

Reimagining the Reproductive Citizen Before and After the Reproductive Turn

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Abstract

This essay focuses on literary conceptions of the “reproductive citizen.” In a reading of two utopian and feminist reimaginings of reproduction, Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s *Herland* (1915) and Octavia E. Butler’s *Fledgling* (2005), traditional connotations of reproduction as furthering the nation by offspring that resembles the current citizenry are linked to the twenty-first-century renewal of reproductive ideologies, in particular in the context of reproduction technology. *Herland*’s utopian world, in which women reproduce through parthenogenesis and create a female-only society, underscores a deeply eugenic form of reproduction as the underlying mechanism that accounts for the ‘perfect’ utopia. Of course, *Herland* was published decades before any scientific debates about artificial reproduction were even feasible. *Fledgling*, in contrast, was published after the so-called “reproductive turn” and casts a utopian vision of a future where artificial reproduction is possible and multispecies family-making is encouraged. Nevertheless, this utopia also suffers from social constructs of race that are disguised as biological facts—and thus depends on similar eugenic negotiations regarding who can or rather should be a reproductive citizen. In contrast to *Herland*, however, *Fledgling* interrogates these long-standing interconnections between reproduction, race, and utopia via its protagonist, Shori, a Black human-vampire hybrid. While genetic engineering caused Shori to occupy a position between reproductive perfection and racial contamination in the first place, the eventual acceptance of Shori as a “new reproductive citizen” enables a careful entanglement of biological traits and their transference into the social and political realm.

Keywords: reproduction; reproductive turn; utopia; feminism; reproductive citizen

Introduction

The introduction of assisted reproductive technologies such as IVF, embryo genomics, and embryo transfer technologies in the late twentieth century was heralded by many as liberating and inherently progressive. The new procreative options meant human freedom would be enhanced; many believed the new technologies would support family arrangements that break the mold of the traditional nuclear family. They would allow donor-conceived children, surrogates, egg donors, and LGBTQIA* parents using reproductive technologies to emerge as “new reproductive citizens” (Plummer 91), who in turn could transform the myth about who is, or can be, a reproductive citizen.¹ Indeed, the idea of the “new reproductive citizen” came up frequently in discussions about “the reproductive turn,” i. e., the starting point of an era in which the “technologization of reproduction” has become “routine and familiar” (Franklin, *Biological Relatives* 5). More generally, Bryan S. Turner defines “reproductive citizenship” as being concerned with “with whom one may reproduce and under what social and legal conditions” (“Human Rights” 53).² Reproductive citizenship is not about the ability to reproduce per se but delineates how to reproduce in a way that is expected, normative, and valued. In a context where heterosexual “reproductive capacity has become a key marker of citizenship,” we find that “reproductive heterosex specifically is the form of reproduction typically referred to by the words ‘natural conception’” (Riggs and Due 957). As a result, being (positioned) outside of these reproductive norms unavoidably involves “being vulnerable to the diminishment of one’s cultural capital as reproductive citizen” (957).

In contrast, the notion of a “new reproductive citizen” relies on the assumption that the reproductive turn would move societal norms away from what is understood as “natural conception” and normalize alternative means of reproduction such as IVF. Such “powerful new technologies” (Robertson 3), however, renewed and transformed possibilities not only for expanding reproductive options but also for controlling them. New reproductive technologies have, for example, “reinforced the normative dominance of marriage as a social relation” (Turner, “Citizenship” 189). Moreover, by exposing the “opposing relationships of white women and women of color to reproduction-assisting technologies” (Roberts, “Race, Gender” 783), feminist scholars have continued their critique of what is called “stratified reproduction” (see Colen; Rapp), i. e., “imbalances in the ability of people of different races, ethnicities, nationalities, classes, and genders to reproduce,” which unobtrusively makes technology-assisted reproduction a “racially salient event” (Bridges 10).

Following this line of argument, a normative hierarchy has always accompanied the reproductive citizen in the United States; even new, arguably liberating inventions in the field of reproductive technologies cannot change these inherent power dynamics;³ imaginations, encour-

1 This designation originally goes back to Bryan S. Turner, who in his article “The Erosion of Citizenship” argues that traditional social participation through heterosexual reproduction is—next to the traditional notions of work and war—one main paradigm for (social) citizenship.

2 As such, reproductive citizenship is similar to the concept of sexual citizenship, in that it understands that “hegemonic forms of heterosexuality underpin constructions of citizenship” (Richardson 212). At the same time, as Turner notes, the connection between sexuality and citizenship is subordinate to the connection between citizenship and reproduction, as the reason for the historical exclusion of, e. g., lesbians and gay men from full citizenship is understood to be not sexuality but “the non-reproductivity of same sex unions and, therefore, their failure to contribute fully to society” (212).

3 Looking at the history of IVF, for example, it should also be noted that the earliest attempts to induce fertilization in glass started not out of a desire to liberate, but to “control life, [...] to redefine it” (Franklin, *Biological Relatives* 2).

agements, and ideas about and regulation of who should reproduce enforce preexisting, normative, and oftentimes non-inclusive structures of citizenship and belonging. While this matter is generally suppressed in popular and/or scientific debates about the future of reproduction, it has notably been taken up extensively in dystopian fiction, particularly since the 1980s. Starting with Gena Corea's *The Mother Machine* in 1985, numerous (feminist) authors have been inspired by the first debates on artificial reproduction and have imagined dystopias "in which white women's artificial insemination was privileged, while the natural reproduction of women of color was devalued and exploited" (Roberts, "Race, Gender" 783). It is not surprising that such a critical view of artificial reproduction was taken up in works that negotiate reproduction, but it is notable that most texts immediately link their dystopian scenarios to an adapted form of eugenics: Imagining novel reproductive technologies seems to revive eugenic impulses, which act together to further suppress women, particularly women of color.⁴

