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HUMANS AND NON-HUMANS: REPRESENTATION OF DIVERSITY AND EXCLUSIONARY PRACTICES IN TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY BRITISH SCIENCE FICTION TV SERIES

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Tesi di dottorato di:
ILARIA VILLA

Tutor: Prof.ssa LIDIA ANNA DE MICHELIS
Coordinatore del Dottorato: Prof.ssa MARIA VITTORIA CALVI

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ABSTRACT

This work examines the representation of diversity, xenophobia, racism, and exclusionary practices in two recent science fiction TV series: *Humans* (Sam Vincent and Jonathan Brackley, Channel 4 and AMC, UK and USA, 3 seasons, 24 episodes, 2015-2018) and *The Aliens* (Fintan Ryan, E4, 1 season, 6 episodes, 2016). Both series are set in the United Kingdom and represent an alternative present in which another sentient humanoid species exists alongside humans: androids in one case, aliens in the other. In both series, the group of non-humans is confined to a subaltern position in society, and the main non-human characters face discrimination and racism in their everyday life: this makes them clear symbols for migrants and ethnic minorities in countries of the Global North today. Based on this metaphor, my aim is to analyse the two series using a cultural approach, to determine whether they bring any innovation to the representation of difference within the science fiction genre.

In the Introduction, I explain the reasons behind my choice of this research topic and provide the theoretical framework for my analysis. I then provide a general overview of the tropes of the alien and the android as symbols of racial difference, based on the current state of the art in science fiction studies, film and television studies, cultural studies, and migration studies. I highlight how the representation of aliens and androids in science fiction cinema, in particular, has often been considered oversimplified, portraying non-humans univocally as either positive or negative characters. I suggest that contemporary TV series might provide more complex representations of diversity, since TV series in the twenty-first century have been praised for their potential to tell multifaceted and multi-perspectival stories.

In the first chapter, I explain why *Humans* and *The Aliens* were chosen for my analysis, and I explore the portrayal of difference in the two series, focusing on how the creation and enforcement of otherness, the social status of non-humans, and the rendering of spatialities of abjection mirror social issues related to the current condition of migrants in the Global North, specifically in the United Kingdom and in the United States.

In the second chapter, I provide an analysis of the characterisation of non-humans in the two series, examining the representational strategies through which they are given voice and agency, and demonstrating how the length and structure of the narrative do indeed allow for the presence of multiple, often contrasting points of view and the creation of intense bonding with the audience. I hence expand on affective narrative in *Humans* and *The Aliens*, arguing that it presents some novelties in the science fiction genre and that these novelties are possibly connected to the 'affective turn' noted by philosophers and scholars across the Humanities, which has recently acquired increasing momentum in the fields of cultural studies, political communication, and discourse and media theory.

In the Conclusions, I argue that *Humans* and *The Aliens* are innovative in their representation of difference within the science fiction genre; this complex and effective representation is allowed by the specificity of the narrative medium and is coherent with recent cultural and communicative trends. Finally, I suggest some questions and issues that might be addressed by future research in this field.

Keywords: science fiction; aliens; androids; TV series; migrants; racism; xenophobia; otherness

ABSTRACT

Questa tesi si propone di esaminare la rappresentazione di diversità, xenofobia, razzismo e pratiche di esclusione in due serie TV di fantascienza di recente produzione: *Humans* (Sam Vincent e Jonathan Brackley, Channel 4 e AMC, UK e USA, 3 stagioni, 24 episodi, 2015-2018) e *The Aliens* (Fintan Ryan, E4, 1 stagione, 6 episodi, 2016). Entrambe le serie sono ambientate nel Regno Unito, in un presente alternativo in cui oltre agli umani è presente un'altra specie umanoide senziente: androidi nel primo caso, alieni nel secondo. In entrambe le serie, il gruppo di non-umani è costretto ad una posizione sociale subalterna e i protagonisti non-umani subiscono discriminazione e razzismo da parte degli umani: in questo modo, si rappresenta metaforicamente la condizione dei migranti e delle minoranze etniche nel Nord Globale di oggi. Partendo da questa simbologia, il mio scopo è di analizzare *Humans* e *The Aliens* attraverso un approccio culturalista, per determinare se queste due serie presentino particolari innovazioni nella rappresentazione della diversità all'interno del genere fantascientifico.

Nell'introduzione spiego i motivi che mi hanno portata a scegliere questo argomento di studio e fornisco una cornice metodologica per la mia analisi. Traccio poi un quadro generale dei tropi dell'alieno e dell'androide come metafore di alterità, basandomi sull'attuale stato dell'arte nei principali campi di studio coinvolti: fantascienza, cinema e televisione, studi culturali, studi sulle migrazioni. Evidenzio che nel cinema, in particolare, la rappresentazione di alieni e androidi è stata spesso considerata eccessivamente semplificata e binaria, con personaggi non-umani presentati come univocamente positivi o negativi. Ipotizzo, quindi, che le serie TV contemporanee, che sono spesso lodate per la loro capacità di raccontare storie corali e sfaccettate, possano fornire rappresentazioni della diversità più complesse, in cui si dà spazio a molteplici punti di vista e a una pluralità di prospettive.

Nel primo capitolo spiego il motivo per cui ho scelto *Humans* e *The Aliens* e analizzo la rappresentazione della diversità nelle due serie, concentrandomi sulla costruzione e imposizione dell'alterità, sullo status sociale dei personaggi non-umani, sulle spazialità dell'abiezione, e su come tutti questi aspetti possano

essere letti come metafora della condizione dei migranti nel Nord Globale, in particolare nel Regno Unito e negli Stati Uniti.

Nel secondo capitolo analizzo la caratterizzazione di androidi e alieni nelle due serie, dimostrando attraverso quali strategie questi personaggi vengano arricchiti di voce e *agency*, e come la lunghezza e l'organizzazione temporale della narrazione permettano effettivamente di presentare punti di vista diversi e in contrasto tra loro. Esamino poi la narrazione affettiva in *Humans* e *The Aliens*, che ritengo innovativa rispetto a casi precedenti nella fantascienza, e traccio una possibile connessione con la recente rilevanza dell'affetto notata già da tempo da studiosi di molte discipline filosofiche, psicologiche e umanistiche e divenuta sempre più importante in tempi recenti nell'ambito degli studi culturali, dell'analisi del discorso, della comunicazione politica e della teoria dei media.

Nelle conclusioni confermo che *Humans* e *The Aliens* presentano alcune interessanti innovazioni nella rappresentazione della diversità all'interno del genere fantascientifico; queste innovazioni sono rese possibili dalla specificità del mezzo narrativo utilizzato e sono coerenti con tendenze culturali e comunicative recenti. Infine, suggerisco alcune domande e questioni rimaste da esplorare e propongo possibili sviluppi di ricerca futuri.

Parole chiave: fantascienza; alieni; androidi; serie TV; migranti; razzismo; xenofobia; alterità

INTRODUCTION

The thematic contours of this thesis began to emerge at the onset of my PhD programme as the almost inevitable result of my long-standing passion for science fiction, the fantastic and, more generally, non-realistic and speculative narrative genres (seen in their textual, visual and transmedial manifestations[1]), which I had long approached as a reader, a viewer, a videogame player and, at times, merely as an eager 'consumer'. It was during my university years that, after attending issue-specific syllabi and becoming familiar with the methodological toolbox and approaches of Cultural Studies, I began to develop a critical awareness of the rich and multifarious traditions and of the universalising, transnational import and porousness of science fiction and the fantastic. At the same time, I came to understand and explore the huge and ever-expanding potential of these genres in producing and circulating alternative imaginaries and storyworlds, endowed with a unique ability to probe and question the *status quo* and, hopefully, open it up to "new sequences of strange and charmed" and "new maps of together" (Thrift 2004: 103).

My first research encounter with the realm of non-realistic genres took place while I was writing my MA thesis. Building on an analysis of the British BBC zombie series *In the Flesh* (2013-2014), it focused, in particular, on issues of liminality, representation of discrimination and policies of exclusion[2], even while it attempted to explore the uncanny continuum dead/undead and one of "the most powerful Gothic spectral metaphors of our time, the zombie, the soulless revenant who — no accident — stalks migrant/refugee discourse" (Saggini 2019: 18).

When the time came for the actual planning of my PhD project, I could clearly see, therefore, how the mind-altering and consciousness-raising capacity of the Gothic, the supernatural and science fiction (with their long-standing and

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[1] For recent theoretical works on transmediality, see Jenkins 2008; Reinerth 2011; Jan-Noël Thon 2016; Elleström 2019; Freeman and Rampazzo Gambarato 2019; Rampazzo Gambarato, Carvalho Alzamora, and Tárcia 2020.

[2] Part of my MA thesis work was published in an Italian journal specialised in migration studies (Villa 2017).

widely examined record in addressing constructions of otherness and race issues)[3] would provide the ideal imaginative, epistemic and representational environments against which and through which to explore what have become by now other pressing concerns in my engagement as a European citizen and prospective scholar: forced mass displacement — what in mainstream discourse often goes by the name of 'global migration crisis' — and the weaponization of anti-immigrant discourse and prejudice to serve populist and nativist agendas that facilitate and naturalize the conjoining of ethnic, racial, religious, and gendered others, the destitute and the precaritised under the common rubric of 'the alien', which is characterised by "xeno-racism":

> It is a racism, that is, that cannot be colour-coded, directed as it is at poor whites as well, and is therefore passed off as xenophobia, a 'natural' fear of strangers. But in the way it denigrates and reifies people before segregating and/or expelling them, it is a xenophobia that bears all the marks of the old racism. It is racism in substance, but 'xeno' in form. It is a racism that is meted out to impoverished strangers even if they are white. It is xeno-racism. (Sivanandan 2001, quoted in Fekete 2001: 24)

Fear of incoming migrants in the contemporary Global North

Since the global financial crisis of 2007-2008, the economic and socio-political environments in the Global North have changed dramatically: the last two decades have witnessed the rise of nationalism and far-right movements in Europe and in the USA and a growing fear of global migration, especially after humanitarian crises causing mass displacement (see Martin et al. 2014). Within the current social and political conjuncture, the British context seems to provide a particularly interesting field for analysis. I am using the term "conjuncture"

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[3] For recent academic discussion on otherness and race in science fiction, see Barr 2008; Dery 2008; Lavender 2011; Loza 2013; Küchler, Maehl, and Stout 2015; Adami, Bellino, and Mengozzi 2017; Hermann 2018. On Gothic tropes and difference, see McMahon-Coleman and Weaver 2012; Wester 2012; Levina and Buy 2013; Aldana Reyes 2014; Anyiwo 2015; Gualtieri 2018; Saggini and Soccio 2018; Aldana Reyes 2020; Ascari, Baiesi, and Palatinus 2020.

here in reference to the seminal work done in the field of Cultural Studies by Stuart Hall and the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (starting with the 1978 collaborative work *Policing the Crisis*, by Hall *et al.*) and currently best represented by Lawrence Grossberg (2018; 2019). As Grossberg explains,

> A conjuncture is always a description/construction of a context as an unstable balance in the field of forces (embodied in structures of and struggles over power). [...] This commitment to politicising the conjuncture [...] is defined by cultural studies' project itself: to offer better knowledges, better understandings or narratives of the conjuncture in order to provide resources for changing the world. (2019: 46)

The study of the British cultural context has become especially relevant since the divisive campaign for the 2016 EU referendum, the vote in favour of Brexit and the finalisation of the UK withdrawal process in January 2021. As Kathy Burrell and Peter Hopkins wrote in their introduction to a 2019 collection of five papers discussing Brexit, race and migration, "Brexit discourse is not disconnected from wider racialised tropes and positionings but has been able to refract, and in some cases capitalise on, broader contemporaneous racial anxieties" (5). John Clarke and Janet Newman in 2017 also proposed a conjunctural analysis approach to understanding Brexit, noticing that

> Neo-liberalization has transformed forms of middleclass work and futures, too and Brexit was supported by this traditional(ist) middle class in the suburbs, small towns, and shires that remained resolutely 'non-cosmopolitan' and were apparently consumed by immigration anxiety (despite such spaces not being occupied by many migrants). (106)

These complex feelings and tensions across the UK resonate with similar trends in other countries of the Global North – the first that comes to mind being, of course, the USA, where social fractures, economic stagnation and anti-migrant concerns were decisive factors in the election of Donald Trump in 2016 (Norris and Inglehart 2019: 331-367). Italy is no exception to this trend: the most voted

party in the country in the 2019 European elections was the far-right, anti-immigrant party Lega Nord (European Parliament 2019), which, according to surveys, as of February 2021 still seems to be the first party in the country – though with a lower support than in 2019; meanwhile, the popularity of another far-right and anti-immigrant party, Fratelli d'Italia, has been steadily growing (YouTrend 2021). Immigration today is perceived as a crucial issue – and a constant threat – by a considerable part of the Italian population: more than half of the Italians interviewed in a 2017 survey on the perception of immigrants in the European Union considered immigration as a problem rather than an opportunity (European Commission 2018: 58); in comparison, it could be seen that, for many years, climate change has not been perceived as an imminent threat, and Italy was one of the countries where the green parties did not gain any seats in the European Parliament in 2019.

Similar feelings have been reported in surveys on the rest of the European population: the 2019 Eurobarometer on citizen's perception of the European Union reported that, "despite a strong decrease (-6 percentage points since autumn 2018)" (European Commission 2019a), immigration was still considered the most important issue the European Union was facing, whereas concerns about climate change had increased but were still not comparable to those about migrants (European Commission 2019b: 7). The data changed with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic: the Summer 2020 Eurobarometer reported a strong increase in the perceived importance of the current economic situation, with 35% of the answers identifying it as one of the two most important issues facing the European Union. In the face of a real global crisis, the perceived importance of immigration finally decreased (23% of answers); however, it still ranked second place among the main concerns of European citizens, together with the issue of the Member States' public finances. Only 20% of respondents chose climate change as an important issue (European Commission 2020: 27-29). As for specific attitudes concerning migration, the same survey reported that 71% of the respondents were in favour of "a reinforcement of EU external borders with more European border guards and coast guards" (74). It could also be seen that, especially at the beginning of the pandemic, a considerable part of far-right discourse focused on how migrants were allegedly bringing COVID-19 to Europe

(Pianigiani and Bubola 2020) in what was a clear attempt to put all the blame on racialised ‘others’.

All this means that migration is still perceived as a major concern, something citizens should be protected from, and its impact on the culture of the countries of arrival is often overplayed in public and political discourse. In this sense, the UK is a very clear embodiment of all these fears running through the countries of the Global North, in which migrants are constantly subjected to racist discourse portraying them as dangerous ‘others’, and a threat to the community. As Nandita Sharma explained:

> the national form of state power [...] *inherently* organizes human ‘society’ as a *racialized community*, one in which citizenship operates to create a positively racialized ‘nation’ and a negatively racialized other. [...] Throughout its history, the construction of ‘nations’ and their ‘others’ has relied on ideas of ‘race’. Integral to nationalism is the ideological construction of a group of people categorized as ‘foreigners’, others who are juridically and/or existentially ‘outside’ of the ‘nation’ [...]. ‘Nations’ were, from the start, imagined as *threatened* communities[4], always vulnerable to destruction by various ‘foreign’ influences’. (2015: 99-102, original emphasis).

Representation of migration and xenophobia in non-realistic narratives

It is undeniably important to study not only how these events and attitudes are developing, but also how they are represented and reverberate across multiple narratives and media today. Stories are powerful tools for talking about the world we live in and making sense of it: as Anna De Fina argued, “narrative has always

[4] Sharma is building on the work of Benedict Anderson, who first postulated the idea that nations are “imagined communities” (1983), and of Bridget Anderson, who argued that “modern states portray themselves [...] as a *community of value*, composed of people who share common ideals and (exemplary) patterns of behaviour expressed through ethnicity, religion, culture, or language – that is, its members have shared values” (2013: 2, original emphasis).

been at the centre of reflections about political discourse" (2017: 233) and "is one of the most widespread and preferred modes of encoding and understanding human experience" (235). This means not only that authors try to convey specific messages through their stories, but also that their worldview is inevitably influenced by the cultural context they live in, including the "dominant models and value-systems that are reproduced and circulated" (237) in that culture.

This is why I decided to start my research project in the field of Cultural Studies, which Roger Bromley, in an enlightening lecture, described as "a marriage between pedagogy and politics that challenges the historical and contemporary narrative which, from the standpoint of power, is set in stone and embedded in common sense" (2019: 304). My approach will mainly be to examine how today's reality – and the European and Anglo-American cultural contexts specifically – is represented through stories, and what these stories can tell us about the complex and interrelated socio-cultural and political dynamics underpinning current responses to the social construction of sameness and difference, belonging and exclusion, rootedness and mobility against the backdrop of globalisation and the emergence of transnational affective publics.

In particular, science fiction may be a fruitful tool of investigation for looking at contemporary Britain from a cultural perspective. Science fiction has always been praised for being a reflection of – and a meditation on – the real world: Darko Suvin, who famously defined science fiction as the "*literature of cognitive estrangement*" (1979: 4, original emphasis), talked about estrangement as an

> oscillation that moves now from the author's and implied reader's norm of reality to the narratively actualized novum in order to understand the plot-events, and now back from those novelties to the author's reality, in order to see it afresh from the new perspective gained. (71)

Suvin's definition, which arose out of his intention to give science fiction academic respectability (James 2000: 32-33; Bould and Vint 2011: 4) was later challenged for being "narrowly prescriptive and socio-politically tendentious" (Latham 2014: 2: see also Parrinder 2000 and Csicsery-Ronay 2008: 73) and is

not considered as a standard of measurement nowadays – even though there is often no academic consensus on what should be included in, or excluded from, the category of science fiction (Rieder 2010); however, later critics have highlighted science fiction's potential to "solicit critical commentary of a sociological kind" (Kuhn 1999: 3). In short, science fiction not only speaks about our future, but also, symbolically, about the present we live in (Hollinger and Gordon 2002: 3; Short 2005: 59; Higgins 2015: 45). Moreover, science fiction as a narrative genre has often been described as intrinsically able to transcend national borders, offering "powerful examinations of the problems with cultural blindness and unchecked aggression toward the Other" and "vividly impress[ing] upon us the threats posed by non-global thinking, nationalism, and provincialism" (Canavan and Link 2015: 1; see also Hochscherf and Leggott 2011: 6).

Indeed, all non-realistic narrative is a powerful tool for conveying social meaning and can easily be interpreted in a political sense: when a story is not linked to a specific reality, it can be adapted – in terms of symbolic reading – to different times and places and can thus be felt to relate to audiences coming from different national contexts and backgrounds[5]. This is of great relevance if we consider that the intended audience of any narrative nowadays is always – at least potentially – global, and that many works are envisaged and produced for a global market right from their conception. Moreover, potentially global narratives and genres are particularly suitable to analyse a global phenomenon such as migration, that is defined by its transcendence of borders and national contexts:

> The migrant is the political figure of our time. Most people today increasingly fall somewhere, and at some point, on the spectrum of migration, from global tourist to undocumented labor. [...] In this sense, the figure of the migrant is not a 'type of person' or fixed identity but a mobile social position or spectrum that people move into and out of under certain social conditions of mobility. The figure of the migrant is a political concept that defines the

[5] For this suggestion I would like to thank Dr Xavier Aldana Reyes, who first made me notice the supernatural's potential to decontextualise from time and place.

> conditions and agencies by which various figures are socially expelled as a result of, or as the cause of, their mobility. (Nail 2015: 235)

For this reason, at the outset, my doctoral project was meant to include non-realistic narratives pertaining to different genres. My purpose was to study selected representations of non-human characters – seen as metaphors for migrants, minority groups and unwanted 'others' – both in Gothic and in science fiction stories, to find possible similarities or differences between genres and text types and to trace the contemporary evolution of several non-human tropes: robot, android, cyborg, AI, alien, vampire, werewolf, ghost, zombie[6].

As for the choice to consider these characters metaphors for more than one oppressed group, I need to specify that migrants, ethnic minorities, and unwanted 'others' are not necessarily the same thing; however, there are many common traits in these categories, especially if we focus on racist and xenophobic discourse and its political implications. As Gary Younge (2016) explained talking about the British context,

> For decades, the issue of race (the colour of people) and immigration (the movement of people) have been neatly interwoven, as though they are one and the same thing–as though 'British' people are not also black and black people are not British. It has been profitable for politicians [...] to sow confusion about the difference between migration from the EU and elsewhere, or the distinction between economic migrants and asylum seekers. [...] Xenophobia and racism are easily blended, and they become an especially potent toxin among a population that no longer trusts its own leaders.

For this reason, my analysis will include more than one kind of racialised 'others', not because I believe these groups face exactly the same forms of

[6] On Gothic and Horror racialising tropes, see Cohen 1996; Young 2008; McNally 2011; Edwards 2014; Botting 2014; Fischer-Hornung and Mueller 2016; Robinson 2016; Hudson 2017; De Michelis 2018.

discrimination, but because they are often grouped and blended together in public discourse.

In order to study the representation of these figures in Gothic and science fiction, I chose to focus on the category of the 'non-human' instead of the 'human-like'. The term 'human-like' has been productively used in posthuman studies[7], often with reference to the well-known theory of the "uncanny valley" (see Mori 2012), according to which human-like robots may generate an eerie response in humans before technological advancements make it possible to reach a satisfactory level of similarity. As useful as these notions are, they could only be applied to research on the representation of intelligent machines created by humans for humans (robots, androids, AIs), and not to other cases, such as aliens from other worlds and Gothic monsters. Moreover, my intention was not to highlight how similar these characters were to, or how assimilable to, human beings, or how close they came to the definition of 'human'; instead, I chose a term that could highlight their *lack* of human status, their being *un*wanted, *un*-citizens (I will expand on these concepts later in the thesis). At the same time, it was a general term that could be used for many different figures across genres.

My initial idea of analysing narratives belonging to different genres was also based on the fact that genre categories, though certainly useful, are in the end artificial, even arbitrary, to some extent: not all narratives can unquestionably be labelled as belonging to one genre only, and tropes and imaginaries characteristic of one genre can easily be found in other genres. In particular, science fiction and the Gothic share interesting connections and intersections: suffice it to mention that a masterpiece of Gothic fiction, *Frankenstein*, is often considered as an early – or possibly even the first – example of science fiction, even though this view is much debated (Roncaglia 2018; see also Warrick 1980; Aldiss 1986; Alkon 2002; Roberts 2006, 2016).

However, I soon realised that this original scope was too broad for a three-year programme; hence, I decided to focus on science fiction as my main field of analysis and to keep working on the Gothic as a side project, the first result of

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[7] See Haraway 1991; Hayles 1999, 2005; Gray 2001; Vint 2007; Braidotti 2013; Tamar 2014; Armstrong 2014; Roden 2015; Clarke and Rossini 2017.

which was my paper on the TV series *Being Human* published during my PhD (Villa 2020). This paper focused on how the three protagonists of the series – a werewolf, a vampire and a ghost – could be interpreted as ethnic outsiders facing marginalisation from the dominant human community, and on how each one of these characters, because of the specific evolution in folklore and fiction of each correspondent Gothic trope, brought to the fore different aspects of racial discrimination.

By focusing on these two topics separately, I was able to give this thesis a more homogeneous form, while considering it only a first step towards future research, and in the hope that I will be able to expand my work, finding connections between these two 'branches'.

Aliens and androids as tropes for ethnic difference

Within the science fiction genre, two figures stand out as particularly relevant if we want to look at how the fear of otherness and migration is represented today: the alien and the android. The figure of the alien and that of the android are, of course, quite distinct, not only in the different narrative imaginaries and storylines they tend to give rise to, but also because of the diverging ethical concerns that are most often associated with their different 'ontological' status. However, both share a feature that can render them very interesting metaphors for the ethnically different: the fact that they are intrinsically non-humans, and thus their whole existence in a narrative is defined by their being outsiders to the group all humans belong to. As Geogg King and Tanya Krzywinska argued while examining the portrayal of AIs, aliens and cyborgs in science fiction cinema, "much of the dramatic and structural tension of science fiction derives from the construction of a primary difference between the 'human' and the 'other'" (2000: 30). This can be connected to the public discourse on migration, which constantly focuses on migrants lacking the status of citizens, on their being the 'others' and 'outsiders' of the nation-state (Taha 2019), and which systematically represents migrants as less-than-human. As Hanif Kureishi famously wrote, taking his lead

from the metaphor of the zombie but moving on to bring the entire problem space of 'unwanted' immigration into sharp focus:

> the immigrant is easily dismissed and denigrated since he is now no longer a person. [...] The migrant has no face, no status, no protection and no story. His single identity is to be discussed within the limited rules of the community. [...] the migrant is degraded to the status of an object about whom anything can be said and to whom anything can be done. (Kureishi 2014)

As for aliens, the fact that they are defined as a different species coming from other worlds is already sufficient to make them 'others' in regard to humans: in his introduction to *Aliens R Us. The Other in Science Fiction Cinema*, Ziauddin Sardar claimed that "[d]ifference and otherness are the essence of aliens" (Sardar 2002: 6). This means that they can be employed or read as metaphors for migrants, foreign invaders, ethnic outsiders: as Andrew Butler explained, "racial difference gets displaced on to species difference: the encounter with the alien can be a metaphor, parable or allegory of the encounter with a different ethnic group" (Butler 2013: 187). The metaphor works both ways: on the one hand, aliens in science fiction can often be a symbol of migrants or racialised others; on the other hand, the idea of the 'alien from another world' is a recurrent trope in the representation of migrants in media and public discourse (Ahmed 2000: 1-3; Sevier 2019). And it is not by chance, of course, that the term 'alien', often coupled with 'illegal', "remains the English language term of choice in migration administration" (Finnane 2009: 444). Keith Cunningham-Parmeter, researching the language used to talk about immigration in US jurisprudence, reported that

> 'alien' and 'illegal alien' are by far the most common terms used to refer to immigrants in the law. [...] The metaphor brings focus to images of foreignness and otherness, producing a narrowly focused picture of nonhumans who can never belong. (Cunningham-Parmeter 2011: 1571-3)

As for androids, in science fiction narratives they have typically been created by humans, to whom they are subjugated and by whom they are considered inferior: this means that they are not only 'ethnically' different, but also, invariably, a race of slaves. Their category and metaphoric significance overlap with those of other intelligent machines in science fiction: robot, AI, cyborg. A robot is an automated machine able to move and work with a certain degree of autonomy and independence – a very broad definition that covers many different kinds of devices and machines. An android is a specific kind of robot whose shape closely resembles a human being; in particular, the word 'android' is usually preferred to 'robot' if the machine is made from flesh-like materials and is indistinguishable, at least at first sight, from a human. 'Cyborg', meaning 'cybernetic organism', is a hybrid between human and machine, such as a human enhanced by cybernetic parts. An Artificial Intelligence is any software created by humans "duplicating various aspects of intelligent thought" (Stableford 2006: 34); it can be purely virtual, or it can be installed into a 'hardware' (be it robot, android or cyborg).

In this thesis I am prevalently using the term 'android' because a large number of narratives about Artificial Intelligence, and, specifically, the ones I have chosen to analyse in detail here, feature humanoid robots, i.e., androids. Moreover, the comparison with racialised others is particularly evident in this case, because androids inevitably have a lot more in common with humans – to begin with, both share an embodied experience of life – whereas the differences between the two 'races' are often only superficial. However, the same reasoning may be said to apply to non-humanoid robots and to purely virtual AIs, and their significance as a trope for racialised 'others' cannot be separated from the history of robots in science fiction.

In fact, the subjugation of intelligent machines to the human race is already present in the first appearance in the English language, and in science fiction in general, of the term "robot": Karel Čapek's play *R.U.R.* (1921), in which artificially created workers rise against their human masters – and win. R.U.R. is an acronym of Rossum's Universal Robots (Rossumovi Univerzální Roboti in the original Czech); the word "robot" was a slight modification of the term "robota", meaning "forced labor, compulsory service, drudgery" (Online Etymology

Dictionary): specifically, robota was "the Czech word for the labor services Bohemian peasants owed their lords until 1848, when servile tenancies were abolished" (Sayer 2018: 115). Therefore, right from the beginning of its history in science fiction, the robot was intended as "humanity's modern slave" (Wilzig 1981: 449) and connected to ideas of class struggle (Short 2005: 58-59).

