

# The Biopolitics of Disability: A Critique of the Neoliberal England of Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*

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## Abstract

This article investigates the biopolitics of disability in the ablenationalist England of Kazuo Ishiguro's novel *Never Let Me Go* and examines how a neoliberal society urges its citizens to depend on market-based private medical management to be able-bodied individuals in order to fully participate in society. It also analyses the lives of clones who reside at Hailsham, a boarding school, as well as those of the non-cloned human beings living in the community outside Hailsham to illustrate the Agambenian ideologies of *zoē* and *bios*. The less explored and less debated sections of the novel, such as the fictional state of England, the institutions that produce and raise human clones like Hailsham, and the society of non-cloned human beings who are waiting for organ transplantation, are examined to exemplify how ablenationalism and able-disabled become strategies for inclusion in a neoliberal society of Ishiguro's fictional England, thus problematising the ableist notion of inclusion as presented in *Never Let Me Go*.

**Keywords:** biopolitics; ablenationalism; able-disabled; *zoē*; *bios*; neoliberalism; *Never Let Me Go*

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## Introduction

This article aims to study the biopolitics of disability in Kazuo Ishiguro's novel *Never Let Me Go* and examines how a neoliberal society compels its citizens to depend on market-driven private medical management and care to become able-bodied individuals to fully participate in societal activities. Ishiguro's neoliberal England promotes private institutions like Hailsham which create human clones, constructing a notion that all bodies are inherently vulnerable and therefore in need of a fix. This is problematic as it results in the normalisation of disability, and underscores the failure of the economic, medical, social, and political agencies to create alternative ways of living with disabilities in a neoliberal society.

The term biopolitics, which denotes the politics that deals with life, was defined by Michel Foucault, a renowned French philosopher, in his book *The History of Sexuality Volume 1: An Introduction* (1978). Biopolitics, as a phenomenon, made a transformation in the order of politics in the West around the eighteenth century. This article aims to study the biopolitics of disability in Kazuo Ishiguro's novel *Never Let Me Go* and examines how the performance or functionality of bodies is evaluated to allow entry into a neoliberal society.

Biopolitics refers to the state's management of population resources by maintaining demographic records. Neoliberalism, on the other hand, is a governance system that is specific to the latter part of the twentieth century. In this system, the focus shifts from governance by and for the people to strategies that facilitate the emergence of corporate-dominated marketplaces (Mitchell and Snyder 2015). The article explores how these strategies and developments impact the lives of people with disabilities and other occupants of peripheral embodiments through illustrations of Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*.

## An Overview of *Never Let Me Go*

*Never Let Me Go* is a story set in a dystopian version of a fictional England in the 1990s. The narrative explains the state's attempts to improve the quality of life by expanding the lifespan of its citizens, particularly those with disabilities. With sponsors from corporate companies and influential politicians, the state succeeds in establishing institutions that create and raise human clones for harvesting organs. The narrative centres on three cloned individuals, Kathy, Ruth, and Tommy, who become close friends while growing up at Hailsham, an institution dedicated to designing clones to serve as organ donors for the citizens of a fictional England. Ishiguro provides a non-linear narration of the story that is a reflection of Kathy's memories of Hailsham. Unlike most dystopian science fiction that represents an imagined future, this novel presents an imagined alternative history to the England of the late twentieth century which may have existed differently with some scientific breakthroughs.

Hailsham is presented as an idyllic place where the young clones spend their early years as students. They are cared for by guardians like Miss Geraldine, Miss Lucy, and Miss Emily who is also the headmistress of the school. The guardians train the cloned children to excel in arts to prove that clones too have souls. The students, unaware of their cloned origins, are puzzled by Madame Marie-Claude's periodic visits to the school to choose some of their best artworks. Miss Emily and Madame Marie-Claude challenge the operation of the organ donations programme in their quest to prove that clones too have souls. They seek to demonstrate that if these cloned students are raised in humane and nurturing environments, they too can develop to be as sensitive and intelligent as any other human.

