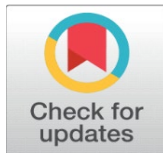


# PSYCHIC SOVEREIGNTIES AND ALIEN AFFILIATIONS: POWER AND RESISTANCE IN BUTLER AND OKORAFOR'S SPECULATIVE WORLDS

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## ABSTRACT

This article examines the intricate interplay of psychic sovereignty and alien affiliation in the speculative fiction of Octavia Butler and Nnedi Okorafor, specifically analyzing *Mind of My Mind*, *Bloodchild*, and *Lagoon*. This study examines the reconfiguration of power and resistance beyond anthropocentric paradigms, uncovering intricate negotiations among autonomy, control, and relationality. Butler's telepathic constructs and alien-human symbioses challenge traditional notions of individual agency, while Okorafor's extraterrestrial interventions foreground Afrocentric paradigms of collective transformation and ecological harmony. This research posits that the examination of the intersections among psychic networks, corporeal transgressions, and postcolonial alien encounters reveals that both authors provide radical speculative frameworks for resisting domination and redefining identity. The article ultimately situates Butler and Okorafor's works as significant contributions to the discourse of speculative resistance, wherein the alien and the psychic emerge as realms of liberation, hybridity, and reimagined futures.

**Keywords:** Afrofuturism, Africanfuturism, Psychic Sovereignty, Alien Affiliations, Posthumanism, Cultural Hybridity, Ecocriticism, Resistance



## 1. INTRODUCTION

Afrofuturism as a literary movement evolved over a period of time. It took decades for Afrofuturism to acquire its present form. Afrofuturism although existed long before, it became known to the world with the publication of Mark Dery's 1994 essay *Black to the Future*. It was series of interview with prominent figures like Samuel Delany, Greg Tate, and Tricia Rose. The purpose of this series of interview was not to frame a new genre or coin a new terminology to encapsulate the corpse of science fiction works authored by African American authors but to ponder on the issue why "So few African Americans write science fiction" (Dery 179). In a conclusion of this pondering over the issue, Dery argued that the "sub legitimate status of science fiction... mirrors the subaltern position to which blacks have been relegated throughout American history" which was actually very surprising (Dery 180). In his attempt of gathering a scantily available works of Black Science fiction, he came across the works of Black speculative fiction found in "unlikely places, constellated from far-flung points" (Dery 182). Dery defined Afrofuturisms as, "Speculative fiction that treats African American themes and addresses African American concerns in the context of twentieth-century technoculture- and, more generally, African American signification that appropriates images of technology and a prosthetically enhanced future- might for want of a better term be called 'Afrofuturism'" (Dery 180).

Afrofuturism offers fertile ground for interrogating the entangled dynamics of power, oppression, and resistance, especially within narratives shaped by Africanfuturist and postcolonial sensibilities. This paper examines how Octavia Butler's *Mind of My Mind* and *Fledgling*, alongside Nnedi Okorafor's *Lagoon*, construct speculative terrains where marginalized protagonists confront systems of control and reimagine agency through cultural memory, hybridity, and embodied resistance. Drawing on Michel Foucault's assertion that "power is everywhere... because it comes from everywhere" (Foucault 93), the study explores how domination is not merely top-down but embedded in social and psychic structures. James C. Scott's concept of "everyday forms of resistance" (Scott xvi) further illuminates how subversive acts: ritual, language, and communal consciousness become tools of survival and transformation. As Mona Lilja and Stellan Vinthagen argue, resistance and power "co-merge," shaping political and social change through their constant interplay (Lilja and Vinthagen 150). Rosi Braidotti's idea of 'transversal connections' is also significant for this analysis as the narratives of Butler and Okorafor defy fixed boundaries and emerge as 'transversal connections' across species, systems and scales. Helen Tiffin and Graham Huggan's postcolonial ecocriticism also forms the basic framework to discuss the ecological consciousness reflected especially in *Lagoon*. Through this lens, the paper analyzes how Butler and Okorafor's protagonists navigate oppressive regimes, reclaim fractured identities, and assert cultural sovereignty, demonstrating that speculative fiction can serve as a decolonial methodology, where memory and resistance are not only thematic concerns but ontological imperatives.

