



ANATOMO-POLITICS AND BIOPOLITICS IN PARADISE FILM (2023): A STUDY OF BIOPOWER BY MICHEL FOUCAULT

Amirudin^{1*}, Tutik Ratna Ningtyas², Bambang Irawan³, Christy Tisnawijaya⁴

Universitas Pamulang, Banten, Indonesia

dosen01215@unpam.ac.id¹

Abstract

Paradise film (2023) by Boris Kunz presents a dystopian premise of longevity in which “chrono-transfer” enables people to trade for their life years. Rich people can buy youth while poor people sell their life years as a means of survival. This article examines the film using Foucault’s biopower framework, focusing on how chrono-transfer technology represents the privatization of life and body control in liberal capitalism. Through qualitative analysis of essential scenes and dialogs such as Elena’s contract, Elena’s body transformation, and bio-hierarchy dialogs, this article explains its two main findings. The first finding is that anatomo-politics operates within Elena’s body through contract mechanisms, instantaneous body transformation, and self-surveillance. The second finding is that the chrono-transfer system produces population biopolitics in which longevity is unequally distributed, reflecting “state racism”.

Keywords: biopower, body discipline, Michel Foucault, Paradise (2023), literary and film study

INTRODUCTION

In the latest decades, dystopian films have become productive mediums on criticizing contemporary capitalism. Films like *Gattaca* (1997), *The Island* (2005), *Never Let Me Go* (2010), and *In Time* (2011) explore how technology can deepen social hierarchy through genetic engineering and wealth. A film by Boris Kunz, *Paradise* (2023), continues this tradition through its premise: a corporation, AEON, has demonstrated the success of “chrono-transfer” technology allowing people to transfer their years of life from one body to another. *Paradise* film (2023) addresses an issue of how age is commodified like in a stock exchange. It is portrayed that some people in this world have longevity, even to a hundred years of life. The poor people have been the common objects of these practices, sacrificing their life in exchange for an amount of money. This film features a spouse, Max and Elena, who live comfortably in Germany. Max, the husband, is a brilliant salesperson working for AEON, but he someday must encounter a financial crisis forcing him to take a secured borrowing from AEON. Without Max’s consent, Elena, the wife, has used her age as a security for debt. Failing to pay the debt, Max must let Elena’s 40 years of life be taken. It changes Elena’s appearance and body structure to a 70-year-old woman. This film depicts Max’s struggles to retrieve his wife’s age.

Based on the summary above, Paradise (2023) goes beyond a sci-fi telling us about “chrono-transfer” technology. It is an allegory of how people’s age is something that can be traded. However, as the authors would like to look more deeply at this issue, it must be examined as a literary work by combining narrative elements and cinematography elements (Lei, 2024). It is strengthened by (Arslaner Hamarat & Gürses Köse, 2024) mentioning that multimodal analysis is required to analyze a film. A film is said to be a multimodal text where various cinematic modes are built together to create a dystopian setting. As media of entertainment, film has been portraying social issues based on real-life issues including power-related issues. Vaccaro (2012) suggested that transformation of the nature of power is the decline of sovereign power and the ascendancy of what Michel Foucault calls biopolitics or biopower. Furthermore, Flew (2015) said that Foucault’s sophisticated analysis of neoliberalism has frequently been absorbed into more generalized neo-Marxist critiques of capitalism, obscuring the distinctiveness of his perspective. Therefore, Paradise (2023) can be analyzed through literary lens since it is a visual allegory of how biopower produces new bio-hierarchy.

There are three concepts of power developed by Foucault, whether they are sovereign power, disciplinary power, and biopower. Sovereign power is power embedded to supreme reign which nobody can contest with (Foucault, 1982). It gives the one who has authority to rule over his or her people in a state or a territory. The second power concept is disciplinary power. This power is not visible but prevalent in every aspect of life (Foucault, 1982). The disciplinary power is internalized by its subjects so that the subjects are obedient to this power because they feel being watched. The third power concept is biopower. It refers to power where a set of regulations or mechanisms in which basic biological characteristics of humans become the object of political strategies (Foucault, 2008). In other words, life itself (the birth, the death, the health, the reproduction, the age, etc) becomes the target of power intervention.