During the "Exchange," a kind of exhibition-cum-sale, the students are paid with "Exchange Tokens" based on the meritocracy of their artwork. The "Exchanges" at Hailsham, where the students are encouraged to showcase their artistic talents, are significant, as they foreshadow the impending "exchange" where the clones will ultimately donate their vital organs to the country's disabled citizens.

This article critiques certain aspects of neoliberalism and biopolitics that allow private medical care institutions to play a major role in determining the value of human bodies. The article also critiques how the citizens strive to be able to be fully accepted in the neoliberal society of Ishiguro's fictional England because what allows full participation in a neoliberal society is simply one's financial means as only those disabled citizens with wealth can afford to access the clones' organs. Furthermore, considering the neoliberal context, it is reasonable to assume, although the novel does not provide explicit evidence, that society is built on the model of private medical care rather than national health insurance.

According to Sexton (2023), Ishiguro intentionally avoids categorising this novel as science fiction to prevent readers from being misled as the crux of the story does not rely on science fiction elements. Sexton reiterates that there are no references to the creation of clones, the process of donation, the political status of the fictional England, or the non-cloned human beings living in the community. Ishiguro wants the narrative to simply be a warning about biotechnology (Sexton 2023). The narrative is not a celebration of the dominant force; instead, it is a representation of the cruel fate of the clones.

## Literature Review

Fiction, as a literary device, has been used to forewarn about the potential consequences, both positive and negative, of ideologies and policies through the writer's representation of an imagined narrative. Through empathetic responses, literature helps to develop moral intuitions and plays a vital role in such ethical debates. However, a biopolitical reading of literary texts that helps understand disability and its nuances is quite limited.

Literary analysis of cloning and organ harvesting as seen in *Never Let Me Go* focuses on the vulnerability of the cloned individuals by using the theories of biopolitics. For example, Valle Alcalá (2019) and Lee (2021) argue for resistance by examining the way affect is utilised in the organ harvesting programme, and how Kathy, a clone, fits into the system. Similarly, the principles of human farming are criticised by Linett (2020) by offering snapshots of how we confront questions of value. Ridinger-Dotterman (2018) analyses the cloning narrative through the perspective of disability studies, using defamiliarisation as a literary technique to scrutinise both the ideological constructions of disability and the physical frameworks that have confined disabled bodies during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and that try to answer what it means to be human. Johnston (2019) foregrounds how the biological bodies of the clones become capital under the neoliberal post-human regime. Similarly, George (2023) explains how clones become objects of medical and disciplinary gazes in this post-human scenario, wherein the dominant and privileged human society incorporates bio-matter from the clones to restore their dysfunctional organs. Others have analysed concepts like bio-citizenship and bare life in the context of literary studies to examine the socio-political status of the engineered lives who are classified as biomedical fodder (Karmakar and Parui 2020).

However, these literary analyses do not highlight the politics that operate on able-disabled individuals like Miss Emily as seen in *Never Let Me Go*, and the struggle of the clones and the non-clones to attain the state of “bios.” Also, they fail to recognise how biopolitics in the neoliberal capitalist era promotes corporeal productivity, which leads to creating a normative/ableist society of inclusion.

Therefore, the article attempts to address this gap by analysing the less explored, the less exposed, and less debated sections of the narrative, namely, the biopower of the institutions that produce and raise human clones like Hailsham; the clones’ persistent struggle to attain the status of what Agamben refers to as “bios”; and the able-disabled status of the non-cloned human beings like Miss Emily, who are waiting for organ transplantation, to illustrate how biopower operates on bodies to create a neoliberal ablenationalist society.

## Politics of Life and Body in the Neoliberal England

The organ harvesting programme described in Ishiguro’s fictional England of the 1990s is pure horror, ameliorated by the “reforms” carried out by institutions like Hailsham, in which clones are raised like ordinary children in boarding schools before they are farmed out for their organs. Central to that horror is the process by which the clones are brought up to believe that this state of affairs is natural and acceptable; their only contact with the outside world is with that of their guardians, to the extent that none of them even contemplates escape or revolt.

