The Interpellated Subjects in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*

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Abstract

This paper aimed to critically investigate Kazuo Ishiguro's Never Let Me Go, in terms of Louise Althusser's concepts of ideology and Interpellation. Kazuo Ishiguro's sixth novel, Never Let Me Go, explores the tragic condition of clones living in an imaginary England of the late 1990s. Out of the parts and pieces of the main character's fragmented memory and unclear descriptions, the reader finds out that Kathy and her friends are clones created to give certain vital organs to ordinary people. However, the main characters in this dystopian novel are not looking for emancipation, and very little could be observed in terms of resistance or objection. Applying Althusser's theories of ideology and interpellation, this study tried to discover the reasons for the characters' passivity and submission. The findings showed that certain beliefs and values despite being shockingly violent were internalized, naturalized, and justified in the decisive ages of childhood through the dominant ideological system. Moreover, the effect of educational system as one of the most important ISAs (Ideological State Apparatus) in interpellating the individual characters into subjects is analyzed in this novel.

Keywords: Ideological State Apparatus, Interpellation, Subjectivity, Kazuo Ishiguro, Never Let Me Go

1. Introduction

Kazuo Ishiguro is viewed as one of the most acclaimed contemporary novelists who won the Noble Prize in literature in 2017. *Never Let Me Go* which is named the best novel of 2005 by Time, is Kazuo Ishiguro's sixth novel, also his second novel to be filmed after *The Remains of the Day.* Haruki Murakami celebrates him, "it is a joy to be blessed with a contemporary like Kazuo Ishiguro". *Never Let Me Go* focuses on the adventures of a thirty-one year-old care giver named Kathy H. who lives in Briton in the late 1990s. "Incited by the upcoming end of her career, she decides to recount her memory concerning the three important stages of her life: her childhood at a boarding school called Hailsham, her brief stage at the cottages, and her taking care of organ donors (Wong 93).

So much like Ishiguro's previous novels, the first person narrator relies on her fragile memory to recall the past events. Kathy remembers the problems and disputes between her and her best friends, Ruth and Tommy. *Never Let Me Go* like its preceding novel *When We Were Orphans*

looks like a detective story. Although here the reader should act as an inspector and by setting the parts and pieces of Kathy's fragmented and unclear descriptions to find out the horrible fact behind apparently ordinary set of events. As Van Gheluve points out, "before long, it becomes clear that something far more sinister is going on in the background" (Van Gheluve 102). The reader discovers that Kathy and her friends are clones specifically created to provide vital organs for 'normals'. What adds to the readers' shock, impatience, and disbelief is that they act calm and confront it submissively. They never challenge the authorities; everything happens in the shadow of silence and mystery.

As children the characters are not allowed to participate in real life; they are isolated from the ordinary people in society. However, from their early ages they have a sense that they are different from their guardians (they call their teachers by this title). The clone students hardly ever discuss the issue among themselves just hint to it awkwardly. In Hailsham they spend their hours creating works of art. Being creative seems to be of great value for them. After the age of sixteen, they have to leave the boarding schools and leave in cottages which are deserted old farm houses. Despite the lack of direct control and supervision in this stage of their life, they don't enjoy their freedom and there is no trace of real adventure in their life. They spend hours reading, preparing their final essay, talking and having sex. They voluntarily apply to be trained as carers after this stage. They are trained to help other clones during their different recovery periods before becoming donors themselves. By the end of novel, Ruth and Tommy are already dead, and Kathy is driving away to an unknown location to meet a similar fate.

The bulk of research on this dystopian novel concentrates on ethical issues of cloning. Biman Mondal and Dr. Aju Aravind in a paper entitled "Human Cloning in Kazuo Ishiguro's novel, *Never Let Me Go"* examine the ways of post-humanism in this novel. The paper tries to show how the novel by employing various narrative techniques addresses the post humanist assertion and reinforces both the ethical status of non-humans and the embedded nature of human technological culture. In the same trend, Yingxuan Zhang in "Human Right of Cloning in *Never Let Me Go:* A Post Human Perspective" analyses the unfair treatment of cloned human beings in "post-human" society through the main characters of the novel. The researcher argues that actually Ishiguro by using the setting of human cloning describes the survival plight of ordinary people and arouses people's sympathy for the oppressed people in real life.

