

# Sojourners' Dystopia in P. D. James's *The Children of Men*

## P. D. James'in *İnsanlığın Çocukları* Başlıklı Eserinde Göçmenlerin Distopik Dünyası

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### Abstract

This article intends to explore different portrayals of sojourners in P.D. James's 1992 novel, *The Children of Men*, and Alfonso Cuarón's 2006 film adaptation with the same title. Through their divergent perspectives on life and social anxieties within a dystopian world, these works offer unique insights into the fear of depopulation. The issue of mass infertility and the plight of people living under a totalitarian government stands at the center of each narrative. Also, in both works, the immigrants are brought to the UK to do various undesirable and laborious work, and they do not have any rights and civil existence in society. The immigrant issue occupies a place in both the novel and the film with varying degrees of importance. Thus, the article aims to explore how the portrayal of immigrants and their agency in each narrative change. Concisely, while the novel centers on mass infertility and rapid population decline, the film amplifies the plight and role of immigrants in a depopulating world. The article argues that this shift in focus may reflect the intensified anxieties surrounding the escalating human mobility on a global scale.

**Keywords:** Mass Infertility, Depopulation, Immigrants, *The Children of Men*, P. D. James, Alfonso Cuarón

### Öz

Bu makale, P. D. James'in 1992 tarihli romanı *The Children of Men* ile Alfonso Cuarón'un 2006 tarihli film uyarlamasında göçmenlerin farklı temsillerini incelemeyi amaçlar. Bu eserler, distopik bir dünyada yaşam, toplumsal kaygılar, nüfus azalmasının yarattığı endişe ve göçmen deneyimine dair birbirinden farklı bakış açıları sunar. Her iki anlatının merkezinde de kitlesel kısırlık sorunu ve totaliter bir hükümet altında hayatlarını sürdüren insanların yaşantısı vardır. Aynı şekilde, iki anlatıda da göçmenler Birleşik Krallık'a çeşitli hizmet işleri yapmak için getirilir ve toplumda hiçbir hak ve insani varlığa sahip değildirler. Göçmen sorununa romanda ve film uyarlamasında farklı ağırlıklarda yer verilmiştir. Bu makale, her iki anlatıda da göçmen meselesinin nasıl ele alındığına değinmeyi amaçlar. Kısaca, roman kitlesel kısırlık ve nüfusun hızlı azalmasına daha çok odaklanırken, film göçmenlerin içinde bulunduğu durumu ve oynadığı merkezi rolü daha ön plana çıkarır. Makale, roman ve filmdeki bu odak kaymasının nedeninin dünya çapında artan insan hareketliliği nedeniyle yükselen kaygılar ile açıklanabileceğini ileri sürer.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Kitlesel Kısırlık, Nüfus Azalması, Göçmenler, *İnsanlığın Çocukları*, P. D. James, Alfonso Cuarón

Received/Geliş Tarihi 16.09.2024  
Revision/Revizyon Tarihi 27.01.2025  
Accepted/Kabul Tarihi 11.02.2025  
Publication Date/Yayın Tarihi 25.06.2025

### Cite this article:

Coşar Çelik, S. (2025). Sojourners' Dystopia in P. D. James's *The Children of Men*. *Journal of Literature and Humanities*, 74, 63-72.

### Atıf:

Coşar Çelik, S. (2025). P. D. James'in *İnsanlığın Çocukları* Başlıklı Eserinde Göçmenlerin Distopik Dünyası. *Edebiyat ve Beşeri Bilimler Dergisi*, 74, 63-72.



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## Introduction

This article explores how attitudes towards immigrants in P. D. James's *The Children of Men* (1992) and its film adaptation by Alfonso Cuarón (2006) diverge, presenting diverse viewpoints on communal fears in a dystopian world. The central focus of the article is on how the level of bleakness in the dystopian worlds pictured in the novel and its movie adaptation differs, leading to contrasting portrayals of the struggles and agency of immigrants. To begin with, the dystopic emphasis portrayed in the novel and the movie adaptation is different. While the novel centralizes mass infertility and rapid population decline, the movie adaptation concentrates more on the situation and role of immigrants in times of social collapse. This article suggests that the contrasting bleakness in the two versions might be explained by the increased immigration flow in the postmillennial period.

