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## **Aliens as an Invasive Reproductive Power in Science Fiction**

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It is worth noticing that the words “East”, “West”, “North” and “South” are abundantly used in the media and in geopolitics to emphasise major cultural differences. It is also significant that explanations regarding these cultural differences increasingly refer to differences in the treatment of women: at present and for some time now, the construction of stereotypes regarding cultural distinctions between “Eastern” and “Western” societies, or between “Northern” and “Southern” societies, make use of gender issues. The West is held to have rendered "their" women free, free to pursue careers until recently restricted to men, free to experience a better sexual life. These achievements in both the professional and sexual domains are in turn linked to Westerners’ abilities to control reproduction and to separate it from erotic activities. The analysis of works of science fiction will allow me to show how popular representations of reproduction are used to portray cultural differences metaphorically as differences between species, thereby justifying the idea of a clash of "civilizations".<sup>1</sup>

An important part of my anthropological research on the ideology underlying contemporary Western representations of procreation is linked to my dual training. I studied medicine (later psychiatry) and cultural anthropology at the same time, in two different universities. Going back and forth between these two disciplines quickly led me to become aware of the highly contrasting ways we have of speaking about sexual differences and reproduction, according to whom we, Westerners, are referring to: ourselves or Others, that is, members of exotic societies studied by anthropologists. At the same time, I could not but notice the pervasive effect the popular version of the Darwinian evolutionist perspective has on the way Westerners perceive these Others, those they, we, so kindly tend to qualify as “primitive” or “archaic”. Indeed, we tend to approach differences between cultures in a way similar to how we treat differences between species. This is probably why we are so easily able to imagine that some “civilizations” cannot be reconciled with each other. I am of course referring here to Samuel Huntington’s article *The Clash of Civilizations* (1993). We

Westerners have a hierarchy of cultures in mind that we are usually not aware of. On the one hand, there are evolved peoples, societies, cultures – those who value sex, eroticism and control over reproduction – who really deserved to be qualified as civilized; on the other hand, there are archaic peoples, societies, cultures who, by contrast, do not only value but overvalue reproductive activities, and still worse, do so at the expense of eroticism and women's freedom.

However, in a number of science fiction works, societies of the future, having reached the highest level of evolution by virtue of their technological achievements, are pictured as susceptible to reverting to a kind of insect-like organization. The overdevelopment of technology in the realm of reproduction having led them to a state of chronic low fertility, they privilege reproduction over erotic activities and individual freedom, and make use of sophisticated biotechnology and/or inferior species in order to reproduce (see for example Rilla's *The Village of the Damned* [1960] and Carpenter's 1995 remake based on the 1957 novel *The Midwich Cuckoos* by John Wyndham). Now, in contemporary Western ideology, state control over reproduction is one of the major characteristics of totalitarian societies, symbolically comparable to insect societies (see, among others, the movies *The Savage Bees* [Geller 1976], *Marabunta*, *Killer Ants* [Charleston and Manasse 1998], *Antz* [Darnell and Johnson 1998]).

Science fiction authors and film makers have the gift of transforming ideology into striking images. Indeed, many contemporary, especially American academics (such as Jameson 2005, Sharp 2007 and Valantin 2003) have stressed the role played by science-fiction in bringing to light critical issues concerning the future of the West, now that the socialist and communist utopias have petered out. Analysing the representations conveyed by works of science fiction provides access to their underlying ideology. Thus, in biology, species are distinguished and hierarchically ordered according to their respective modes of reproduction. However, such considerations also tend to be used, often without our being aware of it, to classify human societies as more or less humanised. In my view, cultural representations of reproduction are particularly useful for analysing how Western societies define themselves with regard to other societies, and more specifically, how they define cultural otherness as grounded in biological differences. It also helps to explain why gender issues tend to be systematically articulated with ways of conceiving cultural differences.

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<sup>1</sup> The word "civilization" is no longer used in present day anthropology because of the almost inevitably racist

## The advent of a Brave New World

In the West, what is presumed to provide freedom and equality to women with respect to men is society's ability to free them from procreative obligations through the development of cultural capacities of control over reproduction. The development of such capacities is equated with a mastery over nature itself, leading to a higher level of culture. This perspective is certainly not a recent one in the West.

