

Sowing Utopia: Feminist Community in Octavia Butler's *Wild Seed*

by

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## Abstract

The oeuvre of Octavia Butler refutes the notion of a stable, wholly equal utopia. Rather, she demonstrates in book series such as *Patternist*, *Xenogenesis*, and *Parables* that self-interested groups or individuals tend to manifest self-interested utopias for themselves and dystopias for the out-group. Despite the dystopian possibilities of utopian visions, Butler shows that utopianism, or “social dreaming,” is necessary for the betterment of society. To herald the better world, Butler frequently uses maternal, feminist, empathetic, community-seeking female leaders to positively influence society: I affectionately name these characters Butler’s Mostly Utopian Mothers, or, MUMs for abbreviation. Butler’s quintessential MUM is Anyanwu of *Wild Seed*, part of the *Patternist* series. Anyanwu builds a utopian commune based on maternity, feminism, satisfying work, and decency. Though Anyanwu’s utopia crumbles due to a parasitic, patriarchal immortal named Doro, the haven that Anyanwu creates is a guiding path for resistance, hope, and bettering lives through utopianism.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

Through aliens, dolphins, and telepaths, Octavia Butler creates worlds that flirt with utopia but never achieve it. Butler's rich collection of novels and short stories is engaging, endlessly complex, and never allows a character to escape the imbricating power dynamics of her diegesis. As a science and speculative fiction author, Butler radically broke into a genre dominated by white men; Lyman Tower Sargent writes that "[e]xcept for the varied work of Samuel R. Delany and Octavia E. Butler, the late 1970s and 1980s saw relatively few utopias by African American authors" ("African Americans and Utopia," 34). Butler herself acknowledges in her personal essay "Positive Obsession," originally titled "The Birth of a Writer," that there "was exactly one other Black science-fiction writer working successfully when I sold my first novel" (134) and that, in 1989, she was "still the only Black woman who [wrote sci-fi]" (134) to her knowledge. In large part due to her impact, the world of science fiction literature has become a more open, diverse space--directly, in the case of novelists like Nnedi Okorafor's *Binti* (2015) or N. K. Jemisin's co-authorship of *Mass Effect Andromeda: Initiation* (2017). Okorafor writes in her tribute to the late Butler that "Octavia's ideas stretched my mind so much that it never recovered to its previous shape" (242). With Butler's ability to expand minds and hearts, her novels have also been lauded as "integral in defining [Afrofuturism] and held up as foundational, almost canonical, texts" (Afful 97). Gaining further recognition as a literary giant, Butler's attention to cautionary dystopias and utopianism have become increasingly relevant.

In her short story "The Book of Martha," Butler writes of a young woman, Martha, who is tasked by God with making the world a better place, but Martha recognizes that it is "[im]possible to arrange a society so that everyone is content" (202), which God agrees with. However, like many of Butler's protagonists, Martha takes on the task of trying to "help" (202)

humanity become “a less self-destructive species” (206). In Butler’s “Afterword,” she calls it her “utopia story” (214); but, because Butler “felt that one person’s utopia would be another’s hell,” Mary’s solution to help humanity posits that “individual utopias are created in each person’s dreams, but only there” (Sargent 37). In an interview with *Democracy Now*, Butler states that she finds “utopias ridiculous” because there will never be a “perfect human society until we get a few perfect humans, and that seems unlikely” (“Science Fiction”). Butler also brings her perspective as an African American writer to the utopian tradition. Lyman Tower Sargent asserts that “[m]ost basically, we want a full stomach, decent clothing and housing, and a sense of security” (“African Americans and Utopia,” 25), but he makes the distinction that “[t]hroughout American history, African Americans were kept from achieving this most basic decent life” (25). Sargent, Afful, and Green expand on the centrality of Butler’s position on race as it relates to the constructions of Butler’s various utopias; while such arguments form a base for my own, I focus on how Butler’s speculative fiction often builds on various feminist, utopian impulses, often directed by strong mothers who find hope in bleak situations. Like Martha, most of her characters exemplify earnest utopianism, defined by Sargent as “social dreaming” (“Three Faces,” 9), but the diegetic reality tempers their final circumstances. Other critics have explored Butler’s work in relation to utopia (see Brataas, Curtis, Green, Haslam, Hutner, Miller, and Zaki) but I will add to these discussions by focusing on the relationship between her utopian worlds and motherhood, emphasizing Anyanwu’s care-centered utopia of decency.

Throughout this essay, I’ll be generally working in the definitional framework laid out in Lyman Tower Sargent’s “The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited” for utopias and utopianism. Sargent defines “utopia” as “a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space” (9), adding that the term “eutopia” or “good place” is often

interchangeable with “utopia” in use. Sargent’s terminology allows for ease of discussion in its specificity and provides a good vehicle for discussing Butler, but I acknowledge that there have been many other definitions set out by both scholars and writers of utopia since Thomas More’s *Utopia* (1516). My thesis as a whole will argue that in a series of novels known as the *Patternist* or *Seed to Harvest*<sup>1</sup> series, Butler uses the potentially immortal, shape-shifting, maternal character Anyanwu to create the utopian settlement known as Canaan on a Louisiana plantation in the 1840s. Anyanwu’s settlement eschews the practice of slavery and relies on self- and community-motivated hard work, a feminist collective of kinship, and a philosophy of decency<sup>2</sup> that centres on maternal figures, and specifically on maternal figures who have control over their own reproduction. Though Anyanwu’s presence can be felt throughout the entire series, I will focus primarily on *Wild Seed* and touch briefly on *Mind of My Mind* because these are the first two books, chronologically within the history of the world that Butler builds, and they document the lives and deaths of two immortal characters, Anyanwu and Doro. Anyanwu’s goal is to birth children who, like her, will not die; in the meantime, she builds tight-knit communities of her family and those that “feel like her family” (*Wild Seed* 238). In this way, Butler presents if not an idealized community, at least one that is better than the patriarchal, racist, and otherwise hierarchized world that Doro represents.

The first chapter of my thesis has two goals. The first is to analyze how Butler’s maternal characters exist on a spectrum of utopianism through such key characteristics as reproductive

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<sup>1</sup> The *Seed to Harvest* series is composed of the novels *Patternmaster* (1976), *Mind of My Mind* (1977), *Survivor* (1978), and *Wild Seed* (1980), and *Clay’s Ark* (1984). This series is not in chronological order, with the first published novel taking place the furthest in the future.

<sup>2</sup> For this thesis, decency is defined as “[s]atisfying a fair standard; fair, tolerable, passable, ‘respectable’; good enough in its way” (*OED*). The care that Anyanwu provides leads to contentment but never in an excessive fashion.

agency and examine how *Wild Seed*'s Anyanwu cultivates the closest instance of a utopia in Butler's oeuvre. The second goal is to examine the downfall of Anyanwu's utopia, why it occurs and what causes its destruction, and to contrast it with the extractivist, self-serving vision of Doro's utopia. For the first goal, I examine what I am calling Butler's Mostly Utopian Mothers (MUMs) from various series, including Lilith of the *Xenogenesis* trilogy, Amber from the novel *Patternmaster*, and Anyanwu from *Wild Seed* and *Mind of My Mind*. Other scholars explore how each of these mothers demonstrate different versions of care and how their traits mold the children that they raise<sup>3</sup>. Further, the ability of each MUM to control, or not, her reproduction will be discussed as it relates to their reproductive agency and legacy to their respective children. After examining Butler's utopian work, I will situate Anyanwu's proposed utopia in the novel *Wild Seed* as it prioritizes motherhood, children, collectivism, and a *contented* community.

The second chapter of my thesis examines alternative utopias within *Wild Seed*, namely the limit case of Anyanwu's dolphin community and Doro's competing utopia of self-interest. Further, this chapter interrogates the downfall of Anyanwu's Canaan settlement; while Doro ensures the dismantling of her paradise by undermining her vision and introducing the poisonous snake that plagues the farm in the form of a violent man, Butler demonstrates that human society cannot sustain utopia. Nevertheless, Anyanwu's place in the *Patternist* series demonstrates Butler's unique mixture of optimism and pessimism. While Doro destroys the utopian space of Canaan, Anyanwu's utopianism has a meaningful impact on her fellow immortal being. Anyanwu's resistance against Doro's inhumanity and his extractivist vision, along with her advocacy for her children's protection, creates a net-positive impact on the lives of her descendants.

