

Discovering Dynamics of Diminishing Resistance in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*¹

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Abstract

This research paper examines the lack of resistance towards the unjust and inhuman treatment of clones, despite the obvious reasons for opposition in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*. The dystopian society depicted in the narrative moves around clones Kathy, Ruth, and Tommy being created only for organ donation to humans. Given the harsh and unfair treatment they endure, one would expect significant resistance from the clones. However, this study argues that definite dynamics repress their aptitude to rebel and instead admit their predetermined providence. Hence, relying on the theoretical concepts of indoctrination and hegemony proposed by Louis Althusser and Antonio Gramsci, this paper unfolds how individuals can be influenced and conditioned to adopt values and beliefs that align with the dominant ideology, even if it contradicts their own well-being and autonomy. Therefore, this article gives emphasis on the importance of critically examining the impact of ideology and socialization on individuals' attitudes and behaviors.

Keywords: dominant ideology, hegemony, indoctrination, inhuman treatment, resistance

The novel *Never Let Me Go* by Kazuo Ishiguro portrays a future world in which people willingly accept their fate as organ donors because there is a pervasive lack of social and political resistance. Set in an alternate England in the 1990s, the narrative explores the lives of clones created specifically to be a source of essential organs for “normal” humans. In the narrative, despite the dehumanizing aspects of their lives,

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Ishiguro's protagonists evince a lucid lack of rebellion or resistance against their predestined fate. As such, this research paper examines the fundamental causes of the clones' lack of resistance in the narrative.

One reason that restricts their ability to resist is indoctrination. French Marxist philosopher, Althusser (1971), in his essay titled "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" discusses about the multifarious mechanisms through which individuals are subjected to ideological control and indoctrination. He argues that the ideological apparatuses, which comprise educational institutions, family, media, and religious institutions, play a crucial role in shaping individuals' attitudes of acceptance and capitulate towards the obtainable organization. Althusser contends that these ideological apparatuses function to reproduce and reinforce the ruling ideology of a society, which is often associated with maintaining the existing power relations and social order, as Althusser (1971, pp. 34-35) states:

The ideological representation of ideology is itself forced to recognize that every 'subject' endowed with a 'consciousness' and believing in the 'ideas' that his 'consciousness' inspires in him and freely accepts, must 'act according to his ideas', must therefore inscribe his own ideas as a free subject in the actions of his material practice. If he does not do so, 'that is wicked'.

Althusser suggests that the ideological representation of ideology acknowledges that individuals who believe in and accept certain ideas must act in accordance with those ideas. In this context, the concept of indoctrination can be understood as the process through which individuals are influenced to adopt certain beliefs and values that align with the ruling ideology. Moreover, Althusser's mention of individuals having consciousness and being guided by their ideas implies that they have agency and are actively engaged in the process. However, this sense of agency is limited by the fact that their ideas are ultimately shaped and influenced by the dominant ideology. This kind of indoctrination is a subtle and pervasive influence, shaping individuals' beliefs and actions to conform to the prevailing ideology. In this way, through various forms of socialization, individuals are taught the values, beliefs, and norms that align with the dominant ideology, thus fostering an attitude of surrender and acceptance.

In the narrative, the clones come to accept that their lives are centered on organ donation as a result of their brainwashing, lack of autonomy or say ideological control. They are conditioned to believe that their purpose is to provide donations that will keep

people alive. They find meaning and purpose in fulfilling their role, even if it means sacrificing their own lives. Therefore, this sense of obligation and acceptance suppresses any inclination to resist, as the clones believe they are fulfilling their purpose and serving a greater good, as Schwetman (2017, p. 426) writes, “the clones in narrative as representative figures for people of all sorts, clone and otherwise, who suffer arbitrary harm for a greater good”. In the same vein, they are socialized from an early age to accept that they are organ donors for the sake of the “originals,” as Kathy states, “[w]hat’s going to happen to us one day. Donations and all that” (p.29). Indoctrination, according to Cambridge English Dictionary, refers to the process of repeating an idea or belief to someone until they accept it without criticism or question. In the same way, in the narrative, numerous techniques are used to indoctrinate them, including the repeated use of expressions, and the supervised upbringing. As a result, the clones internalize their function as organ donors and feel obligated to carry it out. Instead of opposition, this indoctrination fosters an attitude of surrender and acceptance.

The indoctrination precedes as the clones become passive in front of their predestined fate as organ donors, as Tommy states, “[w]e all know it, we’re modeled from *trash*” (p.164). This line demonstrates their acceptance that they are clones solely created for the purpose of organ donation as the word “trash” suggests they are discarded and disposable. Similarly, raised to serve as organ donors for “normal” humans, Kathy, the main character, and her friends Tommy and Ruth are clones. They do not exhibit any symptoms of resistance or dissent even though they are aware of their final goal.

The narrative represents the guardians teaching the clones not to question the authority of their creators, rather to accept their fate. Here, guardians represent the family, where individuals are brought up under systems of authority and norms that instill and naturalize the dominant ideological values, as Althusser (1971, p.9) states,

[T]he State is explicitly conceived as a repressive apparatus. The State is a ‘machine’ of repression, which enables the ruling classes (in the nineteenth century the bourgeois class and the ‘class’ of big landowners) to ensure their domination over the working class.

