

# From Biopolitical Regulation to Posthuman Affirmative Politics: The Posthumanized Asian Body in *Salt Fish Girl* and *On Such a Full Sea*

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## 1. Introduction

In the era of globalization, the world is witnessing an increasing rate of technological development and unprecedented forms of regulations on human body. With the advancement of technology in medical practices, the possibilities of human enhancement, altering or even creating new bodies has become a reality. This has led to the rise of two kind of positions: on the one hand the transhumanist utopian approach, that considers enhancement and human augmentation as something positive regardless of any possible consequences, and the posthuman position, that while challenging traditional definitions of humanity, identity and agency also raises important ethical questions about the intersection of technology and human existence.

From gene modifications and reproductive technologies to artificial intelligence, the application of technology in the biological field brings numerous ethical questions that require consideration. Human modification challenges the ethical implications of what the human is in a society where technologies are growing faster than humanity does. Therefore, a critical analysis that questions the biopolitics of the regulation of human bodies is crucial in our contemporary world. It is essential to examine the power structures which control the use of these biotechnologies to ensure that the benefits they offer do not infringe individual rights or perpetuate systemic injustices. The concept of biopolitics was put forth by Michel Foucault during a course he dictated in 1970s at the Collège de France. Initially it focused on the analysis of the social transformations during the eighteen and nineteenth centuries with the development of capitalism. The concept refers to the processes by

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which human life, at the level of the population, became the object of control. Biopolitical spaces include race, reproduction, medicine, health, science, and technology, all of which develop different techniques that operate in and on the individual body as apparatuses of discipline, and extend to human collective relations. In Foucault's own words: "Biopolitics deals with the population, with the population as a political problem, as a problem that is at once scientific and political, as a biological problem and as power's problem." (*Society Must Be Defended* 245) The concept was later expanded by various theorists (i.e. Lemke 2011; Braidotti 2015) to globalized environments.

Contemporary re-articulations of such Western-style biopolitics are steadily adapting the contemporary world. In the twenty-first century, biopolitics is still very relevant, as it encompasses new practices in the management and regulation of the posthuman body, including for instance genetic engineering, reproductive technologies, cloning, or transhuman enhancement. As a result of globalization and technological advancements, the implementation of these phenomena has shifted perspective from a Western focus to other parts of the world, especially Asia. Broadening their scope, biotechnologies and biopolitics in South, East and Pacific Asia have formed a new field of interest for different categories of academic research. These new areas are not limited to the study of sciences and technology, but need to be repurposed in different fields of research, including literary criticism.

In recent years, a growing body of literature has been preoccupied with the intersection of biotechnologies and the human. David Roh, Betsy Huang *et al.* define "Techno-Orientalism" as "the phenomenon of imagining Asia and Asians in hypo- or hypertechnological terms in cultural productions and political discourse" (2). Indeed, the Asian representation of the posthuman is often associated with notions of biological and technological hybridity. Futurized depictions of posthuman-Asians tend to prioritize their embracement of technology, displaying a sense of otherness in the dehumanization of the posthuman Asian. In "Race and/as Technology; or, How to Do Things to Race," Wendy Hui Kyong Chun highlights the depiction of the Asian/Asian American other "as robotic, as machine-like and not quite human, as not quite lived" (51). Likewise, Hyaesin Yoon further argues that this association becomes more visible in the context of the gendered and racialized division of labor (11). In this scenario, where Asians are treated as capital, the importance of biopolitics becomes particularly apparent.

Making use of Michel Foucault's framework of biopolitics and Rosi Braidotti's theorization of posthuman affirmative politics, this research analyzes the representation of the Asian body in two contemporary novels of speculative fiction, *Salt Fish Girl* by Larissa Lai and *On Such a Full Sea* by Chang-rae Lee in relation to biopolitics. The study highlights the ways in which structures of power control and modify the Asian posthuman body, as it is particularly intertwined with technology. It further questions whether the posthumanized Asian body resists the governmental biopolitical regulation and the capitalist exploitation in the global market by means of affirmative politics. In contemporary Asian-American literature, the posthuman body emerges as the subject of biopolitical regulation, as authors use speculative fiction to explore the intersections of posthumanism, biopolitics and bioethics. In particular, Larissa Lai's *Salt Fish Girl* (2002) and Chang-rae Lee's *On Such a Full Sea* (2014) depict future societies in which the Asian body is regulated and exploited by regimes of techno-scientific control, reducing the racialized body as a commodity in capitalist-driven societies. Both novels use speculative tropes to highlight how issues of race and ethnicity intersect with biopolitical regulation, and how the Asian body is subjected to these forms of control.

Larissa Lai –an American-born Canadian author of Chinese ascent– holds a Canada Research Chair at the University of Calgary. She has published four novels and an extensive body of literary criticism. Precisely, in one of her published articles, she depicts a series of events to which she reacted against in the novel explored in this paper: “[T]he cloning of Dolly the sheep ... the arrival of three rusty ships from China on the West Coast of British Columbia carrying around 600 Chinese migrant laborers ... Monsanto’s altered DNA” (171-172). The author’s preoccupations with the rise of these issues in modern society constitute the fundamentals of *Salt Fish Girl*.