"Moral theories and Cloning in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go"* by Stephanie Petrillo considers the ethics of cloning from the standpoint of a number of moral theories: consequentialism, natural law theory, Kantian Moral Theory, right-based theory, and virtue ethics. The writer comes to the conclusion that the cloning-based donation program in the novel is morally impermissible. The concept of "Elsewhere" is analyzed in Helene Machinal's "From Behind the Looking Glass: Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* and *Beyond"*. The author envisages *Never Let Me Go* as the apex of Ishiguro's reflection on the intricate network of Ideological and epistemological links between elsewhere and otherness.

"The Suffering of Existence in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*" by Martin Semelak examines various manifestations of suffering from the viewpoint of existentialism. This paper focuses on the concept of existential anguish in the context of novel's story, pointing to the topics of the inevitability of death and the apparent absurdity of human existence. Titus Levy's article in Journal of Human Rights examines this novel as a type of Bildungsroman. It shows how autobiographical storytelling functions within the novel as a form of rights claim that gives voice to the suffering of an oppressed social group. Levy appreciates Ishiguro's sensitivity to the experiences of such groups. According to him Ishiguro pays great attention to individual psychologies and traumatic experiences. In the end, Levy finds out that Ishiguro's novel is connected with human rights issues and paradoxes such as the conflict between personality development and submission to a society that both offers and constricts individual freedom. It could be claimed that this novel has not been analyzed through Althusser's conception of Ideology and the reasons for the character's silence and passivity have not been recognized through this theoretical lens.

Theoretical Frame work

(Ideology, Ideological State Apparatuses (ISA), Repressive State Apparatuses (RSA), and Interpellation)

Louise Pierre Althusser (1918-1990), the French Marxist philosopher, in an essay named, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatus" and in his book, *On the Reproduction of Capitalism*, introduces the notions of Ideological State Apparatus (ISA), Repressive State Apparatus, and Interpellation. He analyzes how the dominant systems enforce their control by subtly molding their subjects through ideology. As Barry Maur notes, ideology in Althusser's view is "more than a set of beliefs about the world; it includes material practices within specific institutions that lead to

subject formation and to the production of social relationships. Institutions sort people into particular roles; they shape and police our behavior and our boundaries" (1). In other words, people as raw clay are shaped by ideology which is enforced and practiced within specific institutions.

According to Althusser, every society is made up of ideological state apparatuses (ISAs) and repressive state apparatuses (RSAs) which are instrumental to constant reproduction of the relations to the production of that given society. While ISAs belong to the private domain and refer to private institutions (family, church but also the media and politics), the RSA is one public institution (police/military) controlled by the government. While RSIs function through violence and force, ISAs offer individuals a particular identity which they are encouraged to accept. However, one is not forced to accept that role through violence. Because those roles are offered to us everywhere we look, or even assigned to us by culture, they are presented in such a way that we are encouraged to accept them. They work in a way to persuade the individuals to accept these values as their own. Consequently, 'interpellation' describes the process by which ideology, embodied in major social and political institutions (ISAs and RSAs), constitutes the very nature of individual subjects' identities through the process of "hailing" them in social interactions (Althusser 8-11).

Althusser goes further to argue that "all ideology hails or interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects" and emphasizes that "ideology 'acts' or 'functions' in such a way that it ... 'transforms' the individual into subjects" (11)This is made possible through Althusser's notion of interpellation or hailing which is a non-specific and unconscious process. For example, when a police officer shouts (or hails) "Hey, you there!" and an individual turns around and so-to-speak 'answers' the call, he becomes a subject. Althusser argues that this is because the individual has realized that the hailing was addressed at him which makes him subjective to the ideology of democracy and law (11).

