

Title of the study “Looking at Alfonso Cuarón’s Children of Men through the lens of power,
politics of population and the use of propaganda”

*Dissertation submitted to the Symbiosis (Deemed) University
in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Award of the Degree of*

Bachelor of Arts in Media and Communication

By

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled “*Looking at Alfonso Cuarón’s Children of Men through the lens of power, politics of population and the use of propaganda*”, submitted to Symbiosis Centre for Media and Communication, in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Bachelor of Arts in Media and Communication, is a record of original and bonafide research work done by Mr. Angkuran Dey, during the period 2018-21, under my supervision and guidance and that the dissertation has not previously formed the basis for the award of any Degree/ Diploma/ or any similar title and that the dissertation represents independent work on the part of the candidate. I further certify that the work is worth submitting for the award of the said degree.

This certificate only indicates that the student is a bonafide student of SCMC and has submitted the dissertation in partial fulfilment of the degree. The student was to write the dissertation independently following all academic and ethical norms explained by the faculty from time to time. The final writing was entirely the student’s effort. Therefore, the responsibility of the content rests solely with the student.

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DECLARATION

I, Angkuran Dey, hereby declare that the dissertation entitled “*Looking at Alfonso Cuarón’s Children of Men through the lens of power, politics of population and the use of propaganda*” submitted to Symbiosis Centre for Media and Communications for Bachelor of Arts in Media and Communication, is a record of original research work done by me under the guidance and supervision of Dr Sunil Belladi. I further declare that the dissertation has not formed before the basis for the award of any Degree/ Diploma or any other similar title.

Place: Pune

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ABSTRACT

Alfonso Cuarón's dystopian drama, *Children of Men*, set in the year 2027, shows a decaying world where anarchy has turned existing stable orders on its head. It is only Great Britain that remains peaceful amidst the crisis which ravages the world. The research attempts to look at the movie through different lenses, starting from biopolitics to understanding symbols used in the frames. Living in a pandemic, Cuarón's dystopia feels closer to reality and is uncomfortable to watch at points. With the world destabilising and a health emergency giving rise to authoritarian tendencies, we live in a period unlike any. *Children of Men* had released fifteen years back in 2006, but the relevance of such movies seems to increase every day. Be it authors like George Orwell coming back into the picture or Margaret Atwood's speculative fiction gaining even more relevance. Certain movies like *Contagion* (2011) started to be widely watched as their relevance reached new heights during the pandemic. We cannot ignore the fact that while movies made at a particular time lose their relevance, they can emerge later as an eerie reminder of the world around us.

Keywords: *Children of Men*, Biopolitics, Symbolism, Realism, Colonialism, Authoritarianism...

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Chapter 1- INTRODUCTION

1. Introduction

Children of Men depicts a dystopian world of 2027, where for the last 18 years, women have been infertile, and humanity is on its last legs. Theo (played by Clive Owen) must now escort a pregnant immigrant to safety. The movie presents a world of the police state, a totalitarian government, and rising xenophobia against immigrants. Realism thought fuels the film as it portrays how the lust for power in the guise of stability creates conditions for chaos. Morality has no place in politics; the Machiavellian attitude can be seen right from the movie's beginning. As the headlines are being read out, "Closing of British borders, the deportation of illegal immigrants to continue", introduces us to a world of authority, where controlling the population becomes necessary.

Cuaron depicts a Waltzian world, where it is fear which casts a cloud over the survival of the nation-state. Britain is taking steps towards keeping things in order, a montage which shows major cities suffering from the crisis while at the end it reads, "Britain shoulders on". The British government uses an iron hand to wrest authority and deport illegal immigrants, who are seen as the ones who can create chaos. It brings in a particular insight into the insider vs outsider debate, where the dominant order targets the weak. The movie also tells us about the power relation between the illegal immigrants who have been stripped of their rights and the government in a nation-state. It depicts a sorry picture about the treatment of illegal immigrants and how statelessness makes one a toy in the hands of the nation-states, who treat them like a liability—the ones who are responsible for destabilising the existing order.

The nation-state is a broad concept, but one can understand it as a fusion of sovereignty, which stems from a Westphalian order and emphasises creating an imagined dominant culture in a defined territory. It seeks to put the population under a very convenient bracket and thrusts on the concept of “one community, one nation”. However, there might be other communities historically that have been part of the same territory. What defines being British? Nationalities have been defined through multiple abstractions. The concept of culture and a sense of shared identity between people is an essential myth that has to be justified through abstract ideas. However, what is concerning is that these layers of abstractions are not full-proof; some flaws make the survival of such constructs increasingly tricky. Jean Baudrillard, a post-modernist thinker, points out how reality is manufactured to seem like this is the way it happens.

The concept of nation-state here becomes a simulacrum; the authority then tries to simulate the entire understanding of political order mapping our minds to be conditioned to this abstraction which we do not question. Questions come about only when this abstraction fails at some point; this abstraction has been challenged several times only to be diffused in the larger schema of things. Our existing world orders, international policies, and stances in an international organisation are constituted within this framework of ideas that can be challenged only when a more robust set of ideas have greater forms of plausible abstractions.

Cuaron depicts a grim world where one needs to show their identity, carry citizenship papers, and report suspicious immigrants. In India, there has been a tremendous push by the BJP (Bhartiya Janata Party), the party in power, for the implementation of a nationwide NRC (National Register of Citizens). The NRC exercise already took place in Assam, where each individual had to produce records that they had come to the state before the 25th of March,

1971. The exercise was meant to stem out illegal immigrants from the state. The proclamation of NRC as a huge success was expected, but, in the aftermath, around 1.9 million people were left out, and there are questions about their citizenship status.

The movie uses powerful imagery of immigrants caught by the police and put in cages, reminiscent of what has been happening at the US-Mexico border in the guise of national security. Theo is a bureaucrat who gets kidnapped by the fishes and is seated in a room full of newspaper clippings surrounding him. The clippings give us evidence about how the game of powerplay has wreaked havoc across the world. We get introduced to Julian, the leader of the fishes; the fishes support immigration and are looking for a plausible end to this xenophobia against immigrants. The world of British politics is now one of the Uni-polar order; the fishes(libertarian) are trying to bring back the Bi-polar order in British politics and challenge the power of the existing regime. Cuarón also gives us an insight into how mass media is used for creating a sense of apathy towards immigrants.

Living in a global age of a late-capitalistic society, with media being owned by corporates, there is an increasing emphasis on the portrayal of the elites as the typical ‘good guys’ of the society. The so-called caring ones putting money in the economy and running it, one thing that skips through all of this is the exploitation of workers in a capitalistic world which is portrayed as a duty, aiding the nation in its growth.

Cuarón’s use of imagery and sound to convey the oppressive regime is used masterfully in the meeting between Theo and Nigel. As Theo enters the posh part of the city, the song ‘Court of the Crimson King’ by the British band ‘King Crimson’ starts to play in the background, which is notorious for relating politicians to the devils of the world. Nigel is the

Minister of Arts in the government and has been portrayed as the entitled politician who is busy saving the last great sculptures from around the world. As Theo and Nigel are sitting at the table, Theo is framed in front of Guernica, a Picasso painting depicting the terror during the reign of the dictator Francisco Franco of Spain. At the same time, a Pig can be seen floating in the sky inspired by the Pink Floyd album 'Animals'; which references George Orwell's 'Animal Farm'. The Pig floating in the air symbolises Stalinist control, which has become a reality in Britain of 2027.

The movie also depicts a shift between hierarchy and anarchy. When Julian gets shot in the car amidst the chaos on the road with refugees coming out from the forest on a rampage, there is no leader now, anyone can assume power, but the leadership of the Fishes elect Luke as the leader returning to the hierarchy within the anarchy for preserving the status quo of the group. Kee is an immigrant who is pregnant, the first baby in years. The baby becomes a symbol of the uprising for the Fishes, while for the British government, it symbolises the future of the nation-state. The movie portrays how control over women's reproduction is fundamental towards the formation of nationalism. Women are the ones technically who are responsible for producing subjects for the nation-state.

In "Birth of Biopolitics," Foucault talks about how individuals are reduced to objects by the state. The state wants to control the variables like birth rate, death rate, and other factors, which showcases a shift from the sovereign form of power to biopower. Taking a cue from Foucault, the baby is still an individual entity suspended in the vacuum of power between the two parties: the Fishes(libertarian) and the neo-conservative regime. It has not been yet turned into an object by the state. Giorgio Agamben, an Italian philosopher, points out, "The suspension of the rule of law produces the 'Homo Sacer' or bare life who being denied

citizenship gets subjected to the disciplinary mechanisms of the state without any recourse.” Statelessness has become a pertinent issue of debate in recent times, with a growing number of groups being denied citizenship and being treated as the ‘other’. The influx of Rohingyas into Bangladesh and India, the Chakmas in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, and the Kurds are examples of stateless communities. These groups do not have any recourse and are subjected to the sympathy offered by the respective nation-states.

In the scenes leading to the Bexhill camp, we get pulled into a world where refugees are treated inhumanely. Cuarón takes references from episodes like the Abu Ghraib torture in Iraq. The US Army and Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) personnel perpetrated severe Human Rights violations during the early part of the US-Iraq war. Many of the detainees were subjected to physical and sexual abuse in prison. The torture generated a storm in the International political sphere, forcing the US Army to take action against its officers.

As Theo and Kee are being pushed through the prison-like cages into a world where survival is essentially dependent on the refugee, the world comes to a sort of standstill. We get to know Syd, a police officer in the camp, as he pulls and beats Maricha, who was trying to help Theo and Kee to transport the baby to safety. Francis Fukuyama, in his address about the scenes in the Bexhill camp, tells us that; “the huge island turns into a concentration camp”.

The movie projects a slow decline of the world descending into chaos, where a revolution seems imminent to challenge the existing order. Theo and Julian are dead, the pawns which are meant to be sacrificed for the survival of the nation-state. It will be Kee’s baby, who will become the symbol of a new order evident by the ship arriving to rescue Kee and her baby by the name of ‘Tomorrow’. I want to argue here that; “Children of Men reflects the biopolitics

of our world, the contemporary world events and heralds an age of cinema which functions as a critique of the post 9/11 world.”

1.1 Problem Statement

To understand the Alfonso Cuarón directorial, *Children of Men*, by picking up broad themes, including reproductive politics, propaganda, and references used in the frames. We live in a disruptive world, where ideologies intersect in different ways to create an ever-complicated world order. Movies like *Children of Men* are a reflection of the world while sounding an alarm bell about how in the end it is all about retaining power in the political sphere.

1.2 Literature Review

The characters in *Children of Men*

The narrative of colonialism and the overarching motivations of the characters in a movie that intersects in different ways gives us a deeper insight into the narrative. The focus here would be to look at Burke's Dramatic Pentad introduced by Kenneth Burke. There are five major rhetorical elements in the pentad, namely: a) Act, b) Scene, c) Agent, d) Agency and, e) Purpose.

It is the year 2027, where infertility threatens the future existence of human life and kinship patterns. The motivations of the characters in the dystopian drama keep on changing. One can observe a shift between hope, fear, and an overarching goal to solve the infertility puzzle. Cuarón creates an all-encompassing narrative in the movie by superimposing the idea of

freedom with totalitarianism amidst the concept of biopower.

