



HYPER-CONSUMPTION AND THE NONHUMANS  
IN *OKJA* AND *NEVER LET ME GO* FILMS



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THE MASTER'S PROJECT TITLED  
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This work is created by an organism for all organism to live pleasant lives as we deserve.



SIRIYAKORN ATIREK

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1. Background

Capitalists generally come up with ways to gain as much profit as possible in order to run businesses. In regards to the food industry, each year billions of animals are killed for capitalist profit. In 2014, nearly 1.5 billion pigs were killed and the number has tripled in the last 50 years (Thornton, 2019). In 2015, *Nature*, a scientific journal, reported that scientists in South Korea and China had designed double-muscular pigs with more and leaner meat by editing a single gene. Of all 32 GM piglets that had been created, 13 lived for only 8 months, two are still alive and only one turned out healthy (Cyranoski, 2015, 13). The healthcare industry has been seeking ways to transplant animals' organs to humans due to a lack of human organ supplies since 1960s. Hearts and kidneys of genetically modified pigs are used in nonhuman primates to test for effects and complications (Tena, 2015). Animals are also subject to numerous experiments such as drug, food and cosmetic testing, and most of them are destined to be killed at the end of each experiment.

Apart from the fact that plenty of animals are treated cruelly and unethically in the aforementioned industries during the production process, consumers of animal products are unconsciously lured into hyper-consumption by advertising. Neoliberal capitalism manipulates people to blindly consume products that are not strictly necessary for healthy living, in order to generate profit and continue to employ this strategy in order to maintain the system (Wolff, 2013, 334). Consumers are inculcated with ideas from advertising and the media to eat more or to live longer than their natural bodies would allow. People do not consume for quality of life anymore; they consume simply for consumption's sake. The production process is hidden from the consumers for a relentless pursuit of profit. As various genetically-modified products feature already in food and agricultural markets, the problem is that many of us cannot see how the system we are living in affects other species whose lives are, in an objective

universe, as significant and as deserving of empathy as those of human beings. Though there are activists who fight for animal rights, their powers are not enough to reshape the system and some of the activists themselves are still somehow trapped in anthropocentric values and regard nonhuman species as the 'Other'.

## 2. Objective

This study will examine the concept of hyper-consumption and neoliberal capitalism as well as the effects of these on nonhumans in two films: *Okja* (2017) and *Never Let Me Go* (2010). The researcher will use a theoretical framework developed by applying Zygmunt Bauman's critique of neoliberal capitalism and Cary Wolfe's conceptualisation of posthumanism. The objectives of this study are to show how the capitalist system reinforces hyper-consumption and to unravel the beliefs and discourses behind the issue.

Significantly, this research will help raise the consumer's awareness of the issue by pointing out that humans are constantly taking advantage of other species for their own benefit and at the same time, some of them are unconsciously convinced to do so.

## 3. Research Questions

1. What are characteristics of hyper-consumption in *Okja* (2017) and *Never Let Me Go* (2010)?
2. How do neoliberalism and hyper-consumption affect the nonhumans?

## 4. Definition of Terms

1. Hyper-consumption: a habit of immense and unnecessary consumption – consume for consumption sake.
2. Nonhumans: non-human, though nonetheless sentient beings. The Other in the context of the humanist gaze.
3. Neoliberal capitalist: a free-market capitalist that favours capitalists' profit

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 1. Neoliberalism and Its Critiques

Neoliberalism is a political and economical belief that focuses on free markets and aims to minimise state control as much as possible in order to benefit capitalists' hunger for profit. Libertarianism or classic liberalism favours a laissez-faire or free market which believes in the minimum of state intervention and concerns itself with economic liberty above all. (Thorsen & Lie, 2006, 5-6). Munck, Saad-Filho, and Johnston (2005) stated, "the notion of a self-regulating market was at the core of classical liberalism and is still today reflected in the discourse of global neoliberalism" (61). In 1970s, neoliberalism came to play a part when the Keynesian welfare state, representing a balance between liberty and equality that came after the decadence of libertarianism by the emerging awareness of the working class's social problems, could not handle the economic crisis of the Cold War. The Keynesian welfare state increased costs to the government when economic growth was in need (Clarke, 2005, 58).

Neoliberalism mainly concerns itself with economic growth and capitalist profit. It believes that the state should minimise regulation and tax, and capitalists should own public services which intensify economic inequality when the rich get richer and the poor get poorer (Monbiot, 2016). Bauman (2016) emphasized that "neoliberalism [...] distanced itself from its predecessor and indeed set itself in stark opposition by doing precisely what the classic liberalism fought valiantly to prevent while leaning over backward to reverse in case it was already done". Since regulations were loosened, capitalists are able to come up with various methods to earn profit and maintain their status. Clarke (2005) thus explained that the hunger for profit is the only purpose of capitalist production as this is purposefully done to maintain their capital accumulation (54).

## 2. Hyper-consumption

The term 'hyper-consumption' was introduced by Lipovetsky and Charles (2005) who defines it as a result of postmodern life that motivates individuals to consume for pleasure. The concept of hyper-consumption has also been defined by Veblen (2005) as conspicuous consumption which is a pattern of an individual over-consumption that is associated with hegemony. Ritzer (2012) also defined hyper-consumption as "the tendency to consume more than one 'needs', more than one intends, and ... more than one can afford" (67). In short, hyper-consumption can be summarised as an individual's unawareness of their own excessive consumption influenced by the society.