This essay traces this haunting connection in *utopian* works that reimagine reproduction before and after the reproductive turn. By contrasting Charlotte Perkins Gilman's seminal utopia *Herland* (1915) and Octavia E. Butler's *Fledgling* (2005), it becomes apparent that their reimaginings of the "reproductive citizen" manifest the limiting constructs of sameness, normalization (see Haraway), and optimization—constructs stemming from an era of eugenic politics of reproduction deeply rooted in racial fantasies about reproducing a predominantly white nation. *Herland's* utopian world, in which women reproduce through parthenogenesis and create a female-only society, underscores a deeply eugenic form of reproduction as the underlying mechanism accounting for the 'perfect' utopia. Of course, *Herland* was published decades before scientific debates about artificial reproduction were even feasible, and, perhaps even more importantly, in the heyday of the eugenics movement; it may therefore be seen as a forerunner of utopian reimaginings of the reproductive citizen. *Fledgling*, in contrast, was published after the reproductive turn and can be read as reactionary to debates about IVF, artificial insemination, and reprogenetics that dominated the early twenty-first century. It offers a utopian vision of a future in which artificial reproduction is possible and multispecies family-making is encouraged. Nevertheless, *Fledgling's* utopia depends on similar eugenic negotiations of who can or rather should be a reproductive citizen. Comparing the logics at work in the two texts thus sheds light on the long-standing interconnections between reproduction, race, and utopia: Even in the utopian fictional realm, the potential of new reproductive technologies is concealed by the same generic limitations of earlier kinds of feminist utopian projects, i. e., those of successful nation-building, which link reproduction to eugenic processes of continuation and perfection.

⁴ For an elaboration on this link between artificial reproduction and eugenics in dystopian fiction, see, e. g., Roberts, "Privatization" and "Race, Gender"; Davis "Sexuality."

From Strathern's "Familiar Reproductive Model" to the U.S. Eugenics Movement

The term "reproduction" stems from the field of medicine and biology but is used frequently in legal, ethical, social, and public debates; it is usually considered a neutral word used to describe "the production of offspring," or, in the domain of human biology, "the process of having babies" (see "reproduction," *Cambridge Dictionary*). While the adjective "reproductive" has increased in use since the late twentieth century—it has been applied to the ever-growing fields of *reproductive* medicine, *reproductive* science, and *reproductive* justice—its etymology is seldom addressed, let alone the underlying connotations that such an investigation brings to the fore. The verb "reproduce" can be traced back to the sixteenth century; the OED records it as modeled on the French "*reproduire*," meaning "to produce again," from "*re*" as "again" and "*produire*" as "produce." The OED's first record of the "use of 'reproduce' [...] in the biological sense: 'to bring again into material existence'" is from 1611 (Teilmann-Lock 37). As Stina Teilmann-Lock explains:

In French—as in English—["reproduction"] designated then, as now, the process by which 'something renews itself', or 'the action or process of forming, creating or bringing into existence again', such as the reproduction of the living species. In the seventeenth century, 'reproduction' was most significant in a biological context. However in the eighteenth century it became linked to pictorial representation. [...] In the early nineteenth century a further denotation was added to 'reproduction', namely that a reproduction could be a 'copy or a counterpart, especially a copy of a picture or other work of art by means of engraving or some other process'. The new meaning of 'reproduction' was related to new technologies, including photography, stencils, duplicators, [etc.]. Reproduction as multiplication became a possibility in a 'parallel relation': an infinite number of reproductions, including reproductions of reproductions, is possible, but all reproductions point back to their first origin, always displaying a degree of similarity between themselves [...]. (32)

Teilmann-Lock's etymological investigation is quoted at length here because it points to the tension behind the key argument of this paper: If we take both the contemporary denotation and the etymological history of "reproduction" at face value, the term seems to imply that when humans—or animals—produce offspring, the process is one of *reproduction*, of renewing something that was already there, repeating it, creating it *again*. Considering the biological processes behind human reproduction, however, even with only a basic knowledge of biology one immediately has to reject this denotation, as the fusion of the egg cell and the sperm cell during fertilization develops into a novel organism that is genetically different from the parent organisms. The "product" of reproduction may be *re*created in part, but the production of genetic variation in sexual reproduction differentiates human reproduction from mere cloning or asexual reproduction, where no genetic variety

is produced in offspring. If anything, using the term “reproduction” to designate the process of the creation of offspring is false labeling, and this, as we will see, is of enormous consequence, for it is here that one can immediately establish a connection to important implications for nation-building, citizenship, and belonging.

When it comes to nation-building, in contrast to biology, the desire in many modern Western nations has been to *reproduce* the nation, i. e., to further the nation by creating offspring who “resemble” the current citizenry and preserve the status quo. This pertains especially to “racial and ethnic ‘others,’” who are to be “kept separate from the supposed purity of the dominant group, whose desirable characteristics constitute the state’s preferred national identity” (Jones 45). This understanding is reflected in birthright citizenship through the principle of *jus sanguinis*, as well as in efforts to restrict immigration and thus protect against contamination of the nation. It is also reflected in what Marilyn Strathern has described as the “familiar reproductive model,” which appears inconspicuously logical to the human mind (*After Nature* 119): It includes not only our understanding of “nature [as] systematically organized through the biological laws that govern reproduction” but also, and more importantly, the idea “that kinship systems organize these biological facts into social constructs and institutions” (Franklin, “After IVF”).⁵ Strathern states that “kinship systems are imagined as social arrangements not just imitating, but based on and literally deploying processes of biological reproduction” (*Future* 3). Our understanding of biological reproduction as “reproduction” is thus based on more than *mere* biology: namely, on “socially organized biology” (Franklin, “After IVF”). And as such, it is “always already embedded in discourses of race” (Nadkarni 34).

