

Rose's biomedical governance in Puenzo's *Wakolda*

Pradip Sharma¹✉

¹Department of English, Ratna Rajyalaxmi Campus, Tribhuvan University, Nepal

Article Info

Article History:

Received
14 March 2025
Approved
12 April 2025
Published
30 April 2025

Abstract

This study explores biomedical intervention in Lilith's growth deficiency as depicted in Lucía Puenzo's *Wakolda*, drawing parallels to Nazi medical experiments and Argentina's post-war complicity. The novel follows José, a former Nazi doctor who continues unethical experiments on women and children while in hiding. Using Nikolas Rose's theory of molecular biopolitics, the analysis examines how José's treatments—protein supplements for pregnant Eva and growth hormone injections for Lilith—reflect broader mechanisms of biopolitical control. Rose argues that biotechnology reduces the body to molecular material, subject to political, medical, and social regulation. José's manipulation of Lilith's biology symbolically echoes Argentina's efforts to exploit Nazi expertise for national gain. The study also critiques Eva's passive role in exposing her family to medical manipulation, emphasizing the dangers of uncritical trust in biomedical authority. Ultimately, the paper warns against the misuse of biomedicine and highlights the need to protect human dignity from exploitative scientific agendas.

Keywords: Biopolitics, ethopolitics, biotechnology, epidural, bare life

© Copyright 2025

How to cite (in APA style):

Sharma, P. (2025) Rose biomedical governance in Puenzo's *Wakolda*. (n.d.). *Rainbow : Journal of Literature, Linguistics and Culture Studies*, 14(1), 63-73. <https://doi.org/10.15294/rainbow.v14i1.22348>

INTRODUCTION

The study assays the biopolitical dimensions of medical interventions, particularly in the context of Argentine complicity with Nazi resources in Lucía Puenzo's *Wakolda* (2011). The novel outlines the medical seduction of an Argentine family by José who turns out to be a Nazi fugitive SS 'doctor, Joséf Mengele. Hooked on his biomedical trajectories in Lilith's imperfect body along with her twin siblings, *Wakolda* reimagines

Nazi's biomedical practices of racial purity project. José's refuge in Argentina and his biomedical experiments allude to Nazi war criminals' hideouts and their incomplete project of perfect race and hygiene. Nailing to the medicalized bodies of birthing Eva, deformed Lilith and her post-natal twin siblings in *Wakolda*, the study engages in a compelling narrative intersecting historical trauma, biopolitics, and the biotechnical controlled bodies in the post-Holocaust era. Put differently, it interrogates an ethical issue on the biotechnical

¹ Nazi doctors under paramilitary organization of Nazi known as SS medical corps formed within SS (*Schutzstaffel*), a protection squadron. To Robert Jay Lifton (1986), these doctors conducted a range of activities, including, coercive biomedical experiments on concentration camp inmates under Nazi scheme for racial purity, gas chamber selection

and euthanasia to kill the camp inmates during the Holocaust. These exploitative and murderous actions led to many SS doctors being convicted as war criminals after World War II in the Nuremberg trial.

✉ Corresponding author:

Email: pradipsharma772@gmail.com

p-ISSN: 2252-6323

e-ISSN: 2721-4540

control over body and the unethical medical professions (Barker, 2022, p. 23). Showing José as a medical expertise to optimize Lilith's growth defective body, the study connects it with Rose's "molecular ontology of life; a flattened biomedical epistemology and circuits of vitality" (Molecular, p.3) that defines life at molar level; a molecular entity which can be decomposed, deposited and reengineered through biotechnological interventions. Because José in the novel also deems life as mass of molecules that can be reengineered.

The study uncovers José's fixation in rendering the perfect body through medicinal interventions, in particular, genetic purity that suggests to Argentine ethnic cleansing of Mapuche (*Wakolda*, p.35). Reconsidering these events, the study exploratively interprets the medical exploitations of innocent natives and females, showcasing their vulnerability and complicity. Brooding over their complicity, a critic of Puenzo, Erin K. Hogan (2018) underpins the precarious life under José's medical practices and Argentine military violence in the light of Michel Foucault's biopolitics (power's control over life) developed by Rose. Hogan (2018) claims that José's treatment of underdeveloped body of Lilith calls for Nazi's racial biopolitics that attempted a medical intervention on concentration camp inmates, resonating Rose's technological optimization of body (p. 246). Her analysis also complies with Foucault's (1978) 'anatomy-politics,' unearthing biopolitical intervention on body to make it more productive and docile. More importantly, anatomy-politics refers to the ways of making body governable while using discursive power.

