

THE POLITICAL LIFE OF THE MERELY LIVING IN
FATIH AKIN'S *THE EDGE OF HEAVEN* AND STEPHEN FREARS' *DIRTY*
PRETTY THINGS

A Thesis

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School
of Cornell University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

by

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August 2011

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Cornell University 2011

This paper examines the interplay between the nation-state model, the metaphors of family and body, and the effects of global capitalism on the individual body. Using *The Edge of Heaven* and *Dirty Pretty Things* as case studies, I argue that changes to and ruptures in the nation-state model can be correlated with the transformations taking place in the nuclear family unit from which the “national family” draws its symbolic force. Furthermore, looking at the films through frameworks produced within political philosophy and literary theory, I suggest that the commodification of the individual body within the nuclear family unit attests to the pressures that global capitalism exerts on all persons, particularly those outside the protective borders of citizenship, thus forcing their entrance into the market as commodities without regard for the ethics of the transformation from person to good.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Ying Cheng is a Master of Arts candidate in the English department at Cornell University. Her literary and theoretical interests include twentieth-century American literature, film studies, postcolonial studies, continental philosophy, and psychoanalysis. Ying received her B.A. (2009) and M.A. (2010) at Dartmouth College. She majored in comparative literature at both the undergraduate and graduate levels.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Special thanks to Elizabeth Anker for her support and guidance throughout the year. I am also grateful to Jonathan Culler for his discerning questions and comments in the final phases of this project.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

The Edge of Heaven and *Dirty Pretty Things* are two films that have come out in the last decade about an ethical crisis facing the nation-state model in a global economy. Specifically, the films critique the ambiguous ethical stance of global powers, like Germany and England, regarding the rights of the undocumented individuals working within their borders. The films demonstrate how these nation-states benefit from the selective porosity of their borders; artificially set boundaries through which cheap labor is brought in or deported at the behest of the market, without regard for the rights of workers who do not have the protection promised through citizenship. While the storylines of each film are different, they find common ground over the themes of forced emigration, the ethical imperatives that co-exist uneasily with the logic of capitalism, and the eroticized foreign body on which the pressures of global capitalism are exerted.

The Edge of Heaven is about a series of encounters between six individuals prompted by the geopolitical and economic tensions between Germany and Turkey. These encounters are triggered by Ali Aksu's business proposal to Yeter Öztürk, an undocumented Turkish sex worker in the red light district of Bremen, Germany. Ali asks Yeter move in with him as his companion instead of continuing to receive random men, a proposition to which Yeter agrees. Following a heart attack, Ali accidentally kills Yeter in a fit of rage. Nejat Aksu, Ali's adult son, is horrified by his father's crime and feels compelled to travel to Istanbul to seek the late Yeter's daughter, Ayten Öztürk, who has gone missing. Unbeknownst to Nejat, however, Ayten has recently snuck into Germany under a false identity to hide from Turkish authorities seeking to prosecute her for

political reasons. She also does not know that her mother has been working as a prostitute, nor that she has been killed. After Ayten's meager financial resources are depleted, she hangs around a university campus panhandling and meets Charlotte ("Lotte") Staub, a German student who takes a quick liking to the former and invites her home to stay indefinitely. Lotte and Ayten become lovers overnight; Lotte pressures her mother, Susanne, to finance Ayten's appeal for refugee status, which is denied after an expensive, year-long trial. Lotte is devastated and follows Ayten to Istanbul, against Susanne's wishes. Lotte eventually finds a way to see Ayten in prison where the latter asks Lotte to move a gun from its hidden spot. When Lotte is transporting the weapon to Ayten's outside contact, her purse, and the gun, are stolen by street kids who accidentally pull the trigger and kill Lotte. Susanne goes to Istanbul to sort out the events following Lotte's death and meets Nejat, Ali's son, who has moved to Istanbul in his search for Ayten. In fact, Nejat rents the same room to Susanne as he did for Lotte, when she was still alive. Lotte was never aware that Nejat was also looking for Ayten. At the end of the film, Nejat, Ali, and Susanne are in Turkey seeking something none of them could find at home, in Bremen, Germany.

In *Dirty Pretty Things*, emigrants illegally enter into England to seek what they cannot find in their home country. In a London hotel where the two main characters, Okwe and Senay, work, the body is literally taken apart and sold off for its most valuable organs – the heart and the liver. The indentured organ seller gains citizenship, the intermediary who facilitates this exchange receives thousands of dollars, and the patient waiting for the organ receives a new lease on life. In similar vein to *The Edge of Heaven*, capitalism is depicted as the only means through which one may overcome the limitations and barriers imposed by the nation-state on the undocumented individual. The black market of organ buyers and sellers provides the

undocumented workers with passports to pursue their dreams at the cost of their “real” identity and a piece of their body. Here, the nation is allegorized as diseased and unable to sustain itself without direct intervention and supplements from the foreign other. The organs of its citizens are failing and must be replaced. And, more symbolically, the nation depends on undocumented workers to perform basic, gendered services such as driving cabs (Okwe) and housekeeping (Senay). Ultimately, Senay and Okwe must find a way to navigate through the black market of organ trafficking in order to achieve their own goals of finding a new home in the United States and going home to Nigeria, respectively, without being utterly co-opted by the mechanisms of capitalism.

In this section, I have touched on the main concerns and trajectory of the paper, as well as reviewed the basic plot line. Before delving into close analysis of the two films, I will provide a detailed theoretical mapping, in the next section, of the frameworks and terms to be deployed in the two chapters devoted to film analysis. The second chapter is a theoretical mapping composed of texts broadly defined as political philosophy. Works by Hannah Arendt, Giorgio Agamben, Roberto Esposito, and Pheng Cheah provide critical vocabulary and relevant socio-political contexts with which to “read” the films. In short, the second chapter is both an exploration of the political philosophy on its own terms and a means of minimizing the deviations from film analysis in the later chapters to lay critical groundwork. The third chapter is about *The Edge of Heaven*. This chapter both revisits key themes and frameworks from the theoretical mapping within the context of the film, and most importantly, illuminates the ways in which the film produces comparable theoretical paradigms within its own narrative logic. The fourth and final chapter before the conclusion is about *Dirty Pretty Things*. There, I examine the symbolic importance of bodily organs harvested for black market transplants and the scathing critique of

global power that emerges from the allegory of the human body commodified in its entirety and in its parts.

Chapter 2

IMAGINING COMMUNITIES BEYOND THE NATION-STATE

In *The Edge of Heaven* and *Dirty Pretty Things*, the nation as family and the family as nation metaphors are turned on their heads. Historically, the family unit and the individuals that make up the family unit have been deployed to convey geopolitical tensions between and within nation-states. That is, changes in the family structure allude to changes in the organization of a nation-state. And changes to the bodies that form the family unit, such as illness, suggest changes in the bond between the individual and the nation-state. Also, the borders of the body often denote national borders, with penetration of the former symbolizing penetration of the latter.

The family and body tropes impart a myth of unity around which the nation-state takes shape. That is, the nation as family trope provides a clear distinction between bodies that belong and those that do not belong in a given community, the importance of heteronormative reproduction between gendered bodies to repopulate the nation, a shared history, and a figurative “blood tie” between otherwise unrelated individuals. For these reasons, the family and the body have been long-standing symbols in projects of nation-building. Indeed, since the colonial era, nation, body, and family have been strategically linked to create a community where there once was none.

The term “nation-state” signifies a delimited geopolitical territory that serves the interest of its legally recognized residents, known, for the most part, as citizens. It is a term often attributed to political philosopher Hannah Arendt, whose work focuses on the politics between and within nation-states and the populations that reside within and without the territories. Regarding its historical emergence, Arendt writes: “The nation-state, with its claim to popular

representation and national sovereignty, as it had developed since the French Revolution through the nineteenth century, was the result of a combination of two facts that were still separate in the eighteenth century and remained separate in Russia and Austria-Hungary: nationality and state” (Arendt 229). The nation as family trope used in the process of building nation-states in the collective imagination comfortably encompasses the combination of nationality and state that Arendt identifies. The family trope produces both an affective affiliation that functions to sustain national identity amongst a population of strangers *and* clear-cut borders that construct an inside / outside binary to differentiate one nation from another, just as one family is different from another.

In *Bíos: Biopolitics and Philosophy*, Roberto Esposito briefly revisits the etymology of the term “nation” and its link to birth:

We know how the term “nation” is almost identical in almost all of the principal modern languages and how it derives from the Latin *natio*, which in turn is the substantive form of the verb *nascor*. Naturally, in order for the modern meaning of nation to become stable, a long process is required that doesn’t leave untouched the originary relation with the concept of birth (Esposito 170).

Here, Esposito highlights the long-established interplay between human biological function and political motivation. That is, the nuclear family unit perpetuated through birth cycles functions as an ideal and easily applied rhetorical device when forming geopolitical communities known as nation-states. What is more, the nation as family trope helps to produce affective ties to other individuals and land by calling forth a natural bond inherent to humans regardless of cultural or ethnic background.

In the films, however, these conventional tropes used to construct nation-states in the collective imagination are quickly shown to be inadequate in a global economy. Neither the body nor the family metaphor is able to thoroughly represent the *subject position* of the main characters nor their relationship to the geopolitical territories in which they reside. Put another way, none of the characters in either film could be described as belonging to an exclusive group nor do they adhere to a normative notion of family. Instead, western European nation-states and their citizens are shown to have a *parasitic* dependence on the labor power, erotic and otherwise, of the *foreign other* who arrives, always without papers, through the porous borders of the nation-states, Germany and England, in the films. These undocumented individuals often have competing loyalties or no loyalty to a particular national family. Most importantly, they are coming from developing nations that cannot support their own population who must thus work elsewhere. These undocumented workers provide the necessary labor to sustain the nation-state's standard of living without receiving the benefits and rights that come with citizenship. In short, the undocumented individuals remain at the limits of the national family while helping to perpetuate the myth of plenitude and exclusivity reserved for its official members.

Before diving into close analyses of the films, I would like to examine a selection of texts that could be broadly defined as political philosophy. They will begin to provide some key terms and frameworks, such as the nation as family trope, with which to read the scenes presented in the next two sections. The theoretical frameworks flesh out the “logic of capitalism” that the films’ characters must learn to manipulate in order to reach their goals. The frameworks also illuminate the individual subject positions and motivations that differentiate one character from another. By “logic of capitalism,” I mean markets for tangible and intangible commodities

governed by the law of supply and demand, as well as the legal and pseudo-legal processes undertaken to ensure access to low-cost labor.

Hannah Arendt's post-World War II writings on *mere existence* and the undocumented individual who is not a citizen narrativize a historical moment that sets the stage for the geopolitical tensions that surface in both films. In *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Arendt delineates the creation of the modern political refugee and more broadly, the individual reduced to his mere humanity, beginning from the early twentieth-century until the decades after the Second World War. Arendt's oft-quoted statement on the right to rights (296) still resonates in a world economy where the undocumented worker is the disavowed and abjected body needed to make good on the impossible promise of increasingly wider profit margins. On the subject of rightlessness, Arendt writes:

The calamity of the rightless is ... not that they are not equal before the law, but that no law exists for them; not that they are oppressed but that nobody wants even to oppress them ... [O]nly if they remain perfectly "superfluous," if nobody can be found to "claim" them, may their lives be in danger ... The point is that a condition of complete rightlessness was created before the right to live was challenged (_____ 295-6).