Foucault identified two non-antagonistic poles of biopower, namely anatomo-politics of the human body and biopolitics of population. The anatomo-politics of the human body focuses on a notion of “body as machine” and how to discipline it, to make it useful and docile. This concept can be found in various institutions such as schools, military camps, factories, hospitals, prisons, etc. The power subjects in such institutions are strictly regulated through schedules, hierarchical surveillance, examination, and normalization. Through those regulations, individuals are trained, exercised, corrected, and optimized purposefully to be befitted with socio-economic system requirements. Interestingly, Foucault delineated that body discipline not only is prevalent in the aforementioned institutions, but it also exists within individuals through daily practices. It is further explained that body discipline as the representation of power operates in every aspect of life. Meanwhile the second pole coined by Foucault, biopolitics of the population, focuses on the human species as population. It controls the birth, the death, the reproduction, the health, life expectancy through mechanisms like demography, statistics, public policy of health, and biomedical interventions. In other words, while

anatomo-politics operates on the micro level (individuals), biopolitics operates on macro level (population). Another Foucauldian biopower concept is state racism. Foucault argued that racism is born in biopower as a mechanism that justifies eliminating or maintaining some individuals for the sake of the overall population. In other words, racism in Foucauldian goes beyond hatred to a particular ethnic group; it is a tool or a technology to maintain power by eliminating threats for the goodness of society. In the context of contemporary capitalism, racism can take various forms based on the following matters: class, physical ability, age, economic productivity. Ageism, age discrimination, is one of state racism manifestations, considering elderly people as the burden of the state. Thus, the state let them die systematically through pension policy, the neglect of medical services, and social exclusion. In addition, it is important to note the concept of normalization in Foucault's biopower. In the biopower concept, power does not work in a repressive manner. Power operates through rule setting like the standardization of a healthy body, normal behavior, productive age, etc. Those who are not in line with such rules must be disciplined, if possible. When it is impossible for them to be disciplined, they can be punished or marginalized.

The various commodification of life aspects has been central to films for decades (Harsia & Adi, 2020). As mentioned, Paradise (2023) highlights how people's life has become the object of commodification due to technological advancement. Despite its explicit criticism on class inequality and ageism, studies of this film are still limited. The existing study by Arslaner Hamarat and Gürses Köse (2024) focuses on body sociology and transhumanism, highlighting how the film represents age as commodity and life privilege for upper classes. Another study conducted by Neisya, et al (2024) highlights how body discipline operates at a young woman through family and neighborhood to shape her emotion, behavior, and identity. However, there has not been systematic study applying Michel Foucault's biopower which examines power mechanisms operating in either individuals or mass populations.

This article aims at filling in the aforementioned gap by applying Michel Foucault's biopower theory. It uses qualitative approach which focuses on answering the following research questions:

- (1) How does this film represent anatomo-politics in individuals?
- (2) How does the chrono-transfer system in the film produce unequal population biopolitics?

This article provides theoretical and methodological advantages to its readers. Theoretically, this article broadens the application of Foucault's biopower into scientific study on contemporary fictions. Methodologically, this article offers an analysis model replicable to studies on other dystopian films with similar themes. In addition, this article contributes to literature regarding body and age representation in films which has been dominated by feminist and psychoanalytical perspectives.

METHOD

The research was conducted using a qualitative approach employing library research in which the interpretation of social phenomena and its characteristics becomes the main focus (Yilmaz, 20003). The data were taken from the scenes supported by corresponding dialog. Some steps leading to data presentation and discussion were done, namely (1) watching and re-watching the film, (2) taking notes of the scene timestamps and dialogs to find the evidence relevant to issue focus, (3) classifying the biopower issue category: anatomo-politics or biopolitics, (4) analyzing the scenes and dialogs, (5) synthesizing the analysis based on the theory used.