This observation has significant implications for the reproductive citizen: In the context of a neoliberal political environment, in which citizens are required to take personal responsibility for their actions, reproductive citizenship emphasizes self-control and self-regulation. As Lorna Weir points out, in the context of nation-building, reproduction and pregnancy have become “remoralised” as “ethical practice[s]” (373): They are guided by social and normative expectations regarding who should and should not reproduce the nation. In the United States, the notion of the citizen as one who is responsible for correctly *re*producing the nation was explicitly endorsed during the eugenics movement in the early twentieth century, which sought to ‘improve’ the genetic quality of the citizenry, not least by positively enforcing “correct” reproduction of the white, normative population and excluding people and groups judged to be inferior.⁶ Undesirable traits, eugenicists argued, were concentrated in uneducated, poor, and minority populations, and they worked to eliminate such traits as quickly as possible through, among other measures, legislation enforcing sterilization (see Kevles). By the late 1920s, “30 states [had] adopted eugenic sterilization laws” (Norrgrard

⁵ This, of course, goes back to Darwin’s evolutionary biology, which drew heavily on kinship imagery. See Strathern’s *After Nature* for an elaborated discussion of this connection (74, 90–98).

⁶ While the latter is an example of negative eugenics, policing education and providing tax incentives and/or childbirth stipends to encourage certain forms of procreation are considered positive eugenics; both designations were coined by Sir Francis Galton, one of the pioneers of eugenics in Great Britain (see Kevles).

170), including California and a number of states in the middle Atlantic region and the Midwest. At the same time, even the liberals and human rights activists who fought the eugenicist reproductive narrative often “accepted race as a meaningful object of scientific knowledge [...] in the sense that they did not insist on the separation of the physical and the cultural and spoke in the idiom of organic health, efficiency, and familial solidarity” (Haraway 234). As Donna J. Haraway elaborates:

For many in the first decades of the twentieth century, race mixing was a venereal disease of the social body, producing doomed progeny whose reproductive issue was as tainted as that of lesbians, sodomites, Jews, over-educated women, prostitutes, criminals, masturbators, or alcoholics. These were the subjects, literal and literary, of the commodious discourse of eugenics, where intraracial hygiene and interracial taxonomy were two faces of the same coin. (233-34)

It is exactly this context that provides the backdrop for many of Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s publications, which have been widely acclaimed for their feminist articulations of reproduction and motherhood and experienced a resurgence in early second-wave feminist writings during the 1960s and 1970s. At the same time, the eugenic thought pervading much of Gilman’s feminist non-fictional writing has been the target of considerable critique.⁷ Critics such as Donna J. Haraway, Alys Eve Weinbaum, and, most recently, Asha Nadkarni have convincingly argued that celebrating the feminist impulses of Gilman’s fictional oeuvre obscures how her personal acceptance of “race as a meaningful object of scientific knowledge” is evident in her fictional work (234).⁸ Since Gilman’s texts have been approached numerous times from this angle,⁹ in the following, I will limit myself to arguing how Gilman’s seminal work *Herland* represents a utopian, feminist politics of reproduction and the reproductive citizen.

Tracing the Reproductive Citizen in Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s *Herland*

Feminist critics have read *Herland* as feminist and utopian because it narrates an alternative history of female achievement unimpeded by patriarchal oppression: “In a reversal of imperialist tropes of exploration and discovery” (Nadkarni 43), the novel opens with three male American explorers, the narrators and focalizers of *Herland*, who are on a scientific expedition to one of the few remaining unexplored parts of the world. With the help of a native guide, the explorers eventually find Herland and encounter a group of women, who, when provoked, anaesthetize and imprison them. During imprisonment, the explorers are encouraged to learn the language of their abductors and are gradually introduced to their history and culture. About two thousand years earlier, after a sequence of wars and natural disasters had killed all the men of the land, the remaining women were saved from extinction by a miraculous oc-

⁷ See, e.g., Seitler, who investigates how Gilman’s non-fictional texts demonstrate “how eugenic thought helped constitute a particular brand of feminism” (63).

⁸ See, e.g., Nadkarni’s exemplary analysis of Gilman’s poem “The Burden of Mothers: A Clarion Call to Redeem the Race!”

⁹ Investigation of the interconnections between race, eugenics, and Gilman’s feminism started with Susan S. Lanser’s groundbreaking 1989 article “Yellow Perils,” which reads the “yellow” wallpaper of Gilman’s “The Yellow Wallpaper” as a veiled metaphor for an invasion by Asian migrants (cf. 425). While providing a comprehensive list of subsequent publications is beyond the scope of this article, the following are relevant when connecting race, feminism, and reproduction: Hausman; Ganobcsik-Williams; Weinbaum; Seitler; Hudak, and, most recently, Nadkarni.

currence of parthenogenesis, that is, reproduction without men. In Herland, all citizens are thus descended from one female and inherited the gift of parthenogenetic reproduction from her; the Herlanders cherish this (reproductive) history, and keep detailed histories of their lineage, so that each citizen has an “exact line of descent all the way back to our dear First Mother” (Gilman 82).¹⁰ Moreover, by articulating paradigms of reproduction and “Motherhood” as “the highest social service” (96), the novel presents its readers with a model for feminist citizenship that is arguably highly successful: Herland’s all-female society is described by the explorers as far more advanced than anything they have ever encountered. They see Herland as a big, harmonious family, an organic community sharing common values and pursuing the greater good.

