

“It’s All There Right in Front of You”: Corporate Ideology and Genetic Engineering in  
Larissa Lai’s *Salt Fish Girl*

by

Vanessa Rachael Marsden

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Arts

at

Dalhousie University  
Halifax, Nova Scotia  
August 2016

© Copyright by Vanessa Rachael Marsden, 2016

## Table of Contents

Abstract.....	iii
List of Abbreviations Used.....	iv
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
Chapter 2: Corporate Discourse and Homogeneity .....	7
Chapter 3: Patenting as Social Domination .....	14
Chapter 4: Violent Experience and the (Re)Production of the Individual.....	22
Chapter 5: Queer Resistance and Ethical Responsibility.....	30
Chapter 6: Conclusion.....	37
Bibliography .....	38

## **Abstract**

This thesis considers how Larissa Lai's ecofeminist novel *Salt Fish Girl* (2002) usefully intervenes in debates about genetic engineering by challenging corporatist narratives of techno-scientific progress and control. With reference to a fictitious but familiar social system that increasingly serves the interests of big corporations and thus seems to be out of the control of individuals, Lai foregrounds the unintended consequences of genetic engineering, including the capacity for engineered or mutated bodies to subvert the various policies and practices that seek to control and devalue them. Rather than being eliminated by genetic engineering, mutations and mutated bodies are unavoidable products of the process. By subverting the principles on which they were created, Lai's unruly mutant bodies offer the possibility of alternatives to the corporate social structure that seeks to regulate and normalize individuals.

## **List of Abbreviations Used**

GE	Genetically-Engineered
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization

## Chapter 1: Introduction

The discourse surrounding the genetic engineering of crops is contentious. While the Canadian federal government claims that genetically-engineered (GE) foods are not significantly different from non-engineered food (Andrée 163-4), corporate producers claim many benefits for GE crops, including higher, more frequent crop yields. At the same time, NGOs such as Greenpeace counter by calling GE products “genetic pollution” and warning of the “threat” they pose to human and environmental wellbeing (“Genetic Engineering”). Ecofeminist critic Vandana Shiva warns:

the biotechnology revolution robs even the seed of its fertility and self-regenerative capacities. The colonization of the seed reflects the patterns of the colonization of our bodies. Profits and power are behind the invasion into all biological organisms. (215)

Such critiques of genetic engineering are rhetorically powerful and demand an immediate [re]action from those who hear them. But, in light of the clear partisan divide between pro-GE and anti-GE discourses, and because the long-term environmental, social, and health impacts of GE products are poorly understood, a focal shift away from the product itself and towards the ideologies that enable the existence of GE products helps consumers gain a better understanding of the mechanisms of power currently at work in society, as well as perceive the violence being exerted against them as a result. In other words, considering the ideology that supports genetic engineering rather than its products helps people think more critically about the personal implications of corporate narratives of techno-scientific progress. This dilemma is central to Larissa Lai’s speculative ecofeminist novel *Salt Fish Girl* (2002) as she challenges heterogeneity through her

emphasis on biodiversity and diversity of thought. As such, this thesis considers how Lai's novel usefully intervenes in the genetic engineering debate by challenging the corporate narrative of techno-scientific progress.

*Salt Fish Girl* opens with Nu Wa, a lonely mythological woman who uses mud to create people in her image, then splits their tails into legs. But the novel has a second protagonist, Miranda, who lives on the Northwest coast of Canada in 2044. Miranda, who is a reincarnation of Nu Wa, lives in a future that is plausibly related to our own present.<sup>1</sup> She lives in the corporately-owned compound Serendipity with her parents and brother, and exhibits the symptoms of what is alternately called “the dreaming disease” and “the drowning disease,” which Lai links to the production of GE crops; the effects of the disease include emanating a distinct, often foul odour, psoriasis, sleep apnea, dreams with specific historical content, and the compulsion to commit suicide by drowning. When Miranda and her family get kicked out of Serendipity, they are forced to live in the Unregulated Zone – an area not owned by any corporation – which they have been told is unsafe. In the Unregulated Zone, Miranda meets Evie, a GE person who has escaped from the factory where she worked with her cloned “sisters,” called the Sonias; Evie is also a reincarnation of Nu Wa's lover. Evie introduces Miranda to a new way of conceptualizing the world: whereas Miranda initially trusts the corporations, Evie's revelations about the exploitation and secretive behaviour they rely on to produce the lifestyle and products she enjoys make Miranda question the validity of her previous outlook. Miranda struggles between acting on the information Evie gives her and

---

<sup>1</sup> Miranda's world is similar to our own in that it contains an industrial and a post-industrial society that relies on the industry of the former. The technology is not radically different from our own, but the world is more polluted, and despite having GE and cloned people, Lai's futuristic world is similar enough to our own to be uncanny.

wanting to maintain the life she is used to leading, but in the end she chooses to go with Evie and their child into an uncertain future. My consideration of these aspects of the novel will examine how the women's choices undermine the corporations that devalue them as genetic aberrations.

As Jon Gordon argues, fiction has the potential to “interrupt the relentless justifications of and for the status quo” (xxii), which matters in this context because despite its futuristic setting, *Salt Fish Girl* is very much about disrupting the status quo. Lai explains:

Before 9-11, it seemed to me that the massive corporatization of everything and anything would become the new hegemony and that the nation-state, while continuing to exist, would become so enfeebled by free trade policies, the devolution of power to the provinces, an emergent right wing populism with its own version of "the people," and overly aggressive marketing that it would more or less cease to matter. This is the world of *Salt Fish Girl*. (“Future Asians” 169-70)

Lai is explicit about the fact that the world of *Salt Fish Girl* is also our world, and explains that the book was a response to a number of important socio-cultural or technological events of the last few decades, including the cloning of Dolly the sheep, the arrival of Chinese migrant labourers in British Columbia, a farmer being sued by Monsanto for the likely accidental cross-pollination of his canola crops with theirs, the patenting of GE basmati rice by a large corporation in Texas, and Disney's planning and construction of the town of Celebration (“Future Asians” 171-2). As speculative fiction that engages with futuristic scientific and technological possibilities but is nevertheless

heavily grounded in real-world events, Lai's novel is perfectly positioned to help readers connect the future social, environmental, and technological possibilities that she envisions with their own lived realities.

Although genetic engineering occurs on a microscopic scale, its effects reverberate throughout the various societies in *Salt Fish Girl*. That reverberation is key because it challenges the belief that the effects of genetic engineering, even those which are unforeseen, can be easily contained and managed by the corporations that produce GE products. With reference to a fictitious but familiar social system that increasingly serves the interests of big corporations, and thus seems to be out of the control of individuals, Lai foregrounds the unintended consequences of genetic engineering and explores the potential for its unintended impacts to undermine the very narrative they are designed to support. More specifically, Lai suggests that bodies and ideologies that are deemed aberrant or queer can undermine the corporate and techno-scientific narratives of progress and control that devalue them: although genetic engineering typically favours homogenization and the elimination of aberrations, its process likewise produces differentiated bodies that cannot be easily controlled and whose very existence subverts the principles on which they were created. In other words, Lai challenges corporate narratives of techno-scientific progress and control by showing that, rather than being eliminated by corporate attempts at homogenization through genetic engineering, queer desire and bodies are products of genetic engineering and can thrive on it.

Throughout this essay I will wander between literary and cultural studies and scientific perspectives. The reason I have chosen to do this is that science fiction, a sub-genre of speculative fiction applicable to Lai's novel, has a long-standing tradition of



social criticism. Certain contemporary works of science fiction, including Lai's novel, "offer[] valuable representations of and critical commentary on environmental issues" (Otto 17), and thus should not be read independently of the issues to which they refer. Furthermore, such meandering between fiction and real-world developments is important for gaining a fuller understanding of the issue at hand because, as Katie King points out, the "intersections between gender, science, and cultural studies" are "connections that sometimes have more to do with the materialities of everyday life than with disciplinary connections" (104).