James's *The Children of Men* pictures a futuristic dystopian England, where males cannot reproduce, ceremonial euthanasia called Quietus is enforced, prisoners are sent to a penal island and treated inhumanly, immigrants (referred to as 'sojourners' in the novel) are exploited and not offered any civil human rights. At the crux of the novel stands the issue of unexplained mass infertility which puts humans in danger of extinction. Even the opening scene gives the impression that humans are doomed to disappear as the novel opens with the death of the last human being born on earth. Science cannot offer any answers as to what has caused this global mass infertility. Depopulation is considered inevitable in the near future and the remnant civilization would be a totalitarian governance. In the novel, the government in the UK does not allow citizens' agency and choice over their lives. Mass infertility is considered the biggest threat to the continuation of humankind; that is why coercive reproductive measures are implemented. Only healthy males and females must go through regular checkups for signs of fertility. The novel also presents signs of resistance as a clandestine group of dissenters, The Five Fishes, secretly makes plans to overthrow the government.

Due to the centrality of the issues of mass infertility, fear of human extinction and strict state regulations regarding human reproduction, *The Children of Men* has been studied by many scholars in relation to biopower and biopolitics. Especially the movie "has inspired an impressive body of critical scholarship, the great majority of which reads the film as a critique of globalization through the lens of biopolitics" (Wilson, 2016, p. 156). After touching on this centralized dystopian narrative in the next section, this study will focus on the treatment and function of sojourners who are imported "from less affluent countries to do . . . dirty work, clean the sewers, clear away the rubbish, look after the incontinent, the aged" (James, 2000, p. 83). The deliberate choice of wording is important here. In the novel, these people are intentionally called "sojourners"<sup>1</sup>. In times when human mobility is at its highest, boundary crossers are given different names based on the reason for their move, most commonly as immigrants, refugees, and sojourners. The words immigrant and refugee are generally used interchangeably, but they have different meanings. An immigrant is a person who moves to a country permanently with the intention of settling there. The move here is voluntary. However, refugees flee their countries due to war, violence or human rights violations. While immigrants have legal status and civil rights, refugees are granted protection by the host country. In a nutshell, the main difference between an immigrant and a refugee is the reason for their migration. Different from these two, "sojourners are individuals who are in the new environment temporarily for a specific purpose (e.g. study, work, business) and often for a specific length of time (e.g. several days, months, years). When they arrive in the new environment, they already plan to return to their home country or go on to another destination at some point" (Jackson, 2014, p. 183). In the novel, the term 'sojourners' emphasizes the temporary and functional nature of their stay. Referring to them as immigrants or refugees would suggest legal status, requiring the government to uphold certain rights and protections. However, the reality depicted in *The Children of Men* contradicts this expectation:

*We take the best and then chuck them back when they are no longer wanted. And who gets them? Not the people who need them most. The Council and their friends. And who looks after the foreign Omegas when they're here? They work for a pittance, they live in camps, the women separate from the men. We don't even give them citizenship; it's a form of legalized slavery. (2000, p. 84)*

Their living conditions in camps, with women separated from men, suggest a lack of basic human dignity. The term "legalized slavery" is a powerful and provocative choice, putting the whole blame on the totalitarian UK government. It serves to underscore the extreme exploitation and oppression experienced by the sojourners. Thus, the passage implies that the government is aware of and even complicit in the mistreatment of the sojourners.

The novel depicts a dystopia in which sojourners are marginalized and silenced. They are treated considerably differently in the movie adaptation of the novel. The film diverges from the novel by placing a greater emphasis on the inhuman

<sup>1</sup> Throughout this paper, the terms immigrant and sojourner will both be used dependent on context to refer to the people who migrated to the UK. Though this word choice is elaborated on in the paper in a detailed way, it should be noted here that the word 'sojourners' has been deliberately used in the novel to emphasize the temporariness of immigrants while in the movie they are referred to as immigrants.

treatment of immigrants. The novel centralizes the issue of mass infertility and the importance of procreation in a barren world. The movie likewise does the same, but it foregrounds the condition and treatment of immigrants more. What is more, in the movie the continuation of humans is at the hands of a non-white immigrant woman which differs from the novel. Shortly, the novel centralizes the issue of mass infertility and marginalizes the immigrant problem, yet the movie combines both issues suggesting that human mobility is an ever-present fact. In the novel, sojourners are people coming from less developed countries and they are presented as a disadvantaged group in a bleak world whose biggest problem is the continuation of human procreation.

The novel does not even say whether sojourners are being tested for sign of fertility. That they are kept outside of procreation plans highlights the dehumanization of sojourners. However, in the movie, immigrants are central to the infertility issue as a Black woman ultimately gets pregnant, offering hope for the future of humans. Conversely, in the novel, a white woman from the dissident group named the Five Fishes was pregnant. This study argues that the reason for this shift of focus in the movie adaptation can be related to the increase in the immigration flow in the postmillennial period. That could be one reason the movie pictures an immigrant woman of African descent as the mother savior of a desolate human race. The film's emphasis on the plight of immigrants reveals broader dimensions of human suffering, connecting the experiences of contemporary migrants to the historical legacies of colonialism and slavery. By centering the narrative on the experiences of immigrants, the movie offers a powerful critique of the dominance of wealthy, industrialized nations, and its impact on marginalized populations, revealing inequalities and injustices.

