Apocalypse and the Biopolitics of Childhood

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For three generations, the Ark has kept what's left of the human race alive, but now

our home is dying, and we are the last hope of mankind. A hundred prisoners sent on

a desperate mission to the ground. Each of us is here because we broke the law. On

the ground, there is no law. All we have to do is survive.

[Clarke Griffin, *The 100* (2015)]

Childhood is the most intensively governed sector of personal existence. In different

ways, at different times, and by many different routes varying from one section of

society to another, the health, welfare, and rearing of children have been linked in

thought and practice to the destiny of the nation and the responsibilities of the state.

[Nikolas Rose, *Governing the Soul* (1989), p. 45]

Childhood has received limited critical attention in existing studies on utopian, dystopian and

(post-)apocalyptic fictions, which tend to concentrate mostly on their politics of

representation of gender, sexuality, or race. This paper seeks to urge for further focus on this

subject by examining representations of childhood within these fictions from the perspective

of a relatively recent critical trend of applying theories of biopolitics and biopower in popular

genres like science fiction (Vint 2011) and apocalyptic fiction (Quinby 2014). Biopolitical

theory originated in, and is still largely determined by, the work of Michel Foucault, but it

has also been developed further by a group of theorists that includes Giorgio Agamben,

Roberto Esposito, Judith Butler, Paul Rabinow, and Nikolas Rose, among others. The theory

concerns itself with the emergence of a more sophisticated form of power over the

preservation of life and the management of populations from the Renaissance onwards – a "biopower" – and its predominance over earlier forms of coercive violence and the threat of death that were prevalent during premodern times – so-called "thanatopolitics." One shared feature between this theory and the previously mentioned genres is the focus on theorizing contemporary discourses of gender, sexuality or race, at the expense of childhood, as discursive formations historically constituted by modern biopower. My exploration of the significance of the biopolitics of childhood in (post-)apocalyptic fictions will therefore also seek to encourage the further exploration of the ways in which current understandings of childhood have been determined by biopolitical mechanisms, practices and formations from the seventeenth century up until today.

As a narrative whose major focus is the destruction or survival, the end or rebirth of the human race, the apocalypse is permeated by biopolitical discourses, mechanisms and formations at a fundamental level. Representations of childhood within these fictions are often indebted to biopolitical discourses, as in the case of narratives that include "[i]mages of and references to children" that are "used in post-apocalyptic scenarios as symbols of humanity's historical continuance" (Olson xi). In this sense, they affirm the idea of the child as "a gradually unfolding potential" and of childhood as "the quintessential site of development" that renders it "emblematic of the politics of life" (Wells 18). My thesis is that these fictions stage the apocalypse as the disruption of developmental discourses of childhood that construct it as a stage that leads from innocence to experience, from vulnerability to security and from recklessness to maturity. I will pursue this argument by focusing on two recent television series, namely, Jason Rothenberg's *The 100* (US, The CW, 2014-present) and Dennis Kelly's *Utopia* (UK, Channel 4, 2013-15). Admittedly the two series are very different in terms of style, setting, country of origin and production values, among other aspects, but both of them share a fundamental indebtedness to biopolitical paradigms in

envisioning the apocalypse as a result of attempts to respond to issues of overpopulation and resource management. Before proceeding to illustrate these ideas and arguments in detail, however, a clearer outline of Foucault's theorizations of biopower and their significance for representations of childhood is necessary.

Foucault introduced the concept of biopower in the last of his 1975-6 lectures at the Collège de France, during which he explored the historical emergence of what he termed "governmentality," a rational model of government that started taking form gradually from the seventeenth century onwards as a symptom of the emergence of liberalism and industrial capitalism. Most succinctly described as "the conduct of conduct" (Wells 19), governmentality concentrates on "the administration of life" (Dean 99) rather than the threat of death and operates not by foreclosing but by shaping human agency. It thus refers to a "very specific albeit complex form of power, which has as its target population, as its principal form of knowledge political economy, and as its essential technical means apparatuses of security" (Foucault, "Governmentality" 220-1). Foucault's theoretical investigations on the emergence of governmentality led him to a more elaborate historical account of the mechanisms through which the exercise of power over individuals and populations mutated from pre-modern, medieval times, through the Renaissance, to the Enlightenment onwards. Before the modern period, power was concentrated on the sovereign, who had the right to decide over the life and death of her subjects, a model of power that Foucault refers to as "thanatopolitics" – the politics of death. Thanatopolitics was, in Mark G.E. Kelly's words, "a technology of spectacular and extraordinary physical violence" whereby "people were kept in check primarily by sudden, ad hoc interventions by the sovereign" (4). The sporadic and discontinuous exercise of this power justified its spectacular and excessive nature, as, for instance, in the case of public executions. From the seventeenth