To be rightless, for Arendt, is the most vulnerable position in which an individual can find himself, perhaps even more so than being branded a criminal under the law, for, in the latter case, the body is at least marked by law and is thus acknowledged as a legal entity (_____ 295). Conversely, the superfluosness inherent to the state of rightlessness reduces the individual to what Arendt calls *mere existence*. For Arendt, *mere existence* indicates the status of the individual after the loss of his fundamental right to rights (_____ 301). That is, the individual in

his mere humanness with no legal status is in a precarious and vulnerable state because his death would not longer be an event defined through law and thus punishable by law.

What is more, an innocent individual is, ironically, also more easily deprived of his rights because he is not *marked* by law: “Jurists are so used to thinking of law in terms of punishment, which indeed always deprives us of certain rights that they may find it even more difficult than the layman to recognize that the deprivation of legality, *i.e. of all rights*, no longer has a connection with specific crimes” (_____ 295). In practice, without the right to rights, the merely living may be killed outside the limits of the law that no longer recognizes certain bodies as legal entities to be punished or protected.

To be sure, in the films, the state of mere existence is not produced through world war or concentration camps. It is instead produced through globalization and its effects on undocumented workers who are deprived of the fundamental right to rights in the nation-state to which they emigrate. However, Arendt’s language loses none of its representative power in more recent contexts in which the undocumented laborer provides services in a developed nation without receiving affirmative legal recognition of his existence. The invisibility of the political refugee and the concentration camp prisoner in the first half of the twentieth century is echoed in the invisibility of the undocumented worker who only exists through the creation of goods and services made possible by his labor power. Put another way, the undocumented worker is less of a legal entity than the goods that his labor power produces.

In the decades following Arendt, political philosophers Giorgio Agamben and Roberto Esposito draw from her writings to lay their own groundwork on the status of the rightless. *Bare life* (Agamben) and *flesh* (Esposito) are two of the key terms that encapsulate these relatively newer frameworks built on and against the foundation laid by Arendt and others in the earlier

half of the twentieth century. Both terms gesture towards community and political life not limited by national borders. Furthermore, while Arendt situates the non-citizen in a strictly *apolitical* sphere, Agamben and Esposito, through different motifs, emphasize the inherently political nature of the disavowed, rightless bodies. Simply put, Agamben and Esposito politicize the rightless individuals who are inherently apolitical in Arendt's work.

In *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, Agamben underscores the separation between the nation-state and the nation as family metaphor that has commanded the collective imagination in national communities. He isolates birth from the process of nation building; a radical move as birth has always been located at the starting point of a nation-state's genealogy. Most importantly, it is in this separation of birth from the nation-state model that the sphere of bare life comes to the forefront:

The growing dissociation of birth (bare life) and the nation-state is the new fact of politics in our day, and what we call camp is this disjunction. To an order without localization (the state of exception, in which law is suspended) there now corresponds a localization without order (the camp as permanent space of exception). The political system no longer orders forms of life and juridical rules in a determinate space, but instead contains at its very center a dislocating localization that exceeds it and into which every form of life and every rule can be virtually taken (Agamben 175) [underline added].

Again, the separation (or "growing dissociation") of "birth" from "nation," two terms identified by Esposito as inseparable in the formation of nationhood, produces the sphere of bare life. The individual born outside of the nation-state's protective legal and geopolitical borders is reduced to his mere humanity. That is, if birth is the natural starting point of the nation-state that ushers

individuals into a protective ring, then what could the alienation of birth from nation signify? And what happens to those who are simply born? Instead of imagining birth as the logical starting point of a national family, birth on its own is an abjected and independent status against which the political is defined. Birth without the right to rights promised by a nation-state results in a community of individuals in excess of the national community.

Significantly, in Agamben's work, this surplus constitutes the core of the modern nation-state. Instead of denying political legitimacy to the merely human, as Arendt's concept of *mere existence* does, Agamben argues that the *dislocating localization* of bare life can occur to anyone at any moment, thus rendering this reduction to mere humanity a political tool deployed to control the bodies that move across and within borders. Anyone can be temporarily reduced to the vulnerable state of being born outside of the confines of a nation-state and the protection guaranteed by such a birth. Put another way, Agamben, in direct dialogue with Arendt's concept of *mere existence*, points out that birth as a politicized motif conveys a similar state of vulnerability and rightlessness, *if* it is not situated in the genealogy of a nation-state. If one is simply born, but not accepted into a national community, then one remains merely human or in the realm of bare life, using Agamben's term. Thus, the dissociation of birth from the nation-state is used to figuratively convey the existence of individuals who are without rights and in excess of any national community.

Returning to the Esposito quote at the beginning of this section, when *natio* (to be born) is taken out of nation, birth turns into a wholly other political paradigm that is both in excess of the nation-state model and a product of its exclusion. On the one hand, the nation-state model does not encompass birth without subsequently endowing one with a national identity; one cannot be born into a nation-state without immediately receiving rights. On the other hand, the

sphere of bare life, in which those who are merely born are situated, is a threat to the national family with clearly demarcated borders, particularly if those without rights become greater in number than those with rights.

Furthermore, the sphere of bare life is not reducible to the binary logic of inside / outside. Agamben suggests that bare life is not materially localized in one space. Instead, it is called forth and dissolved by external juridical injunctions imposed on the individual body; an individual can be reduced to bare life or elevated from this status through law. The “camp” may arise and disappear at the behest of a sovereign power such as a president or head of state. Thus, the individual might be a legal citizen at one moment, but marked as an illegal alien in the next. In a move that echoes the work of Arendt, Agamben imagines the space of bare life as one that may be called forth without warning, thus situating a previously legal body in the sphere of bare life: the Jewish-German citizen who is stripped of citizenship is a recurring example in both scholars’ work.

While the concepts of *mere existence* and *bare life* are comparable, Agamben’s reformulation of Arendt’s concept introduces contingency, the political, and surplus into the status of the merely human that are not as fully developed in Arendt’s work. That is, having the benefit of hindsight, Agamben imagines a sphere of the merely living, which he terms bare life, as a space that is transient and ephemeral, whereas Arendt attributes a sense of permanency to the state of mere existence. Put another way, Arendt’s undocumented individual is fixed in the state of mere existence indefinitely, while Agamben’s citizens and non-citizens may find themselves thrust into or out of the sphere of bare life, as this law is imposed under exceptional circumstances neither materially localized nor permanently grafted onto the body. Most importantly, Arendt imagines the undocumented, rightless mass as *apolitical*, whereas Agamben

would argue that those in the sphere of bare life form the negative core of the community from which they are excluded. That is, Arendt's conceptualization of mere existence produces an inner and outer circle of life, with the apolitical rightless situated outside and the citizens situated inside, whereas Agamben might be more likely to suggest that bare life and political life are two sides of the same coin.

Roberto Esposito, in *Bíos: Biopolitics and Philosophy*, takes up the issue of rightlessness by supplementing the nation as family metaphor with *flesh*. Esposito's theory of flesh opens up to a radically different organization of geopolitical space, beyond the nation-state's borders, but always in dialogue with and against the symbolically charged tropes of the national family and the bodies within this family. Esposito's work echoes, to a certain extent, Agamben's bare life as a necessarily political space that is not physically localized, but always an imminent threat to the individual with rights. Esposito asks: "What political form can flesh take on, the same flesh that has always belonged to the modality of the impolitical? And what can be assigned to something that is born out of the remains of anomie? Is it possible to extract from the cracks of *immunitas* the outlines of a different *communitas*?" (Esposito 166). Flesh complicates the metaphor of bodily borders as national borders. That is, Esposito calls forth the excessive and amorphous image of flesh as an alternative building block; flesh being at once a bodily phenomena in the material sense, but also less conducive to projects of exclusion, easily justified in the nation as family trope where individuals that do not belong are *outside* of the family. Looking at the metaphor more closely, flesh could suggest bodies in the national family, but could also be the excess or unwanted surplus of those bodies that is conjured up to disrupt the mythic insularity and unity of the nation as family myth. Whether a new community can emerge from this surplus is a key question in Esposito's work and in the films, particularly *Dirty Pretty Things*.

Broadly speaking, both Esposito and Agamben are invested in politicizing the excess or surplus from the national body in their own terms – bare life and flesh. And for both scholars, this excess, manifested in individuals like the undocumented worker, negatively constitutes the nation-state by defining what it is not. The undocumented worker is, paradoxically, crucial to delineating the borders of a nation-state but is disavowed or rendered invisible in the juridical system. Without the excess or surplus to be excluded, the official residents of a nation-state would not be able to define their exclusivity or, in a more practical sense, uphold their standard of living. In order to break this binary of inside / outside, citizen / non-citizen, and visible / invisible, Esposito appropriates and politicizes the metaphor of flesh as a method of reimagining the way in which bodies could be organized in a global economy. Ideally, a community imagined through the metaphor of flesh might not have any disavowed individuals, nor any who are relegated to the sphere of bare life. Flesh as a metaphor also politicizes bodies that were once deemed apolitical by scholars like Arendt, who situate the rightless entirely outside of the juridical system. Esposito writes:

If everything is the body, nothing will rigidly define it, which is to say no precise immunitary borders will mark and circumscribe it. The seemingly uncontainable proliferation of self-identical agglomerations that are ever more circumscribed by the function of immunitary rejection of the dynamics of globalization signals in reality the eclipse of the political body in its classical and twentieth-century sense in favor of something else that appears to be its shell and proliferating substance (Esposito 166).

The “political body in its classical and twentieth-century sense” is the body appropriated for nation-building projects that inherently exclude those who do not belong through citizenship or other forms of identification, such as race. However, if the modern nation-state relies on both the

individuals from within its borders and those from without, then the body and family metaphors, with their clearly delineated borders, are less able to represent the nation-state. The separation between the body and its “excess” becomes increasingly difficult to ascertain.

Drawing a through-line between these three thinkers, I would say that the metaphor of flesh theorizes the modern nation-state that holds at its core the unsignifiable and undocumented individual that Arendt relegates to the realm of mere existence and that Agamben claims constitutes the negative core of political life (the “dislocating localization” at the center of the political). All of this to suggest that Esposito’s introduction of flesh attempts a radical reworking of a long-standing geopolitical paradigm; specifically, flesh muddles the nation as family and family as nation metaphors. In Esposito’s theorization, what is outside a nation-state is crucial to defining and perpetuating what is inside, which means that the surplus produced by the national family is not contingent but necessary.

Integral to the discussion of the nation-state model are the circuits of capital that form the veins of a nation. That is, regardless of whether one relies on the discourse of flesh, family, bare life, or something other to represent the dynamics between the individual and the geopolitical, the economic apparatus that undergirds these discourses must be addressed. To this effect, one might inquire whether the metaphor of flesh could, to a certain extent, liberate the individual from the nation-state model that adheres to the logic of capitalism. If the nation-state responds to the ebbs and flows of supply and demand, then might an alternative organization of bodies through the metaphor of flesh circumvent the wholesale commodification of tangible and intangible entities bound up in the nation-state model? What, if anything, remains irreducible to the logic of capitalism? And what or who might refuse commodification in an increasingly global economy?

Pheng Cheah offers a form of community in which the “cosmopolitan subject” is both a player in the circuits of capital but is not utterly subsumed by the logic of the market either. In the chapter entitled “The Cosmopolital – Today,” from *Inhuman Conditions*, Cheah introduces cosmopolitanism, an ancient Greek concept reworked through a Marxist lens, as a theoretical framework that could loosen the increasingly bourgeois nation-state’s stranglehold on the individual (as agent of capitalism). He also presents cosmopolitanism as a political paradigm with which to move away from the bourgeois doctrine that has taken over former imperial powers and post-colonies alike. In other words, the new cosmopolitanisms intervene in the dynamics of global capitalism, this last inherited by newly post-colonial nations competing on a starkly uneven field alongside former colonial powers.

