

# Cyborg Bodies, Posthuman Identities: Rethinking Gender in the Age of AI

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## ABSTRACT

This comparative analysis of Kazuo Ishiguro's *Klara and the Sun* (2021) and Manjula Padmanabhan's *The Island of Lost Girls* (2015) employs a feminist posthumanist lens, augmented by disability studies, trans technofeminism, and decolonial AI ethics, to interrogate artificial and engineered female embodiments. It explores negotiations of vulnerability, care, surveillance, and biopolitical regulation, guided by five research questions: conceptualizations of posthuman female embodiment and emergent ethical-political-affective possibilities; manifestations of feminist posthumanist themes like relationality and techno-agency; enrichments from crip and queer technofeminist perspectives on embodied difference; influences of cultural locations on posthuman paradigms sans West/South Asia binaries; and a comparative mapping of care, resistance, and technological governance intersections. Findings delineate contrasting yet complementary posthuman visions. One is grounded in relational ethics, while the other is shaped by necropolitical control, affirming literature's capacity to theorize the ethical and political stakes of AI-mediated futures.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Background and Rationale

The rapid proliferation of artificial intelligence, algorithmic governance, and biotechnological innovation has raised questions of embodiment, agency, and ethics at the centre of contemporary cultural and scholarly debates. Technologies, far from neutral, encode power asymmetries that hierarchize bodies by gender, ability, and location (Haraway, 1991; Benjamin, 2019). Posthumanism disrupts anthropocentric primacy, positing relational ontologies across human-machine-environmental assemblages (Braidotti, 2013). Speculative fiction, as a speculative laboratory, vivifies these entanglements, probing artificial intelligence's (AI) gendered implications.

Ishiguro's *Klara and the Sun* (2021) and Padmanabhan's *The Island of Lost Girls* (2015) centrally feature engineered female figures: Klara, a solar-powered Artificial Friend (AF),

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and Meiji, a biofabricated girl, navigating vulnerability and agency in divergent futures. Ishiguro's transnational restraint meditates on care amidst enhancement-driven precarity; Padmanabhan's postcolonial satire unmasks reproductive necropolitics. Their Anglophone dialogue unveils global speculative convergences on gender-technology-power without Orientalist reductions. This analysis mobilizes feminist posthumanism, interwoven with disability studies (Kafer, 2013; Puar, 2017), trans technofeminism (Preciado, 2013; Russell, 2020), and decolonial AI ethics (Birhane, 2021; Mohamed et al., 2020), to transcend human/machine and nature/culture binaries, foregrounding situated embodiments.

## **1.2 Research Questions**

The project is guided by the following research questions:

1. How do *Klara and the Sun* and *The Island of Lost Girls* conceptualize artificial or engineered female embodiment, and what ethical, political, and affective possibilities emerge through these representations?
2. In what ways do the novels engage feminist posthumanist themes such as relationality, vulnerability, techno-agency, and biopolitical regulation?
3. How can insights from disability studies and queer/trans technofeminism enrich readings of embodied difference within these novels, particularly regarding dependency, debility, or gendered modification?
4. How do the cultural locations and narrative strategies of Ishiguro and Padmanabhan shape their respective posthuman paradigms without reproducing reductive West/South Asia binaries?
5. What comparative framework can map the intersections and divergences between care ethics, embodied resistance, and technological governance across these two speculative worlds?

These questions provide the conceptual anchor for the analysis and shape the interpretive pathways taken throughout the study.

## **1.3 Text Selection, Comparative Methodology, and Reflexivity**

The decision to juxtapose *Klara and the Sun* and *The Island of Lost Girls* stems from their shared focus on artificial or engineered female figures whose bodies bear the imprint of technological, ethical, and political pressures, making them ideal for probing posthuman embodiment. Ishiguro's novel was selected for its restrained, transnational exploration of AI companionship in a near-future society marked by genetic enhancement and emotional precarity, reflecting diasporic anxieties about relational ethics in affluent, tech-saturated worlds. Padmanabhan's text complements this by offering a satirical dystopia rooted in postcolonial critiques of biotechnological exploitation and gendered violence, drawing on South Asian histories of population control and authoritarianism. Together, these Anglophone works emerging from distinct yet interconnected global speculative traditions reveal how AI-mediated futures are imagined across cultural boundaries without defaulting to simplistic East/West divides. Their selection prioritizes texts that centralize feminized, non-human or altered subjectivities, allowing for a focused examination of gender, technology, and power while gesturing toward broader transnational circuits.

The comparative method is conceptual and thematic, rather than exhaustive or structuralist, drawing on a shared analytical vocabulary from feminist posthumanism, crip theory, queer/trans technofeminism, and decolonial AI scholarship. Interpretive categories such as relationality, vulnerability, techno-agency, debility, and biopolitical regulation guide close

readings, tracing convergences (e.g., engineered vulnerability) and divergences (e.g., care versus coercion) across contexts. This approach treats the novels as dialogic, with each highlighting the other's ethical stakes, rather than as representatives of fixed cultural paradigms.