Herland not only foregrounds the reproductive status of women and, by doing so, its power in citizenship but also presents reproduction as a process that needs to be consciously *controlled* in order to “[build] up a great race through the children” (103). Herlanders came to see themselves as “Conscious Makers of People” (75) when their parthenogenetic reproduction capabilities led to the threat of overpopulation:

Then came the filling up of the place. When a population multiplies by five every thirty years it soon reaches the limits of a country, especially a small one like this. They very soon eliminated all the grazing cattle—sheep were the last to go, I believe. Also, they worked out a system of intensive agriculture surpassing anything I ever heard of, with the very forests all reset with fruit- or nut-bearing trees. (Gilman 74)

By paralleling the fight against overpopulation with processes of cultivation in agriculture and farming, this passage metaphorically foreshadows how the Herlanders began controlling human reproduction alongside agricultural reproduction, which also calls for a ‘weeding out’ of irregular seeds. This passage also links back to an observation the explorers made upon arrival in Herland, when they wondered why all of the trees in the forests were either “splendid hardwood” or “food-bearing” (16). They learn that the Herlanders spent several hundred years improving “their agriculture to the highest point,” until they had created a “particularly lovely graceful tree, with a profuse crop of nutritious seeds” (86), combining nutritional and aesthetic value. Later, when the explorers ask about the history of Herland and are given an account of how the all-female society managed to sustain its citizenry, the parallelism between agricultural and ‘human’ cultivation is made explicit:

These women were working all together at the grandest of tasks—they were Making People—and they made them well.

There followed a period of “negative eugenics” which must have been an appalling sacrifice. [...] And then they set to work to improve that population in quality—since they were restricted in quantity. This they had been at work on, uninterrupted, for some fifteen hundred years. Do you wonder they were nice people? Physiology, hygiene, sanitation, physical culture—all that line of work had been perfected long since. [...] They were a clean-

¹⁰ If not indicated otherwise, in the running text, “Gilman” always refers to Gilman’s *Herland*.

bred, vigorous lot, having the best of care, the most perfect living conditions always. [...] Those nation-loved children of theirs compared with the average in our country as the most perfectly cultivated, richly developed roses compare with—tumbleweeds. (Gilman 75-78)

This short summary of how Herland was able to manage its population candidly exposes eugenic practices in both their positive and negative form (see footnote 7): Regarding the latter, the Herlanders almost proudly remark that they made it their “business to train out, to breed out, the lowest types” (89) by, for example, refusing women who have shown criminal tendencies the right to have children.¹¹ When the passage transitions to forms of positive eugenics, the language becomes more metaphorical and thus elusive, the connections are nevertheless clear and unambiguous: with another recourse to agricultural cultivation, the Herlanders, for example, describe how their “fit” offspring are “cultivated” after birth: Their “heavenly babies” are raised in professional baby “gardens,” and it is claimed that the babies compare “with the average in our country as the most perfectly cultivated richly developed roses compare with—tumbleweeds” (78, 113, 117). While it is never pronounced that cultivation experiments also begin prior to birth, the use of botanical metaphors such as “perfectly cultivated roses” can easily be understood as proof of that. The Herlanders thus at least implicitly stress the “inherent naturalness of engineering reproduction” (Nadkarni 47).

In all, Herlanders look to “reproduction and mothering with a near-religious fervor” (Hudak 458) and practice the selective “cultivation” of offspring. Since all Herlanders are descended from “one mother, who alone founded a new race [...] of ultra-women, inheriting only from women” (Gilman 63), racism might not initially appear to be an issue in the process of “cultivation.”¹² Nadkarni has argued convincingly, however, that “the very idea that the nation is reproducible, and perfectible through the very mechanism of reproduction, is what enables a bio- and necropolitical project that marks out certain populations for life or for death in the interests of national futurity” (47). Although sexual difference outdoes racial difference in *Herland*, several passages clearly reveal the Herlanders to be not only gender isolated but racially isolated as well: They, for example, have “no contact” with the “poor savages far below” (Gilman 103), who live close to Herland and helped the explorers in their search for the country at the beginning of the story. Even more important, however, is their blunt refusal to engage in interracial reproduction, which triggers the climax of the story: After the three explorers fall in love with and marry three Herlanders, they are prohibited from sexual relations with them. After one of the explorers attempts to rape his wife, the three men are expelled from Herland to protect the nation from any risk of sexual or racial contamination.¹³ While sex with men would make reproduction uncontrollable, not least because it might end in the reproduction of men, sex with the explorers—marked as racially different outsiders—would pollute the Her-

¹¹ “If the girl showing the bad qualities had still the power to appreciate social duty, we appealed to her, by that, to renounce motherhood” (90). If such a woman with “bad qualities” reproduces anyway, mother and child are separated after birth, and the child is given to another Herlander for care (cf. 90-92).

¹² Regarding this race of the Herlanders, the explorers note duly that they are of “Aryan stock,” and truly “white,” but somewhat more than our Northern races because of their constant exposure to sun and air” (60). The quotation marks here indicate that whiteness expresses something other and deeper than pigmentation.

¹³ Accompanying them is Herlander Ellador, who intends to explore the United States and report back to her homeland on the desirability of establishing a connection to the outside world; this plot is taken up in *Herland's* sequel, *With Her in Ourland* (1916).

landers' racially-pure descendancy from "one mother" (63). *Both* gender and racial isolation become the utopian feminist solution for 'successful' nation-building in *Herland*.