Importantly, this intervention occurs without a wholesale overhaul of the “system,” a belief which Cheah deems to be at once idealistic and apocalyptic. Cheah suggests that the global connections created through mutual capitalistic practices of developed and developing nation-states can give way to another form of affinity-building that deviates from the path forged by capitalistic structures and thereby function to release the nation-state model, to a certain extent, from the grips of capitalism: “Capitalism is certainly the progenitor of the European territorial national state. But in different historical situations, the global interconnectedness brought about by capitalism can also mutate to loosen the bourgeois state’s stranglehold over the nation so that the state can undergo a popular renationalization” (Cheah 28). Here, in a revisionary Marxist vein, Cheah suggests that, while structures of capitalism have erected the current economic and political alliances between nation-states, cosmopolitanism is prepared to take up the mantle of reorganization at the threshold of the path laid out by capitalistic ideology and practice. Capitalism, on the one hand, has planted the seeds for the idea of nationhood in Europe

(“progenitor of the European territorial national state”), a model that is then extended to the colonies and the subsequent post-colonies that emerge following independence. However, the path itself, Cheah suggests, could lead to something other than a continued proliferation of capitalistic circuits amongst increasingly connected nation-states; instead, at the supranational level emerges a new mode of organization that redefines national territory beyond that of a “bourgeois state.”

Amongst the thinkers discussed thus far, Cheah is the only one who introduces an economic lens in the imagining of alternative communities, whereas Arendt, Agamben, and Esposito are much less invested in a *Marxist reinvention* than a *biopolitical intervention* in an increasingly inadequate model of the nation-state, one that Cheah seems willing to preserve, as long as it is modified by transnational *cosmopolitics*. In the following chapters, I will revisit these theoretical paradigms as they are at once tested, validated, and challenged by the films’ own narratives.

Chapter 3

CONTINGENCY AND DETERMINISM IN *THE EDGE OF HEAVEN*

In a 2008 review of *The Edge of Heaven*, *The New Yorker* writer Anthony Lane defends the film against a spatter of criticism regarding the over-abundance of chance encounters that tie together the main plot lines. Specifically, Lane defends the film against critics who claim that Akin has produced “characters [who are] wrenched too neatly into place, and symmetries arranged for the director’s pleasure” (Lane 2). For Lane, Akin is instead “an ironist who understands that bad luck is a crucible, in the heat of which we are tested, burned away, or occasionally transformed. *The Edge of Heaven* is about something more exasperating than crossed paths; it is about paths that almost cross but don’t, and the tragedy of the near-miss” (Lane 2). However, regardless of how critics have approached the plethora of chance encounters in the film, they have, for the most part, acknowledged these encounters as *chance* or *coincidence*. Simply put, the criticism surrounding the film has taken for granted the unplanned and contingent encounters between individuals with vastly different lives as exactly that – chance. However, reading against the grain, I suggest that *The Edge of Heaven* explores the *seemingly* unanticipated encounters produced in individual lives; encounters that belie the diffuse global econo-political determinism driving these coincidences beneath the *illusion* of chance. That is, the encounters that the characters in the film (and the viewer) understand to be chance occurrences are, in reality, probable convergences in individual lives brought together by the economic and political motivations that bind independent nation-states. These nation-states enter into a *parasitic* relationship with each other, depending on the goods and labor power of others nations and thus undermine their mythical status as independent, geographically demarcated, and

contained territories. In the context of the film, the nation-states are Germany and Turkey, the latter of which has not yet entered into the European Union. The lives of six individuals – Ayten Öztürk, Yeter Öztürk, Nejat Aksu, Ali Aksu, Charlotte (“Lotte”) Staub, and Susanne Staub – converge under the geopolitical tensions between Germany and Turkey. These tensions are sparked, in part, by the presence / absence of the European Union, the supranational economic organizing power that drives the flow of capital and labor power through official and unofficial circuits of distribution across borders. The characters undergo trials that bring to the forefront both the significant transformations in the national family and illuminates the changes in the individual family unit that has long constituted the fundamental building block of the nation-state. I will examine the underlying geopolitical and economic drivers that produce the contingent encounters that tie together the main plotlines of the film and I will identify, through close-readings of specific scenes, the capitalistic mechanisms at play behind the superficial layer of chance that create this series of coincidences.

The nation as family is an overarching trope that runs through the course of the film. The family is a strategic, easily understood, and relatable image that has been deployed since the colonial era as a method of forging a collective national identity amongst strangers who have come to share a demarcated geographic space over a given length of time. The national identity that emerges is simultaneously defined against a clear outside or foreign other who is used to strengthen the nation’s own identity through the former being what the latter is not and vice versa. In *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest*, scholar Anne McClintock draws a correlation between the individual family unit and the nation as family, a move that precedes the etymology of nation laid out by Roberto Esposito, cited in the previous section. Indeed, the parallels between the two scholars’ work, despite their different

backgrounds, underscore the significance of the interplay between family, nation, and birth. Specifically, in McClintock's text on colonial and postcolonial South Africa, she suggests that the link between the symbolic nation as family and the actual individual family unit is crucial to forming a strong national identification: "Nations are frequently figured through the iconography of familial domestic space. The term nation derives from *natio*: to be born. We speak of 'motherlands' and 'fatherlands.' Foreigners 'adopt' countries that are not their native countries and are naturalized into the national 'family'" (_____ 357). McClintock's theoretical paradigm, as I re-read it here for Akin's film, helps to theorize the symbolic importance of the fragmented family units with which the film begins. McClintock's work, as does Esposito's, provide a historical through-line that demonstrates how the unified nuclear family has been deployed as a trope and what a fragmented or non-nuclear family unit would suggest in the context of the film. In a more overt manner than Esposito, McClintock draws out the colonial practices that are still in play in a *post-colonial* globalized world, thus suggesting that colonial practices and the uneven power dynamics they have created over the last two centuries are not a thing of the past.

The family units are Nejat, the German-Turkish professor of German literature, and Ali, his German-Turkish father. Ayten, the Turkish political refugee, and her mother, Yeter, who is an undocumented Turkish sex-worker in Bremen, Germany. Lotte, the young German woman who falls in love with Ayten and tries to help her stay in Germany, and Lotte's mother, Susanne. The fragmented German-Turkish family units come together through a series of contingent meetings and near-meetings driven by the geopolitical tensions between the two nations, tensions that push individuals across national borders in both directions – Turkey to Germany and Germany to Turkey. These fragmented family units are springboards to understanding the disavowed parasitic co-dependence between *developed* and *developing* nations that produce

these “contingencies” in the first place; developed and developing being two terms that echo the power dynamic of the *colonizing / colonized* paradigm. Broadly speaking, the nation as a metaphorical family unit and the family unit as a microcosm of the nation are two interrelated tropes that stage the changing power dynamic between nations and the individuals that constitute them in an increasingly global economy.

In the initial set-up of the context and character relationships, the viewer almost immediately understands that none of the main characters have formed or are a product of a nuclear family – the unit that has played such a significant role in defining the structure of a nation-state. Indeed, at the onset of the film, the nation as family and the family as nation are already “broken up.” Or, put another way, the family unit is in the process of being reconfigured into something *other* than the mythical nuclear family of the past, which then suggests a similar reconfiguration amongst nation-states in the context of the film where (trans)national tensions are often staged in the private and domestic family space. Implicitly, the film also suggests that this nuclear family has always been a mere projection of nationalistic hubris used to shield individual citizens from the reality of the co-dependence that has existed between their own nation-state and its *other* since the colonial era.

As McClintock notes in the following passage, the family unit has long been used as the underlying organizing principle for national projects, regardless of the actual porosity of borders between Europe and its other: “The family image came to figure hierarchy within unity as an organic element of historical progress, and thus became indispensable for legitimizing exclusion and hierarchy within non-familial social forms such as nationalism, liberal individualism and imperialism” (McClintock 45). Given the historical precedence of the mythical family unit as a tool for nation-building, legitimizing predatory economic policy, and exclusion of the non-

familial other, the symbolic charge of the *fragmented* family in Akin's film can be said to foreshadow a sea-change in the relation between nations. The fragmented family units in the film also gesture towards a change in the nation-state's own gaze on itself; that is, shifting from a *latent* to a *manifest* recognition of the growing porosity that characterizes its geopolitical borders in a global economy in which cheap labor power is a necessity. The film experiments with the different consequences that arise from the reorganization of the family unit, both in a literal sense through the various characters and their shifting family dynamic, and figuratively, in the Germany-Turkey power dynamic. Put another way, Akin experiments, through individual characters, with the possible results from this coming event; a newly configured notion of family supplanting the long-bankrupt myth of the insular nation-state as nuclear family. The film examines what this sea-change, allegorized through a reorganized and re-imagined family, might bring forth.

The following scene stages the clashing of nations conveyed through individual subjectivities, subjectivities that are necessarily *constituted* by their respective nation-states, Germany and Turkey. Thus, on the one hand, the scene is an encounter between two individuals with their own biases and beliefs, but it is also a politicized encounter between two nations represented by the characters. The scene plays out the effects of what occurs when the Turkish foreigner, Ayten, enters into the already fragmented German bourgeois family of Lotte and Susanne. Ayten challenges the econo-political and hetero-normative principles that have built this familial space.

To begin, the set-up of the scene is worth a mention. Ayten is coming down the stairs after a night with Lotte, who still lives at home with her mother, Susanne, in the suburbs of Bremen, Germany. Just a few minutes into a stilted conversation, Ayten and Susanne are in a

heated discussion about Turkey's entrance into the European Union. Susanne is sitting at the kitchen table calmly pitting cherries while defending her position on the absorption of more countries into the European Union. She claims that once Turkey has entered the E.U., the political strife in the country will subside as more individuals find work or move westward to take employment outside of the country.¹ Susanne says: "Maybe things will get better once you get into the European Union" [underline added]. Susanne does not raise her voice or lose her temper, but instead watches calmly as the younger woman becomes increasingly agitated. Indeed, Ayten cannot stand still and moves around the kitchen erratically, cursing and speaking in an increasingly louder voice in an attempt to argue her point that Turkey must avoid entering into the E.U., an act that would subsume the country under the mark of capitalism and corruption even more so than it already is. Ayten says: "We are fighting for one hundred percent human rights and one hundred percent freedom of speech and one hundred percent social education. In Turkey, just people with money get education." When Susanne mentions the benefits of the E.U. again, Ayten retorts with: "Who is leading the European Union? It's England, France, and Germany, and Italy, and Spain. Those countries are all colonial countries. It's globalization and we are fighting against it." Ultimately, Ayten ends the conversation with a blunt "fuck the European Union" prompting Susanne to say: "I don't want you to talk like that in my house. You can talk like that in your house, okay?" The positioning of the two women underscores the stable and unstable status of each character's "family," the nation-states of Germany and Turkey. That is, the German citizen may sit calmly in her own home preparing expensive produce and arguing the merits of the E.U., comfortable in the belief that her national family is cohesive with readily demarcated borders. Conversely, the homeless or displaced *other* must fight to enter into a new

¹ Dialogue cited from the segment beginning around 57min and ending around 60min

national family or resist the currents of global capitalism to keep her own national family from faltering or being overtaken by corrupt officials, as Ayten believes is happening to Turkey, where only children of the wealthy minority receive an education.