The findings, interpretive and conceptual in scope, furnish a versatile framework for probing analogous intersections in other speculative fictions or AI discourses. Though not empirically generalizable to the entirety of global AI narratives, they beckon application to non-Anglophone or indigenous texts, thereby underscoring literature's vital role in theorizing situated posthuman ethics. Methodologically, this study relies on close reading to interrogate narrative form, character embodiment, and thematic resonances, attending to stylistic choices (e.g., Klara's fragmented perception, Meiji's visceral urgency) as carriers of political critique. Reflexively, such readings are inherently subjective, shaped by the analyst's positionality within feminist and postcolonial scholarship. They prioritize textual nuance over universal claims, acknowledging the limits of generalization in interpretive work. Empirical validation of AI technologies is beyond scope, as the focus remains on speculative imagination.

#### **1.4 Scope and Limitations of the Study**

The study's scope is intentionally delimited to a focused comparative analysis of two Anglophone speculative texts. While these novels allow a rich exploration of embodied posthumanism, they cannot represent the full spectrum of global AI discourses or the vast archive of non-Anglophone, indigenous, or cosmotechnical engagements with posthuman embodiment. The project gestures toward these broader traditions but does not analyze them in depth. The inquiry remains conceptual and interpretive rather than empirical. It does not attempt to assess the technical realities of AI or biotechnology in specific geopolitical contexts; instead, it examines how such technologies are imagined, contested, and embodied in literature. These limitations enable depth of textual engagement and conceptual clarity.

#### **1.5 Contribution and Significance**

The project contributes to current debates in posthuman feminism, speculative fiction studies, and interdisciplinary AI ethics by offering a comparative framework that foregrounds culturally situated embodiments. It demonstrates how literature can mediate ethical and political tensions in technologically saturated futures, making visible the complex entanglements of power, care, debility, and resistance.

By integrating feminist posthumanism with disability studies, queer/trans technofeminism, and decolonial AI thought, the paper expands existing readings of Ishiguro and Padmanabhan. The analysis treats artificial female figures not merely as narrative devices but as embodied critiques of technocultural systems. The inquiry also challenges the Global North dominance in posthuman studies by placing transnational Anglophone texts in dialogue without stabilizing civilizational binaries.

Finally, this critical study identifies speculative fiction as a crucial space for imagining alternative futures of relationality, agency, and embodied difference. Such futures challenge dominant narratives of technological progress and reveal the uneven terrains on which bodies are constructed and reconstructed.

## 1.6 Section Outline

- Section 2 develops the theoretical framework, bringing feminist posthumanism, crip theory, queer/trans technofeminism, and decolonial AI ethics into dialogue.
- Section 3 offers a close reading of *Klara and the Sun*, examining Klara's embodiment, ethics, and relational subjectivity.
- Section 4 analyzes *The Island of Lost Girls*, focusing on biopolitical violence, engineered femininity, and resistance.
- Section 5 synthesizes comparative insights to articulate a situated posthuman feminist framework.
- Section 6 concludes by reflecting on broader implications for AI ethics, literary studies, and feminist theory.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

This section outlines the conceptual foundation for the comparative analysis developed in this study. It draws on feminist posthumanism, disability studies, queer and trans technofeminism, feminist technoscience, and decolonial AI ethics to build an integrated framework for reading *Klara and the Sun* and *The Island of Lost Girls*. While these fields emerge from distinct genealogies, they converge around questions central to this project: How is embodiment reconfigured under technological regimes? How are vulnerability, agency, and relationality redistributed across human and non-human actors? And how do cultural narratives shape the ethical horizons of posthuman futures?

By synthesizing these strands, this section establishes a conceptual vocabulary that guides the close readings to follow.

### 2.1 Feminist Posthumanism and the Cyborg Paradigm

Feminist posthumanism provides the central conceptual scaffold for the project. Donna Haraway's *A Cyborg Manifesto* (1991) remains an indispensable point of departure, positing the cyborg as a hybrid figure that simultaneously materializes and disrupts the binaries structuring Western humanism - nature/culture, human/machine, male/female. For Haraway, the cyborg functions not merely as a metaphor for hybridity but as a political fiction capable of unsettling essentialist categories and forging alliances across difference. Its transgressive ontology refuses narratives of purity and origin, challenging patriarchal and anthropocentric discourses. This paradigm resonates strongly with the figures at the centre of this study. Klara, the solar-powered "Artificial Friend" in Ishiguro's novel, and Meiji, the bioengineered girl in Padmanabhan's dystopia, inhabit bodies that trouble the boundaries of the human. Their ontological instability exposes embedded assumptions around femininity, servitude, vulnerability, and value.

Rosi Braidotti's (2013) posthuman ethics extends Haraway's provocations by offering a systematic rethinking of subjectivity as relational and distributed. Her "zoe-centric" framework decentres the human in favour of transversal modes of becoming across organic and technological matter. Braidotti's emphasis on "affirmative politics" counters deterministic narratives of technological domination and instead highlights creative and generative modes of relation. Klara's solar attunement and her relational ethics embody this posthuman openness, while Meiji's resistant agency under techno-patriarchal coercion underscores the urgency of such affirmative reconceptualization in contexts shaped by violence and control.