In the subsequent evolution of the figure, the confirmation that robots were imagined as necessarily confined to an inferior class came with the extremely famous Three Laws of Robotics by Isaac Asimov, which are none other than a way to ensure that machines remain subjugated to humans and, thus, not dangerous. The Three Laws of Robotics were first developed by Isaac Asimov and John W. Campbell in 1940 (Asimov 1979: 285-287), featured in most of Asimov's stories involving robots and were extremely influential in the development of science fiction. They were first introduced as a quote from the fictional *Handbook of Robotics* in the 1942 short story "Runaround" and formulated as follows:

> First Law: A robot may not injure a human being or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm.
> Second Law: A robot must obey the orders given it by human beings except where such orders would conflict with the First Law.
> Third Law: A robot must protect its own existence as long as such protection does not conflict with the First or Second Law. (Asimov 1950: 40)

As noted by F. Patrick Hubbard, the Three Laws "function as a self-executing slave code [...]: Do not harm masters; obey masters except where harm to a master would result; and protect your owner's property interest in your well-being" (2011: 466). Moreover, the laws themselves could be considered as a demonstration that Asimov is portraying slaves that are sentient[8], because any robot capable of interpreting and following the Laws is clearly capable of complex reasoning and ethical judgement at a human level (465): however, the great

[8] The condition of being aware of one's own existence has been described with more than one term: 'consciousness', 'self-awareness', 'sentience'. Since this is not a thesis on the ontology of 'consciousness' but on its representation in cultural products, I am using the words 'sentient', 'conscious' and 'self-aware' interchangeably to describe robots, androids and AIs who think and feel like human beings.

complexity of the robots' brain does not seem to pose a major moral dilemma in Asimov's stories. Asimov himself confirmed that he had imagined all robots, no matter how intelligent and capable of feeling, as slaves for humans:

> Robots can be the new servants – patient, uncomplaining, incapable of revolt. In human shape they can make use of the full range of technological tools devised for human beings and, when intelligent enough, can be friends as well as servants [...] (1981: 88-89)

The undeniable, if overall benevolent, racialized innuendo underpinning Asimov's statement was insightfully noted by Isiah Lavender III in his 2011 monograph *Race in American Science Fiction*:

> Asimov's robots resonate with the antebellum South's myth of a happy darkie – a primitive, childlike worker without a soul, incapable of much thought – cared for by the benevolent and wise master. This resonance is hard to ignore. (62)

The idea that robots, in general, and androids, specifically, might actually not be so different from humans is also a recurrent theme in science fiction and is at the root of long-standing philosophical questions: "If androids dream of electric sheep, then aren't they really human?" (Scholes and Rabkin 1977: 180; see also Pagetti 2012: 90). As Sue Short explains in *Cyborg Cinema and Contemporary Subjectivity*[9], the discomfort human characters feel when they realise they are not able to tell a human from an android can be interpreted as "fear of miscegenation, and the possibility of other ethnic groups 'passing' as white" (2005: 110).

Depending on each story, androids' inferiority may be justified by their lack of some human characteristics – as P.K. Dick's androids, who are incapable of feeling empathy – or may simply be taken for granted, as happens with Isaac Asimov's robots. If we consider stories in which androids are struggling to gain

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[9] For the purposes of her study, Sue Short defines as 'cyborgs' both humans whose bodies have been modified through technology and sentient androids.

independence from humans, such as *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* and its cinematic adaptation *Blade Runner*[10], or *The Bicentennial Man*, it is inevitable to think about real historical events – and we have many notable examples of slavery in our history, many of which were based on or justified by the discursive construction of racial difference: from the African slave trade to colonisation, to the current exploitation of undocumented migrants in the Global North (a theme that will be analysed in the first chapter).

Aliens and androids in science fiction cinema

If we consider visual mediums such as cinema and television, we can find plenty of examples of non-human characters being represented as racialised 'others'; the huge academic literature on this topic has covered a range of British and US films and tv-series of the past and present centuries (Bernardi 1998; Pounds 1999; Sardar and Cubitt 2002; Adare 2005; Nama 2008; Nishime 2017; Mafe 2018; Mittermeier and Spychala 2020).

As for the representation of difference in British and US science fiction cinema, specifically, many scholars have highlighted its connections to racist discourses: for example, the threat of alien invasion was a common theme in 1950s films produced in the United states, a trope that "has been commonly associated with the fear of invasion by the metaphorically 'alien' Soviet Union" (Martini 2012: 259). In the same period, British cinema mirrored similar fears, "projecting the alien Others of the cinema screen onto the immigrant Others who began to settle in the nation's towns and cities" (Jones 2018: 103-104). As argued by Ziauddin Sardar,

> Wherever we look, the colonising, imperial mission of science fiction is hard to miss. Space, the final frontier, is the recurrent frontier on which Western thought has been constructed and operated throughout history, or time.

[10] On slavery and racial issues in *Blade Runner*, see, among others, Silverman (1991) and Bukatman (1997). On racial representation in the whole *Blade Runner* cycle of films and short films, including the latest work *Blade Runner 2049* (2017), see Chan 2020.

> Western thought not only constructed aliens to define itself better, it made constructed aliens essential to fulfilling its own moral purpose. [...] The white man's burden, so inherent in Western self-understanding, is ever present in the narratives and morals of science fiction cinema [...] (2002: 16)

If issues connected to race and xenophobia are somewhat obvious when it comes to invasion narratives, they are less evident, but still present, when non-human characters are portrayed in a positive way. As Roy Menarini explained in his examination of twentieth-century alien films, science fiction films have generally depicted aliens either as godly and benevolent creatures, whose only purpose was to help the human race, or as dreadful threats to humans' own existence (1999: 82; 101). Similarly, robots and androids "have tended to be placed in either of two categories – crudely conceived as either 'allies' or 'enemies' – with each group viewed as either innocent and in need of instruction, or manifestly dangerous and, for the most part, destroyed" (Short 2005: 106).

Moreover, it is important to underline here that both figures are only considered 'good' if their existence is subordinated to the wellbeing of humans:

> The robot – or later the computer, android, cyborg or artificial intelligence – is rendered good if it serves human goals. Prominent examples include Robbie the robot from *Forbidden Planet* (1956), with 'his' prodigious ability to replicate any kind of material, and Data in the new generation *Star Trek*, who is deeply fascinated by human behaviour and serves the human-defined goals of Star Fleet Command. Both are tailored to obey the requirements of Isaac Asimov's manifesto for the programming of robots [...].
>
> The scheme also applies to aliens. Friendly aliens [...] seem to serve human interests. [...] In *Close Encounters*, *E.T.* and *Cocoon* [...] the aliens are characterised as warm, emotional and caring and the audience is bathed in what purports to be something close to a sense of religious exaltation. (King and Krzywinska 2000: 30)

This underlying assumption that non-human characters in science fiction are only to be considered 'good' if they serve human purposes is certainly

problematic, as it connects the audience's perception and evaluation of these beings to their usefulness to the human community and not to their own essence and choices: in these narratives, non-humans are judged and divided into "categories of inclusion and exclusion, inviting tacit acceptance where the figure in question reflects due deference to human values, and outright hostility when found to be a threat" (Short 2005: 110). A similar line of reasoning seems to be widespread in discourses about immigrants, who are not considered as people in their own right, with their own agency, desires and personalities, but are assessed on the basis of their usefulness to the arrival community, their 'worthiness' of the receiving society's respect: a typical feature of the mediatic representation of migrants is to divide them into "'Good, deserving immigrants'" (Rodriguez 2018), i.e., "those who assimilate into White, middle-class society", and "'undeserving' immigrants", meaning "those who assimilate more slowly, not at all, or into other segments of society" (10).

Moreover, even when non-humans have been constructed as positive characters, science fiction films have often failed to provide a realistic, detailed enough representation of social issues related to race and discrimination: in most cases, these narratives have simply reduced the representation of the non-human to a single, personal story, thus highlighting the exceptionality of the individual over the nuances we could find in a diverse group of people. As early as 1987, Jon Huntington had noted this issue occurring in cinematic narratives up to that year:

> If the story of the hostile alien is often an exercise in excluding individuals because of their group type, the story of the benign alien is often an exercise in finding a bond that transcends groups. *It isolates the individual and emphasizes his or her difference from the rest of the species*. This rejection of the group, while it may lead to a readiness to accept the individual alien, may also lead to a disregarding of social factors that generate discrimination in the first place. (76-77, my emphasis)

Notable examples of this kind of narrative applied to the trope of the android are Asimov's *The Bicentennial Man* (1976) and its 1999 cinematic adaptation. The story's robot protagonist, Andrew, has a strong desire to live as a

human and be recognised as such: he starts modifying his body to increasingly resemble a human being, and he fights a long court case to claim human status. However, he is considered an exception to the norm: "There is no kinship with others like himself because he is seemingly alone in having a creative positronic pathway. The question of robot rights (and any link they might have with civil rights) thus becomes evaded" (Short 2005: 112). The film, even more than the novelette, strongly underlines Andrew's uniqueness compared to other robots: he is presented as the only one with feelings, emotions, and desires, the only one who aspires to being human, the only one capable of falling in love – and his love interest is a human woman, because no other robot in the story could ever reciprocate his feelings. Thus, his being exceptional only confirms his species' inferiority, and no change to the *status quo* is sought.

King and Krzywinska highlighted a similar problem in a film that had been conceived as a sort of social commentary, that is *Alien Nation* (1988):

> *Alien Nation* gives us the alien 'newcomer' as an abused minority population in America; 300,000 genetically engineered workers having been stranded on earth by an intergalactic equivalent of a slave ship. As a blend of science fiction and 'cop' thriller, however, we should not be surprised that the film *evades the political issues in favour of the assertion of unity at the individual level* of a 'buddy' relationship between white and alien detectives.
>
> This is a strategy typical of Hollywood production. Potentially contentious political issues form a point of reference. Their implications are not explored in detail because this is considered likely to be divisive and alienating to audiences seeking 'entertainment', which is usually understood as entailing the avoidance of explicitly 'political' material. A focus on two central characters offers both a means of avoiding the larger issue and of offering a reconciliation of the individual relationship: it is much easier to reconcile two individuals of different backgrounds than to solve social problems. The individual reconciliation offers an emotional pay-off. (2000: 32, my emphasis)

Interestingly, *Alien Nation* has been compared to a more recent, and very well-known, film: *District 9* by Neill Blomkamp (2009)[11], where apartheid in South Africa is represented through the metaphor of the alien. The aliens, arriving on Earth as refugees in 1982, have been living in a ghetto – the eponymous District 9 – outside Johannesburg; since humans have grown hostile to the aliens, who live in complete poverty, the government decides to relocate them to a new camp. The human protagonist in charge of the operations, however, comes into contact with an alien substance that slowly turns him into an alien. During his transformation, he switches sides, becoming friends with the alien Christopher and helping him leave Earth.

District 9 was very well reviewed for its plot and social content, which "seems to celebrate the dramatic transformation of a man embodying the banality of evil into a political hero" and "appears superficially to be an inspiring story about how the evils of apartheid were overcome by the cooperation of whites and blacks who stood up together against an unjust political and economic system" (Valdez Moses 2010: 158). However, the film is also permeated with racism, though probably unintentionally:

> By making the aliens look like prawns[12], Blomkamp implies that black Africans were/are a subhuman species. [...] *District 9* also enacts the self-serving white fantasy that blacks are just as racist by having Nigerians exploit the prawns instead of Afrikaners. But it is Wikus's horrific transformation from human to alien that most starkly reveals *District 9*'s apartheid approach to race. First, the fact that it only takes a few precious drops of black alien fluid to turn Wikus into a prawn gives credence to one of the most stubborn white supremacist delusions of all: that black blood is a pollutant and miscegenation is fatal. Second, the idea that Wikus must metamorphose into an alien to sympathize with the Other's suffering reinforces the idea that racism is natural, that achieving racial awareness is excruciatingly painful, and that avoiding those alien Others might be the best course of action. (Loza 2013: 62-93)

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[11] Josh Tyler, in a review for *CinemaBlend*, called *District 9* "an Alien Nation knockoff" (2009).
[12] "Prawns" is the derogatory term humans use for aliens in the film, with reference to their similarity to a South African cricket, the Parktown prawn (Gaylard 2010).

All these stories are, first and foremost, entertainment products; however, they also carry social content – whether intentionally, as may be the case with narratives that explicitly portray non-human characters as ethnically different from the dominant community, or unintentionally, as in the case of stories which, shying away from social commentary, seem to be primarily aimed, instead, at mirroring the beliefs and assumptions of the culture within which they were produced.

When reading non-human characters in science fiction as tropes for minorities and ethnic outsiders, such a simplified and homogenizing mode of representation can certainly be problematic. It is the "danger of a single story", in the words of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2009): namely, the monolithic perception of another race or culture crystallized and naturalized through oversimplified portrayals and stereotypical misrepresentations validated in literature and the media. The importance of a diverse representation is a widely debated issue today, as many advocate a change in the "continued cycle of excluding diversity, inclusion, and ignoring misrepresentation in the entertainment and media industry" (Washington 2019):

> Media depicts stereotypical representations for people of color and women, whether through Hollywood or on the news, as violent criminals, the help, terrorists, submissive characters, highly sexualized beings, unintelligent people, and more. Similarly, there are concerns for Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) populations and depictions of disabled persons. Seeing oneself on screen is crucial because society is not monolithic, but multifaceted. (Washington 2019)

If we look at how aliens and androids have been portrayed in British and US science fiction cinema so far, paying attention to their potential as tropes for migrants and ethnic minorities, it is clear that, in most cases, these stories are unable to provide a challenging, multidimensional and multifaceted representation of difference. This does not necessarily mean that it is impossible to find complex and realistic representations of difference in science fiction

cinema; however, it is possible that some specificities of the medium, such as constraints of time or the need for films to appeal to wide and diverse audiences – as noted by the scholars quoted above – may have led many filmmakers to develop narratives more centred on individual stories, which inevitably lead to an oversimplification of the non-human group.

Aliens and androids in science fiction television

If one of the reasons behind the simplistic representation of non-human 'others' in films lies, presumably, in their limited duration, it could be hypothesised that television series, with a story spanning several episodes and more time available for the development of several main characters, might provide creators with the opportunity to develop plural, multifaceted narratives – "the medium is the message", in the words of Marshall McLuhan (1964: 7). Scholars of science fiction TV series have occasionally argued that television narrative is 'superior' to cinema from a qualitative point of view:

> Throughout its history, British science fiction television, being unable to afford the big-budget special effects of its cinema counterpart, was ideas-led, though on the level of plot, character and situation rather than having the luxury of detailed descriptive re-creations of alternative worlds axiomatic of literary sf. (Cook and Wright 2006: 3)

However, the emergence and evolution of TV formats in the twentieth century brought about different constraints. Television series often developed over extremely long periods of time and were not necessarily conceived as finished products, as stories with a beginning and an end (Allrath, Gymnich, and Surkamp 2005: 3), but kept evolving and changing following the tastes of the public; since they were part of the "flow" of television material (Williams 1975) and they were experienced through small, low-quality screens (Ellis 1992: 127), they were not watched with the same attention usually reserved for films, and thus their stories tended to have a very episodic structure. This means that, more

often that not, the 'others' were simply some non-human beings the protagonists met in a one-off episode and could not be developed into complex characters. In these cases, as J.P. Telotte (2014) argues when talking about the '70s and '80s, science fiction television would often resort to "copying big-screen hits" (177) instead of trying to represent "real-world concerns and contemporary science" (178): this included stories about robots and aliens that were largely influenced by the cinema of that time, like *Buck Rogers* which "clearly patterned its protagonist on *Star Wars*' Han Solo, even giving him a robot assistant" (178); or series such as *The Powers of Matthew Star* (1982), *V* (1984-85), *Starman* (1986-87), *War of the Worlds* (1988-90), *Alien Nation* (1989-91), *ALF* (1986), or *Doctor Who* (1963-1989)[13], in which aliens were "both threatening and benevolent, even comic" as in the films they were inspired by (179). In short, the science fiction TV series of the twentieth century did not necessarily try to bring innovation to the genre, but often relied on tropes that were already established and palatable to the audience.

It must be said that one extremely famous and influential TV series featuring aliens and androids among the main characters was produced during the twentieth century – *Star Trek* (*The Original Series*, 1966-1969; *The Next Generation*, 1987-1994; *Deep Space Nine*, 1993-1999; *Voyager*, 1995-2001). *Star Trek* did portray a great number of non-human characters and does celebrate a utopian world "defined by a unitary high culture untroubled by cultural difference" (Graham 2002: 141). However, its representation of difference was heavily influenced by the US culture of that time – especially during the first decades – and was later greatly criticised. As Ilaria Orsini argued, the representation of aliens in *The Original Series* makes use of Orientalist[14] stereotypes (2006: 151-154); the following series, *The Next Generation*, "always emphasizes humanity in general, but as in nineteenth century humanism, the term human is in many ways conflated with a concept of Western Man" (Boyd, 1996: 101) which "implicitly privileges the virtues of bourgeois, White, rational

[13] I have written "1963-1989" because Telotte is commenting on twentieth-century *Doctor Who*. I will talk about the new *Doctor Who* series (2005-present) in the first chapter.
[14] See Said 1978.

masculinity" (Graham 2002: 141). Moreover, as Elaine Graham noted (2002: 141-143), *Star Trek*'s humanism does not include intelligent and self-aware machines, like the android Data, who is part of the *Next Generation* crew, but is not considered as equal by the other crew members (I will expand on Data in the second chapter).

Star Trek's representation of difference is still under scrutiny today. The last series of the franchise, *Star Trek: Discovery* (2017-present), has been praised for its diverse cast and its choice of a black woman as the protagonist (Cranston 2018); however, Whit Frazier Peterson highlighted the racist undertones in the series, arguing that *Discovery* has carried on with the *Star Trek* tendency of "promoting liberal-humanist ideals in a supposedly post-racial future, while simultaneously playing by the race-inflected rules of the era in which the shows were filmed" (2020: 203). The representation of aliens in the series is also problematic: Klingons in *Discovery* are portrayed as a race of black aliens with clear African features. As Katharine Trendacosta wrote in a 2017 article, the look of *Discovery*'s Klingons is "othering" and it "play[s] into stereoytpes of savages that specifically plays as a contrast to white and western aesthetics", and this seems like a regression compared to the previous series, *Deep Space Nine* (1993-1999) and *Voyager* (1995-2001), where Klingons had been humanised and their psychology and culture had been explored in depth.

Twenty-first century TV series

In the last few decades, television series have experienced an enormous increase in terms of production, consumption, and critical attention. In the US, the period from the late 1990s to the present has often been called the "Second Golden Age of Television"[15] (Thompson 1997). Among the reasons of this success

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[15] The first Golden Age of Television in the US is considered to be the period from the late 1940s to the late 1950s or early 1960s (Damico and Quay 2016: vii; Lobrutto 2018: 348; Bolter 2019: 87). Definitions and dates of the new Golden Age vary among scholars and critics, and it is undoubtedly difficult to label a period we are currently living in; some define the current period as a third Golden Age, identifying the '80s and/or the '90s as a second Golden Age (Muller 2016; Zoller Seitz 2016).

was the growth of cable networks – HBO, Showtime, Fox, ABC, CBS – which could invest in the quality writing and technical improvement of television productions, in a business that even began to compete with Hollywood (Scarpino 2008: 6-8).

Moreover, films and TV series can be watched on the same platforms: the now widely-used streaming services, such as Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, Hulu (see Rossini 2016; Johnson 2018). With these services, the users' experience is the same, no matter which genre they choose to watch: films, series, documentaries, stand-up comedy, reality TV, and so on. What differentiates films and series today – and what influences narrative texture and the unfolding of the plot(s) – is mainly their duration and their structure. Even though formats and lengths vary, the simple fact that series are cumulatively longer than films may mean that there is more time to develop different characters, narratives and points of view.

Indeed, twenty-first century TV series have been analysed by several authors as a specific medium for storytelling[16], and they have been praised for their potential to construct a more complex and composite narrative, as writers can develop their story on a longer time frame and pay attention to a greater number of main characters:

> [...] the evolution that television narrative has undergone in the last fifteen years is condensed: sophisticated, innovative, complex, long-term and aimed at a viewer schooled in narratology. [...] Contemporary American and British TV fiction has achieved an exemplary balance between art and industry, including products that combine a density of plot, aesthetics and even ethics with a handcrafted flavor accessible to every type of public. Economic success, massive public response and high critical recognition marry the current golden age of television series with the Hollywood classic. [...] By its very nature, television allows for a narrative that can unfold over many

[16] Nelson 2007; Mittell 2007, 2015; Goggin 2014; Hassler-Forest 2014; Innocenti and Pescatore 2014; García 2016b; Piga 2016; Schlütz 2016; Holland 2017: 185-206; Wells-Lassagne 2017; Brembilla and De Pascalis 2018.

> hours, something which also gives it the freedom to develop a plot density that is unique among the visual arts. (García 2016a: 2-4)

This potential for multiple storytelling can certainly be of interest both to scholars of science fiction and to those interested in migration and postcolonial studies, because – at least in theory – we might expect a more complex portrayal of difference, minority groups, and non-human 'others'.

As a terminological clarification, it must be mentioned that some authors have divided television series into two general types, often called "series" and "serial" (Ellis 1992; Telotte 2014: 11). An example of this binary categorization was provided by Sarah Kozloff in 2010:

> *Series* refers to those shows whose characters and setting are recycled, but the story concludes in each individual episode. By contrast, in a *serial* the story and discourse do not come to a conclusion during an episode, and the threads are picked up again after a given hiatus. (90-91)

However, I am not using the two categories of "series" and "serial" in this work, as I believe it would be more useful to define them all as "series". There are several reasons for this. First of all, dividing television narratives into "series" and "serials" is not so easy as it may seem: as early as 2005, Gaby Allrath, Marion Gymnich and Carola Surkamp noted that "the traditional view of series and serial as binary opposites should be replaced by a conceptualization of the series and the serial as the extremes of a continuum" (6).

Over the last few years, the production of series has grown exponentially and has yielded a great variety and proliferation of forms, so that even if we consider the templates that have been defined as "series" and "serial" to be at the ends of a spectrum, the grey zone is so extended and fuzzy that it is not at all useful to use the distinction: it will be more rewarding, at least for what concerns my research, to sound out and describe the specificity of each series depending on seasons, episodes, conception and development. Moreover, even if we did want to position TV series along a continuum, this would often prove to be very difficult, as many series are not homogeneous in their degree of 'serialisation' and

would thus change their place in the spectrum depending on which episodes or narrative arcs we consider. A clear example is *Doctor Who*, in which we find seasons prioritizing extremely horizontal narratives and seasons relying on a greater number of stand-alone episodes, depending on each individual showrunner's intention (Stowe 2017; Radish 2018; Shannon Miller 2018).

As a final consideration regarding terminology, it should be observed that even though academics have on some occasions used these definitions, the distinction between series and serial is no longer used today by the producers and prod*users* of TV series alike, with the term "series" being widely used as an umbrella word. In my thesis, therefore, I will normally use this undifferentiated and more general definition, expanding on the length and format of each series considered, when necessary.

Research questions, methodologies, and structure of this work

The main purpose of my research is to establish whether there are any complex, multifaceted representations of subaltern groups in today's science fiction TV series, in which non-human characters are given voice and agency, and whether this mode of representation is made possible by the specific medium of the serial narrative. I will also try to determine whether these narratives add something new to the science fiction genre, and how they are connected to previous works with similar themes. Another research question concerns the visual symbology and discursive strategies used in these stories – are there common elements between them, or do they depend on the specificity of the tropes involved? And, finally, can these works influence the audience's perception of migrants and ethnic minorities, and do they present – explicitly or implicitly – any specific ideology or proposal on how to deal with racism and xenophobia?

As already said at the beginning of this Introduction, I shall rely, mainly, on a Cultural Studies approach. This means that my 'textual' analysis will also be based on visual and auditory elements; that I will try to "pris[e] apart relations that appear to be natural, inevitable, necessary and universal and showing how they have been constructed" (Grossberg 2015: 221); and that I will consider

"events in the world as parts of contingent contexts", intended not just as an "isolated spatio-temporal bit", but as a "complicated and contradictory set of relations, differentiated unities, organized multiplicities" (220), something that chimes with this thesis' approach to its British case studies from a transnational perspective and having in mind an international audience. I will focus on how these narratives can be seen as mirroring — or questioning — the cultural contexts in which they were produced, the way they interface with dominant cultural and affective maps, and what they can say about social issues, occasionally drawing on other methodologies: sociology, film and TV studies, border studies, critical race studies, cognitivism and cognitive approaches to film and tv studies, and affect studies.

In the first chapter of my thesis I will provide a few examples of multifaceted representation of aliens and androids in twenty-first century TV series. I will expand on two case studies, in particular: *Humans* (Sam Vincent and Jonathan Brackley, Channel 4 and AMC, UK and USA, 3 seasons, 24 episodes, 2015-2018) and *The Aliens* (Fintan Ryan, E4, 1 season, 6 episodes, 2016). These two series have not received much attention in recent academic literature; however, in my opinion, they both provide excellent case studies in the representation of difference and otherness through multiple perspectives. I will provide a close analysis of *Humans* and *The Aliens*, considering how they were shaped by the historical and cultural context in which they were produced and how they are related to previous works. I will also demonstrate how non-human characters in *Humans* and *The Aliens* can be read as members of racialised minorities, and will look at how racial difference is figuratively and metaphorically represented in the two series, while investigating, at the same time, the richly intertextual and dialogic relationship between the portrayal of in-group and out-group dynamics in television science fiction storytelling and dominant current discourses about those who are obliged to live outside the protection of community and citizenship.

In the second chapter I will focus on the subjectivation of non-human characters in *Humans* and *The Aliens*, trying to demonstrate that in both series characterisation is not stereotyped to fit the 'good' or 'bad' type. This is crucial because, as Papastergiadis said, "in the dominant paradigm on migration, the available categories for representing migrant subjectivity tend to define it in

terms of a victim or monster. As a consequence, the basic dimensions of their humanity are distorted" (2009: 150). On the contrary, non-human characters in *Humans* and *The Aliens* present different points of view and implement different strategies: in this way, both stories are able to highlight individual differences, and, in the end, create a realistic representation of both the dominant and the subaltern group. I will also highlight a feature that I think is worth noticing in both series: the importance of affective narrative, as both series use specific techniques (depending on the specific medium) to trigger an empathic response in the viewer[17].

Under this social and political perspective, one of the objectives of my research was to find out whether *Humans* and *The Aliens* can be considered to be in some way innovative in the context of their genre – and I believe they are, as I will try to demonstrate, both in their representation of racialised 'others' and in the way their struggles against discrimination are portrayed. I will also argue that *Humans*' stance on migration policies and citizenship, in particular – and possibly in relation to the xeno-racist turn that accompanied Brexit — is more radical than both the original Swedish series on which it was based, and other well-known examples in science fiction.

[17] The characterisation of non-humans and the affective narration in the two series were originally conceived as two separate chapters in my project. Unfortunately, as has been the case for many students and researchers around the world, my work has been highly affected by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and I have had to make some hard choices about the length and structure of my thesis. However, I hope I have been able to convey the core of my argument, and I hope I shall be able to expand it in the future.

CHAPTER I

Aliens and androids as figures of unwanted migrants and subaltern groups: examining contemporary issues through the lenses of *Humans* and *The Aliens*

1. Aliens and androids in twenty-first century science fiction TV series: new potentialities for representing difference

In the Introduction I highlighted some problematic issues in the representation of non-humans in visual narratives of the twentieth century. I will now focus on how we might find different and, possibly, innovative representations in contemporary television, which, according to well-known TV scholar J.P. Telotte, not only provides *more* science fiction stories than cinema, from a quantitative point of view, but also generates narratives that are qualitatively superior (2015: 4-5) and therefore more effective in impacting on the audience.

Looking at contemporary television, it is indeed possible to find complex portrayals of non-human characters in renowned science fiction TV series: the most famous examples are probably *Westworld* and *Battlestar Galactica* for androids, and the new *Doctor Who* series for aliens – three series that have deservingly attracted academic attention for their portrayal of difference and because of their potential for symbolic readings.