The scientific and biotechnological institutions of this fictional England engage in experiments with these human clones, thereby taking control of the body and life of the

clones to cure the bodily dysfunctionalities in human beings. Miss Emily describes the inhumane treatment of the clones in the following lines:

You Hailsham students, even after you've been out in the world like this, you still don't know the half of it. All around the country, at this very moment, there are students being reared in deplorable conditions, conditions you Hailsham students could hardly imagine. And now we're no more, things will only get worse. (Ishiguro 2005, chap. 22)

It is a fair assumption given its neoliberal context that the cloned bodies are commodified. Though Hailsham was an effort to challenge the then ways of treating clones inhumanely, Miss Emily and Marie-Claude fail to be sensitive towards the problematic notion of commodifying the cloned bodies in the market-driven biocapital England. A close observation of the "Exchange" programmes at Hailsham provides a glimpse of how these cloned students were trained to be exposed to the world of consumerism in the future where these clones as donors must donate their organs to disabled consumers in the community. Tommy's constant struggle to produce creative works of art and the consequent taunting and criticisms from fellow clones can be considered as hints of how individual contributions to society become a driving force for all bodies (cloned and non-cloned) in order to enjoy accessibility in a neoliberal era. This makes the fictional England an ideal state of neoliberalism.

When the effort to find Ruth's clone parent, who is assumed to be a woman from an elite section of society, goes in vain, Ruth frustratingly admits the fact that their cloned originals are from the lower ranks of society. "We're modelled from *trash*. Junkies, prostitutes, winos, tramps. Convicts, maybe, just so long as they aren't psychos. That's what we come from. We all know it, so why don't we say it?" (Ishiguro 2005, chap. 14). Ruth's belief, however, remains unconfirmed in the novel, thus contributing to the restricted knowledge provided to the clones regarding their actual identities, which functions as a disciplinary mechanism to foster such conviction. One of the more powerful ways the novel demonstrates the dehumanising nature of the system within which the clones live is by illustrating how their treatment results in them viewing themselves as abject.

The concept of trash pervades Ishiguro's narrative. Within its neoliberal context, the cloned lives, commodified through organ harvesting, are eventually terminated, that is, euphemistically "completed," and ultimately discarded as trash. Augmenting this interpretation is the incident where Tommy is bullied by his fellow clones, who mimic unzipping his skin like a bag and letting his organs spill out. Similar to a bag that is being emptied of its content, the Hailsham clones metaphorically become bags that carry commodities for disabled consumers in the market. Thus, the bodies of these clones are regarded as containers of organs, eventually becoming trash which is later disposed of after their final fatal donation.

The politics over death which Achille Mbembe (2019) refers to as necropolitics can be understood as a new technique of power of the state that uses biomedicine and

biotechnology to make decisions on when the lives of the clones should begin and end. This allows the state to departmentalise the death of the clones by deciding which organ of the cloned body should first stop functioning. In Mbembe's analysis, necropolitics refers to the use of state power to dictate who lives and who dies, often through the systematic infliction of violence, death, and suffering.

In *Never Let Me Go*, necropolitics operates in conjunction with biopolitics, as the state of Ishiguro's fictional England and the institutions like Hailsham not only seek to regulate and manage life but also attempt to determine who is disposable or expendable within the social order. In one of the conversations with a guardian named Miss Lucy, the clones are informed that they cannot pursue their dreams and that their future is already destined by the state.

None 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. You'll become adults, then before you're old before you're even middle-aged, you'll start to donate your vital organs. That's what each of you was created to do. You're not like the actors you watch on your videos, you're not even like me. You were brought into this world for a purpose, and your futures, all of them, have been decided. (Ishiguro 2005, chap. 7)

At the same time, the biopolitical state of England, as Foucault suggests, attempts to foster the lives of its citizens by deferring their death and helping them survive as able-disabled embodiments in the neoliberal biocapital England. According to Foucault (1978), this evasion of death in the contemporary era is not due to the fear of death itself, but the shift in the focus of power away from death, asserting its control more on life (139). The state's decision on the expansion of the lifespan of its citizens well illustrates the operation of biopower over lives in the modern age.