Althusser talks about state as a mechanism through which individuals are subjected to ideological control and indoctrination. In the same way, guardians, in the book, represent the state or authorities who are working to naturalize the clones’ predestined fate as organ donors. They are indoctrinated to think that their mission in life is to donate their organs,

and that any opposition or disobedience would be interpreted as a betrayal of that mission. The protagonists' acceptance of their situation and unwillingness to question the system are clear signs of this conditioning.

The internalized tyranny that the clones endure is one of the reasons they do not resist. They are denied a sense of identity and human rights and are socialized from a young age to accept their fate as organ donors. They develop a sense of resignation as a result of this indoctrination, seeing their only goal as a way to extend the lives of their "originals." The clones are unable to organize opposition or challenge societal standards because of this internalized tyranny.

The fact that the story takes place in the remote boarding school of Hailsham further contributes to the characters' complacency. Here, Hailsham represents "educational Ideological State Apparatus," as described by Althusser, to reproduce or reinforce a dominant ideology - that is organ donation. And here, in the book, this apparatus is functioning to ensure the compliance and acceptance of the clones. Furthermore, Hailsham's remote and tightly regulated atmosphere, as Kathy mentions the speaking of Miss Lucy, "[i]t is just as well the fences at Hailsham are not electrified" (p.77), that means to say, though the fences are not electrified, Hailsham is still encircled with fences. As a result, it prevents any resistance from growing or any doubting of their assigned tasks. The idea that their goal is to "complete" as many donations as they can has been instilled in the kids, and they absorb this idea without question. This lack of opposition within the school's walls highlights the lack of a social or political rebellion.

As a result, the clones might eventually come to terms with their situation and realize that it is what it is, as Kathy states, "[a]nd yet, all the time, I think we must have had an idea of how precarious the foundations of our fantasy were, because we always avoided any confrontation" (p.51). It evinces a kind of resignation. Similarly, they could experience hopelessness if they believe there is no way to better their circumstances or life. This acceptance can help individuals stop resisting and instead concentrate on finding happiness and contentment in the little time they have left in life. And this might be happening due to the hegemonic nature of the guardians, as Lears (1985, p.568) writes about the Gramsci's concept of hegemony that "ruling groups impose a direction on social life; subordinates are manipulatively persuaded to board the 'dominant fundamental' express". Gramsci refers to the dominance of a ruling class by consent rather than coercion. It is the result of indoctrination and the establishment of a cultural,

political, and ideological framework that is accepted as the natural order of things. Gramsci argued that the ruling class maintains its power not only through force but also through winning the consent of the subordinate classes. The guardians as ruling class are doing the same as Gramsci argues that they are trying to impose an ideology by teaching art, literature, or say rules. That means to say, they are hegemonizing the clones through art and literature rather than force.

The clones' passivity is also influenced by their lack of agency. The clones are artificial entities that do not have the agency that comes with resistance. Their autonomy is highly limited, their lives are tightly controlled, as Rich (2015, p.632) writes, "[t]he program ensures that she and her fellow students circulate through a rigorously controlled world system in order to gain maximum profit from its all-too-human resources", and they were made with a specific function in mind. From the boarding school-like setting of Hailsham to the monitoring devices they wear when they become donors, everything about their lives is closely supervised. The clones are conditioned to think that their only function is to supply organs, and they have little control over their own lives. They therefore lack the means and capacity to prevent their inevitable end.

Interestingly, the narrative narrates the clones as having a fictitious feeling of agency throughout the entire novel. They have the choice to partake in artistic and literary endeavors as well as other pastimes that seem to grant them some degree of independence. But this seeming independence is only a distraction because their final path is already set: they will become organ donors. The clones' false feeling of agency, created by the illusion of choice, obscures the reality of their tyranny and progressively erodes the possibility of resistance.

Another sign that the clones lack resistance is the characters' lack of autonomy in shaping their own destinies, as Miss Lucy, one of the guardians at Hailsham, teaches to the clones that "[y]our lives are set out for you. You will become adults, and then before you are old, before you are even middle-aged, you will start to donate your vital organs. That is what each of you was created to do" (p.80). Here, these lines suggest the lack of autonomy that the clones have in determining their lives and destinies. The compulsion to become donors, despite their desires or aspirations, evinces how their lives are predestined and restricts their ability to shape their own future. Likewise, Tommy, Kathy, and Ruth are powerless over their lives for the entirety of the book. They are only following a preset course that society has mapped out for them; their destinies are already

predetermined. The possibility of social and political opposition is further reduced in the narrative by the lack of such agency.