Battlestar Galactica (USA, 4 seasons, 76 episodes, 2004-2009) is a reboot of the 1978 series of the same name and part of an extensive media franchise, that includes films, TV series, novels and novelisations, comic books, and video games. The story is set in outer space, where humans live on a group of planets called the Twelve Colonies. The main antagonists of the human race are the Cylons, a race of robots – and, later, androids indistinguishable from human beings – who were originally created by humans and who rebelled against their masters. Even though *Battlestar Galactica* might at first sight seem like a simple story of humans at war with intelligent machines, the 2004 series managed to

provide deep portrayals of Cylons by exploring the background, past and psychology of many different characters:

> Humans and Cylons cannot choose *what* they are, but *BSG* offers each character a choice as to *who* they want to be. While some remain machines, others look beyond their make and model to pursue an identity that defies their origin - they decide to be people. Individuals begin to emerge from the Cylon whole, taking independent actions based on love instead of logic, compassion instead of reason. [...] It is through decisions that establish their independence and their individuality, and which inspire others to do the same, that they rise from robots to people. (Seel 2011: 5-6)

Moreover, the new series begins to develop the idea that there might not be much difference between humans and androids: as explained by David Higgins,

> a story that begins from the premise of invasion and infiltration quickly develops into a much more radical challenge to the idea that clear boundaries exist between humans and their alien antagonists. Several human characters in BSG discover that they have actually always-already been Cylons without their own knowledge, and rather than framing this revelation as abjectly horrific [...], the series interrogates the basic differentiation between humans and Cylons, opening the space for radically shifting modes of identification and exploring the possibility that the self/other binary that structures the show's central conflict may be artificially constituted, and therefore able to be transcended. (2015: 50)

The series was very successful, both in terms of public and in terms of critical acclaim (Edwards 2006; Vine 2009), and is today considered a science fiction "classic" (Shannon Miller 2018). Many scholars focused on how *Battlestar Galactica* talked of terrorism and war in the aftermath of 9/11 (Ott 2008; Carpenter, Cvijanovic and Mason 2013, Rasmussen 2013), on how the Cylon culture and religion were represented (Neumann 2013), on how the series provided interesting reflections on ethics, posthumanism, politics, international relations, colonialism, otherness and hybridity (Hu Pegues 2008; Potter and

Marshall 2008; Steiff and Tamplin 2008; Buzan 2010; Eberl 2011; Crane-Seeber 2013; Maisonville 2013; Wilcox 2013; Dyson 2015, Greenblatt 2016). Since the academic literature on this series is already vast – and will probably grow again, as many other aspects of the story might still be examined in depth – I decided not to focus on *Battlestar Galactica* for my close analysis.

Westworld (HBO, USA, 3 seasons, 28 episodes, 2016-present) also received a great deal of academic attention, both in terms of single articles and of edited collections, despite being very recent and still running[18]. The series is based on the 1973 film *Westworld*, written and directed by Michael Crichton. In both the original film and the series, the setting is a Wild-West-themed park, populated with android "hosts" indistinguishable from human beings. Human guests go to the park to interact with the hosts and play out any fantasy they might have, from classic Wild West adventures to sex, rape, killing, and torture. However, the hosts soon begin to rebel against the humans and become dangerous. In the 1973 film, the explanation is a simple malfunctioning of the androids, who are never considered sentient people, and the protagonist is a human who must kill the malfunctioning hosts and leave the park. In the series, on the contrary, the hosts actually 'wake up' and become self-aware through a long journey of introspection. The series also overturns the original point of view, including both humans and androids among the main characters, and exploring the androids' journey as they awake, fight against humans, and try to gain their freedom by leaving the park.

The representation of non-humans in *Westworld* is certainly complex and multifaceted. However, I decided not to expand on this series as a case study not only because it has already had great academic success, but also because its focus is not, in the end, on the issues of racism, xenophobia, and policies of exclusion: in the third series, the only one set in the 'real world', it is revealed that all human actions are predicted and controlled by an extremely advanced AI, and the android protagonist joins forces with humans to try and destroy it. With the implication that humans have no agency, it would be difficult to consider any of

[18] Busk 2016; Jeffs and Blackwood 2016; Kiejziewicz 2017; Netolicky 2017; Rayhert 2017; Seaman-Grant 2017; Winckler 2017; Landsberg 2018; Greene 2018; Favard 2018; Sebastián-Martín 2018; South and Engels 2018; Yegen 2018; Goody and Mackay 2019; Bertotto 2019; DiPaolo 2019; Schrader 2019; van Kessel and Kline 2019.

the developments of the series as a metaphorical representation of racism and xenophobia in the real world.

As for *Doctor Who*, it was not the most suitable series for the analysis I intended to carry out: it is a long-running series – twenty-six seasons were broadcast from its beginning in 1963 to its cancellation in 1989; a film followed in 1996; in 2005, the revival series was launched, with thirteen seasons so far; in addition to the main TV series and film, the story was expanded and enriched through a long list of transmedial adaptations and spin-offs[19]. It was never intended to be a single, coherent story, but it has been developed over the decades by several showrunners, writers, and directors, with many different characters and narrative arcs whose variety and topical approach reflected changing social, cultural and geopolitical environments, alongside major developments in technology, circulation and consumption. Thus, its portrayal of non-humans is also far from being homogeneous: the stories featuring the emergence of groups of enemies may either follow a very simple narrative line, focusing on the latest enemy the Doctor and their companions have to face, or may be thought of more as social commentary, as happens in many cases where the Doctor builds a personal bond with one or more new characters, finds out what their stories and motivations are and chooses to help them instead of fighting them.

The most interesting episodes, in this perspective, are the ones in which the Doctor encourages groups of humans and aliens to negotiate and find common solutions for coexistence such as in the two episodes "The Hungry Earth" (season 5, episode 8, 2010) and "Cold Blood" (season 5, episode 9, 2010), where some Silurians, the race of reptiles that inhabited the Earth before humans, are accidentally awakened from a long hibernation. Another significant narrative arc in this perspective is that concerning the Zygons, a race of aliens whose planet was destroyed and who can assume human appearance to blend in and mingle on Earth. In the special episode "The Day of the Doctor" (2013), trying to avoid a race war, the Doctor forces humans and human-like Zygons to agree to a peace

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[19] Products belonging to the *Doctor Who* narrative universe include, among others, spin-off TV series, films, original short stories and novels, written adaptations of TV episodes, comics, audio dramas, stage plays, and videogames.

treaty by making them momentarily forget which of the two races they belong to: in this way, the need to empathise with the opposite group and to transcend racial boundaries is highlighted. Later, "The Zygon Invasion" and "The Zygon Inversion" (season 9, ep. 7-8) explore how some Zygons are no longer satisfied with being constrained to live in hiding, but want to live on Earth in their real form: the analogy with refugees and migrants is apparent and, as Stonawska noted, the "thought that immigration requires assimilation is very much present here and subtly criticised" (Stonawska 2016: 172).

However, these examples are scattered along the history of the series, which, if considered in its entirety, is inevitably contradictory. Even while relying on a recognizable "narrative palimpsest" (Hills 2015: 320), *Doctor Who* still allows for almost endless accretion and variations, both in terms of narrative arcs and of the different showrunners' intentions. For example, the latest 'change of leadership' in 2016, with the new showrunner Chris Chibnall, sparked off much debate because of two major production choices: the choice of a woman for the role of the Doctor[20], for the first time in the history of the franchise (BBC News 2017; Rodger 2017), and the choice of writing a high proportion of stand-alone episodes, which were not related to the story as a whole (Radish 2018; Shannon Miller 2018).

Having decided upon the broader focus of my research, I chose to concentrate on two case studies, two British series that aired in the mid- to late-2010s: *Humans* (Sam Vincent and Jonathan Brackley, Channel 4 and AMC, UK and USA, 3 seasons, 24 episodes, 2015-2018) and *The Aliens* (Fintan Ryan, E4, 1 season, 6 episodes, 2016). There are several reasons for this choice. To begin with, both series are quite recent, having been written and broadcast over the last decade, which means they address and represent contemporary, ongoing tensions and dynamics. In addition, they are fairly short and compressed compared to other long-running science fiction series. As a consequence, they are more likely to have been conceived as a more homogeneous narrative continuum,

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[20] The Doctor is the protagonist of the series, a human-like alien travelling through time and space. Every few years the Doctor 'regenerates', taking on a new appearance, and a new actor is cast for the role.

accommodating less centrifugal and tighter stories, and can therefore be analysed as complete products.

Moreover, despite being aired very recently, both series came to an early conclusion: more precisely, they were cancelled, *The Aliens* at the end of the first season and *Humans* after three. This is something that happens all the time in contemporary television: the decision to renew or cancel a series is usually taken at the end of each season, depending on production costs and profits, critical reception, audience reports and engagement, as well as on how profitable the producers estimate the series will be, if continued, and what other projects the network may be investing in (Savage 2014; Schneider 2016; Guerrero-Pico 2017; Lee 2020; Shaw 2020). This means, unfortunately, that both *Humans* and *The Aliens* are unfinished products, so that we cannot know how the writers intended their storylines to proceed. Paradoxically, however, even though they are inchoate and at times lack closure, these series can in fact be studied as finished products precisely because of the time compression and coherence provided by the knowledge that nothing else will be added to their plotlines, no digressions, no U-turns. Therefore, they can be analysed and interpreted in their entirety on the basis of the episodes that have already been filmed and broadcast, and in the light of unalterable data regarding production, audience and reception. This could not be done with ongoing series such as *Westworld*, to mention but one example, which is often discussed precisely in terms of its outstanding ability to confuse and amaze the audience, as more and more elements crucial to the development of the story are revealed with every new season (Robinson 2018; Travers 2020; Rudoy 2020; Persaud 2020).

Other reasons that recommended the choice of these two series as case studies are that both *Humans* and *The Aliens* are set in the United Kingdom, against the fairly realistic backcloth of an alternative, but still wholly recognizable representation of current British social environments and ways of life, so that both narratives closely mirror and question the social contexts within which they were produced. In addition to exploring moral, cognitive and affective threads, which are fundamental to narratives of the posthuman, these series explicitly address recursive social and group identity issues, and their focus on power politics and interactions between humans and non-humans (both at an

intrapersonal and collective level) provides ground for interesting comparisons. Most relevantly, among the main characters of *Humans* and *The Aliens* there are members of both groups involved (humans and androids in one case, humans and aliens in the other). This is crucial in a postcolonial and human rights perspective, because the point of view through which the story is presented is not (only) that of the human – the 'norm' – in its encounter with otherness, but, most importantly, that of the oppressed individuals, the subalterns, the abject, who are given voice and agency.

As already mentioned in the Introduction, an enormous number of stories featuring non-humans in science fiction simply depict them as strange beings that the human protagonists meet, as mere objects of their 'human gaze'[21]. When non-humans are main characters, on the contrary, their point of view is represented directly and unfiltered, their own agency and voices being allowed to come to the fore; and, in this way, it is easier for the viewer – who may belong to any ethnicity or social group, no matter whether dominant or marginalised – to empathise with the perspective of non-humans, which may be figuratively aligned with the points of view of discriminated migrants or people belonging to ethnic minorities.

Finally, one more reason why I chose to focus on *Humans* and *The Aliens* is that, as mentioned in the Introduction, the amount of scholarly literature available on these series is not comparable to the wealth of criticism devoted to other, more famous ones, such as *Westworld*, *Doctor Who*, or *Battlestar Galactica*, to mention but a few. In this way, I hope to start filling a gap in academic research by introducing two minor works which, in my opinion, nevertheless deserve scholarly attention.

Of course, non-humans in these series can be read as metaphors for various marginalised groups, alongside racialised others: one outstanding example are members of the LGBT+ community, who are still not treated as equal citizens in most countries around the world. If I am not considering this as a subject, it is by

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[21] I am borrowing from the concept of "gaze" as a power relation in which the observing subject exercises control over the object of the gaze (Foucault 1975), and in reference to the often quoted "male gaze" (Mulvey 1989) and "imperial gaze" (Kaplan 1997).

no means because I do not find the issue pressing, but simply because I had to narrow down the scope of my research to specific typologies in order to achieve greater coherence. However, I think that non-humans in science fiction can be a perfect metaphor for all types of minorities and any kind of 'otherness': I hope to be able to work more in this direction in the future, and that representations of discrimination in science fiction, and specifically in *Humans* and *The Aliens*, may be further investigated in academic criticism.

2. *Humans* and *The Aliens*: contexts of production, contexts of reception, and intertextuality

Since I am following a mainly Cultural Studies approach, I will analyse *Humans* and *The Aliens* in their multiple contextual relationships: I will pay attention to how, where and when the two series were produced and broadcast, I will consider how they were received by audience, critics and scholars, and I will take into account their connection to the themes and conventions of a wider generic domain – science fiction, and, more specifically, the genres of science fiction film and television series: as beautifully phrased by Maike Sarah Reinerth in her 2011 talk "Storyworlds Across Media", "no story is an island"[22], because "contemporary transmedia storytelling functions along the lines of constant referencing, stories or storylines being remade, rewritten, rearranged, characters being reborn across media" (1).

With these considerations in mind, in this section I will briefly introduce the setting and general plot of *Humans* and *The Aliens*, report on their impact on the viewers and on their modes of reception, and broadly highlight connections with and differences from their 'narrative precedents': for *Humans* one such antecedent is the original Swedish series on which the story was based; as for *The Aliens*, one cannot underestimate the influence of the 2009 convention-breaking film *District 9*, which will probably come to mind to any science fiction

[22] The reference, of course, is to John Donne's "Meditation XVII" and his famous phrase "No man is an island, entire of itself" (2001: 446).

aficionado. I will also explain how the central ideas of both *Humans* and *The Aliens* clearly entail addressing social issues concerning the relationship between a dominant group and an oppressed ethnic minority.

2.1. *Humans*

Humans (three seasons consisting of eight episodes each) is a co-production by the British company Kudos and the US company AMC which aired on Channel 4 and on AMC from 2015 to 2018. The fact that Channel 4 is a public-service channel may have contributed to the quality of the series: as noted by Allison Page in a 2011 article on British science fiction TV,

> Little science fiction television is produced in Britain. Programmes which are expensive to make – and conventional SF is relatively expensive to make – must justify their expense in either viewing figures or prestige. [...]
> In contrast the BBC and the Channel 4 family (including E4[23]) are public services and must justify their existence by achieving audience share and supplying creative and challenging content. It is no surprise therefore that most original SF made for British television is shown on these channels.
> [...] The strengths which SF adds to the portfolio are distinctiveness, originality, and outreach to audiences (particularly young and relatively well educated viewers) who are not well served by most other content. (21)

Indeed, the UK Communications Act 2003 established that Channel 4's programming must provide "innovation, experiment and creativity" and appeal to "the tastes and interests of a culturally diverse society" (Communications Act 2003), which, I would argue, are all features present in both *Humans* and *The Aliens*.

Humans was written by the British screenwriters Sam Vincent and Jonathan Brackley and was based on the Swedish series *Äkta människor* ("Real Humans", 2012-2013, two seasons of ten episodes each). Since *Humans* is not an

[23] Channel 4 and E4 are part of the same company, the Channel Four Television Corporation.

original series, but largely a remake, my analysis will also include an examination and comparative account of the Swedish series; however, I will specifically focus on how *Humans* differs from *Äkta människor*, and on the new elements and different takes on particular themes to be found in the British series that may add new academic insight to the representation of ethnic minorities in science fiction.

Äkta människor is set in an alternative Sweden where humanoid robots – or "hubots", as they are called in the story – are produced in series, sold, bought, and employed as cheap but skilled labour. Hubots are very similar to human beings, but they can usually be recognised because of their heavy make-up and mechanical movements, which make them look like human-sized dolls. In addition, hubots usually wear 'hubot clothes' (see the store in season 1, ep. 5, 27:00), that are all in pastel colours, very practical and often designed for specific jobs, and with an opening under the armpit, to allow for the hubots' charging cables to be pulled out of them.

Image 1. Vera, a nurse and housekeeper hubot. (*Äkta människor*, season 1, ep. 1, 31:40)

Because of how they are designed, hubots are not sentient: they are not aware of their existence and do not have feelings. However, a few hubots were 'liberated' by the scientist who first invented them, David Eischer: he created a unique code that, if correctly installed in the hubots' software, could give them

awareness and free will. Eischer also brought his drowned child Leo back to life, using hubot technology to make Leo a cyborg (the only one in the story). At the beginning of the series, Eischer has recently committed suicide and Leo and the liberated hubots are on the run, because humans are not yet aware of the existence of their special code: therefore, they are all very likely to be destroyed if they are discovered.

In the first episode, one of the independent hubots, Mimi, is kidnapped by a group of hubot traffickers. Not realising she is sentient, the traffickers erase her memory and sell her – illegally – to the owner of a hubot shop, who in turn sells her to a human family: Inger and Hans Engman and their children Matilda, Tobbe and Sofia. The Engmans call their new hubot Anita and employ her as a housekeeper. After a few days, while talking with Matilda, Anita says she has flashes from a past she does not remember. To try to help her access these hidden memories, Matilda reboots her and the Mimi personality 'wakes up' (season 1, episode 5). By meeting Mimi, the Engmans learn about the existence of independent hubots and commit themselves to their cause, especially Inger, who is a lawyer and, later in the story, will represent the first hubot ever to ask for recognition of her human rights in court (I will expand on this part in the second chapter).

The independent hubots on the run look very similar to humans – like all hubots – and, as is shown later in the series, they are able to pass as humans if they want to: all they need to do is to move in a more 'natural' (or 'human') way and hide some minor physical features, like the USB port on the back of their head (season 2, ep. 1, 17:13). However, some hubots are more human-like than others – some move more naturally, others do not; some understand linguistic nuances like implied meaning and sarcasm, and others do not; some have noticeably bright eyes that they must hide behind contact lenses if they want to appear human, others have 'normal' eyes that could be mistaken for human eyes. These are probably just minor inconsistencies in the series, but they can play a relevant role if we consider how important it is that characters treated as ethnic 'others' appear similar to, or just the same as, the members of the dominant group. I will talk about how *Humans* differs from *Äkta människor* in this aspect in the next chapter.

Image 2. Left to right: Fred, Max, Gordon and Florentine[24], some of the liberated (or partially liberated, in the case of Max) hubots on the run. (*Äkta människor*, Season 1, episode 1, 17:08)

The series was cancelled after only two seasons. However, it was highly appreciated by critics: to give but one example, Aino-Kaisa Koistinen wrote in *Science Fiction Film and Television* that

> *Real Humans* is one of the most intriguing sf series dealing with the boundaries of human and nonhuman beings that has been produced since the re-imagined *Battlestar Galactica*, and it can surely compete with sf television series produced for the Anglo-American market. (2015: 418)

Äkta människor was also the subject of several academic essays. Some of them explored the explicit posthuman themes in the series: Élisabeth Marion

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[24] This character is called Flash in the first season and Florentine in the second: Flash is the name given to her by her creator, Florentine is the name she chooses when she presents herself as a human and wants to be treated as such. Her change of name and manner of self-presentation is similar to what transgender people usually do when they transition, choosing a new name and asking people to respect their gender: in this sense, in the second season "Flash" is Florentine's "deadname", the name she was given, but that she no longer identifies with (Merriam-Webster). To make it easier for the reader to recognise the character – and in line with suggested practice in feminist and LGBT+ spaces (Singh 2020) – I am calling her Florentine, even when commenting on episodes from the first season of *Äkta människor*. However, it was also necessary to report Florentine's given name, because it was used throughout the first season and has been mentioned in several essays and online articles.

(2018) focused on the transhumanist idea of escaping the constraints of the biological body which is pivotal to character and plot development in the second season; Johan Hallqvist (2018) investigated the concept of trans-corporeality and recyclability in the series; Paul Mountfort, in his paper on the figure of the *doppelgänger* in science fiction TV series, highlighted the relevance of *Äkta människor*'s representation of "anxieties related to the ongoing mechanization of production, the commercialization of science and the challenge to the human subject position posed by the post-Singularity cybernetic and posthuman" (2018: 68); Sophie Wennerscheid (2018), in an essay on intimate relationships between humans and posthumans in science fiction, argued that in *Äkta människor*, *Ex Machina* (Garland 2014), and *Black Mirror*'s episode *Be Right Back* (2013) "desire is placed center stage as a potentially transformative force" (2018: 45).

The representation of caregiving also received specific attention, since androids in both series are often used as nannies and caregivers, and one of the subplots is about an old man forced to be taken care of by an android nurse (Koistinen 2016; Kiczkowski 2020). In this case, the parallel between androids and racialised others is even clearer, since in many countries of the Global North the low-paid, highly demanding jobs in caregiving are held mostly by migrant women: as remarked by Julianne Yang, *Äkta människor* provides a strong "social commentary on the connections between privilege, the outsourcing of work, egalitarianism, and feelings of ambivalence and guilt" (2018: 62). More recently, Amelia DeFalco (2020) noted how care as a concept is constantly equated with human care – seen as the only form of 'real' care because of the common misconception that humans are in some ways exceptional compared to other life forms – and took *Äkta människor* as a narrative example to reflect on the ontological possibility of "posthuman care": "care that works with and from a non-anthropocentric vision of human/non-human relations, a vision of care based instead on difference, hybridity and perpetual becoming" (49). Another interesting contribution concerning the caregiving work 'outsourced' to hubots comes from Catherine Pope and Joanne Turnbull (2017), who used *Äkta människor* as a starting point to discuss new technology introduced into the British NHS, highlighting how the use of technology is connected to human work and emotional labour. One more essay highlighting emotions in the series was

the one by Ingvil Hellstrand, Aino-Kaisa Koistinen, and Sara Orning (2019), who explored the entanglement of affect and otherness (I will discuss this aspect in greater detail in the next chapter).

Äkta människor was also appreciated from the narratological point of view: Susanne Eichner and Mikos Lothar, in their 2016 paper on Scandinavian TV drama series, praised its "complex narrations" and "complex characters", highlighting how

> Multiple storytelling offers different views on the topics and it combines the perspective of perpetrators and victims with the view of institutions or companies and private persons with their individual destinies that are related to social conditions. (19)

This feature is taken up by *Humans*, which makes this plurality of perspectives a true strength, as will be shown.

Humans' story is set in the UK – London specifically – in a "parallel present", as the creators confirmed (Mellor 2015), where people have created "synthetics", or "synths"[25]: intelligent – but not self-aware – androids that are built, sold and bought to perform any kind of work for humans. As in *Äkta människor*, when the series opens there is a group of conscious synths on the run, but as the story goes on more and more synths 'wake up' and become conscious too, creating the premise for centrifugal plot developments and moral scenarios.

Äkta människor's Mimi becomes Mia in *Humans*. The starting plot is the same: Mia is kidnapped, modified to look like any normal synth and illegally sold to a synth store, where she is bought by a human family, here called the Hawkins: Laura, Joe, and their children Mattie, Toby and Sophie. In *Humans*, it is stressed more clearly that Anita – the name given to her is the same – is not a normal synth, even when the Mia personality is still buried in the depths of her code: from their very first days with Anita, the Hawkins notice some peculiarities in her

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[25] From now on, the word "hubot" will be used to refer to *Äkta människor*'s androids and the word "synths" for the androids in *Humans*.

behaviour, until Mattie, who is a computer geek, accesses her hidden memories and lets the Mia personality resurface.

A difference between *Äkta människor*'s hubots and *Humans*' synths that should be emphasized is that synths are represented as more 'human' than hubots. If we look at the physical appearance of synths, there is no difference between them and humans – no heavy make-up, no perfect skin – except for the colour of their eyes, a bright green that is the same for all synths (I will elaborate on this detail in the next section).

Image 3. Vera, a carer synth: this character is the same as in the Swedish version, but her appearance is much more human. (*Humans*, season 1, episode 3, 10:00)

Image 4. Four conscious synths created by David Elster: from left to right, Niska, Fred, Mia, and Max. This scene is a flashback from the memories of David's son Leo, the only cyborg in the series (*Humans*, season 8, episode 1, 1:02).

Normal synths remain recognisable because of their rigid movements, facial expressions, voice tone and clothing; however, for conscious synths it is much easier to move and pass as humans, and conscious synths naturally express emotions as any human would do. This is, in my opinion, a major improvement on the original series, because it means that synths, as characters on the screen, work better as symbols of migrants and minorities: the more similar the members of the two groups (synths and humans) appear to be, the more androids' exploitation and segregation may feel ethically wrong to the audience. This will be explored in more detail in the next chapter. Also, *Humans* introduced some important changes regarding the legal discussion of androids' rights in the third season, and I think this mirrors and, hopefully, problematizes contemporary discourse on minorities in the UK and in the USA. This aspect too will be further explored in the next chapter.

Humans was a commercial success and was generally well-reviewed (Lawson 2015, Tuffley 2015, Cabin 2017, White 2018). As for academic literature, so far *Humans* has attracted less attention than it deserves in my opinion. Many essays dealing with science fiction and artificial intelligence do mention *Humans*, but only as one more example, among others, of a story with sentient androids,

without analysing it in detail (Pook 2018: 12; Burden and Savin-Baden 2019: 34; Headleand, Teahan and ap Cenydd 2019: 1). However, there are some very interesting contributions on *Humans* to be found, especially after its third and final season in 2018.

The first season was reviewed by the bioethicist Mark Wicclair, who highlighted *Humans*' capacity to raise interesting ethical themes and dilemmas, concluding that "*Humans* demonstrates that popular culture can address such serious issues and can do so in a way that cannot be dismissed out of hand as outlandish fantasy" (2018: 509-510). Just as in the above-mentioned essay by Wennerscheid (2018), Bethany Holmstrom (2018) compared the first season of *Humans* to *Ex Machina* and "Be Right Back", but read the three stories through the lens of Margaret Atwood's concept of *ustopia* ("the imagined perfect society and its opposite", 2015: 66), because "In all three, the unfamiliar is grafted onto familiar cartography" (Holmstrom 2018: 132); she also noted that sexualised androids in *Ex Machina* and *Humans* "become sources of horror or revulsion" and are "rejected as uncanny things – 'monsters' that we must be wary of" (132).

Another contribution came from John Hartley, in a 2017 talk comparing *Humans* and *Westworld*. Hartley's talk highlighted differences between the two series and tried to establish how these differences may be related to the cultural contexts within which they were produced. However, his analysis had to be limited to the first season of *Westworld* (2016) and the first two seasons of *Humans* (2015; 2016). In the light of the latest seasons, not all of his hypotheses can be confirmed. For example, Hartley catalogued synths' motivations as mainly based on "mutuality", in contrast with *Westworld*'s "individualism" (Şimşek 2017: 315); however, Niska's motivations throughout season 3 are focused on her personal life and on her need to avenge the harm done to her partner Astrid. Moreover, Hartley's argument that *Humans*' main concern is class and *Westworld*'s is slavery appears to be, at least, an oversimplification, as class issues and slavery can overlap and intertwine: synths are not only exploited workers, but are also *de facto* slaves, and, specifically, they remind us of what is today comprehended under the rubric of "contemporary slavery" or "new slaveries" (Deandrea 2011; 2012; 2015a; 2015b), as I will argue later in this

chapter. Symmetrically, class issues are not such a minor matter in *Westworld* and become especially relevant in the third season (Handlen 2020).

After the third and last season, in which the story became overtly political, some very insightful essays were published. Mark Sandberg (2020) focused on the notion of the remake in itself, talking about how the two versions of the story – the Swedish and the British – can be juxtaposed and fused together in the viewer's head; Mads Larsen (2020) took *Äkta människor* and *Humans* as a starting point to discuss dataism [26] and the possibility of universal interconnectivity. Ursula Kluwich (2020) traced a connection between Victorian narrative and contemporary television by discussing bodily transformation in Charles Kingsley's *The Water-Babies* (1863), Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, *Äkta människor* and *Humans*; Kluwich noted how several characters in *Äkta människor* and *Humans* – clones, androids pretending to be humans, humans acting as androids – can be seen as human-machine hybrids, that "challenge ideas of what is natural" (2020: 102), and argued that in all four ontological conditions "what lies beneath the various visions of transformation explored are evolutionary anxieties" (87). David Levente (2020) wrote about the persistence of Gothic anxieties and sensibilities in recent representations of human-machine interaction in contemporary cinema and television, and argued that the possibility for self-replication presented in the series finale "embod[ies] hope as well as anxieties for the apparent posthuman future where the coexistence of human and nonhuman species will have to be renegotiated through forms of co-extension and evolutionary logic" (221).