century onwards, however, this "power over death now presents itself as the counterpart of a power that exerts a positive influence on life, that endeavors to administer, optimize, and multiply it, subjecting it to precise controls and comprehensive regulations" (Foucault, *Sexuality* 137). The gradual decline of feudalism and the emergence of the centralized, administrative nation-state led to a shift away from previous concerns about how the sovereign should rule her domain towards questions on how she would assure the security of her people. The increasing importance of security is one of the major symptoms of the emergence of this more benign yet no less effective form of "biopower," a form of power that is "situated and exercised at the level of life, the species, the race, and the large-scale phenomena of population" (137). If "the right of sovereignty," in its exercise of thanatopolitics, "was the right to take life or let live," biopower operates through "the right to make live or to let die" (Foucault, *Society* 241). As Paul Rabinow and Nikolas Rose put it, "the birth of biopower in modernity marks the point at which the biological life of subjects enters politics and belongs entirely to the State" (200).

As a form of power that perpetuates itself by intervening in processes of procreation, care, maturation and ageing, it is hardly surprising that "a particularly powerful site for regulating the conduct of conduct" (Wells 20) would be that of childhood. According to Karen Wells, there are historical continuities between the consolidation of modern biopower and the emergence of contemporary understandings of childhood. As she points out, "the emergence of the modern idea of childhood coincides with shifts in governance from sovereignty to bio-power or a politics of life" (15). In the medieval world, Philippe Ariès has argued, "there was no place for childhood" (31) and children were treated as miniature adults in the way they dressed, worked, and lived. Our current conception of childhood as a period of innocence, vulnerability, and immaturity is a legacy of profound transformations in fundamental social institutions of Western societies from the sixteenth century onwards. A

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generalized overview of these developments would start from the Lutheran Reformation and its focus on cultivating the inner soul of the individual that led to an understanding of childhood as "a unique space of life requiring special attention and special discipline" (Nadesan 9). It would then focus on the ensuing increasing importance assigned to the family as a "privileged instrument for the government of the population" (Foucault, "Governmentality" 216), supported not only by Lutheranism but also by liberalism, which emphasized the economic importance of children within the status of the family as a source of national wealth. Furthermore, another "essential event in creating the modern family" was also the "invention and then extension of formal schooling" (Postman 44) after the invention of the printing press and the spread of literacy, a new form of schooling that imposed "a rather stringent discipline on children" (46). The Enlightenment enhanced this emerging view of childhood as a unique period of innocence through its focus on ideas of humanism, individualism and pedagogy, as epitomized by ideas such as John Locke's "tabula rasa" and Jean-Jacques Rousseau's "state of nature." Locke's perception of the mind as a "clean slate" with no innate ideas encouraged a perception of childhood as a period of nurturing and rearing whereas Rousseau's view of the child as closer to an uncorrupted, pure Nature supported understandings of this period of one's life as one of innocence and purity. The emergence of Romanticism as a response to the Industrial Revolution also contributed to a perception of childhood as "a garden, enclosing within the safety of its walls a way of life which was in touch with nature" in contrast to the "bleak, urbanized and alienated" world of adulthood (Cunningham 43).

The view of childhood as a period of innocence was complemented by two other perceptions that emerged from the nineteenth century onwards: one view of childhood as a stage of vulnerability and in need of protection and another understanding of the same stage as one of recklessness and delinquency that needed to be disciplined and normalized. These