Building upon the insights presented so far, the next section will briefly try to situate James's *The Children of Men* in a growing body of dystopian narratives. Then, the article will address the issue of mass infertility as the central dystopian narrative. Following this, it will zoom in on sojourners' dystopia and explore the representation of the immigrant issue both in the novel and the movie. By doing this, it aims to illuminate the ways in which they reflect and reinforce broader anxieties about globalization, immigration, and the persistence of colonial power dynamics. This article seeks to contribute to existing scholarship on dystopian fiction by centering its analysis on the plight of immigrants, a critical and increasingly urgent issue in today's world characterized by a global rise in anti-immigration sentiment.

### **The Core Dystopian Thread: The Fear of Human Extinction**

Dystopian literature in the 21st century is largely dominated by catastrophic scenarios, frequently focusing on government and politics, environmental and climate crises, biopolitical nightmares, and gender-based injustices. Also reflected in these imagined bleak worlds are countless other anxieties, ranging from body issues, youth, and aging to the ever-present threat of natural disasters, devastating epidemic diseases, alien invasion, and the fear of human extinction. That is, dystopian literature in the 21<sup>st</sup> century reflects a wide range of contemporary anxieties such as "industrial monopolies, data harvesting, digital surveillance, the manipulation of mass opinion, anthropogenic climate change, species extinction" (Seeger & Davison-Vecchione, 2019, p. 56). In dystopic narratives, as Gregory Claeys notes, readers find a world full of "ruin, death, destruction, [...] cataclysm, war, lawlessness, disorder, pain, and suffering" (2017, p. 3). Also, in dystopias many of these issues are interwoven; they are either the reason or the result of one another. Dystopian narratives seldom focus on a single issue; instead, they explore a complex web of interconnected problems that shape individuals and societies. As commentaries on contemporary social conditions, these narratives may depict societies as meticulously planned and regulated: "Dystopic societies, especially as reflected in literature, are structured as utopian society models, but this order takes place through excessive pressure, restriction of freedoms, bureaucratic and technological control, surveillance, and restrictions" (Toprak & Şar, 2019, p. 16). While these societies may appear highly organized, they often contain contradictions and flaws that ultimately lead to their downfall.

Dystopian literature has several subgenres such as political, environmental, post-apocalyptic, biopolitical, critical dystopias and demodystopias to name a few. The latter two are particularly relevant to *The Children of Men*. Critical dystopias combine the negative portrayal of society with elements of hope or the possibility of positive change. In other words, as Emrah Atasoy states, a critical dystopia "accentuates residual hope in dystopia" (2019, p. 252). Atasoy defines James's novel as a critical dystopia, arguing that its "open-ended narrative [...] hints at the hope of a revisionary knowledge that might lead to a better, more just society" (2019, p. 261). Regarding demodystopia, Andreu Domingo explains:

*Dystopias that are brought about by demographic change or that make population matters a salient concern I will call demodystopias. Demodystopian fiction first appeared in the years after World War II, when the evolution of the population and changing demographics were seen by many as negative tendencies in Wells's sense. Typically, they present demographic evolution as a social problem in need of a (usually urgent) solution. (2008, p. 725)*

James's *The Children of Men* captures the essence of a demodystopia, combining the issues of mass infertility, depopulation,

and immigration. While the problem of mass infertility foreshadows humanity's demise, the tide of immigration triggers a complete transformation of the UK's ethnic demographics. At its core, *The Children of Men* explores fears surrounding demographic shifts through a dystopian lens, which explains why it can aptly be situated under demodystopia. Concisely, by foregrounding the anxieties surrounding population decline and the influx of immigrants, *The Children of Men* offers a critique of the communal fears that have intensified in the decades since its publication. By exploring these timeless concerns, both the novel and the film adaptation remain a relevant depiction of contemporary fears regarding demographic changes and social disintegration. This demonstrates its enduring appeal to modern audiences.

The novel depicts a bleak 2021 UK, where people suffer under the dictatorship of Xan Lyppiatt. People do not have control over their bodies and life choices. The government is doing regular body checkups, and the system prioritizes some lives over others. For example, only healthy people go through fertility checkups and sojourners do not go through any medical treatment, let alone fertility tests. James offers a prospective narrative picturing a desolate and desperate world. The calendar shows the year 2021 as *The Children of Men* opens, though the novel first appeared in 1992. Similarly, the 2006 film adaptation takes place in 2027, despite its release date. In both narratives, the future projection depicts a world that is coping with problems of unexplained infertility, depopulation of the world, irregular human mobility and inhuman treatment of immigrants coming from undeveloped, disadvantaged countries. In this way, they present "futuristic-apocalyptic fiction" as James Bowman describes it (2007, p. 107). Both works explore the darkest potential outcomes of contemporary concerns.