Looking at the character of our main protagonist Theo allows us to demystify the complications here. The pentad allows us to deconstruct the complicated interactions and removes the meta-narrative surrounding freedom granted to the characters. Burke's Dramatic Pentad allows us to link means in a scene and add context. The five terms attempt to decipher the motivations in the narrative of Cuarón. Exploring the dialectical relations would be a bit out of context here but will be explored later if needed to prove the argument. We also need to realise that culture, language, race, religion and nationalism carry different meanings based on a given context. The characters are merely puppets in the director's world and are meant to take forward the director's agency in the world which he creates.

The Refugee crisis and the politics of population

Rising conflicts and conflagration in different countries has created a situation where many refugees escape from their home countries. The intervention of the developed world has often perpetrated this crisis; an example would be the Russian intervention in the Syrian crisis. The crisis is real, and some countries are slowly closing their borders to the people seeking shelter. A recent example would be Poland and Hungary, which have refused to take in refugees. On the positive side, there are countries like Canada that have provided citizenship to refugees.

The emergence of right-wing parties in European countries, an example would be the emergence of the right-wing party 'Alternative for Deutschland' in Germany, who have been resenting against a multi-cultural society. The same can be seen through events that took

place, say in Norway, when in 2011, a right-wing extremist shot dead 77 teens in a youth camp on the island of Utøya. Concerns have emerged surrounding over-criminalising immigration and how hate crimes against immigrants are on a disturbing rise.

The biopolitical regime does not function on a simple dialectical function of birth and death. In this case, it is about exerting control and keeping the fundamental reproductive rights under the purview of the state. Catastrophic events fragment the societal conditions and leave sections in a state of trauma. The weak here are the refugees who are subjected to heinous treatment and are seen as the 'outsiders'. The trauma for some is never-ending, with the questions of where to go and who would accept us remains. The intersection of class, race and gender we see in the movie is a testament to the world of contradictions where one is supposed to keep silent amidst a world of destitution.

The use of imagery and symbolism

Cuaron uses long takes in *Children of Men*, and this style gets cemented in his recent movie, *Roma* (2018). The use of style traits, far from a Hollywood commercial movie, is an attempt by the director to immerse the audience in time and shuts the audience in a claustrophobic space. One can observe the overall aesthetic changes in the scenes in general, with the shots becoming longer in scenes of action and violence. However, he does not depart from conventions of cinematic techniques and carefully stitches different shots to give a continuous feeling. This brave attempt by Cuaron in the movie points to an assertion of aesthetic distinction while immersing the audience in the scenes.

Does Cuaron depict the contemporary world around us? Cuaron smartly moves around to

focus on the dismantling of the world created by the human race. The film introduces the audience to realist thought and a society saturated with consumerism. There are painting references like Picasso's Guernica, Botticelli's The Birth of Venus, and Michelangelo's David. What overlaps everything in this otherwise grim tale is the overarching symbolism of hope. While we might be in a world of chaos and decline, there is still an unprecedented tenacity that drives the human spirit. Cuarón gives us that hope and does not let the unrelenting force of fear wash over the sacrifices of people. The question, though, remains what happens to the political regime in a disruptive world? Where are the solutions which would allow the world to reconstruct a new order?

This sense of fear, paranoia and ever-growing staccato in the character dynamics starts to take over Theo as he discovers the orchestrators behind the killing of Julian. The trajectory of death brings in a change in the narrative, with the subsuming Hindu spiritual music as if the constant running away from reality has come to a close.

Propaganda, surveillance and world events

The movie is a study of propaganda, and individuals in Cuarón's world are kept in check through surveillance. We see signages across various frames in the movie, which bring into the picture the resentment against immigrants and how the British governments seek to bring a false sense of hope in a decaying world. There are many references, at which we will be looking in detail to understand propaganda through works of people like Noam Chomsky and others. At points, it feels more like a documentary rather than seeing a movie where you as an audience become part of the background.

There are scenes abound with symbolic nuances adding a heightened fusion. Cuarón beautifully places the colonialist narrative, wherein a civilisation, despite being on its last legs, is ready to stamp its authority on them. A perceived national crisis is highlighted throughout the movie. It can be easily observed in light of two major events: a) The 9/11 attacks, which shook the American and British consciousness, ensuing increased militarisation with renewed xenophobia against the minorities. Another event linked to this is the: b) 7/7 London Bombings of 2005, which sparked outrage against the Islamic community in the western world. The movie creates a world where environmental degradation has created a shielded world for those with resources to afford. Like in *The Handmaid's Tale*, the walls and spaces serve as crucial indicators that guide the audience through the vestiges of time.

It is an odd future, refitted for the rich to progress, while others are merely surviving through this decaying world. Historical narratives, art and cultural symbols are revisited in different scenes, which is an obvious play on the past. There are small victories in the stories of the protagonists giving them the will to live. Individuals like Theo and Offred in *The Handmaid's Tale* often require support from radical groups to take forward the rebellious acts of subversive surveillance.

Propaganda and the use of subversive ideas are essential tenants to preserve the existing ideologue in play. Crisis tends to change things dramatically and often provide conditions for power patterns, leaving the people on the other side with little recourse. There is a sense of realist fear in times of chaos wherein the state starts muzzling voices of dissent. We have been observing this phenomenon for a long time, starting from the Colombian protests, the crackdown by the Myanmar military to the Lekki Shootings in Lagos, Nigeria. These are just

a few examples; in the Indian context, we have the CAA-NRC Protests. The ruling government grossly neglected the situation in the Kashmir valley, wherein taking away human rights were portrayed as necessary. Isn't this sending a message here? Who is the one in charge? It is not about the people anymore, but those elected who decide everything on our behalf dismantling the participatory nature of a democracy.

The world of Cuarón in Children of Men

Children of Men is a dystopian reminder about the fragility of reproductive rights, refugee politics and how surveillance has pushed the world into a sense of paranoia. Be it the Syrian refugee crisis, the Rohingya crisis, or the climate refugees being forced to take shelter elsewhere and the complicated issues of statelessness, which has led to drawing new battle lines on the international front. To understand fertility and its impact on the human psyche, one can reference *The Handmaid's Tale*, which is a telling commentary on reproductive power and control over bodies. The traditional government has been turned into an untrustworthy figure, seeking to garner greater power. The portrayal of anti-immigration policies, which are brutal to say in simple words, is starkly different from the benevolent image that Britain has tried to propagate out to the world post their colonial orgies in the east.

Children of Men, the novel by P.D. James and the adaptation of Alfonso Cuarón, is not the realisation of some future bio-political project. On the contrary, it is a stark reminder of the world we inhabit, the echoes of racial tensions and the impact of policy decisions in the face of a Malthusian threat. Contemporary dystopias can be argued, provide a warning, and bring alternatives to the existing conditions in the world. There is no scope of speculation in research, and while many solutions might sound attractive, it needs to be proven in a

particular context. The style of Cuarón is like passing through a history museum and it references symbols in one shot after another as if he wants to make people regret the world, they have destroyed due to their extensive greed. There is a layer of emotion over the burgeoning fear which echoes the words put out by Kristina Moana Thompson, who notes that:

“Existential dread is a unification of ‘anxiety’ and ‘anguish’, stemming from a fear of the ‘future’ and fear of ‘freedom of choice, particularly related to the idea of absolute choice.’”

1.3 Significance of your study

It would be naïve to marvel at a dystopian drama and not look beyond the frame. A study like this allows one to look at the existing complexities by taking a multi-disciplinary approach. Alfonso Cuarón’s world comprises a docile populace; a comparison can be drawn to Nietzsche’s ‘last man’; about whom he speaks in “Thus Spoke Zarathustra”. Human beings, who have been seen as the epitome of aspiration, become content with the bare minimum and decide not to mount a challenge against the existing order. Is humanity devolving into the Last Man?

The answer remains to be found. Indeed, movies like *Children of Men* allows us to understand global politics, reproductive politics, colonialism and surveillance in a world of chaos. This study takes up few broad areas and uses their theoretical frameworks for analysing the movie. However, this research is not all-encompassing and presents an opportunity for extensive research in the times to come.

1.4 Objectives/Research Questions

- a) Pick up specific events in the movie, and establish their global relevance by linking them to actual events and theories of world politics.
- b) Looking at the use of propaganda, biological rights and symbols used, which establishes a narrative.
- c) Understanding how pop culture reflects the world around us and critique the same.

1.5 Hypotheses

- a) Through this dissertation, I would be looking at the complexities of global politics.
- b) The dissertation would also look at the movie through a lens of intersectionality between biology and politics, human rights, and the use of propaganda.
- c) It would also allow me to link the images used in the movie in the foreground and background to tell a commentary about signs, symbols and their impact.

1.6 Chapter Outline

The research being undertaken here has been divided into five chapters. The first chapter is the introduction part, which allows one to understand the motivations behind taking up a particular research area. It attempts to present the research in brief and brings insights from different quarters to present the argument. In addition, the first chapter also consists of the literature review, which gives us an analysis of the various sources which have been used in a bid to structure the findings. Finally, it also lays down the necessary background as we move towards other chapters for substantiating our findings.

The second chapter describes the methodologies employed in the research while explaining the same and points out the limitations involved in the particular method being chosen. The third chapter in the dissertation puts all the information gathered during the research process in a structured manner. The information collected in the third chapter would now be used to draw insights and put into words the author's interpretation based on research findings. While the final chapter might not seem to be that long, it summarises the entire dissertation and raises some questions for further research.

CHAPTER 2- RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In common parlance, research can be seen as an exercise for arriving at a new direction with scope for bringing in new insights. It is not a one-dimensional process but involves multiple, intersectional ties towards generating some form of knowledge. As researchers, we bring into perspective different lenses to look at issues around us; most of us are not philosophers providing new ideas to the world but are part of a movement to discover new things.

The methodology brings concepts such as paradigm, phases and quantitative or qualitative techniques. The author's topic here covers a vast ground, and sometimes this becomes difficult to surmise. The primary aim of using research methodology here is to use existing mapped sources, look at different themes, and develop a coherent narrative that fits the dimension of the topic taken up by the author.

2.1. Research Methods Used

For the topic that the author has chosen here, it does not depend on primary data collection, which forms the basis for research in dynamic fields. Instead, the topic chosen here delves on theoretical perspectives and events corresponding to the respective sections the author seeks to cover. The reasoning behind taking up a particular method can be either inductive or deductive, or even a combination of both. The author here was dependent on secondary research as it fits into the topic and allows one to understand the boundaries of theoretical knowledge to explain particular viewpoints. One can place the information collection process based on the topic here under subjective or argumentative research and even expository research to some extent, wherein one analyses vast amounts of information from across fields

to distil it into what is necessary for introducing new insights.

Researching can be a tough nut to crack, but once the author identifies the sources and methods to be used, it becomes a relatively easy path to tread on while keeping a rudimentary structure in mind. Thus, the researcher, who bases his work on secondary sources, are not confronted with the problems of collecting primary data. Using secondary sources for research comes with its limitations; we will look at it later. Secondary research can be seen as a systematic approach taken up by the author. The author here solely relies on the work done by other authors. The research design involves augmenting different existing sources for generating valid answers to the research problem that the author seeks to answer.

When there are vast amounts of data being generated with the advent of the web, there has been an increased use of secondary sources. It offers a sense of flexibility, allowing it to be utilised in different ways. I am not here to argue which form is better; it all depends on the research question, the veracity of the topic and how a researcher might want to present the same to the world.