In this scene, Ayten circles around Susanne, at the borders of this mother-daughter bourgeois family unit, already changing the fabric of the family with her words and her presence, once again shattering the illusion that the national family is insular, despite the “us and them” language used by Susanne. That is, when Susanne says “you” in the reference to conditions improving once Turkey enters the European Union, she is positioning Ayten as the representative of the Turkish nation. The “you” refers at once to the Turkish political refugee in Susanne’s kitchen and to Turkey’s impending entrance into the E.U., thus placing the nation-state alongside Germany, the former colonial nation, parallel to the manner in which the two characters, Susanne and Ayten, are physically facing each other in the scene. Ayten represents both a displaced individual in a foreign nation-state and a nation-state that is lost in the sea of global capital. This nation-state is also coming under criticism from developed nations like Germany for not adhering to “first-world” standards and policy. Susanne, on the other hand, is an individual securely situated in her own home which is in a nation that is, as Ayten puts it, a former imperial power turned global super-power. In a similar vein, the reference to “my house” and “your house” at the end of the conversation could very well allude to appropriate behavior not only in the domestic space of Susanne’s home, but also behavior as a guest in another nation-state, where *foreign others* must act a certain way to remain on the inside, but always in a precarious state with the threat of deportation looming.

Furthermore, Ayten occupies a complex subject position that cannot be reduced to the economic logic of an undocumented worker like her mother, Yeter. To begin, Ayten has

inadvertently inserted herself into the fragmented Staub family unit but does not occupy the permanent position of either Lotte or Susanne. Instead, Ayten hovers at the edges, defending her fragile position with the “master’s tool” – the German asylum system. That is, Ayten’s impermanence in the Staub family unit is paralleled in court, in the public sphere, where she is ultimately denied refugee status after a lengthy and expensive trial financed by Susanne. As Ayten forges an affective connection with the Staub family, she does not participate in the logic of capitalistic exchange as her mother does; Yeter works as a prostitute to support her family in Turkey. While Yeter’s motivations can be explained within an economy of desire that appropriates the foreign other’s body for sexual services, Ayten’s motivations perplex the logic of capitalism. Ayten refuses to exchange her labor power for financial gain, and yet inadvertently uses the Staub family resources to resist deportation through legal means. Most importantly, Ayten’s choices, her politics, her migration, are personal events, and yet they are also reactions to the econo-political situations that have conditioned her subjectivity. Other characters like Yeter, Nejat, Susanne, and Lotte, do not defy the logic of capitalism, but are pulled into the maelstrom created by Ayten’s unwillingness to become a vessel of labor power.

A related issue is whether Ayten’s arrival in the Staub family is pure coincidence or a product of the circuits of capital that drive individual bodies across national borders. On the one hand, Ayten’s presence in the Staub family is clearly contingent; that is, neither Lotte nor her mother, Susanne, could foresee a Turkish political activist taking refuge in their home and implicating both of them in harboring a political refugee. On the other hand, the probability of Ayten’s presence in Germany, as a wanted Turkish political activist, cannot be completely *unexpected* or purely contingent. That is, the German nation as family and the individual family units that constitute the nation have created the potential for such occurrences through the econo-

political policies that bring cheap labor into the E.U. countries to form the underbelly of the developed nations' economies. Ayten travels along a well-used route to arrive in Bremen, Germany.

The parasitic dependence between the two nations has created the conditions or loopholes for the entrance and exit of undocumented individuals. Germany depends on Turkey for cheap labor. Turkey depends on Germany to absorb the excess labor power that has no outlet in the former. Ayten's political stance and unplanned emigration are both effects of this parasitic dependence, one that is not entirely reducible to the logic of capitalism that governs the economic exchange. Through a purely economic lens though, Ayten could be characterized as the problem child created by the European Union's policies. She is a symptom of global capitalism; a symptom that found its way into the individual family unit of Germany, thus forcing a change (permanent or otherwise) in the structure of the German family unit that has long benefited from the work of the foreign other. But instead of selling her own labor power once she crosses the border like other undocumented migrants, Ayten speaks against the legitimized circuits of capital that extract labor power from less developed nation-states.

Figuratively, Ayten's presence disrupts and changes the German family unit in a manner that can be paralleled to the way undocumented Turkish workers in Germany have altered the fabric of the nation. That is, she is one of many undocumented individuals entering into the German nation-state seeking work, asylum, or, more generally, basic rights not given in their home nation. Unlike undocumented laborers though, as previously discussed, Ayten's unique subject position is not reducible to the logic of capitalism. She is already at the core of the German nation-state's smallest unit – the family – without a desire for financial gain, the driver for most undocumented laborers, including Ayten's mother, Yeter. And, in a break from the

foreign other of the colonial era, Ayten is not constructed as an “orientalized” image against which to produce a concrete European subjectivity, although an argument could be made that she fulfills Lotte’s fantasy of an *other* that gives her a purpose in life. Ayten is physically present in the former imperial power and speaks for her own interests.

The scene between Ayten and Susanne also collapses the binary of political / domestic space and outside / inside, respectively. Often times in the film, the home is the space of the political. And the characters are not politicians *per se*, but individuals who must embody and live the policies put into play. For example, in the scene at hand, the ripple effect of the European Union’s exclusionary tactics have literally changed the dynamic of Susanne Staub’s home. Susanne finds that she is an unwilling host to a stranger; a phenomenon that renders the domestic space a politicized and momentarily criminalized space until Ayten is officially declared an illegal resident in Germany by the courts and contained in a temporary residence for those awaiting trial. Almost immediately upon Ayten’s arrival, Susanne reminds her daughter, Lotte, that it is a punishable offense to harbor undocumented workers. Anecdotally, I would suggest that the phenomenon of undocumented workers must be significant in order for the average German citizen to be able to immediately recall this specific law about harboring them. What is more, this law has already pre-empted the *chance* encounter between Ayten and Lotte and dictates the appropriate measures for such an encounter. The law regulating the process in which an undocumented body becomes documented removes, at least at the level of law, the illusion of contingency initially suggested in the meeting between Ayten and Lotte.

The exchange between Ayten and Susanne also pushes the limits of the German family unit’s ability to extend hospitality to the stranger who, in many ways, sustains the economy of the nation and allows its citizens the bourgeois life-style denied to the illegal, undocumented

worker. The collapsing of the political and the domestic can be more fully developed through the concept of *hospitality*. Hospitality is not an unfamiliar concept in the discourse regarding migrants and refugees, particular in the later work of French philosopher Jacques Derrida. Here, I turn briefly to *hospitality*, as defined in Derrida's essay of the same name, in order to look more critically at the *act* of hospitality extended to the other through Susanne's grudging and always wavering acceptance of Ayten. Hospitality also provides a lens through which to examine the colonial undercurrent that haunts the power dynamic between the one who is hosted and the one who is hosting prevalent in the film.

In Derrida's work, hospitality is broadly defined as learning to wait without waiting and being ready to receive without ever knowing when the stranger (the foreign other) might appear. The theoretical paradigm contains a messianic component that foresees an *event* or arrival of the other that will produce not only change, but a new beginning:

[T]o be hospitable is to let oneself be overtaken [*surprendre*], *to be ready to not be ready*, if such is possible, to let oneself be overtaken, to not even *let* oneself be overtaken, to be surprised, in a fashion most violent, violated and raped [*violée*], stolen [*volée*] (the whole question of violence and violation / rape and of expropriation and de-propriation is waiting for us), precisely where one is not ready to receive – and not only *not yet ready* but *not ready, unprepared* in a mode that is not even that of the “not yet” (Derrida 361).

In short, hospitality is the act of waiting for an “other,” without the anticipation that accompanies the process of waiting. Like the family trope, the concept of hospitality can be elucidated on two levels – the nation and the individual. Circumventing the messianic aspect of the above passage for now, I would suggest that in the context of the nation-state, the experience of hospitality cannot be limited to the German nation-state hosting the other. Indeed, an important question that

recurs in the film is whether Turkey is as much a “host” as Germany, particularly in the second half of the film, when many of the main characters find themselves in Istanbul for a variety of reasons – homesickness, mourning, love. On the individual level, instances of hospitality emerge following the seemingly contingent encounters between Ayten – Susanne – Lotte and then Nejat – Susanne – Lotte. The inversion of the host / hosted relationship confuses the power dynamic that is less ambiguously mapped out on the level of the nation-state, where Germany is more or less depicted as the super-power, while Turkey remains the unstable fledgling nation attempting to secure a foothold on the international stage. Derridean hospitality provides a lens through which to examine both the instability of the host / hosted binary *and* the ethics informing each position which are still haunted by the power dynamic put into place in the colonial era. Furthermore, through the act of physical violation – rape – Derridean hospitality introduces a violent erotics between the one being hosted and the one hosting the other.

Two notable moments in the film stage the interplay between the power binary in Derridean hospitality and the circuits of capital that allow for the uneven encounters amongst the characters. The first moment is Lotte’s encounter with Ayten at the university. This scene is a slightly less jolting arrival of the *other* into the German family than Ayten’s entrance into Susanne’s home at Lotte’s invitation, the second scene to be discussed. In the university scene, Ayten stops Lotte as the latter walks across campus and asks her for money for food. Lotte does not have any small bills and invites Ayten to have lunch with her at the dining hall. During this impromptu meeting, Lotte learns that Ayten is a wanted political activist in Turkey. After some probing on Lotte’s part, she also discovers that Ayten “lives nowhere” and “sleeps nowhere.”² Lotte then proceeds to invite the homeless Ayten to stay with her and her mother, Susanne.

² At the 51st minute

While this scene contains subtler cues compared to many others in the film, it does clearly stage the openness with which Lotte accepts the *other*; the way she accepts to be overtaken by the other, in the language of Derrida. She is prepared for the arrival of the other without knowing when the event might take place, and then follows through with the reception of the other into her home. Here, Lotte and Ayten stage an injunction to receive the other and to be received that is raised in Derrida's work, while also producing an additional question regarding the motivations (some of which are erotically charged) of the host to extend hospitality.

Indeed, as the one *hosting* the other, Lotte is not without ulterior motives, even if these appear to be ripple effects of her initial act of hospitality. Lotte quickly appropriates Ayten to fulfill her own needs, thus adding an erotically charged current to her willingness to take in a stranger. The eroticizing of the other certainly calls forth the established paradigm of a colonizing power coming in to save the "native" or the dispossessed person. Just as the encounter between Ayten and Susanne raise the specters of colonial capitalism, the encounter between Ayten and Lotte harbors the traces of colonialism's more intimate turns. To be sure, the dynamic between Lotte and Ayten is, in many ways, not comparable to that of the colonizer / colonized binary. Ayten speaks English and a spatter of German, thus communicating with Lotte in a language that is foreign to both of them. Their knowledge of the English language situates them both in a privileged group of educated individuals. Ayten also shares the same knowledge base as Lotte, but speaks from a different subject position due to her national identity.³ That is, both are university educated and aware of the current political tension between Turkey and Germany, although Lotte is much less invested in politics until she meets Ayten. Furthermore, Ayten does not *ask* Lotte for help other than money for food so much as the latter offers it up without being

³ As an aside, Lotte's majors in university – English and Spanish – further illuminate her desire to be prepared to receive the other as English and Spanish are two of the most commonly spoken languages in the world.

prompted. Indeed, upon arriving at Susanne's house, Lotte tells Ayten that she may take whatever she wants from the kitchen at any time. In the next moment, Lotte introduces Ayten to Susanne and says that Ayten will be staying for a while.⁴ Lotte shows Ayten the guest room, gives her clothing, feeds her, and offers to wash her clothes, all within hours of meeting her. Over the course of the night, they become lovers. Ayten turns into the focus of the Staub family, in the following year, as Lotte attempts and fails to help her obtain refugee status. All of this to say that Lotte's actions flesh out her own subject position as *host* in a manner not explicitly discussed in Derrida, who is ultimately more interested in the "event," the arrival of the (messianic) other within the context of both contemporary geopolitics and the Abrahamic religions. Lotte also becomes more emotionally invested in the relationship than Ayten, who must accept whatever she is dealt. Put another way, while Lotte actively desires Ayten and seems to be willing to bankrupt her mother to keep Ayten in the country, Ayten can be said to accept events as they come to her, with an, at best, ambiguous expression of active desire, erotic or otherwise, except for the one wish to find her mother, Yeter. That is, Ayten does not *not* desire Lotte, but does not initiate any sort of interaction either, aside from asking Lotte to help her find Yeter. Lotte's motives as *host* reveal more about her desire for the other than it does to *humanize* Ayten as something more than a wanted political activist.

