

## Death and Power: Biopolitics in Klara and the Sun

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### Abstract

By depicting the miserable situation of AFs who are depressed and controlled by human beings to serve their interests, Kazuo Ishiguro's newly published work *Klara and the Sun* shows humanity care to the others. One thing draws the readers' attention is that the victims choose not to run away, but leave their state as whatever required by human beings. This study, therefore, seeks to uncover the truth why AFs are exploited by human beings and find out the exclusive power operation system with the assistance of Agamben's biopolitics theory. In this sense, how AFs are reduced to homo sacer and controlled by exclusive power can be clearly presented.

### Keywords

Biopolitics; Homo Sacer; Exclusive power; Klara and the Sun.

## 1. Introduction

Different from Foucault's idea that biopolitics is productive and positive, Agamben holds that biopolitics is more about death politics and thanatopolitics. Dating back to the Roman law, Agamben finds that in the ancient Roman, if someone committed the crime, he would then be banned from the society and all his rights as a citizen will be revoked. In others words, the bios are deprived of and what only left is the zoe as a simple material of being. Given this, he is reduced to a homo sacer, the one who can be killed by anyone without any legal punishment. Similarly, AFs in *Klara and the Sun* are also the homo sacer who enjoy no political rights and citizenship in the country. While such a decision is in the hand of the sovereign, who produce the expendable forms of life, that is, bare life. Therefore, this chapter aims to find out how and why the human sovereign excluded AFs to the ambivalent existence by following such two ways: first, to explore AF's living situation as the state of exception; second, to find the paradigm of thanatopolitics and concentration camp caging AFs.

## 2. Organization of the Text

### 2.1. Bare Life and the Sate of Exception

In the modern society, different from the sovereign power, time has witnessed the great changes from "power over life" to "power of life", which means that the politics nowadays concentrate on targeting life control. Under this context, similarly, AFs' life are embroiled in the biopolitics business since they are produced. As it is demonstrated in Agamben's work that "in the Hobbesian foundation of sovereignty, life in the sate of nature is defined only by ts being unconditionally exposed to a death threat( the limitless right of everybody over everything) and political life--that is , the life that unfolds under the protection of the Leviathan--is nothing but this very same of life always exposed to a threat that now rests exclusively in the hands of the sovereign"( Agamben, 2000, 5)

Therefore, to Agamben, homo sacers or bare life are totally in the hands of the sovereign in the way that homo sacers are controlled by the power initiated by the sovereign. "The two poles of the sovereign exception are respectively bare life and power, homo sacers and the

sovereign”( Agmben, 1998, 110). That is to say, to the sovereign humanity, all AFs are the potential homo sacers; for AFs, all other people act in the manner of the sovereign. In Klara and the Sun, it is easy to find the traces of AF being rejected、 excluded and unfairly treated by the sovereign. For instance, when Klara is placed in the store, she has seen quite a of such cases. There are the human girls who require her AF to keep away her for few paces behind , which shows that the AF is not loved by the his little master. Besides, the AF boy’s walk is full of weariness. Klara has also witnessed the “an AF could be with a child who despised him and wanted him gone”( Ishiguro, 2021, 18) . For Klara’s best AF friend--Rosa, it is also the similar case. At the very start, Rosa is quite hopeful and curious about the human world, and she always dreams about the world outside the store. But after being bought by a human kid, the life in front of her is quite unfavorable. Although Rosa’s experience is not depicted squarely in this novel, it is still clear to see her tough traces from Klara’s narration. When Klara meets her again many years later in a restaurant coincidentally, she became the one Klara cannot recognize at that moment and it is after many years that Klara realizes that woman is Rosa. Klara depicts her this way, “ a lady of forty -two sitting by herself. I hadn’t see her before because she was pressing herself right against the window, her forehead actually touching the glass, to glaze out into the darkness...she had become even more lonely, believing Dinner Manager is deliberately ignoring her.”(Ishiguro, 2021, 246). And according to the Manager, Rosa was abandoned to the yard at least two years ago, "things didn’t go as well for Rosa as they did for you" (Ishiguro, 2021, 301). It is not difficult to imagine that Rosa must lead an extremely difficult life in the process of accompanying the human family. That is because she only lives as a bare life who deserves no legal rights and who is randomly captured, exploited and controlled by the sovereign human.