perceptions were consolidated through the increasing "policing of families" (Donzelot) throughout the nineteenth century by reform laws and charities that hailed children as "central targets of these normalizing forces" (Nadesan 8). The importance of the emergence of what Nikolas Rose describes as the "psy-disciplines" of the late nineteenth century (psychology, psychoanalysis, psychiatry) cannot be overrated, as these established the so-called "developmental paradigm" that provided theoretical frameworks within which to construct ideas of normal and abnormal childhood development and "share an understanding of an optimal outcome in a normal child" (Wells 19). It is also around this period that discourses of "juvenile delinquency" are constructed, following a pervasive concern with criminality during the Victorian period by social Darwinists and criminal anthropologists. This concern gradually led to the formation of social welfare institutions, such as juvenile courts and schools for truants in the early twentieth-century, managed by "child savers," probation officers and physicians seeking to turn dangerous or vulnerable children into economically integrated adults. During this century, scientific experts replaced philanthropists in educating parents on how to raise their children with an emphasis on "investing in the future" (Hendrick 15-16), under the increasingly pervasive influence of neoliberalist discourses. At the same time, the idea of the innocent, vulnerable child in need of protection got increasingly challenged by advocates of children's rights who suggested that this perception tends to underestimate children's abilities and aimed at denaturalising this concept of childhood. Modern discourses of childhood are therefore seen as being in crisis even if children are also perceived as being exposed to "biopolitical risks": "Children are at risk from spending too much time in front of the computer, from obesity, from underachieving schools, and from environmental toxins in plastic bottles, among other proliferating risks" (Nadesan 3). It is during a cultural moment when biopolitical discourses of childhood adopt a terminology of "crisis" and "risk" that children start figuring more

prominently within popular fictions of utopia, dystopia and (post-)apocalypse. It is to my first

example that I now turn to explore the impact of the biopolitics of childhood in apocalyptic

fictions.

The 100 (The CW, 2014-present)

The 100 is set in a post-apocalyptic future where human civilization has been destroyed and

the Earth has become uninhabitable due to a nuclear holocaust, after which the survivors of

twelve space stations in orbit around Earth lived for three generations on a large single station

made out of the original twelve, the "Ark." However, resources are now running low and a

systems failure leaves the Ark with oxygen for only three or four months. The governing

Council therefore tries to ensure the survival of the human species by enforcing a policy that

combines a thanatopolitics of adulthood and a biopolitics of childhood: every crime on the

Ark is a capital offence punishable by "flotation" in space, unless the convicted is under

eighteen years old, in which case the subject is put on trial upon reaching adulthood.

Furthermore, families are liable to surprise inspections of their homes in case they have more

than one child, which is illegal on the Ark for the sake of population control and resource

management. Biopower is therefore all-pervasive in the universe of *The 100*, as epitomized

by one subplot of its first season involving "Kane's Population Reduction Plan," led by

Council member Marcus Kane (Henry Ian Cusick), a project involving the culling of 320

citizens in order to save oxygen and resources until the Ark is repaired.

The starting point of the series underscores the high extent to which its post-apocalyptic

vision is determined by a rigid biopolitics of childhood. The Council decides to send a group

of 100 juvenile delinquents to Earth to test if it has become habitable. While still on the

dropship en route to Earth, the group watch a recorded message by Chancellor Jaha (Isaiah

Washington): "If the odds of survival were better, we would've sent others. Frankly, we're

sending you because your crimes have made you expendable." The narrative is thus driven by "the fundamental division structuring [the] biopolitical realm," namely "between lives deemed 'worth living' and those deemed expendable" (Vint 163), a division that has been raised, challenged and reaffirmed on several occasions throughout the series so far, to such a degree that it may be seen as one of its major themes. Furthermore, the biopolitical mode of governance of the Ark also consists in the use of their juvenile delinquents as test subjects for the survivability of the planet or, in Giorgio Agamben's terms, in the reduction of the delinquents' "bios" to "zoe." This is a theoretical distinction that Agamben has borrowed from Aristotle during his own elaboration on Foucault's biopolitical theories. Whereas the literal meaning of both terms is "life," in ancient Greek society each carried different political connotations: zoe referred to "the simple fact of living common to all living beings (animal, men, or gods)" whereas bios indicated "the form or way of living proper to an individual or group" (Agamben 1). If "bios" refers to legitimized social life, then "zoe" refers to animal life, life reduced to its pure materiality or, in Agamben's terms, "bare life." A person who is forcibly reduced to zoe is, for Agamben, a "homo sacer," a category he borrows from Roman law that was used to refer to someone who "may be killed and yet not sacrificed" (8), whose "entire existence is reduced to a bare life stripped of every right by virtue of the fact that anyone can kill him without committing homicide" (183). From the very beginning, the protagonists of the series are reduced to nothing more than a group of "homines sacri."