Herland thus depends not only on "a narrative logic of the western or adventure novel that prescribes a separation from modern life and a temporary regression to a more 'natural' state," but also foregrounds the reproductive status of women by suggesting a utopia where "ideologies of national progress [...] depend upon the energies of motherhood" (Seitler 66). Herlanders articulate a paradigm of reproduction as "the highest social service" (Gilman 96), which is rendered by model citizens. It was this substitution of reproductive competence for masculine virility that *Herland*—and Gilman herself—was celebrated for in the 1960s and 1970s. At the same time, it seems that this "feminist rescue" (Seitler 66) is intrinsically tied to a eugenic and racist ideology, as perfection, cultivation, and the prevention of (racial) contamination is at the heart of *Herland*'s reproductive ideologies. Such underlying eugenic thought processes are indeed more elaborately fleshed out in Gilman's non-fictional essays, such as her seminal *Women and Economics* (1898) or *His Religion and Hers* (1923), where "she makes an argument for the necessity of women, as mothers, to regenerate 'the race'" (Seitler 63).¹⁴ Nevertheless, the message that a nation needs women devoted to *reproducing*, i. e., maintaining and even *perfecting* the nation with each generation, is also quite clear in *Herland*. The novel thus presents an ideology where "central to the creation of proper citizens is the development of a national feminist subject devoted to the reproduction and management of the nation" (Nadkarni 55); that is, the "reproductive citizen" is chiefly responsible for maintaining a (racially) pure national genealogy.

Reimagining Reproduction after the Reproductive Turn: Octavia E. Butler's *Fledgling*¹⁵

The advent of new reproductive technologies in the late twentieth century was accompanied by hope in their democratizing potential concerning who can reproduce. Far from liberating us from eugenicist thoughts and early racial science, however, "disturbing trends in genomics research and its applications have demonstrated how biological conceptions of race remain embedded in the diagnosis and treatment of people of color and other minorities and extend to the realm of policy considerations" (Jones 42). In the fictional realm, reactionary texts picked up such limiting ideas of technology-assisted reproduction and immediately connected them to recycled eugenic notions of perfection and exclusion: Andrew Niccol's 1997 movie *Gattaca* famously broached the subject of using genetic engineering to create perfect humans from DNA; individuals could be perfected by selectively choosing certain genes, which then either promote desirable physical and psychological traits or prevent undesirable ones. In a similar way, Nancy Kress's

¹⁴ This critique is also furthered in *With Her in Ourland* using similar metaphors of cultivation and perfection. Herlander Ellador is shocked upon her arrival in the United States with explorer Van, particularly by the conditions pertaining to women and children. Calling the United States an "idiot child" (Gilman, *With Her* 313), and a "dirty child, a careless child, a wasteful child" (316), she once more attests to the "obvious eugenic dangers of bringing together such varied citizens"—that is, migrants—"into one national body" (Nadkarni 56). In order to avoid this "problem," Ellador repeats *Herland*'s ideologies and argues that citizens need to be fittingly "produced": not only does the nation need to have mechanisms controlling the right to reproduce, it also needs protection from external "diseases" and "parasites" (see Gilman, *With Her*, Ch. 9).

¹⁵ I thank Lea Espinoza Garrido for suggesting *Fledgling* in the context of reproductive citizenship.

1993 novel *Beggars in Spain* “imagine[d] a class chasm between genetically modified ‘designer babies,’ who grow up to be smarter and more productive than unmodified human counterparts” (Jones 42). And the wildly successful *Jurassic Park* (1991, film adaptation: 1993), though it is ‘only’ about artificial dinosaur reproduction, popularized the statement that “there is no unauthorized breeding in Jurassic Park” and portrayed “genetic science [...] as a threat to the white nuclear family” (Briggs and Kelber-Kaye 92).

Indeed, even after the reproductive turn and the arguably inherent progressive renegotiations of who can be (or can be imagined as) a reproductive citizen, many fictions still followed *Herland’s* blueprint. Parallel to discussions in the domain of reproductive technology and non-biological parenting, they presented concepts that are by now widely understood as socially determined as if they were biological imperatives. Similar accusations have been made regarding the utopian literary reimaginings of the post-reproductive turn in works by Octavia E. Butler. When the author first addressed genetics, gender, and race in her 1987–1989 *Xenogenesis* trilogy, critics and scholars argued that, to an extent, its “treatment of biology and the social environment is conversant, if not in complete alignment, with sociobiology’s biological determinism, a point that could be read as supporting the primacy of genetics as a determinant of human fate” (Jones 43). Butler’s 2005 novel *Fledgling*, which is understood as reactionary to the advent of new reproductive technologies, also has been criticized for “focusing on the eugenic pursuit of biological similarity as the path to creating the racial stability required for societal stability” (Schapper 188); furthermore, it was claimed that *Fledgling’s* adoption of genetic engineering in combination with eugenics can be understood “as depicting belief in biological essentialism” (189). Contrasting this assessment, the scholars Melissa J. Strong and Esther L. Jones have argued that *Fledgling’s* reimaginings of reproduction and race “are less about supporting biological science as a social determinant” (Jones 43) than they are about exposing biological essentialism and other artificial socially determined constructs that determine belonging and citizenship in a nation. I follow a similar line of argument and find that, while *Fledgling* clearly portrays calls for reproduction as reproduction, the novel, in contrast to *Herland*, is also able to unpack the constructs behind such calls. Accordingly, the remainder of this article first highlights the similarities between *Fledgling* and *Herland* regarding the adoption of eugenic thought and then examines how *Fledgling* breaks with earlier models of reproductive citizenship.