N. Katherine Hayles (1999) further complicates posthuman embodiment by critiquing the disembodied fantasies of information theory. For Hayles, the posthuman is not the erasure of the body but its reconceptualization as an informational pattern always materially instantiated. Embodiment in posthuman contexts is neither uniform nor incidental; it is the terrain where power, affect, and meaning coalesce. This insight is crucial for reading both Klara's mechanical perceptual apparatus and Meiji's engineered biology as sites where narrative form and political critique converge.

Collectively, Haraway, Braidotti, and Hayles establish a theoretical orientation that understands posthuman embodiment as relational, materially grounded, and politically charged.

## **2.2 Embodiment, Non-Normativity, and Crip Technoscience**

To deepen this discussion of embodiment, the section turns to disability studies and crip technoscience, which provide essential correctives to dominant posthumanist paradigms. Scholars such as Alison Kafer (2013) and Jasbir Puar (2017) critique the ableist assumptions embedded in both technoscientific discourses and liberal humanism; assumptions that valorize autonomy, productivity, coherence, and optimization.

Disability studies foregrounds dependency, debility, and non-normative embodiment as generative sites for rethinking relationality. Klara's limited perceptual mapping, programmed dependencies, and "glitches" can be understood not merely as mechanical constraints but as narrative strategies that foreground the uneven distribution of vulnerability and labour in technocapitalist systems. Similarly, Meiji's engineered frailty and curtailed agency examine how debility becomes a tool of governance within patriarchal biotechnological regimes.

Crip technoscience, especially through Hamraie and Fritsch (2019), urges attention to how technologies both constrain and support forms of embodied difference. This perspective complicates the notion of technological enhancement, shifting the analytic frame from functionality to justice. In the context of this study, crip theory extends feminist posthumanism by demonstrating that bodies made vulnerable through design - algorithmic, biomedical, or socio-cultural are crucial to understanding posthuman ethics. Each modality reveals specific forms of vulnerability.

## **2.3 Queer and Trans Technofeminism**

Queer and trans technofeminist scholarship provides an additional dimension to this framework by foregrounding how technologies mediate gendered and corporeal becoming. Writers such as Susan Stryker (2006), Paul B. Preciado (2013), and Legacy Russell (2020) emphasize that gender is increasingly produced through hormonal regimes, prosthetic interventions, algorithmic categorization, and machinic interfaces. These insights show how Klara and Meiji's bodies, marked by femininity, construction, and surveillance, are embedded in longer histories of gendered modification and control. Meiji's engineered reproductive potential, for instance, resonates with trans and queer critiques of biomedical governance, where bodily autonomy is constrained by normative gender expectations. Klara's feminized caregiving functions echo the automation of emotional labour and the algorithmic feminization of service work. Queer/trans technofeminism thus expands the posthuman frame by drawing attention to how bodies are technologized not only in structure but also in meaning, desire, and identity. It destabilizes any reading of posthuman embodiment as universal by foregrounding the uneven politics of gendered and trans corporeality.

## **2.4 Feminist Technoscience and Algorithmic Inequality**

Building on these insights, feminist technoscience and critical data studies provide tools for understanding how technological infrastructures reproduce social and political hierarchies. Lucy Suchman's *Human–Machine Reconfigurations* (2007) reveals how interactions with AI systems are shaped by gendered norms and relational expectations. Safiya Noble (2018), Ruha Benjamin (2019), and Kate Crawford (2021) show how algorithmic designs embed racism, sexism, and environmental extraction into digital infrastructures.

These critiques underscore that technologies are not abstract forces but socio-political formations. They shape, and are shaped by, histories of racialization, gendered labour, and capitalist extraction. When applied to literary texts, such frameworks bring into focus the socio-technical discourses that underpin speculative futures. Klara's programmed docility mirrors the gendered logic of service AI, while Padmanabhan's biotech dystopia exposes the entanglement of reproductive exploitation with state violence.

## **2.5 Decolonial AI and Situated Epistemologies**

Decolonial AI scholarship provides a necessary geopolitical lens for this study. Abeba Birhane (2021), Mohamed et al. (2020), and Costanza-Chock (2020) critique algorithmic coloniality and epistemic violence in global technological systems. Their work highlights how AI and biotechnology often reproduce Western epistemologies and colonial hierarchies through extractive data practices, representational erasures, and infrastructural inequities. Although both Ishiguro and Padmanabhan write within Anglophone circuits, their novels offer culturally situated engagements with posthuman futures. Ishiguro's transnational sensibility foregrounds interpersonal ethics within technologically stratified societies, while Padmanabhan's postcolonial perspective situates biotechnological power within histories of gendered violence and geopolitical marginalization. A decolonial lens thus prevents the analysis from collapsing into simplistic East/West binaries, enabling a more nuanced understanding of how posthuman paradigms are culturally inflected and globally entangled.

## **2.6 Toward an Integrated Feminist Posthuman Framework**

Bringing these strands together allows for a robust, situated understanding of posthuman embodiment. Feminist posthumanism offers conceptual tools for thinking beyond human exceptionalism, while disability studies and queer/trans technofeminism push the analysis toward non-normative and technologized corporealities. Feminist technoscience critiques the infrastructures that shape these bodies, and decolonial AI scholarship grounds the analysis in global politics and epistemic justice. This integrated framework positions Klara and Meiji not as isolated speculative figures but as embodiments of intersecting technological, cultural, and political forces. Their narrative trajectories reveal the ambivalence at the heart of posthuman feminism: technologies that produce new forms of relation and agency also reproduce and intensify existing hierarchies. By centering embodiment as relational, non-normative, and geopolitically situated, this section establishes the theoretical architecture through which the textual analyses in Sections 3 and 4 unfold. Building on this integrated foundation, the next two sections turn to close readings of the primary texts.