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<sup>3</sup> See Hutner, Plant, and Ross.



Through *Wild Seed*, Anyanwu's utopianism for a decent, caring community based on the comfort of kinship leads to her vulnerability but ultimate triumph over Doro's control. Becoming a partner rather than a possession, Butler demonstrates that the collapse of Anyanwu's utopian, feminist, maternal community is inevitable but that striving for the "best" can still result in "better." While power struggles and inhumane humanity causes the collapse of Anyanwu's Canaan, Butler's *Wild Seed* asserts that hope and persistence are the important factors for creating a better tomorrow.

## Chapter 2: Anyanwu, the Quintessential MUM

This chapter has two goals. The first is to analyze how Butler's maternal characters exist on a spectrum of utopianism and examine how the utopia of *Wild Seed*'s Anyanwu compares to other female protagonists in Butler's oeuvre. For Anyanwu's utopia, as previously mentioned, I examine what I am calling Butler's Mostly Utopian Mothers (MUMs) from various series, including Lilith of the *Xenogenesis* trilogy, Amber from *Patternmaster*, and Anyanwu from *Wild Seed* and *Mind of My Mind*. Maternity, as Butler portrays it, is a source of power and resistance for women in patriarchal environments; mothers attempt to nurture, protect, and guide their children so that their children will survive with their humanity intact and improve the future in the name of a collective good. This goal applies to most of the mothers in the *Xenogenesis* series, the *Parable* series, and the *Patternist* series. The humanity that these mothers seek to protect centres on decency, respect, and empathy. However, the role of mother is also understood by many of Butler's mothers as a tool to control women's autonomy. In *Wild Seed*, when Anyanwu agrees to marry Doro's favorite son, Issac, she solemnly recognizes that their consummation would "make children who would prolong her slavery" (140). Anyanwu, Doro, and peripheral characters recognize that she *could* escape Doro if not for her children: "Then Margaret said, 'We're your weakness, aren't we? You could outrun him for a hundred more years if not for us'" (*Wild Seed* 259). However, as Michelle Erica Green notes, the maternal tendency of Butler's female characters demonstrates that they are "holding out hope for a better future" and, therefore, "[need] to make sacrifices for their children" (182). Further, Anyanwu asserts that she cannot "be content without my own around me" (*Wild Seed* 259) and that, if her children were "burdens too heavy for [her]" (259), they would not be born or she would not be with them. This commentary from Anyanwu frames her position as a mother; she will not allow people around her to dismiss

her agency in having children or protecting those children because they are also a source of her “pleasure” (169), leverage (234), and power.

Throughout Butler’s oeuvre, motherhood is a complicated and contradictory act of sacrifice, a hopeful investment in the future, and often a source of power and pleasure. For example, in Butler’s short story “The Evening and the Morning and the Night,” Alan’s mother checks herself into a facility to manage a condition called Duryea-Gode disease in order to protect her son from her increasing violence. In *Parable of the Sower*, while Lauren is not yet a biological mother, Harry remarks upon their journey that she “adopt[s]” people into their group (Butler 210), which increases the number of people they need to feed but also offers greater collective protection. While this moral burden is not held by Butler’s mothers alone, as fathers like Grayson and Travis in *Parable of the Sower* or Issac in *Wild Seed* demonstrate, the weight is considerably borne by women characters. Green suggests that Butler’s “[w]omen make such sacrifices more often than men not because they are genetically more prone to do so, but because they have been socially driven to do so” (182). Maternity has also been used politically as a source of power by “extoll[ing] the private virtues of domesticity while simultaneously legitimizing women’s public relationships to politics and the state, to community, workplace and marketplace” (Koven and Michel as cited by Plant 6-7). In Butler’s *Wild Seed*, Anyanwu uses her position as a mother, among other attributes like shapeshifting and immortality, to legitimize her power and position against Doro’s treatment of his people. In Butler’s worlds of speculative fiction that acknowledge and lean into the messy hierarchical politics of humanity, Jason Haslam asserts that Butler “explore[s] the limit cases of ‘power and control,’ where negotiation ends and absolute subjugation begins” (195). Thus, Butler’s maternal characters attempt to disrupt destructive power dynamics in the utopian hope of a better future even if it means personal

sacrifice. Maternity, in Butler's worlds, is a powerful tool for resistance but inherently poses a danger to the mother as it may limit her autonomy. To prove this, I will discuss each MUM's reproductive agency and the legacy they leave to their respective children. Finally, I discuss Anyanwu's utopia in *Wild Seed* and its prioritization of maternity, children, collectivism, and a *contented* community.

## 2.1 Terminology: Maternity, Utopia, and MUMs

As a tool for resistance, maternity in Butler's work is often tied to utopianism and the construction of communities that aim for utopian ideals. While many of Butler's worlds wade through dystopian territory, Butler's protagonists always reach towards utopia, "the no-space, the 'final frontier,' the glaring void of the 'city upon a hill'" (Haslam 194). As Lyman Tower Sargent asserts, a utopia is a "non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space" (9) and utopianism is a form of "social dreaming" (9) of a situation or place that is perceived by a particular group as being better than current circumstances<sup>4</sup>. For Butler, the arrival in utopia is not an option because of the hierarchical power struggles that manifest within every society. As I argue in a previous paper, Butler demonstrates through her novels that "all relationships exist within an inescapable field of power dynamics" (Gilson 7) because humans are unable to distance themselves from hierarchical thinking. Even the hive-mind created by the so-called "non-hierarchical" alien species Oankali in *Xenogenesis* or the collective tethering created by telepath Mary in *Mind of My Mind* are subject to competing

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<sup>4</sup> While there are many different definitions of utopia, with its long history of scholarship, I will be using Sargent's definitions of utopia and utopianism in order to extrapolate more on Butler's MUM vision. However, there is definitely room to explore how Butler engages with other forms of utopia or, further, whether readers should view her worlds as critical dystopias, eutopias, or otherwise.

power dynamics; as Haslam suggests, Mary's "seemingly progressive utopian society, one beyond race, gender, and class oppressions, end[s] up replicating [power] structures due to the absolutist underpinnings of utopian and exceptionalist politics" (195). However, the mothers in Butler's novels strive to produce utopian spaces or possibilities in the name of future generations. Therefore, while utopia is unattainable, utopianism is ever present in Butler's work. In *Parable of the Sower*, the connection between reproduction and hope in the future is made clear when the protagonist's growing group decides to settle their egalitarian commune, Acorn: "[Planting trees] won't do us any good for a few years, but they're a hell of an investment in the future." / "So is a kid" (Butler 322). Even if Butler does not believe utopia is possible, her work recognizes that hope is necessary to fight against oppressive, dominant structures or, at the least, to maintain humanity.

Therefore, as Butler's maternal characters strive towards brighter futures, they tend to create or foster potentially utopian spaces. Butler's MUM create these utopian, "better" spaces to varying degrees of success; this results in a spectrum of "success," or how near to success a maternal figure's utopia can reach, which is predicated on several recurring considerations. MUM's reproductive agency, power and authority, level of (direct or indirect) care for her children, whether the character is human or not, among other factors, influence the success of Butler's MUMs. This structure will be elaborated on further throughout this chapter. There are recurring patterns of utopian motherhood in Butler's work or, at least, motherhood as an alternative, resistant form of leadership based around care. While I place these characters on a utopian spectrum, the level of utopianism is, inherently, not very clear-cut. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss every mother in Butler's oeuvre, the examples below will illustrate

the concept of Butler's MUMs and why Anyanwu's utopianism is exceptional as it is most nearly attained and most fully ruptured.