Capitalism creates hyper-consumption by using marketing and advertising to lure consumers to maximal consumption for the sake of profit. One key to profit expansion is to play with human desire and fear. Wolff (2013) explained, "Desire can be culturally contextual, and it can be [...] influenced by the hyper-consumer neoliberal context many of us live within" (330). She explained that human desires are associated with survival instincts such as the desire for food. When we starve, the desire is strong and the senses are increased, which results in us being forced to find food. After having food, the desire is fulfilled and our brain connects this delightful feeling with the smell of food (Wolff, 2013, 335). Consumers' desire is often driven by a powerful unpleasant emotion - fear. When our brain detects fear, the body diverts blood from the brain to the centre of the body which makes a person unable to think clearly and choose a compelling choice to ease the fear and fetch safeness (Lindstrom, 2012). Desire and fear are strong instincts which can be easily manipulated and used to control individuals.

Marketing and advertising understand these instincts and emotions well and play with them by persuading people to consume their products. Zygmunt Bauman (2007) depicted the relationship between the consumer and the forces of marketing: that marketing primes buyers to be the subjects of their make-believe advertising (17). Advertising makes people feel they always lack something and spreads this discourse by using marketing which shows how happiness is associated with purchasing (Wolff,

2013, 331-333). Advertising conduces people to fear lack in a myriad of forms: lack of health, lack of wealth, lack of personal attractiveness or simply a feeling of general inferiority, of not quite belonging to society. They then start purchasing bigger, faster, tastier, and stronger products to tame their fears. One direct consequence of the marketing of fear is hyper-consumption.

In a hyper-consumerist society of which consumerism is the heart, a demand of products is increased and met by a mass production of supplies. Therefore, capitalists have to find ways, unethical in some cases, to massively produce as cheaply as possible. Clarke (2005) suggested, “the capitalist who can produce more cheaply than his competitors can earn a higher rate of profit and drive his competitors from the market, so every capitalist has to run ahead in order to stand still” (54). The slaughterhouse is an example of mass production with an unethical method that can produce a large amount of products. Genetically Modified animals also help to reduce production costs, since the size and taste of products can be designed to meet the market’s needs. Therefore, capitalists are programmed by the system to make unethical choices that negatively affect the nonhumans.

### **3. Posthumanism**

Posthumanism is a concept that aims to deconstruct and counter the homocentric values that may jeopardise nonhuman beings. From an anthropocentric or homocentric view, nonhumans are typically seen as being opposite to and thus unequally treated by humans. Cruelty to the nonhumans is justified by the belief that human beings are the most superior beings on earth. Therefore, nonhumans are exploited to serve human economic growth. Many theorists including Donna Haraway have discussed the concept of “anthropocene” which refers to the increasing traces of human activities which transform and affect the earth (Haraway, 2016).

Anthropocentrism is a core value of humanism which has developed through history. The concept of man as the centre of the universe has been developed from a retold oratory of Greek and Roman civilization which put man as the focal point of

literature and philosophy and in a dualistic view, as Bolter (2016) put it [...] the human was cognition and that animals were merely highly intricate machines, part of the material world over against the world of the mind” (3). Anthropocentrism is also a result of the Enlightenment, when cognition of science and knowledge of how the universe works lead to the belief that the human is a conceited being (Bolter, 2016, 1). Thus, humanism is part of the ground of almost all western civilisation yet some see this as “an unfulfilled project, betrayed by Eurocentric violence” (Braidotti, 2017, 24).

Humans apply their knowledge and culture as the measurement of the world seen through their own perception, despite the fact that Homo Sapiens are also animals. Wolfe (2003) mentions Sigmund Freud who suggested that humans only became human due to an act of organic repression. They used to live upon olfactory stimuli but now they rely on their sight which separated them from the physical environment. Their strong point is to observe, since sight is the sense that is associated with aesthetics, perceptiveness and thoughtful remoteness which Freud called the “cultural trend toward cleanliness” (2-3). Since humans and animals use different sensors to perceive the world, human cannot fully understand animals, and vice versa. Animals’ thoughts and feelings are thus beyond human capability to understand such skepticism. Vicki Hearne (2007) remarked on a relationship between a horse and a rider,

“They both know for sure about the other is that each is a creature with an independent existence, an independent consciousness and thus the ability to think and take action in a way that may not be welcome (meaningful or creature-enhancing) to the other” (109).

Nonhumans are not the opposite of humans but rather the beings that humans cannot completely understand or explain their consciousness by human values.