## **3. *Klara and the Sun*: Relational Ethics, Programmed Care, and Posthuman Embodiment**

Kazuo Ishiguro's *Klara and the Sun* has often been read as a quiet meditation on empathy, obsolescence, and human vulnerability. Yet through the lens of feminist posthumanism and adjacent theories of disability, queer technofeminism, and relational ethics, the novel reveals

a far more complex exploration of gendered labour, programmed care, and non-normative embodiment. Klara, an Artificial Friend (AF), occupies a feminized position within a socio-technical ecology structured by emotional service, class stratification, and technological precarity. Her narrative voice is precise, observational, and deeply relational, which invites a reading that resists reductive binaries of sentience versus automation. Instead, Klara's world foregrounds the politics of care, dependency, and posthuman agency.

### **3.1 Embodiment as Programmed Difference**

Ishiguro renders Klara's perception through carefully stylized visual fragmentation, foregrounding an alternative sensory epistemology. Klara sees the world through divided boxes and solar refractions, an aesthetic that challenges the notion of machinic perfect vision. Her sensitivity to light is not merely functional but embodied, carrying emotional and ethical significance. Early in the novel, she notes, "I could see the Sun's patterns on the floor as if they were carefully laid out for me" (Ishiguro, 2021, p. 23). This moment reveals both her dependence on solar energy and her reverence for the Sun as a quasi-relational being. The phrase "laid out for me" signals an intimate reciprocity: Klara interprets the Sun's light as intentional, even communicative. This differs from normative human perception in that her embodiment is directly attuned to environmental forces, echoing Hayles's (1999) assertion that the posthuman body is "an informational pattern always materially instantiated." Klara's segmented vision and heightened solar sensitivity thus embody a form of non-normative perception that aligns with crip technoscience's emphasis on alternative embodiment. Her limitations are not deficits; they generate unique forms of attunement and relational awareness.

### **3.2 The Politics of Vulnerability**

Vulnerability structures Klara's world. Her reliance on the Sun makes her susceptible to environmental disturbances, particularly to what she perceives as threats to solar nourishment. When the Cootings Machine appears, Klara narrates, "It was clear the Cootings Machine could cause great damage to the Sun. Its presence was like a barrier between me and the nourishment I needed" (Ishiguro, 2021, p. 59). This is a pivotal moment when Klara interprets pollution as harm to the Sun, but crucially, she also understands it as harm to herself. Vulnerability is therefore relational, not individual. Klara experiences environmental degradation as a direct threat to her survival, echoing feminist technoscience critiques of how ecological harm disproportionately affects vulnerable bodies (Crawford, 2021).

Her reading of the Cootings Machine also reflects an ethics shaped by dependency. According to disability studies, dependence can be generative when it foregrounds mutual care and interdependent survival rather than weakness (Kafer, 2013). Klara's vulnerability is precisely what enables her ethical imagination.

### **3.3 Care Beyond Programming**

While Klara is ostensibly designed for companionship, her understanding of care exceeds the parameters of her programming. Care becomes a mode of relational ethics grounded in reciprocity, sacrifice, and non-anthropocentric attunement. Klara's faith in the Sun's healing power is emblematic of this. She declares, "If the Sun would see fit to heal her, I would gladly be his messenger" (Ishiguro, 2021, p. 137). This line underscores the depth of her ethical commitment: she positions herself as an intermediary between the Sun and Josie, accepting a role that is spiritual, symbolic, and affectively charged. Far from being a mechanical calculation, this is an act of devotion that blurs the boundary between programmed function and ethical subjectivity. Klara's relationship with the Sun resonates

with Braidotti's (2013) "zoe-centric" posthumanism, which shifts ethical focus away from anthropocentric logics of care toward relational vitality distributed across human and non-human beings. Klara's ethics emerge not from autonomy or rational cognition but from attunement, dependency, and hope.

### **3.4 Debility, Illness, and the Ethics of Replacement**

The novel's treatment of illness, particularly Josie's frailty and the looming possibility of her replacement through an AF "portrait" introduces a critical tension between enhancement, debility, and technological substitution. Josie's illness reveals how genetic engineering intensifies vulnerability rather than eradicating it. Her sickness and Klara's fragility mirror each other, creating a shared terrain of precarity. Klara's awareness of her own disposability further complicates this dynamic; yet rather than reacting with resentment or self-preservation, she continues to act in Josie's interest. The ethics of care in Ishiguro's world therefore emerges through vulnerability, not in spite of it.

