

Afrofuturism and Biopolitical Control: The Convergence of Eugenics and Necropolitics in Octavia Butler's *Wild Seed*

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Abstract

This study examines how biopolitical eugenics and necropolitical authority operate together rather than as two fully separate frameworks, in Octavia Butler's Wild Seed with particular attention to the immortal characters Anyanwu and Doro. Michel Foucault's biopolitics and Achille Mbembe's necropolitics are incorporated as theoretical lenses to reveal Doro's hegemonic practice of selective breeding and genetic governance. His breeding program selectively reproduces powerful individuals to create a power-driven world. In parallel, he lives by consuming others' bodies which depicts necropolitical approaches. In contrast, Anyanwu's counter-necropolitical survival is rooted in healing, collective care and responsibility which defies systemic injustices such as colonialism, racism and gendered violence. By critiquing influential reproduction and commodification of bodies, this study depicts necropolitical control by confronting rigid forms of marginalization that intersects with life.

Keywords: Biopolitics, Necropolitics, Afrofuturism, Reproductive Hegemony, Collective Survival

Introduction

Octavia E. Butler plays a significant role in the discourse of Afrofuturism by centering Black women's resistance against racial and power dynamics. Traditionally, speculative fiction was a white male dominated genre. However, Butler confronts bodily governance and social hierarchy by centering Black women in her narratives. Her writings explore slavery, colonialism and genetic control while reimagining alternative emancipatory futures. Kodwo Eshun insists, "Afrofuturism may be characterized as a program for recovering the histories of counter-futures created in a century hostile to Afrodiasporic projection" (Eshun 301). This transcends the genre of speculative fiction and functions as a political critique.

The term Afrofuturism was coined by Mark Dery in his work *Black to the Future* (1994) to reconstruct Black histories by blending technology and Black cultures.

Speculative fiction that treats African-American themes and addresses African-American concerns in the context of twentieth-century technoculture and, more generally, African-

American signification that appropriates images of technology and a prosthetically enhanced future-might, for want of a better term, be called “Afrofuturism” (Dery 180). Afrofuturism reexamines Black experiences that include racial and gendered violence and enslavement to highlight how hierarchical structures shape the realities of Black individuals. Lisa Yaszek in *Afrofuturism, Science Fiction, and the History of the Future*, argues, “Afrofuturism is an extension of the historical recovery projects that black Atlantic intellectuals have engaged in for well over 200 years... Afrofuturism is not just about reclaiming the history of the past, but about reclaiming the history of the future as well” (Yaszek 47). One of the significant elements present in Afrofuturist discourse is that liberation is grounded in revisiting their past histories. Scholars state, “Afrofuturists often return to the past and reconstruct their history to imagine a fully liberated future” (Sumita, Chhikara 89).