The items of analysis in the study are the scenes representing: (1) the control over the individual body, (2) normalization, (3) body transformation, (4), the contract/consent mechanism (5) social exclusion. The data findings are presented in the table below:

No	Description	Dialogue	Time Stamps	Biopower Issues
1.	Max as the salesperson of AEON is explaining to a client how "chrono-transfer" as a life resource	Max: "If you were to donate 15 years of your life, AEON would pay you 700,000 euros..."	Scene 00:01:33 Dialog 00:01:49 – 00:03:20	Anatomo-politics: body as a resource
2.	Sophie Theissen (the CEO of AEON) is explaining the significance of chrono-transfer technology for life.	Sophie Theissen: "Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart died at age 35... What incomparable musical treasures were forever lost... We will include any current and future Nobel Prize winners in our database of recipients."	Scene 00:07:18 Dialog 00:07:34 – 00:08:50	Biopolitics: normalization of biological hierarchy
3.	Elena has signed the contract as the collateral without Max's consent	Max: "What collateral? ... You put up your lifetime?" Elena: The bank advisor told me it was risk-free."	Scene 00:18:30 Dialog 00:18:55 – 00:19:34	Biopolitics: body as collateral
4.	Elena is looking at herself in the mirror after the instant transformation as	Elena: "Your life goes on. I paid the price, not you."	Scene 00:33:49 Dialog 00:34:54 – 00:35:12	Anatomo-politics: discipline

	the consequence of “chrono-transfer” procedure			and self- surveillance
5.	Max and Elena are seeing a doctor.	“Why would you withdraw 40 years at once? That's incredibly irresponsible and reckless.”	Scene 00:36:33 Dialog 00:36:35 – 00:37:00	Anatomo-politics: discipline
6.	Nowak and Kaya debate over a double-moral standard.	Nowak: “What about us? Illegal software, off-the-record operations. The richest woman in Europe gets to play by different rules?” Kaya; “Our job is to keep Theissen safe, not achieve world peace.”	Scene 00:53:09 Dialog 00:53:42 – 00:55:40	Biopolitics: social exclusion

DISCUSSION

A. Anatomo-Politics in Individuals

The first part of the discussion highlights how individuals are disciplined, transformed, and watched by the AEON system. Based on Foucault’s framework, anatomo-politics is technology employed by the ruling party operating at the individual level, enabling individuals to be docile and useful.

Figure 1. Max attempts to persuade a client



Note. Max tells Denys, his client, to sign the contract, for it can help Denys’ family.
From *Paradise* [00:01:33] by Boris Kunz (director), 2023, Netflix.

Figure 1 uses a medium shot to show that all family members gather to listen to what Max is offering. It also uses minimal natural light creating a dim-lighted sensation to show how the family is in difficulty, and Max is present to help them out of this difficulty. This event occurs at the beginning of the film where one of main figures is introduced, namely Max. As he works for AEON, he must always find clients for his company. In the scene it is shown that Max is trying to persuade a client named Denys to sign the chrono-transfer procedures. At first, Denys refuses Max's offer since Denys is still 15 years old. Max shows his mastery in persuasion by mentioning, "If you were to donate 15 years of your life, AEON would pay you 700,000 euros..." (Boris Kunz, 2023, 00:01:49 – 00:01:55). Using Foucauldian reading on this phenomenon, the objective of anatomo-politics is to make the object obedient. Power as represented by Max can subdue the object by offering a worthy exchange. Even though the object refuses at first, he finally accepts the contract and signs it. He is obedient to the system. On the other hand, AEON, as the power, gains benefits from this object since it can sell the age from the object to its customer. It is implied that power is maintained through this transaction since it is legal to do so. It also shows how disciplinary power works there.

Figure 2. Elena looks at herself in the mirror



Note. Elena is looking at herself in the mirror, observing how quickly she transforms after the chrono-transfer procedure. From *Paradise* [00:33:49] by Boris Kunz (director), 2023, Netflix.

Figure 2 uses an over the shoulder shot to show Elena's drastic transformation. She tries to look carefully at every detail of his upper body as a consequence of the chrono-transfer procedure. This scene also uses dim light to show that both Elena and Max are gloomy for what has happened to Elena. This light also strengthens the isolated feeling that Elena has. This transformation has brought her to a condition she never imagined. As Elena feels frustrated, she asks Max to leave while saying, "Your life goes on. I paid the price, not you." (Boris Kunz, 2023, 00:34:54 – 00:35:12). According

to Foucault, Elena is doing self-surveillance. She feels unfit to people's gaze since she has had a different appearance. She believes that people will see her differently as she is now old, even though Max does not have a problem with that. It indicates that Elena has internalized disciplinary values for she feels watched. Once again, power is invisible here, yet it drives the object to be obedient.