Aiming to assay José's biomedical manipulation over Eva's family in relation to Argentine biopolitical violence over Mapuche community as staged in *Wakolda*, the study resolves the following issues: How do José's biomedicine and Nazi eugenics intersect in Puenzo's narrative? Or put simply, in what way does José subject Lilith's growth deficiency and Eva's gestation to his medical experiments, tailoring Rose's molecularized biopolitics: biotechnological control over life? More importantly, Lilith and Eva's vulnerability and

trust in José, suggest the broader historical patterns where marginalized bodies are subjected to medical practices. Rose's framework of molecular biopolitics — the governance of life through scientific, medical, and political norms — also enables to peruse José's biomedical actions foreshadowing the complicity of Argentine society. In assaying the politics of historical ethnic cleansing of the Mapuche in Argentina in 1960's and the biotechnical regulation of Eva's family, the study takes recourse to Foucault's biopolitical insights as expounded by Rose.

REVIEWS OF LITERATURE

Regarding the studies of medicine and human body, Rita Charon in *Narrative Medicine* (2006) relates human body and literature to medicine. She stated that they are not the new phenomena. She advocated the importance of pathography because it helps the medics graphically understand the complexities of a medical condition on an empathic level that foregrounds patient experience. Likewise, Arthur Frank's *The Wounded Storyteller* (1995) nailed to the patients' subjective experiences bringing out their medical history which helps to have a biomedical purview upon healing illness. The study postulates that taking stock of medical control over the female characters in Puenzo's *Wakolda* retains high value in medical humanities.

Many studies have been made on Puenzo's *Wakolda* and its eponymous movie (2013). The novel's underpinnings of post-holocaust Argentine history have intrigued numerous scholars. Among them, Erin K. Hogan (2018) dug out the use of military and medicinal power to regulate the population. Drawing on Foucauldian notion of biopolitics (biopower) that talks of power's control over life, she explains the control over people: More precisely she rethinks on Nazi doctor Joséph Mengele's treatment of the underdeveloped child protagonist and her mestiza doll, *Wakolda*, demonstrates Nazism's biopolitics, per Foucault, and the immunitary *dispositifs* of thanatopolitics, per Esposito. By virtue of these interventions, Puenzo proposes a parallel of aggression towards two populations: the non- Aryan child and the non-

European Mapuche. (Hogan, 2018, p. 246). Hogan identifies the confluence of biomedical control of José over Lilith and military based death-politics—thanatopolitics—over ‘Argentina’s Conquest of the Desert’ that sabotaged Mapuche tribe. Simply put, ‘aggression’ on Mapuche underpins the biopolitical control of population. Their genocide and exile also recall Agamben’s (1995) concept of *bare life*, wherein individuals are stripped of their political significance and, therefore, become the mere biological mass.

From the same plane, nailing to the theme of silencing the population in Puenzo’s novel, Inela Selimović (2018) and Nathan Cody (2016) allude to post-Holocaust Nazi fugitives and Argentine amnesty to them. Selimović’s exploration of historicity of Nazi fugitives in Argentina and the amnesty given to them indirectly functions as the signpost of appropriating Nazi’s silencing of the non-Aryans and their extermination. Additionally, the social exclusion of Indians in Argentina and complicity to ‘Nazi-welcoming community’ notably marks the vested interest of Argentine regime to control the population by means of biotechnology which is staged through José’s economic and biomedical interventions over Eva’s family. In particular, their complicity stems from Nazi’s ontological perception of pure race that human beings save the Aryans are mere the biological entities without agency.

Besides the exploration of Nazi refugees in Argentina, Emily M. Barker (2022) stated that Puenzo’s novel can be seen to re-orientate political priorities away from the post dictatorship concerns with memory and justice, and towards the bodies who suffer under liberalization processes, bodies that are gendered and racialized (p.17). Barker critiqued the suffering of Argentine people under the policy of ‘liberalization’ after offering amnesty to Holocaust criminals anticipating to extract their resources for prosperity. Her reorientation on the state violence of racialized Mapuche communities who are killed as “a genetically degenerate race” (Puenzo, 2011, p.34) appeals to Agamben’s *homo sacer* figure devoid of human rights and subjected to injustice as in Foucault’s state racism. With the

probing of the biomedical interventions in gendered bodies of Lilith and her twin siblings, this article invokes Rose’s medicalized biopolitics complying with thanatopolitics if not ethically regulated.

On the other hand, to reexamine the medical controlled bodies of Eva and Lilith, Alejandra Heffes and María Agustina Bertone (2015) focused on Nazi’s biomedical remolding of the bodies as per perfect body policy, resulting into repression. They reviewed the idealization of the perfection normativity of the body which would establish that the outside physicality determines the inside. Just like the dolls, Lilith is victim of the ‘standardization’ which occurs within a medicalized society (p. 116). Heffes and Bertone reconsidered José’s medical interference to body for its standardization in *Wakolda* staging the episode of growth hormone.

