



# Silence, Exile and Belonging — *Never Let Me Go*, Kazuo Ishiguro & *Lost Children Archive*, Valeria Luiselli

Mahi

Student

Amity UNIVERSITY UTTAR PRADESH

## ABSTRACT

This paper undertakes a comparative analysis of *Never Let Me Go* and *Lost Children Archive*, focusing on the related themes of silence, exile, and belonging. While Ishiguro writes about cloned children who have been conditioned to donate organs in a dystopian society, Luiselli writes about the silencing of migrant children in the border areas of the United States and Mexico. The paper, based on trauma studies, psychoanalysis, and biopolitics, suggests that silence is a structural tool of power in both texts. Through the use of memory and documentation, the texts emphasise the power of narrative as a tool of resistance to disposability, affirming the dignity of the human in a precarious world.

**Key words:-** Silence, Exile, Belonging, Trauma, Psychoanalysis, Biopolitics.

## INTRODUCTION

There is a recent thread in the contemporary literature landscape that explores the concept of silence, exile, and the assertion of a claim of belonging as a way of navigating the ethical, political, and emotional complexities of the world today. This thread is seen in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* (2005) and Valeria Luiselli's *Lost Children Archive* (2019), both of which, despite the differences in the settings, narrative voice, and the period they portray, share the common thread of the human condition and the way people cope with exile, silence, and the need for a claim of belonging amidst the reality they face. Ishiguro's England and Luiselli's fragmented American landscape are places where the human subjects they portray are made invisible.

In *Kazuo Ishiguro's "Never Let Me Go"*, a controlled dystopian environment has been created, where clones are bred for the sole purpose of providing organs for human transplant. The story is related retrospectively from the point of view of Kathy H. Her controlled and measured tone belies the harsh reality of exploitation that permeates the novel. As discussed, the theme of silence, as seen within the context of Hailsham and the wider social context, serves to highlight the manner in which oppressive regimes are enabled and sustained through ignorance and the suppression of human emotion. The students at Hailsham accept their lot, having internalised the reality of their situation, and the controlled tone of the narrative voice in *Never Let Me Go* serves to highlight this theme and force the reader to confront the harsh reality beneath the surface.

The exile experienced by the protagonist of *Never Let Me Go* is more of an existential one than a physical one. This is because the clones are marginalised from the rest of the human race, making them outsiders in English society. This experience of exile among the clones is also a result of the clones' failure to imagine other forms of existence, which are limited, controlled, and predetermined for them. This experience of exile among the clones resonates well with the current ideas of biopolitics, where human beings are considered resources, and the value of being human is determined by the utilitarian value of being useful. Therefore, *Never Let Me Go* presents a critique of a society that values expediency over responsibility.

The concept of belonging, as portrayed in "Never Let Me Go," is tenuous and circumscribed, defined by relationships and interpersonal connections. Kathy, Ruth, and Tommy, the main characters, are all attempting to attribute meaning to their existence through friendship and relationships. Hailsham, the location, represents a tenuous sense of belonging, where artistic expression and nurturing provide a sense of meaning for the students' existence. However, such a sense of belonging is necessarily ephemeral and illusory, as it does not impact the students' outcomes. Belonging to society, according to Ishiguro, does not matter if justice does not exist.

Valeria Luiselli's *Lost Children Archive* explores similar issues through a starkly different methodological approach. It blends the genres of fiction and documentary essays with photographs, lists, and archival excerpts, situating the work in the context of the migrant crisis on the Mexican-American border. The silences in the narrative are both enforced and deliberate; the migrant children are made silent subjects by the legal and political systems and discourses that treat them as statistical entities and perceived threats. At the same time, the narrative also explores the ethical and epistemological dilemma of witnessing another's pain without crossing the line into appropriation.

In *Lost Children Archive*, the concept of exile has been defined as not only a physical phenomenon but also a mental one. In the context of the novel, the children of migrants are forcibly displaced from their homes, separated from their families, and placed within a different physical environment. This concept of exile can also be related to the pattern of displacement that exists among the Indigenous population, as well as the pattern of displacement that has existed among migrants throughout the Americas. In the context of the novel, the author has related the events of the past to the events of the present, such that the concept of displacement has been defined as primarily emerging from the concepts of colonialism, nationalism, and inequality. In the context of the novel, the migration of the main characters can be defined as an antidote to the concept of migration that exists among the migrants.

