

Universiteit Utrecht

Wars Waged for Babies

How the Fetishization of the Future Child and Motherhood Suggests the Inescapability of
Biopolitics in Alphonso Cuarón's *Children of Men* and Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's
Tale*

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Abstract

Several scholars have argued that the film *Children of Men* by Alphonso Cuarón reinforces the biopolitical structures it ostensibly criticises by upholding a reproductive futuristic message. In this thesis however, I will argue that the upholding of Lee Edelman's theory of reproductive futurism is intentional to demonstrate an inescapability of biopolitics in modernity. According to Agamben's theory of biopolitics the state of exception has become the rule in modernity which causes everyone to be *homo sacer*. Agamben however, does not mention women in his works on *homo sacer*, even though it can be argued that their role in the biopoliticisation of life is different than that of men. By analysing *Children of Men* in terms of reproductive futurism I will be able to prove how a narrative that is concerned with escaping the present is inextricably connected to biopolitics, supporting Agamben's claim that biopolitical logics are inherent in modernity. Because Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* has a stronger focus on the feminist aspects of reproductive futurism I will analyse this text next to *Children of Men*, in order to give a fuller understanding of how the biopolitical logics of reproductive futurism are inherent in modernity. Eventually I will be able to conclude that both texts uphold reproductive futuristic ideas, causing them to reproduce the biopolitical logics they ostensibly criticise and by doing so the texts demonstrate the inescapability of biopolitics in modernity.

Contents

Introduction.....1

Chapter One: Theoretical Framework.....2

Chapter Two: Reproductive Futurism in *Children of Men*.....7

Chapter Three: Reproductive Futurism in *The Handmaid’s Tale*.....12

Conclusion.....16

Works Cited.....18

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How the Fetishization of the Future Child and Motherhood Suggests the Inescapability of Biopolitics in Alphonso Cuarón's *Children of Men* and Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*

Alphonso Cuarón's *Children of Men* (2006) is set in a dystopian future where all women around the world have become infertile. The film follows Theo (Clive Owen) who embarks on a perilous journey with Kee (Clare-Hope Ashitey), the first pregnant woman in eighteen years. Sayantani DasGupta argues that the film, through its fetishization of the future child and motherhood, goes against its attempt to criticise the political structures present in the dystopia. According to her, the film "wears representational blinders when it comes to global trafficking across ... boundaries of gender, the family and the body" (198). Heather Latimer agrees with DasGupta, although she is less critical of the film. In her analysis she focuses on the presence of reproductive futurism in *Children of Men*. Lee Edelman poses this term to describe how the figure of the future child gives meaning and purpose to the current generation (Edelman 3-4). Latimer notes that since Edelman's theory of reproductive futurism declares, "we are no more able to conceive of a politics without the fantasy of the future than we are able to conceive of a future without the figure of the Child", "the reproductive body is a key element of any theory on the limits of citizenship, even one that is against futurism" (Edelman 11; Latimer 68). Latimer builds on Giorgio Agamben's biopolitical theory of the state of exception in which every person can be excluded from the law in the name of the greater good. She states that *Children of Men* highlights "the paradoxes of a political climate focused on the regulation of who or what is considered 'alive' by simultaneously deeming others politically dead" (68).

I will take Latimer's reading one step further and claim that the film's reproduction of

the politics it seems to criticise, is actually what it sets out to do. By doing so, the film implies the inescapability of these biopolitical logics. By comparing the film to *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood (1985) I will be able to give a more thorough understanding of how both dystopias propose that the biopolitical logics of reproductive futurism are inherent in modern democracy. *The Handmaid's Tale* is also set in a fictional future which copes with mass infertility. The narratives of the two texts are therefore seemingly similar, but as they discuss different themes in terms of reproductive futurism analysing them next to each other will give more insight on how reproductive futurism proves the biopolitical logics to be inherent in modernity.

The premise of this research will therefore be how the two texts, through their fetishization of the future child and motherhood, propose an inescapability of the biopolitical logics represented in the texts. By doing so I will argue against DasGupta and Latimer in their notion of the film's reproduction of the biopolitical logics it ostensibly criticises, as a failure on behalf of the text. However, I will build on their ideas of how this reproduction shows an inescapability of these biopolitical logics. In the first chapter of this research I will explain Agamben's biopolitical theory of *homo sacer* and demonstrate what this means for the maternal body. Then, in the second chapter I will give a close reading of *Children of Men* in terms of reproductive futurism followed by a similar chapter on *The Handmaid's Tale*. Finally, I will be able to combine these findings and conclude how the two dystopias propose an inescapability of the biopolitical logics present in both texts and therefore suggest that these logics are inherent to modernity.

