individual and group experiences of privilege and oppression, especially at the intersections of different identities.

As discussed above, traditionally, the theory of intersectionality and standpoint theory have been addressed from the perspective of gender and examined within the context of patriarchy. Kyriarchy, as opposed to patriarchy, encompasses various forms of oppression

beyond those related solely to one's gender by describing the complex social order that keeps intersecting systems of oppression in place. In this manner, intersectionality and standpoint theory are used as analytical tools to deconstruct and dismantle kyriarchy, encompassing all forms of inequality for all groups of people by contextualizing how it affects everyday practices of life in the twenty-first century.

### 3.3 Intersectionality and Kyriarchy

Kyriarchy is a theory about structural power developed in feminist biblical hermeneutics by feminist theologian Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza. Schüssler Fiorenza explains kyriarchy as a “complex pyramidal system of intersecting multiplicative social structures of superordination and subordination, of ruling and oppression” (*Wisdom Ways*, Glossary). Kyriarchy signifies every form of domination where a superior governs a subordinate without the generalizing depiction of a superior always being a man and the subordinate always a woman (Sigurdson 133). Schüssler Fiorenza critiques mainstream feminist theory for focusing solely on gender differences, claiming that this “masks the complex interstructuring of patriarchal dominations inscribed *within* women and in the relationships of dominance and subordination *between* women” (*But She Said* 123). Simply defining the man as dominant and the woman as oppressed without bearing in mind any other factors would be to erase all other facets of their identities. In other words, kyriarchy, as a social system, encompasses all intersecting systems of oppression, while it simultaneously reminds us that individuals may be both privileged and oppressed at the same time. Kyriarchy also reminds us that since different systems of oppression exist, one may contest one form of oppression while dispersing others. This notion highlights that only challenging one form of systemic oppression (patriarchy) is inadequate. All forms of oppression, comprised of kyriarchy, should be confronted.

While the theory of intersectionality and standpoint theory are used for understanding various, symbiotic axes of identities and differences, then kyriarchy defines the power structures intersectionality generates. Kyriarchy, standpoint theory, and intersectionality help us critically consider and understand our multiple positions in society. Structural social standpoints are assigned at birth and with time, individuals will inhabit several positions with fluctuating access to power and experiences of oppression (Schüssler Fiorenza, *Democratizing* 112-3). These standpoints change and renew themselves over time, meaning that a standpoint must repeatedly

be achieved as social orders change. The three theories conjoined provide us with a framework to investigate complex standpoints, injustices, and exclusions that our privileged positions may have stopped us from noticing (Osbourne 20-1). We automatically “hunt for ‘hidden’ structures of oppression [revealing] the interrelationships and intersections that constitute kyriarchy” (22), by asking ourselves questions about how classism is connected to sexism and racism, and vice versa, and what our own standpoints in these questions are.

Subsequently, the importance of space and place in the production and experience of kyriarchy and intersectionality is noteworthy. All three novels analyzed in this thesis remind us that practices and creativity in a community, or in a group, are never neutral, but shaped by power dynamics, revealing both resistance and constraint. Practices are also fixed and entrenched, and spaces can be static and bounded, resulting both in forms of exclusion as well as in forms of self-identification and solidarity. The conceptualization of space, identity, and belonging within the parameters of the theories above are presented in Brah’s theory of diaspora space.

### 3.4 Intersectionality and Diaspora Space – Connecting the Dots

Diaspora space consists of multiple processes at work and is defined as “the intersectionality of diaspora, border, dis/location as a point of confluence of economic, political, cultural and psychic processes” (Brah, *Cartographies* 182). The concept helps explain the location of individuals who no longer belong to any one group with the result that groups of unequal power occupy social locations or border spaces. The foundational notion of diaspora is the displacement of a people from an ordinary homeland and the permanency of relations to such homelands across space and time (Brah, “Articulations” 171). Yet, as Brah suggests, the idea of *diaspora* is a complicated imagined *space* of relationships. This space encompasses all humans in a given location, not only those who have been dispersed; therefore the “diaspora space is the site where the native is as much a diasporian as the diasporian is the native” (Brah, *Cartographies* 209). Consequently, diaspora space is not limited to diasporic communities but rather reconfigures attachments to and estrangements from places much more widely. Diaspora space places migration and consequently change or movement at the center of an analysis, while also storing “the histories and memories of social and cultural struggles, of alternative identities and ways of



life” (Kron and zur Nieden, paragraph 5). Therefore, diaspora space signifies a constant change in perspectives and standpoints.

Space and place can be theorized in multiple ways, thus, to explicate the complexity of space and place in Brah’s diaspora space, we can incorporate the theories of sociologist Henri Lefebvre and urban theorist Edward Soja. Lefebvre asserts that space is a social product of complex social values and productions of meanings; thus, space is produced as raced, classed, nationalized, ethnicized, and gendered through mechanisms of oppression and privilege. Lefebvre’s theory of spatiality operates with first, second, and third spaces; the first is the physical or the perceived space, the second is the mental or the conceived space, and the third is the social space or the lived space. Soja constructs his *thirdspace* from Lefebvre’s spatial trialectics. Thirdspace comprises original values (from the first and second space) and sets up new values and perspectives previously considered incompatible. More specifically, thirdspace is “a space of radical openness, a site of resistance and struggle” (Soja 28). Soja argues that our old ways of thinking about space (first and second space theories) can no longer be contained within one social category, but rather space contains aspects from many categories – navigating the world gets more and more complicated. Polarities and dichotomies of class, gender, nation, and race are combined in thirdspace and thus elucidate the complexity of intersecting issues in Brah’s diaspora space such as poverty, social inclusion and exclusion, racism, and gender inequality.

Overall, what we could call ‘*an intersectional standpoint analysis within a kyriarchy and diaspora space framework*’ will do the following: it acknowledges that gender-based oppression is not the only type of oppression that exists. It understands that one can both benefit from and be oppressed by the system depending on one’s personal location, i.e., one’s standpoint. It admits that while different systems of oppression exist, we can fight one form of oppression while perpetuating others. This could suggest why many oppressed people may be complicit in their own oppression. Most people tend to be both oppressors and victims, and most groups consist of members who dominate other groups of people. Furthermore, the framework sees that systems of oppression are interlinked in time and space and that intersectionality, standpoint theory, kyriarchy, and diaspora space are receptive to change and current social, political, and historical circumstances. The conjoined theories let us consider the time and space of multiple combinations of categories that intersect in migration, i.e., the intersections of being a male, a Muslim, and a migrant. The framework allows us to focus on the performative processes of

adaptation, change, and of achieving new standpoints relating to migration. It lets us study moments of creativity despite harsh conditions. Lastly, it acknowledges that these interdisciplinary areas of inquiry shape the lived reality of people in the twenty-first century; consequently, it offers opportunities to eliminate conventional divisions between academia and activism.

### 3.5 Theoretical Perspectives

In my efforts to build the abovementioned framework for an intersectional analysis, I have had the following considerations about subjectivity, essentialism, and interdisciplinarity. The goal of intersectionality and standpoint theory is an empowerment of those who lack power. These theories seek to disrupt the intellectual and social world, but only as a means of initiating diversity. In this manner, the theories become value-loaded and question the whole notion of objectivity or an objective reality. Knowledge is socially constructed, and consequently, “our positions in society produce understandings of the world similar to *and* different from the understandings of others” (John 95). Therefore, objectivity is only a theoretical ideal, and subsequently, as with most theories, there can be no value-neutral researcher, emphasizing that social and political positions influence both the researched *and* the researcher (95). In applying theory to the novels, I, as a reader, scholar, and researcher, have engaged in an operation between the texts’ inferred meaning and my individual interpretation influenced by not only my personal emotions, knowledge, and my gender, but also by the social and political influences of my time. Scholars, researchers, planners, and other professionals involved in changing current conditions often belong to quite privileged groups. To second a well-known Audre Lorde quote, we may indeed find ourselves, to no effect, ‘trying to dismantle the master’s house with the master’s tools’ (110).

Traditional feminist theorists stand in favor of the idea that all women share a standpoint gained through their experience as ‘the other’ in cultures dominated by men. Such a view, though, merely strengthens inequality in that viewing women as a homogenous group disregards differences between individual women (Harnois 70). This criticism revolves around *strategic essentialism*, a word coined by literary theorist and critic Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak referring to the practice of a generalization of all women, or any group, as though they were fundamentally the same (xviii). In this manner, essentialism clouds the diversity that exists within a group. This

does not mean, though, that certain groups do not provide an excellent base for understanding social inequality through intersectionality and standpoint theory. Introducing the issue of intersectionality offers a richer source for analysis of social inequality in terms of gender and race (Harnois 71). Overall, the theories of intersectionality and kyriarchy remind us that subject-positions ‘crisscross’ (Schüssler Fiorenza, *But She Said* 123). One cannot speak for all members of a group, and getting a diverse set of members even within a specific identity group can be necessary. Intersectionality cautions us not to ignore the existence of other structures of oppression in case we proliferate them unintentionally.

As I intend to discuss in the chapter organizing a reading protocol for teaching intersectionality, an interdisciplinary approach and the multiplicity of theories could make an analysis too complicated, messy, and impractical. As suggested by English professor Maureen Meharg Kentoff, who works with intersectionality in an English Literature classroom setting, neither the intersectional analysis nor the discussion will be a neat process; she encourages students to embrace this quality and underlines how this is evidence of the complexity of characters and life in general (68). I find it helpful to focus on particular identity groups/matrices, foregrounding particular intersections; this will likewise give the student more freedom to choose a specific topic or theme of personal interest within certain intersections. Unfortunately, one intersection may only present part of the picture. As scholars, we should still attempt to understand how other intersection points intersect and interact to overcome the universalizing that can otherwise occur. We should also ask ourselves whether intersections of gender, race, and class are privileged over intersections of age, religion, (dis)ability, and other identities. This can only inspire and demand further intersectional work relating to any field where the theory is beneficial.

### 3.6 Creating a Reading Protocol for Teaching Intersectionality

Regarding the discussion of how to give to prominence to certain intersections over others, Schüssler Fiorenza explicates that

We might inhabit structural positions of race, gender, class and ethnicity, but that one of them might become privileged so that it constitutes a nodal point. While in any particular historical moment class may be the primary modality through which I experience gender

and race, in other circumstances gender may be the privileged position through which I experience race and class. (*Feminist Biblical Studies* 119)

Depending on the author's message, the historical time, and perhaps most importantly, a genuine interest in issues that arise from aspects of one's circumstances, a variety of identities and intersections may be chosen. As mentioned earlier, there is a danger of pedagogical chaos in this kind of choice, but also freedom and an opportunity to show independence and maturity. Potentially, the student may choose the characters, the theme, and thereby the research question of an intersectional analysis. By independently doing so, the student is forced to rely on and examine social, political, and historical contexts. Inadvertently, the student is also forced to take standpoints in perceptions of oneself relating to one's own social, political, and historical surroundings.

An intersectional analysis may be approached in two ways, either by characterization(s) of the protagonist(s) with regard to privilege and oppression and/or by defining overarching themes of oppression and privilege to see how these affect the protagonist(s) in a text. In the end, both approaches should lead to a discussion of the character's privileges and oppression in the intersections of race, class, gender, and so forth within the overarching theme or message that the author is trying to convey. Regardless of the approach, the text's genre and conventions should be determined; the text's various stylistic devices have to be decoded, and the setting and the character's mobility need to be investigated. Lastly, the focus of the narrative (the overarching theme) needs to be decided within the identity categories of race, class, gender, et cetera. In the discussion, these findings must be compared to how the author's standpoints and own intersections of privilege and oppression affect the literary representation.

As discussed, to a certain extent, the themes should reveal themselves. To begin the process, a teacher may ask about the focus of a text, in this thesis 'belonging and migration.' The next focal point should be an investigation into the cultural and historical setting of both the author, the characters, and of the students themselves. This should instigate a discussion about what the historical and cultural setting might mean for the author's intended message and the potential for social commentary. Then, a discussion should commence about how particular intersecting factors – in this thesis gender, class, race, (dis)placement, religion, and (dis)ability – construct, enrich, or limit a character's lived experience regarding migration and belonging. The

following questions (my thesis' research questions) may be formulated to encourage this discussion: What is the impact of gender in the texts? What role does race play in the texts? How is class described? How is (dis)placement portrayed? How are religion and belief defined? How is (dis)ability dealt with in the texts? How are the intersections of class, race, gender, (dis)placement, religion, and (dis)ability depicted in the novels' dystopian societies? What is the value of community in the texts? What role does spirituality play in the survival of the protagonists? How are disparities with regard to migration compounded by intersections of class, race, gender, (dis)placement, (dis)ability, and religion? Literature as social commentary: Do the two authors encourage activism or change regarding migration and belonging? If so, what kind of change or activism do they suggest?

A protagonist is 'created' by what he or she articulates, by how other characters describe the protagonist, and by what the narrator reveals (Krogh Hansen 164). The students should cite specific language used by the narrator and the character(s) related to gender, class, race, (dis)placement, (dis)ability, and religion. They should also examine the literary and linguistic techniques, the setting, a character's appearance and interpersonal descriptions, and the genre to pinpoint how these literary devices support the character(s) and theme(s) (164). In dealing with gender, one could ask *which genders are represented in the text, how are women treated, how are men treated, and why are they treated that way*. Relating to class, the students should find *depictions of work, possessions, attire, education, language, and home life*. Regarding race, the students should *identify the represented races; they should determine the majority and minority races, and investigate how majority races are treated, how minority races are treated, and why they are treated the way they are*. In connection with (dis)ability, the students should search for *reactions to a character's handicaps, both physical and mental disabilities*. Regarding (dis)placement, one should explore *accounts of settings that deal with both micro and macro migration, as well as the subsequent descriptions of the protagonist's emotional state*. Lastly, in connection with religion, one should find *descriptions of various belief systems and possible scenarios of religious persecution or celebration*.

It may be helpful to create a matrix of oppression and privilege to get an overview of the text and its themes; please note that this diagram will change according to the students' research questions. Also, note that the groups that a matrix reveals are groups with which one might both share privilege and oppression as well as the groups from which one might be excluded. The

understanding of exclusion and group membership corresponds to the two first levels of standpoint theory; the first level takes place through an examination of one's individual location, and the second level, the collective level, encompasses an ability to define in relation to others. Concurrently, one should reach an understanding of society's power relations that uphold and produce oppression and privilege.

<b>Social Identity Categories</b>	<b>Privileged Social Groups</b>	<b>Border Social Groups</b>	<b>Targeted Social Groups</b>	<b>Ism</b>
<b>Class</b>	Upper class individuals	Middle class individuals	Lower class individuals	Classism
<b>Gender</b>	Males	Females Males	Females Males	Sexism
<b>Race</b>	White individuals	Bi-racial individuals	Latino, Asian, Black, Native individuals	Racism
<b>(Dis)ability</b>	Abled-bodied individuals	Individuals with temporary disabilities	Disabled individuals	Ableism
<b>Religion</b>	Individuals believing in religion endorsed by the state		Individuals believing in other religions Atheists	Religious persecution
<b>(Dis)placement</b>	Nativists	Migrants Nativists	Migrants	Xenophobia includes: Classism Sexism Racism Ableism Religious persecution

*Figure 1. Matrix of Oppression and Privilege (Based on Adams et al., appendix 3C).*

The research questions for *The Parable Series* and *Exit West* have inspired the following social identity categories: race (racism), class (classism), gender (sexism), religion (religious oppression), (dis)ability (ableism), and (dis)placement (xenophobia). Other social identity categories may be added to a Matrix of Oppression and Privilege, such as sexual orientation (homophobia, transphobia) and age (ageism), which to a certain extent also relate to the three texts, although not represented as critical themes. Please note that the concept of xenophobia includes all of the *-isms* investigated in an intersectional analysis, indicative of the particularly fragile life circumstances in which a migrant may find him or herself. Also, note that it is

difficult to explain the border social group pertaining to religion in the Matrix figure as such beliefs tend to be either or. For a more in-depth usage and explanation of the Matrix figure, see 5. *Intersectional Analysis – Themes and Sub-themes* and 5.1.1 *Gender, Race, and Class – Dystopia for The Parable Series* and 5.2.1 *Gender, Race, and Class – Dystopia for Exit West*.

By creating a Venn-diagram, the students may understand how for instance gender, race, and class intersect to reveal similarities and differences across characters. Privileges available to one character may contrast sharply with those available to another character. These similarities and differences pinpoint oppression and privilege and may help in elucidating when an individual may or may not use an identity to gain power over a situation, one's surroundings, or one's life – i.e., achieve a standpoint. The diagram will change according to the chosen focus and to historical and cultural changes over time. In fact, a Venn-diagram could be created for a character in the beginning phase of a book, again in the end, and over time if a character hypothetically were to be followed beyond the ending of the book. The diagram is meant to compress the temporal aspects associated with a character's development and is, therefore, a theoretical design that shows the dimensions and processes of a character's privilege and oppression. By adding the 'final result' of the standpoint achievement, we may reflect on the different levels of standpoint achievement throughout the book instead of creating Venn-diagrams for each development/standpoint. In dealing with Butler and Hamid's novel, I have selected the following intersections: race, gender, class, religion, and (dis)placement for all three novels, as well as (dis)ability for Butler's *The Parable Series*. The diagram should be seen as a section of an overall Venn-diagram of intersected circles. The two selected middle circles or nodal points, (dis)placement and religion, are suitable for the character Saeed in *Exit West* and the character Olamina in *The Parable Series*; the selected nodal points for Nadia are gender and (dis)placement. In reality, a character may have several nodal points according to chosen themes and character traits. For a more detailed explanation of the Venn-diagram made for the characters of Olamina, Saeed, and Nadia, see 5.1.4 *Intersectional Analysis – Olamina* and 5.2.4 *Intersectional Analysis – Saeed and Nadia*.

