

“THEN I WILL BE FREE TOO:” THE ONTOLOGY OF HOPE AND THE POLITICS  
OF DEATH IN *DIRTY PRETTY THINGS* AND *CHILDREN OF MEN*

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Pretty Things and Children of Men*

Why the hell you can't be blue, or red or green, if you can't be white? You know is you that cause a lot of misery in the world. Is not me, you know, is you! I ain't do anything to infuriate the people and them, is you! Look at you, you so black and innocent, and this time you causing misery all over the world. —*The Lonely Londoners*

The words above are uttered by Galahad, a character in Samuel Selvon's landmark Black British novel *The Lonely Londoners* (1956). This statement is a declaration of the difficulties a colored individual faces by simply being born non-white in a racialized space. Such exclusions has been an integral aspect of post-colonial British politics, ranging from the fulminations of Enoch Powell to the contemporary discourse of the British National Party (BNP), and is exemplified by radical rhetoric that heightens fear of illegal immigrants. This rhetoric has contributed (although it is one of the manifestations in a complex political field) to the consistent biopolitical regulation of “othered” human bodies—a process that is, more often than not, racially marked. However, these biopolitical<sup>1</sup> policies of regulating human “life” also have a sinister

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<sup>1</sup> Foucault, in *The History of Sexuality* (1978), has said that the entrance to the modern age can be characterized by a rupture in the way power is exercised in the modern state. The modern focus of politics, rather than being focused on the absolute right of the sovereign to kill, is instead concerned with “maximizing life” through a proper administration of the population within the nation state. Biopolitics

obverse: very often they have reflected a profound disregard for human life that reveals a marked shift towards the politics of death itself.

A contemporary example will illustrate my claim: In March of 2008, a Ghanaian immigrant to the U.K., Ama Sumani, was removed from her hospital bed in Cardiff and deported when her visa expired. She died two months later in Ghana after having been led to believe that doctors from the U.K and South Africa had been found to treat her, unable to notify her friends of her departure. This woman, a *human* subject, was unwillingly taken from an institution of care and sent “home” to a place where she would have no hope of receiving the necessary treatment she required in order to have any chance of surviving. Without the visa, Sumani’s body literally became a subject without any rights. The existence of rights, thus, guarantees her status as a “human”; without rights, she is simply a disposable body subject to removal. This story is only one example of circumstances for immigrant peoples that are in no way unique, demonstrating the workings of a political system that values strict policy over humanitarian rights, especially when it comes to the case of immigrants. The death of Ama Sumani, a singular injustice, makes visible a greater moral dilemma in which the fatal effects of adhering to such governmentalization often functions as an outright death sentence.

The Ama Sumani incident is a good starting point for my discussion of the phenomenon of human life being subjected absolutely to the “extraordinary” dimensions of sovereign power—a process that can result in a state of living death, a condition in which the human subject is rendered powerless in the face of sovereign power, with

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concerned with the management of living bodies, i.e. the politics of life, versus, necropolitics, the politics of death.

seemingly no capacity for recognizable forms of action and agency. If “life” and “death” (I am aware that these are very mutable terms) are the very stuff of politics, “living death,” as in the case of Ama Sumani prior to her deportation, represents an ontologically indeterminate stage where the subject teeters between both, while being encapsulated by neither.

To be a manifestation of the “living dead” is to endure a form of existence devoid of value. The devaluation of life to the extent of producing a state of death in life for entire segments of human populations is a commonly explored aspect of both the Holocaust paradigm, represented by theorists such as Hannah Arendt and Giorgio Agamben, and the postcolonial theoretical field, as is evident in the works of Franz Fanon and Achille Mbembe. The concrete manifestations of the “living dead” are exemplified by figures such as the *Muselmenn* of Nazi death camps—inhabitants who are divested of any semblance of political rights and reduced to the status of bare life. Such forms of “bare life” (Agamben’s term) are reduced to the levels of devalued objects, have no political freedom, and can be killed without the commission of homicide.

In postcolonial studies, the figuration of the living dead irrevocably relates to the concept of race and racism in “terror-formations” such as slave camps and colonies, where people are divided into groups consisting of “those who must live and those who must die” (*Necropolitics* 17). This Manichean division, as Fanon points out in *The Wretched of the Earth*, instrumentally reduces massive swathes of the colonized population to the status of death-in-life. In postcolonial theory, the idea of the “living dead” has also been closely related to Agamben’s “state of exception” by scholars such as

Ranjana Khanna. The “state of exception” is the concrete spatialization of a power structure supposedly instituted in times of crisis, where the privileges of citizenship and rights are forfeited and the sovereign authority, in the form of the security state, holds absolute power over the death and life of subjects who are abandoned in these zones. These abandoned subjects, like Ama Sumani, become representations of death in life.

In this paper, I draw upon insights from both postcolonial theory and Holocaust studies to examine the figure of the living dead in the contemporary British films *Dirty Pretty Things* (dir: Stephen Frears, 2002) and *Children of Men* (dir: Alfonso Cuarón, 2006). I explore the effects that surviving in a state of living death have on ideas of subjective and collective existence when beset with the constant, immediate threat of death, and the concomitant reduction of human bodies into a site of extreme object-hood, or the state of meaningless flesh. Although my discussion of the film employs Agamben’s ideas on sovereignty and “bare life,” I do not focus (as he does) exclusively on the “extraordinary” dimensions of the suspension of law (which holds that there is no opportunity for worthwhile democratic politics after this point). Instead I move towards a contemplation of the production of social hope in its ordinary dimensions in zones of emergency. In the same sense in which philosopher Ernst Bloch defines the term, I view hope as the ontological condition indicating the individual’s irrepressible outlook for a perceived future--a *different* future. I explore the desire for “more life” in these characters and their capability of orienting themselves to this perceived future, an orientation that eventually leads to “action” in the sense that Hannah Arendt has defined the term<sup>2</sup> My

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<sup>2</sup> Arendt defines “action” as one of the fundamental (three) categories of the human condition—labor, work, and action-- and constitutes the highest realization of living-in-the-world. Action distinguishes

discussion also aligns itself with political theorists like Bonnie Honig, who consider the practical implications of life in post-catastrophic scenarios. Honig centers on the potentialities for “abandoned” subjects to “live on” after enduring catastrophic experiences or existing within a death-like state. She bases her discussion on the opposition between the “mere life” created by zones of emergency and the immanent promise of “more life<sup>3</sup>” Anthropologist Veena Das, too, sees “living on” as a question of how survivors rebuild their lives, and the *decision* of “how and whether to go on, that is, to go on living in the very place of devastation” (*Life and Words* 13). To experience a state of “living death” is to continuously experience a state of being not-of-this-world, transforming the act of simply surviving into an act of will. But, this act of will betrays the stubborn desire to live on—a potential state which can be the basis for a future community that is *not-yet* but *can be*.