2.1.1. Sources

As we looked through the above paragraph, secondary research involves using available sources and creating a pool to generate insights that would allow the researcher to find answers to the research question. There is no sampling or primary data collection involved in the research process here. Instead, the author has chosen the topic that draws from specific instances and finds answers through existing theoretical frameworks. Sourcing of data has been done through the following:

1. Peer-reviewed journals and online databases
2. Published books
3. Websites
4. News reports
5. Magazines
6. Reports made available by organisations
7. Public records

The sources used here were primarily found on the internet. The internet has made secondary research significantly more accessible as the process requires such a vast amount of information to be processed. While secondary research requires less time, much time goes into classifying, scrutinising, and presenting the source points, which can be used in a coherent form by following the objectives. To add caution to the wind, a researcher relying on the use of secondary sources must take into account the following questions:

1. Is the source reliable?
2. Does the information suit the research question and helps in generating new insights?
3. Is the information accurate and fulfils the extent of enquiry?
4. Has the available information been filtered and classified to suit the needs of the research?

Some issues might still creep in despite using different sources, but these are all part of the research process. Though the process remains consistent despite the challenges in play, as an author, one needs to use available sources and derive different interpretations. At last, it boils down to proving the hypothesis and fulfilling the aim that the researcher undertakes.

2.1.2. Limitations

All research methods come with some limitations; here, our focus was on secondary research as the author chose to use it as the fundamental basis for answering the research question. Let us look at some issues to avoid if one is relying on secondary sources:

1. Avoid irrelevant details and keep out background information that does not add anything to the research.
2. Understanding that one is writing this for an audience who has exposure to academia, one needs to avoid explaining every little detail.
3. Detailing things accurately as required and recognising boundaries.

As one goes forward in the quest to find answers to the research question. There are certain limitations that the author has to deal with during the process. Some of the limitations are listed below:

1. There is no way to verify the authenticity of the information being used for research.
2. It is not exactly specific, and making correlations for the researcher might become a difficult task.
3. The data available is mainly free and accessible to all; it does not offer an advantage to a researcher working in dynamic fields. An example would be Computer Sciences or Natural Language Processing.
4. One primary concern is the lack of control over the quality of data being collected throughout the process.

5. An inherent bias remains over the use of secondary sources, as the researcher is relying on the work of other authors.

It can be established thus, that while using secondary research offers certain methodological benefits for answering the research question and generating new insights in hindsight. A successful analysis through the use of secondary data would require a thorough examination of the research question. The author also needs to be wary of the inherent limitations of the method being used and thus keep finding solutions to problems that might come in during the research process.

CHAPTER 3– ANALYSIS

Understanding motivations of the characters

Do movies serve just as products of entertainment, or does it have a broader perspective as well? While familiar narratives provide a sense of comfort to the audience, some movies function more than just providing respite to people. *Children of Men* can be cast into the genre of science fiction, thriller, or most prominently a dystopian drama that portrays a world of 2027, where humanity has been infertile for the last 18 years. Ironically, the world's greatest colonial power, Great Britain, shoulders on as it has been turned into a police state for maintaining a semblance of perceived stable political order. Watching the movie is like going through a museum that has been partitioned based on themes. Walter Fisher, while talking about the importance of symbols, points out;

“Symbols are communicated in the form of stories which brings an order to the human experience for establishing ways of living in common....”

While it might be convenient to shrug off this movie as just a fictional narrative inspired by actual events, but at the same time, this would be rather naive. Dystopian narratives depict a world in decay, a society where normalcy has ceased to exist, and characters live in a world inundated by uncertainty. Kenneth Burke's dramatic pentad, which was put forward in “A Grammar of Movies (1945)”, allows one to understand characters' motivations.

Our hero in the narrative is Theo, a mythical name which in Greek means god; one can understand through the biblical reference here how this narrative might pan out. Theo (played by Clive Owen) fits into the hero archetype, as he is the chosen one to complete a particular

purpose here. I want to argue here that agency-purpose becomes a dominant ratio in the narrative; Theo is a character who is like Sisyphus in the Albert Camus absurdist classic “The Myth of Sisyphus” (1942). Just like, Sisyphus is a character that exemplifies the middle-class mentality and their quest for leading an ordinary life. Theo, a middle-level bureaucrat, looks to lead a life of normalcy; he is the quintessential middle-class archetype who accepts everything around him as it is and refuses to raise questions. Is Theo a coward? We know that Theo was an ex-rebel while in college who becomes a timid individual post the death of his son.

The cynical middle-aged man is detached, unkempt, and distanced from reality. This cynical white Brit now turns into an unlikely saviour, who at the beginning seems like just a microcosm of the decaying society. He now gets elevated to become a hero through the interaction of different agencies for fulfilling a larger purpose. The opening scene of the movie in the café establishes that this is a London where bombs can go off anytime and being safe is a myth, despite the iron grip of the police in the city. Soon enough, he gets pushed into an unfamiliar world, and thus, begins the journey of our hero. Julian (played by Julianna Moore), the head of the organisation Fishes, kidnaps Theo. This confrontation comes at a critical juncture post which Theo transforms into an active agent of change. In the novel of the same name by P.D. James, Theo becomes a spy and resolves to change history.

However, Theo keeps a low profile in the adaptation and is not the sly agent but somewhat becomes a pawn in the narrative. Thus, while the adaptation is from the hero’s perspective, one is also exposed to the changing ideological dimensions determining how Theo would act. We only see glimpses of Julian, but she serves as the face of familiarity for Theo; her death leaves Theo to find another purpose. In the scene where Kee (played by Claire-Hope Ashitey)

reveals her pregnancy to Theo in the barn, Theo realises what is at stake. Kee, whose name is a deliberate play on the word key, carries with her the hope of returning to the old order.

The character of Kee, despite her pregnancy, lacks agency. Kee is an illegal immigrant from Africa who is reduced to her reproductive role and carries a symbolic value in the narrative. In one way, Kee can be seen as a character who depicts how their colonisers have treated women of the colonial world. We all know about the episode in history called the ‘Scramble for Africa’, where the continent was divided amongst the seven European powers who were on the lookout for new territories to fill their coffers, and thus began a bloody episode of gargantuan proportions which lasted from 1881-1914.

This historical narrative gets reimposed in the movie, as Kee is protected by Theo and Julian, reimposing the hierarchical domination of whites over the people of colour. Kee is reduced to a passive character and carries with her a childlike trust in Theo. There is no backstory, which would allow us to establish the motivation of Kee, all we know is that she was a prostitute, and she does not care who had impregnated her. “The most widespread image of the woman who sold sex was that of a ‘vile harlot’, whose body was a stinking sewer threatening society...another alternative image positioned her as a victim of circumstances” (Agustin 2005,6).

Kee being an illegal immigrant, would have been a victim of both forms of construction of prostitution, which might answer why she does not have any agency of her own in the story. Being an immigrant pushed into prostitution has made her docile and turned her a slave to the squalid conditions surrounding her. The film posits a strange dilemma, where Theo can decide to go back or help Kee out of the chaos. Theo decides to help Kee and guide her to the

ship of the 'Human Project', and during this journey, we meet Theo's friend Jasper (played by Michael Caine). Jasper, in one scene, sums up the importance of Kee's baby; "your baby is the miracle the whole world has been waiting for." Nevertheless, Kee is thrust back into the world of patriarchy, where motherhood and pregnancy are essential for being a woman. This is a testimony to the fact that patriarchy can manifest even in subtler forms.

Theo becomes the beacon of hope and throws himself in the danger net. He might fail, but the sacrifices of Jasper and Julian drives him against all odds for taking Kee to safety. He now steps forward for the final part of the journey, a journey that would allow Theo to redeem himself. Agency becomes dominant now, which would allow Theo to fulfil the larger purpose and diffuse the tension in the scenes leading to the end. While we did not look at the scene here in detail, essentially, the scene can be seen as a 'container' where all the dramatic elements are placed and function in different ratios. Theo, following the hero's journey, is now forced to navigate through the inhospitable territory. He learns to deal with things happening around him, to survive in the wasteland for fulfilling the quest.

The refugees in the Bexhill camp are treated as criminals, and one sees how xenophobia can manifest in different forms. The camp is one of high security, and Theo has little time to guide Kee out to the sea and take her to safety. As tension ensues in the camp with the British Army stepping in, Theo, our white saviour, becomes a real-life superhero for keeping Kee and the baby alive. They find a rowboat and are out on the sea as the Airforce jets start firing on the camp. What happens next is the end of our hero's journey but the beginning of a new journey for Kee. Theo reveals that Luke had shot him as blood splatters across the boat; at that moment, Kee names her son Dylan as if resurrecting Theo and Julian's son. Dylan incidentally; means 'son of the sea' and thus ends our hero's journey. Looking at it plot-wise,

one can bring in the plot device 'Deus ex Machina'; which originates from Greek tragedy, that is used as a device to show divine interventions for solving conflicts. Theo is elevated to become the actor who plays god in this narrative which is reimposed by his death, an unlikely hero who sacrificed himself for the larger good. Finally, the ship by the name of 'Tomorrow' arrives for Kee and her baby, and the film ends here on a symbolic level signalling the creation of a new order.

One can speculate that Cuarón wants to negate the biblical linearity by bringing in a cyclical concept of time into the picture. If one sees the narrative, it might well be that the ship is headed to the continent of Africa, which is the 'cradle of civilisation'. Does Kee finally become free? While Theo might have brought Kee to the final destination but seems like she is stuck again amidst people who see themselves as her saviour. Borrowing from Antonio Gramsci, Kee is thrust back into the cycle where she becomes the 'subaltern' and is placed away from the centre of power.

She thus becomes a woman of the colonised world who is surviving due to the mercy of her colonisers. This is the crux of the argument put forward by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, that how seemingly sympathetic acts by white men push the women of the colonial world into a cyclical process of violence again. Freedom for her is a myth, just like privacy in the digital world we inhabit. Kee is an illegal immigrant; her survival is suspended precariously between the established notions of nation-state and those looking to establish a new order. Stuck in this conflict is her baby, which becomes a battleground of hope and power. Movies like *Children of Men* serves as an essential tool that reveals our reality and how there is an ongoing process of making the population numb.

Biopolitics, the status of refugees and dealing with trauma

We have entered into an Orwellian world of 2027, where the world order is fragmented, and it is only Great Britain that has survived through this chaos. The once-great colonial power retains its colonial prestige as it is turned into a police state for keeping the population in order. The infertility pandemic has created a decaying society, and there are question marks over the future of the nation-state. This is where a biopolitical context might be necessary to understand how politics interferes with the lives it governs and those who are seen as a force of threat. The Cuarón directorial hits right at your face as you see illegal immigrants being caged and hunted down in a world where having control becomes necessary.

In one scene, Jasper and Theo are driving past a carriage carrying caged refugees. The words of Jasper summarise the state of the refugees in the movie; “Poor Fugees(refugees) after escaping the worst atrocities and finally making it to England, our government hunts them down like cockroaches.” The novel by P.D. James and the adaptation by Cuarón both take up rhetorical positions for communicating how biopolitics and biopower transform the world we inhabit (Manthei 2016,33). In the world of Cuarón, old boundaries of the nation and body have been erased. Instead, the body is reconfigured in a way that allows those in power to manage the populace biologically.