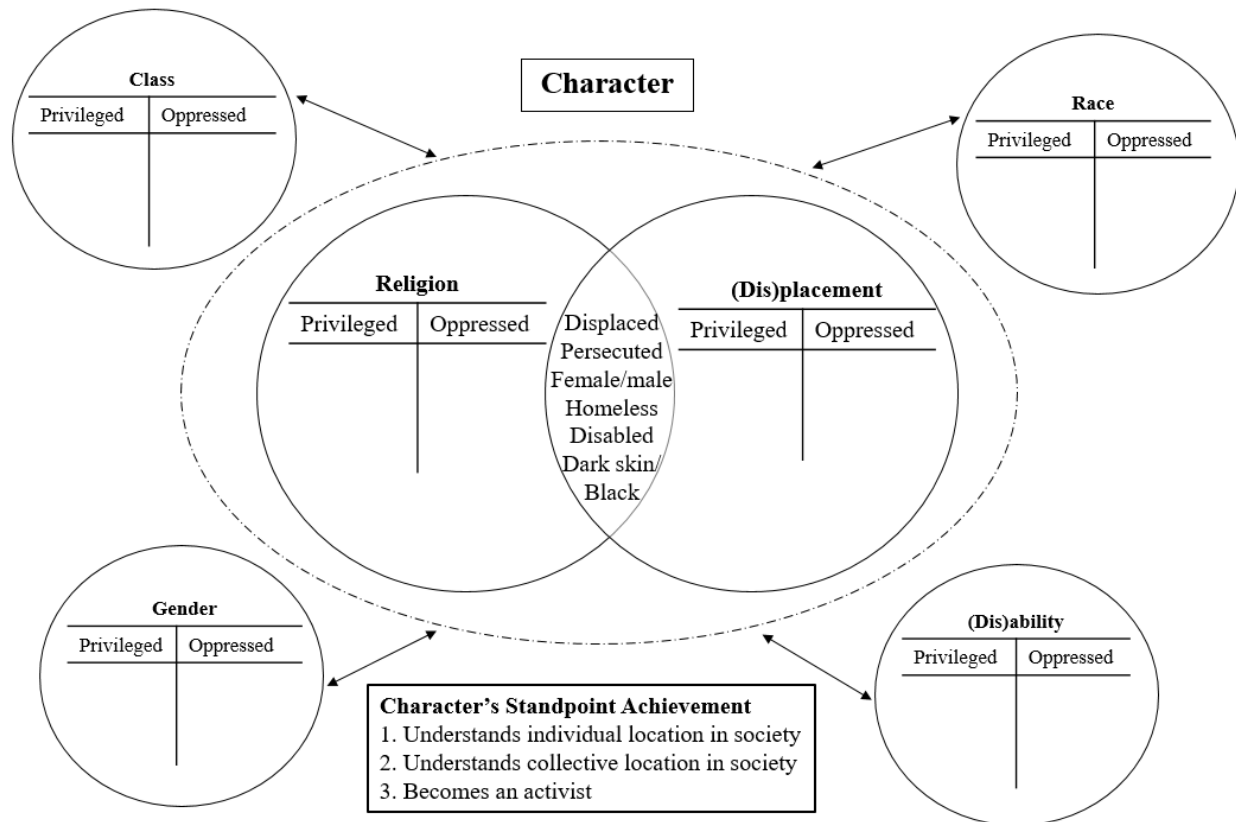


Figure 2. Intersectional Venn-diagram (Inspired by Krogh Hansen).

An intersectional reading considers the intersections of identities, representing the multiple crossings of oppression and privilege a character might face. The intersections of multiple oppressed identities often go unnoticed, as the identities are mostly studied separately; oppression may seem unsolvable if several intersections are overlooked. In the diagram, each circle has been assigned to an identity that provides the student with a topic to consider while reading. In fact, each circle represents a specific identity lens through which one might analyze the text. In the novels analyzed in this thesis, the oppression factors are assembled at the intersection of the two nodal point circles. The intersection of religion and (dis)placement results in persecution due to religious belief for the character, while he or she is simultaneously being displaced due to forced or voluntary migration. Thus to recapitulate, not only is the character displaced and religiously persecuted in this example, but the character may also be discriminated due to gender, class, race, and disability aspects in all or some of the groups to which the character belongs. Standpoint theory supports an intersectional reading in that the theory explains in which group a character has or has not achieved a standpoint towards the



surroundings. Most importantly, however, is to accentuate the privileged positions within each identity; the privileged positions may aid in combating each oppression, as well as assist in the achievement of a standpoint. Each circle is connected to another circle and again to all circles of the diagram to represent the intersections of identities. The student should consider how the circles are related to the story and what these links/intersections mean for the story. To summarize, the nodal points represent the identities that the reader or analyst feels are primary to the character and the chosen topic(s), and the privileged positions within each identity represent assets that the character carries throughout the oppression in each identity. These assets may aid in achieving a standpoint and in overcoming oppression.

The positive outcome of an intersectional analysis for a student should be the ability to generate specific and complex analyses, not just of characters, but also of themes and the various literary devices utilized by the author. It should give the student the ability to explore how critical concepts of lived experiences affect fictional representations, and how fictional representations may in turn inspire change. Furthermore, the strong student will understand that framing of stereotypes and sexist norms can be powerful enough to influence one's self-concept. Again, the theory of intersectionality and standpoint theory are asking questions such as 'Have I been oppressed?', 'Have I oppressed others?' (John 113-4), while concurrently demanding an investigation into the scholar or researcher's own position. In both the fictional world and in the real world, a character's self-deception reminds the readers to pose questions about the protagonist. Simultaneously, the readers are encouraged to ask themselves the exact same questions. An intersectional reading will help the students tease out and recognize oppressing issues that may be referred to indirectly in the text. Ultimately, an intersectional reading might help change binary worldviews.

### 3.7 Fiction as Social Commentary

Before commencing the intersectional analysis of Butler's *The Parable Series* and Hamid's *Exit West*, I would like to offer a broad note about fiction as data material for real-life explorations and social commentary, as well as explain how it connects with the theory of intersectionality.

We are continually involved in narratives of all kinds. They connect us socially and give our past and present consistency and linkage. This argument calls for a consideration of the narrative in its social context understood as relations between the narrative, the producer, and the

audience of the story, as well as in the context of rules for what constitutes a meaningful narrative (Ricoeur). This argument is based on the hermeneutic tradition, which represents the view that the social world is always interpreted and that interpretation is central to people's social existence (Crotty). In hermeneutic theory, we furthermore find "the prospect of gaining an understanding of the text that is deeper or goes further than the author's own understanding" (91). Generally, in narratives, explorations of cultural worlds and cultural issues are done with the assistance of many lenses – a multitude of theories and methods forming a myriad of interpretations. Therefore, a narrative analysis is, in fact, more concerned with exploration than with 'result' and demands a thorough methodology from the scholar, student, and researcher performing the analysis.

The narrative may be one of the most influential ways to convey human experiences. By intertwining fictional elements with a realistic foundation, fiction authors accomplish what more research-based theories and methods cannot – compassion, personalization, and exemplification. As readers, we get to know our character's hidden life, since key events and representations may be illustrated without questioning the realistic modus of an author's ideas (Krogh Hansen 144). When the characters in a novel change and grow, we, the readers, follow not only our protagonists' paths but also our own paths. This way, literature has an impact that is far more powerful than for instance a sociological approach. An author's narrative draws from a range of available cultural narratives; these narratives never exist in a void, but continuously draw on each other (Lawler 44). Since all social interaction happens in a field of power relations, narratives are social processes that may involve the exercise or exchange of power. Fiction mirrors, creates, and questions the meanings of race, gender, class, sexuality, and other dimensions of difference that society holds; concurrently, replicating the prejudices, views, and misperceptions of its time, its authors, and its readers. Seeing that intersectionality has both structural and representational qualities, the theory promotes critical thinking of the relations between multiple dimensions of difference, meaning-making, and cultural production.

Based on the theories and the reading protocol, let us now 'do an intersectional analysis.'

#### 4. The Texts and Their Authors

To consider Butler and Hamid's points of departure relating to oppression and privilege, their social, political, and historical contexts need to be explored. A student should trace not only the

shifting nature of power dynamics in society given different historical, cultural, and structural contexts but also the authors' own achievements of standpoints. Concurrently, the student may inadvertently obtain personal standpoints by examining Butler and Hamid's authorship and personal backgrounds.

#### 4.1 *The Parable Series* – Butler's Social Location

Butler was the first African American female to gain popularity and recognition as a significant science-fiction writer in a genre mostly dominated by white males. She was born in 1947 in the racially integrated community of Pasadena in California, allowing her to experience ethnic and cultural diversity in the midst of segregation. Her father, a shoeshine man, passed away when she was seven; thus, Butler was raised by her mother, who worked as a maid, and her grandmother in what she describes as a strict Baptist environment. She saw herself as a loner, suffered from shyness, and due to mild dyslexia, schoolwork was a torment except for science (Butler, *Sower* 335). Born in an era of conformity and segregation, Butler's dreams of becoming a writer seemed unimaginable, but she persevered in her desire to write, graduated college, and worked a series of temporary jobs that allowed her to write during the night (334). Noted science fiction writers Harlan Ellison and Samuel R. Delany became impressed with her writings at a workshop designed to mentor minority writers in the 1970s. She started publishing her work and won the Hugo Award in 1984. In 1995, she was the first science-fiction writer to be awarded the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation Fellowship.

Her work includes *The Patternist Series* (1976, 1977, 1978, 1984), depicting a transformation of humanity into three genetic groups. The best-selling novel *Kindred* (1979) portrays an African American woman who is transported from 1976s' Los Angeles to early nineteenth century Maryland. *Speech Sounds* (1983) is set in post-apocalyptic Los Angeles where a pandemic has caused most humans to lose their ability to read, speak, and write. *The Xenogenesis Trilogy* (1987, 1988, 1989) explores what happens when humans are forced to coexist with other species. Butler's last novel *Fledging* (2005) deals with vampires living in mutualistic symbiosis with humans. Her authorship also counts a number of critically acclaimed short stories.

*Parable of the Sower* was published in 1993, and the sequel *Parable of the Talents* followed in 1998. *Parable of the Sower* was nominated for the Nebula Award for Best Novel in

1994 and was the New York Times Notable Book of 1994. *Parable of the Talents* won the Nebula Award for Best Novel in 1999. Butler envisioned four more *Parable* novels, but after several attempts to begin the third *Parable* novel, she decided to stop the series claiming in interviews that research and writing of *The Parable Series* had overwhelmed and depressed her (Liming).

#### 4.1.1 Setting, Point of View, and Literary Devices in *The Parable Series*

Olamina is the first-person narrator of *Parable of the Sower*. She tells her story through her journals, an intimate and personal perspective of her family, her dreams for the future, and of her religion, Earthseed. The story is set in California in the post-apocalyptic gated community of Robledo, where Olamina's family along with several other families are sheltered from experiencing much of the outside world. If the community members do venture outside the community wall, they must go armed. They are under constant siege from thieves and drug addicts, who roam the streets outside. There are no prospects for young people within the wall, education is a luxury no one can afford, and there are no available jobs.

During the years 2024-2027, the United States is on the verge of collapse. State lines function more like international borders, although there is still a presidency. Gas is scarce, cars are rare, water is a luxury item, and people venture north towards the Canadian border to look for jobs and a better life, not knowing if 'prosperity in the north' is merely a myth. The only alternative is to move to the company town of Olivar. However, families who choose this option value security over freedom, since the company will control every aspect of their lives. Olamina refuses to go to Olivar. Instead, she migrates north to potential freedom, after her community is burned down and her family is killed by drug addicts. Many of the people who join her throughout the journey are escaping some form of virtual slavery, i.e., debt slavery or prostitution. Bankhole, who joins the group, a former doctor and the future husband of Olamina, has property in Northern California. The group decides to settle on his land and build the community Acorn, founded on Olamina's religion, Earthseed. Although the group faces the difficult task of attempting to survive, they have freed themselves from external oppression.

Life in the *Parable of the Sower* is dangerous, helping others might not be the smartest or safest thing to do, but someone must persevere. Butler's language and descriptions are brutal and honest, containing rape and murder. She writes with economy, while simultaneously taking care

that her readers know her characters well. Some of the characters are killed, others survive, but the reader knows enough about them to care, being cautious not to become too attached – the reader understands that other characters could suffer the same consequences. This way, the reader identifies with the first-person viewpoint; Olamina does not know whom to trust or whom to show emotional attachment to – sometimes Olamina succeeds other times her affability backfires. The world of *Parable of the Sower* feels real, complex, but lived in. Racism does not happen in obvious ways in the two novels; there is a perceived lack of black and white descriptions; gender is an issue, but it does not entirely control life, and often, political solutions fail miserably when confronted with reality in Butler's fictional world. Civilization deteriorates due to self-interest and a lack of foresight, not due to an invasion or a war.

*Parable of the Talents* is told in the voice of Olamina and Bankhole's daughter Larkin. Sections in the novel include Larkin as the first-person narrator, but Larkin also includes excerpts from both Olamina and Bankhole's journals, giving the readers contrasting perspectives on events that test Olamina, Larkin, and the rest of the Acorn community's faith and perseverance. Though Olamina is a sympathetic character, those closest to her do not see her dedication to Earthseed in a solely positive light; both Larkin and Bankhole question her religious ideas. Our characters find themselves in a war-torn continent with a far-right religious crusader as the president of the United States in the 2030-90s. Human life thrives nevertheless, as we follow the rise and fall of Earthseed's first communal home Acorn.

At the beginning of the book, Acorn prospers as a community; newcomers are found or rescued and join the community. Amongst them is Olamina's brother, Marcus, though he only stays for a short time before joining the far-right Christian supporters of the president, Reverend Andrew Steel Jarret. Jarret converts millions to his sect, Christian America, as his most fanatic supporters imprison, murder, and rape those labeled 'heathens.' The heathens' children are kidnapped and raised in Christian households. Simultaneously, Jarret leads a war against Canada and Alaska. After Christian fundamentalists capture Earthseed's followers and seize Acorn, the community changes into what resembles a concentration camp, in which Olamina's followers are treated like slaves. Due to an earthquake, Acorn's remaining survivors manage to defeat the fundamentalists and start new lives, separated into smaller groups to avoid suspicion. The search for the lost children begins, while Olamina gains stature as one of the most intense and

prominent religious leaders, spreading the word of Earthseed and its ultimate goal: guiding humankind to the stars with the prospect of interstellar travel.

Larkin's narration adds an extra level of interpretation. While Olamina writes from her point of view and naturally writes sympathetically about Earthseed, Larkin writes with bitterness and anger, blaming her mother for bringing about the abduction and her hardships. Larkin views Earthseed as an obsession that her mother values over her and never quite believes that Olamina has searched for her for years. As readers, we sympathize with them both. Olamina does not seem like a demagogue when she writes about her religion, and we understand Larkin's condemnation of her mother as the irrational resentment of a child who has felt abandoned all her life. However, Larkin does more than that; she gives voice to the skeptics, both the fictional ones and the real-world readers. She helps us question if Olamina's religion is sensible; thus, whether Butler's spiritual idea is conceivable as to cultivate a belonging and a solution to the problems of humankind. In Butler's world, Earthseed helps answer the question of how we are connected to everything and how the continuity of our lives connects to the big picture. The one constant in Earthseed is change, and this acceptance of transience allows Olamina and her followers to survive. Butler's narrative views migration as a solution to the problems that plague Olamina and her followers' existence. They make the changes necessary for them to survive by migrating to other worlds.

Hamid's *Exit West* is less about migrants and more about the consequence of migration. The novel deals with the adaptation process of migration rather than any prototypical expression of migrant identity. It takes place in a not too distant future that is utterly globalized and marked by inequality. Two worldviews are presented in *Exit West*, one that perceives migrants and refugees as dangerous threats to Western societies, and another that considers migrants and refugees emblems of multicultural coexistence and democracy. Similar to *The Parable Series*, *Exit West* is very much about change. It is about holding on to things that seemingly should not change, which according to Hamid is irrational, since human life in itself is transient, no place or state of mind is ever fixed.