Returning to the colonial paradigm for a moment, Lotte, in a way, relies on Ayten's distress to give herself a sense of purpose, a sentiment clearly expressed in Lotte's last conversation with her mother over the phone, when the former is already in Istanbul. Lotte, as an official member of a nation-state deemed a global power, feels directionless and unsure of who she is until the foreign other arrives to complete the binary of host / hosted. In this instance, the

⁴ At this moment in the film, Ayten is still using her pseudonym, Gül, and has not yet shared her real name with Lotte.

foreign other completes the family unit – the microcosm of the nation-state – by providing a sense of *futurity* and purpose to its members who are wanting for nothing and yet deeply lacking in a non-material manner. While the German nation-state turns to undocumented workers such as Yeter to sustain the underbelly of the economy, individual citizens also turn to the foreign other for intangible wants that cannot be reduced to the logic capitalism, as Lotte demonstrates. The actual community that comes to light in these encounters surpasses the limits of the national community.

The second instance in the film that is in dialogue with Derrida's theory of hospitality is when Lotte brings Ayten home. The former almost immediately rebukes her mother, Susanne, for being "too German" when the latter protests that Lotte does not know very much about the person she has invited into their home. Here, Lotte's act of hospitality is quickly juxtaposed with Susanne's, the latter of whom does not have any ulterior motives, latent or manifest, that would color her relationship with Ayten. In German, Susanne says:⁵ "Very generous of you letting a stranger come and stay with us." Lotte simply responds that they have to help Ayten without giving her over to the federal system that might not grant the latter asylum. Lotte's hospitality appears to have no upper threshold. But, as previously discussed, it is not devoid of an ulterior personal motive, whether Lotte is consciously aware of this or not. Lotte and Susanne's different reactions to the arrival of the other speak as much to the generational difference in the mother-daughter dyad, as it does to their individual needs. That is, Lotte's sexual appropriation of Ayten's body is just as problematic as Susanne's facile assumptions regarding the economic benefits that entry into the European Union will bring to developing nations like Turkey.

⁵ At the 53rd minute

Both of these scenes demonstrate how the foreign other supplements the physical and mental well-being of the official residents of a nation-state. Ayten changes both Lotte and Susanne and the dynamic between the two. She gives the former a sense of purpose, while eventually tempering the political idealism of the latter. That is, through her increasingly less tenuous relationship with Susanne, Ayten shows the older woman the underbelly of the homogeneity and fair exclusion promised through national citizenship. Ayten, in her search for her mother, also drives home the reality that the foreign other has already entered into the German national family via routes not officially mapped out by supranational organizations like the E.U. Furthermore, Lotte's sexual encounter with Ayten calls forth a long history of oriental exoticism while Susanne's generalizations about the E.U. illuminate the power relations inherited from the colonial era that are still in place; that is, the former imperial powers extract the most benefit from a global economy, while the developing nations circle at the periphery of the developed nations, creating new paradigms of colonization not named as such.

Looking more closely at the intimate relationship between Ayten and Lotte, I would suggest that the queer subjectivities that emerge in this erotically charged encounter is limited when it comes to subversive and radical agency. The colonial trace still haunts the power dynamic that allows Lotte to take in Ayten in the first place, because the former can afford to, at her mother's expense. In the language of Lacanian psychoanalysis, the relationship between Lotte and Ayten does not subvert phallic law but adheres rather banally to the law of the father, with Lotte occupying a position closer to the symbolic phallus. That is, the queer potentiality is arguably diminished by the colonial power dynamic at play in the relationship between Ayten and Lotte. Lotte's desire for Ayten cannot be said to be completely devoid of a certain *jouissance* in obtaining the exotic other's forbidden body, available only through Ayten's own transgression

of geopolitical borders and her subsequent distress as an undocumented body in the German legal system. Regarding phallic law, desire, and queer subjectivities, Judith Butler writes:

The offering of the lesbian phallus suggests that the signifier can come to signify *in excess* of its structurally mandated position; indeed, the signifier can be repeated in contexts and relations that come to *displace* the privileged status of that signifier. The “structure” by which the phallus signifies the penis as its privileged occasion exists only through being instituted and reiterated, and, by virtue of that temporalization, is unstable and open to subversive repetition (Butler 90).

Here, Butler is presenting the “lesbian phallus” as an alternative to the law of the father at the core of Lacanian psychoanalysis. In the context of the film, Lotte cannot be said to use the phallic signifier to “displace the privileged status of that signifier.” Instead, she often resorts to the power of the phallic signifier to obtain what she wants, such as gaining access to Ayten when she is in prison in Istanbul, despite not being a family member, and before that, bringing Ayten into her home and supporting her for a year through Susanne. Furthermore, Lotte and Ayten’s relationship could be easily subsumed under phallic law; that is, neither of them signify *in excess* of what has already been established in terms of an erotically charged relationship, other than the fact that they are both women. Lotte uses legal and economic means in her attempt to keep Ayten in the country. At the end of the film, Ayten eventually submits to Turkish and international law to free herself from prison. In short, Lotte reiterates phallic law more than she subverts it, thus diminishing the seemingly radical potential of same-sex desire. She is closer to assuming the position of the colonizer of the last century than that of the “lesbian phallus” that Butler deems to be subversively queer. While neither of them adhere to the traditional notion of family or nation as a heteronormative nuclear unit, Lotte and Ayten both lend their bodies to be signified in a

manner that plays out a patriarchal power dynamic instead of attempting to break that bind. To be sure, one must also ask whether alternative subject positions are available to these two individuals, or whether the only way in which they may forge an intimate connection is through established binarisms of power inherited from a colonial past.

While Derridean hospitality and Butler's Lacan-influenced queer theory help to illuminate the subject positions and motives of Lotte and Susanne, neither thinker fleshes out the subjectivity of Ayten any more than identifying her as the *other* who arrives unexpectedly and is appropriated to fulfill a function in Lotte's economy of desire. Specifically, in the case of Ayten and Yeter, two undocumented individuals in Germany, the violence of emigration is violently inscribed on the body that is always at risk of being uncovered for what it is – unaccounted for. Their bodies are manifestations of the transience and bare life that form the underbelly of insular national families. Yeter, as an undocumented sex worker, conveys the effects of uneven development through the eroticized body. Ayten is the body that is irreducible to the logic of capitalism.

In Yeter's case, her verbal contract with retired Turkish-German worker Ali to accompany him as a live-in companion underscores the latter's inability to establish a new family within the German national family other than literally purchasing a body; a body made available as a result of the uneven distribution of wealth between nations. Here, the ideal nuclear family that forms the mythic unit of the nation-state is given a rude reality check through Yeter accepting Ali's offer. Ali effectively purchases an individual to fulfill the role of wife, thus collapsing the public and private spheres by entering into a verbal contract that allows him to mimic the nuclear family via a public market – the red light district in Bremen. Ethnicity is also an important factor; Ali quickly learns that Yeter is Muslim and Turkish, thus making him feel

guilty about taking advantage of a fellow countrywoman. Indeed, Yeter's ethnic identification very possibly incites Ali to make the proposition to form an alternative Turkish family that, from the outside, would look respectable. In this short-lived exchange between Ali and Yeter, capitalism is shown to be the sole agent capable of ushering individual bodies across national borders, creating separations between real family members, and then "reuniting" these bodies in a mimicry of the family unit while the biological families (Lotte / Susanne and Yeter / Ayten) are never reunited.

As previously mentioned, Yeter's intentions are subsumed under the logic of capitalism while Ayten's motivations are less easily explained away by the incentive for financial gain. I would suggest that Ayten's subject position both renders her an anomaly in a capitalistic ideological apparatus, but also a vulnerable *human being* reduced to exactly that. Unlike the undocumented worker who has minimal access to financial resources in exchange for labor power, Ayten is not subsumed under the mark of capitalism and does not officially exist in an legal capacity in Germany until she declares refugee status.

A moment in the film in which the concept of *bare life* is both elucidated and complicated is during Ayten's escape from the German police. Ayten and Lotte have borrowed Susanne's car to go looking for Ayten's mother, Yeter, and are soon pulled over by the police for a traffic violation. While Lotte can provide papers documenting her status as a German citizen and a valid driver, Ayten is immediately put in a dire situation. She has not declared herself as an asylum seeker and is essentially in Germany without permission. In a moment of panic, she attempts to flee from the police officers but is quickly arrested just a few feet away from the car. It is in this moment of fleeing that Ayten's status transforms from that of bare life into a marked criminal. Put another way, prior to drawing the attention of the police, Ayten is an undocumented

individual who does not officially exist. In the earlier work done by Arendt, an individual without rights is reduced to *mere existence*. That is, she does not have the fundamental right to rights and is thus not protected by the constitution of any nation-state. She is merely human. In the case of Ayten, however, Agamben's work proves to be more salient than Arendt's, as the former explicitly acknowledges the transience and impermanence inherent in the merely human. Indeed, prior to her arrival in Bremen, Ayten is a wanted political activist in Istanbul, Turkey. She is marked as a criminal by law and faces a stiff sentence upon return to the country in which she is a citizen. Days later, Ayten falls into the sphere of bare life, unmarked by law and vulnerable in her mere humanness. She is then marked again as a potential refugee once captured by the German police. In Ayten's case, the sphere of bare life is neither localized, her status changes from that of bare life to criminal on a street in the suburbs of Bremen, nor is it permanent.

This second mother-daughter dyad complicates the insularity of the nation-state model exemplified in the Susanne-Lotte coupling where nationhood, capitalism, and law all work in favor of the individual while shutting out the foreign other. That is, Yeter and Ayten, as the unaccountable surplus that finds its way back into the nation-state, underscore the dependence of the national family on the other for both commodities produced by underpaid and undocumented laborers, including sex workers, *and* affective relationships irreducible to the logic of capitalism.

In this chapter, I have examined the geopolitical and economic undercurrents that drive the seemingly contingent encounters between the main characters in *The Edge of Heaven*, all of whom alter the traditional family unit through their friendships and interactions. I have also looked at the reasoning behind the actions of certain characters and the vulnerable state in which they put themselves through a refusal to take part in capitalistic exchange. The interplay between

bare life and the undocumented individual will be explored in more detail in the next section, where an alternative to the nation as family and family as nation tropes is introduced in Stephen Frears' *Dirty Pretty Things*.