The movie portrays physical, racial and symbolic realities in a fictional narrative which leaves one in discomfort. Are we moving towards a world of Children of Men? This question seems relevant now, more than ever, in the middle of the COVID-19 Pandemic and dropping fertility rates in countries like Japan and South Korea. Old structures of the world order are being dismantled, and a health emergency has allowed leaders to turn their regimes into

authoritarian ones. The movie points out that control is not just limited to those supposed to procreate but extends to those who have not been able to procreate. There are exceptions to this as well. The bodies of immigrants and those who are disabled or suffering from illnesses might not be a part of a direct biopolitical configuration. However, in an all-pervasive power structure, they still are a part but deemed unworthy.

In an entropic world, where all men and women are sterile, the movie does not answer the reason behind this crisis. Biopolitical management of population is not strictly a top-down approach, but here power comes from the bottom. It is present across micro-levels and macro-levels; it would be naive to look at existing power relations through its terminal forms. The mechanism of surveillance, security, propaganda, and evolution in medical technologies opens up a space for managing the conduct of the population (Manthei 2016,35).

Cuaron brings out the bigoted rhetoric which denigrates the immigrants and refugees into nothingness in a world of Britain-first nationalism (Dinello 2020,2). It sounds pretty familiar as nations retreat from becoming a global player into an ultra-protectionist shell. We are already seeing an ‘America first nationalism’, and the recent address by Vice President Kamala Harris, who was on a two-day visit to Guatemala, clearly stated to the asylum seekers, “Do not come” (Cathy 2021,1). Ironically, Harris herself is the daughter of first-generation immigrants and has proudly carried her Asian-African American identity leading up to the 2020 US Elections. There has been a war on illegal immigration in recent times, be it the implementation of NRC (National Register of Citizens). The final draft left out 19 lakh people who failed to prove that they had entered Assam before 24th March ’1971. While some have been pushed into detention camps set up in the state, there are no credible numbers to show how many people are present in these camps. In the draft stage, the

influential All Assam Students Union (AASU) raised objections against the names of 2.5 lakh people included in the draft. Many of them were refugees who had come into the state looking for shelter during the years of turmoil between 1947-1971, leading up to the formation of Bangladesh.

Despite having their documents duly verified, some were left out and were stripped of their citizenship; what happens to them now? Pushed to the margins without any recourse or rights, that is the current dystopic world that these stateless citizens are inhabiting. During the previous years, many undocumented migrants who had entered the state, especially in the Cachar region, were given D-voters (Doubtful voters) status by the Election Commission of India (ECI). These people marked as D-voters are not allowed to vote and have to prove their citizenship status in front of a foreigner's tribunal.

The exercise of NRC has been xenophobic, to say the least; while the state-level machinery has come to the rescue of Bengali Hindus, the Bengali Muslim has been pushed to fend for themselves. Often called by the derogatory 'miyah', the Bengali Muslim has been at the centre of long-standing conflicts in the state from colonial times. During the India Today Conclave East in 2019, the current Chief Minister of Assam Himanta Biswa Sarma, while pointing to the importance of the NRC exercise, said to Rajdeep Sardesai, "If it is not done, in 10 years Badaruddin Ajmal will become the Chief Minister of Assam."

Controlling women's reproductive ability and sexuality has been central to nationalist and colonialist practices, as women are the vital link that ensures the survival of a nation-state. Hermanson Catelynn, in "Biopolitics and the Status of Refugees as Represented in Children of Men", points out that:

“Citizenship is created through exclusion, who is, and more importantly, is not allowed to be considered a citizen and with citizenship comes protection and personhood.”

The advancement of technologies and the rapid expansion of capitalism has seen biopower enter into the economy; many might call it ‘bioeconomy’, but I would like to avoid the same as it may create confusion. The pregnancy of Kee is seen as a miracle, a possibility of establishing new modes of control. The movie presents the British government as totalitarian, having little regard for human life. The Human Project is seen as a better biopolitical option for the survival of Kee and her baby. Kee can be seen as becoming a part of the miracle, which would be passed through tests and observations in a quest to find a cure for infertility. As we saw, citizenship is created through exclusion, Kee though, is politically excluded from the centre of power, but it is her foetus that gets constructed as the ‘ultimate citizen’.

The foetus of Kee has been granted a ‘foetal citizenship’, which would be used for bringing biological reproduction into the picture yet again towards establishing the dominant hetero-normative order. One of the many advertisements shown in the movie says, “not getting tested for fertility is a crime”, but this diktat only applies to the legal citizens of Britain, indicating how only chosen ones are worthy of procreating. Refugees are not seen as humans; they are even denied their fundamental rights and are at the mercy of the British government. Cuarón, in the scenes post, the death of Baby Diego, reveals our own biopolitical biases, and how a particular form of life gains importance in our discourse, while other lives do not matter. Refugees are hunted down and put into cages, the Londoners do not care to shed a tear for them, but the entire city slips into sadness over Diego’s death. This apathy was seen in the case of Terri Schiavo’s Right to Die case; where the Republican Party, through its

representative power in Congress, turned this personal tragedy into a political circus. This would ultimately lead to Schiavo, who was in a 'vegetative state' and 'brain-dead', become the centre of a legal tug of war. Perhaps, the politicians were concerned by the belief surrounding the sanctity of human life. Most of the politicians who voted to intervene in Schiavo's case coincidentally federally supported the war in Iraq (Petsko 2005,2).

Perhaps their pro-life stances are limited to a Judaeo-Christian life, while lives in the Iraq War are lost almost every day. The US Army was at the centre of the Abu Ghraib Torture episode, which saw Army personnel perform a series of Human Rights violations in the forms of sexual abuse, torture and rape. India has for long seen AFSPA (Armed Forces Special Powers Act) as an essential tool to keep peace in the Northeast and Jammu & Kashmir, which has resulted in cyclical violence being carried out against the population in the guise of ensuring 'national security'. There is no second meandering around the fact that AFSPA goes against the very core of a Democracy (Langer 160,2008).

There has been a series of human rights violation under this act which gives Army personnel immunity; some of those highlighted include the Kunan Poshpora incident in Kashmir and the murder of Thangjam Manorama in Manipur. Manorama was dragged out of her house forcibly; she was tortured and shot dead on suspicion of being an underground operative (Sen 2020,1). A grave violation of fundamental rights where she was stripped of her dignity, victims like Manorama are left with no recourse and their families are portrayed as anti-nationals. While some lives, like that of the Army personnel, are seen as integral to protecting our nation, some are left at the mercy of these protectors who exercise control over their minds and bodies.

The Bexhill Camp is where the refugees are kept under strict control; the camp exists in a 'state of exception', as described by Agamben. The refugees, as Agamben points out, "... are subjected to de facto sovereignty which remains indefinite in both its temporal sense and nature, as it is situated outside the sphere of legal control". Cuarón is one of the scenes shows us how a white refugee is more concerned about standing next to a black refugee rather than the fact that the military might just put a bullet through her head. (Godamunne 2011,54). This is powerful in the sense that immigration cannot be subtracted out of race relations. Cuarón attempts to move the refugee out of the 'Homo Sacer' state through the character of Kee. Unfortunately, Kee hardly has any agency in the movie despite her pregnancy being the central focus of the narrative. The British government is on a quest to find interventions for making its population fertile yet again. On the other hand, it also promotes 'Quietus,' which is a suicide kit that seeks to erase depressed individuals from the new Britain.

Individuals who are seen as a threat to the 'biological body of the nation' have to be eliminated to ensure the nation's efficient biological functioning. The racism perpetuated against immigrants and asylum seekers highlights the Foucauldian concept of state racism as a biological problem. Foucault points out;

"Racism is bound up with the workings of a state that is obliged to use race, the elimination of races and the purification of the race to exercise its sovereign power".

It is the sovereign who now sits on judgement for deciding the value of life. During the COVID-19 Pandemic, we saw our health systems getting overwhelmed, and health workers were forced to choose whom to save. An old lady who might not live long, or a young individual who has a long life ahead and would contribute to the country's economy?

The young were allowed to live, while the old were left to die for the nation's sake. The choices, no matter how painful for many, had to be made in an extraordinary situation. Aren't these choices part of the biopolitical sphere? A young population is given preference over the old for keeping the future of the nation safe. While biopolitics has become a sponge, which is moulded to fit various theoretical ends, this framework becomes increasingly necessary with the monitoring of the population. Various interventions have looked to regulate the population at an optimal level; this stems from the Malthusian alarm, which saw China adopting the One-Child Policy and India adopting a National Programme for Family Planning.

Children of Men portrays how only a select few have everything they want and how the government is concerned with preserving the bourgeoisie. The old structure remains affixed for the privileged, while even essential services remain scarce for others. Biopower seeks to conserve this life of the privilege to maintain the established order (Miranda 2016,156). The state is in control of individual bodies of the nation and can now control the consumption patterns of the individuals. Bringing in Agamben again here, he points out that: "the law suspends itself to 'take hold' of non-citizens and 'radically erase' the legal status of the individual." In a dystopian world, capitalism dramatically increases its speed as it seeks to push it to impose itself in all forms of human interaction. Biopower takes forward late capitalism, which dominates the business sphere at the cost of the individual subject.

We see a billboard that talks about selling kidneys; which portrays how the ruling class exercises biopower for agglomerating resources from the other sections. As Theo goes through the city in a car in one scene, we see the city's ruin, with ash and grey dominating the colour palette. In the scene where Kee reveals her pregnancy to Theo, she cannot understand

why farm equipment manufacturers cannot make something that would fit the anatomy of a cow so that the udders of the car would not have to be cut while taking out milk. The scene points out that there is no consideration of life here, and the companies would be able to earn more profits by spending less, thus establishing the logic of capitalism. There is an inherent dilemma here about how biopower interacts with the late capitalistic structures to control the population's lives and serve the privileged.

Refugees under International conventions are entitled to receive protection that would grant them fundamental human rights. The UN Convention of 1951 puts out the definition of refugees as:

“A refugee is a person who has fled his/her country owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his/her nationality, and is unable or, owing to such fear is unwilling to avail himself/herself the protection of that country.”

The body of Aylan Kurdi, which washed up on the shores of Turkey, became the face of the refugee crisis that the world is facing. Millions of people had to leave their homes for escaping violence and persecution in their home countries. Countries like Syria, Somalia, Afghanistan, Yemen, and Myanmar have seen people fleeing for their lives and taking refuge in other countries. Contrary to feeling safe in the countries that these people have fled to, they have been experiencing threats in their new location, and are being treated as ‘second-class citizens’ in their adopted country. Many countries are considering banning asylum seekers and are making the process of being granted asylum overtly tricky.

Western states with economic interests are likely to look at conflict regions as a strategic leveraging point rather than accepting the refugees on humanitarian terms. Policymakers have often viewed host-state security and refugee security as totally unrelated; but both are intrinsic to each other as often impoverished states like Lebanon, which have taken in Syrian refugees, has blamed the rising inflation on the influx of Syrian refugees (Lischer 2017,12). There have been fear surrounding migrants entering countries post the 2015 Paris attacks, which have shifted focus to the question of keeping the nation safe and ensuring asylum seekers are scrutinised carefully to prevent such acts of terror.

Britain is the only existing stable order; the greatest colonising force does not go out to fend for themselves, but rather others are left at their mercy. The narrative positions refugees as the dirt of the society who are a stain on the nation which shoulders on. In one scene, Kee's water breaks on the bus leading into the Bexhill camp. One of the security guards says, looking at the pool of water below the seat, "you fucking people disgust me". Their life holds no political value for the state; they are positioned as the people responsible for the crisis, a classic case of projection where fears are projected onto someone weaker. Slavoj Zizek points out in the DVD commentary that:

"The film gives us a hyper-real version of our current reality in that what is shown in the background—a destroyed environment, suffering refugees, terrorist attacks, and other effects of global capitalism."