Lai uses the rebellious Evie and the more naïve Miranda to expose the ideological (patriarchal, corporate, scientific) systems that enable genetic engineering. By taking a contemporary, real-world problem and setting it in a not-so-distant and not-so-implausible future, Lai suggests that if we continue to deny the fact that we participate in a "conscious cultural trend" of ignorance (Ozeki 334) regarding the ideologies and corporate practices that support genetic engineering, then that dystopic future could be our own. Thus, Lai invites her readers to "rethink" (Plumwood n.p.) the way that contemporary society functions and to confront their own conscious ignorance beyond the pages of her novel. In an attempt to consider how the novel guides readers to "rethink" their approach to GE food production, this thesis begins by considering how corporations exercise ideological violence against the various communities in the novel. Next I consider how violent practices inherent in industrial food production accumulate in human bodies: more specifically, with reference to the corporate control of individual bodies in the novel, I consider what Lai's novel has to contribute to the concept of bioaccumulation of violence. Finally, I consider how Lai's representation of various

mutant life forms challenges the corporate narrative of control and techno-scientific progress. In so doing, I demonstrate that Lai challenges the corporate rhetoric that values control over people and the environment by focusing on mutations as positive and on mutant forms of life that flourish: through mutation, genetically engineered products undermine the control they are meant to exemplify.

## **Chapter 2: Corporate Discourse and Homogeneity**

The corporations that produce genetically-engineered food have a vested interest in promoting their products, and thus circulate positive information about their products to the public. For instance, Monsanto Canada Inc. claims that “the use of biotechnology is one of the tools that can help farmers grow crops more efficiently, protect biodiversity and provide all of us with a more abundant and affordable food supply” (Jordan). Genetic engineering corporations also use social projects to promote themselves as community-minded, environmental custodians; thus, ConAgra Foods emphasizes that “great food comes from brands that have an unwavering dedication to doing what's right for all, which means giving back to communities, sourcing ingredients in a responsible way and being a caretaker of the environment. It also means that growth should not come at any cost” (“Our Commitment”). According to Fanny Domenec, such “legitimacy strategies” are important for their ability “to counter negative perceptions” (54): “for agricultural biotechnology and oil multinationals [...] legitimacy consists in constantly reminding the public of the final purpose of their activities, that is to say, help to solve major problems for the world’s population” (54). Put differently, such corporations must actively and aggressively promote an image of themselves as socially-engaged environmental stewards in order to counter the consumer misgivings about the social and environmental costs of their products and practices.

Doubts surrounding genetically-engineered food should be heightened by the fact that no long-term or post-product-approval monitoring is done on the crops in Canada (Andrée 181), and their environmental impact (including cross-breeding with non-engineered species and subsequent contamination) is thus poorly understood.

Furthermore, the Canadian federal government has for a long time resisted the mandatory labeling of genetically-modified market products (Andrée 162), and thus consumers are being denied the right even to choose whether or not to purchase genetically-engineered products. Roland Barthes usefully addresses the illusion and ultimate denial of consumer choice in “Soap Powders and Detergents”: he points out that these two seemingly different products give consumers the illusion of choice, but both are owned by the same company, so, no matter what choice consumers think they make, they support only one company. A similar trend occurs with the failure or refusal to label GE products: consumer agency is denied because the possibility of choice is obscured. This extension of power leaves consumers vulnerable to corporate decision-making that may not be in their best interests. Anti-labeling policies create the conditions for a potentially costly complacency by making it difficult for consumers to make informed decisions. Because consumers are unaware of their lack of choice, their consumptive patterns remain conformist and thus contribute to ongoing corporate control.

Lai depicts the corporations in her novel as secretive and disinclined to circulate accurate information about their products. When Miranda first meets her new employer, Dr. Seto, Seto tells her about the dreaming disease. Before this moment, Miranda evidences some symptoms of the dreaming disease, including a strong durian odour, scaly skin, and odd dreams, without realizing that they are attributable to a recognized disease. Dr. Seto tells Miranda that, despite the pervasiveness of the diseases’ symptoms throughout the novel’s various communities, “Aries William, the CEO [of Painted Horse, a corporate compound similar to Serendipity], says there is no disease. He calls it mass hysteria. He won’t allow research of any kind” (100). Aries William seeks to deny the

existence of the dreaming disease because the kind of aberration it exemplifies is deemed unacceptable as a result of the corporate demand for homogenization. However, Lai begins the novel with a challenge to such notions of normalcy. Lai's re-imagined mythological beginning posits all humans as aberrations: Nu Wa initially creates beings in her image out of mud that is already "hard to control" (2), and when she is dissatisfied with them because they are insolent, she punishes them by bifurcating their tails, the pieces of which then develop into legs (2-3). Lai thus argues that aberration is part of humanity's origins, yet the corporations in her novel seek to deny the existence and possible abilities of deviant bodies. Despite overwhelming evidence that the dreaming disease is the aberrant product of genetic engineering, "none of the corporations want to acknowledge it" (100), so they deny not just its connection to genetic engineering, but its very existence.

Arguably, this denial also happens in the real world, where the science used to evaluate GE products tends to be biased in favour of corporate producers' political aims. Scholars from various disciplines increasingly recognize that scientific research is used to service the interests of "an economy of deliverable outcomes and profitable goods" (Bahng 667). The risk assessments performed on GE products, specifically, are value-laden rather than objective because "they involve choosing which harms to consider and which to ignore" (Holtug 171). Because the developers of new GE products are allowed to "submit to the FDA safety data from the tests they conducted on the food biotechnology" (Meghani 973), genetic engineering corporations exercise "ecopower" (Andrée 167) by writing their own partisan narratives about their products and using scientific inquiry to legitimate them. The attempted silencing of scientific inquiry

exemplified in *Salt Fish Girl* compromises public well-being by denying information and recourse to vulnerable individuals like Miranda. And, to the extent that Lai's fictitious corporations have corollaries in the real world, her novel underscores the necessity and precariousness of robust, independent scientific enquiry.

The corporate ideology of control that drives genetic engineering is a form of authoritative discourse in Mikhail Bakhtin's sense: "it enters our verbal consciousness as a compact and indivisible mass; one must either totally affirm it, or totally reject it. It is indissolubly fused with its authority – with political power, an institution, a person – and it stands and falls together with that authority" (683). As a form of authoritative discourse, corporate discourse demands to be accepted in its entirety. This is the case in *Salt Fish Girl*: Miranda's father, Stewart believes that his role as a tax collector is socially important and he hopes Miranda will "be proud of the part [he] play[s] in the life of [their] community" (25). Stewart's feeling of importance, compounded by his desire to escape the unhappiness of his marriage, cause him to become addicted to using his Business Suit, a suit which allows him to access the real world as an avatar and work as if immersed in a video game, to work overtime from home (60) despite the physical pain and violence he suffers while using it (27-8, 66, 78). But, the violence Stewart suffers is also ideological. As Tara Lee notes, by donning the Business Suit and "obliterating his own features" (26), Stewart makes himself an indiscriminate cog, clone, or "zombie" (26), until his manipulated image on a screen is more real than he is, even to Miranda, who is in the same room as him (27). Stewart is complicit in his own erasure because he is distracted by the bank's promise of adventure (29), which replaces his unhappiness with a false sense of fulfillment, contribution, and worth. Through Stewart's work as a

tax collector, this manipulation causes him to spread a corporate ideology that subjugates both its perpetrators and their intended targets.

