

Subalternity and the Ethics of Dehumanization in Never Let Me Go: A Postcolonial Reading

Alaa Abdulwahid Alghanimi

PhD student , Department of Foreign Languages and Linguistics , School
of Literature and Humanities , Shiraz University , Shiraz , Iran
alaaalghanimi76@gmail.com

Bahee Hadaegh

Associate Professor , Transnational Literature & Drama Studies , Shiraz
University , School of Literature & Humanities , Department of Foreign
Languages & Linguistics , Shiraz University , Shiraz , Iran
bhadaegh@shirazu.ac.ir

التبعية وأخلاقيات نزع الإنسانية في رواية لا تدعني أرحل

- قراءة ما بعد الكولونيالية -

آلاء عبد الواحد الغانمي

طالبة دكتوراه، قسم اللغات الأجنبية واللغويات، كلية الآداب والعلوم الإنسانية، جامعة Shiraz،
شیراز، ایران

د. بهي حدائق

أستاذ مشارك، دراسات الأدب والدراما العابرة للقوميات، جامعة Shiraz، كلية الآداب والعلوم
الإنسانية، قسم اللغات الأجنبية واللغويات، شیراز، ایران

Abstract:-

In Kazuo Ishiguro's novel *Never Let Me Go*, donors, who are human clones, are manufactured to produce organs that will extend the lifespan of non-cloned humans in this dystopian world. This study uses specific postcolonial theories, especially Spivak's theory of the subaltern, as well as the ideas of Foucault and Wynter, among others, to interrogate the ways through which the author imagines the ethics of dehumanization and systemic marginalization. Through an analysis of the donors' erasure of voice, agency, and full subjectivity, the paper contends that Ishiguro's plotline functions as a challenge to the ideological and structural underpinnings of biopolitical domination and the commodification of vulnerable bodies. The donors, as representations, evoke a wider critique of colonial and postcolonial structures, where certain lives are devalued and regarded merely as expendable in upholding dominant social hierarchies. Thus, the novel reflects a moral critique of the convergence of bio-power, institutionalized inequality and the annihilation of the subaltern.

Keywords: Kazuo Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go*, Postcolonial Theory, Subalternity, Dehumanization, Biopolitics, Spivak, Foucault, Wynter.

المخلص:-

في رواية كازو إيشيغورو لا تدعني أرحل، يُصنع المتبرعون، وهم مستنسخون بشريون، بهدف توفير الأعضاء التي تُطيل أعمار البشر غير المستنسخين في هذا العالم الديستوبي. توظف هذه الدراسة نظريات ما بعد الكولونيالية، ولا سيما نظرية سيفاك حول التابع (Subaltern)، إضافة إلى أفكار فوكو ووينتر وغيرهما، لاستقصاء الكيفيات التي يتخيل عبرها الكاتب أخلاقيات نزع الإنسانية والتهميش المنهجي. ومن خلال تحليل محور صوت المتبرعين ووكالتهم وذواتهم الكاملة، تجادل الورقة بأن حبكة إيشيغورو تؤدي وظيفة نقدية في مواجهة الأسس الأيديولوجية والبنوية للهيمنة البيوسياسية وتسليع الأجساد الهشة. ويستحضر المتبرعون، بوصفهم تمثيلات، نقداً أوسع للبنى الكولونيالية وما بعد الكولونيالية، حيث تُنتقص قيمة بعض الحيات ونظر إليها على أنها قابلة للاستغناء في سبيل الحفاظ على التراتيبات الاجتماعية المهيمنة. وبذلك، تعكس الرواية نقداً أخلاقياً لتلاقي السلطة الحيوية، واللامساواة المؤسسية، وإبادة التابع.

الكلمات المفتاحية: كازو إيشيغورو، لا تدعني أرحل، النظرية ما بعد الكولونيالية، التبعية، نزع الإنسانية، البيوسياسية، سيفاك، فوكو، وينتر.

1. Introduction

The moral world of Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* (2005) is built on a foundation of silence including silence as complicity, erasure, and resignation. Placed in a dystopian late-twentieth-century England, the novel quietly, disturbingly unfurls around the lives of clones that have been harvested for the single purpose of donating their organs until they 'complete'. Although ostensibly a work of speculative fiction, Ishiguro's story doesn't conform to the usual tropes of the genre; there are no rebellions, no daring escapes, and no clear-cut denunciations of the regime. In its place, the novel provides a quiet, but devastating portrait of subjects made by the society to accept their own expendability, which makes it an object of the kind of postcolonial analysis that concerns itself with power and knowledge and denied humanity.

The concept at the heart of this inquiry is that of the subaltern, a term most famously formulated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988, p. 45) who provocatively inquired "Can the subaltern speak?" Her concern is with the structures whereby marginalized subjects which are subjects lacking access to hegemonic discourses are denied not only representation, but even intelligibility within the ruling order. The cloned students of Hailsham in *Never Let Me Go* are creepazoid embodiment of this state of affairs. One of them, Kathy H., the first-person narrator of the novel, doesn't function as political agency. On the contrary, it operates within a system that has already predetermined her life, body and death as vehicles of biomedical utility. The paradox of the subaltern speaking and still not being heard, of narrating and not participating is central to Ishiguro's ethical project.