Recounting the historicity of Nazi hideout in Argentina, Puenzo in an interview with Carlos Anguilar (2014) hooked to Eva’s family’s medical seduction. Puenzo further unpacked the infatuation of Lilith to the biotechnology because she has been facing disgraced harassed by the discourse of socially normal body, therefore, German fugitive SS doctor hunts of the Argentine family for medical seduction. She noted that What I think is that despite this historical reference, *Wakolda* is a very intimate story. It is the story of a teenage girl and the way she falls in love with a monster. It is the story of a hunt and of a seduction (para. first). Puenzo both in her movie and novel unbuttons the false identity Dr José holds during his hideouts in Argentina. Cody like critic links it with Argentine amnesty policy to war criminals so that Argentina would exploit their expertise for economic boom. Puenzo also peruses José’s medical infatuation over Lilith and her siblings alluding to Nazi’s genetic project which informs Rose’s conceptualization of biotechnological control over life.

To recap, Puenzo also emphasizes on Lilith’s obsession of her deformed body that compels her to be medically seduced by Jos. As aforementioned, Heffes and Bertone discuss on the biomedical use to immunize body from

imperfection that reminds Nazi's racial purity and genocide. Similarly, both Barker and Cody explore Nazi fugitives in hideouts and the historical injustice over Mapuche community in Argentina that resonates Nazi atrocity over Jews and others. Indeed, Puenzo's *Wakolda* recounts biomedical experiments to mold body and violence over Mapuche. *Wakolda* entails a heart rendering medical narrative of biomedical control as foreign intervention upon the body of Lilith whose growth deficiency comes under biochemical administration inviting health hazard. José's biomedical practice of remolding her physiology and the postnatal twins substantiate Rose's new ontology of biopolitics, deeming life a mass of molecules that can biotechnologically be decomposed, redesigned, banked, and transacted. Thus, Rose's insight of medical biopolitics conduits to assess Jose's biomedical and economic interventions in Argentina.

The exploration of medical governance in *Wakolda*, identification of textual evidences associated with Jose's biomedical activities recalling SS doctors' schema of racial purity during the holocaust and their critical evaluation in the limelight of Rose's notion of biopolitics associated with technology and biomedicine are the major objectives. These objectives guide this study to assess the medical raid and biotechnological control over Eva's family in Puenzo's tome.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

Puenzo's *Wakolda* offers textual evidences to critically analyze the politics of biotechnical control over bodies. A close reading of Puenzo's narrative for making explicative hermeneutics helps find the textual data to be analyzed which resonates interpretive research. In so doing, it makes use of Rose's biopolitical insights of molecularization of life that talks of optimizing its vitality via technological intervention. While conceptualizing technological governance of life in *The Politics of Life in Itself*, Rose builds on Foucault's biopolitics that deals with control over life and death of the populations through state apparatuses. Foucault (1978) argued in 18th century after the sovereign power that would hold power over life

and death there rise of biopower; taking care of life through *anatomo-politics*—making life governable by deploying the state apparatuses— and regulating the demographic trends (p.135). Whereas Foucault's biopolitics sheds light on the management of individuals and populations for constituting the biocapital to address the burgeoning liberal economy, Rose's biopolitics offers a new outlook of molecularized biopolitics that talks of the possibility of re/utilizing human body when alive and even after death. His molecularization of life aligns with modern biotechnology that imagines human life at molar level entailing "limbs, organs, tissues, flows of blood, DNA, and hormones" (Molecular, p. 5). The molar body can be isolated, decomposed, banked, transacted, accorded a discrete value, and traded across time, space, species as the tools of bioeconomics (Rose, 2007, p. 7) to enable and optimize human resource. Moreover, the bioscience expertise subject body to modern biotechnology that dissects it into molecules which can be reengineered and circulated, as staged in José's medical raid over Eva's family in *Wakolda*.

Rose's concept of molecularization of life recounts the breakthrough in life science and technology. He analyzes the effect of biotechnology on life and helps to understand it from a clinical gaze. Rose's *The Politics of Life in Itself* explores how power mingles with biomedicine for the construction of subjectivity of the people. He discusses the interface of life with power, scientific knowledge, politics, ethics, and economy. He primarily contributes to analyze the technology and power induced subjectivity and the new dimensions of citizenship in the twenty-first-century (Lekka 108). Rose sheds light on human position just a fleshly biological being which he terms as mass of molecules that departs from the spiritual ontology of life.

Rose further postulates that modern biomedicine not only heals diseases but also help to "treat organic damage" (*Politics*, p.17) and "refigure vital process" (18) of human physiology. José's medical-care to Lilith and her siblings in *Wakolda* complies with Rose's postulation of medicalized body. Against the backdrop of

“medical imperialism” (Molecular p.4), he offers a toolkit to peruse how molecules, cells, genes, politics, organ transplantation and reproductive technology –In Vitro Fertilization (IVF), sperm bank, cloning— notably, biometric praxis in the domain of security infuse together to affect human vitality. His study of genomic science informs about the internal genetic matrix and its reshaping to deter human’s health hazards. More importantly, the “genetic and metabolic” (*Politics*, p.47) ‘reprogramming’ draws on biomedicine that is compatible with modern technology to visualize life differently. José’s use of growth hormone injection and vitamins over Eva’s family undeniably spouses with Rose’s medical control over life. Largely, his preparation of “a concentrate of mother’s milk mixed with serum, iron, hormones and vitamins” (*Wakolda*, p.188) to optimize the postnatal twins also appeals to medical governance in *Wakolda*. For these immature biological entities are ever exposed to death under medical raid by José. In this way, life is understood and acted upon at the molecular level, in terms of the properties of coding sequences of nucleotide bases and their variations.