Suspicion of animal’s capabilities triggers humans to retrieve their control by using violence. Human’s vulnerability for not knowing animals’ mind leads to the repetition of human domination and animal subservience (Bolton, 2014, 52). Wolfe

(2003) explains that this action is seen as Oedipal and narcissistic, since “the treatment of animals (familiar since Descartes) as mere unfeeling brutes, as stimulus-response mechanisms, or more recently, as genetically programmed routines and subroutines; or the demonization of the animal as the monster or mysterious outsider...” (5). Humans oppress nonhumans by objectifying them as highly intricate machines, merely via the sight which is the sense that humans most heavily rely on. Vision is naturally associated to the objectification process (Wolfe, 2010, 132-134). Human vision is inseparable from social and cultural aspects, and they are most of the time unaware of this (Bolton, 2014, 51). In fact, humans are incapable of comprehending animals’ minds, a fact which annihilates the humanist position, and which further justifies nonhuman abuse. Posthumanism is a movement in opposition to the idea of anthropocentrism. Bolter (2016) explains, “It seeks to undermine the traditional boundaries between the human, the animal, and the technological” (1). It concerns the benefit of all nonhumans which include “all those ghosts, all those human others that have been repressed during the process of humanization: animals, gods, demons, monsters of all kinds” (Herbrechter, 2013, 15). Braidotti (2017) suggests that a key to support posthumanist concepts is to deconstruct the anthropocentric values and create a new complex and multidirectional framework. (30). Thus, posthumanism attempts to deconstruct and disengage from anthropocentric values as feminism and post-colonialism oppose the dominant values in a corresponding manner.

#### **4. Related Studies**

In the last decade, there have been instances of research that discuss the films *Okja* and *Never Let Me Go* in a similar manner but one that looks at hyper-consumption and its effects on nonhumans has not yet been found. Three studies of *Okja* and *Never Let Me Go* raise questions on how nonhumans have been treated differently. In “*Okja* (2017): Unplugged Voices”, Acquier and Rehn (2019) examine the distinction between human cultures versus nature and how the cultures render nature or nonhumans the other. They also briefly mention the subject of commodification and ethical issues with



regard to nonhumans. In “The Othering in Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go*”, Vichiensing (2017) analyses the othering process by using post-colonial theory to see its negative consequences on nonhumans. In “The Construction of Otherness in Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go*”, Kata (2012) deconstructs the concept of Otherness through the lens of linguistics and shows how Otherness is portrayed in the story. A related examination of the posthuman aspect is also found. In *Affective Embodiment and the Transmission of Affect in Ex Machina* (2014), Fahn (2019) discusses the machine’s emotional capabilities and the importance of embodiment by using a framework of posthumanism.





### CHAPTER 3

#### METHODOLOGY

This study will examine and analyse *Okja* and *Never Let Me Go* through aspects of hyper-consumption in neoliberal capitalism and its effects on nonhumans by using Zygmunt Bauman's critique of neoliberal capitalism and Cary Wolfe's conceptualisation of posthumanism framework. Textual analysis and qualitative descriptive methodologies are used to analyse the films under the aforementioned framework. The films are selected by their content, critiques and popularity. In the two selected films, there are interesting topics related to hyper-consumption and nonhumans.

*Okja* (2017) directed by Bong Joon Ho is a story about the "Super Pigs" project which is a genetically modified (GM) pig production project run by the Mirando Corporation aiming to fulfil a high demand of meat consumption in the United States. The corporation distributes their 'Super Pigs' to local farms around the world to raise and holds a competition to find a pig-raising champion. *Okja*, one of the GM pigs that has been raised in South Korea by Mija and her grandfather, is the winner of the competition. The CEO of the Corporation, Lucy Mirando, lies that the super pigs are eco-friendly, natural and non-GMO, due to the fact that no one would want to eat genetically modified animals. However, the truth is finally exposed by the Animal Liberation Front (ALF), an international animal rights resistance group. *Okja* represents the usage of nonhumans for the benefit of capitalism and vividly portrays the marketing strategy of a company in the neoliberal capitalist era. *Babe* (1995) has similar topics as *Okja* such as factory farming, traditional farming, and the usage of nonhumans for humans' benefits, but in an era of neoliberal capitalism, *Okja* contains more depth on the topics raising ethical questions on the capitalist system and nonhuman otherness. The other film in this study is *Never Let Me Go* (2010) directed by Mark Romanek. It is a story about human clones who are created for organ harvesting in order to cure diseases and extend human lifespan. These clones live in a boarding school where they are monitored for the quality of their organs. Their destiny is completely planned by humans. They are told

what to do and where to be, and start to donate their vital organs before their middle age. Though the clones already have a fixed lifespan, they seek ways to live longer, for only one or two years. *Never Let Me Go* ingeniously camouflages the capitalist system in its school setting and directly deliberates about the worthiness of humans and nonhumans. Other interesting nonhuman films such as *Blade Runner* (1982) and *Ex Machina* (2014) also challenge the morality of the capitalist system and the identity constructs between humans and nonhumans, but they are more likely to focus on the problems of identity crisis than critique the capitalist system. Another reason that the two films are chosen is that they narrate the topics of hyper-consumption and nonhumans in everyday life settings which creates such an impact that the hyper-consumption and nonhuman problems are not a future concern but both have already happened and have our urgent attention. *Okja* and *Never Let Me Go* will be examined through the topic of the nature of hyper-consumption in neoliberal capitalism and its effects on nonhumans under the framework developed by applying Zygmunt Bauman's critique of neoliberal capitalism and Cary Wolfe's conceptualisation of posthumanism.