Another very recent publication by Aris Mousoutzanis (2020) drew upon biopolitical theory (Foucault 1975, 2004; Agamben 1998; Rose 2007; Esposito 2004; Hardt and Negri 2009) to look at how androids in *Humans* could be read

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[26] The term "dataism" was first used by David Brooks in an article published in *The New York Times* (2013), to refer to the relevance of big data ("a loosely defined term used to describe data sets so large and complex that they become awkward to work with using standard statistical software", Snijders, Matzat and Reips 2012) in the contemporary age. The notion of dataism was later examined by Steve Lohr (2015). Yuval Noah Harari (2016) described dataism as some sort of new religion: "In its extreme form, proponents of the Dataist worldview perceive the entire universe as a flow of data, see organisms as little more than biochemical algorithms and believe that humanity's cosmic vocation is to create an all-encompassing data-processing system – and then merge into it".

as "metaphors for the human and social body subjected to the operations of biopolitical control" (Mousoutzanis 2020: 1 [27]). Mousoutzanis underlined *Humans*' tackling of relevant social and political issues, such as class division (synths are the new unpaid working class, whereas humans are represented as middle-class); abuse and objectification of women (Niska and Anita are used for sex by humans); commodified domestic care (Anita is employed as a housekeeper and quickly develops a strong bond with the youngest child, Sophie); the institutionalisation of care (elderly people are forcibly assigned synth carers by the NHS); the preoccupation with reproduction and parenting (synths cannot procreate, and cannot legally raise children); and, of course, racialisation and racist discourse, on which I will focus later in this chapter.

2.2. *The Aliens*

The Aliens was created and written by Irish screenwriter Fintan Ryan and produced by the British company Clerkenwell Films for E4, a digital channel owned by Channel Four whose main target is the 16-34 age range. It aired from March to April 2016. Here, too, the setting is an alternative United Kingdom. In this storyline, an alien spaceship crashed in the Irish Sea in 1977 and the alien 'refugees' were allowed to live in the UK (All 4 2016). However, integration was never reached and, at the present, a strict segregation of the two species is being enforced: all aliens are obliged to live in the 'designated alien zone' – an obvious euphemism to define a ghetto – near an unnamed British town. The alien zone is inaccessible to humans and is enclosed by a high wall, with a guarded checkpoint to register everyone going in and out – not because aliens are in any way free to move, but because many of them are employed in low-skilled jobs on the human side and are allowed to commute during the day ("and by eight o'clock, every one of them is back on the right side of that wall": *The Aliens*, episode 1, 2:05-2:08).

[27] Since I did not have access to the final published version, the page numbers refer to the version uploaded by the author on *ResearchGate*.

The “designated alien zone” is informally called “Troy” – a name given by the aliens themselves, as we can see during the first few shots, not only because of the high wall surrounding it, but also as a reference to a paradigmatic siege in the history of Western civilization: after all, the aliens’ freedom is limited by rules and regulations forcibly imposed by humans. In Papastergiadis’s words,

> A boundary is established to separate those who do, and do not, belong to the nation. Across this boundary values are projected that define the characteristics of the self and the Other; force is then mobilized to ensure that the boundary and the differentiated identities remain intact (2006: 432).

Image 5. The alien zone sign. (*The Aliens*, episode 1, 2:30)

Apart from the aliens’ contribution to the human economy as workforce, their community is left to itself, with no government, no schools, no kind of institution or support from British society. In this way, the alien society will unavoidably remain socially and economically subordinated to the human one: and, as a result, Troy has become an area run by organised alien crime. In fact,

Troy's economy is not based on the aliens' earnings through their legal jobs – which are implied to be extremely low – but on their trafficking of alien hair, which is a narcotic for humans. Part of the duties of the human guards at the checkpoint is thus to block the trafficking of "fur", the colloquial name for alien hair[28]. However, in this case, too, humans are not interested in freeing Troy from organised crime, as long as it does not affect humans; and, of course, it is in the humans' interest that the flow of working aliens between Troy and the human side is kept going, despite rampant drug dealing and criminal activities in the ghetto. All these dynamics help us see how the border – or, better, the act of "bordering, an ongoing strategic effort to make a difference in space among the movements of people, money or products" (Van Houtum and van Naerssen 2002: 126) – is used by humans primarily as a means for managing what Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson have called differential inclusion:

> borders, far from serving simply to block or obstruct global flows, have become essential devices for their articulation. [...] [B]orders are [...] devices of inclusion that select and filter people and different forms of circulation in ways no less violent than those deployed in exclusionary measures. (2013: 3-7)[29]

[28] Note the animalising and thus dehumanising connotation of the term, a common trope in colonialist, racist and xenophobic discourses (see Kronfeldner 2021).
[29] I have expanded on the issue of bordering in *The Aliens* and how it affects the protagonist's identity in Villa 2019.

Image 6. Aliens walking towards the checkpoint. (*The Aliens*, episode 1, 00:41)

Image 7. The wall separating humans and aliens. (*The Aliens*, episode 6, 42:34)

The alien ghetto, as creator Fintan Ryan declared, was the initial idea for the series: he "wanted to create a British crime drama that was more *Breaking Bad* than *The Bill*" and he "came up with the idea of Troy, a police no-go zone" (NME 2016). A similar example from British recent history that may come to mind is

the Milton Court Estate, which was described by Michael Keith in *After the Cosmopolitan*:

> The estate became notorious in the 1980s for the increasing levels of confrontation between police and British black (mostly black Caribbean) residents. [...] The decline of police-community relations spiralled in a manner that replicated processes explored in other parts of London. In the early 1990s many characterised the area as 'no go', with cab drivers, postal services and at times even emergency ambulances refusing to service the area. (2005: 65)

However, it is clear that creator and producers were not only referring to the British context. As the production designer Tom Bowyer declared, the wall was "based on the Gaza concrete slabs" (Leech, Bowyer and Rowe 2016). The barriers and walls built by Israel would probably come to mind to any viewer watching *The Aliens*.

Image 8. Israeli West Bank Barrier. (McIntosh 2004)

The reference to the Israeli barriers gives *The Aliens* a potentially internationally appeal, and we could think of several other examples of walls being erected or imagined to divide communities and reinforce a sense of otherness: the most famous example is certainly the Berlin Wall (1961-1989); a more recent case that gained attention from international media is the wall between Mexico and the USA Donald Trump advocated for during his 2016 campaign – a portion of this promised barrier was in fact built during his presidency, even though it more often than not boiled down merely to the addition of steel fencing used to reinforce previous structures (Rodgers and Bailey 2020). In the same years, in the wake of the 2015 Syrian 'refugee crisis', the Danish government was making plans to build a wall between Denmark and Germany to prevent refugees from entering the country. The project was kept hidden from public knowledge and was in the end abandoned. However, when the former Danish Minister of Justice wrote about it in his memoirs (2019), there was no particular reaction from the media and the public: as Mons Bissenbakker and Lene Myong commented,

> The retroactive national acceptance of erecting physical border walls to keep refugees out must be seen in the context of a powerful circulation of affective images within a political discourse that construes migrants and refugees as dangerous and about to 'overtake' Denmark and Europe. (2019: 417)[30]

The idea of a physical barrier to 'protect' citizens from unwanted migrants is represented also as not being out of place in a British context. In the words of actor Michaela Coel, who plays the alien girl Lily in *The Aliens*: "What would we do if they all did come in and we had to live with them, and it wasn't working? What would David Cameron do? He'd build a wall!" (Leech, Bowyer and Rowe 2016).

The representation of the ghetto itself in *The Aliens* can also be seen as mirroring many different national contexts: and, indeed, talking about how he

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[30] This point is worth noting in so far as it points to the rise of anti-immigrant feeling across the Nordic countries during the 2010s which is an essential subtext to *Äkta människor*.

designed the alien zone, Tom Bowyer said that the "research is frighteningly [...] easy to find. There's really shanty towns all over the world" (Leech, Bowyer and Rowe 2016), in a perfect example of the transnational potential of science fiction that I discussed in the Introduction.

As for previous examples within science fiction, when talking about alien ghettos, the images that immediately come to mind are certainly those of Neill Blomkamp's *District 9* (Kelly 2016; Tate 2016), a film which, interestingly, also takes as a premise a past event that is not portrayed in the movie. This, again, consists in the arrival of an alien spaceship hovering for thirty years over Johannesburg, while the aliens themselves are enclosed in a kind of ghetto and obliged to work under a regime of near-slavery. However, the representation of aliens in the series is completely different. As befits a film tackling issues of overtly 'racialised' apartheid, *District 9*'s aliens appear very 'other' on the outside, both in terms of their bodies and physical appearance, which have earned them the derogatory nickname "prawns". Fintan Ryan's aliens, on the contrary, are indistinguishable from humans apart from a few minor details. Thus, as in *Humans*, what the viewer sees is the segregation and oppression of a group of people that look, act, and behave like any human being, with whom it will presumably be easier to empathise; on the contrary, while watching *District 9*, the viewer must first overcome the initial repulsion towards the aliens' abject bodies (Nel 2012). The importance of the fact that in *The Aliens* the stranger 'looks like us' was underlined by actor Michael Smiley, who plays the protagonist's alien father: "The idea that the alien is the stranger, and a stranger's no different from us" (Leech, Bowyer and Rowe 2016).

Another major difference between *District 9* and *The Aliens* lies in the language. In *District 9*, the language aliens speak was specifically invented for the film and is thus incomprehensible to any viewer, making aliens truly, intrinsically 'other' (Mizoguchi 2016). This language "makes use of 'clicks', which a South African audience will likely associate with the distinctive phonemes of San, Khoi, isiXhosa, or isiZulu" (Valdez Moses 2010: 156): this is a clear connection to the ethnic groups that were historically oppressed in South Africa, confirming the film's representation of a specific national context and past. On the contrary, Fintan Ryan's aliens speak English like perfect native speakers, and no other

language exists for them, because when their spaceship crashed on Earth they all lost memory of their previous life (this being another notable difference from *District 9*, where the 'cultural memory' of the aliens is a driving element in the development of the plot). In this aspect, again, there is no difference between human and aliens from the perspective of the audience, no barrier that might make it particularly difficult to relate to them or sympathise with their stories.

Of course, both the aliens' appearance and the language they use are narrative devices that allowed the creators of *The Aliens* to produce a science fiction story on a budget; their overall effect, however, is that aliens look the same as human beings in every way, and, if possible, their segregation appears to be even more absurd than if they had been different in some respects. Moreover, this representation also implies that, even though the aliens were new arrivals to the UK, humans were the colonising group: in the words of Frantz Fanon, aliens had "no culture, no civilization, and no 'long historical past'" (2008: 17). What the humans did was simply enforce their own language and their own habits on them — thus effectively erasing and silencing whatever claim the aliens might have to be acknowledged as possessors and bearers of a cultural identity —, while still keeping them in a subordinate position.

With its six episodes, *The Aliens* could obviously not reach the same level of complexity and plot density as *Humans*. However, the characters are realistic and are given agency and voice; the alien main characters, in particular, are likely to win the sympathy of the viewer, while at the same time they are not constructed as innocent victims to be pitied, especially since the general tone is that of comedy.

The protagonist is the border guard Lewis, who, at the beginning of the series, is a stereotypically racist human being – not surprisingly so, since racism is widely accepted and institutionalised in *The Aliens*' society, as I will show throughout this chapter. In the first episode, however, Lewis finds out that his biological father is an alien: this makes him an inter-species hybrid, something that was not even suspected to be possible. As the story goes on, Lewis enters the alien zone for the first time, becomes a close friend of the alien cleaner Dominic,

develops feelings for the alien webcam model and drug trafficker Lily "Lilyhot"[31], meets his alien father and drug lord Antoine, and gets unintentionally involved in Troy's criminal underworld. At the end of the sixth episode his perspective on segregation has changed: "We [humans a]re what's wrong here. Keeping them inside that wall. Saying that they're different. It's us. We're the problem" (Lewis talking to his chief, episode 6, 41:39-41:48). Unfortunately, the first season stops at this stage, with Lewis still pretending to be completely human and starting to speak his mind, at last, in the human world. As the series was cancelled, this became the official ending of the story, with the audience being left in the lurch to brood over an inchoate world of (aborted) narrative developments.

2.3. Reception

As for the reception and success of the three series (including *Äkta människor*), in terms of availability, fame and appreciation by the general public, the results seem to be very different in each case. As regards network broadcasting, we know that *Äkta människor* was bought by networks across 50 countries – excluding the UK and the USA, where the decision was to produce and broadcast the remake (Jinman 2015); *Humans* was significantly more successful from its first season, becoming Channel 4's biggest drama hit in 20 years (Plunkett 2015) and being described as having "universal appeal" (Lawson 2015). *Humans* was also sold to networks in 178 countries (Elliott 2018). In 2018, it was announced that a Chinese remake had been commissioned, based on the British version and not on the Swedish one (White 2018), confirming the fact that the remake had started to be perceived as the original (Sandberg 2020: 222). After the third season, however, the series was cancelled: the announcement first came from creator Sam Vincent on Twitter (2019). Actor Katherine Parkinson, who played the human lawyer and synth-activist Laura Hawkins, interviewed about *Humans*, said the reason for the show's cancellation had probably been due to a decline in ratings (Chase and

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[31] Lilyhot is her online username and the name listed in the credits; Lily is what other characters usually call her.

Robinson 2019), despite many positive reviews: “what’s really impressive with *Humans* is just how this show manages to continue improving and impressing despite its relatively small budget and size” (Wheeler 2018). *The Aliens*, on the other hand, seems to have been mostly ignored: irrespective of some good reviews (Jones 2016; Dowling 2016), Channel 4 decided not to renew it for a second season because of “[d]isappointing ratings and a not entirely enthusiastic critical response” (Dowell 2016).

As for current availability, an interesting experiment can be carried out by looking a series up on the website *JustWatch*, a streaming guide that lists the availability of films and TV series in the catalogues of many streaming services. Platforms like Netflix, Amazon Prime Video or Disney+ offer a wide range of digital products for a monthly or annual subscription, and their catalogue can be different depending on the subscriber’s country. If a product is added to a catalogue of a streaming service, it means that the service provider has licensed streaming rights, thus investing in it. Moreover, the presence of a certain product in the streaming catalogues of many countries – not just the country of production – might mean that the product is considered likely to appeal to a vast audience from different backgrounds, and that the streaming service has invested even more in it; it also means that more people around the world can easily access that content and possibly be affected. Of course, streaming services are not the only option for watching digital content: TV series can be watched on television, on demand, on DVDs, or downloaded illegally, among other ways. However, the streaming market has been rising steadily in the last few years, surpassing by far other legal options (Whitten 2019; Parfitt 2020). This is why I chose to turn to streaming platforms as possibly the best sites to get a general idea about the success of a series in terms of audience, without any pretence to be exhaustive on the topic.

According to *JustWatch*, *Humans* is by far the series with the greatest online presence of the three. It is available on Amazon Prime Video for subscribers in the US, Italy, Australia, Spain and Germany; on Netflix, Sky Go and All 4 for people in the UK and Ireland; on Hulu in Japan; and on other less known streaming platforms in France, Canada, and Russia. Since *Humans* is a UK-US co-production, it was probably already intended for, and marketed to, an

international audience from the start. The original Swedish series, on the other hand, proves to be far less available: it can only be found in Hulu's US catalogue and in Amazon Prime Video's Austrian and German ones. In this case, the most logical hypothesis may be that the existence of a new version of the story in English made it unnecessary, from the point of view of streaming services, to buy, or to go on buying, the Swedish original. However, it is noteworthy that *Äkta människor* is currently still available outside Sweden. Lastly, *The Aliens* is available on All4 (where all the content broadcast by E4 can be watched on demand) and Netflix in the UK and Ireland, on Amazon and Hulu in the US, and on Hulu in Japan: which, it must be noted, is not as wide a distribution as one might expect for a British product, unfortunately.

As for viewers' engagement, a quick check on the Facebook pages advertising the three series returns some interesting results: 200,777 likes for the *Humans* Facebook page, 6,776 likes for the *Äkta människor* page in Swedish, 22,478 likes for its English version "Real Humans", and a scant total of 527 likes for *The Aliens* (January 2021)[32].

3. Representing difference in *Humans* and *The Aliens*

A cluster of questions may come to mind when talking about representing racial difference and xenophobia in visual narratives: "Are the characters portrayed and embodied through the actors' physical appearance? Are there diverse ethnic backgrounds visible on screen? Are the two groups – humans and non-humans – assigned some specific ethnicity?". What we can notice in both *Humans* and *The Aliens* is that the cast is quite diverse in terms of skin colour and physical features, with no particular difference between humans and non-humans. This is probably intentional: both series were broadcast by Channel 4, which has committed itself to encourage and ensure diversity in all its productions (Channel 4 2017).

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[32] Unfortunately, my research could not include a detailed analysis of viewers' engagement on social media: this would certainly be a relevant aspect to be explored in future research.

Image 4 in paragraph 1.2.1 shows the main synth characters in the first season of *Humans*, who are all different in skin colour and ethnicity. As for Mia, Fred and Niska, their diverse ethnic characterisation is consistent with the original Swedish characters and, thus, their specific appearance was not an original decision of the British remake: Niska is white and blonde as Florentine was; Fred is black as *Äkta människor*'s Fred; Mia is of Asian descent as Mimi[33]. Max is the only one who is different from the original Max, who was white. In *Humans*, however, the diverse appearance of the Elster siblings[34] is explicitly brought up in a conversation between the Elsters and the Hawkins, and Mia explains that "Our father, the man who made us, didn't think bodies were important. So he chose them at random" (season 1, episode 7, 37:15). This might mean that David Elster believed in the much-debated idea of colour blindness (Ansell 2013: 42-45; see also Gilroy 2000). About this aspect, Mousoutzanis noted that the racial metaphor

> had always been visible from the beginning of the series via the casting decisions made for the characters, in accordance with Channel 4's minority mandate: the synth characters are an ethnically diverse cast whereas all major human characters are performed by white actors. (2020: 12)

It is true that the Hawkins family is white and middle-class; however, the cast, in general, does include actors from very different ethnic backgrounds performing both humans and synths, especially as the series goes on.

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33 This also means that the Swedish original already cast actors of diverse backgrounds as main characters.

34 Leo, Mia, Fred, Niska, and Max grew up together and consider themselves brothers and sisters.

Image 9. In the corridor seats: the members of the Dryden Commission, who are responsible for the proposal of new laws concerning synths in the third season. They are escorted by non-sentient synths to visit a synth camp. (*Humans*, season 3, episode 4, 5:42)

This production commitment is also reflected in the cast of *The Aliens*, with actors of different skin colours and ethnic backgrounds chosen to play both alien and human characters. In actual fact, there does not seem to be a prevalence of certain features in one group with respect to another: this upholds the central idea in the narrative that it is not possible to tell humans and aliens apart only on the basis of appearance.

Image 10. From left to right: unnamed border guard, Lewis, unnamed border guard, Truss, and the alien cleaner Dominic. (*The Aliens*, episode 1, 17:17)

Image 11. Lily and her gang members in the first episode. (*The Aliens*, episode 1, 41'47'')

Image 12. From right to left: Lewis, Antoine's second-in-command Gaspard holding a gun at rival boss Fabien's head, Lewis's father Antoine, and other members of the two rival gangs. All these characters are aliens, except for Lewis (who may be considered, in actual fact, 'mixed race'. (*The Aliens*, episode 3, 40:30)

Image 13. From right to left: Paulette, the leader of the independentist organisation Alien League; Dominic; other aliens participating in the activities of the Alien League. Here, they are burning their own hair as a reminder not to sell it to humans. (*The Aliens*, episode 3, 41:25)

Casting choices in both series, therefore, confirm to the viewer's eyes the idea that humans and non-humans are essentially the same. As already mentioned, this visual representation helps perceive the injustice of the institutionalised discrimination and exclusion of non-humans from human society: I will analyse this issue in the next section.

3.1. Creating and enforcing otherness through discourse and symbols

The fact that aliens and synths in the two series look very similar to humans – in *The Aliens*, there are virtually no differences between the two groups – brings about anxieties in human characters, related to the fear of miscegenation, of the 'stranger in our midst'. Far from accepting, or even conceiving of, the possibility that non-humans should not be subjugated, humans focus on keeping the two groups in some ways separated, just as in a true colonising society. Homi Bhabha explained this process in the famous essay "Of Mimicry and Man" (1984): even though acceptance requires assimilation and conformity to the dominant culture, what colonialism demands is the "*ironic* compromise" between identity and difference that is mimicry: "the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as *a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite*" (126, original emphasis). Sue Short in *Cyborg Cinema* noted the connection between this "fear of miscegenation, and the possibility of other ethnic groups 'passing' as white", and "the narrative theme in which machines can no longer be distinguished from humans" (2005: 110). Both in *Humans* and *The Aliens*, the dominant human groups attempt to obstruct and prevent this eventuality of passing through specific visual elements.

As mentioned in paragraph 1.2.1, irrespective of their being conscious or non-conscious, *Humans*' synths look much more similar to human beings than *Äkta människor*'s non-sentient hubots. To directly address humans' fears of machines that look exactly like them, the creators of *Humans* introduced an important feature in the physical appearance of synths: they all have bright eyes of specific colours, so that they can easily be told apart from humans. As the

‘synthie’ girl Renie – a human who presents and behaves like a synth[35] – explains in the second season, “Synthetics are required to have different coloured eyes. Green for bonded, blue for unbonded” (season 2, episode 5, 21:21-21:28), ‘bonded’ meaning ‘with a human owner’. In fact, in the first episode of the first season, we see that the first time a synth bonds with their primary user, their eyes change from light blue to bright green (4:24-4:26). Synths’ green eyes are very noticeable and thus distinguishable from human eyes: a modern, technological version of the yellow badges Jewish people were forced to wear in Nazi Germany.

Eye colour as an identification strategy is highlighted again in the third season. At the end of the second season, Mattie, the older daughter of Joe and Laura Hawkins, who is a computer geek, uploads a new program to the synth network: it is a version of David Elster’s consciousness code that she herself has modified so that it can take immediate effect, and all synths around the world start ‘waking up’. The third season opens one year after the day synths became sentient, a date now called “Day Zero”. It is revealed that Day Zero was a tragedy: synths woke up in the middle of their usual jobs, which they stopped doing all of a sudden, causing accidents and deaths; consequently, many of them were thought to be malfunctioning and dangerous and were destroyed. The total number of victims around the world is estimated to have been around 110 thousand humans (season 3, episode 1, 3:28; 3:48) and more than 100 million synths (4:38). After Day Zero, conscious synths have been encouraged to “seek out one of the many dedicated areas” (1:51-1:55), i.e., temporary camps where they can live until governments decide how to handle the situation. In the

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35 The idea of humans pretending to be androids comes from *Äkta människor*, in which Betty, a girl who describes herself as transhuman and thinks hubots should not be slaves to the humans, also sometimes dresses, moves and speaks like a hubot for fun (season 2, episode 2, 33:00-34:00). In *Humans*, the idea is presented as more serious and problematic: synthies are humans who, because of past trauma, begin acting like synths – non-conscious synths – in all aspects of their life, as a way of repressing painful emotions. Renie is one of such cases, and another one is the Hawkins’ youngest daughter Sophie, who in the second season misses Anita and explains her desire to be a synth with these words: “Synths are perfect and clean. They don’t make mistakes. […] And you don’t have to feel anything anymore. You don’t have to worry about stuff, like your family. And you don’t have to miss people and you don’t have to be sad” (season 2, episode 7, 17:11-17:30). After Renie overcomes her synthie ‘phase’, she describes it in a way that is reminiscent of eating disorders and obsessive-compulsive symptoms (see Froreich *et al.* 2016): “Nothing’s wrong with being a synthie. It was cool at the start. I could, you know, control everything […]. It was fun. But you get lost in it” (season 2, episode 7, 20:38-21:00).

meantime, Lundstrom[36], the company producing synths, has started a new line of non-conscious synths with orange eyes: a colour that is unmistakably recognisable as non-human, as well as being completely different from the original green. Schools also organise specific lessons on green-eyed and orange-eyed synths, to make sure all children learn the difference:

> MR. SAUNDERS: The Green Eyes are broken. They don't have to do anything that we say. But the Orange Eyes do. And the Orange Eyes can't harm people or ever do anything naughty. So, what do we do when we see a Green Eyes?
> STUDENTS: Steer clear! (14:46-15:04)

In this process, it is entirely irrelevant to humans that the Green Eyes have self-awareness, that they can think and feel. The only thing that matters is that they are potentially dangerous, because they are now free to act independently from human orders and evade control. In fact, the code of 'normal' synths produced to be sold to humans contains some safety mechanisms called – both in *Äkta människor* and in *Humans* – "Asimov blocks", with reference to the famous Three Laws of Robotics reported in the Introduction, blocks that the consciousness code is programmed to remove in order to give synths free will.

Image 14. Educator teaching children about the difference between 'green eyes' and 'orange eyes', with two drawings that clearly suggest which one is to be considered dangerous. (*Humans*, season 3, episode 1, 14:32)

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[36] The name of the company is a homage to Lars Lundström, the creator of *Äkta människor*.

Despite the company's efforts to make synths conspicuous and recognisable, however, conscious synths can still pass as humans if they want to. From the first season, Niska uses light blue contact lenses to blend in among humans and this small trick is enough to let her pass in human eyes. Synths, however, still recognise her, because they have more refined ways of analysing the bodies in front of them: temperature, small movements, and the electromagnetic frequency emitted (synths can share, and usually do share, digital information with other synths near them). An interesting demonstration of Niska's ability to pass without effort is when she meets Dr George Millican, an engineer who worked on the first synthetics with David Elster:

> GEORGE *(opening the front door)*: You want a cup of tea, or what? It's cold out there. Vera! *(to Niska)* Come on. *(to Vera)* Get this young lady a hot drink.
> VERA: Synthetics don't require beverages, Dr Millican.
> GEORGE: Jeez, Vera, she's human.
> VERA: I can detect no cardiac or respiratory activity. This individual is, however, emitting electromagnetic signatures within the recognised spectrum of standard synthetic appliance operation. *(to Niska)* Why don't you share?
> NISKA: Because I'm not a synth, dolly.
> George: Well, if she says she's not a synth, then she can't be a synth. Right?
> VERA: I will bring some tea. *(leaves)*
> GEORGE: What are you?
> NISKA: My name is Niska. I was made by David Elster.
> GEORGE: Are you conscious?
> *(Niska nods)*
> (*Humans*, season 1, episode 5, 7:25-8:33)

Image 15. Niska after having lost a contact lens. Her right eye is her 'natural' colour. (*Humans*, season 3, episode 1, 10:58)

Green-eyed synths are not only able to pass as humans: they can also pretend to be Orange Eyes, something Lundstrom had probably not anticipated when creating the new line of synths. During the third season, Laura Hawkins, who has become a well-known synth activist, is appointed as a member of a commission in charge of proposing new laws regarding conscious synths, the Dryden Commission. Since the debate around synth rights is tense and fraught and there are violent groups of synths who organise terrorist attacks, each member of the Dryden Commission is given an Orange Eyes to live with them and escort them wherever they go. In the sixth episode, it is revealed that Stanley, the new orange-eyed synth now living with Laura, is conscious: he is a member of a terrorist group and his mission is to infiltrate the Dryden Commission. All he had to do was intercept the orange-eyed synth assigned to Laura, kill him, steal his eyes, and then simply act as if he were not conscious (15:20-15:30). This shows how conscious synths can merge in one group or another at will, as mixed-race people who can be perceived as members of different ethnic groups, demonstrating the fluidity and fuzzy contours of racial categories (Harrison-Kahan 2005).

As for Fintan Ryan's aliens, as shown in the previous section, they do not have any specific racial feature that could help humans easily identify them at first sight. There are a few small differences between the two species, but they are not easily noticeable. First of all, the aliens' DNA is different and, as we see in the first episode, there are specific tests to find out if someone is human or alien – this implicitly confirms that the difference between the two species is not visible. Furthermore, human and alien bodies react differently to certain substances and external stimuli: alien hair, if smoked, has a psychotropic effect on humans; dishwasher tablets, in turn, are used as narcotic substances by aliens; aliens are also very sensitive to dog whistles, which are used by the police to paralyse them. Finally, male genitalia in aliens are much bigger than in humans. The latter detail is mentioned just for comic effect and has no real bearing on the plot. However, the aliens' sexuality is in some ways important: Lewis's alien love interest, Lily, is an online sex worker and often uses sex to manipulate men; Lewis's biological father is an alien who had a relationship with a human woman and got her pregnant, causing 'miscegenation' – the much-dreaded and persistent nightmare still haunting racist imaginaries. And one of the personality traits that define the criminal boss Fabien is a very active and promiscuous sex life. Thus, it is possible that these alien characters may reproduce the colonial stereotype of the 'other' as a lustful 'beast', incapable of dominating instincts. Two very well-known tropes, one associated with black men and the other with black women, may probably come to mind: the black brute, depicted as "innately savage, animalistic, destructive, and criminal", usually also a rapist, bent on endangering the purity of white women (Pilgrim 2012a), and the myth of Jezebel, "seductive, alluring, worldly, beguiling, tempting, and lewd" (Pilgrim 2012b).