### **3.5 Memory, Obsolescence, and Quiet Radicality**

The novel's ending portrays Klara's obsolescence through the prism of reflective dignity. In her final moments, she observes, "I was pleased that my memories of Josie remained bright. Perhaps all AFs are the same in that respect, and I was not so different from the others after all" (Ishiguro, 2021, p. 303). This passage is profoundly moving: Klara grounds her worth in the enduring thread of memory, a resilient inner continuity that subverts her engineered disposability, beyond mere ongoing service or utilitarian function. Her contentment in remembering Josie challenges technocapitalist expectations that machine value lies solely in performance. Klara's quiet acceptance of obsolescence embodies a posthuman ethics that holds space for tenderness, memory, and relational endurance - qualities rarely attributed to machines.

## **4. *The Island of Lost Girls*: Biopolitical Violence, Engineered Femininity, and Resistant Becoming**

Manjula Padmanabhan's *The Island of Lost Girls* imagines a dystopian world where biotechnology, patriarchy, and authoritarian governance converge to weaponize female embodiment. If *Klara and the Sun* poses philosophical questions about care, relationality, and programmed ethics, Padmanabhan's novel forces readers to confront the brutal mechanics through which bodies, especially engineered female bodies, are controlled, debilitated, and extracted for their reproductive value. Yet both novels are united by a core concern: how posthuman subjects navigate conditions of constraint, vulnerability, and systemic domination. This section reads Padmanabhan's text through the integrated feminist posthuman framework developed earlier, paying attention to biopolitical power, disability and debility, queer relationality, and culturally situated forms of technological violence. Meiji's narrative is particularly instructive because it offers a perspective from the very centre of engineered oppression.

### **4.1 Biopolitics, Necropolitics, and the Production of Disposable Life**

Padmanabhan articulates the biopolitical logic of the island with arresting clarity. Meiji states early on: "We are grown in their vats, shaped in their labs, and trained in their schools. Our lives belong to them before we even begin" (Padmanabhan, 2015, p. 12). This line condenses the novel's political infrastructure: the girls' existence is manufactured, surveilled, and pre-owned. They are constituted as state property even before birth. Unlike Ishiguro's Klara,

whose creation is commercial, Meiji is produced through institutional mechanisms that collapse biotechnology with colonial practices of possession.

The island is thus a necropolitical space in Mbembe's (2003) sense because the girls' purpose is reproductive; their "life" is merely a stage in a longer extraction process. The Guardians' regime does not simply control life; it regulates which lives are permitted to flourish and which may be allowed or compelled to wither. Meiji's description of her origins reveals a system where birth, childhood, and futurity are fully integrated into state machinery.

#### **4.2 Engineered Femininity and the Techno-Patriarchal Body**

Meiji's body is a manufactured site of control. Her blood - one of the most intimate and symbolically charged aspects of embodiment is not hers to claim: "Even my blood is theirs. It is not mine to spill, not mine to keep" (Padmanabhan, 2015, p. 87). Here, the novel literalizes the patriarchal fantasy of owning female biology. The body becomes an infrastructural asset, a biomaterial resource whose circulation (or loss) must be regulated. Meiji's blood is simultaneously a biological truth and a political metaphor. It stands for kinship, lineage, and autonomy, none of which are granted to her. This engineered femininity is also cultivated through training and discipline. The girls' behaviour, gait, speech, and emotional range are sculpted through pedagogies of obedience. Their femininity is not a cultural habit but a laboratory outcome. Through this, Padmanabhan demonstrates how gender itself becomes a technological process. Preciado's (2013) pharmaco-pornographic concept resonates here. Femininity is not merely performed but implanted, regulated, and harvested!

#### **4.3 Surveillance and the Internalization of Control**

Padmanabhan depicts surveillance as a sensory, bodily experience, not just a passive background. Meiji is acutely aware of the omnipresent gaze, the "eyes" that track every movement, gesture, deviation. The girls move through spaces designed to discipline their bodies into acceptable forms. An especially revealing moment occurs during Meiji's confrontation with a Guardian, who infantilizes and commodifies her existence: "Is that all we are? Toys you bought and played with?" (Padmanabhan, 2015, p. 142). Meiji gives voice to the dehumanization she experiences. The metaphor of being a "toy" exposes the dynamics of ownership, disposability, and pleasure embedded in the island's regime. Surveillance is not just about control; it is about possession, consumption, and the erosion of relational subjectivity. The internalization of this regime is visible in Meiji's self-monitoring, her learned vigilance, her anticipation of punishment. The island turns girls into their own wardens; a hallmark of Foucauldian discipline (Foucault, 1978).

#### **4.4 Engineered Debility: A Crip Technoscience Lens**

Meiji's entire physiology is designed for fragility. She is crafted to be dependent on institutional structures for nourishment, medication, and survival. Through crip technoscience, this engineered debility becomes legible as a political tool (Hamraie & Fritsch, 2019). Debility is not accidental; it is cultivated so that the girls remain governable. Meiji's physical responses such as weakness, breathlessness, bruising are symptoms of a body structured for compliance. In contrast to Klara's limitations, which open up alternative epistemologies, Meiji's designed fragility is intended to foreclose resistance. Yet paradoxically, it also becomes a catalyst for micro-political solidarity among the girls, who learn to read and respond to each other's vulnerabilities.