My exploration of these two film-texts proceeds in three distinct, but interlinked, directions. First, I discuss the role of each of the visual representations of these spaces as examples of “the state of exception.” Second, I explore the spatio-temporal realities of the emergency spaces represented in these films, and the potentialities of movement for “living dead” populations through maze-like and unnavigable spaces in emergency zones. I ask: How do these “zombified” subjects face such profound risks and yet dream of survival? Third, I focus on exploring the figuration of temporality in such zones of

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humans from animals and gods, and its two central features are plurality and freedom. Freedom, here, represents the capacity to begin, or start something new, a capability that all humans are granted by simply being born. Action as the realization of freedom is, then, rooted in natality, a concept that indicates the promise inherent in birth. Natality, then, grants the human with the capacity to perform “miracles”—to introduce the completely new.

<sup>3</sup> Honig’s idea of “more life” is influenced by Derrida’s concept of “Living On” in which he comments that sur-vivance contains both *plus de vie* and *plus que vie*.

emergency, where the banal occurrence of violence collapses and seals the sign of the future into a glacial present—an experience where, at a phenomenological level, the movement of time appears to the subject as meaningless and repetitive. How do subjects then make meaning and imagine alternative futures in chronotopes where death and nihilistic despair seem to predominate over the movement of life? Lastly, I will examine the production of social hope within these zones where ordinary human life seems to have collapsed under the sign of an “extraordinary” catastrophe. Is there hope at all, and if so, how is it expressed and what does it mean? What do these films suggest about the production of social hope and the capabilities of the human subject to not only continue surviving, but to assert subjectivity through acts of significant action and agency? I will begin with a comprehensive discussion of the contemporary representation of immigrant life in Britain portrayed in *Dirty Pretty Things*, then move on to the metaphorical imaginative space of the future displayed in *Children of Men*.

### **A Nation in Crisis: Civil Terror and Emergency Ethics in *Dirty Pretty Things***

*Dirty Pretty Things* has largely suffered from critical inattention. An exception is the essay by V.O. Odamtten and S.P. O’Connell, who read the film as a contemporary exploration of immigrant experiences in London, revealing the “system” as deeply flawed and based on exploitation. This article goes on to discuss the “economics of invisibility” in British immigrant culture by juxtaposing the film with the work of Ghanaian writer Amma Darko. Though this focus on the concept of the immigrant as an “alien” visitor to a specific space certainly lends itself to my discussion, Odamtten and O’Connell’s article is more closely focused on Darko’s work and less concerned with a direct treatment of

this film. In addition, while I begin by deploying their “alien” trope, I move beyond it to discuss modes of ethical action and conceptions of social hope in times of catastrophe.

*Dirty Pretty Things* focuses on portraying the experience of “illegal” immigrants in London by tracking the stories of two characters: the African immigrant--and illegal alien--Okwe (Chiwetel Ejiofor) and the Turkish refugee Senay (Audrey Tatou). The two protagonists share an apartment for convenience and cost, but work opposite shifts at the same hotel, and are very rarely in each other’s presence. As the film progresses, Okwe and Senay become involved in an underground organ trading ring operating out of the hotel and run by their boss Juan (Sergi Lopez), yet their relation to this “dirty business” varies. Okwe becomes aware of the organization due to an incidental discovery of a human heart in a hotel restroom, but immediately positions himself as the moral opponent to such a system of violent profit, while Senay considers submitting herself to the operation in order to exchange her liver for a passport. Senay recognizes the potential for death in undergoing such an operation, but is willing to face the risk. However, her decision spurs Okwe to action, and the two characters unite to drug Juan and sell his organs for procuring the money to leave London. At the conclusion of the film, the two friends (despite having fallen in love) part, with Okwe returning to Africa to reunite with his daughter, while Senay heads in the opposite direction to America.

*Dirty Pretty Things* reveals that the contemporary state of affairs for immigrants (“illegal” or otherwise) in London share resonances with the conditions immigrants encountered in the 1950s, 60s and 70s, when the political rhetoric of relocation strategies was rampant, threatening to send West Indian and Jamaican immigrants back “home” by

the boatload. As mentioned previously, Samuel Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners* is one representative imaginative text from these earlier eras. The protagonists of *The Lonely Londoners*, Moses and Galahad, seem to be absolute outsiders attempting to navigate an alien space; this process is uncannily similar to science fiction explorations of a "new world", since the reader views it from the outsiders' perspectives.

However, the dominant "science fiction" trope of the conquest of other lands is reversed: Moses and Galahad experience the foreign reality as "alien" and alienating. Galahad and Moses are partially represented as the classic binary of innocence versus experience, wherein Moses is disillusioned by all he has witnessed, while Galahad is represented as optimistic or, in Moses's opinion, naïve: he does not yet realize the racial discrimination and lack of basic rights that are in store for immigrants in London. Moses's profound awareness of the injustices of life in this so-called land of promise has led to an everyday experience of complete banality, seemingly devoid of feeling, as every new day is indistinguishable from the last. Every Sunday the "boys" meet in his apartment is unremarkable and repetitive—a "dead," lifeless repetition of the previous Sunday. Galahad, on the other hand, seems to be a representative of vitalism, containing that "spark" of energy that marks him as un-mechanistic and intuitive, creating a stirring of life in Moses.

The Senay-Okwe pair in *Dirty, Pretty Things* shares elective affinities with the characters from Selvon's novel. Senay and Okwe embark upon a relationship that resembles the friendship between Moses and Galahad, navigating the complexities of immigrant life in London together, yet standing in opposition to one another in the same

essential manner: Senay as a depiction of idealism and innocence, compared to Okwe—the representative of experience who is resigned to his surroundings. This opposition, then, makes them ideal companions to navigate this world together. The film’s depiction of the spaces in which Moses and Galahad reside, and must navigate daily are earlier reflections of conditions that have worsened in the present for immigrants. Britain’s treatment of “illegal” immigrants can in some ways be currently classified as an example of Agamben’s “state of exception.”<sup>4</sup> Senay and Okwe are legal and political outsiders who hold no rights of citizenship and can expect no financial aid or welfare from the government, who are actively working against their habitation of this space.

In *State of Exception*, Agamben discusses the predominance of political states of exception in the current day:

In this sense, modern totalitarianism can be defined as the establishment, by means of the state of exception, of a legal civil war that allows for the physical elimination not only of political adversaries but of entire categories of citizens who for some reason cannot be integrated into the political system. Since then, the voluntary creation of a permanent state of emergency (though perhaps not declared in the technical sense) has become one of the essential practices of contemporary states, including so-called democratic ones (2).

Such practices become visible in the contemporary London of *Dirty Pretty Things*, where immigrant populations are denounced as the manifestation of “what’s wrong” with London today. Such racist rhetoric exacerbates fear of the “othered” populations inhabiting this space, designating “entire categories of citizens” as the disposable scapegoats that ratify the post-imperial nostalgia that insists London was great before

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<sup>4</sup> Another filmic example here is David Cronenberg’s *Eastern Promises*. The character of immigration in Britain has changed. Earlier most of the immigrants were from the formerly colonized regions. Now there is a massive influx of immigrants from post-Communist Eastern Europe and Russia (the major population component represented in *Eastern Promises*).

*they* came. Such forms of exclusionary politics render the space of London itself as entirely unstructured to accommodate figures such as Okwe and Senay, who find themselves with no legal autonomy and no outlets for the assertion of subjective agency.