#### 4.2 *Exit West* – Hamid's Social Location

Mohsin Hamid was born in 1971 in Lahore, Pakistan. He spent part of his childhood in the United States, from the age of three to the age of nine, and again at age eighteen when attending

college. He graduated from Princeton University, having studied under acclaimed writer Toni Morrison, and later from Harvard Law School, but found corporate law uninteresting and returned to writing. About his childhood move from Lahore to California, and back again, Hamid has said, “I liked my new existence, but I’d liked my old one too, and I imagined places where the two could come together” (“Once Upon a Life”). He now divides his time between London, New York, and Lahore and describes himself a mongrel (“Mohsin Hamid”). The real-life crisis in Syria that has displaced millions, combined with the nationalist movements that have been gaining ground in the West, has made his novel grimly prophetic. Hamid started writing *Exit West* before rising nativist sentiments brought on Brexit and before Trump barred refugees from entering the United States (Alter). He says of his stories that they help him find a future in which he can be comfortable, “Radical, politically engaged fiction is required. This fiction need not focus on dystopias or utopias, though some of it probably will ... This does not require setting fiction in the future. However, it does require a radical political engagement with the future” (“Mohsin Hamid”). With his books, Hamid is searching for new ways of belonging.

Hamid is known for focusing on urgent global and political concerns in his books. Hamid’s debut novel *Moth Smoke* (2000) follows a banker’s descent into crime and addiction at the time of the 1998 Pakistani nuclear tests. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007) deals with a Pakistani’s initial love affair with America, an American woman, and his eventual abandonment of both in a post-9/11 Islamophobic world. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* was adapted into a movie in 2012. *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* (2013) is a classic rags-to-riches story about a poor Asian boy who becomes a water industrialist in the city. Hamid’s novels have been featured on bestseller lists, shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize, he is the winner or finalist of more than twenty-five awards, and his books are translated into more than thirty-five languages.

#### 4.2.1 Setting, Point of View, and Literary Devices in *Exit West*

*Exit West* chronicles Nadia and Saeed’s journey from their unnamed war-torn country of birth to the Greek Island of Mykonos, through London, and to their final destination in the United States, Marin, near San Francisco. They reach these Western locations through magical doors. Hamid’s story is likewise speckled with short vignettes of other people’s migrations to the West and the locals’ feelings towards these migrants.

Nadia and Saeed meet in an evening class. Although Nadia at first refuses Saeed's flirtatious invitation, they eventually start seeing each other. Saeed lives with his parents, whereas Nadia lives on her own. Nadia explains to Saeed that she does not get along with her family due to her disrespect towards religion and her general rebellious attitude. When the curfew in their city is imposed, and Saeed's mother is killed by a stray bullet, they decide to leave the city and their home country. They urge Saeed's father to go with them, but he refuses. Nadia promises that she will take care of Saeed. A hired agent helps them flee to Mykonos through a special door. As they attempt to settle in a refugee camp, Nadia notices the first sign of bitterness in Saeed, Nadia has an easier time adjusting. Eventually, they use another door to go to London in an attempt to find better living conditions.

In London, they end up in a mansion inhabited by other migrants who have arrived from Guatemala, Nigeria, and Indonesia. Nadia integrates with ease, joining the Nigerian elder council, whereas Saeed becomes more remote and seeks a community of his own people. Tensions are rising between the migrants and the nativists who want to reclaim London and a "Britain for Britain" (*Exit West* 135). In the end, the nativists accept the need to coexist with the migrants. Nadia and Saeed get jobs at a construction site outside London, working long hours while they grow increasingly distant. Trying to repair their relationship, Nadia suggests that they travel to yet another country through another door. This time, they end up in Marin, a shantytown, near San Francisco. Nadia starts working at a food co-operative, while Saeed gets involved in a religious organization led by an African American preacher and his daughter. Saeed falls in love with the daughter, Nadia moves out and starts seeing the co-operative's female cook. In the last chapter, Saeed has moved back to their old city, and Nadia has returned for the first time. They meet in a café and somewhat rekindle their friendship both thinking what could have happened had they done things differently. Saeed promises that he will take Nadia to Chile one day, not knowing if that will ever happen.

Saeed and Nadia are the protagonists in Hamid's story. The third-person omniscient narrator has the most significant focus on Nadia and Saeed's perspectives, although the narrator also knows the fates of other characters, for instance, Saeed's father. The narrator is likewise familiar with the fates of other migrants who use the doors to travel, but these presentations are more detached and factual in their descriptions. Saeed and Nadia are the only characters that Hamid names in the novel; this emphasizes their status as protagonists while it also stresses the



fact that they are deeply implicated in each other's lives. Everyone else exists in relation to our protagonists or someone else such as 'the preacher's daughter' or 'the neighbor,' or to occupational belongings such as 'the cook' or 'the maid.' The psychedelic mushrooms and the weed that Nadia and Saeed use are symbols of their desire to find solace in their war-torn city; their happiest moments are when they smoke joints together late at night – a nostalgic symbol of their relationship and close connection. Saeed is described as an "independent-minded, grown man, unmarried, with a decent post and a good education" (*Exit West* 10). He is handsome, and when Nadia first meets him, he is presented as lighthearted and slightly ironic. When the war worsens, he is especially protective of Nadia, but also of his parents. Saeed wants to marry Nadia and refuses to have sex with her until they are. Saeed changes by the experience of exile, he has regrets about leaving his father behind, and he feels bitterness towards his new makeshift existence. Nadia is more adaptive and adventurous, but her resilience changes the dynamics of their relationship, which begins to decline due to their enforced closeness, the dependency on each other, and their uncertain existence – the worries of finding food, shelter, and work every day.

Nadia and Saeed's city, which is unnamed in the text, undergoes several changes. It was once a romantic place, where Saeed's parents met, but now it is caught in the crossfire between militants and the government sending its inhabitants fleeing. The city has become a dangerous and increasingly restrictive place; executions are frequent, and food and money are scarce. However, in the final chapter, it is suggested that the city somehow survives, "it was not a heaven but it was not hell, and it was familiar but also unfamiliar" (*Exit West* 229). Upon return, home is never quite the same.

Hamid writes in a poetic, fairytale-like style with lengthy and twisting sentences. His style denotes oral storytelling, but it also has a mystical flair to it; at times, the language is somewhat honest and brutal; other times, it is passionate and loving. In many ways, Hamid's style is the language of daydreams; desires, terrors, and dreams mixed with magic. It resembles travel literature as well, conveying what it means to leave home and what it means to search for a new place of belonging. Returning home, one is never quite the same.

### 4.3 Science Fiction, Afrofuturism, and Magic Realism as Social Commentary

Science fiction and magical realism are categories representing genres with considerable overlap. Generally, magic realism is regarded as a sub-genre of fantasy, although it may contain elements of science fiction. There is some disagreement amongst scholars and publishers as to the definitions of each genre. As Butler has suggested, the science fiction genre is wide open, claiming that she has never had to delimit herself, “There doesn’t seem to be any aspect of humanity or the universe around us that I can’t explore ... Good stories are good stories, no matter how they’re categorized” (*Sower* 335; *Talents* 417).

*The Parable Series* is science fiction, genre-defined as speculative fiction dealing with imaginative concepts, such as space travel and futuristic science and technology. In many ways, *The Parable Series* also resembles post-apocalyptic novels, another sub-genre of science fiction, although unlike other books in this genre, it portrays a world torn apart not by one major incident, such as zombies, pandemic, or nuclear war, but by many human-made incidents converging at once. However, Butler’s authorship may also connect with the genre of Afrofuturism, a term that was coined by author and cultural critic Mark Dery in 1993 (Barr xviii). Afrofuturism describes a literary and cultural treatment of the African diaspora incorporating conventions from science fiction, fantasy, and magic realism seen from a black cultural perspective and it is understood not as a sub-genre of science fiction, but as a genre that interconnects with science fiction. Butler’s authorship brings fantastic black diasporic narrative elements to the tenets of realism adding elements of allegory, folktale, and romance (Barr ix-x). Read through the lens of Afrofuturism, Butler attacks gender politics and social institutions, speaking to those who lack power.

In general, the science fiction genre may give voice to African Americans who

have been cut off from their African ancestry by the scythe of slavery and from an American heritage by being excluded from history. For us, science fiction offers an alternative where that which deviates from the norm is the norm. Science fiction allows history to be rewritten or ignored. Science fiction promises a future full of possibility, alternative lives and even revenge. (Mosley 202)

One might argue that the science fiction genre as such has not given much room to African Americans and ethnic minorities. Rather, the genre of science fiction is probably not the genre, scholars and critics of African American literature turn to, to see how African American authors shape their visions of a better future for African Americans and ethnic minorities in general (Govan 43). However, Butler's novels indicate that African Americans must be actively engaged in creating a future for everyone. She forces the reader to question ideas about gender, class, and race in society in general and in the African American community in particular. The combination of utopia and dystopia amplifies the inequalities and injustices that exist in society, and it gives the freedom of creating supernatural intelligent black female characters, such as Olamina, in an (in)credible black diasporic storyline.

Identifying the genre of *Exit West* is somewhat more difficult, and Hamid is indeed known for writing genre-blurring novels. The characters in *Exit West* jump through time and space with no detailed descriptions of the passages. The readers only hear about the arrival and the characters' reactions after having been transplanted to a new location through magical doors. The doors in the novel tear down the rigid fences and borders built to protect the native from the foreigner, but the doors do not quite liberate the characters. Rather, the doors liberate the author in that he does not have to use book pages to explain the actual escape and transport. Hamid covers social realism, eyewitness reportage, and parable, all captured in elements of magical realism. *Exit West* gives associations to children's storytelling, such as Lewis' *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*; a normal door "could become a special door, and it could happen without warning, to any door at all" (Hamid, *Exit West* 72).

Magic realism primarily expresses a realistic view of the world while adding magical elements, "when a highly detailed, realistic setting is invaded by something too strange to believe" (Strecher 267). Originating in Latin America, it brings fables, myths, and folktales into a contemporary social relevance encompassing a modern political reality and a "deliberate withholding of information and explanations about the disconcerting fictitious world" (Chanady 16), and then the story continues as if nothing out of the ordinary took place. Science fiction differs from magic realism "in that its impossible events are based on rational-scientific norms of logic" (Hegerfeldt 54), providing a forecast of our world explained by developments in science. In magic realism, the stories take place in a world that resembles our own with an added magical element that cannot be explained by conventions of science.

With multiple realities and references to the reader's world, both science fiction and magic realism are excellent genres for drawing attention to social or political criticism. The 'alternative world' in both genres works to correct established viewpoints in society. Unfortunately, ideals, dreams, and sense of justice are not always satisfied in the real world, and this is where these genres offer hope and consolation. The genres insist that the righteous will prevail though not without sacrifice and loss. Both genres may help us 'repair' reality in drawing attention to social and political injustice.

##### 5. Intersectional Analysis – Themes and Sub-themes

To organize the intersectional analyses of *The Parable Series* and *Exit West*, I commence with the last item on the analysis list from 3.6 *Creating a Reading Protocol for Teaching Intersectionality*: I select my overarching theme/research topic and my sub-themes. In *The Parable Series* and *Exit West*, I find binary themes of alienation and transcendence, savagery and spirituality, slavery and freedom, as well as disunion and community. I have selected the following sub-themes under class, race, and gender intersections: dystopia, spirituality, and community. I have also added the three identity categories of religion (religious persecution) and (dis)placement (xenophobia) for both *The Parable Series* and *Exit West*, and (dis)ability (ableism) for *The Parable Series*, in an effort to create an even more precise investigation of intersecting factors of privilege and oppression.

Again, my overarching theme is an investigation of individuals' resourcefulness in spite of, and because of, belonging. I intend to answer the following questions from my thesis statement: How do the protagonists negotiate their transcultural identities, seeing that they inhabit different spaces at different times in terms of intersections of race, class, gender, (dis)placement, religion, and (dis)ability? Under the sub-theme of dystopia, I explore how Butler and Hamid convey class, race, and gender issues in a world characterized by dehumanization, totalitarianism, and environmental disasters. Under the sub-theme of spirituality, I aim to study what role spirituality plays for the survival of the protagonists, in particular, the belief in a supernatural realm and the quest for new standpoints in personal and collective growth. Under the sub-theme of community, I intend to investigate whether our protagonists find new ways of belonging and if so, what they are and whether they suffice. Lastly, I wish to discuss the two

authors' social commentary, their intents and ideas for reform, and the parallels to our current society. We begin with Butler's *The Parable Series*.

### 5.1 *The Parable Series*

As preparation for *The Parable Series*, Butler researched global warming and the ways it is likely to change the planet. She looked at drug problems, the growing gap between rich and poor, and the willingness to build prisons but not schools. She foresaw "the United States becoming, slowly, through the combined effects of lack of foresight and short-term unenlightened self-interest, a third world country" (Butler, *Sower* 337). Butler looks beyond her particular historical moment, making the unthinkable thinkable, while she contemplates how to change direction.

#### 5.1.1 Gender, Race, and Class – Dystopia

In Butler's dystopian world, ethnic minorities, women, the poor, the mentally and physically disabled, and LGBT individuals are most victimized by ecological disaster and war. Economic downturns make vulnerable individuals even more vulnerable (Lötter 66), and troubled societies tend to backtrack to a nostalgic imagined past of faith and stability (Gideon). Butler highlights the disheartening connection between social injustice, environmental disasters, and warfare by furthermore stressing the fact that present-day society already victimizes minorities. Racist, sexist, classist, and xenophobic ideologies are propagated and gain prominence throughout the two novels as people search for scapegoats and excuses for behavior in a competition for necessities and survival. Butler's literary world is constructed after societal tendencies present in our contemporary society; she connects a present society with an imagined future. However, she does not merely state societal facts, she also discusses the root causes through discourses about community, spirituality, and empathy, and she gives suggestions as to how to change direction. Through *Earthseed*, she generates tools and creates a utopian vision for the future. The future in *The Parable Series* is alarming, albeit plausible, but Butler also builds hope in her presentations of 'critical utopias' based on change: "the critical utopias, then, suggest ... a shift from simple negation to a negation with alternatives" (Moylan 237). In Butler's novels, utopian desires grow from anguish and chaos.

In *The Parable Series*, Butler describes a dystopian society where the standard of living among the lower and middle classes is generally poorer and much more perilous than in our

existing society to accentuate the decay of society. Humankind is divided into compulsory communities, castes – creating in- and out groups,

Indenturing indigents, young and old, is much in fashion now. The Thirteenth and the Fourteenth Amendments – the ones abolishing slavery and guaranteeing citizenship rights – still exist, but they've been so weakened by custom, by Congress and the various state legislatures, and by recent Supreme court decisions that they don't much matter.

Indenturing indigents is supposed to keep them employed, teach them a trade, feed them, house them, and keep them out of trouble. In fact, it's just one more way of getting people to work for nothing or almost nothing. Little girls are valued because they can be used in so many ways, and they can be coerced into being quick, docile, disposable labor. (Butler, *Talents* 40)

In *Parable of the Sower*, Olamina is aware of her class privilege inside the community wall. Other people live in neighborhoods “so poor that their walls were made up of unmortared rocks, chunks of concrete, and trash” (Butler, *Sower* 10). Others live in residential areas where “A lot of the houses were trashed – burned, vandalized, infested with drunks or druggies or squatted-in by homeless families with their filthy, gaunt, half-naked children” (10). These people are dangerous in terms of assaults and theft in Olamina's community. Through her hyperempathy, Olamina understands their behavior though, “They're desperate or crazy or both. That's enough to make anyone dangerous” (10).

While being aware of the difficulties of the poor, Olamina is also conscious of those who are far more privileged than she is. Wealthy people live in their mansions behind the highest walls. Even though their standard of living may have gone down too, due to society's current state, they maintain their privilege taking advantage of the poor. This is supported by the government who suspends “‘overly restrictive' minimum wage, environmental, and worker protection laws for those employers willing to take on homeless employees and provide them with training and adequate room and board” (Butler, *Sower* 27). The divide between the wealthy and the poor is caused by a biased power and privilege distribution. In *Parable of the Talents*, Olamina and her followers become slaves condoned by the country's administration as they are forced to embrace the religion of Christian America. Olamina advises her followers to endure the

violent attacks of the Crusaders, hoping that they seem compliant while they continue to cultivate Earthseed. The community members who revolt are hung. The violence in society extorts victim and perpetrator alike; the struggle for power, the exertion of it, and the lack of it become crucial for life or death.

Another aspect of power exchange is Butler's notions of gender. As a young girl, Olamina struggles with the impact of her gender. Like her brothers, she is expected to learn how to handle guns to protect the community. However, in a world gone mad, her status as a woman alone makes her vulnerable. She realizes though that she is more fortunate than many other women, seeing the oppression they face, "Some middle class men prove they're men by having a lot of wives in temporary or permanent relationships. Some upper class men prove they're men by having one wife and a lot of beautiful, disposable young servant girls. Nasty" (Butler, *Sower* 36). In particular, Olamina refers to the Moss family in the Robledo community. Richard Moss holds several wives, which to Olamina is sex slavery; additionally, he has created his own religion inspired by The Old Testament and West African religious practices. Moss claims that God wants, "men to be patriarchs, rulers and protectors of women, and fathers of as many children as possible ... he can afford to pick up beautiful, young homeless women and live with them in polygamous relationships" (36). Outside the community wall, the future looks even more desolate for a woman; forced prostitution, rape, or slaughter, although this is a threat that also faces children and men alike. Butler describes several men and children of both sexes being used as sex slaves.

