

Impact of state control

'...your futures, all of them, have been decided.' (Never Let Me Go) 'But eventually...they break you.' (Stasiland)

Compare what these two texts suggest about the impact of state control over the individual.

Under the asphyxiating shackles of a totalitarian governance, people struggle to preserve their sense of self and persevere in the hopes of a better future. In a pythonesque reality that promotes compliance and suppresses individuality, Anna Funder and Kazuo Ishiguro explore the impacts imposed on those who fall victim to the commodification and destruction of the human spirit. Yet, while in *Never Let Me Go*, the clones' future remains hopeless and bleak, the GDR citizens in *Stasiland* instead harness their ability for critical thought and are able to thwart the debilitating regime, regaining control of their lives. In this way, Funder highlights the unquestionable truth in the dynamic power of critical awareness and interpersonal connections to sustain the human condition's inextricable need for hope, and provide the strength to transcend the rigid paradigms of totalitarian oppression.

A totalitarian state is omnipotent and unrelentingly employs physical and psychological torture, resulting in the dehumanisation of the individual human spirit. Immediately, as Kathy articulates, 'my name is Kathy. H', Ishiguro unlocks the door to an unjust world where something as essential as a name and therefore identity, is denied, exposing the underlying quashing of the clones' existence by the rest of their society. Realising she is 'different to them', Kathy divulges her stultifying and burdensome existence, in which she and the rest of the clones are often shunned to the peripheries of society, dehumanised and exploited for their ability to supply organs, solely for the benefit of the 'normals'. Evidently, as the 'normals' 'shudder at the very thought' of the clones' existence, this ubiquitous yet ambiguous totalitarian reign succeeds in ostracising and stripping them of their humanity; they are indoctrinated with the belief that they are not proper humans, which contributes to their soporific passivity. Through its facade as an idyllic boarding

school, Hailsham masks the horror lurking within, whereas in Stasiland, Funder explains, 'the Stasi were methodical', as they apply brute force and use torturous methods to suck the life out of dissidents, in order to maintain state control. After months of 'solitary confinement', deprived of any 'contact with the outside world', Miriam, internally wounded and scarred, describes herself as 'locked in an interminable present', emphasising the relentless and ruthless nature of the GDR, a state that fetters and suffocates the freedoms of its people. Just as in East Germany, where 'trading in humans was a source of hard currency', the clones' are 'created' for the sole intention to 'donate [their] vital organs', encapsulating the way these minorities are exploited and commodified, regarded as nothing more than a mechanism to be abused by these autocratic governments.

Compounding their cruel and inhumane treatment of citizens, despotic figures of authority aim to pervade the fabric of society, using censorship and propaganda as tools for obfuscating reality, thereby preventing rebellion and encouraging absolute obedience to the dominant ideology. Barred by the gates of Hailsham, the clones are constantly monitored, convinced that 'there was always someone likely to be passing by within earshot', reflecting the paranoia bred by the omnipresence of the ruling force. Kathy has 'no idea if anyone [is] actually watching', highlighting the crippling power of intangible and nebulous control to generate submissiveness. Contrarily, although the GDR is labelled as the 'most perfected surveillance state' and equally scrutinises the citizens' every move, its overt and visible army of informers is in fact limited to the public sphere. While 'information ran in a closed circuit', primarily censored by the government with the intention of distorting the truth', the East German citizens live with the awareness of what 'could be discussed' inside and outside the home, rendering possible the whispers of protest and the igniting of treasonous fires behind closed doors. In stark contrast, due to the harrowing surveillance that imbues the clones' lives, they are forced to find ways to 'sneak off...without getting everyone curious', deeming Ishiguro's alternative England a perfected totalitarian state, in which neuroses develop as a result of such omnipresent incarceration. Insidiously, the guardians 'timed very carefully and deliberately' everything they tell the Hailsham students', ensuring they are 'told and not told', as a means of maintaining subservience and unquestioning acceptance of their fate. Subsequently, the clones' lives becomes an ontological reality in which they are inculcated to believe that their role in the organ donation program is indispensable. However, as the Stasi 'couldn't control' people's access to 'western television', the East Germans have a point

of comparison that provides them with insight into an alternative lifestyle, serving as an open window through which critical and individual thought can drift.