The loss of rights and legal autonomy is experienced at a corporeal level through inhibitions to bodily movement. In *Queer Phenomenology*, the postcolonial theorist Sara Ahmed shows how social relations are spatially arranged in Western spaces, in that bodies are organized by their movement through a world that allows some subjects (namely, those privileged by the effects of “whiteness”) to pass through easily. Such subjects enjoy the privilege of having objects “within reach.” Black, queer or disabled bodies, on the other hand, are constantly subjected to the experience of objects being “out of reach,” or of being “stopped.” Ahmed writes, “For Fanon, racism “stops” black bodies inhabiting space by extending through objects and others; the familiarity of the “white world” as a world we know implicitly, “disorients” black bodies such that they cease to know where to find things—reduced as they are to things among things” (111). Such “disorientations” render the “I can” for subjects marked by the privilege of race into the “I cannot” for black, queer or disabled bodies. The spaces of London Senay and Okwe inhabit, are then rendered spaces of “I cannot” versus that of the “I can.” Such difficulties reflect their experiences as unbidden, invisible denizens of the city, causing them to be subject to the terror of governmental surveillance, and the threat of being caught or “stopped” at any time.

This fear is evidenced by the terror of police raids, which effectively hinder the immigrants’ movement through the city space and cause them to take cover. Agamben

writes, “The declaration of the state of exception has gradually been replaced by an unprecedented generalization of the paradigm of security as the normal technique of government.” Such a system is on display in this film. In the underground society of illegal immigrants and legal refugees, who are exploited for cheap and free labor, the police wield their badges as a weapon under the guise of ensuring security for the more privileged. They seem to follow up on their appointments with Senay for the sole purpose of keeping her in a constant state of terror.

Senay is not permitted by the government to work, but she must work to survive, and in order to work, she is subjected to ritualistic sexual abuse at the hands of her boss in response to his threats to have her deported. Senay’s boss threatens her, “If they find out you’ve been working, what will they do? They will put you in prison. And here, they mix the men and women. So, every night you will be raped” (*Dirty Pretty Things*). The effects of the reign of terror that characterizes the state of exception force Senay, thus, to occupy a position of living death, a condition which pushes her towards the belief that death no longer represents an end, but a mode of escape from the dehumanizing present. When Okwe reminds Senay of the probability of death for those who choose to undergo the organ removal surgery, she replies, “Then I will be free too” (*Dirty Pretty Things*). Such declarations illustrate the depths of Senay’s despair and the increasing meaninglessness of life in the “state of exception.”

In this state of exception, refugees and immigrants exemplify Agamben’s idea of the *homo sacer*: “biologically alive but legally dead persons, situated in a limit zone between life and death, in which they are no longer anything but naked life and so can be

killed without the commission of homicide” (Jones 18). This nonvalued class of the living dead can be used instrumentally for profit or financial gain. They can also be disposed of at any time with no threat of retribution or legal action. Near the beginning of the film, Okwe’s friend reminds him, “I don’t ask questions after eleven years here and I’m a certified refugee. You’re an illegal, Okwe, you don’t have a position here. You have nothing” (*Dirty Pretty Things*). This testimony again displays the effects of terror as the primary technique of governmentality in the state of exception; the expectation of the worst becomes a constant part of everyday life. For example, Okwe has never unpacked his bags in his apartment, constantly anticipating the threat of deportation back to Africa, a place he was forced to flee after being charged with the murder of his wife by the government, forcing him to leave his daughter behind. This demonstrates the impossibility of being-at-home in this space for Okwe and those who inhabit the same circumstance. In the state of exception, the expectation that the worst could occur at any time becomes the banal experience of the everyday. The threat of violence is felt immediately and viscerally.

The state of exception I am describing is characterized by its complete denial of legal recognition for immigrant or refugee peoples. Like Selvon’s Moses and Galahad, Senay and Okwe exist within a community where they hold no rights and are legally unrecognized, forced into jobs that offer unending labor for wages that can barely purchase food and living quarters. These extreme circumstances result in a profound disillusionment for those immigrants who, fleeing from one place, find no refuge in their new environment. The actuality of cramped ghettos, bottom-level wages and racial

discrimination, then, leads to an existence of extreme hopelessness and melancholy; this is a whole class of people who have been abandoned.

These conditions are emphasized by the *mise en scene* that Frears and cinematographer Chris Menges have created—the realist film uses a gritty, urban palette of cool grays and diegetic light that results in the feel of a documentary (a genre in which Menges has worked extensively). The splashes of bright, primary colors always serve a purpose, as in the violent red of the blood that severely contrasts the white of the toilet when Okwe finds the human heart disposed of in the hotel bathroom. Since the viewer will discover that the heart was a waste product of Juan’s illegal organ surgeries, Okwe’s discovery of the heart can be read as communicating the fact that “in relation to the nation-state, the illegal immigrant is waste” (Hinzman 5). In the spaces these immigrants inhabit, politics can no longer be envisioned within the “caring,” pastoral regime of biopower. Instead, what we see is the prevalence of what Achille Mbembe calls the “necropolitical.” Necropolitics, as defined by Mbembe, is the subjugation of life to the power of death. These immigrants, legally and politically either unrecognized or closely monitored and controlled, are worked to death—they exist as nonvalued forms of cheap or free labor, and as demonstrated in the emphasis on organ trade, can be seen as commodity only, hunks of meat and flesh rather than human individuals.

The stultifying effects of the devaluation of the subject are further emphasized by the consuming force of Okwe’s continual work on his existence. Okwe works numerous jobs and is often seen chewing caffeine in order to stay awake; others continually remark that he will drive himself to death if he continues working so hard, further noting that in death, no one would notice his absence. Another “illegal” or second-class citizen would

volunteer for the completion of Okwe's menial tasks, and the system would continue with no recognition of Okwe's death—it would be business as usual. This horrific truth is again evidenced when Okwe tells Senay of the organ surgeries, “Because you are poor, you will be gutted like an animal. They will take what they want and leave the rest to rot” (*Dirty Pretty Things*). The implicit horror of such mutilations performed upon the body are discussed at length in Adriana Caverero's *Horrorisms*, in which she examines the phenomenon of mutilation and massacre implicit in torture and terrorism (from both the East and West) from the perspective of the victim rather than the perpetrator.

The organ trade depicted in this film is certainly one such example of the profound disregard of human life, a horrific violation that society attempts to ignore and obscure. Cavarero writes, “Exposed unilaterally to *vulnus* [the wound that the other may inflict on it], the defenseless are the targets of a violent death that surpasses the event, atrocious in itself, of death, because it has degraded each of them beforehand from singular being to random being” (76). The contempt towards the life of a human subject expressed by Juan's operations denies the body any agency, denying the existence of the subject even as it still breathes; the extreme violence inherent in these mutilations is an ontological assault at the same time as it is a corporeal one. Senay, as victim, is under the threat of being “gutted” and transformed into a heap of dismembered, rotting flesh. When Senay agrees to undergo the operation, the effects (for her) of living in a constant state of “living death” are evidenced: she nearly becomes an “anti-subject”<sup>5</sup> as her subjectivity is nearly (but not quite) annihilated.