## 2.2 Butler's MUMs: Agency, Reproduction, and Power

Central to the role of Butler's MUMs is the volition and agency that the mothers have in their reproduction. In her short story "Bloodchild," Butler demonstrates that both social power dynamics and biological coercion may accompany impregnation. This remains a point of contention throughout Butler's oeuvre. In *Xenogenesis*, the aliens reproductively sterilize all surviving post-apocalyptic humans and then they are only "offered the 'choice' of reproduction" (Peppers 47) if they procreate human-alien hybrids. Lilith Iyapo, the central protagonist of the trilogy's first novel *Dawn*, is chosen by the aliens to facilitate human acceptance and conversion to this reproductive offer; thus, as Cathy Peppers puts it, Lilith "sees her role as being a Judas goat' leading humanity into an undesired mutation" (50) even if it is the only way for so-called "humanity" to survive. Yet, Lilith actively "resists tyranny, is independent, bold, and curious" (Osherow 75) as well as empowered by being the "mother" (Butler 111, emphasis not mine) of the surviving humans. The aliens appoint Lilith the duty "[t]o teach, to give comfort, to feed and clothe, to guide [the survivors] through and interpret what will be, for them, a new and frightening world" (111). Lilith takes this role in order to "Learn and Run" (118); her goal is to learn from the aliens how to survive on a post-apocalyptic Earth before escaping. Yet, at the end of *Dawn*, an alien, without her knowledge or consent, impregnates Lilith with the child of her deceased lover. Further, Lilith never forgives the alien that impregnates her, despite bearing many more children with it. Through Lilith, both alien-human and "pure humanity" adapt to the new demands. Lilith nurtures a community that values empathetic caring, less overtly or

traditionally hierarchical, and sustainable practices. Several scholars suggest that by the end of the trilogy, Lilith and her children lead humanity into utopia<sup>5</sup>. However, Lilith's overturning of society's patriarchal values does not upend hierarchy without complication, as clearly demonstrated by the lack of reproductive agency in Lilith's situation.

*Wild Seed's* Anyanwu, on the other hand, has full biological control over her body and leverages it to gain power and, eventually, establish her feminist, collectivist community in 1840s "Canaan," or Avoyelles Parish in Louisiana<sup>6</sup>. Anyanwu's ability to control every part of her body includes her ability to control when she is or is not fertile (57), to be any sex she chooses (132, 233) to consciously become pregnant (129), to genetically modify a child in her womb (234, 151), and to bring post-human children safely through "transition" (160) into their own powers. While Doro can and does coerce Anyanwu during her enslavement, primarily through threats to her children, she gains power and leverage through her reproductive control. Even at Wheatley, a settlement of Doro's people and Anyanwu's home until the mid-eighteenth century, her position as *the* mother figure grants her a unique authority and status among the inhabitants. While Doro coerces Anyanwu into producing children and "pressures Anyanwu into an incestuous marriage with Issac [Doro's favourite son] with the aim of saddling her into obedience with maternity and motherhood" (Okonkwo 74), at Canaan (another utopian town, created by Anywanu), Anyanwu freely marries and takes lovers. Further, only when she creates

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<sup>5</sup> See Kendra R. Parker, Kitty Dunkley, Michelle Erica Green.

<sup>6</sup> The third book within *Wild Seed* is titled "Canaan," which is sometimes used as an alternative word for the "Promised Land" in Christian religious songs and literature (*Encyclopedia Britannica*). Further, the name Canaan for a colonial, utopian settlement in the United States has a long history, most notably in Thomas Morton's *New English Canaan* (1637). For more on this text, see Bumas and Walden. While Canaan and Canaanites have a complicated and lengthy history within various utopian and religious discourses, I will broadly interpret Butler's Canaan as a signal that Anyanwu's plantation in Avoyelles Parish is a haven for the post-human descendants of Doro, Anyanwu, and those "like" them. Therefore, I often shorthand Anyanwu's plantation and utopian commune as Canaan.

Canaan does she begin to realize the extent that she can control her body and shapeshift “and still know [her]self, still return to [her] true shape” (*Wild Seed* 234). Her bodily and, thus, reproductive control bolsters her power, agency, and fully allows her the *choice* of motherhood. This reproductive control even allows her to breastfeed children<sup>7</sup> whenever she decides it is necessary (281). For those that she draws into her settlement, she is “mother, older sister, teacher, and, when she invite[s] it, lover” (235) but her community often relies on her strength and position drawn from being a mother; Anyanwu asserts that her people “fe[el] like her children” (236) even when they are not her direct descendants. Anyanwu even breastfeeds Doro (284) in a mutual act of trust, as the distinctions between her roles as healer, lover, and mother often blur. Anyanwu’s autonomy is often at risk due to the care she enacts for the sake of her children, but the superhuman control that she exerts over her reproductive situation increases her power, leverage, and personal agency.

Reproductive agency is central to many of Butler’s MUM utopias, but not every mother in Butler’s work can control their bodies like Anyanwu. Within the *Patternist* series, the final chronological novel *Patternmaster* features a young but highly experienced healer named Amber, whose healing abilities allow her to control her reproduction much like Anyanwu does. In the *Xenogenesis* trilogy, the ability to genetically manipulate organisms is taken out of the hands of the mother and given to the alien Oankali. As earlier mentioned, this is how Nikanj impregnates Lilith without her knowledge or consent. In *Wild Seed*, a telepathically-sensitive woman named Susan has three children by Doro, but he kills her once “she could no longer be of use to [him]” because she “had enough children, and she could not care for them” (289). Susan’s

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<sup>7</sup> Breastfeeding within the American tradition has a broader significance, especially due to the history of enslaved Black women being forced to nurse their enslavers’ children. For more on the history of breastfeeding in American culture, see Doyle and Gaard. In this section, I focus more on Anyanwu’s ability to control her body.



ability to reproduce keeps her alive but, once she has children, if she does not enact motherhood, she is useless to Doro. Butler's work does not assert that women are only valuable if they perform some aspect of motherhood, but as Green points out, they are often "socially driven to do so" (182). Participation in motherhood by biological reproduction or childcare is a common theme; Mary in *Mind of My Mind* will have children because her partner desires that she does, but she is clear that she will not raise them (203). In *Wild Seed*, one of Doro's children, Anneke, discovers that despite her telepathic powers, she is infertile, but she "half adopt[s]" one of Anyanwu's children (157). *Wild Seed*'s Luisa, an elderly friend of Anyanwu's at Canaan, cannot have children at her age but becomes a foster mother or "'grandmother' to all the children" at the settlement (248). To my knowledge, the female characters do not show hostility towards women who desire to foster children or women who desire *not* to raise their children, as long as their child is not endangered. However, there are several male characters, like Doro or Mary's husband Karl (*MoMM* 203), who are averse to women who refuse to be mother figures. In *Wild Seed*, Doro plainly states, when he first meets Anyanwu, that "he had better get her with a new child as quickly as he could" because then her "independence would vanish without a struggle" to "keep her child safe" (29); therefore, Butler demonstrates that motherhood can be used to strengthen patriarchal control.

A final important example of reproductive agency and power from Butler comes in *Imago*, the third book of the *Xenogenesis* trilogy. In this novel, an allegorical Eve is discovered among the survivors that were untouched by the Oankali; in a violent sexual assault that left her mother dead and her barely alive, the First Mother becomes pregnant without alien intervention (*Imago* 661). While her society later treats her as a goddess for her discovered fertility, her pregnancy begins a cycle of incestuous, violent reproductive oppression for generations and

generations of fertile women after her. Butler makes it clear that there is little humanity in those who treat women as reproductive machines, but that there is also a mystical power historically tied to motherhood. While this is not an exhaustive list of Butler's mothers, the ability for women characters to exercise their volition in becoming mothers is important for the creation of utopian spaces and the physical and mental well-being of all human characters (664). The disparity between Anyanwu of *Wild Seed* and the First Mother of *Imago* suggests that reproductive volition and women's choice in motherhood is paramount for achieving a utopian situation. However, there is no other mother within Butler's oeuvre with the same amount of control as Anyanwu.