The story of *Fledgling* is set in a clearly fantastic yet speculative future reality¹⁶ in which vampires (called Ina) and humans are separate species. Quite in contrast to traditional vampire lore, vampires and humans live together in various queer relationships in what is referred to as a mutualistic symbiosis, “a complex symbiotic relationship with one another where humans are neither killed nor turned into vampires as a product of

¹⁶ Categorized in reviews as “completely transform[ing] vampire lore] in a startlingly original story about race, family, and free will” (*Washington Post*, quoted on the cover), *Fledgling* is most often understood as a fantasy novel; after all, it features vampires, the typical sensitiveness to sunlight, symbionts, etc. At the same time, the story is not only set in the United States with references to U.S. places and history but also picks up the science of genetic engineering, which has been interrogated in the realm of speculative fiction numerous times.

vampire feeding” (Schapper 185). Humans benefit from this relationship because the Ina venom strengthens their immune system and extends their life expectancy, while the Ina need human blood to survive. This utopian world in *Fledgling* thus radically reimagines traditional vampire lore by introducing readers to “nonmonogamous queer human-vampire hybrid families” (Morris 147), which somewhat mirror hopeful calls for “new reproductive citizens,” such as those by LGBTQIA* parents. In an interesting parallel to the Herlanders’ marriages to the explorers, also in *Fledgling*, the boundaries of these queer relationships are, however, clear-cut when it comes to actual biological processes of reproduction: “We can’t interbreed with them. We’ve never been able to do that. Sex, but no children” (Butler 67).

Unlike in *Herland*, where the possibility of an uncontrolled irregularity is suppressed by the citizenry by prohibiting sex and expelling the explorers, the biological impossibility of interspecies reproduction is only the backdrop of the actual story of *Fledgling*. Because the story takes place in a speculative world set after the reproductive turn, it can imagine a genetically engineered crossbreed from a human mother and a vampire father, who was created in order to perfect evolutionary goals: *Fledgling*’s protagonist and narrator Shori Matthews. Two Ina families, the Gordons and the Matthews, have worked for decades on experiments to bypass the Ina’s vulnerability to daylight, which is typical of vampires. They eventually succeeded by combining their vampire genes with melanin from Black human DNA. One of the progeny of these experiments is Shori, who is not only a human-vampire hybrid but Black. The melanin in her dark skin allows her to survive in the daylight. Moreover, she heals more quickly and can move faster, so that she represents what in the context of assisted reproductive technology would be referred to as a “designer crossbreed” or “hybrid vigor.” In *Fledgling*, reproductive citizenship is thus imagined through one genetically altered being, not the make-up of society as a whole. As I will show in the following, as the offspring reconciling two arguably biologically distinct species, hybrid Shori is particularly able to untangle biological constructs of reproduction from social ones.¹⁷

Fledgling opens after a mysterious assault kills both of the parent families; Shori is the only survivor and thus the only remaining “product” of her families’ genetic experiments. Soon after the attack on Shori and her family, it becomes clear that other Ina families, the so-called Silks and later also the Dahlmans, objected to the genetic experiments and now consider genocide the only way to prevent further human-Ina crossbreeding. When the Silks learn that Shori survived the attack, they begin hounding her and whoever she is with, and call for “maintaining separation of species at all costs, even if it means ethnic cleansing” (Jones 44). Shori is clearly considered a reproductive threat by the Silks, who, even though Ina themselves, do not consider Shori as part of their own species:

17 Note that *Fledgling* is ambivalent about an actual genetic differentiation between vampires and humans: “Are we related to [human beings]? Where do we come from?’ ‘I think we must be related to them.’ [Iosif, Shori’s father] said. ‘We’re too genetically similar to them for any other explanation to be likely’” (Butler 67).

“Then why try to kill me?” [...] “Because I’m dark-skinned?” “And human,” he [one of the attackers that tried to kill Shori] said. “That’s not supposed to happen. Not ever. Couldn’t let you and you ... your kind ... your family ... breed.”

So much death just to keep us from breeding. (Butler 173)

According to this attacker, Shori threatens the society of the Ina not only because of her phenotypic difference, what Shori calls her “dark skin,” but because she is half-human. Rejection of the human species is, however, uncommon for the Ina species because humans and Ina usually live together in symbiosis. Moreover, “the lifesaving human DNA” has given Shori—and thus by extension the whole Ina species—“something [the Ina] sought for generations: the ability to walk in sunlight, to stay awake and alert during the day” (Butler 272). It is precisely due to their hypersensitivity to light that the Ina must rely on humans, who can guarantee their physical survival during the day (cf. Butler 147, 218). Classifying Shori as a reproductive threat because of her half-humanness, as argued above, is somewhat counterintuitive. And it becomes clear later in the story that Shori, who was unfamiliar at that point with concepts of skin-color and race due to amnesia, had formulated the question somewhat incorrectly when she referred to herself as “dark-skinned” instead of “black.” The fact that the Silks reject the biological perfection Shori represents—the incorporation of human melanin into the Ina genetic make-up—points to a tension based on sociocultural, and not phenotypic or biological, understandings of species difference. It is, in fact, not the biological human DNA they fear, but the race that the melanin and pigmentation are connected to:

You want your sons to mate with this person [Shori]. You want them to get black, human children from her. Here in the United States, even most humans will look down on them. When I came to this country, such people were kept as property, as slaves. (272)

The Silks reject introducing melanin into the Ina make-up not because of the human component, but because they believe *racial* contamination equals species suicide. Through the Silks and their supporters, the eugenicist narrative of racial differentiation and contamination, and particularly the claim about intrinsic and thus biological differences between different groups of people, is recycled here and attached to the context of genetic engineering and artificial reproduction. Even though race and racism might not be used openly as a biological imperative (“when I came to this country”), the concepts still transgress political categories of belonging and hence reproduction. By repeating “long-surviving ideologies of eugenic thought, black inferiority, and social ills attributed to race-mixing” (Jones 55), the Silks dramatically disrupt *Fledgling’s* arguably utopian world set after the reproductive turn.