It would not be surprising to see how stunned contemporary readers of *The Children of Men* in the 2020s could be because the fictional dystopic society in the novel resonates with the reality of the early 2020s. This is because, especially amidst the Covid-19 pandemic, many of these issues occupy a central place on the global agendas of today's world, perhaps even more acutely than the time when the novel and the movie came out. The effects of the Covid-19 pandemic were extensive in innumerable ways and stirred discussions regarding the causes and results of the disease. Prevention measures such as wearing masks, social distancing, shutdowns, quarantines, and vaccination had a tremendous effect on the way humans started to organize their lives. The transformation of life was fast and sudden as daily routines have been significantly altered. That is why people had to face various challenges to maintain daily sustenance and survive the day. All of these caused strong resistance, too. Conspiracy theories voicing concerns about a planned reduction in the human population proliferated especially with regards to the spread of the virus and the vaccination debates. Claims alleging the involvement of both the virus and the vaccines in a supposed planned depopulation gained traction. Both the fear of the virus and the distrust of vaccines had a common cause: they would culminate in future generations to be infertile which would eventually depopulate the world (*Population Matters*). It seems that the fear of human extinction has always been a concern to humans in real life and in fiction, especially in dystopias and apocalyptic scenarios. This view is supported by M. Keith Booker who writes that "the treatment of imaginary societies in the best dystopian fiction is always highly relevant more or less directly to specific 'real world' societies and issues" (1994, p. 19). In the same vein, Bowman draws intriguing parallels between the societal anxieties about depopulation depicted in dystopian fiction and similar concerns present in the real world by saying that

*The Children of Men was much more accurate than most eschatological fiction, for it presents an exaggerated version of a problem – namely the gradual depopulation of the developed world through below-replacement fertility rates – that in the years since its publication has begun to seem rather scarily unexaggerated. (2007, p. 107)*

The anxieties surrounding low birth rates, fears of gradual depopulation and even human extinction, are likely to remain prominent social concerns, particularly in the aftermath of the Covid pandemic. All in all, it is an eerie coincidence that first published more than thirty years ago, James's *The Children of Men* centralizes the issue of mass infertility whose cause is unknown although James "vaguely suggest[s] that it might be caused by some kind of sperm killing virus" (Bowman, 2007, p. 107). Therefore, the novel's exploration of a global crisis stemming from a mysterious biological agent resonates with contemporary concerns, particularly in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. This highlights humanity's vulnerability to unforeseen health threats in the realms of both fact and fiction.

The novel starts in the form of a diary, and to the surprise of the post-covid audiences, the first entry in the diary of Theo Faron is dated January 1, 2021, which is when the Omega generation is in their mid-twenties. The phrase Omega generation is used to describe those who were born in the year 1995, which is known as "the year Omega" (James, p. 7). Omega refers to the last letter of the Greek alphabet, symbolizing the end of humans. The first entry in the diary talks about the death of Joseph Ricardo, "the last human being to be born on earth" (p. 3) aged twenty-five. The problem of infertility is presented as a universal problem:

*Twenty years ago, when the world was half convinced that our species had lost forever the power to reproduce, the search to find the last known human birth became a universal obsession, elevated to a matter of national pride, an international contest. (p. 5)*

As the novel also suggests, it is impossible to know for sure whether humans continue to procreate in remote parts of the world. That is why Joseph Ricardo may not be the last human being born, but it is certain that he is “the last human whose birth was officially recorded” (p. 3). Also implicit in the novel is the inability of human beings to know, solve and govern problems that bother them. This may sound paradoxical because the novel portrays the UK as a controlling dictatorship, where everything is strictly regulated. Yet, at the same time, both the authorities and society are helpless due to limited scientific knowledge which cannot offer an explanation as to what has caused this “global disaster” (p. 7). The inability to procreate is a crushing burden, making people frustrated and despondent. Also, being deprived of a scientific explanation as to why humans cannot procreate is equally so. The novel subtly touches upon human beings’ reliance and dependency on Western science which “has been our god” (p. 6). The overall feeling here is that it must be disappointing to have no scientific help to explain and solve the problem:

*We are outraged and demoralized less by the impending end of our species, less even by our inability to prevent it, than by our failure to discover the cause. Western science and Western medicine haven’t prepared us for the magnitude and humiliation of this ultimate failure. There have been many diseases which have been difficult to diagnose or cure and one which almost depopulated two continents before it spent itself. But, we have always in the end been able to explain why. (p. 6)*

In *The Children of Men*, humans are doomed to vanish from earth just like other creatures did throughout world history. This implies the vulnerability and frailty of the human species despite the scientific claims and the illusion of reigning in the world as rational beings. *The Children of Men* suggests that supposedly supreme creatures on earth, humans are indeed as helpless as formerly extinct species:

*After all, of the four billion life forms which have existed on this planet, three billion, nine hundred and sixty million are now extinct. We do not know why. Some by wanton extinction, some through natural catastrophe, some destroyed by meteorites and asteroids. In the light of these mass extinctions, it really does seem unreasonable to suppose that Homo sapiens should be exempt. (pp. 16-17)*

This feeling of helplessness dominates the atmosphere, and the majority of people are acquiescent.