Another important factor for Butler's MUMs is the level of power that they gain from being a mother, the power given to them by society for being a mother, and the power that they hold to assert their volition. For example, the Oankali appoint Lilith to be the mother of the human survivors, which grants her the physical strength to defend her ideals about humanity because attempts at physical violence from regular humans are less effective. Further, Lilith has the power of the Oankali backing her (*Dawn* 157). Lilith gains power from being a mother, to the human survivors and her hybrid children, but her power never surpasses the biological warfare and physical strength of the Oankali. There is also the example of the First Mother in *Imago*, who has power because she is a mother but her society uses her as a tool and goads her into incestuous reproduction. To be clear, the First Mother is not Lilith, but part of a colony of human resisters who reject the Oankali. In her case, it is poignant that even though people who knew the First Mother are still alive in *Imago*, because the Oankali halt their aging process, the First Mother is mortal and does not have a name. However, the name of her first son, Adan, is

remembered (663). Like Lilith and other MUMs, Anyanwu gains power from her position as a mother.

Yet, Anyanwu is a goddess, a mother, and an ancestress long before and after she first meets Doro. She draws power from gathering her children around her, but also by being able to protect, heal, and, when necessary, lead her people. Anyanwu's power as a mother hinges on her superhuman ability to shapeshift. She remarks that prior to her physical transition into power at age twenty (*Wild Seed* 56), Anyanwu was in "disfavor with [her first husband's] family because after five years of marriage, she had produced no children" (56-7). Once Anyanwu is able to fully control her body and become pregnant, she feels immense relief despite being outcast for witchcraft. Through her transformation into this powerful form, Anyanwu does not need to bow her head to any husband or wife in subjugation (10). However, due to her so-called "potential" as a mother to produce powerful offspring, Doro covets Anyanwu; this demonstrates how the power she gains from her bodily control is tempered by those who use her role as mother to exploit her. For these reasons, Butler appears to argue that the social power one holds *in addition to being a mother* is essential to the enactment of MUM utopias because, otherwise, the utopia may fall to patriarchal notions of motherhood, while silencing the woman protagonist's ideals. Anyanwu's Canaan, for example, can thrive because of her ideals but her power as a mother *and* an immortal shapeshifter are necessary.

### 2.3 Contentment in Canaan

In *Wild Seed's* Canaan, Anyanwu achieves the closest thing to a utopia in comparison to other Butler MUMs. Adwoa Afful suggests that "[t]hough Doro coerces Anyanwu into captivity, she still attempts to recreate a version of her old life wherever she lands, building alternative

kinship networks and families in each new place” (101). However, as Christopher N. Okonkwo notes, before Anyanwu’s Canaan settlement, she is seen as a “formidable, protective force yet a woman whom her people malign as an evildoer” (70) due to her shapeshifting and healing powers. Yet, at Canaan, Anyanwu surrounds herself by gathering “family or people who feel like [her] family” (*Wild Seed* 238), people who are different, people who understand difference, or people who accept difference “without understanding” (266)<sup>8</sup>. Anyanwu asserts to Doro that she “never set out to build a settlement like one of [Doro’s]” but she needs her “own kind around” (238). They are her children and, without a fellow immortal companion, they stave off her loneliness and fulfill a kind of altruistic duty. When Doro asks her why she is “raising witches of [her] own” (231), despite scolding his predatory empire-building, Anyanwu expresses that they “felt like her children” (236) and they “need” her protection (232): “They need someone who can help them, and I can help. You don’t want to help them, you want to use them. But I can help” (232). And she does.

In Anyanwu’s Canaan, “diseases swept across the land and left Anyanwu’s people almost untouched” and those who catch a disease “surviv[e] it and recove[r] quickly” (237). Anyanwu brings together a community in Canaan that is full of “misfits, malcontents, [and] troublemakers” that “[do] not make trouble for Anyanwu” (235). In 1840s Louisiana, she enslaves no one and recruits freedmen to work for her (235) or she “bought some of the people who worked for her [...] but those she bought, she freed” and “[t]hey always stayed to work for her, feeling more comfortable with her and with each other than they had ever been elsewhere” (235). Anyanwu acts as “mother, older sister, teacher, and, when she invited it, lover” (235) but no role that she

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<sup>8</sup> The politics of accepting or adapting to difference with/out sufficient understanding is a reoccurring concept in Butler’s work, especially in the *Xenogenesis* trilogy. See Bonner, Green, Peppers, Tucker, and Wagers for more on this concept in Butler’s texts.

takes “diminishe[s] her authority” (235). Her people enjoy collective, paid work for board and are “supplied with decent housing and good food” (256). Upon seeing one of Anyanwu’s people’s homes, a “cabin [that] gave the impression of being a plain but comfortable place to live” (239), Doro remarks that he “[has] several people, black and white, who don’t live this well,” to which Anyanwu asserts that she does not (239). In Canaan, Butler describes a fulfilling ambience of *contentment* and comfort. Things are not indulgent or excessive and, further, the work in the fields (256) or as the account manager (256) can be difficult, but there is a stasis around the settlement. While those around her are mortal, Anyanwu is able to sustain the lives of the family around her in a lulling comfort. The outside world gossips, but Anyanwu creates a misted veil over the workings of her settlement; she holds off racist, white neighbours through a self-molded disguise of a white plantation owner, Edward Warrick (215, 254), and chases off anyone who pokes around by taking on the form of a large, black werewolf (218). Further, demonstrating the utopian status of Anyanwu’s Canaan, the greatest punishment that one of her children could face is exile from the chosen people, the life of content, and the mother-protector: “The worse [sic] she did was occasionally fire someone. Firing meant eviction. It meant leaving the safety and comfort of the plantation and becoming a misfit again in the world outside. It meant exile” (235). In her protective arms, Anyanwu’s collectivist, diverse, decent utopia nears completion.

The life that Anyanwu cultivates at Canaan values decency, contentment, the acceptance of difference. Anyanwu seemingly insists on monogamy at her settlement in resistance to the practices of slavery by people like Doro or primarily white people in the antebellum United States (230), who are “bred” (135) and are “not permitted to care for their children” (230). However, when Doro prods at the rules that Anyanwu follows versus those she asks her children

to follow, she concedes that if “[her] children show any signs of growing as old as [she is], they may do as they please” (238). Further, when everything else fails, Anyanwu’s Canaan brings her an inch away from her greatest desire. She remarks that her son by her wife Denice, Stephen, may be the “son [that she] will not have to bury” (227). Although he gains control slightly more slowly than Anyanwu does, Stephen can control and heal his body in miraculous ways, which leads her and Doro to believe that Stephen may live forever, but he does not. He is kind, protective, hard-working, and a hopeless romantic, but he is unable to learn his gifts fast enough to learn whether he is immortal. Therefore, Stephen represents the full realization of Anyanwu’s perfect utopia; he fulfills her desire for an immortal kindred and is the result of Anyanwu’s relationships built in Canaan, rather than having any direct connection to Doro. Stephen’s death marks the complete destruction of Anyanwu’s Canaan community and the values she tried to cultivate there.

The fall of Anyanwu’s utopia will be left to the second chapter. Yet, it is a testament to Butler’s utopian vision that Canaan (nearly) provides the maternal goal that Anyanwu crossed the Atlantic Ocean for. It is not Doro who provides a child that will not die before Anyanwu; it is never Doro. Rather, it is the lover that Anyanwu freely chooses and brings into her community. Yet, Anyanwu’s divine benevolence cannot sustain its protection of the utopian community; once Doro finds Anyanwu and Canaan, the compromises that Anyanwu makes lead to the destruction of the harmonious haven because of Doro’s corrupting, vampiric intentions.

Butler questions the possibility of utopia and critiques humanity’s hierarchical tendencies through the conflict between Anyanwu and Doro in *Wild Seed* and *Mind of My Mind*. However, Butler appears to offer a *guiding* path towards equality and a sustainable community that is led by strong motherhood and places value in decency, contentment, and the acceptance of change.

Doro claims that he is an essential component in Anyanwu's utopia because his aid will allow her to produce "a [child] that [she] will not have to bury" (*Wild Seed* 227) but Doro's fear of submission drives him, and those around him, to destruction. When Anyanwu builds Canaan, it is Doro's influence that tears down the safe haven she built. Encroaching into the stasis of her haven, Doro tears down Anyanwu's utopia. Through the compromise of her authority and control over her Canaan collective, her utopia is extinguished. As mentioned earlier, Butler asserts that utopias are "ridiculous" and that there is not going to be a "perfect human society until we get a few perfect humans" (Butler as cited by Belk 369). As I show in the next chapter, Butler demonstrates how utopia is always a necessarily failing work-in-progress and how one utopia cannot satisfy every individual; as there are only "imperfect," different humans, there is neither a way for every human to be happy, nor a homogenous hivemind that can reach for an immutable goal. Nevertheless, Butler does not give up on the functions of maintaining an *idea* of utopia as pictured through Anyanwu, the quintessential MUM.

