
Damaged Society In No. 6 by Atsuko Asano

Human Failings in Perfect Societies

Humans strive to push their way to the top of society to create what they see as a utopia. This drive exists in all of us. Good things result from this trait. Horrible events occur too. Once on top and in power, others who oppose the one on top get subdued or thrown out. Atsuko Asano's novel, No.6, portrays an ideal society on the surface. Science and technology flourish. Only 0.05% of deaths in No.6 result from suicide. The novel focuses on the holy city, No.6. It is one of six city-states founded after a nuclear fallout. It views the world in black or white. Citizens are for or against No.6. This society strives to be perfect, but it cannot avoid a major human trait. Humans will use, abuse, or cut out those weaker or in opposition to stay on top. People inside No.6 are citizens and outside the wall they are insects. Shion, a resident who escapes false imprisonment, wants to blur the lines between black and white. Shion is only human. Humans want the perfect society and strive to create one with good intentions, but they succumb to being human.

In the beginning, No.6 appears to be a world without sorrow. Science advances to the point citizens do not have to worry about an early death from most illnesses. Even elders do not fear death. Once they meet certain undisclosed criteria, the government sends them to the Twilight Cottage, which takes care of elders until the end. Once death comes families do not have to worry their loved ones suffers before death. At the funeral "they all would look like they were having some wonderful dream" (Vol 1. Ch. 3). A peaceful death is not the only delusion the government forces its citizens to believe. With everything perfect, citizens have no urge to revolt against the government. No.6 puts out a facade so the citizens think they are safe and protected at all times. Those living outside the wall dividing No.6 from West Block do not get to indulge in such a luxury. In fact, No.6 preys upon those outside the wall to become stronger. To the mayor of No.6, "West Block isn't part of the city" and he uses it as "some kind of garbage dump" (Vol. 1 Ch. 4). Shion, disgusted the city he once lived in could treat others as subhuman, vows to change its ways.

Shion moves to West Block until the collapse of No.6. West Block does not hide their wrongdoings like No.6. People want to survive and morals get disregarded. The weak will die and the strong will reap the benefits. Shion still believes people inside and outside the wall are the same humans. His friend Inukashi tells Shion that "if [he keeps] believing in that fantasy of [his, he'll] never survive [in West Block]" (Vol. 3 Ch. 1). But, citizens in No.6 and West Block are the same humans. Both want to get rid each other. They want power and to stay in it. The

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only difference is No.6 lies and conceals their motives. In their minds two options exist, either No.6 or West Block falls. However, Shion sees the third path. He sees a way “to seek cohabitation rather than retribution” (Vol. 7 Ch. 3). West Block and No.6 can exist together. Before that can happen, the wall separating No.6 and West Block must fall.

No.6 did not just collapse because Shion and Nezumi destroyed the Mother Computer or parasitic wasps killed random citizens. It acted a catalyst that allowed new people to rise to power. The people suspected No.6 had faults but were too afraid to speak up. Karan, depressed over her son’s safety being unknown, sits on a park bench as she grieves. After thirty minutes a nice old lady came to check on her. If it wasn’t for Yoming interrupting the conversation, the government would discard of Karan since she almost voiced her distress. Yoming tells Karan that “citizens are allowed to space out for thirty minutes” (Vol. 3 Ch.2) before it becomes suspicious and the old lady tried to get Karan to express dissatisfaction. Most citizens act naïve and like easily led cattle. But how many are that way out of fear? Fear will not stop rebellion from happening. Fear turns into hatred and wishing to be the one on top. No.6 failed because they tried so hard to crush any threats to their power. West Block never had as big of a revolution as No.6, but near the end of the novel the power shifts slightly. In a society comprising the lowest of the lower class, a social hierarchy exists with shopkeepers and gravediggers at the top. They have the most money and therefore power in West Block. At the bottom is everyone else. Everyone fears the ones above them, but like No.6 citizens, hate them. After the marketplace in West Block gets destroyed from No.6 using “acoustic shock waves” (Vol. 5 Ch. 3) and most either die or go to the correctional facility, the survivors waste no time in stealing leftover money or goods. It wasn’t a revolution like No.6, but the weak did whatever they could to climb up their money driven social ladder.

The revolution in No.6 left its citizens scrambling to put their government back together. Even though he is only sixteen, Shion becomes a member of the reconstruction committee. But, by the end of the novel, Shion is no longer the idealistic boy he used to be. Shion lost his empathy as soon as he shot Rashi. Almost sadistically, he asks Rashi questions in a “low voice, stripped of all emotion” (Vol. 7 Ch. 4) as he makes him suffer before killing him. To sum up, Shion is no longer what made him different from the leaders before him. On the reconstruction committee, only one obstacle stands in his way, Yoming. Yoming’s following worries Shion. He decides to “remove, drive away,” and “destroy his obstacles” (No. 6 Beyond Ch. 3). He tricks Yoming into confessing to a crime Shion thought he likely committed. Even as he frames Yoming, Shion says he is creating a “world that is different from No. 6?one that is for humans.” (No. 6 Beyond Ch. 3). No.6 always existed for humans. The human tendency to thirst for power drove it down the wrong path. It is difficult to tell if Shion is just crazy, hungry for power, or maybe even both. Either way, Shion’s actions show nothing has learned after the rebellion. The future of No.6 appears to be dim since it appears nothing was learned, but anything can happen.

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To summarize, the collapse of No. 6 resulted from the power struggle between those in power and the weak. No. 6 tried to make a utopia but failed due to their greed. Only the high ranking officials wanted the power and didn't want citizens to voice opinions conflicting theirs. No.6 viewed themselves as superior human beings than those around them, such as West Block. Neither is better than the other because like Shion suggested, everyone is equal. The future of No.6 will be rocky as they struggle to learn to balance their urges for power and listening more to the people. Besides No.6, struggles for power have caused many conflicts throughout history. No.6 separated itself from the outside, much like East Germany did during the cold war. Both built a wall to keep its citizens from leaving or coming into their country. Instead of protecting anyone, the walls represents freedom each government was taking away from its people. Humans failure such as these will help future generations learn how to deal with the power-hungry. Controlling the power-hungry first starts with understanding compromise. No one person is more valuable than the next. We all are the same humans.

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