Apart that, Although it seems that Klara has spent a smooth life in her whole life, she has also witnessed all kinds of unfairness and no human right treatment which happened on herself. Take Josie’s party as an example, Klara is used as a toy for human pleasure. She is required to “ go say hello to those boys”(76); to be thrown over the sofa to test the coordination; to sing for the human guest the harmonic minor scale. In these occasions, Klara is treated as the playing thing of little importance to just entertain the human kids. Besides, even though Josie has promised that “I’d never let anything bad happen to you...nothing’s changing”( Ishiguro, 2021, 254),and promised that after Klara lives with her, Klara would never be put in the cupboard. It turns out, however , that it is Josie’s ignorance and indifference sent her into the utility room and even the recycling yard. The price to inhibit Josie life is to abandon Klara’s own body, while to humans , it is only a piece of fabric. Therefore, it is clear to see that AFs are trapped in the framework of political power, but with no legal political rights. In essence, they are solely the animal beings who have lost their political identity. In the process of normalizing AF as "bare life", human beings have deprived AFs’ democratic power in all levels of social life.

Following the French jurist Carl Smit's ideas on the state of exception in his Political Theology, Agamben argues that the state of exception is a fundamental political structure, “ traces a threshold between the two, on the basis of which outside and inside, the normal situation and chaos, into those complex topological relations that make the validity of the juridical order possible.”(Agamben,1998: 19). Besides, the state of exception is the place when homo sacer is excluded from the community and exists in a inclusively excluded way. In Klara and the Sun, AF's living situation is much like what we call "state of exception", a state of legal ambiguity. That is to say AFs are within the law on the one hand , as they are subject to human rules, but outside the law on the other hand for the reason that their legal right would never be met as human beings in the society. So what exactly is the identity of AF in Klara and the Sun? Can they be counted as human? For AFs, they are equipped with all the same cognitive abilities, emotions, action abilities as humans. And they even own a much stronger knowledge base than humans, always making the right decision, but they do not enjoy the same power as humans. When Josie's mother asked Klara to occupy Josie's clone body and to act as Josie in terms of her daily

observation, she claimed that Klara would be able to receive all the love which belongs to Josie before, including hers, father's and Rick's. But the question is can Klara really be treated as Josie, living as a "human"? No one can answer that in the novel. Just as Josie's father puts it to Klara, "if the moment ever comes, never mind how well you play your parts, Klara, never mind how much she wishes it to work, Chrssie just won't be able to accept it."(Ishiguro,2021 221,222). And the real reason hidden behind is that Klara, as an AF, has long been excluded from the original community structure, even though she pretends to be human, for Chrssie, Klara is just a cold machine who will never becomes her real daughter. At the end of Klara's life, she confessed to the Manager that no matter how hard she works to learn Josie, she would never be able to replace Josie. " Not because I wouldn't have achieved accuracy, but however hard I tried, I believe now there would have remained something beyond my reach. The Mother, Rick, Melania Housekeeper, the Father. I'd never have reached what they felt for Josie in their hearts.( Ishiguro,2021 ,302). The reason is that at the very start Klara, as the homo sacer, has been excluded from the human community. So how could it be possible that Klara come back into the community and accepted by other human being as a "human being"?

In addition, other characters in the novel also treat AFs with the same resistance and rejection, and has never included them in the community. For example, Rick's mother, Helen says to Klara that "one never knows how to get a guest like you. After all, are you a guest at all? Or do I treat you like a Vacuum cleaner?"(Ishiguro,2021 ,142). Apart from that , Josie's Father has also expressed that "I've never been good at, well, relating to your kind."(Ishiguro,2021 ,213). For AF, no matter being defined as either a "human being" or an "alien", will threatens to challenge the normal social order and legal system as they have never been the integrated part of the human community.