Analysing the practice of segregation of Hailsham clones from the outside world would metaphorically denote the socially and politically disabled status of the clones (Garland-Thomson 2015) even though they exhibit able-bodied potentialities. This seclusion of cloned subjects kept in shadows is a form of dividing practice that manipulates the cloned bodies for harvesting organs. In the following lines, Miss Emily confesses to Kathy and Tommy how the world perceives the clones:

However uncomfortable people were about your existence, their overwhelming concern was that their own children, their spouses, their parents, their friends, did not die from cancer, motor neuron disease, heart disease. So, for a long time, you were kept in the shadows, and people did their best not to think about you. And if they did, they tried to convince themselves you weren't really like us. That you were less than human, so it didn't matter. (Ishiguro 2005, chap. 22)

In "On the Government of Disability: Foucault, Power, and the Subject of Impairment" (2006), Shelly Tremain refers to Foucault's theory on power and states that Foucault

introduced the term “dividing practices” to refer to “modes of manipulation that combine a scientific discourse with practices of segregation and social exclusion in order to categorize, classify, distribute and manipulate subjects who are initially drawn from a rather undifferentiated mass of people” (186).

The power of the state and institutions like Hailsham that create cloned lives to procure organs for the survival of the citizens of the country using biotechnological advancements is evidence of how politics in modern times operate on bodies. This biopolitics, in Foucault’s words, is an agent of power, which modern society uses to control and manage individual and collective lives. Thus, an in-depth study of Hailsham, along with other less discussed institutions such as Glenmorgan House and Saunders Trust, which are also organisations that foster human clones, provides insight into how human clones are created only to supply medical treatment for the inevitable disablement.

Neoliberalism promotes individualism and consumerism in the community of non-cloned individuals who are waiting for organ transplantation, shaping cultural norms and attitudes towards the body. This can manifest in various ways, such as the pressure to conform to normalisation promoted by industries. Neoliberalism intersects with biopolitics, which Foucault describes as the regulation of populations through norms. Thus, politics operates on bodies in the neoliberal era by shaping socio-economic structures of the fictional England of the 1990s, by emphasising the cultural norms of the citizens like Miss Emily, and by constructing the policy frameworks of the state to establish institutions for harvesting organs from human clones, thereby enabling access to resources, opportunities, and well-being, and simultaneously perpetuating inequalities and marginalisation.

### Miss Emily as Able-Disabled

Miss Emily, the head guardian, is a complex character whose portrayal as an able-disabled figure helps one understand the dynamics of disability and exposes the complex intersections between power, agency, and societal attitudes towards disability. Hailsham was her initiative, as a response to the way the entire donations programme was being run, to treat the clones humanely and not as mere commodities for consumption. Although students were scared of her and felt intimidated by her presence, since she was not like other guardians, they respected her decisions, felt safe around her, and considered her to be fair. However, towards the end of the novel, she honestly explains to both Tommy and Kathy that deferrals are just rumours and that their life must run the course that it has been set for, that is, organ donations.

A scrutiny of the community of non-cloned human beings outside Hailsham would give an insight into the state of what Robert McRuer (2006) refers to as compulsory able-bodiedness. Though Ishiguro’s narrative does not shed light on the lives of people living in this community, a few characters like Miss Emily and Madame Marie-Claude, the

founders of Hailsham, provide glimpses of how wealthy citizens like them utilise the state-sponsored private medical care system to obtain organs from clones.

Nikolas Rose (2007), a renowned sociologist, explores the intersection between scientific knowledge, governmental power, and individual subjectivity in his book *The Politics of Life Itself*. He examines how forms of knowledge production, such as psychological and medical expertise, shape our understanding of what it means to lead a healthy and “normal” life. He emphasises that the politics of life is not just about the exercise of explicit state power but also involves other forms of governance that operate through various societal institutions. He highlights the role of technologies of the self, where individuals are encouraged to take responsibility for their health and well-being through self-monitoring and self-discipline (Rose 2007, 26). His work encourages a critical examination of the power dynamics and ethical implications inherent in these processes. He explains that the politics of the twenty-first century

is neither delimited by the poles of illness and health nor focused on eliminating pathology to protect the destiny of the nation. Rather, it is concerned with our growing capacities to control, manage, engineer, reshape, and modulate the very vital capacities of human beings as living creatures. It is, I suggest, a politics of life itself. (Rose 2007, 3)

Kathy’s description of the figure of Miss Emily in a wheelchair as “frail and contorted” (Ishiguro 2005, chap. 21) informs the readers about her debilitating condition, which is natural for human beings as their bodies pass through time and space. But Miss Emily explains to Kathy and Tommy about her present condition in a wheelchair as temporarily disabled. “I’ve not been well recently, but I’m hoping this contraction isn’t a permanent fixture” (Ishiguro 2005, chap. 22).

