The Non-Places of Migrant Cinema in Europe

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1. One of these notable exceptions is Rainer Werner Fassbinder's film *Fear Eats the Soul* (*Angst essen Seele auf*, Germany, 1974), which shows the love between Emmi, a middle-aged German woman, and Ali, a younger Berber guest worker. The film detects racial and gender stereotypes that were to typify Germany and Europe from then onwards. A useful article on this is Shohini Chaudhuri, '*Ali: Fear Eats the Soul*: An Anatomy of Racism', in Jeff Geiger and R L Rutsky, eds, *Film Analysis: A Norton Reader*, W W Norton, New York, 2005, pp 640–659.

2. See, for instance, Hamid Naficy, *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 2001; Elizabeth Ezra and Terry Rowden, eds, *Transnational Cinema: The Film Reader*, Routledge, New York, 2006; Yosefa Loshitzky, 'Journeys of Hope to Fortress Europe', *Third Text*, 83, vol 20, no 6, November 2006, pp 745–754, and *Screening Strangers: Migration and Diaspora in Contemporary European Cinema*, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana, 2010; Sandra

INTRODUCTION

Cinema is an ideal arena for illustrating how new forms of representation and socio-political contestations are articulated in what we now refer to as the New Europe. Although migratory characters and issues were occasionally featured in European films made before the 1980s, changed and accelerated patterns of migration have magnified their visibility and significance in more recent cinematic productions.[1] They have become central agents in new hybridised and eclectic films, which blend different traditions and genres, and which are currently commanding the attention of media critics, film festival juries and the public in general.

This is obviously connected to the rise of transnational and postcolonial cinema in which accented or third-space films are characterised by the representation of identities beyond national boundaries, collaborative modes of production and the use of alternative distribution channels.[2] However, this is also linked to the European crisis, during which self-explanatory identity has come under pressure in recent decades as a result of increased postcolonial awareness, the revival of religious practices in the public sphere and the crisis of the secular state, and the rise of new forms of racism, such as those that emerged in the aftermath of 9/11, often grouped under the banner of Islamophobia.[3] Such transnational shifts serve to explain the recent interest shown by film directors in postcolonial and migratory themes, issues and characters, as they attempt to make sense of the increasing erosion or changing notions of European identity. These directors are also endeavouring to deal with the national 'colonial unconscious', in other words, the unprocessed colonial legacies of several European countries (such as France, the Netherlands, Portugal, Italy, Germany, Belgium) and growing xenophobia and racism within Europe.[4]

The cost of film production and difficulties with distribution explain the relatively late arrival of cinema as a medium of expression for migrant perspectives when compared with other art forms such as music, literature or photography. However, thanks to the digital

Ponzanesi and Marguerite Waller, eds, *Postcolonial Cinema Studies*, Routledge, London and New York, 2011.

3. See, for instance, Etienne Balibar, *We, the People of Europe?: Reflections on Transnational Citizenship*, James Swenson, trans, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 2003 and Graham Huggan, 'Perspectives on Postcolonial Europe', *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, vol 44, no 3, 2008, pp 241–249.

4. See Sandra Ponzanesi and Bolette Blaagaard, 'In the Name of Europe', *Social Identities. Journal for the Study of Race, Nation and Culture*, vol 17, no 1, 2011, pp 1–10.

5. Historically, hospitality has been seen as a private and ethical duty to welcome strangers. With the development of the modern state such practices become inscribed in national and international legal systems that order citizenship, with political belonging on the one hand versus the precarious status and place assigned to the 'alien' on the other. Current philosophical debates and theories of justice focus on the rights of others (see Seyla Benhabib, *The Rights of Others: Aliens, Residents and Citizens*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2004 and Saskia Sassen, *Guests and Aliens*, New Press, New York, 1999), on the tension between the demand for unconditional hospitality (Jacques Derrida and Anne Dufourmantelle, *De l'Hospitalité*, Calmann-Lévi, Paris, 1997) and on the absolute ethical requirement to host the stranger on the one hand and political and legal limitations on the other (Heidrun Friese, 'Spaces of Hospitality', *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities*, vol 9, no 2,

revolution and the continued proliferation of film festivals, migrant and postcolonial cinema in Europe has, in the last decade, attained increased visibility and more commercial success. This increased visibility mirrors the shifted position of migrant and postcolonial subjects from the wings to centre stage, where they now occupy cultural spaces that were previously monolithic and impenetrable to non-Western cultures.

Hamid Naficy has explored in great detail the elements that characterise exilic and diasporic cinema, which he describes as 'accented', to express how the origin of the film-maker impacts on not only thematic but also stylistic aspects of film. Accented cinema might be characterised by questions of belonging and identity (travel and journeys, borders and confinement, a nostalgic longing for 'home'), by language use (multilingualism, orality, acousticity, accents and inflection), modes of production (interstitial, collective forms of production, multi-source funding and co-production), narrative style (autobiographical and epistolary, using voiceover, letter reading, telephone communication, and more recently e-mail and SMS texting), and the addition of haptic elements (structures of feeling accented through the senses of touch and smell).

The above could be considered to be the common denominators of what is specific to migrant and diasporic cinema. In this contribution, however, I would like to focus in particular on another recurring aspect that is of thematic and aesthetic relevance and provides a critical commentary on migration and the condition of postcolonial Europe (and elsewhere): the use of 'non-places'. I will explore these 'non-places' in three films: the first, *Last Resort* (UK, 2000), is directed and co-written by Pawel Pawlikowski, a British film-maker of Polish origin. It addresses the question of refugees in Britain through the experiences of a young Russian woman and her son, who are, it turns out, refugees by mistake. The second film, *Dirty Pretty Things* (UK, 2002), was made by the established British director Stephen Frears and is based on a screenplay by Steven Knight. It critically engages with Britain's New Labour and its ambivalent politics of hospitality concerning asylum seekers and illegal migrants.[5] The third film, *Io, l'altro* (*I, the Other*, Italy, co-production, 2007), written and directed by the Tunisian Mohsen Melliti, articulates the encounter with, and response to, religious fundamentalism and media alarmism in the wake of 9/11 through the representation of two fishermen in a boat in Tunisian extraterritorial waters off the coast of Sicily.