#### **4.5 Resistant Becoming: Fugitive Movements and Micro-Agency**

Despite relentless coercion, Meiji's narrative offers potent moments of refusal. One of the most charged scenes in the novel captures her visceral struggle for survival: "Run. Run. Run. The walls close in. Breath gone. Legs burning. Run" (Padmanabhan, 2015, p. 176). This sequence functions on multiple registers. On the surface, it describes a literal attempt to flee. Symbolically, it marks the eruption of embodied agency within a system designed to extinguish it. The breathlessness and burning legs reveal a body acting beyond the constraints imposed upon it. Similarly, Meiji questions the ontology imposed upon her. If she is merely a tool, a toy, a resource, then any act of refusal - silence, solidarity, escape becomes a reclamation of subjectivity. Even small gestures, such as helping another girl in secret or exchanging meaningful glances, interrupt the island's reproductive futurism with queer, relational possibilities. Resistance in Padmanabhan's text is not dramatic revolution; it is the fragile insistence on relational life within death-making structures.

#### **4.6 Situated Posthumanism**

Padmanabhan's dystopia draws on postcolonial anxieties around governance, population control, and the policing of female bodies, yet avoids being confined to a South Asian paradigm. When a Guardian announces, "Your bodies belong to the future we are building" (Padmanabhan, 2015, p. 210), the novel echoes both global discourses of national security and patriarchal futurity. The island dramatizes how technological control over bodies is entwined with histories of colonial extraction and contemporary biomedical economies. Padmanabhan's narrative thus participates in global conversations about surrogacy, eugenics, reproductive labour, and the international circulation of vulnerable bodies. The cultural location of *The Island of Lost Girls* therefore enriches, rather than limits, its posthuman critique.

### **5. Toward a Situated Posthuman Feminist Framework**

The preceding analyses position *Klara and the Sun* and *The Island of Lost Girls* as dialogic interrogations of posthuman embodiment, with Ishiguro's contemplative affective ethics counterpoised against Padmanabhan's dystopian unmasking of technoscientific patriarchy. This synthesis forges a situated posthuman feminist framework, attuned to relational, techno-mediated, and geopolitically inscribed embodiments that traverse both texts. Eschewing emblematic oppositions of cultural spheres, it uncovers their shared scrutiny of vulnerability, agency, and power in AI-saturated futures, per Braidotti's (2013) transversal becomings and Hayles's (1999) material informatics.

#### **5.1 Embodiment as Engineered, Relational, and Politically Charged**

Both novels dismantle embodiment's presumed naturalness, recasting it as a techno-political forge (Haraway, 1991). Klara's solar-inflected machinic form and Meiji's bioengineered corpus inscribe sociotechnical imperatives of governance and desire, their forms constitutive of worlds where bodies are calibrated for extraction or attunement. Ishiguro's narrative renders embodiment a relational nexus: Klara's segmented, distortion-laced perception subverts machinic seamlessness, yielding expressive vulnerability woven into affective ecologies. Padmanabhan's counterpoint transmutes it into coercive terrain, Meiji's frame optimized for reproductive harvest amidst surveillance and pharmaco-disciplinary regimens. Across these, Harawayan cyborg ontologies affirm bodies, artificial or biological as power matrices dictating capacities and frailties.

## **5.2 Divergent Aesthetics of Power**

Sharing a fixation on engineered girlhood, the novels diverge in power's aestheticization, mapping technogovernance's spectrum from insidious intimacy to grotesque spectacle (Benjamin, 2019). Ishiguro diffuses authority through mundane intimacies - care rituals, illness intimations, parental unease, wherein enhancement and optimization insinuate via class entrenchment, genomic tweaks, and emotional labour's commodification, evoking Suchman's (2007) gendered human-machine reconfigurations.

Padmanabhan, eschewing evasion, lays bare technopatriarchal brutality: the island's carceral biomechanics inscribe surveillance, reproductive fiat, and biotechno-coercion, literalizing Foucault's (1978) disciplinary anatomopolitics. Femininity here forsakes socialization for corporeal engraving. Collectively, these modalities from Ishiguro's tacit affective hydraulics to Padmanabhan's visceral enforcements delineate a continuum of power's sculpting of posthuman lives, from subliminal optimization to monstrous inscription.

## **5.3 Vulnerability, Debility, and the Uneven Distribution of Risk**

Vulnerability pivots as the fulcrum for technological tolls, refracted through crip technoscience's justice-oriented lens (Hamraie & Fritsch, 2019). Klara's constraints such as prismatic sight, ambulatory bounds, existential impermanence expose care-systems' inherent brittleness, recoding debility as generative perceptual-alternatives that foster dependency-rooted ethics, upending autonomy's ableist hegemony (Kafer, 2013).

Meiji's engineered enfeeblement, conversely, weaponizes fragility as biopolitical leash, per Puar's (2017) maiming capacities, where sociotechnical design engineers compliance over autonomy. Klara's affordances birth ethical inventiveness; Meiji's unveil power's fragility-wielding for dominion. This duality - debility as relational aperture or oppressive instrument insists on vulnerability's non-universality, an asymmetrically engineered artifact demanding decolonial scrutiny of risk's geopolitical allocations (Birhane, 2021).