Miss Emily considers the contraptions she uses for mobility like the wheelchair and crutches to be non-normative. She declares with confidence that her current disabling condition would one day be fixed by the neoliberal market-driven biocapital England that relies upon biotechnology. The urge to retain her abled identity could be problematic because it is impossible to attain an abled identity as her body ages. By trying to expand the lifespan of its citizens, the state of England, like Huxley’s *Brave New World*, attempts to postpone ageing, which is a natural phenomenon of life. This struggle to exist as an able-bodied citizen is what McRuer (2006) refers to as “ability trouble,” which resonates with Judith Butler’s (1990) theory of gender trouble in which she critiques the binary understanding of gender as strictly male or female. She posits that this binary is a social construct that serves to uphold certain power dynamics and excludes those who do not conform to these rigid categories. Similarly, this “ability trouble” is problematic as it is impossible to retain an abled identity consistently as human bodies go through ableness and disablement at various stages of life.

In addition to Miss Emily, the clones by virtue of their existence are seen as able bodies, but experience iatrogenic disability due to their systematic organ donations. Miss Emily



serves as an example of what Mitchell and Snyder (2015) refer to as able-disabled. She expects that her current disabling condition will be fixed shortly by one of the clones using the state-sponsored organ-harvesting programme. To be included in this society, disabled individuals like Miss Emily strive hard to become able-bodied. Miss Emily's perception of disability and desire to be able-bodied are juxtaposed with the experience of the clones who are temporarily able-bodied, and intentionally and permanently disabled. Mitchell and Snyder (2015) explain how impairment becomes one of the main features of debility in a neoliberal society. In this process, some disabled individuals like Miss Emily gain entry into society by overcoming their limitations caused by disability through private medical care that is promoted by institutions such as Hailsham to normalise different embodiments. Meanwhile, others with severe disabilities but no resources are unable to access the private medical care system and are constantly excluded from society. Those bodies who are allowed entry into this neoliberal society are called able-disabled.

The biopolitical England of *Never Let Me Go* effectively regulates bodily norms within categories of abnormalcy, aiming to structure disabled or non-normative bodies into commercially exploitable identities using human clones. Consequently, biological traits are turned into measurable attributes judged against the benchmarks of an increasingly medicalised culture. This leads the scholars of disability studies to discuss the problem of establishing inclusivity in a neoliberal society. In such a society, the meaning of inclusion is understood as an expanding tolerance towards previously stigmatised groups like people with disability. This neoliberal disability ensures that all bodies must adhere to the norms of ability, i.e., to be nondisabled, or at least not too disabled (Mitchell and Snyder 2015).

Ablenationalism developed as the mid-twentieth century entered an age of normalisation where citizens are expected to be more alike than different. Ablenationalism and able-disabled are neoliberal strategies of biopolitics designed to regulate disabled people from entering the ableist society (Mitchell and Snyder 2015). They are against the kind of inclusion that in the name of social integration attempts to normalise disabled bodies. Thus, there exists a tension between community and immunity (Bird and Short 2015), and this modern form of governance, as portrayed in *Never Let Me Go*, is characterised by the efforts to both include and exclude certain groups from the political community based on notions of health, security, and risk.

## Life as Zoē and Bios

Giorgio Agamben, an Italian philosopher, promulgated Foucault's theory on biopolitics and offered valuable insights into the complexities of modern governance by examining power, sovereignty, and the relationship between politics and life. In *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, Agamben (1998) uses the Greek distinction of life as "zoē" and "bios" to show how lives gained significance in the classical period. While "zoē" refers to the simple fact of living a biological life (the biological existence), "bios"

refers to the manner of living the life that makes the life politically significant (the political existence).

