

# The *Homo Sacer* in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*

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## Abstract

Agamben's concept of *homo sacer* may have Roman genesis but its modern and postmodern connotation is far more consequential. Since the present world is a cauldron of biopolitical activities, its effect on the general populace, especially after the Second World War and the cold war, is self-evident. The nation-states have been acting like sovereign powers in the name of security and democracy. The common citizenry, both willingly and involuntarily, is compelled to give up its basic rights and empower the sovereign powers to subjugate it for moderately trivial comforts. Beckett's play *Waiting for Godot* epitomizes the predicament of the common person in the form of its characters, Vladimir, Estragon, and Lucky. The former two forgo their daily activities in exchange for a meeting with a person named Godot who keeps them in a perpetual state of exception that places them outside spatial-temporal reality. Lucky, on the other hand, self-subjugates to elucidate the dehumanizing effect on the populace because of the biopolitical nature of the world. Hence, this paper aims to encapsulate the Roman and ancient connotation of the term *homo sacer* in the context of Beckett's play.

**Keywords:** *homo sacer*, sovereign power, state of exception, biopolitics

## Introduction

Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben has reintroduced the term *homo sacer* in his book *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* to decode the biopolitical nature of the present world where the commoners are relegated to bare existence, stripped of their political identity, by sovereign powers. This relegation is not forceful. Rather, in most cases, this is a voluntary subjugation on the part of the commoners for immediate inconsequential satisfactions. On the other hand, etymologically, *homo sacer* is a person who has failed to comply with the



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contract he has signed – *patronus si clienti fraudem fecerit, sacer esto* – “If a patron defrauds a client he shall be accursed” (Warmington 490). An accursed person, according to Roman law, is thrown outside the Roman society and is deprived of all constitutional rights and legal protections an ordinary citizen enjoys.

What is common and significant in Roman law and Agamben's latest connotation of the term is the presence of a contract in different forms. Legally speaking, a contract is an agreement between two or more parties that create legal obligations to fulfill it. A contract has certain characteristics – it is a promise of exchange, it is executory in nature, it must be enforced by law, the court will be the arbitrator in case of breach from any of the participating parties, and lastly, it should be discrete. According to Richard Stone,

“Freedom of contract” ... has two main aspects. The first is that it is the individual's choice whether or not to enter into a contract, and if so with whom – in other words, the freedom *to* contract, or “party freedom”. The second is the freedom to decide on the content of the contractual obligations undertaken, or “term freedom”. This allows parties to make unwise, and even unfair, bargains – it is their decision, and the courts will not generally intervene to protect them from their own foolishness.  
(2)

Although the Romans did not have any generalized concept of “contract,” they used the concept of contract in case of individual financial transactions, and the origins of all modern laws can be traced back to *The Laws of the Twelve Tables* (*lex duodecim tabularum*) where fundamentals like a contract law can be found in its Table 8, under the title “Torts and Delicts.” Under this section, numerous offences had been set down categorically – from public and personal slander to assault and battery, from theft to murder, from arson to vandalism, and from fraud to false witnessing. All of these offences had been classified as civil crimes loosely connected with the concept of contract, especially article twenty-one of this section where a fraudster is deemed *homo sacer*, and can be regarded as the pioneer of the law of contract we use today.

While the Roman *homo sacer* is a criminal who has broken a contract, the modern *homo sacer* becomes one through entering a contract with the sovereign power. The modern *homo sacer* surrenders their basic rights to sovereign power mostly in exchange for protection. At the hand of the sovereign power the accursed person becomes a biopolitical tool wielded on a whim. In Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, we find three such characters – Vladimir, Estragon, and Lucky, who enter contracts with other characters – Godot, Pozzo, in exchange for something they deem important and substantial. This paper will try to determine how these

contracts exclude these three characters from the political and legal realms, relegate them to bare existence, and dehumanize their existence by abandoning them which has become “the *nomos* of the earth” (Schmitt, *Nomos* 48) at present.