## 2. UNDERSTANDING PSYCHIC SOVEREIGNTIES AND ALIEN AFFILIATIONS IN THE LIGHT OF POSTHUMANIST CONCERNS

It is crucial to understand the concept of psychic sovereignties before delving deep into its reflection in the selected works. Psychic sovereignties refer to autonomous forms of mental, emotional, and telepathic agency that challenge external control particularly in speculative fiction where psychic networks or powers are used to resist domination and assert communal or individual identity. In Butler's *Mind of My Mind*, psychic sovereignties reflect itself in the form of creation of the Pattern, a decentralized psychic network embodies psychic sovereignty. It resists Doro's authoritarian breeding program and reclaims agency through shared consciousness and collective memory. Whereas alien affiliation is at the heart of narrative like *Lagoon*. Alien affiliations describe the relational and often transformative connections between human (or posthuman) characters and extraterrestrial beings. These affiliations can symbolize cultural hybridity, negotiation across difference, and the redefinition of identity beyond anthropocentric norms. In *Lagoon*, Ayodele's arrival and her interactions with Lagosians reflect alien affiliations that disrupt colonial hierarchies and invite new modes of belonging. In *Fledgling*, Shori's hybrid identity also positions her as alien to both human and Ina societies, complicating notions of kinship and power. All the characters in these narratives voice posthumanist concerns. Posthumanism is a philosophical and cultural framework that challenges the centrality of the human subject in favor of more relational, hybrid, and decentered models of being. It critiques human exceptionalism and embraces entanglements with technology, ecology, and nonhuman life. Rosi Braidotti describes the posthuman subject as "a transversal entity" (Braidotti 45) embedded across species, systems, and scales. In *Fledgling*, Shori's genetic hybridity and in *Mind of My Mind*, Mary's psychic evolution reflects posthuman identities that resist fixed categories and embrace multiplicity.

## 3. BUTLER, GODMOTHER OF AFROFUTURIST FICTION AND HER SUCCESSOR NNEDI OKORAFOR

Octavia Butler (1947–2006) is widely regarded as a foundational figure in speculative fiction, particularly for her pioneering work in Afrofuturism and Black feminist science fiction. Her narratives interrogate systems of power, race, gender, and biology through complex, often posthuman protagonists. In *Mind of My Mind*, Butler explores psychic networks and communal consciousness as tools of resistance against authoritarian control. *Bloodchild* conversely is a gripping science fiction short story set on an alien planet where humans, known as Terrans, live in a symbiotic yet unsettling relationship with the insect-like alien species called the Tlic. The narrative centers on Gan, a young boy chosen to carry Tlic offspring, and explores themes of power, consent, bodily autonomy, and interdependence through a deeply personal and disturbing lens. Butler's speculative worlds are deeply political, offering critiques of domination while imagining alternative modes of survival and agency. As Catherine Mills posits, "Butler's work reveals how resistance is not simply oppositional but emerges from within the very structures of power it seeks to challenge." Her legacy continues to shape contemporary discourse on decolonial futures, intersectionality, and speculative ethics.

Nnedi Okorafor is a Nigerian American writer whose work defines and advances Africanfuturism—a term she coined to distinguish her narratives from Afrofuturism by centering African culture, geography, and epistemologies. Her fiction blends science fiction, fantasy, and indigenous cosmologies to explore identity, migration, and transformation. In *Lagoon*, Okorafor uses alien contact to catalyze sociopolitical upheaval in Lagos, foregrounding African agency and mythic storytelling. Her protagonists, often young African women, navigate hybrid identities and cultural tensions in technologically advanced yet spiritually grounded worlds. Okorafor's work challenges Western technocultural dominance and reclaims African futures from within, offering speculative landscapes where tradition and innovation coexist.

Power, oppression, and resistance are sharply explored in Octavia Butler's *Mind of My Mind* and *Fledgling* and Nnedi Okorafor's *Lagoon* through imaginative frameworks that subvert prevailing socio-political paradigms. These texts examine the ways in which systemic control appears in both human and posthuman contexts, whether it be through colonial alienation, racialized violence, or psychic dominance. Butler explores the coercive power of Doro, a centuries-old creature who manipulates and breeds telepaths for his own purposes, in *Mind of My Mind*. Mary, his creation, opposes and eventually defeats him, representing a new, group-based style of leadership. Through Shori, a genetically modified Black vampire who challenges gendered and racial violence while claiming her independence and redefining kinship, *Fledgling* reimagines the vampire myth. Okorafor's *Lagoon* places resistance in a postcolonial Nigerian context, where alien arrivals spark social unrest and give voiceless people the ability to confront dishonest establishments and corporates. These stories highlight the transformative power of resistance, agency, and a reimagined community while illuminating how oppression functions through both overt dominance and covert systemic constraints.