Nevertheless, Stewart's position as purveyor of corporate ideology is destabilized by his own internal discourse. Stewart contradicts his initial position as an upholder of corporate ideology by acting in a way considered queer by the corporate system. When Miranda's parents go to the Unregulated Zone, her mother sees durian growing and, despite knowing the risk associated with wild or "unregulated" food, she "wanted it anyway" (14). The durian is illicit because its pungent smell makes it undesirable from the corporate perspective, and thus Aimee's desire for it is queer because it does not conform to the corporate norm of acceptability. Miranda's father initially decides to uphold the corporate ideology about what is acceptable and does not allow Aimee to have any fruit. However, he brings her durian a week later, and that act rekindles their desire for one another and leads to Miranda's conception (14-5), or, in other words, leads to the production of another queer, non-normative body. Likewise, after Miranda is born and exhibits the symptom of the drowning disease that makes her smell strongly of durian, Stewart is the one who wants to try herbal and other traditional medicine to 'cure' Miranda of her odour. Stewart's desire to 'cure' Miranda using unsanctioned remedies destabilizes the role of reproducer of corporate patriarchal ideology that his very desire to 'cure' his daughter of her body's natural odour expresses. In short, Stewart's desire to use traditional medicine undermines his desire to normalize Miranda according to corporate norms.

Despite her queer desire for durian, Miranda's mother also accepts various aspects of corporate discourse. While Stewart brings Miranda to the Unregulated Zone so that

she can try alternative forms of medicine to cure her of her durian odour (35-41), it is Miranda's mother who "persuade[s him] to take [Miranda] to a Saturna-sanctioned medical doctor and to stop taking [her] out of the compound and feeding [her] unproven remedies" (60). Aimee has also come to embody patriarchal capitalist ideology, at least in this regard. However, rather than being motivated by the need for personal fulfilment as Stewart is, Aimee's motivation for conforming to corporate ideology is grounded in her desire to keep her daughter safe. When Aimee has the opportunity to eat durian, she is willing to "take[] the risk" (14) of eating it for herself, but she is not willing to risk Miranda's health by using "unproven remedies" (60). Aimee's desire for Miranda's security causes her to accept corporate medicine as desirable, and her choice, though different from Stewart's, is implicitly underlaid by the same belief that Miranda is queer and must be cured.

Both of Miranda's parents struggle with corporate authoritative discourse and their own internal discourse, which at once rejects and accepts various aspects of corporate discourse. While the authority of corporate discourse is represented and transmitted through their parental authority, Miranda's parents' position as sanctioned authorities are destabilized by the conflict between their personal beliefs and the corporate ideology of homogenization. Thus, Lai demonstrates that even the corporate system's beneficiaries are not secure within the corporate system and that this structure, which simultaneously empowers and disempowers its participants, is unstable for men as well as women. Regardless, Miranda's mother never seeks an escape from her corporate-run life, and her father only does so when he feels directly affronted and betrayed after being fired and kicked out of Serendipity (95).



Like her parents, Miranda is also indoctrinated by the all-pervasive corporate discourse in Serendipity; however, moving to the Unregulated Zone allows her to gain a perspective that destabilizes her allegiance to Saturna. When Miranda is young she believes that only the “Real World [is] awash with a plethora of ideologically interesting half-truths, in such abundance that only the most obsessed insomniacs could sort them, and even then, any action based on information gleaned [is] a gamble” (60) because she has not yet learned how to become critical of corporations, or even that it is necessary to do so. While her parents feel the tension between their personal and corporate beliefs, Miranda is taught to have faith in corporate discourse, and she does so despite the fact that she can see the negative impact of her father’s unwavering dedication to his violent job. Even as a child Miranda notices that her father’s eyes have “the sheen of the waking dead” (60) and “a sinister gleam because of all the secrets he was keeping” (60), and despite the fact that she feels “angry and powerless” (78), she does not question the validity of his work. Without any alternative to the corporate discourse she has been socialized to believe, Miranda cannot become critical of Saturna, but moving to the Unregulated Zone and meeting Evie provide her with the opportunity to gain a new perspective on her society, a thread which I will pursue shortly.

### Chapter 3: Patenting as Social Domination

The terminology used to designate bioengineered food is contentious. According to Les Levidow and Joyce Tait, the term ‘genetic engineering’ “implies a transgression of nature, by reducing life to interchangeable parts” (127), which make bioengineering seem unnatural, while the term ‘genetic modification’ seems less inflammatory because it “presents the organisms as *merely* modified, a modest evolutionary step” (127).<sup>2</sup>

Levidow and Tait also note that “in public discourse, the promoters’ [of GE food] language has largely shifted from biological revolution to evolution” (126), which makes the products of bioengineering seem like a logical or natural step. Lai demonstrates her skepticism of this tendency through her representation of the issues surrounding patenting and ownership of life. Therefore, this section of the thesis considers how patenting participates in the corporate project of social domination and control in Lai’s novel.

Patents assure the continuing function of colonial ideology, the process of violent acquisition, ownership, and control of resources. Shiva warns that “if this last colony [the regenerative body] is allowed to be carved out in the name of patent protection, innovation, and progress, life itself will have been colonized” (217). This issue is relevant to *Salt Fish Girl* because, although Stewart believes that patenting serves to protect the individual’s interests (14, 32), it rather supports the abstract ideological interests of juggernaut social institutions like capitalism. Rather than ensuring consumer safety as Stewart believes it does, patented food contributes to the long-term subjection of

---

<sup>2</sup> I use the term “genetically-engineered” as a reminder that GE food is not natural, which comes partly from the fact that bioengineering combines genes from species that could never naturally reproduce, and thus differs from the selective breeding practiced in the past, and partly from the fact that natural plants and animals cannot be patented, but bioengineered ones can.

consumers and nature by colonizing the body: Shiva also notes that “in making genes the object of value through the patent system, a dangerous shift takes place in the approach to genetic resources” (216) in part because “gene manipulation reduces the organism to its genetic constituents” (216). In other words, genetic manipulation is a form of violent dismemberment, and the ideology that enables it views all organisms in dismembered terms as constituting interchangeable parts rather than being whole. Thus, through their use of discourse and patenting rights, the corporations in Lai’s novel exercise what Slavoj Žižek terms “systemic violence” (2). Systemic violence is ideological; it is “the often catastrophic consequences of the smooth functioning of our economic and political systems” (Žižek 2) and it “sustain relations of domination and exploitation” (Žižek 9) present in a given society. In Lai’s novel, it is not just the literally exploited workers who are subject to systemic violence. As discussed, Miranda and her family, supposedly more privileged than many other families, are nevertheless subjected to systemic violence because, like the ideology behind genetic engineering, corporate ideology views them in terms of ownership as replaceable parts of their larger social whole.

On one level, patenting removes farmers’ agency because farmers who grow GE crops are “forced to return to the seed company yearly” (Fowler 216) for new seeds because the ones they are sold are modified to be genetic dead ends rather than the regenerative origin of life, and farmers are thus at the mercy of corporate supply and pricing. Rather than supporting farmers, GE seeds ensure farmers’ ongoing dependence on corporations. But patenting operates on another level of power relations which extends beyond the farmers who use GE seeds. According to Cary Fowler, as increasing amounts of power and control are given to patent holders, “the effect is to maintain the

centralization of control over biodiversity which has existed since colonial times. The mode of control has simply shifted from physical to legal” (218). This matters in *Salt Fish Girl* because Lai demonstrates that patenting can also be used as a means of ideological control. In the novel, patenting is used as a mechanism of control by which corporations spread the belief that they and their products benefit society. Privileged corporate citizens live in luxury compounds where food and other products are guaranteed safe, according to corporate discourse, while everyone else lives in the polluted Unregulated Zone: the corporations use a discourse of fear predicated on the uncertainty of the effects modified pollens have on plants in the Unregulated Zone to ensure that their citizens only eat the food that they patent and produce (32). Thus, the people living in the corporate compounds believe that “wild things” and food without Saturna stickers are not safe for consumption (14), arguing that “Everything has been affected by these modified pollens. If it grows wild in the Unregulated Zone you have no idea what kinds of mutations have occurred” (32). Here, Lai suggests how the marketing of patented food as safe increases consumer reliance on corporations by playing on consumers’ fear and uncertainty, and the manipulation of the consumer’s desire for security disguises the fact that consumer agency is diminished by that process.