According to Agamben, homo sacers are exposed to a double exclusion: they are not only excluded from the secular law (they can be killed), but also the divine law (they cannot be sacrificed). Thus, for the AF homo sacers, on the one hand, they are placed outside the jurisdiction system of human beings.It is the state of exception set up by humans to suspending the law and leaving AFs to the sovereign's judgment; on the other hand, AFs have no access to the territory of divine law. As a god-like being for Klara, the Sun is the source of AFs' life as it generously pours out its nourishment to his followers, which even save the life of the beggar man and his dog. So when Klara tried to save Josie's life, she begged the Sun to bring nourishment to Josie at the cost of destroying Cootings machine who pollute the air conditions. With the help of Josie's father, Klara took out her P-E-G 9 solution that saved in her head box and put it into the Cootings' body, believing that she has fulfilled her vow with the Sun at Mr McBain's Barn. To receive the gift from the Sun, Klara's efforts to take out the solution to destroy the machine can be regarded as a kind of sacrifice to the God. And Klara's own body fluid is the oblation. Klara, however, finds out that there are quite a lot of other Cootings still existing and it's impossible to destroy all of them by her own. " I was able to observe that this was not the same machine the Father and I had destroyed in the yard. Its body was a different shade of yellow, its dimensions a little greater--and its ability to create Pollution more than a match doe the first Cootings Machine."(Ishiguro,2021, 258). Therefore, Klara's sacrifice ceremony to some extent has failed as she cannot make her promises come true. While the reason of her failure is because of her identity of the homo sacer who are also excluded from the sacred realm. She is the one who cannot be sacrificed and she is always living in a state of ambiguity, what we call state of exception. In the end, even in Klara's eyes, Josie was healed because of the nourishment sent by the Sun, but other humans ignored this possible fact. No one knows for sure why Josie recovered. Except the similar homo sacer Rick, there is no one believing that it is Klara saved Josie. Later on, Klara has also been evicted from the human world and was abandoned by the sovereign to the yard, waiting for the end of her life. This is what Agamben calls " who may be killed and yet not sacrificed."( Agamben, 1998, 8)

The governance of life in Klara and the Sun is the one what Foucault calls “ the new non-disciplinary power applied not to man-as-body but to the living man, to man-as-living-being; ultimately, if you like, to man-as-species...and that the new technology that is being established is addressed to a multiplicity of men, not to the extent that they are nothing more than their individual bodies , but to the extent that they form, on the contrary, a global mass that is affected by overall process characteristic of birth, death, production, illness, and so on.( Foucault, 2003: 242,243). That is to say, the state biologically controls the entire population by improving its genetic eugenics as it intervenes, fosters, optimizes, monitors, evaluates, regulates and corrects life to promote the nation’s organisms. In the world of the book, the sovereign excludes those children who have not genetically lifted by blocking them out of the colleges. Those gene-lifted children would take class on the rectangular board, by which their private teachers will do all the class jobs online. So does Josie, who has always had always been excellent in study, but she still needs pay more effort to her interpersonal relationships. For example , she needs to hold parties even she doesn’t like to do so. For many other kids who have lifted their genes like Josie, they would undergone the same course as Josie. In this sense, those gene lifted children can not only receive high quality education, but also foster their network of interpersonal relationship which is only built between those the gene lifted ones. While for those kids from poor families who cannot afford the gene lift project, what lies in front of them is the gloomy future of exclusion. Because they can’t afford the expensive home tutor fees on the one hand, and the overwhelming majority of the colleges would not admits them as they were thought inferior in intelligence on the other. For them, the college admission rate is less than two percent. Rick, as the typical example of the non-lifted kid, although works hard to go to Atlas Brookings, has to let go of his wishful thinking at last and come back to the community to be with those who also haven’t lifted their genes. Under this context, gene enhancement is so important that it can determine how ones’ life go and only those who are lifted can embrace the bright future. What’s worth noting behind this gene project is that this project has automatically divided all the people into two groups of the rich and the poor before it operates its system. Those who can support their children to lift their genes are all the wealthy families from the upper classes. In this sense, those who are rich will grow richer and those who are poor will become poorer. So does the upper class and the lower class. There’s great division between them. And in so doing, the value of life and the value of capitalism are organically combined. The sovereign defended the interests of the capital class by developing the the law that no child can be enrolled without gene lift. But on the other hand they have cleverly exempted themselves from the law’s constraint.