*Okja* and *Never Let Me Go* got positive reviews from various critics. *Okja* was acclaimed for its exposure of the food industry. "*Okja* has serious messages about consumerism, ecology, and food production" (Berardinelli, 2017). "While it starts with the gentle human-animal dynamics of *Babe*, it eventually arrives at the polemics of *Fast Food Nation*, revealing a movie eager to please and editorialize at the same time" (Kohn, 2017). *Never Let Me Go* is an adaptation of Kazuo Ishiguro's book in the same title. A review on the book stated that, "Ishiguro successfully breaks this genre barrier by making 'the other' portray human emotions and actions" (Weidner, 2018). The films also contain the same mood, tone and themes found in the book, with some limitations of a feature film. "*Never Let Me Go* proves a remarkably successful adaptation of Kazuo Ishiguro's acclaimed 2005 novel. Director Mark Romanek and scripter Alex Garland do make a few missteps, but most of the movie's off-key notes result simply from the inherent limitations of squeezing a book's contents into a feature-length film" (Jenkins, 2010).

In terms of popularity, *Okja* currently has a rating of 87% based on 232 critic reviews and 81% by 10,502 audience reviews on Rotten Tomatoes, and has scored 7.3/10 based on 101,031 IMDb users. *Okja* was also selected for the Palme d'Or Award at the Cannes International Film Festival 2017. *Never Let Me Go* (2010) currently has a rating of 70% based on 180 critic reviews and 37,852 audience reviews on Rotten Tomatoes website, and has scored 7.1/10 based on 135,885 IMDb users. *Never Let Me Go* was also nominated for Best British Independent Film of British Independent Film Awards.



## CHAPTER 4

### ANALYSIS

#### 1. From farms to factories: an (un)changeable fate of nonhumans and the disguised exploitative system in *Okja*

In *Okja*, Mirando Corporation uses strong marketing to create desires and initiate hyper-consumption for sales of their products. A fallacy is used by the corporation to draw attention to the products. Lucy Mirando, the CEO, claims on the inauguration of the Super Pigs project that, “the world's population is at seven billion. 805 million human beings struggle with hunger every day, including 30 million, right here in the United States. The world is running out of food, and we're not talking about it. We needed a miracle. And then we got one” (Bong, 2017). It is true that the majority of humans struggle with hunger, but in fact the hunger has been caused by poverty and inequality in society. In the US, inequality is caused by the food industry itself, and also used as a charitable action purely for the purposes of marketing (Elmes & Derry, 2013). Here, Mirando plays with insecurity and the fear of hunger to pave the way for her products. Mirando's marketing creates an anxiety and at the same time, it promises an impeccable solution which she claims is “a revolution in the livestock industry” (Bong, 2017). A super piglet becomes the solution of the delusive hunger.

Mirando Corporation strengthens its marketing by saturating the brand image to be ethical and intriguing. The Company claims that the piglet was miraculously discovered on a Chilean farm, observed and studied with love and care, and reproduced by non-forced, natural mating and non-GMO. The super pigs will be big, tasty and “they will also leave a minimal footprint on the environment, consume less feed and produce less excretions” (Bong, 2017). The Company creates a competition for the best super piglets from local farms around the world. Mirando says, “I have asked each farmer to raise their special guest, honoring traditional techniques unique to their respective cultures” (Bong, 2017) and her scientists will fully support the raising. She has thoroughly designed the product's image to be natural, down to earth with a concern for minor producers. This sounds ethical and gets along with 2010's eco-

friendly and organic market trend. Stanev (2017) points out that that the term 'eco-friendly' is an emotional charm that sensory marketing concentrates on, since it triggers "emotions, sensations and the imagination" of consumers, and offering an ethical choice for consumers makes them feel responsible for the society and feel pleasurable to purchase the products (187). Mirando Corporation thoroughly understands costumers' gratification. Lucy admits, "such a shame we had to tell all those little white lies. It's not our fault that the consumers are so paranoid about GM foods" (Bong, 2017). The mischievous marketing sets up intense though misguided desires to purchase that lead to hyper-consumption and make consumers believe that they consume promising products without noticing their source.

Consumers' impression of a brand is essential, since it relates to sales and profit; therefore, in the film the Mirando Corporation is seen as using a variety of marketing strategies to maintain a good company image. Bauman (2007) suggests that "buyers will wish to obtain commodities for consumption if, and only if, consuming them promises gratification of their desires" (10). Mirando Corporation is extremely focused on their promising image and puts the utmost effort to maintain it. After the Animal Liberation Front (ALF) tries to save a super pig, Okja, as she is taken to the US, Lucy is upset with the news that her employees carry Mija, the pig owner, away from Okja. She cries, "abusing that adorable girl. And in the uniforms that I personally designed myself. And shoving her best friend onto a truck. That's gonna kill us" (Bong, 2017). Evidently, Lucy is more concerned about the company's image than the violent act and the tragic fate of the girl and the pig. To regain the public's trust, her assistant comes up with a telecasted reunion idea and uses Mija as a brand ambassador, "an embodiment of Mirando ideal. She's young. She's pretty. She's female. She's eco-friendly and she's global. She's a godsend" (Bong, 2017).