CHAPTER ONE: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (1995) Giorgio Agamben researches how modern democracies can turn into totalitarian regimes. He begins his argument by explaining

the difference between *zoē* and *bios*, which both mean “life” in ancient Greek. However, where *zoē* means life “common to all living beings”, *bios* implies a political life. *Zoē* is excluded from the *polis* and only belongs to the sphere of reproductive life (Agamben 5).

In the last volume of *The History of Sexuality* Michel Foucault argues that the sovereign has a right of life and death over its subjects. This right has been around in various forms since the Classical age (112). Wars used to be “waged in the name of the sovereign”, but in the modern age “they are waged on behalf of the existence of everyone” because in modernity the social body has become the sovereign (Foucault 113). Foucault describes that, at the beginning of modernity *zoē* becomes included in the political life which causes politics to not only be concerned with *bios* but also with *zoē*, and this process is called biopolitics. According to Agamben’s reading of Foucault, biopolitics starts when “the species and the individual as a simple living body become what is at stake in a society’s political strategies” (6). In modern democracy, the nation’s population has become more important than its territory and is therefore of the utmost importance for the sovereign power “which is then gradually transformed into a ‘government of men’” (Agamben 6). The nation’s health has subsequently become a concern for the sovereign power.

Agamben argues that “[n]ot simple natural life, but life exposed to death ... is the originary political element” (74-75). “[L]ife exposed to death” is sacred life or bare life, the life of *homo sacer*. This is a term which Agamben draws from the Roman Empire: “The sacred man is the one whom the people have judged on account of a crime. It is not permitted to sacrifice this man, yet he who kills him will not be condemned for homicide” (Festus qtd in Agamben, 61). Since this man can be killed without committing homicide he is not in the realm of human jurisdiction. However, because he can also not be sacrificed, he is not in the realm of the divine either. He is doubly excluded by being doubly included. This exclusion by inclusion Agamben compares to the structure of the state of exception.

In the state of exception the sovereign can move beyond the law in the name of the public good. However, that what is excluded in the exception still maintains a relation to the rule “in the form of the rule’s suspension. The rule applies to the exception in no longer applying to it, in withdrawing from it” (Agamben 19). What is excluded is thus included in the rule through the rule’s suspension. The *homo sacer* is captured in the state of exception because the law can always potentially “maintain itself in its own privation” by abandoning its subjects (Agamben 27). Life is included in the law and thus, also excluded, *homo sacer* is abandoned by the law, “that is, exposed and threatened on the threshold in which life and law, outside and inside become indistinguishable” (Agamben 27).

Both *Children of Men* and *The Handmaid’s Tale* are set in such a state of exception. In *Children of Men* we follow Theo Faron, who lives in London in the year 2027. In this future setting all women around the world have become infertile. The entire world has fallen into chaos and “only Great-Britain soldiers on” (00:04:00). However, after a bombing in the first couple of minutes of the film, the audience soon learns that this is no utopia either. Refugees (or “fugees”) from all over the world have come to the United Kingdom and are all sent to camps. In this dystopia everyone can be abandoned by the law to ensure the state “soldiers on”. *The Handmaid’s Tale* is written in the first person narrative of the character Offred. She lives as a Handmaid in the Republic of Gilead. Just like the Wives and the Marthas, the Handmaids have a particular task in this former American republic. They are one of the few fertile women left and are therefore issued to an upper-class family who are unable to have children, to serve as a surrogate mother. From Offred’s story the audience learns how the Republic of Gilead came to be. After the president and the entire congress were killed “the army declared a state of emergency” and “that was when they suspended the constitution” (179). The republic of Gilead is therefore a textbook example of a state of exception, where the government suspends the rule and people are moved outside of the human realm.