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<sup>5</sup> Lauro and Embry, 10

At this point, Senay seeks expression of agency in a transcendent fashion, denouncing the system that produces death—later, her rhetoric will transform as she becomes a signifier for the potentialities of violent resistance. Since Senay is gradually represented as a symbol of resistance, she often takes a derisive or incredulous attitude towards Okwe’s general submission to “the way things are.” Okwe’s experience is reminiscent of Quentin Meilloux’s work on the temporality of post-emergency economies, termed the “glacial world—the evacuation of human subjectivity as it recedes in the face of a universe that is, demonstrably, indifferent to both human and zombie struggle” (Boluk 13). In the “glacial world,” time no longer marches on, but instead “lurches,” transforming everyday existence to an experience, at a phenomenological level, of meaningless repetition—as discussed with Moses in *The Lonely Londoners*, every day that passes appears to be no different than the one that came before. Okwe’s constant usage of caffeine bestows upon him an animal-like quality, nearly mindless as he moves through the numbing everyday routines that have effectively crushed his will to effect change. His constant engagement in soul-sucking, vampiric labor has granted him a beast-like quality, inhabiting the role of the less than human “other” in the here-and-now of London<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Marx and Engels use the metaphor of the vampire when discussing capitalism in *The Communist Manifesto*. Marx uses the zombie metaphor in order to reveal the vampire as a simultaneous demonstration of the possibility of capitalism while also a warning against it. Though some have argued that Marx was simply employing a rhetorical literary device that played on irrational beliefs of his time, it now seems clear that his actual goal was to emphasize the central dialectic of capitalist production: the distinction between living and dead labor. Mark Neocleous provides a useful analysis of this metaphor in his article “The Political Economy of the Dead: Marx’s Vampires.” *History of Political Thought* XXIV. 4 (2003)

For most of the film, Okwe represents a resigned subject who has, if not accepted his station in life, accepted his inability to overcome his circumstances. This resignation has resulted in an everyday condition in which profound awareness of the cyclic banality of immigrant experience is accompanied by the strong belief that change will not and cannot occur. Achille Mbembe provides a description of such a state of inertia in *Out of the World*: “How, in such circumstances, does one experience not only the everyday but the *hic et nunc* when, every day, one has both to expect anything and live in expectation of something that has not yet been realized, is delaying being realized, is constantly unaccomplished and elusive?” (201). Okwe is a man who has been going through the motions, literally sleepwalking like a zombie. It is the actions of Senay that begin to slowly wake him up, making the experience of life seem immediate and vital once again. She suggests that, in emergency spaces, it is better to face the risk of death than to continue within a structure of time that seems to mean nothing at all, to be simultaneously never-ending, yet never moving.

In contrast to Okwe, Senay is also shown as perhaps the character of the most profound resilience and courage even though the forfeit of her dignity and power occurs in the most grotesque manner. She is forced into sexual subjugation at the hands of her sweatshop boss, remains under constant threat of deportation, yet demonstrates the astonishing capability of the body to express incredible agency. The potentialities of corporeal resistance that Senay exhibits have been demonstrated under the regime of the Holocaust and American slavery. Mbembe writes of the American slave, “Breaking with uprootedness and the pure world of things of which he or she is but a fragment, the slave

is able to demonstrate the protean capabilities of the human bond through music and the very body that was supposedly possessed by another” (Necropolitics 22). The expression of agency through the recognition of one’s own physicality is a necessary component of maintaining the self under the state of exception; it allows Senay the opportunity to continually re-orient and re-center.

Though it is implied that the sexual abuse she undergoes at the hands of her boss is prolonged and perhaps even mechanized, she eventually gathers the strength to, as she says, “bite. This time, I bit” (*Dirty Pretty Things*). This is an overt demonstration of physical resistance; Senay writes herself into history, and wills herself to be seen through this act of violence against the anti-human that is her boss. After the audience views the first sexual assault, Senay is discovered by Okwe dancing to Turkish music, frantically and desperately attempting to find meaning and orient herself through the gesticulations of her own body. These physical expressions are Senay’s attempts to find a way to “live on” in a world that has profoundly disappointed her. Later, the extremity of Senay’s eventual desperation is emphasized by her willingness to sacrifice her body, which has asserted itself as an incredible corporeal agent of resistance. However, she continues to attempt to invert the limiting power structures enforced upon her in a multiplicity of subtle ways, even when the opportunity for meaningful resistance seems futile.

When Juan demands that she is to again submit herself to sexual degradation in order to undergo the surgery (and therefore a chance at obtaining a passport), she refuses to allow the entire act to occur entirely on his terms. Juan, aware of her status as an unmarried Muslim woman, and a virgin (she had not been penetrated by her sweatshop

boss) tells her “I want the whole thing. Take it or leave it” (*Dirty Pretty Things*). Senay’s reply is a devastating declaration: “You do not see me. You just do. Take it or leave it” (*Dirty Pretty Things*). She literally renders the power of his gaze ineffective by disallowing him from viewing her body, and her pain, in the light, but she also makes a greater point: he, like so many others in the society she exists within, does not recognize her as a human being. He sees her only as a disposable commodity meant to serve a purpose, be it sex or the potential for monetary gain.

Senay’s experience as a victim of sexual brutality, as well as her eventual retribution mark her as an exemplification of the postcolonial critic Ranjana Khanna’s figure of the woman that “haunts, cuts through and indeed exposes what Theodor Adorno called “the damaged life,” moments of justice even as they seem to be elided by the mechanisms of law and language that are present and that seek compensation and closure” (Khanna 7). Though the “exceptional” system would resign Senay’s experiences to Khanna’s “dustbin of history,” and her terror and injustice (as well as the terror and injustice of thousands of other women) goes unnoticed and uncompensated, her inability to remain silent and passive still haunts whitewashed narratives of immigrant experience. Hers is a narrative that would essentially be “cut,” (just as sequences in film are cut and then sutured together to create the effect of a continuing narrative<sup>7</sup> but Senay insists on

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<sup>7 7</sup> As Khanna notes, in cinematic terms, to cut “is to splice together two shots from different time and space configurations, the cut itself is the edge that belongs neither to one frame nor to the other” (5). She uses this metaphor in order to discuss the narratives that are left out of history, such as her example of the Algerian mother Kheira, who was systematically gang-raped for over several months by thirty to forty French soldiers in an internment camp southwest of Algiers in 1959. Such relegated experiences give way to myths and rumors that haunt the edges of society without entering into official accounts.

making herself visible through acts of retribution and corporeal resistance. Senay's statement is reinforced by Okwe's reply upon being asked by a businessman why he had not seen them before; Okwe says, "Because we are the people you never see" (*Dirty Pretty Things*). With this statement, he also asserts himself and Senay as figures that had previously remained unseen, but can no longer be ignored.