Figure 3. Elena has a medical check-up.



Note. Accompanied by Max, Elena is seeing a doctor to check her pregnancy. From *Paradise* [00:36:33] by Boris Kunz (director), 2023, Netflix.

Figure 3 uses a medium shot to present the situation in an examination room. Max and Elena go to see a doctor due to Elena's health decline. This scene uses a practical lighting over Elena's head to show that she is being examined by the doctor. At first, Max has no idea about what happens to Elena. It is revealed that Elena has miscarriage, according to the doctor's report. It is surprising news for Max; he regrets what happens to Elena. The doctor comments on this condition that it happens due to the chrono-transfer procedure done by Elena. She says, "Why would you withdraw 40 years at once? That's incredibly irresponsible and reckless." (Boris Kunz, 2023, 00:36:35 – 00:37:00). It can be said that the chrono-transfer is harmful to the donors since not only it takes their lifetime, but also their quality of life. This is something realized by all of the people living under the system. According to Foucault, it is a form of discipline to the system despite the danger. People who have internalized the system can do anything as long as they do not deviate from the normal condition dictated by the system. Shown in the scene, the doctor, someone who is assumed to have better understanding about people's health, takes it for granted. It is implied that even though it is dangerous, it is a normal thing for people to be chrono-transfer donors. This is how

power works at individual levels, planting beliefs in people's minds that everything listed and regulated by the system must be done despite bad consequences.

B. Biopolitics in Paradise Film (2023)

The second part of the discussion revolves around how imbalance is produced due to the chrono-transfer system. This part discusses how power is maintained through AEON's agenda. This discussion is represented by three scenes as presented below.

Figure 4. Sophie Theissen delivers a speech how age transfer is important for civilization



Note. Sophie Theissen gives a speech to all employees about how chrono-transfer technology can save a civilization. From *Paradise* [00:36:33] by Boris Kunz (director), 2023, Netflix.

The scene uses an extreme long shot to show that Sophie Theissen, the CEO of AEON, is the central attention in this event. It is supported by the use of practical lighting shedding light on her during the speech. As the leader, she tries to bind all of her subordinates to the same paradigm saying that chrono-transfer is a solution for human civilization. Even though it is not mentioned explicitly, Theissen is trying to prove that she has got sovereign power to control all of the people there. She goes on to mention, "Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart died at age 35... What incomparable musical treasures were forever lost... We will include any current and future Nobel Prize winners in our database of recipients." (Boris Kunz, 2023, 00:07:34 – 00:07:42). To convince the audience, Theissen hypothetically argues about what big things could happen if many prominent figures in history had been the recipients of chrono-transfer technology. It actually shows that this technology is exclusive to chosen people. It implies that the technology which is supposed to benefit all humans can only be accessed and used by some elites. It denies its original purpose. Furthermore, it is implied that the technology has produced another form of racism. It leads to what is called bio-hierarchy, the structures in a society established due to biological engineering.

Figure 5. Elena's lawyer explains the contract signed by Elena



Note. The lawyer explains that Elena becomes collateral for the debt to AEON. From *Paradise* [00:18:30] by Boris Kunz (director), 2023, Netflix.

This scene uses various shots like over the shoulder shot, medium shot, and long shot. The use of over the shoulder shot indicates there is turn taking in conversation among the characters in the frame. Besides, it also uses practical light placed behind Max and Elena to show the emotional tone of uncertain conditions they face ahead. This event occurs when Max and Elena are consulting a lawyer about the fire happening in their apartment which leads to their financial crisis. Here it is revealed that Elena is the collateral, forcing Elena to let her 40 years be seized by AEON. Max is shocked, "What collateral? ... You put up your lifetime?", and Elena replies, "The bank advisor told me it was risk-free." (Boris Kunz, 2023, 00:18:55 – 00:19:34). The fact that Max has no idea that Elena used herself as collateral shows how biopower mechanisms applied in this system are prone to institutional abuse. The debtor has no power or opportunity to cancel or refuse the clause signed. The debtor is always the party who suffers loss. That actually shows biopower logics; power is maintained through norms or regulations that no one can avoid. Based on this scene, it is implied that the objects of biopower have been controlled since the first time they live under the system.