Thus, in 1898, that is, just prior to the new century, Freud suggested that "it would be one of the greatest Triumphs of Mankind, one of the most concrete liberations from the constraint of Nature to which our culture is submitted, if we were able to make procreation into a voluntary and intentional act, and to separate it from the satisfaction" of sexual pleasure (1989, p. 232). In brief, it would be wonderful to be able to separate sex and reproduction. One century later, at the very end of 1999, in the last issue prior to the new Millennium, of a French magazine *Télérama* (a guide for television, theatre and art exhibits which is read by all who wish to be seen as well educated), an article proposed a list of traits whereby people in the year 2100 would characterize humanity of the year 2000. Among the items mentioned was: "In the year 2000, people were born *inside* their mothers, like animals" (Sorg 1999: 13, italics added).

Thus, maternity, pregnancy, natural child birth, the unavoidable process of being embedded within another body in order to be born, is supposed to relegate mankind to the level of animality. This idea has to be taken seriously even if the article I am referring to was facetious. Indeed, this same notion is constantly found in works of science fiction dealing with matters of procreation. I have tried to demonstrate elsewhere that science-fiction is a new form of modern Western mythology (Moisseeff 2000, 2004, 2005, 2008, 2009, 2010abc, 2011, 2012a). One of the first myths of this genre, which the just quoted text reminds us of, is Huxley's *Brave New World*. It was published in 1932 when new modes of procreation for human beings did not yet exist. In *Brave New World*, children are made in test tubes and raised in State Hatcheries and Conditioning Centres. This industrial mode of reproduction, making use of artificial uteruses, is contrasted with "viviparity", a scientific term purposely used as such by Huxley to refer to the dreadful obligation of having to pass through a female body in order to be born. For civilized human beings, in this novel, viviparity is considered to

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connotations that imply its current usage.

be a hideous remnant of the past. It persists only in a few reservations for “savages” from which the truly civilized must be protected by electrified fences.

In this pseudo utopia – or rather dystopia – the height of civilization is sterilization for all. This is accompanied by the disappearance of family, marriage and all forms of kinship relations which have become so many obscenities. When we think of *Brave New World*, we tend to remember and focus on test tube babies. We often forget the importance and value attributed to sexual activities. Indeed, what is really at stake in this book is the emphasis placed on the separation between sex and reproduction through the use of contraceptive, here called “Malthusian”, measures, such as condoms – French letters – and abortion. Everybody is encouraged to practice sex as much as he/she can and with as many people as possible. Children in kindergarten, who are reluctant to join in “ordinary erotic play”, are sent to a psychologist. Indeed, in this anticipatory narrative, pornography is related not to erotic activities but to natural childbirth. Thus, persons, young and old, are extremely embarrassed when the past, viviparous state of mankind is mentioned. This is what happens when the Director of Hatcheries and Conditioning questions his students, a bunch of teenagers, on the meaning of the word “parent”:

“There was an uneasy silence. Several of the boys blushed. They had not yet learned to draw the significant but often very fine distinction between smut and pure science. One, at last, had the courage to raise his hand.

'Human beings used to be...' He hesitated; the blood rushed to his cheeks. 'Well, they used to be viviparous.' [...] The poor boy was overwhelmed with confusion.

'In brief', the Director summed up, 'the parents were the father and the mother.' The smut that was really science fell with a crash into the boys' eye-avoiding silence. 'Mother,' he repeated loudly, rubbing in the science [...]. 'These', he said gravely, 'are unpleasant facts; I know it. But, then, most historical facts are unpleasant.' [...] ('For you must remember that in those days of gross viviparous reproduction, children were always brought up by their parents and not in State Conditioning Centres.') [...]

'Try to realize what it was like to have a viviparous mother.' That smutty word again. [...]

'Try to imagine what “living with one's family” meant.'

They tried; but obviously without the smallest success.

'And do you know what a “home” was? They shook their heads. [...] home was as squalid psychically as physically. Psychically, it was a rabbit hole, a midden, hot with the

frictions of tightly packed life, reeking with emotion. What suffocating intimacies, what dangerous, insane obscene relationships between the members of the family group! Maniacally, the mother brooded over her children (*her* children) ... brooded over them like a cat over its kittens [...].

Our Freud had been the first to reveal the appalling dangers of family life. The world was full of fathers – was therefore full of misery; full of mothers – therefore full of every kind of perversion from sadism to chastity; full of brothers, sisters, uncles, aunts – full of madness and suicide” (Huxley, 1994: pp 20-34).