Both the novel and the adaption highlight that the refugees are not welcome and are unworthy but somehow become a systematic part of Britain's population. After experiencing events that have led them to flee, refugees are further dehumanised to suit the host country's needs. A new struggle has started to create their identity and assimilate into an unwelcoming world

where racism and chances of violence still loom large. In *Children of Men*, we see how apocalyptic narrative and trauma are two ideas that can be placed on the same plane where existing structures of identity and language are broken down. From the erasure of memories, new structures are constructed, but often old memories get reconstructed due to the pre-existing symptoms. Auerhahn and Dori Laub, in “Intergenerational memory” (1998), points out that:

“Massive trauma has an amorphous presence not defined by place or time and lacking a beginning, a middle, or end, and that it shapes the internal representation of the reality of several generations, becoming an unconscious organising principle passed on by parents and internalised by their children.”

Trauma is futuristic because it persists over time; it is like the spectre that haunts the individual. There also lies a future trauma; if at all, the new identity granted to the individual would remain for the time to come. Refugees and asylum seekers are often constantly oscillating between a sense of hope, fear and an increasingly unpredictable world where no one knows who would accept them. In *Children of Men*, it can be argued that Cuarón wants to shock people by creating a narrative that embodies trauma in the future tense (Kaplan 2016,82). We also see Jasper’s wife in the story, a former Photojournalist who was a dissident against the state apparatus. She now has become catatonic from the traumatic experiences, which is a commentary on the repressive state apparatus being employed to control the flow of information.

Living in a comatose state, the reason behind the condition of Jasper’s wife is revealed as the Camera pans in the room to reveal the personal belongings of Jasper. One of the news reports reads, “MI6 denies involvement in the torture of photojournalist”. Jasper protects her ‘bare

life' till the moment it gets threatened by the Fishes. The Right to Die here is decided by Jasper rather than the state responsible for her current state. She is of no use to the state's biopolitical management system and inhabits a world defined and decided by Jasper. Just like Kee, she too does not have her agency, a rare similarity between a black woman and a white woman, who are at the mercy of others.

Aesthetics, symbolism and a sense of hope

The Alfonso Cuarón directorial is an audio-visual product filled with symbols that portray the world we inhabit. Due to its lack of star power, the movie, though produced by Universal, could not make a mark at the Box Office. Nevertheless, Cuarón, with his cinematographer Emmanuel Lubezki has crafted a sophisticated world that leaves much to be deciphered for an audience. This chapter attempts to decipher some of the major symbols and imagery portrayed in the movie. It will not be wrong to say that every frame has been crafted to convey something that goes beyond that particular scene. Slavoj Žižek suggests that; the movie needs to be read concerning the foreground and background. While the foreground entertains and follows the archetype of a hero's journey, it is the background that reveals the movie's politics.

This juxtaposition of the foreground and background become an essential conjecture for understanding this neo-liberal order and critiques late capitalism. Žižek points to us that; "Theo's point of view conducts the spectator's gaze but does not substitute it; he is a prism, not a camera." Borrowing from Physics, Prism is a refractive device that splits light into its seven constituent colours. Theo becomes the prism on the same plane, allowing us for an 'amorphous' reading of the movie. In cinematography, an anamorphic lens is used instead of

a spherical lens for broadening the field of view. Lubezki employs this to push the audience into a decaying world. What follows is the bombardment of information that often might be detrimental to commercial success but provides an opportunity to analyse rare movies like this, which packs so much in a frame. Our hero, Theo, is our guide in the movie, which allows us to navigate the world of Cuarón.

Set in 2027, there has been a mysterious plague of infertility, putting the hetero-normative order and traditional kinship patterns at stake. Great Britain seeks to return to the old order; it uses coercive power and disciplinary mechanisms to keep its population docile. This has allowed it to control human bodies, women's reproductive rights and turn immigrants into criminals. The movie functions as a critique and evokes images from the atrocities committed during the Iraq war, the power granted to homeland security, turning immigrants into terrorists, and a media that is all-pervasive seeking to convey state propaganda pushing the population into a state of fear—borrowing from C.S. Pierce's linguistic concept of icon, index and symbol. We will look at some references which would fit into this classification.

a) There are direct iconic references such as the newspaper clippings being used in the scenes and the advertisement billboards spread across the city. We also see Christian iconography, which adds a theological dimension to it.

b) The indexical here in the movie can be seen through the garbage strewn on the streets, buildings that are not maintained at all, a drab colour palette, and the apathy of authorities.

c) Symbols are spread across different scenes in the film. Some include the floating pig in the background when Theo meets his cousin Nigel, the paintings and the graffiti's, which portray

meaning beyond just simple pieces of artwork.

The camera becomes rooted in the spiritual lives of the individuals as a collective as it takes you on a journey of each of these characters. The multi-layered mise-en-scene permeates beyond the frame and raises the question of the 'state of things' amidst a decaying world both metaphorically and in reality. While describing the camerawork of Lubezki, Michael Parenti says that;

“He uses it as Godardesque pedagogical tool through which one can easily read the ideological makeup of the political present through the distorted lens of the film's vision of the future.”

Children of Men has been shot in a documentary fashion, capturing raw emotions and bringing the viewers to face the despair set in 2027 (Giannitsi 2012,2). Let us look at the scene when Theo visits his cousin Nigel in the 'Ark for the Arts' and the scene inside the Ark, which would give us an idea about the 'state of things' in the London of 2027. Theo drives through the squalid parts of the city in a Bentley, reinforcing the unequal world around him. We live in this world where the rich get richer and control everything, while others are being pushed to the margins as their survival does not matter.

They contribute only a minuscule amount to the economy; their lives are not valuable. During the pandemic in India, this situation was reinforced when India had launched Vande Bharat Missions to repatriate rich Indians. In contrast, migrant workers had to walk miles for reaching their homes. The camera points to the emblem of Bentley for a second; the Bentley symbol is similar to an occult logo which symbolises divinity and power (Titov 2019,2). This can be read as portraying an arrogance surrounding the charisma of victory, a victory for the

select few who are now controlling lives at their convenience. Everything at the moment is grey and overcast, reinforcing the hopelessness of the population; as the car crosses the bridge, we see a floating pig in the air through the back window.

This again becomes visible during the meeting scene between Theo and Nigel. For those familiar with George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, Pigs symbolises Stalinist control, thus depicting the totalitarian state of the country. This can be a direct reference picked up from Pink Floyd's album 'Animals', which shows a pig suspended above the power station. As Theo enters the Ark, the space is well-lit; the walls are white and barren, just like the population of Great Britain. We see an imposing figure of Michelangelo's David, whose left calf is broken with Theo entering the scene; the dogs shout growling as if the divine has arrived for them. We see iconic paintings like the *Guernica* by Pablo Picasso, which depicts the irrationalities surrounding war, its impact on the citizens, and how it changes lives forever. The film employs pro-life imagery, which establishes the pro-life rhetoric that the government espouses.

In the movie, Kee's foetus has been given personhood while the future of Kee herself remains uncertain. In metaphorically creating a hetero-normative family, with Kee naming her baby as Dylan, a symbolic meaning gets established that Theo and Julian would remain the child's symbolic caretaker re-establishing the 'white saviour complex' yet again. Somehow globalisation seems to change everything, including the filming style; there has been a homogenisation of styles in recent times, with distinctions being harder to make out. However, Cuarón's movie *Children of Men* stands out as it moves away from the contemporary Hollywood style by employing several long takes. This is rare, as average takes are reducing over time and often, a long take mounts a challenge for the crew. While

defying new standards, Cuarón goes back to an older tradition where long takes defined the aesthetic standard (Udden 2009,27). This pushes the artistic envelope of Cuarón as a director and Lubezki as a cinematographer for taking that risk. The movie is a critique of globalisation; ironically, he does it under the banner of Hollywood.

The more action and violence are there in the scene, the longer is the take in the movie as if Cuarón wants to make a conscious effort to pull the viewers into a world where stability is just a myth, despite it being a police state. Cleverly put together, as has been revealed by Universal, these are multiple shots edited so that it appears to give the appearance of a single long take. Leaving that aspect out for a bit, the longest take in the movie is that of the battle in the Bexhill camp at the climax. It is too complicated for a long take and is, as discussed, multiple shots strung together. With average shot lengths ranging under ten seconds, anything above that can be considered a long take.

As Nigel hugs Theo, he says, “Could not save La Pieta... Smashed up before we got there.” The famous Guernica has been merely reduced to wallpaper in the background. The wounded statue of David, the neutered paintings, servants who do not have their agency, the dogs howling and the pig floating above the power station in the background all combine to portray a world that is in despair. Theo asks Nigel, “What keeps you going?” Nigel pauses and answers, “You know what it is, Theo, I just do not think about it.” The movie can be read through a religious lens as well, as it brings in the Christian messianic theology of the ‘Son of Man’ who is entrusted with the responsibility for becoming the saviour in a global apocalypse. The messianic role of Theo seeks to save Kee from the wrath of humanity while ironically ensuring the future of humanity.

He uses non-violent means to get through the unfamiliar surroundings he has been pushed into. There are no guns in his back pocket, but our figurative hero passes through all difficulties and resurrects himself at the end. In the scene when Theo and Kee leave a building in the Bexhill camp, we see a herd of sheep passing through in front of them, pointing to the image of Jesus as a shepherd (Schwartzman 2009,3). The group Fishes, which want to use Kee's baby to get political legitimacy, the name can be read as a play on the Christian fish icon. Steve Vineberg interprets the character of Kee as; "an earthbound version of Virgin Mary, carrying the miracle child of an unborn father." The messianism is present across other characters meant to be sacrificed like pawns for the divine to fulfil his role of saving humanity. Be it Julian, the leader of Fishes who thrusts Theo into this unknown world or Jasper, who is the epitome of counter-culture in the movie. The final scene sets up an image of a distant ship amidst a misty sky where we see the blinking yellow light coming from the buoy, resembling the light we saw from the window of Theo's room.

Cuaron creates a narrative that richly references reality, there are cross-references to spiritual themes as we looked at here, but an overarching reference would be T.S. Elliot's "The Waste Land". The Waste Land brings into perspective a world where people lead an unhappy life. There are some common themes between birth and rebirth, religion, nihilism (a belief that most things in this world are meaningless and people live in a perpetual dilemma of existence) and Elliot's projection that history is a repeating cycle in itself (Amago 2010,3). A striking similarity comes out at the end, as both conclude by invoking the Upanishads. Upanishads are the central texts of 'Sanatan Dharma', as we know it, which expounds the thematic basis of the Vedas forming the core of Vedantic Philosophy. Religious references used in the movie points to a revival of hope and a sense of agency in a dystopian world.

Despite a bleak depiction of the present and the future, there seems to be some hopeful mediation in the narrative (Amago 2010,2). We see how Theo transforms from a disillusioned bureaucrat to god's hero in the narrative. The symbolic journey comes a full circle, and justice is done to Theo's sacrifice in the end, as Kee names her baby Dylan. The cinematic landscape thus brings in the sense of hope for the world, which has been pushed into obscurity for long. Kee's baby can be seen as a hope for keeping the future of humanity in place while ensuring the continuity of the nation-state.