Similarly, Chang-rae Lee is a Korean-American novelist and professor of creative writing at Stanford University, with six published novels and a Pulitzer Prize nomination. His inspiration for the novel came from a visit to working factories in Hong Kong where “most of the workers were young women” and the situation in Baltimore ghetto neighborhoods full of “racism, economic decline, post-industrial stuff” (E. Wong 2015: n.p). He created a society afflicted by the merge of those issues in *On Such a Full Sea*, and reacted against them.

*Salt Fish Girl* and *On Such a Full Sea* share a similar plot involving dystopian hierarchical societies with Asian posthumans who fall under the domination of biotechnologies and forced labor. Both novels have Asian young female protagonists who suffer the commodification and exploitation of their bodies in future versions of an environmentally destroyed North America. Both technocapitalist driven societies also share different forms of mortal diseases that threaten the rest of the population. *Salt Fish Girl* follows the story of Miranda, who is a product genetic engineering and affected by the ‘dreaming disease’; and Evie, a cyborg manufactured by cloning, who is exploited as free labor. Together, they plot along other cyborg clones to denounce their technological exploitation by biologically engineering their own species. Chang-rae Lee’s *On Such a Full Sea* follows Lai’s novel with the journey of his protagonist Fan, in search of her boyfriend Reg. Due to the strange circumstances of Reg’s disappearance, Fan leaves her home in a production colony of Asian workers in search for answers. This apparent archetypical love story turns into a difficult journey for Fan, as she encounters different communities struggling to survive in a hostile world full of disease and political corruption. When she is sold in servitude to a rich couple, she discovers that they traffic with human lives for their personal benefit. The couple keeps other seven young Asian girls imprisoned in their home, treated as sexual objects by the man, and as replaceable daughters by the woman.

While Larissa Lai and Chang-rae Lee have explored the subjectivity of Asian Americans and the role they play in society –including the measure of population control and labor exploitation– they have also stressed the reduction of the Asian body as a mere commodity. Both literary works explore the ways in which the Asian protagonists are seen as a site of power relations based on biological factors and how different authoritarian regimes abuse the use of biopower to regulate their societies.

As mentioned, the terms “biopolitics” and “biopower” were first introduced by Michel Foucault as part of his lectures at the Collège de France (1978-1979), in relation to the analysis of how the state exerted control over health and population management. For Foucault, modern “biopower” –often used indistinctly with biopolitics– has to “rationalize the problems posed to governmental practice” in order to increase the “health, hygiene, birthrate, life expectancy” (*The Birth of Biopolitics* 317) of the population. Biopolitics involves controlling and regulating the population through the use of various technologies and restrictive measures. Biopower, therefore, acts as the intersection of political practices with the regulation of the biological life, and a term that gives any government control to regulate and control bodies. The analysis of two speculative novels –*Salt Fish Girl* and *On Such a Full Sea*– through the lens of biopolitics highlights the ways power is exercised over

individuals and racialized groups in these speculative futures. Writing after Foucault's biopolitics, posthuman philosopher Rosi Braidotti expands Foucault's theory on biopolitics from a posthuman perspective. She criticizes how Foucault's conception of an "allegedly benevolent political economy" (Braidotti, "Affirmative Politics" 31) required the welfare system to regulate and control the citizens by force. These mechanisms of control exerted by the state to ensure the equilibrium of society often "tend to target essential vital functions –such as reproduction, sexuality, health" ("Affirmative Politics" 32), thus, the body itself. Posthuman affirmative politics advocates for policies and actions that promote inclusive and equitable societies in which the individuals exist at the intersection of multiple identities. Her theory calls for a shift from hierarchal systems towards more inclusive communities (Braidotti, "Affirmative Politics" 30-53). In the two speculative novels explored in this paper, where biotechnological control is used to oppress and control populations, posthuman affirmative politics offer a tool for resistance of biopolitical control and agency.

Together, Foucault's and Braidotti's theorizations provide complementary frameworks for my analysis of the power dynamics in the two aforementioned speculative novels. Considering biopower and posthuman affirmative politics are crucial to explore the ways in which speculative novels grapple with the complexities of power relations, race, resistance and agency in biotechnological controlled futures. The paper explores first Larisa Lai's *Salt Fish Girl*, focusing closely on reproductive control and on the discrimination of post-human Asians. The paper goes on to explore *On Such a Full Sea* by Chang-Rae Lee, a novel that challenges the population control and techno-fetichism of the Asian body.