#### 4. PSYCHIC SOVEREIGNTY AND COMMUNAL RESISTANCE IN MIND OF MY MIND

Octavia Butler's *Mind of My Mind* engages the politics of control and the ethics of engineered identity through speculative fiction, providing a powerful critique of genetic manipulation and the fight for autonomy. Butler introduces Doro, an immortal creature who has bred telepaths selectively for millennia to produce a strong psychic race, in *Mind of My Mind*. Because he has complete control over his subjects' lives, procreation, and fates, his manipulation is not only biological but also profoundly authoritarian. As Cassandra Jones posits, "In respect to historic colonialism, Doro's colonization is marked by the violent oppression of the people under his domination via torture, coercion, and reproductive control" (Jones 702). The protagonist, Mary, was created through this program but eventually opposes Doro's control. A significant change from individual control to collective agency is represented by her development of the Pattern, a psychic network that links telepaths. Mary ponders, "Did I need those latents, somehow? Was that why I was so enthusiastic, so happy that I was going to get them? I knew I wanted them in the pattern. They belonged to me and I wanted them", indicating the reclaiming of Mary's independence and the establishment of a new social structure (Butler *Mind of* 153). This story is consistent with feminist and Afrofuturist bioethical frameworks, which stress the value of consent, community, and self-determination while criticizing the historical exploitation of Black bodies in scientific research. Through Shori, a genetically altered Black Ina who awakens with amnesia and has to reconstruct her identity, Butler reimagines the vampire myth in *Fledgling*. The reason Shori exists is because her Ina family purposefully altered her genes to make her resistant to sunlight and able to endure in a harsh environment. However, she is the target of racialized violence and social exclusion in Ina society because of her hybrid status. Iosif, Shori's father asserts about her enhanced abilities after genetic modification, "The sun wouldn't disable her at once. She's faster runner than most of us, in spite of her small size. And she would have come awake faster when everything started. She's a light sleeper, compared to most of us, and she doesn't absolutely have to sleep during the day", and this enhanced ability further becomes the matter of hatred among some other Inas (Butler, *Fledgling* 66). Real-world conflicts over racial purity and biotechnological enhancement are reflected in her struggle to establish her position in a society that perceives her as abnormal. In addition to taking back her past, Shori is redefining power and kinship according to her own standards as she moves toward autonomy. Butler's genetically altered characters, according to Jeanine Webb as she formulates in her talk, "forge new models of kinship and power" and "resist the roles assigned to them by patriarchal and racialized systems" (Webb 13). Posthumanist theory is discussed in both books, especially Rosi Braidotti's idea of the posthuman subject as, "a transversal entity, fully immersed in and immanent to a network of non-human relations" (Braidotti 1183). Mary and Shori are relational beings rather than isolated individuals, and their identities are shaped by networks, psychic in Mary's case, symbiotic in Shori's. Their defiance of genetic control is a reclamation of agency within their altered bodies

rather than a rejection of those bodies. Thus, Butler's writings subvert the natural versus artificial dichotomy by presenting a complex understanding of autonomy that values diversity, hybridity, and ethical complexity.

## 5. RESISTANCE: NEGOTIATION, NOT REBELLION IN BLOODCHILD

In *Bloodchild*, Octavia Butler creates a speculative story that looks at the complicated relationship between power, oppression, and resistance through the uneasy relationship between the alien Tlic and the human Terrans. Butler's story is not just a simple story about power. It looks at how coercion can look like care and how people can have power even when they are being controlled. The Tlic's dependence on human bodies for reproduction renders them simultaneously as guardians and exploiters, obscuring the distinctions between refuge and imprisonment. When Gan expresses his frustrations, saying, "No one ever asks us," ... "You never asked me", it complicates the role of consent in the novel (Butler, *Bloodchild* 23). Butler shows that resistance is not just outright rebellion, but also a way to survive by having Gan reluctantly accept his role as host and then confront T'Gatoi and demand autonomy. The acceptance on the part of Gan is a kind of negotiation between his own freedom and his loyalty to his family. As he wants to prevent his sister Hoa who is excited to carry Tlic eggs, he unwillingly accepts T'Gatoi's proposal. The reproductive politics in the story, shown by Gan's mother Lien's refusal of narcotic eggs and Gan's moral reckoning, bring up feminist issues about bodily autonomy. The Preserve's colonial undertones suggest postcolonial readings of spatial and corporeal control. In the end, *Bloodchild* rejects binary frameworks and instead offers a nuanced look at how power works through closeness and how resistance can happen within, not outside, oppressive systems.