We hear 'Fragments of Prayer' playing in scenes representing a sense of life, intimacy and hope. The sound design by John Taverner reflects grief and a transcendental hope of humanity which evokes a potential change in the times to come (Whittington 2011,5). However, the question remains, what kind of hope can be associated with the birth of a child in a decaying world? This is a moment of contradiction, as the movie ultimately remains silent on this (Davidson 2007,2). A world that is so unsure of itself that social movements for bringing a change have become a thing of the past. The population remains so docile that fighting for political change is the last thing on their minds. *Children of Men* seeks to underpin this contradiction between hope in the narrative and movements for changing the world. Would a change halt the destructive momentum of the world order? There is an ambivalent message of hope in the narrative, starting from religious references to an inherent dilemma for questioning the established order.

Propaganda and the creation of the world of surveillance

It is challenging to define propaganda in a simple understanding of things; we need to understand that propaganda is not essentially negative. However, it has a largely negative

connotation associated with it, but if we look at the awareness campaigns launched during COVID-19 or even commercials that raise awareness, propaganda can have a positive impact. Throughout history, it has been through the population's support that policies have held higher stead (Macdonald 2006,45). The support is often brought in through subversive campaigns, which draw on nationalistic fervour. The Supreme Court of India in 2016, on a petition, made it mandatory for the National Anthem to be played in Cinema halls, and every cinemagoer had to stand up for the same. However, this judgement was reversed in 2017, where the Supreme court observed that there was no need to stand up for the National Anthem in theatres, just for the sake of proving one's patriotism (FP Staff 2017,1). The U-turn was a welcome move that took moral policing out of the equation and portrayed that patriotism cannot be shoved down the throats of the population. During the 20th Century, controlling people's minds became critical for maintaining the flow of information.

Propaganda has been an integral part of controlling information flow, especially in communist nations of China and the former Soviet Union. The word came into perspective during the rise of Nazis in Germany and the rise of Communism under Joseph Stalin in Russia. Going back into history, the favourite word of the 'woke' generation developed at the Propaganda Palace in Rome (Sala 2020,1). The word comes from the Latin *propagare*, which means to spread or propagate. As we see again here that propaganda does not have a dark or negative meaning.

The messaging in *Children of Men* is centralised and comes from the centre of power, ensuring consistency and maintaining the status quo. The status quo here is a police state, which pushes immigrants to the margins and conceals the despair of Great Britain through advertisements. We see messaging spread all around on walls and billboards, which

bombards the population. Images, symbols and messages spread around play an essential role in pushing the people into a state of docility. We see in the movie how each character almost lives in a perpetual state of despair; death is inevitable, and life for them will never be the same.

Suspicious? Report All Illegal Immigrants; AVOIDING FERTILITY TESTS IS A CRIME; Quietus: I am Free to Decide My Destiny; INFERTILITY IS GOD'S PUNISHMENT; KIDNEY 3000 pounds INSTANT CASH. These are some of the messages we see in the movie, which showcases the socio-political reality of Great Britain and how it remains the only nation that seems to shoulder on while the world is in anarchy. One is also able to understand the xenophobic sentiments and the anti-immigrant rhetoric clearly. Right at the beginning, we see headlines like Day 1,000 of the Siege of Seattle; the deportation of illegal immigrants will continue...

The Homeland Security, bombs going off at any time, and a police-state with an all-pervasive media stoke fear amongst the population, justifying the work being done by the authorities. No one raises a finger, as they feel it is for the larger good. We see Fishes emerging as a challenge to the established order and how Kee, a pregnant immigrant, becomes a symbol for returning to the old hetero-normative order. The imagery in the movie is recognisable, and Cuarón deliberately strikes our consciousness, placing the movie closer to reality (Wolmart 2017,2).

Politicians have been lying with some impunity for decades now; regimes work on repetition and distraction, away from the crisis of humanity (Lichfield 2017,1). Well, I do not need to bring in an analogy here; the Indian government's response to the second wave of infections

that saw pyres burning all over the country sums it up. It was denial and distraction, which was employed to escape the crisis. One might call them heartless, but it is power at the centre of everything in a neo-liberal world. Gideon Lichfield describes the power of populism in its “ability to combine 20th Century propaganda techniques with 21st Century technology.” Like the recommendation system of Netflix and YouTube, which pushes users into an echo chamber, a docile population that we see in *Children of Men* gets pushed into an illusory world of stability. The government in the movie claims control by way of culture and a sense of unified identity. Who is British now? The white man with blue eyes or the black man who does not fit the quintessential British standards. It seeks to manipulate the ideas and views of its people, using the power to construct public opinion. The government glorifies marginality and exclusion; those who report immigrants are seen as the true patriots.

The elite lives in a closed township with all luxuries available to them away from the dying population out there. Over time, studies done in the context of reporting during times of war in the USA and Great Britain have pointed out that; “the media acts as a faithful servant to the state, not just in autocratic but also in democratic regimes (Goddard et al. 2008,11).

Punishments have changed from physical infliction to psychological warfare, which transforms our minds; often, we do not even realise it. We have moved away from a world of ‘sovereign power’ to one of ‘disciplinary power’, which is being done by monitoring the population. Disciplinary power is not limited to the terminal forms we observe as institutions imposing rules on us, but it exists in forms we often do not realise.

We regulate our behaviours contextually as if we are being watched, dressing up for school or picking up our books to study. These interactions might seem trivial, but it is necessary to look at these daily interactions as essential instances of power relations to understand how

each character in *Children of Men* functions. The fear of Theo that he would fail to take the baby and Kee to safety or even the government's paranoia that someone would challenge them. The emergence of Nazi propaganda can be traced back to Hitler's autobiography *Mein Kampf*, in which Hitler says, "the first duty of the propagandist is to win over people.... Select and train men who will be capable of carrying on the propaganda." Nazi propaganda is a classic case where existing stereotypes and biases of the German population was targeted.

This turned into a potent tool and thus began the marginalisation of the Jews, Gypsies, Communists, Homosexuals, and others seen as inferior to the Aryan race. Explicit propaganda was employed, portraying Jews, Gypsies and other communities who did not fit into the Aryan standards as fat, ugly, and people who could side by the enemies during the time of war. Nazis successfully created a clustering illusion by playing with the inherent biases of the human mind wherein people would suspect the Jews and others as enemies of the Reich (Narayanswami 2011,2). A paradigm thus gets established where Aryans are the superior race, and others are inferior, unfit for survival in this great Aryan world. Bringing in *Children of Men* here now, we saw how the authorities employed anti-immigrant rhetoric in creating the perfect British nation.

The immigrants are seen as the scum of the society, unfit to even survive and far away from even getting basic rights. Authorities successfully exploit biases in the population, wherein we see no one reacting when they see immigrants being kept in cages. Cuarón, in the movie, dehumanises them to an extent that the Londoners do not even want to look at them. Blamed for the crisis, immigrants serve as a punching bag for the authorities to land one blame after another.

What strikes me in the movie are the advertisements, which shows a dialectic between hope and hopelessness. Some advertisements like dresses for pet dogs and greyhound racing serve to divert people's attention from the crisis surrounding them. We see how different government entities starting from Homeland security to the foreign office, put out advertisements asking the population not to avoid fertility tests and report all illegal immigrants. While one might see advertisements as something, not much of concern, but when one is bombarded with the same images left, right and centre somewhere, a sense of conformity emerges. The persuasive power of advertisements follows a timely routine, and they do not disappear, making us crave that particular experience.

We want to lead that specific life by being the handsome man or the beautiful girl desired by all. The government-sponsored suicide kit 'Quietus' gets advertised as if it gives agency to the people for deciding their own life. The logo is designed like the Christian cross as if deciding to take your life has been approved by Jesus himself. In a world, which is grey and devoid of all forms of hope, happiness is being sold in a pill. One particular advertisement that caught my eye is Niagra, which provides 'The Ultimate Climax'. Niagra, a deliberate wordplay on Viagra, which is associated with sexual stimulation. An ironic experience in an infertile world, where sexual intercourse is now just a recreational activity.

Surveillance has always been present in our society, just that we are not always aware that someone is watching us (Manokha 2018,220). Giddens, who, while making observations about surveillance, sees it as: "constitutive of modernity alongside the advent of capitalistic enterprises". Scholars have used Foucault's conception of the 'Panopticon', which was, in turn, borrowed from Jeremy Bentham. 'Panopticon' serves as an example of diffused power that does not require any form of agency to be enforced. The contemporary means of

surveillance has rendered it impossible for a person to break away from it. Everything is stored now in some form or the other and can be retrieved at any point in time. In *Children of Men*, we see the construction of utopian complexes where everything seems jolly; life flows with a sense of normalcy. However, this utopian bubble bursts as Theo meets Nigel and a sense of cascading loneliness sets across despite the luxuries around. These worlds are extensively controlled, shielded away from the outside world. Surveillance often gets associated with metropolitan settings where people are busy and do not care much about what is happening around them, just like Theo.

An intricate relationship ensues between the space, monitoring, and the decaying environment (Marks 2015,84). Environmental degradation is observed through the perpetual smog in the sky. There is a sense of hierarchy here as the rich make their utopian enclaves while others continue living in the dystopian world. While this can be seen as a loss of freedom and agency, the characters are happy to inhabit this world where the only respite is materialism. Walls, boundaries and the spaces which are created are an essential component for preserving the existing order. Though the country is on its last legs, it heavily militarises its borders to maintain illusory stability and shield itself from incoming refugees. The island is turned into a military fortress. Refugees who pass these borders are pushed into cages, bringing in the imagery of children kept in cages at the US-Mexico border or even the Nazi concentration camps. “Surveillance underpins this ‘rewilding of the earth, for ‘every animal has been tagged, and now they were showing up on screens as patterns of coloured dots.” (Marks 2015,163).

Works like *Children of Men* and *The Handmaid’s Tale* show surveillance as a force of oppression, while like the quote above, surveillance can also play an active role in saving the

environment from degradation. Be it Offred in *The Handmaid's Tale* or Theo in *Children of Men*, both emerge from a period of relative peace and are now placed in this dystopian world. Both characters make sacrifices as they slowly break away from the extensive surveillance networks that sustain this dystopian world. We inhabit a world of surveillance capitalism where capitalists have been aggressively asserting their independence. In a world of totalitarianism, as we see in Cuarón's *Children of Men*, the tyrant gets placed outside the sphere of humanity and treats others as insignificant beings.

Contemporary world events and referencing *The Handmaid's Tale*

Alfonso Cuarón's *Children of Men* creates a fictional world that eerily feels closer to reality; set in 2027, the film is a commentary of our present world and its manifestations. Mass migration became an international issue with the Syrian refugee crisis, and this crisis would soon expand beyond the middle-east. As we looked at, refugees are not always driven by conflicts in the countries; climate change too has forced people to find new homes. The movie appears clumsy to the eyes, but the messaging is right there for us to see. Rising xenophobic sentiments against the immigrants, militarisation of borders, a world where state propaganda is used through an all-pervasive media, surveillance over the population and refugees being packed into cages like sardines. Sounds a bit familiar?

Events around the world have shaped to reflect the narrative of Cuarón, a pure co-incidence, not really. The movie uses the warning signs which could be seen worldwide to create the narrative, and it feels like the world we inhabit (Barber 2016,2). It becomes hard to watch, more so during the pandemic where authoritarian tendencies are on the rise. The pandemic has proved as a perfect cover for leaders to get more power and extend their influence.