Endemic to the maintenance of a totalitarian state is the attempted destruction of relationships, that isolates the individual in order to impede challenging the regime. Prior to Kathy and Tommy learning the demoralising truth behind their existence, Kathy reflects on how she and Tommy are able to become 'close again', as they firmly believe they can achieve 'three years just to themselves' if 'they could prove they were properly in love'. Their belief in the power of love to protect them from their fate, by means of the rumoured deferrals, temporarily unites them. Conversely, Frau Paul sorrowfully admits that she has to 'decide against [her] own son', highlighting the Stasi's determination to break families apart, in order to crush the human spirit and leave the individual susceptible to dominion by the authorities. For Miriam too, 'the past stopped when Charlie died', and she is left lonely, depressed and emotionally drained. However, Funder turns to the inevitable rebuilding of human connections, as Miriam hopes that 'the puzzle women in Nuremberg find out something about Charlie', expressing her determination, courage and belief that the truth will hold the state accountable for destroying her love and leaving her emotionally scarred. In opposition to Funder's optimistic outlook on surviving subjugation, Ishiguro instead focuses on how Kathy and Tommy are forced apart by their society's overwhelming power to vanquish their existence, as Kathy watches as Tommy 'slipped and fell out of view into the blackness', suppressed and vacuumed into an abyss of nihilism.

While Ishiguro presents an ending devoid of hope and resistance, Funder instead illuminates the profound power of exposure to an alternative lifestyle to catalyse rebellion and free the individual from the immobilising bounds of state control. Julia recounts that at any time, anyone could 'jump up and change the channel' to a Western television program, allowing for heterodox behaviour that threatens the longevity of the state. In direct contrast to the possibility for insubordination in East Germany, the clones, even after being sent to the Cottages, 'stayed...fearful of the world', lacking the language for rebellion and therefore unable to question their inviolable future of organ donations. Yet, through exposure to West Germany and an impenetrable private sphere, the East Germans are 'aware their lives were observed, manipulated and sometimes ruined', enabling them to revolt 'against the communist dictatorship', helping bring the GDR to its ultimate demise. In contradistinction to the GDR citizens' strength and ability to triumph over the totalitarian government, Kathy decides to 'drive off to wherever it was [she] was supposed to be', remaining

a passive product of her society's indoctrination.

While Ishiguro's perspective on the consequences of totalitarianism concludes lacking any hope for the future survival and humanisation of the clones, Funder instead highlights how there can be no peace 'until Miriam has some kind of justice', signifying Miriam's determination to seek the truth about Charlie's death, despite living in a world of obfuscation. Accordingly, Miriam epitomises resilience and resistance to the subjugation of the intimidation and falsehood established by totalitarian regimes of the past, as well as the power for insistence, despite the pervasive injustices committed, all of which are absent in Kathy's somnambulistic gravitation towards her expected role in society. Thus, for Funder, the tenacity of the human pursuit for truth resists the oppression of dictatorial regimes, and stands defiant against attempts of state control.

Delving into the nature of life controlled by totalitarian hegemonies, Funder and Ishiguro explore the impacts of oppressive state control on the individual. In Stasiland, the East Germans have exposure to the West, which provides them with awareness and courage to overthrow the destructive government, and survive beyond the nightmarish era of subjugation. Contrarily, in *Never Let Me Go*, the clones lack external awareness and the capability to dissent, leading to their termination as they remain nothing more than marionettes of unexplored potential. Unlike Ishiguro, Funder conveys that the possibility for individuals to thrive under totalitarian governments hinges on an amalgamation of critical thought and awareness, active change, meaningful relationships and hope, enlightening readers that these qualities are fundamental to achieving a world free from the restraints of state control, that sparkles and shines with the beauty of the human spirit.