Rose’s biopolitics delves into the molecular mechanisms that regulate gene expression and transcription; the link between the functional properties of proteins and their molecular structure, the role of intracellular components— ion channels, enzyme activities, transporter genes, membrane potentials— with their particular mechanical and biological properties (Molecule, p.5). Similarly, he claims that the medico-technological innovation in particular, genetics science that can reengineer human anatomy along with the political transformation has brought a decisive shift to look into the human body and its biological functions not only when alive but also after death. The modern medical praxis of gene bank, gene tampering, and organ transplantation substantiate it. The engagement of Puenzo’s novel with the mutation and restructuring of the gestational twins and teen-aged Lilith aligning with biotechnology call forth Rose’s notion of medicalized biopolitics. Moreover, the medical intervention on Eva’s gestational twins and Lilith’s

growth deficiency in the novel aligns with Rose’s biopolitics that helps to analyze how body comes under the medical/ biotechnological gaze in modern era.

To recap, Rose’s molecular biopolitics (*Politics*, p.15) shifts from Foucault’s regulatory control of population to the biotechnical intervention on human physio-psychology. Puenzo’s novel conforms Rose’s biopolitical nuances—molecularization, genomic reengineering, optimization, subjectification, expertise, bioeconomics— when José injects growth hormone into Lilith’s body to cure her growth deficiency. Put differently, José’s medical expertise to biomedically intervene in Lilith dwarfness stands as an optimization of body which modern technology expects to boost up the cycle of re/productivity. With the help of modern biotechnology “molecular elements of life may be mobilized, controlled, and accorded properties and combined into processes that previously did not exist” (*Politics*, p.15) which *Wakolda* explicates when José’s import growth hormone (p.114) to combat Lilith’s growth issue. The mobile molecular feature of life as biomass naturally draws its relation to biotechnology, politics and ethics. Rose’s molecular biopolitical concept further helps survey the practices of gene mutation, organ transplant and blood transfusion among others (*Politics*, p.51, & p. 81). Taking recourse to Rose’s biomedical understanding of human body that can be reshaped and reused, the study analyses Puenzo’s (2011) *Wakolda* wherein José injects the growth hormone (p.170) in curing Lilith’s dwarfism. His biomedical experiments on Eva’s gestational twins to constitute Siamese twins also spouses Rose’s understanding of life as biomass that can be redesigned and transported. Suffice to say, the notion of racial purity of Nazi complies with genocide of “genetically degenerate race” (*Wakolda*, p.34), Mapuche in Argentina transcends Rose’s molecular biopolitics and draws on Esposito’s concept of immunization from foe and illness, Foucault’s state racism as underbelly of biopolitics and Agamben’s notion of bare life. To recap, José subjects Lilith and her postnatal siblings to ‘genomic reengineering’ scheme

because of their anomaly in 'genetic inheritance' which his biomedical intervention can make-up normal. Thus, his biochemical governance and the genocide of Mapuche both come into the orbit of Argentine government adhering with Rose's biopolitical nuances.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Both Lilith and Eva's gestational anomalies intrigue José who as a medical police (*Politics*, p.28) designedly befriends with them for the biomedical experiments. José's experiments on their genomic reengineering (*Politics*, p.15) stems from Nazi's racial purity that ably aligns with Rose's biopolitical insight permeated with genomics, biotechnology, pathology, neurosis, psychopharmacology, and political norms for the governance of life (*Politics*, p.78). Not knowing about José's biomedical experiments aiming to 'genetic reengineering' and obsession with Lilith's growth defect, Eva's family remains complicit to subject themselves to his medical administrations. Because they are induced by social normativity of human body. Eva's anxiety about her neonatal and Lilith's social stigma regarding their anatomy becomes the *kairos* for José to redesign their bodies, resonating his sinister genetic trials at Auschwitz.

Prior to executing his genetic schema, José convinces Eva showing her "books, photographs, statistics and with a flowering rhetoric... (*Wakolda*, p.115). He employs his oratorical skill as well as techno-based knowledge to draw consent, concealing the fact that he is a Nazi *SS* doctor on run. Puenzo decries his skill as; "José suggested that a minimal dose of growth hormones would be beneficial for strength during the final months of pregnancy" (*Wakolda*, p.155). José's technological and oratorical competence subjects Eva and her family to be his object of genetic experiments. In this context, Maria Elena Rodriguez Mendoza (2023) also sheds light on his capacity to transfix people drawing reference from Holocaust survivors (especially child subjects of his experimentation) whom he possessed an eerie capacity to seduce children (Punzo, 2011, p.13). Mendoza showcases José's discursive power that

easily influence people so that he could easily subject them to genetic experiments.