In this context of Afrofuturist discourse, *Wild Seed* interrogates structural power and physical governance unlike mainstream science fiction that consistently foregrounds technological advancement. Ytasha L. Womack, a Black scholar states, “Afrofuturism is an intersection of imagination, technology, the future, and liberation” (Womack 9). This allows Black communities to reclaim historically sanitized narratives. As Afrofuturism challenges the structures of power, *Wild Seed* is grounded in bodily transformation and the political systems that regulate humans. This text resists hegemonic structures that reinforce racial and biopolitical management, thus making the immortal shapeshifting protagonist, Anyanwu’s and immortal authoritative character, Doro’s conflict move beyond individual dispute. “Butler’s work does not offer us worlds absent of war, violence, empire, or forms of domination; instead, her work searches for possibilities to first survive and then transform worlds filled with such social evils” (Jenkins 2). The politics of survival in *Wild Seed* is viewed through the theoretical lens of biopolitics, defined by Michel Foucault. Rather than treating biopolitics as a detached framework and necropolitics as a later addition, the novel shows how the regulation of life already contains forms of death making, exclusion and disposability. Biopolitics shifts its concern from operating via direct violence, to exploring how life is organized by reproductive governance. Here, in *Wild Seed*, bodies become a political site where authority is categorized by existence and productivity. Michel Foucault’s *The History of Sexuality*, asserts, “to eliminate defective individuals, degenerate and bastardized populations. In the name of a biological and historical urgency, it justified the racisms of the state, which at the time were on the horizon. It grounded them in “truth” (Foucault 54). Doro’s breeding project may appear to be an initiative that enhances lives, but his program is intertwined with necropolitical practices of exclusion and elimination. This reveals that biopolitical systems accommodate underlying necropolitical edge. He aims to seek “worthy” individuals for his breeding program. Within the discourse of Afrofuturism, it depicts a racialized perspective because controlling lives becomes intertwined with the histories of colonialism and slavery. Roberto Esposito in his work *Biopolitics and Philosophy* states biopolitics as, “affirming the superiority of one’s own blood to the point of imposing it on those with whom one does not share it” (Esposito 7) closely relating to the reproductive program that Doro conducts. Doro asserts that certain bloodlines possess extraordinary significance that degrades the value of humanity by institutionalizing biological purpose. Biopolitics here is not merely governmental; it also prepares the ground for sovereign violence by deciding which bodies are valuable to preserve and which to be treated as expendable.

Similarly, necropolitics underlines that such administration relies on the power to reveal death to selective populations. These two frameworks emphasize that the preservation of certain lives is facilitated by the disposability of others which makes these frameworks not as two isolated entities but interlocked with each other. Achille Mbembe deepens Foucault’s theory of biopower by suggesting that authority is operated through the ability to classify who must live or die. It depicts a political system where marginalized individuals are subjected to death

and violence. Mbembe states, “To exercise sovereignty is to exercise control over mortality and to define life as the deployment and manifestation of power” (Mbembe 12). According to Doro, life is beneficial only when one fulfills Doro’s aim and this connects with Mbembe’s viewpoint of sovereign force and his authority to exercise threat and death. Doro survives by possessing others’ bodies by killing them and utilizing their bodies to survive in a human form. “I kill, Anyanwu. That is how I keep my youth, my strength. I can do only one thing to show you what I am, and that is kill a man and wear his body like a cloth... This is not the body I was born into. It’s not the tenth I’ve worn, nor the hundredth, nor the thousandth” (Butler 12). The very character that nurtures and breeds lives, is sustained by others’ death for his survival. Preservation and destruction act as intersecting practices rather than functioning as binaries. Thus, the convergence of biopolitics and necropolitics reveals how systems exercise authority and categorize valuable and expendable lives.

While various Afrofuturist research on *Wild Seed* explores the themes of race, gender, slavery and posthumanism, critical engagement with the intersection between biopolitical governance and necropolitical authority is identified as limited. Reproductive domination and survival are located as isolated patterns rather than approaching them as the interlocking methods of power. This paper addresses this gap by analyzing *Wild Seed* as a survival text that converges biopolitical control and necropolitical authority.

Biopolitical Eugenics and Reproductive Governance

Wild Seed portrays the overlap between endurance of life and hegemony as it is evident by the biopolitical breeding project implemented by Doro. This is anchored in reproductive exploitation and selective breeding, thus highlighting the eugenic structure. Doro had been their god since he had assembled them generations before and commanded them to marry only each other and the strangers he brought to them. They had obeyed him, throwing away clearly defective children born of their inbreeding, and strengthening the gifts that made them so valuable to him... pleasing him was the most important thing they could do. (Butler 45).

Wild Seed foregrounds that the idea to foster an ideal population is rooted in eradicating bodies that uncovers the closely knit relationship between biopolitical enhancement and necropolitical elimination. Bodies are reduced to biological models where the concept of reproduction becomes a political idea. His community serving as breeding systems reveals how human life is commodified and systemized based on hierarchical and eugenic values. He targets individuals who are “abnormally long lives, resistance to disease, and budding special abilities made them very important to him” (Butler 14). Here, it reflects how biopolitical power is made effective as it is naturalized. Doro’s subjects obey him which reveals how power is conducted through internalization over coercion.