Chapter 4

INVISIBILITY AND BARE LIFE IN *DIRTY PRETTY THINGS*

At the beginning of *Dirty Pretty Things*, sex worker Juliette asks rhetorically, “I don’t exist, do I?”⁶ a statement that gets at the core of a story about two people who do not officially exist, Senay and Okwe. They are undocumented emigrants from Turkey and Nigeria, respectively, living and working in London without papers or an official status such as *citizen* or *refugee*.⁷ If *The Edge of Heaven* stages the real geopolitical determinism driving seemingly contingent encounters between characters, then *Dirty Pretty Things* reformulates this illusory contingency into invisibility to arrive at a similar critique of the nation-state as a non-self-sufficient body, a point made many times over in *The Edge of Heaven*. That is, *Dirty Pretty Things* sheds light on the invisible or unseen individuals and their unaccounted for labor that make the visible or “accounted-for” possible. The invisible refers to the labor power provided by undocumented workers who are always facing the threat of deportation. They are summed up in Okwe’s description as such: “We are the people you don’t see. We clean your rooms and suck your cocks.”⁸ The invisible also refers to the anonymous bodies from which organs (especially hearts and livers) are harvested and turned into a commodity governed by the logic of supply and demand, the former from undocumented emigrants and the latter from buyers willing to pay thousands of dollars for an organ. The indentured organ donor, always an undocumented individual, gains citizenship while a high-paying person in need of a transplant receives a new

⁶ At the 7th min

⁷ To be sure, Senay has applied for refugee status; her application is pending with the office of immigration. For this reason, she is not permitted to work but does so anyway to support herself and is thus an undocumented worker even though she exists in government records. Okwe, on the other hand, has a more ambiguous status as he has escaped from Nigeria as a wanted criminal for a crime he did not commit.

⁸ At the 125th minute

lease on life via the black market of the body. In the film, Senor Juan, or “Sneaky,” is the hotel manager turned organ seller who acts as the intermediary between buyers and sellers. He attempts to coerce Okwe, a Nigerian doctor working as a front desk attendant, to perform the operations, but the latter refuses until both his life and Senay’s life are at risk. Continuing the discussion of nation and family from the previous chapters, I suggest that the illegal selling of organs at once allegorizes the proliferation of the commodity and the necessary *supplement* to the national family through the illegal worker who is both indispensable, yet non-existent or invisible. Put another way, the economy of exchange for organs underscores the nation-state’s need for the other’s body and labor power in a manner that both disavows this body by claiming it is not there through absence in official records while demonstrating that the national family itself is inadequate and frail without the material organs and immaterial labor from the foreign other.

The undocumented individual as *supplement* and the human organ as *commodity* are almost immediately drawn together and collapsed in a telling event about ten minutes into the film. The scene is set up as follows: Okwe, the front desk night attendant at The Baltic Hotel, heads up to the fifth floor to fix a clogged toilet. Eventually, to resolve the issue, he must reach into the toilet to pull something out and comes up with a healthy heart, the cause of the clogging. When Okwe approaches the manager, Sneaky, about his discovery, the former is threatened with deportation if he attempts to contact the hospital or the police which would place unwanted attention on the hotel, a space valued for its ability to provide anonymity. As Sneaky puts it: “The hotel business is about strangers, and strangers will always surprise you, you know, they come to hotels in the night to do dirty things and in the morning, it’s our job to make things look

pretty again.”⁹ This scene is the first of many that demonstrate how quickly spaces and bodies are repeatedly resignified as the demands of the market change. First, in terms of space, the discovery of the heart foreshadows the collapse of the hotel room with the surgery room; an event that takes place towards the end of the film when Okwe transforms one of the hotel suites into an operating room to extract an organ from Senay in exchange for two passports.

Furthermore, Okwe reveals enough to Sneaky about his knowledge of the *healthy* heart for the latter to piece together, after a background check, that his hotel night attendant is a doctor accused of a heinous crime in Nigeria, the country in which he is a citizen. The black market forces a resignification, or an over-signification, of spaces and bodies, both of which become interchangeable for other signs at the behest of the market. Simply put, this scene demonstrates that while certain spaces like hotels and surgery rooms are exclusive in theory, the needs of the market can collapse official institutions with non-overlapping goals into an ambiguous and unstable space that could be used for both legal and illegal forms of commodity exchange.¹⁰

Okwe’s roles as hotel worker, taxi driver, janitor, and doctor are quickly shown to be interchangeable in the service of capital, all three supplementing the “official” (documented) labor force, while facilitating the extraction of organs turned into commodities. Finally, the dirty / pretty binary is laid out in this early scene; specifically, in Sneaky’s threat to Okwe in the dialogue quoted above where “dirty” is associated with the night-time activities in the hotel and “pretty” is associated with the exchange of goods and services that fall within the limits of the

⁹ At the 11th minute

¹⁰ Another example would be Okwe’s recurring role as doctor to the other cab drivers who have contracted STIs from a sex worker. When he examines the cab drivers in the manager’s office, Okwe is temporarily resignified from cab driver to doctor. What is more, Okwe shares an illegal permit with other cab drivers, none of whom are actually the person on the identification card, yet another form of invisibility.

law during the day; exchanges that cover up the night-time activities. Together, the dirty / pretty binary calls forth the adage that capitalism never sleeps.

This scene plays out the dirty / pretty dichotomy through the staging of an uneasy encounter between the legal or official manifestations of capitalism, like the hotel business, and capitalism's invisible or illegal marketplace that appropriates and resignifies official spaces of business for other purposes. Looking at the scene more closely, the hotel's most basic circuitry, the plumbing system that guarantees cleanliness, discretion, and a baseline standard of living, is clogged by the excess from another form of exchange, governed by the very same logic with which the hotel is run, but invisible, except to those who know where to look. Indeed, the scene lends itself well to the following metaphor: the visible front and the invisible underbelly of capitalism come to a head; a problematic encounter that requires Okwe, the invisible or non-existent individual, to remove the excess or blockage in order for both sides of capitalism to resume their course, one during the day and the other at night. The actual object blocking the hotel's own circuitry is the highly symbolic human heart, which itself, plays a most crucial role in the body's own circulation system. The misplaced *organic* commodity literally jams up the pathways of exchange of another commodity; that is, hotel service defined by privacy, anonymity, and luxury. Granted, the multiple (re)significations of the characters, settings, and objects are less symbolically charged at the beginning of film when the viewer is uncertain as to the meaning of these overlaps but they already share in the logic of capitalism, regardless of whether the viewer or the characters in the film are able to make the link at the moment.

Okwe and Senay's status as undocumented workers necessitates a constant straddling between the inside and outside of the law, indefinitely collapsing the binary of legal and illegal to produce the large grey area in which the logic of capitalism is most forcefully manifested.

That is, Okwe and Senay's labor power do not diminish the expansion of the market just because they are undocumented and illegal workers. On the contrary, it might be this very friction between the legal and illegal aspects of capitalistic exchange that optimizes the extraction of profit. Put another way, without the cheap labor from undocumented workers, the hotel's profits would plummet with the rise in overhead and, to use another example, the garment factory in which Senay briefly works after leaving the hotel, would cease to exist altogether. Thus, the official, visible institutions in which the legal exchange of commodities for currency is practiced require their own underbelly or "night-time" market as a *condition* and not a consequence or side effect of producing marginal profits; more and more profit with an increasingly lower percentage of revenue allocated to the cost of labor. The night-time market is seemingly in excess but actually constitutive of capitalistic practices. In short, Okwe's crucial role in removing the heart from the clogged toilet underscores capitalism's need for foreign bodies to guarantee that supply continues to meet demand; a demand that straddles the border of legality, allowing both "dirty" and "pretty" things to enter into the market as commodities, thus maximizing the amount of profit extracted. Not insignificantly, Okwe as the non-existent, undocumented worker inadvertently guarantees the smooth running of both sides of the market.

As an aside, the shades of visibility and invisibility are again emphasized when Guo Yi, a night-time morgue attendant and friend of Okwe's, reminds the latter that he would have a hard time justifying his presence at any moment if prompted because he is not suppose to be in the country. Guo Yi states: "I'm a certified refugee; you're an illegal; you don't have a position here."¹¹ Guo Yi's remark harbors traces of Juliette's words, cited at the beginning of this section, to Okwe in its emphasis on the lack of presence Okwe has in whatever space he inhabits. What is

¹¹ Around the 15th min

more, the morgue itself will eventually be resignified by Okwe and Senay, both of whom will use the space as a hideout from the immigration police and eventually, as a supply source for the last surgery in exchange for passports. All of this to say that what remains at the threshold of law, whether it is an individual worker or the black market for organs, is malleable and easily resignified because it lacks the fixity of language endowed by law. Thus Guo Yi can easily identify himself as refugee to anyone who asks but Okwe and Senay are marked as doctor, cab driver, maid, hotel attendant, sex worker, in an interchangeable and impermanent manner, in order to sustain an ever-growing market solely governed by the law of supply and demand, a phenomenon that cannot be delimited by national borders.

Both Okwe and Senay exist at the borders or limits of a nation-state that cannot sustain itself without this disavowed and yet necessary presence of the “invisible.” Roberto Esposito imagines this “inclusive exclusion” as the excess flesh that does not fit into or does not have its own place on the national body. I call it “inclusive exclusion” because individuals like Senay and Okwe are not fully excluded in the sense that their labor power is not being purchased or desired. Indeed, on the contrary, it is the exclusion of their official *documented* existence that enables the nation-state to take advantage of the undocumented worker’s cheap labor (and organs).

Returning to the morgue scene briefly mentioned, Okwe and Senay are neither alive nor dead as far as the government is concerned. Indeed, the corpses amongst which they are hiding at the end of the film are given more official recognition than the two undocumented emigrants, an irony not lost if one stops to examine the juxtaposition of the visible and the invisible at the morgue. Put another way, as undocumented individuals, neither Okwe nor Senay has the right to live or die, thus placing them in a lesser position than most of the dead bodies at the morgue; bodies that are named and tagged, and for which official death certificates will be issued.

In the following passage, Esposito further develops the term flesh as it relates to political life. The context is that of the Nazi regime and World War II, with an emphasis on a racially inflected form of exclusion in the German nation-state at that time. Flesh signifies what the body has expelled in order to maintain inner homogeneity. The expulsion of flesh is an auto-immune act that the body performs on itself:

[E]xistence without flesh is considered to be all that does not have racial qualifications necessary to integrate ethnically the individual body with that of the collective. But perhaps a more meaningful term is that of flesh, because it is intrinsic to the same body from which it seems to escape (and therefore expels it). Existence without life is flesh that does not coincide with the body; it is that part or zone of the body, the body's membrane, that isn't one with the body, that exceeds its boundaries or is subtracted from the body's enclosing (Esposito 159) [underline added].

If Esposito's theorizations could be brought into dialogue with the film's own imagining of "flesh," beyond the Nazi paradigm in Esposito's initial formulation, then one might imagine the *real* national family as being always already in excess of its own myth of plenitude. That is, myths of racial homogeneity or inclusion through citizenship that constructs the national family are premised on the expulsion of a part of its own body that it then disavows but at the same, requires, to constitute the nation's collective subjectivity. In the historical context of Esposito's work, the disavowed "flesh" or body were those of the German-Jew, the homosexual, the gypsy, and other individuals considered deviant from the racial qualifications for inclusivity in the national family during the Third Reich and yet these "deviants" were needed as the *other* against which the German citizen could be defined. Simply put, the nation-state cannot break completely from what it has disavowed because the "invisible" or flesh is a constitutive part of its national

identity that has been produced through exclusion. Thus, this exclusion must constantly be reiterated in order for a myth to maintain its hold on the collective imagination.