### **Godot as a Sovereign**

The characters of Beckett’s play *Waiting for Godot*, Vladimir and Estragon, have “no rights any more” (54), they “got rid of them” (54). They are very discretionary about it, as if they are “tied” (56) to someone through a contract. This display of submission is pervasive throughout the play. What binds Lucky and Pozzo together is also a mutual contract that they both feel the need to carry out sincerely. But Vladimir and Estragon are not as fortunate as Lucky. Unlike Pozzo, Godot does not honor the contract. Although, according to Roman law, that makes Godot a fraudster, it does not make him a *homo sacer* since Godot as a sovereign entity “stands outside the normally valid legal system” (Schmitt, *Theology* 7) and has the power to suspend the law and “legally place[s] himself outside the law” (Agamben, *Homo Sacer* 15). That does not absolve Godot from retaining the status quo he enjoys in Vladimir and Estragon’s predicament. In fact, Godot must keep them in a perpetual “state of exception” (Agamben, *Exception* 1) in order to practice biopolitical stratagem upon them. Their bare existence is the sole purpose of the sovereign or Godot in the play.

Garner, before Schmitt, had made distinctions between two sovereigns – the first one is legal, “that determinate authority which is able to express in a legal formula the highest commands of the state” (240), and the second one is political, “a power to whose mandates the legal sovereign must in practice bow and whose will must ultimately prevail in the state” (240). Beckett’s Godot is not a legal sovereign, for Vladimir and Estragon cannot drag him to the court for the breach of contract or agreement. Neither is he a political sovereign in reference to Garner’s definition since he is not the embodiment of the people’s opinion and selection. James Bryce’s definition of sovereign comes close though: “An ordinary layman would call that person (or body of persons) Sovereign in a state who is obeyed because he is acknowledged to stand at the top, whose will must be expected to prevail, who can get his own way, and make others go his” (505). Austin, on the other hand, has made distinctions between mortal and immortal sovereigns. The immortal is, of course, god, as “God is emphatically the *superior* of man. For his power of affecting us with pain, and of forcing us to comply with his will, is unbounded and resistless” (Austin 30). If we are to understand from the play that Beckett has portrayed Godot as god then Austin’s claim justifies Godot’s action. In fact, Austin’s definition of immortal sovereign substantiates Garner’s definition in the sense that God’s authority is supreme in every sense and all other sovereigns must bow before God. It reiterates Bryce’s definition as

well, for Godot can exert his will on Vladimir and Estragon and make them go his way. Vladimir and Estragon have acknowledged his superiority over them without any question –

Vladimir: We have to come back tomorrow.

Estragon: What for?

Vladimir: To wait for Godot.

Estragon: Ah!

(Beckett 150)

On the other hand, Austin's mortal sovereign is "... the master, of the slave or servant ..." (30). In such a case, the superior-inferior dynamic is defined by the ability to force someone into submission. However, there is no reference in the play whether Vladimir and Estragon are forced to wait for him; their wait seems, quite, voluntary. They are bound by "a vague supplication" (Beckett 53) that Godot is not morally or legally obliged to fulfill; rather they feel obligated to wait for him despite his continued non-appearance at the designated place. Although the word non-appearance has a legal connotation, it is nonetheless appropriate since before *The Law of Twelve Tablets* all the Roman laws were unwritten and mutual. They followed *mancipatio*, a legal procedure they used to draw up wills, adoption papers and emancipation of children from parents. The procedure needed at least five witnesses, requiring, of course, that they should be adult Roman citizens, and a sixth person who will hold a scale – "It is thus that both servile and free persons are mancipated, as also such animals as are *mancipi* (mancipable) ..." (Zulueta 39). Unlike Lucky, Vladimir and Estragon are not *mancipi* of Godot. They do not have a master-slave relation with Godot. So, the rule of *mancipatio* cannot be applied to their contract, and Godot cannot be held accountable for the breach of contract or maltreatment, otherwise he would be subjected to legal ramifications – "Be it noted finally that we are not allowed to behave insultingly to those whom we hold in *mancipio*; if we do, we shall be legally liable for the insult" (Zulueta 47). Therefore, Austin's concept of mortal sovereign power does not fit in their case as well.