## 2. Biopolitics in *Salt Fish Girl*

In the novel *Salt Fish Girl*, Larissa Lai reacts critically to the imminent threat of genetic modification, Asian labor exploitation and transgenics becoming every day concerns. Through the use of biopolitical measures imposed in a technologically-driven society, the author rejects them from a critical position in her novel. This analysis focuses on two aspects of biopolitics that are central to the novel: the regulation of reproduction under biotechnological domination and the dehumanization of Asian bodies through technology.

### 2.1. Regulation of Reproduction under Biotechnological Domination

The domination of the character's bodies in *Salt Fish Girl* under the technological system starts with the governmental control over population reproduction. In this futuristic version of North America, the use of genetic engineering is justified to ensure the continuation of human race. The use of biotechnologies seeks to create a superior race of humans for the sake of the ruling classes, not for the benefit of the population; therefore, biopower is abused by those on positions of power. This manipulation of reproduction only represses the freedom of individuals, who are not able to make their own reproductive choices in this society. The novel highlights the dangers of the overuse of biopower by authority figures in the context of reproductive regulation. Turning to Foucault, in respect of control of reproduction, he argues that:

As soon as a society poses itself the problem of the improvement of its human capital in general, it is inevitable that the problem of the control, screening, and improvement of the human capital of

individuals, as a function of unions and consequent reproduction, will become actual, or at any rate, called for. (*The Birth of Biopolitics* 228)

When the problem of low fertility arises in any society, the creation of measures to ensure the survival of humanity are more than justified. To improve “the human capital” in the novel, big corporations as Saturna or Nextcorp –owners of the main cities and advocators for their development– take measures against this low fertility rates. With biotechnology in their hands, scientists experiment by “implanting human genes into fruits as fertility therapy” (Lai 258). However, since “pollen bl[ows] every which way and c[an] not be contained” (258), mutations start to occur. One natural mutation in particular, happens in durian trees, causing women to be impregnated without insemination when one durian is consumed. The majority of these trees happen to be in the Unregulated Zone, a place outside the jurisdiction of the authorities where they cannot take action to control them. These transgenic fruits causes the newborns born with this mutation to contract an illness called “the dreaming disease” (85), which differs from any other medical affection that doctors have seen before:

The symptoms are so peculiar, and so unlike any other known disease –foul odours of various sorts that follow the person without actually emanating from their body, psoriasis, sleep apnea, terrible dreams usually with historical content, and a compulsive drive to commit suicide by drowning. (Lai 100)

This is the case of Miranda, who is the product of one transgenic ‘durian’ that her mom had eaten causing her to become pregnant. She suffers from these symptoms as well, since her body emanates a strong durian smell. She refers to it as “the unpleasant cat pee odor [that] flowed into every room” (15-16). The ‘durian’ –which is a highly consumed fruit in Asia, but rejected by Westerners because of its peculiar smell– further links the Asian body as the solely sufferers of the disease. It is implied that the only consumers of such fruit are citizens of Asian ancestry. Miranda’s mother, of Asian descent begged her husband for one durian after remembering the ones she ate as a child in Hong Kong (Lai 14). Also, although it is not mentioned in the novel, the wife of Miranda’s brother would probably be an Asian descent as well. Since the wife “had drowned” and, in some pictures she seemed to have a “scaly fish tail” (217), these characteristics can be traced as the “dreaming disease” symptoms.

Because of this genetic mutation these Asian individuals are sought by technological corporations in order to perform experiments on their bodies. Miranda is brought to a laboratory run by Dr. Flowers, who studies the disease to get information from her ill body. Nevertheless, the intentions of scientists are not to investigate the cure for an illness that causes women several painful afflictions, but to stop the death rate of women who suffer the disease. Even Dr. Flowers’ assistant, Dr. Seto points out that if the symptoms of the disease “weren’t making people suicidal, ... either Flowers or [herself] would be particularly interested in it” (Lai 103). The fact that these people are suffering from bad dreams, apnea or strong body smells is not important. For the government regulating genetic experimentation, the advantages of biotechnology outweigh the drawbacks of the symptoms their subjects could be experiencing. Corporations like Saturna and Next Corp abuse their biopower to perform experiments and develop new post-humans under the excuse of ensuring the population survival in their society. Biotechnology becomes, thus, a tool used by those in power to exploit the Asian body.

In this futuristic society, there is an organization of women clones who cultivate and distribute mutated durian fruits among the population. They belong to the Sonias series produced by Dr.

Flowers in his laboratory, all of which are victims of the genetic engineering experiments developed by the authorities. Evie Xin, another Sonia clone and Miranda's friend, helps her sister-clones to resist the biotechnological control over reproduction. Evie and the "Sonias 116, 121, 148, 161, 211 and 287," (Lai 222) –who are identical clones varying from different ages– grow genetically modified durians in the city of Serendipity. As Tara Lee points out, the government in *Salt Fish Girl* "employs biology to engineer bodies, but by invoking genetics, it also unwittingly risks creating self-mutating bodies" (108). By allowing the use of biotechnology, the government takes the risk of making it accessible to the population as well. If the authorities make use of genetic engineering as a form of reproduction control, it can also become a tool of defiance and resistance used by the citizens.