Senay's willingness to participate in the organ removal surgery shows that, in extreme circumstances, such as those existential states where the subject experiences death-in-life, death itself can be an act of agency, a symbolic path undertaken towards the attainment of freedom. However, neither Senay nor Okwe become the figure of the martyr, unlike the protagonist in *Children of Men*, whose sacrifice takes on the sign of the future, dying to ensure the possibility that the "new" (in this sense, the newborn child) can live, creating hope for history out of the apparent negation of death. Conversely, Senay and Okwe survive by accomplishing an act of violent agency, drugging the ringleader Juan and removing his liver for the money to escape. Senay and Okwe, as Sara Ahmed suggests "regather their experiences in order to rise up: "By accounting for the "I cannot," for the body that is stopped or held up, we also attend to the condition of possibility for the emergence of a collective form of activism. We act by collecting together such moments of being held up and held back" (155). Okwe and Senay's combined experiences give them the strength to take action in a way that would not have been possible for them alone, and demonstrate one mode of the production of hope in emergency spaces. The film can be viewed as treating the banding together of its protagonists towards collective activism as a predictable revenge narrative. However, this

act of collectivization can also be read on a much more complex register. By experiencing the collaborative warmth of collectivity, the subject can “gather” the strength to participate in resistance, motivated by the sudden realization that a (different) future may be possible. In spite of this optimistic depiction of the potential for disenfranchised groups to “regather” and participate in resistance, the conclusion of the film ignores the more challenging implications of Okwe and Senay’s violent action.

Though the ending may seem overly neat and typically cinematic, it is not a traditional “happy” ending. In order to obtain the means to leave London, Okwe has to “play dirty,” participating in corruption as a means to an end, therefore giving up the moral superiority that kept him supposedly “human” throughout his years in London. Juan’s reply to Okwe’s eventual agreement to perform the surgery is “Well holy shit, Okwe, so you are human,” suggesting that moral superiority in emergency spaces is futile (*Dirty Pretty Things*). This awakening leads to an act of violence which mars the neatly resolved ending with serious implications that remain unacknowledged. Is it possible to achieve productive forward movement without incredible violence? Like Sartre’s famous proclamation that violence is the only means of real historical change, this film seems to suggest that such radical acts are necessary in the state of exception, and that perhaps violent acts can represent the mastering of one’s own destiny. Like Walter Benjamin’s idea of “divine” violence, they have the potential of blasting an alternative route through the continuum of history—they represent a leap into the dark and also a willingness to embrace the risks of futurity. The threat of the violence carried out by these figures is always in excess of the real violence Okwe and Senay can perpetrate—their violence is

created by the system (it has been produced in and by western hegemony<sup>8</sup>) and, as such, is a signal of what may come. Violence, in this sense, becomes an incredibly hopeful harbinger of change for the counter-narrative of the oppressed, but an overpoweringly threatening sign of destruction for the political status quo: a threat that must be stamped out<sup>9</sup>

This dialectic then, perhaps explains the film's readiness to celebrate the "divine" violence these characters demonstrate-- indicating that in this circumstance, the mere fact of "living" represents greater violence, while the concrete act of "living on" after the violent act can herald an alternative redemptive reality. Hannah Arendt has theorized that the process of taking "action" is the means through which the subject can insert itself into the world, fulfilling the promise implicit in the act of being born.<sup>10</sup> She writes, "With word and deed we insert ourselves into the human world and this insertion is like a second birth, in which we confirm and take upon ourselves the naked fact of our original physical appearance. This insertion is not enforced upon us by necessity, like labor, and it is not prompted by utility, like work" (116-117). Therefore, their ethically problematic actions at the end of the film do not represent a submission to the values of the horrific spaces they find themselves in, but instead represent the potentiality for a new beginning and the conscious decision to seize life through the assertion of "action" in the sense that Arendt has defined.

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<sup>8</sup> Kawash, 240

<sup>9</sup> Samira Kawash notes that the modern day terrorist serves a similar function in contemporary society, representing a "spectral violence," that is always in excess of its material effects, and is not "containable, specifiable nor localizable" (240).

<sup>10</sup> Though it must be noted that Arendt objected to the violence she felt that Fanon and Satre "glorified," her theory of "action" and *natality* is oft-appropriated to exemplify the way in which subjects fulfill their destinies by creating change and creating a new "hope for history" out of asserting individual agency—an act that sometimes necessitates violence.

The capacity of hope is comprehensively discussed by Bloch, who also considers hope's inherent promise of inducing action. He writes, ““As long as man is in a bad way, both private and public existence are pervaded by daydreams; dreams of a better life than that which has so far been given him. In what is false, and the more so in what is genuine, every human intention is applied on to this ground” (Bloch 6). Senay, and eventually Okwe, continue to “hope beyond the day which has become,” and this tendency to imagine a specific future that may eventually occur drives their gradual transition towards radical action. Senay dreams throughout the film of reaching New York, “daydreaming” about a place with “lights in the trees” where she can be free from the trials of everyday life she experiences in London. Okwe suppresses dreams of being reunited with the daughter he had to leave behind, attempting to bury his hope under a façade of resignation and repressed rage. Though Senay eventually realizes that her dream had been idealistic, she nevertheless pursues the very course she had imagined taking so many times, fulfilling the promise of her dreams, and the action that gave her the means to explore them. This perception of hope as a necessary component of every human undertaking is complicated by the infertility experienced by the population in *Children of Men*, but the possibility of imagining (and achieving) individual or large scale change emerges as a driving force in both films discussed here.

The final frames of the film flesh out these themes of hope and action in order to more explicitly express these subjects' futural gaze in spite of all they have experienced. The film ends with Senay and Okwe going their separate ways at the airport, though not before they finally voice their true feelings towards each other for the first time. Even

though they must separate, their continued existence is rife with the hope of a new beginning, in which they have gained the potential to experience a life in which the constant threat of death feels less immediate, and love and friendship are possible. In the environment of their shared apartment in London, prioritizing love over the act of simply surviving was an impossibility—however, Okwe’s interactions with Senay are the sole instances in the movie in which he appears life-like, signaling the importance of such connection for his continued existence. Amit R. Baishya, in his article on guerrillas who are abandoned in spaces of emergency, has discussed the functional role of “ordinary” emotion in postcolonial narratives, such as the mutual trust and affection that builds between Senay and Okwe in the exceptional emergency space. He writes, “ordinary” feelings like love, friendship and trust can still sustain horizons of hope and orientations towards futurity, even when any semblance of a recognizable form of life...dissipates in zones of emergency” (1). In this way, the construction of interpersonal bonds represents a significant expression of continued humanity for “abandoned” subjects, becoming another representative of the imaginative capacity of hope as already discussed. Aesthetic decisions regarding the film’s cinematography also reflect the desire to emphasize the ability of love or hope to bloom even in the most torturous or mundane of circumstances; the warm yellow light of the hotel sconces or the bright daylight streaming through the airport windows as Okwe and Senay embrace occasionally pierce the dark blacks and greys of the film’s mise en scene. These decisions continue to reinforce the idea that, in the state of exception, “ordinary” feelings like love sometimes *become* extraordinary in

their ability to reveal an implicit hope that seems to regenerate a futural outlook and an opening up of possibility.<sup>11</sup>

This renewed possibility is demonstrated both by Senay's departure for New York, and in Okwe's joy and incredulity at his forthcoming reunion with his daughter—the final frame of the film shows Okwe tearfully calling her on the phone to assure her of this homecoming, indicating that the film ultimately places its faith in the future generation (who always signal the ultimate expression of hope). Though Okwe could have followed Senay to America, he chooses to forfeit the chance for an easier life in favor of raising a child who may not have to know the same injustices that Okwe himself has suffered. Arendt writes, “The new always happens against the overwhelming odds of statistical laws and their probability, which for all practical, everyday purposes amounts to certainty; the new, therefore, always appears in the guise of a miracle” (178). Again, Okwe's ethical decision at the end of this film reflects the hope for something new and “miraculous” to come into the world by the opening up of original paths for the next generation. This hope for history contains implicit faith, a position asserted much more explicitly within the allegorical framework of *Children of Men*.