### Chapter 3: Compromise with the Reaper

As discussed in the previous chapter, Butler questions the possibility of utopia and critiques humanity's hierarchical tendencies through the conflict between Anyanwu and Doro in *Wild Seed* and *Mind of My Mind*. However, Butler appears to offer a *guiding* path towards equality and a sustainable community that is led by strong motherhood and that places value in decency, contentment, and the acceptance of change. Doro claims that he is an essential component in Anyanwu's utopia because his aid will allow her to produce "a [child] that [she] will not have to bury" (*Wild Seed* 227) but Doro's fear of submission drives him, and those around him, to destruction. When Anyanwu builds Canaan, it is Doro's influence that tears down her "city upon the hill" (Haslam 194). Encroaching into the stasis of her haven, Doro tears down Anyanwu's utopia. Through the compromise of her authority and control over her Canaan collective, her utopia is extinguished. When examining Butler's Anyanwu as a MUM, it is important that while Anyanwu is *nearly* perfect, Butler makes it clear that no perfect human is possible; Anyanwu's utopia contains the seeds to its own destruction because it includes imperfect humans. Regardless, Doro causes Canaan's swift and total rupture as the evil, imbricating, human society crashes into Anyanwu's utopia.

In this chapter, I discuss how Doro precipitates the destruction of Canaan by insisting on his authoritarian, dystopian, all-encompassing dominance and by forcefully intertwining Anyanwu in the harm of her children. The beginning of this chapter will examine how Butler introduces Canaan's necessary features by contrasting them with Anyanwu's experiences at Wheatley and with a community of dolphins. Anyanwu's oceanic utopia exemplifies a limit case of kinship and community separate from human society and demonstrates its unfortunate inefficiencies for Anyanwu's needs. Further examination of Doro's self-serving utopian



settlement, Wheatley, reveals the negative consequences of Doro's vision on "his people" (*Wild Seed* 121). Rather than set out to help them or bolster their community, he asserts that those in his care are "only for [his] own use" (73) and they are "more his property than his people" (121). Finally, this chapter will examine how Doro's discovery of Anyanwu's Canaan is ultimately the cause of her utopia's violent dissolution through his so-called "leadership" style and his introduction of the snake, Joseph Toler, into Anyanwu's slice of Eden. While Butler uses Canaan's destruction to deny Anyanwu the possibility of a perfect utopia, it is clear that Anyanwu's vision is *better* precisely because it was not maintained by nor was it built upon violent, patriarchal hierarchy.

### 3.1 Driven to Dolphins

Butler contrasts the utopian commune that Anyanwu creates with the conditions of enslavement at Doro's Wheatley settlement. At Wheatley, Anyanwu manages to pull together Doro's people and attempts to heal them. Cassandra L. Jones suggests that Anyanwu "represents both a connection to the past and the potential for liberation from these structures of domination" (700). However, the destructive influence and dismal conditions required by Doro's utopian goal undermine Anyanwu's attempts. Further, Doro resents the community-building that Anyanwu strives towards as "the protector, [...] the defender of anyone who needed her" (*Wild Seed* 149). Despite Anyanwu's attempts at creating bonds and community at Wheatley, Doro's inhumane vision is inhospitable to growth. Comparing Doro's vision to historic colonialism, Jones states that Doro maintains "violent oppression of the people under his domination via torture, coercion, and reproductive control" (702). When Doro visits Anyanwu at Wheatley, he proudly remarks that "[his people] were building themselves" (*Wild Seed* 167) now, but he does not wonder what

or who causes this shift from total dependency on Doro to a potential for actual community. Part of Anyanwu's healing power is her ability to build connections between people that lead to hope rather than despair.

In fact, these community ties also hinder Doro's self-serving interests by creating community action that does not centre around his needs. Due to his disdain for community bonds, Doro treats parenthood, particularly motherhood, at Wheatley and at his other settlements as a weakness and tool to control objectified women with. Doro makes his relationship with maternity clear when he associates impregnating Anyanwu with her "independence [...] vanish[ing] without a struggle" (29) because she will "do whatever he asked" (29) to ensure the safety of her children. Okonkwo argues succinctly that Doro uses "maternity and motherhood" (74) to ensure Anyanwu's obedience. Further, he describes Anyanwu as being "*too much a mother*" (*Wild Seed* 99, emphasis mine) to leave her children with Doro; thus, he views her maternal instinct as an excessive trait that provides him with leverage over her volition. Anyanwu acknowledges that the reason Doro wants her to have children is to "prolong her slavery" (140) because Doro views mothers as inhuman animals to be bred for his purposes (129). A bond from mother to child, in Doro's mind, allows him to manipulate the vulnerability that comes from attachment in order to enforce obedience. Yet, while Anyanwu knows that attachment to and attempts to protect her children can make her vulnerable to coercion, she demonstrates how motherhood can make a character more agential and content.

Doro may believe that Anyanwu is "too much [of] a mother" (99) but Anyanwu convincingly insists that her many children would not live if they were "too heavy" (259) a burden for her. She attempts to heal those at Wheatley, but her influence does not outweigh the subservience that Doro demands. Anyanwu stays at Wheatley to protect her children as best as

she can from Doro, even though she is the person “[best] fit to escape” (170) him: “She could break free of him only by dying and sacrificing her children and leaving him loose upon the world to become even more of an animal” (139). However, once it becomes clear that Doro intends to murder her, she knows that she “cannot save [her] children” (136) from Doro by staying in Wheatley any longer. Doro will not allow her to challenge his authority, even if he is willing to reap the rewards of her bolstering his settlement’s community. Therefore, Anyanwu must instead hope that her successful fleeing from Doro will give her children, and Doro’s people more broadly, *hope* that they too can escape him or, at least, that “others would notice his failure [to kill her] and see that he was no god” (211). To go where Doro cannot follow, Anyanwu turns to the ocean in hopes of surviving in a dolphin community. She must test whether she will be “alone among the dolphins” (209) or if she can “make a tribe of dolphins” (210).

Driven to dolphins, Anyanwu seeks a community outside of human society, where Doro cannot hurt her. Anyanwu’s first experience with dolphins occurs during her passage to the United States; aboard the ship, she consumes dolphin flesh and creates “the best body she had ever shaped for herself” (90). Her dolphin form is “wonderfully agile” (90) and performs certain tasks, like breathing, “more efficiently than an ordinary human body” (88). However, the other dolphins communicate in a “foreign speech” (89) that she cannot understand or communicate in as easily: “If only dolphin speech came as easily as dolphin movement” (90). While underwater, Anyanwu is disconnected from both the humans above and the dolphins, with whom she can only manage rudimentary, biological communication. Despite this barrier, the dolphins quickly accept Anyanwu on this first encounter; they welcome her into their community swiftly, even if she cannot fully communicate with them. When she resurfaces, Butler writes that Anyanwu

“adopt[s] the dolphins” (98) and protests any further killings because the dolphins “are like people” (98). Madhu Dubey notes that Anyanwu “must kill other animals in order to eat them and to read their ‘flesh-messages,’ but this violence implicit in her way of knowing other species goes unacknowledged in the novel” (37); further, while Anyanwu tries not to eat a species again if it is “like people” (*Wild Seed* 98), she does eat the meat of other animals without moral quandary. In contrast to Doro’s violent extractivism, Dubey suggests that Butler emphasises the “logic of empathetic identification” (37) that accompanies consuming their flesh. However, due to her knowledge-gathering, Anyanwu already knows the freedom and acceptance that the dolphin community offers before she flees Wheatley. However, when Anyanwu must leave her human children behind, she wonders “how long she could endure being away from kinsmen, from friends, from any human beings” (209). Anyanwu feels that her connections with the dolphins are distinctly inhuman; they are “like people” (98) but they are not “like her” (236) or her kin.