Amartya Sen, in his speech, while receiving the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade, emphasised that; “the world is facing a pandemic of authoritarianism”. Hungary emerged as an example of the perfect Post-Soviet Democracy, but things changed with Viktor Orban taking power in 2010. The country became the first victim of pandemic authoritarianism. On 30th March 2020, Orban won the approval of a decree in the Parliament, which allowed him to rule the country indefinitely (Shattuck 2020,1).

Sounds similar to Xi Jinping, who can now rule China till his death, as the top brass of the Communist Party Congress removed the two-term limit on the President. China is coercively taking over Hong Kong, which had observed autonomy away from the pervasive Chinese modes of surveillance and politics. These events point out how crises exacerbate authoritarian tendencies, which get legitimised in the public sphere. People are turned into mere spectators in this power mongering exercise, where there is no way one can express their voices. Else, one would end up just like Jasper’s wife, who lives in a comatose state after being assaulted by the state for questioning those in power. So much for keeping stability and ensuring national security, in *Children of Men*, we observe two overarching themes: infertility and pushing the ‘others’ to the margins of a dominant white British order.

Arizona in the US has seen extensive illegal immigration, with immigrants crossing over from Mexico into the state. In response to this came Arizona’s law SB1070, which sought to drive out illegal immigrants out of the state, a job that the federal governments over the years had failed to do (Lexington 2010,2). Over the past two decades, this has been happening where states have decided to take up the mantle to flush out illegal immigrants despite the power being exclusively limited to the Federal government. The law SB 1070, which Governor Jan Brewer signed on 23rd April 2010, expanded the role of officers in immigration.

Like we saw in *Children of Men*, the law has the provision of criminalising even a 'just citizen' if they are found to be harbouring an illegal immigrant even unknowingly. State-level regulations surrounding immigration are not a new phenomenon, but such pervasive ordinances are a relatively recent phenomenon.

Pushing refugees into cages, or in the last scene where we see Theo and Kee making their way through the Bexhill camp. One might link this to the Nazi Concentration camps, pushing children into cages on the US-Mexico Border and, most significantly, the Abu Ghraib episode during the US invasion of Iraq. Close to fifty thousand men and women were pushed into the prison, which was in a deplorable state of affairs and soon enough, began a series of human rights abuse which had carefully been shielded for quite some time. Only after images from the prison got leaked, one realised the gravity of what had just transpired, the great liberating power of America, was now being questioned in the international sphere.

Now, let us come to the NRC (National Register of Citizens), which was first implemented in Assam, and the BJP made promises to implement it across the country. This started the CAA-NRC protests, which in some places like Jamia Milia Islamia and Jawaharlal Nehru University was met with state-sponsored violence on students. Here, we will look at NRC in the context of Assam and how identities become a playground for creating political legitimacy.

Like *Children of Men*, *The Handmaid's Tale* is a dystopian drama about the world that gets separated from political freedom. In the Republic of Gilead, the Christian rule creates a world of fear through extensive surveillance (Nystrom 2012,2). In the dystopian world of Gilead and the city of London, subjects are being watched, and this becomes a central feature that

allows those in power to maintain order. Gilead and the heavily militarised Great Britain become a prison for both the soul and body; thus, the individuals are physically and mentally stuck in this world.

Picking up from here, we see how both worlds here are in a degenerative state; wherein human rights are a thing of the past. While we see Offred speaking in soliloquies, we know the state of Gilead through her perspective. Unlike, Offred who is stuck as a handmaid for Commander Fred and is under extensive surveillance. Theo is relatively free from the oppressive patriarchal structures that Offred faces as he is the 'white man' entrusted with fulfilling the larger purpose.

Gilead is governed based on religious dogmatism and uses the bible as a tool for enforcing the word of God. Who knows if the entire bible has been modified to suit the needs of the regime? One particular line which is used as a justification for the role of the Handmaid's in Gilead is: "and she said, Behold my maid Bilhah, go in unto her; and she shall bear upon my knees, that I may also have children by her." (Genesis 30:1-3). Offred and the commander's wife Serena Joy would link hands in a weird exercise which has been given a biblical significance; hearing from Offred, we realise that it is "supposed to signify that we are of one flesh, one being."

Coming back to Children of Men, some of the significant biblical references include the character of Theo and the larger purpose he is supposed to fulfil for saving humanity. Kee carries the symbol of human civilisation, a hope for returning to the old order. She becomes the new Virgin Mary, a symbol that will bring in abundance in a crumbling world. The title of Cuarón's movie Children of Men has been borrowed from the Psalm, which reads like:

“Thou turnest man to destruction; and sayest, Return, ye children of men” (Psalm 90:3). The theme of infertility is a major one in both the adaptations, in *Children of Men*, where everyone except Kee is infertile. Unlike *The Handmaid’s Tale*, where the handmaids remain the only fertile ones in the republic. These handmaids are assigned to each commander, who would bear babies for the commander and his wife.

One can now understand the synthesis of the name Offred (a play on the word offered), which means offered to Fred Waterford, the commander. Both the adaptations, represents oppressive forces, surveillance mechanisms, power politics, gendered oppression in a modern form, which undermines the notion of equality and how keeping a population docile becomes a necessity to hold power in a crumbling world. The handmaids in *The Handmaid’s Tale* are often warned:

“Modesty is invisibility... never forget it. To be seen is to be... her voice trembled...penetrated. What you must be, girls are impenetrable.”

The private sphere of the individuals has been turned into an all-pervasive space in a world that breeds surveillance. Spaces have been chalked out for the privileged, but in turn, they are supposed to sacrifice their autonomy and hand it over to the state. As scholars have pointed out, *Children of Men* have serious problems surrounding gender, race, and the politics of the population. There are numerous gaps to be filled in the narrative, which Cuarón seeks to showcase, but it also allows one to understand world politics and sensitive issues through different lenses. We cannot expect objectivity in imagination inspired by actual events; we are all biased in some way or the other. Subjectivity and objectivity are merely two sides of the same coin. Surprisingly, unlike *The Handmaid’s Tale*, which portrays sexual intercourse as an essential juncture of power relations in Gilead, *Children of Men*, whose primary theme

is fertility and reproductive politics, is devoid of sex. This probably reflects the social conservatism of its people, or a rather disbelief that sexual intercourse will not yield us our future heir anymore.

CHAPTER 4- RESULTS AND INTERPRETATION

We looked at *Children of Men* and how Cuarón, through his narrative, asks uncomfortable questions about the world we inhabit. Its commentary on the historical events has allowed us to link it to different circumstances while creating a framework for understanding the world we inhabit now. Power is not exercised through a Juridico-Discursive understanding; it manifests all around in countless ways that we often do not consciously realise.

Advancements in medical technology have made the human population powerful, and thus, emerges the politics of population and reproductive politics. Treat these frameworks like a sponge, which would allow us to explain many of the policy decisions starting from the One-Child Policy in China to family planning programmes in India.

Freedom is a myth, and even those inhabiting the upper echelons of society live in a sense of blind privilege. In *Children of Men*, we see the city of London, which is in ruins, but the rich will find their way. The privileged have created their own spaces, shielding themselves from the despair outside. The Great Britain of 2027 is a society where immigrants are treated like cockroaches and are at the centre of the blame game. Taking the example of Assam, successive governments have blamed Bengali Muslims for the poor economic condition of the state. We also saw how the movie needs to be read through the character's motivations, the background and the various references it seeks to point out.

One might carefully observe that how each frame takes you beyond it and forces one to feel claustrophobic at points. There are biblical references aplenty throughout the movie. Our hero Theo; is named after the Greek for God, which already signifies the divine journey that Theo is about to undertake. The irony here in the narrative is how the erstwhile colonial power is

going through a steady decline. There is some form of poetic justice and respite for the post-colonial in the narrative. Certain biases are visible in the narrative; this includes: keeping the conception of a hetero-normative family as a symbol for returning to the old order; the post-colonial narrative also falls flat as Kee, the Black African woman, has hardly any agency. However, these are just interpretations, and there might be deliberate reasons on the part of Cuarón in making those choices. There has been an explosion of Post-Apocalyptic Cinema in recent times; however, *Children of Men* is not your futuristic *Blade Runner* narrative but an anti-*Blade Runner* narrative where a world close to reality gets portrayed through different lenses.

We are close to the world on the brink, waiting to erupt as we live through a pandemic. These unprecedented times have taken millions of lives around the globe and has changed the conception of a global world. The pandemic has also allowed politicians to control the population and grant them greater legitimacy in the world power structure. There has been a growing impetus towards developing digital technologies which would enable governments to track the movements of their population and sniff out dissent on social media. The future is shaping to take precedence in the digital space, wherein reproductive politics in some countries will take centre stage and leave us with more questions than answers in the current schema of things.

CHAPTER 5- CONCLUSION

Children of Men is a telling commentary on illegal immigration, the rise of neo-conservative regimes, totalitarianism, and the intersectionality of politics and biology. Cuarón paints a picture of reality we see now; the Syrian refugee crisis, rise in resentment against multiculturalism in Scandinavian countries, the US-Mexican crisis accentuated by the rise of leaders like Donald Trump seeking to seal borders and close America to immigrants, the other rhetoric though which can be challenged here is the very fact that the United States as a country itself has been built on immigration. The movie raises uncomfortable questions about power, morality, and how immigrants are seen as perpetrators.

Unfortunately, we live in a world that seems eerily similar to what Cuarón has created in the movie. This can be superimposed during the pandemic, where totalitarian tendencies have come to the fore amidst a health emergency. The authoritarian tendencies are not limited to taking power, but it is also about keeping the population under control by constant surveillance. Power and the question of the nation-state are interrelated in a Westphalian order. As the scope of technology expands, so would governments transform into someone who has their eyes everywhere, as if they are looking after you. There would always be a common reason, to keep us safe and maintain national security. We have lived through a relatively peaceful period in the 21st Century, but as resources get exhausted, and the pandemic raises inequities across countries. There will be a rush of refugees from conflict areas, and resources being owned by the few would create crevices in the established social order.

Things have never been as complicated as they are now; as the world deals with an

unprecedented crisis, structures are slowly getting eroded. Reproductive politics, control over bodies and rights in a digital sphere has turned into a battleground. In one of the scenes, Theo, while talking about hope, points out, “I can’t remember when I last had any hope, and I certainly can’t remember when anyone else did either. Because, since women stopped being able to have babies, what’s left to hope for?”

The narrative of *Children of Men* is an ironic one about Great Britain. However, while it seeks to critique colonisation and globalisation, it still falls into the trap of putting the white characters on a pedestal. The title of the movie is in itself an irony, ‘Children of Men’, men cannot bear children, but the title is inspired by a biblical reference as we had seen before and probably tries to point out how inherently patriarchal even our biblical references are. A quote from film critic Roger Ebert in his review about the movie sums the impact of something like *Children of Men*; he tells us; “Cuaron fulfils the promise of futuristic fiction; characters ... look just like today, except tired and shabby...the film serves as a cautionary warning. The only thing we will have to fear in the future, we learn, is the past itself. Our past. Ourselves.”

APPENDIX

Let us look at some statistical data from various sources which will allow us to understand the existing crisis.