The Sonias clones make use of biopolitics to rebel against the corporations who profit from their free labor as non-humans. They seize reproduction onto their own hands, to create "a free society of their own kind from the ground up" (Lai 256). The fruits they cultivate are distributed to women who cannot conceive along with cabbages and radishes to "support and strengthen the fetuses" (258). They want a new species of women who can self-reproduce, not only without male intervention, but without authoritarian scientific intervention as well.

In her theorization of posthuman affirmative politics Rosi Braidotti denounces how "the question of the governance of life contains that of extinction as well" ("Affirmative Politics" 46). Any biopower exerted by a government also involves the management of death in case it is needed to regulate society. Therefore, the extinction of deviants who self-reproduce themselves without the state's approval is a justifiable measure under Foucault's biopolitics. The government, does not only control the life of Asian posthumans, but their death as well when they try to create their own species. Since they are a threat to the state's control over reproduction, they must be stopped. Because of this, the authorities of Serendipity kill some Sonias after finding the clones' conspiracy plan. Miranda and Evie confront Dr. Flowers when he committed the slaughter against his own creations:

"You don't know," said the doctor, "what monstrosities might have come of those births. Those trees have been interbreeding and mutating for at least three generations since the original work. The fertility those durians provided was neither natural nor controllable. It was too dangerous".

"But what you did to make me, to make us, was not?"

"I am a scientist, Evie. Whereas those Sonias ... not human..." (256)

The control of reproduction, thus, shifts from being a measure to ensure the survival of the human race to a technique of exploitation of the subjects created. In the case of Miranda and Evie, they are created by biotechnology, but, due to their posthuman condition, they lack the right to make their own reproductive choices. The only difference between the governmental use of genetic engineering and the clone's distribution of durians is that the former is controlled and monitored by authoritarian corporations; whereas the latter, is not. Therefore, the use of biopolitics becomes a tool of control and oppression limited to the government, who, in the end, abuse their power to exploit the racialized characters for their own profit.

## 2.2. The Dehumanization of Asian Bodies through Technology

David Morley and Kevin Robins point out that, with advancements in science and technology, the connection between the Asian subject and the machine has integrated into technology itself, rather than disappearing (170). Lai creates a narrative in which the bodies of Asian bodies –especially those

of women— become victims of racist tropes of embodiment of technology. The authorities in this dystopian society not only experiment with human genetics to increase and control reproduction, but also make use of biotechnology to clone humans and use them as labor force for the powerful corporations. In the city of Pallas—the most technologically and capitalist-driven city— Dr. Flowers also experiments with the recombination of human DNA with animal species to manufacture improved women clones.

According to Foucault, technology emerged as a more effective tool of regulation of citizens if used with moderation by governments (*The Birth of Biopolitics* 321). Since the cities of Serendipity and Pallas suffer from low fertility and the available human labor is scarce, the government excuses the use of cloning experimentation under a biopolitical measure to ensure population. However, the predominant reason why corporations clone people is because “their labor costs [become] so low” (Lai 157). Therefore, the authorities abuse their biopower to obtain a profit out of human clones in a society that lacks “laws governing [non-human] biomaterial” (158). Precisely, Braidotti points out how “the opportunistic political economy of biogenetic capitalism has also turned ... non-human intelligent matter—into a commodity for trade and profit” (“Affirmative Politics” 42). Modern capitalism abuse the possibilities of new technological advancements to make economic profit of biotechnological beings. In the end, technology becomes not a tool used with moderation, but a system that benefits from biogenetic modifications and dehumanizes the posthuman Asian body.

Dr. Flowers manufactures two series of clones, the Sonias, who are made out of “*Cyprinus carpio* freshwater carp” DNA (Lai 158), and the Miyakos, who are made out of “cat genes” (252). Each of them are one of “a hundred thousand with identical material” (158) from the same human DNA sample. In both cases, the human genetic code used for the cloning comes from a “Chinese woman who married a Japanese man” (160), which makes all the human clones of Asian descent. Even Donna Haraway’s theorization of the cyborg falls into the fetishization of Asian as susceptible subjects of technological exploitation. In her “Cyborg Manifesto”, she links the figure of the cyborg with “Southeast Asian village women workers” (58-59). Since the bodies of the female protagonists are hybrids because of the genetic modifications of their bodies, they are treated as machines in a capitalist society, dehumanizing them completely. Most of the Asian clones who are sent “to the factories to work for Pallas” (Lai 252) are victims of labor exploitation in a capitalist society.