In the motherless universe pictured by Huxley, sex reigns supreme. Chastity, on the other hand, is perceived as one of the worst perversions. Indeed, it prevents people from experiencing orgasm, one of the greatest spiritual experiences for those who are given the right to enjoy the highest degree of civilization. This was the point Freud wanted to make: in his view, the cause of most neuroses was the lack of sexual satisfaction due to fear of undesired pregnancy. In *Brave New World*, as tends to be the case in contemporary Western society, sex and pregnancy are presented as antithetical. In the novel, pregnancy is seen as lowering humanity to the level of bestiality. It is linked with nature, the sexual life of animals being held to be mainly concerned with reproductive goals and to be deprived of orgasm. Sex *per se*, without a reproductive goal, on the other hand, is portrayed as the privilege of humanity. It is “cultural” rather than “natural”. And, in order to fully enjoy eroticism, true human beings, that is, supposedly the most evolved beings on Earth, should be freed from the reproductive yoke.

In our, non-fictional world, this emphasis on the separation between procreation and erotic activities has provided the basis for sexual liberation and for a symmetrization of male and female social roles. Indeed, in the present-day Western world, the more or less radical separation between sexuality and procreation (as attested by contraception, abortion and the use of new reproductive techniques) is to be seen as correlated with a will to achieve symmetry between gender roles: once the issue of procreation is removed, men and women may be appreciated as occupying status-equivalent positions. However, because of women’s physiological constraints, this development creates new problems regarding society’s capacity to maintain its reproductive abilities over time. Technology thus comes to be seen as an inevitable recourse for all. The remarks of a renowned French immunologist, Jean-Claude

Weil, published in a very serious journal of geopolitical studies in 2004, corroborate this perspective:

“I am convinced that, very soon, reproduction will be done only in laboratories and only through in vitro procedures. The old mode of reproduction will be the exception rather than the rule. Considering the current evolution of society, this is inevitable: women pursue careers, get diplomas and, when they reach forty, they want the children they did not have the time to have before. The simple solution is to extract ova and sperm from individuals when they are eighteen in order to foresee this future parental desire. Thus, one will have fresh reproductive cells that one will be able to use as required for in vitro fertilization.”

This account of new normative modes of reproduction for the future is very close to what is envisaged in *Brave New World*. Indeed, if Huxley was influenced by what he saw in the West of the West (he wrote this novel after a trip to California), Westerners – writers, biologists and the lot – have internalized, in turn, Huxley's myth. Thus, it appears obvious to us that the advent of the technological baby-making for all is just over the horizon.

### **The alien: a metaphor of the female reproductive function**

Huxley's novel sets the ground for subsequent science fiction works reflecting the evolution of representations and practices linked with reproduction in Western societies where erotic activities and procreation tend to be viewed as independent spheres: if individuals are to achieve full sexual pleasure, believed to be a human prerogative, they must be “protected” from reproductive risk. Child-bearing, in turn, belongs to the preserve of the “medically assisted”. The function of motherhood is placed under the authority of specialists, gynaecologists and obstetricians in particular, who are more or less exclusively in charge of this domain. At the same time, having children is not linked with access to any particularly respected social status, and the parental function does not partake of the definition of adulthood. Adult sexual identity is assumed to derive directly from one's sexual identity at birth, and the acquisition of an adult, parenting role does not require any specific procedure, aside from the act of providing pubescent individuals with effective means of contraception aimed at avoiding pregnancy (Moisseff 1992, 2012b).

The fact that procreation is taken care of by specialized agencies, third parties set apart from the mundane world, gives rise to the possibility that procreation be represented as an autonomous entity, distinct from the relations between men and women. Pregnancy and the uterus are sacralized, occupying an ambiguous position in Western ideology: we have to master them, and control over them must be undertaken by specialists. These specialists tend to perceive and to describe pregnancy as a parasitic phenomenon, one potentially lethal for mothers. One of the greatest mysteries of immunity deals with a mother's capacity to host an alien body within her own body. When I was a medical student, we were told that if ever we were able to explain this mystery we would be able to fight cancer. Indeed, the development of cancer is due to the transformation of one's own cells into alien, foreign ones.

This state of affairs leads to representations of pregnancy as a parasitic, cancerous type of phenomenon, in which the baby is perceived as a stranger within, an invader from inner space. This is obvious in science-fiction movies of the Alien type. I am referring specifically to the four episodes of *Alien*<sup>2</sup>, whose predecessor is *The Thing from another World* made in 1951 (Nyby) – a remake being Carpenter's *The Thing* (1982) – and its prequel *Prometheus* (2012) made by the *Alien* saga's initiator, Ridley Scott.