This internalization of systemic injustices occurs due to people participating in their own oppression. Doro’s community independently started sustaining his ideologies by depicting eugenics as a self-perpetuating system. Foucault also argues that modern power is effective when individuals adopt dominant practices without authoritative involvement. This extends Foucault’s notion of disciplinary power. “Children with “forbidden” things wrong with them—twins, for instance, and children born feet first, children with almost any deformity, children born with teeth—these children were thrown away” (Butler 26-27). This passage is not simply descriptive; it depicts how the logic of usefulness has been absorbed into communal practice, making oppression feel ordinary. This also mirrors Foucault’s biopower which reflects people’s engagement in sustaining oppressive systems. Moreover, human relationships dealt in the novel lack emotional agency and are obliged to biological productivity. Hereby, the body becomes a site of political and genetic regulations. “I search the land for people who are a little

different—or very different. I search them out, I bring them together in groups, I begin to build them into a strong new people” (Butler 18). The language utilized mirrors colonial expansion and how mobility highlights colonial practice. He claims to be an agent who assists individuals to build them into their stronger version. Individuals are viewed as biological resources who are classified and gathered to be exploited. Foucault claims that power is enforced through disciplining bodies and biopolitics is performed through regulating populations. “Hence there was an explosion of numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the Subjugation of bodies and the control of populations, marking the beginning of an era of biopower” (Foucault 140). Doro intensifies biopolitical eugenics by perceiving humans as genetic machines rather than subjects with autonomy. “Most significant among this extension was the conversion of the human being, who became recognized first and foremost as human capital” (Winninghoff 18). Doro foregrounds humans’ supernatural abilities and discovers Anyanwu to be highly compatible for his project. “He had to have the woman. She was wild seed of the best kind. She would strengthen any line he bred her into, strengthen it immeasurably” and Doro further states, “Come with me, Anyanwu. You belong with me, with the people I’m gathering” (Butler 22). This language of Doro corresponds to possession rather than kinship. It exposes how human lives are diminished to extractive materials that serve enduring dominant systems. This raises the question of what makes Doro gather people across countries. The novel suggests that this movement resembles colonial expansion, where bodies converted into resources and social bonds are replaced by extraction. Additionally, his journey to cultivate life by selective breeding causes the others to be deemed disposable. This biological advancement performs adjacent to the exclusion of lives.

In contrast, Anyanwu deconstructs reproductive exploitation by her shapeshifting abilities, which is not reductively a biological trait, but represents resistance against eugenic approaches. In her dolphin form, and before that, in her leopard form, Doro had discovered that his mind could not find her. Even when he could see her, his mind, his tracking sense, told him she was not there. It was as though she had died, as though he confronted a true animal—a creature beyond his reach (Butler 88). Anyanwu’s shapeshifting capabilities interrupt the influential design as she becomes incomprehensible to the system. Butler employs animal transformation as a key factor since animals refrain from the human classifications that are situated within the social and hierarchical divisions. Anyanwu denies being diminished to her biological effectiveness and also disrupts Doro’s authority of marginalization that collectively interrogates biopolitical and necropolitical power. Her transformation serves as a counter-biopolitical element that enables her to escape Doro’s constraints. Doro’s breeding program is deeply connected to rigid binaries such as male/ female, mortal/ immortal, valued/ devalued since eugenics work under such fixed categories, which makes Anyanwu’s shapeshifting abilities to disrupt these dualisms. “The control over sex therefore is... biopolitical. It is not determined by cultural norms, but by the strategy to gain control over life (Repo 8). Repo asserts that biopower functions through fixed gender categories whereas Anyanwu rejects this ideology as her body and identity are constantly fluctuating. “Within her body, she killed his seed. She disconnected the two small tubes through which her own seed traveled to her womb. She had done this many times when she thought she had given a man enough of children. Now she did it to avoid giving any children at all, to avoid being used” (Butler 119). Biopolitical systems manage populations by regulating reproduction and Anyanwu’s control over her fertility affects biopower through which Doro exercises authority.