Lai most directly challenges the belief that genetic engineering corporations can provide a safety guarantee for their products with her representation of what is alternately called the dreaming disease and the drowning disease. Sufferers of this disease exhibit symptoms which include “foul odours of various sorts that follow the person without actually emanating from the body, psoriasis, sleep apnea, terrible dreams usually with historical content, and a compulsive drive to commit suicide by drowning” (100). Many

rumours circulate about the origins of the disease, but the consensus is that it is related to GE crops: Miranda's father (69), Dr.s Seto and Flowers (102), and Evie (164) all represent the disease as a product of genetic mutations that occurred in the soil after the introduction of GE plants whose recombined genes act as an environmental contaminant. With her references to recombined genes, Lai invokes pleiotropic effects, meaning that "a single gene can also be responsible for more than one trait" (Andrée 169). The various functions of a single gene interact with one another as well as with the surrounding genes (Kollek 100; Andrée 169, 186); thus, putting a pleiotropic gene in a new context through genetic engineering can activate or change its various functions in the new organism, or can activate or change the organism's original genes, leading to unforeseen combinations and mutations in the GE organism. Even if a gene's multiple functions are addressed in research, "it is not possible to determine beforehand whether these gene products will be of specific significance in these new contexts or whether they will interact with other gene products already present in the cell" (Kollek 102), and thus a degree of uncertainty remains inevitable with GE products. However, Lai suggests that such uncertainty can usefully interrupt the ideology of control that produces GE food, which I will expand on in the following sections.

Lai further challenges the corporate narrative that genetic engineering represents techno-scientific progress by linking corporate space to genetic environmental pollution. Not only are the corporate compounds not safer than the Unregulated Zone, they are the source of the dreaming disease. When Miranda tells Dr. Seto that she has heard of a girl who "had to move into the bathroom because only water could stop her terrible dreams" (100), Seto identifies that girl as "case UZ1, the first case outside Painted Horse" (100),

which suggests that the dreaming disease first appeared in the corporate compound rather than in the Unregulated Zone. People living in the compounds eat corporate brand food like “Saturna Gala” (32) apples, which would seem to be a strain of Gala apples patented by Saturna. Thus, the link between GE food and the dreaming disease is strengthened because concentrations of GE food are higher in the corporate compounds, where the genetic engineering corporations are responsible for providing all the food to the compound’s inhabitants. Even if the corporations in the novel could guarantee that the food they provide to the people in their compounds is safe for consumption, the other effects of their GE crops, such as the dreaming disease, surface throughout the various communities in the book, including in their compounds. The distinction made between the GE food served in Serendipity or Painted Horse and that found in the Unregulated Zone is a matter of discourse, evidencing a dominant position heavily biased in favour of corporate interests of which consumers must be wary. The prevalence of the attitude that corporate food is safe and other food is not in corporate citizens attests to the overarching power corporate socialization exercises and the pervasive indoctrination of this discourse in the compounds. Thus, that the random mutation of GE crops only occurs in the Unregulated Zone as the corporations claim is questionable: the corporate citizens’ belief that such is the case is not sufficient evidence that it is so because they demonstrate a clear bias towards the corporations, and as already discussed, the corporations are untrustworthy. Rather, this evidence leads to the conclusions that genetic mutations occur everywhere, that no food is safer or less so than any other, and that the uncontrollable nature of genetic mutation undermines the discourse of control and progress that underlie genetic manipulation.

Lai points to the reduction of biodiversity and cultural diversity as inherent parts of increased corporate control over food production. The first indication of corporate homogenization occurs at the beginning of the novel when Miranda's mother smells "durian, such as she hadn't tasted since she was a small child and her grandmother smuggled one in from Hong Kong, once upon a time before the absolute power of the Big Six and our [Miranda's] family's fortunate installation at Serendipity" (14). Lai at once gestures to the oligarchic power held by six corporations, and to Miranda's initial naïveté in believing that she and her family are fortunate for being subjected to that control. Part of the corporations' expression of power is that they refuse to sell products that are too different, or queer. Durian smells like "pepper and cat pee" (15), and in a society that attempts to hide what is unpleasant (like the exploitation of workers and environmental devastation) it is no wonder that the fruit is deemed unfit for consumption. Corporate homogenization and control extends so far that the odour of durian itself is "intriguing, yes, and familiar too, and also illicit—the smell of something forbidden smuggled on board in a battered suitcase" (13). Because her scent continually associates her with durian, a fruit not provided in the compounds and only available in the Unregulated Zone, Miranda is, by extension, a queer, "illicit" being in need, from the corporate perspective, of homogenization and normalization. Miranda's non-conforming scent puts her at odds with the corporate ideology that values homogeneity, and she is thus subject to taunts from her classmates (21) as well as her parents' repeated attempts to dispel her scent using various remedies. Lai's use of "illicit" food to represent "illicit" bodies points to the environmental and social consequences of genetic engineering collapsing into one another. However, as Paul Lai points out, "the association of the durian with Miranda

points to the power of corporate and scientific control over humans and the limits of that control” (179). As evidenced by the ineffectiveness of the various remedies her parents procure for her, Miranda’s odour has an element of uncontrollability that “emphasizes the materiality and biology that undergird social relations even as biotechnological control promises a transcendence of the biological” (P. Lai 167). Lai’s affirmation of the “mud and muck of origins” (268) at the end of the novel thus both affirms the importance of biodiversity and reaffirms the uncontrollability of genetic material.

Living in the corporate compound distances Miranda from natural heterogeneity. Miranda is so used to regulated GE food that she construes non-GE food as “strange, twisted and misshapen” (31). However, when she and Evie have sex, she notes that

The stench that poured from our bodies was overwhelming—something between rotting garbage and heavenly stew. We rode the hiss and fizzle of salt fish and durian, minor notes of sour plum, fermented tofu, boiled dong quai—all those things buried and forgotten in the years of corporate homogenization. Steam rose from us like water splashed on a hot pan of garlic greens. (225)

Miranda’s association of queer desire with queer, illicit foods expresses her desire for a norm outside of corporate control and homogeneity, including heteronormativity, and she defies corporate control by refusing to belong in the neat categories allowed by the corporations.

The desire for reductive categorization on the part of corporations is also expressed by their practice of genetic engineering because it requires the mentality that



organisms are no more than the sum of their parts, which by extension are freely interchangeable. As Andrée notes, the normalization of such compartmentalization is already being rhetorically legitimized:

In terms of crop development, biotechnology includes conventional breeding, mutagenesis and genetic engineering. This term did not emerge in widespread usage, however, until after the more controversial techniques of genetic engineering became possible. The concept of biotechnology itself is therefore an illustration of the normalization process of biopolitics in the area of genetics. (168)

The desire to manage crops is inseparable from the desire to manage people, and the attempted conversion of people into consumers (with the removal of some problem traits, such as free choice, which impede growth in certain areas) is perhaps the most sinister effect of the unrestricted exercise of corporate control. However, as Lai suggests, consumer culture, like GE crops, can mutate in unforeseen ways: despite the homogenization its implementation intends (in society and in the environment), unforeseen and uncontrollable mutations will occur to reinstate heterogeneity, which Lai suggests is a good thing.