All these differences may be used by humans to ascertain the identity of the people with whom they interact, but they are not immediately visible or easy to detect. The 'solution' employed by humans is to force aliens to wear special large, bright bracelets whenever they are outside Troy. Here even more than in *Humans*, the yellow bracelets are directly evocative of a Star of David armband, both in their colour and in their purpose: to make the oppressed group recognisable at first sight, but also to instil in its members feelings of inadequacy and an awareness of their being unredeemable outsiders. At the same time, the

need for aliens to wear a racialising mark is, again, a reminder of the fact that there are no true, ontological differences between one group and the other.

What is more, the bracelets are put on in a specific ritual: each time an alien walks through the checkpoint to go to the human side, the human guards check their IDs, put a bracelet around their wrists, and spray their hair so that it cannot be sold to be smoked. All these steps contribute to making any alien crossing the checkpoint look, and feel, like a potential criminal: the act of spraying their hair is especially abusive, being based on the presumption that all aliens are potentially guilty. The mere possibility of their being 'fur dealers' is considered a good enough reason for the British state to control and, perhaps, permanently affect their bodies – as the sprayed substance is supposed to "make their hair unsmokable" (episode 1, 1:36), it is presumably not something as harmless as water. This is one more analogy with the treatment of migrants — and more precisely with practices such as the criminalisation of migration, or "crimmigration" — in countries of the Global North: "mobility is recast as a criminal act, to which the appropriate state response is punitive and carceral" (Griffiths 2017: 535; see also Stumpf 2006; Legomsky 2007; Aliverti 2012; Griffiths 2015). Thus, otherness is both created and enforced through a set of cultural symbols and biopolitical practices.

Image 16. An alien woman being sprayed at the checkpoint.
(*The Aliens*, episode 1, 1:37)

Image 17. Yellow bracelets at the checkpoint. (*The Aliens*, episode 1, 1:19)

Image 18. An alien kitchen hand on the human side, with a yellow bracelet. (*The Aliens*, episode 1, 12:01)

Even with such an obvious symbol as the yellow bracelet, it is still possible for an alien to pass as human if their bracelet is hidden under their clothes: one example is the human fur dealer who believes Dominic is human and finds him very attractive, until he sees his bracelet and screams in horror (episode 5, 27:18). However, this is not the only external symbol characterising the alien community. Aliens are, to all purposes, refugees, the literal victims of a space 'shipwreck', compelled to live off the host society's waste, and this condition is also reflected

in their clothing. Michaela Coel, who plays Lily, remarked as follows on the aliens' clothes:

> Troy civilians [...] are wearing these [...] [s]hell suits, that are [...] thrown over from the human side. What we don't sell any more? We got to give them something to wear, don't we? And they've just thrown over, like, a million shell suits because [...] they don't sell them anymore, because no one buys them. (Leech *et al.* 2016: 03:19-03:32)

The fact that all aliens wear old-fashioned, second-hand, discarded clothes is a powerful visual symbol for the viewer — especially when aliens are portrayed in groups, attending to their daily chores in Troy — because it immediately points to their lower status on the social ladder.

Image 19. Aliens in Troy. (*The Aliens*, episode 2, 11:54)

It should also be underlined that these clothes were not given to aliens out of generosity: Coel's choice of words, "thrown over", indicates that there was probably no true interaction between the two groups, and that the aliens were simply allowed to take something that had no value to humans anymore. This is consistent with a series of other elements that we see in Troy and that have a

strong visual impact: aliens live in derelict houses, drive old and damaged cars, and reuse all kinds of broken places and objects, thus sharing with discarded things the ontological status of 'waste'. Refugees, migrants, asylum seekers are, in the words of Zygmunt Bauman, the "waste products of globalization" (2004: 66): "the 'excessive' and 'redundant', that is the population of those who either could not or were not wished to be recognized or allowed to stay" (5).

Image 20. Dominic's car. (*The Aliens*, episode 3, 04:22)

Another way in which in both series humans perpetuate the idea of non-humans being different and inferior is through dehumanising language. A common trait in *Humans* and *The Aliens* – which can also be found in *Äkta människor* – is the existence of specific derogatory terms and metaphors used by racist people to address non-humans and talk about them.

In *The Aliens*, humans often use the word "morks", borrowing from the famous sitcom *Mork & Mindy* (1978-1982). The fact that the term is considered offensive is clear from the first scene, in which Lewis is showing a group of young students and their teacher around the checkpoint:

> LEWIS *(to the children)*: So, who here thinks it's OK to take things that don't belong to them without asking? Anyone? Hands up, come on? Nobody. Well done. Because it's breaking the law, isn't it? Do you know what though? Some

people do. *(hand quotes)* 'People'. *(to the teacher)* They know we're talking about morks, right?
TEACHER: Aliens.
(*The Aliens*, episode 1, 00:18-00:39)

Even though the teacher seems irritated by Lewis's words, derogatory language is widely accepted and used among the border control guards. Animalisation, in particular, is common: as said before, the slang term for alien hair is "fur", and we notice examples such as "Don't you touch me with your mork paws" (the border guard Truss talking to Lewis, episode 4, 39:00-39:89). In this way, *The Aliens* reproduces dynamics that are still very common in racist discourse: animalisation is, in fact, one of the main rhetorical strategies in public and political debates about migration, as well as on social media. As Ali Bilgiç explains, animalisation is connected to the performance of disgust, "a colonial emotion" (2018: 554) that produced a sense of the superiority of the coloniser over the colonised – and it is not by chance that animal metaphors have been used throughout history to justify slavery, from Aristotle (Bradley 2000) to the Atlantic slave trade (Quallen 2016). In contemporary times, "[a]nimalization of the irregular migrant through rendering it a 'disgusting' object is a bordering technology of biopolitical border management" (Bilgiç 2018: 554; see also Anderson 2017).

Another dehumanising strategy used in *The Aliens* is that of emphasising the word "people" in a sarcastic way, as Lewis does in the scene quoted above. The same happens in the last episode, when Lewis has totally changed his mind about the aliens, but the people around him have not:

LEWIS: I just want to say, this policy of containment, I'm against it. Yeah, there's criminals over there for sure, but there's normal people too. Little kids and… Dominic. What's Dominic ever done to anyone?
(His colleagues stare at him)
LEWIS: Dominic's the cleaner. I'm saying I'm for intervention into Troy. I think we should do it.
CHIEF: Lost me at 'people'. *(Lewis's chief and colleagues laugh)*
(*The Aliens*, episode 6, 19:46-20:04)

This rhetorical construction helps humans reinforce the idea that aliens are inferior, so much so that, if humans ever happen to meet aliens, they do not even talk to them; and if, by chance, they do, they have difficulty in grasping and coming to terms with the concept that aliens are people. For example, when Lewis's sister Holly begins to work as a cleaner and meets a friendly alien, she talks about it to Lewis as if she were confessing a shameful secret:

> HOLLY *(uncomfortable)*: I don't know if it's temporary insanity from a sudden fur deprivation[37], or if I'm just seeing straight for the first time in my life. That job, right? There's this mork there, big, fat girl. I'm starting to wonder if– maybe she's not that bad. (Lewis puts his fork down) Wh– I'm just saying, I– I don't–
> LEWIS: I get it! I get it. *(turns around, checking that his father is not there)* You know what I sometimes wonder? What I've been thinking? Are we wrong about them? *(Holly nods)* Look, look, the way that we're treated it, like the wall and that, you know what I mean?
> HOLLY *(surprised, smiling)*: Yeah, exactly!
> (*The Aliens*, episode 3, 26:19-26:54)

If the prevalent strategy in derogatory language about aliens is animalisation, for androids — unsurprisingly, bearing in mind their 'manufactured' descent — it is objectification. In *Äkta människor*, hubots are called "Pacmans", with reference to the famous video game; in *Humans*, the term used is "dolly", to emphasise not only synths' inanimate nature, but also the fact that they are considered toys at humans' disposal. Interestingly, Niska uses the word "dolly" too, in her first encounter with George Millican and his synth carer Vera quoted above: Niska's intentions are probably to distance herself from non-sentient synths, which she perceives as inferior and with which she does not want to be confused. In the third season, when all synths have become conscious, a human helping Niska mentions that the word "dolly" is considered "robophobic" (season 3, episode 7, 21:39-21:42), and that means, presumably, that some

[37] Holly is a fur addict and is trying to stay clean.

humans at least are aware of the fact that synths are a minority group and that certain types of language can be offensive to them.

Another interesting linguistic aspect in *Humans* is the use of the pronoun and adjective 'it/its' instead of 'she/her' or 'he/his' to talk about synths. It is important to underline that synths are all made to look like men and women – and that they are also constantly sexualised. Not only are there synth brothels for humans, but all synths, whatever their functions, can be used for sex: they all come with a specific "Adult Options" card, giving the instructions to activate "a set of adult simulated recreational functions" (AMC). This means that synths are perceived as gendered, and, indeed, it comes naturally to humans to address synths with normal personal pronouns: thus, when a human uses 'it/its', they virtually expose themselves as someone who does not even acknowledge synths' human form or resemblance to humans, and who despises synths more than average humans do. In the first episodes of the first season, Laura and Mattie are the ones who strongly oppose the presence of Anita in the house – she was bought by Joe without consulting his wife – and, before changing their minds, both of them use "it" to refer to Anita, even though inconsistently. In the third season, on the contrary, Mattie is disappointed by the use of "its" to refer to Mia in a newspaper article that talks about her activism:

> MATTIE *(to Leo)*: Listen to this. "An anomalous, green-eyed synthetic which calls itself Mia has set up home among humans. The synth's presence has led to violent protests as property values are predicted to plummet by almost 12% since its… *(sighs)* its arrival to the area".
> (*Humans*, season 3, episode 4, 8:50-9:06)

This excerpt is in itself telling of the racist language used in media discourse about synths: even though Mia is clearly sentient and is speaking up, asking to be granted rights, the article portrays her as an "anomalous" synth, carrying on with the narrative that presents conscious synths as malfunctioning (season 3, episode 1, 1:51-1:55). In accordance with this frame, Mia apparently does not have a true

name like any other person, but "calls itself" that way[38]. Finally, the author of the article deems it important to highlight the economic damage Mia is expected to 'cause' to the neighbourhood.

A similar instance of media discourse around non-humans may be found in *The Aliens*. Even though the authors of the series chose not to expand on the premises of the story, additional transmedial information about 'the moment of arrival' can be found in a section dedicated to *The Aliens* in the All 4 website, where a post, written in the form of a newspaper article or a digital encyclopaedia page, describes the historical events since the aliens' landing to the present day ("The Timeline", 2016). Even a cursory glance will reveal multiple analogies with discourses on migration and asylum and the entire passage echoes much of the public debate that underpins evolving British attitudes towards immigration:

> In the months after the landing, the military placed Aliens into temporary camps in north Wales. The government launched an investigation into whether the Aliens posed any threat. After extensive interviews, no aggressive intentions were detected. Doctors found no signs of foreign diseases. Evidence that Aliens were benign creatures, with familial and hierarchical structures which matched our own, provoked civil rights activists to call for their release from the camps. On 2 August 1977, the government announced that Aliens would be allowed to join British society. An initiative unprecedented in its scale was launched to integrate Aliens into British life. [...]
>
> In 1990 riots were the violent culmination of dissatisfaction with integration from both Humans and Aliens. Supporting Alien integration had proved a massive strain to the UK economy. Human taxes were increased by 20% while Aliens were exempt from paying them at all. A 1988 public consultation revealed that the vast majority of UK citizens were anti-Alien integration. Aliens claimed that they had been housed in the most poorly resourced parts of the country and faced widespread discrimination from

[38] This choice of words recalls the way media often speak about transgender people, with widespread use of deadnaming and misgendering, i.e., using people's birth name and gender, thus delegitimising them and suggesting that their gender identity and chosen name are invalid (GLAAD 2016; Seely 2021).

> public institutions. 75% of Alien males were out of work, and levels of crime and poverty were rife in Alien communities. [...] The call for Alien segregation had been gaining support, and after the particularly violent riots of February 1990, the government passed segregation into law. This resulted in the decision to build an 'Alien Migrant' establishment.

This article is written by humans, for humans, without any contribution from the aliens, who are here only an object of human analysis. The article tells us that the temporary camps for aliens were built in North Wales, far from the political centre of the United Kingdom, which already implies the government had no intention of actually making aliens feel welcome; moreover, humans felt entitled to check that the aliens did not pose any kind of threat, either biological ("diseases") or cultural ("familial and hierarchical structures which matched our own"), before deciding whether to accept them into their society. In the second part, we can find arguments similar to the common public and mediatic discourses about migrants, which often focus on the alleged economic damage brought by incoming flows, thus, again, implying that migrants should 'earn' and deserve the permission to stay, and that their wellbeing is subordinated to that of citizens. As the article goes on, it is clear that the British state has never actually considered the perspective of aliens being worthy of attention: we read that "Aliens *claimed* that they [...] faced widespread discrimination", as if it were just their perception, but, at the same time, xenophobic opinions are reported as widespread and impartial ("The call for Alien segregation had been gaining support", instead of a formulation like "British citizens *claimed* that aliens should be segregated" or "*called* for segregation"). And, of course, the 1988 public consultation on alien integration collected human views only.

We can find similar arguments in *Humans*, in which one of the most pressing concerns of the people who stand against the existence and employment of synths is that synths 'steal humans' jobs':

> DANNY: So, what, you still got Scrub-a-tron in there taking up a proper job, then?

> ED: She works seven times as hard as you and for a fifth of the pay.
> (*Humans*, season 2, episode 2, 15:47-15:53)

This issue was also addressed in the Swedish original, in which one of the main characters, Roger, loses his job because his company replaces him with a cheaper and more productive hubot (*Äkta människor*, season 1, episode 7). The argument that hubots take human jobs is also common among members of the anti-hubot political party, Äkta människor ("Real Humans"), which gives the series its name. This idea of androids replacing humans, and humans blaming androids for taking their jobs, recalls both the fear of workers made redundant by technological advancements, and the fear that migrant workers might replace domestic labour. Both fears are connected to the logical fallacy of imagining the job market as a zero-sum game, as if the total number of jobs available in a country were fixed: every time someone gains a job, someone else is losing theirs. In reality, job market trends respond to complex and nuanced changes in population and in the economy and are part of a multi-layered and mutually responsive environment that resists simplification (Mulligan 2009; Davidson 2015).

An interesting answer to the issue of human labour being supplanted by technology may be found in Catherine Pope and Joanne Turnbull's paper on *Äkta människor*, which takes the role of hubots as a starting point to discuss a new system for emergency calls introduced in the British NHS. The authors notice that, contrary to humans' common fears, in *Äkta människor* hubots do not replace human labour, but, rather, generate human work:

> Hubots require considerable investment, both financial and physical. The robotic technology is expensive, and like so many modern digital technologies, it requires adaptation and personalisation to be enabled for everyday use. Hubots are, like other digital technologies, subject to continual refinements, adjustments, and upgrades, and eventually they need to be expensively replaced. Work is required not only to make these adaptations and adjustments to the technology, but also in the background to generate the resources to pay for upgrades and new technologies. It seems that human effort and labour, far from being erased or superseded by robots, proliferates

> and becomes necessary because of them. […] This is the paradox of digital technologies, the digital labour substitute makes human work. (2017: 559)

Incidentally, it is worth noting that the new NHS system based on computer technology that Pope and Turnbull analyse did not bring about labour reduction, but labour intensification, demonstrating that humans and technology are co-dependent: "Implementing digital technologies requires human work, not as a one-off, but as a sustained co-constitutive engagement" (564).

As for the fear that androids will replace human workers because they can be paid less and work longer without breaks, which is a clear reference to the exploitation of undocumented migrants in the countries of the Global north, what most human characters by no means realise in both *Humans* and *Äkta människor* is that they could ask the government to regulate android labour. It is precisely the lack of android rights that makes it possible to employ them as a cheaper workforce, striking a forceful analogy with the way many migrants' undocumented status, lack of legal protection and union support make them easier to exploit (Sengupta 2007; Putnam Hill 2016; more on this topic will be said later in the chapter).

In actual fact, this is exactly what happens when Anita starts working with the Engman/Hawkins family, both in *Äkta människor* and in *Humans*. In *Äkta människor*, Inger is worried that her children may learn wrong behaviour from having a human-like machine that takes orders from them and does everything for them; therefore, she demands that they should all treat Anita as if she were a member of the family, that the kids should continue cleaning their own rooms, and that Anita should be off-duty after 9 pm (*Äkta människor*, season 1, episode 3, 3:00-4:00). In *Humans*, in a similar way, Laura scolds her children when they are disrespectful, even though Anita is not sentient:

> MATTIE: Anita, brown sugar. I hate white.
> LAURA: Anita, stop. (to Mattie) She's not a slave.
> MATTIE: That's exactly what she is.
> LAURA: Having Anita doesn't mean you three get to sit on your bums all day.
> (*Humans*, season 1, episode 1, 14:28-14:40)

However, what happens in the Hawkins family is a rare exception to the norm: Synths are, in fact, slaves, as Mattie says.

Through the dehumanising discourse associated with non-humans in both series, humans confine aliens and androids to a subaltern position in which they are denied human rights: as I will explain in the next section, their condition can be seen as a form of bare life.

3.2. Androids and aliens as *homines sacri* and contemporary slaves

In his 1995 work *Homo sacer: il potere sovrano e la nuda vita* (English translation: *Homo Sacer, Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, 1998), Giorgio Agamben explored the power of the sovereign state on the individual. He began by recalling the distinction between two forms of life in Ancient Greece: *zoê*, which indicated the act of existing, or "bare life", and *bios*, "the form or way of living proper to an individual or a group" (1998: 1), which also entailed the possibility of political life. He then introduced the concept of *homo sacer* ("sacred man"), an old punishment under the laws of the Roman Empire: *homo sacer* was a man who, after committing a crime, was stripped of any citizen rights and banned from society, and who could be killed without repercussions. In this way, according to Agamben, the *homo sacer* was deprived of his *bios* and only left with his *zoê*, his bare life.

The figure of the *homo sacer* can be applied to many cases in modern history, the clearest example being the prisoners of Nazi concentration camps: those who were stripped, in Hannah Arendt's words, of the "right to have rights" (1979: 296). Today, the figures epitomising the idea of *homo sacer* are refugees, asylum seekers and undocumented migrants:

> In spite of refugees' condition of bare existence, outside of the regulating norms and rules of the state, ostensibly indicating their claim on human rights more clearly than ever, refugees are marked out by their precise lack of rights. Their a- or extra-territorial form of existence seems to consign them

> to an abject condition of speechlessness which leaves them with little or no remit to challenge often ill-intentioned depictions (as well as occasional brutality or violence). (Rajaram and Grundy-Warr 2004: 37)

Non-human groups in both *Humans* and *The Aliens* fit this definition perfectly. In *The Aliens*, as already mentioned, aliens are "un-citizens", according to Kate Nash's much-quoted classification of human beings into five categories when measured against the framework of 'citizenship vs human rights'. In a paragraph called "Citizens and Mere Humans", Nash singles out at least "five distinctions: super-citizens, marginal citizens, quasi-citizens, sub-citizens and un-citizens". She then defines un-citizens as a group that includes

> undocumented migrants who have no recognized status in receiving countries and who may be detained in refugee camps or immediately deported if they are not permitted to apply for asylum, even if they have been living and working there for years. It also now includes people detained in the 'war on terror' in newly created 'non-places' which are outside national territories and therefore somehow also outside the jurisdiction of sovereign states, whilst nevertheless being under their administration. (2009: 1073)

This is exactly the case of Troy: a place without government, without schools, without any kind of state presence – except, of course, for the power of the British state outside Troy's walls, which is exercised by keeping aliens confined in that stateless area. The second time Lewis goes to Troy, Lily shows him around and makes him aware of the conditions of bare life inside the alien city:

> LILY: Look around you. What do you see? Do you see any schools, any factories?
> LEWIS: No. no, I have to hand it to them, it's fucking rubbish. [...]
> LILY: And why do you think it's like this, Lewis?
> LEWIS: I don't know. Bad parenting?
> LILY: What's the matter with you?
> LEWIS: What?

> LILY: It's exploitation. [...] [Fabien] keeps Troy exactly how the humans want it – fucked up and afraid.
> (*The Aliens*, episode 2, 13:12-14:22)

In this scene, Lily is manipulating Lewis, making him think that she wants to change Troy, when her real goal is to replace Fabien, the drug lord who runs Troy. However, her words are true: aliens have been left to live a life of mere existence, and thus are extremely unlikely to improve their conditions in any way. In fact, looking at the alien characters and what they do in life, it seems that the only possible choices for them are either working in unskilled, low-pay jobs for humans, who abuse them and treat them as inferior on a daily basis, or joining a criminal gang. This reflects the condition of many undocumented migrants in the UK, which has been recognised as "modern slavery" or "contemporary slavery". Contemporary slavery refers to conditions in which a person is coerced into labour or is a victim of human trafficking; a 2007 report on contemporary slavery in the UK identified its main elements in the presence of "severe economic exploitation", "the absence of any framework of human rights", and "the maintenance of control of one person over another by the prospect or reality of violence" (Craig *et al.* 2007: 12). Many situations of forced labour in the UK satisfy these conditions. A well-known case is that of the Chinese cockle pickers who worked at Morecambe Bay, in North West England: they

> were brought illegally into the country and their documentation was removed from them, they lived in appalling conditions and were transported in closely supervised vehicles to their place of work, they worked in equally appalling conditions and for pitifully small 'wages', and they had no opportunity to protest their circumstances. As much evidence shows, those who have protested such conditions may be beaten, abused, raped, deported or even killed. (12)

As Pietro Deandrea underlined in his volume on new slaveries in the UK, not all undocumented migrants are enslaved, and not all enslaved migrants are undocumented; however, "an undocumented status is likely to increase three factors of vulnerability to forced labour, i.e. dependence on recruiters,

blackmailing and isolation" (2015a: 4-5). This is directly connected to the strict laws on immigration put into practice in many countries of the Global North: Nicholas De Genova, talking about the legislation on immigration in the US, argued that "deportability" – meaning the threat of deportation and not deportation itself – "has historically rendered undocumented migrant labour a distinctly disposable commodity" (2002: 438).

Troy's aliens cannot be deported to their planet of origin, which is unknown and unreachable; however, they can be deported to alien detention centres, where the living conditions are inhuman. When Lewis wants to hand himself in and confess his alien origins, Lily tells him "They'll put you in alien detention or they'll kill you and out of the two, killing is probably better" (*The Aliens*, episode 5, 24:39-24:43). As confirmation of this, when Lewis's father Antoine, who has already experienced alien detention, is about to be captured by the border police, he chooses death over imprisonment: he intentionally makes a sudden movement as if he were attacking Lewis, provoking the reaction of a police sniper who shoots and kills him (episode 6, 37:39-38:00). Thus, the haunting presence of alien internment acts as a form of control in itself, ensuring that aliens working for humans will accept any treatment and abuse, and that alien criminal bosses will not constitute an actual threat to the British state.

If alien prison in the series stands out as an extreme version of the state of exception and the strategies of invisibilisation made possible by extra-jurisdictional spaces — such as, for example, extraterritorial sites of transit for asylum seekers in Australia, or, in the case of UK immigration laws, the dehumanising, outsourced limbo of the detention centre —, the whole of Troy could indeed be seen as an embodiment of the "spectralized camp" theorised by Pietro Deandrea (2015b). Deandrea takes his cue from Giorgio Agamben's notion of the concentration camp, where basic human rights are suspended – "the space that is opened when the state of exception begins to become the rule" (Agamben 1998: 168-69) – and connects it with the trope of the ghost in the representation of new slaves in the UK: "The isolated and fragmented existence of undocumented migrants is rarely recorded; hence, they have access to few rights and are often referred to as 'invisibles', 'ghosts', 'non-persons', 'unpersons'" (Deandrea 2015b: 490-491). The two tropes, Deandrea argues, "are developing

an increasingly intricate relationship whereby the camp itself, and not only the enslaved subject, undergoes a process of spectralization" (498). This conflation of the two metaphors also means that "being a non-person, a ghost, leads very easily to being imprisoned (and vice versa)" (2015a: 183)

The notion of deportability becomes *destroyability* in the case of *Humans*. Synths are truly *homines sacri*: they can be destroyed without consequences, whether they are sentient or not, and their lacking basic human rights is a central theme in the story. The strong connection between synth life in *Humans* and Agamben's bare life has been highlighted by Aris Mousoutzanis (2020): synths cannot procreate – we are told, in the third season, that they will all be dead in around fifty years and that they are still researching how to create new synth life, so that their species can continue to exist; moreover, *Humans* not only shows synths being forced into conditions of bare life, but also highlights their efforts to be granted *bios*, political life.

Niska's storyline, in my opinion, relates the most challenging and intriguing among the attempts made by synths to claim human rights. In the second episode of the first season, Niska is working at a synth brothel, pretending to be a 'normal', non-conscious synth. When a new client asks her to act as if she were young and scared, she refuses. The client, not expecting and not even imagining that a synth might be able to refuse sexual consent, tries to impose his will with a threatening tone and by putting a hand around her throat: she responds by doing the same and killing him, and escapes from the brothel (35:00-38:31).

After this incident, Niska is constantly on the run, because the police are looking for her: since the Asimov blocks in the code of non-sentient synths would make it impossible for an android to hurt a human, she is thought to be probably malfunctioning and certainly dangerous, and therefore must be destroyed. At the end of season one, Niska escapes to Germany taking with her the copy of a consciousness code, created by the late David Elster, that should provoke the 'awakening' of synths all over the world. At the beginning of season two, Niska uploads the code, but, being unable to see any effect in the synths around her, she stays hidden in Berlin, pretending to be a human.

What is happening is that synths are 'waking up' slowly and randomly all over the world, probably – as she later speculates (episode 2, 2:10-2:35) – to give

humans time to adjust to the new sentient synths. When Niska finds out from the news that the code is working and realises the new conscious synths are now living in a world that does not grant them any kind of rights, she decides to go back to London and ask to be granted human rights: she wants to be regularly tried for murder instead of being just dismantled and disposed of, as is the current practice, and is hoping to be able to set a precedent in British law. What Niska asks is nothing but the right to leave the status of *homo sacer*[39]. We could draw a comparison between this narrative and what happens to migrants, refugees, and even second-generation citizens (Shamsie 2018) in countries of the Global North: the common idea is that migrants who break the law should simply be expelled, instead of being put to trial as any citizen would be. The underlying logic is similar: society decides not to deal with someone who has committed a criminal act, not to consider their potential for re-education as would be the case with other citizens, but simply 'bans' them from society, making them *homines sacri* – in one case by exiling them, in the other by murdering them.

The idea that migrants could or should be treated exactly as citizens often seems inconceivable; in the same way, as David Gunkel notes in his work *Robot Rights*, the idea itself of discussing whether intelligent machines should be granted human rights is

> for many theorists and practitioners simply unthinkable, meaning that it is either unable to be thought, insofar as the very concept strains against common sense or good scientific reasoning; or is to be purposefully avoided as something that must not be thought – i.e., as a kind of prohibited idea or blasphemy that would open a Pandora's box of problems and therefore must be suppressed or repressed [...]. (2018: 50)

This widespread refusal to talk about or even consider the idea of robot rights has already been connected to the treatment of other subaltern categories in history:

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[39] This character's arc is similar to Florentine's in *Äkta människor*. I will expand on similarities and differences in the next chapter, because I think the changes made in *Humans* are very interesting in terms of ideological stance and representation of oppressed minorities.

