The Postclone-nial in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* and Amitav Ghosh's *The Calcutta Chromosome*: Science and the Body in the Asian Diaspora

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> If you happen to actually live in a country that you think won't actually provide a broad enough setting to address what you see as the really crucial issues of the age, that inevitably means you start moving away from straight realism.
>
> Kazuo Ishiguro (Vorda and Herzinger 12)

I. Introduction: Asia, Modernity, Narration

Amitav Ghosh's *The Calcutta Chromosome* (1995) and Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* (2005) are relatively rare instances of Anglophone writers of the Asian diaspora using the themes and conventions of science fiction (Chambers).[1] While examples of science fiction-like texts from popular fiction and media can certainly be adduced—including the writings of Manjula Padmanabhan, Haruki Murakami, and Koji Suzuki, well-known Japanese anime productions like *Ghost in the Shell*, and short stories represented by such anthologies as *Speculative Japan* (2007, edited by Grania Davis and Gene van Troyer) and *So Long Been Dreaming* (2004, an anthology of work by writers of Asian, African, and Aboriginal descent, edited by Nalo Hopkinson and Uppinder Mehan)—many of these were originally written in languages other than English, consequently do not have much international circulation, and indeed may not be very well known even in their countries of origin. This is a stark contrast to the long history, popularity, social and literary impact, and ubiquity of science fiction in Western Europe and North America, where it not only has a loyal following in its "hardcore" forms (novels, short stories, television, and film) but also crosses easily into "serious" literature (one thinks of Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse*

Five, Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale,* George Orwell's *1984*, Anthony Burgess's *1985*, and *A Clockwork Orange*, among many others). However true Brooks Landon's observation that "science fiction in the twentieth century has moved from the fringes to the center of modern consciousness" (4–5) is of the Western European and Northern American markets that dominate the production and consumption of science fiction, it does not seem to represent the very different context of the developing nations of Asia.

There are, of course, social and contextual reasons for this vastly different response to and production of science fiction narratives in developed as opposed to developing nations, the foremost of these likely being the extensive and involved socioeconomic problems within many of the Asian nations that attained independence around the middle of the twentieth century. Nations like India, China, and Indonesia—among the most heavily populated nations in the world—continue to struggle with the problems of populations straining the meagre limits of their various infrastructural capabilities and economic resources, as well as with ecological and agricultural problems in their vast rural areas. These and other nations in (especially) South and Southeast Asia also struggle with problems of sectarianism and social inequality due to ethnic heterogeneity, religious politics, rapid social change at odds with cultural traditionalism, and other similar factors. Where pockets of economic and technological success do take hold—for example, in the rise of Information Technology (IT) professionals in India, or of highly educated professional classes in places like Sri Lanka, the Philippines, China, Hong Kong, Malaysia, and Singapore—they are often accompanied by the familiar phenomena of talent mobility or exodus, poaching or exploitation of talent by foreign agencies, capital flight, elite stratification, and other issues (Wong, Pflegerl, Khoo, Yeoh, Koh; D'Costa; Baliga). Information Technology itself is an interesting touchstone: often seen as the embodiment of or hope for an open, wired global society, it still reveals the fundamental imbalance between technology possessed by the "East" and "West." In regional terms, Asia only has a fraction of the Internet bandwidth that the US, Canada, and Europe, enjoy; problems of state surveillance and control still dog the use of the

Internet and spread of connectivity in a number of Asian nations; and countries at the bottom of the IT pecking order (including Bangladesh, Cambodia, and Myanmar) have almost negligible computer access rates, with less than ten personal computers for every one thousand people in the population (Rao 9; Ho, Kulver and Yang 3; Lyon).

It is thus hardly surprising that writers who locate their work firmly within developing societies tend to be far more concerned with the thematics of Asian development—poverty, crime, oppression, social injustice, sectarian violence, rapid change and its human consequences—than with the "imaginary marvellous," the possibilities, and "what ifs" that often characterize science fiction (Landon 6). As Homi Bhabha points out, the characteristic narrative movement of many of these new Asian nations is a "doubled" one with elements of a "nationalist pedagogy" as well as "performative" plurality comprising the "prodigious, living principles of the people as contemporaneity" (145). Caught between nationalist agendas and the often crushing weight of lived "contemporaneity," the speculative future and its technological enhancements recede very much to the margins. Theories of the ways in which technology comfortably interfaces with (and indeed energizes and enables) various aspects of human existence (Haraway; Murphie and Potts) thus seem to miss the essential condition of everyday life in many Asian societies, where even the most rudimentary technology is a luxury beyond reach, and where hard labour and basic subsistence are the rule. Science fiction certainly has its dystopian and negative aspects, in which science assumes a monstrous, dehumanizing character—techniques of behavioural modification in Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange*, digital human storage and the costs of immortality in Richard K. Morgan's *Altered Carbon*, clones and androids in *Blade Runner* and *Terminator*, the power of artificial intelligence in Gibson's *Neuromancer*, and many other examples show this perspective. Yet what is ultimately affirmed through these dystopian narratives is a new cyborg future in which essential human qualities are married to technologies in order to form new possibilities and "connections" which perpetuate the human despite the initial threat of the technological (Haraway 311; Pyle 134). Dystopian science fiction, by serving to undermine "the value of the distinction between real

and simulation, between authentic and prosthetic" (Landsberg 186), ultimately affirms the technological connection with and enhancement of the human within a narrative of imaginative possibilities-made-flesh.