In *Parable of the Talents*, Olamina dresses as a man to survive. She is described as a masculine woman and disguises as a man because she is "big enough and androgynous looking to get away with it" (Butler, *Talents* 337). Olamina uses gender passing as a successful survival mechanism for a black woman traveling alone on dangerous roads. The constant fear of women being raped describes the harmful power dynamics between men and women and the apparent vulnerability of women. Olamina furthermore uses her gender passing to attract Nia's attention to Earthseed. Nia, a former teacher, lives a lonely life on a property with a house that Olamina wants to use as a sanctuary for homeless, abandoned, and formerly abducted children. Thus, Olamina stimulates Nia's sexual attraction to her by advertising not only her own body, but she also creates a spiritual seduction to promote Earthseed. In one role, she is oppressed; in the other, she uses her acquired privilege to gain more power.

Through *Olamina*, Butler explores the idea of controlling one's own destiny, showing the ambition and autonomy of women in general. *Olamina* is presented as female, African American, healer, savior, nurturer, victim, settler, mother, rebel, and liberator – a host of identities, in which she is oppressed in some and privileged in others. She eventually becomes the female founder of a religion, a rare accomplishment. The dystopian society that Butler portrays retains gender roles. She inadvertently criticizes a society that expects women to maintain feminine traits and men to be hypermasculine. This becomes extremely difficult when communities rupture and both men and women have to survive outside the protective walls. *Olamina* realizes that men must have a particularly hard time sharing other people's pain; that a man, who is a sharer and suffers from hyperempathy, is shamed especially for showing emotion (Butler, *Sower* 324). Most of Butler's characters, male or female, are exposed to daily power struggles as they try to survive and prosper in society. Through *Olamina*, Butler questions as well as redefines gender roles; thus, Butler challenges society's gender expectations.

Since *Olamina*'s community is multiracial, she knows that its members encounter the social and political crisis and the environmental disaster unequally. For a community to work together and survive, this inequality is explained as something insignificant in the beginning, "The Garfields and the Balters are white, and the rest of us are black. That can be dangerous these days. On the street, people are expected to fear and hate everyone but their own kind, but with all of us armed and watchful, people stared, but they let us alone" (Butler, *Sower* 36). Later on, in connection with the corporate community of *Olivar* offering jobs to the residents of *Olamina*'s community, it becomes apparent that *Olivar* prefers white families. *Olamina*'s father has this comment, "I doubt that *Olivar* is looking for families of blacks and Hispanics, anyway ... The Balters or the Garfields or even some of the Dunns might get in, but I don't think we would" (122). The community is constantly at risk of being pulled apart by racial divisions. *Olamina* knows that she is at greater physical risk in her own community than in the protected community of *Olivar*, but she is also aware of the fact that her family will become debt slaves in *Olivar*. However, Butler offers plenty of hope for a multicultural society in *Parable of the Talents*; relating to race in *Acorn*, she says, "We're you name it: Black, White, Latino, Asian, and any mixture at all – the kind of thing you'd expect to find in a city. The kids we've adopted and the ones who have been born to us think of all the mixing and matching as normal. Imagine that" (*Talents* 41).



An overall matrix of oppression and privilege in *The Parable Series*, concerning class, gender, race, (dis)ability, religion, and (dis)placement based on the textual analysis just performed, could look like this:

<b>Social Identity Categories</b>	<b>Privileged Social Groups</b>	<b>Border Social Groups</b>	<b>Targeted Social Groups</b>	<b>Ism</b>
<b>Class</b>	Upper class: wealthy people living within walls  Christian America	Middle class: communities living within walls	Lower class (living outside walls): Poor Homeless/displaced Disabled Slaves (debt & sex)	Classism
<b>Gender</b>	Males	Females Males	Females Males Homosexuals	Sexism
<b>Race</b>	Whites	Bi-racial people Latinos Asians Blacks	Bi-racial people Latinos Asians Blacks	Racism
<b>(Dis)ability</b>	Abled-bodied individuals	Individuals with temporary disabilities (hyperempathy)	Disabled individuals (hyperempathy)	Ableism
<b>Religion</b>	Individuals believing in religion endorsed by the state (Christian America)		Individuals believing in other religions (Earthseed)  Atheists	Religious persecution
<b>(Dis)placement</b>	Nativists Christian America	Migrants Nativists	Migrants	Xenophobia includes: Classism Sexism Racism Ableism Religious persecution

Figure 3. Matrix of Oppression and Privilege in *The Parable Series* (Based on Adams et al., appendix 3C).

Notice that the targeted social groups, the homeless, the displaced, the poor, the disabled, people of color, women, individuals challenging gender and sexual norms, and the slaves are all exposed to classism, sexism, xenophobia, and racism in Butler's dystopian world. The Christian America wealthy upper class, especially the white males, are privileged and powerful. It is clear then that race, gender, class, (dis)ability, religion, and (dis)placement play a crucial role in whether a person is privileged or oppressed in Butler's dystopian world. It is also clear that these identities intersect and that in specific groups, poor white males are privileged compared to poor white females, while literate African American females are privileged compared to white illiterate males. For more on this, see chapter 5.1.4 *Intersectional Analysis – Olamina* and chapter 6. *Comprehensive Intersectional Discussion of Exit West and The Parable Series*.

### 5.1.2 Gender, Race, and Class – Spirituality

In *Parable of the Talents*, Butler writes about militant Christian fundamentalism ascended from dystopian social and political chaos. She presents a critique of the malicious intersectionality of religious intolerance and the various forms of power, oppression, and domination that follow in its path. Again, we see that poor people of color, women, the mentally and physically disabled, and individuals challenging gender and sexual norms are being hunted and sacrificed. In discussing dystopia, we saw that environmental disaster and war aggravate social injustice; religious fundamentalism likewise leads to tendencies of scapegoating and further injustice.

Throughout the two novels, Butler discusses the role of religion in modern society. In *Parable of the Sower*, Olamina questions her father's Baptist beliefs. In *Parable of the Talents*, she questions Christian America's belief system. She does not understand how a god that cares about humankind allows destruction, as Bankhole notes, "Olamina believes in a god that does not in the least love her" (Butler, *Talents* 46). Olamina is disgusted by how people personify a god; she instead advocates a way of interacting with a god that emphasizes active engagement. Olamina creates a tool that can work in a communal space accommodating of different forms of human identities and their beliefs. The tool is Earthseed, inspired by religion, philosophy, and science.

The titles of the two novels are allusions to two parables told by Jesus with the same titles. Biblical parables are designed to be instructional, as are Butler's two novels. The biblical Parable of the Sower is an allegory for spreading God's word; only a few will hear and

understand in the beginning, but the ‘harvest’ from it will be all-important. Butler alludes to the fact that it takes time and effort to change contemporary political and social policies that are destructive, but the word of ‘change’ must be spread. The biblical Parable of the Talents suggests that human beings should use their talents, intelligence, creativity, and so forth, to work for the benefits of the community as well as humanity in general, rather than only to benefit and save oneself. Olamina starts a new religion, just as Jesus did. At first, Olamina’s surroundings are extremely skeptical and dismiss her ideas, due to her young age and to general fear. The first seeds that Olamina spreads never take root. When Olamina speaks about her new religion outside the community walls, her surroundings begin to take her seriously, and she succeeds in creating a community based on Earthseed’s principles.

The tenets of Earthseed arise from a somewhat thought-provoking collaboration between scientific and religious imaginations, as Butler herself describes the result of several efforts and interests coming together (*Sower* 335). By asking herself what the most potent force in the universe is, the one thing that cannot be still, she came up with ‘change’ inspired by Buddhism and existentialism, while the inspiration to the verses comes from Taoism (336). Olamina says that change is the one inescapable truth, and that change is the clay of people’s lives (25). Humankind must learn to shape change and respect it to live productive lives. Humankind must learn, teach, adapt, and grow (295), privileging rational thought. Earthseed’s longtime goal is not Paradise, but the migration of humankind into outer space by interstellar space travel, “The destiny of Earthseed is to take root among the stars” (Butler, *Talents* 77), concerned with how humanity survives once Earth has exhausted its potential. Before Olamina dies, she sees Earthseed’s destiny fulfilled as the first group of her followers leaves to colonize the moon. Earthseed goes beyond the definitions of religion and philosophy by combining spirituality with social issues (Melzer 6). Change needs to be grasped as a tool of empowerment.

As stated, Earthseed is inspired by religions in general, but perhaps, in particular, the spirituality that was powerful in the lives of Black slaves; “A sociopsychological force ... that revolved around the presence of spiritual forces as the guiding elements of life and the universe. Religion permeated all areas of existence; there was no distinction between the sacred and the secular” (White and Cones 30). By combining the spirituality of black slave religion with the ‘here and now’, Butler probes the potential of creating modern systems of religion and communities that may “sustain individuals across radical lines of difference” (McCormack 18).

Not only does *The Parable Series* carry on “the long African American tradition that, while acknowledging the life-affirming function of religion as a survival technique” (Valkeakari 158), it also stresses female and African American agency. While the religion began as fiction, Earthseed has inspired several real-world movements,

More and more have turned to Earthseed as a way to find a sense of purpose and safety. These people are building intentional communities modelled after Acorn, the first such community in *Parable of the Sower*. These real-life communities are rooted in concepts of shared work, respect and love of children, social-justice frameworks, disability and healing justice, and a way of living in harmony with nature. They root their work in kindness, drawing again on *Earthseed: The Books of the Living*, in which Butler states, ‘Kindness eases Change.’ They meet regularly with each other, sharing ideas, creativity and love. (Halsted)

*The Parable Series* is a reflection of not only Olamina’s but also of Butler’s theological reflections (Ware 115). Butler herself questioned whether a faceless god could comfort during personal and global chaos. Olamina asserts that in the end, the real test of a religion is whether the support it offers conforms to the nature of the universe. An attempt at this is Earthseed’s gatherings, Olamina explains them as discussions, “They’re problem-solving sessions, they’re times of planning, healing, learning, creating times of focusing, and reshaping ourselves” (Butler, *Talents* 66). These gatherings function primarily as a spiritual and emotional catharsis for the community. For Butler, religion is both an answer and a problem. In many ways, Earthseed is not a comforting belief system; instead, Earthseed calls for active involvement as seen practiced in the real-life Earthseed communities. The common goal for these communities is rooted in shared work and respect for both nature and fellow humans.

Olamina is not perfect; she is not a prophet like her father or her brother Marcus. Butler illustrates how a person working for the greater good may not be perfect by her own philosophy, a three-dimensional perspective that reflects the multifaceted themes of the novels. Olamina is trying hard to be her father’s daughter in *Parable of the Sower*. She feels she is living a lie as she does not believe in her father’s religion, but she still attempts to honor his expectations (Butler, *Sower* 3). For Olamina, teaching is more important than preaching; in teaching one may

question, in preaching one cannot. Marcus chooses his religion, Christian America, because it gives him a sense of power and a means of making Earth a better place by letting the church transition into politics. Marcus finds his individual standpoint, a shared standpoint with the group of Christian America, and an activist standpoint in that he attempts to make a difference. Olamina questions if it is for the right reasons, but just like his sister, Marcus is not perfect. Olamina is not the typical charismatic male preacher, rather a woman attacking the patriarchal notions of religion. She highlights the impracticalities in traditional religion; Earthseed is not bound to a church or a preacher but may be carried within throughout daily trials as an instrumental orientation. Earthseed was founded on the belief that the safety of Olamina's neighborhood would disappear. She prepares for the destruction by packing a backpack with supplies (80), the same way she equips her followers with the means to survive through Earthseed.

Religion has always been immersed in migration, identity, and the cultures of diasporic communities. Many religions have spread because a few committed migrants take their cultural practices with them. Earthseed reclaims and re-signifies African diasporic religious and cultural traditions as a means of liberation and innovation. If a god is change, then humankind and mainly African American women can change themselves, their community, and life circumstances in general.

### 5.1.3 Gender, Race, and Class – Community

Olamina and her followers view migration as a solution to their threatened existence. Migrating north holds promises such as “heading north where water isn't such a problem and food is cheaper” (Butler, *Sower* 82). Olamina's father does not seem optimistic, “No ... There are no jobs up there. Newcomers work for food if they work at all. Experience doesn't matter. Education doesn't matter. There are just too many desperate people [who] work their lives away for a sack of beans and they live on the streets” (82). Whether Olamina is right or whether her father's point is valid, ‘north’ is a metaphor for a sanctuary that will alleviate some of the problems that Olamina and her followers have. ‘North’ is a spatial metaphor elucidating that life simply has to be better ‘there’, since it certainly cannot be any worse than ‘here.’ A migration north then describes a physical movement, but it is also allegorical since it is associated with imagined improved socio-economic conditions and no racial discrimination. It sends parallels to the Great

Migration that relocated more than six million African Americans out of the rural Southern United States to the urban Northeast, Midwest, and West in the 1910s to 1970s (“Great Migration”). Moreover, as we shall see, it relates especially to the discussion of migration and the refugee situation in Hamid’s novel.

As argued in the previous chapter, it is difficult for people of the diaspora to keep their religious identity after being transplanted. In *The Parable Series*, Butler discusses how ‘old’ religions do not meet the standards and needs of an even further displaced population in a fluctuating and pluralistic society set in the near future. Since religious identity may become something ambiguous, then identity is to be found in some other form of unity. Thus, a community becomes immensely important. Unity with a common goal is the only way to survive in a hostile world, but it also presents challenges. Olamina’s old neighborhood was divided by petty disagreements and arguments, as she explains it, “All too often in my old neighborhood in Robledo, there was no relationship at all” (Butler, *Talents* 66). It took a powerful personality such as that of her father to make people come together and see the value in acting as a community. With Acorn, Olamina seeks to build a community according to the truths of Earthseed. She recognizes that life is change, and she wants people to adapt themselves to this truth. The individuals who join her are struggling but honest people, longing for the safety and the comfort of a community. Through Earthseed, Olamina establishes a strong community by encouraging dialog and mutual commitment. She likewise admits that a community is a vulnerable entity, “We came home and wrapped our community wall around us and huddled in our illusions of security” (Butler, *Sower* 133), and that safety and belonging are volatile concepts.

Olamina’s success in communal conflicts is possible because she recognizes that survival, progress, and prosperity are only probable goals if the community collaborates towards these goals. The characters find physical security as well as belonging by the end of *Parable of the Sower*, building the gated community of Acorn. *Parable of the Talents* opens with a world that is only slightly off, but Larkin’s diary entries warn the readers that the calm will not last. Butler’s characters desire control over the conditions under which they live, a control that is impalpable and is lost and gained in *Parable of the Sower* – and lost and gained again in *Parable of the Talents*. This explains how standpoints may be gained, lost, and then gained again on both the first and second level of standpoint achievement. Olamina’s followers find their belonging,

albeit for shorter periods at a time. While the first level covers an awareness, the second level involves the collective achievement of a standpoint or control and covers an awareness of how one is oppressed and privileged. Olamina's community is aware of and questions the theocratic rule of the government and the intentions of those in power. Olamina sees that her world is shifting away from what it has been, but she does not dream of a world where the police come when called or where people have access to running water. One may shape the explanatory powers of life, but one might not be able to shape the conditions of life, they are just there. Olamina and Acorn's community members see the world for what it is, change accordingly, and look for new belongings. In transit, Olamina and many of her followers reach the third level of standpoint achievement as they become activists while working together to build a new world.

Olamina demands that her new community, Acorn, looks towards the future and the stars for safety and belonging. In her childhood home of Robledo, Olamina desperately tries to make her surroundings understand that familiar spaces of home and community cannot offer refuge anymore. For future social and political transformations to materialize, Robledo's "dying, denying, backward-looking people" (Butler, *Sower* 25) need to believe in something else than the naïve idea that everything eventually will return to what once was. The community has to change. In a diaspora space, or a frail community such as Acorn, which is "not an organic community unified by collective memory, ethnicity, shared cultural heritage, or attachment to a place" (Dubey 6), constant efforts of mediation and translation are essential. Dubey asserts that the "process of finding unity in diversity is necessarily risky and difficult, requiring the ability to interpret unfamiliar codes and the alert balancing of suspicion and trust typical of ... social interactions" (6-7). In Acorn, decisions are made by deliberation and dialog during gatherings rather than looking towards a mutual past and traditions for advice, something that does not exist for Acorn's members and does not exist for diasporic communities in general. The actual text of *Earthseed*, Olamina's handwritten notebook, is read and discussed during these gatherings, and communal issues dealing with practical matters are debated; these gatherings bind the community together and give the community purpose in the diaspora space.

*Earthseed*'s mantra 'god is change' comments on the fact that we cannot keep everything the same. We must acknowledge that the world is constantly changing, hinting towards a globalized world forever in the making. However, Butler cautions us that we must probe globalization and its impact, seeing that it opens new horizons for an increasing number of

people while it likewise generates worsened prejudice, inequality, and alienation amongst people and nations. Migration is a growing real-world issue presently, as we shall see in the analysis of Hamid's *Exit West*. Butler insists that control only exists in a static world so that worlds may be traversed in limited spaces, from community to community, and from group to group. Diasporas are not merely geographical and cultural; they are also bodily, articulating multiple forms of alienation and approximation. The only thing that is certain in Olamina's community is that it lacks permanence and stability. Therefore old conceptions of community, and of society in general, are traded in for a progressive idea of change. Is change then a problem or a solution for a community that seeks stability and security? As Nilges explains,

By turning change into God, [Olamina] regressively transforms change into a religion, which, of course, makes change into as permanent a structure as one can imagine: a religion as a strong set of rules that have ultimate truthvalue for the believer, a system of explaining and mapping one's environment with the ability to radically simplify and explain all complexities of an increasingly unmappable world. (1338)

By embracing change, the community attempts to reduce the complexity of society by transforming change into simplicity and stability, the one thing that Olamina is certain does not subsist. Therefore, they do not succeed in achieving stability as Acorn is taken over by the Christian Crusaders. Conversely, they are ready to re-build new communities should the old ones fail.

