HOW TO CREATE INHUMANITY:

Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*

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It is easy to read Kazuo Ishiguro's chilling novel Never Let Me Go as an indictment of human cloning, but thankfully Andrea Kowalski does not do the easy reading. In "How To Create Inhumanity," she argues inventively that Ishiguro's celebrated novel, set in 1990s England, explores what Michel Foucault called "biopower," namely the politicization of all life. Ishiguro's clones are created to donate their organs until they die, and they don't rebel against this fate despite the fact that they are intelligent and well-educated. Why? This is the central question asked by *Never Let Me Go*. Kowalski answers it by arguing that the workings of biopolitical racism – the stratification of people into masters and servants – are as subtle and inescapable in Ishiguro's novel as they are in real life.

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In his novel, *Never Let Me Go*, Kazuo Ishiguro skilfully allows for the creation and abuse of slave classes in reality to become apparent through the exploitation of clones for organ production within the novel. The continuation of the donation program is enabled by the

symbiotic forces of social denial and biopolitical racism. *Biopower*, as defined by Michel Foucault, is a force that concerns itself with "the administration of bodies and the calculated management of life" (140). In other words, biopower is a force that concerns itself with populations and their stability and productivity. Racism, in biopolitical terms, is the division of groups to determine higher and lower "races"; the higher race being the protected and privileged population. Charles Mills' *Racial Contract* is an example of this hierarchical evaluation of races, using "white" as the privileged race and "nonwhite" as the subordinate race: "the general purpose of the Contract is always the differential privileging of the whites as a group with respect to the nonwhites as a group, the exploitation of their bodies, land and resources, and the denial of equal socio-economic opportunities to them" (Mills 11). The Racial Contract applies especially to the clones in terms of the exploitation of their bodies, but also to the denial of their social opportunities. Biopolitical racism in *Never Let Me Go* depends on the subconscious presence of the Racial Contract that supports a concurrent social denial of its oppressive reality.

In the alternate society of *Never Let Me Go*, the societal schism between the clones and normal humans is manifested through three societal customs: childhood normalization, deluded fantasy, and minimum humanity. Childhood normalization is the process in which the abusive treatment of the clones becomes accepted within society and by the clones themselves: the way in which realities are "told and not told" (Ishiguro 81). Deluded fantasy is the society-wide denial of the clones' fate: a series of illusions that uphold class division through false hope. Minimum humanity is the conscious justification for the use of the clones for organ production for non-clones. This exploitation is defended by the dominant class seeming to give the clones fulfilling lives, yet ones only within the parameters of their slavery. Normalization, delusion and limited humanity facilitate the Racial Contract and its requirement of "a certain schedule of structured blindness and opacities in order to establish and maintain the white polity" (Mills 19).

The process of childhood normalization instils acceptance of the clones' subordination and medical purpose within society. The clone children are segregated from the rest of society;

their perception is entirely moulded by the guardians who raise them. By introducing their role as organ donors very early, the guardians ensure that the clones accept that role as their purpose and only reality:

> the guardians had, throughout all our years at Hailsham, timed very carefully and deliberately everything they told us, so that we were too young to understand properly the latest piece of information [. . .] but of course we'd take it in at some level, so that before long all this stuff was there in our heads without us ever having examined it properly. (Ishiguro 82)

Through early normalization, it becomes possible for the clones to know about their situation without understanding it emotionally: "[w]e certainly knew [. . .] that we were different from our guardians, and also from the normal people outside; we perhaps even knew that a long way down the line there were donations waiting for us. But we didn't really know what that meant" (Ishiguro 69). This acceptance is in the interest of and is the outcome of biopolitical force, as it is for the benefit of the privileged population that the clones should be complacent and efficient organ producers. Biopower centres on "the body as a machine: [. . .] the parallel increase of

its usefulness and its docility, its integration into systems of efficient and economic controls" (Foucault 139); normalization is therefore an essential tool to increase the utility of cloned bodies. The clones' willingness to donate without resistance increases that utility. By utilizing normalization, the society is exempt from having to force or subdue the clones into donation.

Yet in Ishiguro's novel, normalization instils more than acceptance; it instils a disturbing pride in the clones for being donors: "I'm really fit, I know how to look after myself. When it's time for donations, I'll be able to do it really well" (Ishiguro 108), Tommy reassures his guardian. There is a sense of honour amongst the clones for being "good" donors, for enduring the process multiple times: a "donor on a fourth [. . .] is treated with special respect" (Ishiguro 278). There is also pride instilled in the clones for being good carers, for keeping fellow clones calm and complacent: "[m]y donors have always tended to do much better than expected [. . .] their recovery times have been impressive, and hardly any of them have been classified as 'agitated'" (Ishiguro 3), boasts Kathy. These demonstrate the integration of the Racial Contract "that shapes

citizens' moral psychology, conceptions of the right, [and] notions of self-respect" in Ishiguro's alternate England (Mills 10).

Another form of social denial is deluded fantasy. The clones, as well as those in direct contact with the clones, demonstrate this denial by instilling false hope and hopeful delusion. Delusion about the brutality of the clones' future is created by polite language and by not mentioning the donations as much as possible. The terminology used in connection to the clones and the donation program is not only gentle and polite, but also contains positive connotations. The word "donation" is perhaps the most blatant example of this; it totally ignores the destructive aspect of the clones' organs being taken from them, focusing instead only on the positive aspects to the privileged human race. This deceptive language is used repetitively: the clones' cultivators are "guardians," those clones who ensure the passivity of donors are "carers," and when the clones finally perish from the operations it is called "completing." Even the clones themselves are not referred to as such: "*students*, we preferred to call you" (Ishiguro 261). This kind of language serves to create an illusion of positivity in denial of the actual

abuse taking place. To enforce this illusion, the donation program is purposely mentioned as rarely as possible: there is a "rule about not discussing the donations openly" (Ishiguro 84). This hopeful delusion calms the clones and those who are involved in the donation program, reducing their perceived gravity of the situation and therefore decreasing resistance towards it.

