

## Gender Issues across Planets in Octavia Butler's Wild Seed and Dawn

D. Alice Ligorina,

Ph. D Research Scholar, Government Arts College (Autonomous), Salem

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**Abstract:** *The present study is based on the analysis of gender issues across planets encountered by human and alien characters that occur in the novels, Wild Seed and Dawn of Octavia Butler. The paper begins with a brief introduction of the writer Octavia Butler and a short summary of the novels chosen for study of this paper. As the title suggests the study of the paper is carried out on the issues of the different genders introduced by Octavia Butler in the two novels. The different genders of our study include the analysis of new fictitious alien genders like the Ogbanje, Oankali and Ooloi along with the two familiar earthly masculine and feminine genders on the basis of a general discrimination of the victimizer and the victimized, colonizer and the colonized. The analysis of the gender issues is done through the perspective of three principles namely: Principle of Entrance, Principle of Adaptation and Principle of Acceptance. Each principle is explained with examples cited from both novels one by one. Then the paper is concluded with Butler's message as a solution to the gender issues that tread with us for generations stating that We come to infer many thoughts like difference exists and does persist in all we see, it is difference only when we consider it a difference. We should accept each other with the difference that exist in each other and try to lead life taking the difference in a positive connotation.*

**Key words:** *colonized, discrimination, gender, settlement, victimized*

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### I. Introduction

Octavia Estelle Butler (June 22, 1947 – February 24, 2006) was an American science fiction writer. A recipient of both the Hugo and Nebula awards, Butler was one of the best-known women in the field. In 1995, she became the first science fiction writer to receive the MacArthur Fellowship, nicknamed the Genius Grant. Her works include three series such as Patternist Series, Lilith's Brood and the Parable Series: wherein the Patternist series include five novels under the titles Patternmaster, Mind of my Mind, Survivor, Wild Seed and Clay's Ark; the Lilith's Brood include three novels such as Dawn, Adulthood Rites and Imago; and the The Parable Series include two novels such as Parable of the Sower and Parable of the Talents. Apart from these series she is credited for the publication of two great novels such as Kindred and Fledgling and a short story collection titled Bloodchild and Other Stories.

Butler's two selective novels like Wild Seed the fourth novel in the Patternist Series and Dawn the first novel in the series of Lilith's Brood is chosen for the study of this paper. As the title suggests the study of the paper is carried out on the issues of the different genders introduced by Octavia Butler in the two novels. The different genders of our study include the analysis of new fictitious alien genders like the Ogbanje, Oankali and Ooloi along with the two familiar earthly masculine and feminine genders on the basis of a general discrimination of the victimizer and the victimized, colonizer and the colonized.

*Wild Seed* is the story of two immortals such as Doro and Anyanwu. It opens in Africa at the close of the seventeenth century, at the height of the slave trade. Doro, an Ogbanje has sustained himself for the last 3,500 years by feeding on people, through stealing their bodies whenever he feels hunger, or to exert control over other person. He is drawn across the continent to Anyanwu, who is effectively immortal and is over three centuries (350 yrs) old at their meeting. He also finds that she is a shapeshifter, chameleon-like, long-lived with the complete power to manipulate and change her body and its functions, absorbing pain even at the cellular level and healing herself and other people of her village who fear her as a God and a witch.

Doro has been spending his very long life collecting and breeding humans with sensitivities, quirks, and special traits in an attempt to breed a race of people like him—more than human. He calls these people “seeds” and the villages where he's settled them all over the world “seed villages.” Nothing is more important to him than finding and controlling good seeds to continue his breeding program, with the ultimate goal of producing the perfect offspring. He succeeds in persuading Anyanwu to leave her village in Africa and travel back to his settlement in the New World as his wife and she agrees in exchange for his promise that he won't touch her family. And as a wild seed, only two things prevent him from harming Anyanwu directly: first, his

fear that if he takes her over, he will lose all knowledge of her special talent; and second, his fear that if he kills her, he will have lost the only immortal who would ever understand him.

When Anyanwu arrives in America, she learns that he never had any intention of making her his wife, and instead marries her off to his favorite son Issac. Throughout the entirety of their marriage, Doro forces her to not only have sex with him but other men and bare the children of these unions. Issac, Anyanwu's husband is also taken from their home, to occasionally father children with other women. Doro constantly threatens Anyanwu and yet he has the nerve to be angry that she does not love him. From start to finish, their interactions are filled with deceit, sexual violence, emotional abuse and an extreme imbalance in power. When Anyanwu finally makes a bid for freedom after Issac dies, she manages to live for 100 years as a dolphin but when she sets up her own community, Doro quickly finds her and forces himself back into her life, though he begins to feel conflicted about what he is doing to her. Once again, in order to protect her children, she concedes to his will.