Moreover, José's genetic episteme helps him make Eva gullible. To impress his clients, he boasts his proficiency in genetics; "Genetics is a complex science, but there are simple explanations. What is most important is always looking for what geneticists call the founding effect. If you can find a clear hereditary pattern, you can work to improve the breed" (Punzo, 2011, p.81). Grounded on his knowledge of genetics, he seduces people like Eva to improve her gestation. Because "[H]e already had several clients: calves, cows, pregnant women with anaemia problems..." (Punzo, 2011, p.114), however, in *Wakolda* he adds physically deformed Lilith to his experiments, in consonance with the traumatic genetic experiments by *SS* doctors. The ensuing discussion furthers José's caliber to subject people to his genetic reengineering scheme; "Even Lilith's parents had agreed to a two-month trial" (ibid) to remain under the medical care of José. Subdued by medical power; They told their daughter the evening before she was to begin treatment (Punzo, 2011, p.115) which obsessed Lilith happily abides by. This anecdote helps to navigate Rose's molecular biopolitics while exploring the power of biotechnology and its overarching control over people.

With José's medical dose Eva feels better: "When he had seen that Eva felt measurably better thanks to the iron and vitamins he had prescribed" (Punzo, 2011, p.115). As Eva's doctor, a German in Argentina, whom her husband Enzo had consulted, had also advised to follow José's medical care. Eventually José succeeds in making this family his genetic laboratory. Eva's willingness to take vitamin injection revitalizes Rose's notion of biotechnological manipulation of modern life; "As he (José) filled the syringe.... She let him clean her arm with a ball of cotton dipped in alcohol and let him jab her without protest.... She trusted him. She'd felt better the past two weeks thanks to the vitamins. She had begun to grow fond of the German" (Punzo, 2011, pp.115-116). In sum, gestational Eva was under the care of two German medics living in Argentina. This also subtly infers to their project of racial purity

permeated with biotechnology. Along with medical intervention, the ethnic cleansing in Argentina; They had ten-foot high barbed wire, with hundreds of Mapuche starving to death without anything to eat (Punzo, 2011, p.123), epitomizes how Nazi's racial policy is revitalizing there. Both medical-care and racial genocide for immunizing Argentina from Mapuche invigorate Nazi's atrocity.

Along with it, Puenzo in *Wakolda* explores the advent of DNA sequence testing (*Politics* 24), which subtly recounts the Third Reich's inherent racist views of genetic modification of human anatomy. José's unavoidable medical raid over Eva's children from gestation to postpartum period, and remolding of the mestiza doll truly resonate Rose's biopolitical notion of genetic mutation along with the rise of modern bioscience. Exactly, Barker's (2022) reading of *Wakolda* substantiates it. Puenzo, however, insists upon the recognition of Nazism, not as an aberration, but as a continuation in a long history of racially justified exclusion and necropolitics, inherent to the operation of the modern state, and not just as a function of 'totalitarianism.' (p. 22). Alluding to Nazi's racism and Argentine ethnic cleansing of Mapuche, Barker terms it the praxis of 'necropolitics,' politics of death. Definitely, under the alibi of medical care, José's practices in *Wakolda* subscribes both Rose's contention of life under the control of biotechnology and Barker's (2022) postulation of Mapuche as "degenerate races" (p.34) who are sabotaged for racial purity.

Also, the crime like ambience of Eva's birthing room wherein "Everyone was covered in blood" (Punzo, 2011, p.164) suggests José's life-sacrificing medical-care. José performs Eva's caesarean operation and helps her mother the twins. Though it seems that José is doing medical care out of philanthropy, the medical dose causes the twins' premature birth with ill health. Because the twins lure him since his Auschwitz days; "[H]e couldn't resist the temptation to postpone his trip for a few days (Punzo, 2011, p.169) as he is under

the desperate hunt of Israeli secret agency, "Mossad's bloodhound" (Punzo, 2011, p.159) project. Unfortunately, one of the twins dies shortly due to respiratory failure, however, it causes happiness in José. So, he "puts on a surgical mask to keep Eva from seeing his happiness over confirming the final phase" (Punzo, 2011, p.173) of the diseased twins. Even death intrigues him to write in his black notebook with an "urgency of a maniac: data, calculations and statistics" (Punzo, 2011, p.174). Perhaps this ground of death-inducing misuse of biotechnology in the novel compels to rethink the social justice that draws on Rose appeal to the global community (*Politics*, p.78) to be careful while exploiting the biomedicine.