#### **Chapter 4: Violent Experience and the (Re)Production of the Individual**

Despite the uncertainties and dangerous consequences Lai attaches to GE food on the environmental and social levels, she nevertheless allows that genetic engineering can be beneficial, which she demonstrates through the Sonias. The Sonias are made of the same genetic material as Evie, and like Evie, they have escaped from “the mad, dark factories” (202) in which they were exploited. One of the problems the free Sonias face is that they are unable to reproduce without the assistance of GE food because the corporations that manufactured them only produce women (258). The alternative to sex for procreation needed by the Sonias is provided by GE fruit which has been implanted with human genes “as fertility therapy for women who could not conceive” (258). Apart from being able to use durian for insemination – which the novel also hints is what got Miranda’s mother pregnant with her – the Sonias use GE cabbages and radishes to “support and strengthen the fetuses” (258) they conceive by consuming the modified durian. Though Lai continues to demonstrate that genetic engineering is inextricably bound up with uncertainty, she demonstrates that that uncertainty can be subversively used to readjust the balance of power in favour of individuals. The trees that were genetically engineered to act as fertility therapy for women eventually “fertilized the fruit of trees bred for other purposes [... and] Perhaps some natural mutations were also involved” (258). The result of these various mutations is that the trees now produce fruit that “make[s] women pregnant without any need for insemination” (258) at all, which is how Miranda speculates she becomes pregnant (258-9). While the durian trees were initially produced to create profit for the corporations, their mutations allow the Sonias to use them to take control back from the corporations who initially produced both them and

the trees. Rather than being regulatory agents that allow the corporations to decide who can reproduce by controlling who can receive fertility therapy, the trees mutate, thereby allowing the proliferation of heterogeneous, mutated, “illicit” lives like Miranda’s and the Sonias’ daughters’.

The focus on female [in]fertility is significant not only because of the feminization of the subject in relation to corporations, but because female [re]production becomes a source of empowerment for the Sonias. As Vandana Shiva notes, “the seed and women’s bodies as sites of regenerative power are, in the eyes of capitalist patriarchy, among the last colonies. These sites of creative regeneration are turned into ‘passive’ sites where the export ‘producers’ produce and add value” (211-2) within a patriarchal framework like that of the genetic engineering corporations, and the women could easily be subjected to this attitude. Lai’s link between GE seeds’ genetic dead end and the Sonias’ intended reproductive dead end further highlights the way in which corporations work to disempower their feminized subjects. But, these women take their bodies, which are initially meant to assist in the [re]production of corporate citizens, and rather than allowing themselves to be defined as passive vessels to be filled with patriarchal corporate purpose, use their procreative capabilities in a subversive way to create “the new children of the earth, of the earth’s revenge” (259), and they thereby refuse and resist the ‘truths’ espoused by the corporate patriarchal discourse of control.

At once autonomous individuals and identical to one another, the Sonias represent the corporate attempt to homogenize society at one of its most extreme points, although GE food participates in the corporate homogenization process too, as previously discussed. Although certain Sonias escape the factories where they are made (in both the

fabricated and forced senses of the word) to work, Evie goes a step further than the other Sonias by renaming herself after her escape from the Pallas shoe factory. Rather than keeping the name Sonia 113, Evie renames herself as such, and although her new name is “never quite comfortable” (223), her gesture is important because it rejects the dehumanizing clone identity imposed on her by Pallas and demonstrates her own power through self-definition. At the same time that Evie asserts an individual identity for herself, “the indeterminacy associated with the clone offers the possibilities of subversive acts of political resistance” (Mansbridge 128). Thus, when it comes to creating clones, corporations are undone by their very attempt at control as the bodies they invest with uniform genes are nevertheless also invested with indeterminacy. Dr. Flowers initially creates Evie to be his daughter, but “when the daughter turned out no good, he sent her to the factories and forgot about her” (252). But, Evie’s genetic and personal unpredictability helps her escape the limiting roles of ‘dutiful daughter’ and ‘loyal worker’ imposed on her by Dr. Flowers, and to participate in the subversive resistance undertaken by the escaped Sonias.

Evie is an uncanny figure who helps bring the concerns surrounding GE food to a conceptually manageable scale. In his discussion of Paolo Bacigalupi’s *The Windup Girl*, Scott Selisker makes an observation about genetic engineering relevant to my discussion of *Salt Fish Girl*: genetic engineering occurs on a micro scale that makes it difficult to deal with conceptually, while its effects in ecological time occur on a macro scale that make them equally conceptually difficult to understand (500; 503), and unlike the cleaners at Miranda’s school whose organs have been visibly rearranged (76-7), “the invisibility of the GMO’s genes renders impotent any aesthetic appeals to the ‘natural’”

(Selisker 501).<sup>3</sup> Two things contribute to Evie's uncanniness: her genes and her sisters. Although Miranda knows Evie better than she does the other Sonias, their identical appearance contributes to making them uncanny, and Miranda "couldn't imagine how [she] would react if [she] were ever permitted into one of the factories and saw them working side by side" (216), an image of the workers that recedes infinitesimally, making them indistinguishable from one another as their existence as clones implies they ought to be. Miranda even wonders if the oldest Sonia in the group, Sonia 14, "see[s] Evie's life as an extension of her own, as a second shot at those things that had failed the first time" (228), effectively collapsing them, along with the other Sonias, into a single being with the ability to be present in multiple time frames at once. The Sonias exist in a liminal space between the human and the non-human, and, just like the "soup made from embryonic chickens still sleeping in their eggs and coated in mucousy egg white" (59) that Miranda is forced to drink as a child, their liminality "horrifie[s]" (59) her. But Evie creates a balance between the silent invisibility of genetic engineering and the mass undifferentiated identity of "the Sonias," and as an uncanny figure, she renders the discomfort of genetic engineering more evident and understandable.

The initial genetic dismemberment that must occur in order to produce GE crops, and the environmental violence caused by monocultures and intensive farming bioaccumulate in the consumers of GE food. The violent practices and treatment inherent in contemporary industrial food production processes "write" themselves on to the products that are sold to consumers. When food is consumed, this imprinted violence

---

<sup>3</sup> Such intrinsic objections to genetic engineering should not be discounted, according to Robert Streiffer and Thomas Hedemann, because "several prominent views in the agricultural bioethics literature regarding the political import of intrinsic objections conflate the ethical validity of those objections with their political relevance" (191-2).

accumulates in and imprints itself on the consumer's body in a process called bioaccumulation.<sup>4</sup> The concept of bioaccumulation of violence comes from the simple adage “you are what you eat.” In her work exploring the connections between patriarchal gendered violence and violence against animals, Jean O'Malley Halley notes that “if we really *are* what we eat—and much of science shows that, indeed, we are—then *we* are corn” (62). However, if we are what we eat, then we are not only corn, we are violent. The violence of corporate and industrial-scale food production, which relies on the exploitation and dismemberment of feminized groups (including workers from marginalized groups, animals, plants, and the environment as a whole) to operate, bioaccumulates in individuals through the food they consume. The capitalist and patriarchal violence that bioaccumulates in food can manifest itself as various forms of abusive behaviour<sup>5</sup> or, as recent research suggests, gets expressed genetically and is thus continually reproduced during procreation itself.

