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Biopolitics and the Birth of Camp: The Formation of “Bare Life” in Edward Bond’s *Born*

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
Article type: Research Article Article history: Received: 25 July 2021 Received in revised form: 30 April 2022 Accepted: 09 May 2022 Published online: 30 January 2024 Keywords: Agamben, camp, Foucault, inclusive exclusion, zoe.	Since the late 1960s, Edward Bond’s theatre has occupied a significant position in British drama. He is among those contemporary British playwrights who stage the influence of late capitalism on contemporary society and the individual’s social life. Bond’s work depicts the ways in which late capitalism and its components, including rampant technology and gratuitous bureaucracy, intrude into people’s lifeworld. Such impingements result in the impoverishment of social welfare, the impairment of human relations, and the escalation of violence in society. Bond effectively portrays the capitalist society as a camp inhabited by the walking dead. In <i>Born</i> (2006), he presents an apocalyptic dystopia within which posthumous bodies roam. These trembling dead-walkers are, in fact, symbolic figures who represent the shivering prisoners of Nazi concentration camps. What happened in Nazi concentration camps provoked many philosophers and sociologists to delve deeply into the reasons and motives behind the strategies of such cold-hearted mass human extermination. Giorgio Agamben was one the philosophers who attempted to analyze these brutal and systematic mass killings as Western governments’ strategies for power exertion. Throughout their history, Agamben maintains, Western governments have controlled people by placing them inside or outside the domain of law. In other words, following their rise to power, these governments stand above the law and changing its boundaries to ensure their preservation. Moving the boundaries of the law puts some of the citizens outside its domains; a condition which Agamben names “inclusive Exclusion.” Under such circumstances, the excluded are kept at a certain distance from the law, and consequently, from other citizens; a condition much similar to Josef. K’s situation in Kafka’s <i>The Trial</i> (1925). The geopolitical realm of such condition is called the “camp.” As a paradigm for the biopolitical condition of Homo Sacer, the camp accommodates those abandoned in “bare life” condition. While, in Ancient Greek philosophy, zoe is biological life and bios, the ideal ethical and political life, “bare life” or <i>nuda vita</i> is a form of life neither human nor animal. It is an inhuman mode of existence at the limits of political and ethical forms of living. Bond stages <i>Born</i>’s dystopia on the basis of camp paradigm. In the first part of the play, Donna and Peter move to a new apartment with their new born son, Luke. Their apartment is a symbol of family love and kindness. The second part, depicts a dystopia of violence and surveillance twenty years later. Transformed into a police state, the majority of citizens, including Donna and Peter, are transferred to camps. The suspension of law and the displacement of people are depicted in <i>Born</i>’s society. Like Agamben, Bond believes that Western governments change the boundaries of the law not according to the demands of sociopolitical justice but their own neoliberal interests. Under these conditions, injustice becomes normal and exception a rule. Unsurprisingly, this violent and unjust society can only be controlled by surveillance and disciplinary force. Such society is inevitably metamorphosed into a carceral archipelago which portrays the concentration camp paradigm.

Accordingly, Bond maintains “We should take responsibility for our lives. We must first understand our present social situation has become an enormous burden, a dead weight on human society” and the life that we “lead can result in a concentration camp”. Thus, Bare life is another Agambenian leitmotif in *Born*. While parts one to four depict the establishment of police state and camp life in society, the fifth part shows the influences of such violent officialdom on the inmates’ bodies and souls. In this part, Donna and Peter’s apartment is converted into a residence for living corpses. Portrayed as staggering bodies in their last convulsions, these dehumanized figures represent the total domination of biopolitics and the reduction of bios not to zoe, but to “bare life.” The comparative analysis of Bond’s depictions of Western governments’ politics of life and Agamben’s theories about biopolitics shows that both of these thinkers, one a playwright and the other a sociologist, simultaneously consider biopolitics an inborn component of Western politics; an entity that was not only formerly realized in Nazi concentration camps but was also latterly actualized in Guantanamo and Abu Gharib.

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