Animal Transgene is one of the effective methods in the food industry to gain profits and beat other competitors. Transgenic animals are animals that have been genetically modified (GM) to increase traits (e.g., health and growth) and yields (e.g., meat and milk) that are important to the economy (Forabosco, Löhmus, Rydhmer, &

Sundström, 2013, 2). The quantity of products helps reduce cost and the quality gives more value to the products (Mora et al., 2012, 4). Thus, both methods help capitalists maintain their status. The GM pigs are pawns of the Mirando Corporation, to stand out impressively in the market despite the fact that lives have been tortured in the process. The GM pigs are designed to be enormous and tasty as Lucy Mirando claims on the inauguration of the Super Pigs project. In creating one GM pig, many attempts have failed and not every pig has turned out fine. The film shows that ill piglets are kept in small cages, some can barely stand and some have blistered skin. As a massive herd of GM pigs are caged within an electric fence waiting to be slaughtered, the pigs are forced one after the other by electric cattle prods to go into a slaughterhouse, after which a worker uses a gun to kill the weeping pigs while they are still conscious. Migrant labourers rush to turn the pigs into meat while blood is all over the slaughterhouse, showing that "violence against the animal is ethically permissible" (Wolfe, 2009, 567). Okja is also forced to be a part of the torturing process. Okja is forced to mate and to have her meat extracted for a taste test. Dr. Johnny Wilcox, a scientist of the Super Pig project, says, "bang! Sirloin. Ooh! The shank. Don't worry. You won't die. We're *just* gonna take some of your meat... i'm gonna poke you in five places. And I'm sorry. It's gonna hurt" (Bong, 2017). Though Dr. Johnny seems to express empathy for Okja, his words reflect anthropocentric values. He thinks that meat extraction is *just* a regular process for nonhumans. He uses the word "poke" instead of "stab" or "cut" to describe the slaughter process which implies a homocentric point of view toward animal slaughter. This undermines the fact that nonhumans can also suffer as humans do and humans merely see nonhumans as the Other. The GM pigs are born to inevitably suffer and get killed to serve humans who are driven by hunger for money and profit and justify their cruelty with anthropocentric views.

As portrayed in the film, the FDA standard can be strategically used for the capitalists 'benefit and to mislead consumers from the origin of the products. The standard does not imply compassion towards the pathetic lives of GM pigs. This is a pitfall of the capitalist system ruled by anthropocentrism. In an interview of Bong with

The Independent, he said the reason he rushed making this film was that the FDA had already approved GM salmon and he had talked to a PhD student who takes care of a GM pig project. He said, at the moment the Super Pigs is maybe fictional, but the real product is coming (Loughrey, 2017). After the unethical process of the Super Pigs project is exposed by the ALF, Nancy Mirando, Lucy's twin sister, takes charge and tries to push all Super Pig products out to the market. She asks her assistants, "we already have FDA approval, correct?" (Bong, 2017) and the answer is yes. As Mirando Corporation desires to distribute the products immediately and due to their current disrepute, a slaughterhouse is an ideal, though unethical, solution to achieve cheap and fast production. The slaughterhouse is able to massively produce in a minimum of time and the cost can be even more minimised by employing cheap migrant labourers. Since neoliberalism is a free-market, consumers have multiple choices to consume and the cheapest ones always get chosen. Thus, Nancy confidently says, "if it's cheap, they'll eat it" (Bong, 2017) though the products are disreputable.

Humans do not truly value nonhumans' lives as their own species, but they see themselves as saviours. The anthropocentric perspective is ironically depicted in the film through the ALF members. As the ALF tries to sabotage the Super Pigs project, K, a Korean member of the team, asks for Mija's permission to use Okja as a spy to get film footage inside the laboratory. Mija refuses and asks to bring Okja home, but K translates the message to the team that Mija consents to the mission. He values Okja's life less than his own purpose - that is to complete the mission that has been planned for a long time. At the Mija and Okja reunion telecast, Okja looks tired and frustrated. She stumbles around the stage with her red confused eyes and bites on Mija's arm. Jay, the leader of the team, attempts to hit Okja with the microphone stand, but Mija catches it before it hits Okja. This scene can be implied that Jay does not think that Okja's life is as important as Mija's. When it comes to a choice between human and nonhuman, humans choose to save their own species without hesitation. Though the ALF members determine to save Okja and all the GM pigs, they still see nonhumans as the Others and a quest to accomplish.



Okja and GM pigs are born as commodities with their unchangeable fate, but the fate can be changed by the power of money. Though the ALF cannot completely sabotage the project and numerous GM pigs are massacred, Mija finds a way to save Okja from death. While Mija is about to go after Okja, her grandfather tries to stop her by drawing a meat cut on Okja's photo and says this is Okja's fate. According to an interview of Bong, the name Okja is an old-fashion female name (Wise, 2017). The female name may imply that Okja is submissive to the capitalist system as a woman who is submissive to patriarchy. Patriarchy is simply an oppression and objectification of women by men which can be compared to workers who are oppressed and exploited by capitalists. In the slaughterhouse, Mija negotiates with Nancy that she wants to get Okja home, but Nancy refuses,

No, it's my property... we're extremely proud of our achievements. We're very hardworking businesspeople. We do deals, and these are the deals we do. This is the tenderloin for the sophisticated restaurants. The Mexicans love the feet... It's all edible. All edible, except the squeal (Bong, 2017).