Current scientific research reveals a source of genetic expression related to the concept of bioaccumulation of violence. In the conclusion to their study on the impact of maternal behavior on the genetic expression of offspring in rats, Ian C. G. Weaver, et al. note that their “findings provide the first evidence that maternal behavior produces stable alterations of DNA methylation and chromatin structures, providing a mechanism for the long-term effects of maternal care on gene expression in the offspring” (852):

---

<sup>4</sup> The verb bioaccumulate refers specifically to “a (*toxic*) *chemical*: to accumulate in the tissues of an organism, or in a specific environment, food chain, etc.” (“Bioaccumulate, v.” n.p.; emphasis added).

<sup>5</sup> A more comprehensive explanation of this point is available in my article “Bad [Wo]Men Eat Meat: Biopolitics and Cycles of Violence in Ruth Ozeki’s *My Year of Meats*, Han Kang’s *The Vegetarian*, and Kyung Ran Jo’s *Tongue*.”

maternal effects on defensive responses to threat are apparent in plants, insects and reptiles. Such effects commonly follow from the exposure of the mother to the same or similar forms of threat and may represent examples whereby the experience of the mother is translated through an epigenetic mechanism of inheritance into phenotypic variation in the offspring. Thus, maternal effects could result in the transmission of adaptive responses across generations. (852)

Where DNA methylation is an epigenetic mechanism controlling gene expression, and epigenetic traits relate to or arise from non-genetic influences on gene expression, a mother's behaviour can, even post-partum (850), influence her children's genetic material and expression. Thus, the maternal body becomes an even greater site of contention because the trauma that bioaccumulates in a mother's body is transmitted to her children and reverberates throughout the generations.<sup>6</sup>

Though this process is not restricted to GE products, with regards to genetic engineering specifically, as GE crops and people like Evie are produced, mutate, and propagate, they transmit the trauma of their own genetic dismemberment (caused by the very fact that they are GE) onto the genetic sequence of their offspring. Weaver, et al.'s research is useful for understanding Lai's project because it allows readers to appreciate the ways in which Miranda is "a child afflicted by history" (70), more so than she ever realizes. Because Miranda's family lives in a corporate compound and consumes high

---

<sup>6</sup> Weaver, et al. describe a kind of intergeneration bioaccumulation of experience rather than the accumulation I describe, which occurs through an individual's food consumption over their lifetime. Henceforth, I will use the verb "bioaccumulate" in the initial sense described above, while the verb "transmit" will be used to denote the genetic process described by Weaver, et al.

concentrations of GE food, they bioaccumulate greater concentrations of corporate and patriarchal violence than people living in the Unregulated Zone. At the same time, Miranda's mother transmits her own bioaccumulated trauma to Miranda. This is confirmed through repeated references to sighing, a behavior that the two women share: Aimee has "an ancient sigh, the kind that comes only from repeated disappointment" (18), which Miranda quickly adopts as a child and uses when her parents disappoint her. When her mother first disappoints her, Miranda is unsure of whether or not her sigh is like her mother's (34), but when her father disappoints her, Miranda is certain that it is (42). The experiences bioaccumulated by and transmitted to Miranda are expressed through her dreaming disease symptoms; while others catch the disease through the soles of their feet, Miranda is born with it. Lai creates various legitimate sources of the dreaming disease (directly from the earth near plantations of GE crops or genetically), just as she creates a complex motherhood for Miranda, where "Miranda/Nu Wa is both child and creator of her mother, but also identifies as a 'motherless child'" (Reimer 10); it is all part of the "mud and muck of origins" (268) that she uses to combat the reductive and compartmentalist attitudes with which corporations and science regard life.

Interestingly, when Miranda first gets her period, she expresses an understanding of herself as dismembered, incomplete, and at the mercy of the male gaze: "I closed my eyes and imagined a steel table, sharp tools and curved ones with empty gaps the shape of organs. I imagined a bright searchlight and my own body splayed open like a gutted trout" (73). Miranda's observation indicates an antiseptic, penetrative, and violent trauma associated with her reproductive and maternal potential. She exhibits the kind of stress reaction to stimuli, in this case her period, that Weaver, et al. describe. Although in



a less scientific way, Lai also indicates that a mother's experiences quite literally get written into the genetic sequence, and the repercussions thus echo in individuals long after the sufferer's death. Miranda is also likely to transmit her bioaccumulated trauma to her own children, for, in addition to her feeling of personal dismemberment, she witnesses the public display of female dismemberment under the male gaze when she sees the Cabaret of the Diseased at the New Kubla Khan. A doctor enters the stage with a woman, then proceeds to open her chest with a scalpel:

Moving as though in a trance, the woman swung her legs to the floor and stood up. She reached into her own body cavity and one by one drew out a heart, a liver, a kidney. She threw the heart into the air. In a moment, she was dexterously juggling the three, grinning demonically the whole time. (193)

Though the spectacle procures a "nervous laugh" (193) from the audience, there is no other indication that the sight produces general discomfort. The woman's dismemberment, and subsequent enjoyment of that dismemberment, are used primarily to amuse the audience, who hoot and clap (194). Despite her participation in the act and own seeming amusement at it, the dismembered woman is rendered powerless, and the very fact that she seems to revel "demonically" in her own body's spectacularity sends the message that that powerlessness is enjoyable. Maintaining integrity in Lai's future is challenging since she foresees a society in which corporate ideology pervades the body as well as the mind near the point of personal violation.

## **Chapter 5: Queer Resistance and Ethical Responsibility**

According to Ruth Ozeki, we participate in a massive cultural trend of conscious ignorance (334). Like Ozeki, Lai suggests that this trend inhibits social change because it allows people to stagnate, to avoid critically evaluating their lifestyles, and therefore allows the continued dominance of current corporate practices. Having grown up in a corporate compound, Miranda is especially vulnerable to the tension created between her enjoyment of her lifestyle and the ethical responsibility to even acknowledge how that lifestyle impacts others, let alone act to change it accordingly. Although “Evie had described to [her] in lurid detail the mad, dark factories, the greed that drove pay ever lower as contractors moved their factories to more and more desperate places” (202), Miranda justifies her employment for Pallas’ advertising firm by thinking “what the hell [...] I didn’t personally do anything to those factory women, did I?” (202). She further justifies her employment by telling herself that it will help “put a bit of real glamour into the lives of the women who bought the shoes” (202). Through Miranda, Lai points out the difficulty individuals face of acting ethically when the results of that activism directly impact their comfortable lifestyle. Individuals do not generally accept exploitation when it is right in front of them, but the more removed an occurrence is, the less immediate it becomes, and thus it becomes more acceptable, even on a large scale. This “conscious ignorance” happens through a process of identification described by Waldo Tobler’s first law of geography: “everything is related to everything else, but near things are more related than distant things” (304). Thus, the closer two objects or two people, the greater

the likelihood of their similarity, and thus their identification with and understanding of one another.

In a diasporic, globalized world, Tobler's law can hold less true where geographically-distanced issues remain immediate in an individual's mind, but the tendency to prioritize what is immediate holds true. Miranda exemplifies this difficulty, as briefly discussed above, for although Evie exposes her to the exploitive nature of the Pallas Shoes corporation, Miranda sells her mother's most famous song to them and decides to work for the Logo Moguls, their advertising firm, in order to earn a living. But also present in Miranda's decision to work for Pallas is her desire to forget what Evie has shown her and to return to the ignorance of her previous life. Miranda can thus be seen as an instrument and victim of systemic violence, as defined by Slavoj Žižek, who argues that systemic violence "is invisible since it sustains the very zero-level standard against which we perceive something as subjectively violent" (2). Although Miranda is right in stating that she does not directly affect the women working in the factories, her decision to work for Pallas does not contribute to changing the exploitative conditions which she knows are imposed on them. In her desire to maintain social normalcy for herself, Miranda's decision to ignore the facts creates distance between herself and the workers whose exploitation she is aware of and ultimately does contribute to.