### **Political Fertility and the Necropocalypse: the Forfeit of Life towards Hope of History**

In contrast to *Dirty Pretty Things*, which is set in the London of its release date in 2002, *Children of Men* depicts a post-apocalyptic vision of a future London. However,

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<sup>11</sup> Thinkers like Hardt and Negri and Lauren Berlant have also been turning to a consideration of the nonsovereign aspects of love in their recent work.

the locations look remarkably similar in both films. These depictions of the future illustrate a bleak landscape where the same issues of mobility, autonomy and “living on” discussed earlier have become increasingly difficult. As such, these visions of the future can be viewed as an allegorical depiction of the sort of normalized, invisible violence London’s working class and immigrant society is already experiencing. At the same time, the film also depicts such spaces as a representation of terror tactics deployed in modern states of exception like Guantanamo Bay and Nazi concentration camps.

*Children of Men* has been read by critics such as Anirban Kapil Baishya as a representation of the haunting after-effects of Britain’s memory of colonialism, as well as of the traumatic residues of images of war, violence and destruction. Such readings suggest that these catastrophic memories, characterized by “nightmarish” images of emergency spaces such as those of Nazi death camps and Hiroshima, inhabit the present consciousness in the here-and-now. In these emergency spaces, human figures were relegated to the status of bare life itself, like the individuals shown inhabiting the refugee camps in the film. Slavoj Žižek views the film as a pointed critique of the tyranny of twenty-first century democracy, noting that the enemy here is not “uniformed totalitarian bureaucrats, but enlightened Democratic administrators”, identifying the film as a science fiction version of current reality (2). He discusses the social realities that this film makes visible: in the “post-political” world of the here-and-now, the most legitimate sources of conflict have become cultural, racial or religious. On the other hand, the postcolonial critic Donna Jones views *Children of Men* as a text revolving around the gradual awakening of the central character from a state of living death towards life itself,

culminating in the willing sacrifice of his life towards the assurance of the new life that will bear his name.

In this section, I plan to expand on Jones's fragmentary comments on the film. *Children of Men* is set in the year 2027, in a London that resembles the current reality, rather than exhibiting typical futuristic science fiction filmic tropes (flying cars, high-tech gadgets, etc.). In this future, humans have been rendered infertile, a condition for which the film offers no explanation. The protagonist, Theo Faron (Clive Owen), is shown as leading a completely meaningless life, existing in a state of despair and absolute nihilism. Through a series of events, Theo learns of the existence of the world's first pregnant woman in seventeen years, Kee (Claire Hope-Ashitey), and is designated as a guardian for her, meant to safely escort her to the near-mythical Human Project, a group of scientists dedicated to curing infertility who reside in the Azores of the North Atlantic. Many of their companions are either taken or die along the way, including Theo's ex-wife Julian (Julianne Moore) who suggested that he volunteer for the task. Eventually, Theo and Kee are taken into a refugee (or "fugee" as they are referred to in the film) camp as false prisoners, and must navigate their way through a full-scale battle between the fugees and the British army in order to reach the water off the shore of Bexhill, where the Human Project ship will be waiting. At the end of the film, it is revealed that Theo was shot in the chaos, yet, as he dies, the lights of the Human Project ship are seen in the near distance. Near death, Kee tells him she will name her child Dillon after the son he and Julian lost to a flu pandemic in 2008. The credits roll over the sound of children

laughing, but the film does not show Kee reaching the Human Project, leaving the question of the fate of humanity literally hanging in the balance.

Though the film is set in the future, every frame is set up to reference contemporary realities to the most detailed extent. Cuarón explained in an interview, “It’s not about imagining and being creative, it is about referencing reality. So—the cinematographer, he said that not a single frame of this film can go by [without] making a comment about the state of things. So everything became about reference...how this has relevance in the context of the state of things, of the reality that we are living today (1). Cuarón specifically cites instances in which he based certain images on war photography, and the battle scenes towards the end are clearly inspired by news correspondent real-time footage, with an emphasis on hand-held shooting, long takes and continuous editing. The film is shot mostly in medium and long shots, with the camera often tailing Theo’s movement with few cuts. This realist format gives the viewer sufficient time to take in the details of each take, and gives the director the opportunity to include hundreds of minute details that continue to subtly reinforce the oppressive environment and the political rhetoric that accompanies it.

Such artistic decisions accentuate the reality effect of the situations, making the desolate landscape on film seem uncannily familiar. Therefore, the audience’s identification with this vision of the future exposes how economies of terror function in contemporary times. *Men*’s protagonist, Theo, mutters, “Too late,...the world went to shit. It was too late before the infertility happened.” Lines such as these suggest that the conditions of *now* are already moving towards a future as bleak as this one. The film

begins by suggesting that hope, the affective state that signals new beginnings in history, has been lost. In this film, London has become a true state of exception: the refugee prisons for illegal immigrants resemble Guantanamo Bay and Holocaust concentration camps, suicide kits and anti-depressants are part of normal rations, and the old hippie's Zen music has been spliced with the sound of people screaming as if being tortured. Reparation of these conditions seems impossible, and the rampant infertility the plot hinges upon has rendered conceptions of hope meaningless. In fact, P.D. James, who wrote the novel *The Children of Men* that the screenplay was loosely based on<sup>12</sup>, has said that her inspiration for this work was the question, "How would people behave if there was no future?" In this depiction of a futureless population, the power of sovereignty is exercised in a paradox of the classic Hobbesian sense—the rights of subjects are forfeited completely to the absolute sovereign, who has the ultimate power to decide who to kill and who to let live. However, the sovereign power seems to maintain a constant state of war of all against all through its exceptional decision to take the life of anyone who moves against its diktats.

Achille Mbembe's notion of necropolitics (which reworks Hobbesian notions of sovereignty) maintains that "the ultimate expression of sovereignty resides, to a large degree, in the power and the capacity to dictate who may live and who may die" and also notes, using the example of the French Revolution, that in the state of exception, "terror is construed as an almost necessary part of politics" (Necropolitics 1, 19). This state of affairs is reflected in the film by the Fishes' (a group of revolutionaries opposing the

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<sup>12</sup> Some significant differences between the novel and film include: Julian, a white woman, carries the baby, rather than Kee (who is absent from the novel), the baby is a boy, not a girl, and Theo survives at the close of the novel, which ends with him baptizing the baby.