Along with this awe-inducing necropolitics of José's pseudoscience, he exploits Lilith's unconventional body. As discussed earlier Eva is fully convinced, so is Lilith. Their complicity calls upon Stockholm syndrome² in which the petrified hostages for survival start loving the captors which Lilith watches in, "Teenage Zombies" movie; "two young women, who had been kidnapped on an island by a mad woman scientist and an army of zombies, were imprisoned in a glass capsule and gassed to brainwash them" (Punzo, 2011, p.133). Eva and Lilith become analogous to those 'two women kidnapped by a mad woman' exemplifying their strong reliance on José's medical care. Like the hostages in the movie, Eva's family's complicity to let José's medical care Lilith's growth can be an allegorical representation of Argentine adaptation of Nazi's ideology for optimizing prosperity. It also notably evokes Rose's take on the intersection of techno-led ideology and life.

Overall, Eva lets José for medical experiments because she is worried about the bullying and ragging on Lilith's physical abnormality by her peers. Lilith who "was born two months premature" (Punzo, 2011, p.79) and has unconventional body. As she is much shorter than her peers, she is frequently bullied at local German school. Obsessed Lilith recalls how others

² Stockholm syndrome is that psychological condition of the hostage who starts loving the kidnapper for survival. In it the abused victim develops love to the captors. This bond

functions as a coping with strategy which Cathy Carruth calls 'working through mechanism' to overcome the traumatic situation.

look down her; “I was Evil and refused to talk to me again.” “It wasn’t the only bullying she’d received in Primo Capraro” (Punzo, 2011, p.130) to inform the ‘bullying’ she’d got in her community because of her abnormal body as per her age. Moreover, the ensuing anecdote at school delineates how such ragging hurts her; “Every time the bell rang she hurried to hide herself in her cave. If she heard any catcalls or nicknames (albino dwarf was the favorite one) she just kept going, head down” (Punzo, 2011, p.106). These offensive episodes that spotlights her social low positioning show the social construction of normal body that Lilith never meets. Rather, to avoid insult from other Eva allows José to make biomedical experiments over Lilith’s body and over her expectancy with twins. Accordingly, he injects the growth hormone “He had been injecting her with growth hormones for months” (168) causing unbearable pain, fever, pneumonia, swelled stomach, and skin rashes. Lilith’s growth hormone injection aligns with Rose’s DNA tampering to re-engineer her biological growth. This event rightly explicates Rose’s medical (biotechnological) intervention over life for its optimization (*Politics*, p. 115) to address the demand of bioeconomy.

Coincidentally, Lilith is so swarmed up by social normativity that she loves José’s medical raid without grumbles: “There was an unbearable cramp in her jaw and her eyebrows bunched and her eyes watered. Her body was a battleground. José’s chemicals were tentacles that travelled through her blood to her extremities, seeping into her bones and making her grow” (*Wakolda*, p.168). José’s administration of growth hormone in Lilith recounts Rose’s biotechnical intervention in human anatomy which is amplified by Brett Neilson (2012) who argued that the body is viewed less as an organic substrate than as a kind of molecular software or reserve of information that can be read and rewritten (p. 55). This ‘geneticization’ of Lilith body by José, substantiates Rose’s ‘molecular biopolitics’ that analyzes genetic re-engineering (*Politics*, p.16) of human anatomy and the circulation of human vitality even after death.

To put it differently, Lilith’s undersize, perceived as “imperfect,” becomes an object of José’s medical gaze; “Poets write what they see, painters paint it, I weigh and measure everything that interests me” (Punzo, 2011, p.104). This shows that her physical anomaly intrigues his obsession with genetic intervention which alludes to SS doctor José’s biomedical experiments (Cody, 2016, p.19). Puenzo recounts José’s camp experiments and infanticides, “For more than a decade, in each one of the 3,000 twins who passed through his hands, he had attempted to demonstrate the complete and reliable classification of human genetics (Punzo, 2011, p.24). With this dreadful genetic experiments, *Wakolda* further reviews José’s fixation in ‘re-designing’ her growth defect reflects a biopolitical imperative to standardize bodies according to idealized social norms. Unlike Foucault’s notion of ‘anatomy-politics’ delving into disciplining body as the governmental scheme, Rose explores the inevitability of biotechnical praxis of re-architecting body standard which José attempts to do with Lilith. The docile family of Enzo comes into the radar of ethopolitics (*Politics*, p. 22) or biosocial norms because they inculcate the socially constructed truth of normal body. On the other hand, José’s medical intervention insidiously blurs the boundaries between medical necessity and eugenic manipulation. His medical control under the guise of helping her grow reconsiders the biopolitical impulse to regulate and normalize bodies.

In Lilith and her postnatal siblings’ context, the scientific experiments fail, calling forth Rose’s warning of the unethical biotechnical intervention and control of life to optimize it. He urges global humanity to “mitigate or avert the potential damage to humanity itself that lurks within this engineered future (*Politics*, p.78) and appeals to use ethically unlike José’s laboratory practice. The technological optimization of body (*Politics*, p.15) also comes under perusal of [Nicholas Nicou](#) (2014) who also explored José’s [deep involvement in Eva’s pregnancy, conducting experiments on her children](#). *Wakolda* explicitly [invokes the dark and disturbing influence José had got over Eva’s family](#)

[during his hideout in Argentina](#). With this, Cody (2016) also traces Eva's complicity to let war-criminal, José make her family a biochemical laboratory. Following Cody, Mondoza reflects on the hostage state of Eva's family, recalling the Stockholm syndrome. She writes, "Eva permits José to administer hormones to Lilith while she looks the other way from the closed doors where José practices his experiments with the child. In like manner his prisoners accepted everything with the naïve hope that they would be spared" (Cody, 2016, p.14). Reiterating Stockholm syndrome in which the captives befriends the captor for better life in future, Eva loves José's drug practice over them which Mondoza examines through their collaboration in letting him do so.