It is at this final stage of the story, beyond disturbing that Anyanwu ends up in bed with Doro willingly and she feels a version of love for him, even as she is repulsed by him. Similarly, Doro moves beyond seeing Anyanwu as an animal to breed in the end does not make it any better. Anyanwu and Doro are pushed together by immortality and she gains a measure of control in the relationship. Doro and Anyanwu are balanced blends of unchanging immortal and immortals who are changed by each other. With these two, and the changing setting, Butler explores eugenics, the meaning of family and love, and humanity. There is enough resolution to their story to have some closure at the end of the novel. Thus, the central dynamic of the book is between both Doro and Anyanwu's desire for companionship, on the one hand, and their utter loathing for each other, on the other hand.

Dawn is the first novel in the Xenogenesis trilogy which was republished as Lilith's Brood. The story begins with Lilith Iyapo, a young black woman who is found in the remote Andes Mountains, mourning the death of her husband and son, was revived through an awakening from a type of REM (sleep that has lasted for some time) 250 years after a nuclear holocaust on an enormous ship orbiting Earth. The Earth has been destroyed in the nuclear holocaust and it led to the near extinction of humanity and destruction of 80% of its population while a group of unconscious survivors have been taken by the alien Oankalis to the mother ship and placed in "sleeping" pods for some 250 years. Oankalis were aliens like species that travel throughout the universe to find other species to breed with in order to construct new genes. Lilith is ultimately brought to this new place to help humans adapt to this new "culture". However, she fears these creatures but forces herself to overcome her repulsion and to learn about the Oankali and the plans they have for the remaining humans.

The Oankali are very genetically engineered creatures that can adapt or evolve their own genes to the environment. But they have done this process too much, and now need to breed with other species they allow for new genetic processes. Therefore, Lilith faces a dilemma that manipulates her decision between accepting the medical augmentations and the sexual advances of her Oankali "new family" (which consists of Male Oankali named Jhadaya, Female Oankali named Tediin, and Ooloi named Kaghuyaht) while trying to help other humans. In this defenseless position, she is forced to adapt to a culture not of her own, if she does not do this, she will die. Lilith is kept in solitary confinement for two years with no knowledge of who her captors are. When she's released she has no control over her life. She is denied contact with other humans for a long time. At first the Oankali won't allow her writing materials or access to some written human records they saved. And she discovers that they have destroyed the few ruins of human society, so humanity can "begin anew" with the Oankali.

She comes to an uneasy truce and trust in the Oankali's explanation of where she is and her role: she has been chosen to awaken a select group (based on her reading of detailed personal resumes). Lilith will be a leader in one of the new human-Oankali communities on Earth. Her children will have fun tentacles. And she has no say in the matter. Lilith reacts to this with more than a little skepticism—she almost kills herself. The Oankali manipulate her into training the first group of humans to re-colonize Earth. Lilith is a natural leader, but leading 40 angry, confused and captive humans is no easy task. As she awakens them, one by one, she confronts their anger and confusion and, eventually, their resistance to the notion of gene trading proposed by the Oankali. Her loyalties are divided: On one hand she wants human freedom; on the other, she comes to respect and perhaps even love some of the Oankali. She develops a rewarding yet unequal intimate relationship with one of the Oankali ooloi (third sex) named Nikanj.

Lilith is both mentor and enemy to the humans; lover, captive and defiant apprentice to the Oankali. Neither the humans nor the Oankali make this easier on her. The human community is hateful, violent and cruel. The Oankali are arrogant, careless and have no concept of human rights. While Lilith doesn't regain her freedom, there is the possibility at the end of the novel that the other humans will. Lilith is coerced and manipulated, and her choices are extremely limited (interbreed, death or a solitary life aboard the ship). But she's an intelligent, creative and strong-willed woman. She negotiates between poor options. She reluctantly acts as the mediator between the humans and the Oankali. She isn't willing to be an Oankali pet or a guinea pig,

but she isn't willing to revert to caveman society with the humans either. Throughout the novel she demands respect from the Oankali, and works to forge a more equal partnership between the two groups. The novel ends as Lilith becomes a mediator between the humans and the Oankalis, giving birth to a son interbred by her and an Oankali.

