

**Controlled (Post)Human Bodies in Minister Faust's *War & Mir*,
Volume I: *Ascension***



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Questioning In/Equalities

Minister Faust's self-published and under-researched science fiction (SF) novel *War and Mir, Volume I: Ascension* (2012) addresses the attempted control of (post)human bodies within fictional systems of biopolitics. As the first novel in a trilogy, the narrative recounts the turbulent story of the human protagonist Harq, a man in his thirties, who is suddenly confronted with a powerful princess, an intergalactic system of power, life beyond earth, and a journey through space. This description positions the novel as a fascinating SF space opera, a genre which scholar Sherryl Vint describes as a narrative filled with "thrilling space battles, heroic masculinity, stunning technology, and imperiled women," while it also relies on the fulfillment of prophecies and the presence of "a mysterious force" (2). In this regard, the novel shares many narrative parallels with George Lucas's famous *Star Wars* saga, a movie series that spans over four decades (2). The saga also includes a variety of masculine heroes as well and introduces the "force," which imbues Jedi knights with their powers.

However, Vint's description of the genre can be misleading or interpreted as incomplete since Faust's novel also includes a critical commentary on systems of power and possible abuses of hierarchical structures. As I observe, the novel emphasizes and condemns the horrific enslavement and mistreatments of predominantly black bodies. I elaborate through the example of *War & Mir* how the larger genre of SF works as an important tool of social critique which makes systemic racism visible. I compare the political treatment of the (post)human bodies in Faust's novel to the treatment of black, disenfranchised people who suffer amongst systems of discrimination and racism across borders. The Canadian novel includes racist structures with regards to the treatment of othered black bodies that are similar to those in the U.S. antebellum South while it also reveals how racism and black diaspora moves beyond borders and into space. Accordingly, Alexander Weheliye rightfully asserts that "questions of humanity . . . have relied heavily on the concepts of the cyborg and the posthuman," while at the same time not taking into account "race as a constitutive category in thinking about the parameters of humanity" (8). While presenting an inherently racist system, Faust's novel reflects upon the interests of leading powers in maintaining regulatory mechanisms over the life and death of these bodies. The novel arguably approaches bodies as a biopolitical problem whose control demonstrates an exertion of power in an inherently racist system, which is interested in maintaining regulatory mechanisms over life and death.

The narrative focuses on representations of black diaspora by introducing the characters Harq and Thagó. I contend that the two black men are central to the racial framing of the novel. When the protagonist Harq is confronted with the revelation of an unknown universe filled with foreign species, and unknown systems of power, he slowly begins to investigate and question the mechanisms of the regulations in place. Similarly, this analysis is going to investigate Faust's narrative, which represents attempts to control bodies within fictional systems of biopolitics that use biopower to control human and non-human populations. The French philosopher Michel Foucault famously introduced the theoretical concept of biopolitics in his lecture "Society Must Be Defended." In his lecture, Foucault provides the broad definition of biopolitics as the "State control of the biological" productivity of bodies (1440). Importantly, Foucault's construct of biopolitics does not consider systemic racism. While referring to the nineteenth century, he situates man as a living being who is under the control of the state who has the "power's hold over life," also known as "biopower" (1440). In Faust's novel, Harq experiences various systems of such "biopower."

On his journey to foreign planets, Harq not only becomes aware of his lack of control over his own (post)human body, but he also witnesses an excessiveness of wealth enabled by enslavement. Importantly, I investigate the portrayed bodies as 'posthuman' because of the transformative aspects of the ontological explorations of the human. Rosi Braidotti provides a useful definition of the complex term 'posthuman':

The posthuman predicament is such as to force a displacement of the lines of demarcation between structural differences, or ontological categories, for instance between the organic and the inorganic, the born and the manufactured, flesh and metal, electronic circuits and organic nervous systems. (90)