Once the delinquents land on the ground, they realize that Earth is not just inhabitable but actually inhabited, by the "Grounders," survivors whose societies have regressed to a form of medievalism not only in appearance (clothing, make-up, tattoos) but also in their mode of governance, which relies more on thanatopolitics than on biopower. According to Grounder law, for instance, their Commander (Alycia Debnam-Carey) can place a kill order on any of her subjects that only she can remove, as in the case of Lincoln (Ricky Whittle)

("Wanheda (Part 2)," Season 3, Episode 2). The "sovereign with [her] sword," however, is only one indication of a society governed by thanatopolitics; other symptoms enlisted by Foucault that are identifiable in the Grounders include "the honor of war" and the "triumph of death," denoting a society dominated by "the system of alliance, the political form of the sovereign, the differentiation into orders and castes, and the values of descent lines," where "power [speaks] *through* blood" (Foucault, *Sexuality* 147) – or, where, as the Grounders' motto puts it, "blood must have blood."

On the other hand, for the "Sky People," as the people from the Ark come to be called, "every life matters" once on Earth, as Bellamy Blake (Bob Morley) puts it in "Earth Kills" (Season 1, Episode 3). The original dialectic between thanatopolitics of adulthood and biopolitics of childhood operating on the Ark is thus reconfigured as a distinction between that regime in space and life on Earth respectively. If survival aboard the Ark relied on the culling of citizens for the sake of resource management, on Earth, as Clarke Griffin (Eliza Taylor) points out in "Murphy's Law" (Season 1, Episode 4), they "don't decide who lives or dies. Not down here." Furthermore, for the Sky People, blood does not carry any symbolism of honorable death or glorious war but of life and survival, as in the case of the so-called "Harvest Project" run by the "Weather Men," another group of humans who survived by living inside Mount Weather, a military facility used as a shelter after the nuclear holocaust. These people are trapped inside the facility because, unlike the Grounders or the Sky People, they have not adapted to survive the effects of radiation in the outside world. The Harvest Project aims at the exploitation of the healing properties of Grounder blood for Mountain Men in order to filter any radiation poisoning out of them. The series introduces this Project when Clarke discovers a group of Grounders imprisoned inside Mount Weather, hanging upside down and with their blood being transfused to Mountain Men ("Incitement Weather," Season 2, Episode 2). Metaphors of vampirism are conjoined with imagery reminiscent of

one of "the exemplary places of modern biopolitics: the concentration camp" (Agamben 10), even as the symbolism of blood shifts from the thanatopolitics of war to the biopolitics of survival. Later on, the Sky People are also reduced to bare life in a very literal sense when the leader of the Project, Dr Lorelei Tsing (Rekha Sharma) discovers that the Mountain Men can achieve full immunity to radiation if they extract the bone marrow of the 48 delinquents they hold prisoners for the survival of 382 residents on Mount Weather. "They'll die so we can finally live," says the Mount patriarch Dante Wallace (Raymond J. Barry) ("Into an Abyss," Season 2, Episode 7), in another iteration of "the fundamental division…between lives deemed 'worth living' and those deemed expendable" (Vint 163). The ensuing conflict between Mountain Men and Sky People is resolved by the same logic: the season ends after Clarke finally decides to irradiate the entire group of Weather Men in order to rescue her own people.

Differences in what Foucault describes as the "symbolics of blood" are therefore determined by different types of governance between these groups. In turn, these differences also determine different perceptions of and attitudes towards children within each group. Whereas for the Sky People, childhood is a period of vulnerability, immaturity and innocence that is radically different from adulthood, the Grounders share a premodern attitude towards children whereby there seems to be little distinction between childhood and adulthood; their children's involvement in labor and battle is different from that of adults in degree rather than in kind. The first scene to highlight these differences is one in which the juxtaposition of different understandings of childhood is intertwined with different attitudes to the symbolics of blood. In "The Calm" (Season 1, Episode 11), Clarke is forced by one leader of the Grounders, Anya (Dichen Lachman), to treat a lethally wounded little girl named Tris (Alison Thornton). Clarke confronts Anya about sending such a young girl into battle and Anya tells her that Tris was her "Second" and that this is how they train them to be warriors. Later,

Clarke will find out that Tris had already killed five people: "She was a little girl," she exclaims. "She was brave," a nameless Grounder responds. While trying to treat Tris, Clarke realizes that she needs a blood transfusion in order to survive, but Anya refuses to let Clarke take her blood and Tris dies. A blood transfusion would be unacceptable in this society, where blood owes