Figure 6. Kaya and Nowak discusses how rich people can take poor people's lives



Note. Kaya and Nowak are debating on how unfair life is due to chrono-transfer technology. From *Paradise* [00:53:09] by Boris Kunz (director), 2023, Netflix.

This scene uses an over-the-shoulder shot for each character shown in the frame. This scene shows the conversation between two Theissen's subordinates. The scene also uses practical light placed between the two characters which functions to give a boundary between them, considering the different position and role they have. This scene is when Kaya and Nowak argue about sensitive issues regarding how imbalance happens due to the system. Nowak faces a dilemma, making him in the position of maintaining his ideology or protecting Theissen. Nowak questions how rich people, like Theissen, can do anything they want. Nowak says, "What about us? Illegal software, off-the-record operations. The richest woman in Europe gets to play by different rules?", and Kaya replies, "Our job is to keep Theissen safe, not achieve world peace" (Boris Kunz, 2023, 00:53:42 – 00:55:40). Based on the talk between the two, Nowak reveals that what they have done is not consistent with values AEON brings up. According to Foucault, this phenomenon is state racism, allowing a party that has power to break the rules it creates. This event implies that people who are bound to the system have no courage or ability to fight back even though there are a lot of them. It shows how power operates and controls through subjectification. As Theissen's employees, Nowak and Kaya identify themselves as professionals who consciously accept that phenomena as a means of survival.

CONCLUSION

This article has analyzed *Paradise* film (2023) by Boris Kunz employing Michel Foucault's biopower. Based on the findings and discussion, it can be concluded in two ways. First, this film has effectively represented how anatomo-politics operates at individual levels. Through a contract signed without full understanding, instant body transformation, and mirror scene as self-surveillance, this film has shown how biopower does not require physical prison to discipline the body. It only needs a contract and biomedical technology. Second, this film criticizes how biopolitics produces unequal class-based age distribution. This film, through Foucault's view, has shown state racism in which poor people are systematically killed.

REFERENCES

- Arslaner Hamarat, H., & Gürses Köse, İ. (2024). Age as a Token: Representation of Elderness and Youth in *Paradise* (2023). *Akdeniz Üniversitesi İletişim Fakültesi Dergisi*, (45), 76–90. <https://doi.org/10.31123/akil.1424520>
- Bay, M. (Director). (2005). *The island* [Film]. DreamWorks Pictures; Warner Bros. Pictures; Parkes/MacDonald Productions
- Boris, K. (Director). (2023). *Paradise* [Film]. Netflix
- Foucault, M. (1982). The subject and power. *Critical Inquiry*, 8(4), 777–795.

- Foucault, M. (2008). *The birth of biopolitics: Lectures at the college de France 1978-1979*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Harsia, S., & Adi, I. R. (2020). Commodification of values in American popular family movies in 1990s. *Rubikon: Journal of Transnational American Studies*, 7(1), 12. <https://doi.org/10.22146/rubikon.v7i1.62507>
- Lei, J. (2024). Ambivalent Utopias: Corporate Biopower and the Gendered Limits of Agency in Reset. *Journal of Chinese Film Studies*, 4(3), 545-566. <https://doi.org/10.1515/jcfs-2023-0060>
- Neisya, Aprilia, F., & Triwulandari, E. (2024). Body discipline in the movie "Turning Red": Foucauldian discourse. *Lire Journal (Journal of Linguistics and Literature)*, 8(1), 33-44. <https://doi.org/10.33019/lire.v6i2.214>
- Niccol, A. (Director). (1997). *Gattaca* [Film]. Columbia Pictures; Jersey Films.
- Niccol, A. (Director). (2011). *In time* [Film]. New Regency Productions; Strike Entertainment; Regency Enterprises
- Romanek, M. (Director). (2010). *Never let me go* [Film]. DNA Films; Film4.
- Vaccaro, J. (2012). *Modernity's Automatization of Man: Biopower and the Early Zombie Film*.
- Vázquez Arredondo, Raymundo. (2024). Biopolitics: An approach to the thought of Michel Foucault. *Valenciana*, 17 (34), 35-58. Epub November 26, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.15174/rv.v17i34.750>
- Yilmaz, K. (2013). Comparison of quantitative and qualitative research traditions: Epistemological, theoretical, and methodological differences. *European Journal of Education*, 48(2), 311-325. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ejed.12014>