Both *The Edge of Heaven* and *Dirty Pretty Things* demonstrate that the nation-state in a global economy cannot sustain itself without the excess “flesh” at its borders, this last identified as the individuals who work in the nation-state without being given a proper life – basic rights, papers, education, etc. What is more, flesh as a potential trope for community beyond the nation-state model recognizes the *internally* produced need for the other, thus refuting potential claims that refugees and emigrants gravitate towards wealthier nations for their resources. The wealthier nations create their own dependency on the other by adhering to a model of global capitalism that could not be sustained without increasingly cheaper labor. The nation-state creates its own lack that is mitigated by an invisible labor force brought from without but disavowed once this labor force has crossed the nation-state’s borders. In the above passage, Esposito explains that flesh is “intrinsic to the same body from which it seems to escape,” a statement that underscores the paradoxical nature of the developed nation-state’s relationship to the other; this relationship is constituted by a figurative biopolitical connection immediately followed by a disavowal of the bind. Broadly speaking, flesh as a trope for the nation-state with porous borders sheds light on the nation’s constitutive lack. This lack is produced by transnational circuits of capital that bind one nation to another in a necessary and *parasitic* dependence in which no object, including organs, is beyond commodification.

Returning briefly to a passage from the second chapter, Esposito posits the trope of flesh as a viable politicized alternative for a new form of community that would emerge out of the nation-state model. Esposito asks: “What political form can flesh take on, the same flesh that has always belonged to the modality of the impolitical? And what can be assigned to something that

is born out of the remains of anomie? Is it possible to extract from the cracks of *immunitas* the outlines of a different *communitas*?” (Esposito 166). If the nation-state as a unified body without excess or the nation-state as a family of citizens no longer offers a realistic representation of the actual communities formed around the world, then what new possibilities might “flesh” (as opposed to “body” or “family”) offer? Moreover, Esposito introduces a clear political agency to the individuals disavowed as non-existent in the political sphere. This distinction between the political and the apolitical in Arendt’s *mere existence* is crucial; it both demonstrates the failure or unwillingness of the nation-state to truly politicize undocumented individuals, aside from claiming these bodies to be illegal or non-existent, while also underscoring the fact that so many bodies are unaccounted for in a given nation-state that the nation as family trope is always already lacking except in its own myth.

The film stages the failure of this long-held trope on two levels – from both economic and biopolitical vantage points. As discussed thus far, the national body is lacking without the labor power brought in by foreign bodies that enable citizens of a given nation-state to experience a higher standard of living and, in the context of *Dirty Pretty Things*, even to continue living once their own organs fail. For example, Senay’s under-paid work in the garment warehouse, filled with undocumented workers (all women) from developing nations, guarantees less expensive operating costs for the manufacturers and cheaper clothing for the consuming public. Whether the commodity is tangible or intangible (i.e. a service), it cannot be delivered to the consumer without entering into the grey area of law in which capitalism thrives and the national body as insular is shown to be an archaic notion. While such is not the case for all exchanges, I would suggest that the emphasis on pseudo-legal activity underscores global capitalism’s *need* and not preference for unofficially porous national borders that would

guarantee a constant influx of cheap disposable labor power. In short, the national body is always already lacking due to its fundamental need for the other's labor in order to sustain the myth of homogeneity, not necessarily through "racial purity" as in the Nazi regime, but through the more equalizing theory of inclusivity / exclusivity through citizenship. To be sure, citizenship is not completely divorced from ethnic identification, in practice, as former colonial powers are often the nations that receive undocumented workers, while individuals from formerly colonized nations are the ones to slip through the porous borders of former colonial powers seeking work. The porosity of national borders needed to keep up with a "global economy" jars with the exclusivity, class distinctions, and in some cases, racial identification part and parcel of citizenship. In short, the undocumented worker serves as a compromise between the need for cheap labor and the nation-state's unwillingness to take on the financial "burden" of giving rights to the foreign other.

Sneaky's theory of happiness could be mapped right onto the nation-state's partial condoning of undocumented labor, certainly not divorced from a sharp racial inflection. Here, Sneaky is speaking to Okwe and attempting to convince him to take part in organ trafficking: "If you were just some African, the deal would be simple, you give me your kidney, I give you a new identity. I sell the kidney for ten grand, so I'm happy, the person who needs the kidney gets cured, so he's happy, the person who sold his kidney gets to stay in this beautiful country, so he's happy, my whole business is based on happiness."¹² Simply put, the exchange is not legal but insures that supply meets all demand versus the legal end of the system that only meets some of the demand. In the case of the nation-state, the undocumented laborer is a key element in the "chain of happiness" that ensures a high standard of living for citizens, work for the emigrants

¹² At the 57th minute

from other nations, and a reduced burden for the nation-state that does not have to extend full rights and benefits to the undocumented workers and yet could not function at an optimal (i.e. competitive) level without them.

The film also exhibits a clear biopolitical inflection, perhaps to underscore the economic metaphor through the organ trade. Without overstating the metaphor, the trafficking of organs from undocumented and / or illegal emigrants supplements a health care system that does not have the ability to provide essential organs for those needing transplants. Thus, individuals with the “ten grand” needed for an organ turn to the black market for this commodity, forcing supply to meet demand and creating incentives for individuals like Sneaky to round up supply sources, despite the risk. In a revealing exchange between Okwe and a young girl from Somalia translating for family members who do not speak English, the viewer learns that a wounded man in need of immediate medical attention had “swapped his insides for a passport,”¹³ forged by Sneaky’s Lebanese sources. The man refuses hospital treatment, for fear of being deported. In fact, despite not speaking any English, he somehow understood the negative implications of going to the hospital and had adamantly refused when Okwe mentioned that word in Sneaky’s office, where this man had been bleeding to death. Okwe asks the young girl what was obtained in exchange for the kidney and she replies that he is now English. Again, the black market for organs teases out the class distinctions between citizens of the nation-state and the seemingly misguided desire to become a citizen at all costs. It is also interesting to note that Okwe treats the man from Somalia in the latter’s own apartment, once again collapsing seemingly exclusive spaces, the public hospital with the private home, to manage or unwillingly perform damage control on the excess of the market; in this case, the living post-surgery body.

¹³ Okwe speaking at the 41st minute

Whether this desire for inclusion is truly misguided cannot be determined on an individual level as anyone would gravitate towards a better life with basic rights. It is instead the institutional (and international) apparatuses that force individuals to make these “choices” that merit an ethical examination. That is, the need for the foreign body’s internal organs underscores the nation-state’s parasitic *feeding* on the other in exchange for the promise of one day becoming a citizen who will do the same to a new foreign other. Thus, on a micro level, the trafficking of organs provides a short-term solution to those in need of papers. But, in the long run, the logic of capitalism, devoid of any ethics, which is unethical in itself, serves to perpetuate a vicious cycle of feeding on the disenfranchised other until she or he finds an illegal way to legality and becomes the perpetrator.

Significantly, Okwe, as a *cosmopolitan subject*, is one of the only characters (in addition to Guo Yi) who appropriates the tools and “language” of capitalism to help the disenfranchised. That is, instead of becoming a well-paid player in Sneaky’s black market dealings, Okwe resists the temptation of easy, untraceable money for his skills as a doctor. Indeed, Okwe turns the circuits of capital on its head by taking Sneaky’s liver for the final exchange, instead of Senay’s, forcing the intermediary to play the role of the organ provider. On the one hand, one might argue that all of the players in the market are victimized to a certain extent. Even Sneaky is an agent of the market, and not an agent of his own desires. If he did not play the role of intermediary, someone else would take his place, as individuals are interchangeable in the service of capital. However, falling back passively on a Foucauldian argument of an all-encompassing power / knowledge apparatus, as Sneaky implicitly does, is not the only way in which one might engage with the circuits of capital that govern every-day life. For example, Okwe manages to move through the circuits of capital without becoming implicated in the various transactions against his

will or being corrupted by the benefits of adhering to global capitalism in its “invisible” form as a black market doctor. Simply put, he quickly recognizes the visible and invisible exchanges that take place around him but refuses to become implicated by refusing the financial rewards. Even when he does perform medical services, such as saving the man from Somalia, he takes no fee or other forms of payment, thus disrupting the logic of capitalism in which a good or service is always valued by currency.

In Pheng Cheah’s *Inhuman Conditions: On Cosmopolitanism and Human Rights*, the interplay between capitalism and cosmopolitanism is fleshed out, with the latter suggested by Cheah as a means by which to undermine the intent of the former without imagining a beyond or *outside* to structures of capitalism like financial markets or transnational corporations. Theories of cosmopolitanism might help to develop Okwe’s subject position more fully. Cheah writes: “Capitalism is certainly the progenitor of the European territorial national state. But in different historical situations, the global interconnectedness brought about by capitalism can also mutate to loosen the bourgeois state’s stranglehold over the nation so that the state can undergo a popular renationalization” (Cheah 28). Here, Cheah envisions a possible solution from within; specifically, “global interconnectedness,” a necessary condition for and a result of global capitalism, will force a reorganization of the nation-state and the individuals that constitute this community, both officially and unofficially. Cheah’s theory of cosmopolitanism is helpful in identifying the unintended effects or side effects of global capitalism that might just lead to a “popular renationalization” of the troubled nation-state. That said, neither of the films lend much credence to a reimagining of the nation-state model; that is, *The Edge of Heaven*’s characters accept the limitations of the nation-state model, while the characters in *Dirty Pretty Things* turn the institutions of global capitalism to their own advantage. In short, both films imagine

something *other* emerging out of the excess of global capitalism's hold on the nation-state but do not go as far as suggesting a "popular renationalization." Instead, in the films' more radical moments, the characters declare temporary guerrilla war against the public, national, and private institutions that constitute the circuits of capital and, indirectly, on the nation-state model itself.

Specifically, while both films underscore the necessary and problematic porosity of borders needed for nation-states to thrive in the age of "global capitalism," *The Edge of Heaven* falls slightly short of demonstrating how the cosmopolitan subject emerges out of and is conditioned by this alternative imagining of power relations and importantly, how cosmopolitan subjects might hint at a new form of community, as all of the characters in the film ultimately accept the limits imposed by the nation-state model and international law. *Dirty Pretty Things*, however, attempts to go beyond the limits of the nation-state model through the character of Okwe. Borrowing Cheah's terms here, Okwe might be considered a member of a not-yet-formed community that could arise out of the interconnectedness made possible through the propagation of a set of cultures and languages common to the same nations that have the highest number of transnational corporations; that is, the former colonial powers turned global powers. I suggest that Okwe is a *cosmopolitan subject* because he is able to interpret the symptoms of capitalism while remaining relatively in control of his role and actions in the most intense moments of exchange. He is both constituted by the "global interconnectedness" brought about by the expansion of capitalism through his education, training, and language skills, but also an individual resisting the temptations of becoming an agent of capitalism by refusing its financial benefits. To be sure, Okwe's level of education and gender, as well as his ability to speak English, all contribute greatly to his ability to navigate the tortuous labyrinth of organ trafficking without taking part in it. And, not insignificantly, in minor moments of the film, he shows a clear

sensitivity to the different religious and cultural discourses that govern the lives of the people around him, such as his acknowledgement of Senay's dietary restrictions when he makes her lunch and his advice to a fellow cab driver to remove the cross around his neck when driving around with the "Mohammed" identification card; both of these are examples of moments that cannot be reduced to the logic of capitalism that undergirds the plotlines of both films. In other words, Okwe plays by the rules of the market without actually supplying what is demanded – the commodity or end product. His choice to do so is itself a radical form of resistance against the pressures of the market as well as a disregard for the punishments that await, such as deportation.