Consequently, individual subjects are presented principally as produced by social forces, rather than acting as powerful independent agents with self-produced identities. Althusser's argument here strongly draws from Jacques Lacan's concept of the mirror stage. However, unlike Lacan who distinguishes between the "I" (i.e., the conscious ego which is created by the mirror stage) and the "subject" (that is, the symbolic subject of the unconscious), Althusser collapses both concepts into one (Callari and Ruccio 79). It could be implied that society shapes the individual's identity and enforces certain beliefs, attitudes, and behavior, to the extent that they assume them as part of their

nature. This process which is called internalization "involves the integration of attitudes, values, standards, and the opinions of others into one's own identity or sense of self" (Corsini 140).

Passivity and mere obedience in the face of violence and illogicality could be interpreted by Althusser's notion of "interpellation", as Sadjadi and Ahmadirad explain, "When the individuals are exposed to ideology and act according to its rules, they are altered to the subjects of that ideology. Interpellation occurs the time the subjects are hailed directly or dramatically by ideology" (205). The process of interpellation is used for maintaining and reinforcing the authority of the dominant groups or systems by unconscious conditioning of the individuals for accepting the rules. Ideological interpellation which functions without compulsion and intimidation creates social acquiescence. Althusser defines the meaning and the function of interpellation as the following: "I shall then suggest that ideology 'acts' or 'functions' in such a way that it 'recruits' subjects transforms them all by that very precise operation which I have called interpellation or hailing (174).

Discussion

This section is going to discuss how Althusser's Ideological/Repressive State Apparatuses function in interpellating the individual characters in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* into subjects. In other word, it is an attempt to draw parallels between the novel's theme of silence and Althusserian key concepts. What the reader discovers from the bits and pieces of information based on the protagonist's fragile memory is that Kathy and her friends are living in a cruel system which produces non-human entities, clones, and lets them live up to a certain age in order to donate their vital organs and 'complete'. This cruel and barbaric system shocks and resents the reader; the lack of the slightest attempt to escape in spite of no evident restrictions or any defiance to the cruelty committed against the clones strikes the reader even more.

The clones in *Never Let Me Go* who are isolated from general public live in boarding schools. The special education they receive in the formative years of their early childhood moulds their subjectivity and turns them into obedient and submissive adults. As Jerng observes, "there is indeed very little to be seen in terms of resistance, protest, or politics" (80). Ideology is defined by Althusser as "the interpellation of individual as a subject" (Bridet 70). Its ultimate goal is the submission to the ruling order; "Order always gives an order. It calls for obedience" (72). Althusser draws a distinction between Repressive State Apparatuses (RSAs) and Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs). The RSAs have a monopoly on violence (such as imprisonment, torture,

execution, exile, etc) and include army, police, courts, and prisons (Maur 3). The RSAs direct effect in *Never Let Me Go* cannot be clearly seen to exist. However considering the school's isolated setting, nondescript countryside away from any village, one may legitimately think of its similarity to prison camps. Black points out that, "Hailsham is not so different from the prison camps in the second world war" (789). Miss Lucy (one of the guardians) implicitly suggests this similarity when the topic comes up during one of her poetry lessons.

> We…drifted on to talking about soldiers in world war two being kept in prison
> camps. One of the boys asked if the fences around the camps had been electrified
> and someone else had said how strange it must have been, living in a place like
> that, where you could commit suicide any time you liked just by touching the
> fence…I went on watching Miss Lucy through all this and I could see, just for a
> second a ghostly expression come over her face as she watched the class in front
> of her. Then I kept watching carefully_ she pulled herself together, smiled and
> said: "It's just as well the fences at Hailsham aren't electrified. You get terrible
> accidents sometimes (*Never Let Me Go* 76-77).

Miss Lucy does some quick comparisons in her head between the world war prison camps and Hailsham boarding school, which does not remain unnoticed by Kathy as she is monitoring her expressions.