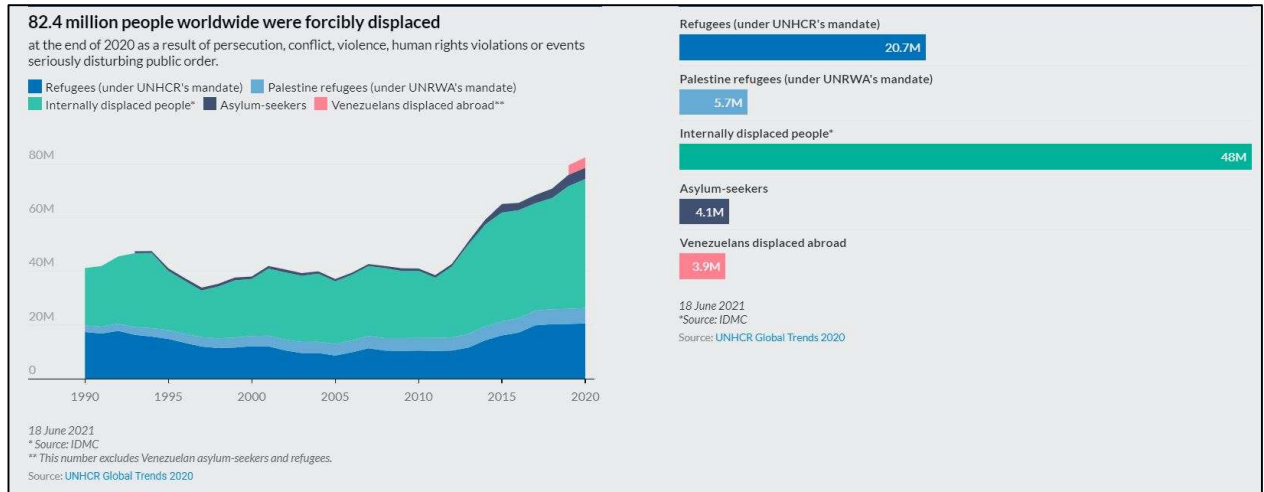


Image source: Trends, UNHCR Global. *Figures at a Glance*. UNHCR, 2020.

<https://www.unhcr.org/figures-at-a-glance.html>.

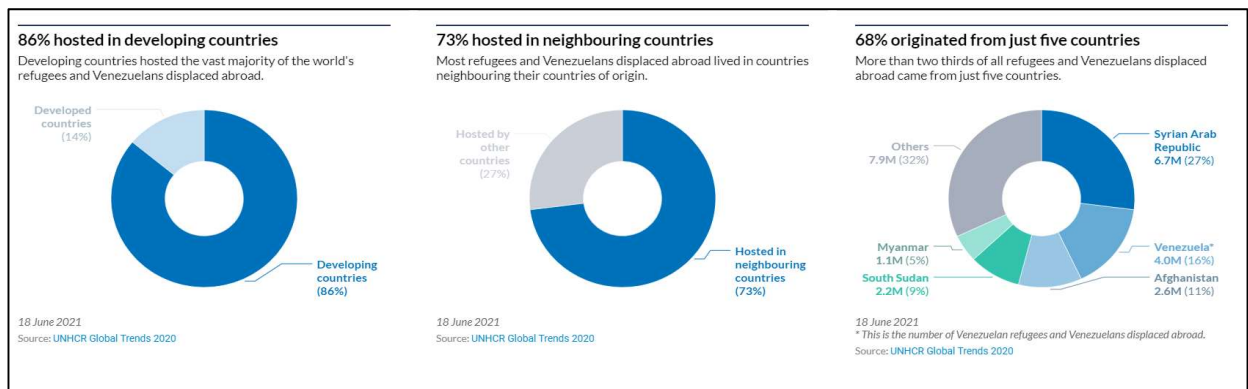


Image source: Trends, UNHCR Global. *Figures at a Glance*. UNHCR, 2020.

<https://www.unhcr.org/figures-at-a-glance.html>.

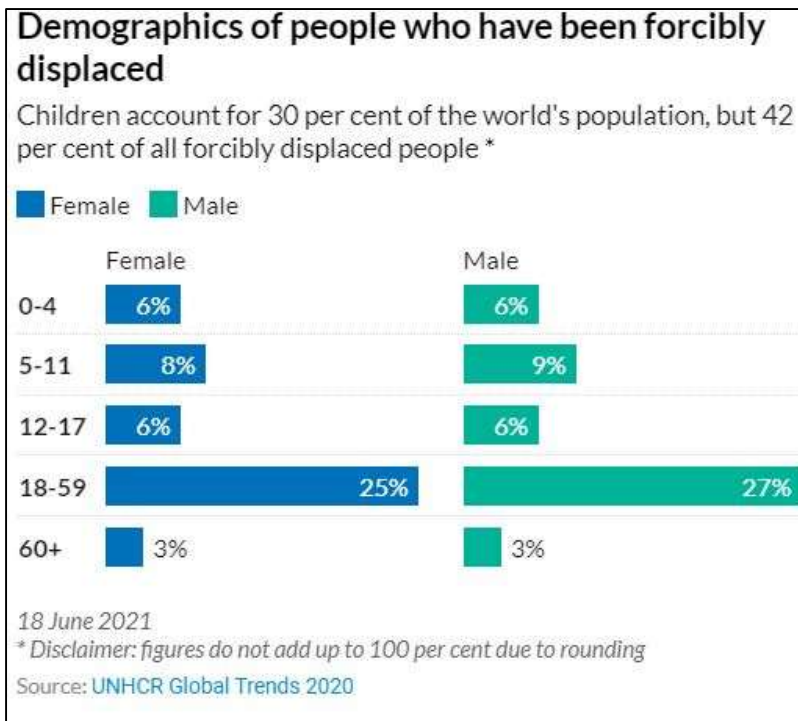


Image source: Trends, UNHCR Global. *Figures at a Glance*. UNHCR, 2020.

<https://www.unhcr.org/figures-at-a-glance.html>.

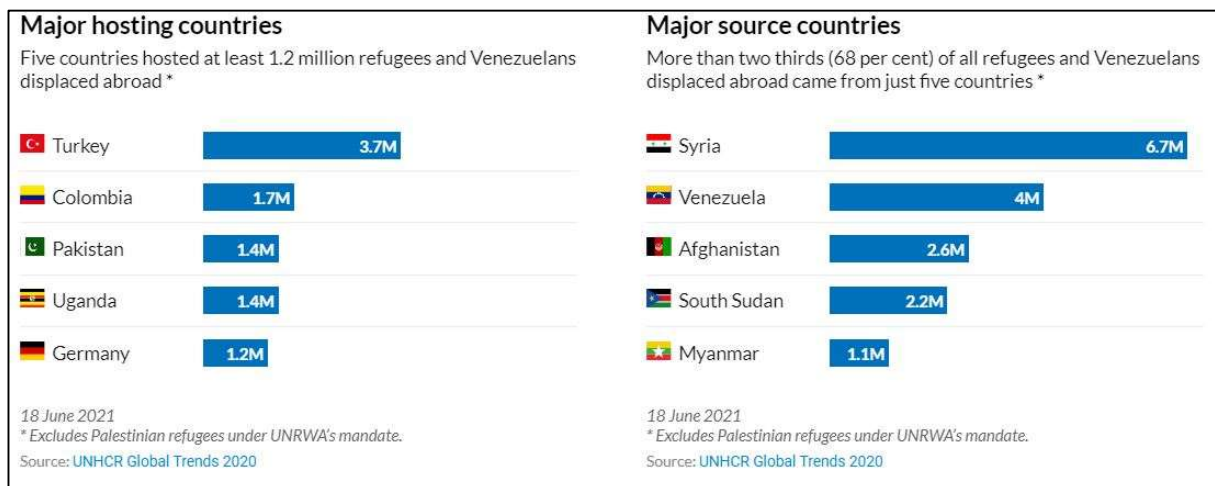


Image source: Trends, UNHCR Global. *Figures at a Glance*. UNHCR, 2020.

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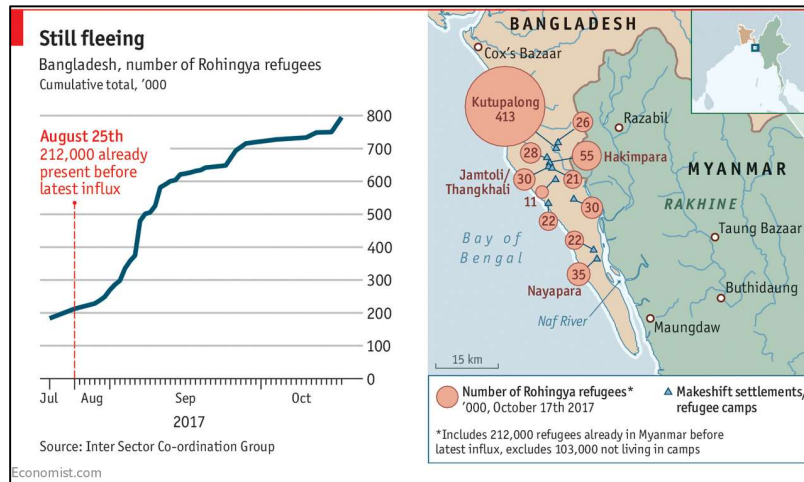


Image source: Chart, Daily. *The Flow of Rohingya Refugees into Bangladesh Shows No Sign of Abating*. The Economist, 2017. <https://www.economist.com/graphic-detail/2017/10/19/the-flow-of-rohingya-refugees-into-bangladesh-shows-no-sign-of-abating>.

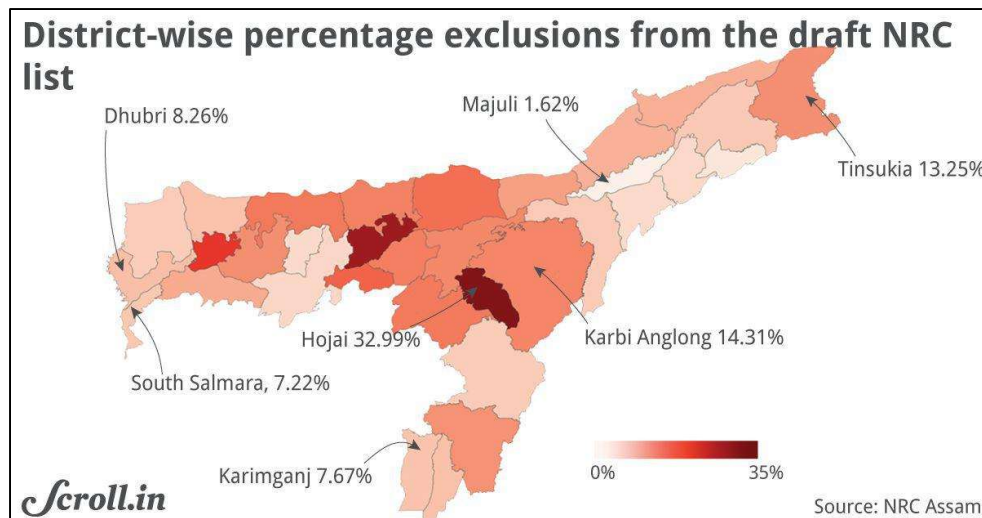


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Image source: Kalita, Prabin. *19 Lakh Left out, Final Assam NRC Elicits Anger & Sense of Betrayal*. The Times of India, September 1, 2019.

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