Briefly here, theories of cosmopolitanism might be brought into dialogue with Esposito's notion of an alternative community outside of the nation-state model as the former, cosmopolitanism, precedes the emergence of the nation-state, and thus, cannot be a derivative form of the nation-state model. Put another way, cosmopolitanism need not be defined with or against the concept of nationhood, unlike terms such as transnational, international, or even diasporic. Cosmopolitanism is not bound up in the binary of nation and other; it intervenes as a third term, outside of the binary. Cheah writes:

The cosmopolitan embodies the universality of philosophical reason itself, namely its power of transcending the particular and contingent. The regional particularism opposed by cosmopolitanism may be defined territorially, culturally, linguistically, or even racially, but it is not defined nationally as we now understand the term, because in a Europe made up of absolutist dynastic states, the popular national states did not exist. Nor, indeed, had the doctrine of nationalism been articulated. Cosmopolitanism thus precedes the popular nation-state history and nationalism in the history of ideas (Cheah 21).

Cosmopolitanism has a longer history than the nation-state; the former already in circulation as a concept when territories were still divided into city-states. Cosmopolitanism certainly precedes and may also end up outliving the nation-state model. Significantly, cosmopolitanism, as a signifier of a universal, renders obsolete, on the other end of the spectrum, the need for nation as a signifier for the particular, given that the term emerged when the notion of nationhood had not yet entered into the political imagination. Instead, cosmopolitanism situates at its opposite end in meaning, territory, culture, language, or race – signifiers of difference that are increasingly unrelated to national borders. For example, in terms of culture, diasporic communities across various nation-states can be said to share a common or similar set of cultural values, such that the borders of the nation-state cannot contain a particular culture anymore. Language functions in a comparable manner, with English as the most conspicuous example. Furthermore, a minute number of nation-states can be said to be racially homogenous to a large extent, which renders national borders as delineations of racial difference unreliable and dated. Even the geographical limits of a given “territory” is not necessarily synonymous with that of nation, as particular nations still hold interests outside of their borders. In short, while all of the above terms – “regional particularisms” – as Cheah writes, suggest difference, none of them can be contained by the borders of a particular nation. The cosmopolitan thus gestures towards a paradigm outside of the bind of nationhood and non-nationhood. Cosmopolitanism – today – demands a new political vocabulary, perhaps producing its own set of binaries in the process, but situated outside of the nation-state model.

If Esposito’s concept of “flesh” offers a biopolitical paradigm for the excess of foreign bodies that both constitute and *de-complete* the parasitic national body relying on the other’s labor (and organs), Cheah’s theories of cosmopolitanism tied to an all-encompassing practice of

capitalism might provide a workable alternative that puts Esposito's re-imagining of the national body through flesh into a framework not only defined by what it is not, but also independent from the nation-state model altogether. Simply put, cosmopolitanism might offer a way to politicize the "impolitical" that Esposito mentions in the last quoted passage by the scholar. The shift away from the nation as family trope into an alternative conceptualization of the interconnectedness between individuals essentially gives a language to phenomena already taking place. Indeed, the main issue at hand is that even though cosmopolitanism as defined by Cheah is being practiced and easily observable in "real life," as these two films portray with a certain fictional flair, the language and frameworks used to imagine the relations between individuals and nations, always with political intentions, refuse to reflect the reality created by global capitalism, and instead continue to perpetuate the archaic myth of a unified national family with impenetrable borders protected by citizenship and birth rights.

An example of this "real life" can be found in Okwe from *Dirty Pretty Things*. Out of the two main characters, Okwe, more so than Senay, would probably be the subject in which the cosmopolitan and the biopolitical converge to produce an individual who is both always already a part of the "system" and yet manages to work around it with a sense of ethics without ever imagining or believing in an outside to this system. He plays the cards he is dealt but introduces a code of ethics previously unknown in the game. In the language of Esposito and Cheah, Okwe's actions both gesture towards a mode of community that cannot be reduced to the logic of capitalism, while exemplifying the subject position of an individual who reads the language and signs of capitalism without becoming its agent. Simply put, he attempts to create inadvertently, through his daily actions, a version of the *communitas* as worked through by Esposito, from within the defined boundaries of commodity exchange, both in legal and illegal markets.

Examples of the irreducibility of Okwe's actions to the logic of capitalism range from his sensitivity to the religious affiliations of those around him, as previously mentioned, to his willingness to give medical attention to his fellow cab drivers up to the point of stealing medication to treat their STIs, to his obvious but unspoken affection for Senay.

After he is inadvertently roped into the black market of organ trafficking, Okwe reacts to the invitations of capitalism via Sneaky by bringing something that is utterly foreign to the circuits of exchange – ethics. Okwe's actions cannot be accounted for within the logic of capitalism. First, he takes no fee for imparting specialized medical knowledge that is valued monetarily almost everywhere in the world, he does not try to get ahead by taking advantage of others, as many other characters in the film do without hesitation, and his ultimate goal is not profit-driven. Even Senay's desire to go to New York City centers around her dream of eventually running a coffee shop with a family member who already lives there. Okwe's ethical stance does not waver, nor does his willingness to help the other placed in front of him.

Okwe renders services to others like himself throughout the film without receiving any compensation in return, thus troubling the market logic that so clearly governs other individuals like Sneaky, the garment factory owner, and even Senay, who, if seen in a more pessimistic light, could be waiting in the wings to become a bigger player once she has her passport and travels to the United States. Indeed, Okwe's actions could not even be called services, *per se*, as this term implies the commodification of a goal-seeking action. They are more so manifestations of a friendship without demands, a rare occurrence in the film also exhibited between Okwe and Guo Yi, the latter of whom waits in the get-away car to drive Senay and Okwe to the airport once Sneaky's liver has been delivered. It is this friendship, one that cannot be reduced nor explained by the logic of capitalism, that might plant the seeds for a new form of community in which

individuals are both constituted by the “interconnectedness” that Cheah refers to, while remaining inassimilable to capitalism despite being formed by it.

Indeed, one cannot quite say that Okwe is oblivious to the exchanges and signs around him; he quickly puts the pieces together regarding the organ trafficking in the hotel and he is also sensitive to Senay’s sexual compromise (giving up her virginity) for the passport. And yet, he navigates through the various situations with an ethics that is external to the logic of capitalism, thus suggesting that while much of the nation-state is a vessel for capitalism, there are individuals within the borders of the nation who *choose* to elude the benefits of adhering to the state-sponsored form of relating to the other (i.e. relating through the object) and produce instead an alternative ethics that might form a community outside of the logic of capitalism without being oblivious to it. Simply put, the cosmopolitan subject relates to the other *through the other* and not through the commodity, thus rendering the most basic element of capitalism unnecessary to reach out to the other.

While much of the film falls strictly under the logic of capitalism, that is, the demands of the market and the pricing of commodities, Okwe introduces an element of ethical friendship that cannot be accounted for under the rules that govern the interplay between the individual and the commodity. This friendship is also manifested in the various relationships that come to the forefront in *The Edge of Heaven*, some of which are erotically charged and some of which have less of a manifest driver, such as the friendship between Nejat and Susanne, the former of whom offers Susanne a place to stay in Istanbul after Lotte’s death. Perhaps this form of non-commodified friendship might be the foundation of an alternative community that both emerges out of the symptoms of global capitalism (i.e. transnational corporations, English as the new *lingua franca*, etc) while refusing to be completely subsumed by its rules, including some of the

most fundamental ones such as attributing a monetary value to all objects. Perhaps it is this friendship that will salvage the *de-completed body* from the nation-state's parasitic feeding.

Chapter 5

CONCLUSION

Much of the discussion has revolved around the question of why the nation-state model is being eroded in a global economy. In the films, symptoms of this erosion have been most manifest in the family unit – the basic building block of the nation-state. Indeed, as McClintock and Esposito have pointed out, the family is a microcosm of the nation and the nation is constructed in the collective imagination as a family. Changes in the structure of a family parallel changes in the nation-state model, perhaps even bringing forth new forms of community not limited to the territorial borders of a nation-state. The mother-daughter dyads, the father-son unit, and the eroticized body of the sex worker in the films are all harbingers of change in the nation-state model premised on a nuclear family.

The undocumented sex worker is a particularly glaring symptom of capitalism's eroding effect on the nation-state model; it is not surprising that she appears at the foreground and background of both films. The prostitute conveys, through and on her body, the impotence that wracks the nation-state model in the face of global capitalism. In theory, the prostitute has abandoned her body's biological function meant to perpetuate the nation-state's population by commodifying the sex act. In this act of repudiation, the will of capitalism overtakes that of the nation-state. The female body that was once symbolically appropriated for nation-building becomes one of the more abject and potent examples of capitalism's ability to commodify tangible and intangible entities to meet demand anywhere in the world, regardless of the geopolitical demarcations that separate one nation-state from another.

Broadly speaking, capitalism, as an economic doctrine and practice, drives the mass migrations of individuals from developing nations to developed nations that seek cheap labor power. While national borders are always in place, they are somehow just porous enough to allow for a constant stream of undocumented workers to slip through. This porosity allows for new communities of displaced subjects to be formed in the interest of sustaining profitable capitalistic production. Other communities, such as those of political activists, are also formed in resistance to the predatory tactics of global capitalism, particularly in developing nation-states preyed on by the Western world. Yeter and Ayten, from *The Edge of Heaven*, belong to these communities, respectively. Okwe and Senay, from *Dirty Pretty Things*, are also undocumented workers learning the rules of the game as they go along, and quickly become exposed to the true nature of capitalistic exchange. Capitalism, in practice, has no regard for arbitrary national borders, nor is it reigned in by the law. On the contrary, the legal and illegal exchanges undertaken in both films demonstrate that capitalism flourishes when it can straddle the border (outside / inside) and law (legal / illegal). In short, despite national or legal limitations, capitalistic practices can bring together individuals who would otherwise have no affinity.

However, communities formed around a mutual desire for profit and satisfaction does not account for all the modes of belonging exhibited by the characters. Not insignificantly, both films imagine communities that cannot be reduced to a shared practice of capitalistic *doxa*. To this effect, Okwe and Ayten are the two characters that have been looked at most closely. Okwe's sensitivity to the cultural, ethnic, and religious differences around him and his refusal to commodify the medical care he gives to those who cannot afford it create a community of individuals *not* bound by the logic of capitalism. Ayten's form of resistance to capitalistic practices is less controlled than that of Okwe. A radical and often violent political activist, Ayten

is blinded by her rage against the social injustices created by global capitalism, in her home country of Turkey. Her actions, although irreducible to the logic of capitalism, are defined directly against global capitalism. She reacts to the devastating effects of capitalistic practices in developing nations; she is controlled by events beyond her control. It is only in her budding friendship with Susanne, the late Lotte's mother, that Ayten begins to exhibit a sense of belonging that cannot be accounted for through the logic of capitalism. In Istanbul, Susanne invites Ayten to stay with her, in Nejat's apartment, until Ayten lands on her feet again, following her release from prison. Susanne's gesture foreshadows a mode of community previously lacking, despite the numerous groupings that have taken place in the film such as mother-daughter, father-son, romantic partners, prostitute-client. None of these combinations have been beyond the reach of global capitalism's incentives and limitations. The Nejat-Susanne-Ayten pairing suggests something more; a community that is in excess of the possibilities offered by the nation-state model.

The fledgling community in *The Edge of Heaven* and Okwe from *Dirty Pretty Things* pose a similar and yet-unanswered question about the political potential of communities beyond the national family; a question that also comes up in Esposito's work, with which I will end: "What political form can flesh take on, the same flesh that has always belonged to the modality of the impolitical? And what can be assigned to something that is born out of the remains of anomie? Is it possible to extract from the cracks of *immunitas* the outlines of a different *communitas*?" (Esposito 166).

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