The closest association one can make between Godot and a definition of the sovereign is that of Schmitt's. Schmitt's sovereign is the one "who decides on the exception" (5). Exception, for Schmitt, is an extra-judicial order where normal law and order is suspended. And it is the sole prerogative of the sovereign to declare that exception: "The exception ... can best be characterized as a case of extreme peril ... or the like" (Schmitt, *Theology* 06). So the question might arise about what peril the characters of the play find themselves in. The play portrays several perils – religious, existential, psychological, philosophical, social, and moral. It is not clear which of these problems Vladimir and Estragon need for

Godot to address; but there is one, though it is not “very definite” (Beckett 53) but it might have a connection with their salvation – “we’ll be saved” (Beckett 152). That is why Godot can exert “unlimited authority” (Schmitt, *Theology* 12) over Vladimir and Estragon, because they have accepted him as their sovereign and done away with their rights, transferring all of them to Godot –

What shall we say then of someone who has absolute power from the people for as long as he shall live? Here one must distinguish. If the absolute power is given to him pure and simple without the style of a magistrate or commissioner, and not in the form of a grant on sufferance (*precaire*). Then he surely is, and has a right to call himself, a sovereign ... For the people has here dispossessed and stripped itself of its sovereign power in order to put him in possession of it and vest it in him. It has transferred all of its power, authority, prerogatives, and sovereign rights to him and [placed them] in him, in the same way as someone who has given up the possession of, and property in, something that belonged to him. (Bodin 7)

Thus, he can forevermore make them wait for him. Agamben has borrowed the concept of sovereign from Schmitt and added some criteria to the definition. One of them is the normalization of the exceptional situation for perpetuity. For example, waiting becomes a normal routine for them. The reason Agamben gives for this endless situation is the making of a “zone of indistinction” (*Exception* 26) where juridical and political distinction gets blurred in the sense that it makes provision for a repressive order where the inhabitants are stripped of their legal and political rights. That is why Estragon is subjected to beating without any capacity to protest the act. And Vladimir considers the beating justified because he thinks it is very natural since Estragon must have done something to deserve that – “I mean before they beat you. I would have stopped you from doing whatever it was you were doing” (Beckett 106). In addition to that, Agamben incorporates Foucault’s concept of discipline and surveillance that fairly corresponds to their predicament – they are afraid of non-appearance because Godot might punish them for it – “There can be no doubt that, ‘the exercise of the sovereign power in the punishment of crime is one of the essential parts of the administrative justice’” (Foucault, *Discipline* 48). That is why they have made sure that the messenger boy has seen them and they have not failed to comply with their part of the bargain. The boy functions as a surveillance system for Godot who ensures that his will has prevailed and he has made others, Vladimir and Estragon, go his way.

Therefore, Godot is of course a sovereign. But his sovereignty is neither legal nor political; rather it is beyond both and is a foundation of a modern state of affairs

that is the *nomos* of the current world order. Godot as a sovereign places himself outside the juridical-political reality he puts Vladimir and Estragon in. He exerts his authority as a sovereign and, “to suspend the validity of the law, legally places himself outside the law” (Agamben, *Homo Sacer* 15). Thus, the law of contract is not applicable to him; he cannot be held accountable for the breach of contract, either in regular law or in *mancipatio* according to *The Law of the Twelve Tablets*. He does not become accursed through breaching, rather through his authority as a sovereign makes Vladimir and Estragon *homo sacer* or the accursed persons and perpetually places them in an extra juridical-political reality to retain his status quo as one.