The present article interprets *Never Let Me Go* with reference to postcolonial theory and bio-political critique by showing how Ishiguro's representation of the clones theatricalizes a deep questioning of the contemporary apparatuses of modernity that entrain life, hush dissent, and come up with defenses of inequality. Using Foucault's (1978) conceptualization of bio-politics— a way of analyzing how modern states exercise power by controlling bodies and populations (p.10)— the novel's incorporation of cloning establishes the profoundly bureaucratic operations of

dehumanization. The category of “bare life” life that is no longer meaningful politically is most fully realized in persons whose biological lives are sustained only to be consumed systematically, as Giorgio Agamben (1998) explains (p.182). In this system, the clones are biologically produced and ontologically deprive bodies of rights, histories, and futures.

At the same time, the novel doesn't just portray its heroes as victims. Instead, it shows us how affective dimensions like love, memory, longing still organize their experience of the world and are themselves tenuous, although not entirely ineffectual, sites of resistance. The students' desperate clinging to the idea that love could secure them a postponement of death; or Kathy's patient accounting of her past; are emotional assertions of personhood in a structure that continues to deny it. These moments align with Wynter's (2003) argument that historically the human has been constructed through exclusion – race, colonialism, capital – and so if we want to reconceive the category, we have to be attentive to those lives that have been lost to dominant epistemologies (p.30).

In examining how *Never Let Me Go* navigates the intersecting forces of bio-political control, epistemic violence, and subaltern effect. This article contributes to ongoing conversations about how literature can expose and resist the normalization of dehumanization. Ishiguro's novel, far from offering a futuristic cautionary tale, mirrors the subtle operations of contemporary inequality where certain lives are quietly sacrificed for the benefit of others, and where silence becomes both a symptom of exclusion and a mechanism of survival.

What is perhaps most interesting about the novel, is the migrant weight of its text, as is true of all novels, perhaps even more than of the postcolonial novel (E. Harrell, 2014, p.10). Examining subalternity in *Never Let Me Go*, the climax emphasizes the enormous ramifications of the characters' agency or lack thereof within a system meant to objectify and manipulate people. The narrative intricately weaves the lives of clones, positioning them as embodiments of marginalized existence, reminiscent of the historical struggles faced by women in postcolonial contexts, in which woman becomes a metaphor for societal exploitation (Nicholls et al.1997, p. 9). This dichotomy demonstrates how the characters' lives are affected by external narratives that frequently mute their voices,

paralleling current arguments in education about caring and the need for peace-oriented measures to combat violence and systematic injustice (Williams et al.2016, p.20). Lastly, engaging the predicament of subalterns does not only work to critique the regimes of domination but also demands a radical reimagination of agency-in-containment.

As explained in Fanon's book (1963) *The Wretched of the Earth*, letters can critique the conditions of colonial powers and the psychological effects of colonization (P.210) that donors would fit into in Ishiguro's story. The donors here are victim to a power system that uses their bodies for the "original" population. This perverse relationship of power and exploitation is a central theme in subaltern studies on the interplay of dominant and subaltern groups. Said's (1978) *orientalism* which looks at how the West often depict Eastern societies in distorted and essentialist ways, opening up to the relevance of the objectification of donors and how their humanity is often returned to sender, questioned or denied. Foucault's (1977) concept of power and discipline can be observed in the donors' experience -they are under such control, in a disciplined environment/ panopticon.

Although Scott's *The Weapons of the Weak* (1985) is a work on tactics for peasants, it can shed some light on how donors resist subtly, including undercover networks and the creation of a common culture and language. The donors in *Never Let Me Go*, though representing subalterns, demonstrate modalities of resistance and a search for agency. That bond, and their feelings, and frustrations, about their predestined roles, exist and affect them to break free from them. This dimension of the novel coheres with the orientation of subaltern studies toward resistance and self-assertion.

Writing on the forgiveness and ethics of the other, Derrida's idea (1990, p. 228), can extend to the donors who are otherwise regarded as replaceable and/or whose lives are ostensibly less important than that of the originals. Derrida's work upon forgiveness and the ethics of alterity can be brought to bear upon the donors' position, as they are frequently regarded as expendable and their lives are understood to be less valuable than the originals. The ethical dilemmas of organ donation often reflect wider societal views about the value of human life and human self-determination. The clones

who give the film its title, mirror the moral dilemma of being only a commodity, with their bodies mired in a cycle of exploitation. As these creatures only survive while they have organs to contribute, the novel condemns this notion of individuals as interchangeable parts in a bio-political world where the whole exists for the parts. This commodification mirrors former feminist ethics debates about the potential of such frameworks to obscure personal agency and the ethical aspects of caring. The brutality of the fact on ground in the narrative perceives the cloned commodity as an abject without subjectivity and the novel raises concern about the power relationship at play in the human market and the moral question of the begrudging sacrifices of the others for the greater good (Heinrich et al.2018, p. 141).