THERE IS NO PLACE LIKE HOME[6]

Non-places (*non-lieux*) were defined by Marc Augé in his book *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*.[7] Augé's non-place is set against a Durkheimian notion of anthropological place as an organic sociality rooted in space and time with shared meanings and notions of personhood. 'These places,' writes Augé, 'have at least three characteristics in common. They want to be – people want them to be – places of identity, of relations and of history', but the exact opposite can be said of 'non-places', which do not incorporate any organic society.[8] Augé describes the distinction as follows: 'If a place can be defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity, then a

2004, pp 67–79). The
term 'political hospitality'
explores the inherent
tensions in the double
meaning of the term. See
'"The Politics of
Hospitality" and
Migration', a joint paper
by Heidrun Friese and
Sandro Mezzadra
presented as part of their
workshop on Hospitality
and Transnational
Migration in Europe and
the Mediterranean Middle
East and North Africa at
the 8th Mediterranean
Research Meeting,
European University
Institute–Robert
Schumann Centre for
Advanced Studies,
Florence, 21–25 March
2007, and available online
at http://www.eui.eu/
Documents/RSCAS/
Research/Mediterranean/
WS15MRM2007.pdf. See
also http://www.iue.it/
RSCAS/Research/
Mediterranean/mrm2007/
pdf/WS15_MRM2007.
pdf, last accessed 25 May
2012.

6. This citation is from the
film *The Wizard of Oz*,
1939, USA, colour film,
101 minutes, directed by
Victor Fleming.

7. Marc Augé, *Non-Places:
Introduction to an
Anthropology of
Supermodernity*, Verso,
London, 1995

8. Ibid, p 52

9. Ibid, p 79

10. Ibid, p 78

11. Ibid, p 103

12. Ibid, p 103

13. Michel Foucault, 'Of Other
Spaces', Jay Miskoviec,
trans, *Diacritics*, vol 16,
Spring 1986, pp 22–27,
p 24

space which cannot be defined as relational, historical, or concerned with identity will be a non-place'.[9] 'Non-place' is a concept ascribed to a world

> …where transit points and temporary abodes are proliferating under luxurious or inhuman conditions… where a dense network of means of transport which are also inhabited spaces is developing… a world thus surrendered to solitary individuality, to the fleeting, the temporal and the ephemeral.[10]

Augé refers in particular to places created by late capitalism, such as shopping malls, airports, train stations, hotel chains, motels and motorway stops, places where individuals function as passengers or customers or both at the same time, immersing themselves in the chance anonymity of a space without history, as if trapped and frozen in a time unmarked by events happening in the present. In supermodernity, the mode of transport itself is as much a non-place as the social and geographical places of transit and waiting. Augé's definition also includes peripheral locations in which migrants and refugees are contained before they get, or are refused, full access to society with its rules of hospitality and exclusion. Augé's 'passenger through non-places retrieves his identity only at Customs, at the tollbooth, at the check-out counter'.[11] Zones of stasis such as the airport, detention area or the immigration and social service office create 'neither singular identity nor relations; only solitude, and similitude'.[12]

Augé's definition of non-places builds on Michel Foucault's notion of heterotopia (of other spaces, *des espaces autres*). Different from utopias, which are about an idea or an image that is not real but represents a perfected version of society, heterotopias do exist. They are 'sites with no real place… [with] a direct or inverted analogy with the real space of society'.[13] Foucault distinguishes several types of heterotopia, but in general a heterotopia is a space that organises otherness and difference, and is also a means of escape from authoritarianism and repression. These are spaces of *otherness*, neither here nor there, that are simultaneously physical and mental. The term heterotopia might refer to a separate space, such as a boarding school or a motel room, where activities like coming of age or a honeymoon take place out of sight, to sites of deviation, such as institutions used to house undesirable bodies and people whose behaviour is outside the norm (hospitals, asylums, prisons, rest homes, cemeteries), to sacred, purifying and forbidden spaces, such as saunas or hamams, to places that suspend and preserve things from the ravages of time, such as museums; or spaces, such as the garden, that work as a microcosm of different environments with plants and flowers from around the world. According to Foucault, every society constructs sites that can be defined as effectively enacted utopias (heterotopias), sites where social policies are articulated and where ideals of social ordering are physically performed. The two terms, heterotopia and non-place, are therefore related but not interchangeable, since Augé's term is more strictly focused to account for an anthropology of supermodernity and therefore applicable more to mass-mediated and technological contexts.

The colonial space could also be defined as a heterotopia, a place where regimes of otherness are organised and enforced, creating a laboratory for what the perfected society at home should be, far away from the

centre but imprinted with its model of inclusion and exclusion. However, with the movements of decolonisation, many of the colonised came to occupy locations other than restricted outposts. Through processes of migration to the metropoles the enacted heterotopias came to occupy more ambiguous and invisible locations.

Postcolonial subjects and migrants outside the European Union, and in particular asylum seekers and refugees, are barely welcome or integrated into the New Europe, which has expanded its boundaries but closed its borders. What in derogatory terms is defined as 'Fortress Europe' refers to a place in which legal and military practices of inclusion and exclusion keep the foreigner, alien or unwanted other outside its territory, which is both real and imaginary.

Practices of exclusion in the New Europe, which we can say was created in the aftermath of the fall of the Berlin Wall, are more insidious than those of the old racist Europe because they replace old paradigms with new economic and religious ones. In the case of the UK, for example, where the cultural and political issue of blackness has been debated since the arrival of postcolonial migrants:

> The body of the asylum seeker or refugee becomes the (un)marked body of strange(r)ness in current debates... This move from the 'black' immigrant to the figure of the asylum seeker mirrors the movement from a racism predicated upon biological difference, to a 'meta-racism' predicated upon cultural difference, to the current form of 'xeno-racism' and 'asylophobia'.[14]

According to Sarah Gibson, this shift from symbolic differences (racialised bodies and figures) to economic and cultural differences (economic migrants and political refugees) parallels Britain's appropriation and integration of some forms of otherness as its own in its re-branding as a multicultural place.