In *Alien*, the enemy of the future is a gigantic insectoid species, half-insect, half-spider, whose outline is like that of a dinosaur, so as to better remind us of its primitive nature. It is a predator whose only goal is to reproduce itself at the expense of other species, especially human beings. It does not eat, nor does it copulate or excrete. It only reproduces itself by transforming its prey into cocoons in which its offspring, the content of its eggs, will develop. Here, Otherness is not the other sex, but procreation itself: Alien's deadly arsenal is its reproductive system. A face-hugger shaped like a large scorpion implants the contents of the Alien's eggs within the chest of its prey; after a very rapid development, the baby Alien hatches, bursting the chest of its host. In this case, the reproduction process is therefore not sexual: it occurs in the upper half of the body and within male and female chests alike. The reproduction is portrayed as an invader that destroys its hosts from the inside, like a cancer or a parasite.

In a way, science-fiction movies, *Alien* and its Hollywood avatars – *Xtro* (Davenport 1983), *Species I* (Donaldson 1995) & *II* (Medak 1998), *The Body Snatchers* (Siegel 1956, Kaufman 1978, Ferrara 1994), *The Puppet Master* (Schmoeller 1993), etc.– are the follow up of *Brave New World*. It is as if natural procreation, having been denied its rights on Earth, was



trying to take revenge: it is floating somewhere in outer space waiting for the opportunity to regain its original power to threaten humanity as a whole. Paradoxically, in these worlds where female and male roles tend to have become more equal, only a woman can fight this "thing" which, in fact, is the hideous aspect – for Westerners – of Maternity itself. Its huge eggs look like externalized wombs and they are shown to be Pandora's boxes<sup>3</sup> from which escape thousands of demons transforming human beings into animals, that is, into slaves devoted to furthering the life force of reproduction.

At the same time, the *Alien* epic may be seen as an allegory of female initiation in which one can see the threefold division of rites of passage as described by Van Gennep (1981 [1909]): separation from the ordinary society, a liminal phase during which the novice undergoes painful and terrifying ordeals, and finally, reaggregation into society with a new status. It is important to note that science fiction writers and film-makers very often use the framework of an initiation path to develop their plot. Let's consider the four episodes of the *Alien* saga in this light:

A young woman is taken out of her usual (earthly) environment and immersed in a wild undomesticated world (intergalactic space), where she has to undergo a number of painful ordeals in order to accede to what is, for her, a hideous aspect of femininity: maternity. During this liminal period, she passes through different initiation stages that lead her gradually to assume this other aspect of herself. She is first the nurturing mother of a kitten, then the surrogate mother of a little girl, then she is pregnant with a non human female and finally is at the origin of the first male of the *Alien* species. At the end of this initiation, she dies to be reborn totally metamorphosed, stronger and even more feminine than ever. She can now be reintegrated to society – the Earth – with a new status as a full-fledged woman.

The symbolism of death and rebirth, so characteristic of male initiation rites in the real world (Moisseff 1992), is linked here with the initiation of a female, fact that suggests that in future times, in the new brave new world these films portray, women will gain superiority

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<sup>2</sup> *Alien*, *the 8th passenger* (Scott 1979), *Aliens* (Cameron 1986), *Alien 3* (Fincher 1993), *The Resurrection* (Jeunet 1997).

<sup>3</sup> Brian de Palma's film, *Carrie* (1972), is a masterful, more direct illustration of how terrifying women's powers are, to this day. Carrie is an innocent teenage girl frightened to death by her first menstrual blood. The rest of the story will corroborate her fears: with puberty, her innocence turns into a devilish force destroying everyone around her.

over men at the condition of mastering reproduction. Alien and the heroin, Lieutenant Ripley, alias Sigourney Weaver, represent the battle between woman and her reproductive function: the woman has to become the hero of future times in order to definitely master maternity. In order to do so, she has to incorporate her animality that underlies her strength and power and then sacrifice it by killing her offspring.