False hope is also created by deluded fantasy. The clones uphold a false hope that there are escapes from the system, such as the "deferrals" and those who created and ran Hailsham upheld false hope in society's desire to perceive to the clones' humanity. The rumour that "some Hailsham students in the past, in special circumstances, had managed to get a deferral" is a deluded illusion of hope (Ishiguro 153), never something that has occurred. This is an illusion created unintentionally by the clones to ease the inescapability of the situation, not a single rumour but "one that gets created from scratch over and over" (Ishiguro 258). Similarly, Miss Emily and Marie Claude, who founded and ran Hailsham, did it in the false hope that they could "prove [clones] had souls" (Ishiguro 260). They collected the art of the clones to try and

prove their humanity: "[l]ook at this art! How dare you claim that these children are anything less than fully human?" was their argument (Ishiguro 262). Yet that goal proved to be deluded and would be abandoned: "[h]ere was the world, requiring students to donate. While that remained the case, there would always be a barrier against seeing you as properly human" (Ishiguro 263).

The biopolitical need to foster longevity in the privileged race ensured the continued need for the dehumanization of the subordinate race: the clones. The purpose of the biopolitical state is to secure "the privileges and advantages of the full white citizens and [maintain] the subordination of nonwhites" (Mills 14); in the case of Ishiguro's society the full white citizen is a naturally conceived human, and the nonwhites are the artificially conceived clones. Deluded fantasy functions as yet another biopolitical mechanism of "optimizing forces, aptitudes and life in general without at the same time making them more difficult to govern" (Foucault 141). Similarly, minimum humanity is the denial of the injustice of the donation program by improving the lives of the clones, yet only within the parameters of the slave class. The

superficial civility surrounding the donation process is a strong example of this. The clones are treated with concern in the centres where their organs are removed from their bodies: there are entire centres with private recovery rooms and a carer for each donor. This is all done for the limited improvement of their quality of life: "[a] good carer makes a big difference to what a donor's life's actually like" (Ishiguro 282). Yet these surface kindnesses have no effect on the societal exploitation of the clones' bodies: "[o]kay, it's really nice to have a good carer. But in the end, is it really so important? The donors will all donate, just the same, and then they'll complete" (Ishiguro 282).

The greater delusion of humanity is the project of Hailsham. The clone academy of Hailsham is an alternative founded in opposition to cruel treatment of the clones in their childhoods: "Hailsham was considered a shining beacon, an example of how we might move to a more humane and better way of doing things" (Ishiguro 258). Hailsham aimed to change society's perception of the clones as inhuman, to educate and culture them, and give them innocent and protected childhoods:

> we were able to give you something, something which even now no one will ever take from you, and we were able to do that principally by *sheltering* you. Hailsham would not have been Hailsham if we hadn't. Very well, sometimes that meant we kept things from you, lied to you. Yes, in many ways we *fooled* you. I suppose you could even call it that. But we sheltered you during those years, and we gave you your childhoods. (Ishiguro 268)

Hailsham is another feeble expression of humanity that extended protection to the clones, yet only to the extent to which society could still efficiently exploit their bodies for organ production. Indeed the minimum humanity exhibited at Hailsham functions, as the other forms of denial, to increase the manageability of the clone population:

> [we] hadn't yet understood what any of it meant [. . .] it doesn't really matter how well your guardians try to prepare you: all the talks, videos, discussions, warnings, none of that can really bring it home. Not when you're eight years old and you're all together in a place like Hailsham; when you've got guardians like the ones we had; when the gardeners and delivery men joke and laugh with you and call you 'sweetheart'. (Ishiguro 36)

Minimum humanity never transgresses the borders of "race"; it never allows the clones rights that would decrease their utility as organ donors. This superficial humanity does nothing to alleviate the clones' role in the Racial Contract as the "'subject races' [. . .] biologically destined never to penetrate the normative rights ceiling established for them below white persons" (Mills 17).

Biopower's concern in this novel is to sustain the donation program and so the life privilege of the dominant class: "[i]t was life more than law that became the issue of political struggles, even if the latter were formulated through affirmations concerning rights" (Foucault 145). For that purpose it becomes necessary to deny the clones full humanity, to keep them within an exploitable and inhuman underclass: "you were less than human, so it didn't matter" (Ishiguro 263). Ishiguro's novel, however, is not practically concerned with proving the possibility of this clone-abusing society; he uses the society as a demonstration of modern slavery. Kathy, Ruth and Tommy are heartbreaking representatives for the exploited spectres of our society: the abandoned, the deprived, and the minorities that have been denied the potential of the

privileged classes. *Never Let Me Go* is a poignant elucidation of our biopolitical society, our scientific world: exclusionary in its efficiency. It is a mourning for the morality and compassion that has been lost to that modernity:

> I saw a new world coming rapidly. More scientific, efficient, yes. More cures for the old sickness. Very good. But a harsh, cruel world. And I saw a little girl, her eyes tightly closed, holding to her breast the old kind world, one that she knew in her heart could not remain, and she was holding it and pleading, never to let her go. (Ishiguro 272)

Works Cited

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