Students at Hailsham had made some frightening stories about students who dared just to pass the fences, out of their curiosity to see what is going outside. These rumors indirectly threaten them. The massive consequences of leaving or trying to escape the school have greatly affected their mentality. They know that if a child breaks the rules and leaves the school, she/he will be badly punished. One story concerned a boy who ran away from Hailsham boundaries and "his body had been found two days later, tied to a tree with the hands and feet chopped off" (*Never Let Me Go* 50). The other story was about a girl who climbed over a fence just to see what it was like outside, and "when she tried to get back in she was not allowed…Eventually she'd gone off somewhere out there, something had happened and she'd died" (50). These stories are horrible enough to prevent any kind of adventure on the part of the students.

Throughout this mysterious dystopian novel the characters find themselves under strict, close, and invisible observation. This situation makes one think of Jeremy Bentham's, the 18th century philosopher and social theorist, panopticon. Toker and Chertoff confirm this idea; "Hailsham ….is

a panopticon, where the students are under constant surveillance" (11).. Once Kathy planned to meet Tommy privately by the pond. She notices how it was not possible for a secret conversation; "for a start, you could be clearly seen from the house. And the way the sound travelled across the water was hard to predict; if people wanted to eavesdrop, it was the easiest thing to walk down the outer path and crouch in the bushes on the other side of the pond" (*Never Let Me Go* 23).

Moreover, the strict rules in Hailsham restricted any human intimacy, close physical and emotional closeness between the clones and the guardians. A Kathy notes, "Didn't we all dream from time to time about one guardian or other bending the rules and doing something special for us? A spontaneous hug, a secret letter, a gift" (60)? This passage primarily reveals the clones' being human and desiring the same emotional needs. The inflexible rules which are defined for the clones and their guardians are prerequisite of creating a stifling atmosphere, to bring fear in the mind of the potential offenders so that before thinking of any disobedience they know that they have to bear severe consequences. The especially strict training in Hailsham even affects their mentality and behavior in their brief residence in the cottages when they were not under constant surveillance of the guardians. Like Hailsham, the Cottages are also relatively isolated from the outside world with sporadic and indifferent visits from the caretaker Keffers. However there is reluctance to talk about donation; disobedience or protest could not be observed.

Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) usually function without direct force (though as a backup, they can and do resort to violent repression), but instead use other forms of persuasion. ISAs include family, law, church, politics, education, trade, unions, mass media, and cultural institutions (sports, literature, etc), not all of these institutions are state controlled, but in general they function on behalf of the state (Mauer 2). In the pre-capitalist period in Europe, there was one dominant ISA, the church. Now there are several competing ISAs, but Althusser claims that the ideological apparatus of education dominates. In Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go,* the impact of several ISAs could be identified; although, the dominant ones include: education, journals, and T.V.

The clones in the novel spend formative years of their life in the boarding school before leaving to the cottages. There is no clue of their first years of life. The readers are not told in what age the clones are brought to Hailsham. There are some scenes of children three or four playing in the field. Their teachers called 'guardians' take care of them and teach them to be creative; in fact, most school hours are spent in art and poetry. They do not have any communication with the people outside. The students (clones) isolation gives their teachers a considerable amount of control over

exactly how and when they are made aware of their future. "Instead of one big and potentially distressing revelation, their destiny to become carers and eventually donors is introduced to them slowly and in increments" (Gheluwe 93). The children in Hailsham gradually find out what awaits for them in future, they discover their differences with the limited number of 'reals' they have the chance to know, since they live in isolation.

As students, they were so much occupied with their art works and sport lessons. As Kathy confesses, "we certainly didn't think much about our lives" (89). The mildly rebellious characters Kathy and Tommy discussed and discovered all about that only after they left Hailsham. They noticed that the guardians timed deliberately everything before they told them,

> Tommy thought it possible the guardians had, throughout all our years at Hailsham, timed very carefully and deliberately everything they told us, so that we were always just 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. (*Never Let Me Go* 50)

Ideology seems to work in the same way, it tries to naturalize, justify, and sustain certain beliefs and values in society. According to Althusser ideology articulates us as a part of discursive social system when we are small children, before we are capable of employing the most powerful tools of critical thinking (ctd. in Maur 3). Kathy and Tommy only later came to this "conspiracy theory". She remembers that she knew about donations in some vague way, even as early as six or seven. She declares that all stuff was in their head without having examined it properly. Their guardians used other techniques to confuse them more, mixing donation with lectures about sex for instance, as Kathy later notices;" when the guardians first started giving us proper lectures about sex, they tended to run them together with talk about donations. At that age again …we were all worried and excited about sex, and naturally would have pushed the other stuff into the

Background" (*Never Let Me Go* 52). In other words, guardians cunningly managed to suggest a lot of basic facts about their future while students were so busy and preoccupied to challenge the school authorities and advocate for change.