British state) comments to Theo concerning terrorist activity in the city. Theo inquires whether the Fishes had been responsible for the bombings the government had attributed to them, but they reply that these acts were done by the government itself, in order to “spread the terror” (*Children of Men*). Such tactics characterize the state of exception. Michel Foucault refers to the normalization of this paradigm when he says, “The principle underlying the tactics of battle—that one has to be capable of killing in order to go on living—has become the principle that defines the strategy of states” (137). This notion is clearly illustrated in the breathtaking panorama of battle that Theo moves through near the end of the film (which I will discuss later), as well as the 344 second unbroken scene in which Julian is killed. As the car moves through the beautiful, seemingly idyllic landscape of the countryside, with the joyous Theo and Julian indulging in a rare moment of affection, the attack occurs suddenly and violently. This attack claims Julian’s life and results in the killing of two policeman by Julian’s (presumed) compatriot Luke (Chiwetel Ejiofor) in order to ensure their escape—as the car drives away, the camera lingers on the wasted bodies of these men.

It is apparent that the battle is endless, and also clear that the war between the resistance and the British government perhaps has no meaning at all here; the reason for war *is* war. Here we see a classical representation of the concept of “war without end”—while “peace” and “war” seem to coexist as bracketed entities in “normal” circumstances, in such exceptions the boundaries between war and peace, ends of war and the means of war collapse absolutely. In the battle raging at Bexhill that Theo and Kee later navigate, there is no modulation, no rules, and no protocol; there is only mindless killing, rendering

each soldier (who no longer knows what he fights for) machine-like, rather than human. When Kee and Theo pass through the armies with the new-born baby in tow, the first sign of new life for seventeen years, the extent of this society's reliance on war is revealed: though the soldiers pause reverently to allow them to pass, as soon as they are out of the line of fire, the battle resumes again unchanged.

The fugees' position in the London of *Children of Men* can be thought of as similar to the that of the people captured in Afghanistan and relegated to a status below the criminal, therefore possessing no legal rights. Agamben remarks that they are "Neither prisoners nor persons accused but simply de facto of a detention that is indefinite not only in the temporal sense but in its very nature as well, since it is entirely removed from the law and from judicial oversight" (*State of Exception* 4). Leerom Medovoi's work on the terrorist ("Global Society Must Be Defended") elaborates upon these claims, illustrating the changes in society that no longer distinguish between "internal" and "external" enemies, the means of war and the ends of war. Therefore, anyone can be designated an enemy by the transcendent security state by employing the rhetoric of protecting global welfare; he points out that such politics assert a "simultaneous state of war and peace" (55). As such, modern-day suspected terrorists are treated in much the same manner as Agamben's *Musselman*, subjects whose citizenship and legal identities are forfeited. These figures subsist through the mere fact of remaining biologically alive.

These detainees are identical to the fugees haunting the background of Cuarón's film; they rarely take front and center, but the camera often lingers on political rhetoric

denouncing the refugees' right to inhabit this space; the film opens with a newsreader announcing, "The Homeland Security bill is ratified. After eight years, British borders will remain closed. The deportation of illegal immigrants will continue. Good morning" (Children of Men). In this society, Britain has become the last representative of so-called "civilization," a society who has reached the point "when regulation's militarism has surged into the open" (Medovoi 54). There is also frequent focus on the actual refugees detained in the camp, who again resemble photographs of Nazi death camps and prisoners of war. The spaces themselves are directly modeled after the culturally recognizable spaces of the concentration camps, Guantanamo Bay and the Maze, again rooting the injustices of this future world as part and parcel of contemporary times. In this context, Anirban Kapil Baishya remarks, "The figure of the living dead therefore also recalls the figure of the *Muselmanner*. The images of the living dead in concentration camps have become a cultural artifact in our times, functionally and firmly lodged in our *optical consciousness* because of the archiving of the war years through photography and film (8). Walter Benjamin commented at length on the political capacity of film and photography to impact society—though the image is not the "real", the picture, or the scene, provides a recognizable representation of the "real" for the political subjects of a given community. Therefore, the images of the fugees being detained in a public space, or the woman mourning, arranged in the posture of Michelangelo's *La Pieta*, connect (either consciously or unconsciously) with viewers. This effect is particularly important for Cuarón—though the film is set in the future, the details of the film, the cultural artifacts scattered throughout, root the film in the contemporary emergency politics of the current day.

Recognizable political rhetoric is also employed, in statements such as the newsreader's comments above, and the city slogan that reads "Britain alone soldiers on," a detail that serves multiple purposes. This enunciative statement serves to inform the audience that Britain has become the only functional nation in the world, simultaneously recreating a vocabulary of them versus us, fugees versus Britain, insiders versus outsiders.<sup>13</sup> This clearly raises the specter of a long history of British racialism running from the notorious "rivers of blood" evoked by Enoch Powell to the more coded racism of contemporary radical British nationalists, such as the rhetoric of the British National Party (BNP).

The zone of emergency that has been normalized throughout Britain is also characterized by the distortion of ordinary temporality discussed earlier with Okwe. Theo's initial existence rests in the flow of glacial time, and the meaninglessness this condition has engendered in him is apparent from his first appearance in the film. He has become numb to everything surrounding him. The job he attends means nothing, and the violent stabbing death of "Baby Diego," who, at 18, had been the youngest person in the world evokes no emotional response. Theo remarks, "I can't really remember when I last had any hope, and I certainly can't remember when anyone else did either. Because really, since women stopped being able to have babies, what's left to hope for?" (*Children of Men*) The everyday zones of the city he must navigate are profoundly unsafe, but his existence within them has become extraordinarily banal. His kidnapping

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<sup>13</sup> Another comparative text is Alan Moore's ten-issue graphic novel series *V for Vendetta*, in which a masked vigilante in a Guy Fawkes mask (called only V) roams a post-catastrophic London dispatching the perpetrators of totalitarian violence and experimentation.

by the Fishes (and Julian, as he soon discovers) registers as the first shock he has felt in years.

Just as Okwe's transformation in the film can be viewed as having gone from sleeping to waking up, Theo also undergoes a similar process. His mantle as the protector of Kee gives him something to live for again, and at this point, his existence is perceived as no longer absolutely futile. It is also suggested that the mother herself underwent a similar process, from an unvalued commodity (it is suggested that she was a prostitute) to a giver of life, a body that can create rather than simply endure. Kee says to Theo of first feeling the baby kick, "The little bastard was alive. I feel it, and me too. I am alive" (*Children of Men*). The "new beginning" inherent in Kee's pregnancy revitalizes both Kee and her companions—the new African Eve, who reveals her pregnant stomach in a rural setting among the animals of a rustic barn, signifies the promise of a different society to come.

This process of "waking up" from death to life and Theo and Kee's navigation of the spaces of battle and danger culminate in the experience of emergency "reality" in immediate and visceral terms. Theo becomes profoundly aware of the capacity for disaster to occur, as is emphasized by the unbroken topography of battle that he and Kee circumnavigate towards the end of the film (in which Theo receives the bullet wound that causes his death). This action scene presents the illusion of an unbroken 454 second continuous shot, reflecting the film's aim to create the tone of a gritty documentary. This filming technique makes the experience of the battle feel real and immediate, and the effect forces the audience to share in Theo's heightened perception of the potentiality for

disaster. The real-time navigation of this risky space builds the tension slowly, culminating in their successful escape to the boat, where Theo's as yet unperceived injury is revealed.