This perpetuation of an ideology of irreconcilable difference between *Black* humans and Ina, including the call for genocide, constitutes the key

plot in *Fledgling*. In contrast to *Herland*, and the two passages above that only hint at underlying ideologies of structured racism, *Fledgling* openly portrays racist patterns that reflect “anxieties about white racial purity and the angst caused by race-mixing” (Jones 55). When Shori and her supporters are attacked again, they are able to capture one of the attackers, Victor. They use Shori’s venom to intoxicate him and inflict pain to make him confess. When he finally wakes and sees Shori, he immediately throws racist comments at her, only to then realize a second later that he

“Didn’t mean to say that,” he whispered. “Didn’t mean to call you that.” He looked at me. “Sorry. Didn’t mean it.” “They call me those things, don’t they?” He nodded. (Butler 173)

The passage reveals how racist thought prevails even when it is suppressed: Only under influence does the attacker voice his racism openly, and even then, he realizes quickly that he violated the norm and apologizes. This nevertheless confirms the Silks’ racism, which they do not announce in public but practice in private. The Silks believe Shori’s difference is both “a social pathogen and a biological contaminant that will destroy the Ina body politic if permitted to exist and reproduce” (Jones 48). In this respect, the Silks function not only “as an allegory of US eugenics policy, as it pertains to the regulation and containment” (48) of the reproduction of people of color but also as a new version of the same kind of reproductive citizen represented by the Herlanders: it is their responsibility to maintain a racially pure national genealogy. The Silks only differ from the Herlanders in that their eugenic thoughts are exposed through blatant racism.

This open confrontation with race and racism is a noticeable characteristic of *Fledgling*: Throughout the novel, for example, it is emphasized that race and skin color are two concepts originating from two different realms, and not only with regard to the Silks’ racism. This entanglement is perhaps most obvious when Shori suffers from memory loss at the beginning of *Fledgling* and is unaware of the sociological structures that construct (her) race: “‘Ordinary sun exposure burns your skin even though you’re black?’ ‘I’m ...’ I stopped. I had been about to protest that I was brown, not black, but before I could speak, I understood what he meant” (Butler 31). The narrative situation makes it possible to interrogate race as a social construct in *Fledgling*: The story is told homodiegetically by Shori, who has forgotten her past and is forced to reacquire much of the knowledge she has lost, including knowledge about the social concept of race, which comes up for the first time when she is actively asked about her skin color (cf. quotation above).¹⁸ Such an entanglement between actual skin color and race is repeated and manifested when later in the story Shori encounters other Ina:

I could see that Stefan was darker than Iosif, darker than Wright. He was a light brown to my darker brown, and that meant ... “You’re an experiment, too,” I said to him when we’d talked for a while. (76)

¹⁸ In contrast, the narrative situation in *Herland* rules out such an investigation: The story is narrated by the three explorers, who give us their account of what they experience in Herland. Because they have been socialized in the United States during a time of eugenic thought, it seems only logical that they would transfer this perspective into their observations of the Herlanders.

In addition to the interrogation of race made possible by an unknowing narrator, it is argued throughout *Fledgling* that the Ina—except for the Silks and Dahlmans—are “completely uninterested in commonly held physical signifiers of race, such as skin color” (Schapper 62). As one of the human symbionts observes: “they’re not human ... They don’t care about white or black” (162). And notably, some of the other Ina, such as the survivors of the Matthews and Gordon families, do not object to Shori having offspring; they even insist that she mate with other Ina families:

“Preston wants you. He thinks you’re worth the risk. He says your mothers made genetic alterations directly to the germ line, so that you’ll be able to pass on your strengths to your children. At least some of them will be able to be awake and alert during the day, able to walk in sun-light. Preston says you have the scent of a female who will have no trouble producing children. His sense of smell is legendary among Ina. I believe him.” He paused, leaned forward, took my hands. “My brothers and I will mate with you.” (218)

In contrast to the Silks, who object to Shori due to their inability to separate biological and sociological structures, other Ina families welcome the idea of Shori reproducing. It could be argued that the other Ina are able to untangle racism as a social construct from biology, as the ‘perfection’ Shori achieves by means of a dark skin color can only be comprehended if it is separated from her identification as “black.” By pitting the Silks and their eugenic, racist thought against Shori and her supporters, *Fledgling* thus reframes the debate about interconnections between reproduction, race, and perfection—and about who can and should be a reproductive citizen. *Fledgling* reveals how traditional concepts of the reproductive citizen as reproducing the nation are inherently racist through the Silks, and Shori and her supporters reveal that reproductive citizenship ideologies that aim to correct reproduction must be exposed as social constructs, not as rooted in biology. Only when the *social* understanding of reproduction is deconstructed, made transparent, and subsequently altered can technological reproductive innovations (i. e., Shori, the “new reproductive citizen”) help transform who is accepted to reproduce.

Notably, *Fledgling* reaches its climax when these two representations of “reproductive citizenship” and “new reproductive citizenship” are pitted against one another. After Shori and her supporters are attacked again, she decides to publicly try the Silks in a “Council of Judgment” (232) to determine who is responsible for the killing of her family and supporters. During this trial, which takes up the last third of the novel, the Silks are quick to reverse the accusations by questioning Shori’s citizenship and thus her right to make accusations in an Ina court. Katherine Dahlman, one of the Silk representatives, for example, scrutinizes Shori’s right to represent the interest of her family based on the fact that Shori is arguably “not Ina”:

“No one can be certain of the truth of anything you say because you are neither Ina nor human. Your scent, your reactions, your facial expressions, your body language—none of it is right . . . We are Ina. You are nothing!” (272)