In the three films analysed here, the bodily inscription of the postcolonial subjects, migrants, refugees and asylum seekers becomes marked as other, and therefore socially ordered elsewhere through their physical displacement to the outskirts of society, into liminal spaces that function as waiting rooms or holding areas for the 'legal' Europe. However, these zones of marginalisation and exclusion, heterotopias or non-places actually become places of semi-belonging and transformation. As I will argue, non-places can be inhabited and appropriated and can be regarded as alternative venues for hospitality where the 'host', who is usually in a position of domination and control, becomes dependent on the 'guests'. Through the analysis of the three films a requalification of Marc Augé's term 'non-place' will be proposed by accounting for the transformative role that migrants and asylum seekers make of these sites, which become resignified.

LAST RESORT (UK, 2000)

14. Sarah Gibson, '"The Hotel Business is About Strangers": Border Politics and Hospitable Spaces in Stephen Frears' *Dirty Pretty Things*', *Third Text*, 83, vol 20, no 6, November 2006, pp 693–701: 697

Last Resort is a film about Tanya, a vulnerable and naive young Russian woman who arrives in England with her ten-year-old son Artiom. When her English fiancé Mark does not show up at Stansted Airport, Tanya asks for political asylum in order to protract her stay in England. Mother and son are taken to Stonehaven, a grim seaside resort and 'designated holding area' where they are to stay until their claim for asylum has

been processed. The fictional Stonehaven is a deserted and dreary place that gathers together, contains and constrains hundreds of asylum seekers. The film's actual location is Margate in Kent, a seaside tourist resort for British people which saw its heyday, as did all British seaside resorts, in the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century, and which has specific social and class implications. At the time of filming, Margate is a depressed town in Kent in the South East of England which has been designated a Regeneration Area. The Margate that we see in the film is rather abstracted and stylised, empty of traffic and people, filmed in desaturated colours to enhance its visual bleakness. However, Alfie's Dreamland – an abandoned amusement arcade – creates a connection between the history of the seaside resort and the 'non-placeness' of Stonehaven, connecting the narratives of the real spaces of social and cultural practices with those of the imagination.[15]

Tanya is assigned a dingy flat with peeling tropical wallpaper and stuffy brown furniture. She is informed that she cannot leave until her case is decided and that this will take 'from twelve to sixteen months'. This town, says Tanya, is 'like punishment for some mistakes that I made'. The sense of entrapment and imprisonment is reinforced by the grey presence of the sea that constitutes a natural barrier, and by the fact that the railway station is closed 'until further notice'. Stonehaven has been turned into a penal colony for people designated as criminals by the European immigration authorities; they are kept under surveillance by CCTV cameras and the police patrol the area with dogs.

Tanya attempts to contact her fiancé from a solitary phone box, the sole means of connection with the outside world. Desperate to escape, she forges an unlikely alliance with the amusement arcade manager Alfie, and this soon develops into something more. Tanya is not allowed to work, in line with the asylum seeker policy that prohibits access to economic activities. As only illegal and exploitative occupations are available to her, she explores the 'job offers' of online prostitution. Witnessing Tanya's desperation to get out of Stonehaven and Artiom's slide into criminality, Alfie decides to help them. They hide overnight in a boat and sail off at dawn around the headland. They make it to the main road heading towards London, where Tanya and Alfie part.

In his article 'Welcome to Dreamland', Les Roberts sets out an incisive analysis of the film and identifies three main zones through which Tanya and Artiom move: the zone of arrival and departure (Stansted Airport); the zone of transition (between airport and holding area) and the zone of stasis (Stonehaven). As Roberts writes:

> Characteristic of all three, at least until the final scene, is the absence of agency in movement. They are *conveyed* through the airport on the shuttle car, *processed* by the immigration officials, *despatched* by the police and *delivered* to the holding area, where the curtailment of travel, movement, and the breaching of borders define, by virtue of their absence, the spatial practice of resistance.[16]

Several non-places shape the construction of the film. For example, the opening and closing of the film occur in an airport. In the opening scene Tanya has just arrived in London, hoping to be picked up by her fiancé, but she is stopped at customs. The final scene shows Tanya in an airport tunnel, embracing her son as they leave Britain, after their

15. Les Roberts, '"Welcome to Dreamland": From Place to Non-Place and Back Again in Pawel Pawlikowski's *Last Resort*', *New Cinemas: Journal of Contemporary Film*, vol 1, no 2, pp 78–90, p 78

16. Ibid, p 80

seaborne escape from the detention centre helped by Alfie, who expected a more romantic happy ending in return for his efforts.

The film is replete with zones of compulsory stasis and waiting, such as the detention centre, the abandoned entertainment arcade, the phone box and the beach, bounded by the sea. The telephone on the seafront, for example, which only works with pre-paid cards, is a crucial symbol of escape around which the asylum seekers and refugees gather, queue and fight in order to gain access to 'other spaces' and 'voices'. It becomes a desirable non-place for achieving connection to the outside world, going beyond the grey and claustrophobic geopolitical borders of Stonehaven. The phone booth is:

> … by any measure of Durkheimian anthropology, a totem of the Stonehaven asylum community, as well as being a portal from which the transnational and transcultural spaces of a globalized postmodernity are accessed and conceived. It represents a discontinuity in space that, by virtue of its capacity for spatial compression, is able to express continuity in time, and hence act as marker of anthropological space, shared identities and established meanings.[17]

In this way the non-place of Stonehaven is transformed through the utilisation of the phone box by the asylum seekers to establish transnational connections. It becomes a place of organised identity and belonging since the telephone is static but connects. Interestingly, the mobile phone, which, it is claimed, is the most popular technological tool for Third World people and postcolonial migrant youth alongside satellite TV, is totally absent from the film, placing the asylum seeker communities in a kind of suspended Neverland, probably in order to emphasise the non-agency of asylum seekers who would, had they the use of new digital media, participate more in the creation of an organic society, and therefore of a more integrated space.