Interpreting the purpose of the existence of the cloned lives at Hailsham would be sufficient to illustrate how Agamben's concept of bare life functions on the cloned bodies. The clones grow up at Hailsham where they attend school like real citizens of the country. After their schooling at Hailsham, that is, "[u]ntil their maturation, the clones are suspended in institutional ennui" (Ridinger-Dotterman 2018, 69), after which they take up the career of being a "carer" to support and tend to the needs of their fellow clones at the time of their organ donation. Later these "carer" clones would become "donors" themselves and accomplish the purpose of their lives by donating their organs one by one to the needy citizens of the fictional England. Their lives as carers and donors are what they believe makes them politically significant (bios) within the world of Hailsham, as implied in the words of Kathy:

Now, I know my being a carer for so long isn't necessarily because they think I'm fantastic at what I do. There are some really good carers who've been told to stop after just two or three years. And I can think of one carer at least who went on for all of fourteen years despite being a complete waste of space. So, I'm not trying to boast. But then I do know for a fact they've been pleased with my work, and by and large, I have too. (Ishiguro 2005, chap. 1)

Agamben introduces the concept of "bare life" (also referred to as "zoē") to describe a state where life is reduced to its biological, physiological aspect, stripped of any political or legal protections. In this condition, a person's life becomes vulnerable and exposed, lacking inherent rights and subject to control by the sovereign power (Agamben 1998, 159). In the community of neoliberal England, it is the notion of compulsory able-bodiedness that emphasises the need for citizens like Miss Emily to attain the status of bios. The state ensures that these citizens are not reduced to the state of bare life or zoē. This control over the bare biological life has been framed to supervise peripheral embodiment specific to disability (Mitchell and Snyder 2015, Introduction).

With the help of scientists and biotechnologists, the state tries to create a robust society in which every citizen is promised the status of what Agamben refers to as bios, which, according to the Greeks, "indicated the form or way of living proper to an individual or a group" (Agamben 1998, 1). While some proponents argue in favour of biopolitics, promoting it as a means to provide public health and safety, others criticise it as violating democratic values by dehumanising its population. Therefore, the comparison between the politics that operates within the world of Hailsham and the external world where the non-cloned citizens like Miss Emily live as a community helps readers study how biopower functions differently in both worlds.

Agamben in *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* refers to Foucault's argument that "the modern Western state has integrated techniques of subjective individualization with procedures of objective totalization to an unprecedented degree" (1998, 5). This

argument is well delineated in the novel where the state along with its citizens strives to elevate their lives to the standard of bios by cooperating with the government in the state-sponsored organ-harvesting programme to increase the rate of life expectancy and gain political significance in the society. Any life that does not meet this standard is deemed to be *zoē* or bare life, which is considered undesirable by the state. This new development to make the fictional England an ideal state is what Garland-Thomson (2015) refers to as a eugenic world-building that

strives to eliminate disability and, along with it, people with disabilities from human communities and future worlds through varying social and material practices that range from seemingly benign to egregiously unethical. Such world-building seeks social improvement and freedom of choice by eliminating devalued human traits in the interest of reducing human suffering, increasing life quality, and building a more desirable citizenry. (Garland-Thomson 2015, 134)

## Politics of Disability and Debility in an Ablenationalist England

In the contemporary neoliberal era, where biocapitalism has become the new economic resource, the fear of developing debilitating conditions in the human body forces individuals like Miss Emily to rely on biomedicine and biotechnology to restore their lost functionality. Biocapitalism, according to Kaushik Sunder Rajan (2006), is the economic value derived from biological resources, i.e., by transforming biological entities such as genes, tissues, and cells into commodities. The intersection of biotechnology and capitalism shapes contemporary life. Biocapitalism, while offering health and healing at a cost, simultaneously also promotes diseases, thus commodifying both health and illness.