Penelope Deutscher describes how Agamben does not mention the role of the woman in the biopoliticisation of life (57). In her research she focuses mainly on women's reproductive rights in relation to biopolitics. According to Deutscher, anti-abortionists turn the mother into a "sinister sovereign" who has the power to either terminate or sustain the pregnancy (66). The State, however, is a second sovereign in this scenario who has to compete with the potentially murderous mother. Deutscher quotes from the US supreme court's decision in the *Roe v. Wade* case, "though the State cannot override that right [of terminating the pregnancy], it has legitimate interest in protecting both the pregnant woman's health and the potentiality of human life" (66). The State tries to biopoliticise the mother to protect the potential future life. Heather Latimer also notices the absence of the woman in Agamben's works. She argues that in Western modernity as women get pregnant they are put into the institutionalisation of the pregnant body. Pregnant women have to go to ultrasound scans, doctor's appointments and many more, all for the good of the child (58). A pregnant woman can thus potentially be reduced to mere reproductive life, or bare life. The foetus cannot be ascribed to any of Agamben's categories, since it is prior to life, it cannot be stripped of anything because it has not had a life yet (Deutscher 59).

Both texts refer to the biopoliticisation of the pregnant woman. The narrator of *The Handmaid's Tale* recognises the mother's position as *homo sacer*: "now that she is the carrier of life, she is closer to death" (32). Furthermore, by describing the Handmaids as "sacred vessels" the term is almost used literally (142). The biopoliticisation of pregnant women is demonstrated, for example, when Offred talks about her doctor's appointments: "I'm taken to the doctor's once a month, for tests ... the same as before except now it's obligatory" (65). This coincides with Latimer's beliefs of the institutionalisation of pregnant women and also reflects on the fact that, although the biopoliticisation is made more explicit in the Republic of Gilead because the tests are obligatory, it has always been present. In *Children of Men* it is

also expressed that “avoiding fertility tests is a crime” (00:16:41). When Kee reveals her pregnancy to Theo she is standing in a barn among cows and calves. When she drops her dress to reveal her pregnant body she becomes animalised, putting her outside the human realm. She says, “You know what they do to these cows? They cut off their tits, they do ... four tits fit the machine. It’s wicked, why not make machines that suck eight titties?” (00:35:18). She refers to the institutionalisation of the cows’ reproductive parts and subsequently refers to her own biopoliticisation as she is reduced to reproductive life.

Agamben does not agree fully with Foucault, he argues that *zoē* has always entered the realm of the polis, not just in modernity. According to Agamben, for modernity the decisive fact is that, together with the process by which the exception everywhere becomes the rule, the realm of bare life—which is originally situated at the margins of the political order—gradually begins to coincide with the political realm, and exclusion and inclusion, outside and inside, bios and *zoē*, right and fact, enter into a zone of irreducible indistinction (11)

Because the nation only consists of its own population it can exclude people who form an anomaly in the nation, and by reducing them to their bare life, they become *homo sacer* and are therefore killable. Thus, biopolitics allows the sovereign power control over the life and death of its subjects, but as the sovereign power has become the “government of men” and, as the state of exception is almost a constant in modernity, we are all *homines sacri*. In the next two chapters I will elaborate on how both dystopias, with their focus on the future and the meaning-giving of birth and motherhood, show how we are all *homines sacri* because biopolitical logics are inherent to modernity.

CHAPTER TWO: REPRODUCTIVE FUTURISM IN *CHILDREN OF MEN*

In *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* Lee Edelman introduces the notion of reproductive futurism; an idea that is inherent in the social order, that positions the future child as “the emblem of futurity’s unquestioned value” (Edelman, 4). Reproductive futurism derives from the will to give meaning to our lives in terms of the social order, for future generations ensure a continuation of society. Edelman writes,

[h]ence, whatever refuses this mandate by which our political institutions compel the collective reproduction of the Child must appear as a threat not only to the organisation of a given social order as such, insofar as it threatens the logic of futurism on which meaning always depends (11).

Reproductive futurism therefore underscores the structure of the social order. As it “perpetuates as reality a fantasy frame intended to secure the survival of the social in the Imaginary form of the Child” the child becomes the emblem of futurity (Edelman 14). Everything queer – that is: “all so stigmatized for failing to comply with heteronormative mandates” (Edelman 17) – abolishes the future and can therefore be seen as a threat to society. Future children are imagined to be safe only through ensuring the “sanctity” of the heterosexual marriage and reproduction (Latimer 66). Edelman describes that “the social order exists to preserve for this universalized subject, this fantasmatic Child, a national freedom more highly valued than the actuality of freedom itself, which might after all, put at risk the Child to whom such a freedom falls due” (11). Everyone is thus able to be reduced to bare life, to ensure the freedom of a child that does not yet exist. Here a connection with biopolitics can be noticed. Everyone’s rights can be taken away for the sake of the greater good that is future generations. This would mean that wars are not merely “waged on behalf of the existence of everybody” like Foucault said (113), they are in fact waged on behalf of the existence of future generations, to ensure the continuation of the social body. In this

research I will align myself with Edelman and Latimer by positioning against reproductive futurism because of the biopolitical exclusionary logics it upholds.