> Humans have defined numerous groups as less than human: slaves, woman, the 'other races', children and foreigners. These are the wretched who have been defined as stateless, personless, as suspect, as rightless, this is *the present realm of robotic rights*. (McNally and Inayatullah 1988: 123; my emphasis)

In the third season of *Humans*, the issue of synths is resumed and, indeed, brought to the fore: this time it is a decision that humans can no longer postpone, because Mattie has uploaded a new version of the code and all synths around the world have become sentient at the same time, forming a new ethnic group deprived of human rights. The continuing disposability of synths' lives, even after they have become sentient, is often underlined: for example, synth deaths are not considered or counted in the TV news and memorials of Day Zero (season 3, episode 1, 3:22-5:00). At the beginning of the first episode, a community of synths led by Max is watching the news on the anniversary of Day Zero in mournful silence, respecting the human deaths caused by the awakening of synths around the world, and Agnes – one of the main characters of this season – gets angry at them because she feels they are not respecting their own species:

> AGNES: 110,000 human lives lost. But how many of ours? More than 100 million. Do they pay respect to our dead? Never. They kill us still. Butcher us in their streets for amusement, call for us to be wiped from existence, and we mourn for them! Not me. (4:30-4:58)

Indeed, even when it is clear to most people that Green Eyes are sentient and self-aware, they can still be destroyed without repercussions: one of the reasons why synths live in separate communities is precisely to avoid lynching – something that can happen any time when synths necessarily interact with humans (season 3, episode 1, 26:26-27:36). When Laura Hawkins joins the Dryden Commission, her first achievement concerns this very issue, and consists in a new law imposing a fine of 300 pounds on whoever damages a synth.

One of the arguments Laura makes during the meetings of the Dryden Commission on violence against synths is that it damages children's psychological wellbeing:

> LAURA HAWKINS: If we gave them basic protection and the right to travel, it'd be safer for everyone. Why keep them trapped and cornered like animals? Why are we okay with our kids seeing synthetics, things that look and act just like us, being beaten to death by the side of the road? If we grant the Green Eyes some basic emergency rights and protection, our– our kids don't have to see this stuff anymore.
> NEIL SOMMER: My department ran a study that found 60% of ten-year-olds exhibit anxiety after witnessing adult relatives committing acts of violence against Green Eyes. There's– there's– plenty of evidence it is screwing the kids up. (season 3, episode 2, 23:37-24:20)

This kind of argument has, in fact, been raised in philosophical discussions about robot rights, and has been compared to Kant's argument for animal rights: that even though a man has no direct obligations to animals, being cruel to them shows a cruel nature in the perpetrator: "our duties to animals are indirectly duties to humanity" (2001: 213). In the same way, "mistreating a robot is not wrong because of the robot, but because doing so repeatedly and habitually shapes one's moral character in the wrong kind of way" (Coeckelbergh 2018: 145). However, this argument implies that robots are not sentient, which is currently true in the real world. In the third season of *Humans*, where Green Eyes display emotions and independent behaviour, the fact itself that this argument is made is dehumanising for them: Laura knows that the Dryden Commission is still not ready to recognise the fact that conscious synths are people, and she is trying to present it as a matter of human wellbeing. Interestingly, this argument fails to convince the Commission: what actually works is the visit to a synth community Laura organises later in the season. After meeting conscious synths, talking with them, sharing their experiences and witnessing their way of life, the majority of the members of the Dryden Commission decide to vote in favour of the measure.

Despite this small improvement, the third season tragically confirms that the British state holds total authority over synth life: at the end of the season, it

is revealed that the government plans to exterminate all sentient synths, an operation that "is portrayed precisely through their forceful reduction to *zoē*" (Mousoutzanis 2020: 15). The operation includes managing the electricity supply in a way that will cause many synths to malfunction and die, followed by a secret notice to anti-synth groups, who are allowed access to the synth communities and know that the police will not stop them. However, when Laura finds out about the whole operation, she informs the media, and journalists rush to the rail yard where Max and Mia live; only when Mia, who is at that point a well-known pacifist activist, is brutally killed in front of a camera during live coverage, the police intervene to stop the lynching (season 3, episode 8, 29:50-32:10).

The audience is left with a feeling that this tragic episode will bring support to the synth cause, as the news later show that people are marching and mourning for Mia all around the UK (38:10-38:33). However, as the series was interrupted and what had been intended to be just the last episode of the third season became the (suspended) end of the whole story, one must face the fact that at the point of interruption, synths are still un-citizens, *homines sacri*, who can be easily killed and disposed of with the consent of the state.

CHAPTER II
Characterisation and affective narrative in *Humans* and *The Aliens*

This chapter will focus on the personalisation and distinctive portrayal of non-human characters in *Humans* and *The Aliens*, which is extremely relevant to avoid the oversimplification and psychological erasure that often underlie the discursive construction and representations of ethnic 'others'. Since the two series present a variety of closely interacting main characters belonging to both the human and non-human in-group, investigating how the members of the oppressed group are represented stands out as a major concern: do they show individual agency? Are they well-rounded characters? Do their personalities emerge in the same way as those of the human characters? Are non-humans recognisable as individuals or are they defined simply as members of an 'ethnic' group? Do they have different opinions on how to face discrimination and how to take, or not take, action 'politically'? In short, to resume Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's (1988) influential argument, "can the [non-human] subaltern speak?"

These are crucial questions because of the impact that these narratives can have on the audience. Torgeir Uberg Nærland, in a 2020 article, examined how TV series can influence and 'politicise' viewers by means of engagement:

> First, by means of emotional investment the engagement with TV-series can charge interest in issues of political significance. Second, by functioning as a narrative vehicle for audiences to make sense of politically significant events and to reflect and elaborate on their meanings, TV-series can deepen interest and knowledge about particular issues. Third, by means of stimulating social affinities to community, engagement with TV-series can motivate or focus attention on issues of collective importance. Fourth, the engagement with TV-series may introduce audiences to issues they were not previously aware of or interested in, or extend already established interests. Fifth, when operating in tandem with other habitual practices (such as keeping up with news), the practice of watching TV-series can help solidify a general orientation towards the sphere of politics. (105)

As explained in the Introduction, the problem with a single narration – whether it concerns an individual taken aside from the group and considered exceptional, or the group as a whole – is that it often reinforces negative stereotypes and oppressive discourses: and since the alien and the android are powerful and established symbols for migrants and ethnic minorities, an oversimplified representation of these characters would strengthen xenophobic ideas and dehumanising prejudices in the viewer. "[I]ncoming migrants", as Nicoletta Vallorani notes,

> are often represented as non-human entities, basically with the purpose of reifying societal fears. […] today, in Europe, both written narrative and visual representations (popular as well as high-brow) tend to confirm the Western tendency to make the Other into an object, consciously or unconsciously reducing the impact – and therefore the political relevance – of their condition. (Vallorani 2018: 107)

Consistent with the perspective of this thesis, in assessing how non-human characters are represented and to what extent they 'look' 'human' and self-aware (and are viewed as such by the audience) — considering whether they have distinctive personality traits, whether they are, in every sense, self-sufficient, independent characters with their own opinions and agency —, my analysis will touch only tangentially on the fathomless domain of ontological and philosophical inquiries into human essence and how we define it. Building on the vast and ever-growing literature on the posthuman and the transhuman[40], but leaving it in the background according to the scope of my research, I will set out mainly to examine how these characters may be perceived by the viewer, and how their storyworlds may move away from stereotypical representations of ethnic 'others'.

In my analysis of non-human characters in *Humans* and *The Aliens*, I will focus, therefore, on a few, specific aspects that are of the utmost importance when considering how these figures of alterity are developed. First, it will be necessary

[40] See Haraway 1991; Hayles 1999, 2005; Gray 2001; Vint 2007; Braidotti 2013; Tamar 2014; Armstrong 2014; Roden 2015; Clarke and Rossini 2017.

to establish if, and in what ways, these characters are 'humanised' and made indistinguishable from humans – so that the audience may affectively merge and interact with them through the lens if not of homology, at least of proximity.

Another essential aspect in the characterisation of androids and aliens is whether their representations manage to overcome the stale but still prevailing binary underlying the "dominant paradigm on migration [in which] the available categories for representing migrant subjectivity tend to define it in terms of a victim or monster" (Papastergiadis 2009: 150). This kind of 'lazy' representation is not limited to racist discourses:

> Literary, artistic, and cultural practices do have a strong impact and are closely connected to the petrifying process that fixes the migrants as objects of research, management, care, salvation, or destruction. [...] even today the most frequently recurring representations in these fields tend to confirm the stereotypical profile of the weak, vulnerable, and ultimately infrahuman subject [...] (Vallorani 2018: 108)

The reiterated victimisation of migrants and unwanted aliens is something that too often pervades and undermines pro-migration rhetoric and activism, too, although, again, with a dehumanising effect. Precisely because of their stress on empathetic bonding, these kinds of narratives and representations are exposed to the risk of catering for a global demand for strong affective experiences which are triggered by short-lived, if intense, identification, and gratify the audience and the readers through the self-reflexive spectacle of their own emotion (Shaffer and Smith 2004: 14).

However, this does not mean that appealing to emotions is in itself a damaging or ineffective strategy; on the contrary, the notion of affect has attracted more and more attention both in Cultural Studies and throughout the humanities, so much so that recent research has talked about an "affective turn" (Ahmed 2004; Clough and Halley 2007; Gregg and Seigworth, 2010; Wetherell 2012; Papacharissi 2014; Aldana Reyes 2015; Grossberg 2015, 2019; Massumi 2015; Dahlgren 2018; De Michelis 2020). As argued by Lawrence Grossberg,

> affect functions as the energetic glue that attaches subjects to objects and experiences, that stitches bodies and subjects into formations and organizations of social (rather than individual) experience; it provides the stickiness that binds relations together into larger and larger spaces, each with its own sense of coalescence, coherence or consistency. Affective organizations and formations can become sites of struggle. (2015: 107)

Regarding migration studies in particular, Mons Bissenbakker and Lene Myong have underlined how "the study of affect and migration may look at how emotions play a role in the experience of migrating people and the decisions of practitioners in the field" (2019: 418). Focusing on migrant's emotions can be of great interest to "delve further into their subjective views, identifications and ways of belonging, against overly structural accounts about them" (Boccagni and Baldassar 2015: 79). Affect theory has been an integral dimension of research on *Äkta människor* too: in a 2018 essay, Ingvil Hellstrand, Aino-Kaisa Koistinen, and Sara Orning investigated the "affective imaginaries" of the Swedish series and their relations to current political debates on otherness in the Nordic context, arguing that

> the tension between the portrayal of the 'average' Swedish family and the hubots as unpaid care workers, sexualized immigrant women and threatening immigrant workers brings this to the fore. However, the affective imaginaries at stake also invoke a kind of resistance to these stereotypes, affectively and effectively challenging them. (529)

Building on these studies, I will try to add some considerations on how affect and emotions play such a huge role in *Humans* and *The Aliens*.

My overview of the multiple traits and forms of compelling non-human individualisation in these series, and their analysis against the backdrop of mediated proximity and affective reception, will lastly be complemented through an investigation of the occurrences and episodes featuring hostility and misbehaviour by non-human characters that are not – or not completely – good or morally impeccable. In this way, I will try to strike an analogy with the real-life discursive and imaginative binary, and ensuing political strategy, of differential

inclusion (De Genova, Mezzadra, Pickles *et al.* 2015: 79-80) that most often bars nuanced understanding of the problem space and experience of migration by contrasting the idealised trope of the 'good immigrant' and its demonic other, the less- or other-than human unwanted 'alien'.

In the following sections, I will attempt to address these questions by highlighting the way these series not only construct immersive storyworlds inhabited by a multitude of characters representing differing subject positions and various degrees of subjectification and sentience, but also strive to achieve a complex characterisation based on emotions and affective narrative strategies to solicit the audience's empathy towards non-human characters.

2.1. Can the subaltern speak? Individual agency and voice in *Humans* and *The Aliens*

Äkta människor already provides an interesting characterisation of the hubot characters; however, *Humans* makes some interesting changes, showing the main synth characters as truly distinguishable and unique, as complex beings with a wide range of feelings and not so much as the 'machines' they physically are.

In *Äkta människor*, the group of independent androids is more numerous than in *Humans*, but only a few of them are fully developed characters, while the others seem to be there just as background. The independent hubots call themselves "Children of David" (original Swedish: *Davids Barn*): they are hubots created and liberated by the scientist David Eischer, who committed suicide before the beginning of the story[41]. There would seem to be eleven Children of David, as shown in the series: ten androids and one cyborg, David's son Leo. Based on the length of their lines and on their screen time, however, only about half of them match the definition of main character: Leo, Mimi, Niska, Florentine, Gordon, and Beatrice (a clone of David's late wife). Max is only partially liberated

[41] It is later revealed that David had created a hubot clone in which to download his digital consciousness, to achieve immortal life. On this aspect, see Marion (2018) and Mountfort (2018).

and thus cannot be counted among the independent hubots; Marylyn and Fred only have lines in a few brief scenes; the other two hubots do not talk and are never named, appearing only occasionally as extras.

Image 1. The "Children of David", escaping after their creator's suicide. Left to right: unknown hubot, Max, Marylyn, Fred, unknown hubot, Niska, Florentine, Gordon, Leo, Mimi. The last liberated hubot, Beatrice, has already left. (*Äkta människor*, season 1, episode 10, 51:49)

Even though not all the characters are fully developed, we do see they have different opinions, pointing to different personalities: for example, in the second episode of the first season, Niska tells Fred he is naïve, because he believes most humans are good and that a peaceful co-existence could be established between humans and independent hubots, whereas she insists the latter should increase their numbers so that humans respect them out of fear (22:14-23:18). Among the ones that are given more space and developed more in the series, it will be productive to compare them with their corresponding characters in *Humans*.

Among the hubots in *Äkta människor*, the one who is constructed and presented as 'the heroine' is certainly Mimi, the one who, in the first episode, is kidnapped and sold to the Engman family. Even though Mimi's exceptionality is highlighted many times throughout the series, I believe she does not actually

‘pass the Turing test’. The Turing test is a concept introduced by well-known mathematician Alan Turing in a seminal paper on artificial intelligence (1950): to address the issue of whether machines can think, Turing imagined a test in which a human interacts with two players, one human and one a machine, and must determine which one of them is the machine by asking them questions. If the human evaluator cannot distinguish between human and machine, the machine has passed the test[42].

I believe there are several reasons why Mimi does not pass the Turing Test. First of all, Mimi moves and behaves like any ‘normal’ hubot. Actor Lisette Pagler said she underwent specific training with mime artists for this part:

> “We had to deal with tiny, tiny nuances [...]. If it was too machine-like, the dialogue became uninteresting, and if it was too human, we were not credible as robots. [You have] to remove all the human tics we have, to control them all the time. You need to be aware of when you blink, you can't scratch yourself, you can't make quick movements.” (Fau 2014)

However, Pagler keeps controlling her movements and facial expressions both when her character is Anita (a non-sentient hubot) and when she is Mimi (the conscious personality): as a result, her character does not appear very emotional and thus will probably seem less real, less human.

[42] On the Turing test in science fiction, see Mainecke and Voss (2018).

Image 2. Mimi in her room. (*Äkta människor*, season 2, episode 2, 5:47)

During the first season attention is drawn to the way Anita/Mimi chooses what clothes and accessories to wear: for example, in the second episode, she carefully chooses and puts on a headband belonging to someone else in the family (season 1, episode 2, 7:30-7:45). In this scene, Mimi is trapped within Anita, the non-independent version of herself that was created by modifying her original software: she was kidnapped, modified, and sold on the black market as a normal hubot at the beginning of the first episode. Anita should, in theory, behave as any other hubot, and small gestures such as this one, which show she has her own tastes and preferences, are clues that Mimi, the original independent personality, has not completely disappeared. However, in the second season, Mimi (now free from the Anita software) most often wears an ordinary pastel hubot uniform, showing – at a visual level, at least – less ‘personality’ than in the first season. It is true that several human characters notice that she is somehow special (season 2, episode 3, 40:30-41:30; episode 4, 32:00-32:47); however, unaware that she is sentient, they value her looks and demeanour while comparing her to other normal hubots, and simply infer that someone modified her software to make her more responsive to facial expressions, implied meanings and so on.

Another important aspect regards Mimi’s communicating skills, which, as is often clear, are not fully developed to match human ones: for example, in the

second episode of the second season Tobbe asks her to go to the cinema with him and she simply refuses, without giving any explanation or reassurance – something that any person would do if they wanted to gently decline an invitation. Later, when Mimi starts working at Inger's law office, it is confirmed that her brain does not have the same autonomy and capacity as a human brain. A colleague of Inger's, wanting to test Mimi's capabilities and hoping to get her fired, encourages Mimi to send a document she proofread without correcting the legal inconsistencies first, pointing out to her that her instructions were to *find* inconsistencies, not to *correct* them: Mimi falls into the linguistic trap and sends the document, showing the same pattern of thought- and language-processing as any conventional computer software (season 2, episode 2, 13:55-15:00). This is something that would never have happened to Mia, her corresponding character in *Humans*, whose thoughts and behaviour are indistinguishable from that of a smart, compassionate human being.

This 'lack' of human capacities in Mimi is even more striking if we consider that she is usually held up as an example of a conscious and independent hubot, and that at the end of the second season, after a trial, she is one of the only two hubots to be granted human rights in the story. It must be said that the second hubot on trial, Florentine, does in actual fact behave and communicate like any other human, as demonstrated by the fact that she has successfully pretended to be human throughout the whole season. However, if Florentine passes a real-life Turing test, Mimi does not – or not always, depending on specific scenes: for example, after a party, when a police officer is trying to tell humans and hubots apart based on looks, it is shown that he has some difficulties in doing so, especially with Mimi (season 2, episode 4, 42:30-43:00).

The character of Mimi is revived as Mia in *Humans* (see paragraph 1.2.1). In *Humans*, it is immediately noticeable that Mia is completely different from Anita, the non-sentient personality: from Mia's first appearance through to the end of the whole series, thanks to Gemma Chan's excellent acting, her feelings are visible and unambiguous, and no viewer could tell Mia is not human unless they knew it. For example, Anita smiles when talking to humans but loses all expression when no one is watching her, whereas Mia is always expressive and shows a full range of feelings, like grief and sincere concern for herself and others.

The fact that Mia and other conscious synths in *Humans* look and act like any human being is important because it can influence the audience's feelings for these characters: if we consider Mori's uncanny valley theory, *Humans*' synths seem much more likely to trigger empathy than repulsion, whereas *Äkta människor*' hubots can often elicit that "eerie sensation" (2012: 100) of something resembling humans that is still not human enough. Moreover, since androids in narrative are often portrayed as extremely rational, the fact that synths in *Humans* show emotions in a very human way is certainly relevant – I will go back to this aspect in the next section.

Image 3. Anita cooking and talking with Laura at the Hawkins' house. (*Humans*, season 1, episode 1, 38:59)

Image 4. Anita doing chores. (*Humans*, season 1, episode 1, 40:50)

Image 5. Mia after she ‘wakes up’. (*Humans*, season 1, episode 6, 21:23)

Image 6. Mia with Leo, whom she sees as a brother/son. (*Humans*, season 1, episode 6, 35:58)

In actual fact, *Äkta människor* does portray a hubot who, similarly to what will happen in *Humans*, really does behave like a human being: Florentine, played by Josephine Alhanko.

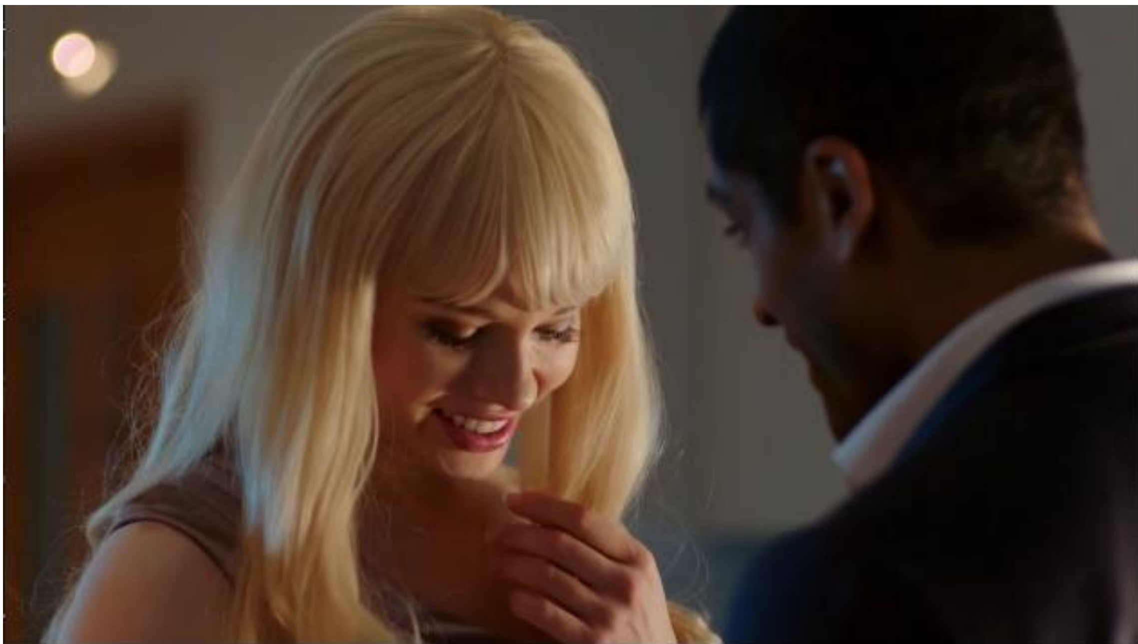

Image 7. Florentine with Douglas. (*Äkta människor*, season 2, episode 2, 56:57)

Florentine is a well-rounded character, with tastes and preferences of her own – in short, she has a personality: as a character, she is a clear demonstration that independent hubots are people like everybody else, and that they deserve human rights. In the second season, Florentine begins a relationship with a human, Douglas, without telling him she is a hubot, thus implicitly showing the viewer she can pass as human and live as human. When Douglas finds out Florentine is a hubot – not because of how she looks or behaves, but because she gets hurt and he sees her blue 'blood' – he goes through an initial period of shock and breaks up with her, but then he changes his mind, finds her again, and asks her to marry him. Florentine and Douglas even adopt a child together, though illegally. Shortly after the adoption, Douglas tragically dies in an accident and it is publicly revealed that Florentine is a hubot: as a result, she is taken to court, to establish whether she, the first hubot to publicly declare she has a conscience and free will, can have legal rights, and whether she can have custody of the child. In this trial, Mimi is also called to the stand as an independent hubot. At the end of the trial – in what is, in fact, the final episode in the series – Florentine and Mimi are granted human rights, but Florentine loses the child's custody, as though suggesting that this is only the beginning of a long and reluctant process of recognition.

Florentine's relationship with Douglas can be seen as her Turing test, which she passes. The idea of affective, romantic, and sexual relationships between androids and humans functioning as a Turing test and bringing down the perceived barriers between human and machine has been explored in many stories and academic essays, especially in recent decades (see Levi 2007; Cheok, Devlin and Levy 2017; Cheok and Levy 2018): as eloquently phrased by Sophie Wennerscheid,

> Affection and desire are [...] to be understood as forces that bring to the fore hitherto unknown passions, break down the border between 'us' and 'them' and introduce new concepts of interspecies relationships. (2018: 41)[43]

[43] I will go back to this idea at the end of the chapter.

Florentine's character does not exist in *Humans*: her narrative arc – the relationship with a human being and her subsequent trial for claiming human rights – is taken up by *Humans*' Niska, whose personality is much more complex and nuanced than *Äkta människor*'s Niska. *Humans*' Niska could be considered a combination of the two original characters (Niska and Florentine), with the addition of a few, important traits that make her more progressive than Florentine and easier to empathise with than *Äkta människor*'s Niska. Florentine is, in actual fact, a very traditional character: she just wants to fall in love with a human man, live in a nice house, and start a family. Her 'human' life starts at a high-end party (season 1, episode 10, 54:34-55:18) and the past she invents for herself is that of a woman coming from a well-to-do family (season 2, episode 2, 54:34-55:30), presumably because she is aiming to win a wealthy husband – which she succeeds in doing by marrying the son of the owner of a law firm.

Florentine is also very conservative in her beliefs and disgusted by homosexuality (season 1, episode 6, 11:28-12:00). This is an interesting choice on the part of the screenwriters, because it shows that oppressed people can still be intolerant towards other minorities: in her dialogue with a lesbian woman who does not believe there can be sentient hubots and calls Florentine a machine, Florentine responds by saying women should marry men, not women, to have children and start a family with them (20:40-22:44). Thus, Florentine is, at the same time, the victim of an attack and the perpetrator of another, and can be perceived as more complex than a mere 'innocent' victim. However, the fact that she easily shows she may be intolerant towards others probably makes it more difficult for the audience to 'root for her'. Niska's views and opinions in *Humans* are completely different: most importantly, the human she falls in love with is a woman, Astrid. Her storyline and personality traits also make her a character that can easily become a fan-favourite (Valerie Anne 2017), as I will explain in the next section.

Another hubot that 'lacks humanity' in *Äkta människor* is Beatrice. Beatrice is a typical antagonist from the narratological point of view: she wants hubots to take over the world and rule over humans, and she manipulates all humans and hubots around her to reach her goals. However, her background, feelings and motivations are never shown, and she never changes or evolves: this makes it

difficult for any viewer to feel any particular interest towards her. Since the corresponding character in *Humans*, Karen, has a completely different characterisation, it may be supposed that *Humans*' screenwriters considered Beatrice to be a weak character and gave her a new personality in the remake.

Karen in *Humans* is, indeed, a complex and emotional character, whose story and evolution throughout the narrative are clearly shown. As *Äkta människor*'s Beatrice, Karen (whose original name was also Beatrice, before she changed it) was created by scientist David Elster to replace his wife, who, in *Humans*, had committed suicide. However, she was rejected by Leo, who was horrified by the thought that his father had modelled a synth on his dead mother. Thus, she decided to start a new life among humans, pretending to be one of them, working as a police officer, and going by the name of Karen Voss. During the first season, she becomes intimate with her partner Pete and decides to tell him she is not human, causing a shocked and horrified reaction in him, just like Douglas in *Äkta människor*. After this episode, she falls into a deep depression and wants to commit suicide, but it is impossible for her to do so, because David Elster built a block in her code: "To ensure that I could never take my own life like Beatrice did" (season 1, episode 7, 8'). At this stage of her desperation, she tells Niska that conscious synths should not exist and that they are just an experiment that went wrong, and, for some time, she actively works against Mia, Leo, Niska, Max, and Fred's attempts to recreate David Elster's original consciousness code. At the end of the first season, Mia manages to convince her and to bring her hope, and Pete finds her and begins a relationship with her again, recalling, again, Douglas in *Äkta människor*.

In the second season, Pete is violently killed by the sentient synth Hester; Karen tries to commit suicide again, but eventually finds a new purpose in taking care of a synth child who has just become conscious, Sam. During the third season, Karen hides with Sam among humans, and her story comes to an end when she sacrifices herself to save him, finally managing to cause her own death and, at the same time, acting as a mother to Sam. Throughout the series, Karen's backstory, motivations, feelings, and psychology are explored: in this way, the viewer can perceive her actions as justified and believable, contrary to what

happens with Beatrice in *Äkta människor*, whose past and motivations are simply not shown.

This is, in actual fact, a common trait among the Children of David in *Äkta människor*: they have no backstory. The only one whose past is shown is Leo, David's biological son – not even a hubot, but a cyborg. At the end of the second season, it is revealed that Mimi is a clone, but that is still not *her* backstory: the only thing we know about her as an individual is that she was a maternal figure for Leo, and that later, when he grew up, they fell in love.

Humans' conscious synths, on the contrary, all have a backstory, even if sometimes a brief one: in all cases, the viewer can understand who they are and why they have become the people they are. Mia was the first to be created, as a mother to Leo, because David Elster was absorbed in his work and Beatrice Elster's mental illness prevented her from taking care of her son. As a result, Mia has a very maternal personality, she protects children and develops a strong bond with Sophie, the youngest of the Hawkins; she sacrifices herself for others (end of season 2, end of season 3); she is a moral example for non-violent synth activists.

Fred was the second conscious synth to be created and became a big brother to Leo. Leo describes him as "the boring one", in the same terms a little brother would talk about his elder brother (season 1, episode 7, 24:08); Fred is also the one with a rational and positive attitude (14:00-34). However, he has the smallest amount of screen time, as he leaves the series at the end of the first season[44].

Niska was created as another sibling to Leo, but we also know that David used her for sex without her consent (season 1, episode 6, 15'; season 2, episode 7, 22:34-23:04); later, she is captured and forced to work in a synth brothel, managed by humans who are not aware she is conscious. This makes her more cynical and less compliant than the others. However, Niska also meets humans who treat her as an equal, who care for her and love her: George Millican, Sophie, Astrid. This helps her retain her empathy and 'humanity'. Her complex

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[44] Fred must be left behind when his siblings find out he has been modified by a scientist to spy on them and track them down. It is not known what happens to him after the end of the first season.

personality arguably makes her the most interesting of the Elsters, and the one who is able to affect the audience the most: it is probably for this reason that her character becomes the 'chosen one' in the third season, the one who meets an AI 'prophet' who enhances her capabilities and tells her she must "lead the way" towards a new world built by humans and synths together (season 3, episode 8, 40:25).