Additionally, science fiction in general carries an ideological load at considerable odds with the social and national consciousness that emerges in many Asian nations. For these countries, the moment of emergence into independent statehood was also a point of socioeconomic and political crisis in which survival meant a rapprochement with colonial definitions of progress and reason. Gyan Prakash explains in the context of India that

> To be a nation was to be endowed with science, which had become the touchstone of rationality. The representation of a people meant claiming that the nation possessed a body of universal thought for the rational organization of society. The idea of India as a nation, then, meant not a negation of the colonial configuration of the territory and its people, but their reinscription under the authority of science. (7)

Science, even as it offered to endorse the modernity of the developing nation, also re-inscribed it in essentially colonial terms as continually subjected and struggling toward external standards of rationality. Simultaneously and reciprocally, European modernity and rationality also relied on a projection of "primitive" racialized Otherness which confirmed that modernity in the "European self-representation" (Gikandi 150). This "scientific" racial segregation was again reinforced by colonial epidemiologies and anthropologies of pathology which marked the Asian body (and its environment) as unhealthy and diseased in comparison to the healthy and strong European body; science as a discourse of modernity, by definition, could thus only write the non-European body as a lack, within a taxonomy of bodily weakness and deficiency (Ramasubban 41–42; Farley 189–93).

Science fiction thus narrates along the fault lines of an inequity which marks the division between First and Third World nations, developed and developing societies, the global and the local (or emerging global) cultures, marked and unmarked/clean bodies—in effect, postcolonial

fault lines. The re-inscription of science onto Asian diasporic writing, while useful in foregrounding (broadly) postcolonial issues with a perspective of new "possibilities," can also reinforce the abjection of the Third World subject within postcolonial conditions. Science fiction's cyborg possibilities and new connections, while reinforcing the dominance of the developed world—its authority, culture, and subjects—in the connected milieu of globalization, ultimately have quite a different effect on the developing world due to science's inherent ideological capacity in juxtaposition to the social conditions in many Third World nations. Science and capitalism impose a powerful discursive overlay which transcribes the Third World subject as the serviceable and servile body in globalization, mobile and empowered to a certain extent and in certain capacities, but ultimately circumscribed and confined to the position of the lacking and subjected other vis-à-vis the developed world order. In this light, one of the most interesting motifs of science fiction is genetic engineering and cloning: on the one hand a popular motif with which to highlight the endless and even extravagant "possibilities" of "human evolution" (Pringle 44, 45), on the other it also foregrounds the different status accorded to different bodies, and the politics of that differentiation. By asserting one kind of scenario or possibility in the course of its narrative, a science fiction discourse thus runs the constant risk of inscribing a corresponding basis of differentiation or discrimination.

It is therefore interesting, from this point of view, to look at Amitav Ghosh's *The Calcutta Chromosome* and Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*—both books which were their respective author's only foray (so far) into science fiction, both representing something of a departure from their respective oeuvres, and both written by well-known Anglophone writers of the Asian diaspora who (to varying extents) have nevertheless engaged with and set some of their works in the lands of their birth. These two novels also form an interesting pair in that both are concerned with technologies affecting human life and life expectancy: *Never Let Me Go* is explicitly about clones, while *The Calcutta Chromosome* deals with the transferral of human life into other bodies, in the process raising questions about the continuity of identity and the fungibility of bodies.

We might thus call these novels prototypical "postclone-nial" narratives, playing out those concerns of the Third World body as the site of the discriminatory markings and power play of capitalism and technology. Both novels foreground cloning—whether it be actual or symbolic—as one of the key themes wherein postcolonial politics and identities will be negotiated in the contemporary global era. The clone (as it were) embodies the kinds of issues of cultural politics involved in writing from postcolonial contexts, including the "difficulties encountered" as a result of former colonial rule, but also the awareness of one's "derivativeness," and thus the overall condition of being caught between and "being shaped by" that patriarchal source and becoming a "new shape" out of that source (Patke 4–5). The postcolonial subject's struggle toward authentic identity and self-articulation within the web of perpetuating neocolonial influences and inequities is thus sharply embodied in the clone's dilemma: being of the original source yet also different and discriminated against, sharing a communion (of DNA, locus, history, etc.) but also disenfranchised. In particular, the clone's marked resemblance to the original calls the arbitrary inequities of power, privilege, and voice sharply into question, all the more so when the marks of a common humanity are manifestly bodied forth, and in an era of advanced technologies which only widens the gap between privileged and disenfranchised groups. In effect, the clone is in many ways the quintessential symbol of the body of the Third World native, disciplined and harvested in order to bring benefit and gain to the privileged, yet also containing a mute but palpable critique of that exploitative order—a "postclone-nial" discourse in the agon, marks an alienation of the body.

II. Amitav Ghosh's *The Calcutta Chromosome*: Revisionist Narrative, Native (Anti)Technology, and Transnational Bodies

Amitav Ghosh is well known as an author whose works often focus on marginal classes and groups in India and the Indian diaspora: *The Hungry Tide* is concerned with human displacement and the underclass that ekes out a precarious existence in the Sundarban tidal region, while both *The Glass Palace* and *The Circle of Reason* are concerned with the struggles of Indian and other migrant labourers. Once described as a

"disillusioned Marxist" (Alam 140), Ghosh is very much concerned with colonial and neocolonial consequences as they complicate the distribution of wealth, privilege, and authority in a globalizing world, and maintains that he was "writing about globalization long before it became fashionable" (qtd. in Gilbert). Capitalism—in the form of local business elites, transnational business flows, migrant labour, the tourist industry, and the general impact of foreign economic influence—is seen as the exploiter of rural native bodies, which become inscribed as illegitimate, irremediably Other, and ultimately expendable. The novels become, in dramatic and sometimes even unsubtle ways, a chiaroscuro of First- and Third-World conflicts.