Though the alien genders also have the similar categorization of male and female alike the humans in their characteristic features, the analysis of the major characters in both the novels with such a categorization of male and female gives a result in favour of a feministic perspective. A deeper analysis of the genders ended with an enlightenment stating that not all the male characters of the novel are responsible for the sufferings of the female characters while there were traces of a few notable male characters who contributed towards the happy, healthy and secure life of the female characters of both the novels. Accordingly the study of these alien genders along with that of the human genders that occur in these two novels such as *Wild Seed* and *Dawn* are being analysed with the perspective of three principles namely: Principle of Entrance, Principle of Adaptation and Principle of Acceptance to get a balanced and unbiased opinion.

First to analyse the Principle of Entrance: the principle of entrance deals with early stage of life or relationship. The principle of entrance is that the gender who first enters the world or orbit of existence feels more stronger, knowledgeable, successful survivors and even saviours of the following gender who enter second or next to the first gender. To add more validity to this point, the preceeding ability of Adam the first man is imposed over Eve the woman in the Garden of Eden. Accordingly in the novel *Wild Seed* Doro, the Ogbanje who lives longer for about 3500 years at the time he meets Anyanwu the opposing immortal gender who have survived only 350 years is being controlled and abducted by Doro in spite of the possession of her immortal powers. Similarly in the novel *Dawn*, the first intruders or the inhibitors of the galactic ship takes control of the humans and even among the humans Lilith serves to be the leader among the remaining humans on the ship as she was being awakened earlier than them.

The entry of the thought of being first and the other next itself paves the way for emergence of 'inequality'. Sometimes this pride of first entry gives a sense of prominence among the remaining and this intention may gradually lead to the unequal treatment of others. Although the person who comes first finds the next as the person similar to his gender, power, knowledge, ability etc, he still stays to be a slow learner and analyzer to accept the reality. This tendency of inequality and the quality of slow or delayed accepters is developed in the minds of the first entry as a result of mythical social mental setup which they think by themselves that they always exceed the next or the second entry in all ways.

This concept is very much applicable to the mental setup of Doro over Anyanwu. At this present world we say that a feminine gender is comparatively the marginalized and the gender of more struggle when compared to the masculine gender. To the contrary Butler's heroine Anyanwu possessed the power of interchanging her gender completely as long as she will. This power was more equal to that of Doro's but still the fact of gender was not the reason for her submissiveness. Though Doro was aware of Anyanwu's state of immortality equal to the immortal status of himself, he delayed himself to accept it and used her emotional attachment towards her own values of life, especially the existence of her children and their descendants to force her to dance according to his whims and fancies. Doro failed to accept her powers as an equal to him rather her powers stayed just the reason to choose her from her native land as a 'wild seed', a new comer with strange abilities almost like rare valuable tool that can be used in his breeding projects.

The same is the case with that of the Oankali in the treatment of Lilith and the other human captives. The Oankali's awareness of the rare and valuable ability in humans such as the possessors of bodies with new and inspiring things like cancer and higher intelligence only was the reason for them to choose the humans as captives and use their rare values for their own disgusting project of 'gene trading'. Consequently this pride of first entry, the attitude of inequality and tendency of slow accepters of the reality make them the deciding factors of everything under the sky. For instance Doro in *Wild Seed* and the Oankali's and the Ooloi in *Dawn* in spite of their power and longer existence have gained the status of a leader, creator and protector over the equally powerful Anyanwu and the humans.

The Principle of Adaptation is to be studied next to the Principle of entrance. The principle of Adaptation deals with middle stage of relationship. The Principle of Adaptation is the gender who entered as next and second to earth or any planetary orbit of existence feels a bit secondary to the people who entered first. This principle includes the various stages of adaptation of both the gender with each other. The unequal treatment and the over protective nature of the people of first entered gender had paved way to the submissiveness and exploitation of the second entered. The second entered or somehow misled or being deceived by the illusionary protectiveness (subtle dominance) of the previous gender. All the good deeds of the former were done, so as to make the latter trust them and bring them slowly under their control like the deceitful persuasion of Eve by the Snake in *Paradise Lost*. Accordingly the second entered by the continuous denial of equality, try to overcome and prove themselves equal to the previously entered.

For instance in the novel *Wild Seed*, Anyanwu was misled by Doro to follow him with false promises of providing her family with the procreation of undying powerful descendants. The moment when Anyanwu comes to know that all the promises of Doro were a mirage, she strives to leave him and lead an independent life and live a life of a dolphin which is devoid of all the emotional trait and threatening control of Doro. Doro's care and emotional support to Anyanwu as his wife in his native land (seed village), such as giving her food, shelter, clothes, a home and people to assist her in a new land were done by Doro to persuade Anyanwu to do according to his will.