Another element which indicates the transnational connections with the outside world, breaching the zone of stasis, is the internet. Les, Stonehaven's local pimp, recruits attractive women as virtual prostitutes for an online porn site which has clients throughout the world. It is remarkable that the medium for transnational communication par excellence, capable of liberating the body from identity markers such as gender, race, age, accent etc, reduces women to their bodily materiality. Iain Sinclair comments on the seaside town's global business with locally confined women:

> [C]yberprostitution is the town's sole profit-making industry. All other activities – queuing for queues, servicing slot-machines that rage in a perpetual Hawaiian surf-orgasm, bingo-revivalism – are unconvinced survival strategies; ways of putting on time before the final cull. Website pornography glues this exhausted maritime settlement to the map 'We're live in Pakistan and the Gulf.' From a grand sea-facing house, a slimeball called Les ('I am Mr Stonehaven') operates an interactive masturbation factory.[18]

Another interesting liminal non-place that can be turned into place by the migrant communities is the beach, which, as an interstitial zone between the land and the sea, defies spatial categorisation and can be seen as a border as well as a place from which escape is possible. In this zone of

17. Ibid, p 85

18. Iain Sinclair, 'The Cruel Seaside', *Sight and Sound*, 119, March 2001, p 3

Alfie, Artiom and Tanya in *Last Resort*, UK, 2000, directed and co-written by Pawel Pawlikowski, courtesy BFI.

stasis, as Roberts indicates, several interesting topoi of non-places are articulated, around which the communities of asylum seekers attempt to create alternative forms of 'organic society' against all the odds. The boat used for the escape represents the tool of connection between the entrapment of the land and the freedom of the sea. And yet it is only at the airport that the real departure from Britain and its constrictive laws against refugees can take place.

Though Pawlowksi is under no obligation to 'document' asylum seeking, he opts to tell the story of a Russian woman against the backdrop of detention without introducing any of the other asylum seekers. Tanya has only fleeting contact with them at the immigration desk and the phone box. She mostly interacts with British people, including the internet porn entrepreneur and Alfie. The director, who is better known as a documentary film-maker, privileges here the individual story above the mass of anonymous asylum seekers who are left in the background (no names, just faces) while the more established fiction film recipe of one major story line, plot–crisis–happy ending, flavoured with a love story, seems to work more effectively for wider audiences. However, this also enhances the privileged position that Tanya has in her options with regard to place and 'non-place'. Though she is continually shuttled between the host (the British helpers) and the 'real' guests (the official refugees), she is a refugee by mistake and therefore only temporarily out of place. The postcolonial implication of Tanya's 'privileged position' is also linked to her 'whiteness', which allows her to 'pass' easily for a European.

682

19. An interesting text on the relationship between postcolonialism and postsocialism is discussed by David Chioni Moore in: 'Is the Post- in Postcolonial the Post- in Post-Soviet? Toward a Global Postcolonial Critique', *PMLA*, vol 116, no 1, January 2001, pp 111–128.

20. Many scholars have rightly pointed out that Eastern Europe is actually Mittel-Europa, Central Europe, which was re-qualified as Eastern Europe with the drawing of boundaries for the newly founded European Union, which originally only covered Western Europe.

21. These films irreverently approached the experience of Asians or other minorities in Britain, challenging dominant conceptions with their pluralities of identities and rejection of essentialism. These are films set in the iron years of Margaret Thatcher and convey the reality of a racially mixed swinging London questioning the meaning of Britishness from a variety of positions; not only racial but also class, sexuality, and gender politics at the same time. Furthermore these films challenged the construction of national cinema as constituted by heritage films (eg Merchant Ivory productions such as *A Passage to India*, 1984, and *Heat and Dust*, 1983) or associated primarily with a nostalgic modern British upper class.

22. Shohini Chaudhuri, *Contemporary World Cinema: Europe, the Middle East, East Asia and South Asia*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2005, p 18

23. Stéphanie Genz writes the following on the definition of a political Third Way to connect it to her new rephrasing of Third Way/ve feminism: 'In their manifesto, *Europe: The Third Way/Die Neue Mitte*

In shots of the crowds of refugees queuing at the phone box or at the office desk, it is obvious that Tanya stands out for her whiteness, youth and beauty. Here being a refugee by mistake also comes to imply that there are different layers of 'non-welcomeness' to Britain, some of which are arranged along the lines of the old colonial contract and associated with the new fear of the other rekindled by the conflict following 9/11. Tanya's in-betweenness as a subject of the post-Soviet empire, outside the EU, but not outside Europe in cultural, geographical and historical terms, interestingly points to the ambivalence, but also to the short-sightedness of EU legislation and notions of EU citizenship based on a paradoxical definition of identity and belonging.[19] Her Russian origin is also of interest in connection with the redefinition of Europe after the fall of the Berlin Wall, which has left the Eastern borders of Europe open and in a state of constant expansion.[20]

Therefore, through Tanya, Stonehaven becomes an interesting topos of non-place, a detention centre, euphemistically referred to as 'holding area', which is mobilised from within by the involuntary guests who make the host confront his/her shortcomings and lack of hospitality. By establishing new forms of emotional ties and creating possible lines of flight, the detention centre is transformed into a non-place where new negotiations are made possible and where the postcoloniality of Europe is central.