Anyanwu makes an earnest effort to build a “tribe” (210) with the dolphins and their warm offering of immediate community allows her to survive after devastation at Wheatley. The dolphins are enough to have “reached her” (211) before she withdrew from community altogether. They offer her companionship even though they cannot understand Anyanwu or vice versa; it is a chance to live with care but without true understanding. For Anyanwu, linguistic and intellectual understanding between individuals is as important as collective emotional understanding. Nevertheless, the dolphin community acts as an undersea utopia for Anyanwu, closed off from the messy human world and power struggles, away from the interpersonal connections in human society that haunt her attempts to build communities in Nigeria, Wheatley, or even Canaan. Dubey notes that Anyanwu’s ability of “animal metamorphosis takes a rather

unexpected direction as animal nature is presented as precisely *not* a domain of irrationality, sexuality, wild nature, or messy reproduction” (37, emphasis in original). No dolphin asks her to compromise her morality or attempts to harm her; Anyanwu recalls “being bullied as a female animal, being pursued by persistent males, but only in her true woman-shape could she remember being seriously hurt by males--men” (90). Therefore, this dolphin community allows Anyanwu to recover from her traumatic experience at Wheatley without being subject to threats particularly from male humans. Sadly, being underwater in the dolphin utopia isolates Anyanwu from her kin as well, and from communication beyond “chattering incomprehensibly” (211). Further, Dubey suggests that “the interaction between Anyanwu and the dolphins is not reciprocal but unidirectional, in favor of the human” (40). Anyanwu cannot get all that she needs from the dolphin community; Dubey rightly questions how the dolphin community interprets Anyanwu’s presence. Alas, Anyanwu’s disconnection from the dolphins and her kin are the key variables of why the dolphin utopia is insufficient. Ostensibly, she could live forever with them but she would not be truly content.

The dolphins cannot offer Anyanwu necessary relationships, a lack which further cements why Anyanwu’s progression out of the sea and her creation of Canaan is necessary. Anyanwu, like Doro but for different ends, needs people who are biologically and spiritually “like her” (236). She thrives on the care that she can offer to a community, the protection she can offer children, and the love they offer back to her (257). While Anyanwu can take mates among the dolphins and find “eager” (91) pleasure in that, the children that she bears with them are dolphins and “[n]ot human at all” (234). Therefore, Anyanwu’s dolphin children cannot fulfill her dream of having a child “like her” (236) that she “will not have to bury” (227) because the dolphin children cannot be biologically related to her. They are all “the young of the dolphin

Isaac had caught and fed to [her]” (234), which she uses as a complete blueprint for her dolphin form. They “[inherit] nothing at all” (233) from Anyanwu and, therefore, a dolphin child’s inability to be “like” Anyanwu and inability to take any of her strangeness will make them insufficient for her goals. Care must flow in every direction and, for Anyanwu, the possible care that the dolphin community can offer is insufficient compared to her human kin. Anyanwu’s dolphin utopia serves as a limit case for a utopian community in which Anyanwu could live without human society, without Doro, and without human evil, but also without the care and kinship that she needs to be content. And with her power, care, and authority, she successfully does this in Canaan before Doro arrives. Therefore, Anyanwu has no choice but to situate her utopian community within the human world. Even if it means imbricating herself with the possibility of evil, she decides that utopia is not possible without her kin; a certain degree of likeness and fellow humanity is necessary for understanding, even as a lack of difference leads to stasis. Therefore, she must merely try to approach power struggles with the intention to move towards a net positive impact.

### 3.2 Kindred Immortals

In *Wild Seed*, Butler thus creates two competing immortals who are constantly at odds with each other and, yet, are similar in many ways. Anyanwu and Doro live long lives of strangeness; naturally, several aspects of their habits, comforts, and goals overlap. However, their similarities are shallow as Anyanwu chooses to be a healer (232) while Doro firmly chooses to be a predator (261)<sup>9</sup>. Doro’s Wheatley settlement, and his attempts to remake Canaan in its

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<sup>9</sup> In a meeting with Anyanwu, Doro questions why Anyanwu establishes Canaan. Anyanwu replies, “I’m a healer” (232). Anyanwu’s answer suggests that she believes herself to innately be a healer. Doro counters Anyanwu’s assertion by stating that Anyanwu “chose to be a healer” (232). By establishing that it is a choice to be a healer, one can examine Doro’s self-assertion

image according to Anyanwu (241), are useful when examining the differing leadership styles of Anyanwu and Doro. Further, the dissimilarities between the immortal beings aid in cementing why, even though Canaan is a gathering of people “[Doro] seek[s] out” (231), it is the utopia that Wheatley is not: one settlement offers the possibility of contentedness and utopia, while the other offers subservience, dependency, and an inhumane deity.

Both Anyanwu and Doro agree that assuming an authoritative position can be necessary in order to maintain autonomy:

“Sometimes, one must become a master to avoid becoming a slave,” [Anyanwu] said softly.

“Yes,” he agreed. (Butler 10)

However, there is an important distinction between Doro and Anyanwu on this position.

Anyanwu does not desire to be a master; she desires an independent people, a community that she can aid and receive care from. Before Doro arrives in Canaan, she is the final authority, but she does not impose her order unless it is necessary for her survival or for the protection of her community; her people ask for her aid in solving disputes (247), but they “are a very independent people” (241). On the other hand, Doro expects subservience, and any disobedience is an “abomination” (128). For Doro, people are objects to be of use and, when they are no longer serving his purpose, they are useless. His children depend on him, but they do not “overestimate [their] own value” (52). One of Doro’s children, Woodley, meditates on his identity as an expendable child in the eyes of his father: “And he knew the living generations of Doro’s sons

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later in the text. Doro says that he “is no healer” but that he tries to save lives by mitigating the damage of others through selective body transmigration (i.e., he believes that by taking the life of an individual who may commit violence, he saves lives without being a healer). Thus, Doro believes that he cannot *be* a healer, which leads to a degree of “bitterness” (149) regarding Anyanwu’s ability to help others.

and daughters would populate a city. He knew how easily both he and [other children] could be replaced” (52). Haslam writes that Doro is an “ideal consumer who is both part of a ‘race,’ ‘nation,’ or ‘empire,’ . . . and its predator” (202). Doro’s mindset that people are his rightful property to *use* as objects for his own purposes is a constant throughout *Wild Seed* as long as Doro views himself as a lone god. Anyanwu protests that her settlement is not like Doro’s because she “want[s] to help [her people], [Doro] want[s] to use them” (231). She does not want a master-slave relationship with her people and actively opposes it, while Doro enslaves people to create an endless supply of new, different bodies (238). As Doro’s disdain for and objectification of mothers as no more than mares is due to Doro’s belief that attachment makes one vulnerable to manipulation, relationships of mutual authority or equal partnerships are not possible; demanding or expecting to be treated like a god does not open one up to healthy, multi-way relationships. His obsession with power drives the loneliness he feels (169), but also acts as a protection, a way to endure the constant death of those around him (270). If he *deserves* the bodies that he exploits, if he is truly a god, then his “breeding project” and reserve of living vessels can be depersonalized.

This omnipresent threat of death to those around Doro and Anyanwu pushes each immortal towards different goals, which are also significant. Doro strives to know what his potential was in his original body and seeks to either inhabit a body like his original flesh through the cultivation of another Doro, or to create a “companion” (62) that is like him; this latter goal assumes that Doro could handle a being like himself and that he would not struggle for power with his double. Afful suggests that Doro strives “to experience the kind of material embodiment that he has not enjoyed for many a millennium” (104), which further complicates the loneliness that Doro feels. In *Mind of My Mind*, Butler grants Doro his wish through the



telepathic powerhouse Mary, who completes her transition into a “more complete Doro” (Haslam 196) by surviving her transformation, unlike Doro’s original body (*Mind of My Mind* 225). However, when her power grows too great for him to control (225), he seeks to end her life because she dwindles his reserves of bodies and, thus, threatens his innate ownership and power over his people (217). Thus, death drives Doro’s desire for self-fulfillment through an unattainable and unsustainable method. In contrast, Anyanwu faces death constantly and it drives her to risk her own survival in pursuit of close communal bonds (*Wild Seed* 24); it increases her protectiveness over her own and her yearning for a child that is “of [her] own kind” (24), one who she will not watch “grow old and die” (24). She seeks a companion, but very specifically, a biological descendent to whom she is a mother figure. Unlike Doro, she is averse to ideas of incest (129). Therefore, her desire for an immortal child is a desire solely for companionship, familial care, legacy, and a unique nurturing relationship from her mother-child bond.