Necropolitical Authority and Subjugated Bodies

“Sovereignty means the capacity to define who matters and who does not, who is disposable

and who is not” (Mbembe 27). Doro’s biopolitical management of life can be further considered as necropolitical as sovereignty is not merely an administration of reproduction, but aligns with constant death as a governing method. His system of life governance is prolonged through his potential to impose death, therefore developing an interconnected power dynamics. Human bodies are subjected to commodification and are eliminated immediately after his aim is fulfilled. “These strange ones, his witches, were good kills. They offered him the most satisfying durable food and shelter. He still preyed on them” (Butler 104). This converges biopolitical preservation and necropolitical destruction by portraying that Doro sustains certain lives as he preserves the power to consume them. Life and death become mutual mechanisms in terms of power. Mbembe refers to this as “death-worlds” where individuals live in an enduring state of fear as they are kept alive but are unsafe and can be harmed or disposed of at any instant. “Creation of death-worlds, new and unique forms of social existence in which vast populations are subjected to conditions of life conferring upon them the status of living dead” (Mbembe 40). Fear serves as a tool of disciplinary factor where those who fail to adhere to Doro’s aspirations risk death or disposability. Power is not merely operated through direct killing but also through the threat of death or precarity. Fear becomes a structure where people constantly alter their conduct to escape disposability, exposing how necropolitics functions through an enduring threat of possible death. Scholars state that this framework of necropolitics unfolds through the histories of colonialism and race and how the community experiences social violence. “Necropolitics emerges from its engagement with race, coloniality, and resistance” (Peters et.al 466). Furthermore, Doro symbolizes the system of extraction as his immortality is inseparably linked to necropower. This emphasizes two kinds of immortality where Doro’s consumption represents extractive survival and Anyanwu’s adaptation reflects relational survival. Therefore, longevity becomes a question of what forms of survival rely on supremacy and which on reciprocity. This underscores Afrofuturist readings of posthuman reproduction where endurance is interconnected with oppression. “This capitalistic, instrumentalizing activity fits more closely to those of white slaveholders who operated from racist and sexist beliefs to profit from the bodies of enslaved people of African descent” (Smith 53). In contrast, Anyanwu’s resistance to be suppressed to a temporary vessel interrupts Doro’s necropolitical authority and structural violence over her reproductive ability. “Within herself, she altered her reproductive organs further, made herself literally no longer a woman, but not quite a man” (Butler 121). This scene is depicted not solely to mark bodily change but to portray that survival can also mean refusing the categories through which domination operates.

Wild Seed portrays Anyanwu as a counter-necropolitical figure revealing that necropolitical domination becomes disrupted when one embodies refusal against hierarchical characters. She reflects survival through healing abilities, contrasting and dismantling necropolitical logic. She restores injured bodies, re-establishing their livelihood and redirects and rejects Doro’s necropolitical governance. “She grew... medicines for healing, used them when people brought their sick to her. Often, she needed no medicines, but she kept that to herself. She served her people by giving them relief from pain and sickness” (5). Anyanwu contrasts Doro’s mode of destructive survival by her healing abilities. As a result, survival is redefined as collective care and responsibility. Ultimately, Anyanwu refused to be one of Doro’s resources and denied the idea that a body can be owned by one. She possesses the capability to heal herself and teach women medicine. “I’m going to teach some of the women to make it... So that they can heal themselves and their families without depending on what they see as my magic (257). Her healing abilities serve as an opposing approach to the political idea of knowledge being monopolized. Doro’s persistence relies on authoritative control and dependency whereas Anyanwu teaches people how to survive independently. This perspective challenges the structure of governance and by transmitting knowledge, power shifts from individual strength to shared responsibility.

