Neill Blomkamp’s *District 9* offers an example from science fiction for thinking about the status of another group who find themselves in precarious relation to the community and its protections: refugees. The film portrays an alien population whose ship has arrived in a damaged and weakened state to hover above Johannesburg, South Africa, in 1982. Blomkamp makes use of these science-fiction aliens to comment on the country’s apartheid past and to look forward to the current problems of refugees in the film’s 2010 setting. While not exactly regarded as animals, the aliens of *District 9*, often referred to as “prawns,” are marked as a different, non-human species who are similarly excluded by this categorization from the protections of the human community. It is not surprising in this regard, then, that the film also invokes the past situation for the “coloureds” of District 6 and incidents such as the demolition of Sophiatown in South Africa’s history of apartheid, as well as other human atrocities from history and the present exclusions that humans and animals experience. The lives of those who find themselves outside the human community and its protections are therefore made more disposable to its security, wealth, and well-being.

The film succeeds in touching upon these specific human atrocities through its portrayal of a non-human species in part because of the nature of biopolitics. It replaces the signs used to manage space during apartheid—“whites only” and “non-whites”—with signs marking off businesses and spaces as for “humans” and “non-humans” to show the ways in which this logic draws on categories of race and species. Like the biopolitical questions raised in Chap. 5 about the arrival of foreign humans and
non-humans in the local community portrayed in Zakes Mda’s *The Heart of Redness*, Blomkamp’s film offers a reflection on the hospitality, or denial of hospitality, that these aliens experience from the larger community of Johannesburg. It nicely brings together many of the biopolitical issues raised in this study about spatial and population management, the administration of life and death, the commodification of life, scientific testing on bodies, and, of course, the role of desire in all of this.

Early on in *District 9*, a man (presumably a resident of Johannesburg) is being interviewed about the presence of the aliens there and comments: “If they were from another country, we might understand, but they are not even from this planet at all.” As an excuse for his lack of openness to the aliens, this comment demonstrates what Derrida might call a “conditional hospitality” (25) in that it imposes the condition on the hospitality being offered that the other must come from another country. While other interviewees offer far more violent responses in suggesting that the aliens “must go” or that they should be killed with a specially designed virus through biological warfare, this first seemingly less innocuous statement performs a failed hospitality that is in fact in line with these more extreme views. That is, by offering hospitality only on the condition that the foreigner is from a nation-state, the commenter establishes a boundary in advance where the aliens exist in what Agamben calls a “zone of exception” (98) outside of the human community of Johannesburg, although still inside the city in a spatial sense and therefore under its legal jurisdiction. Agamben describes this exception as “a limit zone between life and death, inside and outside, in which they [people in the camp] were no longer anything but bare life” (91). Despite early efforts of humanitarian aid for the aliens, the area initially chosen to help and feed the malnourished aliens becomes the “militarized” and fenced-in zone of *District 9*, as the sociologist in the film, Sarah Livingstone, reports. Writing about post-colonial asylum-seekers, David Farrier explains the situation which occurs at the point of contact between the state and the stranger:

> Sovereign power is invested in keeping hospitality conditional, and thus the moment of the stranger’s arrival at the border becomes a contest between the stranger’s right to access, and the host’s right to deny it, exercised as Derrida points out, by filtering, choosing, and thus by excluding and doing violence. (167)
The aliens experience this violence as they occupy this space of “bare life,” being denied entry into the community as subjects of rights.²

In *Of Hospitality*, Derrida suggests a more ethical openness to the foreigner in an “unlimited hospitality.” In this concept he specifically mentions non-humans as included in those to which we must be hospitable for a true hospitality: “Let us say yes to who or what turns up … whether or not the new arrival is the citizen of another country, a human, animal, or divine creature, a living or dead thing, male or female” (77). Saying yes “to who or what turns up” then offers a much more inclusive hospitality, one not based on the category of the human and its exclusivity.³ Saying yes to all-comers motivates the ethics of an unconditional hospitality rather than the conditional statement expressed in the first commenter’s remark, which offers a hospitality only to those from other countries, those whose rights are (or were at some point) granted to them as subjects of other nation-states. In *Before the Law*, Cary Wolfe summarizes Hannah Arendt’s critique of the notion of universal rights that points to this problem of the necessity of a nation-state for the guarantee of rights:

Arendt brilliantly argues in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* that the idea of ‘universal human rights’ is dubious because it attempts to ground the standing of the subject of rights in the mere biological designation of the human being as *Homo sapiens*, whereas rights themselves are always a product of membership in a political community. (6–7)

Thus the commenter’s position defines the limits of hospitality as a contract between subjects of rights; therefore aliens from another planet, presumably without a nation-state recognized by humans, are excluded from being subjects of rights and are not extended the protections of the community. This conditional hospitality also exercises the mastery of colonialism, as Farrier argues, in explaining the distinction between a foreigner from another country and an “absolute other”:

“Foreigner” is thus equated with legitimacy, rights, and (limited) access. By contrast, the absolute other is unknown and anonymous, and thus the theoretical recipient of a hospitality that does not ask for reciprocity or deference of any sort. Here asylum issues and postcolonial issues intersect: the “coloniality” of conditional hospitality perpetuates the colonial structure—of the host/master—in the home; absolute hospitality confounds the host’s sovereign right to define the stranger, conferring instead an “unquestioning welcome”. (167)
Unconditional hospitality, by contrast, offers a more radical potential for inclusion into the community and its protections to those persons or things who find themselves outside of the protections of nation-states. This unconditional hospitality figures as an openness to the other that does not seek to automatically make that other fully present to knowledge through mastery, but instead allows them to remain, in part, different. As Wolfe explains, this unconditional hospitality is an impossibility in practice (92) because it would likely kill the community in allowing all life to thrive equally (even deadly viruses, etc.) and prevent ethical action in its infinite openness. Nonetheless, he argues, it should still motivate possible, concrete actions.

**The Space of the Camp and the Law**

The failed hospitality towards the aliens in the film is motivated in part by the citizens’ relationships to national space. As argued in Chap. 2, biopolitics takes on a spatial dimension in its racist and speciesist forms as populations are managed in tightly patrolled areas to prevent things such as miscegenation or “contamination” and other threats—which stem from desire, materiality, and population—to the ethnocentric state’s aspirations of biological purity and its biopower. Agamben also identifies the concerns with space in biopolitical thought in his discussion of “the camp” and the relationship between land, birth, and nationalism. Like the discomfort felt by characters in *Disgrace* when the presence of others reaches a threshold of “too many,” the citizens of Johannesburg are portrayed in Blomkamp’s film as attempting to restore the homeliness of their city by removing the aliens. Violent riots and statements against the aliens—the news headline reads: “non-humans violently evicted from townships”—confirm that these citizens occupy a privileged position in relation to the land as subjects of right. As “managers of national space” (Hage) they take it upon themselves and call on their government to remove these alien others from the city and from close proximity to it, viewing the aliens as objects to be managed without rights of their own. This failure in hospitality results in the government’s hiring of Multi-National United (MNU) to fulfill its plan, headed by the film’s white male protagonist, Wikus Van De Merwe, to relocate the aliens to District 10 much further away from the city. This scene demonstrates the arbitrary nature of the legal status of the aliens as the state grants or denies them rights as it sees fit or as it best benefits the state.
How does the space provided for the aliens by humanitarian aid organizations so quickly turn into a militarized camp? Agamben cites two examples as the possible first camps, and notably one of these is South African: “Historians debate whether the first camps to appear were the campos de concentraciones created by the Spanish in Cuba in 1896 to suppress the popular insurrection of the colony, or the ‘concentration camps’ into which the English herded the Boers toward the start of the century” (Agamben 95). However, Achille Mbembe rightly argues that the colonies were the first states of exception in citing Arendt’s observation of the treatment of “savages” as a precursor to that of Jews in the Second World War, and in remarking that “in most instances, the selection of races, the prohibition of mixed marriages, forced sterilization, even the extermination of vanquished people are to find their first testing ground in the colonial world. Here we see the first syntheses between massacre and bureaucracy, that incarnation of Western rationality” (22–3). Thus South Africa has a rather long history of the camp, and in District 9 Blomkamp suggests that this violent treatment in marking others as bare life will continue in the arrival of the aliens and their exclusion from the community. In his book about hospitality in J.M. Coetzee’s fiction, Mike Marais says something similar when he argues of Disgrace that “[w]hile apartheid may have ended, Coetzee’s point seems to be, the history of the ostensibly new South African community still erects itself in the old manner: i.e. through a logic of collective discrimination which is, by definition, hostile to otherness, to singularity” (224). The exclusions of the aliens from the “human” community in District 9 then perpetuates a legacy that has its origins in colonialism, and, as I’ll discuss later, in the traditional exclusion of animals from many human cultures.