Thus, the posthuman concerns the transgression of binaries between human and non-human, between subject and object, and to take it one step further while considering insights from Critical Race Theory (CRT), between free and enslaved bodies. The posthuman attempts to move away from a human-centered, anthropocentric approach. In conjunction with Foucault's observations on biopolitics, Braidotti offers an insightful observation of bodies as liminal, taking on blurry ontological positions. While Foucault observes the control of a state over *human* bodies, I inquire whether his theory is applicable to posthuman bodies as well. I ask: How are *posthuman* bodies controlled in Faust's narrative and by whom? Zakiyyah Iman Jackson also calls attention to the fact that early posthumanist scholars of the 1990s "sidestepped the analytical challenged posed by the categories of race, colonialism, and slavery" (671). It is problematic that race as a critical term is absent in much posthumanist discourse (Ellis 7). Therefore, a CRT investigation of "the relationship among race, racism and power" and its critical engagement with "the very foundations of the liberal order" serves as a guide throughout this analysis (Delgado and Stefancic 3). Thus, this essay establishes linkages between Foucault's observations, posthumanist thought, and constructions of racism.

While especially focusing on the treatment of children as slaves, the sexual exploitation of bodies and the control over bodies through systems of racism and sub-human re-categorization, this essay discusses the dehumanization of posthuman, 'othered' bodies. In this context, I investigate the co-dependent but isolated enslaved groups of humans and numans in Faust's novel within the framework of CRT. In comparison to humans, numans are the only other sentient population in the universe apart from humans (Faust 46). Posthumanism continues to rapidly evolve while establishing connections to fields such as postcolonialism, animal studies, queer studies and CRT (Jackson 674). "Numans" appear almost virtually indistinguishable from humans, apart from their skin marks. They are the only other sentient population in the universe apart from humans and are responsible for abducting humans from earth (Faust 46). In comparison to humans, numans are the only other sentient population (46).

Uncovering Biopolitical Hierarchies: Harq's Journey and Awakening

Harq begins his journey in his home on earth in Edmonton, Canada. He finds out that his friend Thagó is indeed a Suftem, or "a former human who was abducted from earth and was raised by monks" on a planet called Quorodis (Faust 37). His friend Thagó enlightens the confused Harq by describing to him the knowledge of *Yuthi*, a mysterious, magical knowledge of the universe (73). This knowledge is comparable to the dark side of the force present in the *Star Wars* franchise and already touches upon constructions of biopolitics since power is inextricably linked to knowledge as Foucault observes (1444). Similarly, Weheliye suggests the idea of "a technological assemblage of humanity, technology circumscribed here in the broadest sense as the application of *knowledge* to the practical aims of human life . . . of what it means to be human in the modern world" (12, emphasis added). The technological assemblage and the dark force of the *Yuthi* thus signifies the idea of a powerful knowledge that commands the fictional universe in Faust's novel. In a biopolitical hierarchy, the *Yuthi* finds itself the mediator and facilitator of such a hierarchy. Thus, Harq suddenly finds himself in a traditional SF scenario of cognitive estrangement due to his introduction to an unfamiliar "novum" of knowledge that forces him to re-establish his world-view (Vint 38).

Following this incredible discovery of life beyond earth, mysterious men chase Harq and Thagó. The two escape these alien "terrorists," who nonchalantly kill humans in their pursuit with their technologically advanced weaponry, resulting in "people hitting the ground like cows electro stunned in slaughterhouses" (Faust 26). This violent description points to a comparison of humans to chattel. Similarly, in his *Notes on the State of Virginia*, Thomas Jefferson compares the African American slave to "distributable" or "moveable" thing, to an "animal whose body is at rest, and who does not reflect, must be disposed to sleep of course" (144, 146). With this comparison between the enslaved and animals, Jefferson exemplifies the dehumanization of the enslaved and excuses slavery. Faust's narrative thus begins a similar description that dehumanizes human bodies, referring to humans as disposable bodies, a notion that continues throughout the narrative.