Wild Seed's Critique of Survival Politics

Wild Seed critiques biopolitical governance that includes eugenics, racial hierarchy and command over bodies. Doro's breeding network is not solely a fantastical element, but a speculative interpretation of historical events that expose the interconnectedness of human value with biological significance. His relentless pursuit of powerful lineages parallels the ideologies of eugenics where "the more inferior species die out, the more abnormal individuals are eliminated, the fewer degenerates there will be in the species as a whole" (Foucault 255). Racialized power dynamics are closely related to bodily dominance as Doro lived across time and space thus situating him within colonial histories and enslavement where marginalized Black bodies are identified as assets. Scholars note that Butler's speculative narratives confront how racism promotes production of bodies and some observe that, "Butler creates a paradigm in which definitions of coercion, reproductive control, and, ultimately, sexual assault can be interrogated and challenged" (Williams III 56). Consequently, *Wild Seed* articulates eugenics as a broader political approach and not scientifically oriented.

Butler critiques the contemporary ideology that refinement of society can be retained by systems of sociopolitical dominance. Doro mirrors Foucault's critique of power over populations, where management of life operates by means of racist classification. "In a normalizing society, race or racism is the precondition that makes killing acceptable" (Foucault 256). He further states, "Racism has a second function... The very fact that you let more die will allow you to live more" (255). Butler extends Foucault's response to the racial classifications through Anyanwu's fluid identity and healing abilities by resisting to confine within rigid labels. Studies underscore that Butler's works interrogate the worldview of how society progresses naturally and emphasizes that technological and biological advancements persist discrimination of individuals in a modern form. The distinction between Doro's destructive authority and Anyanwu's collective care challenges oppressive structures that manage others' lives by defining which bodies are to be disciplined or sacrificed.

Conclusion

This study reveals how the convergence of biopolitical eugenics and necropolitical authority control life through fear, reproductive control and possession of bodies. Necropolitics does not merely follow biopolitics, but highlights that biopolitical governance consists of necropolitical traits. This analysis demonstrates that life regulation is shaped by disposability. *Wild Seed* highlights the interconnectedness of survival and racism where, Black bodies in particular are treated as resources and how a human's significance is measured on the grounds of their genetic utility and supernatural abilities. The findings of the analysis emphasize's focus on Black women's experiences within speculative historical narratives from which they have been excluded, reclaiming agency within power and survival. By Anyanwu's embodied autonomy, *Wild Seed* destabilizes modern mechanisms of domination, thereby centering Afrofuturism as a discourse that questions controlling historical systems rather than solely treating it as a speculative field of study.

The paper further emphasizes that liberation is closely related to recovering subjugated Black histories by reimagining alternative futures where Black women are free from racial, gendered and reproductive governance. This develops Foucault's notion of biopolitics by portraying how systems that were created to govern life produce necropolitical conditions highlighting bodies as expendable. Thus, the text subverts the idea of modern scientific advancements leading to liberation, and proposes that it reproduces racial stratification. It also reframes endurance not as power over marginalized bodies, but as collective resistance against oppressive systems that decide whose lives are considered valuable.

This paper is limited to its focus on Foucault's biopolitics and Mbembe's necropolitics as the primary theoretical lenses for the study on Butler's *Wild Seed*. This theoretical dimension limits other thematic concerns that include cultural or spiritual perspectives of the novel. Moreover, this critical reading solely revolves around the immortal characters, Anyanwu and Doro, restricting the experiences of other secondary characters. Further scope for study in Afrofuturist narratives can be expanded to environmental humanities, posthumanism and digital humanities in Afrofuturist novels and films. A comparative analysis can be conducted on other Afrofuturist and Africanfuturist writers that include Nnedi Okorafor, Samuel R. Delany and similar writers.

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