Therefore, to a certain extent, we can also say that children who have not been genetically promoted are similar to AFs as they are both marginalized ones and bare life. They are also excluded from the original community structure and placed in the state of exception, where the sovereigns are in charge of the power to decide if they are worth living. In the name of protecting life, the sovereign interferes and intervenes in its citizen’s life at the cost of transforming the some of the poorer into the homo sacer. “the relation between sovereignty and the state of exception appears in the form of an identity between the sovereign and anomie. Because he is a living law, the sovereign is intimately anomos” (Agamben, 2005: 70) . Just as Agamben puts it, the sovereign is the living law and whatever decisions he makes are all aiming to serve his interests.

## 2.2. Thanatopolitics and the Concentration Camp

For Agamben, the life of the homo sacer is the thanatopolitics, for the reason that:

“he is in a continuous relationship with the power that banished him precisely insofar as he is at every instant exposed to an unconditioned threat of death. He is pure zoe, but his zoe is as such caught in the sovereign ban and must reckon with it at every moment, finding the best way

to elude or deceive it. In this sense, no life, as exiles and bandits know well, is more “political” than this.” ((Agamben, 1998: 183)

So in the novel, after Mr. Capaldi learned that Josie recovered and Klara was of no use to Josie’s family, he hoped that Klara could become the volunteer to donate her body to further open up her black box. In so doing, the research results will be used to respond to society’s doubts about the AF threat theory. The reason why Mr. Capaldi would propose such a request crossed the line is because once the sovereign has revoked its protection, the homo sacer will be exposed to the violent lawless states. So when Klara lost Josie and her mother’s protection, she is reduced to the situation of no one to rely on and no identity to attach on. The absence of blood lineage and land connection, the disconnection between one’s citizenship and body all make the birth of AF, AFs’ body and their right disconnected. The same is the body, but of humans and AFs it reveals the opposite value of life. In the eyes of the Nazis, the extermination of Jews was not considered a crime of homicide. Similarly, in the eyes of people like Mr. Capaldi who serve the interests of the sovereign and the ruling class, AF’s life is of little importance. Countless AF will never be spared from the violence killings of the sovereign power, by which their bodies are interpreted and processed in a variety of ways, and life is reduced to animal-bodies. “This is both the basic technical prerequisite for all kinds of massacres and humiliations of the body ..... It is likewise a technical prerequisite for the affirmation of all kinds of private power” (Mingan Wang, 2005: 31)

In the fictional world, the emergence of AF has replaced many human jobs. For instance, Josie’s father who had worked in the pretty cutting-edge chemical plant has been substituted even though he is a quite brilliant talent. And when Josie tries to take Klara into the theater, some of the human being would consider Klara as huge threat to them. They think the sought-after seats shouldn’t be taken by machines, but the actual reason is “First they take the jobs. Then they take the seats at the theater?”(Ishiguro, 2021:238). In this reorganized world, there are already signs of power struggle. Therefore, under the logic of taking care of the human being’s life and interests, human beings have adopted a “genocidal” approach to AFs who threatens their very survival and development. The inner logic of Foucault’s government of life is that “in order to consolidate, improve and protect some groups’ life, another group’s life must be excluded, segregated and even killed” (Yang Zhang, 2016: 17). Therefore, for men like Mr.Capaldi, the purpose to slaughter AF is hoping to learn something from AF, thus making their own race biologically healthier and stronger, free from the threat of other races. Just as Mr.Capaldi has expressed that “ I believe AFs have so much more to give us than we currently appreciate. We shouldn’t fear their intellectual powers. We should learn from them. AFs have so much to teach us.”(Ishiguro, 2021: 197). At this point, AFs have to be turned into the bare life for the purpose of protecting human population’s life and their state. And it is the state of exception AFs excluded in that separate bare life (zoe) from the political forms of life (bios).