Further, both immortals are “pulled” (152) towards their kin as a source of nourishment. For Doro, he can source his bodily vessel from any person, as exemplified during his first round of sporadic killings upon his initial death during his transition (189). However, the bodies of those who are his “spiritual kin” (190) possess an “aroma of food” (190) for him. Further, the degree to which he is pulled and the pleasure he derives from the killing depends on the power of the “prey” (22). This is how Doro originally finds Anyanwu (2) and Wheatley’s residents (113), why he returns to Wheatley when Anyanwu’s powerful child, Nweke, approaches transition (152), and how he finds Anyanwu at Canaan (215). However, while Doro remarks that, “on a sensory level” (191), killing the strongest and closest of his children is “the most pleasurable” (191), they remind him of his uncontrolled, accidental killing of his parents and bring him mental anguish. While Doro’s son Isaac tries to defend his father’s violent extractivism, his defense falls

flat: “[In] his own way, [Doro] can be a reasonable being. You’re right about his killing; he can’t help doing it. When he needs a new body, he takes one whether he wants to or not” (137). While Doro’s spirit refuses to die and thus “can’t help” (137) but kill eventually, he does not treat his “reserves” (190) as precious. Doro switches bodies when he is spiteful (especially at Anyanwu, see page 183), uncomfortable, indifferent, or hungry far more often than he takes a life to “save life in the only way [that he] can” (261). His killings and pullings occur far more often due to self-interest; he “gather[s] reserves of them, breed[s] them, see[s] that they [are] protected and cared for” (190), but only so far as its necessary for his people to remain a pleasurable resource for consumption. In contrast, as mentioned in the previous chapter, Anyanwu “gather[s] family” (235) because, like her descendants, she is drawn to them by “a comforting by indefinable similarity” (235). She strives to help them in a symbiotic fashion, protecting and providing shelter for them gives her pleasure (265). Anyanwu gains nourishment from surrounding herself with people like her, “all these special ones, these slightly strange ones” (235), but it is never shown to be a destructive nourishment. Doro devours those he gathers, even if he does not always wish to, while Anyanwu seeks to sustain those she gathers. Butler offers through her MUMs the possibility of an empathetic society to challenge the patriarchal structures that they encounter.

### 3.3 Doro’s Dominion

Through Wheatley, Butler demonstrates why Doro’s self-serving, extractivist utopia is uninhabitable and primarily destructive. While Doro purports to have many settlements around the world, this section will focus on the United States settlement that Doro brings Anyanwu to, Wheatley, because Butler offers the greatest amount of information on Doro’s practices through

this particular settlement. One hundred and fifty miles from New York City, Doro enforces a doctrine of obedience, reproductive enslavement, and dependency:

These strange ones, his witches, were good kills. They offered him the most satisfying durable food and shelter. He still preyed on them. Soon he would take one from Wheatley. The people of Wheatley expected it, accepted it, treated it as a kind of religious sacrifice. All his towns and villages fed him willingly now. (Butler 113)

In Wheatley, children are often abused (146) or spoiled (114) and familial connections cease to have meaning as incest is a looming possibility under Doro's doctrine (129). For these reasons, as mentioned earlier, Anyanwu posits that Doro's people treat him as a god because they have no hope of escaping him (211) while Doro believes that his children "accep[t] his authority and see[m] to need his assurance that strange as they were, they still belon[g] to someone" (159). To Doro, his people are his property; he owns them and deserves his position of ownership. Doro remarks about a daughter that she belongs to him "from the moment of her conception-- his property as surely as though his brand were burned into her flesh" (159). Over and over, Doro describes his children in terms of ownership and property "for [his] own use" (73), and so his children worship him and seek his attention due to forced dependency.

Isaac defends his father's treatment at Wheatley and Doro's other settlements: "'Have you ever known him to neglect the needs of the children he claims? [...] Have you ever seen his people left landless or hungry? He takes care of his own" (229). Yet, once again, Isaac adopts a rather optimistic view about the violence his father doles out. He does at times neglect the needs of his children, especially through negligence (146, 170). Further, in a scene that I discussed earlier, Doro acknowledges upon viewing a modest cabin in Canaan that the conditions of most his "people" are not at the same *decent* standard that Anyanwu offers:

Overall, the cabin gave the impression of being a plain but comfortable place to live.

“Is it enough?” Anyanwu asked.

“I have several people, black and white, who don’t live this well.”

“I don’t.” (Butler 239)

Even if someone devotes their life to him, once he does not see further use for them, once their death is of greater use to him, or once their defiance grows too bold, he kills them. This is not what Isaac probably pictures when he envisions his father taking care of his own. Even so, it occurs on multiple occasions; particularly violent examples of this are the deaths of Thomas (183) and Susan (289), who serve Doro until their deaths. In Wheatley, people view these deaths as a “religious sacrifice” (113), but that does not change the truth of what they are, murders of those who swear loyalty to him or not. Doro may believe that “[k]illing children is wasteful” (38), in terms of the future use his children may have for him, but their lives are ultimately replaceable commodities. Doro’s extractivist, utilitarian, self-serving gathering of people cultivates people as resources for his consumption.

Further, unlike Anyanwu’s utopia, which centres the nurturing aspects of motherhood, Doro situates himself as a parent in a much colder way. As mentioned in the discussion of Anyanwu’s dolphin utopia, Doro does not respect motherhood. In his clouded, consuming perception, Doro views any form of motherhood as a site of weakness and vulnerability, a site for him to leverage his control. Therefore, while he can and has biologically been female and a mother, he only uses women’s bodies to continue his breeding project<sup>10</sup> (62). As he detaches himself spiritually from the flesh he uses, he never becomes a caregiver in the same way that mothers like Anyanwu (or Butler’s other MUMs) do. With his god complex, Doro views women

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<sup>10</sup> It is clear in *Wild Seed* and *MoMM* that Doro is most comfortable and spends the most time in a male body but, regardless of his sex at any given time, his patriarchal outlook is unwavering.

and female secondary sex characteristics as signals that one is inherently weaker or relinquishing control (24)-- mothers are mere physical vessels for his children or his own soul. Doro's role as a mother and view towards mothers generally reflect a disturbing view of motherhood within the patriarchal imagination. Further, as an *ogbanje*, he is the bane of mothers in terms of Butler's representation of Igbo mythology, with Anyanwu describing him as "an evil child spirit born to one woman again and again, only to die and give the mother pain" (13). Doro does not offer Wheatley the same symbiotic, mother-child relationship that Anyanwu offers at Canaan. The goal of Doro's settlement is to serve Doro's extractivist needs; his so-called "protect[ion]" (190) comes at far too high a cost. Thus, when Anyanwu realizes with horror that "[Doro] was making a new Wheatley" (241) out of Canaan, she feels hopelessness: "She could live on and on and have nothing" (241).