Describing the space of the camp, David Farrier is right when, using terms from Deleuze and Guattari, he says that “the interstices available to and inhabited by the asylum seeker differ from that described by postcolonial studies as a ‘smooth space’ of productivity and difference—rather, it is a space of detention and exclusion through inclusion, striated by razor wire and legislated segregation” (7). The aliens of District 9 have an “improper” relation to the space where they come to dwell in Johannesburg as they don’t fit the traditional state logic of being naturalized citizens in being born on the land. Wikus explains to the MNU agents that “we have to say this is our land, please will you go,” demonstrating humans’ rights over a space which aliens occupy without being subjects of rights. Agamben
explains this assumption about the relationship between birth and sovereignty that underpins nationalism:

If refugees ... represent such a disquieting element in the order of the modern nation-state, this is above all because by breaking the continuity between man and citizen, nativity and nationality, they put the originary fiction of modern sovereignty in crisis. Bringing to light the difference between birth and nation, the refugee causes the secret presupposition of the political domain—bare life—to appear for an instant within that domain. In this sense, the refugee is truly “the man of rights,” as Arendt suggests, the first and only real appearance of rights outside the fiction of the citizen that always covers them over. (Agamben 77)

By highlighting this “bare life” which politics often elides—the fact that we all are born and can become again bare life—the aliens’ presence necessitates a government decision. As Cary Wolfe puts it, “to live under biopolitics is to live in a situation in which we are all always already (potential) ‘animals’ before the law” (Before the Law 10). The state seeks to prevent all unauthorized or deterritorialized flows and occupations of space. As such, it includes the aliens in its territory only through excluding them from the realm of rights afforded its naturalized citizens. The laws of the state can only include aliens by outlawing them, making them illegal. The aliens of District 9 are included in this space of exclusion as they—as an unexpected and unsanctioned flow—are assimilated into the space of Johannesburg without being allowed in the realm of subjects of right and without being allowed to move beyond the strict confines of the camp (Fig. 6.1).

The aliens’ lack of legal standing in the film is revealed in the scenes where MNU begins to forcefully evict them from the shacks they’ve constructed in District 9 to the tents set up by the government 200 km away from Johannesburg in District 10. Grey Bradnam, a correspondent in the film, comments in an interview that the 24-hour notice and protocol for eviction are a legal “whitewashing.” Hired by the government, MNU operates with impunity as it manages the aliens’ population and occupation of space in District 9. As the plan to evict the aliens is made public, the TV news reports that MNU should follow all UIO regulations, and human rights groups will be watching because they “suspect abuses might occur.” However, the temporary space of D9, which was an exception, has become normalized as “the camp” and, as Agamben says of the camp, “every question concerning the legality or illegality of what happened there simply makes no sense” (97).
Occupying a status outside the realm of the subject of rights, the law and its protections do not apply to the space or people of the camp according to the state’s logic of exclusionary inclusion. As “bare life,” the aliens are more vulnerable outside the protections of the state and therefore they occupy a space where it is acceptable to manage them as objects rather than subjects with rights, and even to kill them under the law in a “non-criminal putting to death.”

Throughout the film, MNU workers, as hired security for the government, thwart the law to complete their eviction mission. The role of capital in this is notable as well since MNU receives payment from the government for executing the mass eviction and thus its actions are motivated by profit. The aliens become disposable then not only because of what Derrida and Wolfe might refer to as the “autoimmune disorder” (“After Animality” 184) of the South African community in refusing hospitality to foreigners but also because of MNU’s financial interest in managing the alien population. The MNU’s and the Nigerian gangsters’ stockpiles of alien weaponry and testing on aliens further confirm the capitalist logic of surplus value extraction that adds to the disposability of the aliens. In essence, the government not only fails to extend hospitality to the aliens as

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Fig. 6.1  Thomas, Wikus, and Fundiswa serving an eviction notice on an alien. *District 9.* Tri-Star, 2009. [http://www.imdb.com/media/rm820873472/tt1136608?ref_=ttmi_mi_all_sf_3#](http://www.imdb.com/media/rm820873472/tt1136608?ref_=ttmi_mi_all_sf_3#)
they keep them separate from the rest of society in District 9 and approve their eviction to District 10 but also fails to ensure any other protections for the aliens, leaving it up to MNU, a corporation, to follow the law and to deal with the aliens unregulated. This situation recalls Pickover’s discussion of South African industries that deal with animals, such as factory farming, which are responsible for following the laws written to protect animals or reduce animal suffering on their own with little or no government oversight (146–7). Already marked as bare life, the aliens become disposable not only to an ideal of a homely nation but also to the ambitions of a profit-seeking multinational corporation, which in capitalist fashion will sacrifice the safety and lives of others for a larger profit margin.

In serving eviction notices, MNU is shown disregarding and manipulating the law for its own ends. For example, one alien hits the eviction papers clearly as a violent refusal when he is asked to sign them as a confirmation that they have been received. In response, Wikus says to another worker, and perhaps to the documentary camera, that the alien has made his mark in touching the paper and that it “counts as a scroll” or signature. Importantly here, the role of the paper serves to administer the law to the aliens who, as stateless refugees, are paperless. The refusal to sign evokes Melville’s “Bartleby the Scrivener,” and that character’s notorious refusals in the “I would prefer not to,” a text that David Farrier reads in Postcolonial Asylum. After noting Derrida’s observation that paper determines legal subjectivity, Farrier argues that “Bartleby unsettles paper’s legitimizing function” (131) through the manner in which he performs his work as scrivener. More important than this literary intertextuality, however, the scene also evokes historical events in South Africa—namely, the anti-apartheid activists’ act of burning pass books to undermine the authority of the law—the Pass Laws Act of the apartheid regime—a law developed to control and survey the movements of the African population. In District 9, however, Wikus distorts the alien’s refusal to acknowledge the eviction paper into an acceptance of the authority of the law to advance MNU’s population-management goals.

Similarly, as Wikus attempts to serve the eviction papers on Christopher Johnson, Christopher questions the legality of the notice, asking: “Why? You must give me 24 hours. This isn’t legal.” Christopher refuses, even though he is forced to kneel at gunpoint, and, in response, Wikus intimidates him to sign by first asking if he has a license for his child. Finding that he does, Wikus makes a bogus charge of “unsafe conditions” and threatens to take his child away to Child Services where
“he will live in a one-by-one meter box for the rest of his life.” Through threat of imprisonment, violence, and death, the aliens are intimidated in the attempt to force them to accept the authority of the law and the state’s decision on their rights as foreigners toward the goal of eviction; if they refuse, they are often killed, bribed with cat food, or violently made to submit, as in the space of the camp they have become bare life.

Another way the state performs a failure in hospitality, by including the arrivant through an exclusion, is by marking off the aliens as criminals. Farrier notes Arendt’s observation of this mode of the state’s accommodating the foreigner: “As Arendt says, ‘Since [the stateless person] was the anomaly for whom the general law did not provide, it was better for him to become an anomaly for which it did provide, the criminal’” (12–13). When he is not calling for airstrikes on District 9 or intimidating aliens to sign papers, Wikus is constantly identifying “criminal” behavior and signs—spray paint means gang-related or criminal, Christopher’s possession of computers, and so on—as a means of bringing the aliens “before the law” without being subjects of rights. Through these various activities, Wikus exercises biopower over the aliens, who have become the bare life of the camp in District 9, further controlling them by preventing their self-organization and possession of property.