Kee's status as a black refugee and a single mother with no family can also be seen as not complying "with heteronormative mandates", and thus as queer. Indeed the rebel group the Fishes claim that "this government would never acknowledge the first human birth in eighteen years is from a fugee" (00:38:59), suggesting that this is not the desired, normative family. The film therefore, seems to critique reproductive futurism in its queering of the figure of the mother of the future, but by representing Kee as the mother of the future it reproduces reproductive futurism at the same time. Because Kee is a black woman of African descent it also reinforces the racial stereotype of "the fertile other" and compares her to "the Hottentot Venus" (DasGupta 188). According to Latimer, the heteronormative love story between Julian and Theo is the backbone of *Children of Men's* plot. As Kee eventually names her child after Dylan, Julian and Theo's deceased son, in the last scene of the film, the "white family unit is saved" and the black girl is transformed into the white boy (Latimer, 67). However, I find this a difficult reading of the ending. Theo dies just before they can board the *Tomorrow*, a ship owned by the mystical Human project, an organisation aimed at finding a cure for the mass infertility. It is true that by naming the baby Dylan, Julian and Theo's immortality is ensured. They do end up being able to deliver the future. However, it is the black girl that will board the *Tomorrow*, not the white boy. It is therefore difficult to argue that the black girl is transformed into the white boy, especially because the fact that Dylan is now a girl feeds into the film's reproductive futurism. It underlines the hope that Dylan might as well be able to bring forth future generations. Instead of following Latimer completely in this reading I will build on her earlier argument that the connection between reproduction and the state of humanity "is so commonplace culturally and biopolitically that a film about reproduction cannot help but engage with this narrative" (Latimer 59-60).

The film is quite ambiguous in its stance on reproductive futurism. The Fishes call Kee's baby "the flag that could unite us all" (00:38:20), suggesting that this baby could establish the uprising against the government and begin the future. Kee however responds to this with "my baby is not a flag" (00:38:25). When Luke, the new leader of the Fishes, desperately cries: "We need him Theo" (01:30:32), he seems to be taken aback when Theo responds with: "It's a girl Luke" (01:30:41), suggesting that the baby is not the heteronormative, fantasy messiah because she does not fit into the patriarchal narrative of the male hero. When the Fishes turn out to be more violent than expected, Kee and Theo embark on a perilous journey to the *Tomorrow*. However, running from the Fishes in order to prevent the baby from becoming their flag, to a boat called the *Tomorrow* seems an ironically failed attempt at fleeing reproductive futurism. Especially when taking into consideration the fact that the Human Project aims at solving the mass infertility and will undoubtedly perform a series of tests on the only fertile women in the world; Kee.

At first glance Theo seems to disagree with reproductive futurism. He rejects the excessive mourning for baby Diego, the youngest person in the world, who importantly, keeps being referred to as a baby. In fact, in the beginning of the film Theo is sceptical that a baby could make the future any better. "Even if they discovered the cure for infertility it doesn't matter, too late, world went to shit" (00:19:17). Once he sees Kee's pregnant body, however, he completely rethinks his position and becomes ironically naïve in his belief that this baby can save the future. He, for example, states to Miriam that now she "can be there at the beginning" (01:03:04). Under his protection however, Kee remains just as much *homo sacer* as she was before. This can for example be seen in his meddling with the baby's name. Also, in his last act before he dies, Theo tells Kee how to make her baby burp, conforming her role as a vessel for the future generation. The audience gradually learns that Theo is depressed and sinister because of the loss of his son. This could be interpreted as the reason to why he seems

to reject any form of futurism. The loss of his son would then mean the loss of a future for Theo, implicating that he is actually invested in reproductive futurism.