The fictional England of *Never Let Me Go* represents an ablenationalist society with a state-sponsored organ-donation programme. The fictional state of England meticulously guides its citizens into acceptable norms of bodily functionality. This detailed process creates a type of biopolitics where nationalism and ableism intersect (Mitchell and Snyder 2015).

The government of Ishiguro's fictional England, which grapples with the inevitable challenges posed by the epidemics, chronic diseases, and deteriorating health conditions of its citizens, reckons biotechnology as a remedy to improve the health status of the population. In *Never Let Me Go*, Ishiguro does not present a detailed description of these scientific procedures. However, in the following lines, Miss Emily explains to Kathy and Tommy about the breakthroughs that happened in medicine at that time: "Suddenly there were all these new possibilities laid before us, all these ways to cure so many previously incurable conditions. This was what the world noticed the most, wanted the most" (Ishiguro 2005, chap. 22).

Thus, the public health and biological life of the citizens of the fictional England of *Never Let Me Go* become the problem of the state. This new technique of power, which

Foucault (2003) calls the power of regularisation, is incapable of controlling death and therefore uses its mechanism to take control of mortality. Foucault elaborates:

And thanks to a power that is not simply scientific prowess, but the actual exercise of the political biopower established in the eighteenth century, we have become so good at keeping people alive that we've succeeded in keeping them alive when, in biological terms, they should have been dead long ago. (Foucault 2003, 248)

The state of the fictional England creates an ablenationalist society that, according to Mitchell and Snyder (2015), hinders the bodies with disabilities or functional limitations from finding accommodation in society. In this ablenationalist England, disabilities are accepted as long as they do not necessitate substantial modifications to largely rigid institutions, settings, and societal norms. Specifically, the disabilities of citizens like Miss Emily are tolerated to the extent that they do not greatly disrupt the standards upheld by a national identity that relies on the ideals of bodily wholeness and a limited spectrum of normalcy if not outright perfection (Mitchell and Snyder 2015). Therefore, to accommodate these disabled and debilitated bodies, the ablenationalist England of the 1990s used medical advancements in genetic engineering such as cloning to replace the dysfunctional organs of its citizens with the new ones from the clones, thus increasing the life expectancy of the population.

Miss Emily's explanation of the Morningdale scandal to Kathy and Tommy reiterates the negative attributes of these biopolitical mechanisms. She narrates how a researcher named James Morningdale conducted his experiments in a secluded region of Scotland. He aimed to provide individuals with the opportunity to have offspring exhibiting advanced traits such as heightened intelligence and athleticism. Morningdale pushed the boundaries of scientific exploration beyond the constraints of legality, delving deeper into his research than any predecessors. However, upon his discovery, authorities intervened and terminated his controversial work. Miss Emily explains:

But it did create a certain atmosphere, you see. It reminded people, reminded them of a fear they'd always had. It's one thing to create students, such as yourselves, for the donation programme. But a generation of created children who'd take their place in society? Are children demonstrably superior to the rest of us? Oh no. That frightened people. They recoiled from that. (Ishiguro 2005, chap. 22)

These advancements are considered innovations in the context of late capitalism (post-Fordist economies) because they, especially concerning individuals with disabilities, emphasise enhancing bodies labelled as "debilitated" to create new products and expand markets (Mitchell and Snyder 2015). Under neoliberalism, almost all bodies are viewed as impaired and require market commodities to address their cognitive, physical, emotional, and aesthetic shortcomings.

Theorists and philosophical thinkers who study the interference of politics in the life and death of human beings have paved the way for advocates and scholars of critical

disability studies to lay the foundation for a discipline that explores and examines the operation of power on disabled and debilitated embodiments. Bodies with disabling or debilitating conditions are considered vulnerable and a threat to a robust society.

According to Butler (2022), the “health of the economy” was deemed more important than the “health of the people” during the pandemic times of the neoliberal era. This idea personified the economy as a human body that must be supported at all costs, even at the expense of human lives. This shift did not just apply human qualities to the markets; it drained health from people to sustain the economy (Butler 2022, 52). This deadly inversion is particularly evident during the pandemic times.

