

## **Postcolonial Transplants: Cinema, Diaspora, and the Body Politic**

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A major consequence of the diasporic movement of people across national borders -- albeit one that has not received the analytical attention it deserve -- has been the compromising of ethical and legal systems, which had previously been naturalized as modes of national self-recognition and corporeal integrity. The body politic can only function politically, that is, it can only foster a shared sense of community and responsibility when the lines between acceptable and unacceptable behaviour are clear and accepted by all 'good' citizens.<sup>1</sup> The focus on political subjectivity as citizenship can, however, lessen our recognition of the corporeal reality of subaltern bodies whose availability for exploitation is enabled precisely by their often structurally agonistic relation to the category of 'good citizen'. Because of this agonistic potential, the body politic often rejects those intrusive agents that are deemed to threaten its survival and integrity. The transnational seepage and viral or even metastatic potential of bodies coded as alien (in ethnic and/or gendered terms) is perceived to compromise the ability of political bodies, be they nation states or other types of federal unions, to function in terms of boundary maintenance and cultural reproduction.

From the perspective of the official organs of the body politic as such, the subaltern or alien body is perceived as fundamentally dangerous and unappealing when acting in the service of its own particularized objectives, but is salubrious and life-giving when servicing the agendas or fitness of the whole, whose needs are usually synecdochically reduced to those of the most privileged class. It is the fact that their

boundaries and allegiances are unclear and that they are variously appropriable by narratives of use and uselessness that gives contemporary diasporic communities and individuals, in their subalternity, their particular positioning as viral or virile, vampiric or lifegiving. The boundary blurring of both the transplant -- in all its literal and metaphorical guise -- and transgender identity compromises traditional notions of corporeal integrity just as diasporic movement compromises notions of national and cultural integrity. This is especially true as the ability of diasporized individuals and communities to maintain contact with their communities of origin lessens their general investment in assimilation as their unquestioned *terminus a quem*.

In this essay we will argue that recent filmic depictions of transplanted and transgendered bodies are emblematic of anxiety about the loss of cultural identity in much contemporary European -- particularly French and British -- film.

Contemporary collective identities must incorporate a transnational and transcultural adaptability as the movement from here to there becomes easier physically (and, concomitantly, as the movement of information has been rendered instantaneous and, for all practical purposes, borderless). Just as the airline terminals and train stations that have made the European Union a living reality are designed to be as unthreateningly generic and immediately readable as possible, other work spaces are becoming similarly interchangeable. Ultimately, the very blandness of these spaces facilitates the disparate lifestyles of those at both ends of the economic spectrum for whom transnational movement is a way of life. For the contemporary migrant the first action that is performed when stepping into a new place is no longer to try to get his or her bearings, but to go to work. Place has not given way to placelessness, but to the omni-placeness and cultural disorientation of what we have termed the

*transplantation*. By this we mean one of the sites where the actual grunt work of difference and inequality takes place by enabling the production of the things that make leisure and privilege possible for people who would not (or would only) be caught dead in those places. In other words, these are the kinds of places that citizens in good standing and in pursuit of good health or good times visit but leave, places where dirty and not-so-pretty things (as in the film by Stephen Frears, which we will examine below) are left behind and then cleaned up by ‘the people you do not see’. One does not see these people because the very fact that they have been relegated to such places is indicative of their lack of good standing, of the fact that they are not ‘connected’.

*Transplantations* are sites such as hotels, sweatshops, farms, factories, hospitals, brothels, and battlefields where underpaid work, increasingly performed by immigrants both legal and otherwise, not only takes place but is essential to the site’s existence as a productive or money-making enterprise. Not only are these sites made recognizable by the particular types of low-paid labour that takes place in them, but also by the discourses that are committed to reforming them and in one way or another liberating their denizens. The result of globalization is that these once localized sites are no longer invisibly local enough for those who benefit from them to carry on with business as usual. For the disenfranchised, this delocalization has catalysed a new culture of transnational activism and political self-awareness.