Lucy is the representation of a capitalist who merely concerns herself with profit and ways to achieve it, without considering how many squeals she has caused and lives she has tortured. Eventually, Mija successfully trades Okja with a golden pig she received from her grandfather as a memento of Okja herself. Money or profit seems to be the most important objective in neoliberalism, that can change the unchangeable fate of Okja. After Mija makes her offer, Nancy replies, "pleasure doing business with you" (Bong, 2017). To Mija, Okja is her family, but to the Mirando twins, Okja and other GM pigs are submissive commodities that they can exploit and drain profit out of their lives.

## **2. From school yards to organ factory farms: enslaved donors and their premium organs in *Never Let Me Go***

Hyper-consumption is an assembly of unnatural desires which functions by mass production and other interdependent components. Bauman pointed out,



“consumerism stands for production, distribution, desiring, obtaining and using, of symbolic goods” (Blackshaw, 2005, 113). The desires stimulated by the capitalist system usually make humans feel unsatisfied with their natural body. Bauman (2007), referring to Günther Anders 'work, remarks that, “nowadays the human body is something that 'must be overcome 'and left behind. The 'raw', unadorned, un-re-formed and unprocessed body is something to be ashamed of” (59-60). It isn't only that unnatural and undeniable desires for products drive mass production to meet high demand, but there are also other required components that create hyper-consumption. It is also compulsory that the products have to captivate consumers 'attention so that they will be admitted and massively consumed (Bauman, 2007, 6). After the desire is created, quality control and marketing come to play a part to ensure a high value of the products from the mass production.

An inability to conquer incurable diseases has created an immersive demand for transplanted organs. In *Never Let Me Go*, it is stated that “the breakthrough in medical science came in 1952. Doctors could now cure the previously incurable. By 1967, life expectancy passed 100 years” (Romanek, 2010). To cope with the incurable diseases, organ supplies from human clones in boarding schools all over England are used to extend elderly's life span. Kathy, a clone from Hailsham, reveals that “there were people from White Mansion, Oakhill, Morningdale and other homes I'd never heard of” (Romanek, 2010). These so-called schools are comparable to factory farms where products are raised to meet the high demand of the market and another main character, Tommy, refers to these schools as “battery farms” (Romanek, 2010). The school setting provides a suitable environment to create quality organs. School provides the idea of growth, youth and development which gets along with the process of raising cloned children for organs. The school controls the children by creating activities and pursuits of scholarly and sporting achievement which allow them to properly develop their bodies and minds. The school also camouflages its factory function from the children as it might affect the growth and quality of organs.

Evidently in the film, the clones are merely seen as commodities which are subject to physical and mental maltreatment. Nonhumans, including clones, have been exploited by the homocentric belief that it is righteous to kill animals as Wolfe (2003) indicates,

It is what seems to be a simple substitution: We kill animals instead of humans. But of course, as everyone knows, we do indeed kill humans all the time, and it is in order to mark such killing as either “criminal” or “noncriminal” that the discourse of animality becomes so crucial. We can see how the law of culture arranges its species significations on a kind of grid. (101)

For the manufacturing of products, quality control is a regular process. Quality control of the clones in the film is practiced by physical and behavioral inspection. There is a regular physical examination by doctors and nurses to check the overall health of clone bodies and they check the bodies so thoroughly that even a tiny bruise must be closely inspected. Hailsham students are not allowed to smoke cigarettes because they are treated as commodities with quality organs. The principle reminded them, “keeping yourselves well, keeping yourselves healthy inside, is of paramount importance” (Romanek, 2010). In addition, an efficient marketing strategy is employed to show the quality of products. Art works and poetry from the clones are evidence of their abilities and only exceptional examples will be publicized, as Miss Emily explained, “We used your art to show what you were capable of” and “I think it shows more than technical ability. It gives a real insight into the child. Which is precisely what Marie-Claude wants for the gallery” (Romanek, 2010). The gallery can be seen as an advertising space for the products. The selected art works represent the clones from Hailsham who have good creative ability and quality organs.

Classes and routines of the child clones in Hailsham can be compared to prison lives. There were both outdoor and indoor activities for the clones. Teachers let the clones run around school and do sports which was to physically develop the clones.

There were sex education classes for possible reproduction, role play class for the preparation of a few years in the outside world, and art class for the reflection of the mind. There was a free market in the school which the principle called a bumper crop. The child clones were excited and gathered their tokens to buy stuff. There were dolls without arms, broken musical instrument, broken toys, old clothes, and parts of broken objects. Bumper crop means unusually larger crop, but the Hailsham 'bumper crop' were more likely to be unusually useless objects which were considered trash to humans. The clones had strict routines and boundaries. After the clones woke up, they lined up for a jar of milk and pills to get ready for the day. Each clone had a bracelet to check-in and out of the school and cottages. When Kathy worked as a carer, she still had to check-in and out every time she went to work. In Hailsham, there were the myths that prevented the clones to go out of school boundary. The clones told a new teacher that a boy who ran off the boundary was tied to a tree with hands and feet cut off, and a girl who climbed over the fence was not allowed back to the school and starved. The new teacher asked who told them the stories and how they knew that the stories are true. They replied, "everybody knows them" and "of course they're true. Who'd make up stories as horrible as that?" (Romanek, 2010). One detail in which Hailsham was unlike a prison was that it used psychology and the naivete of children instead of violence to control them.