For another obvious biopolitical example, Wikus and a few other MNU workers destroy an alien incubation shack which houses alien eggs. As he removes what seems like a feeding tube from the egg, he jokes to another MNU worker that he can take the tube home as a souvenir of his first abortion. Wikus then calls for a “population control team,” which sets fire to the shack with the “prawn” eggs, and they can be heard screaming as they burn. This scene of the sounds of non-human life coming from eggs recalls the discussion in Chap. 2 of Mr. Henry’s attempted theft of an ostrich egg in The Devil’s Chimney, where he cannot hear the noise emanating from the shell but the adult ostriches do, resulting in their protection of the egg and killing of Mr. Henry. In this scene, however, the eggs aren’t saved as Wikus shows no signs of sympathy or concern for the aliens but is rather excited on his first day in this position of authority, performing for the camera and delighting in explaining that the sound of the alien eggs burning sounds like a popping, “like a popcorn.” Wikus and the other MNU workers function in this scene not unlike the doctors that Agamben mentions who took it upon themselves to decide life, something he notes as a power which used to be reserved for the sovereign:
[B]iopolitics can turn into thanatopolitics, this line no longer appears today as a stable border dividing two clearly distinct zones. This line is now in motion and gradually moving into areas other than that of political life, areas in which the sovereign is entering into an ever more intimate symbiosis not only with the jurist but also with the doctor, the scientist, the expert, and the priest. (Agamben 72)

Assuming the authority to manage the life and death of the aliens, Wikus and the other MNU workers exercise biopower as employees of a multinational security company hired by the government, rather than as administrators of the law. This phenomenon of companies exercising biopower is the mode of the day, as in his essay “Necropolitics” Achille Mbembe explains that “Military manpower is bought and sold on a market in which the identity of suppliers and purchasers means almost nothing. Urban militias, private armies, armies of regional lords, private security firms, and state armies all claim the right to exercise violence or to kill” (32). District 9 emphasizes this vulnerability of those marked as bare life as almost anyone can kill them with impunity.

INTERSPECIES SEXUALITY

Like several of the texts discussed in this project, District 9 offers some brief commentary on cross-species sexuality, which in this case demonstrates an exercise of biopower. However, in this film, which focuses on the camp in its title, sexual desire across species is not explored as a positive force; rather, sexual desire gets reterritorialized as capitalist desire as the only instances of sex involve interspecies prostitution and MNU’s false report about Wikus participating in sex acts with aliens as a means of making him killable. Discussing bestiality cases in colonial America, Colleen Glenney Boggs notes how, under the law, the act of bestiality can remove a subject of rights from that community, transporting that person into the state of exception. She explains how “the accused [of bestiality] was recognized as bios before the law, but his crime relegated him to the category of zoë in that he was stripped of his legal rights and put to death” (34). In a scene which occurs after Wikus has begun to transform into an alien, this accidental and unwelcomed becoming-alien, when he has escaped from the MNU laboratory, he returns to a fast-food restaurant which he and other MNU workers dined at earlier in the film. While trying to keep a low profile by wrapping himself in a blanket, a news report comes on the TV reporting on his escape, which portrays
him having sex with an alien, blurred, of course, for the purposes of
decency, and he is immediately identified as the man on the news by the
workers and patrons of the restaurant.

Clearly, MNU’s falsely constructed TV news release derives from
the logic of the taboo against sex with a species other than human that
Boggs describes. As noted in the discussion of bestiality cases in South
Africa in Chap. 3, this religious taboo against interspecies sex also has a
long history in South Africa. In this sense, the TV report is constructed
with the intent to position Wikus in a realm of “non-criminal putting to
death.” The MNU doubles up on this marking of Wikus as zoe, as more
disposable and further away from bios, by appealing to the autoimmune
anxieties of the security state through falsely reporting that Wikus is also
highly contagious. Foucault explains this autoimmunitary logic in a dis-
cussion of racism and biopolitics:

On the one hand, racism makes it possible to establish a relationship
between my life and the death of the other that is not a military or war-
like relationship of confrontation, but a biological-type relationship: “The
more inferior species die out, the more abnormal individuals are elimi-
nated, the fewer degenerates there will be in the species as a whole, and
the more I—as species rather than individual—can live, the stronger I will
be, the more vigorous I will be. I will be able to proliferate.” The fact that
the other dies does not mean simply that I live in the sense that his death
guarantees my safety; the death of the other, the death of the bad race, of
the inferior race (or the degenerate, or the abnormal) is something that
will make life in general healthier: healthier and purer.” (Society Must Be
Defended 255)

As District 9 makes apparent here, however, this logic extends from markers
of race to categories of species as the non-human aliens are quarantined with
the aim of improving the health of the human community of Johannesburg.
The dramatic effect of this news report as an exercise of biopower is immedi-
ately realized as Wikus unsuccessfully appeals to the law when the restaurant
workers now refuse to serve him: “[Y]ou are legally obliged to serve me.”
Instead of receiving the food he orders, the other customers flee the store
to separate themselves from him and, now marked as bare life and without
rights, he is shot at by the store manager using a high-powered rifle. The
shots miss, however, and to escape this certain death in the space of the
community, Wikus then heads off to District 9, to the camp, to this zone of
another kind of death, a zone proper to those in the state of exception.
After Wikus is exposed to the liquid which Christopher has collected from discarded alien technology, which he’s been gathering in order to power their small ship so that they might return to the mothership, Wikus’ body begins to transform as his hand turns into an alien appendage. In this metamorphosis, this becoming-alien, Wikus loses his standing as a subject of rights, as described above, via MNU’s media reports. While this becoming-alien or “becoming-minoritarian” offers the potential for reorienting Wikus’ sense of subjectivity and ethical attachments to others, specifically the aliens, he undermines the radical potentiality of this becoming as he seeks only to re-establish himself as a subject of rights in his privileged position. Deleuze and Guattari explain in *A Thousand Plateaus* that, “[i]n a way, the subject in a becoming is always ‘man,’ but only when he enters a becoming-minoritarian that rends him from his major identity” (291), and they describe how becoming “constitutes a zone of proximity and indiscernability, a no-man’s-land” (293). Instead of following through on this opportunity of becoming to embrace his removal from a dominant subjectivity and from dominant culture in inhabiting the no-man’s land of District 9—an opportunity that presents the potential for resistance and revolution against the state and its violent exercises of biopower over the minoritarian and the anomalous—Wikus largely seeks to regain this “major identity.” For example, he attempts to chop his alien arm off with an ax to separate this alien limb from his human body, to restore a human purity to his body, and he asserts his difference from the aliens when Christopher’s son holds up his arm in comparison, saying that they are the same. Wikus replies: “We’re not the fuckin’ same.” Indeed, most of his actions after his metamorphosis begins are geared toward “fixing” himself as he establishes an agreement with Christopher where he will help Christopher to steal the canister of liquid back from MNU if he agrees to return Wikus to his human state. However, the opportunity to reorient his sense of attachment away from a “humans-only” community continues beyond this selfish desire to return to a privileged position, even after the contract with Christopher is breached by being extended into the future.

**Hospitality as Desire**

As Derrida explains in *Of Hospitality*, guest and host can exchange places in the process of hospitality, and this is evidenced in the exchanges that take place in *District 9* between Wikus and Christopher. Derrida explains:
So it is indeed the master, the one who invites, the inviting host, who becomes the hostage—and who really always has been. And the guest, the invited hostage, becomes the one who invites the one who invites, the master of the host. The guest becomes the host’s host. (125)

While the citizens of Johannesburg largely fail in their hospitality to their guests, the aliens, once Wikus too is marked as bare life, he appeals to Christopher’s hospitality as he arrives as a guest at Christopher’s shack, seeking sanctuary from MNU. Like the aliens who were initially in such a weakened and sickly state on first contact, Wikus arrives in an extremely vulnerable condition as he immediately falls to the floor, unconscious, from the toll the transformation is taking on his body. At this point, Christopher, the guest, becomes the host to the host Wikus, the one who earlier in his mastery was attempting to remove Christopher and manage him in space. In his appeal for sanctuary, Wikus remarks: “Please sir, you have to hide me,” confirming the role reversal.