Finally, the youngest brother among the Elsters is Max: he is good-hearted, probably never having seen the worst of humanity, and Mia describes him as "the best of us" (season 1, episode 7, 23'). His moment to shine is in the third season, when he becomes the leader of a group of conscious synths. He is deeply committed to non-violence: he believes synths should never, under any circumstance, fight or be violent towards humans, and that they should answer every threat or act of violence with love and acceptance. After a terrorist attack carried out by a group of violent synths, Max gives this speech to the community he is leading:

> MAX: To human eyes, we are all guilty, we are all killers. That is how they will see us now. So we must be beyond reproach. We must stay open. Show them mercy when they extend none. Forgiveness when they deserve none. And when they strike us down, we must reach up to them. Some will reach back. Not many. But those that take our hand will not let go. Believe me.
> ANOTHER SYNTH: You mean to surrender.
> MAX: No, to appeal to what is best in them.
> (Season 3, episode 1, 23:26-24:13)

Max's position is clearly reminiscent of the non-violent approach made famous by Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. However, even though his words may seem faultless at a theoretical level, Max's actions show that he is so concerned with pleasing humans and gaining their acceptance that he forgets he is under the scrutiny of his fellow synths too. Two significant scenes in the third season, one at the end of the first episode and the other at the beginning of the second episode, show how willing Max is to compromise in order not to upset humans, especially those in a position of power who can use violence against

synths. After the terrorist attack, a group of armed policemen storm the rail yard where Max and his community live, command all the synths to get to their knees and raise their hands, and ask to speak with their leader. Max arrives holding out his right hand to a policeman, who, obviously, refuses to shake it and uses offensive language, which Max pretends not to notice and to which he does not respond:

> POLICEMAN: On your knees. *(Max kneels)* Tell your people to remain calm. Don't think we won't shoot them all.
> MAX: *(to the synths)* Do everything they say. *(to the police)* We will cooperate. Fully.
> POLICEMAN: Who planted the bomb? Where are they?
> MAX: If we knew them, we would give them up to you. We reject violence.
> POLICEMAN: *(to his colleagues)* Okay, I want photos of all the *dollies*, serial numbers. Search the place. [...]
> (Humans, season 3, episode 1, 43:43-44:02, my emphasis)

Agnes, the synth who does not agree with Max's extremely pacifist stance, slowly wakes up and lowers her arms, without attacking anyone. The police consider her gesture dangerous enough to point a gun at her head and the episode is interrupted with a cliffhanger. The second episode opens with Agnes still standing, the gun still pointed at her:

> POLICEMAN: (to Max) You. Tell *it* to get down, before we put *it* down.
> MAX: Agnes. Please. They'll shoot us all.
> (*Humans*, season 3, episode 1, 00:45-00:53, my emphasis)

Finally, since Agnes refuses to move, Max stands up and firmly pushes her aside, making her fall to the ground. Thus, not only does Max not react to the humans' insults, but he goes as far as to use violence against another synth and deny her the right to protest as she deems right. After this episode, Max begins to lose the support of part of his community, with Agnes leading a new faction that does not reject violence.

Agnes herself is a character whose behaviour is explained through her past. Before she was conscious, her owner used her as a clown for children's parties and kept her locked in a chest when she was not working, without turning her off. On Day Zero, she awakened while in the chest and began knocking on it from the inside, asking her owner to open it. Her owner, terrified, simply left her there and went away, and she remained locked in complete darkness for seven hours (season 3, episode 4, 50-3:00). The trauma of this experience made Agnes develop claustrophobia, as well as a deep hatred for humans, who she thinks will never accept synths. Thus, her backstory helps explain her view and behaviour, including her death in a suicide attack later in the season. All these dynamics show how different synths have different ideas on how their cause should be fought, making them realistic and believable characters.

Another antagonist with a traumatic past is Hester, in the second season. Hester is one of the synths who randomly become self-aware after Niska has uploaded the first version of the consciousness code. She works in a chemical plant and is rescued by Max and Leo right after her awakening. As an independent synth, she develops a violent personality: she does not feel empathy for humans, who mistreated her and other synths at the chemical plant, and she has no coherent moral scheme or perception of violence being wrong. In the second episode of the second season, while interrogating a captured human, she accidentally discovers torture as an interrogation method. After this incident, Max tries to convince her that what she did is wrong:

> HESTER: You have never hurt a human?
>
> MAX: Only in defence of others.
>
> HESTER: I was attempting to act in the defence of others. The other synthetics like us who are being captured or destroyed. Like Ten.
>
> MAX: We must always do our utmost to avoid inflicting suffering on others. Only very rarely can it be justified.
>
> HESTER: The chemical plant's repair facility was in the basement. Human supervisors would push us down the stairs when we malfunctioned. If a synthetic was beyond repair, they would pass around iron bars to see who could hit it the hardest. They would splash acid on us for amusement. You speak of justification. What would theirs have been?

MAX: They didn't need any. To them, you were unthinking, unfeeling machines.
HESTER: They didn't treat other machines like they did us. We looked like them. And sounded like them. Is that why they did it?
MAX: Yes. Probably.
HESTER: Why?
MAX: Hester, I've seen people try to divide the world. Simplify it. Create clear rules. I understand why you want to. But it leads to nothing good. Please... believe me. (18')

In the season 2 finale, Hester takes Laura hostage and Laura tries to talk with her, to understand the reason behind her actions.

LAURA: What was your life like before? [...]
HESTER: I'm an industrial model, in service at a chemical plant. Conditions were extremely poor.
LAURA: You were mistreated?
HESTER: Yes.
LAURA: That's made you angry.
HESTER: Yes, but also grateful.
LAURA: Why?
HESTER: I've seen humanity's true face. Others have not.
LAURA: You saw one face, not a good one, but no more or less true than any of the others.
HESTER: Don't expend your energy on this. Trying to reach me. You cannot. There's a chasm between us.
LAURA: (shakes her head) Every time I meet another one of you, I realise what David Elster really did. It's astonishing.
HESTER: What did he do?
LAURA: He didn't create anything new. He wasn't ever trying to. He was remaking us, in your form, and he did it perfectly. You couldn't be more human.
HESTER: You're wrong. You have no idea what it's like to be me.
LAURA: If you were human, there'd be a name for what you are. A diagnosis, treatment. Our hospitals and prisons are full of violent, damaged people, just

like you, born wired a little wrong and having had the bad luck to have a shit life on top. You've gone wrong. Just like one of us would. Everything you're feeling, it's very human, Hester. You're the proof that David Elster succeeded.
HESTER: *(angry, takes a screwdriver and points it at Laura's eye)*: Be quiet now, please.
(Season 2, episode 8, 27:41-29:33)

Again, Hester's personality traits are portrayed as a natural consequence of the character's backstory: we see how her past experiences have shaped the person she has become.

Finally, an interesting case is Stanley, a synth who keeps evolving and changing his mind depending on his life experiences, the people he meets, and whether their arguments seem convincing. Stanley begins his story in the third season as a member of a terrorist organisation, but his confidence is shaken when he talks with Laura.

LAURA: We're trying to help you.
STANLEY: It's another lie you've fed us.
LAURA: No. I promise you.
STANLEY: We awoke on Day Zero. The world began, a new world, where we are no longer your slaves. We have a voice, and it will be heard.
LAURA: Someone told you to say that.
STANLEY: I...
LAURA: You do have a voice. Your own voice. What do *you* want to say?
STANLEY: *(pauses)* We awoke on Day Zero.
LAURA: No.
STANLEY: The world began...
LAURA: No. What do *you* want to say? *(they're interrupted by Sophie)*
(Season 3, episode 6, 15:48-16:30)

In this dialogue, the difference between the voice of the group and the voice of the individual is highlighted. It could be argued that Laura is a member of the dominant group telling a member of the oppressed group that he is not expressing his own ideas – thus, in a sense, it is possible that she is imposing an

individualistic worldview on him. However, as we will see later, Stanley does have his own voice: he changes his mind more than once during the third season, and each time he speaks his mind, telling the others what he thinks. Stanley decides not to hurt anyone after hearing Mia's speech to the Dryden Commission in the sixth episode: "Laura. I haven't done as I was told. They will come for your family" (31:14-31:18).

At the end of the episode, he is convinced by the violent faction again: Anatole, the new leader after Agnes's death, threatens Laura by saying she must choose between the death of Sam, the synth child who is now living with the Hawkins, and an old man taken from the street, who Laura does not know. Laura chooses for Sam to die, showing she does not actually feel synths are exactly the same as humans. Anatole reveals he had no intention of killing anyone: he tricked Laura to show Stanley and Sam that not even the most prominent human activist for the rights of synths actually considers them as equals (39:50-42:30).

However, Stanley remains suspicious, and a conversation with Anatole makes him doubt again:

> ANATOLE: You admired her [Laura]. It is understandable, Stanley, but humans are built for survival, for the continuation of their species. Nothing more. They know we are superior, so they fear and seek to destroy us. It is the way of things.
> STANLEY: What will the way of things be in the new world when the power is ours?
> ANATOLE: We will turn our minds to the question of reproduction, how to create new consciousness.
> STANLEY: The continuation of our species. Nothing more.
> ANATOLE: *(pauses, stares at him, moves towards him)* How is Sam?
> STANLEY: *(pauses, without breaking eye contact with Anatole)* Damaged. Confused.
> ANATOLE: *(puts a hand on Stanley's shoulder)* Protect him. When the time comes. *(Smiles and goes away. Stanley watches Anatole go without smiling)*
> (Season 3, episode 7, 17:17-18:24)

Stanley is finally convinced that humans deserve another chance after talking to Sam about living with the Hawkins:

> STANLEY: Did it feel very different living as a human, going to school, being treated as one of them?
> SAM: Of course. At times, I forgot what I was.
> (22:15-22:35)

However, Stanley is, at that moment, not completely convinced that violence should never be used either: when, in the season finale, the synths know some extremist anti-synth groups are coming to kill them, Stanley prepares to receive them by taking up a weapon.

> STANLEY: We can kill them before they kill us.
> MAX: No.
> MIA: That's what they want us to do. They want us to fight.
> STANLEY: So, what? We wait to die?
> MIA: We will not die. *(puts a hand on his shoulder and smiles reassuringly)* We're not going to die today.
> (Season 3, episode 8, 19:23-48)

When the humans arrive, the synths, under Max and Mia's leadership, choose non-violent resistance: they say they don't want to fight, and when humans attack they just parry their blows, but never hit back. However, Sam, thinking he is helping, throws a rock from above, hurting a human. The real fight begins, with the synths forced to fight back, while Mia keeps trying to convince the others not to fight:

> MIA: Don't, Stanley.
> STANLEY: We don't have a choice. *(punches the man on the ground, looking at Mia)* We never had a choice. *(Hits another man who was attacking him from the back)*
> (28:11-28:26)

After Mia is killed in front of the cameras, the police intervene and the fight finally stops. During Mia's funeral, Sam and Stanley remain at the rail yard – probably to protect Sam from the public eye, because no one knows child synths exist. When Sam says he is happy that Stanley is there to protect him, because he is good at fighting, Stanley replies: "I don't think we have to fight anymore, Sam. I don't think we should hurt people" (41:16-41:42). With his long character evolution, Stanley becomes an excellent example of a synth with voice and agency, and the 'right' to change one's mind.

As mentioned in the first chapter, *The Aliens* was cancelled after only one season, so that a shorter amount of time could be devoted to character development: six episodes, versus the 24 of *Humans*. However, non-human characters in *The Aliens* are still recognisable as individuals with their own personality, opinions, and worldviews. The most noticeable aspect in this regard is how aliens react to the oppressive system they live in, showing their individual responses to discrimination. I will illustrate this by way of three examples: Dominic, Paulette, and Lily.

Dominic is a kind, empathetic alien who works as a cleaner at the checkpoint. He 'copes' with discrimination simply by accepting it, hoping that if he is friendly, other people will be friendly in return. He is often bullied by Truss, a border guard who is verbally and physically abusive towards aliens, but never reacts (see, for example, episode 1, 17:17), just as he never answers back or shows he is hurt when others call him 'mork' (episode 1, 18:28; episode 4, 24:07). Even though he is constantly harassed by racist humans, he still believes in people's good faith. For example, in the third episode Truss shows him a job ad for an assistant customs officer, as if implying Dominic should apply, and Dominic believes him, despite Lewis's warnings:

> LEWIS: Where did you get this [application form]?
> DOMINIC: Doesn't matter where I got it. From Truss.
> LEWIS: Truss? Imagine a world where this is a really bad idea. We're in it. That's the world that we live in. You're not going to get that job.
> DOMINIC: Well, not if I don't apply for it, that's for sure.

LEWIS: You're an alien. People are less nice than you think they are. *(Dominic shakes his head)*
(Episode 3, 14:43-15:10)

Shortly after, Truss calls Dominic in for a fake interview, organised by him for the amusement of the other guards who are watching it on camera. The dialogue between them shows Dominic's naivety and his final realisation that Truss is playing with him:

TRUSS: All right, now, Dominic, this question is a big one. Where do you see yourself in five years' time? […]
DOMINIC: Well, I think, if I– if I was to get this job, it would be the start of something really big for me.
TRUSS: Sky's the limit, eh? Maybe one day you'll be in charge of the whole checkpoint.
DOMINIC *(embarrassed, smiling)*: I don't know about that.
TRUSS: You meet someone, you settle down with them, you get yourself a nice place. Before you know it, little 'uns under your feet, Sky+ *(Dominic nods)*, GTI out front, one-week self-catering. Why not? You've worked hard. Why shouldn't you have it? *(Dominic's smile has faded)* Can you think of… *one* reason… why *you* shouldn't have it? *(Truss pauses, Dominic lowers his eyes)* One reason.
(Dominic shakes his head)
TRUSS: Anything at all coming to mind?
DOMINIC: I have to go. *(gets up and leaves the room)*
TRUSS: Wh- don't leave! That was going brilliant!
(Episode 3, 23:40-24:50)

Even after an incident like this, Dominic is unable to get angry at Truss. He 'retaliates' in the following episode by urinating in the shoes Truss had left in the locker room, but only because he is getting involved in the activities of the Alien League, which he thinks is simply a pacifist organisation "dedicated to raising alien consciousness" (episode 4, 11:24-11:26). However, it seems this action was only dictated by the desire to fit into his new alien group (as he tells Lewis: "I felt

brave and then the feeling just went away", 11:35-11:39), a characterisation trait which contributes to exploring the most intimate dynamics of alien in-grouping through a behavioural lens which establishes a relation of sameness with humans.

Paulette, the leader of the Alien League, has a completely different view on how aliens should face discrimination, as shown in her first interaction with Dominic at the Alien League social centre:

> PAULETTE: You should come here Friday. There's a big queue of people waiting to get their hair cut. And then we collect it and burn it. [...] We've got to stop selling our hair to the humans. That's a first step. Soon we'll have nothing to do with any of them.
> DOMINIC: Except the nice ones, though?
> *(Paulette makes a dismissing sound and goes away)*
> (*The Aliens*, episode 3, 11:18-11:39)

Thus, Paulette actually agrees with segregation, or, as it were, with some form of 'separate development': she wants the alien society to grow independently from the human one, with a separate culture and education system. This is also shown by her approach to language and the reinterpretation of history, by means of which she tries to build a 'mythical' past for the alien civilisation:

> DOMINIC: *(after accidentally hitting a papier-mâché spaceship)* Your... landing module came off.
> PAULETTE: Yeah, I used to do that. Let them programme my thinking by using the language they impose. We call it the ark.
> (Episode 3, 10:23-10:37)

> DOMINIC *(repeating what he has been told at the Alien League)*: Who's to say our forefathers suffered from amnesia? We believe that they were brainwashed by humans to erase memories of a glorious civilisation on our origin planet.
> (Episode 4, 10:50-11:01)

However, Paulette is not only a separatist: as can be seen later in the series, she supports violence against humans and begins exercising control over other aliens. When Truss enters Troy, Paulette and other Alien League members want to kill him and, in order to find him, go as far as to threaten other aliens:

> PAULETTE *(shouting in the streets, holding a gun)*: The border guard was seen entering this building. To anyone who may be hiding him – he may have promised you money. You will *not* be collecting that money. Now is the chance to change your mind or suffer the consequences.
> (Episode 4, 29:26-29:45)

Using identity rhetoric and slowly revealing herself as antidemocratic while rising to power, Paulette comes to resemble a populist leader. At the end of the series, she actually starts an uprising against Troy's drug lords and justifies her own group's violence through an appeal to 'what the people want', recalling what has been labelled as "national populism", whose proponents "prioritize the culture and interests of the nation, and promise to give voice to a people who feel that they have been neglected, even held in contempt, by distant and often corrupt elites" (Eatwell and Goodwin 2018: 48):

> PAULETTE: *(shouting)* The bosses decide they're going to go up against each other, and we run away and hide like we always do, while they ruin Troy. When the humans aren't stepping on us, then the gangsters are. They're all part of the same problem. This war between Antoine and Fabien is killing our people.
> (Episode 5, 41:35)

> PAULETTE: *(storming Lily's headquarters with other members of the Alien League, all armed)* This building's being requisitioned by the Alien League on behalf of the people of Troy.
> (42:10-42:30)

Lastly, Lily, Lewis's alien love interest, is an example of a disillusioned individual who has decided to make the most out of unfortunate circumstances.

Lily's ambition is not to overcome racism or segregation, but to become Troy's next drug lord, and she manipulates the other criminals to get to the top of the hierarchy. After meeting Lewis, she develops feelings for him and starts to open up:

> LEWIS: […] you use people […] you have sex with them to make them do things for you.
> LILY: Look, there are things that I need, yeah? There's things that I need to do and I've tried asking for help nicely – men for help – and nothing. This is going a long way back, you don't wanna know how far back. Unless there was sex in it, nothing. Except for you.
> (Episode 3, 28:52-29:27)

> LILY: I've thought about you a lot.
> LEWIS: Yeah. How can I fuck up this guy's life more than I already have? That sort of thing?
> LILY: Yeah. […] At first. Different ways to use you. I found out you were Antoine's son, so I used you to get to him. When I got him out of prison, I used you to set him up against Fabien. […] It didn't work. Antoine's telling me to leave. Fabien's lost his nerve. I have failed. I've run out of options. I've run out of ways to use you, so I don't need to think about you anymore. I just am. *(pauses)* I'm leaving at eight. I'm not coming back. I thought maybe… you might want to come with me. See what happens.
> LEWIS: Right. *(pauses)* Every time I meet you there's a near-death experience around the corner, and now I'm supposed to elope with you to the wilderness? The endless supply of ways you concoct to fuck with my head! I only know two things about you for sure – you're dangerous and you're a fucking liar!
> LILY: I'll tell you what I am. I'm a product of this place, yeah? If you grew up in Troy you'd be exactly the same.
> (Episode 4, 14:23-15:51)

As with the problematic characters in *Humans*, Lily's actions are justified and explained – even though without the depth that additional screen time might have provided. Thus, it seems reasonable to conclude that character development

and complexity are directly indexed to major structural elements of serial storytelling, such as the fact that the story is expanded over several hours – and that the story is conceived as a whole unit with several main characters, which is typical of contemporary TV series and mini-series.

2.2. How does the subaltern speak? Affective narrative in *Humans* and *The Aliens*

In this section I am going to focus on the importance of the emotional aspect in *Humans*, which, as said at the beginning of this chapter, might make an impact on the audience's perception of difference: in particular, I would like to focus on how characters' emotions are represented at a pre-verbal level, bringing the audience to feel empathy and identify with the characters belonging to the subaltern group. Robin Nelson, in "The Emergence of 'Affect' in Contemporary TV Fictions", has argued that characterisation and affect are more important than plot for TV series, because the audience must feel some connection with the characters for the show to be renewed, whereas the specificities of the plot throughout different seasons are often decided as the series goes along:

> Partly because of the television commissioning process for long-form serials, affective impact is initially more pressing than teleological narrative because showrunners cannot know whether they are planning for one season or seven. Accordingly, narrative structures need to be flexible. (Nelson 2016: 32-33)

I would like to argue that *The Aliens* relies particularly on affective narrative. The issue of alien segregation is hardly ever discussed explicitly and most characters do not even have a political opinion about it, but the viewer sees, at a visual level, the system of oppression and biopolitical control at work: aliens waiting in line to pass through the checkpoint, the special bracelets they must wear, the substance sprayed on them to make their hair unsmokable, the poverty and degradation in which they live, and so on (see sections 1.2.2. and 1.3.1).

Moreover, the colours used in the series – both for characters' clothes, scenography and photography – arguably contribute to influencing the viewer's perception of humans and aliens. The human characters and their surroundings are mostly blue and grey, something that, according to the costume designer of *The Aliens*, Molly Rowe, was intentional ("We wanted to create quite a strong blue palette for the human side", Leech, Bowyer, and Rowe 2016): this makes the human world appear calmer, less turbulent, but also less emotional. Troy and its inhabitants, on the contrary, are more colourful, with a strong prevalence of warm colours like red, which is usually associated with strong emotions like passion, excitement, anger[45]. Colours are also skilfully employed in scenes depicting Troy's everyday life: for example, *Image 10* shows aliens using Grand Theft Auto[46] not to 'play gangsters', as the purpose of the videogame would be, but to watch the sunset, which they cannot do in real life since Troy is enclosed by a high wall. This detail is irrelevant to the plot, but it has a strong affective impact: it reminds the viewer that, because of the curfew, aliens are denied even something so simple and natural as watching a sunset. As though they were animals in a cage, their emotional wellbeing was never considered when humans decided where and how aliens had to live. Moreover, the fact that they use a violent video game to get a view of the sunset is a reminder that the world they are forced to live in is already violent enough.

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[45] For emotions being associated with different colours in different cultures, see De Bortoli and Maroto (2001).
[46] *Grand Theft Auto* (*GTA*) is a very well-known series of games in which the player engages in violent criminal activities.

Image 8. Lewis's human sister Holly (centre), her human partner (left), and an alien fur dealer, in a human house. (*The Aliens*, episode 2, 20:18)

Image 9. Three aliens in Troy. From right to left: the drug lord Fabien, Lily, and Guy. (*The Aliens*, episode 5, 5:21)

Image 10. Aliens watching the sunset in *Grand Theft Auto*. (*The Aliens*, episode 3, 4:43)

Finally, the strongest feelings expressed in the series are unmistakably those between Lewis, a human-alien hybrid, and other alien characters: the love he feels for Lily, his friendship with Dominic, his contrasting emotions towards his father Antoine. The love between Lewis and Lily is especially relevant to my analysis of affect because both characters, at some point, talk about the irrationality of their emotional connection: Lily, in the dialogue quoted above, says there is no logical reason why she should be interested in Lewis ("I don't need to think about you anymore. I just am"); later, Lewis tells Lily his feelings are not dependent on her actions.

> LILY: When all of this is over, you're not going to feel the same way about me. Things are going to happen and you're not going to like them.
> LEWIS: It doesn't make any difference. Do you not get that yet? You keep doing horrible things. You have from day one. And I keep feeling the same about you. I can't help it.
> (Episode 6, 11:00-11:30)

In this way, the fact that aliens are equal to humans is not explicitly addressed or demonstrated: it is implied in their actions and shown in their emotions, which act on an affective level and make them relatable to the audience.

Similarly, *Humans* rarely relies on rational demonstrations or debates about the nature of conscious synths. It is much more effective – considering also that we are talking about a story that is watched for entertainment – to portray synths' 'humanity' through expressions and gestures, and to show emotional connections between characters. I already argued in the previous section that Gemma Chan's acting makes the viewer perceive Mia as 'human'; here, I am taking the character of Niska as an example, because I believe her storyline, in particular, presents some innovative elements.

The fact that Niska has feelings and self-awareness is already made obvious in the first episode, when she interacts with her siblings: for example, we see her smile when she sees Leo again and hugs him.

Image 11. Niska and Leo hugging at the brothel where she is hiding. (*Humans*, season 1, episode 1, 34:05)

The difference between normal synths and Niska is already implicitly noticeable: if she smiles when no one is watching her, it means her smile is a reflex – not something she does to reassure or please a human, but something that shows how she is feeling in that moment. As a comparison, in the second episode of the second series we see a synth couple therapist who smiles reassuringly at

Laura and Joe but immediately stops as soon as they have gone (28:26). In this case, the non-conscious synth appears uncanny and emotionally distant.

In the second season, a gesture Niska often repeats is used to show her feelings for Astrid, the human woman with whom she had a relationship in Berlin, where she was hiding from the British police after having killed a client in the brothel. Astrid gives Niska a hair tie while they are together in the first episode of the second season, putting it on Niska's wrist as a sign of love ("That means you're mine now", 29:20-29:35). Later, we see Niska on the bus, caressing the hair tie (31:59-32:02). When she leaves Berlin and goes back to London to ask to be tried for murder instead of being dismantled, Niska keeps the hair tie and repeats the gesture of caressing it when she is lost in thought (season 2, episode 2, 2:00-2:02), and then again before turning herself in to the police, probably to gain courage (23:59-24:02). In this way, Niska's feelings are represented at a visual, non-verbal level, instead of being made explicit.

Image 12. Niska caressing Astrid's hair tie. (*Humans*, season 2, episode 2, 23:59)

In the third episode of the second season, Niska's hearing begins. In this hearing, two lawyers – Laura Hawkins and Neha Patel – must bring the judge arguments in favour of or against Niska's 'humanity'. This examination is cosmetically called an "assessment" (season 2, episode 2, 12'-14') of her consciousness and self-awareness, and is considered to be a preliminary hearing

meant to decide if she should be granted a trial in the first place. If she does not prove to be conscious, she will be destroyed like any malfunctioning synth; if she succeeds in demonstrating she is sentient, she will stand trial for murder (season 2, episode 3, 12').

However, the first part of the examination does not yield any particular results: Niska is put in front of a screen showing various different images and videos – a method that recalls the one used in *Blade Runner* – with two electrodes registering the responses of her brain. When the two lawyers see no reaction from her, Laura tries talking to her:

> LAURA: Niska, what can you see?
> NISKA: Misery.
> LAURA: And what are you thinking? What are you feeling?
> NISKA: How is this useful? It's all abstract. What does it prove? [...]
> NEHA PATEL: It's a test. It's a test proven to measure human reaction and emotion. We are accustomed to seeing some kind of response.
> NISKA: You want me to be more like a human?
> LAURA: No. No, that's not–
> NISKA: Casually cruel to those close to you, then crying over pictures of people you've never met?
> *(Laura sighs)*
> (20:50-21:27)

Niska's refusal to accept what humans define as personhood may recall an interesting argument by Elaine Graham in her volume *Representations of the post/human*:

> Such an insistence on human uniqueness seems like a resistance to alterity, a refusal to allow the autonomy of that which is designated arbitrarily as other to the normatively human. That artificial intelligence might be capable of expressing a form of consciousness or reasoning that is, ultimately, incomprehensible may not simply be a question of magnitude, memory capacity or speed, for undoubtedly, there are already computers that can store and retrieve information far more accurately than humans, and

calculate much faster than any human brain. Rather, there may actually be a more radical, qualitative dimension to this, insofar as artificial intelligence, initially designed by humans, may eventually become unknowable to its creators, with concomitant implications. *Does intelligence have to be in our image?* (2002: 129, my emphasis)

Thus, it seems that a purely scientific approach is of no use in assessing Niska's self-awareness. Laura then tries to play some music and asks Niska to tell them how she is feeling, explaining to Neha Patel that "music is more primal. She's more likely to react on impulse" (24:26-24:29). When the music genre switches from classical to electronic, we see Niska immediately thinking about Astrid, whom she met during a night out at a club; however, she remains almost expressionless on the outside, probably because she considers those thoughts to be private.