DIRTY PRETTY THINGS (UK, 2002)

Dirty Pretty Things is a film about illegal economies and illegal migrants in London made by a mainstream British film-maker, Stephen Frears, well known for successful films such as *Dangerous Liaisons* (1988), *The Snapper* (1993), *High Fidelity* (2000) and the Oscar-winning *The Queen* (2006). Frears dealt with postcolonial and multicultural themes earlier in his career with ground-breaking films such as *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985) and *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid* (1987), both written by Hanif Kureshi.[21] As Shohini Chaudhuri writes:

> . . . a rich vein running through these films. . . is their enlarged definition of Britishness. They reinscribe the distinctive experiences of Black Britons into the discourse of British cultural identity, where they are so often absent. In this sense, they are often 're-defining' Britain, or redefining British cultural identity.[22]

Dirty Pretty Things continues in that tradition twenty years later, foregrounding changes in a globalised Britain not under Thatcher's conservatism but under Tony Blair's New Labour regime with its compromised politics of left solidarity and liberal capitalism. As Stéphanie Genz writes, New Labour's Third Way means: 'the loosening of the "ideological straitjacket" of left-wing politics and an embrace of the forces of globalization and micro-economic flexibility'.[23] In this new era the hostile representations of the 'others' within Europe have significantly shifted from postcolonial migrants to refugees and asylum seekers who, as Graham Huggan writes, remind us of the limits of cosmopolitanism and of the contradictions of a 'euphoric' globalist worldview which should welcome migrants of every religion and ethnicity into the
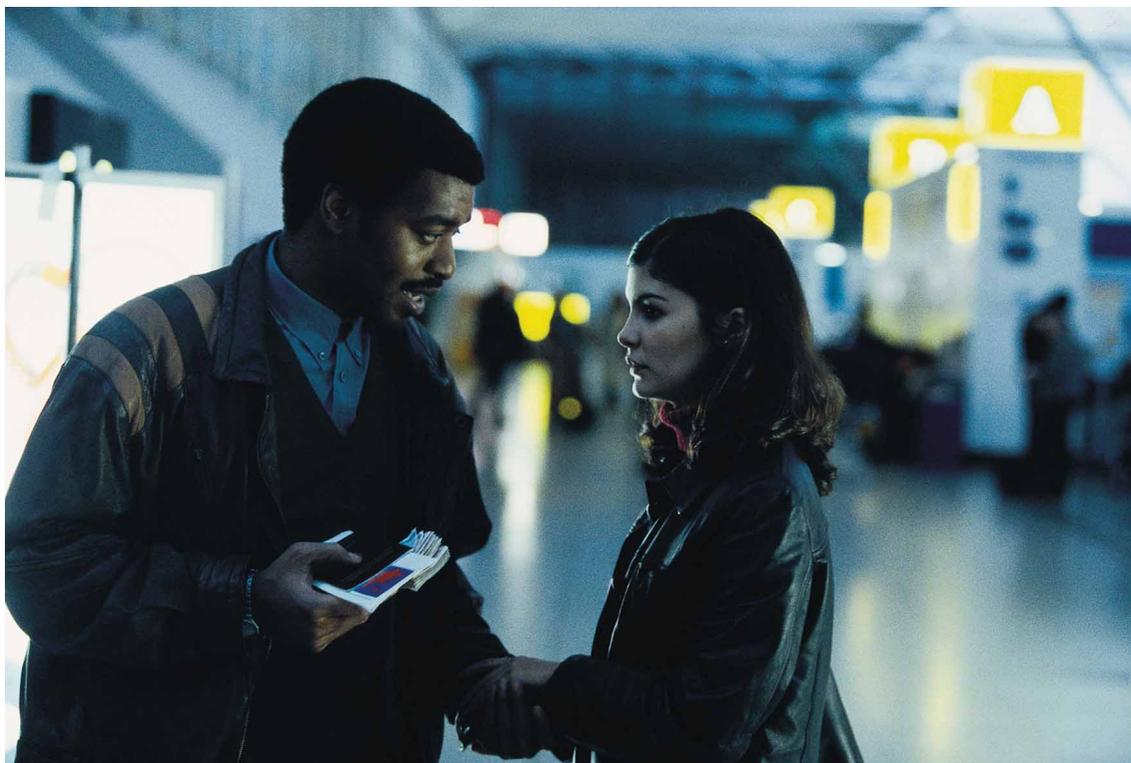
Above, Audrey Tautou as Senay, and below, Alex Mpondo as Okwe with Senay in *Dirty Pretty Things*, UK, 2002, directed by Stephen Frears, courtesy BFI

(1999), Blair and [German chancellor Gerhard] Schroeder set forth the values and programmes indispensable for a renewal of social democracy, at a time when the leftist doctrines of the past no longer wholly apply. In their search for "honest well-constructed and pragmatic policies", they promote "a go-ahead mentality" and "a new entrepreneurial spirit at all levels of society" in order to support a market economy and "create the conditions in which existing businesses can prosper and adapt, and new businesses can be set up and grow". As the politicians of the New Centre and Third Way astutely point out, "the most important task of modernisation is to invest in human capital: to make the individual and businesses fit for the knowledge-based economy of the future". In this way, human and economic interests are seen to be interdependent as they are merged in the promotion of the concepts of efficiency, competition and high performance.' See Stéphanie Genz, 'Third Way/ve: The Politics of Postfeminism', *Feminist Theory*, vol 7, no 3, 2006, pp 333–353.

24. See Huggan, op cit, p 245.

25. The cast is also an interesting ensemble of famous rising stars – Audrey Tautou, who starred in *Amélie*, plays Senay Gelik – and lesser-known but accomplished actors such as Chiwetel Ejiofor as Okwe (Ejiofor played the anti-apartheid activist Alex Mpondo in *Red Dust* and covered other major roles in Hollywood films and theatre roles) and Sophie Okonedo as Juliette (known for her role in *Hotel Rwanda* and other minor appearances).