Ghosh's 1995 novel *The Calcutta Chromosome* takes a particular approach to this conflict, focusing on the intellectual capital of scientific discovery, prizes, and honours, and *techne* as a means of social control and authority. At the heart of Ghosh's novel is the story of Ronald Ross's Nobel Prize-winning work on malaria, which Ghosh turns into an account of the "high-handed" racism of colonial science (Chambers 62), and in opposition to this, the shadowy yet powerful movement of native cult wisdom and folk knowledge. Ghosh's narrative turns Ross's research, which was conducted in India while he was serving in the Indian Medical Service in the last decade of the nineteenth century, into a colonial comedy of errors, an almost slapstick jaunt in which the white administrators play golf and tennis and make "lucky" scientific breakthroughs for which they take all the credit, even as a cartel of seemingly abject natives make significant and unacknowledged contributions to the research (Ghosh, *Calcutta* 72–74). Ross's research initially travels through a series of wrong turns—he thinks the malaria parasite is waterborne, and tries in vain to recruit native volunteers to drink his cocktail of dead mosquitoes—but takes a giant step forward when a native "dhooley-bearer" (one who "shovels shit," in the colonial government's scheme of things) named Lutchman not only volunteers for Ross's experiment and disproves the erroneous theories but also suggests that the real malaria vector is a particular species of mosquito (75–77).

Lutchman and his native team (including the enigmatic, demiurge figure Mangala) thus represent an alternative form of knowledge, a

"counter-science" that proceeds in a radically "different way" from Western empirical sciences: "a way so different it wouldn't make any sense to anyone who's properly trained" in the "conventional" sciences (*Calcutta* 105, 106). In the course of the novel, this team succeeds in maneuvering and manipulating the colonial scientists, in part by playing on their assumptions of racial and cultural superiority, and accomplishes its goals of discovering and isolating the malaria strain that permits the transfer of human life and identity into other bodies. In the process, they allow Ross to take credit for the far less significant goal of identifying the means of transmission of the malaria virus.

The novel is told from the perspective of Antar, an Egyptian working in modern-day New York as a "programmer and systems analyst" for LifeWatch, a non-profit public health consultancy that is part of the "mammoth" conglomeration the International Water Council (*Calcutta* 9). Antar plays detective in trying to reconstruct the narrative pieces and events in the life of Murugan, a fellow LifeWatch employee whose obsession with the "real" story of Ross's life and work precipitates the events of the novel, including Murugan's own disappearance and Antar's involvement in the whole affair. The solemn Antar and excitable Murugan, unlikely companions when they first meet, develop into doubles of each other, both persons of foreign origin lost in the lower echelons of a huge New York corporation, both out of favour (Antar for "declining productivity," Murugan for his "increasingly erratic and obsessional behaviour," 5, 37), both searching for an existential puzzle that is in some ways connected to their Third World status. Antar's social circle in New York is a nexus of migrants who generally occupy marginal social and economic positions in America:

> the Sudanese bank-teller, the well-dressed Guyanese woman who worked in a Chelsea used-clothes store, the young Bangladeshi man from the subway newsstand…. large, noisy Middle Eastern and Central Asian families—Kurds, Afghans, Tajiks and even a few Egyptians. (13–15)

This society thus seems, at least for the earlier half of the novel, like a modern-day corollary to that of the natives of colonial India, who also

orbited as the ragged fringe around the colonial centre. Indeed, the two worlds connect, as Antar finally discovers that hidden within the detritus of America's abject foreigners are the avatars of the same natives who had trumped the colonial scientists. Lutchman and Mangala, with others of their circle, are revealed to be the same personalities (or essential identities, inhabiting different bodies) as a number of other native characters—Romen, Lucky, Urmila, Mrs. Aratounian, and Tara—who crop up in both contemporary Calcutta and New York.

True to Ghosh's abiding concern with native bodies—who, variously, are exploited, abused, mutilated, killed, and otherwise marked and abjected in his other novels—*The Calcutta Chromosome* turns out to be in many ways a story of "native" life, as much in colonial times as in the present, in India as in the diaspora. Yet the foregrounding of science, in the story of Ross's research and the "alternative" work of Lutchman and Mangala, seems to offer a different, perhaps even opposing, moral trajectory to that of Ghosh's other novels, where science and the politics of the First World are often the more or less witting perpetrators of the indignities upon the natives. As Suchitra Mathur puts it, Ghosh's abiding concern is with the "omissions and commissions of the discourse of [a] modern science" whose essential workings and intents are inextricably bound to "technology," "positivism," and "progress" (119–21), and thus its effects are oppressive on the marginal positions occupied by natives, especially native women. Science and technology certainly play a prominent role in the stories of colonial oppression in many of Ghosh's other works: for example, the British army's sudden and calamitous annexation of Burma with their "boats so fast they can outrun a tidal bore" and guns that "can shoot quicker than you can talk" (*Glass Palace* 17); or the 1950 visit to Calcutta by Nobel Laureate Irene Joliot-Curie and her humiliation of the protagonist Balaram, with the long train of disastrous consequences this engenders in *The Circle of Reason*: "They were all the same, all the same, those scientists. It was something to do with their science. Nothing mattered to them—people, sentiments, humanity" (*Circle* 16).

In *The Calcutta Chromosome*, the oppressive role of science is once again evident in the form of "self-important and opinionated" colonial scientists like Ross and his colleagues, who freely patronize natives by

exploiting their labour and even using them as "guinea pigs" (138, 243). However, in this novel the oppressive European scientists receive their comeuppance at the hands of the native researchers. Ghosh's use of the science fiction convention, like Murugan's techno-conspiracy thesis, allows him to write an "alternative interpretation" (in Murugan's phrase) to colonial science, in which a native science is shown to be "maybe three or four years ahead of the state of play in the international scientific community" (36, 243).