The novels as such reject a locale or an actual organic notion of community, "reaching instead for more complex ways of representing communities that are not co-extensive with places or with discrete cultural traditions" (Dubey 2), illustrative of Brah's diaspora space as a place forever in the making. Instead of looking towards the often idealized past, Butler looks towards the future and new forms of belonging and community living. She presents a modest agricultural society upholding primitive social orders as alternatives to contemporary capitalist societies. However, Butler also describes a thriving Acorn that wants to grow more prominent and more prosperous, well knowing that this kind of evolution started the perils of humankind. Olamina and her community members occupy a diaspora space in which home means a safe place as well as a place of ambiguity. Nevertheless, Butler recognizes that social transformation



requires an imagined elsewhere to inspire and focus attention towards; therefore, Olamina's religion entails mobility across space, quite literally, as an indispensable and empowering condition (5). A community is not tied in with a particular place then, but with its members.

#### 5.1.4 Intersectional Analysis – Olamina

Butler has carefully chosen an African American young woman as her protagonist. Olamina's race and gender force her to experience greater adversity; in that respect, one could infer that she is more able to relate to others who are oppressed. Both Butler and Olamina come from minority backgrounds; they are African American females fighting poverty. They are suppressed by intersecting constraints of racism, gender, and class, besides possibly added intersections of (dis)placement, religion, for Olamina also (dis)ability, which influence their identities. Olamina realizes that the result of social injustice, based on race, class, and gender oppression, is a return to slavery. Slavery this time around will not be limited to those with black skin color; slavery will adhere to everyone who does not hold power to be a slaver. The validation for slavery is no longer racial supremacy, but debt and sex slavery.

Furthermore, Butler's utopian protagonist has a psychological disorder caused by her mother's drug abuse. Hyperempathy is by Olamina explained as "I feel what I see others feeling or what I believe they feel. Big shit ... I get a lot of grief that doesn't belong to me, and that isn't real. But it hurts. I'm supposed to share pleasure *and* pain, but there isn't much pleasure around these days" (Butler, *Sower* 12). Due to her hyperempathy syndrome, Olamina is aware of all the suffering of those around her both men and women, also outside her community wall, which means that she feels sympathy for those less fortunate. In a violent world, she perceives the disorder as a flaw. Any sign of weakness can lead to assault, rape, or death, but she appears more compassionate towards her surroundings because of it. Olamina is forced to enter the subjective positions and to feel the struggle for the standpoints of others.

Just like Butler, Olamina is a thinker and writer, refusing to conform to standards and norms of society. For them to change existing paths, they realize that it may help people unify and make progress if they have a mutual goal. Olamina creates a belief system that lacks dogmatic viewpoints but primarily meets the needs of the multiethnic community she founds. Butler suggests a religion that is practical and grounded in the everyday lived experience of people of multiethnic background in the twenty-first century; thereby, she questions her own

Baptist upbringing. She proposes a belief system for societal activism designed to meet the needs of people in their particular social situation, and she lets Olamina build a religion that in the end is followed by the masses, but also questioned by the ones closest to her.

To further explain the intersecting dimensions and the multilayered perspectives of the analysis, an intersectional Venn-diagram based on Olamina’s different identities and her struggle to achieve a standpoint could be completed as such:

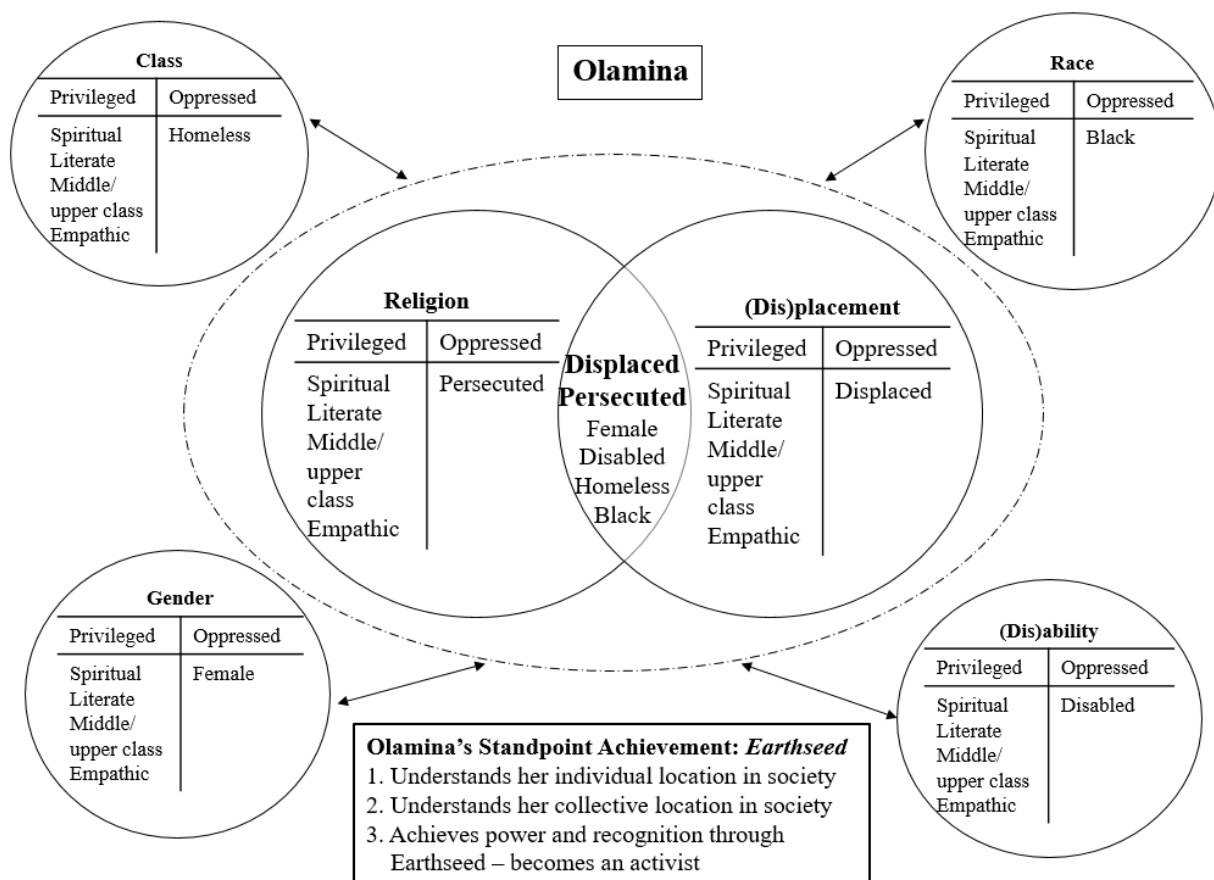


Figure 4. Intersectional Venn-diagram of Olamina’s Character (Inspired by Krogh Hansen).

Olamina’s Venn-diagram is based on the nodal points of (dis)placement and religion, constituting the primary identities for Olamina. However, disparities with regard to migration are compounded by secondary intersections of religion, class, race, gender, and (dis)ability in the novels as seen in the intersecting part of the two circles or nodal points in the Venn-diagram. With regard to religion, Olamina is both oppressed and privileged. She is oppressed in the sense

that Christian America prosecutes her, and she is privileged in that she finds solace and purpose in creating her own religion. In reality, on the oppression side in the circles, the identities include intersections of being displaced, persecuted, female, homeless, black, and disabled; however, the particular oppression for each identity needs to be illuminated prior to establishing the intersections. On the privileged side, the same four privileges or personal properties exist, spirituality, literacy, middle/upper class membership, and empathy; these provide an anchor and general stability. As is also noticeable in *Exit West*, literacy is a strength for our protagonists and carries through in all identities; the fact that Olamina can read and write gives her the ability to learn, teach, and succeed. Another asset is Olamina's membership of the middle class, at least in the beginning and end of the novel. She comes from a somewhat privileged position and overall might have a better chance of surviving than people coming from already oppressed positions. Please note that although Olamina commences in the middle class, she loses that position when her city is burned to the ground. She becomes homeless and displaced, but in the end, she regains her position in the middle class, possibly in the upper class, having gained a position as a prophet with a wealthy organization as support.

Olamina accomplishes all three levels of standpoint achievement. She achieves self-awareness and the ability to self-define in relation to her surroundings by being aware of her own locations, her privilege, and her oppression by contesting society's rules and by relating to others and their unique situations due to her hyperempathy. She is aware of the groups with which she shares both power and oppression, namely her communities, and of the groups from which she is excluded, the wealthy. Both Butler and Olamina choose to become activists and engage in group resistance as to overcome the oppression they are faced with; Butler through her writing and Olamina through Earthseed.

#### 5.1.5 Butler's Social Commentary

Crime, drug addiction, illiteracy, and an increasing gap between rich and poor were emerging in the 1990s when Butler wrote *The Parable Series*. She imagined life in the twenty-first century and unknowingly produced an alarming familiarity with the real-world status quo; however, she weaved in numerous threads of hope. *Parable of the Talents* feels unnervingly similar to current events in the world. Lately, we have seen a fanning of the flame of intolerance, populism, violence, and bigotry that Butler presents in her version of the United States during the 2030s;

the novels are frighteningly believable. Likewise, *The Parable Series* is inspired by historical events such as slavery, the Holocaust, and genocides in more recent times – each of these events demonstrates how minorities have been mistreated and abused, suggesting that if one does not actively fight against such injustices, there will be consequences in the future. Butler makes a statement about how history is cyclical, and she tells her readers how to learn from the past,

To survive  
 Let the past  
 Teach you –  
 Past customs,  
 Struggles,  
 Leaders and thinkers.  
 Let  
 These  
 Help you.  
 Let them inspire you,  
 Warn you,  
 Give you strength.  
 But beware:  
 God is Change.  
 Past is past.  
 What was  
 Cannot  
 Come again. (*Talents* 376)

Butler questions previous generations and their motives. She encourages us to learn what we can from them, but then we should change our ways, look to the future, and make sure history does not repeat itself. *Earthseed* suggests different religious and communal practices, emphasizing individual agency and communal solidarity.

As mentioned previously, we find several transformations in Butler's two books, suggesting that Butler has grown and changed in the process of writing the two novels and that

she might question her agenda or vision of utopia from *Parable of the Sower* to *Parable of the Talents*. These transformations have been discussed in 4.1.2 *Setting, Point of View, and Literary Devices in The Parable Series* concerning the voices that narrate the two novels, and in 5.1.4 *Gender, Race, and Class – Spirituality* concerning the altering of political strategy in *Parable of the Talents*. Both novels use journal entries, yet in *Parable of the Sower*, Olamina's point of view is the only reference for the reader, while in *Parable of the Talents* the reader is exposed to multiple voices with various viewpoints. Olamina's mission is to form a community and protect its members in *Parable of the Sower*; whereas in *Parable of the Talents*, Butler through Larkin problematizes the utopian vision that Olamina formulates single-handedly. Hereby, Butler comments on Olamina's power as a potential demagogue and questions how one administers such leadership. In *Parable of the Sower*, Olamina spreads the idea of Earthseed through her own words, wanting to gather and protect a community within a broader chaotic environment. In *Parable of the Talents*, she changes her tactics; she utilizes the power and influence of missionaries and wealthier people to spread the word of Earthseed. Once more, through Larkin, Butler questions Olamina's true intentions. Through Larkin's skepticism, Butler comments on the form of activism that has the most potential to achieve social change, and she thereby problematizes not only social and political issues but also the complicated sides of idealism in activism. Regardless of Butler's somewhat ambiguous sentiments towards activism and what it takes to achieve social change, both Butler and Olamina have gained the third level of achieving a standpoint as they choose to become activists in a collective.

*The Parable Series* and *Exit West* are texts about voyages considering the ambivalence of migrants set in the near future. In fact, I propose that *Exit West* may be read as a social commentary on Butler's anticipation of events in the twenty-first century – all three novels painfully resonate with current predicaments such as climate change, religious conflicts, testing of nuclear weapons, the existential risks and benefits of AI, and the refugee crisis. Where Butler writes about a dissolving world in which humankind needs to migrate to other planets to survive, Hamid takes a more 'earthly,' but at the same time more 'magical' approach. Hamid paints a picture of a dystopian cosmos capturing the global perils of what might lie down the road. He asks his readers to reconsider the roles and standpoints of migrants; in fact, he proclaims that a migrant's outside perspective may, in fact, be non-constrictive and inspirational. Just like Butler,

Hamid writes a dystopian parable; a parable about the current refugee crisis and migration in general, asserting that humans are ‘all migrants through time.’

## 5.2 *Exit West*

*Exit West* drifts forward and backward through time and across geographies to emphasize that no place is static and that the state of mind is always elusive – the world is continuously changing. *Exit West*, like *The Parable Series*, forecasts a world where wars turn cities into combat zones, technological changes make individuals hyper-dependable and hyper-helpless, and tensions between nativists and migrants erupt in the wake of political and economic chaos. Just as *The Parable Series*, Hamid’s fictional world is created by societal tendencies, a tale about wars and a global refugee crisis, both timely and prophetic.

### 5.2.1 Gender, Race, and Class – Dystopia

Saeed declares, that “The end of the world can be cozy at times” (Hamid, *Exit West* 83) to infer that even at the edge of dystopia, human existence is familiar and persistent. However, Hamid also warns us that the end of the world will not only affect poor, already war-ridden nations, but also wealthy, Western countries. When militants arrive in Saeed and Nadia’s city, it is with air strikes and bombs. Cellphones do not get signals; the internet is shut off, municipal services are shut down; thus, there is no electricity and no running water. Society’s descent is methodically recorded, while the human instinct is to endure intuitively. When Saeed and Nadia think they have made it to a safe haven, the cycle repeats itself, not only on a personal level, *Exit West* is as much a love story as a story about migration and change, but also on a societal level, mapping the vulnerability of humanity. Hamid asserts that

Every time a couple moves they begin, if their attention is still drawn to one another, to see each other differently, for personalities are not a single immutable color ... but rather illuminated screens, and the shades we reflect depend much on what is around us. So it was with Saeed and Nadia, who found themselves changed in each other’s eyes in this new place. (*Exit West* 186)

Nadia and Saeed are continually moving in search of something safer and better. By explaining the conditions of a relationship, Hamid also attempts to explain the life of a migrant. Like most love affairs, theirs is complicated and challenged by conditions forced upon them by the surrounding society. As with Olamina and Bankhole in *The Parable Series*, one could wonder, had Saeed and Nadia met under different circumstances, would they have been a couple? Their togetherness represents the instinct to find communion with other people and to love even if that means that it makes them twice as defenseless. Therefore, commitment poses questions of both belonging and vulnerability.

As is typical for educated, unmarried men in his country, Saeed lives with his parents. Less characteristic, Nadia lives by herself having cut family ties due to religious reasons “Something all of them ... regretted, but which none of them would ever act to repair, partly because of stubbornness ... partly because the impending descent of their city into the abyss would come before they realized that they had lost the chance” (Hamid, *Exit West* 22). Living alone as a single woman, she is determined to survive. Her status as a woman makes her exposed though, and she struggles with the impact of her gender constantly negotiating her position, “There was a burly man ... who ... greeted her, and when she ignored him, began to swear at her, saying only a whore would drive a motorcycle, didn’t she know it was obscene for a woman to straddle a bike in that way ... she thought he might attack her, as she stood her ground” (42-3). She is even molested by a man in a bank, as someone pushes “his hands down her buttocks and between her legs, and penetrating her with his finger, failing because he was outside the multiple fabrics of her robe and her jeans” (63). Nadia is saved when “Some bearded men separated the mob into two halves, male and female, and she stayed inside the female zone” (63). Hamid’s dystopia describes how women are disproportionately affected in times of war and conflict.

To protect herself, Nadia wears a black robe “So men don’t fuck with me” (Hamid, *Exit West* 16). The robe is a defense against predatory and bigoted males rather than an expression of religious or cultural conviction. For Saeed, the robe initially signals Nadia’s religiousness, which we as readers know she has rejected altogether. Hamid undermines our assumed knowledge, questioning why Nadia, a modern and independent young woman, is covering up her entire body. Therefore, the robe signals conformity and escaping notice, while later on, in the West, the robe becomes a statement of nonconformity and defiance (114). In many ways, Saeed’s father

sees Nadia as the stronger person in the relationship, “Saeed’s father then summoned Nadia into his room ... and said that he was entrusting her with his son’s life, and she, whom he called a daughter, must, like a daughter, not fail him, whom she called father, and she must see Saeed through to safety” (97). Saeed is not aware of this secret pact between Nadia and his father. Perhaps Saeed’s father sees that “Nadia had long been, and would afterwards continue to be, more comfortable with all varieties of movement in her life than was Saeed, in whom the impulse of nostalgia was stronger, perhaps because his childhood had been more idyllic, or perhaps because this was simply his temperament” (95). Where Nadia has been fending for herself, Saeed has lived a protected family life.