The importance of the future child is further emphasised in the biblical analogies present in the film. The baby is literally called Jesus Christ on several occasions. When Theo first sees Kee's pregnant belly his words are "Jesus Christ" (00:36:52), "Jesus" (01:38:38) is also the last word Theo utters before his death and when the character of Syd sees the baby for the first time all he can exclaim is "Jesus Christ" (1:17:52). Furthermore, Kee jokes that she is a virgin, suggesting an immaculate conception. It turns out however, that she does not "know half of the wankers' names", which does not comply with the archetype of the chaste Virgin Mary (00:51:24). It is striking how, even though the roles are almost completely reversed, Kee's story still cannot escape being a biblical metaphor. Latimer, therefore, was right that the heteronormative family remains intact in the end, only not through Kee naming her baby Dylan, but through the religious institutionalism that she cannot escape from. Naming her baby Dylan merely emphasises how the roles are reversed, as a boy is transformed into a girl, which then underlines this inescapability.

The only character in the film who is not future orientated is Nigel, Theo's cousin and the director of the government building the Arc of the Arts. However, he is metaphorically associated with the figure of the fascist pig, as his face is almost constantly framed by a floating pig, a recreation of the floating pig on Pink Floyd's album *Animals* (1977), which is a reference to George Orwell's analogy of the Soviet Union; *Animal Farm* (1945). When Theo goes to see Nigel *In the Court of the Crimson King* by King Crimson (1969) is played in the background, suggesting that he is visiting "the court of" the devilish figure "the Crimson King" (Domingo 114). The film therefore, seems to condemn not worrying about the future as totalitarian.

Despite the various references to the future, the audience never actually learns what

happens. In the final scene of *Children of Men* Kee sings a Ghanaian lullaby to console the crying Dylan: “Don’t cry, Don’t cry, Don’t cry for someone to look in your mouth / A gold nugget is in your mouth”, signalling Dylan’s subjectification for her worth (Trimble 259). Moreover, associating the black baby with a precious metal “invokes a history of imperial violence on the Gold Coast, thereby constructing Dylan’s body as contested terrain” (Trimble 259). This is further emphasised in the image of the woman of African descent being claimed by a ship, which “evokes the ‘drowning grounds’ of the Atlantic” (Trimble 258). The lullaby then fades into a single high-pitched tone, referencing the “swansong” that Julian mentioned in the beginning of the film: “You know that ringing in your ears? That eeeee, that’s the sound of the ear cells dying, like their swansong” (00:15:27). This suggests not a beginning, but an ending; a death. The title abruptly cuts off the story, just like it did in the beginning of the film, suggesting circularity. Then we hear children laughing and as the credits begin John Lennon’s *Free the People* starts to play; “We don’t care what flag you’re waving ...” (01:40:41). A utopian picture is painted where the world is filled with laughing children that are not subjected to race- or gender-based limits. But as this picture is outside the framework of the film, created by the title shot, it is insinuated that this is a world that will never be reality.

In its contradiction of tone, the film seems ambiguous in its intention. Does it agree with the Theo from the first half of the film and is his drastic turnaround ironic to show how inherent reproductive futurism and its biopolitical structures are? Or does it suggest that there can always be a hope for the future and with this reproductive futuristic message fail to criticise the biopolitical structures expressed? The film answers this apparent ambiguity in one particular scene. When Kee and Theo try to flee the refugee camp Bexhill they have to get out of a residential building that is being attacked by the army because the Fishes are hiding in there. The building is filled with refugees who are getting caught in the crossfire and

are desperate for safety. As Kee and Theo walk out everyone stops fighting when they see Kee's baby. The scene seems to draw a reproductive futuristic image of the baby as a hope for the future. Everyone is praying in different languages, the soldiers let them go through unharmed and the violence stops. The scene drastically changes from being highly chaotic to calm and serene. For a moment the audience gets a hopeful vision of a world that is restored because there is hope for the future again. But then a bomb goes off and everyone turns away from the baby and the violence starts again, and the film makes clear in one scene how a future generation cannot save the current one.