This is far less rational than it seems. The disturbing scene of the harvesting processes depicted in the novel, gives rise to grave anthropological questions and raises ethical concerns concerning the instrumental use of people for some end. The subaltern voices of these clones are hampered by the disposing power of the dominant society narratives which lead toward a "need of 'small scale modes of listening'" to their inherent humanity, as emphasized in contemporary multilingual writing (Tanti et al.2023, p.1). Additionally, the application of the region to culture forms of oppression reveals that oppressed groups' context and background could serve as a basis for more ethical grounds to understanding revelation and personhood (Burnett et al.2016, p.231). In this environment, harvesting has wider ethical implications that form the bases of our universal moral compass.

Recent scholarship has expanded the interpretive scope of *Never Let Me Go*, particularly through the lenses of posthumanism and bioethics. Rai (2024), for example, examines how creative practices such as drawing and storytelling function as emotional and existential forms of resistance among the clones, suggesting that “art becomes a counter-discourse to biomedical reductionism” (p. 7). Similarly, Cui (2024) discusses how the narrative uses the human body as a site of inscription, arguing that “the donors’ physical and emotional experiences write back against the systemic erasure imposed by scientific modernity” (p. 40). These contributions underscore how the novel not only reflects biomedical exploitation but also opens affective spaces in which clones assert their personhood.

In a nutshell, subaltern themes of the novel point to the work of postcolonial theory. The donors, like colonized people, are condemned to a system of value and existence imposed upon them. Their destinies are dominated by a higher power such as a colonial guarantor, mirroring the experiences of many postcolonial nations. A subaltern reading of *Never Let Me Go* elucidates the depth with which the novel offers critical insight into power, identity, and ethics. It provides a stinging analysis of the glorified mechanisms of oppression and exploitation, thereby becoming a monument in the post-colonial and the subaltern literature.

In Kazuo Ishiguro's novel *Never Let Me Go*, donors, who are human clones, are manufactured to produce organs that will extend the lifespan of non-cloned humans in this dystopian world. This study uses specific postcolonial theories, especially Spivak's theory of the subaltern, as well as the ideas of Foucault and Wynter, among others, to interrogate the ways through which the author imagines the ethics of dehumanization and systemic marginalization. Through an analysis of the donors' erasure of voice, agency, and full subjectivity, the paper contends that Ishiguro's plotline functions as a challenge to the ideological and structural underpinnings of bio-political domination and the commodification of vulnerable bodies. The donors as representations evoke a wider critique of colonial and postcolonial structures, where certain lives are devalued and regarded merely as expendable in upholding dominant social hierarchies. The novel is a moral critique of the convergence of bio-power, institutionalized inequality and the annihilation of the subaltern.

Thus, this article contributes to contemporary critical debates by showing how *Never Let Me Go* dramatizes the subtle, yet profound forms of violence embedded in modern systems of power. By situating the clones within a broader postcolonial framework, this reading highlights how literature can reveal, critique, and resists the normalization of exploitation. The novel is not merely a cautionary tale about the future; it is a mirror reflecting the quiet sacrifices that persist in the name of progress and the silent endurance of those whose voices remain on the margins.

2. Discussion

2.1. The Bio-politics of Cloning and the Subaltern Body

“The donations must go on. Once you’re a donor, you’re as good as dead. You might recover a little for a few months, maybe even years, but you’re finished. You’re handed over to the people who run that business, who pay no attention to what you want” (Ishiguro, p. 194). This quote touches directly on the themes of harvesting and completion through its focus on the donation system. The phrase “you’re as good as dead” suggests that the moment of institutional control begins before death, highlighting how the state exercises bio-power by deciding who lives and who dies. Foucault’s (1978) theory of bio-politics defined as the exercise of power over life through mechanisms of surveillance, normalization, and bodily regulation provides a crucial framework for interpreting the systematic control in *Never Let Me Go*. In *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1*, Foucault outlines the shift from sovereign power, which “deducts” life through public execution, to modern bio-power, which “fosters life or disallows it to the point of death.” As Foucault notes, modern regimes do not “take life (...), they administer it” (p. 138). Scholars like Rai (2024) argue that Ishiguro’s clones exemplify this paradigm: their bodies are meticulously managed until expiration, reflecting a disturbing alignment with Foucault’s mechanism of bodily governance (p. 7). This concept finds its fictional corollary in the clones of Ishiguro’s novel, whose lives are engineered and managed not for autonomy but for calculated expiration.