### **The State of Exception in the Play**

According to Schmitt, “In the exception the power of real life breaks through the crust of a mechanism that has become torpid by repetition” (*Theology* 15). In a sense, exception never comes to the characters of the play. They engage themselves in seemingly repetitive nonsenses to pass their time while waiting for Godot to come and save them. Even the appearance of Pozzo and Lucky is also repetitive. Vladimir notices some changes in Pozzo and Lucky even in the first act. We, the readers, are not aware of their previous meeting, neither are Estragon nor Lucky nor Pozzo. Only Vladimir is aware of the changes of his surroundings only to notice gravely their unvarying predicament in contrast – “They all change. Only we can’t” (Beckett 93).

But this ceaseless waiting or deferment is the core characteristic of a “state of exception” (Agamben, *Exception* 1). The characters, like the residents of a refugee camp, wait for someone to show up and help them in crisis. Like refugees, they have been abandoned by society and refused basic human rights. That is why Estragon seems like a fair game to the people who beat him on a regular basis. This modern reality deprives its denizens of any kind of normalcy – political, social, psychological, judicial, and physical. Regular spatial-temporal reality has been suspended for them indefinitely. They inhabit a liminal space both during the course of the play and off stage – an unspecified tree and a ditch, which are difficult to determine since these places are extraterritorial –

Like the fence of the camp, the interval between death sentence and execution delimits an extratemporal and extraterritorial threshold in which the human body is separated from its normal political status and abandoned, in a state of exception, to the most extreme misfortunes. (Agamben, *Homo Sacer* 91)

Bryce’s aforementioned definition of the sovereign reflects some aspects of sovereignty yet it fails in this particular aspect since it “declined to recognise

the principle of extraterritoriality” (Garner 249). But the setting of *Waiting for Godot* is itself extraterritorial. The setting of the play is an ambiguous country road where spatial-temporal sensibility gets blurred easily since the characters who traverse the road on a daily basis cannot distinguish between day and night. In addition to that, although Pozzo claims that Vladimir and Estragon are on his land, he does not make distinct demarcation regarding the area of his property. If we are to borrow Agamben’s term “space of exception” (19) then the setting of the play renders some meaning other than being just an absurd setting in an absurd play. The unnamed tree in the play becomes Agamben’s “space of exception” (*Homo Sacer* 19) which is a zone of exclusion – individuals’ existence becomes a mere physical one without political capacity and legal rights. Agamben refers to Greek philosophy to elucidate different connotations of the concept “life.” Greeks had two words that both meant life but they differed in quality. *Zoē* refers to “the simple fact of living common to all living beings (animals, men or gods)” (Agamben, *Homo Sacer* 1). On the other hand, *bios* means proper way of living with group identity. Aristotle endorses this way of living in his *Politics*: “a man is by nature a political animal” (59). But neither Vladimir nor Estragon has any political identity, or even a group identity, in the play. They exist outside a judicial-political sphere where their existence has been relegated to mere *zoē*. There is not ample reference in the play as to determine whether they have been expelled, but their peripheral existence is text-evident – “Hand in hand from the top of the Eifel Tower, among the first. We were presentable in those days. Now it’s too late. They wouldn’t even let us up” (Beckett 42). That might be one of the reasons why Godot can exercise his power over them and make them tools for biopolitical practice.

Among other things that stipulate a state of exception is the concentration of power. To Schmitt, in a state of emergency the sovereign has the ultimate authority to decide “what must be done to eliminate it” (7) along with his prerogative to decide on the exception. The role of legal order or constitution does not exceed beyond the suggestion on the selection of a sovereign. When the constitution has decided on a sovereign he becomes the sole arbitrator to handle the exception or emergency however he sees fit. Power is concentrated in him until the emergency has been moderately extenuated or properly handled. In Beckett’s play, as discussed earlier, the emergency is not clearly stated. Yet, the situation that circumscribes the play emanates a sense of emergency through the characters which endows Godot with complete authority over Vladimir and Estragon that resultantly generates a state of exception particularly for them as “What characterizes an exception is principally unlimited authority” (Schmitt, *Theology* 12). Schmitt’s state of exception is not a personal affair, rather it is a state emergency. Schmitt is referring to the validity of Weimar Constitution