Lai foresees a world in which as corporations become more powerful they continually fail to acknowledge the social and environmental impacts of their practices. Nextcorp and Saturna, the novel's rivaling corporations, are concerned with profit, and do not engage in ethical deliberations when it comes to exploiting their patented workers, despite the fact that the Sonias are, apart from their point zero three per cent freshwater

carp genes (158), ninety-nine point ninety-seven percent human. Like the GE seeds and crops created by Nextcorp, the Sonias are patented life forms (158) and are therefore subject to corporate ownership. As products, the Sonias have no rights and are considered “illegal” (157-8) wherever they go. Thus Lai introduces cyborg politics and citizenship issues, which are compounded by the fact that the women used to produce the corporate clones are selected under the guise of the Diverse Genome Project which “focused on the peoples of the so-called Third World, Aboriginal peoples, and peoples in danger of extinction” (160), or, in others words, people already marginalized in the Euro- and male-centric West.<sup>7</sup> Lai portrays the corporations in her novel as disinclined to consider social and environmental issues in their policies, as evidenced by the rampant pollution in the Unregulated Zone (188) and the factories that move to increasingly desperate areas in order to keep production costs low (202). Thus, though corporations may be held accountable for their actions, Lai foresees that they will not typically take the initial responsibility to create positive social change.

Because she represents large corporations as being unreliable and untrustworthy, Lai establishes that social responsibility for action lies with the individual. The responsibility for acting and consuming ethically is the consumer’s because, as Domenec discusses, corporations will not take responsibility for their actions or products, except in a discursive way that makes them appear to be interested in benefiting people rather than making a profit (54). Consequently, it is individuals like the Sonias, individuals who are aware of the exploitation practiced by corporations and who have an interest in creating

---

<sup>7</sup> Citizenship and cyborg politics are beyond the scope of this essay, but Alessandra Capperdoni, Sharlee Reimer, Hee-Jung Serenity Joo, and Tara Lee provide good discussions of these issues with regard to Lai’s work.

social change, who act to bring about that change. Apart from sharing the information she has with Miranda, Evie participates in a protest in front of an industrial compound (148-50), and the Sonias produce shoe soles that imprint subversive messages on the ground such as “*What does it mean to be human?/How old is history?/The shoemakers have no elves*” (237) or

*materials: 10 units*

*labour: 3 units*

*retail price: 169 units*

*profit: 156 units*

*Do you care? (238)*

There are also unknown individuals who write graffiti onto walls about how to seal feet in plastic bags to prevent catching the dreaming disease (231). While the biotechnology industry uses discourse to promote their humanitarian and environmental agendas, and in that way “seeks ethical legitimacy for its efforts to obtain state subsidy and to minimize regulatory constraints – in particular, to treat GMOs as otherwise normal products” (Levidow 177), it is individuals who actually take the initiative to both expose the various falsehoods found in corporate discourse and act to demand a change in corporate practices. Miranda demonstrates how easily individuals can participate in the corporate culture of silencing by focusing on the personal benefits they receive from doing so, and she is faced with the choice of choosing whether to align herself with the corporations or with the subversive communities working to undermine their power; as Evie tells her, “you have to decide which side you’re on, baby girl” (154).

As I have discussed, genetic engineering reflects the reductive corporate ideology of compartmentalization and control. However, in the novel, references to the “mud and muck of origins” (268) challenge the reductive attitudes that allow for technologically-enabled genetic recombination and reproduction. The corporations in *Salt Fish Girl* value ideological simplicity (or exclusive belief in the master narrative) because that makes people predictable and easily controllable. But, by stressing the biological and ideological complexity of origins, Lai undermines the validity of attempts to control those origins. Whether biological or ideological, when origins are complex and interconnected rather than simple, isolated, and interchangeable, Lai points to the uncertainty that trying to control and manipulate those origins engenders. Acknowledging complex origins is subversive as it undercuts the power exercised by corporations in a capitalist society. Furthermore, emphasizing that the attempted control of the “mud and muck of origins” is upsetting (268) draws attention to the fact that corporate ideology attempts to compartmentalize and simplify life. Such emphasis likewise highlights that that attempted homogenization is indeed upsetting and is therefore worthy of attention and action which will ideally lead to change.

Though she has always known herself to be different, Miranda embraces her non-normativity as preferable to the normative life she had before meeting Evie. Pointing out that the dreaming disease does not leave Miranda feeling unwell, Evie asks, “then what’s the problem?” (164). Evie’s attitude indicates that she does not think the effects of the dreaming disease are an issue because, though they mark its bearers as non-normative, they are not life-threatening. However, Miranda is not able to answer Evie’s question directly because the two women are interrupted by “two young white men” (165) – the

embodiment of social privilege – entering the bus. The men’s entry is symbolic of the way that privilege potentially interrupts subversive conversation and action. Nevertheless, the interruption reinforces Miranda’s affinity with non-normativity as she witnesses Evie’s attempted defense of the young woman the men harass. As Evie transforms Miranda’s world into “something quite different from what it had been mere moments ago” (161), her perceptions regarding the value of corporate life and normativity alter, and she accepts herself in a way that she was incapable of beforehand: “Through all the years of my strange durian odour, it never occurred to me to tell anyone that nothing hurt” (167). Miranda’s realization that “nothing hurt” begins a perceptual shift that increases her skepticism regarding the corporate values that defined her as non-normative and required her to be ‘cured.’ This change helps Miranda begin to reconceptualize her own position in her society, which Lai demonstrates is a necessary component of resisting corporate homogenization and control because it disrupts the complacency that allows the practice of “conscious ignorance.”

Miranda’s queer body further becomes a site of resistance when she is capable of heeding Evie’s admonition that, when it comes to corporate exploitation and control, “It’s all there right in front of you. All you need to do is look” (160). Lai advocates a politics based on “shared experience, as opposed to shared origins” (Reimer 7), and in her novel, shared experience is grounded in the manipulative and secretive practices of corporations that perform and develop genetic engineering, and thus it is important to create a community with others who share the experience of being oppressed by corporate practices. As Miranda increasingly recognizes her queer affiliation with and desire for Evie, she likewise recognizes that she is “watching and listening in a way [she] had not

known how to before” (165). Thus she begins to acknowledge that her life has been predicated on the exploitation that the Sonias and others are subjected to because it maintains her desired living standard. Though, as discussed, Miranda initially has difficulty acting on that recognition, the act of recognition itself is an important component of her development and compels her to “rethink” (Plumwood n.p.) her life.



## **Chapter 6: Conclusion**

No revolution happens at the end of Lai's novel. No radical social change makes life better. But what does happen is that Miranda and Evie commit an act of resistance against corporate ideology by embracing their non-normative bodies and experiences, and entering an uncertain future together with their child. In an increasingly individualistic society that increasingly relies on social media, technology, and practices that distance people from one another mentally and often physically, the reminder that communities and friendships are valuable and powerful enough to create personal and social change is important. Like Miranda, we have a choice to make about the kind of world we want to live in and the kind of future we want to create, and if we can "understand ourselves to literally embody the historical shifts that connect gender, science, and cultural studies" (King 104), then we empower ourselves to influence the course these shifts take. But social change requires individuals to identify allies and to begin to consider how their actions impact others because silencing is not only practiced by corporations, but by individuals as well who do not want their lifestyle to change drastically. In other words, individuals must change themselves first if they desire social change. Concluding the novel by having Miranda leave with Evie despite her internal struggle regarding which course of action she should take suggests that ethical action will eventually prevail over issues of personal (dis)comfort, but only if the problems of exploitation and corporate secretiveness get acknowledged, in this case, and then only "until next time" (269), meaning only until the next social issue ethically requiring a paradigm shift and change in behaviour is brought to consciousness.