The concept of belonging in *Lost Children Archive* seems to manifest uncertainly and fluidly. The novel appears to explore whether and to what extent belonging might be interconnected with territory, language, family, and/or memory. In this community of migrants, belonging seems to be systematically negated through the borders of citizenship and exclusion. At the same time, however, Luiselli seems to hint at the possibility of other forms of belonging, which might include notions of solidarity, narrative, and listening. In fact, the very act of archiving seems to represent a form of resistance to erasure and ensures the continued existence of these lives in spite of a lack of societal acknowledgement.

When the two texts are read together, the similarity between *Never Let Me Go* and *The Lost Child Archive* appears to be considerable, despite the particularities that set them apart. In the two texts, the world appears to be defined by the power of the institution, the power to speak, the power to exile, and the power to make someone belong. Silence, apart from being the exclusion of the voice, appears to be politically sustained. Exile, as seen in the two texts, appears to represent the essence of modernity. However, the idea of belonging appears to represent the precarious nature of human life, a life that continues to be coveted.

Ultimately, however, Ishiguro and Luiselli challenge readers to think through difficult questions of whose lives are made secure and whose are forfeit, and whose belonging is possible and through what means. In both works, the reader is placed in a position that necessitates a recognition of complicity in a world that is underpinned by a politics of silence. These works are important literary interventions, encouraging readers to think through the politics of empathy, responsibility, and a new politics of belonging in an uneven world.

## Historical And Theoretical Background

### Never Let Me Go- Historical and Literary Context:-

The England of the alternate late-twentieth-century world of *Never Let Me Go* is organised around scientific progress in the post-war era, especially in the fields of bio-tech, cloning, and medical ethics. The novel is a reflection of the issues that were pertinent to England in the era, especially the issues that were being raised about these emerging biotech, cloning, and medical ethics issues. As a Japanese of British origin and a post-war British writer, Kazuo Ishiguro's works are also infused with issues that were pertinent to British social culture, such as reserve and emotion. The clones' acceptance of their fate is a reflection of the issues of humanity and belonging, which were common in the treatment of minority groups that were often silenced and alienated from society.

The book may be classified within the genre of dystopian fiction; nonetheless, it differs from the conventional dystopian novels, such as *1984*, in that it lacks rebellion or spectacle. Instead, Ishiguro uses first-person narrative and emotional complexity. Such narrative choices are indicative of prominent influences from modernist introspection and postmodern ambiguity.

Furthermore, the text engages with post-humanist theory in that it reflects on the idea of human-ness in a world where life is artificially created. The text also reflects the contemporary British fiction that deals with issues of human identity and the experience of existential alienation.

### Lost Children Archive- Historical and Literary Background:-

Valeria Luiselli's novel, *Lost Children Archive*, was published in 2019, a time when immigration policies in the United States were becoming a hot-button political issue. This novel is relevant to the border crisis between the U.S. and Mexico, particularly the detention and separation of migrant children, which has been a result of the stricter policies. It is based on real humanitarian crises involving Central American asylum seekers.

The novel is firmly embedded in contemporary issues of border control, nationalism, and what it means to be stateless. While Ishiguro's narrative is a fictional and futuristic vision of a dystopian world, *Lost Children Archive* is rooted in documentary realism, based on the real-life experience of the author interpreting for migrant children in U.S. immigration courts.

The novel is a mix of fiction, documentary sections, and archival material. It is clearly a product of the contemporary migrant literature and autofiction movement. The disjointed narrative style and the interweaving of testimony also speak to a postmodern approach to storytelling. Luiselli situates her work in a tradition of border writing and explicitly political writing. It engages with the road narrative and the documentary tradition, using storytelling as a form of bearing witness. The archival narrative does not hide its presence, using literature as a site of political resistance.

## Psychological Analysis of the text

A psychological approach to *Never Let Me Go* by Kazuo Ishiguro and *Lost Children Archive* by Valeria Luiselli focuses on how memory, trauma, repression, identity formation, and emotional survival shape the characters' inner worlds. Both novels explore how individuals psychologically cope with systems that marginalise or destabilise them.