This essay will focus in particular on the representation of immigrants as transplants in recent French and British cinema. Postcolonial immigrants are represented in various ways as perpetual interlopers in the metropolitan centres of the two largest

former colonial empires. Comparison between French and British films that depict immigrants from the former colonies shows very different relations between postcolonial subjects and their families. The British films tend to show postcolonial immigrants in familial or quasi-familial settings, with the younger characters struggling to break free of the constraints of tradition in order to integrate more fully into mainstream British culture. The French films repeatedly construct models of intrusion, in the form of male subalternity as a threat to French family life. The single males shown in these films without strong family bonds conform to the stereotype of the lawless troublemaker who threatens to destabilize French domestic and legal institutions by his very presence. In relatively recent mainstream UK hits such as *East is East* (Damien O'Donnell, 1999) and *Bend it Like Beckham* (Gurinder Chadha, 2002), as well as the earlier *Bhaji on the Beach* (Gurinder Chadha, 1993) and *My Beautiful Laundrette* (Stephen Frears, 1985), young second-generation immigrants must define themselves in relation (even if this relation is an oppositional one) to their parents and their national 'homeland', eventually coming to an uneasy truce. French films, on the other hand, tend to depict unattached males separated from their families and doomed not to integrate fully into French mainstream culture in part because they do not fit into the idealized structure of the nuclear family.

Many French films from the mid-1990s to the mid-2000s focus on young male characters of North African origin (Beurs) cast adrift from their families and the 'old country'. Hamid Naficy has written of the Beurs' 'bitter realization that they are French but not quite, that they are North African but not quite, and that they have no home to which they can return' (Naficy 2001: 98). As if to demonstrate this sense of homelessness, Beur characters are most often depicted as single (usually male)

figures, outside of nuclear family structures, and often wandering aimlessly through the urban landscape. The absence of the nuclear family in these French films better emphasizes the central characters' status as 'transplants', as foreign bodies, viruses in an alien 'host'.<sup>2</sup> Both French and British films consistently use corporeal metaphors to represent the transplantation of immigrants into the body politic and to belie conventional notions of French and British colonial history, which assume that the French empire worked by means of assimilation or cultural integration, whereas the British empire allowed a much greater degree of cultural autonomy. Strikingly, however, both French and British films also go beyond metaphor in using corporeality as a dramatic element of their narrative structure. In other words, specific body parts are given a literal rather than figurative function in the unfolding of the film as both story and visual spectacle.<sup>3</sup>

### **Transplantations**

Throughout history, diasporic movement has been catalysed not only by the dreams and nightmares of alienated subjects seeking better lives 'over there', but just as strongly by the various types of commodification by means of which, as corporeal objects, they have been interpellated or into which they have been dragooned. The atomized bodies of immigrants and the poor are subjected to dehumanizing forms of commodification and atomization as they are drawn into the webs of transnational exploitation that, in its dystopian dimension, characterizes economic globalization. This denaturalizing dynamic can be most starkly figured as the movement of one person's body part into the body of another person in an organ transplant, but this dynamic also has a non-metaphorical dimension. Laura Marks terms 'transnational

objects' those objects 'created in cultural translation or transcultural movement' (Marks 2000: 78). Increasingly, as biotechnological advances outstrip the availability of 'raw materials' to sustain them, body parts themselves are becoming depersonalized transnational objects. In the hierarchy of global citizenship, bio-objects like organs and stem cells have become valued components in the supplementation and survival of the bodies that matter by the body parts of those that do not. Both the metaphor and the reality of the transplant, of the human being reduced to parts that can then be commodified, assigned a 'street value', are the logical conclusions of the process of globalization.

In Stephen Frears's *Dirty Pretty Things* we find the most explicit representations of both the dangerous transplant as a socially destabilizing force and the subaltern body as exploitable resource. For many, Frears established the cinematic vocabulary for representing multiethnic London in his breakthrough films *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985), to which we will return, and *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid* (1988). A generation later in *Dirty Pretty Things*, we see not only the continuation of Frears's 'attraction to the working and underclasses' (Barber 1993: 224), but also the complete collapse of the social hopefulness of his early films. The black-market kidneys that drive the film's plot are stark emblems of economic despair. As Nancy Scheper-Hughes has noted: 'The kidney as a commodity has emerged as the gold standard in the new body trade, representing the poor person's ultimate collateral against hunger, debt, and penury' (2003: 1645).