Similarly in the novel *Dawn*, the human survivors along with Lilith Iyapo, the protagonist were made captives by the Oankali stating that they have saved them from dying with great injuries of war and have prolonged their life span by curing many diseases like cancer which they diagnosed while analyzing their bodies. They also promised that they will be sent back to earth after they have set right the damages of the nuclear war and make it a comfortable place to live in. Though it seemed a good promise with no harm in it they did all care to the humans so as to make them trust the Oankali's as harmless creatures but indirectly they persuaded the humans to accept the role of gene donors as a price for their care.

In this stage of adaptation though the characters in both the novels fall apart with issues of self affirmation, attaining independence and dominance they were put together not by the need of the presence of the other but by the fate of life, they were drawn towards each other and were made to live besides each other along with their differing attitudes and unsolved protests they gradually try to get used and adapt with the difference of the other. The same adaptation process is being explored by Butler in the character of Anyanwu with Doro in the novel *Wild Seed* and Lilith Iyapo among the human captives to survive with Oankali's in the novel *Dawn*.

The third and the final Principle of study is the Principle of Acceptance. This deals with the final stage of relationship. The Principle of Acceptance is that the burdens of life and struggles of survival are lightened and the coarse confusing path of life turns to a less troublesome path when it is led with a ray of hope and acceptance of the other. The hate, fight and all grudge that people held with each other in the path of life slowly dissolves in the long run of life with changing time. People put together by fate of life find a meaning and importance in the existence of their companions at this stage. They start to know the gain and loss of the presence of each other. They become responsible towards each other and the colonized and the victim tend to succeed the colonizer or the victimizer through submission. Through submission they attain the long awaited dominance.

Accordingly in the novel *Wild Seed*, Anyanwu slowly understands and accepts Doro and he in turn try to know and accept her as his equal. Anyanwu and Doro's conflicts are amazing in how they change over time. Doro starts out as a tyrant, using people like cattle, to breed and dispose of at his pleasure. Anyanwu is the human counterpart to his cold planning. She cares about people, she wants her children safe, and wishes to be master of her own life. Despite their difference, struggle, pain and loss that Anyanwu have gained for being with Doro, she understands the state of Doro that to survive he needs a human body to inhabit, and whenever that one is spent, he must find another one.

Doro has the gift and curse of being able to take on the body of anyone he desires. This is a gift because is immortal, but it is a curse because when a body gets old, it is mandatory that he changes bodies in order to live. In order for Doro to survive, he must kill. This causes the other characters to be very wary of how they behave around Doro because they know that their life can be over at any moment. This has made him companionless. Living for so long, death, morality and love mean something entirely different to him if at all. Anyanwu is the human, ethical side as Doro is the animal, biological. But this dichotomy is too simplistic for what Butler is trying to achieve. For life is all about the fight, the will to assert power, to pursue what you think is right and most of all, the search for companionship. And eventually, after many centuries, both Anyanwu and Doro find an uneasy truce, but not before her heart have been broken many times and Doro learns an unexpected lesson: compromise.

In the novel, *Dawn* since it is the novel in the series the story doesn't end but continues in the next stories of the series, there isn't a definite fortunate ending as in the relationship of Doro and Anyanwu in *Wild Seed*, but it has a similar concluding situation. Lilith Iyapo the protagonist of the novel strives to know and understand her own self and the things which surround her. Broken apart with her trials of opposing to accept the views of the Oankali's her captivators, she accepts to obey the orders of those genetic engineers. In that act though she wanted to be in the side of the humans, she is mistaken as the supporter of the aliens. The humans start acting against her treating her as one who belongs to the community of the Oankalis. They even go to the extent of killing her when she tries to teach them about the reality of the place they live in. Lilith is abandoned by the humans and they return to earth without her leaving her with the Oankali's. Left companionless by her own race, Lilith is being comforted by the race of the aliens and is taken as the member of their family at the end of the novel.

Thus from the analysis of the stories of both the novels of Butler, in the perspective of three principles: Principle of Entrance, Principle of Adaptation and Principle of Acceptance we come to conclude that all problems related to any difference such as race, gender, social status etc., can be solved when we understand the reality and accept the need and importance of the other. Through the variance of gender in her characters, Butler gives a true picture of reality. All the problems of race and gender encountered by the alien and human characters of the novels can be applicable to reality and the reconciliation made within the characters of her novels also serve as the solution to the gender issues that exists in today's world too. We are able to infer many thoughts like difference exists and does persist in all we see, it is difference only when we consider it a difference. We should accept each other with the difference that exist in each other and try to lead life taking the difference in a positive connotation. Anyanwu and Lilith stand as the examples to succeed life through submission to beings who are different and intolerable.

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