As a guest in Christopher’s shack seeking sanctuary, Wikus no longer displays the sense of mastery that he exercised in his earlier dealings with Christopher and the other aliens as a top operative for MNU. Earlier in the film, Wikus demonstrates this mastery in attempting to explain all the behavior of the aliens as if he had full knowledge of them, and, of course, he seems mistaken and wrong in most of his conjectures about alien culture. Where earlier Wikus engages with the aliens in brief and violent, largely one-way, conversations as a government-hired and therefore authoritative eviction notice deliverer, as a guest of Christopher, he engages with him for sustained periods of time with more even exchanges in communication. Extended periods of contact can enable transformations in the asymmetrical relations of the “contact zone,” a term that Mary Louise Pratt developed to describe mostly colonial encounters in travel writing, and which Donna Haraway employs in her discussions of human–animal relationships. She explains this transformative power via Vincaine Despret, a philosopher of science:

Emphasizing that articulating bodies to each other is always a political question about collective lives, Despret studies those practices in which animals and people become available to each other, become attuned to each other, in such a way that both parties become more interesting to each other, more open to surprises, smarter, more “polite,” more inventive. The kind of “domestication” that Despret explores adds new identities; partners learn to be “affected”; they become “available to events”; they engage in a relationship that “discloses perplexity.” (Haraway 207)
The affectivity that occurs in sustained encounters with others can, in other words, reorient the self away from dominant subjectivity toward positive and ethical relations, where the self develops as a process through “becoming with” others in assemblage, as Haraway describes. This potential of sustained contact reveals the violent and strategic tactics of the strict separation of others from the community that pertain to the camp and, indeed, to apartheid.

During their discussions after Wikus’ arrival, Christopher shows his son the MNU brochure for District 10, explaining that this will be their new home and that it should be better than District 9. This is in response to his son’s expression of a desire to return home to their home planet. Here, Wikus corrects the lie that MNU peddles to the aliens, and he explains that the tents are not better and that they are “smaller than the shacks, actually more like a concentration camp.” This description confirms the presence of the camp, of the zone of exception, and indeed this camp will be an even more violent site of biopower than their current location. In being offered hospitality by Christopher and in becoming more attuned to Christopher’s life and situation from the sustained close encounter in the “contact zone” of the shack, Wikus no longer maintains his role of mastery over him but tells him this fact, which is in Christopher’s interest to know, offering more of a hospitality than mastery himself.

Indeed, Derrida describes unconditional hospitality as something that is “desired” or “as desire” (127, 147) and heterogeneous to rights. On the difference between “absolute or unconditional hospitality” and “conditional hospitality,” Derrida explains:

The law of absolute hospitality commands a break with hospitality by right, with law or justice as rights. Just hospitality breaks with hospitality by right; not that it condemns or is opposed to it, and it can on the contrary set and maintain it in a perpetual progressive movement; but it is as strangely heterogeneous to it as justice is heterogeneous to the law. (25–7)

This argument for the heterogeneity of justice and the law recalls Deleuze and Guattari’s argument that “justice is desire and not law,” discussed in Chap. 5, suggesting further that unconditional hospitality works as a desire for the other, for the protection of the other. As host and guest reverse in this scene and throughout the rest of the film, the assemblage of Wikus, Christopher, and Christopher’s son works to protect its members’ lives, futures, and interests through their expressions
of what Derrida calls desire for hospitality and desire as hospitality. However, the lives and futures of the individuals of the assemblage are sacrificed or risked when this desire, in Wikus, gets reterritorialized as an oedipal and capitalist desire as lack where he sacrifices and “eats” the others in an attempt to be again a full subject of rights, rights that he feels he is lacking. Wikus sacrifices the others, for example, when he knocks Christopher unconscious, leaving him for the MNU forces to find, and he steals his small spacecraft. In this scene, Wikus separates father and son in his attempt to fly to the mothership, it seems, in hopes of restoring his body to a fully human state in a more immediate fashion after demonstrating his frustration with the 3-year waiting period for the return of his human body, which Christopher has just announced.

**Eating the Aliens**

The aliens’ advanced weaponry and technology become a valued commodity, and yet a stubborn one that does not easily yield to being transformed into capital. Designed with biological technology, the weapons only fire if operated by aliens—although both the gangsters and MNU extract the weapons from District 9 and stockpile them, they are unsuccessful in turning them into a profit because of this biological resistance. Both groups are aware of the potential value in this weaponry, as the advanced security state portrayed in *District 9* provides for an economy where more powerful weapons are highly sought-after commodities. After explaining Wikus’ great value as a hybrid who can operate alien weaponry, the MNU scientists discuss that they want to “harvest” Wikus, remarking that he represents “hundreds of millions, maybe billions of dollars” of biotechnology, and that governments and companies will surely want it. His father-in-law, Piet Smit, a top official at MNU, asks if Wikus will survive the harvest, and the scientist replies in the negative. Yet his father-in-law says to harvest his arm anyway, demonstrating a sacrificing of life for profit. As one of the interviewed characters in the film explains of Wikus, “he became the most valuable business artifact on earth,” and his “real value is that he could operate alien weaponry.” At this point Wikus becomes “disposable” and he experiences the dispossession of his body as it becomes a possession of MNU, just as District 9, the property and bodies of other aliens are forcibly taken from them in the eviction plan as they are marked off by their species and status as foreigners as outside the realm of rights. However, like the biotechnology
of the alien weapons which prevents their easy assimilation in human capitalism, Wikus’ great strength in the alien arm affords him a resistance to this mastery of his body and prevents his death in a capitalist endeavor as he uses it to break free from the restraints of the medical lab bed.

The dissection of alien bodies and the attempt to “harvest” Wikus’ body that occurs in MNU’s laboratories performs an “eating the Other” as the bodies are cut and sacrificed with the hope of extracting the ability for humans to use the aliens’ weapons. Again the government is complicit in the capitalist consumption of these bodies as it fails to successfully oversee or regulate the multinational corporation’s practices. While the government officials who, colonized by capitalist desire, sacrifice their communities for bribes or personal profit are at least tasked with protecting their communities and fail them as THE MAN does in Zakes Mda’s The Mother of All Eating, the situation in District 9 makes evident the boldness of capitalism in its colonizing power as government officials take a back seat to capitalists hired by the government to protect the community. In a similar fashion, the Nigerian gangsters in the film, who serve as a bald-faced and underground version of the violence of the corporate and state-sponsored MNU, also seek to extract the power to operate alien weaponry. However, they literally eat the aliens in practicing a muti is a traditional medicine, which they believe will grant them the aliens’ powers. As many critics note, the representation of Nigerians only as gangsters in the film plays on stereotypes, marking them as dangerous outlaws in the larger South African community. While I agree that this representation of one national group as the homogenous and sole element of organized crime is a weakness of the film,7 in my view the gangsters’ role serves to bring the violence of the state-sanctioned MNU into focus.

As the counterpart to the Nigerians, MNU is essentially revealed to be a gangster organization of the same order, if not a more menacing threat to life in Johannesburg because of its secret biological experimentations and duplicity. This juxtaposition highlights the exclusionary violence upon which communities have traditionally been founded, as history shows. The gangster element in District 9 kills aliens at will, like MNU, because it is legal to kill them according to their status as bare life and they seek to extract a profit from them. Also like MNU, the head gangster wants to cut off Wikus’ arm, although he wants to eat it to take his power. Wikus’ becoming-alien through contact with the fluid—this flowing material—however, is what enables him to operate alien weaponry and is an
indication that the alien biology will resist this capitalist eating as well. By stealing back the canister with this fluid from MNU, which seems not to have been tested yet in their labs, Christopher and Wikus prevent MNU from discovering this key to operating alien weaponry and therefore prevent the transformation of alien weaponry into capital because it remains inoperable by humans. As both MNU and the Nigerian gangsters are colonized by capitalist desire, they relate to the aliens only through a sacrificing of them toward their personal accumulation of wealth.