> its high value at the same time to its instrumental role (the ability to shed blood), to the way it functions in the order of signs (to have a certain blood, to be of the same blood, to be prepared to risk one's blood), and also to its precariousness (easily spilled, subject to drying up, too readily mixed, capable of being quickly corrupted). (Foucault, *Sexuality* 147)

All these different symbolic functions of blood are present in Grounder society and they are closely intertwined with the place of children within it. When Chancellor Jaha lands from space on the Dead Zone of Earth in "Many Happy Returns," (Season 2, Episode 4), he encounters a woman named Sienne (Luvia Peterson) with her son Zoran (Finn Wolfhard) who has a facial deformity. Children born with deformities, Sienne explains, are usually left to die "to erase the stain in the bloodline," but she and her husband Osias (Chad Riley) decided to leave their clan instead. The same language is used by another nomadic Grounder, Emori (Luisa D'Oliveira) in "Rubicon" (Season 2, Episode 12), when she explains to Murphy (Richard Harmon) that the deformity on her left hand made her people see her as "a stain in the bloodline, something to erase." Furthermore, the function of the "blood relation" as "an important element in the mechanisms of power, its manifestation and its rituals" (Foucault, *Sexuality* 147) becomes more prominent in the main storyline of the series during its third season: Commander Lexa's most promising successor is young Aden (Cory Gruter-Andrew),

who is introduced in the show while he is sparring with her in "Ye Who Enter Here" (Season 3, Episode 3), and Lexa specifically praises his fighting skills. Aden is one of the future candidates for Lexa's place because he is also one of the "nightbloods," Grounders whose blood is darker than usual, a mutation that makes them eligible to become Commanders. These narrative threads encourage further comparison with medieval societies where one of the "methods employed for the marking and maintaining its caste distinction" was "in the form of *blood*, that is, in the form of the antiquity of its ancestry and of the value of its alliances" (Foucault, *Sexuality* 124). The portrayal of young nightbloods like Aden reinforce these comparisons insofar as they are indebted to premodern discourses of childhood where the "word *child* expressed kinship, not an age" (Postman 14).

Clarke's reaction when she is introduced to Aden is indicative of the differences in perceptions of and attitudes towards childhood within the group from the Ark: "I'm sorry if I'm worried the fate of my people lies in the hands of a child" ("Watch the Thrones," Season 3, Episode 4). Leadership by a child is an idea difficult to grasp in a society that shares modern ideas of childhood as a period of innocence, immaturity, recklessness, and vulnerability. When Clarke's mother, Abby (Paige Turco), first encounters Lexa, she exclaims: "She's a child, they're being led by a child!" ("Remember Me," Season 2, Episode 9). This, however, is not the only instance where attitudes towards childhood are expressed with regard to issues of governance. It may instead be seen as part of the focus on the importance of laws, rules and regulations for the management of a group, which is highlighted very early on in the series and establishes an association of childhood with a lack of rules and laws and adulthood with their re-inscription. From the very first episode, Bellamy encourages other delinquents to remove the wristbands that transmit their vital signs to the Ark: "Here, there are no laws" and "we do whatever the hell we want." However, the Chancellor's son Wells (Eli Goree) wants to reproduce the rules and laws of the Ark down on

Earth. In "Earth Skills" (Season 1, Episode 2), he keeps the clothes of two dead delinquents because they "share based on need, just like back home," only to be confronted by Bellamy, who says, "this is home now. Your father's rules no longer apply." However, the importance of rules is reaffirmed after Wells's murder by young Charlotte (Izabella Vidovic) in "Earth Kills" (Season 1, Episode 3), in a subplot whose attitude to the relationship between childhood and violence, murder, or the use of weapons is in stark contrast to that of Tris's in Grounder society. Charlotte is introduced as a child who suffers from recurring post-traumatic nightmares where she relives the flotation of her parents by Jaha while still on the Ark. Bellamy advises her to try to "slay her demons" when she is awake so that they disappear from her dreams, but Charlotte interprets his advice literally and slays Wells with a knife after witnessing Clarke mercy-killing a lethally-wounded Atom (Rhys Ward) in the same way. Importantly, the knife was given to her by Bellamy in order for her to prove that she is not a little girl anymore. It is after Charlotte's eventual suicide, and after the delinquents come close to hanging Murphy as a prime suspect, when Clarke reiterates the importance of rules and laws: "if we're gonna survive down here, we can't just live by whatever the hell we want. We need rules."