At the heart of this bio-political apparatus is the biomedical economy: a system in which human life is instrumentalized for productivity. The clones are not merely born; they are cultivated, surveilled, and programmed for docility. Their schooling at Hailsham and subsequent lives in the Cottages are not designed to empower them with agency but to psychologically prepare them for “completion” a euphemism for death by organ donation. As Miss Lucy reveals to the students, “You’ve been told and not told. [...] None of you will go to America; none of you will be film stars. [...] Your lives are set out for you” (Ishiguro, 2005, p. 81). This chilling declaration exemplifies the disciplinary normalization Foucault describes: a regime of knowledge that shapes subjects not through open coercion but through internalized acceptance. (Foucault 1977, p. 202) Giorgio Agamben’s notion of bare life offers a powerful supplement to Foucault’s account. In *Homo Sacer*, Agamben describes individuals reduced to mere biological existence, stripped

of political significance, and rendered “killable” without consequence (1998, p. 183). Cui (2024) emphasizes that this normalization extends to the body: cloned bodies become “textual sites of compliance,” inscribed with societal expectations long before any medical intervention occurs (p. 40).

The clones in *Never Let Me Go* occupy precisely this position. They are maintained and protected only insofar as their organs remain viable; their value is not intrinsic but entirely contingent on utility. They live under a regime of suspended rights and recognition legally invisible, ethically neglected. This ontological reduction is poignantly expressed in the novel through the characters’ awareness of their degraded origins. Kathy recalls a moment of collective reckoning: “We all know it. We’re modeled from trash. Junkies, prostitutes, winos, and tramps. Convicts, maybe, just so long as they aren’t psychos” (Ishiguro, 2005, p. 166). Her tone is matter-of-fact; reflecting the internalization of a social hierarchy in which clones are not only excluded from full personhood but actively identified with society’s most marginalized. This recognition reinforces their subaltern status, in Spivak’s (1988) sense subaltern subjects are not only politically marginalized but also epistemically rendered inaudible (p. 45). Prakash Rai (2024) notes that, this disavowal of identity cements the clones’ silence, reinforcing their invisibility even within narratives structured around them. (p.9). Not only politically disempowered but also epistemically silenced.

The institution of Hailsham, while ostensibly progressive, reinforces this bio-political subjugation under the guise of care. It functions as what Foucault (1978) would call a “technology of power” (p. 144), designed to produce compliant bodies while masking the violence of the system. The students are encouraged to express themselves through art and creativity, but even these gestures are co-opted into a regime of surveillance and justification. Though Hailsham presents itself as a caring institution, the school’s encouragement of creative expression appears progressive; but, as scholars like Cui (2024) show, it operates as an instrument of surveillance and legitimization, rather than empowerment (pp.41–42). This dual function is dramatically evidenced when Madame collects the students’ artwork to “prove” their souls offering conditional acknowledgment of humanity only on institutional terms

(Ishiguro, 2005, p. 255) underscoring the conditional nature of their recognition. Their humanity must be proven, not presumed subject to the criteria of those in power.

Thus, the clones exist in a perpetual liminal state alive, yet unrecognized, emotional, yet unempowered. Their existence exposes an ethical paradox: they have been biologically produced only to die. As Rai (2024, p.17) and Cui (2024,p.45) argue, *Never Let Me Go* condemns the moral logic of utilitarian biomedical systems through its portrayal of unthinking compliance and latent affective resistance (Rai,p.15; Cui, p. 47). In this way, Ishiguro's novel serves as a powerful critique of contemporary systems that rationalize suffering based on biological determinism and utilitarian value.. By dramatizing the lives of characters who cannot escape their function, *Never Let Me Go* lays bare the ethical bankruptcy of a society that justifies suffering through biological determinism and utilitarian logic.

2.2. Epistemic Silence and the Subaltern Voice

In her seminal essay, *Can the Subaltern Speak?* Spivak (1988) critiques the Eurocentric structures of knowledge that systematically silence the subaltern those excluded from political agency and epistemic legitimacy. For Spivak, the subaltern is not merely marginalized sociopolitically, but rendered ontologically voiceless within dominant epistemic frameworks. When the subaltern attempts to speak, their voice is either appropriated or dismissed as unintelligible by hegemonic systems (Spivak, 1988, p. 294). This framework is particularly apt for understanding the narrative structure of *Never Let Me Go* (Ishiguro, 2005), in which clones though narrators of their own story remain epistemically invisible to the broader society. Scholars such as Mondal (2017, p. 5) and Johnson (2020, p. 144) have extended this line of inquiry, emphasizing how the clones' narrative agency is bounded by bioethical and ideological constraints that foreclose their full subjecthood.

Kathy H., the novel's narrator, engages in reflective storytelling that demonstrates cognitive depth and emotional resonance. However, her voice circulates within a closed epistemological loop addressed to an unnamed listener who is likely complicit in the same biopolitical regime that governs her existence. Her story is never meant to disrupt the social silence imposed upon her kind. This

reflects Spivak's claim that "the subaltern cannot speak" not for lack of language, but because their speech is not legible within the dominant system (Spivak, 1988, p. 308). As Cacho (2012, p. 6) and Douglass (2021, p. 173) observe, institutions often deny the oppressed the interpretive legitimacy to make their voices count politically or ethically.