After freeing the beautiful and seductive Princess Azir Utto and journeying through outer space in a tumultuous journey, Harq arrives on the planet Tuwitl. In a plot twist, Azir Utto turns out to be the controlling monarch of Tuwitl, a space associated with extraordinarily cruel power structures. Azir Utto enslaves humans whose only “freedom is death” (Faust 95). Thus, on his first journey into space, Harq witnesses an excessive amount of wealth enabled by the enslavement of humans. At the top of this hierarchy are so-called “numans” like Princess Azir Utto who profit from the physical labor and involuntary sexual exploitation of the enslaved. Harq learns that numans are responsible for abducting and enslaving humans from earth (46).

Enslavement as Racial Biopolitical Violence

However, in Faust’s narrative, Azir Utto struggles to maintain her power. As a monarch, the princess attempts to combine a system of medieval sovereignty with biopolitical control on the overarching structure of the astriarchy, the “(m)ajor political, economic power” in the solar system (40). Harq’s companion, the Suftem priest Thagó regards himself as a protector of the Astriarchy, the underlying “star kingdom” or “star order” (38). Furthermore, the Suftem complicate the power structures as a government-sanctioned religion that prays to a powerful entity named “the Glory” (45). The narrative thus also hints at the possibility of an underlying theocracy structure that enforces a racist treatment of humans by numans. For instance, the Suftem theology states that “human are the degenerate reprobate miscegenates from an ancient misflowering, purely material beings lacking Souls, whereas the very Nature of Numans is glorious, consisting of and imbued with the Divine, radiation from deepest interior the celestial Immanence that is the essence of sublime Consciousness” (172). The theology bears similarities to racist power ideologies (like the ones mentioned in Thomas Jefferson’s *Notes on Virginia*) that utilize biological racism and prejudices to distinguish humans from “non-human” slaves. Overall, it becomes apparent that many of the various power structures in place share the characteristics of dominating and controlling human bodies. Additionally, *War & Mir* inhabits underlying systems of racism and sub-human categorizations, which further the biopolitical power structures.

Thagó shares his suspicion that the princess is indeed a *saiyarkutlet*, or unempathetic “soul-eater,” a being that craves power (127). This attribution of insatiable power to the character Azir Utto certainly reflects the sovereign’s power and the biopolitical structures at play. Thagó elaborates (in his local dialect):

Saiyarkutlet not having conscience. Maybe you go back far enough, maybe they are being manipulators of us all since long-ago time, since first-times. Making the systems, societies, making all of us slaves to them, making us livestock on their farm. (127)

He evokes here Foucault and the biopolitical control over the productivity of bodies, but he is also again evoking U.S. notions of chattel slavery due to the comparison of human and enslaved bodies as a livestock. This description establishes enslaved human bodies in *War & Mir* as “posthuman” because their treatment as dehumanized slaves moves beyond an anthropocentric approach to the human. Their position displaces “the lines of demarcation” between “ontological

categories, for instance between the organic and the inorganic,” between the free and the enslaved body (Braidotti 90). Due to their treatment as slaves, the humans take on a new, posthuman ontology, one which is emphasized due to their exploitation within systems of biopolitical control.

War & Mir demonstrates underlying systems of racism and sub-human categorizations which further the biopolitical power structures. Thagó recalls: “Over centuries, steal dozens-dozens-thousands. Breed millions of babies, and enslave them, too” (Faust 41). The breeding or “production” of enslaved humans is hence essential to maintain the biopolitical hierarchies. Additionally, the abduction of “millions of babies” also reveals that Tuwitl’s power system especially exploits children (41). One of them is Ti-Joto, a young boy in whom Harq takes a protective and parental interest. The human child grew up in Turwitl and in an Anakin Skywalker-like twist, he evokes the pity of Harq. When Harq first thinks about freeing and adopting Ti-Joto he is confronted with the harsh bureaucratic reality of his endeavor. His companion MarAset elaborates: “You’ve gotta buy him and then free him yourself. But even then it’s not over because if we freed him here, he’s got no savings, nowhere to love” (106). MarAset reveals that the system of biopolitics on Tuwitl is highly bureaucratic and difficult to disrupt due to its complex and entangled structures.