While his alien arm enabled his resistance to MNU’s attempt to harvest his body, it is, unbeknownst to Wikus, Christopher’s son who protects him from certain death at the hands of the Nigerian gangsters by remotely operating an alien robot armor suit and shooting them. This protection demonstrates the young alien’s hospitality and desire to protect Wikus, accepting him into a human–alien assemblage. With his life under direct threat of being sacrificed by the gangsters, Wikus does not gain protection from the law or demand of these outlaws a recognition of his rights. Instead it is the desire of the alien, a desire for the other in ethical response, that seeks to protect Wikus. This is an exercise of what Derrida describes as a *desire as hospitality*. Talking about the time when an antinomy exists at the same time as its impossibility—such as “[o]ne cannot at the same time take and not take, be there and not be there, enter when one is within” (125)—he explains that:

This duration without duration, this lapse, this seizure … this is a necessity that cannot be outsmarted any more: it explains why one always feels late, and that therefore, at the same time, one always yields to precipitation, in the desire for hospitality or in desire as hospitality. At the heart of a hospitality that always leaves something to be desired. (127)

In this desire as hospitality, Derrida explains again the way in which host and guest interchange and enable a simultaneity in being at once host and guest, and vice versa. Hospitality as desire involves these reorientations of self and these contradictions to exist in the becoming that removes the fixity of dominant subjectivity, undoing self and other.

**Becoming-Alien and a Line of Flight**

To be sure, Wikus is selfish as he at first leaves Christopher for dead in knocking him out, and leaving him unconscious and vulnerable for MNU to find. He all but sacrifices him in the attempt to restore
his dominant subjectivity and position. Later, again, he selfishly runs away to protect himself toward the end of the film when he overhears Christopher being beaten by MNU and hears of their decision to kill him. In response, this time Wikus turns round and protects Christopher, enabling his and his son’s escape from the camp. What motivates this response? It is not his wanting to restore his dominant position or to secure his own safety. It is not out of a sense of upholding the law or a contract that has already been breached. It is a desire for the other that leads to this protection: in risking the self—rather than seeking safety and attempting to re-establish his privileged, dominant human position—Wikus enacts the positivity of desire outside of capitalist or oedipal formations toward a desire for another. Working outside the law and against the law’s hired security firm, he offers a protection for these two aliens—a protection that the larger alien community offers him as his life immediately comes under threat from the head MNU “cowboy” after he helps Christopher to escape. Once again, host and guest exchange: as Wikus serves as host in protecting Christopher and his son, the other aliens of District 9 play host to Wikus in killing the MNU military leader and saving him from certain death. Wikus’ altered sense of community and ethical relations that derive from the new assemblages within which he dwells is best dramatized by comparing his disregard for alien life in the abortions and his participation in violent evictions early in the film, to his risking his life to protect Christopher toward the film’s end. He moves from being an instrument of a security corporation that derives profit from the state by managing the lives and populations of its enemies (informed by its autoimmune disorder), and from seeking to strengthen his own dominant position and wealth in a capitalist desire, to becoming a force against this thanatopolitical regime in embracing postcolonial desire where the self is risked and altered in ethical relation to the alien.

The film could have been more successful in making this difference—Wikus’ move away from the pursuit of a dominant self—clearer. While Christopher’s promise to return to “fix” Wikus in 3 years time might allow for a reading of Wikus’ behavior in saving Christopher from murder as still motivated by a selfish interest in the desire to return to his dominant position, Wikus’ saving him is not self-interested. This self-centered reading is perhaps Michael Moses’ assumption in his claim that “the most disturbing aspects of District 9 … [are] its thinly veiled portrait of post-apartheid South Africa as a political dystopia, and its persistent undercurrent of nostalgia for the old days of racial segregation”
Moses continues this reading of Wikus as nostalgic for apartheid: “The ostensible white hero of the film does not want to join the aliens: indeed, his sole and abiding wish is to return to his comfortable home and his beautiful white wife, Tania” (159). There are inconsistencies in such a reading, however, and I would submit that Wikus no longer has a “sole” wish. Also, if we bracket, only momentarily, the important question of his returning to a dominant position in a society of such inequality, should we fault characters for wanting to live in comfortable homes with the people they love? This is, after all, what Christopher and his son and the other aliens of the camp seem to want as well. As Moses himself notes in the positive portrayals of Christopher and his son, and in the idea that “the degraded condition of the aliens might be interpreted from a liberal perspective as the result of their mistreatment and oppression by the South African authorities and MNU, rather than their inherent viciousness” (159), the film certainly offers some positive representations of aliens and even the potential for a sustained positive reading of its portrayals of the othered aliens. While I’ve argued in agreement with Moses that Wikus largely seeks to restore his dominant position throughout his opportunity for becoming-alien, this instance where he protects Christopher falls outside of a desire to return to a dominant self, as do a few other events, frustrating Moses’ attempt to make Wikus into a totally selfish and dominant subject-seeking character.

Wikus’ becoming-alien reveals the difficulties of transforming subjectivity away from dominant positions in such heavily striated and policed cultures. Deleuze and Guattari’s description of how even oedipal and striated formations can produce lines of flight might explain how Christopher and his son engage with Wikus, who is at first almost totally oedipalized, to deterritorialize him to enable a line of flight from the camp:

[I]mpasses must always be resituated on the map, thereby opening them up to possible lines of flight ... one will often be forced to take dead ends, to work with signifying powers and subjective affections, to find a foothold in formations that are Oedipal or paranoid or even worse, ridgified territorialities that open the way for other transformational operations. (14–15)

Wikus, the administrator of population control, eviction-server, concentration camp ferryman, and in so many other ways manager of movements, stopper of flows, and patroller of space, who at first stole Christopher’s small ship which offered Christopher’s only line of flight
out of the camp—this same dominant subject Wikus becomes deterrioralized and transformed, offering Christopher protection to the damaged but still flyable ship and a path out of the camp on a line of flight.

While the promise of physical transformation back to a human state and his desire for a return to this dominant subjectivity informs the majority of Wikus’ interactions with Christopher, they don’t inform all of them as alternative desires exceed and frustrate the dominant definition of a subject as lacking. Like David Lurie’s experience of this desire that exists as an excess of oedipal desire in Disgrace, Wikus’ non-oedipal desire presents opportunities for ethical response and relating that are closed off by capitalism and dominant culture. It also seems clear that things have changed irrevocably for Wikus and that, even should he still desire a return to the past and the way things were, this is ultimately impossible. He cannot simply return to work for his father-in-law and MNU, which sentenced him to death, and whose dozens of workers he killed and building he bombed (which was reported as “terrorism,” another classification that is used to mark others as bare life), as if nothing has changed. Nor can he return to life as it was, given his highly televised and reported escape from MNU as a “contaminated” human, becoming an alien. His assistant Mhlanga’s imprisonment for revealing MNU’s violence makes this clear. In fact, he must now seek the protection of the aliens from the violence of MNU and the state. The limitations of Moses’ reading stem also, it seems, from the way he reads the aliens too closely as a mere allegory for the apartheid past and from his failure to address the singularity of the fictional aliens as a different species, as asylum-seekers, and so forth.

Reading Wikus as a “corporate stooge,” as John Marx does (165), is decidedly more accurate than Moses’ reading of him as some sort of anti-apartheid hero who also somehow wants a return to apartheid, a difficult reading which Moses then obviously finds to be a menacing fault with the film by describing it as a “troubling lament” for apartheid (160). If anyone is a hero in the film, it is Christopher, a hero-to-come, who has worked for 20 years to collect liquid to power the ship in order to return to the home planet for help and, now that he is aware of it, to protect the aliens from being used in medical experiments. The film’s choice of white protagonist who plays a role in protecting aliens runs the risk that several commercialized films do of perhaps implying racistly that the aliens need a white hero or savior figure. In this sense, this directorial decision recalls Laura Wright’s critique of Dalton from TheHeart of Redness, discussed in Chap. 5, for the
way he has a solution but calculatingly withholds it until the last moment to position himself as a hero and rescuer of the community—an action that Wright reads as continuing in a colonial logic that denies the autonomy and agency of indigenous people. Yet Wikus seems less calculating, and the film portrays his assistance to the aliens of District 9 as more unexpected and against his self-interest and egoism. Instead of being seen as a hero, Wikus might better be read as an allusion to Dirk Coetzee, a death squad leader for the apartheid regime who changed alliances by first confessing his murderous work in killing the ANC’s political leaders of the anti-apartheid movement. He later worked for the ANC to help dismantle apartheid and prevent this while seeking its protections from the apartheid state. As leader of the eviction program in District 9, Wikus is certainly less knowledgeable of MNU’s thanatopolitical practices and somewhat less violent than Coetzee; Wikus’ switching of alliances is also not as clear or dramatic as Coetzee’s because he only changes briefly right before the film’s conclusion. However, Fundiswa Mhlanga, Wikus’ assistant, perhaps completes this historical allusion as toward the end, the film shows that he is imprisoned for exposing to the public MNU’s illegal genetic testing program on the aliens.