CHAPTER THREE: REPRODUCTIVE FUTURISM IN *THE HANDMAID'S TALE*

Where *Children of Men* is ambiguous about reproductive futurism, *The Handmaid's Tale* discusses the blame and shame that stems from the reproductive futuristic tendencies of the social order. Significantly, Offred describes the pregnant belly of the Handmaid Ofwarren (whose previous name was Janine) as "a flag on a hilltop" (32), just like Kee's baby was referred to as "the flag that could unite us all" (00:38:20). The baby is thus represented as an emblem for the future of society. Offred suggests that Janine's pregnant belly means that "we too can be saved" (32). By which she positions the future child as a hope for the future itself. Furthermore, when Offred discovers Janine's baby was an "Unbaby" and Janine blames herself for this, Offred feels that this is "like Janine ... to take it upon herself ... [b]ut people will do anything rather than admit that their lives have no meaning" (223). This would suggest that Janine feels she is responsible for protecting the future generations as a way to give her life meaning, which is coherent with Edelman's theory that all meaning depends on futurism. In the Republic of Gilead everyone seems to want babies. Just like in *Children of Men* it is not mentioned once whether it would be a good idea to raise a future generation in this totalitarian regime. When Janine has her baby, this is seen as a joyous occasion. However,

it is “a girl, poor thing” (132). It is recognised that the child is born into oppression, but that is never given as a reason not to want a child. Thus, at the moment the child is born, it too has to give up its own freedom to ensure the future generation. This is further implied by the fact that, when a baby is born with a physical disability it is declared an “Unbaby”. They are then somehow disposed of, and although it is not entirely clear what happens to the Unbabies the fact that they are sometimes referred to as “shredders” could imply their fate (222). As reproductive futurism implies, there is no possibility of a “feminist, queer, crip” future generation (Kafer 171).

Throughout the novel, women are blamed for the rising infertility. For example, Offred explains that “[t]here is no such thing as a sterile man any more, not officially. There are only women who are fruitful and women who are barren, that’s the law” (66-67). As Offred tells more about her past, it becomes clear that with rising infertility, methods like birth control and abortion became more taboo. This suggests that when the future generation is less certain, women would naturally put the existence of a foetus before their own wishes. This is supported by Offred’s statement that “no woman in her right mind, these days, would seek to prevent a birth, should she be so lucky as to conceive” (39). This indicates the internalised responsibility women feel for the reproduction of society. Offred herself also feels the shame that reproductive futurism has inflicted upon her. For example, when her bank account is frozen and she is fired for being a woman she wonders “[w]hat was it about this that made us feel we deserved it?” (182). This stresses the internalisation of reproductive futurism. By using extreme examples the novel demonstrates the indoctrination this shame comes from. This is evident, for example, in the passage at the Red Centre, the training centre for the Handmaids, where Janine talks about being gang raped at the age of fourteen which led her to abort the subsequent pregnancy.

But whose fault was it? Aunt Helena says, holding up one plump finger. *Her fault, her fault, her fault*, we chant in unison. *Who* led them on? Aunt Helena beams, pleased with us. *She did. She did. She did.* Why did God allow such a terrible thing to happen? Teach her a *lesson*. Teach her a *lesson*. Teach her a *lesson* ... For a moment, even though we knew what was being done to her, we despised her (78).

It is consequently implied that the blame and shame that is bestowed upon women comes from indoctrination. Thus, the reproductive futuristic tendencies of the social order cause the women to feel shame, but by using extreme examples to show the indoctrination this blame comes from, the novel forces the reader to both recognise this in modernity and reconsider the biopolitical logics that it stems from.

Because reproductive futurism is based on the idea of a perfect world for future generations it can be seen as a utopian concept. Fiona Tolan connects utopianism to totalitarianism, stating that it is based on exclusionary logics where the ends justify the means (19). Because of the restrictiveness of utopian thinking it can take freedom away from people. *The Handmaid's Tale* represents Isaiah Berlin's notion of "negative and positive freedom" (1958) through Aunt Lydia's statement: "There is more than one kind of freedom ... Freedom to and freedom from. In the days of the anarchy it was freedom to. Now you are being given freedom from. Don't underrate it" (30). Tolan argues that through the representation of negative and positive freedom the feminist characters that are present in the novel are being critiqued on their utopianism. Berlin's categories of freedom describe negative freedom as the freedom from interference by others and positive freedom as the freedom to live as one wants. With positive freedom potential is crucial (Tolan 24). Aunt Lydia advocates negative freedom, but eventually enforces a positive form of freedom because, according to Tolan, the Aunt's envisioned society – or utopia – "necessarily interferes with the social reality of other individuals" (25). The limitations of the utopian aspects of feminism are furthermore

recognised when Offred states: “Mother... you wanted a women’s culture. Well, now there is one. It isn’t what you meant, but it exists. Be thankful for small mercies” (133). Since utopianism can be aligned with reproductive futurism, it can be suggested that both forms of freedom, are shown in the novel to eventually stand on biopolitical pillars, because of the restrictiveness of reproductive futurism. This would underscore the inescapability and internalisation of these biopolitical logics.