26. See Gibson, op cit, p 693.

celebration of a world without borders.[24] The film indeed contests the image of London familiar from glossy tourist representations, showing the underside of cosmopolitan London by bringing to the foreground the illegal workers who keep up the façade of the service industry, providing hotel management, cab driving and sexual favours. This underclass is figured through three main bodies in the film: an illegal immigrant from Nigeria, Okwe; a Turkish asylum seeker, Senay; and a black British prostitute, Juliette.[25] The film combines characters who are underdogs and who come from different legacies in the making of Britain. Okwe is clearly the postcolonial subject, originating from the former colony Nigeria, but in London not as the direct result of the process of decolonisation but of the subsequent corruption and dictatorship installed in his own independent country. Juliette is black-British, a postcolonial subject who despite her claim to full Britishness is hyphenated in her dual legacy. Senay is the new migrant category; brought to Britain as migrant labour but without a work permit, she has even weaker ties than the other two and is therefore even more vulnerable. These conditions of marginalisation and otherness are conveyed using styles and techniques that are mainstream and reach out to a wide audience. The postcolonial theme is articulated around the hotel, the place where immigrant workers and tourists meet at the interface of global travel: the hosts and the guests, the servants and the clients, the cosmopolitan tourists and the immigrants, the businessmen and the illegal workers, and so forth.

The hotel is also, according to the definition given by Marc Augé, a non-place, a location of transit and ephemeral consumption where the customer is a passenger immersed in the anonymity of an empty space without history. The hotel stands for a fleeting notion of hospitality, which functions according to standardised rules of reception and service versus economic exchange. In Frears's film the hotel in question, the Baltic Hotel (a name that already alludes to somewhere other than Britain) becomes a metaphor for the nation, the microcosm where the larger issues of immigrant labour and the British service economy are played out, and also a space in which to negotiate who has the right to enter and, by extension, to belong to the nation:

> In the 'global hierarchy of mobility' the hotel becomes a pivotal space for analyzing the distinction between asylum seekers and tourists as it intersects two different types of hospitality: the increasing politicization of hospitality in Britain's immigration and asylum systems and the centrality of the hospitality industry in branding tourist Britain.[26]

This Janus aspect of hospitality management is represented in the film through the exploitation of the invisible workers who become vulnerable to other forms of exploitation, such as renouncing their kidneys in order to secure a fake passport, a new identity and the possibility of a new life in Fortress Europe. In one of the opening scenes we see an outraged Okwe, who has just found a heart flushed away in room 510 where the illegal practices of organ removal take place at considerable risk to the refugees operated on by unprofessional hands in non-sterile conditions. Behind the polished façade of the service industry, the hotel conceals inhuman practices such as the illegal trafficking of human bodies and organs.

When Juliette is confronted with this discovery and asked to account for it – it was she who called Okwe to unblock the lavatory – she declares, 'I

don't exist, do I?'. Okwe, wanting to call the police after uncovering the illegal practices perpetrated behind the apparently impeccable front of the Baltic Hotel, is told: 'You don't have a position here. You are nothing, you are nothing.' These immigrants are the invisible operators of Britain's economy and its tolerant reputation. Okwe states toward the end of the film: 'We are the people you don't see. We drive your cabs, we clean your rooms, and we suck your cocks.' His statement suggests that all the systems that sustain hospitality in the British service industry depend on the actions of ghost workers who survive around non-places, but cannot make any claims based on their economic contribution to the nation.

The hotel is literally divided into two zones, the reception desk and the comfortable ambience reserved for the guests of the hotel, shot in warm golden and red colours, and backstage, reserved for 'staff only', the underworld of illegal workers and immigrants, shot in desaturated and cold blues, greys and greens, the same colours used in shots of the few exterior scenes to which the world of exploitation extends: Senay's grimy living space, which she illegally shares in day and night shifts with Okwe, the sweatshop run by Asian employers where Senay works after leaving her position as a maid at the Baltic, the office of the Nigerian minicab agency where Okwe collects his salary, and the hospital morgue, the workplace of Okwe's Chinese friend Guo Yi who allows Okwe to access extra medicines and tools to 'rescue' refugees from illegal operations.

The hotel manager, the Spanish Señor Juan, eloquently nicknamed Sneaky, states, 'the hotel business is about strangers… strangers will always surprise you. They come to the hotel at night to do dirty things, and it is our job to make it look pretty again.' Thanks to his 'European status', the Spaniard Señor Juan exploits the weaker position of other immigrants, the so-called illegals from outside the sanctuary of the European Union, to secure quick cash through practices that elite citizens need for their survival.

The film comments harshly on how the bodies of the refugees literally become disposable goods, made invisible through the exploitation of their work in the underworld of the service industry, behind the 'staff only' doors. Senay, sexually harassed in the sweatshop by an immigrant like herself because of her refugee status, decides to succumb to the temptation offered by Señor Juan and allow him to remove a kidney to pay for her freedom and achieve her dream of flying to New York. In the process she is doubly exploited and has to sacrifice both her virginity and her kidney to seal the deal. The film offers an unexpected final twist with the invisible worker, Okwe, striking back by removing Señor Juan's kidney instead of Senay's, having secured forged passports for the two of them. The film ends with an unrealistic happy ending in which wrongdoers are punished and the just attain their wished-for lives.

It is no coincidence that this film, like *Last Resort*, both begins and ends in the space of the airport at the doors of Britain and Europe. The film opens with Okwe greeting an international traveller with 'do you wanna a cab?… do you wanna a taxi?'. The film ends with Senay checking in for her flight to New York, using a new name and identity, the Italian Isabella Incarico, and with Okwe using a phone box to reconnect to his family, calling his daughter and heading back to her in Nigeria. The airport functions as a non-place where tourists and refugees fulfil a

27. The various improvised laws that attempted to regulate and legislate the presence, residence and right to citizenship of the newcomers were without exception inadequate and disastrous (Legge Martelli, 1990, Turco-Napolitano, 1998; Bossi-Fini, 2002; Legge Pacchetto Sicurezza, 2009). The sudden influx of immigrants to Italy (chaotically housed in detention centres, refugee camps and improvised 'centri di accoglienza' – hosting centres) was not a temporary emergency but was destined to continue. Migration could therefore not be thought through outside the social and economic development of Italy itself, with the complex logic of late capitalism which intersected patterns of migration with the globalisation of the labour force; but the fear of the other, as the resurrection of the unprocessed colonial past, re-emerged in Italy with violence.