Even amidst this feeling of widespread helplessness, a determined minority who named themselves “The Five Fishes” did not surrender to pacifism under the totalitarian rule of Xan Lyppiatt. In Nicole L. Sparling’s words, they are “underground militant organization . . . which aims to undermine government operations and protect immigrants and illegal aliens who have become the British nation’s internal enemy, political target, and obsession” (2014, pp. 160-161). In a pamphlet promoting their message, they wrote:

*If our race is to die, let us at least die as free men and women, as human beings not as devils. We make the following demands to the Warden of England:*

- 1. Call a general election and put your policies before the people.*
- 2. Give the Sojourners full civil rights including the right to live in their own homes, to send for their families and to remain in Britain at the end of their contract of service.*
- 3. Abolish the Quietus.*
- 4. Stop deporting convicted offenders to the Isle of Man Penal Colony and ensure that people already there can live in peace and decency.*
- 5. Stop the compulsory testing of semen and the examination of healthy young women and shut down the public porn shops. (pp. 158-159)*

The demands of the dissident group present dehumanizing conditions imposed on society. The Fishes’ initiative gives an idea about the present regime’s most pressing regulations in a slowly depopulating world. They demand political changes in totalitarian governance that control people’s daily lives starting from birth to death. Also, they fight for human dignity and a better world where people, including immigrants, would have autonomy over their lives and live in prosperity.

In the pamphlet, the second entry about the condition of the immigrants is particularly important because the presence of immigrants in the UK is actually related to the decrease in population. In *The Children of Men*, immigration from other countries can be taken as a potential answer to the declining population at least in terms of the human workforce. This is because, in a place where there are no new births and the population of the elderly is on the rise, a workforce shortage is inevitable. This resonates with today’s up-to-date discussions regarding migrants filling in workforce shortage especially in Europe where the elderly make up the majority of the population. This is also verified by the Eurostat, the statistical office



of the European Union, which reveals that between the years 2002-2022 “the share of persons aged 65 and over increased in all Member States while the share of young people (aged 0 to 19 years old) decreased” (“Demography 2023 Edition,” *Eurostat*). The portrayal of immigrants in the novel and the movie resonates with present day discussions surrounding the treatment, conditions, roles, and rights of immigrants, making *The Children of Men* seem less far-fetched today. Both in the novel and the movie, Lyppiatt’s totalitarian governance has transformed England into a dystopian surveillance state, where individual liberties are strictly suppressed. The oppressive regime under Warden Lyppiatt has fostered a climate of fear and paranoia. What is more, discriminatory immigration policies implemented by the Lyppiatt regime are direct consequences of the totalitarian ideology that prioritizes only English people. The dehumanizing treatment of immigrants under this regime has fueled xenophobia and violence.

Theo’s conversation with Warden Xan reveals that voluntary immigration is restricted in the novel. Regarding human flow to the UK, a government official says:

*You’re not suggesting we should have unrestricted immigration? Remember what happened in Europe in the 1990s? People became tired of invading hordes, from countries with just as many natural advantages as this, who had allowed themselves to be misgoverned for decades through their own cowardice, indolence and stupidity and who expected to take over and exploit the benefits which had been won over centuries by intelligence, industry and courage, while incidentally perverting and destroying the civilization of which they were so anxious to be a part of. (p. 138)*

The current government has an extremely negative view of immigration. Especially the phrase “invading hordes” sounds threatening as if immigration is an implicit version of invasion. This point of view overlooks the fact that immigration experiences may vary depending on the country and context. Even though many people immigrate because of poor and unsatisfactory living conditions in their home countries, government official blames immigrants for the mismanagement of their countries. This is a very supremacist point of view because the people in host countries are considered superior to the others. In response to this statement, Theo says: that “restricting immigration in a dying and underpopulated world isn’t a particularly generous policy” (p. 138). Also, it is not practical because as the population decreases, so does the workforce. Without new births, the population inevitably ages, increasing the demand for services like manual labor, cleaning, construction, healthcare, and elder care. Thus, in the novel, younger people from disadvantaged countries are brought to do menial and often unpleasant labor.