Saeed is described as an independent-minded, grown man with a decent education and a good job; he is religious and prays. Prayer is about “Being a man, being one of the men, a ritual that connected him to adulthood and to the notion of being a particular sort of man, a gentleman, a gentle man, a man who stood for community and faith and kindness and decency, a man, in other words, like his father” (Hamid, *Exit West* 201-2). Saeed tries desperately to hold on to the old ways, to tradition. He prefers to wait until marriage to have sex, even when he invites Nadia to live with him in his parents’ apartment (74). Prayer remains a way to connect with family and home for Saeed throughout the novel. Saeed changes more than Nadia does by the experience of exile. He regrets leaving his father behind, he is disillusioned over being double-crossed by other migrants, and he shows bitterness over his new improvisatory existence. Saeed cannot protect Nadia, as he feels it is his duty, even though she in many ways is stronger than he is both physically and mentally. In times of regret and despair, he returns to his religion.

Although both Nadia and Saeed are exposed to power struggles and the conformity of society’s gender roles, as they fend for themselves, Hamid does not let traditional stereotypes burden them – he lets his characters evolve with differing results. The same may be said of the setting. Even though it is inferred that Saeed and Nadia’s city is in the Far East, the location is not presented as an exotic entity designed to generate the hierarchical binary between East and West; it is a metropolis like any other Western city. The characters of Nadia and Saeed seem thinly sketched in the novel, perhaps to resemble ‘everyman’ and ‘everywoman.’ They are complex people though, not overly likable, and the readers may find themselves in an understanding of both characters’ standpoints, making Nadia and Saeed’s relationship real and plotted. One roots for the individual more than for the coupling. Sometimes it is just easier to



survive alone, when the stress of upholding life wears out a person, though one does not always last alone, as Hamid says, “Alone a person is almost nothing” (*Exit West* 9).

In *Exit West*, race is intermixed with class. The novel addresses the global politics of racial and economic inequality indirectly and the consequent collapse of the previously solid categories of religious, national, and geographic identity, “cutting across divisions of race or language or nation, for what did those divisions matter now in a world full of doors?” (Hamid, *Exit West* 155). What does it mean for the world when national borders may be bypassed by entering and exiting through random doors? For instance, in London, a new environment comes to resemble an old one, the one they escaped from in their hometown. Saeed and Nadia encounter the familiar prejudices and faults of human nature, “They realized that their street was under attack by a nativist mob ... The mob looked to Nadia like a strange and violent tribe, intent on their destruction, some armed with iron bars or knives, and she and Saeed turned and ran, but could not escape” (134). Millions of migrants squat in abandoned houses and apartments in an apocalyptic version of London. As in other parts of Europe, tension and violence mount between migrants, ‘mostly dark-skinned,’ and nativists, mostly ‘white-skinned,’ while a major confrontation looms.

The doors ease mobility, but they do not necessarily mean mobility towards prosperity. Instead, they symbolize survival and the unity of humankind. The doors have the potential to lead to a utopia where borders cease to matter and where Nadia and Saeed, together with millions of other migrants, are citizens of the world. The doors may be seen as the digital devices with which the characters move around the planet, but it is also a metaphor for the travel agency in all its modern forms, including the smuggling of people. People who can afford to pay smugglers to travel through the doors are privileged in *Exit West’s* dystopian society, though these people seem to come from both the lower and middle classes since real visas are only available to the wealthy (Hamid, *Exit West* 52). The doors are also metaphors for the evanescence of today’s world where cell phones’ “antennas sniffed out an invisible world, as if by magic, a world that was all around them, and also nowhere, transporting them to places distant and near, and to places that had never been and would never be” (39). Modern inequality travels promptly around the world, while the movement of people persists on being slow, violent, and in flux; anyone, at any given time, might become a refugee or migrant.

An overall matrix of oppression and privilege in *Exit West*, concerning class, gender, race, religion, and (dis)placement based on the above analysis, could look like this:

<b>Social Identity Categories</b>	<b>Privileged Social Groups</b>	<b>Border Social Groups</b>	<b>Targeted Social Groups</b>	<b>Ism</b>
<b>Class</b>	People who can afford to pay a smuggler to use the doors  Nativists  Military	People who can afford to pay a smuggler to use the doors  Nativists  Migrants	People who cannot afford to pay a smuggler to use the doors  Migrants	Classism
<b>Gender</b>	Males	Females Males	Females Males Homosexuals	Sexism
<b>Race</b>	White-skinned	White-skinned Dark-skinned	Dark-skinned	Racism
<b>Religion</b>	Individuals believing in religion endorsed by the state		Individuals believing in other religions  Atheists	Religious persecution
<b>(Dis)placement</b>	Nativists	Migrants Nativists	Migrants	Xenophobia includes: Classism Sexism Racism Religious persecution

Figure 5. Matrix of Oppression and Privilege in *Exit West* (Based on Adams et al., appendix 3C).

The targeted social groups, people who are not able to pay a smuggler, women, people of color, and individuals challenging gender and sexual norms are all exposed to classism, racism, sexism, religious persecuting, and xenophobia in Hamid's world. As Nadia and Saeed attempt to develop their identities and belongings in new and unfamiliar places, external pressures underscore their different attitudes to sex, religion, and their opposing views of their homeland. Hamid does a thorough job trying to dismantle society's ordinary conformity of notions of gender, class, and race after Saeed and Nadia's stay in London. As will be discussed in connection with Hamid's social commentary, Hamid does not succeed entirely in showing a solution to violence and

displacement, although his attempt might have pedagogical purposes. Again, please note that the concept of xenophobia is inclusive of the various *-isms* explored in the intersectional analysis, symptomatic of a migrant's unstable and frail life circumstance. Likewise, note that the border social group spot pertaining to religion in the matrix diagram is empty as such beliefs tend to be either or.

### 5.2.2 Gender, Race, and Class – Spirituality

As touched upon previously, the doors symbolize chaos and the breakdown of social order; though, the doors may also be symbols of reincarnation. With each passage, an individual has the opportunity to start afresh, to find love, to choose a new life. The otherworldly doors or portals add a sense of magical realism while they methodologically free Hamid from considering the demanding nature of the deed of fleeing. This is in itself contradictory, since the physical journey for most refugees is the most traumatic and risky part. Where Butler spends time describing Olamina and her followers' journey north in great detail, Hamid pays little attention to his protagonists' travels. Instead, Hamid focuses on how his characters adapt to being trespassers in unfamiliar places tracing the emotional effects of migration.

As a replacement for letting Saeed and Nadia experience all the horrors of flight, they (and the readers) watch it from a distance. Nadia sits on the steps of a building reading the news on her phone, when she suddenly realizes that she is pictured on an online photograph at that very moment, “how she could both read the news and be the news, and how the newspaper could have published this image of her simultaneously, and she looked about for a photographer” (Hamid, *Exit West* 157). Nadia and Saeed live their own lives, as well as the lives their migration symbolizes in political terms. Hamid lets the readers watch their symbolic lives as though it is being viewed on social media, which the refugee crisis indeed has happened to be in real life recently. Nadia and Saeed are saved from being psychically harmed in the process of transfer, but migration cannot undo the pain already inflicted between the two. Saeed's dauntless religious faith rubs against Nadia's reason. This has an immense consequence for their approaches to surviving, and to why they finally part.

Even though Nadia and Saeed have Muslim names, they are not distinctly Muslim protagonists. In fact, the word ‘Muslim’ is not mentioned in the novel. Nadia defies all expectations of a Muslim woman; her liberal approaches towards religion, sex, and drugs

surprise even Saeed, and Nadia offers a diverse representation of Muslim women. Nadia's childhood home entailed religious verses and "photos of holy sites, framed and mounted on the walls" (Hamid, *Exit West* 21), Nadia is born into her religion, but she is not religious. Saeed has a shadow of a beard, stubbles, which he meticulously maintains, and he prays (201-2), hinting towards the fact that most Muslim men grow a beard to imitate the practice of the prophet Muhammed (Haddad and Smith xv). Saeed is deeply religious and feels torn in London; he misses home and cannot live with the memory of his mother being killed by militants. He is distraught to such a degree that he contemplates fundamentalism, "The white-marked beard spoke of martyrdom, not as the most desirable outcome but as one possible end of a path the right-minded had no other choice but to follow" (Hamid, *Exit West* 155). Conversely, we are told that "Unmarried lovers such as they were now being made examples of and punished by death" (86), reflecting religious persecution. In the end, Saeed's religiosity contains no violence at all, only a precise depiction of a man who prays "as a gesture of love for what had gone and would go and could be loved in no other way" (202). Nadia is non-nostalgic and opposed to organized religion, whereas Saeed's nostalgia is entwined with faith. By believing, he maintains his faith in himself, humanity, and its potential to build a better world (203).

While Nadia and Saeed continue to prove and test their individuality in ways not entirely dictated by war, displacement, and the consequences thereof, they also question their national identity and their cohesion with a community.

### 5.2.3 Gender, Race, and Class – Community

The home, away, home story pattern is quite visible in *Exit West*. First, the reader is introduced to an urban city, a 'normal' reality – a safe home of some sorts, although it is hinted that not far away people are killing each other. We do not know the name or exact place of this city; the 'un-naming' of the city leaves out political and national contexts to show only the effects of Nadia and Saeed's decisions. The away state takes the reader to several locations around the world, a campsite in Greece, a squat in London, and a shantytown outside San Francisco; places in which our protagonists are vulnerable to xenophobes, demagogues, and people who have nostalgic visions of politics. Nadia and Saeed are "adrift in a world where one could go anywhere but still find nothing" (Hamid, *Exit West* 187). They then return to some state of home, although not the home they left. Attachment to place and the achievement of a cultural identity in *Exit West*

appears superficial; the story is about adaptation to one's surroundings rather than about any prototypical expression of identity.

Nadia and Saeed escape their city, knowing they will not return,

Saeed desperately wanted to leave his city, in a sense he always had, but in his imagination he had thought he would leave it only temporarily, intermittently, never once and for all, and this looming potential departure was altogether different, for he doubted he would come back, and the scattering of his extended family and his circle of friends and acquaintances, forever, struck him as deeply sad, as mounting to the loss of a home, no less, of his home. (Hamid, *Exit West* 94)

For Nadia, the feeling of leaving home is slightly different, "Nadia was possibly even more feverishly keen to depart, and her nature was such that the prospect of something new, of change, was at its most basic level exciting to her" (94). Nadia is non-nostalgic and wants to leave. As predicted, she adjusts well, whereas Saeed's emotional state changes during their journey, "It seemed to Nadia that the farther they moved from the city of their birth, through space and through time, the more he sought to strengthen his connection to it, tying ropes to the air of an era that for her was unambiguously gone" (187). Saeed is drawn to people from his home country, both in the labor camp in London and via social media. For him, home develops as fond memories in the persistent despair of life, and although he does return home at the end of the novel, home is not the same as it was.

Throughout the novel, possibly in part to underscore the simultaneity of time and space in a globalized world, we additionally witness other people's migrant stories, albeit in a cursory manner. These migrant stories remind us of the similarities and differences among countries and individuals across an increasingly interconnected planet. Concurrently, the stories present the reader with standpoints of individuals who are either frightened at the arrival of the new migrants or touched positively by their influx. Some of these characters have never moved geographically, but have grown old in one place and have found that place transformed; for Hamid, these people are also migrants. Other characters escape from political turmoil, and others again reverse course to seek new challenges and existences as an alternative to the comforts of modernity. The stories of Saeed and Nadia melt with the stories of these peripheral characters. In Mykonos Greece,

“Everyone was foreign, and so, in a sense, no one was” (Hamid, *Exit West* 106) and in the work camp in London, Saeed meets a family who does not speak to each other, because everyone is ashamed. Hamid explains that the shame is “for the displaced ... a common feeling, and that there was, therefore, no particular shame in being ashamed” (184). When Saeed returns to bring the family to the mess tent for a meal, they have made a home out of their tent, “a place that was already beginning to be theirs” (185) in the midst of a labor camp. The perception of home is rattled, but it is also narrowed down to a family of three, who within a new community find a meal and some solace and identity. Just as in *The Parable Series*, community and a sense of belonging are not tied to a particular place then, but with fellow beings and a sense of security in a place where one can find a safe spot to sleep and where one may find something to eat. Home then is not a fixed node, but a construction of “social practices, cultural imaginaries, historical memories and our deepest intimacies” (Brah, “Some Fragments” 173). Home is where one is from, but it is also what one moves towards physically, socially, politically, and culturally.

#### 5.2.4 Intersectional Analysis – Saeed and Nadia

Nadia and Saeed epitomize a passionate love story that is likewise a story about friendship; a friendship that withstands and that is non-possessive. Hamid allegorizes migration through a love story to show the micro-quandaries of migration while disregarding that nations argue about the macro-quandaries. Through Nadia and Saeed’s journeys, our protagonists learn much about themselves and their relationship while also acknowledging fellow humans and recognizing the power struggles in the different communities.

Hamid lets his protagonists question masculinity and femininity in moments of crisis, while simultaneously illustrating how society, on the verge of chaos, exacerbates notions of gendered, classed, and raced articulations. Hamid requests that society reimagine such realities. Nadia’s dissonance with her family is in stark contrast with Saeed’s upbringing, as he grew up in a loving family marked by affection and intimacy. In many instances, Saeed seems emotional and weak, while Nadia is strong and has learned to fend for herself. The novel provides a setting in which both the protagonists as well as the reader may grapple with confined gender roles and the potential that is exposed when these are traversed. Nadia and Saeed experience migration in entirely different ways, creating a nuanced depiction of how gender is both suffocating and a source of meaning and comfort. Both characters resist and confront the identities imposed on

them, Nadia by living rebelliously, and Saeed by resisting his masculinity in treating his partner with care, protection, and patience. Hamid works towards breaking down and questioning cultural assumptions.

Nadia is a utopian female protagonist. She is independent and defiant in a society that is hostile towards women and their independence, creating a space for herself when there seems to be none. As Saeed's father realizes, Nadia is better equipped in a harsh world. Comfort is not something she takes for granted; thus, she handles discomfort throughout their migration much better and more productively than Saeed. Her experiences make her capable of moving beyond the comforts of home; she readily forms new alliances with people in new communities.

In contrast, Saeed hesitates, since he maintains a nostalgic connection to his family, his identity, and his religion. He finds meaning in praying, an element of organization and direction, discovering a connection between masculinity and religion, especially in the fundamentalist community in London; for Nadia, this seems superficial. Saeed is drawn by the sense of belonging this group of people can give him, but that kind of sameness is concurrently used to justify violence. Through Saeed's experience in London, Hamid maps the social forces that push men into radicalism. Through Nadia's demeanor, Hamid maps the possibility of redirecting that kind of desire towards something meaningful, a community that is safe and prospers.

Nadia and Saeed's Venn-diagrams highlight their differences:

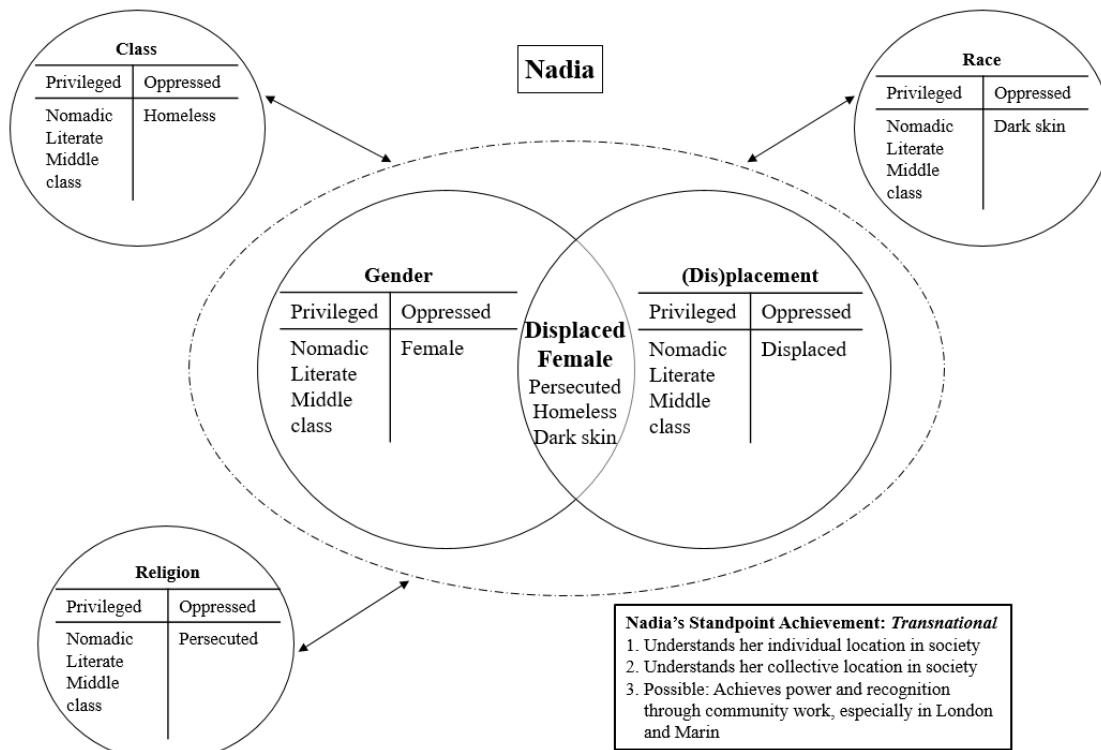


Figure 6. Intersectional Venn-diagram of Nadia's Character (Inspired by Krogh Hansen).