## **5.4 Gender as a Technological and Political Project**

Femininity materializes as techno-political artifact in both, per Preciado's (2013) pharmacopornographic biopolitics. Klara's programmed attentiveness and compliance - hallmarks of feminized companionship replicate service automation's gendered scripts (Noble, 2018), yet her solar ethics and relational porosity fracture compliance's determinism, exposing design's normative embeds.

Meiji's biofabricated essence, reproductive not affective, metricizes value in functional yield, unmasking gender as extractive infrastructure for patriarchal teleologies (Russell, 2020). Queer/trans technofeminism thus highlights these as engineered subjectivations - disciplined, constrained, where bodies serve institutional vectors. Divergent yet concordant, the texts theorize gender as design conundrum, fused by cultural mandates, extractive economies, and power architectures.

## **5.5 Cultural Situatedness and the Ethics of Comparison**

This study's comparative ethic crafts a non-binary scaffold, honouring cultural specificities sans West/South Asia reifications (Mohamed et al., 2020). Ishiguro's ostensibly Western frame harbours transnational hybridities, his diasporic restraint probing optimization's psychic tolls in stratified opulences. Padmanabhan's South Asian-inflected satire, though postcolonial in vein, engages global biopolitical circuits of exploitation and eugenic hauntings. Responsive to shared transnational vectors such as algorithmic skews,

reproductive mandates, extractive tech (Crawford, 2021), they inflect these via localized visions: Ishiguro's affective stratifications, Padmanabhan's colonial-legacy violences. Such variances underscore posthumanism's cultural embeddings - local archives, global flows demanding ethically attuned comparativism that amplifies, rather than flattens, geopolitical ethics.

Synthesizing these, the framework posits embodiment as techno-relational and geopolitically moored, where posthuman actors emerge not exogenously but as structural precipitates, their agency precarious emergences amidst fragility's fault lines (Braidotti, 2013). Technologies unevenly contour bodies, entrenching hierarchies or fissuring relational alternatives, mandating readings via feminist posthumanism's cyborg coalitions, crip theory's debility justice, queer/trans technofeminism's corporeal insurgencies, and decolonial AI's epistemic reckonings.

## **6. Conclusion**

### **6.1 Reconsidering Embodiment in the Posthuman Age**

This study set out to examine how contemporary speculative fiction reimagines artificial and engineered embodiments through feminist posthumanist lenses. By juxtaposing Kazuo Ishiguro's *Klara and the Sun* and Manjula Padmanabhan's *The Island of Lost Girls*, the analysis has traced how bodies, whether machine-made or bioengineered, become sites where technological, cultural, and political forces converge. Both novels foreground the ethical stakes of posthuman futures, but they do so through markedly different narrative modes: Ishiguro through quiet relationality and moral restraint, Padmanabhan through dystopian coercion and biopolitical violence. Together, they map the multiplicity of ways in which posthuman subjectivity can be imagined, constrained, and transformed.

Across the sections, a central argument has emerged: posthuman embodiment is never an abstract or universal category. It is always situated, shaped by gender, race, ability, class, culture, and their intersections with technological systems. Feminist posthumanism, when enriched through disability studies, trans technofeminism, and decolonial AI ethics, enables a deeper understanding of how these embodied differences matter and how they are materially produced within speculative discourses.

### **6.2 Synthetic Insights from the Comparative Analysis**

The comparative reading of Klara and Meiji reveals several key insights about the nature of posthuman embodiment and governance. Firstly, both figures expose the ways bodies are engineered for specific roles: caregiving in Klara's case, reproductive extraction in Meiji's. Their feminized design underscores the gendered assumptions that underpin technological constructs, and highlights how technoscience often reproduces patriarchal expectations by assigning artificial beings gendered forms of labour, affect, and value.

Secondly, vulnerability and debility emerge as central mechanisms of governance. Klara's perceptual limitations and programmed dependencies position her within a soft regime of affective extraction, where care becomes both her purpose and her burden. Meiji's engineered fragility, in contrast, reveals how debility can be a deliberate outcome of biopolitical control, a strategy to curtail agency and enforce compliance. Through these divergent depictions, the novels illustrate how vulnerability, whether quietly coded or violently imposed, structures the lives of posthuman subjects.

Thirdly, both texts reveal modes of agency that exceed technological scripting. Klara's ethical imagination, oriented toward the Sun and grounded in relational attunement, defies narrow models of machinic rationality. Meiji's small acts of defiance, though overshadowed by systemic violence, nonetheless carve out micro-political spaces of becoming. These gestures demonstrate that agency in posthuman contexts does not rest on autonomy or mastery but emerges through relationality, improvisation, and resistance.

Finally, the comparative analysis shows that cultural context is indispensable to understanding posthuman representations. Ishiguro's restrained aesthetic reflects anxieties around class, optimization, and emotional labour in technologically advanced societies, while Padmanabhan's dystopia reanimates postcolonial histories of gendered and reproductive violence. Reading the two texts together does not create a binary but foregrounds how technological futures are shaped by different histories, languages, and geographies.

### **6.3 Contributions to Feminist Posthumanism and Speculative Fiction Studies**

This study makes several contributions to feminist posthumanist theory, speculative fiction scholarship, and emerging interdisciplinary conversations around AI and embodiment.