Though the terrible condition of sojourners is mentioned by the dissident group The Five Fishes, the main focus is on the issue of depopulation. The procreation of sojourners is still out of the question; they are not even tested for signs of fertility. It seems that the extinction of the human race is preferred to the continuation of the race through the child of an immigrant. This practice reveals underlying currents of racism and xenophobia. Different from the novel, the movie adaptation even more strongly emphasizes such dehumanizing practices by placing the treatment of sojourners at the front. To understand the true cruelty of this system, a closer examination of the movie’s portrayal of sojourners is necessary.

### **A Parallel Dystopian Thread: Sojourners’ Dystopia**

The movie opens with a scene where people watch news streaming live. The TV anchor goes: “the Muslim community demands an end to the occupation of mosques. The Homeland Security Bill is ratified. After eight years, British borders will remain closed, the deportation of illegal immigrants will continue” (Cuarón, 2006). There is no such scene in the original novel. This is a strong opening highlighting the movie’s focus on immigration issues rather than depopulation. Strikingly, this scene resonates with the UK’s recent Rwanda Asylum Plan, first brought forward in April 2022 by the governments of Boris Johnson and Rishi Sunak. According to the Rwanda Asylum Plan, the UK would deport illegal immigrants and/or asylum seekers to Rwanda. Even though it has not been implemented, this deportation plan aroused heated discussions globally:

*Gillian Triggs, an assistant secretary-general at the UNHCR, said the agency ‘strongly condemns outsourcing the primary responsibility to consider the refugee status’, as laid out in the scheme put forward by Prime Minister Boris Johnson and Home Secretary Priti Patel. (Daly, 2022)*

Notably, a novel from 1992, its 2006 film adaptation, and even the Rwanda policy from 2024 all share thematic parallels. This parallelism suggests that anxieties about human mobility have become increasingly prominent for at least four decades now, on both local and global agendas. The novel portrays the plight of immigrants under a discriminatory totalitarian regime, while the film adaptation expands upon this theme. Thus, the movie reflects the increased global mobility observed in contemporary society, both internally and across borders. The World Migration Report 2024, published by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), reveals a significant increase in the estimated number of international migrants, rising from 150 million in 2000 to 281 million in 2024 (IOM, 2024). The same report specifically highlights the likelihood of an even

greater volume of human mobility across different localities (IOM, 2024). The film adaptation explores this dystopian world, a reality that resonates with the current migration trends: “Presciently warning against the rise of fascism, *Children of Men* proves that a movie made as part of the capitalist entertainment complex can be thematically complex and politically subversive” (Dinello, 2019, p.15). This is highly relevant to contemporary audiences who are increasingly aware of the complexities and challenges associated with human mobility.

After the opening scene, the movie turns its attention to the issue of depopulation as the TV anchor mentions the death of Diego Ricardo: “Good morning, our lead story: the world was stunned today by the death of Diego Ricardo, the youngest person on the planet” (Cuarón, 2006). The film then quickly moves on with a deeper exploration of the immigration problem as the camera zooms in on a poster with the following words: “Target Britain . . . Working for the British People . . . Report Illegal Workers to D.E.D<sup>2</sup>” (Cuarón, 2006). The movie depicts a totally pessimistic scene where migrants are literally caged, and it is considered illegal to feed and shelter undocumented immigrants. Very early in the movie, Faron and his friend are walking and a huge truck full of immigrants passes by them. His friend explains: “Illegal immigrants ... taken to Bexhill. After escaping the world’s atrocities, they found a way to make it to England, our government hunts them like cockroaches”. (Cuarón, 2006). Again, this fictional idea of a human relocation program in Alfonso Cuarón’s *Children of Men* mirrors today’s Rwanda Asylum Plan. In both fictional and real-world scenarios, the situation for immigrants is dire and grim. This is especially so in a dwindling world where resources are limited. The influx of immigrants can initially appear threatening, but it can also be a source of renewal. This is because both the immigrants and people in the host countries are desperate to find a way to continue humanity. The movie shows immigrants as a key factor in people’s fight against human extinction. The focus in the movie is more on the immigration issue, which makes it rather sojourners’ dystopia:

*Both terrorists and immigrants are portrayed through the mise-en-scène as invisible faceless enemies that trespass borders, invade territories and attack or threaten its citizens’ security, apparently with no clear or valid cause. In the story these liquid fears are partly elaborated and constructed by the media, which seems to be completely controlled by the government. The city of London appears wrapped in advertisements and propaganda that compel British citizens to report terrorists and illegal immigrants. (Domingo, 2015, p. 147)*

Here, Domingo refers to public advertisements that openly encourage people to hunt for immigrants: “Protect Britain, Report all” (Cuarón, 2006). Streets are full of such messages, urging citizens to report both terrorists and immigrants. The media controlled by the government amplifies the fears of citizens and invigorates xenophobia.