Further, Lilith's vulnerability in *Wakolda* reflects how Holocaust children and pregnant women were subjected to medical experiments and control. José, a representative of SS doctor exerts biomedical power, using his medical knowledge to reengineer Lilith and her newly born twin siblings. Preoccupied with their physical anomaly, José deems them medically reconfigurable that informs Rose's assertion that biopolitical power functions not merely by exerting control but by reconfiguring norms of health, physicality, beauty, and human potential to be apt for biocapital. To him, the redesigning process "is a matter of the government of life" (*Politics*, p. 70) because medical doses have governed Eva's family.

Like of José's medical intervention to remold life as per Nazi's race project, the expulsion and sabotage of the native Mapuches also draw a line of racial purity project in Argentina which can be a socio-political issue. Tying to it, the critics, García-Reyes and Gallardo (2022) comment the politics of treating the natives as if they are the species; biomass in Rose's molecular understanding of life whom Agamben (1995) names, *homo sacer*.

Puenzo shows family and existential conflicts that are embedded in the development of her plotlines, spotlighting a world that is much more complex than the binary structures of fiction. Her characters are on the edges, in their animal condition or in their social or racial exclusion,

which gives us a complete and enriching perspective of difference. It shows us the liminality of characters that are susceptible to a marginalization of their bodies and their sexualities.... (2).

The dehumanization and 'marginalization' of Mapuche community through the "inhospitable conditions in the face of constant persecution" (Puenzo, 2011, p.34) reflects an underbelly of biopolitics. The killing of "degenerated race" (ibid) who "Before being decimated... made up a third of the country's inhabitants (137) shows the state racism that safeguards the super race invoking the thanatopolitics of Holocaust. Encapsulating it, Barker's perusal of Mapuche's genocide also unpacks racist biopolitics because they belong to *homo arabicus* (*Wakolda*, p.24); imperfect race who comes under the scheme of racial immunization or Foucault's state racism which advocates self/other dichotomy.

Additionally, Galak et al (2018) also examined Argentine policy of homogenization that alludes to Nazi's racial purity. They associate Argentine politics with Nazi's DNA tampering which is allegorically staged in "the manufacture of doll in large number through genetic pairing and mutation" (p.1). José's homogenous dolls production and the tampering the color and eyes of the doll metaphorically subject bodies to a technocracy as a part of biopolitics. Galak et al's postulation of the technocratic of somatic body of Lilith navigates her subjugation to 'eugenic medical knowledge,' which draws on Rose's molecular life: permeation with technology for its optimization. After pirating the doll's copyright, José offers finance to Enzo's fledgling doll-making business that the latter can't resist. José as a representative of foreign investor engages Enzo to doll production so that he would freely run his biomedical experiment on Eva's family. This event draws on Argentine needs of foreign investment which doll business indexes as an allegorical battleground on which the local cottage industry collides with the large corporate companies. By the same token, Enzo's local handicraft of doll making also contrasts with the insidious machinations of José, evoking the historicity of war criminals'

investment for Argentine economic advancement. More importantly, the way José inserts “the glass eye” (Puenzo, 2011, p.175) in the dolls and sutures the disfigured ‘mestiza doll’ that represents his plan of genetically redesigned life. More importantly, it recalls his Auschwitz project. Overall, the doll production emblematically represents the genetically modified perfect race as an outcome of modern technology. The modified doll and medically intervened lives of Lilith and her twin siblings in *Wakolda* inform Rose’s molecular biopolitics; the technological control over life. José failure in Lilith’s physical modification scheme recalls the pseudoscientific experiments of SS doctors in Nazi camps.

CONCLUSION

Puenzo by offering a literary space to explore and assay the unethical medical experiments by SS doctor, José in his Argentine hideout alludes to Auschwitz’s genetic project. More importantly, José’s medical control of Lilith and Eva comply with Rose’s concept of biopolitics, where human body comes into the medical orbit to be modified for its optimization. Rose’s postulation of molecular biopolitics, in relation to techno-led optimization of life for economic prosperity ably conforms with Argentine complicity in letting refuge to José like Nazi war-criminals. Techno-led optimization of life has also its underbelly, including unethical experiments, organ piracy, and racial genocide as a tool of immunization to ensure racial purity as observed in the holocaust. The advancements in biotechnology has raised an ethical issue on genetic engineering, reproductive technologies, and personalized medicine and their interventions on human life.