### 3.4 (Wild) Seeds of Destruction

Doro's attitudes thus lead to him becoming the primary cause of the destruction of Anyanwu's utopian settlement, Canaan. His self-serving behaviour, petty greed, and insistence upon absolute obedience force the utopian stasis of Canaan to rupture. Rather than prioritizing the community, he forces every inhabitant to prioritize his authority while Anyanwu must "[stand] by and [say] nothing" (242). Further, it is Doro who brings in Joseph Toler, whom Anyanwu later refers to as a metaphorical snake (256), knowing that "perhaps [some of Anyanwu's descendants, including Joseph] will disrupt the family you've made for yourself as nothing else could'" (240). Joseph "refuse[s] to do work of any kind" (242), which goes against the egalitarian principles of Canaan, "yet he could not be fired and sent away" (242). Joseph proceeds to commit many heinous crimes when he gains telepathic powers in Canaan, which

Anyanwu cannot punish with exile. The snake continues to destroy Anyanwu's garden until he brutally murders Anyanwu's son, Stephen, the only child that Anyanwu ever has who could have been immortal (227). This cements the ruination of Canaan and symbolizes Doro and human society's incompatibility with the utopian good in Canaan. Further, as Joseph's violence forces Anyanwu to kill him, the imbrication of evil that Anyanwu sought to avoid occurs, as she kills a member of the settlement for the first time (235). While Doro attempts to shift the blame for the destruction of Canaan onto Anyanwu and her ancestral line, it is Doro's insufficient nurturing that sows Joseph's destructive relation to power; he cultivates the monster, even if by negligence. Anyanwu challenges Doro's attempts to avoid blame for the harm he causes his children; she knows that as the mother and matriarch of a utopian society, her care at Wheatley and Canaan is powerful and effective (when Doro is absent for long enough). Doro recognizes this to a degree, suggesting that perhaps Anyanwu's "influence is just what [he] need[s]" (240). Later, after Joseph wreaks havoc upon Canaan and is executed, Doro brings Joseph's brothers into Anyanwu's care; he suggests that if Anyanwu raises them, they will turn out better but if she treats them like criminals, they will become criminals too (263). Again and again, Doro forces Anyanwu to compromise her ideals for Canaan; he insists on intertwining her in the various "evils" that he commits. He undermines Anyanwu's cultivation of community at Canaan by insisting that Anyanwu "serve[s]" (240) him and that her people obey him (241). He views Canaan as Anyanwu's attempt at competition for his resources; then, when he asserts his authority it becomes simply another stepping stone to his personal success.

Butler suggests a perfect utopia is impossible and, in *Wild Seed*, even Butler's god-figures cannot achieve a lasting utopia on their own. For Butler, to exist within human society, regardless of the power one wields, is to intertwine with both the good and evil of humanity.

Even though Anyanwu is known to be “a woman through which a god sp[eaks]” (*Wild Seed* 5), she insists that she, too, is “flawed” (177). Doro reveals to Anyanwu that the snake, Joseph, the “grandchild of her grandchildren” (262), is her own descendent. Attempting to intertwine Anyanwu in the death of Canaan serves Doro’s goal to undermine the confidence and authority of Anyanwu. He places fault on her: whether the fault lies in her not raising the child herself (240) or allocating blame due to relational proximity (262). Either way, Doro is disingenuous. He suggests that it is Anyanwu’s duty alone to care for the children he depends on and neglects. Doro never allows Anyanwu an escape from this imbrication with evil even in her darkest moments; he assigns blame to her, even if partial, to manipulate her. While Anyanwu is not perfect, Doro forces her to compromise her morals and her care to an extent that she would not otherwise.

When Doro shows his humanity to Anyanwu to convince her to live (296), she decides to move towards a net good as best as she can while acknowledging that she cannot escape the messy interweaving of human society. Anyanwu accepts that she cannot achieve her utopian enclave, but that she can try to make Doro more human and more humane by living. In the epilogue of *Wild Seed*, Anyanwu is given the freedom to create a community in California after she negotiates with Doro. While this community is more ideal than Wheatley and demonstrates growth on Doro’s behalf, as he vows not to “interfere with her [closest] children” (297) or “coerce her into giving [cooperation]” (296)-- which is the bare minimum--it is not as utopian as Canaan because it is inseparable from Doro’s vision (298). Further, in *Mind of My Mind*, which takes place when in relation to *Wild Seed*?, Anyanwu lives in Forsythe, Georgia, United States. This calls into question the ideal nature of the California community that Anyanwu builds there. Within Butler’s oeuvre, Anyanwu’s Canaan in *Wild Seed* comes closest to a feminist,

collectivist, decent utopia but, as with other MUMs, it too is ultimately unsustainable due to the fact that human society is rife with constant power struggles.



## Chapter 4: Conclusion

While Doro forces Anyanwu to compromise her utopia, Anyanwu survives long enough for someone to challenge Doro's empire building. Unfortunately, in *Mind of My Mind* a new oppressive regime rises to power, but Anyanwu's feat of survival and empathetic bettering of various communities is noteworthy. Anyanwu cannot create a lasting utopia, but her persistence allows her to maintain and re-invent communities that protect each other. Butler may find the idea of utopias ridiculous but they are also essential. In an interview with *Fast Forward*, Butler notes that "the human species, over my lifetime-- yeah, Butler's words of wisdom-- is that we do tend to go to the *edge* more often than we ought to. You know, we go to the edge and then we look and then we realize, 'My God, that's a precipice; we could fall over, we could die.' And we draw back" ("transcending barriers"). Butler's MUM figures, like Anyanwu, appear to be the ones who draw humanity back from the edge. With the "magic she [performs] with her own body" (*Wild Seed* 39), Anyanwu softens an immortal, parasitic ogbanje, she strengthens communities, she provides comfort for misfits, and she resists. While life dismantles her utopian vision, Anyanwu continues to strive for *better* whenever feasible.

Butler MUMs may never reach a utopian finale, but their striving betters the worlds that they inhabit. Their strength, empathy, and persistent hope for survival or better circumstances safeguards against the ruin of their communities. In "Near of Kin," a young woman sorts through the belongings of her absent mother while her family tries to explain the different ways that her mother tried to provide her love. In *Dawn*, Lilith guides humanity and her own children as the designated all-mother through a significant altering of the human species. Anyanwu crosses seas, endures oppression, and fights for the best possible reality for her children. In *Parable of the Sower*, Lauren, like Anyanwu, adopts an egalitarian, misfit community and offers them heaven

that “you don’t have to die to reach” (222). These MUMs, among many others, do the best that they can do for their communities and children. While utopia may not be achievable, the characteristic MUM utopianism arguably improves each diegetic world.

Outside of those diegetic worlds, many contemporary authors draw inspiration from Butler’s work and the empathy and strength that Butler’s MUMs exhibit. Authors such as N.K. Jemison, K. Tempest Bradford, Candra K. Gill, Nnedi Okorafor, and Nisi Shawl all carry on Butler’s legacy. Shawl proclaims that the current generation of science fiction authors will never replace Butler, but will strive to uphold her legacy:

We don’t have weapons but we do have numbers. And we have the memory of you, your pessimism and persistence. And we have the path you were walking when you died.

Especially for science fiction authors of color, that path is easier to see now that you’ve walked it. Easier to see means easier to take. Also, taking it is way less lonely for people of color these days than it was when you first set out. As I said, we have numbers.

(Shawl, “My one-and-only Octavia”)

The positive depictions of female strength and leadership in Butler’s work paves the way for future feminist science fiction authors to expand the reaches of the genre’s inclusivity. Echoes of Butler’s work may be found in popular culture beyond literature as well; the popular science fiction series *Mass Effect*, created by Casey Hudson, Drew Karpysyn, and Preston Watamaniuk, has a diversity-seeking species called the Asari that are remarkably similar to the Oankali of Butler’s *Xenogenesis*--complete with tentacles. Further, Ava DuVernay and Charles D. King’s Macro Ventures are hopeful to produce a television series based upon *Xenogenesis’ Dawn*. Credited or not, Butler’s work continues to influence aesthetics and paths taken by science fiction and Afrofuturism.

In Butler's *Wild Seed*, Anyanwu's utopianism creates a temporary utopia that Anyanwu sustains through her maternal strength, empathy, and contentment found in a kindred community. While Canaan, like all of Butler's utopias, cannot exist long in reality, it demonstrates a lightning-in-a-bottle moment of positive escapism from the imbricating evils of human society. The striving of Anyanwu for a better future shows the importance of utopianism to Butler, as hope drives survivalism and the potential for decent to better conditions of care. Butler offers a *guiding* path towards equality and sustainable community that is led by strong empathetic leadership and malleability to accept or influence change. Doro offers Anywanwu the chance to produce "a [child] that [she] will not have to bury" (*Wild Seed* 227) but Doro's fear of submission drives him, and those around him, to destruction. Butler's *Wild Seed* exhibits Canaan as a space of feminist, maternal, decent utopia. As scholars and activists look to the powerful texts of Octavia E. Butler, discussions of Butler's utopian visions will provide insight about social hierarchy, the necessity of change, and the need to embrace difference.

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