The expectation for consistent disaster is typical of the state of exception; anyone can be taken at any time—the subject has no legal rights. When Kee is at danger of being taken by immigration officials, her guardian Miriam fakes religious mania to protect the birthing woman. She is immediately dragged off the bus and forced into a row of other innocent immigrants on their hands and knees, and exposed to the threat of immediate death. This is the last shot of her that the audience sees, as the bus drives away and she is never heard from again. The immediacy of looming death in this so-called “civilization” is present not only for the fugees, but for anyone who threatens the regime. This point is never more brutally clear than in the death of Theo's friend Jasper (Michael Caine) who is shot and killed after he refuses to give up Theo and Kee's whereabouts. The audience is forced to watch along with Theo, aligned with him by a point-of-view, over-the-shoulder take of the execution. The unjustified and non-punishable murder of a legal citizen is typical of the state of exception, in which the death of Jasper (and the suicide of his wife) will be swept into the essential “dustbin” of history, forgotten and wiped out, just as Miriam is.

So the question remains: is there hope to be found in these bleak portrayals of post-emergency society? Though there is no one definitive answer, there are moments in this film in which the hope for a future suddenly seems possible, and perhaps even probable. Theo's death is a symbolic gesture that lends purpose and meaning to a life that

previously had none; he dies for the continued possibility of life. Mbembe's discussion of martyrdom states, "The power and value of the body result from a process of abstraction based on the desire for eternity. In that sense, the martyr, having established a moment of supremacy in which the subject overcomes his own mortality, can be seen as laboring under the sign of the future. In other words, in death the future is collapsed into the present" (Necropolitics 37). In a world in which humankind had been perceived as slowly fading away, hope was a meaningless term.

However, it is significant that characters still attempt to assert meaning onto the face of this nothingness, uttering statements such as "Everything happens for a reason" and "there's a bigger plan." Bloch writes that, "Hopelessness is, in itself, in a temporal and factual sense, the most insupportable thing, downright intolerable to human needs" (5). As such, even these empty signifiers of faith express humankind's general need to imagine change and to find meaning against all odds—conversely, citizens like Theo demonstrate the utter banality of existing without hope, experiencing complete stasis in a constant awareness of complete lack: the lack of a future, the lack of love or emotion, the lack of hope. When Jasper commiserates with Theo over his hangover, Theo replies, "At least with a hangover, I feel something" (*Children of Men*).

But, when Theo learns of Kee's pregnancy, he realizes that perhaps all is not lost. In some ways, he is a means to an end; his ongoing survival matters only to the extent that he must help Kee to reach a safe place. His death not only represents a collapse of the present and the future, but his death actually ensures that a future is possible. He is the ultimate martyr. In this way, death gives meaning; the destruction of the body does

not signal nothingness. Mbembe writes, “One only drops from existence to enter into that infinite time that is another piece of reality, the time of judgment. . . . History itself becomes “hope of history.” Henceforth, each death or defeat leads to a new appearance, is perceived as confirmation, gage, and relaunch of an ongoing promise, a “not yet,” a “what is coming” which—always—separates hope from utopia” (*Out of the World* 206). These words indicate that Theo’s death does not imply meaninglessness or defeat, but in fact, signals the reverse; his death—a laboring in the sign of the future—confirms that the hope of history for mankind is not a lost cause, as it first seemed at the start of the film. His death reaffirms the subject’s right to life.

These speculations are supported by the soldier’s reactions to the appearance of the child. Though I noted earlier that they continued fighting once the baby had passed, thus revealing the battle itself as unfounded, it is significant that they pause at all, since it is these moments of brief peace that allow Kee and Theo to escape. Anirban Baishya suggests, “When a biopolitical state of exception has become normalized, the precious event of birth irrupts as a shock—a literal blast from the past that has the potential of radically changing the continuum of history” (21). In this barren world, the birth of a child symbolizes nothing less than hope itself, as this child indicates that this particular post-history is not on its last gasps. The child, which now appears as a miraculous remnant from another, better time, represents a fusion between the past (which is our present) and the future depicted here. Thus, Jasper tells Kee, “Your baby is the miracle the whole world has been waiting for” (*Children of Men*). The ambivalent conclusion of *Dirty Pretty Things* is fleshed out much more explicitly here; the burden of “living on” seems to rest with the next generation, as the child becomes the vessel and symbol of faith in a future, as Theo opts out of living in order to

ensure the next generation's survival. Arendt's concept of *natality* supports the claim that the creation of new life is essential to the affirmation of life and the ontology of hope, maintaining that the "new beginning" apparent in birth is the essential core of the human condition. In *The Human Condition*, she writes:

The miracle that saves the world, the realm of human affairs, from its normal, "natural" ruin is ultimately the fact of *natality*, in which the faculty of action is ontologically rooted. It is, in other words, the birth of new men and the new beginning, the action they are capable of by virtue of being born. Only the full experience of this capacity can bestow upon human affairs faith and hope, those two essential characteristics of human existence which Greek antiquity ignored altogether, discounting the keeping of faith as a very uncommon and not too important virtue and counting hope among the evils of illusion in Pandora's box. It is this faith in and hope for the world that found perhaps its most glorious and most succinct expression in the few words with which the Gospels announced their "glad tidings": "A child has been born unto us (247).

It is only with the onset of new life—a singular event that is contingent and unpredictable—that humanity has a reason to expect change or to envision a future, a concept that is the focal point of *Children of Men*. At the beginning of the film, Theo realizes that there is literally no faith left; without the possibility for new life, the world was over and the hope for humanity was lost. His discovery of the new pregnancy becomes the affirmative statement the world had been waiting for, and is a clear declaration that the promise of birth is the continued promise of life itself. So, although Theo dies at the end of the film, the child has been protected, and Theo's sacrifice will live on through the child who carries his late son's name. With every new birth, humanity gains the right to continue hoping.

*Children of Men* illustrates a world that terrifies us because it depicts a future in which the world has not changed for the better; normalized violence has become a way of life even in the so-called worldwide center of civilization, and refugees are denied any legal status whatsoever, resembling a sovereign economy reminiscent of the unicum of the state of exception: Nazi Germany. *Dirty Pretty Things* illustrates the current conditions in the same locale that create an existence in which most people will not undergo an incredible “escape” like Senay and Okwe, but will instead remain in a perpetual limit zone between life and death. In the emergency spaces depicted in these films, life becomes an existence defined by being simultaneously terrible and absolutely mundane, rendering the passage of time both never moving and ongoing. Existence becomes nothing more than a repetitive routine, resembling a form of death in life.

Yet, in spite of all of these profound reasons to submit to despair, there is astonishing hope and endurance depicted in these portrayals, demonstrating that the “human condition” as, perhaps, innately inclined towards futural hope and new beginnings. It seems a miracle that they hope at all, that they keep going, that they believe in a future that will be different. Hope lies in the realization of the body as agent, in love and the assurance of a future, in the ability to “regather” and create outlets in which, together, the “I cannot” may become a “we can.” Sometimes, the passage through death, these texts suggest, is a necessary sacrifice towards the assurance of a perceived future and the possibility for new life, becoming a hopeful gesture rather than a meaningless act. Death is no longer the end or limit of consciousness, but the presage towards a form of future life.

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