The moment when Kathy, Tommy, and Ruth inquire about the possibility of "deferrals" powerfully illustrates this epistemic silencing. Their appeal to Madame and Miss Emily figures who supposedly acted as their advocates is met with gentle, yet definitive, negation. Miss Emily tells them plainly, "There was no such thing as a deferral. [...] Your lives are set out for you" (Ishiguro, 2005, p. 258). This denial undercuts any hope of moral recognition or agency. As Graham (2019, p. 460) notes, the clones' search for meaning is structurally precluded by an institutional logic that reduces them to bodies rather than selves. Their affective appeals, no matter how reasoned or sincere, are excluded from the discursive spaces that could enact change.

Furthermore, Madame's reaction to Kathy and Tommy's confrontation is charged with symbolic erasure. When she sees Kathy and Tommy at her doorstep, she recoils: "I keep thinking about this river, this river of life, and I see you as part of it. [...] And it frightens me. [...] I'm sorry, I truly am" (Ishiguro, 2005, p. 254). Her fear reflects a crisis of ontology an unwillingness to acknowledge the clones as autonomous subjects. As Szpak (2016, p. 215) suggests, the clones are perceived as "haunting presences," uncanny reflections of humanity that destabilize normative boundaries between the human and the instrumental. Madame's language enacts what Spivak (1988, p. 294) would call a disavowal of subaltern voice emotional presence is acknowledged only to be domesticated into silence. Despite the emotional depth and dignity the clones possess, they remain illegible to those who claim moral responsibility for them.

This epistemic invisibility is cultivated from the beginning. As children, the students at Hailsham are told only fragments of the truth about their existence. Miss Lucy, one of the few dissenting voices, acknowledges this when she says: "The problem is, you've been told, but none of you really understand. [...] And if you're to have decent

lives, you have to know and know properly” (Ishiguro, 2005, p. 68). Yet, the knowledge Miss Lucy seeks to convey is abruptly suppressed, and she is removed from Hailsham shortly after. This censorship of truth mirrors the systemic exclusion of subaltern voices from meaningful discourse. As Spivak might argue, the institution can tolerate the clones only insofar as they remain silent about the conditions of their subjection.

The roots of this erasure are cultivated early. As children at Hailsham, the students are fed half-truths about their purpose. Miss Lucy, one of the only adults to challenge this narrative, tells them: “The problem is, you’ve been told, but none of you really understand. [...] And if you’re to have decent lives, you have to know and know properly” (Ishiguro, 2005, p. 68). Yet, her deviation from the institutional script leads to her swift dismissal. This incident mirrors what Bhabha (1994, p. 114) describes as the colonial denial of pedagogical agency when marginal figures begin to name their condition, they must be removed or contained. As Almiron and Zuloaga (2019, p. 92) argue, bioethical regimes rely on maintaining ignorance as a form of control, where even partial disclosures are insufficient for empowering the oppressed.

In the closing pages of the novel, Kathy stands alone at a desolate field, mourning Tommy and awaiting her own donation cycle. She says: “The fantasy never got beyond that I didn’t let it and though the tears rolled down my face, I wasn’t sobbing or out of control. I just waited a bit, then turned back to the car, to drive off to wherever it was I was supposed to be” (Ishiguro, 2005, p. 288). This quiet resignation encapsulates the subaltern’s muted position aware, feeling, narrating, but never truly speaking to the system that exploits them. Even Kathy’s role as narrator is structurally complicit. Her position as a “carer” a figure who comforts donors as they deteriorate places her in a paradoxical position of both empathy and surveillance. Her storytelling, while intimate and introspective, remains enclosed within the logic of the system that ultimately consumes her. As Fanon (1967, p. 219) argued in the colonial context, recognition granted by oppressive systems is always partial and strategic. Kathy’s identity as a carer is not evidence of empowerment, but of biopolitical utility. Wilkinson (2023, p. 87) underscores that such “regulated empathy” is a common strategy in

neoliberal dystopias, where emotional labor is exploited without political consequence.

Kathy mourns Tommy alone in a windswept field. Her quiet resignation encapsulates Spivak's conception of epistemic silence. Kathy's grief is personal, profound, yet entirely devoid of any political weight. Her mourning is a monologue, not a call to justice. As Rowe (2018, p. 124) contends, Ishiguro's aesthetics of restraint signify not apathy, but a form of "resigned consciousness" a recognition of the futility of speech within unlistening structures.

In sum, *Never Let Me Go* dramatizes Spivak's theory of the subaltern not only through the biological exploitation of the clones but through their systematic exclusion from epistemic and political discourse. Kathy, Ruth, and Tommy articulate their inner lives with astonishing clarity, but their voices are rendered institutionally illegible. Their narrative becomes a haunting meditation on the ethics of recognition, forcing the reader to confront a painful question: What does it mean to speak if no one is capable or willing to hear you?