28. This recent 'immigration emergency' has been caused by the sudden influx that has transformed Italy from a country of emigration (from which millions of people migrated to Northern Europe, Argentina and the United States at the beginning of the twentieth century) into a country of immigration. Since the 1980s the rapidly increasing number of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees coming not only from the former Italian colonies in the Horn of Africa (Somalia, Eritrea, Ethiopia) but also from the Maghreb and other African countries, and from Latin America, the Middle East and Eastern Europe (especially after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the war in Yugoslavia), has dramatically changed the face of Italian cities.

29. Iain Chambers, 'The Mediterranean: A Postcolonial Sea', *Third Text*, 70, vol 18, no 5, 2004, pp 423–433, p 425

completely different ideological role. It is a place of arrival and departure, but also stasis, one of the difficult gateways to official status as citizens. The European nation-state is inhospitable and the hotel a temporary abode, a location of entrapment but also of transformation, before the flight to the USA promises a new 'real' freedom for Senay and the return to Nigeria the hope of a new beginning for Okwe.

In that sense migrant cinema demonstrates the failure of integration but also the amazing resilience of migrants, refugees, illegal workers and asylum seekers, who, through their passage into non-places, become transformed into highly determined and assertive subjects who find the constraints of the nation, and its biased hospitality system, too limiting a concept to adapt to as a final destination.

IO, L'ALTRO (ITALY, 2007)

Though migration to and from Italy is not new, the scale and intensity of immigration from Africa, Latin America, the Middle East and Eastern Europe to Southern Italy are unprecedented. The onset of this phenomenon in the last two decades has been tackled with unclear and inappropriate immigration laws.[27] Desperate migrants attempting to reach Italian shores (from Albania or North Africa) to secure a future in Europe have been received as if they betoken an invasion. For Italy closeness to Africa and the question of refugees are not only a matter of demography and ideology but also of liminality. The territorial proximity of the Southern European shores and North Africa makes of the Mediterranean an interesting crossroads space, fluid and in continuous evolution.

The film, by Mohsen Melliti, also a well-known migrant writer and newspaper columnist, transfers the debate and cinematic imagination of migrants and refugees from the North to the South of Europe where the patterns of immigration and reception are different, both historically and geographically, creating ideological differences in the politics of hospitality.[28] *Io, l'altro* is interesting in that it is almost completely shot on a boat in Tunisian extraterritorial waters. The boat becomes a metaphor for larger personal and political dynamics taking place around questions of media, migration and terrorism. The setting, a boat on the sea, is remarkable not only because it constitutes one of those non-places described by Augé, a means of transport disconnected from national or societal identification, but also because it is an uncanny location where the ground rules of legality, hospitality and survival operate differently from on the mainland.

According to Iain Chambers, the sea works as a metaphor, with its waves, winds, currents, tides and storms fostering the ideas of journey, navigation and dispersal, and therefore providing a far more suitable frame for recognising the unstable location of historical knowledge than the dubious dependence on the fixity of kingship, blood and soil:

> …the Mediterranean becomes the site for an experiment in a different form of history writing, and, as such, an experiment in language and representation. The lands, languages, and lineages that border and extend outwards from its shores become accessory to its fluid centrality.[29]

The film *Io, l'altro* is a metaphorical rendition of our world in a boat. Yousef (whose surname is, fatefully, Ben Ali) and Giuseppe (the two share the same name in its Arabic and Italian versions) are longstanding friends who have shared many problems, both personal and professional, in a Sicily always run by invisible hands. They have been working together, united in their fate by the boat, bought from the local mafia boss on whom they still depend because he controls the prices on the fish market. However, while at sea, the news of a terrorist attack (the Madrid train bombing of 11 March 2004, also referred to as 11/3) arrives with a statement that the international police are looking for Yousef Ben Ali who, apart from his name, is only said to be an Arab man between thirty and thirty-five years of age. A case of homonymy destroys in a few hours the long friendship between the two fishermen, instilling doubts and suspicion in Giuseppe to the point that he panics and kills Yousef. The film closes with the radio announcement that the suspected terrorist Yousef Ben Ali has been arrested, leaving Giuseppe in agony because of his atrocious deed, not based on ingrained racism but triggered by a moral panic absorbed from the media.

The film also makes indirect references to Italy's 'postcolonial unconscious'. One of the incidents that fuels the escalating tension between Yousef and Giuseppe is their unexpected encounter with the dead body of an African woman, snagged in their net and hauled on board. As the men scrutinise the woman's dead body, which shows no sign of decomposition, Yousef immediately declares: 'E' una somala' ('It's a Somalian woman'). It is probably the corpse of a woman thrown overboard by human smugglers during a clandestine journey to Italy. The two men enter into fierce conflict around the disposal of the corpse: while Yousef wants to throw her back in the sea to avoid further problems with the law, given his status as a suspect terrorist, Giuseppe wants to take her to the mainland to return the corpse to her family, though her provenance is totally unknown. The uncanny status of the woman's corpse quickly acquires paranoid overtones which will lead to the film's tragic end. While the woman renders testimony to the recurring and tragic experiences of people in their desperate journey to Europe, it also brings to the fore Italy's repressed colonial past.