While Wikus is mostly “just doing his job” throughout most of the film, the indication that he is not a “corporate stooge” through and through, however, is his correction early in the film after comparing his promotion in MNU to his wedding day that the promotion is, in fact, not as important as his wedding day. His desire for his wife supersedes his capitalist desire to be a model employee and thereby to be a model state-hired eviction server and administrator of the state’s biopower, suggesting that he has not been entirely colonized by capitalist definitions of desire. This excess desire, its possibility in what Foucault calls Homoo economicus as a subject of interest that exceeds the subject of rights (The Birth of Biopolitics 275), is what biopower seeks to limit and capture in its mastery. In fact, desire threatens state and capitalist biopower more so than interest, as Deleuze and Guattari argue: “And if we put forward desire as a revolutionary agency, it is because we believe that capitalist society can endure many manifestations of interest, but not one manifestation of desire, which would be enough to make its fundamental structures explode, even at the kindergarten level” (Anti-Oedipus 379). Even in this most ridgified subject, Wikus, its threat looms as a flow and power that might undo the dominant regime of biopower. The alien fluid which Wikus was exposed to and which now flows through
his body (and which enabled Christopher’s line of flight) dramatizes this effluvial character and potential of desire to overflow the *bios*-centered subject of rights. His father-in-law and director of MNU, Piet Smit, explains that Wikus’ being married to his daughter did not factor into his calculation to appoint Wikus as head operative, seemingly to explain away any favoritism in the hire. Yet this explanation is more revealing in that biopower doesn’t factor postcolonial desire—Wikus’ desire for his wife which exceeds his capitalist desires—into its administration and calculations of managing life and death. His expressions of desire for his wife in this statement, and in creating the flower for her, frame the film in a way that demonstrates desire’s ability to traverse species boundaries and transform ethical relationships and community boundaries drawn to mark off those who count and those who do not. The importance of this seemingly minor detail in Wikus’ mentioning that his wedding is a more important day, if not already apparent, can be further highlighted through a comparison to a character discussed in Chap. 5.

Wikus’ relationship to desire and his working for his father-in-law at MNU recalls the situation in Michiel Heyns’ *The Reluctant Passenger* for the protagonist, Nick Morris. As he finds himself almost working for the unseen hand of the former apartheid regime, Judge Conroy, who continues its violent acts of biopower—recall the “death squads”—on the South African population in the “post-apartheid” era, Morris finds that his reappraisal of desire and his relating to others and non-human others has helped him to escape from the manipulations of the judge. Like Wikus, Morris is at first a bit of a “corporate stooge” in that he is a model worker and never lets his life, desire, or passions make him late for work, and even though he is an environmental lawyer, he doesn’t care about the environment but just does his job. While both characters largely seek to master, control, and keep separate non-human flows and *zoe* from themselves and the human community (with Morris it is more of this control over his own *zoe*), as “good” workers in capitalism (and Morris’ transformation to embrace *zoe* is much clearer and more dramatic), their desires from assemblages exceed and resist being totally colonized by Oedipus and capitalist desire as lack. This excess desire leads them both to change from being apolitical, self-centered, capital-seeking, dominant subjects to reorient their sense of community, extending hospitality to those marked as bare life by dominant culture—offering hospitality to a troop of Chacma baboons and an alien population. Wikus, like Joyce Tomlinson in *The Reluctant Passenger*, remains incalculable
because of this desire, and therefore beyond the mastery of biopower. This postcolonial desire, seemingly absent from these characters’ bios-centered subjectivities, presents the power for radical change even in its minuteness in occurring at the level of the individual, and has, as both texts bear out, significant revolutionary potential to change the state of affairs for those marked as “disposable” in the workings of multinational corporations and the state.

The consequences in both texts, had these characters not enabled their excess desires to flow but allowed them to be reterritorialized or colonized, are devastating given the potential continuation of Conroy’s thanatopolitics in Morris’ case, and the blockage of all lines of flight for Christopher and the doubtful future of the aliens in Wikus’ case. In helping Christopher, however, Wikus is no longer a dominant subject of rights who feels a lack of those rights; instead it is a transformed sense of self and a desire that positively flows from his belonging in an assemblage with Christopher and his son. In the closing scenes, Wikus, now fully alien, makes a metal flower on a garbage heap, which his wife later finds on her doorstep, hoping it’s a gift from him. Moses reads this as confirmation that

*District 9* stands as a troubling lament on behalf of South African whites for the world lost with the end of apartheid. Disturbingly, it literalizes the long-running nightmare of the white Afrikaner that the demise of apartheid spells the decline of the white ruling elite, who will be reduced to a condition identical to that of the continent’s impoverished, exploited, and politically oppressed black masses. (160)

As I’ve attempted to argue here, we should, instead, read this scene as an alien expressing desire for a human, or even without these categories of species, as an expression of desire between two bodies, two actants, in excess of and in resistance to the colonizing reterritorialization of capitalist desire. It is a desire which presents lines of flight away from the workings of biopower in the security state. The film’s open ending, with the promise of an alien return, demonstrates the threat posed by *zoe*, by the non-human, and indeed by the desire which precedes thought as therefore the “unthought at the heart of the thinking subject”8 (Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects* 112) given the way that this desire enabled Wikus’ aid in Christopher’s line of flight. This non-human desire flows through the posthuman subjects that we are becoming, a posthuman and postcolonial desire
that overflows the highly ridgified category of the human and undoes it, thwarting its exclusionary violence. The promise of the untimely return of Christopher with more aliens to protect his people enabled by this *zoe* and assemblage is what *bios*-centered biopower hasn’t thought of. In *Nomadic Subjects*, Braidotti explains how desire precedes thought after noting that Deleuze and Irigaray “bank on the affective as a force capable of freeing us from hegemonic habits of thinking” (40). She continues explaining that

>affectivity in this scheme stands for the preconscious and the prediscursive: desire is not only unconscious but remains nought at the very heart of our thought because it is what sustains the very activity of thinking. Our desires are that which evades us, in the very act of propelling us forth, leaving as the only indicator of who we are, the traces of where we have already been, that is to say, of what we have already ceased to be. (40)

Wikus’ desires and the desires of the other members of the assemblage transform him and change his habits of thought. He is no longer colonized by dominant culture’s obsession with the self and an oedipal definition of the self as a lacking subject. Capitalist and *bios*-centered dominant culture attempt to tame or master desire by defining and fixing it through representation as Freud’s Oedipus does, assimilating it as a known entity into thought. Yet coming before thought, it retains its potential to resist this assimilation and operate otherwise, transforming dominant thought and dominant subjects. Braidotti also explains that desire comes from the materiality or corporeality of the body (*Nomadic Subjects* 112) in a way that points to both matter’s resistance to physical mastery and desire’s resistance to the mastery of thought. In its assumed totalitarian mastery, thanatopolitics cannot stop or prevent the threat of a revolutionary power of desire that has the potential to transform subjects and to deterrioralize the current state of affairs in order to protect the members of its assemblage from the non-criminal murderous operations of the biopolitical *dispositif*.