The heart of this achievement in native science is a form of cloning, illustrated in the transmission of Mangala's human essence—personality, consciousness, identity—into a "new body" at will (Ghosh, *Calcutta* 235). While this is not "cloning" in the strict sense (etymologically, *klon* means "twig" in Greek, signifying a genetic branching out from the original source), it has in common with cloning the creation of bodily subordinates (twigs), subjected to the will and demands of the personality-essence and the primary body it currently inhabits.[2] The "technology for interpersonal transference" which Mangala and company discover involves having the "information" of one's personality "transmitted chromosomally, from body to body." As Murugan explains it, "when your body fails you, you leave it, you migrate—you or at least a matching symptomology of your self. You begin all over again, another body, another beginning. Just think: no mistakes, a fresh start" (Ghosh, *Calcutta* 109).

Ghosh's twist on cloning consists of the continuity of the self over the genetically and physically different bodies it may inhabit, rather than the genetic duplication of identical bodies. Thus Mangala is recognizably herself, even in her later avatars, for example in the scene in modern New York where Lucky (as Lutchman is now called) "flung himself down on the floor in front of Tara and touched his forehead to her feet" (224); it is this scene's recollection of other similar scenes of veneration (involving Mrs. Aratounian, Urmila, and Mangala) that suggests Tara's true identity as Mangala's latest avatar (152, 166, 307).

The parallel of this crisis of identity with the condition of the Third-World native is clearly indicated by Murugan earlier in the novel, when he compares the Calcutta chromosome and the transference of identity

that it enables with "migration" (109). The clones or bodily shells that are awaiting possession by Mangala or another immortal occupy positions of short-lived haplessness and fatalistic subjection to a higher authority with life-and-death power over them that all too closely resembles the general fate of the Third World native—a fate which, not coincidentally, Antar and his circle of acquaintances show us something of, as foreign workers in New York. Thus early in the novel Antar depicts his apartment building, occupied largely by foreign workers, as a place of disintegration, where any possibility of even a temporary community of immigrants is lost, a loss that parallels Antar's own loss of his wife Tayseer:

> They were all gone now, all those noisy, festive families that had so attracted Tayseer. They had been syphoned slowly away into small towns and suburbs by the demands of their expanding businesses and their ever-growing families….
>
> At first he had expected that the building would fill up around him after his old neighbors left—just as it had in earlier generations, with one wave of migrants moving out and another moving in. But somewhere down the line the patterns had changed: an alteration in the zoning regulations had prompted the building's owners to start converting the apartments into commercial properties.
>
> Soon the only residents left were aging holdovers like himself: people who couldn't afford to move out of their rent-controlled apartments. Every year the building grew emptier of people, while the storage space expanded. (16)

In place of any real community (either the Egypt of Antar's childhood, or even the temporary community of migrants in his building) comes the capitalist simulacrum of community: the anonymity of coworkers in a huge corporation, Antar's pseudo-companionship with his computer (named "Ava" after its model acronym) whose "laser-guided surveillance camera" keeps Antar at work as a kind of parody of human supervision, and even the "appropriate rural dialect of the Nile Delta" which Ava is programmed to use with Antar (7, 14).

In Ghosh's other novels too, especially *The Circle of Reason* and *The Glass Palace*, migrant workers are depicted as leaving the defining cultures and identities of their homelands and undergoing the dislocating and disorienting process of abject labour and life overseas. Like clones or body shells, these migrant labourers have little or no control over their own bodies, which effectively become the property of the capitalist machines that purchased them, and which possess them much as Mangala's personality (dis)possesses her chosen ones. Interestingly, it is at this stage of the dissolution of Antar's circle of migrants and the emptying of his apartment building that the immortals Tara, Maria, and Lucky enter his life, taking advantage of the space available in his building to find a refuge for the now "illegal" Tara. The immortals literally and figuratively colonize empty space, not only in the living quarters of their fellow migrants but even (in case of need) in their bodies.

One of the most unsettling things about this novel is the way in which the reader's experience of the main characters is ultimately overshadowed by the uncertain fate that awaits them, in the face of the technology of identity-transference. Toward the end of the novel, Murugan, as he realizes the enormity of the native coterie's power and plans, most clearly evinces this sense of hopeless uncertainty and abjection:

> Suddenly, taking Urmila by surprise, Murugan fell to his knees, squeezing himself into the narrow leg space of the back seat. Bending low he touched his forehead to her feet. "Don't forget me," he begged her. "If you have it in your power to change the script, write me in. Don't leave me behind. Please." (307–08)

The confusion is marked by the fact that although Murugan is speaking to the Urmila-who-is (at that time she is unaware of her fate, replying "I don't know what you're talking about," 307), he is actually pleading with the Mangala who will ultimately inhabit Urmila.

The confusion over identity is reinforced by the fragmentary nature of the narrative and its vagueness with respect to details. The narrative is divided into different chronotopic chunks, with one group of such chunks narrated from Antar's point of view as he reconstructs Murugan's career, another from Murugan's point of view as he conducts his in-

vestigations in Calcutta, and yet others from the perspective of other characters both historical (such as the missionary doctor Elijah Farley, whose perspective we share as he encounters Mangala and her circle in chapter 21) and contemporary (such as Sonali, as she searches for her friend Romen). The episodic chunks are shuffled together, sometimes with a certain perverse logic (or lack thereof) to emphasize the confusing nature of events. For example, the unconnected episode of Urmila's domestic life in chapter 20 is interspersed between Antar's downloading of the facts about Farley at the end of chapter 19 and the unfolding of Farley's narrative in chapter 21. Similarly, in chapter 42 Antar finally confronts a visual telecast of Murugan who is inexplicably naked, handcuffed, and "encrusted with dead leaves and straw … mud and excrement" (294), and at the end of the chapter the image asks, "So you want to know what happened to Murugan?" (294, 295); however, the next two chapters jump to events in Calcutta which do not explain Murugan's fate, and when we return to the confrontation between Antar and the virtual Murugan in chapter 45, there is still no explanation of the events leading to Murugan's condition.