The most rebellious figure in this novel, Miss Lucy, a guardian who later leaves Hailsham abruptly, discloses the facts of these children's life and also the different strategies employed by the school authorities to keep conformity; "the 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. Your lives are set out for you" (79-80). She thinks these children have the every right to know about their fate.

The specific diction that students and guardians at Hailsham use, shows that certain factors concerning their existence have been naturalized and internalized. It shows the power of language and word choice in shaping the mentality of characters. As Toker explains, from an early age onward, for instance, Kathy and her friends are taught to refer to the people outside as normal-which immediately implies that they themselves are not and consequently not entitled to the same rights. Other words include donation which suggests that transplantation happen on a voluntary basis. Completion is used to indicate that a donor has passed away, but keenly avoids the idea of death and instead presents the fact as if that donor has achieved his or her life goal (164).

The word game acts as a veil on the face of the ugly and terrifying truth. It hinders the students from considering the issue in depth, drives them into passivity, and prevents resistance. What is observable in *Never Let Me Go* is complete and helpless compliance in front of their predesigned destiny. As teenagers, they even used to laugh and make jokes about donation by inventing the word "unzipping". They pretended to unzip their body and take an organ out and zip it again; "the idea of things "unzipping" …[became] a running joke among us about the donations. The idea was that when the time came, you'd be able just to unzip a bit of yourself, a kidney or something would slide out, and you'd hand it over" (76). As Taketomi observes, "they invoked a kind of defense mechanism so that they can enjoy the fantasy and stay away from the reality, even though they knew the ending of the fantasy is brutal" (10).

The guardians justify the harsh realities about the clones' life in this novel and encourage acceptance, "I can see ... that it might look as though you are simply pawns in a game. It can certainly be looked at like that. But think of it. You were lucky pawns. There was a certain climate and now it's gone. You have to accept that sometimes that's how things happen in this world" (Never Let Me Go 266). These remarks by Miss Emily disturbingly explains the frustrating situation of the clones' life and reveals the mentality which shaped the children's identity.

Television and magazines form a strong influence on clone characters in the process of shaping their values and meanings. Kathy realizes that her friends in the cottages are mostly copying the things they see on T.V: "how so many of their mannerisms were copied from television" (*Never Let Me Go 118).* Considering the identity as a social concept, Eisend and Moller discuss how media can have immediate effect on one's perception of social reality (101).

After graduation from Hailsham, the clones spend most of their time in cottage watching soap operas and flip through the pages of magazines that contain content of sexual nature. The leisure time activities which are provided for the clones are not meant to broaden their mind rather they distract them from important life issues and questions.

Conclusion

Through the bitter life story of the clone characters in *Never Let Me Go,* Ishiguro invites us to contemplate how ideology works in keeping the individuals silent and how it pursues its goals in a society. In sum, the clones represent the oppressed class produced for the benefit of the dominant social class, 'normals'. Their short lives serve for the health and profit of a community which disregards their humanity. In this paper, the functioning of certain educational institutions as Ideological State Apparatuses which serve to shape its objects in accordance with the ruling class, was analyzed. Different strategies are employed by the school authorities to normalize the cruel fact behind clones' life, such as intermixing the materials and putting them into young children's head before they could really understand what is awaiting for them in near future. By inventing new words and phrases, which are regularly and naturally applied in everyday speech in school, like 'to complete' for dying, 'donating', which suggests a voluntary act for giving vital organs, the educational system attempts to hide the violence. While there may be bitter objections in the readers' mind to the clone characters' docile acceptance of their fate, the fact is that they act the same in different situations. This is the way ideology works in keeping silence and conformity in society.

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