In sum, the exploration and critical appraisal of José’s use of growth hormones on Lilith and her siblings strongly buttress Rose’s molecular conceptualization of life. His medical governance of Argentine family succinctly illustrates Rose’s idea of medicalized biopolitics, where bodies are controlled, regulated, and used for bioeconomics. Showcasing Lilith’s sickness after she receives growth hormones and her sibling’s medical death, the study compliments

Rose’s warning of biotechnological intervention of life. With this, it also warns about possible biohacking, piracy of vital organs and banal use of biotechnology in modern era, surfacing José’s medical experiments over the postnatal twins and Lilith’s physical anomaly also index the misuse of biotechnology and medical power for genetic remodeling, alluding to Nazi’s racial purity project. Both Rose’s insight and Puenzo’s narrative details, therefore, help this study to critique the unexpected consequences of unscrupulous medical practices, as José escapes to Brazil, leaving behind Lilith (Argentina) amid the danger of drug. Ultimately, the study of medical raid aka biomedical governance in the novel serves humanity to be aware of the possible dangers of medical imperialism. Simply put, the study’s perusal of medical control of life deeming it just a mass of molecules compels readers to reflect on the ontological value of life which is not merely a mass of molecules. Therefore, it underpins the need of redrawing the ethical boundaries between medical practices and life to safeguard humanity against the misuse of science and biotechnology.

References

- Agamben, G. (1995). *Homo sacer: Sovereign power and bare life* (D. Heller- Roazen Trans.). Stanford University Press.
- Aguilar, C. (April 25, 2014). Deceiving monsters: Lucía Puenzo on The German doctor, *Sydneys Buzz the Blog*. <https://blogs.indiewire.com/sydneylevine/deceiving-monsters-Lucía-puenzo-on-the-german-doctor-wakolda-argentina-international-film-business-oscars>.
- Barker, E. M. (2022). *Nazism, the second world war, and the holocaust in contemporary Latin American fiction*. Cambridge University Press.
- Charon, R. (2006). *Narrative medicine: Honoring the stories of illness*. Oxford University Press.
- Cody, Nathan W. (2016). History, historical fiction, and historical myth: ‘The German Doctor’ by Lucía Puenzo.” *Student Publications*. 1-30. https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/student_scholarship.

- Esposito, R. (2008). *Bios: Biopolitics and philosophy* (T. Campbell Trans.). University of Minnesota Press.
- Frank, A. (1995). *The wounded storyteller*. The University of Chicago Press.
- Foucault, M. (1978). *History of sexuality: An introduction* (R. Hurley Trans.). Penguin Books.
- Galak, E. L. et al (2018). About projects of science and mass production: Corporal education, biopolitics, and eugenesis in *Wakolda*." *Acta Scientiarum Education*, 40(4), 1-10. <https://doi.org/10.4025/actascieduc.v40i4.40985>.
- García-Reyes, D., and M. Gallardo (2022). Lucía Puenzo: Readings from the margins of a literary film universe, *Humanities*, 11(40).1-10, <https://doi.org/10.3390/20040>
- Heffes, A. and M. A. Bertone (2015). *La perfección de la forma: Una mirada sobre Wakolda*." *AURA Revista de Historia y Teoría del Arte*, 3(3). 116- 139. <http://www.ojs.arte.unicen.edu.ar/index.php/aura>.
- Hogan, E. K. (2018). "Girls and dolls: The biopolitics of gender and race in Lucía Puenzo's *Wakolda*." *The Comparatist*, 42, 246- 263. <https://doi.org/10.1353/2018.0012>.
- Lekka, V. (2013). "Review of *the politics of life itself: Biomedicine, power, and subjectivity in the twenty-first century* by Nikolas Rose." *Historien*, 13, 107-111.
- Lifton, R. J.(1986). *The Nazi doctors: Medical killing and the psychology of genocide*. Basic books.
- Mendoza, M. E. R. (2023). "Challenging Conformity: Unconventional Bodies in Latin American Literature." *Top Academic Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 8(2), 8-15.
- Neilson, B. (2012). Ageing, experience, biopolitics: Life's unfolding. *Body and Society*, 8 (3), 2012, 44-71. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1357034X12446377>.
- Nicou, N. (04 August, 2014). *Wakolda (The German doctor)*. *Sounds and Colours*. <https://soundsandcolours.com/articles/argentina/wakolda-the-german-doctor-23881/>
- Puenzo, L. (2011). *Wakolda* (D.W.Foster Trans.) Nova.
- Rose, N. Molecular Biopolitics, Somatic Ethics and the Spirit of Biocapital. *Soc Theory Health* 5, 3–29 (2007). <https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.sth.8700084>.
- Rose, N. (2007). *The politics of life itself: Biomedicine, power, and subjectivity in the twenty-first century*. Princeton University Press.
- Selimović, I. (2018). *Affective moments in the films of Martel, Carri, and Puenzo*. Palgrave.