Lacking not only authorial omniscience but also a narrative organization into discrete and distinct strands, *The Calcutta Chromosome* compels the reader to share the confusion and uncertainty of Antar and other characters, even to the novel's close. Thus when Antar, in the closest that he comes to a denouement, sees a visual recording of "Tara— except that she was in a sari," talking to "Maria who was wearing a sari too" (310), the reader finally receives confirmation that the Tara and Maria in Antar's New York circle of migrant workers are later avatars of Urmila and Sonila. However, it is never possible to be sure which is which, nor do we know for certain which is Mangala (or, for that matter, who the other female immortal is who takes possession of Sonila's and then Maria's bodies). While it is suggested at the end of the novel that Antar (with the help of Tara and the other immortals) will go "across" into the circle of immortals, there is no indication of what will happen to Antar's consciousness and personality in this process—whether it will remain as one aspect of "a crowd of people" that will share his body, or whether he will simply be supplanted by another personality or person-

alities (311). In addition, the actual science and methodology of the Calcutta chromosome's effect on human identity is obscured even to its most dedicated archivist, Murugan, "One of the reasons why the Calcutta chromosome can't be found by normal methods is because unlike the standard chromosomes it isn't in every cell. Or if it is, it's so deeply encrypted that our current techniques can't isolate it" (250).

If the deliberately fragmentary and often obscurist narrative conceals the full extent of the native gang's sinister plans and pseudo-scientific methods, it cannot quite conceal their transformation into an exploitative power elite that bears more than a passing resemblance to colonialists and corporations. While the novel's intent is to suggest that "we [the native, the colonized] are not left without power," (257) as Nelson argues, it also paints a disturbingly complicit and morally dubious picture of the "new humans" produced through the unpredictable metamorphoses sponsored by the Calcutta chromosome. Yet for all that, the momentous technology of identity transfer seems to make little real impact on the position of the native in the global economy. Tara/ Mangala and Lucky/Lutchman end up in contemporary New York as a part-time nanny and a "clumsy" casual labourer, occupying the same social space and strata as other migrant workers like Antar. Mangala's clones are neither liberated counterrevolutionaries nor powerful authority figures, but caught somewhere in between, a makeshift scientific and power elite that replicates the problems of subjection even as it spurns and seeks to surpass the capitalist connections of the West.

Ghosh's only science fiction novel thus turns out to be something of a narrative clone: it invokes familiar elements of clone fiction, such as the potentially endless biological possibilities and the subversiveness of posthuman identities with a subcontinental twist that foregrounds the Asian aspect of identity politics and possession (who owns the clone body?) in an age of new biotechnology and transnational capital, but finally reiterates the ideological conviction that "science, obligatorily, is always (apparently) elsewhere than the 'Third World'" (Nelson 253). The body of the native, whether we call it "Mangala" or "Tara," "Lutchman" or "Lucky," whether possessing or possessed, turns out to be much of a muchness: an indistinguishable mass, like the cacophony of voices Antar

hears right at the close of the novel, which, if it is capable of slipping out of the crude taxonomy of Victorian colonial scientists, falls neatly into place in a global order which sees all migrants as faceless, indistinct, and utile, a mere "symptomology" (in Murugan's term) of selfhood. Murugan's analogy for the confusing effects of identity transfer, in the context of Ghosh's double-narrative, comes to sound like a fantastical version of the diasporic individual's experience of cultural loss and consciousness dislocation: "You'd have him speaking in your voice, or the other way around. You wouldn't know whose voice it was. And isn't that the scariest thing there is, Ant? To hear something said, and not to know who's saying it? Not to know who's speaking?" (108).

Yet it could also serve as a description of the Third-World body in science fiction, and of science fiction from and about the Third World: unlike the distinct voice calling for social justice in Ghosh's other novels when the expectations and ideological weight of science fiction and the body of the native meet, in *The Calcutta Chromosome* we often find it difficult to ascertain "who's speaking," and what position is being taken on these social issues.

III. Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*: Mirroring, Tribalism, and the Hollow Body

Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*, his only novel with a science fiction theme, in its own way poses as much of a narrative and moral puzzle as Ghosh's *Calcutta Chromosome*.

Scholars have not given as much attention to *Never Let Me Go* (although it must be said that it is his most recently published work) as they have to some of Ishiguro's other novels, particularly *The Remains of the Day*. Yet *Never Let Me Go*, its science fiction premise notwithstanding, does pursue a number of Ishiguro's characteristic social themes, including repression, one's complicity in social power structures, and "memory, desire, and self-deception" (Shaffer 5), even as *The Calcutta Chromosome* shows a continuity with the social concerns of Ghosh's other novels. As with Ghosh, the use of science fiction narrative conventions and premises in *Never Let Me Go* ostensibly furthers Ishiguro's characteristic depiction of power and its social effects, yet also intro-

duces a discordant note in science's inevitable alignment with and reinforcement of the power of the state.