## Bibliography

- Andrée, Peter. "The Biopolitics of Genetically Modified Organisms in Canada." *Journal of Canadian Studies* 37.3 (2002): 162-91. *CBCA Complete*. Online. 05/02/2016.
- Bahng, Aimee. "Specters of the Pacific: Salt Fish Drag and Atomic Hauntologies in the Era of Genetic Modification." *Journal of American Studies* 49.4 (2015): 663-83. *Cambridge Journals*. Online. 03/15/2016.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail. "Discourse in the Novel." *Literary Theory: An Anthology*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Ed. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan. Malden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2004. 674-85. Print.
- Barthes, Roland. "Mythologies." *Literary Theory: An Anthology*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Ed. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan. Malden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2004. 81-9. Print.
- "Bioaccumulate, v." *Oxford English Dictionary: The Definitive Record of the English Language Online*. Oxford University Press, 2016. Online. 06/26/2016.
- Capperdoni, Alessandra. "Feminist Progenies – Unlawful Citizenship: Reproduction, Technology, and the Spectres of the Nation in Margaret Atwood and Larissa Lai." *West Coast Line* 42.3 (2008): 44-60. *CBCA Complete*. Online. 03/15/2016.
- Domenech, Fanny. "Monsanto's and Chevron's Home Pages in the US and the UK: Corporate Discourse as a Reflection of Social Trends?" *Ibérica* 27 (2014): 51-76. Online. 06/03/2016.

- Fowler, Cary. "Biotechnology, Patents and the Third World." *Biopolitics: A Feminist and Ecological Reader on Biotechnology*. Ed. Vandana Shiva and Ingunn Moser. London: Zed Books Ltd., 1995. 214-25. Print.
- "Genetic Engineering." *Food*. Greenpeace International, 2015. Online. 05/24/2016.
- Gordon, Jon. *Unsustainable Oil: Facts, Counterfacts, and Fictions*. Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2015. Print.
- Halley, Jean O'Malley. *The Parallel Lives of Women and Cows: Meat Markets*. New York: Palgrave Macmillian, 2012. Print.
- Holtug, Nils. "The Harm Principle and Genetically Modified Food." *Journal of Agriculture and Environmental Ethics* 14.2 (2001): 169-78. *CBCA Complete*. Online. 05/02/2016.
- Joo, Hee-Jung Serenity. "Reproduction, Reincarnation, and Human Cloning: Literary and Racial Forms in Larissa Lai's *Salt Fish Girl*." *Critique* 55.1 (2014): 46-59. Online. 03/15/2016.
- Jordan, Trish. "Monsanto Canada Comment on March Against Monsanto." *News and Views*. Monsanto Inc., 05/19/2016. Online. 05/26/2016.
- King, Katie. "Feminism and Writing Technologies: Teaching Queerish Travels through Maps, Territories, and Pattern." *Configurations* 2.1 (1994): 89-106. *Project MUSE*. Online. 07/31/2016.

- Kollek, Regine. "The Limits of Experimental Knowledge: A Feminist Perspective on the Ecological Risks of Genetic Engineering." *Biopolitics: A Feminist and Ecological Reader on Biotechnology*. Ed. Vandana Shiva and Ingunn Moser. London: Zed Books Ltd., 1995. 95-111. Print.
- Lai, Larissa. "Future Asians: Migrant Speculations, Repressed History, and Cyborg Hope." *West Coast Line* 38.2 (2004): 168-75. *CBCA Complete*. Online. 07/07/2016.
- . *Salt Fish Girl*. Toronto: Thomas Allen Publishers, 2002. Print.
- Lai, Paul. "Stinky Bodies: Mythological Futures and the Olfactory Sense in Larissa Lai's *Salt Fish Girl*." *MELUS* 33.4 (2008): 167-87. Online. 03/15/2016.
- Lee, Tara. "Mutant Bodies in Larissa Lai's *Salt Fish Girl*: Challenging the Alliance between Science and Capital." *West Coast Line* 38.2 (2004): 94-109. *CBCA Complete*. Online. 03/15/2016.
- Levidow, Les. "Whose Ethics for Agricultural Biotechnology?" *Biopolitics: A Feminist and Ecological Reader on Biotechnology*. Ed. Vandana Shiva and Ingunn Moser. London: Zed Books Ltd., 1995. 175-90. Print.
- Levidow, Les and Joyce Tait. "Error-Friendliness and the Evolutionary Impact of Deliberate Release of GMOs." *Biopolitics: A Feminist and Ecological Reader on Biotechnology*. Ed. Vandana Shiva and Ingunn Moser. London: Zed Books Ltd., 1995. 121-38. Print.

- Mansbridge, Joanna. "Abject Origins: Uncanny Strangers and Figures of Fetishism in Larissa Lai's *Salt Fish Girl*." *West Coast Line* 38.2 (2004): 121-33. *CBCA Complete*. Online. 03/15/2016.
- Marsden, Vanessa Rachael. "Bad [Wo]Men Eat Meat: Biopolitics and Cycles of Violence in Ruth Ozeki's *My Year of Meats*, Han Kang's *The Vegetarian*, and Kyung Ran Jo's *Tongue*." *Lire le corps biomédical: Regards sur la littérature canadienne/Reading the Biomedical Body from the Perspective of Canadian Literature*. Ed. Daniel Laforest, Guy Clermont, and Bertrand Rouby. Limoges: Presses Universitaires de Limoges, 2016. 77-95. Print.
- Meghani, Zahra. "Risk Assessment of Genetically Modified Food and Neoliberalism: An Argument for Democratizing the Regulatory Review Protocol of the Food and Drug Administration." *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics* 27.6 (2014): 967-89. *Springer*. Online.
- Otto, Eric C. *Green Speculations: Science Fiction and Transformative Environmentalism*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2012.
- "Our Commitment." *ConAgra Foods*. ConAgra Foods Inc., n.d. Online. 05/26/2016.
- Ozeki, Ruth, L. *My Year of Meats*. New York: Penguin Books, 1999. Print.
- Plumwood, Val. "Nature in the Active Voice." *Australian Humanities Review* 46 (2009): n.p. Online. 04/01/2016.
- Reimer, Sharlee. "Troubling Origins: Cyborg Politics in Larissa Lai's *Salt Fish Girl*." *Atlantis* 35.1 (2010): 4-14. Online. 03/15/2016.

- Selisker, Scott. “‘Stutter-Stop Flash-Bulb Strange’: GMOs and the Aesthetics of Scale in Paolo Bacigalupi’s *The Windup Girl*.” *Science Fiction Studies* 42.3 (2015): 500-18. *JSTOR*. Online. 06/03/2016.
- Shiva, Vandana. “The Seed and the Earth: The Colonization of Regeneration.” *Women in a Globalizing World: Transforming Equality, Development, Diversity, and Peace*. Ed. Angela Miles. Toronto: Inanna Publications and Education Inc., 2013. 210-7. Print.
- Streiffer, Robert and Thomas Hedemann. “The Political Import of Intrinsic Objections to Genetically Engineered Food.” *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics* 18.2 (2005): 191-210. *Springer*. Online. 05/02/2016.
- Tobler, Waldo. “On the First Law of Geography: A Reply.” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 94.2 (2004): 304-10. Print.
- Weaver, Ian C. G., et al. “Epigenetic Programming by Maternal Behavior.” *Nature Neuroscience* 7.8 (2004): 847-54. Online. 06/08/2016.
- Žižek, Slavoj. *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections*. London: Profile Books, Ltd., 2009. Print.