The film’s most striking difference from the novel is the introduction of Kee, a pregnant Black woman, whose existence offers hope for humanity’s continuation. In a world facing extinction, her pregnancy is a hope and a turning point. However, her being a Black immigrant adds another layer of significance because this would be a huge problem in the eyes of the totalitarian government. In a society facing collapse, the film emphasizes the importance of diversity and the potential for renewal through unexpected sources. Nicole L. Sparling highlights contrasting portrayals of pregnancy in the book and the movie, connecting the difference to post 9/11 context:

*In James’s pre- 9/11 version the pregnant mother is a British citizen, Julian, who is described as an idealistic political dissident with a disfigured hand. The father of her baby is an unlikely suspect (an epileptic priest named Luke) at the same time that their reproductive compatibility is a surprise to the government that has already dismissed them as eugenically unfit and nonreproductive. Informed by post-9/11 border politics, Cuarón’s new Eve is Kee, a “refugee” woman, or, in this case, a dark-skinned refugee of African descent, whose child will most likely be stateless, following the illegal status of its mother and the circumstance of its unknown paternity. (2014, p. 161)*

In the novel, the pregnant woman is Julian, a British citizen and an idealistic dissident. In the movie, it is Kee, an African refugee. This deviation is apparently related to heightened concerns about immigration and border politics. In a society that encourages reporting immigrants for deportation, Kee and her unborn baby face a particularly precarious situation, which is why they have to be protected.

In Cuarón’s film, the main aim of the resistance group the Five Fishes is to hide Kee until she delivers her baby safely. This is crucial because if the government finds out that a woman of African descent is pregnant, the life of the baby would never be safe. The main character Theo Faron joins the Five Fishes in the movie to help protect Kee. Theo suggests that Kee’s pregnancy should be made public, to which the group objects fearing that the government would mistreat a black woman’s baby. This highlights a strong racial bias within the government that implements white supremacy by not even putting immigrants on fertility tests. No information is given about the background of Kee and the baby’s father. A dialogue from

<sup>2</sup> Deportation and Exile Deportation

the movie gives the impression that she is a sex worker because when Theo asks who the father of the baby is, Kee simply says “I don’t know those guy’s names” (Cuarón, 2006). She has almost zero agency about her baby’s and her life. As Jayna Brown points out “Kee’s value is defined by her biological worth and sexual function—her ability to reproduce” (2013, p. 125). This also implies the dehumanization of immigrants, as Kee has no inherent worth as a human being. That is, Brown might be drawing attention to the fact that reducing someone’s worth to reproduction is a sign of neglect even by those who protect her. This is because Kee receives help in the movie, not because she personally needs it, but because she is expecting a baby.

Kee actually prefers to have the baby in secret and then wants to be brought to the Human Project, an NGO working for the good of immigrants. However, she has no time and power to decide what she will do. She only relies on Theo. Very briefly, the two manage to escape; Kee has her baby while Theo eventually dies. As Brown states Kee “is, by tired cliché, ‘Africa, mother of civilization’” (2013, p. 125). This can be a reference to the idea that Africa is indeed the source from which humanity and civilization spread. Thus, presenting Kee as the mother of a survivor baby is symbolic of the possible rebirth of a new human civilization, offering hope amidst the infertility crises. The movie closes while Kee and the baby are in a small boat on a body of water, presumably heading towards the Human Project. The ending of the movie seems partially hopeful because the film does not explicitly state whether they reach the safe point. The glimmer of hope in the movie given through a black baby can be interpreted within the context of evolving ideas about race relations becoming less rigid and national identities becoming less distinct:

*In Children of Men, he moves from a racially homogeneous male (Baby Diego) to Kee’s daughter Dylan, a bastard child of unknown origin who is positioned as the symbol of the world’s new hope. It is my argument that in doing so Cuarón has produced a text that is, in part, legible within the current postracial/transnational embrace. (Wilson, 2016, p. 159)*

The idea of nation-states as self-contained entities is increasingly challenged, which can be explained as complex social, economic, cultural, and geographic relations emerging as a result of human mobility. Both the novel and film versions of *The Children of Men* depict a dystopian society that exploits immigrants, echoing historical patterns of colonialism and slavery. James’s *The Children of Men* presents a closed country where borders are strictly protected, and immigrants are seen solely as a source of labor, not as human beings. This portrayal reflects the exploitation often faced by immigrants in a globalized world. In the movie adaptation, Kee becomes a symbol of hope for the survival of humanity. Kee’s intersectional identity—Black, immigrant, and pregnant—highlights the complex experiences of individuals who belong to multiple marginalized groups. Moreover, Kee’s presence in a foreign country can symbolize the connectivity of people across borders. Her story can foster empathy and understanding between different cultures and communities. Also worthy of note is that pregnancy symbolizes new beginnings, the continuation of humanity, and hope. Thus, Kee’s pregnancy can represent the potential for a new generation that will hopefully be free from the burdens and limitations of the past. On the other hand, the closing scene shows Kee and her baby in foggy, misty water, implying uncertainty about the future ahead. It is not revealed whether Kee and her baby make it safe to the Human Project or not.