Never Let Me Go includes a number of general similarities with *The Calcutta Chromosome*: the narrator, Kathy H., sifts through her memories of and emotional responses to her upbringing in mysterious boarding school called Hailsham. Kathy's narrative is in some ways a quest for truth in a world where (as she says) little is "actually … talked about in the open" (Ishiguro 56), and where the protectiveness of the school's "guardians," the ignorance of her peers, and the mendaciousness of her close associate Ruth all conspire with her own memory and faulty knowledge to obscure her own real story. Cloned only to donate their organs and then to "complete" their life cycle in death, Kathy and her friends occupy a position in society analogous to laboratory animals or "post-human" shells (Summers-Bremner), although the poignant irony is that Kathy's tentative and nostalgic narrative confers upon her a greater semblance of humanity than any of the "real" humans we meet in the novel.

The school's "guardians"—an ironic reference to Plato's preceptors in *The Republic*, since Ishiguro's guardians conceal rather than reveal, and pervert rather than nurture individual development—are thus in the service of a state-capitalist machinery, the "corporations" and "politicians" that Miss Emily refers to (Ishiguro 242) that authorizes this cloning and the dehumanizing treatment of the clones. Far less activist and rebellious than Ghosh's native scientists, Kathy and her fellow clones are nevertheless caught in a similar power struggle, fighting if not for victory and survival, then at least for the truth behind the facade that (it is hoped) will give their existences some meaning. The power system in which they find themselves is rather more pervasive and "concealed" than the largely blundering colonial system in *The Calcutta Chromosome*, and more institutionalized than the native power system represented by Mangala's circle; yet it too embodies features of a "possessive" and controlling world-system which makes functionaries (the guardians) or abject possessions (the clones) of everyone, in the process creating a milieu, familiar from other Ishiguro novels, that is "dangerous, secretive, paranoid and persecutory" (O'Brien 793, 796; Britzman 309).

Ishiguro's emphasis on the cloned body, like Ghosh's on the native body-shell, raises a number of questions to do not only with the general condition of the human in an age of advanced biotechnology and commodity culture but also specifically with the position of the marginalized in society. The fantastic trope of clones fully capable of feeling, thinking, and narrating that are effectively undistinguishable from "real" humans but nevertheless accorded a distinctly subordinate and subhuman status, evokes fundamental notions of the discrimination against and persecution of particular social groups. The ultra-professional and dehumanized butler Stevens in *The Remains of the Day*, for example—himself a hollowed-out, clone-like creature—has been read as a tool of the British class system and colonial economy, or the possessive individualism of "new world order," or similar forces (O'Brien 793, 796), and in many ways the situation of the clones in *Never Let Me Go* is analogous.

Yet while Ishiguro's almost archetypal symbolism allows the clones to symbolize the effects of all kinds of repressive and exploitative authorities, there is textual evidence (as well as Ishiguro's own ethnic background) to suggest that race is one of the issues at stake. Ishiguro has long denied writing as a "Japanese" author, acknowledging his "lack of authority and lack of knowledge about Japan," clearly stating his resistance to being "put in a group," and identifying himself instead as "an international writer" (Ishiguro and Oe 82; Shaffer 4). He tends to make light of the Japanese element even in his first two novels set in Japan, or "supposedly set in Japan," as he puts it (Ishiguro and Oe 82). Yet even his repeated comments on not being able to "represent Japanese people" show a deep preoccupation with ethnicity and how that affects his own writing and that of other minority writers (Ishiguro and Oe 82). He speaks of Salman Rushdie's winning the 1981 Booker Prize as a "milestone" in Britain's literary landscape, and attributes much of the success of his own first novel *A Pale View of the Hills* to the consequent new receptiveness to a writer like himself with "this Japanese face and this Japanese name" (Vorda and Herzinger 8). Whatever Ishiguro's personal and artistic ambitions for a borderless "international" status, a kind of aesthetic cosmopolitanism, the inescapable shadow of ethnicity hangs

over his life and work, making him (in his own words) a writer "stuck on the margins," with "no society or country to speak for or write about" (Ishiguro and Oe 83; Vorda and Herzinger 12).

This marginal status manifests in Ishiguro's writing not necessarily in explicitly racialized characters nor in scenes of racist prohibition, but as a covert performance of racial politics "in whiteface" which reveals all the more pointedly the persistent problematics of race (Ma 79). In *Never Let Me Go*, the clones are never described in terms of ethnicity, yet they are marked by a "difference" which the narrative finds hard to pin down. Kathy acknowledges that she and her circle "were different from our guardians, from the people outside," but struggles to articulate the basis of this difference:

> So you're waiting, even if you don't quite know it, waiting for the moment when you realize that you really are different to them; that there are people out there, like Madame, who don't hate you or wish you any harm, but who nevertheless shudder at the very thought of you—of how you were brought into this world and why—and who dread the idea of your hand brushing against theirs. The first time you glimpse yourself through the eyes of a person like that, it's a cold moment. It's like walking past a mirror you've walked past every day of your life, and suddenly it shows you something else, something troubling and strange. (Ishiguro 33)

The estranging mirror encounter is a *locus classicus* of clone fiction. In Richard K. Morgan's *Altered Carbon*, an extreme vision of a society in which the rich and powerful attain immortality by digitally storing their personalities to be uploaded into cloned or rented bodies, the protagonist and narrator Takeshi Kovacs has just such a mirror encounter with his newly acquired body,

> This is always the toughest part. Nearly two decades I've been doing this, and it still jars me to look into the glass and see a total stranger staring back…. For the first couple of moments all you can see is someone else looking at you through a window frame….