Accordingly, the descent of the adults of the Ark to Earth in "The 48" (Season 2, Episode 1) is staged as the restoration of rules upon the group: after they had decided to banish Murphy, Bellamy sees him again in this episode and attacks him, but he is tackled by Kane: "You are not animals. There are rules - there are laws. You are not in charge here anymore." The difference between childhood and adulthood is recoded as a contrast between animalistic violence and human law, suggesting that the arrival of the adults is a restoration of bios over zoe, that "zone of indistinction and continuous transition between man and beast, nature and culture" (Agamben 65).

Furthermore, the arrival of the adult group is followed by a power struggle between Clarke and her mother, at the time also an acting Chancellor. In the beginning, Abby refers to her daughter as "just a kid," when she is interrupted by another member of the delinquent group, Raven (Lindsey Morgan), who tells her that Clarke stopped being a kid "the day you sent her down here to die" ("Human Trials," Season 2, Episode 5). The tensions between mother and daughter escalate in "Coup de Grâce" (Season 2, Episode 11), when Abby tries to assert her authority as an adult, a mother and a Chancellor: "Clarke, you are not in charge here. We do things my way." By the end of the episode, however, Clarke's management of conflict and her experience of life on the ground make even Kane admit that they should trust Clarke, who responds to her mother: "You may be the Chancellor, but I'm in charge." The maturation narrative comes full circle officially by the middle of the third season, when even Abby herself admits to Kane that "in case you haven't noticed, they're not kids anymore" ("Bitter Harvest," Season 3, Episode 6).

One of the main storylines of that season underlines the connections between *The 100* and a series that is very different in many other ways, *Utopia*. In a flashback scene in "Wanheda (Part I)," it is revealed that the nuclear apocalypse was induced by an Artificial Intelligence named A.L.I.E. whose core command was "to make life better" by "fixing the root problem," namely "too many people" and therefore launched the nuclear bombs that brought about the end of the world. The shared commitment to the amelioration of life through the management of the human population from the part of the villains of the story is a main point of convergence between the two series, which underscores a common preoccupation with the politics of life in their visions of apocalypse. The fact that this vision consists in disruptions of linear developmental narratives of childhood establishes even stronger connections between them. My discussion will now turn to the Channel 4 show, set not in a post-apocalyptic future but a pre-apocalyptic present.

Utopia (Channel 4, 2013-14)

At the waiting area of a bus station, a little child is sneezing. "Bless you!" says the man

sitting at the next bench, when the toddler's mother apologizes: "He's got a touch of flu."

"Yeah, it's going round," says the man. As they begin to talk, she tells him she chose to travel

by bus to the South of France because of the impact of carbon footprint emissions on the

environment. The man agrees: "Why did you have him, then? Nothing uses carbon like a

first-world human. Yet you created one." And he continues, as the child's mother listens in

shock, during a monologue that essentially reduces the life of the child from bios to zoe:

> He will produce 515 tons of carbon in his lifetime. That's 40 trucks' worth. Having
>
> him was the equivalent of nearly 6,500 flights to Paris. You could have flown 90
>
> times a year, there and back, nearly every week of your life, and still not had the
>
> same impact on the planet as his birth had. Not to mention the pesticides, detergents,
>
> the huge quantity of plastics, the nuclear fuels used to keep him warm. His birth was
>
> a selfish act. It was brutal. You have condemned all this to suffering.
>
> In fact, if you really cared what you'd do is cut his throat open right now. Or I could
>
> do it for you. I could take out my knife, make an incision in his neck, walk away. I'd
>
> get my coach over there and you would have done more than your bit for the future
>
> of humanity. I could do it now.
>
> But look at me chatting. I think they're about to leave. I hope he gets over that flu.
>
> But maybe he just shouldn't. (Season 2, Episode 6)

The child is thus reduced to a young *homo sacer*, no less expendable than the delinquents

of *The 100*, but this scene occurs in Dennis Kelly's *Utopia*. The man is Terrence (Steven