Huxley's anticipation myth foresaw the yet-to-come evolution of cultural representations and practices related to reproduction in Western Countries. Indeed, erotic activities and reproduction tend to be dealt with as two separate domains almost independent of each other. As soon as they become fertile, individuals, and more specifically women, have to be protected from reproductive risk. Pregnancy is conceived, described and treated as a what amounts to a sexual disease and, in a number of science-fiction movies or TV series, among which those most favoured by teenagers and young adults, it is portrayed as a potentially lethal one (Moisseff 2004, 2012a). Moreover, childbearing is often presented as a possible obstacle to sexual fulfilment, to personal realization and professional attainment. It is something that may prevent women from reaching equality with men and, more generally, may impair sexual freedom.

Peoples, cultures and societies which are not willing to control procreation, to free "their" women from the reproductive yoke, are placed on a lower rank on the evolution ladder, closer to animals. In popular representations and phrases, for example, having lots of children is sometimes seen as behaving like animals: dogs in the US, rabbits in France. The level of evolution of a society is deemed inversely proportional to its fertility rate, high fertility rates being closely linked to poverty (Malthus 1778, 1803; Moisseff 2005).

### **East/West: prolificity versus subfertility**

Western countries are those which have difficulties maintaining a viable fertility rate, all the while being the ones which most fear overpopulation. This makes sense: they fear the overpopulation of others they judge less evolved than themselves, claiming, at the same time, that overpopulation is a threat for all humankind. The West feels threatened by the fertility rates of more "primitive" countries located in the East and the South, described as archaic societies precisely because they are held to overbreed. But at the same time, the migrant populations that come from the East and the South enable Western countries to maintain a viable fertility rate, allowing for the renewal of generations, that is, a viable demography required to maintain geopolitical balance. This is not new. Jonathan Swift, in his *Modest*

*Proposal for Preventing the Children of Poor People, from being a Burthen to their Parents*, published in 1729, suggested, with trenchant humour, that the babies of the poor be sold and eaten by the rich. The present-day circulation of children through international adoption gives some weight to this early analysis of the problems between the rich and the poor. It also has to do with what Foucault has called “biopolitics”.

However, if we see ourselves as civilized with regard to other terrestrial peoples deemed primitive, we may also, just as well, imagine ourselves to be the “primitives” for more advanced extraterrestrial civilizations or species. This is precisely what happens in movies like *The Village of the Damned*.

In a number of works of science-fiction, cultural differences tend to be portrayed as similar to those between species. In this light, different planets can be seen as referring to different continents. The Earth is the territory of the real human beings, typically exemplified by Americans; they are located in the West of the West, and in the Northern hemisphere where the most evolved Westerners live. According to his view, other planets refer to continents of potential immigrants located in the South and in the East. These immigrants, these Aliens, are supposed to be much less evolved, and to have exhausted their resources; they have stayed archaic and are deprived of individual freedom because they did not try to control their reproduction. In doing so, they have endangered not only themselves but also all the human beings on Earth. In science-fiction films, these far-too prolific migrants who are supposedly less evolved than Westerners are portrayed as huge insects that have a problem of overpopulation on their planet.

Parasitism and swarming related to insects’ prolific nature underlie the privileged position occupied by insects in science-fiction movies as a means of designating the horror of uncontrolled reproduction. In ordinary life, insects are very small in comparison to human beings. However for film makers, gigantic insects are perfect for portraying the threat of a swarming, parasitic invasion. A good example is the 1998 Verhoeven movie *Starship Troopers*. The film is inspired by a classic science fiction novel of the same name published by Robert Heinlein in 1959. However it is also a way for Verhoeven to criticize the US intervention in the first Iraqi war in 1991. In the very beginning of the movie, a professor explains to his students that insects are superior to human beings because they breed so much and in much greater quantities, and because they do not have individual selves. Gigantic arachnoids from another planet are sending asteroids to Earth in order to kill human beings and so as to be able to replace them on Earth. Indeed, they have clearly exhausted their native

milieu because of their overpopulation. This is why they need to conquer other territories. At the same time, one cannot but see the metaphorisation of the first Persian Gulf war.

Another characteristic of insects that has been used by film-makers, is the transformation of the sterile individual, the larva, into a reproductive adult, an imago, by passing through the stage of chrysalis, the nymph. This insect metamorphosis is often used, in this type of movie, to describe the metamorphosis occurring at puberty: an innocent girl is thus transformed into a terrible predator whose unique goal is to have sex with a male in order to reproduce her kind. A reproductive woman, a menstruating one, is potentially dangerous: incorporating her maternal role transforms her into someone of a different species dangerous for humanity.