In addition, in *Never Let Me Go* the clone donors are discriminated against by anthropocentric laws. There is a national organisation, the National Donor Programme (NDP) that controls the donation system and provide supplies for the clones. Killing clones is not a crime but it is legitimised by the idea of nonhumans for humans 'sake. Miss Emily said, "We were providing an answer to a question no one was asking. If you ask people to return to darkness, the days of lung cancer, breast cancer, motor neuron disease, they'll simply say no" (Romanek, 2010). Humans set their needs as a greater priority than nonhuman lives.

The inevitably tragic fate of the clones is vividly portrayed in the film. The clones ' organs have been taken as many times as possible and they cannot prevent this

anguished fate. They have been tortured and suffer from the donations before they are dead. "Complete" is strategically used as a substitute word for dead. To complete is to accomplish something and in this case, the word can imply the completion of harvesting. Ruth, Kathy's best friend said she did not want to survive after her third donation. She said, "After the fourth donation, even if you've technically completed, you're still conscious in some sort of way. And then you find out that there are more donations... just watching and waiting. Till they switch you off" (Romanek, 2010). A mere touch of sympathy was never offered to the clones. They were objectified as commodities and harshly treated. In the physical examinations, the child clones were roughly touched by doctors and nurses as if they were checking inanimate objects and in the operating room where they harvested the organs, the clones are treated like fresh meat on a cutting board. Evidently, humans do not see the clones as living beings who were capable of pain and emotion, so that they mistreat the clones without hesitation. It seems that childhood in Hailsham is the most precious memory that they can have and hold on to while they are awaiting completion. Ironically, the fate of the clones is told in the school song at the beginning of the film:

When we are scattered afar and asunder. Parted are those who are singing today. When we look back and forgetfully wonder. What we were like in our learning and play. Oh, the great days will bring distance enchanted. Days of fresh air in the rain and the sun. How we rejoiced as we struggled and panted. Echoes of dreamland Hailsham lives on. (Romanek, 2010)

The film demonstrates the use of language to moderate violence and create a utopian world for clones and their caretakers. Discourse is a pattern of language which is used to organise knowledge and has power to persuade people to accept the knowledge as true. Discourse provides social, cultural and political status to specific types of people who have authority to speak about certain topics such as doctors and religious authorities (Whisnant, 2012, 17). Foucault (1981) pointed out that discourse is

“controlled, selected, organised and redistributed by a certain number of procedures whose role is to ward off its powers and dangers, to gain mastery over its chance events, to evade its ponderous, formidable materiality” (52). Clones had identical appearances as humans which made it hard for the caretakers to endure the oppression, since the clones reminded them of their own kind. They knew that the clone that they took care would be suffer and dead to serve the needs of organs, so the language usage played an important part to run the organ factory. The word “complete” impacted on both caretakers and clones in a subconscious level. “Complete” gave a sense of fulfilment and accomplishment which associated with calmness and happiness. The word helped caretakers and nurses who always worked with the clones and saw their suffering to get through and go on with their live without conflict and guilt. For clones, the word “complete” was part of the utopian world that had been created to lure them. It made the clones think that this bubble world was the world they deserved and to complete meant that their purpose of lives had been fulfilled. The word complete signified that the clones were created to complete human bodies and goals but their bodies, their lives and their dreams would never be completed. In the recovery centre, a horse figure toy by Ruth’s bed reflects the reminiscence of her childhood as she dreamed since a child to have horses of her own, but her dream was left incomplete.

Self-doubt is a consequence of the clones 'pathetic lives which also erodes their identity. After Kathy, Ruth and Tommy grew up and were sent to live with clones from other places, they started to question their own worth. Kathy did not understand that sexual desire was a natural phenomenon, since the school only explained how to reproduce but did not provide a proper sex education, she tried to find her “Original” in pornographic magazines. Ruth tried to imitate human gestures from TV shows and laughed with jokes that she did not understand. It seems that she tried to be human. Though she could copy those manners, she would never truly inhabit them. Names of the clones, such as Kathy H. and Tommy D., symbolise an absence of identity. The abbreviated surnames are likely to be a product code that does not allow tracking back to their Originals. Ruth was told that her possible Original is in town, when they went in

town to see Ruth's Possible. In a restaurant full of old humans, Kathy, Tommy, and Ruth felt awkward to ordering their meals and while they were eating, Kathy sensed an unfriendly and critical gaze from the humans. They were discriminated against and seen as the Others in the society. When Ruth found out that her Possible was not her Original, she realised that the clones were not made from the best prototype and broke down and cried:

They never, ever model us on people like that woman. We all know it, we just never say it. We are modeled on trash. Junkies, prostitutes, winos, tramps. Convicts, maybe, as long as they aren't psychos. If you want to look for possibles, if you want to do it properly, look in the gutter. That's where we came from. (Romanek, 2010)

With this realization, Ruth saw herself as worthless. She saw herself as a person who was unacceptable to the social norm; the Others and Ruth depicted her worthlessness as the copy of the Others. Mentally and physically damaged, the clones thus lived a miserable and painful life. They were tired and lost as characters in the tale *One Thousand and One Nights*, that Kathy reads for Tommy in his recovery centre – after a long and tired journey, they finally found an island appearing like the Garden of Eden where they disembarked. As the humans accomplish their goal and achieve happiness, the organ-transplanted patients get to live longer and the capitalists gain profit while the only way for the clones to end their suffering is to “complete” their donations.