In her insightful analysis of the film, Áine O'Healy writes that the corpse comes to haunt the national imaginary, stressing the need to examine occluded colonial history in order to revise conceptions of contemporary nations and their relations. As O'Healy writes:

> It is tempting to read the figure of the drowned migrant that haunts the final section of *Io, l'altro* precisely as a reminder of a chapter in Italian history that is often elided in contemporary politics and media discourses and has been largely ignored in recent Italian cinema, that is, the memory of Italy's expansionist adventure in the Horn of Africa from the late nineteenth century to the end of the fascist era. I would argue, in fact, that the uncanny presence of the woman's body in Melliti's film signals a return of the repressed memory of Italian colonialism, and at the same time obliquely draws attention to the relative absence of this figure elsewhere in the contemporary cinematic imaginary.[30]

30. Áine O'Healy, '"[Non] è una Somala": Deconstructing African Femininity in Italian Film', *The Italianist*, vol 29, 2009, pp 175–198, p 177

The non-placeness of the boat and of the African woman's corpse symbolises the dislocated and unacknowledged 'postcolonial unconscious' along with Italy's current 'multicultural drama'. Melliti's choice to use the boat in

extraterritorial waters as a non-place, in which national identities and prejudices are played out in a small claustrophobic space, highlights the importance of local events within global politics.[31] The encounter/clash between Giuseppe and Yousef becomes symbolic of the fear of the other; the familiar becomes estranged through the orientalising representations of the war on terror furnished by the media, which position the other as fearsome and unpredictable. Following Edward Said's model of orientalism, according to which the Western self is constructed in opposition to an Oriental other, which is envisioned as childish, irrational and therefore dangerous, post 9/11 media representations have perfected this 'othering machine' in order to justify the invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan under the heading of a civilising mission but also to exorcise the innate anxiety about the other as the dark side of the self. The film is a reflection of the intolerance and divide created post 9/11, which affects not just nations but also human beings, co-nationals and friends.

As Derek Duncan argues, many Italian films on migration need to be seen in terms of how they racialise the non-Italian subject, and the ways in which they are embedded in complex histories of Italian colonialism and emigration. In these contexts they are not simply migrant films but post-colonial films as they deal with the representation of migrants, such as Albanians, North Africans or Middle-Easterners, as extraneous to the Italian nation, pointing to the non-compatibility of the categories of nation and race. In films that racialise the other through stereotypes

Still from *Io, l'altro* (*I, the Other*), Italy, 2007, directed by Mohsen Melliti, courtesy Marcello Rascelli

and references that rekindle the racial practices of Italian colonialism, the migrant subject becomes extraneous to the national identity, which in the Italian case often means whiteness and Catholicism.[32] As in Paul Gilroy's seminal work *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*, which argues against the mutual exclusiveness of the category of blackness and that of British nationhood, the migrant body in the Italian context becomes racialised and therefore excluded from the national identity project.[33]

The film shows in dramatic terms how events since 9/11 have aggravated this polarisation and replaced the notion of racialised subject from Southern Italians to colonial immigrants to Muslims *tout court*. Therefore the historical connection to Italy's many othernesses is constantly displaced and misplaced onto new subjects whose legal but also symbolic entrance into Italy's national imaginary is met with strong resistance. The Mediterranean Sea in *Io, l'altro* functions as a non-place with multiple meanings, beyond the law of the soil, but also as a fluid barrier that costs the lives of many illegal migrants trying to make it to European shores.

Like the sea in *Last Resort*, the Mediterranean represents new opportunities, but also innumerable dangers, with refugees becoming stranded and drowning in their attempt to cross over, as we hear in the daily news. This liquid non-place, to paraphrase the 'liquid modernity' coined by Zygmunt Bauman, represents the alternative to the enclosure of detention centres and exploitative hotels but offers no greater guarantee of security and hospitality.

CONCLUSIONS

The Stonehaven detention centre in *Last Resort*, the hotel in *Dirty Pretty Things* and the boat in *Io, l'altro* are all non-places in the sense that they do not offer places of identity, relations and history. People are trapped by anonymity, immobilised in a time without events, stripped of their humanity. They are set within the constraints of society at large (the nation, Europe or the Western world) that uses these non-places to contain and control otherness.

What people usually do in such places, according to Augé, is little more than wait, remember or shop while passing through; but for postcolonial migrants, refugees and asylum seekers these non-places are zones more of stasis than of transit, of entrapment more than consumption, and of exploitation more than resistance. They actually embody what Foucault meant by heterotopia, as opposed to the 'not-here' of utopia, a critique of modernity derived from an immanent yet disturbing relation to the here and now, a perspective on what mainstream society labels as 'other spaces', relegated for the construction, organisation and management of otherness.

The non-places of postcolonial and migrant cinema refer to the visual and ideological instability of the notion of Europe and also to the creation of an alternative space, a possible Third Space, which is a location of transformation, a non-place becoming inhabited and belonging to an alternative organic society, like that established by the postcolonial migrants who are able to convey new notions of the hospitality and tolerance that Europe seems to have abandoned.[34]

32. Derek Duncan, 'Italy's Postcolonial Cinema and its Histories of Representation', *Italian Studies*, vol 63, no 2, pp 195–211

33. Paul Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack: The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation*, Hutchinson, London, 1987

34. Homi Bhabha argues that all cultural systems and statements are constructed on what he calls the 'Third Space of enunciation' in which we understand that the claims of originality and purity of culture are 'untenable'. Bhabha argues that it is in this space 'that we will find those words with which we can speak of Ourselves and others. And by exploring this Third Space, we can elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of ourselves' (details below, p 8). By stressing the interdependence between coloniser and colonised, the Third Space becomes the postcolonial location par excellence where transformation and contamination take place, not in the simple sense of hybridisation but as diversity in difference. See Homi Bhabha, 'Cultural Diversity and Cultural Difference', in Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, eds, *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, Routledge, London, 1995, pp 206–209, p 6, p 8.

The detention centre becomes a place where Tanya finds herself again, the hotel presents an opportunity for resistance, rescue and mobility in the illegal world of the service industry. The boat, scene of the survival of Giuseppe and the death of Yousef, provides a bitter demonstration that there is no uncontaminated zone and no clean separation between host and guest that would allow the rules of dominance and submission to be clearly applied.

Applying the toolkit of postcolonial studies to migrant cinema in Europe involves the revision of concepts of Europeanness from new perspectives and subject positions that are often elided or marginalised by mainstream culture. However, as the analysis of the three films has attempted to demonstrate, these positions are no longer marginal, and despite the confinement of the characters to some non-places, to the outside or outskirts of Europe, counterpoised as an organic society rooted in space and time, they manage to undo notions of belonging and hospitality from within, claiming a space and a place in Postcolonial Europe by transforming the outsider/insider relations and making of those non-places locations for alternative belonging and trespassing.