For example in the movie *Species 1* (Donaldson 1995), the alien born from extraterrestrial DNA attains puberty by passing through the intermediary state of a chrysalis from which emerges a fully reproductive individual. Prior to this metamorphosis, the young woman is portrayed as unappealing and somewhat chubby, as is the case for many pre-adolescents. She also behaves in ways that often show up at this stage of life: binge eating, running away from home, looking in the mirror with the impression of undergoing horrible changes. However, when she emerges from the chrysalis, it is as a svelte, sexy assertive bombshell. Upon acquiring her reproductive capacities, what was until then an inoffensive little girl is transformed into a predator seeking sexual relations with the sole aim of reproduction. Like the praying mantis or the black widow spider, she kills her sexual partners as soon as they have fulfilled this procreative role. Once inseminated, she becomes an animal and is ready to do anything to save her offspring. Here reproduction is associated both with animality and with death. In the movie *Species 2* (Medak 1998), an astronaut infected by Martian DNA can not help but make love whenever he can. His partners are immediately impregnated and moments later are killed by the explosion of their impregnated wombs; next to their corpses young boys, their offspring, suddenly appear. When the infected astronaut impregnates these women, tentacles grow out of his back, once again showing how the conjunction of sex and reproduction leads to animality.

In traditional Western representations since Antiquity, sperm is held to be produced in the bone marrow and especially in the spinal column, the penis being seen as a prolongation of the spine through which sperm flows out (Héritier 1985, 1986, D'Onofrio 2004). In species such as deer, the horns of males are taken to attest to the abundance of sperm they secrete. It is not for nothing that in English, to be sexually excited is to be "horny". And if the cuckold is symbolically portrayed as having horns, it is because, as Françoise Héritier (*ibid.*) has argued,

his sperm, whose flow is blocked by the one who has replaced him in the conjugal bed, is believed to flow backwards towards his head. The horns and bony protuberances of the mutants in *Species 1* and *2* that appear when insemination takes place makes use of this symbolism.

In the movies of the kind I am referring to here, sex and procreation, when linked together, are shown to be potentially lethal, annihilating. And this is also the case with the four episodes of *Alien* initiated by Ridley Scott.

### **Anthropology in the study of popular culture**

In *Alien* and other similar films, pregnancy is likened to an inexorably fatal, parasitic occurrence affecting men as well as women: with the exception of the heroine, the male and female characters are equal in this respect and in all others (they perform similar activities together). Otherness is not represented by the difference between the sexes, but by reproduction, embodied by a monster. Indeed, the creature's name, Alien, with its various implications, clearly indicates the terrible Otherness facing humanity: stranger; different or set apart; supposedly linked to creatures from other worlds; a specimen coming from elsewhere, entering this world and having accustomed itself to its new environment; hostile; unacceptable or repellent (Allen, 1990). It is presented as "a survivor unsullied by conscience, remorse or moral illusions" (*Alien, the Eighth Passenger*). And by a strange coincidence, in this science fiction world where men and women are equal and mix in all spheres, only a woman is able to combat the crazy, immoral "relic" represented by pregnancy. This new type of myth therefore brings dramatically back to life what our 'egalitarian' societies tend to conceal; that is, the primordial asymmetry favouring women by virtue of their reproductive faculty, giving them specific, exclusive powers. For if there is one constant underlying symbolic elaboration on the difference between the sexes, it is the more or less systematic correlation between women's reproductive powers and the notion of danger, of some hidden, death-dealing force.

In a number of non Western societies, the cultural elaboration of the difference between the sexes consists in a reversal of the natural asymmetry favouring women that consolidates men's social and cultural superiority (Moisseff 2008, 2010c). In the *Alien* myth, the cultural elaboration of the difference between the sexes consists of creating symmetry between their social and cultural roles; paradoxically, it tends to reinforce the asymmetrical

nature of male and female positions with respect to reproduction. By inventing practices such as new reproductive techniques (IVF, test-tube babies, clones) corroborating the feasibility of dissociating sexuality and procreation – that is, by setting the field of obstetrics apart from the relations between the sexes – society simply recognizes what is specific about the female reproductive function, namely gestation. Pregnancy can then be reintegrated into cultural imagery as an independent entity, cut off from its usual sexual medium, the female body. Its appearance becomes that of a beast, whose monstrous mask hides those occult, lethal female powers. Thus, in movies such as *Alien*, we are led to witness a battle between a female and her procreative function, a means of connecting what has previously been disconnected. However, if this myth suggests the possibility of such a disjunction, it also provides a novel solution to this situation: a process of initiation, through which women may subjugate what have become the quasi autonomous powers inherent in their capacity from motherhood.