These Asian clones also suffer from fetishization of the Asian body as subjects without agency. Even Dr. Flowers himself took two clones, “one for a wife and one for a daughter” (252) for his own personal benefit. Kuo Wei Lan defines “Technofetichisim” as the treatment of “technology as fetishized commodity” (257). By investing political and economic personal values to the cyborgisation of the body, the clones become victims of technofetichisim. They are treated as both commodities to obtain economical profit, and sexual fetiches. Dr. Flowers wife, Dr. Seto; and her daughter, who happens to be Evie, are subjected to a double oppression, as they become both workers and domesticated family members. The fetishization of the Asian woman, in the case of Dr. Seto, extends to imposed sexual duties, emphasizing the interrelation between technologized and hyper-sexualized female body (McCarthy n.p.). For Evie, technofetichisim translates into an infantilization of the Asian body, which is a recurrent trope among cyborgs embodied in Asiatic women.

Not only Dr. Flowers benefits from the creation of clones, corporations like Nextcorp or Saturna work along scientists to obtain profit out of them with impunity. Because of environmental problems, the government allows “animals and plants” to be cloned in this society “but not humans” (Lai 158).

However, the techno capitalist-driven cities of Serendipity and Pallas have been “making people for years” in order to reduce the cost production and get “stinking rich” (157). Hui Wong criticizes this capitalist logic that believes in genetic engineering and a market in climate solutions rather than “regulations for corporations or an overturning of capitalism” (3). The clones in Lai’s novel are designed without “wits or willpower,” (Lai 158) to minimize labor costs for the production of shoes for Nextcorp. They are marked with serial numbers in their skin, which shows their model and year of fabrication:

At base of her spine was a series of numbers, which looked at a distance like they had been tattooed on, but if you looked more closely, the digits were raised ridges filled with some kind of powdered metal. They could be read by touch, Braille beneath the skin. (156)

What is more, aside from being branded as property, they are subjected to constant surveillance by a device inserted inside their bodies. The Guardian Angel, as they called this device, “looks after [them], monitors [their] body temperature, notes the presence of disease”, but in reality is another tool to have the clones under control and “help rescuers find [them] if they get lost” (159). Thus, the only way to escape from the governmental control implies extracting the device from their spine, leaving a scar from the cables that have been ripped.

To “deploy the full ethical and political potential” of biopolitics, a shift “beyond Foucault” is needed (Braidotti, “Affirmative Politics” 46). For Braidotti, this shift has to be made from individualistic and human-centric perspectives towards a collective approach in which hybrid identities are embraced (“Affirmative Politics” 51-53). A sustainable biopolitical state should be, thus, not only anthropocentric and focused on maximizing human profit, but rather social justice and equality for all beings. For Evie and her sisters, posthuman affirmative politics is a tool to embrace their hybridity and agency and achieve human-like equality by acts of resistance. By regaining control over their bodies, they sought to oppose to the biopolitical oppression. Because of this, every Sonia who become free from the biotechnological system, forcefully removes her “Guardian Angel”. With the elimination of their tracker devices, they embrace their hybridity and agency as post-humans, not machines. However, in a capitalist society that abuse its biopower to exploit female cyborgs, affirmative politics fail to help them regain control over their own bodies. When the authorities discover the Sonias and their plans of self-reproduction, they are terminated, one by one. Therefore, the embracement of hybridity only becomes an act of resistance that, in reality, fails to achieve equality and agency for post-human beings. The deaths of the clones denounce the restrictive biopolitical control exerted by the state, but they are not enough to change the system. The remaining clones who do not resist the oppression remain, thus, dehumanized as patented commodities.

### 3. Biopolitics in *On Such a Full Sea*

In *On Such a Full Sea*, Chang-rae Lee challenges the concept of biopolitics to explore the ways in which power is exercised over the bodies of the citizens of a dystopian future North America. The novel deals with rigid economic and political systems that control the world in a futuristic globalized era and presents a social order, based on a racial hierarchy in which the politics of representation are challenged. The paper examines two aspects of biopolitics in *On Such a Full Sea*: the restrictive biotechnological measures exerted by the government over the population to control them and the Techno-fetishization of Asian bodies.

### 3.1. Restrictive Biotechnological Measures of Population Control

Lee's novel presents a market-driven society where control over population is needed to achieve greater goals for the ones in charge. The communities in his fictional society divide in three categories, from highest social class to lowest: Charters, Facilities and Open Counties. They are governed by a central state called the Directorate (Lee 22), which structures the communities for the main comfort of the Charters. The Facilities and Charters live in symbiosis, the former produces supplies; and the latter, receives the products. Charter villages are populated by white inhabitants who enjoy the best quality of products, have access of technology and good healthcare. In contrast, the Facilities only serve as a product supply chain of racialized subjects to ensure the Charters have their needs met. The Open Counties, however, are unruled places where the living conditions are terrible due to environmental disasters, lack of water and food.