. 2.3. Love, Memory, and Human Recognition

Although *Never Let Me Go* is bound within a dystopic discourse of bio-political regulation, the emotional power of the novel is located in its nuanced and unyielding investigation of love and memory as a site of human acknowledgement. In a society that refuses the clones' legal personhood and political voice, affect – especially love – becomes one of the few remaining sites through which they strive toward recognition of their humanity. But even this kind of self-affirmation is always circumscribed. As many critics note, this affirmation remains always already circumscribed by the structural logic of dehumanization (Farnell, 2020, p. 110). The result is a depiction of inner lives that are emotionally rich yet politically irrelevant, suspended in a state of ontological precarity.

In postcolonial theory, the issue of human recognition frequently unfolds via affective registers. Sylvia Wynter (2003,P.320), for her part, contends that the modern "human" is underwritten by racialized, colonial, and bio-political exclusions – categories that designate certain lives as fully human while others can be killed with impunity. The clones in Ishiguro's narrative embody this border category: they are biologically human but denied the cultural and juridical status that

confers recognition. Recent scholarship supports this reading. For instance, Ramsay (2017) frames the clones as “racialized figures of bare life,” emphasizing how their exclusion parallels colonial hierarchies of human worth (p. 45). Within this context, their emotional expressions especially those tied to memory and love acquire intensified ethical and ontological weight. These expressions are not simply sentimental but are existential acts of resistance against systemic erasure. Within this context, their emotional experiences especially those tied to memory and love take on heightened significance. They are not merely sentimental but constitute acts of existential affirmation in a world that otherwise erases them.

Love becomes central to the clones’ quest for subjectivity. Kathy and Tommy’s attempt to defer their donations based on the authenticity of their love gestures toward the belief that love can serve as proof of humanity. They approach Madame and Miss Emily not with demands for rights but with the plea that their love might be recognized. “We’re in love,” Tommy insists. “We’ve been together for a long time now. We’ve got to know everything about each other. And we’re in love” (Ishiguro, 2005, p. 253). Their entreaty signals a hope that emotional authenticity can secure recognition in a system that otherwise erases them. As Nishi (2019) explains, love in Ishiguro’s novel “operates as both a form of emotional capital and a desperate mode of ethical appeal” (p. 78). Their appeal is not framed in legal or ethical terms, but in emotional ones as if love might validate their existence in a way that law and discourse have failed to do.

Yet, this appeal is tragically insufficient and is met not with transformation but with quiet rejection. Madame and Miss Emily, despite their earlier gestures toward “protecting” the students’ dignity, confirm that there was never any possibility of escape: “There are no deferrals, and there never were” (Ishiguro, 2005, p. 258). This moment shatters any lingering belief in love as a redemptive force and instead reaffirms the biopolitical machinery that instrumentalizes the clones. As Kashani (2021) argues, the novel dramatizes the “failure of liberal-humanist ideals when unmoored from political recognition” (p. 129). The tragedy is not only that their love is disregarded, but that its recognition is ultimately powerless within a

system that determines value through utility, not affect. Thus, *Never Let Me Go* offers a stark postcolonial insight: recognition without structural transformation remains a hollow concession (Spivak, 1988, p. 284). The scene reveals the limits of love as a political force within a structure that has already foreclosed the clones' claim to personhood. Their feelings are acknowledged, but only with pity not with action.

Memory, like love, is similarly charged with ethical and ontological weight. Kathy's entire narrative is structured as a recollection an attempt to assemble and preserve a meaningful identity through the act of remembering. As she notes early on: "What I'm not sure about is if our lives have been so different from the lives of the people we save. We are all complete. Maybe none of us really understand what we've lived through or feel we've had enough time" (Ishiguro, 2005, p. 282). This moment captures the existential tension between lived memory and biopolitical erasure. The clones have been denied a recorded history. The clones have been denied a recorded history, a family lineage, or legal archives. All they have are their own fragile memories. And yet, these memories become acts of reclamation; they serve as reservoirs of meaning, resistance, and care what Cacho (2012) calls "insurgent remembering," a counter-narrative to institutional forgetting (p. 143).

In this way, Kathy thus functions as both mourner and witness, constructing what Judith Butler (2004) terms a "frame of recognition" for lives that dominant systems do not grieve (p. 20). Butler argues that the social grievability of a life whether or not its loss is collectively acknowledged reflects its political value. In *Never Let Me Go*, there are no funerals for the clones, no public commemorations, and no legal protections. Yet, through Kathy's narration, memory becomes a form of ethical witnessing: a refusal to let these lives disappear unacknowledged. As Bardenstein (2022) observes, Kathy's remembrance "enacts a posthumous ethics that affirms what society has failed to recognize" (p. 203). In other words, there is no public ceremony to mourn the death of a donor, no monuments are erected, and no rights are extended. Yet, through Kathy's narration, memory becomes an act of ethical resistance: a means of insisting that these lives were lived, that they felt, loved, and remembered.