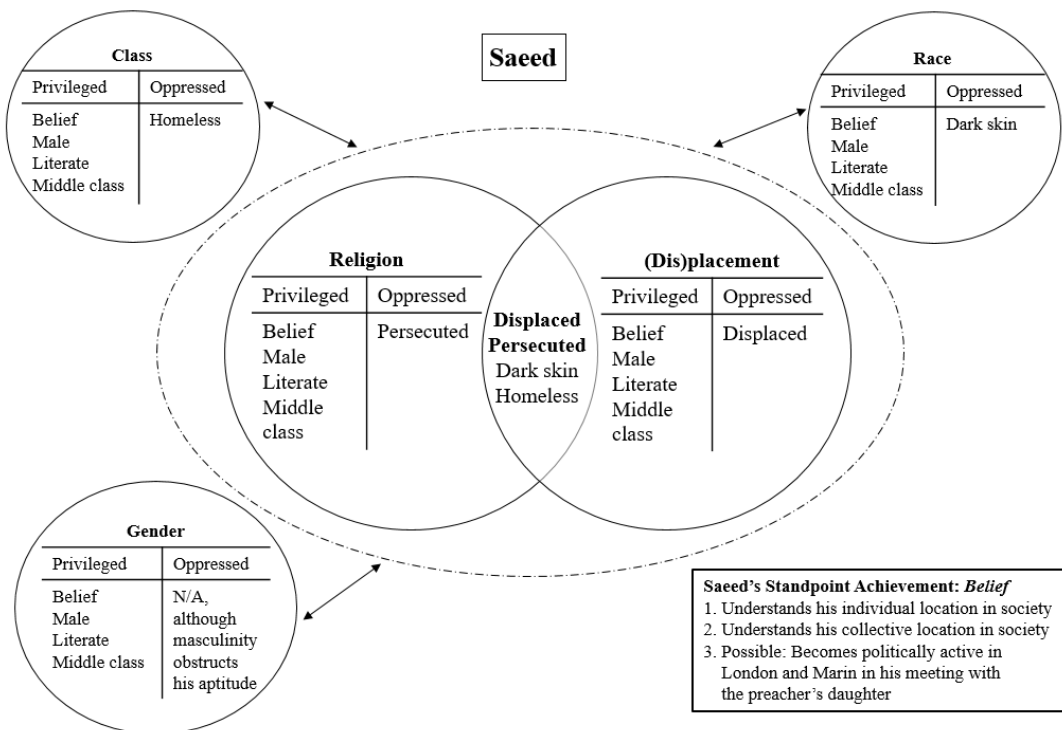


Figure 7. Intersectional Venn-diagram of Saeed's Character (Inspired by Krogh Hansen).



The intersection between religion and (dis)placement is particularly thorny for Saeed, whereas the intersection between gender and (dis)placement offers particular complications for Nadia. Both class and race identities add to the complexity of the two protagonists' chances for achieving standpoints. On the oppression side of the circles, the identities include intersections of being displaced, persecuted, homeless, and colored; however, the particular oppression for each identity needs to be defined prior to understanding the intersections of all circles. On the privileged side, the same three personal properties are seen for Nadia: nomad, middle class-membership, and literacy provide an anchor and general stability throughout all intersections. Saeed has four personal properties on the privileged side, which means that he has one more asset to draw on than Nadia has. Nevertheless, Nadia seems to fare better throughout the novel, possibly due to her already oppressed position as a female in the dystopian society and the estrangement from her family; she knows how to fend for herself. The gender aspect is not an apparent hindrance for Saeed in any of the intersections, whereas Nadia carries it throughout her intersections. Gender may however in some regard be a hindrance for Saeed in that he is rooted in his masculine ways, wanting to protect Nadia without being quite able to, which signifies that his gender role somewhat obstructs his aptitude.

Conversely, Nadia possesses a natural free spirit and belief in herself, human conditions that Saeed either lacks or questions. In many locations, this lack impedes Saeed in his efforts to commit to his surroundings and always searching for something better. As is likewise noticeable, Saeed's belief creates both privilege and oppression. He is oppressed in the sense that he might be religiously persecuted if he does not believe in what his surroundings want him to believe in or conversely, his beliefs might turn into radicalism. Religion becomes a privilege in the sense that his faith carries him through in the most desperate moments. In the end, though, guided by Nadia and her hunger for new beginnings and her adaptability, he finds his belonging in faith, the preacher's daughter, and in her community. Nadia finds her belonging with a new lover and within her nomadic and transcultural identity; she is genuinely content anywhere. As seen in *The Parable Series*, literacy is a strength for both protagonists and carries through in all identities; both Nadia and Saeed can learn, teach, and work in new locations. Another asset is their memberships of the middle class, at least in the beginning and at the end of the story. They both come from privileged positions and overall might have a better chance of surviving than people originating from already oppressed positions.

Saeed and Nadia achieve standpoints on individual levels as well as on collective levels. Furthermore, by contesting society's rules and by relating to others and their unique situations, they are aware of their privilege and oppression. Through their migration, they connect with different communities, especially in London, and understand with which groups they share privilege and within which groups they are oppressed. Whether the protagonists reach the third level of achieving a standpoint, the activist level, is more doubtful – Nadia probably more than Saeed does, in that she, due to her attitude, morals, and integrity, becomes an example to other people. By writing, Hamid asserts his activism by attempting to explain the consequences of migration. Moreover, he challenges people's preconceived notions of migration through his fiction.

#### 5.2.5 Hamid's Social Commentary

*Exit West* leaves lots of space to infer, conclude, dismiss, and reconsider. This perplexity is partly due to the author's somewhat unusual, almost poetic, writing style, and partly due to the emotional and current refugee crisis, both foreseeable and unsolvable. *The Parable Series* does not leave the reader the same kind of leeway, except for interpretations of the Earthseed verses; Butler is determined to teach and inspire. Butler's fictional world foresees events that she insists on mending before they happen. Hamid's fictional world deals with already unsolvable problems that he is trying to fix regardless or at least make his reader discern.

Hamid's use of magic realism, the doors, extracts the refugees' journeys that we have already watched on the news – the leaky boats and the drowning children. He is more interested in the cost of loss, the displacement, and in how to reclaim what was lost. He explains the border crossings of migration as emotional violence, in saying that “When we migrate, we murder from our lives those we leave behind” (Hamid, *Exit West* 98). He provides horrifying details of war in general: sexual assaults, stray bullets, blood from an execution in an upstairs apartment that seeps through the ceiling, and children playing soccer with a severed head. Furthermore, Hamid comments on humans' tribal nature that ignites conflict and that these tribes may be found in otherwise peaceful places, such as London, where “nativist extremists were forming their own legions, with a wink and a nod from authorities” (135). He writes about Syria where cities are turned into war zones, sending millions fleeing. He considers the global political crisis, technological changes, and rising tensions between migrants and nativists. However, he manages

to advocate an increasingly integrated world, “Without borders nations appeared to be becoming somewhat illusory, and people were questioning what role they had to play” (158). Hamid is worried about the future, yet hopeful. He asks his readers to reimagine global movement of individuals without any boundaries.

The fact that Saeed and Nadia are seeking better places by testing new doors seems to counter reality; often, a refugee does not have that option. Somehow and possibly to show a political and human solution, Hamid lets his protagonists, and many of his more peripheral characters, assume this elite position; intermittently endorsing idealistic views of the processes of border crossing, refuge, and migration not quite able to remove himself from his privileged position or standpoint. Hamid states that ‘we are all migrants through time’, although people’s living conditions differ immensely in various parts of the world. By generalizing and by omitting the hardship refugees endure when they escape, he asserts that all migrants, or any group, are fundamentally the same – refugees are also migrants, but migrants are not necessarily refugees. Migrants make a conscious choice when they decide to leave their country to seek a better life elsewhere. Refugees are forced to leave their country due to risks of experiencing persecution, or perhaps because they have already experienced persecution. There is a difference, and it matters; countries deal with migrants under their own immigration laws, and they deal with refugees through norms of refugee protection and asylum defined in both national legislation and international laws (“UNHCR Viewpoint”). It is also important to understand that notions of hybridity and migration often work as “critiques of nationalism and essentialist identities,” while simultaneously contributing to the “postcolonial discourse that celebrate[s] [hybridity and migration] as unproblematic ways of countering hierarchies and hegemonies” (Nyman 1). Whereas migration may be seen as “an uninhibited performance of postmodern subjectivity” (1), migration for many is involuntary and may spawn trauma and loss. On a political level, the refugee crisis can only be handled through confrontations of the realities of nationalism and imperialism – the colonial project continues to affect us; on a personal level, only the attentiveness and flexibility that Nadia sanctions will bring into being the kind of world in which we want to live. For more on this, see *7. Migration and Home in the Twenty-first Century and Beyond*.

In *Exit West*, things go back to somewhat of a normal; Nadia and Saeed’s city of birth is the same and then not. As Saeed observes, “The apocalypse appeared to have arrived and yet it

was not apocalyptic, which is to say that while the changes were jarring they were not the end, and people found things to do and ways to be and people to be with, and plausible desirable futures began to emerge, unimaginable previously, but not unimaginable now” (Hamid, *Exit West* 217). Hamid dreams up a utopia after having survived a dystopia. He feels that indeed it might be possible to believe in humankind’s potential for building a better world even in the face of death and disaster. As *The Parable Series*, *Exit West* attempts to offer hope in a world that is engrossed in religious and ethnic nativism; according to Butler and Hamid, a desirable future may be attainable if we allow ourselves to change, ‘we must learn and teach, adapt and grow’ – by changing, we create the potential for what might be.

#### 6. Comprehensive Intersectional Discussion of *Exit West* and *The Parable Series*

*The Parable Series* and *Exit West* are stories that challenge the fixed notions of identity and belonging. The stories offer new ways of understanding movement and migration in an accelerated and changing world. Migration for Butler is over land and through space, determined to find a way for humankind to survive. Migration for Hamid is likewise over land but through magical doors. For both authors, magic and space travel signify a hopeful future, but these elements also represent aspects that are not real, at least not yet.

Both Butler and Hamid use their stories to address political issues, and the complicated notions influencing human’s identity-shaping processes in a world gone wild. The three protagonists find some form of identity and belonging although in points of no return to their old identities. Both Saeed, Nadia, and Olamina are suppressed by intersecting constraints of race, gender, and class, which influence their identities. The fact that they are spiritual, except Nadia, as well as displaced, and in Olamina’s case likewise disabled, only adds to the complexity of their lives as seen in the Venn-diagrams for the three protagonists. On the other hand, they have the opportunity to examine and utilize their privileged positions in their identities of race, class, gender, (dis)placement, (dis)ability, and religion to overcome society’s oppression. Olamina and Nadia find home within themselves in new locations or in places that have no apparent significance for their identities. Finding home within oneself for them means to unify their many identities and utilize the privilege of each identity. Olamina and Saeed find home in their spirituality and faith, in believing that something or someone guides them. Nadia is content with a nomadic and displaced way of living. The protagonists, especially the two women, have freed

themselves from oppression by rejecting power relations that obstruct their path to finding selfness. Nadia is strong enough to defy society's prejudice, and Olamina becomes a prophet, although both women have to sacrifice someone and something in transit. Saeed is more set in his masculine ways; he is protective, faithful, and ambitious, which in turn means that his gender role somewhat obstructs his ability to adapt. Guided by Nadia's strength, his faith, and a new love, he settles – although changed in the process.

Both Hamid and Butler recognize that the world is a site of violence and discrimination, and definitely not perfect; that racism, classism, and sexism are parts of the human condition and society's architecture. All this, plus displacement, probable religious persecution, and possibly disability, is what a migrant encounters in a diaspora place, in a search for a new place of belonging. In *Exit West* and *The Parable Series*, Hamid and Butler create multi-dimensional characters living in dystopian communities where race, gender, and class issues exist but not necessarily govern every aspect of people's lives; life is also a question of survival, love, and immortality. By presenting the Earthseed community members' separate stories, Butler contrasts these characters with the rest of the community and the world to explain that not all humans are alike, that everyone comes with different standpoints and therefore contributes differently. Butler creates images of friends and enemies and love and hate, even in times of societal chaos. Earthseed's members come from all classes and corners of the world. She lets them come together not by preaching but by teaching. In *Exit West*, Hamid presents a multitude of migrant stories, migration as in moving through time, across landscapes, towns, countries, and borders, and moving from one belonging to a new – misplacing, discovering, and establishing new standpoints. People, who would never have met had they not been migrants, unexpectedly meet. The migrant stories are complex and intersected by systems of oppression and privilege. Both authors proclaim that an individual may in creative ways draw upon his or her multiple identities: a black woman, a single mom, disabled, exposed to extreme violence, displaced, and religiously persecuted may gain control over her life and identity, as long as the systems of oppression are made visible to her. By illuminating Olamina's intersections of race, gender, class, (dis)ability, (dis)placement, and religion as well as the privileges and oppression within each identity, the mandate for intellectual reflection and political engagement for change is a natural consequence.

Both *Exit West* and *The Parable Series* deal with the entanglement of societal pressure and individuality weakened by being displaced. All the protagonists are suppressed by intersecting constraints of classism, racism, and sexism which influence their identity, and which are exacerbated in their efforts to find places of belonging. By rejecting society's preconceived notions of gender, class, and race, our protagonists find home within themselves. They become something else and someone else in the process, realizing that the self and what we perceive as the self is a construct (Brah, "Some Fragments" 174). People are the intersections of different social developments that involve many different people and places in a continual transformation. Butler's narrative considers migration as a solution to the problems that haunt Olamina and her followers' survival. They survive by migrating to other planets. Hamid's narrative views migration as something universal, asserting that a person's identity is multifaceted to such a degree that everyone, in some aspect, is unvaryingly a migrant different to other people; consequently 'the other' and 'us' cease to matter, since 'the other' is also every one of 'us.' For both authors, change is the one constant in a world gone mad. *Exit West* is about the irrationality of holding on to things that ultimately will change. The only stable component in Olamina's religion, Earthseed, is change and this acceptance of transience allows the survival of humankind. In *Exit West*, Nadia is the epitome of adjustment, co-operation, and acceptance. Hamid portrays her as a utopian female protagonist, who represents hope and acts as a role model for humankind. In *The Parable Series*, Earthseed is the epitome of unity and progression, a faith-based vision of how to live by the way things are meant to grow and change; Earthseed is Butler's solution to the challenges facing humanity.

### 6.1 Revision of Reading Protocol

As an evaluation of the intersectional analyses of the three novels, I intend to reflect on the process in the following. Moreover, I do this to strengthen my case for teaching intersectionality in an English literature classroom setting. As previously mentioned, the primary outcome of such an analysis is the ability to generate specific and complex analyses not just of characters, but also of themes and various literary devices utilized by the author. Intersectionality enables the student to explore how key concepts of lived experiences affect fictional representations. Likewise, the strong student understands that the framing of stereotypes and sexist norms can be utilized for self-assessment to search for one's positioning relating to oppression, privilege, and personal

standpoints. Another beneficial aspect of an intersectional analysis is the opportunity for the student to show independence in relation to selecting a subject or theme that has a particular and possibly personal interest. Through that process, the student, perhaps unconsciously, receives a standpoint in perceptions of oneself relating to one's social, political, cultural, and historical context compared to that of the text's.

As an introduction to intersectional readings, the theory and its framework should be presented in the classroom as well as the theory's background. Furthermore, it is crucial to pre-teach or review the technical terms. Terms such as gender, class, race, privilege, oppression, kyriarchy, nodal points, intersections, and individual and collective standpoints may be discussed, so all students may partake in discussions and turn in assignments with the same terminology. The usefulness of the Venn-diagram and the diagram for the Matrix of Oppression and Privilege should be discussed and possibly adjusted to the themes and interests of the students.

Intersectional readings are especially fitting for group work. This can be done in a myriad of ways depending on the physical classroom setting, the student body, personal teaching styles, and so forth, but the most obvious route to take is to have the students fill out the two types of diagrams in smaller groups as an aid to the discussions and any written assignments. The circles in the Venn-diagram will have considerable overlap and will differ according to students' personal standpoints. Details should go in the circle that seems most appropriate and fitting for the protagonist, but there will be much debate in the groups about the placement of the different attributes of class, gender, race, and the other selected identities for each character. It will become messy and seem disorganized, but by pre-selecting binary themes and sub-themes, it should culminate in a somewhat organized fashion. In the classroom setting, the discussions will help develop the analysis and eventually organize it.