Moreover, the characters' alienation from emotions and human connections further emphasizes their lack of resistance, as Miss Lucy says them that "[n]one of you will go to America, none of you will be film stars. And none of you will be working in supermarkets as I heard some of you planning the other day. Your lives are set out for you" (p.80). Here, these lines suggest that the dreams and aspirations of the clones are discouraged. And this discouragement of pursuing personal goals portrays a sense of emotional detachment and alienation from their own desires. Similarly, Miss Lucy also says that "[t]he problem, as I see it, is that you've been told and not told. You've been told, but none of you really understand, and I dare say, some people are quite happy to leave it that way" (p.79). These lines imply that the characters are living with ambiguous position in terms of their true purpose and destiny. And this lack of understanding further distances them from emotional and human connections. Moreover, Kathy, Ruth, and Tommy seem emotionally cold and stoic as they accept their lot in life throughout the entire book. Similarly, the clones are prevented to have sex from outside people with the fear that they can emotionally connect themselves with outside people as Miss Lucy teaches to the clones, "sex effects emotions in ways you would never expect, we had to be extremely careful about having sex in the outside world, especially with people who were not students, because out there sex means all sorts of things" (p.82). They don't band together tightly or take coordinated measures to stop their fate.

Moreover, the clones in *Never Let Me Go* are kept secluded from the 'normal' humans, ensuring their isolation from society, as Kathy states, "[t]he Sales were important to us because that was how we got hold of things from outside" (p.41). This separation prevents any interaction that could potentially lead to the development of empathy, understanding, and solidarity, which are essential for collective resistance. Their lack of connections outside the clone community further reinforces their resignation and inability to challenge the system, as 'Althusser (1971, p.37-38) states, "all ideology has the function of 'constituting' concrete individuals as subjects". Althusser argues that individuals are produced and shaped by ideological apparatuses, such as education, family, media, and religious institutions. These apparatuses contribute to individuals' acceptance and internalization of dominant ideologies, making it challenging to envision alternatives.

It is also possible to read the lack of resistance as a criticism of the political atmosphere in the narrative's setting. In order to preserve societal order and stability, individuality and freedom are stifled in the dystopian world that is portrayed in the narrative. Fear and the harsh nature of the ruling class could be the cause of the lack of opposition, as Kathy states about a guardian named Miss Emily, "[w]e were all pretty scared of her and did not think of her in the way we did the other guardians" (p.39). This suggests that Kathy and the other characters in the novel view this guardian with fear and possibly even a sense of unease. Moreover, the clones are so fearful that they cannot even question, as Kathy states about Miss Lucy, "some of us were sure she was dying for someone to ask: '[w]hy? why is it so much worse for us?' But no one did." (p.68), these lines indicate the intimidating and authoritative presence of the guardians.

The clones know that resistance in any form could lead to dire consequences, including death, as Kathy says, "she and I cross some line together, and I was not prepared for that yet. I think I sensed how beyond that line, there was something harder and darker and I did not want that. Not for me, not for any of us" (p.55). Similarly, Shameem (2009, p. 778-79) writes, "[a]ny protest against this system of values, conscious or unconscious, is met with ridicule by their peers, who do as much as the barely registered system of teachers and doctors to maintain their status as machines without the capacity to resist their own exploitation". In this way, these lines showcase the nature of punishment that the clones have to endure if they break the rules.

It seems purposeful to keep the clones ignorant of their existence and function, as Miss Lucy says, "[t]he problem, as I see it, is that you've been told and not told. You have been told, but none of you really understand, and I dare say, some people are quite happy to leave it that way" (p.79). It showcases the ambiguous state of their existence: they know it but at the same time they do not know it. Likewise, they receive a restricted education and meticulous protection from the outer world. Guardians only teach them art and poetry. As described by Althusser, arts and literature denote the "cultural Ideological State Apparatus". Althusser (1971, p.16) states, "the Repressive State Apparatus functions 'by violence', whereas the Ideological State Apparatuses function by ideology". Althusser distinguishes Ideological State Apparatus with the Repressive State Apparatus. That means to say that the dominant ideology is not simply imposed upon individuals through repressive means but is infused into their consciousness even before they become conscious themselves. And here, it is the arts and literature that are serving

to infuse the ideology as organ donors into the consciousness of the clones. The general aim of art and poetry is to amuse our soul and mind. Maybe, they are being taught art and poetry only to prevent them from knowing about their circumstances. And it could be challenging for them to identify their abuse and the potential for resistance because they do not know enough about their circumstances. Furthermore, we can take the guardians as intellectuals here, as Gramsci (1971, p.113), an Italian Marxist philosopher, in his book *Prison Notebooks: the Intellectuals* writes, “[e]very social group, coming into existence on the original terrain of an essential function in the world of economic production, creates together with itself, organically, one or more strata! of intellectuals”. Gramsci (1971) discusses the role of intellectuals that emerge within social groups and how they contribute to disseminating the ruling ideology and perpetuating indoctrination through their intellectual work.

This research paper concludes by highlighting the puzzling absence of opposition to the unfair treatment of clones in a dystopian society where their only purpose is organ donation. Though there are good grounds to oppose such inhumane actions, instead of rising up, the clones appear to accept their lot. This research paper examines how people can be persuaded to adopt the dominant ideology, even when it goes against their own autonomy and well-being, by examining the concepts of indoctrination and hegemony put forth by Louis Althusser and Antonio Gramsci. It emphasizes the necessity of critically analyzing how ideology and socialization affect people’s attitudes and behaviors and calls for further research on the causes and consequences of this resistance to be suppressed.

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