It was basically Caucasian which was a change for me.…
(Morgan 16)

It is also a scene redolent of racial schizophrenia, a disjuncture of the self in the face of the racialized roles that the self is called on by society to play. Rudyard Kipling's Kim, a Victorian racial role-player par excellence, has one such moment of racial schizophrenia when he is left alone to ponder on his "personal identity," "Who is Kim—Kim—Kim?" a feat of mental "mazement" which "a very few white people, but many Asiatics," can perform (Kipling 186). In a more contemporary instance, the protagonist Shahid in Hanif Kureishi's *The Black Album* is a "Paki" student in London who describes the experience of growing up in a white society, which imposes on him the feeling that "there was something I lacked" and of feeling "more like a freak than I did normally." As a result, he becomes "terrifyingly sensitive" and "paranoid" about the "disgust and hatred" he imagines in the other people around him (10).

Likewise for Kathy, the mirror scene is "troubling and strange" because of the double-vision in which she sees herself, not just with her own eyes and consciousness, but also with the consciousness of the "people out there," the "normal people outside" who inexplicably see her as different, even when her origins as a clone would not be immediately evident (Ishiguro 33, 63). This incessant and internalized lack then manifests itself as a constant sensitivity to rejection by the majority, even (or especially) when this rejection is only inferred. Kathy, "so keenly tuned" to Madame's response when the children try the experiment of "swarming" around her, reads a "real dread" on her face, and after a chance meeting with an apparently "angry" Miss Lucy, responds with feelings of "shame and resentment" which she nevertheless "wouldn't have been able to explain" (32, 83–84).

This lack, pervasive throughout the social system in which the clones find themselves, is also concretized in their bodies, which are literally emptied of their vital organs before being discarded. The clone's hollow body is the most fundamental and totalizing of discriminations, being independent of and prior to any socioeconomic position-

ing and individual choice in matters of behaviour, manners, language, belief, and other acquired and conditioned factors. The frustration experienced by Kathy, Tommy, and the other clones in their quest for an answer and solution to their condition, is a result of the fact that none of their various speculative theories and courses of action can help, because the discrimination levelled against them is founded in their very bodies, in the unchangeable nature of their birth and origins. *Never Let Me Go* addresses a primal level of social discrimination and oppression, one that admits no possibility of redress even through radical social reconditioning or efforts at personal change. This is in contrast to Ishiguro's depiction of changing social conditions in some of his other novels, such as the changes from wartime to postwar Japan and England depicted respectively in *An Artist of the Floating World* and *The Remains of the Day*. As Susie O'Brien observes, Stevens' efforts at learning to banter in *The Remains of the Day,* as much as his belated quest for a more personal relationship with Miss Kenton, are an attempt to adjust to "the new world order" and its "new emphasis on social and economic freedom" (792–93). However ineffectual his attempts, and however far in excess of his capability for change are the social structures of both the old and new order which confine him, Stevens' professionalism (which he likens to a "suit" that one puts on) is a social construction that, at least in theory, admits of the possibility of change and adaptation.

In contrast, what the clones in *Never Let Me Go* discover over the course of the novel is that there is nothing that they or the sympathetic guardians can do to change a form of discrimination which is inextricably tied to the fact of one's bodily existence. The foregrounding of the clone body as the primal scene of social discrimination thus brings Ishiguro's novel even closer to the experience of the racialized body, which cannot change the fundamental difference that the "normal" (unmarked, majority) others assign to that body, no matter what the immigrant can try to change at the level of dress, manners, speech, and other acquired details. Hence the doomed nature of the project to prove that the clones "have souls at all" via the media of "pictures, poetry, all that kind of stuff"; their "souls" and "insides" are uncontestable because they

are irrelevant in the face of their fixed and commodified bodily identities (Ishiguro 160, 238).

The students are inducted into this circular logic and closed economic system from an early age. Thus the illusory and circular system of "Exchanges" at Hailsham not only presages the clones' fate as "harvestable organs" (Summers-Bremner), it shows the ubiquitous and indefatigable nature of the market's myths and ideological machinery. At the end of the novel, Kathy gazes at a barbed wire fence in an open field against which the wind has driven "all sorts of rubbish"; like the students' myth of Norfolk as "a lost corner" (where she does, indeed, appear to find her lost cassette), the image reinforces not only the waste generated in an advanced consumer culture but also the incessantly circular nature of production, consumption, marketing, and values (Ishiguro 60, 263). Caught in this circular system, the clones are unable to escape their status as commodity-bodies, a fact which Kathy's own narrative imagery constantly reminds us of.

The parallel with the economy of migrant workers (as racial Others) is made, as it were, offstage, in the novel's only mention of an explicitly racialized figure. In chapter 22, when the students track down and confront Miss Emily, the latter refers to an earlier encounter with Kathy:

> In fact, Kathy H., once not so long ago, I passed you sitting on that bench out there, and you certainly didn't recognise me then. You glanced at George, the big Nigerian man pushing me. Oh yes, you had quite a good look at him, and he at you. I didn't say a word, and you didn't know it was me. (234)

Like Kathy's earlier mirror scene, there is clearly something troubling to her about this encounter with the black servant, to the extent that the original purpose of her visit—Miss Emily—is completely overlooked and ignored. Yet to the "normal" people, George—who already occupies a marginal role in the novel—hardly registers, and in the course of the students' confrontation with Miss Emily and Madame he is referred to, but otherwise does his work voicelessly and almost invisibly.