In *The Handmaid’s Tale* names are very important in the structuring of power. The Handmaids, for example, get named after their commanders. The name Offred simply means that she is of Fred, which signals the handmaids being seen as property. This way of naming might seem alien to the audience, but is in fact not far derived from popular Anglo-American last names like Johnson or Wilson. Naming the future generation after the father ties in with reproductive futurism since it is a way to immortalize him. In the epilogue the audience gets a glimpse of the future. The Republic of Gilead is fallen and several professors have now done historic research on the Gileadean period. The names of the professors differ strongly from the ones that were seen before. The surnames of, for example, “James Darcy Pieixoto” and “Maryann Crescent Moon” (307) signal indigenous American, rather than Anglo-American names, which would suggest an inversion of power. However, even though the power relations are inverted, they are still similar to the ones that could be observed in the republic of Gilead. The reader learns that Offred’s narrative has been compiled by two professors, about two-hundred years later. Karen Stein argues that by “bracketing [Offred’s] tale” Professor Pieixoto’s “text reiterates the tension between Offred’s words and patriarchal control of her story which forms the crux of her tale” (Stein, 59). This is supported when professor Pieixoto admits that part of the reason they called the story *The Handmaid’s Tale* is because of its audial correspondence to the word tail, putting Offred outside of the human realm and sexualising her at the same time. Furthermore, professor Pieixoto suggests that he

sympathizes with the men in the Republic of Gilead because “[w]hat male of the Gilead period could resist the possibility of fatherhood, so redolent of status, so highly prized” (319). This indicates that reproductive futurism is still present in this future society. Thus, although seemingly contradicting, the Republic of Gilead and this future both uphold normativity and stand on the same biopolitical pillars.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, *Children of Men* is ambiguous in its stance on reproductive futurism. On the one hand it expresses thoughts against reproductive futurism, while on the other there is a strong focus on the meaning-giving of birth and motherhood which supports it. Admittedly, this ambiguity can be interpreted in various ways, but the scene where Kee and Theo walk out of a building that is under attack with the baby in their arms, supports my interpretation of the film exhibiting the inescapability of reproductive futurism which leads to how the biopolitical logics that are present in the film are inherent in modernity. Where in *Children of Men* the focus lies mainly with race, *The Handmaid’s Tale* focuses strongly on gender. The novel is less ambiguous in its stance since it clearly criticises the internalisation of the blame and shame that stems from reproductive futurism. In its rejection of the utopian aspects of feminism the novel furthermore, shows how both positive and negative freedom can stand on the same biopolitical pillars. Finally, in the epilogue an inversion of power can be noted. However, this new power structure stands on the same biopolitical logics as the former, indicating once more that these biopolitical logics are inescapable.

This thesis opens up avenues for further research on the biopolitical aspects of reproductive futurism and gender. Both *Full Surrogacy now: Feminism Against Family* by Sophie Lewis and *The Ahuman Manifesto: Activism for the End of the Anthropocene* by Patricia MacCormack are interesting studies on this subject. Additionally, MacCormack bases

her arguments largely on ecocriticism, stating that population decline or even human extinction could be considered beneficial for the planet as a whole. It would be interesting to think about the ecocritical aspects of reproductive futurism like explained in *Worlds Without Us: Some Types of Dysanthropy* by Greg Garrard and *Staying With the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* by Donna Haraway. This could be another interesting subject for further research.

To conclude, this thesis has shown how *Children of Men* and *The Handmaid's Tale* both demonstrate how a narrative that is concerned with escaping the present, is inextricably connected to reproductive futurism and thus to biopolitics. The biopolitical logics that are ostensibly criticised are kept in place, indicating their inescapability. By using the extreme dystopian examples it is demonstrated how these logics are inherent in modernity. Hence, the texts support Agamben's claim that in modernity we are all *homines sacri*. However, by exhibiting this through reproductive futurism a new perspective on his premise is given because of his conspicuous silence on gender.

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