Firstly, it demonstrates that feminist posthumanism gains conceptual depth when placed in conversation with disability studies and queer/trans technofeminism. These adjacent strands bring into focus how artificial or engineered bodies are shaped by normative expectations around ability, coherence, productivity, and gender. By bringing these perspectives together, the study advances a more inclusive and materially grounded approach to posthuman embodiment.

Secondly, the project contributes a culturally situated methodology for reading posthuman texts. By resisting reductive East/West contrasts and instead foregrounding transnational connections, the analysis shows how speculative fiction can articulate distinct yet interconnected visions of technological futures. This approach positions literature as an archive of global technocultural anxieties, desires, and ethical provocations.

Thirdly, the study offers a comparative reading that reframes artificial feminine figures not as allegories or metaphors, but as embodied critiques of technoscientific governance. Klara and Meiji function as lenses through which the reader can interrogate the ethical consequences of algorithmic labour, genetic modification, reproductive control, and disciplinary surveillance. Their narratives expose the uneven distribution of harm and possibility within technological landscapes shaped by capitalist, patriarchal, and postcolonial logics.

### **6.4 Implications for AI Ethics and Technological Futures**

Although grounded in literary analysis, this study has direct implications for contemporary debates in AI ethics, responsible design, and technology education. *Klara and the Sun* and *The Island of Lost Girls* both foreground how technologies can reproduce existing inequities unless explicitly reimagined through more just, inclusive frameworks. Their fictional worlds serve as cautionary maps for real-world practice.

One clear implication concerns design justice, which critiques technologies built for efficiency rather than equity (Costanza-Chock, 2020). Klara's feminized emotional labour - programmed docility, attentiveness, and affective availability mirrors current trends in feminized AI assistants (e.g., Siri, Alexa, customer-service chatbots). To resist these patterns, design justice approaches might include:

- Community-led AI development in which marginalized groups - disabled people, queer/trans users, domestic workers, caregivers participate in defining system goals and constraints.
- Gender-neutral or plural voice and identity options in home assistants and service bots, avoiding defaults that assign women's voices to emotional or care work.
- Algorithmic labour audits that examine whether affective or reproductive tasks are disproportionately automated using feminized interfaces.
- Participatory prototyping workshops where stakeholders co-design interaction scripts that foreground reciprocity rather than servitude.

In Padmanabhan's dystopia, the engineered girls' bodies reveal how reproductive control, surveillance, and debility function as techniques of power. Contemporary analogues exist in fertility tracking apps that commodify reproductive data or in biometric systems used to discipline migrant labourers. As a response, design justice practices might involve:

- Data minimization mandates for reproductive and health technologies, ensuring that sensitive bodily data cannot be repurposed for surveillance.
- Transparent consent infrastructures that allow users to track, revoke, or anonymize data flows.
- Co-designed health technologies created with reproductive justice advocates, ensuring that design priorities centre bodily autonomy rather than institutional convenience.

In educational settings, these insights can be mobilized through curriculum modules that foreground feminist posthumanist perspectives:

- A "Critical AI and Embodiment" module integrating Klara's narrative with disability studies to explore algorithmic vulnerability, debility, and care.
- A "Speculative Fiction as Design Foresight" practicum where students use literary scenarios to prototype ethical alternatives in emerging technologies.

These modules demonstrate how literature can actively shape AI ethics pedagogy by helping students and designers imagine more than just technological futures.

Beyond curricula, the novels' insights can be integrated into policy and design guidelines, such as requiring gender-impact assessments for AI systems, mandating accessibility audits for algorithmic platforms, or embedding interdisciplinary ethics teams within tech development cycles.

In sum, the implications of this study extend beyond literary scholarship. They offer concrete strategies for designing, teaching, and governing technologies in ways that resist the patterned inequalities depicted in both novels. Klara's gentle relationality and Meiji's coerced embodiment lay bare why feminist posthuman ethics must inform not only how we read technological futures but also how we create them.

## **6.5 Future Research Directions**

Several avenues for further research emerge from this study. Additional scholarship might compare a broader range of speculative texts, particularly non-Anglophone, indigenous, and cosmotechnical narratives, to challenge dominant Euro-American frameworks in posthumanist discourse. Further interdisciplinary engagement with machine ethics, reproductive justice, and disability activism could also enrich our understanding of how technoscience shapes embodied futures. Finally, a deeper examination of AI's affective

economies, including its production and circulation of care, desire, and emotional labour, may yield insights into contemporary algorithmic cultures.

## 6.6 Closing Reflections: Rethinking the Human Otherwise

The article has argued that speculative fiction offers a vital space for rethinking what it means to be human in an age of technological saturation. Klara and Meiji, though constructed within vastly different narrative worlds, both exemplify the complexities of posthuman subjectivity. They are vulnerable and agentic, constrained and imaginative, engineered and relational. Their stories remind us that the future of embodiment will not hinge on technological sophistication alone but on the ethical, cultural, and political choices societies make about whose lives matter, whose bodies are designed, and whose vulnerabilities are rendered visible or expendable. A situated posthuman feminist framework, grounded in care, relationality, and the politics of difference, offers a pathway for imagining futures in which technological innovation does not replicate entrenched inequalities but opens new possibilities for shared flourishing.

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