

Posthuman Pedagogy and Identity Politics in Octavia E. Butler's *Adulthood Rites*

I. Introduction

This paper examines the dynamics of identity politics and resistance through Akin, the posthuman protagonist in Octavia E. Butler's *Adulthood Rites* (1988). As a hybrid child of human and Oankali descent, Akin becomes a lens to explore posthuman education and its ethical dilemmas. Raised by his human mother, Lilith, and the Oankali, Akin becomes involved in the struggles of human resisters who reject the Oankali's symbiotic policies, including forced sterilization. His kidnapping by resisters serves as a turning point, deepening his understanding of their suffering and fostering a stronger identification with his human heritage. This empathy propels Akin's advocacy for the resisters' autonomy, ultimately leading to the establishment of an independent human colony on Mars.

In addition to Akin's personal growth, this paper explores the Oankali's experimental educational practices and their ethical implications. While traditional humanism sees education as a means to preserve humanity, *Adulthood Rites* challenges this by integrating technology and nonhuman elements. As the line between human and nonhuman blurs, Butler critiques the ethics of posthuman education and urges a reevaluation of educational paradigms that accommodate diverse species and knowledge systems.

II. The Concept of Posthuman Pedagogy

Posthuman pedagogy responds to evolving relationships between humans, technology, and the nonhuman world. It challenges traditional human-centered educational models and instead emphasizes the interconnectedness between human and nonhuman agents. This concept can be categorized into three main frameworks: relationships between humans and nonhumans, ethical decentering of human agency, and socially just pedagogy.

Human and Nonhuman Relationships

The first framework centers on the relationship between humans and nonhumans, particularly the role of technology in shaping education. As Lili Yan, Breanne K. Litts, and Chungsoo Na argue in "Learning in the More Than Human World," posthuman pedagogy challenges the dichotomy between humans and nonhumans by emphasizing how technology and the natural world co-shape learning. They state, "The increasing integration of technology with human activities brings into question the ontology of education. The need to rethink

education becomes more acute when science and technology breakthroughs are moving closer to the identification or formulation of possible nonhuman agency” (2313). This perspective broadens the educational framework, positioning nonhuman elements as central to learning, moving away from anthropocentric approaches towards a more holistic understanding of education.

Ethics of Decentering Human Agency

The second framework focuses on the ethical imperative of decentering human agency, especially in environmental education. Raichael Lock, in her essay “Exploring Posthuman Pedagogies,” highlights that decentering human agency allows educators to engage with the broader implications of human interactions with nonhumans. Lock emphasizes that “the practice of decentring the human as an ethical pedagogical method for environmental education” is vital for considering the ethical responsibilities humans have toward nonhumans (296). Lock presents two posthuman pedagogies to support this ethical shift:

1. Common Worlding: Humans and nonhumans co-create knowledge through shared encounters, as exemplified by the Workshops for Wildlife project.
2. Intra-active Pedagogy: Grounded in Karen Barad’s agential realism, this pedagogy highlights the interconnectedness of all matter, blurring the traditional boundaries between subjects and objects.

Through these frameworks, students are encouraged to think beyond anthropocentric views and consider the agency of nonhumans. Lock asserts that “such stories highlight how pupils, when given the opportunity to think with other beings, can decentre the discourse that names them human” (304). This fosters a collaborative, multispecies educational environment.

Socially Just Pedagogy

The third type of posthuman pedagogy integrates social justice, addressing the marginalization of both human and nonhuman groups. Rosi Braidotti, in *Socially Just Pedagogies*, argues that socially just pedagogy in posthuman times must engage with both human and nonhuman actors, recognizing the exploitation of nonhuman agents alongside the marginalization of human groups. Braidotti calls for a “pedagogy of the oppressed” that includes marginalized human communities such as indigenous and queer groups, as well as “non-human agents, technologically mediated elements, Earth-others (land, waters, plants,

animals)” (xx). Braidotti emphasizes the importance of what she terms the “transversal alliance,” a collective of these marginalized groups and nonhuman actors who are united by their exclusion from mainstream educational systems. She argues that we must “de-Oedipalise” the relationship between humans and nonhumans, a methodological shift that dismantles traditional hierarchies and places an ethical responsibility on educators. Braidotti’s vision of an inclusive and transformative educational framework seeks to dismantle both the anthropocentrism and humanism that have historically marginalized non-Western and nonhuman knowledge systems.

Therefore, posthuman pedagogy challenges conventional education by integrating nonhuman elements and addressing ethical and social justice concerns. It advocates for a rethinking of how we engage with nonhuman actors, encourages ethical responsibility in education, and calls for an inclusive framework that acknowledges marginalized voices, both human and nonhuman. These theoretical frameworks are not merely abstract ideas but have real-world implications, as seen in Octavia Butler's exploration of hybrid identities and resistance in *Adulthood Rites*.