One of the most important production Facilities is B-Mor, constructed over the ruins of Baltimore. B-Mor produces fish and vegetables and distributes them throughout different wealthy Charters. This production colony is formed by Asian immigrants and their descendants, who are conceptualized as machinery labor, since their only purpose in the community is to supply other neighboring rich Charters. Due to the pollution caused by "farms and factories and power plants and mining operations," (Lee 17) the cities were no longer habitable, as they lacked clean air and potable water. Thanks to advancement on genetic engineering, this society was able to eliminate "pests", "bad weather" and produce an "uncontaminated, nutrient-rich media" in controlled conditions (70-71). The Directorate in this society needs human labor, people "trained from an early age in the techniques of maximized production" (71). For that reason, they need well-functioning production facilities as an unlimited source of work labor. The community is united by the safety and shared purpose of the working facilities, but they renounce to agency, a sense of subjectivity and freedom.

In this society, the actions taken by the state under the premise of regulating a well-functioning community justify authoritarian practices. In his analysis of biopower, Foucault precisely points out that the "principle of *raison d'Etat*" (*The Birth of Biopolitics* 6) has been used to justify violence and repression by the governmental forces. This principle is a way of governance in accordance with rational application in the state. Foucault argues that *raison d'Etat* is often used to justify decisions that seem rational for the best interest of people, but rather only benefit those in power. The regime of the Directorate, abuse their biopower by following this principle. By rationalizing their hierarchal working system as the most suitable way of maintaining order in society, they become an oppressive government for B-Mor. The state only prioritizes the well-being and prosperity of high-class Charters while exploiting working facilities. The Directorate applies different control measures over B-Mors to avoid rebellion, not because the policies are reasonable to maintain the order. Following Foucault's theorization of biopolitics, the reasoning of oppressive measures makes this government unfit of ruling. The problem of biopolitics, thus, is not the regulation of reproduction, health, science and technology; but rather "how this way of governing develops" (Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics* 6). The Directorate disguises an oppressive system under an equal symbiotic relation between Charters and Facilities. When in reality, Facilities carry the weight of maintaining a well-functioning society.

Lee's novel revolves around Fan, a sixteen-year-old B-Mor citizen who works as a tank diver taking care of fish for their distribution among Charter villages. When the government makes her boyfriend Reg disappear, she abandons her life in B-Mor in his search. Nobody in B-Mor questions Reg's abduction, since it is common practice for people to disappear and to be erased from the

community if they act against the government. However, Fan finds out that Reg did not commit a crime, but rather scored “C-free” (Lee 65) in his annual blood panel. This version of America suffers from a disease derived from the extreme pollution called “C-illness” (58). The symptoms are extreme pain, organ failure and ultimately “the Crash, a degenerative condition in which the major organs begin to fail” (65). Eventually, every person, regardless of their colony, will manifest symptoms of the illness. The wealthy Charters can afford the “latest drugs and interventional therapies” (65), but the majority of the B-Mor habitants cannot, as they are denied the most technological advancements in the society since it is considered a waste of resources:

B-Mors are looked after pretty well, but once a potentially terminal episode is diagnosed and treated, it will not be treated again, unlike for Charters, who have enough wealth to visit their specialists as often as they wish, theoretically and infinitum, or at least until their bodies eventually succumb to the accrued effect of the interventions. (Lee 101)

This capitalist and technological-driven society denies access to treatment to the working class of the population. The habitants of the working Facilities like B-Mor cannot receive medical treatment for the C-illness. The government, thus, abuses their biopower to decide the portion of the population worthy of biotechnological treatment. The authorities do not only apply policies that affect the physical state of the inhabitants. They also use psychological manipulation to create a narrative in which the working Facilities become a community serving a greater purpose. As Jeshua Enriquez points out, B-Mor’s system of exploitation acts as a “model minority” where part of the racialized population works willingly for the benefit of the governing white citizens (176). The citizens of B-Mor are composed of a majority of Asian descents who willingly accept their fate as labor machinery. They lack any form of agency and have scarce access to the technological developments that serve the white rich Charters. Fan notes how Charters “live quite a bit longer than [B-Mors] do, ten or so years”, and still B-Mors believe that when they die “tears flow not so much in sadness as prideful recognition of your role... for you have done your job, you have labored and nurtured” (Lee 65-66). The community of B-Mor is brainwashed into believing that they must work for the benefit of Charters, even though they are treated as a racialized commodity in society and denied medical treatment. The capitalist system of this postindustrial society produces “profit-oriented power relations” (Braidotti, “Affirmative Politics” 41), as it bases its logic in the economical exploitation of minorities. When the population of the Facilities believes in the restrictive healthcare policies and comply with their limited access, the Directorate benefits both economically by saving resources, and socially by avoiding rebellion.