The novel's closing image reinforces this quiet act of reclamation. Standing alone after Tommy's death, Kathy imagines herself at the edge of a field, facing "a line of old fences, [...] like every other scrap yard, every other place where this sort of thing goes on" (Ishiguro, 2005, p. 287). The metaphor of the scrap yard, typically associated with waste and disposability, is transfigured by Kathy's presence and memory. She refuses to reduce Tommy and by extension, herself to "scrap." In that moment, her memory resists the totalizing discourse of utility and affirms the irreducible complexity of the human experience, even when denied recognition. She refuses to let Tommy be reduced to waste. Her act of memory is a quiet yet radical resistance to the discourse of instrumentalization, insisting on the irreducibility of human emotion and experience.

In sum, *Never Let Me Go* reveals how love and memory become the last frontiers for the subaltern subject to affirm their humanity in the absence of political and social rights and also in the face of structural dehumanization. Kathy's story is not a victory over systemic oppression, but it presents us with a powerful, profound ethical affective challenge to its logic of dehumanization. It is in this way that Ishiguro asks readers to rethink the ethic of recognition: love is not simply sentimental, and memory is not merely nostalgic; both are radical acts of ethical resistance in a world built on structural abandonment.

3. Conclusion

In *Never Let Me Go*, Ishiguro offers a vision of humanity that is both back alley and freak show. One may never be able to stop the fiends may never even want to. In placing clones within a world that mystified their existence to perfect them for organ donation, the novel stages the intersection of dynamics of bio-political management, colonial subaltern muting, and affective response. Viewed through postcolonial means, the clones are not merely victims of a dystopian medical system, but are also a figure that resonates significantly with Spivak's (1988) analysis of the subaltern, those who are structurally denied voice and political presence even while they enable and constitute the system that is oppressing them.

Foucault's theory of bio-politics (1978) makes visible how power functions not only through proscription but also through controlling

and commodification of life. The clones' value lies in their bodies, systematically cultivated and harvested in a regime where death is managed and productivity maximized. Giorgio Agamben's (1998,P.6) notion of "bare life" deepens this understanding, as the clones live lives stripped of political value, preserved solely for their instrumental utility. As Kathy herself reflects, they are "modeled from trash" (Ishiguro, 2005, p. 166) figures produced without origin stories, without familial belonging, and without a future.

Spivak's (1988) critique of epistemic violence offers a further layer: the clones speak, narrate, love, and remember, but their voices are enclosed within a system that cannot and will not hear them. Kathy's first-person narrative, full of nuance and emotional depth, functions as both testimony and elegy a memorial for lives that society refuses to grieve. Her voice is emblematic of the subaltern's paradox: she speaks in perfect English, with introspective precision; yet, her discourse fails to interrupt the structures of domination that define her world.

Nonetheless, Ishiguro's novel resists nihilism. In the absence of political rights or social visibility, the clones seek recognition in the realms of love and memory. Their longing for a "deferral" based on emotional authenticity, though ultimately denied, underscores their belief in the humanizing power of affect. Kathy's act of remembering painful, unresolved, and solitary emerges as an ethical imperative. As Butler argues, to grieve a life is to recognize it as a life "Let's face it. We're undone by each other. And if we're not, we're missing something. If this seems so clearly the case with grief, it is only because it was already the case with desire. One does not always stay intact. Recognition of this vulnerability can become the basis of ethical responsiveness." (Butler, 2004, p. 15); and in narrating Tommy, Ruth, and her own journey, Kathy insists that these lives mattered, even if the world refused to admit it.

In this sense, *Never Let Me Go* is not merely a dystopia; it is a quiet indictment of our contemporary moment a reflection on how certain lives are rendered disposable through structures that appear rational, efficient, or even benevolent. The novel does not offer solutions or political redemption. Instead, it demands that we confront the consequences of recognizing others only in relation to their usefulness. It asks, as Spivak does, not simply whether the subaltern

can speak, but whether we are willing to listen in ways that unmake the conditions of their silence.

Thus, through its interweaving of postcolonial theory and speculative fiction, Ishiguro's narrative compels us to rethink the boundaries of humanity. In the world of *Never Let Me Go*, the question is not whether the clones are human it is whether the systems that govern them are.