III. Akin’s Journey and Identity Politics

Akin’s story offers a compelling embodiment of these pedagogical challenges, where the integration of human and nonhuman elements into educational systems becomes a lived reality. As a human-Oankali hybrid child, Akin experiences the ambivalence between two competing knowledge systems—one focused on human autonomy and the other on nonhuman symbiosis. His journey reflects the ethical complexities of posthuman pedagogy, particularly how educational practices influence identity, autonomy, and consent. By examining Akin’s struggle, we can understand how Butler critiques and reimagines these educational paradigms through the lens of identity politics and resistance.

Akin as a Hybrid Figure

Akin’s hybrid identity embodies the ambivalence between individual autonomy and collective existence. As he grows, he is caught between the human value of individuality and the Oankali’s symbiotic approach, where the needs of the collective take precedence. This duality reflects the challenges of posthuman pedagogy, where integrating human and nonhuman elements raises ethical questions about autonomy, consent, and the preservation of identity.

Akin's struggle with his identity focuses on the posthuman pedagogy: how education can shape not just knowledge but the very essence of what it means to be human or nonhuman. His experiences urge us to reconsider how educational systems—particularly those incorporating nonhuman elements—can respect the autonomy and identity of their participants.

Akin's Kidnapping and Experience in Phoenix

A pivotal moment in Akin's journey is his kidnapping by human resisters. This event deepens his understanding of the power dynamics embedded in Oankali education. For the human resisters, the Oankali's genetic merging represents a form of colonization, stripping them of their reproductive autonomy and cultural identity. On the other hand, the Oankali view their genetic interventions as a path to salvation, believing that their education and biological merging offer a solution to human self-destruction.

This experience gives Akin a dual perspective. As he witnesses human suffering firsthand, he develops empathy for their desire for independence. This empathy propels Akin's advocacy for a compromise between the Oankali's purpose and human autonomy. He begins to question the ethical implications of imposing Oankali education on unwilling subjects, highlighting the conflict between the supposed benefits of symbiosis and the human need for self-determination.

Ethical Dilemmas in Oankali Education

Akin's journey is a reflection of the ethical dilemmas that arise in posthuman pedagogy, particularly around the imposition of education on marginalized groups. The Oankali's intervention, while framed as benevolent, echoes the colonial practices of dominant cultures imposing their values on subjugated people. The human resisters' rejection of Oankali education parallels real-world resistance to colonial assimilation, where autonomy and cultural distinctiveness are at stake.

Akin's **dual perspective** exposes the power imbalance in Oankali education. While the Oankali believe they are helping humans by offering them genetic survival, Akin's understanding to the resisters' suffering reveals that this help frequently compromises human autonomy. The ethical question then becomes: can education truly be liberating if it imposes collective intelligence on those who do not consent to it? Akin's struggle reflects the broader tension between individual autonomy and collective well-being in posthuman pedagogical frameworks.

Akin's Advocacy for the Mars Colony & Hybrid Existence

Akin's empathy for human resisters culminates in his advocacy for the creation of an independent human colony on Mars—a space where humans can evolve without Oankali interference. This advocacy for autonomy mirrors the resistance movements of marginalized groups fighting for self-determination and the preservation of cultural distinctiveness. Akin recognizes that for true autonomy to exist, humans must be allowed to forge their own path, free from the imposition of Oankali genetic engineering.

However, Akin's vision goes beyond simple resistance. He rejects the binary choice of being either human or Oankali. Instead, he seeks a third space where hybrid identities, like his own, can coexist and thrive. This vision challenges the rigid boundaries between species and promotes a posthuman ethos of collaboration and mutual respect. Akin's quest for this third space embodies the promise of posthuman pedagogy: a reimagining of educational systems where diversity is embraced, and autonomy is balanced with collective well-being.

IV. Conclusion

In conclusion, Akin's journey in Butler's *Adulthood Rites* offers a powerful exploration of the ethical and political dilemmas posed by posthuman pedagogy. His hybrid identity forces a reevaluation of human and Oankali knowledge systems, revealing the complexities involved in integrating nonhuman elements into educational frameworks. By reflecting on both posthuman pedagogy and identity politics, Akin's advocacy for human autonomy through the Mars colony emphasizes the importance of preserving distinct identities while balancing collaboration. Therefore, Butler's work calls for a rethinking of educational paradigms—one that values diversity and respects the ethical need for autonomy and self-determination.