**CONCLUSION: DESIRING SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES**

Characters in most of the fiction discussed in this project negotiate their relationships to positive desire and away from capitalism’s colonization of it; or, in some cases, they experience desire that exceeds capitalism’s definition briefly and fail to take up the opportunity to change
their ways of thinking and relating. Non-human animals and aliens also express desires that frustrate the mastery of biopower’s thanatopolitics. In *Disgrace*, David Lurie consumes others in a dominant, self-serving desire and struggles against the potential for changing his self when he discovers a desire in excess of this. In *The Devil’s Chimney*, Miss Beatrice moves away from Mr. Henry’s patriarchal, capitalist desire in her relationship with Mr. Jacobs, yet she reinstates relations of dominance in her sexual relations with September and Nomsa. The ostriches’ desires in that novel also resist the total mastery of biopolitical control by killing Mr. Henry to protect their egg and future hatchling. The Whale Caller begins to be colonized by Saluni’s capitalist desire but refuses and maintains his non-capitalist desire in assemblage with Sharisha; Saluni, too, finally learns “the arts of love,” outside of an extractive mode of relation before her death. Minke and Corsicana’s desires flow forth from their assemblage with Lahnee O, leading them to exact vengeance for the capitalist murder of endangered species in the bizarre world of *Tanuki Ichiban*. The messenger in Mda’s short play acts on a revolutionary desire that undoes THE MAN’s capitalist colonization of the community. Camagu in *The Heart of Redness* moves from being a self-centered economic development PhD and user of women to embracing a different kind of desire for women and for the protection of his newfound community in Qolorha from Western development. Nick Morris moves from a *bios*-centered existence to embrace *zoe*—both non-human desire and the non-human in a broader sense, including animals—as positive in *The Reluctant Passenger*. The small bit of Wikus’ desire that derives from being in assemblage with his wife, and later Christopher and his son, exceeds the dominant subject of biopower’s total control. All of these desires, to varying degrees, at some point escape capitalist and oedipal colonization and move toward relating to others ethically in assemblage. They also enable the protection, or potential for protection, of those marked as bare life, and this also includes a potential of not just humans alone; instead, this desire is produced as a function of humans and animals, of human and non-human assemblages.

This revolutionary power of desire which derives from assemblages, regardless of the species or race of the members that compose them, has the potential to produce flows which escape the capture and reterritorialization by dominant culture. Desire’s postcoloniality in resisting colonization by Oedipus, by regimes of global capitalism, and dominant *bios*-centered culture, offers ways out of the colonization of
communities, the risking of their sustainable futures, and their destruction in biopower by both capitalist interests and the anxiety-ridden workings of the security state. If colonization is the first scene of the state of exception, as Mbembe argues, then a postcolonial mode of resistance is needed to confront biopower in its current forms in globalization and late capitalism. As animals also figure as the founding location for the space of sacrifice and the marking of bare life in many cultures, as Agamben explains in describing the “anthropological machine”, their movements and materiality can resist the mastery of biopower—their desires which, too, are material in coming from the materiality of the body also possess a potential to protect vulnerable bodies from the workings of biopower.

Yet, in recognizing this material resistance to biopower, environmentalists and communities must be attentive to the difference of life, considering how different life forms affect the community and its future sustainability. Rather than a homogenizing view of all life as equal or the same, and a position that all life should thrive and be protected in an uncritical affirmative biopolitics, a more discerning biopolitics might recognize how viruses such as HIV, and species that deplete necessary resources for life, such as water, affect the community. Instead, too, of the purist, autoimmunity of some approaches that operate along rhetorics of sameness in terms of race, species, or indigeneity (and that therefore adopt a hostility toward the foreign and the different in advance), this critical affirmative biopolitics might develop from observing how “new” or foreign forms of life affect the community’s well-being. Of the texts studied here, Mda’s *Heart of Redness* best displays this critical affirmative biopolitics in Qukezwa’s biopolitical decisions to kill those life forms that threaten to decimate the broader community: its water supply and positive modes of relating. Such a critical perspective must also take into account the desires and lives of non-human animals, as many characters in Mda’s novel do in their communications and deep affection for them. What do animals desire? While it is a difficult, and seemingly impossible, question to answer, asking it makes us aware that animals have their own interests and pleasures. While animals can express desire in some ways that we might agree are recognizable—in desiring to avoid suffering or in desiring pleasure—through their movements and other bodily gestures as when, say, an animal indicates sexual desire through signaling or calling to a potential mate, much of what animals desire remains unclear or unknown. Yet in attempting to live more
ethically with animals, we might somehow attempt to acknowledge or take into consideration these desires rather than managing and organizing all animal life according to human interests and desires.

Isabelle Stenger’s “Cosmopolitical Proposal” argues that our thinking about politics often moves quickly past issues that escape our knowledge, and that we attempt to assimilate new or different things into existing frameworks of normative or established modes of politics. Rather than simply ignoring such resistances to knowledge and differences or moving quickly past them to politics as usual, as in her example of Melville’s enigmatic character Bartleby, Stengers argues that we might here “slow down” to think differently. In this sense, while rights discourse provides a ready-made and perhaps “quick” option to turn to when it comes to protecting humans and animals, slowing down to consider what other opportunities and ways of thinking are available might lead to solutions that are more cosmopolitical in nature. Stengers also argues for “the building up of an active memory of the way solutions that we might have considered as promising turn out to be failures, deformations or perversions” (998). Such recognition of the failures of past solutions might motivate more creativity and a desire for new ways of thinking. The passing of human rights laws and some protections have clearly failed those they were created to protect at times, as we see throughout the literature discussed in this book. Citing this idea from Stengers to formulate her “indigenous cosmopolitics,” Marisol de la Cadena argues that such slowness “creates possibilities for new interpretations.” (336) De la Cadena argues that thinking outside of traditional politics might lead to different and new thought, different solutions and ways of relating:

For a different result, the problem has to be taken to a different plane: to the political moment that created the ontological divide between humans and nature … and created politics as a human affair different from nature … . Seen from this different historical plane … the conflict would potentially change: rather than a cultural problem between universal progress and local beliefs, the fate of other-than-human beings—Ausangate [an Andean mountain] for example—would emerge as a political conflict among worlds. (352)

Constructing politics and “nature” differently, putting the “universal” discourse of human rights in conversation with indigenous views of politics and the world, might lead to other ways of thinking, other approaches to protecting communities and bodies. Experiences of non-human desire and affective encounters with animals offer such
alternatives to “normal” politics and have the potential to offer new ways of thinking.

In his speech at the African Literature Association in 2014, South African author and scholar Njabulo Ndebele called for a change in the way communities are organized, arguing that they should be based on “inclusion” rather than “extraction.” He called for this reorientation of community after critiquing South African president Jacob Zuma’s private use of public funds and his palatial transformation of his personal residence. In the course of this talk, Ndebele notably also criticized conservative repression of alternative sexualities, these “non-normative” desires, and specifically mentioned that both humans and non-humans should be included in this reforming of community. As one of the tools of colonial power is the attempt to force the adoption of a dominant subjectivity, as I mentioned early on in this project, challenging capitalism’s and dominant culture’s fetishization of the subject as lacking—a definition which enables the flourishing of this extractive ethos—toward becomings and toward assemblages where ethical relations obtain and from which positive desire flows, presents opportunities for this kind of inclusiveness, opportunities for hospitality toward others, whoever or whatever they may be. The fiction of these South African authors and this film-maker promotes the awareness of the power of postcolonial desires, imagining ways of relating to the world other than capitalist biopower, thinking of other ways of forming and sustaining communities.