Thus, the possibility of a truly equitable future is uncertain in the 2006 movie adaptation. This uncertainty reflects the harsh realities faced by many migrants seeking a better life. Shortly, different from the novel, Cuarón’s film is important to understand the dystopia of immigrants. This is because “these individuals who move away and escape from oppressive societies are exposed to practices of separation, prevention, denial and sometimes even isolation” as Özlem Türe Abacı puts it (2023, p. 136). Furthermore, she continues, these inhuman practices are “in harmony with history of slavery and colonialism” (p. 136). Today, rising nationalism and anti-immigrant sentiment all around the world can be considered a backlash against the rise of human mobility all around the world. Overall, it can be concluded that the movie’s ending, with Kee giving birth, is complex and multifaceted because it simultaneously evokes hope and uncertainty.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, this article discussed how James’s novel and Cuarón’s film adaptation diverged in their treatment of possible human extinction and portrayal of immigrants. The article focused on mass infertility as a central dystopian theme and then examined the portrayal of immigrants, or sojourners, in both the novel and its film adaptation. By analyzing these representations, the article aimed to uncover how *The Children of Men* reflected societal concerns about demographic changes and immigration.

All in all, the novel can be classified as a demo-dystopia, a subgenre of dystopian literature focusing on population issues and demographic changes. While the novel prioritizes infertility, depopulation and collapse in the future UK, the film adaptation presents a dual dystopia: one of a dying humanity and another for immigrants facing persecution and limited resources. Cuarón’s movie is loyal to the original novel in terms of how it addresses humanity’s struggle with global-scale



infertility, yet the plight of immigrants takes center stage. In other words, the film powerfully illustrates a different aspect of human suffering by focusing on the experiences of immigrants. It connects the challenges faced by immigrants to the lingering effects of colonialism and slavery by focusing on the media's portrayal of immigrants as a threat to the British people. Through its immigrant-centered narrative, the movie offers a critique of Western dominance, exposing systemic inequalities and injustices faced by marginalized communities that seek a better life abroad. This is the basic difference between the novel and the film adaptation. This article intended to attract attention to this difference of focus with the aim of highlighting a dystopia that is not just for UK citizens but for those seeking refuge as well. In this way, dystopia becomes relevant to a broader audience.

The shift in focus in the movie reflects the growing anxieties of the postmillennial era, where concerns about human mobility and immigration issues are intertwined. Both narratives remind us of the complexities of human societies, where the challenges of migration persist even in the face of potential extinction. *The Children of Men* becomes eerily prescient in today's world, echoing our fears of depopulation and infertility in the post-COVID period, while simultaneously amplifying anxieties about increased immigration. Overall, the rise of nationalism and hostility towards immigrants can be seen as a reaction to the growing migration trends in the world. Still, the film's exploration of themes of human extinction and immigration is intricate and layered, inspiring both optimism and doubt.

Finally, considering the broader context, *The Children of Men* underscores the importance of human connection, empathy, and the resilience of the human spirit to overcome even the most desperate circumstances. By depicting these issues in a thought-provoking manner, both literature and film can serve as catalysts for social change and urge audiences to reflect on their values. The affective power of fiction and film can inspire audiences to consider potential solutions to the challenges presented in the narrative. This may include advocating for a global shift towards sustainable living, promoting intercultural understanding, and supporting more inclusive immigration policies. By foregrounding the experiences of immigrants, this analysis contributes to existing literature by demonstrating how *The Children of Men* powerfully reflects contemporary social and political anxieties, particularly those surrounding pandemics, population anxieties, and anti-migration sentiment. This highlights the enduring relevance of both the novel and the movie in capturing the attention of audiences today and in the future.

**Peer-review:** Externally peer-reviewed.

**Conflict of Interest:** The author has no conflicts of interest to declare.

**Financial Disclosure:** The author declared that this study has received no financial support.

**Hakem Değerlendirmesi:** Dış bağımsız.

**Çıkar Çatışması:** Yazar, çıkar çatışması olmadığını beyan etmiştir.

**Finansal Destek:** Yazar, bu çalışma için finansal destek almadığını beyan etmiştir.

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