as example which was a state emergency. This is hardly relevant to Beckett's play, the exception is neither common nor national, not even local or territorial; rather it is extraterritorial and personal. It is personal because no one except them knows who Godot is. Yet it is baffling that Pozzo should know the reason of their waiting for Godot – “what happens in that case to your appointment with this... Godot... Godot... Godin... anyhow you see I mean, who has your future in his hands... (*pause*) ... at least your immediate future” (Beckett 67-68), although they have not discussed the matter with him. When Vladimir charges him with it, he diverts the discussion to a different topic. Pozzo's knowledge, or at least his idea, about the predicament of Vladimir and Estragon and his treatment and relationship to Lucky normalizes the fact that they, Vladimir, Estragon and Lucky, have chosen others, Godot and Pozzo, to act as sovereign over them. They have forfeited their liberty as individuals and surrendered their body and soul to their chosen sovereigns. Liberty requires individuality – “Over himself, over his own body and mind, the individual is sovereign” (Mill 13). But they willingly got rid of it for some immediate gains. Pozzo clarifies Lucky's intention – “He wants to impress me, so that I'll keep him” (Beckett 70). But the intentions of the pair are not clear enough. But it is clear that they too have some motives. So, the state of exception they inhabit is clearly engineered by them for personal reasons. This personal deification of the individuals by persons or groups for immediate benefits justifies sovereigns' wish to concentrate power in them at the expense of the bare life of the people who voluntarily subjugates themselves to them.

Agamben has borrowed a lot from Schmitt's definition of the state of exception and added some modern connotations to it. Whereas Schmitt's state of exception is a temporary measure, Agamben sees it an opportunity for authoritarianism – “the state of exception appears as a threshold of indeterminacy between democracy and absolutism” (Agamben, *Exception* 3). This is true in case of Beckett's play. Despite the uncertainty of the pairs' intentions, Godot's practice of authoritarianism is evident from the text itself. The presence of the messenger boys is clear indication of the panoptic compound that exists to regulate their lives. Vladimir repeatedly confirms with the messenger boys of their appearance at the designated place – “Tell him ... (*he hesitates*) ... tell him you saw us. (*Pause.*) You did see us, didn't you?” (Beckett 98). Additionally, their daily return to that particular place reflects normalization of the institutionalized human behaviors for authoritative control – “All I know is that the hours are long, under these conditions, and constraint us to beguile them with proceedings which – how shall I say – which may at first sight seem reasonable, until they become a habit” (Beckett 133). Foucault complements the normalization of such behaviors in his book *Security, Territory, Population*:

I think it is indisputable, or hardly disputable, that discipline normalizes. Again we must be clear about the specificity of disciplinary normalization .... Discipline, of course, analyzes and breaks down; it breaks down individuals, places, time, movements, actions, and operations. It breaks them down into components such that they can be seen, on the one hand, and modified on the other .... Second, discipline classifies the components thus identified according to definitive objectives .... Third, discipline establishes optimal sequences or co-ordinations.... Fourth, discipline fixes the processes of progressive training (*dressage*) and permanent control, and finally, on the basis of this, it establishes the division those considered unsuitable or incapable and the others. (56-57)

Vladimir and Estragon's daily drill at a specific country road encapsulates the same procedure. They have been broken down, modified – “habit is a great deadener” (Beckett 148), compartmentalized – “In another compartment. There's no lack of void” (Beckett 114), from the society, classified as other and *homo sacer*, trained to wait for Godot perpetually that signify Godot's permanent control over them – “Let's wait till we know exactly how we stand” (Beckett 53). Foucault further supplements the status quo of sovereign power, in this case of Godot, through his book *Society Must Be Defended*. In the eleventh lecture given on 17 March 1976, Foucault discusses sovereign control over life. He notes this feature of sovereign power as the distinctive mark of modern life:

It seems to me that one of the basic phenomena of the nineteenth century was what might be called power's hold over life. What I mean is the acquisition of power over man insofar as man is a living being, that the biological came under State control, that there was at least a certain tendency that leads to what might be termed State control of the biological. (Foucault 239-240)

It is apparent that Greek demarcation of life between *bios* and *zoē* is present in Foucault's understanding of power exercise as well. Central to this particular lecture was the normalization of this particular shift making – biopolitics, a new order of the world that still exists. Foucault argues that this ultimately results in the formation of a constitutionalized autocracy that the nation-states have been practicing in the name of security in a post-9/11 world. This practice also depends upon a contract between the state sovereign and those who it has promised to protect. Foucault calls it biopolitics. In Beckett's play what we see is the culmination of biopolitics practiced upon the pair by Godot. He has taken hold over the body that is drilled to endure the physical pain of the body

in waiting and trained the soul for perpetuity although “he couldn't promise anything” (Beckett 53).

Like Foucault's biopolitics, Agamben's state of exception is permanent. It is a permanent mode of government that the sovereign perpetuates to retain its present state of affairs. This is done through the normalization of the exception – “One of the essential characteristics of the state of exception – the provisional abolition of the distinction among legislative, executive, and judicial powers – here shows its tendency to become a lasting practice of government” (Agamben, *Exception* 7). This undeniably corresponds to Foucault's process of normalization. For Agamben, what starts as an emergency measure, unlike Schmitt, prolongs forevermore – “The state of exception tends increasingly to appear as the dominant paradigm of government in contemporary politics” (*Exception* 2). If Godot were a Schmittian sovereign he would have addressed their issue as early as possible and relieved them from waiting for him. But Godot, as a modern or Agambenian sovereign power, makes them perpetually wait for him and their salvation at his hands never eventuates. There is only a little textual reference as to assuredly determine Godot's behavior as voluntary procrastination except the information they get from a messenger boy that “He does nothing” (Beckett 149). In fact, it does not really seem to indicate Godot's incapacity to help them; rather it is a clear indication of Godot's exercise of biopolitical control over the pair. The whole mechanism of control starts when the pair self-subjugates themselves to Godot for seeming salvation just as the modern citizenry self-subjugates itself in the name of security or some other trivial issues which is supposed to be “an equal exchange” (Foucault, *Sexuality* 220) but in reality paves the way for biopolitics and in the making of bare life “to make bare life as such the preeminent object of politics” (Agamben, *Bodies* 225).

### **The Bare Life of Vladimir and Estragon**

Self-subjugation is one of the prominent aspects of Agamben's *homo sacer*. This is where Agamben is different from Foucault and Schmitt. For Schmitt, the exception is a temporary emergency where the sovereign “decides ... what must be done to eliminate it” (Schmitt, *Theology* 7). On the other hand, Agamben's sovereign keeps the emergency sustained for biopolitical reasons. The subjects too concede to the sovereign for the resolution of the emergency. In exchange they agree to part ways with their rights until their predicament has been addressed properly –

Vladimir: Let's wait and see what he says.

Estragon: Who?

Vladimir: Godot.

Estragon: Good idea.

Vladimir: Let's wait till we know exactly how we stand.

Estragon: On the other hand it might be better to strike the iron before it freezes.

Vladimir: I'm curious to hear what he has to offer. Then we'll take it or leave it.

(Beckett 53)