In the wake of the global shutdown, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, several US states enacted emergency declarations that targeted disabled individuals, especially those with intellectual disabilities. Disability activists, bioethicists, and public health officials quickly condemned these measures as not only unethical but outright illegal. As the world transitioned from treating COVID-19 as a pandemic to an endemic disease, disabled individuals with immunological issues were the social group left to die. When lives are lost or people are left to die though prevention is possible, the value destroyed is the value of life itself, which makes sense only if we believe all lives are equal or should be treated equally. Some worry that asserting equal value for all lives could undermine the unique worth of each individual life. The lost value is often seen as shared by the community. Discussing the value of life is challenging because “value” is usually associated with market worth (Butler 2022, 84–85). The COVID-19 pandemic underscores that our world is fundamentally eugenic, organised to care for the privileged few deemed to be of “good stock.” This line of analysis is essential for understanding our current global condition as well as that of *Never Let Me Go*. Madame Marie-Claude’s interpretation of Judy Bridgewater’s album song “Never Let Me Go” to Kathy and Tommy becomes a pivotal moment of realisation for the readers because it expresses the fear of approaching a dystopian future that misinterprets the meaning of inclusiveness in a neoliberal ablenationalist era. She says:

I was weeping for an altogether different reason. When I watched you dancing that day, I saw something else. I saw a new world coming rapidly. More scientific, efficient, yes. More cures for the old sicknesses. 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. That is what I saw. It wasn’t really you, what you were doing, I know that. But I saw you and it broke my heart. And I’ve never forgotten. (Ishiguro 2005, chap. 22)

Biotechnological advancements could be used for therapeutic purposes and for enhancing the quality of life by enabling high-functioning bodies. While the former is productive, the latter is problematic as it is a form of eugenics. The novel thus highlights the state’s perception of mortality that is in contrast with the inevitable transformation of bodies through time and space. In order to promote healthy inclusion of varied

embodiments, proponents of disability studies demand a shift in the attitude towards disability and encourage alternative ways of living with different embodiments.

## Conclusion

Human beings live in a world of norms and there is no area of life in which the idea of the norm has not been calculated (Davis 2006). The reference to an able, normal body is necessary to understand a disabled body. According to Lennard J. Davis, “the ‘problem’ is not the person with disabilities; the problem is the way that normalcy is constructed to create the ‘problem’ of the disabled person” (2006, 3). Disability is a cultural construction and has no inherent meaning. If we investigate the phenomenon of disability from the perspective of a medical model, people are deemed inherently able-bodied (with perfect genes) or disabled (with defective genes) based on the categorisation of the genes (Rose 2006).

The term “normate” coined by Rosemarie Garland-Thomson indicates the composite identity position held by those unmarked by stigmatised identifiers of disability. She also emphasises the importance of understanding that value judgements concerning disability or impairment rely on the act of comparing individual bodies with determining norms that dictate expectations of how human beings should look and act (Garland-Thomson 1997). In other words, “the term normate usefully designates the social figure through which people can represent themselves as definitive human beings” (Davis 1999, 504).

These neoliberal strategies of creating an ablenationalist England as illustrated in *Never Let Me Go* explore how disability is seen as something deviant from the mainstream, and certainly not representative of the human condition. According to Davis (2006), every human body in its variations is metaphorised, commodified, normalised, abnormalised, formed, and deformed. By identifying Miss Emily as an able-disabled figure, and the urge for bodies to become politically significant (bios), the article justifies the argument on how the meaning of inclusion in a neoliberal era is problematic when bodies find accommodation in society only by complying with the norms of compulsory able-bodiedness. “The word ‘normal’ as constituting, conforming to, not deviating or different from, the common type or standard, regular, usual, only enters the English language around 1840” (Davis 2006, 3). However, when it comes to the human body, the concept of normalcy has become a prominent scale that measures and labels the body as able or disabled.

Biotechnology needs to understand that functional limitation is an integral part of the process of life as the human body travels through time and space. The scientific practices of harvesting organs to retain corporeal functionality and ability through transplantation will only provide negative perceptions about bodies that fail to fit into such standards. A critical analysis of these scientific practices has drawn attention to the argument on the need for an attitudinal shift towards disability.

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