During all four episodes of the *Alien* saga, the eponymous character to be combated by the heroine – the foreigner – has the physical appearance of an extraordinary predator whose only aim is reproduction. It is a cancer-like invader, exterminating from within by penetrating the host organisms, where it develops lightning-fast. *Alien*'s supreme weapon is pregnancy. This repugnant 'thing' with its many Hollywood avatars is no other than the hideous mask by which the modern Western world, patterned after the United States, designates the inhuman, beastly, invasive – in short, parasitic – aspect of procreation. Moreover, pregnancy, that exclusively female phase of sexual reproduction, is close to representing an almost insufferable asymmetry in a cultural universe whose proclaimed ideal is to achieve perfect symmetry in gender roles. Medical science has successfully taken over this problem: making babies outside their mother's womb is apparently a particularly adequate solution. It is as though medical agencies have appropriated the female reproductive function, thanks to their increasingly sophisticated technology and the growing power it gives them in this sphere. After all, the idea of men appropriating female reproductive powers is a rather commonplace theme in anthropology. It is easily found in the rituals and myths of more traditional cultural contexts, where it serves to justify the superiority of men as a group, notably with respect to fertility (Moisseeff 2010c).

In the *Alien* myth too, it is men (scientific officers working for a mercantile Company, and soldiers) who attempt to monopolize the reproductive function by capturing the creature. However, the difference is that they are systematically and unambiguously depicted as the bad guys. Indeed, one of the paradoxes of Western culture resides in its association of reproduction – represented here by *Alien* – not so much with the perpetuation of the species

as with its destruction. A connection should be made between the fictional beast's extraordinary ability to proliferate, ability which underlies its phenomenal destructiveness, and the constantly hammered theme, in real life, of the threat of annihilation by overpopulation. As opposed to the general assumption that holds sway in traditional societies, in the Western world, and for some time now (see Malthus and Swift), misfortune and poverty tends to be associated with excessive fertility<sup>4</sup> rather than with sterility.

Controlling the access of the poor, the "under-civilized", to reproduction by controlling the wombs of their women is indeed one of the primary objectives of the "civilized" world (United Nations 1995, Paltrinieri 2010)<sup>5</sup>. With sterilization viewed as an efficient means of warding off the supposedly dramatic risks entailed by the global overpopulation to which unbridled natural reproduction would allegedly expose the human race, one has the uneasy impression that Huxley's brave new world, foreseen in 1932<sup>6</sup>, will soon be upon us. In that dystopian state of affairs, only a few savages surviving in faraway reservations still resort to the womb, to the great displeasure of the "civilized" world whose favourite motto is "civilization is sterilization". The corollary of this development is unrestricted access to sexual pleasure. Thus in *Brave New World*, the civilized indulge in unlimited erotic enjoyment, free of any risk of pregnancy, with babies being produced in test tubes or cloned in "incubation" and "conditioning" centres. This shows how prophetic science fiction can be and demands that we recognize it as an anthropological object in its own right.

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<sup>4</sup> The French have a word for "breeding like rabbits", *lapinisme*, defined in *Le Nouveau Petit Robert* dictionary (1995) as: "Excessive fertility (in a couple or a nation)". In the exotic societies studied by anthropologists, fertility is hardly ever and possibly never spoken of as excessive. The existence of this notion in modern western societies, and definitely in our society, as indicated by this French term and the English equivalent, is associated not only with a form of malady, but also with animality. One occasionally hears people say: "Those people act like animals". The fact that rabbits are extremely prolific qualifies them as metaphors for both the affliction of excessive fertility and the animality on which such behaviour confines. A very peculiar affliction indeed, since it is supposed to affect not only couples but also whole peoples, incidentally those who have not reached a par for civilization: the poor, the savages, the "developing".

<sup>5</sup> It is worth consulting the table of contents of the *Programme of Action of the United Nations International Conference on Population & Development* on line (<http://www.iisd.ca/Cairo/program/p00000.html>) as evidence of a clear articulation between Malthusian perspectives and biopolitics.

<sup>6</sup> It should be recalled that Huxley believed that the risk of having a "dictatorship of scientists" set up to impose widespread sterilization would be an unavoidable consequence of overpopulation, as he explicitly showed in *Brave New World Revisited*, published in 1958.

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