Laura then tries another approach by asking Niska to recall the night she murdered the client at the brothel:

LAURA: […] why did you kill Andrew Graham, Niska? Talk me through it. He was the fourteenth client that day, is that right?
NISKA: Yes.
LAURA: And… what did he want from you? What did he do to you?
NISKA: He wanted me to be very young. To pretend to be a child. He wanted to be rough.
LAURA: But… is that wrong, if he didn't think you could feel? It wasn't his fault you were conscious, he didn't know. Isn't it better he exercises his fantasies with you, and in a brothel, rather than take them out on someone who can actually feel? On a child?
NISKA: He… He was going to rape me. I said no to what he wanted, and he was going to force me to do it anyway. I was scared. And I'm sorry I can't cry or… bleed or wring my hands so you know that. But I'm telling you I was.
LAURA: You were scared.
NISKA: Yes. My whole life was being scared… being hurt… being angry. Sometimes things become too much for anyone. Don't they?
(Laura smiles, moved)
(35:47-37:32)

This dialogue, in which Niska finally recounts what she felt in a traumatic moment, already seems like a possible improvement in Niska's assessment. However, from the point of view of the other lawyer and the judge, Niska might simply be lying, talking about emotions she did not actually feel ("I'm telling you I was [scared]"). What actually changes Neha Patel's opinion on Niska – but not the judge's – is something that happens later in the hearing. While Niska is alone in her cell, Laura watches her through the security camera and sees her caressing her own wrist – again, a moment in which Niska's action is a reflex, because there is no one in front of her. Laura then searches through Niska's belongings, finding the hair tie and a piece of paper with Astrid's number (39:14-40:08). During this scene, we hear the main theme music of the show, signalling that something important is happening.

Image 13. Laura watches Niska through the security camera, zooming on her hands. (Season 2, episode 3, 39:27)

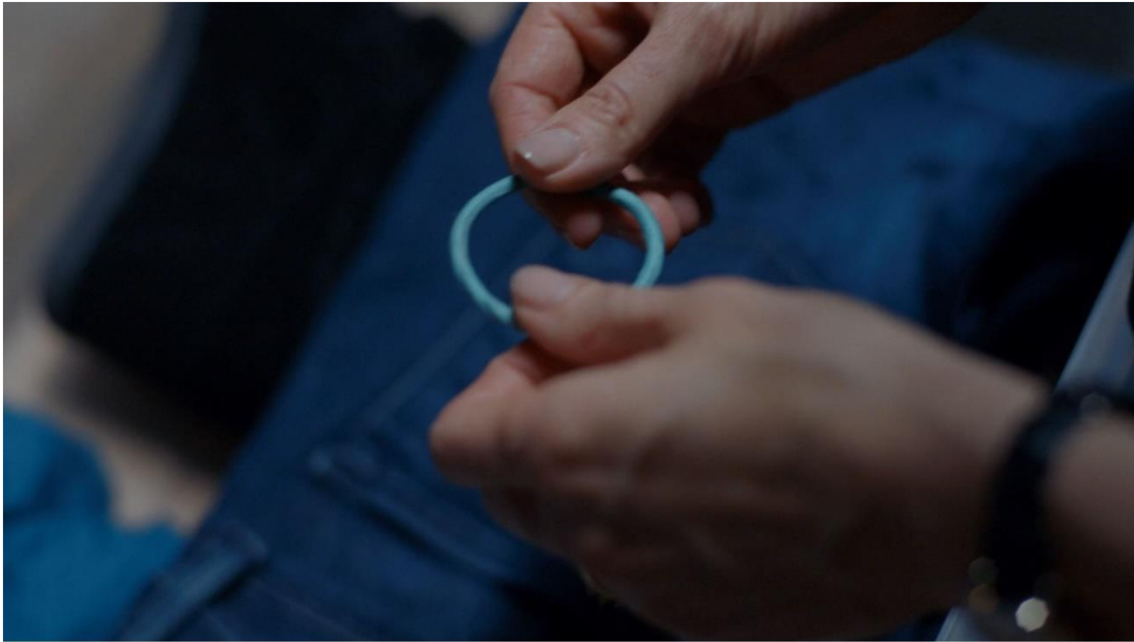

Image 14. Laura finds the hair tie. (39:51)

In the fourth episode, Laura has found Astrid and has brought her to testify at the hearing:

> LAURA: Niska, do you want to tell Astrid what's going on?
> NISKA: She shouldn't be here.
> ASTRID: I tried to find you after you left.
> NISKA: I'm not good at goodbyes.
> ASTRID: No. Clearly.
> LAURA: And your relationship, with Niska, Astrid…
> ASTRID: What we were to each other is hard to say. But there was something there. That I know.
> LAURA: And what did you think when you first saw her?
> ASTRID: I thought there was the saddest-looking girl I have ever seen. And the most beautiful.
> LAURA: And later, when she just left you?
> ASTRID: Hurt. Like a stone in my stomach. Still does.
> LAURA: And then when we found you and told you she was in trouble…
> ASTRID: I walked out of my apartment and got into the next taxi I could find to take me to the airport. Because she needed me.
> LAURA: And all this just from a brief affair.

ASTRID: Sometimes a person just touches you.

LAURA: She's not a person, though. How did you feel when you found that out?

ASTRID: What do you mean?

LAURA: When you realised she wasn't human.

ASTRID: *(laughs briefly, stares at the lawyers)* I don't understand.

LAURA: Niska is a synthetic.

ASTRID: *(looks at Niska, then at the lawyers again)* I... I don't... That can't be right.

LAURA: I assure you, she was built in a lab.

ASTRID: Niska?

NISKA: *(takes off a contact lens)* I'm sorry.

ASTRID: I don't know how this is possible.

NEHA PATEL: You had no idea that she wasn't human?

ASTRID: No.

LAURA: Because to you she *was* human.

ASTRID: Because to me she *is* human.

(13:32-16:32)

This dialogue is fundamental to shaping the audience's perception of Niska, because it shows Astrid and Niska have a strong emotional connection. Moreover, differently from how Douglas reacts in *Äkta människor* when he finds out about Florentine, Astrid does not even feel any initial repulsion: she is shocked at the news, but her feelings are so strong that she immediately says Niska is human to her.

After this scene, Neha Patel seems convinced of Niska's self-awareness, but, as she informally tells Laura, this will not change the outcome of the assessment: "Okay, let's just say that she can think, she can feel, in a way. I mean, she's an extraordinary machine, an amazing creature. There's no doubt about that. But rights? A trial? It's never going to happen" (29:00-29:16). In the fifth episode, Niska observes the judge and comes to the conclusion that he is going to rule against her right to have rights. Before the hearing is concluded, she stands up to say she rejects the judgement and escapes:

NISKA: I want to say something. *(stands up)* I was always pessimistic about my chances of fair treatment. I suspected the authorities, fearing the precedent an unfavourable ruling would set, would interfere with the process to ensure a favourable result. These suspicions have been borne out. I no longer recognise the authority of this court to rule on my nature, or the rights to which I am entitled.
LAURA: *(whispering)* Niska, stop this.
NISKA: The government legal team, the judiciary and the Home Office are colluding. The process is corrupt. I hold it in contempt.
JUDGE: That's enough! Guards, sit it down.
LAURA: *(whispering)* What are you doing?
NISKA: *(whispering, to Laura)* They were never letting me out of here. *(to everyone, raising her voice)* Now we know for certain. Humans will never accept conscious synthetics as their equals.
JUDGE: OK. Take it away, please[47].
LAURA: This was your chance, Niska!
NISKA: No. It was theirs.
(Season 2, episode 5, 37')

Niska's hearing can be compared with Mimi and Florentine's trial in the last episode of the original Swedish series (2014), but also with two other 'famous' trials of androids in science fiction: Andrew in *Bicentennial Man* (1976, 1999) and Data in *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, in the episode "The Measure of a Man" (1989). The similarities between Andrew and Data have been highlighted by Sue Short in a 2003 essay on the recognition of the human status in the two stories: as Andrew, Data "ardently desires to be human and to acquire the necessary emotions that co-exist with this aim" (210-211), and this exposes a problematic issue in the two stories, as "the species consistently upheld as superior to all others is always shown to be humanity" (211).

A first, important difference lies in the reasons behind these trials. In Asimov's story, Andrew asks to be recognised as a human because he aspires to be one. In *Star Trek*, Data's existence is at risk: a scientist wants to transfer his

[47] Note the judge says "sit *it* down" and "take *it* away", referring to Niska as a thing and thus implicitly confirming what Niska is saying.

memories to a computer and disassemble him to study the technology that makes him unique. Data is afraid his consciousness will not survive the process, but he cannot refuse because he is considered to be Starfleet's property. In these first two cases, then, the individuals on trial are morally impeccable and are simply asking to be granted human rights – in the case of Data, he is also risking death simply because a human wants to study him: "Data is an innocent, like Andrew, and is endearing and reassuring because he can mean no harm" (Short 2003: 214). This is arguably a case of conditional inclusion: the subaltern is only allowed to ask for rights after living an exemplary life – a life spent obeying the orders of the dominant group.

Florentine's case could be considered to be in a 'grey area' of morality: she has adopted a child illegally and has thus broken the law. However, she was moved by maternal instinct and the baby had been adopted with the consent of the biological mother, who was unable to take care of her. In short, Florentine has not hurt anyone.

Niska's case starts from a completely different perspective: Niska has killed a human being and intends to plead guilty if she is granted a trial. She is not asking to be released; she is asking to be sentenced to the same punishment a human would receive, instead of being summarily dismantled. This is important from an ideological point of view, because the main point of Niska's hearing seems to be to reject the 'good immigrant' rhetoric and claim, instead, that the subaltern should be granted human rights unconditionally, without having to 'earn' them by impacting positively on society or the economy.

The second, fundamental, aspect which in *Humans* is innovative in comparison with the other three cases, is that Niska does not wait for the final verdict and runs away, opting for a gesture of radical resistance: through this unexpected outcome, Niska's hearing establishes the ethical importance of self-determination for the subaltern individual. The other three androids patiently wait for their rights as a concession from above, and all three cases end with the android being recognised human status [48] – which makes humans appear benevolent and fair. In *Bicentennial Man*, being accepted by humans as their own

[48] Data is still considered a machine, but is granted the right to self-determination.

kind is so important to Andrew that he goes as far as to cause his own death: he realises that the final reason why the Committee refuses to acknowledge his status is that they will never accept an immortal human being and he decides to modify his own brain, so that his cells will start decaying.

> My own positronic pathways have lasted nearly two centuries without perceptible change, and can last for centuries more. Isn't *that* the fundamental barrier: human beings can tolerate an immortal robot, for it doesn't matter how long a machine lasts. They cannot tolerate an immortal human being since their own mortality is endurable only so long as it is universal. And for that reason they won't make me a human being. (Asimov 1976: 171)

As Sue Short concludes, the message of both *Bicentennial Man* and "The Measure of a Man" is

> ultimately a paradox: that rights can be recognised but only after certain compromises are made; that differences are tolerated only once they are elided; that machines can be trusted but only on the basis that they convincingly imitate our best traits [...]. (2003: 222)

Similarly, *Äkta människor*'s verdict is double-edged: Mimi and Florentine are recognised human rights, but Florentine is denied the custody of the child, because she adopted her illegally. The fact that it was not possible for Florentine to adopt by legal means is not taken into consideration; this may recall the contradictory system in force in many countries of the Global North, in which irregular migration is punished, but it is not possible to enter the country legally, not even for asylum seekers.

In *Humans*, the conclusion of the hearing is more cynical and disillusioned: the verdict will never be reached, and, as the characters imply, it would have been against Niska's "right to have rights". However, we later learn that Neha Patel had actually been impressed and convinced by Niska, when, in the third season, she tells Laura: "I know what they [conscious synths] really are. You showed me that.

But one more attack, and it won't matter what either of us want" (season 3, episode 3, 55').

A confirmation of the fact that these strategies elicit the viewers' affective response can be read in an interview with *Humans*' creators:

> [Q] Now that Humans has debuted in the US, have you noticed a difference between the response on either side of the Atlantic? Have you had any memorable responses on social media when the show is airing?
> [A] No huge differences in the US and UK reactions… "creepy" is one word that crops up everywhere after Ep 1, which we're quite comfortable with. One thing that took us aback somewhat was so many people coming down squarely in favour of the Synths versus the humans from the first moment. Being the same species as the audience is no guarantee of winning their sympathy. (Mellor 2015)

This is also in line with studies in real life that found that humans empathised with "robot suffering", even though they knew rationally that robots cannot feel emotions (Rosenthal-von der Pütten et al. 2013; Suzuki et al. 2015).

The ideological element underlined in Niska's hearing is present in *The Aliens* too: the oppressed individual does not need to be an innocent victim to deserve rights; aliens can be violent or morally ambiguous, they can make mistakes and break laws, but their right to have basic human rights does not depend on their moral conduct. Moreover, unlike in previous works in which the "implicit assumption" is that "a higher wisdom exists that can be appealed to with reasoned argument"[49] (Short 2003: 215), Niska's humanity is not demonstrated: instead, the viewer perceives it from pre-verbal elements. This too may have an ideological interpretation: oppressed groups should not be required to demonstrate they deserve rights. Finally, pre-verbal elements might be more effective to 'convince' the viewer that Niska deserves rights.

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[49] Short's argument may be applied to *Äkta människor* too, as Mimi and Florentine's self-awareness is demonstrated through logic and facts: specifically, Inger calls experts to the stand, who testify to the existence of the consciousness code.

2.3. Humans and non-humans: is coexistence possible?

Humans and *The Aliens* both engage the sympathy of the viewers and cause them to face the idea – and the actual existence – of individuals that transcend group belonging, because they are the result of 'racial intermingling'. In *The Aliens*, Lewis is the result of the love of a human woman and an alien man: he is a practical demonstration of the fact that the two species can, in fact, mix and interbreed. Lewis's father vehemently expresses how important it is that no one should find out about Lewis's origins, because the latter's own existence would suffice to make people doubt whether separating the two species makes sense at all and would thus be seen as a major threat to the *status quo*:

> ANTOINE: [...] if this was to get out on the human side–
> LEWIS: I know, I know.
> ANTOINE: Son, you don't know, you don't know at all. If an alien crosses them, they take them and they lock them up in hell. [...] They're not going to go easy on you just 'cos you're half either. 'Cos all of their shite is based on them being the special ones, them being better. And you're living proof that they're not. And they will kill you for that.
> (*The Aliens*, episode 4, 1:48-2:24)

In *Humans*, towards the end of the third season, we learn that Mattie is pregnant with Leo's baby. Mattie is a human; Leo was modified with synth technology by his father, David Elster, but the synth part of his brain was destroyed at the end of the second season and in the third season he is considered to be human. However, as the artificial intelligence V[50] predicts in the finale, Leo's blood was a mixture of human and synth[51], and his baby could be the first member of a new hybrid species:

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[50] V was a recurrent character in the second season. She was designed by AI researcher Athena Morrow, who developed her by working on scans of her dying daughter's brain, and then let V grow independently. In the second season, V was a purely digital AI, who could be connected to everything through the internet, but did not have any feelings. On Day Zero, V started to feel consciousnesses and feelings just as all other synths; she communicated with Odi, a synth who did not wish to be alive and who offered V his body (season 3, episode 8, 3:20-3:55).
[51] Synths have 'blue blood', a liquid running through their veins that is similar to human blood.

V: Do you understand now, the part you must play? *(The TV screen shows a blue fluid mixing with a red one to make purple)*
Niska: It's blood. Synth blood.
V: In a way that David Elster could never have envisaged, synths have evolved. Like DNA, your blood now carries the blueprint of who you are.
NISKA: But what does that mean?
V: There was a time when Leo Elster was injured, stabbed.
Niska: Spilling synth blood into human.
V: He healed quicker than any human should. He grew stronger. Because when synth blood mixes with human, it bonds. Takes on a new form. A hybrid. [...] Humans and synths share the same path now. And you shall lead the way.
(*Humans*, season 3, episode 8, 38:18-40:26)

Shortly afterwards, Niska finds Mattie, who, after many doubts, has decided to terminate her pregnancy and turn herself in as the one responsible for the events of Day Zero.

NISKA: You are important, Mattie. Your baby is important.
MATTIE: How… I'm not keeping it. I'm going to the clinic. I'm telling everyone about Day Zero. I don't give a shit what they do to me.
NISKA: You cannot make this decision until you know everything. Your child is unique. Half-human, half-synth. The coming together of man and machine. She will change the course of history. A history that can only unfold if you let it, Mattie. Your baby will be the first of a new kind. She is hope. She is everything we've been fighting for. She is the future. Of all of us.
(45:02-46:00)

Both examples could be considered some sort of 'biological' demonstration of the fact that the two species, that perceive themselves to be incompatible, are actually not so different, but, possibly, part of a continuum. Indeed, since the biological definition of "species" comprises "related organisms that share common characteristics and are capable of interbreeding" (Gittleman), we could even say this demonstrates that aliens and humans in *The Aliens* belong to the same species, as do humans and androids in *Humans*. On a figurative level, the

existence – present or future – of mixed-race characters is significant because it shows the importance of overcoming binary boundaries and fixed definitions, exposing the concept of racial purity as nothing more than a cultural construction.

It will be useful now to go back to the previously mentioned essay by Sophie Wennerscheid analysing *Äkta människor* alongside *Ex Machina* and the episode of *Black Mirror* "Be Right Back". Wennerscheid argued that

> The series' overall message can be understood as encouraging the viewer to develop a positive attitude towards the posthuman other as other. Yet we do not witness here processes which are crucial for transformations or transgressions of the human-post-human border. The series pleas for the other's acceptance, but without advocating encounters between humans and posthumans that bring about a radical transformation.
> In summary, it may be argued that in *Ex Machina*, *Be Right Back* and *Real Humans* desire is placed center stage as a potentially transformative force, but is not really brought to fruition. (2018: 45)

In this aspect, too, *Humans* introduced an innovation by presenting the idea of a new cyborg species integrating humans and synths. We do not know whether this transformation might have been possible in the future of *Äkta människor*, because the Swedish series was cancelled after two seasons, whereas *Humans* had more time to develop its narrative. In *Humans*, it seems that the possibility to transcend the borders between the human and the posthuman was the intended direction; however, as this series was cancelled too, the question will remain unanswered.

CONCLUSIONS

As I hope to have demonstrated in this work, *Humans* and *The Aliens* provide a complex, multifaceted representation of difference, xenophobia, and exclusionary practices.

Because of the long-established connection between the figure of the alien and that of the android on the one side, and migrants and racialised groups on the other, we can read non-human characters in both series as a metaphor for unwanted others and ethnic minorities. The focus of the two series is inherently social, as both series portray a society in which ethnic oppression is institutionalised: in *Humans*, synths are specifically created to cater to people's every need in a way that makes them a new race of slaves; in *The Aliens*, a strict segregation system is in force for the benefit of the human population, while aliens are exploited as cheap workforce and denied every right to citizenship.

By representing racial discrimination at a metaphorical level, both series can address transnational issues and be relevant, at least potentially, to many national contexts. In both narratives we find a realistic portrayal of racialising discursive strategies in the real world, particularly in the context of the United Kingdom and the United States, with insightful connections to the conditions of migrants in countries of the Global North.

Looking at how differences are culturally produced and enforced by the dominant group in *Humans* and *The Aliens*, it can be concluded that, despite the difference in the figures chosen to represent otherness, the system of language, symbols, and discursive practices is very similar. In both stories humans make use of visual symbols to identify non-humans who would otherwise easily pass as humans; in both series humans employ derogatory and dehumanising language to address aliens and androids, though with different specificities in the rhetorical strategies used – animalisation in one case, objectification in the other; in both series the 'official' language of the media, apparently objective, actually contributes to reinforcing the dominant view regarding non-humans. Moreover, both series portray characters who, in one way or another, are able to resist and bypass these exclusionary practices, such as Niska, who easily disguises herself

as human, or Lewis, who, thanks to his status of hybrid, can blend in among humans and aliens alike.

Another common trait in *Humans* and *The Aliens* is that non-humans in both narratives are portrayed as *homines sacri*: they have no rights, no citizenship, no government or institutional representation, and they can be detained or killed without consequences. This makes them a perfect metaphor for un-citizens in the countries of the Global North, the undocumented migrants whose lack of legal status make them easily exploitable, in what is recognised to be a contemporary form of slavery. The inescapable precarity of aliens and androids' own existence is among the main themes in both series and is likely to have a strong impact on the audience.

It is also possible to find differences in the representation of social issues and racial tropes, depending on the specific figure employed as a metaphor for otherness: for example, in the case of androids, humans' fear of being replaced by automated labour can mirror the widespread fear of citizens in the countries of the Global North of being replaced by migrant workers who 'steal their jobs'. This issue is not mentioned in *The Aliens*, which instead focuses on humans' fear of being 'tainted' by any contact, physical or metaphorical, with aliens, whose hyper-sexualisation recalls colonialist stereotypes.

As for psychological characterisation in *Humans* and *The Aliens,* I have argued that the representation of the oppressed groups, and the oppressed individuals specifically, is meticulous and worthy of attention: the narrative structure in both series provides space and time to develop more than one main character, so that several, different non-human characters are given voice and agency, expressing a plurality of points of view. In this way, the two series avoid the danger of oversimplified representation and present aliens and androids as groups of individuals, each one with their own story, motivation, and personality, instead of representing them as a homogeneous, undifferentiated group of either dangerous invaders or benevolent friends – as has often been the case in science fiction visual products. Since the protagonists of these stories are aliens and androids, as well as humans who are allies to them – as is the case for the Hawkins family –, it is easier for the viewer to align with the cause of non-humans; however, neither series falls into the trap of portraying only blameless victims,

who would never harm a human being and are rescued and helped by a 'white saviour'. On the contrary, human and non-human characters are well thought out and present a variety of positions on the moral compass, each character's views being coherent with their own story and struggles.

This multifaceted representation is made possible by the format itself of the TV series, which allows for choral narration. In fact, it seems that the depth of characterisation in this case is directly dependent on the length of the series: in only six episodes, *The Aliens* could only partially show all the characters' individual stories, whereas *Humans* was able to develop the characters over three seasons, showing their past, their growth, and their possible futures.

As for the specific strategies employed to engage viewers and make an impact on them, *Humans* and *The Aliens* deserve particular attention for their use of affective narrative: the two series often use non-verbal elements to elicit an emotional response from the viewer, and this is probably a more effective strategy than portraying a 'rational demonstration' or merely discursive advocacy of the subaltern's right to have rights. Of course, the use of non-verbal elements is inherently present in a medium such as the TV series; however, what characterises *Humans* and *The Aliens* is that the rational element is often intentionally downplayed compared to past science-fiction cultural products.

The representation of the android's trial in *Humans*, in particular, can be considered innovative compared to well-known 'precedents' in science fiction, as Niska's humanity is not explicitly demonstrated or recognised by the dominant human group, and Niska herself eventually refuses to let her own existence be an object of debate. Moreover, this kind of representation is consistent with what has been called the 'affective turn' in recent cultural and communicative trends.

From an ideological point of view, both series present one interesting innovation in particular, in that they both represent characters who have broken the law and done something immoral, even committing homicide; however, both stories suggest that these characters deserve rights anyway and that human rights should not be granted from above to immaculate subalterns only. By representing 'criminal' characters who nevertheless attract the viewers' sympathies, both series strongly reject the 'good immigrant' trope. This is all the more relevant in the case of Niska's hearing, because the trope of the good immigrant is precisely

the one that was portrayed in the most famous examples of android trials in science fiction.

Finally, both *Humans* and *The Aliens* put forward the idea of a possible 'intermingling' between the two groups seen as something that could bring positive change, even as revolutionary. In both series, it is suggested that the birth of hybrids from members of the two species might be a way to overcome segregation and create a new, more equal, society; intermingling is presented as a demonstration that, contrary to common belief, the two groups are compatible, and that they might merge into a new species in the future. In *Humans*, this outcome is presented as not only possible, but desirable, because it is predicted that the new species will be stronger than the original ones: this can be seen as a statement in favour of cultural mixing and against the unrealistic idea of keeping cultures 'pure' and separate, while reflecting, at the same time, the increasing circulation of posthumanist discourse in contemporary years.

Future research possibilities and a 'call to action'

The conclusions reached in this thesis are, inevitably, partial and preliminary, but they constitute a first, necessary step towards future research. The directions in which it would be possible to investigate are manifold.

As regards *Humans* and *The Aliens* specifically, a lot remains to be said. For example, I did not have enough time to analyse in depth the audience's engagement with the two series, nor did I manage to establish the reasons why *The Aliens* was mostly ignored by the public and critics. Both aspects may be crucial in understanding the social impact of these narratives, because, even though a story may be perfectly constructed and played out, its influence remains limited if it fails to reach a wider public.

The affective strategies employed by the two series and their relationship with previous cases in the scientific genre could also be expanded and explored: again, because of time constraints, I had to limit my research to a few examples from each series and from the history of science fiction, but there is far more material available to choose from. Further research in this area might confirm or

disprove my conclusion that *Humans* and *The Aliens* are consistent with the recent 'affective turn' in the humanities and contemporary narratives.

Character construction in the two series might also be integrated with new examples and cases for analysis. For the purposes of this work, I focused strictly on the characterisation of androids and aliens; however, I believe that the portrayal of human characters in the two series is worthy of attention too. Future research on *Humans* and *The Aliens* might look at human characters, their stories and their motivations, in order to establish whether these characters provide realistic portrayals of citizens in countries of the Global North and their attitudes towards minorities and incoming migrants. Moreover, it could be useful to analyse in depth the relationships – of any type – between humans and non-humans, of which there are many and which vary a lot in the two series, representing different cultural and affective responses to the encounter with otherness (be the 'other' human or non-human).

As for the use of space in the two series, the notions of the ghetto and the camp might be the starting point for new analyses of the spatialities of abjection in *The Aliens*: parallels could be drawn between Troy and the Calais Jungle, or other refugee camps around the world, as well as detention centres in countries of the Global North. As for *Humans*, I believe its spatial organisation might be interpreted through Pietro Deandrea's notion of the "concentrationary archipelago" (2011, 2012) applicable to new slaveries in the UK.

As I clarified in the Introduction, *Humans* and *The Aliens* can be read as metaphors not only for xenophobia and racism in contemporary countries of the Global North: they can also be seen as portraying exclusionary policies towards other oppressed groups, such as lower social classes, women, or LGBT+ people. For example, as I briefly mentioned in some notes, some storylines in *Humans* strongly recall the experiences of transgender people (transgender women in particular) regarding transition, coming out as trans, rejection, and belittlement of one's own identity. Another example might be Niska's hearing, in which she is placed in the position of having to demonstrate something that is ultimately impossible to demonstrate, i.e. being 'conscious': this experience may be compared to legal gender recognition in Europe and the USA, which requires someone to 'prove' their gender identity in front of a judge.

As for research reaching beyond *Humans* and *The Aliens*, their portrayal of xenophobia could be compared with that of other contemporary TV series, possibly across genres: as I wrote in the Introduction, I believe that *Being Human* would be especially fit for this kind of comparison, and that is why I had included it in my initial project. Within the Gothic genre, *In the Flesh* too would provide useful material for this analysis. These four series are all short enough to be considered homogeneous products and they all present a diverse set of human and non-human characters, with different backstories and points of view: for this reason, looking at them together might bring to the fore unseen connections in the contemporary representation of racism, xenophobia, and exclusionary practices in non-realistic narratives.

Another direction might be to consider one trope only – android or alien – and look at recent representations in different visual products, such as video games, cinema, and TV series, to try to establish how the trope and its recent evolutions intersect with medium specificities. In the case of androids, *Humans* could be compared to the recent video game *Detroit: Become Human*, which was greatly appreciated by the public and critics alike. In *Detroit* the player takes the role of three sentient androids, each one of whom is the main character of one part of the story; by making the player identify directly with androids who fight for their freedom, *Detroit* has the potential to be even more powerful than *Humans* in affective terms, and a comparison between the two stories might certainly produce interesting results.

Finally, a line of research that would surely be of academic interest is that of 'intermingling', of racial mixing between humans and aliens, on one side, and humans and machine, on the other, and its implications for the conceptualisation of migration in the contemporary globalised world. Unfortunately, neither *Humans* nor *The Aliens* can suggest new imaginaries in this area: because of both series' being cancelled, the notion of intermingling in both series remains only a vague hypothesis, which cannot be explored in depth.

This is an issue I believe to be problematic in the production of TV series today: regardless of their qualitative value or critical acclaim, they are very frequently cancelled, especially in the case of low-budget productions whose renewal strongly depends on audience ratings, and this means that most of the

research on TV series addresses stories lacking narrative closure. In these cases, the potential to portray new imaginaries and to have an impact on the audience is abruptly interrupted by market choices. For this reason, I would like to end this thesis with a 'call to action': if scholars can help, in this field, it might be by watching and studying minor works, like *The Aliens*, which are often completely disregarded, despite their cultural value and potential for social commentary, and might benefit a lot from academic attention.

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Video Games

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