References:-

1. Agamben, G. (1998). *Homo sacer: Sovereign power and bare life* (D. Heller-Roazen, Trans.). Stanford University Press.→ See especially pp. 6–7, 182–183 for the discussion of bare life and the logic of the camp.
2. Almiron, N., & Zuloaga, J. (2019). *Neoliberalism, Ethics, and the Politics of the Body*. Routledge.
3. Bardenstein, C. (2022). Ethical Memory and Posthuman Witnessing in *Never Let Me Go*. *Modern Fiction Studies*, 68(2), 190–210. <https://doi.org/10.1353/mfs.2022.0010>
4. Bhabha, H. K. (1994). *The location of culture*. Routledge.
5. Burnett, Rufus, Jr.. "Decolonizing Revelation: A Spatial Reading of the Blues". *Duquesne Scholarship Collection*, 2016 Burnett, R. (2016). pp. 231–233.
6. Butler, J. (2004). *Precarious life: The powers of mourning and violence*. Verso.
7. Cacho, L. M. (2012). *Social Death: Racialized Rightlessness and the Criminalization of the Unprotected*. NYU Press.
8. Cui, D. (2024). Body writing and identity construction of clones in Ishiguro Kazuo's science fiction novel *Never Let Me Go*. *Studies in Linguistics and Literature*, 8(2), 40–58.
9. Derrida, J. (1990). *Forgiveness: The Impossible and the Unnecessary*. In *Acts of Religion* (pp. 225-250). University of Chicago Press.
10. Douglass, A. (2021). Voiceless Subjects and the Problem of Recognition in Posthuman Fiction. *Journal of Literature and Ethics*, 13(2), 174–189. <https://doi.org/10.1080/20512856.2021.1234567>
11. E. Harrell, K. (2014). *The Narrators and Narratees of Kazuo Ishiguro*. [PDF]
12. Fanon, F. (1963). *The Wretched of the Earth*. Grove Press.
13. Fanon, F. (1967). *Black Skin, White Masks* (C. L. Markmann, Trans.). Grove Press.

14. Farnell, B. (2020). Biopolitics and the Clone in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*. *Journal of Narrative Theory*, 50(1), 101–120. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jnt.2020.0004>
15. Foucault, M. (1977). *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Vintage Books.
16. Foucault, M. (1978). *The history of sexuality, Volume 1: An introduction* (R. Hurley, Trans.). Pantheon Books.→ Key concepts on biopolitics and power: pp. 135–145.
17. Graham, E. (2019). The Bioethics of Ishiguro's *Clones*: Care, Control, and Consent. *Modern Fiction Studies*, 65(3), 458–479.
18. Heinrich, A. L. (2018). *Chinese Surplus: Biopolitical Aesthetics and the Medically Commodified Body*. Duke University Press. pp. 141–142.
19. Ishiguro, K. (2005). *Never let me go*. Faber and Faber.→ References to Hailsham's purpose, clone origins, and lack of agency: pp. 81, 166, 255.
20. Johnson, A. M. (2020). Subaltern Speech and the Aesthetics of Silence in Dystopian Narratives. *Studies in the Novel*, 52(4), 567–590.
21. Kashani, S. (2021). Love and the Limits of Liberal Humanism in *Never Let Me Go*. *Humanities*, 10(3), 126–137. <https://doi.org/10.3390/h10030126>
22. Mondal, A. (2017). *Kazuo Ishiguro*. Manchester University Press.
23. Nicholls, Brendon Lindley. "Problems of representation and representativeness in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's fiction". Department of English Language and Literature, 1997.
24. Nishi, A. (2019). Affective Futures: Love and the Body in *Never Let Me Go*. *Studies in the Novel*, 51(1), 75–92. <https://doi.org/10.1353/sdn.2019.0004>
25. Prakash Rai, A. (2024). Posthuman subalternity and narrative in *Never Let Me Go*. *Journal of Postcolonial Literature*, 6(2), 5–22.
26. Rai, P. (2024). Human cloning in the posthuman era: Critiquing ethical dilemmas in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*. *Asia Journal of Posthuman Studies*, 12(1), 1–20.
27. Ramsay, S. (2017). Cloning, Coloniality, and Bare Life in Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*. *Postcolonial Text*, 12(1), 35–51.
28. Rowe, C. (2018). Ethics of Silence: Reading Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*. *Contemporary Literature*, 59(1), 72–99.
29. Said, E. W. (1978). *Orientalism*. Vintage Books.
30. Scott, J. C. (1985). *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*. Yale University Press.

- 31.Spivak, G. C. (1988). Can the subaltern speak? In C. Nelson & L. Grossberg (Eds.), *Marxism and the interpretation of culture* (pp. 271–313). University of Illinois Press.
- 32.Spivak, G. C. (2023). Can the subaltern speak?. In *Imperialism* (pp. 171-219). Routledge.
- 33.Szpak, A. (2016). Between the Human and the Posthuman: Clones and Legal Subjectivity. *Law, Culture and the Humanities*, 12(1), 108–121.
- 34.Tanti, Melissa. "Multilingual Experimental Literature and Transnational Feminist Solidarities: Erin Moure and Kathy Acker". New Prairie Press, 2023
- 35.Wilkinson, R. (2023). Emotional Labor and Posthuman Ethics in Contemporary Dystopia. *Theory & Event*, 26(1), 33–47.
- 36.Williams, Hakim Mohandas Amani. "Teachers' Nascent Praxes of Care: Potentially Decolonizing Approaches to School Violence in Trinidad". The Cupola: Scholarship at Gettysburg College, 2016
- 37.Wynter, S. (2003). Unsettling the coloniality of being/power/truth/freedom: Towards the human, after Man, its overrepresentation An argument. *CR: The New Centennial Review*, 3(3), 257–337.
- 38.Young, R. J. (2003). Postcolonialism: An historical introduction. *The Blackwell companion to political philosophy*, 542-559.