The Directorate continues to abuse their biopower under the false promise of benefiting the whole state when, in reality, its purpose is not to cure the disease. Despite the unlimited Charter’s access to resources, the only thing that is beyond their reach is the cure for the disease. “For decades they’ve had drugs and treatments to address every expression of the dreaded C but still there is no blanket prevention, no inoculation, no ultimate cure” (Lee 104). Because the Charters spend unlimited money to delay the symptoms, the C-illness becomes a profitable market for the capitalist government. Since the scientists keep creating new expensive treatments and the Charters paying for them, there is no intention of finding a cure. Reg is, therefore, abducted and subjected to experimentation without the intention of helping the rest of the population in a near future, but rather because he addresses a threat to the C-illness therapy market. Unpublished death rates from the first case of C-illness 125 years ago show that, in fact, “Charters didn’t actually live more than a few years longer than they did back then” (Lee 277). Which proves that the high-cost treatments that the Charters spend their money in are not even that effective.

The therapies produced by biotechnology only create a capitalist-like market where the citizens buy cure after another. Far from being beneficial for the treatment of the illness, these therapies only add side effects and more visits to the medical centers of the Charters. The treatments only serve to make the C-industry “massively rich” (278) by taking economic advantage of the Charter villages. Charters, in the end, are as abused as the Asian minority of B-Mor. They are deceived into believing that, due to their white-high class superiority, they have access to unlimited resources and the most advanced technological developments. When, in reality, the Directorate uses biopolitics in their own advantage to make profit of the population not for the population.

### 3.2. Techno-fetishism of the Asian Body

In *On Such a Full Sea*, Chang-rae Lee portrays the commodification of the Asian body through the life experiences of Fan who is exploited and reduced as a mere commodity in this futuristic society. Both when she was a B-Mor citizen as a worker who produced supplies for Charters, and after she left her community in search of her boyfriend Reg. Through the depiction of Fan’s struggles, the novel highlights the dehumanizing effects of a capitalistic society that, not only values profit over individuality, but also treats Asian women as sexual technological objects who can be easily exploited.

After leaving B-Mor and her community, Fan struggles for survival in the Open Counties, where she endures the bad living conditions due to the scarcity of food and water. In this unregulated place outside the Directorate jurisdiction, survival is prioritized over order and control. Still, in this context, the strongest part of the population abuses the weak and the minorities. In the case of Fan, she is sold to a Charter village’s family in exchange for treatments for the C-illness, which cannot be found in the counties. Mister Leo and Miss Cathy –Fan’s new employers– lived in a Charter village called Seneca with her current housemaid Mala. Originally, Fan was brought into the house to be “that woman’s helper... and then someday take over when she retires” (Lee 167). Fan notes how Mala is also “an Asian of some kind but her skin was quite dark” (172), implying that she could have Vietnamese, Indonesian or Filipino ascent. The population of the Charters continue to profit economically from Asian population in these cities as well, not only the servitude as Mala is from Asian descent, but other workers as nannies appear to be “darker skinned” (163) as well.

What was supposed to be a life of forced labor for Fan becomes rather a life of abuse. Fan finds a box in Mala’s room with pictures of several little girls, seven in total, all “around the same age and of some kind of Asian blood” (Lee 176). They abuse their biopower in order to bring Asian children into their house under the premise of giving them access to technology, healthcare and their household resources. This is an important aspect, for Braidotti shows, vulnerable minorities who seek asylum or refuge become another emblem susceptible to the contemporary biopower, “because they are the perfect instantiation of the disposable humanity” (“Affirmative Politics” 49). These Asian girls are mostly orphans from the Open Counties, who do not have access to food, water, technology or medicine. They are vulnerable minorities who accept to work in their Charter village to survive. However, they are treated as disposable commodities in the hands of a wealthy Charter family who takes advantage of them. Instead of receiving help as children in need, the little girls are kept incarcerated to fulfil the couple’s fetishes.

For Mister Leo, ‘The Girls’ are sexual objects, and for Miss Cathy, daughters’ replacements to dress and play with. They are dehumanized, reduced to a number for name, “One being the eldest and so on down the line” (Lee 212). The loss of their identities is further marked by a physical enhancement

performed in their eyes, making them “huge and shaped in the same way (209). Their Asian eyes were shaped to look more innocent and or like “some puppy or doe who craves only your company and succor (212-213). The Girls are ‘cyborgized’ to look less human and more doll-like, the biotechnological enhancement is only done to become another technology that they can possess. There is no governmental purpose that justifies the application of biotechnologies in The Girls bodies’ aside from the personal gratification and abuse of biopolitics of the Charter couple. The Girls were “damaged by Mister Leo” (Lee 223) by being continuously sexually abused to fulfill his Asian-doll fetish. The Girls, as they grew older, were incarcerated and replaced for another younger Asian girl to satisfy Mister Leo sexual deviances. From One, to Seven, all of them were occasionally visited by their master. Since Fan becomes number Eight, she endures the same fate.

Likewise, Miss Cathy keeps the Girls “the same way beloved pets were once kept by their owners” (Lee 231), and makes them one by one to perform the role of her fictional daughter. She dresses, plays, brings them to the mall and pays for homeschooling tutors until she gets tired and tosses them like objects in a locked room. Because of this, they remain “chronically achy and weak” (219), the lack of sun causes them vitamin D deficiency and the lack of ventilation, “botulism” (Lee 236). Despite that they are constantly ill, they are only allowed to leave the room whenever Mister Leo wants them or to sleep next to Miss Cathy because “something about the temperature and smell of [the Girls] help[ed] Miss Cathy to go back to sleep” (213).