In "*Never Let Me Go*," a Freudian analysis would focus on repression and defence mechanisms. Kathy's narrative voice and calm demeanour can be seen as a form of repression, where she does not openly express anger and rebellion at her predetermined role as a donor. Instead, Kathy uses memories as a defence mechanism. The clones' acceptance of their predetermined role can be analysed in relation to the idea of internalised authority, where they do not question it on a subconscious level. However, Tommy's outbursts also hint at underlying frustration, which indicates fissures in this repression. From an existential psychological perspective, the novel presents quiet despair and the human search for meaning in the face of inescapable mortality. The characters form small emotional connections of friendship, love, and shared experiences to create a psychological community in a world that does not accept them as human.

The psychological model in *Lost Children Archive* focuses on trauma, fragmentation, and narrative identity. The novel portrays the psychological impact of migration and displacement, especially on children. The mother's collection of stories about migrants can be seen as a psychological process, as if she were trying to heal through the act of creating an archive. The change in narrative voice, especially when the narrative shifts to the perspective of the son, can be seen as a form of psychological fragmentation. The children's fantasy of blending with the stories of lost children can be seen as a form of empathetic identification, in which the boundaries between self and other collapse. This can be seen in the context of trauma theory, in which children's psychological development is influenced by stories of suffering.

The family tension in the novel also touches on attachment theory. The emotional distance between the parents creates insecurity, while the children's quest for stability comes through their imagination. Their psychological journey into the desert symbolises their fear as well as their quest for independence. The anxiety in the novel, though different in tone from Ishiguro's, is also informed by politics.

When both texts are analysed, they demonstrate the psychological effects of silence. In *Never Let Me Go*, silence is internalised and naturalised, and emotions are subdued. In *Lost Children Archive*, silence is political and traumatic, associated with the disappearance of migrant voices. In both texts, the construction of a narrative, whether through memory or documentation, is a psychological coping mechanism. Therefore, a psychological approach to the texts illustrates that both novels examine the ways in which people construct their identities and coping strategies in the face of marginalisation and ambiguous belongings.

## Literature Review

The current studies of modern fiction texts have revolved around similar themes, such as silence, exile, and belonging, but they are more than just themes because they define the concept of dispossession and identity in modern fiction texts. For example, consider two texts, such as Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* and Valeria Luiselli's *Lost Children Archive*. These two texts, written in different styles and genres, discuss the concept of dispossession in different contexts but eventually overlap in their themes of dispossession and identity. Ishiguro sets the scene in a dystopian world, while Luiselli sets hers in the real world of politics and migration.

Silence, in the works of Ishiguro, is not the mere opposite of sound, but a means of storytelling. The clones are under a carefully crafted regime of ignorance, a form of biopolitics that guides them towards docility rather than defiance. In the works of Ishiguro, Kathy's narrative restraint has also been read by several theorists as a metaphor for the clones' self-discipline, wherein memory has become a sensitive zone for dignity and belonging. Exile, in the case of the clones, is not only physical, but also existential, for they have a biological connection to the larger society, but are excluded from its moral fabric.

Luiselli describes silence as one that was enforced through law and red tape. Her use of fragments of history, testimonial, and metafiction has been interpreted as a strategy to resist the effacement of stories. In her writing, exile refers to physical space and generations, created through the process of crossing borders and the fences of nation-states. Belonging, always precarious, is mediated through paper, records, and who the world chooses to acknowledge.

Collectively, these texts extend the conversation in trauma studies, migration writing, and biopolitics. These texts also demonstrate that silence, exile, and belonging are not discrete categories but rather intertwined aspects of precarity in the present day, with the novel playing a central role in ethical witnessing and the affirmation of lives on the margins.

## Conclusion

While we are drawn into the world of *Never Let Me Go* and *The Lost Children Archive*, we are also drawn into a reflection on silence, exile, and belonging in the machinery of power today. Both novels are from very different places – one is set in a dystopian future, and the other blends reportage and fiction – but both novels share a common concern: the way power shapes and controls the lives of those who are most vulnerable to its influence.

While silence is not loud in the world of *Ishiguro*, it is something that shapes who we become and who we are. Identities are frozen in time and do not rise. Memory is a precious and essential sanctuary in which dignity is preserved, and rebellion is quiet. By contrast, silence in the world of Luiselli is something imposed from above. Documentation and narrative are forms of resistance to political silence and to the way people are erased from the world. Together, we see a reflection on exile and belonging – and the way in which exile is not just a place but an existence – and the way in which belonging is not something provided to us by the world around us but something we create through the way we tell stories and the way we remember. Both novels affirm the power of literature to subvert the way in which we are marginalised and to celebrate our existence in a world that seems to be against us.

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