Robertson), a hitman working for the Network, a shadowy organization that aims at tackling overpopulation by unleashing "Janus," an engineered virus aimed at sterilizing the majority of the human population. This project was turned into a plot in a cult graphic novel entitled *The Utopia Experiment* by geneticist Phillip Carvel (Ian McDiarmid) after he stopped working for the Network. The series begins as a group of fans of the graphic novel realize that its vision of a viral apocalypse is a real-life conspiracy. As a "technology that enables the control of populations" (M. Kelly 4), biopower is fundamental to the apocalyptic vision of *Utopia* insofar as it is informed by anxieties on overpopulation and the weaponization of disease. What is distinctive about Janus is that it does not aim at the extinction of the human race but at its very survival by virtue of selective sterilization; as far as the Network is concerned, they work not in the name of death but in the name of life. They operate under the rule of biopower whereby "killing or the imperative to kill is acceptable only if it results not in a victory over political adversaries, but in the elimination of the biological threat to and the improvement of the species of race" (Foucault, *Society* 256).

Terrence is not the only Network member to rely on statistics in order to defend the Janus project. When the lead characters, Ian (Nathan Stewart-Jarrett), Becky (Alexandra Roach) and Wilson (Adeel Akhtar) have captured one of Network's members, Letts (Stephen Rea), he bemoans the rise of the human population to seven billion from two billion at the time of his birth and praises Genghis Khan for massacring 40 million people, thus reducing the current population by one billion:

> Janus affects 90 to 95% of the population, leaving only 1 in 20 fertile. We predict the population will plateau at 500 million in just under a hundred years. By then, normal breeding ways should resume, but on a planet that will feel… empty.
> (Season 1, Episode 5)

It is hardly a surprise that Network members would rely on a discipline that would be so fundamental to the consolidation of modern biopower. The emergence of statistics in the eighteenth century converged with the discipline of biology and contributed to the formation of the very idea of "population" itself, which is "constituted by biopolitics: there is no 'population' in the modern sense before biopolitics" (M. Kelly 4). Mark Kelly is following Foucault's argument, who suggests that "biopolitics emerges at this time" when the population is dealt with as a "political problem, as a problem that is at once scientific and political, as a biological problem and as power's problem" (*Society* 245). In its concern with overpopulation, the series raised major ethical debates on prioritizing the short-term or long-term survival of the species, particularly through the character of Wilson, who chooses to side with the Network and eventually becomes their leader by the end of the second season. *Utopia* also shared with *The 100* an interest in raising questions regarding "the fundamental division structuring [the] biopolitical realm between lives deemed 'worth living' and those deemed expendable" (Vint 163). On this occasion, however, the focus was on "race" rather than childhood as its second season concentrated on whether Carvel chose to make a specific race immune to Janus and therefore ensuring its survival.

At the same time, this concern with overpopulation and resource management also determines the Network's view of children as creatures wasting resources, a perception that disrupts rather than reinforces dominant developmental paradigms of childhood. In their bleak vision of the future, children are not an "investment in human capital" (Foucault, *Birth* 230) but an expenditure. There is a certain irony, then, that the Holy Grail of the Network, the Janus virus, is revealed to have been hidden in the blood of a child, since it turns out that Carvel hid the virus inside the blood of his daughter Jessica (Fiona O'Shaughnessy). In a perverse twist of the developmental narrative of childhood, the future of the human species is

indeed embodied in a child – but this is the future of genocide. At the same time, Jessica's description of her body when she finds out the truth is exemplary of the indebtedness of the apocalyptic vision of *Utopia* to the biopolitics of childhood: a "genetic container" of disease.

These images of childhood, however, are only part of a set of representations within the series that subvert developmental discourses insofar as they disrupt established biopolitical narratives of procreation and maturation. These representations, in turn, are part of a recurring preoccupation with biopolitical issues and concerns such as infertility and artificial insemination, physical torture and corporeal violence, psychological shock and childhood trauma. An early subplot of the series involves senior civil servant Michael Dugdale (Paul Higgins), who is being blackmailed by the Network because he has left a Russian prostitute named Anya (Anna Madeley) pregnant, while Dugdale and his wife Jen (Ruth Gemmell) are considering In-Vitro Fertilization because of Jen's inability to conceive. Later in the season, it is revealed that Anya is in fact a British agent working for the Network and that she is not pregnant after all, in a plot detail that may also be read as quite symbolic and indicative of a recurring tendency of the series to erase the concept of motherhood. Further to Anya's false pregnancy and Jen's inability to conceive, Carvel's wife Brosca (Anca Androne) died after giving birth to their daughter Jessica, while, during the second season of the series, Jessica herself realizes that she cannot conceive as a result of the experiments her father conducted upon her. Mother*s* are either absent, weak, dead or barren in *Utopia* and the preoccupations with increasing overpopulation are intertwined with anxieties about the status of human reproduction with the proliferation of technologies of artificial insemination. In her reading of the show, Lorna Jowett maps the biopolitical space within which the series is located:

Medical testing and experimentation, corporate domination, anxieties about surveillance, nervousness about a global pandemic, projections about overpopulation and taxing our

planet's resources all feature in the conspiracy narrative. The show stops short of making any overt connection between the availability of fertility treatments (integral to one character's subplot) and widespread overpopulation, leaving the viewer to ponder the blurring of public and private concerns in the contemporary politics of reproduction.

It is within the context of the "politics of reproduction" of *Utopia* that its representations of motherhood are intertwined with those of childhood. Series creator Dennis Kelly has the significance of children in *Utopia* in a manner indebted to the developmental model of childhood that underlines the biopolitical significance of the child as the literal and symbolic embodiment of the future of the species:

> There's a kind of a connection to children as you go through the series - I think it's something to do with the future. In trying to write about where we might be headed as a culture, as a nation, even as a species, the people that the future affects most are the youngest.

Utopia's apocalypse, however, consists precisely in the disruption, even the reversal, of the developmental progression of childhood towards adulthood, insofar as it is a show in which children act like adults and adults act like children. On one hand, the behavior and acting of child characters appears more adult than expected, as in the case of Grant (Oliver Woolford), a member of the original team of *Utopia* fans, and Alice Ward (Emilia Jones), a girl that he meets and entrusts with the second volume of Carvel's *Utopia*. Grant has even lied about his age to the other members of the forum, telling them that he is a banker working for the City who drives a Porsche. But, as in the case of *The 100*, the disruption of the developmental narrative of childhood also consists of an association with violence and

murder, since both Grant and Alice witness and re-enact murders they witness. In the opening episode, Grant witnesses the murder of another fan of the *Utopia* graphic novel, Bejan (Mark Stobbart) by Network hitmen Arby (Neil Maskell) and Lee (Paul Ready) whereas he is the one who murders Carvel in the series final episode. Alice, on the other hand, witnesses her mother being murdered by Arby (Season 1, Episode 3) and, in the following episode, while still in a state of shock, grabs a shotgun and kills Network associate Monroe (Mitchell Mullen), because she considers him responsible for her mother's death. These are also not the only children to witness violence in the series as Jessica reveals to Grant that as a child, she witnessed the long torturing and murder of her guardian, Christos (William Belchambers). As Aidan Smith commented in his review of the series, "everywhere you looked, or dared to, childhoods had been stolen."

On the other hand, there are adults who act like children, specifically Arby, the sociopathic hitman working for the Network, whose name comes from the initials R.B., for "Raisin Boy," which is how the way he was called by members of the Network referred to him when they forgot his real name of Pietre. Arby turns out to be Carvel's son and his characterization is determined by psychiatric discourses of trauma insofar as his state of dissociation is attributed to the experiments to which he was subjected by his father when he was still a toddler. The opening episode of the second season, set in the 1970s, includes a scene where Carvel brings a rabbit in front of young Pietre and slaughters it as part of his experiments to suppress his son's violent tendencies. Instead, these experiments left Pietre traumatized, emotionally disconnected and, as an adult, capable of murderous sociopathy. Arby's storyline, therefore, finds itself indebted to discourses that have historically consolidated the governing of childhood, such as the "psy-disciplines," and the series underlines the biopolitical regime of the Network in their ability to turn not only a virus into a weapon but also trauma into violence.

It is quite unfortunate that the eventual cancellation of the series has not allowed writers to further explore the concerns and anxieties articulated through their apocalyptic visions in the first two seasons. Regardless, *Utopia*, and *The 100*, remain two of the most representative examples of the proliferation of representations of childhood in (post-)apocalyptic fictions. Accordingly, often these fictions tend to reflect and challenge assumptions about childhood by associating the apocalypse with the disruption of established, modern developmental narratives of childhood. Biopolitical theory is particularly useful in exploring the discursive strategies employed in these fictions in order to achieve that end, and further work on the subject would need to involve not only more detailed exploration of even more similar fictions, but also further attention to the intersection of representations of childhood with those of gender, sexuality, "race," and class.

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