The only way the Girls have to resist their abuse is by drawing a large mural in their room’s white wall to capture their existence. They challenge the biopolitical control of their host family by acts of posthuman affirmative politics that challenge the dominant power structures. Braidotti notes how bodily politics has changed to new forms of vulnerability in a world of technology, making subjects who signify difference “disposable bodies of the global economy” (“Affirmative Politics” 46). She calls for marginalized individuals to resist oppressive systems. Since the Girls cannot leave and resist the biopolitical control, they advocate for expressing their own agency through the retelling of their lives in a painting:

This was the way of the mural; it reflected whatever was happening at the moment, and by reading it from the beginning, Fan could trace the looping areas of their time and how each girl had come but also whatever was of interest of concern, becoming a more intricate map of their consciousness as it was emended and evolved. (Lee 220)

There, they portray their humanity as beings who are not the same. Although “their identical altered eyes” (Lee 212) made it harder to identify them, they do not want to be categorized as products of the same manufacturer, identical one after the other. Since each girl has a different personality and age maturity, they portray their feelings in a different way. Painted scenes before Three were “generally straightforward and even childlike,” but in later scenes “the mood of the renderings seemed to shift ... the emotions of the Girls becoming more patent (220) as they become older.

Despite their attempt of resisting the biopower inflicted in their bodies, the Girls remain both fetishized and infantilized, unable to question the only form of life they know. They are unable to regain agency by means of posthuman affirmative politics. Braidotti explains that the “establishment of empowering relationships based on cooperation and the combination of the specific powers of each entity aims at increasing each entity’s individual capacity to preserve themselves against adverse force” (Braidotti, “Affirmative ethics” 104). For Braidotti, affirmative politics is based on the collective desire of all entities to work together for the common benefit. This theory advocates for cooperative relationships to empower minorities against adversities. However, in a society where

minorities are abused, affirmative politics become insufficient to help the Girls to regain agency. The state follows oppression, instead of cooperation between collectivities. The Girls, lose their ability to preserve themselves against adversities in an environment that wants them subjected and dehumanized.

Fan and the Girls convince Miss Cathy to send Four and Five to the hospital to treat a “virulent bloom of a fever (Lee 253) that was killing them. Fan, took the opportunity and went with them in the ambulance whilst the other Girls stayed in the house with Miss Cathy, waiting for Four and Five to return when healed. The Girls plot with Fan and help her to escape in the ambulance, but decide to remain with Miss Cathy in their enclosed room. Because the Girls lack tools to defy the authority of their host family outside their mural of expression, they can only comply with their commodification. In the end, the techno-fetishism of the Asian body serves as a powerful tool for biopolitical domination that the Girls cannot overcome. They remain reduced to mere commodities, stripped of their individuality and agency. The use of technology reinforces the biopower over Asian minorities and further oppresses them economically, sexually and eventually, psychologically.

#### 4. Conclusions

The relationship between structures of power and the Asian posthuman body become intricate with the examination of biopolitical control in technologized societies. In both *Salt Fish Girl* and *On Such a Full Sea*, the governmental biopolitical regulation and capitalist exploitation have a significant impact on the posthumanized Asian body. These power structures operate through techniques of biotechnological domination, reproductive control, commodification and techno-fetishization that aim to regulate posthuman bodies. The female Asian protagonists in both novels are unable to escape the domination of their respective governmental biopower. They remain trapped in a dystopian technological world where their bodies are controlled with restrictive measures of reproductive control and reduced to mere commodities.

Although these texts highlight the potential for posthuman affirmative politics to help resist this domination and reclaim agency, the theory is not sufficient to destitute the intricate biotechnological domination. The posthumanized Asian body does not resist the forms of governmental biopolitical regulation through affirmative politics. Braidotti advocates for a society where being “posthuman does not mean to be indifferent to the humans, or to be de-humanized” (*The Posthuman* 190). However, both versions of a posthuman North America fundament themselves in the exploitation of non-humans through technology, instead of embracing their hybridity. In addition, due to the identification of Asians as technological beings, the inequality between humans and posthumans is enlarged. The state’s technological and biological control over the bodies of racialized posthumans cancels any act of resistance and agency and reinforces the existing power structures. Thus, technology is used as a tool of domination, instead a tool of liberation, agency and hybridity.

This analysis contributes to a deeper understanding of the complex ways in which power operates in a globalized technological market where the posthuman becomes an object of exploitation. Moving forward, the further exploration of these themes with the interrelation of bioethics is essential in a rapid changing technology-wise world. The techno-fetishism of the Asian body highlights the further need for a critical examination of how technology dehumanizes the Asiatic body, reinforcing race, gender and class differences.

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