The clones were born as commodities and there was not a way to save or extend their lives. Deferral was a myth that if two clones are truly in love with each other, they could apply to extend their lives and stay with each other for a few more years. Tommy was obsessed with this myth and wanted to apply it with Kathy. He drew hundreds of pictures over the years because he believed that the pictures would prove his love for Kathy. Tommy and Kathy went to see Miss Emily to show his drawings and prove that they were in love, but they only found out that all the art works and The

Gallery were intended simply to demonstrate the capabilities of the clones and the deferral rumour was only a myth. Miss Emily said, "We didn't have The Gallery in order to look into your souls. We had The Gallery to see if you had souls at all" (Romanek, 2010). It is irony that the clones had to verify their love and begged for their lives while it is unnecessary for humans. They could not run away from their fate as Miss Lucy, a caretaker, once told them that "none of you will do anything except live the life that has already been set out for you...You have to know who you are and what you are. It's the only way you'll lead decent lives" (Romanek, 2010). After Tommy completed, Kathy went back to deserted Hailsham as her first donation would begin in a month. She reminisced her childhood and the times she was with Tommy. She questioned that why their lives had been so different from the ones that they saved. She continued, "we all complete. Maybe none of us really understand what we've lived through or feel we've had enough time" (Romanek, 2010). The clones questioned their existence, since humans and nonhumans appeared to be the same, and yet they were treated differently. The dissatisfactions of the self and the excessive desires of the humans manipulated by the capitalist system abused and exploited the nonhumans.



## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

*Okja* and *Never Let Me Go* similarly portray the nature of neoliberal capitalism and the effects on nonhumans. *Okja* concentrates on the nature of capitalism. It focuses on marketing process and exposes the capitalist's exploitation of the economic system's pitfalls to manipulate consumers and exploit the nonhumans. It is narrated from a third-person point of view with straightforward facts and images of the unethical processes and directly criticises the capitalist system. Bong clearly illustrates Mirando Corporation as an antagonist who is an embodiment of the capitalist system. *Never Let Me Go* focuses on the feelings of the nonhumans, since it is narrated from a first-person point of view which is Kathy's. It introduces audiences to a futuristic capitalist world filled with the details of the main characters' routines. The film seems to be neutral in its point of view at first, but then there are impactful scenarios that bring up empathy and sympathy, consequently pointing towards the exploitation of nonhumans.

The critique of neoliberalist performativity explores how the problematic system manipulates consumers and exploits the nonhumans in the films. It shows how the Mirando uses marketing to lure and lie to consumers. Capitalists use analyses of human behaviour to plant the idea of hyper-consumption. They understand the consumers too well, since the ugly truths of their products are revealed, but it cannot effect the sale. The GM pig products can be sold because they are cheap and the transplanted organs are still on the market because of humans' fear of death. The critique also points out the pitfalls of the system which are FDA and NDP and which favour capitalists' profit. The neoliberal capitalist system creates capitalists who ceaselessly crave profit. They drain profit from the resources they claim including nonhuman lives and are proud of their achievements.

Posthumanism scrutinises the practice of humanism and its jeopardy to the nonhumans. In the films, humans believe that nonhumans are the only resources by



which they might serve their needs. They claim nonhuman lives as their own and massacre these pathetic lives as Mirando Corporation and Hailsham School do to the nonhumans, then justify the actions by the humanist value. Though some humans try to help the nonhumans, they are still stuck in with the anthropocentric perspective which is one of the most central norms in the society. *Okja* seems to decisively oppose meat consumption, but Bong claims in the interview that he is not against the consumption, but he wants the audience to be aware of their food sources, an awareness which he believes will progressively decrease meat consumption (Loughrey, 2017). Meat consumption which is generated by neoliberal capitalism is not a typical way to sustain lives. Consumption is a natural and essential behaviour for any organism to maintain life while hyper-consumption exists to serve social needs which are artificial and optional processes when it comes to the maintenance of existence. Thus, killing nonhumans to sustain lives is called a circle of life, but killing nonhumans to maintain social status and serve social needs is called exploitation. Thus, humans only need to find ethical ways that respect and care for nonhumans (e.g., avoiding factory farm products) in order to exist harmoniously together in the world.

The two films seemingly convey the same messages concerning the exploitative capitalist system, homocentric discourses and the effects on the nonhumans. In both films, the nonhumans can be ignored, discriminated by and exploited by the humans for humans 'sakes. To end the exploitative system, it is imperative to build a sense of empathy among humans and towards nonhumans. Wolfe (2010) mentioned Cora Diamond and Jacques Derrida who both pointed out the ability to be harmed and to suffer that humans share with nonhumans as the core of the question of ethics and justice (81-82). Therefore, suffering is a powerful feeling and a shared experience between humans and nonhumans. It is thus a responsibility of we humans to have compassion and empathy towards nonhuman creatures and regard their suffering as something akin to ours.

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