> "I'm sorry students, but I must leave you now. George! George!"
>
> There had been a lot of noise out in the hallway, and perhaps this had stopped George from hearing, because there was no response....
>
> It felt like time for Tommy and me to slip away, but the George man was helping Miss Emily with her coat, while she stood steadily between her crutches; there was no way we could get past, so we just waited. (243–44, 246)

Miss Emily (continuing the Platonic allusion, here to the Myth of the Cave) describes the clones as having been "kept in the shadows" (240), and in a very practical sense George the migrant servant—the "big Nigerian man," as Miss Emily designates him, specifically calling attention to his foreign origins and his body—is also "in the shadows," using his body for the purposes that it is intended in this economy, but otherwise voiceless and unnoticed.

Kathy's brief but significant encounter with George is thus an implicit recognition of kinship, of the similar role played by migrants and clones in this economy. In a sense, the Hailsham students' characteristic activity throughout the novel—remembering and sustaining the common bond of school memories which marks them as "special" and as a distinct community—is a form of tribalism which sustains the community in the face of the discrimination of the "normal" majority, but also of course affirms their hapless difference from that majority. Cast out from Hailsham with memories of that common point of origin that may not be entirely reliable, and with the later closure of the school, Kathy and her fellow alumni are an "imagined community" in the diaspora.[3] Thus Kathy, on hearing the news of Hailsham's closure, reflects on the fate of its alumni, "I'd meant us, all the students who'd grown up with me and were not spread across the country, carers and donors, all separated now but still somehow linked by the place we'd come from" (193). Just after this she has a minor epiphany, remembering a man with a bunch of balloons with faces on them. To her, "they looked like a little tribe" (194).

Tribalism works in one of two possible ways: there is the attempt at denial and assimilation represented by Ruth, who is constantly "performing," "struggling to become someone else" in a vain effort to appear normal like the people outside (118). The main response on the part of the abject, however, is to identify with each other and band together as a means of dealing with the fear of the outside. This is an impulse which Kathy articulates when her friends leave Hailsham for the cottages, and they instinctively huddle together in a group, "fearful of the world around us, and—no matter how much we despised ourselves for it—unable quite to let each other go" (109). This, of course, also has the effect of reinforcing the tribe's awareness of its difference from the rest of the world, an effect which accords all too well with society's project of keeping the abject "in the shadows" of their marginal and functional place in the scheme of things.

Tribal identifications, like the silent but meaningful exchange of glances between Kathy and George, are often deeply felt and inarticulate rather than obvious and fully conscious. The novel's entire narrative mode is of fragmentary remembrance and a gradual unfolding which never seems to reach a climax of emotion and consciousness. Kathy never quite realizes the applicability of her narrative symbols and imagery to her own condition and place in society, does not piece together the snippets revealed to her by the guardians in order to make a full critique of the socioeconomic system, and right to the end of the novel maintains "control" and compliantly goes off to "wherever it was I was supposed to be" (263). Fragmentary remembrance does, however, allow Ishiguro to leave unsaid and implicit the messy ideological and affective entanglements at the heart of the contemporary society in which he writes, including the entanglements of capitalism and abjection, science and racism, and language and (self-)deception. *Never Let Me Go* is Ishiguro's clone narrative, not only in the literal sense that this is the clone's story but also in the sense that Kathy is Ishiguro's surrogate, performing, though not fully articulating, the condition of being "stuck on the margins," including the marginality of being Anglo-Japanese, seemingly "normal" but resiliently different. The clone in narratological terms turns out to be not just a "test-tube" genetic reconstruction but

also an ideological double, standing in proxy for all the groups that are treated as "spare parts" and "rubbish" within the emerging "new world." Ishiguro's clone narrative thus allows him to inscribe his own story, even as he appears to write a larger and more general tale of longing and loss in a technological-capitalist age.

IV. Conclusion: Science Fiction, Development, and Narrative Unpredictability

The power of combining science fiction premises and conventions with Asian diasporic issues is found in fluidity, connectivity, and possibility, all illustrated by the common trope of connections seen in Ghosh's bewildering identity transferences and Ishiguro's affective tribal connections. In all this, the key is the body: as the "meat" that must be conquered in order to realize the technological future (including immortality, wholeness, and mobility), it is also the site of the resistant concrete realities, the physical limitations at the margins of these new worlds. Science fiction and Third-World development thus become a potently unpredictable combination in narrative terms, on the one hand pushing the envelope of change and possibility, while on the other hand also calling attention to the abiding limitations of the body, particularly the abject, racialized, developmentally marked body. The doubleness of this narrative project thus consists in the fact that it is both a reminder of the abiding differentiations of race and development even within globalization and technological futures, as well as a discursive perpetuation of—and arguably a complicity in—that differentiation.

Notes

1 A number of scholars and writers (among them Stableford; Simmons and Urbanski) have preferred the term "speculative fiction," as a broader category including both science fiction and fantasy, or have used the term "speculative fiction" more or less interchangeably with science fiction. While I am generally in agreement with this usage and have also adhered to it elsewhere (see Goh), in the present article I prefer the term "science fiction" in pointing specifically to the elements of technology (and its alignment with capital and power) in the texts I discuss.

2 Evidence of Ghosh's reflections on cloning, chromosomal duplication and their wider implications can be seen elsewhere in his writings. In *The Glass Palace*, for

example, two characters discuss the history of the "clonal variety [of rubber trees] called avros," including its colonial origins in the work of scientist-administrators like H. N. Ridley, and how this history has become intertwined not only with the cultivation of rubber in British colonies like Malaya but also the entire colonial economy of migrant labour, emigration, and cultural transformation inextricably bound up with all this (232). Discussions on scientific species and genus also occur elsewhere in *The Glass Palace* and *The Hungry Tide*.

3 Kathy's nostalgic discourses of Hailsham, shared with its other alumni, are akin to the textual mechanisms (such as newspapers) which forge imagined national communities in Anderson's account (33–36).

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