Desperate, Ti-Joto violently attempts to break out of the system after being asked to submit himself sexually to a guest on Tuwitl with his mother. This demand reveals that the system enforces sexual enslavement. Sexual encounters become a matter of biopolitical regulation. After Ti-Joto’s resistance to sexual exploitation, the princess condemns him to participate in the Taizahfohn, an obscene gladiator-like tournament where spectators watch children massacre each other (96). In addition to the sexual regulations, the Taizahfohn seems like the ultimate grotesque embodiment of the biopolitics in place, a control over human bodies in Hunger Games fashion, so to speak. The event evokes the question if our societies similarly are increasing to switch off between an “all work” to “all play” mentality, a change which might be amplified by the presence of information technologies (Haraway 300). The competition demonstrates here how the Princess’s sovereignty over death is opposed to the regularization of life by technologies of biopower (Foucault 1446). In systems of biopower which do not include the sovereign’s power, death can be reconceptualized by technologies of biopower as being less ritualized and hidden away.

After winning the Taizahfohn, “the coliseum screams [Ti-Joto’s] name, worshipping him with their collective hatred” (Faust 102). The hatred directed towards Ti-Joto reveals that despite his win, he is still regarded as sub-human due to the fact that he is a human. Ti-Joto’s discrimination indicates parallels to systemic racism. Indeed, *War & Mir* reflects how “race can be placed front and center in considerations of political violence” (5). When Harq ultimately decides to free Ti-Joto from his state of oppression, he encounters Ti-Joto’s mother. After Thagó elaborates his intentions to free Ti-Joto, she demands payment for her son, which Thagó submits to. In this short glimpse of her, Ti-Joto’s mother is thus portrayed as unempathetic and marked by the capitalist exploitative system of Tuwitl. She lets her son go, but not without re-evaluating his material worth

as a body in the system. His mother positions his body as a consumer good or ‘capital’ in an economic context.

The example of Ti-Joto demonstrates how the biopolitical hierarchies on Tuwitl are maintained by representing humans as less or othered through the employment of racist mechanisms of dehumanization. I connect the dehumanization of the enslaved to Weheliye’s idea of “racializing assemblages” (3). In the prominent work *Habeas Viscus*, Weheliye interprets racialization as a “conglomerate of sociopolitical relations that discipline humanity into full humans, not-quite-humans, and nonhumans,” thereby facilitating the process of othering (3). In particular, black bodies are stereotypically described as akin to the non-human or animal. Similarly, Barbara Johnson observes: “Many entities that could be—or later are—defined as persons are represented as non-persons in the eyes of the law: slaves and fetuses and corporations, for example. Does it mean they are things? Not necessarily” (2). Racism reflects this struggle of which “humans can lay claim to full human status and which humans cannot” (Weheliye 3). With this inquiry Weheliye points towards “the layered interconnectedness of political violence, racialization, and the human” as well as the ‘thingification’ of human bodies (1). Likewise, Faust’s work successfully asks questions about the complex power structures of master/slave relationships, of the sovereign’s power dynamics in an intergalactic system which is also marked by what Foucault determines as structures of biopolitics or the control of the productivity of bodies.

Faust’s work critiques the complex power structures of master/slave relationships and of sovereign power dynamics in an intergalactic system. Especially on Tuwitl, bodies are transformed into “private satisfaction- and utility-maximizing machine(s)” (Haraway 306). Furthermore, Faust’s novel positions racism as a systemic problem that is deeply embedded in these structures. In fact, systemic racism can be read here as furthering the biopolitical power structures. This reading is especially relevant for SF narratives in general. SF creates a safe distance to discuss prevalent issues of race and power while being able to critique and challenge present structures with loosened metaphors (Vint 5). It remains important to continue investigating the “triangulation of race, sovereignty, and the human” within SF (Nyong’o 253). I found that SF novels like *War & Mir* remind us that a technically advanced fictional universe does not necessarily imply an equally “advanced” social treatment of bodies within that same universe. Our goal now is to criticize the systems at hand to dismantle them for a more socially equitable future.

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