If slavery is the ultimate form of reification, it can be imagined as a form of transplantation *in toto* to the extent that in enslavement, one person's entire biological

apparatus becomes both the prosthetic supplement to the master's will and the productive engine of his privilege. Correlatively, when the human body is viewed as a collection of transplantable organs, the subaltern body is reduced to the potential of being literally 'farmed'. As Scheper-Hughes observes: 'In general, the circulation of kidneys follows established routes of capital from South to North, from East to West, from poorer to more affluent bodies, from black and brown bodies to white ones, and from female to male or from poor low status men to more affluent men' (2003: 1645). It is no coincidence that we speak of organs as being 'harvested', thereby transferring the idea of labour from the underclass body to the 'surgeon' who performs the act of harvesting and ultimately to the masters who enjoy the harvest. These images of the harvesting of organs, of storage, and, even more troubling, of stockpiling suggest just how far outside its conventional ethical parameters the selling of organs takes physicians and other health care professionals as healers. As Thomas H. Murray has pointed out: 'The very words used to describe what physicians do -- they "take care of patients" -- come from the language of personal, moral, nonmarket relationships' (1997: 356). In an era of globalization, the plantation as the site of slave labour (and thus the epitome of reification) has been given new life in the image of the transplant (as both the body in motion and the body literally in pieces and available for purchase).

The fact that in addition to the significantly named 'Baltic' hotel, the action of *Dirty Pretty Things* takes place mostly in a morgue and a sweatshop makes it clear that the hands-on dynamics of exploitation and privilege involve both mobility and access. Instead of functioning primarily as a place for either temporary accommodation or illicit sexual affairs, The Baltic, like these other locations, functions as a

‘transplantation’. Transplantations like *The Baltic* are the places of employment of immigrants working in the hotels of advanced capitalist countries, as well as the sweat-shop workers in Nike factories in Nepal, and the well-educated, middle-class Indians working long hours in the call centres of multinational corporations in India. The ‘trans’ in ‘transplantation’ signifies the crossing of the border between more and less industrialized countries. In transplantations, the border traffic tends to be one-way: citizens of less-industrialized countries work in sites owned by companies originating in the more industrialized countries. This is why it is currently inconceivable to imagine British, American, French or German citizens working in a Nepalese-owned sweatshop in Chicago or London.

In *Dirty Pretty Things* the characters occupy what seems to be almost a post-national version of London in which difference has become feral and created a dystopian world where white Britishness is so thoroughly marginalized from the city’s urban reality that it can only swoop in vampirically at the end in order to retrieve the foreign but vital body parts without which, the film suggests, the ailing body of white Britain itself cannot survive. It is the futility of his efforts to function as a good citizen in both London and Nigeria that has led to the expatriate protagonist Okwe’s global deracination and downward mobility. The cautionary image of the doctor who scrubs toilets is one of the new stereotypes enlivened by the globalization of diaspora as a phenomenon that has lost much of its class-based specificity. Similarly, the image of a human heart in a toilet starkly literalizes the disposability of the subaltern body. Significantly, even Okwe’s ‘good’ black body, which contains his ‘good’ (and ‘black’) heart, is never allowed to compromise, not even by way of a kiss, that of the Turkish woman who, while not British, is still white and European in ways that he can

never be. The fact that Senay, the immigrant who finds herself struggling for survival in London, is Turkish, indicates ambivalence about the ability of an ‘alien’ (read ‘Muslim’) state like Turkey, to be successfully transplanted into the European body politic (despite the fact that the role of Senay is played by the cinematic figurehead of European adorableness, Audrey Tautou). Senay can only free herself from the force of her Turkish difference by first becoming ‘Italian’ and then, like Okwe, by leaving Europe altogether, suggesting that despite its bid for inclusion, Turkishness as such is finally, like Okwe’s African heart which beats only for Africa, something that must be rejected.