Working with intersectionality offers insight into how such a reading can be applied to a variety of literary genres. An intersectional analysis calls for novels with condensed social worlds. Social outcomes are the results of actions of ordinary human beings, who are acting for their own particular reasons. Both real-life and fictional beings find solutions to the challenges of life that confront them; they pay attention to themselves, their families, and their surroundings. They make mistakes, they act out their passions, take risks, they step with caution, follow impulse, and they dream. Out of these ordinary human traits, arise social outcomes: migration,

revolution, famine, economic crises, and the rise and fall of regions and cities (Schutt). *The Parable Series* and *Exit West* provide such worlds, and the novels are used as mediums of sociological knowledge. Even though the novels are set in the near future, they speculate about human behavior and human interactions; in addition, they work as social commentary in current as well as utopian and/or dystopian settings.

By including the notion of kyriarchy in the framework, we include all protagonists in our analysis without focusing solely on gender oppression or gender privilege. Interdependent stratifications such as gender, race, class, religion, (dis)placement, and (dis)ability were inspected in the novels. These structural positions or identities are assigned to every one of us at birth. As we noticed in the analysis, our protagonists inhabited several of these identities at once, although positions with privilege and/or oppression became nodal points through which other positions were experienced. Saeed and Olamina's primary nodal points were based in (dis)placement and religion; their standpoints were founded in belief and spirituality. Nadia's were (dis)placement and gender; her standpoint was established in her transcultural aptitude. The complexity of the Venn-diagrams with multiple intersections reveals that humans exist on spectrums of privilege and oppression and that the nodal points, at which we exist, change and vary over time due to historical, cultural, and social contexts. What is likewise apparent is that we cannot deny any privilege we might have at any given point if we are to identify power systems. This recognition helps us understand social injustice and inequality.

In *The Parable Series*, we saw the following intersections: men regardless of color dominating displaced women regardless of color (race, (dis)placement, gender); upper class, religious extremists persecuting female non-believers (class, religion, gender); mentally able white people deriding disabled colored people (gender, race, (dis)ability); upper class white people exploiting working class colored people (class, race) and so forth. In *Exit West*, we noticed these intersections: displaced colored religious males being aggressive towards displaced colored religious males (religion, race, (dis)placement); men regardless of color dominating displaced women regardless of color (race, (dis)placement, gender); and so forth. By understanding their own privilege and their own oppression in the specific nodal points, the protagonists were able to gain standpoints on both personal and communal levels.

The analyses were extensive, but as argued an intersectional analysis can never be exhaustive. As discussed previously, one intersection may only present part of the picture, and



even though teachers along with their students tend to delimit themselves and the protagonists in text selections, one should be able to defend and explain one's choices. In fact, this may only inspire additional intersectional work in any field where the theory is beneficial. In a classroom setting, depending on student level, it might be advantageous and pedagogical to provide the students with a selection of fitting passages, chapters, or sections of the novel, instead of analyzing the full novel. This approach is primarily fitting for introductions to intersectional readings. Please note though that in a teacher's selection of passages, as with any teaching material and tool, the teacher makes a subjective choice and thereby delimits the whole process of students independently selecting themes and literary areas of personal interest. However, as an introductory lesson on intersectionality choosing less text might be more constructive.

Throughout the lesson, a teacher should offer examples to help the students get started – if the students work in groups, a teacher may move around the room, listen in, pose questions, and offer suggestions. Subsequently, collectively, the class should discuss each circle in the Venn-diagram as well as how a circle intersects with other circles; the students must find documentation in the text, both literal and figurative descriptions. While the group work is progressing, the teacher should explain that the students are in fact practicing close reading. The teacher may then review and discuss literary devices, such as imagery, symbolism, dialect, and so forth if these devices are evident in the text. Subsequently, the students should explore how these devices affect the text. The setting, the author's point of view, and the students' own standpoints should be established, while contemplating what this does to the analysis. The students should investigate how the characters change in the course of the text; moreover, the students should consider what the author wishes to communicate with a character's potential transformation. Most importantly, the impact of the intersections of gender, class, and race identities should be discussed, and how the selection process of the intersections is complicated or straightforward. Finally, the students should consider what could have been done differently or what needs to be done for future work.

With an onset in the novels chosen for this thesis, a teacher could focus on one of the *Parable* novels and Olamina as a character for an introductory class. For a more advanced class, a teacher may focus on *Exit West* and compare Nadia and Saeed's different experiences as migrants. Alternatively, a teacher could ask the students to compare Saeed and Olamina's spirituality, or Olamina and Nadia's roles as utopian females – the possibilities are endless. An

intersectional reading opens a forum in which students are challenged to explore more fully and concretely how key concepts of lived experience affect literary representation.

## 7. Migration and Home in the Twenty-first Century and Beyond

Migration complicates notions of home as the word comes to reference multiple locations through time and space. Home then comprises more than one's 'place' and includes a transnational and a translocal sense of belonging. Presently, globalization is an essential factor of social transformation all over the world. A rising number of local, national, and transnational migrants are on the move, crossing cultural and national borders (Moslund 1-2). Nation-states encourage certain types of mobility while restricting others. Consequently, new diasporas are created and questions of belonging and home require negotiation and transformation. Home in the twenty-first century is affected by patterns of this mobility; home is where we find our connections to others and the world, either forced or voluntarily.

Brah identifies two notions of home; one is an invocation of narratives of 'the nation' understood as the basis of nationalist discourses, so "a group settled 'in' a place is not necessarily 'of' it" (*Cartographies* 3). The other is an image of home as the site of everyday lived experience involving discourses of locality, networks of family, friends, and colleagues. It signifies the social and psychic geography of space, a sense of feeling 'at home' (4). According to Brah then, home is where an individual is from, but it is also what an individual moves towards. She argues that individuals carry different images of home when they travel. Memories of home are personal but also organized around intersecting realities of class, gender, and race (Brah, "Some Fragments" 174). When one moves, new contexts may offer different or further opportunities. A move may also offer additional or altered limitations depending on one's ability to understand and achieve different levels of standpoints. Diasporic conceptualizations of power foreground spaces of race, class, and gender that again foreground movement across shifting cultural, religious, linguistic, geographical, and psychological boundaries (174). In this respect, home is no longer an autonomous concept or place, since external and internal forces decide for an individual if he or she is at home or not at home (Lloyd and Vasta 1).

The presence of 'others' challenges a comfortable sense of home and belonging from a nativist point of view as was noticeable in all three novels. This aspect is explored in connection with tensions rising between migrants and nativists in London in *Exit West* and both Butler and

Hamid's sentiments about fundamentalism and xenophobic scapegoating in the three novels. The different images of what we construct as home, seen from both the 'us' and the 'other' angles, are deeply personal. However, these nativist images are likewise constructed around social differentiations across factors such as class, gender, race, age, sexuality, and so forth. As Brah emphasizes, "Home, whether in the sense of a nation, a transnational belonging or a residence, is a site of intersectionality where contradictory realities are experienced" ("Some Fragments" 174). In diaspora space, both migrants and non-migrants encounter changed values, attitudes, and codes of conduct in the course of integration. Both migrants and non-migrants are forced to define and redefine their identity and their self-representation in a community (Brah, *Cartographies* 209). The three novels argue for the need to recognize and respond to the 'others' in new ethical and interpersonal ways, recognizing the importance of communities inclusive of transcultural and transnational identities. None of the novels promote essentialism of nations or cultural traditions as markers of identity. The novels replace nationalistic and essentialist ideas with mutual understanding, acceptance, and collaboration. The three novels function as social commentaries with a call for political and social action, albeit the authors are aware of the complicated sides of activism and resistance. Butler contemplates the means for political activism through rich people's funding, and Hamid considers martyrdom and fundamentalism. Essentially, the three protagonists in varying degrees reach the third level of achieving a standpoint, the collective level; in that, they are willing to improve conditions for themselves and others, while concurrently leading change through example. Also, the novels call for a realization of the fact that migration is an obvious part of the fluid nature of global mobility and that social landscapes consisting of 'others' and 'us' are obsolete. The utopian social landscapes in *The Parable Series* and *Exit West* consist of various people sharing territories without any borders.

As stated in chapter 5.2.5 *Hamid's Social Commentary*, the migrant and the refugee descriptors are not always comparable. To the list of descriptors, we could add exile, border-crosser, immigrant, nomad, expatriate, settler, colonizer, and so forth. The descriptor typically reflects an awareness of what pushed the migration. The words with which a migrant (or an author) tells a story about the experience of migrating reveal a great deal about the storyteller's identity construction, choices of personal safety, stability, or economic gain. Irr operates with *digital migration* and *traumatic migration* to identify migration and transcultural literature in the twenty-first century comparing the self-representations of hyper-mobile elites to narratives that

consider the less prosperous migrants (25). In traumatic migration, memory and the past dominate the present, whereas digital migration is accelerated, multidirectional, and represents a new eternity (25). Nyman concludes on a more political level that we have two narratives in migration, “Rather than consisting of an unlimited movement of peoples, things, and ideas across national and cultural borders, ecological disasters as well as political and military violence push human beings towards the borders separating Europe from Africa, Australia from Asia, and the United States from Latin America” (6). What should be acknowledged regardless is that often migration may be initiated by trauma, racial violence, and forced diasporas, as well as give rise to new allegiances and new cultural identifiers. Crossing a border both disperses and gathers “various actors, and creates new modes and spaces of interaction, new borderscapes where identities, belonging, and citizenship are negotiated and reconstructed” (6). A diaspora space can be harmful when it prevents the migrant from exercising agency and when the plurality and contradictions cause paralysis.

If we investigate Butler’s Afro-diasporic voice in *The Parable Series* further, it represents diasporic cultural memories of loss and trauma, as well as environmental and societal critiques with regard to the representation of intersections between gender, class, and race in society in general. Through the Afrofuturistic lens, Butler furthermore addresses themes and concerns of the African diaspora rooted in narratives of slavery and the Black Atlantic. If we investigate Hamid’s Pakistani-diasporic voice in *Exit West*, it addresses multicultural socio-political issues re-imagining identity and nation in the South Asian diaspora with the premise that people are hybrid beings with contradictory identities subject to flux. His stories are rooted in past and present historical narratives of territorial, economic, and cultural imperialism. Butler’s cautionary tales about forced migration meet Hamid’s tale about global migration as a fundamental right. Their novels show us that literary texts may indeed help us negotiate the fluid nature of global mobility as well as question the illusive perception of single-bounded cultures and monocultural identities.

The three novels analyzed in this thesis consider both the celebrations and the upsets of migration. The potential for multiple belongings and hybridity in migration is linked to rootlessness and nostalgia – emotional states that are painfully real for a migrant and simultaneously mythicized. Saeed’s world is filled with homesickness and nostalgia, while Nadia and Olamina embrace the new and its potential. Saeed’s realization of the absence of home

involves homesickness for a home that does not exist anymore, a home is then a home beyond place. He finally comes to terms with the fact that place simply ceases to matter; on the way though, he loses the sense of who he is, which explains that when he, a migrant, returns home, the only thing that stands clear is that *he* is, in fact, a changed man. Nadia and Olamina's standpoints are different from Saeed's, although their experiences also come with loss and sacrifice. For our two female protagonists, the diaspora space is both constructive and liberating. They are both able to negotiate an outside perspective 'in a new world' that is free from entanglement in local controversies and constricted by no one. They possibly succeed because they already come from oppressed positions that are suddenly re-negotiated in a changed non-bigoted world. Especially Olamina reaches a transcendent place as an Earthseed prophet, while Nadia seems content with being nomadic. In this sense, home is being 'practiced' as "a new set of possibilities to make ourselves at home in relation to others ... our home does not 'belong' to us; rather we 'belong' to home" (Lloyd and Vasta 4). It was noticeable throughout the three novels though that the impact of power relations makes it challenging to establish any sense of coherence with the outside world. War and violence, as well as intersections of racism, classism, and sexism, made it difficult for the protagonists to commit and establish an understanding of the place they called home or sought to call home.

The constructed longings and belongings of migrants are built between the real and a utopia, and thus "remembering is an act of lending coherence and integrity to a history interrupted, divided, or compromised by instances of loss" (Seyhan 3). By engaging in one's own stories, one becomes a narrator, who "redress[es] forcibly forgotten experiences, allow[s] the silences of history to come to word, and imagine[s] alternative scripts of the past" (3). Therefore, narratives that originate in a diaspora space cannot be bound by a border, cultural traditions, or a language: "They seek to name and configure cultural and literary production in their own terms and to enter novel forms of inter/transcultural dialogue" (4). In recognizing our old stories and memories, we become narrators who tell alternative stories of the past. When we do that, according to Seyhan, we transform both the present and the future, and then we may reevaluate our belonging.

In the last chapter in *Exit West*, Nadia and Saeed meet to share their stories of the past, not quite remembering the exact details. By contemplating the past and creating an alternative narrative that makes the hardship bearable, they reconstruct a sense of attachment to each other

and their city of birth. For Nadia, identity is constructed in the act of in-betweenness. She is at peace anywhere and therefore an example of the postmodern transnational female characterized by fluidity and heterogeneity; Nadia merely adapts to her surroundings. For Saeed, identity is constructed in the process of mourning and a realization of the fact that he has become someone else in the process. Only then, he can reattach to his faith and his community. Initially, their journey together forced a deconstruction of their identities and their relationship; however, ultimately, their journey led to a reconstruction of their identities and new belongings. By writing in her journal, Olamina in *The Parable Series* renegotiates and rewrites her past; the readers even get glimpses of this mediation in Larkin's journal entries, where the daughter confronts and questions Olamina's aspirations. By creating a community and a religion, Olamina constructs an identity formed in her migration north. She endures a great deal of suffering in transit, but it is in this exact 'crossing of borders' that she finds her new belonging. In our migrating world, home is not a fixed place but is realized in diaspora spaces, where transnational and transcultural possibilities of belonging are negotiated, molded, and forever changing.

## 8. Conclusion

By exploring how migrants negotiate their way of life, while inhabiting different spaces at different times in terms of intersections of race, class, gender, (dis)placement, (dis)ability, and religion, we were able to determine whether the protagonists, Nadia, Olamina, and Saeed, found new ways of belonging. For the three protagonists finding home within themselves meant to unify their many identities, utilize the privilege found in these identities, and fight the oppression within every identity and every intersection of the identities. Olamina and Saeed found home in their spirituality and faith. All three, especially Olamina and Nadia, managed to free themselves from oppression by rejecting power relations that obstructed their paths – Nadia was strong enough to defy society's prejudice, and Olamina became a prophet. Saeed was set in his masculine ways, protector, faithful, and ambitious, which meant that his gender role somewhat hindered his ability to adapt. Guided by Nadia's strength, his faith, and a new love, he settled, although changed in the process.

*The Parable Series* negotiates the lives of migrants, whereas *Exit West* contends with the actual topic of migration. These narratives for new belongings are just three out of many in a growing genre of transcultural fiction, literature for a changing world. Both the authors, their

themes, and their protagonists personify the transcultural identities fostered by forced or voluntary migration. The narratives are sites of struggle and denial while advancing possibilities of new relationships and opportunities in the crossing of borders. My thesis has traced how intersecting factors of gender, class, race, (dis)ability, religion, and (dis)placement construct, enrich, or limit migrants' lived experiences concerning movement and belonging.

By utilizing an intersectional standpoint analysis within a kyriarchy and diaspora space framework, I have investigated standpoints, privileges, systems of oppression, injustices, and exclusions in the novels that my privileged position as a white female scholar may have otherwise prevented me from noticing. The analysis section of the thesis was framed as a heuristic teaching tool, demonstrating and discussing an intersectional reading of fictional texts within the theme of migration. My hope is that this reading protocol for 'doing intersectionality' might validate that intersectionality is not just about demonstrating the mesh of socially and politically relevant differences, but that it is a pro-active tool used to overcome the social and political significance of existing differentiations. The method may increase recognition and appreciation of diversity – also amongst students in a classroom setting.

Intersectionality is advancing in educational contexts because it resonates with lived experiences in the twenty-first century. When applied to everyday lessons in classrooms, an intersectional framework may be used to eradicate inequality and promote social justice within not only the classroom but also within society in general. The original intersectional framework of Collins, Crenshaw, and many other feminist theorists remains crucial, but we have to expound the complexities of an intersectional framework fitting for the twenty-first century and beyond. Recognizing the complexities of for instance migration and transnationalism, constructed of spaces in between, within, and across nation-states, and even in virtual spaces, is crucial for our research of intersections of power and privilege that may be similar to and different from the original concepts of intersectionality.

Butler and Hamid are thinking beyond nationality and the real world as necessary bearings for models of analyzing how individuals interconnect with space and place to form different identities and to survive. As Brah reminds us, in diaspora space, belonging is forever in the making, across cultural, religious, political, and linguistic boundaries (*Cartographies* and "Some Fragments"). Most often, we think about *where* we feel at home, rather that notion should change to *when* and *how* we feel at home. This rethinking is necessary in order to understand

globalization and its current local, national, and transnational migrations that create new (dis)placements around the world. Although migration has always been vital in the story of the human race, movement of peoples across national and cultural borders will be a defining and challenging issue of this century. Worries about an increasing global population, availability of energy, terrorism, economy, poverty, climate change, and armed conflict are fueling the xenophobia sweeping through Western democracies presently. As Butler insists, change is inevitable; societal activism is, after all, impossible without change. Change may teach us to adapt, and it may help us develop resilience, but only if we recognize our own capacity for growth and learning. The novels analyzed in this thesis imaginatively go to the future, because, unless we go there and explore, we cannot disarm the fear of it and find hope in it.



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