The strength of non-human desire as resistance to biopolitical management is that it remains unknowable and unpredictable. Neocolonial capitalism and biopolitical power attempt to make a community where everyone’s desires are the same, and everyone seeks the same products and markers of wealth, the same modes of pleasure, where everyone adopts the same way of thinking (about the self, the world, relationships, etc.), only giving the illusion of difference and liberation through a consumer’s freedom to choose. Yet this kind of choice effectively maintains the status quo, maintains hierarchies and vast inequality, with an accumulation of wealth for a few. Postcolonial desire—non-human desire that refuses to be made human, and resists capitalism’s lures and dominant culture’s norms and definitions—makes communities difficult to manage, and hard to manipulate or calculate. Such desires can therefore frustrate biopolitical power’s attempts to make a homogenous community and can transform its culture of sameness toward the different and the new. These South African texts make clear that creative and new modes of
thought, new strategies, new ways of becoming are needed in the efforts to thwart the colonization of life and communities. As Byron Caminero-Santangelo puts it in writing about Camagu’s anticipation of the eventual success of the neocolonial casino development in *The Heart of Redness*, “there are limitations to Camagu’s strategies for resistance and ... new ones will need to be produced if Qolorha is to resist the protean operation of imperial capital” (305). Such new and creative responses to the ever-changing threats of neocolonial power might arise from non-human desires and from the desires of non-human animals that often flow between human and other animal bodies.

New modes of thought and relation have the potential to arise from the desire that dominant culture and institutions often mark pejoratively as weird, non-normative, or different from the same. Why do certain institutions and dominant Western modes of thinking dismiss or denigrate certain desires and modes of thought? This dismissal recalls Hegel’s dismissal of African “animism” or different African understandings of the agency of non-human, environmental matters. Perhaps it is in part because of the threat that such desires and ways of thinking pose to a particular definition of the human in humanism and the elite place that it gives itself in a hierarchy over nature. Such desires also threaten the status quo and culture of the same. Garuba argues that “an animistic understanding of the world applied to the practice of everyday life has often provided avenues of agency for the dispossessed in colonial and postcolonial Africa” (285).

Zakes Mda’s novels discussed here make this especially clear. These works of literature also indicate that an attitude of openness, intimacy, and vulnerability to different experiences of desire, rather than the mastery of some dominant modes and models of desire, can bring difference and newness into the world. The risks involved in this vulnerability include death, as becomings and moments of intense affect are always running this danger. Such moments of transformation often risk a social death in the sense of being outcast or treated as less than human, or as bare life, for a non-normative or different way of relating and desiring. Desire and other experiences of affect can lead to ways of organizing society differently from past colonial and apartheid regimes of violence to truly postcolonial, transformed ways of relating that differ from the extractive modes of power.

The desire that flows through this South African literature suggests the potential of such postcolonial literatures and film to offer ways out of the same to futures where things might be different. Yet given the imperial thrust of biopolitics to control all that lives and the similar expansiveness of
global capital to reterritorialize all relations into modes of extraction, other affective experiences, other modes of thought, and new and unforeseen creative strategies and approaches will be necessary in the effort to resist neocolonial management.

Notes

1. When learning about this film in Arizona in the US, students often point out its relevance to the situation of "undocumented" immigrants from Mexico and other parts of Latin America, whom the state includes only through exclusion in marking them as criminal, as "illegal immigrants." Matthew Jones also points out that "When van de Merwe warns one of the aliens not to go to District 10, the new camp built specifically for the visitors, the sense of urgency and horror in his voice leads one to imagine that inspiration for the solution to the alien problem might have been drawn from the Nazi’s Final Solution or the Soviet Gulags" (121).

2. Animals are marked as even more disposable in this film as their bodies largely appear only as food. When his alien arm is tested by MNU for its capacity to operate alien weaponry, Wikus unsuccessfully attempts to refuse his being forced by electric prodding to shoot at the live alien target by explaining that he prefers to shoot the pig instead, which seems to possibly already be dead, having the effect of emphasizing the difference of lives and challenging biological continuism. What might be called animal aliens are also forced to fight each other to the death in the camp in a way that evokes the violence of cock and dog fighting. Lastly, in the scene where he protects Christopher’s passage to the small aircraft, Wikus flings a pig (live or dead?) with incredible force to kill an MNU gunman. This is just the use of an animal as a mere blunt object as a weapon, and the film might have offered more creative ways of thinking about animal lives.

3. I agree with Wolfe’s position that you can’t actually offer hospitality to everyone or everything in practice because, if you do, you can all but sentence the community to death. Unlike the trees that Qukezwa kills and the casino city which are banished from the village in The Heart of Redness because of the devastation they would visit on the community, the aliens in District 9 are not a colonizing threat to the community of Johannesburg; they are vulnerable and in need of help. Wolfe explains this problem of unconditional hospitality in practice by challenging the biological continuism of Esposito’s affirmative biopolitics: “[I]f we want to salvage the Deleuzean impulse of Esposito’s conjugation of life and norm—do we extend ‘unconditional hospitality’ to anthrax and ebola virus, to SARS?—then we are necessarily driven back on a pragmatist rather than ontological
reading of Deleuze” (Before the Law 94). Further, it is in fact the autoimmune disorder of the state which creates the threats to its immunity as the violence against the aliens gives rise to potential revolutionary action against the human community in Christopher’s promise of return. Roberto Esposito makes this point in Bios: Biopolitics and Philosophy. “[A]s in all areas of contemporary social systems, neurotically haunted by a continuously growing need for security, this means that the risk from which the protection is meant to defend is actually created by the protection itself” (qtd in Wolfe, Before the Law 49-50).

4. See Bourke, “Bare Life’s Bare Essentials.” Bourke also highlights the film’s engagement with Agamben’s concepts of the camp, Homo sacer, and bare life.

5. Lucy Valerie Graham notes this as a problem of the film as it becomes “part of a tradition of films that present, for Western viewers, the ‘problem’ or dilemma of the other, but do so through the lens of a white male focalizer who becomes a point of identification” (162). To be sure, as a Hollywood blockbuster, the film is somewhat flawed in this regard and certainly in others, as I discuss below. The choice of white male protagonist does, however, have the benefit of pointing to the often elided violence upon which white privilege rests. Nonetheless, the film is still valuable for its commentary on the deployment of race and species discourse in biopower.

6. Wikus’ moving from a position as manager of those without rights to being without rights himself also alludes to the reversal for the protagonist, a colonial magistrate, of J.M. Coetzee’s Waiting for the Barbarians when he loses his post for his engagements with “the barbarians” and is imprisoned by Colonel Joll. Farrier reads this novel of Coetzee’s for its representation of bare life; Coetzee’s Life & Times of Michael K offers perhaps an even more overt engagement with “the camp,” and Mike Marais discusses this in terms of hospitality in his book.

7. In his review, Michael Valdez Moses notes this problem with the representation of Nigerians in District 9: “Obesandjo and his gang members are a distillation of some of the most negative contemporary South African stereotypes of Nigerian immigrants, tens of thousands of whom have entered the country illegally since the 1980s, and some of whom are part of a nationwide (indeed international) crime syndicate trafficking in drugs and engaging in other illegal activities that got its start in Johannesburg in the late 1980s” (158). Similarly, in her review entitled “Amakwerekwere and Other Aliens: District 9 and Hospitality,” Lucy Valerie Graham discusses the problems with the representations of the Nigerians when she “acknowledge[s] the rather obvious point that although the film critiques xenophobia, it ultimately perpetuates it” (162).
8. Ron Broglio makes a similar point in reporting from the field of the animal revolution, a point informed by Erica Fudge’s “A Left-Handed Blow”: “As the [human] hand which is thought covers the paw, claw, hand of the animal, out of nowhere comes the other hand, the paw or claw or jaw of a left-handed blow. Reason never counted on being outwitted by that which it rejects outright—idiocy, dullness, the body, and the animal” (28).

9. Agamben explains the need to stop this anthropological machine in The Open: Man and Animal: “Like every space of exception, this zone is, in truth, perfectly empty, and the truly human being who should occur there is only the place of a ceaselessly updated decision in which the caesurae and their rearticulation are always dislocated and displaced anew … . And faced with this extreme figure of the human and the inhuman, it is not so much a matter of asking which of the two machines (or of the two variants of the same machine) is better or more effective—or, rather, less lethal and bloody—as it is of understanding how they work so that we might, eventually, be able to stop them” (37). Cary Wolfe also explains this space left open by the sacrifice of animals: “[A]s long as the automatic exclusion of animals from standing remains intact simply because of their species, such a dehumanization by means of the discursive mechanism of ‘animalization’ will be readily available for deployment against whatever body happens to fall outside the ethnocentric ‘we’” (Before the Law 21).

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