It might seem logical at this point that Katherine Dahlman, who represents the Silks and thus the “*reproductive citizen*,” only refers to biological aspects—scent, facial expressions—to argue against Shori’s acceptance as Ina. Shori’s “credibility is challenged because of behavior and appearance that are too different to overlook” (Jones 59). Along similar lines, another Silk representative asks the Council to have Shori examined by a physician, proposing that this could determine whether Shori is an Ina citizen. Instead of defending themselves for their alleged crimes, the Silk family seeks to discredit Shori’s status as Ina by relying solely on biological factors, which they cannot distinguish from social ones, i.e., their racism; in other words, in the context of this judicial setting, the call for genocide based on the understanding of Shori as a reproductive threat becomes a question of eligibility for citizenship. As the Silks shift the proceedings towards an interrogation of Shori’s citizenship, their accusations are challenged by Shori’s supporters, who continue to untangle her biological make-up—and particularly her skin color—from sociological racism:

“Listen to me. Shori Matthews is as Ina as the rest of us. In addition, she carries the potentially lifesaving human DNA that has darkened her skin and given her something we’ve sought for generations: the ability to walk in sunlight, to stay awake and alert during the day.” (272)

Shori also proves her Ina-ness by forcing the Silks to admit that they could have resolved their objection to her family’s experiments in another way. In a quite brilliant stroke of reasoning, she asks the Silks if they are not aware of the “Council of the Goddess” (293), which was created in Ina law exactly for conflicts like the one between the Silks and the Gordon / Matthews family. By doing so, Shori proves her higher knowledge of Ina *culture*, which acts as another marker of (her) Ina citizenship. Following the same ideology, she also implicitly questions the Silks’ Ina-ness, as they disobeyed Ina law when they killed Shori’s family instead of going to court.

All in all, the court proceeding mirrors the ideological divide between the Silks / Dahlmans and Shori / her supporters. After three days of discussion, council members are still split in terms of judging Shori’s guilt, i.e., her eligibility for citizenship. While the lack of unanimity in the Council vote reveals the ideological rift sketched above, when the verdict is eventually reached at the conclusion of *Fledgling*, the majority of the Council votes that the Silks are guilty: Their sons are expelled from the family, and “must be adopted by five families in five countries other than the United States [...]. They will be Silk no longer” (299). As representatives of “*reproductive citizens*,” they are thus unsuccessful in their attempt to keep the nation racially pure but instead are expelled

from it themselves. When taken away, a last outcry from one of the Silk sons once again openly confirms the racism and fear of miscegenation that guided all of their arguments:

At first, it seemed that he wasn't making words. He was only looking at me and screaming. Then I began to recognize words: "Murdering black mongrel bitch ..." and "What will she give us all? Fur? Tails?" (300)

Fledgling thus concludes by once again exposing the social and ideological constructs behind the supposedly biological reasons for rejecting Shori, as well as by clearly—and literally—convicting people who represent such ideologies: the Silks. Shori and her supporters, in contrast, successfully assert the rights and citizenship eligibility of “new” reproductive citizens who share relations with both Ina and humans. As one of the concluding sentences of the novel affirms: “The Matthews family could begin again” (310).

Concluding Remarks

The final judgment plotline, which engraves Shori's triumph, thus dramatizes the need to disentangle post-reproductive turn technologies and the alternative forms of reproduction and socialization they enable from social constructs of race that are disguised as biological facts—and that hinder any progressive potential arguably inherent in such new technologies. On the one hand, *Fledgling* presents its readers with a reprocessing of historical eugenicist beliefs: By way of analogy, the Silk family, in particular, reveals how even in contemporary times both medical scientists and laypeople nevertheless still routinely act on sociobiological assumptions dating back to eugenics. Moreover, they represent how racism originating in eugenic thought can be disguised by other social ideologies, thus demonstrating “continued links between the racist logic of eugenic science and the presumed progressivism of contemporary genetic engineering” (Jones 47). Through their rejection of Shori, the Silks update the “hybrid vigor” version of eugenics to a post-reproductive turn era, which still relies, in part, on racial distinctions understood as purely biological. On the other hand, and in quite remarkable contrast to *Herland*, which rejected any possibility of racial miscegenation by means of cultivation and a rejection of sexual reproduction, via Shori *Fledgling* interrogates the *scope* of “ethical considerations in the face of alienating difference, regardless of its basis in sociology, biology, or some combination of the two” (Jones 43). As a crossbreed suffering memory loss, Shori enables a careful entanglement of biological traits and their transference into the social and political realm. In other words, *Fledgling's* concerns revolve around exposing the ethical contours of how we treat difference, not how difference is biologically established.

This interrogation, in turn, has important significance for our discussions about who can be imagined as a reproductive citizen. In *Herland's*

realm, according to eugenic thought, miscegenation and reproduction are understood as scientific, biological processes, and as such are not open for debate; strict limitations are posed on the imagination, which must adhere to processes of perfection and *recreation* in order to guarantee successful nation-building. Even though the Herlanders were freed from heterosexual reproductive capacity as the only acceptable norm, as “reproductive citizens” they still have to dutifully control and manage their reproductive citizenship in order to correctly reproduce not only the family but the nation as well.

Fledgling, in contrast, brings attention to the fact that understandings of miscegenation and reproduction are linked to social constructs of who should and can reproduce. Here, strict adherence to *reproduction* as (racial) perfection and cultivation are eventually rejected; in fact, genetic engineering caused Shori to occupy a position between reproductive perfection and racial contamination. While the latter constitutes an indispensable problem for the Silks, other Ina can separate biological and sociological constructs and can accept Shori as Ina—they and Shori emerge as “new reproductive citizens.” That the Council of Judgment, in analogy to the state as a whole, eventually also accepts Shori confirms this reimagination of the reproductive citizen. *Fledgling*, therefore, represents a utopian vision of how “new” reproductive citizens have to be validated not only through scientific possibilities but affirmative social and legal acceptance processes. Only when the underlying social processes guiding and limiting *reproduction* are exposed, deconstructed, and transformed can reproductive technology enable the evolution of “new reproductive citizens”—in the fictional world of *Fledgling* and beyond.

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