In Claire Denis’s *L’Intrus* (*The Intruder*, 2004), the ethical problematics of the reliance of the wealthy on the healthy bodies of the poor for survival are even more bluntly revealed. In Denis’s film the physically declining European subject facing death becomes an amoral entity committed to using his resources to achieve what the film makes clear will be an undeserved supplement to a corrupt life, as Louis Trébor, a loner who ignores his loving adult son and young grandchildren, pays for his black-market heart transplant with money earned by presumably dubious means. This corruption is made even more unsettling by the fact that, unlike the claustrophobically urban *mise-en-scène* of *Dirty Pretty Things*, much of *L’Intrus* takes place in surroundings of stereotypically unspoiled nature on the Swiss-French border. Correspondingly, *L’Intrus* itself, whose story is presented out of sequence, and whose coherence is not immediately apparent, is ‘corrupted’ as a narrative presumably as a means of preventing the viewer from easily identifying with a character whose ‘bad heart’ must so clearly be rejected. The film’s fragmentary aesthetic, as a series of parts to be assembled, evokes the motif of the transplant, of disparate parts

amalgamated into a 'whole'. Trébor rejects his own flesh and blood (in a metaphorical sense) as his own flesh and blood (in a literal sense) have rejected him. After he murders an 'intruder' who has been attempting to cross the border illegally into France, we learn that Trébor himself is a migrant, a fluent Russian speaker with a Russian passport. Trébor is or has been an immigrant, but, having made his fortune, he becomes a cosmopolitan traveller, capable of crossing borders with ease, and of gaining a kind of access to the cultures he frequents by paying people for their services. He travels to Tahiti to search for a son he believes he fathered with a Polynesian woman many years earlier. Unable to find him, he bids the villagers to find his son, and they, realizing that such a person may never have existed in the first place, literally audition young local men to play the role. Too late, it turns out, Trébor desperately attempts to find replacements for things beyond repair: someone else's heart, someone else's son. In what demands on a narrative level to be read as a dream sequence, Trébor observes the body of his neglected son Sidney being wheeled out of a morgue, to reveal a long scar on his chest that suggests he has had his heart removed. Sidney, emblem of fatherly solicitude toward his own small children, haunts Trébor as the victim of his own paternal heartlessness. (A Russian woman who has witnessed the murder Trébor committed haunts him more assiduously, following him on his world travels. She is likely a phantom from his past, representing the ghostly intrusion of his own conscience.)

According to Jean-Luc Nancy, in his book *L'Intrus*, on which Denis's film is based: 'Once [the immigrant] is there, as long as he remains a foreigner, instead of simply becoming "naturalized", he keeps coming; he continues to arrive, and this arrival does not cease to be, on some level, an intrusion' (Nancy 2000: 11; our translation). The

past, too, is an intruder of sorts, an idea reflected not only in the non-linear sequence of the scenes in *L'Intrus*, but also in the use of footage from another, unreleased film, *Le Reflux* (directed by Paul Gegauff), shot in 1962 in Polynesia, and featuring a much-younger Michel Subor, who plays Louis Trébor in Denis's film. The only temporal cue that *L'Intrus* provides is the presence or absence of the long scar running down Trébor's chest and abdomen, which indicates whether a given scene takes place before or after his transplant operation. Martine Beugnet has argued that:

In *L'Intrus*, the deep scar that runs across the body of the main character finds its visual equivalent in the duplication of man-made borders that deny the openness of even the wildest of landscapes and in the frames that similarly limit and fragment the film's images: frontiers and customs, walls, blinds, doors, windows; scars (as incongruous and rectilinear as the human borders that divide the surface of the earth). The film speaks of a world of violent and paranoid ownership, fixated on the delimitation and defence of a territory where the foreign body is always the intruder, always reducible to a threat, to be hunted, driven away or destroyed. (Beugnet 2007: 144-5)

The scar is a trace that signals prior violence. Tellingly, in *L'Intrus* Trébor's daughter-in-law is a customs officer who uses attack dogs, at the ready to wound and maim, to keep illegal cargo from crossing the border into France. She is therefore one of the figures charged directly with protecting the integrity of the European Union against dangerous contaminants.