To slaughter AFs, human has also embarked on the building of the invisible concentration camp. “ the camp is the space that is opened when the state of exception begins become the rule.”(Agamben,1998: 168,169).Taking Auschwitz concentration as an example, Agamben uncovers how Jews, the refugees during World War II, became bare life subjected to violent and arbitrary treatment. The store where AF is initially located in the novel is such a concentration camp, which separates the human world from AF’s world. Any sovereign human who enters the store has the power to do anything as his will to the AFs. “ political space, normalized by the camp, is reduced to a specific mode of exercise of power: the decision on the value of life.”( Katia Genel, 2013:57). In the store, the state of exception in which AF lives has become a state of routine life. When the customer comes, every AF needs to behave themselves as what the Manager has taught them. At this moment, customers’ purchasing will is the sign of the AF’ s life value as well. If one hasn’t behave well, one’s position assigned by the manager as aforementioned will be moved backward the shop gradually as what Klara has experienced.

Besides, Agamben used the word “abandonment” to describe the living situations of homo sacer in the community in the sense that they are captured, commandeered, controlled, and become inferior beings. “one of the few rules the Nazis constantly obeyed throughout the course of the ‘final solution’ was that Jews and Gypsies could be sent to extermination camps only after having been fully denationalized, that is, after they had been stripped of even that second-class citizenship to which they had been relegated after the Nuremberg Laws” (Agamben, 2005:22). For Klara, it is the same case that she was sent to the concentration camp after Josie’s recovery. At the end of the story, everyone keeps away from Klara: Josie sent her into the Utility Room; Mother no longer needs Klara to imitate her daughter, so she deliberately avoids meeting Klara to have less interaction with her because of Klara’s presence brings back difficult, embarrassing memories, “The Mother, like Josie, had less to do with me during this period, sometimes not looking my way even when she encountered me around the house.” (Ishiguro, 2021: 292); Rick also went to the community to find his new life, losing contact with Klara. At this time Klara, old and useless, was sent to the yard. It is from then on, Klara has lost the protection from the human world and her life has been degraded to the “second-class citizenship”. Isolated from the human world, her life has been reduced to state of exception in the concentration camp. “the camp is a piece of territory that is placed outside the normal juridical order” and yet “it is not simply an external space” (Agamben 2000: 40). the camp excludes what is captured inside, which is an inclusive exclusion. And the law is suspended in the camp, and arbitrary or exceptional decisions on the status of life become the rule.

The camp can also be seen as a execution camp where “having in themselves an untidy entity” and “visitors aren’t frequent” (Ishiguro, 2021: 298). This is the final place for AFs to wait for the end of life. And their life value has been erased like the face drawn in sand. while unlike the concentration camps that Agamben describes, the space in the novel is not the notoriously visible, violent space, but the seemingly “normal” places. What’s more, Ishiguro has not depicted how AF will be processed at last in the yard, but it is easy to imagine that they must end in tragedy. Such zones of isolation created by the sovereign are filled with elements of implicit violence, in which the sovereign establishes implicit mechanisms of power and legal order that serve exclusively the political interests of his biopolitics.

In addition, all the humanitarians appearing in the text are all hypothetical. Although they all seem to care about Klara, in essence no one ever tries to save her from the chaos. The Mother said to Mr. Capaldi that, “Klara deserves better. She deserves her slow fade.” (Ishiguro, 2021:294). And Rick has also expressed her kindness to Klara that if she ever need his help, just tell him. These humanitarians seem to have great sympathy for Klara, but no one has ever prevented Klara from being finally abandoned to the dumps yard. “Humanitarian gaze cannot diminish the power of the bomb” (Mingan Wang, 2005: 29). It is the existence of AF that demonstrates the concept of humanity and the pallor of human rights declarations.

### 3. Conclusion

By portraying the miserable life of the AFs, Klara and the Sun has not only showed great sympathy to AFs, but also has implied how they are reduced to the homo sacer step by step. It is mainly because that the human sovereign power has excluded AFs from the mundane world to the exclusive state. Besides, the real image of the concentration camp mentioned by Agamben incarnated as the yard to end the life of AFs. So it is reasonable to say the politics of AFs are the Thanatopolitics. The evil of the concentration camps is still spreading, and the ultimate concern for the bare life’s survival situation, life dignity and life value must not stop. What lies in Kazuo Ishiguro’s light and soothing words is a long-lasting warning, which also rings an alarm for the relationship between human beings and modern technology.

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