Such a predicament is not peculiar to Beckett's play only. Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* also depicts a similar scenario where Faustus accepts the authority of Lucifer over him for living "in all voluptuousness" (Marlowe 63) for twenty-four years. Whatever grand plans Faustus had never materialized. His right to call on god was also taken away from him. But Faustus too admits that it was he who was to blame for his predicament since Mephistopheles never forced him to sign the contract. In this sense he becomes the subject of biopolitics in the hands of evil. As discussed earlier, it is not evident whether Godot has forcefully ordered Vladimir and Estragon to wait for him. They choose to do so on their own – "What exactly did we ask him for?" (Beckett 53) to which Godot answered vaguely, "That he'd see ... That he couldn't promise anything" (Beckett 53). As a result they do not remain equal to Godot which in case of a contract is a precondition. And "since no man has a natural authority over his fellow, and since strength does not confer any right, it follows that the basis remaining for all legitimate authority among men must be agreed convention" (Rousseau 49). So, they agreed to yield to Godot in exchange for "a kind of prayer" (Beckett 53) and got rid of or transfer their right as a legally discriminated party in the contract with Godot, thus becoming slaves for him like Lucky does for Pozzo – "To transfer is to give or to sell. Now a man who becomes the slave of another does not give himself: he sells himself, in exchange, at the very least, for his subsistence" (Rousseau 49). And when Estragon asks Vladimir whether they are tied to Godot, Vladimir confirms their predicament "To Godot? Tied to Godot? What an idea! No question of it (*Pause*). For the moment" (Beckett 56).

But Godot, like Lucifer, takes the opportunity to exercise biopolitical power over them after they surrender to him. His deliberate prolonging creates a state of exception for them. It puts them in a grey zone or "zone of indistinction" (Agamben, *Homo Sacer* 4) where the body of the sovereign and the body of *homo sacer* "can no longer be told apart" (Agamben, *Homo Sacer* 59). Therefore, as long as Vladimir and Estragon exist, Godot exists as a sovereign. Or alternatively, as long as they allow themselves to be hegemonized by Godot he can keep practicing biopolitics upon them. Had they "dropped him" (Beckett 150) without fearing the punishment he can unleash upon them Godot might have lost his authority upon them. But the fear of punishment stops them from

doing so – “He’d punish us” (Beckett 150), consequently providing Godot with docile bodies which is the prerequisite for biopolitics – “The general form of an apparatus intended to render individuals docile and useful, by means of precise work upon their bodies, indicated the prison institution, before the law ever defined it as the penalty *par excellence*” (Foucault, *Discipline* 231).

This “state of exception” (Agamben, *Exception* 1) is also distinctively characterized by ban. But this ban does not absolve them from law and politics, rather for them it “institutes a paradoxical threshold of indistinction between the two” (Agamben, *Homo Sacer* 18). The pair is put outside a socio-political reality where they can no longer expect humane behavior – “Certainly they beat me” (Beckett 41) – from the rest of the society. That is why they can casually talk about the beating they get from others as if it were a normal phenomenon. They become *homo sacer* in the real sense of the word –

What is captured in the sovereign ban is a human victim who may be killed but not sacrificed: *homo sacer* . . . . The life caught in a sovereign ban is the life that is originally sacred – that is, that may be killed but not sacrificed – and, in this sense, the production of bare life is the originary activity of sovereignty. The sacredness of life, which is invoked today as an absolutely fundamental right in opposition to sovereign power, in fact originally expresses precisely both life’s subjection to a power over death and life’s irreparable exposure in the relation of abandonment. (Agamben, *Homo Sacer* 53)

This clearly alludes to Foucault’s biopolitics, and for Foucault it is one of the constituents of governmentality of the contemporary age which functions as an opportunity for sovereign power to introduce certain regulatory mechanisms – “the body imbued with the mechanics of life and serving as the basis of the biological processes: propagation, births and mortality, the level of health, life expectancy and longevity” (*Sexuality* 139). Although both Agamben and Foucault emphasize the normalization of regulatory process, the latter’s biopolitics does not include self-subjugation as one of the mechanisms of control. Still, what binds Agamben’s “state of exception” (*Exception* 1) and Foucault’s biopolitics is their tendency to present the exceptions as normal world order – “A normalizing society is the historical outcome of a technology of power centered on life” (Foucault, *Sexuality* 144). Like Godot has been using the messenger boys to keep the pair under constant surveillance to ensure that they come at the designated place without fail – “Tell him . . . (*he hesitates*) . . . tell him you saw me and that . . . (*he hesitates*) . . . that you saw me . . . You’re sure you saw me, you won’t come and tell me tomorrow that you never saw me!” (Beckett 149).