## 6. ALIEN AFFILIATIONS AND CULTURAL HYBRIDITY IN LAGOON

Conversely, *Lagoon* by Nnedi Okorafor is a vibrant and politically charged examination of ecological resistance and colonial legacies that uses speculative fiction to examine the long-lasting effects of imperialism on Nigeria's socio-political and environmental landscape. The novel is set in Lagos and starts with aliens landing in the city, which sparks social unrest, environmental revitalization, and a rethinking of power dynamics. In this story, Okorafor challenges colonialism's extractive logic and its aftereffects on human and non-human systems while putting forth substitute forms of cohabitation based on relationality, indigenous knowledge, and environmental justice. *Lagoon* is thematically consistent with postcolonial ecocriticism, a framework that studies the ways in which colonial histories influence resistance and environmental degradation. Postcolonial ecocriticism, as Helen Tiffin and Graham Huggan postulate in their work *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment* (2010), "investigates the many ways in which nature and culture, human and non-human, are constructed through complex networks of agencies and interactions" (Tiffin and Huggan 12). This complexity is personified in *Lagoon* by the alien Ayodele, who acts as both a healer and a disruptor. Her arrival forces Lagos to confront its colonial past and present inequalities. Addressing the people of Lagos she states, "Nobody is attacking you. And nobody will dare now. The winds of change are blowing. We are change. You will see" (Okorafor, *Lagoon* 45). With ecological and social change entwined, this declaration marks a break with the status quo.

Ecofeminist theory, which connects the exploitation of nature with the oppression of marginalized groups, especially women, is a major influence on Okorafor's portrayal of Lagos as a site of ecological resistance. In her thesis, *Bridging Feminism and Ecology: An Ecofeminist Reading of Lagoon* (2025), Elif Karaca highlights how Okorafor uses the ocean as a symbol of ecological agency and feminine power to deconstruct binary oppositions like human/nonhuman and nature/culture. According to her, "The Lagos takes on a personality of its own, reflecting the tenacity of the city's residents by being fluid, generative, and uncontrollable" (Karaca 53). Furthermore, by depicting corrupt institutions and militarized reactions to alien contact, *Lagoon* challenges the colonial legacy of environmental exploitation. Even in the face of transformative opportunities, these responses demonstrate the colonial impulse to dominate and extract. Scenes of group storytelling, masquerades, and music, aspects of indigenous culture that defy erasure and affirm ecological and cultural continuity are used by Okorafor to counter this. The book embraces multiplicity and decentralization as acts of literary and political resistance, further subverting colonial narrative forms through its nonlinear structure and polyphonic narration. In the end, *Lagoon* presents speculative fiction as a place where ecological resistance is not only feasible but also required for decolonial imagination. Okorafor pushes readers to reconsider the limits of identity, community, and environmental stewardship in a postcolonial world by emphasizing indigenous epistemologies, feminine agency, and multispecies relationships. In an act of resistance, she fuses the ecological consciousness with



African cosmology. This kind of resistance aligns with Nxumalo & Cedillo's theoretical position to defy supremacy of Eurocentric epistemology: "The recontextualization of African cultural potentialities calls into question the primacy of Euro-Western knowledge." (Nxumalo and Cedillo 99)

The speculative narratives in *Mind of My Mind*, *Fledgling*, and *Lagoon* by Octavia Butler and Nnedi Okorafor, explore the dynamics of oppression, power, and resistance in psychological, biological, and socio-political domains. Whether it is by overthrowing authoritarian breeding programs, reclaiming agency in the face of racialized violence, or upending colonial legacies through ecological transformation, each of the three protagonists Mary, Shori, and Ayodele embodies a challenge to established systems of control. These texts provide nuanced depictions of resistance as relational, adaptive, and firmly anchored in community and identity, rejecting the oversimplified dichotomies of victimhood and dominance. By redefining power as collective agency, empathy, and the ability to change oppressive systems from the inside out, Butler and Okorafor's speculative frameworks highlight the transformative potential of marginalized voices.

## 7. CONCLUSION

This study has illuminated how Octavia Butler and Nnedi Okorafor deploy speculative fiction to interrogate and reconfigure the boundaries of psychic sovereignty and alien affiliation in *Mind of My Mind*, *Bloodchild*, and *Lagoon*. Both authors use telepathic networks, interspecies symbiosis, and extraterrestrial interventions to question dominant structures and present radical ideas of resistance that go beyond traditional humanist ideas.

Butler's psychic communities and alien-human entanglements undermine concepts of autonomy and control, illustrating how power can be simultaneously oppressive and generative when disseminated throughout collective consciousness. Okorafor, on the other hand, sees alien contact as a place of Afrocentric renewal, where resistance isn't just a reaction but is deeply rooted in cultural hybridity and ecological interconnectedness.

These stories make us think about agency in a new way. Instead of seeing it as a single force, we should see it as a fluid negotiation between self and other, human and nonhuman, and individual and group. In their imagined worlds, sovereignty is weak, and resistance isn't always loud; it can be quiet, relational, and deeply transformative. In the end, Butler and Okorafor don't just picture new futures; they make us face the alien inside and outside of us. In doing so, they give us plans for survival, solidarity, and radical reimagination.

## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None .

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