In Denis's earlier film *J'ai pas sommeil* (*I Can't Sleep*, 1994), the intrusive 'foreign body' as crosser of boundaries is just as starkly and disturbingly literalized. The fact that the victims of this intrusion are elderly French women murdered in their own homes often for little more than small change reinforces the notion of the absolute vulnerability of the old guard in relation to the onslaught of menacingly queer foreign bodies. In this film, the transgendered Caribbean serial killer Camille, based on the notorious 'Monster of Montmartre' who may have murdered more than twenty elderly French women, moves through a world in which there is no place for him other than as an exotic or entertaining object -- unlike the Lithuanian actor (played by Katerina Golubeva, who plays the enigmatic Russian woman haunting Trébor in *L'Intrus*) who comes to France and, it is implied, will use the cash she steals to begin the process of assimilating into a 'good' European subject. It is this assimilation that the film suggests is impossible for the black or alien subject who must either leave (like Senay and Okwe in *Dirty Pretty Things*) or die. The only other option is the loss of true subjectivity, the living death, that is represented by the life of underclass labour that brought the subaltern subject (or his or her ancestors) to the metropolis, or the castigation to which many people who sell organs are subjected in their home communities when their 'scar of shame' is revealed.<sup>4</sup> If prostitutes are people who 'sell' themselves (or, as is very often the case, are sold), thus compromising their humanity in an act of objectification, organ sellers' self-reduction to flesh for sale makes them literally beyond recognition.

## **Transsexualities**

The dynamics of transplantation and assimilation are intensified when the borders to be crossed are not only national and cultural, but sexual or gendered as well. The etymology of 'sex' (illustrated so memorably in Plato's *Symposium*) refers to the reunion of two halves that once formed a whole. When individuals' sexual or gender identity, by virtue of its self-sufficiency, complicates this model of incompleteness -- that is, when they desire not the 'other' but the 'same', or when they are not 'one' or the 'other' but both -- their integration into the larger body politic is compromised because they fall outside the reproductive economy of the traditional nuclear family. In a transcultural context, however, this self-sufficiency can be perceived as a virtue from the perspective of both 'transplant' and 'host', leading (for individuals) to escape from the strictures of patriarchal oppression, or (for institutions) to the exploitation and objectification of otherwise threatening cultural differences.

In *East is East*, the Khan family's integration into white British culture is complicated by the fact that it is composed of an interracial couple (a Pakistani father and white British mother) and bi-racial children. Like that of the transgendered person, it is their in-betweenness, their corporeal interconnection across lines of ethnic difference, that gives their situation its particular poignancy. In the context of the culturally hegemonic racialist discourse of 'purity' and 'contamination', their white Britishness is always in a sense under erasure. Their very existence challenges the notion that 'east is east' just as the existence of the transgendered challenges the idea that 'male is (always) male' and 'female is (always) female'. The Khan family's in-betweenness is replicated by the form and narrative arc of the film. A strange hybrid of teen comedy and tense drama, it effectively plays like an episode of *The Brady Bunch* with domestic violence. As in *My Beautiful Laundrette*, although more fleetingly, it is

homosexuality that functions as a means of escape from the complicated dynamics of ethnic particularity or the lack thereof. This film is, however, particularly provocative in presenting the world of the gay couple, figured by the hat shop in which the oldest son works with his lover after bolting from the arranged marriage that his father has contracted for him, as one completely devoid of any distinguishing characteristics other than an empty slavishness to fashion.