Agamben uses the concept of camp to illustrate the similarity between these two diverge issues. Modern camps allow the sovereign power to treat them as exceptional spaces where judicial-political rights are suspended *in toto*. The entry in the refugee camps is voluntary. People who seek refuge in a foreign country voluntarily subjugate their rights in exchange for shelter and better life. The camps become a place for perpetual waiting like the country road in the play. The unspecified tree becomes a refugee camp for them since it is here they must wait for Godot, for their seeming salvation at the hands of Godot like the refugees who allow the sovereign power, the host countries in this context, to exert power over them. Modern politics has been considering camps as the *nomos* of the world, normalizing their existence in the changing political paradigm of the new world order:

The supreme goal of all totalitarian governments is not only the freely admitted, long-range ambition to global rule but also the never-admitted and immediately realized attempt at the total domination of man. The concentration camps are the laboratories in the experiment of total domination .... Total domination is achieved when the human person, who somehow is always a specific mixture of spontaneity and being conditioned, has been transformed into completely conditioned being .... The disintegration of personality is carried through in different stages, the first ... when the judicial person is being destroyed .... The second stage of destruction concerns moral personality and is achieved through the separation of concentration camps from the rest of the world, a separation which makes martyrdom senseless, empty, and ridiculous. The last stage is the destruction of individuality itself and is brought about through the permanence and institutionalizing of torture. The end result is the reduction of human beings to the lowest possible denominator .... (Arendt 240)

“Total domination,” “conditioned being,” destruction of “the judicial person,” destruction of morality, “senseless, empty and ridiculous” martyrdom, destruction of individuality, perpetual institutionalized torture, and “lowest possible denominator” – all of these clearly refer to the making of a *homo sacer* in both the ancient and modern sense. Arendt is just repeating what Agamben has been saying in his *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* and Foucault’s theory of normalization in *Security, Territory, Population*. Beckett’s characters in the play are truly relegated to the “lowest denominator,” biopolitical subjects or *homo sacer* – all of these terms almost synonymously expressing the same idea.

### Conclusion

It is evident that Godot is certainly a sovereign, in fact, he is a modern sovereign

who perpetually prolongs the state of exception created for whatever reason, yet remains outside it: “The paradox of sovereignty consists in the fact that the sovereign is, at the same time, outside and inside the juridical order ... the sovereign, having the legal power to suspend the validity of law, legally places himself outside the law” (Agamben, *Homo Sacer* 17). Therefore, the legality of any contract does not hold them accountable for breaching it, rather it empowers him to set the condition of the contract – for Godot has instructed where and when the pair should wait upon him. He also engages messenger boys to monitor their appearance at the designated place and time. And he has clearly proclaimed that non-appearance will be met with punishment. On the other hand, Vladimir and Estragon, by entering into a contract with Godot, has transferred all their rights, even their right to laugh – “You’d make me laugh, if it wasn’t prohibited” (Beckett 54). The play continuously portrays the limit of their dehumanization at the hands of their sovereign, Godot. They have even given up thinking – “We’re in no danger of ever thinking any more” (Beckett 112), which is a stark contrast to Lucky because, despite all the ill-treatment he receives from Pozzo, he still thinks.

All three of them – Vladimir, Estragon, and Lucky, are modern *homo sacer*. Their differences lie in their limit of dehumanization and their comprehension of their respective conditions. Whereas Lucky is clear about his predicament and his need, the pair are somehow oblivious of their situation. Between the pair, Vladimir is more perceptive of their predicament. Nonetheless, that does not change their condition at all. They are all discarded from society – “In an instant all will vanish and we’ll be alone once more, in the midst of nothingness!” (Beckett 134) and relegated to the bare minimum, happy only to remain alive – “To have lived is not enough for them” (Beckett 108). Although they have kept their part of the contract – “We have kept our appointment, and that’s an end to that ... how many people can boast as much” (Beckett 133) – they remain accursed because of the changed connotation of the term *homo sacer*.

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