The film *Kinky Boots*, with its teleological investment in fashion as a life-affirming cultural site suggests, that the best way for dying European industries to save themselves is to refashion themselves as purveyors of the unnatural accoutrements of deviant lifestyles and experiences. The 'drag queen' is particularly useful as an image of both viral contagion and succour for the body in decline because the transgendered body has routinely been positioned as that of little more than a special kind of prostitute. This is a result of the fact that few societies have offered the transgendered any means of supporting themselves other than through the display and sexual purveying of their 'exotic' bodies or, more specifically, the exoticizing presentation and supplementation of their 'normal' bodies. It is this dynamic of presentation and supplementation that grounds the plot and 'humour' of *Kinky Boots*. It is interesting and perhaps not coincidental that the actor Chiwetel Ejiofor plays both the provocative but assimilable Lola/Simon in *Kinky Boots* and the essentially neutered but somehow unassimilable Okwe in *Dirty Pretty Things*. In *Dirty Pretty Things* Okwe's anti-capitalist resistance to the notion that the people who can afford things should, for that reason alone, have unfettered access to them, positions him as the kind of alien who should obviously, in the classic expression of xenophobia, just 'go back to where he came from'. Unlike the genuinely transgendered Jaye Davidson

whose peek-a-boo penis earned him short-lived fame and an Academy Award nomination for *The Crying Game* and then did 'go back to where he came from' by returning to the fashion world, Ejiofor has become one of the most internationally recognized black British actors working today.

The relationship between Davidson's character Dil and the IRA operative Fergus in *The Crying Game* and the idea that homosexuality, or at least bisexuality, is contagious underscores the idea of shifting and unstable boundaries that is at the heart of national anxieties about immigration and the effects of certain types of unsanctioned and, implicitly, 'unnatural' contact. One of the reasons why terrorism has achieved its prominence in global and transnational discourses is because the terrorist can be imagined as someone who can without warning subject privileged bodies to the type of atomizing dismemberment to which less privileged bodies have throughout history been routinely subjected. It is not a coincidence that the terroristic mode of delegitimation to which the French aristocracy was subjected during the French Revolution was decapitation, a literalization of the body in pieces and of the figurative rejection of the 'head of state' (although, as is often overlooked in contemporary discourse, the French 'terror' was a form of 'state' rather than 'anti-state' terror). IRA terrorism has lost much of its cinematic appeal in the light of terrorists whose alien status does not have to be established by expository back narratives given the self-evidence of corporeal difference (that is, what airline security personnel are told to identify as 'a Middle-Eastern look') as a potential marker of ideological difference.

In *The Crying Game*, which depicts a world driven by anxiety about territorial boundaries and threatened by bodies deemed foreign, transgression occurs along (and across) both national and gendered lines. Okwe says of organ sellers in *Dirty Pretty Things* that ‘they swapped their insides for a passport’, and these words could just as easily be used to refer to the corporeal border crossing (or criss-crossing) between one gender category and another. If most transgendered people do not surgically reassign their bodies, such reassignment nevertheless functions as the potential endpoint for transgendered subjectivity; in narratives of radical change and new possibility, surgery is often the utopically transformative gesture for the transgendered that organ selling is for the hopelessly subaltern. Although in terms of will and agency the transgendered individual might seem to fall into a completely different category from organ sellers or transplant recipients, the appeal of representations of transsexuals or ‘drag queens’ for straight audiences as a component of diasporic and immigrant communities is that they literalize the image of the person who seems to be one thing but is in fact something else. Becoming a resident of another country, like becoming another gender, begs the question of what can be retained and what must be left behind. In the extremes of organ transplant and actual sexual reassignment surgery, what is gained and what is lost when the other is literally incorporated into one’s self?

Like immigration, alternative sexualities and gender identities represent a threat to the integrity -- in other words, the threat of dismemberment -- of the body politic, as the transgendered and homosexual characters represent a supposed threat to the reproductive economy valorized in models of the nation-state. In three high-profile French films of the last decade that feature Maghrebi characters -- *Wild Side* (Sébastien Lifshitz, 2004), *Chouchou* (Merzak Allouache, 2002) and *Drôle de*

*Félix/The Adventures of Felix* (Olivier Ducastel and Jacques Martineau, 2000) -- the central characters are gay or transgendered. *Wild Side* focuses on a three-way relationship between a transgendered French sex worker by the name of Stéphanie, a second- or third-generation Maghrebi man named Djamel, who is also a sex worker, and a Russian immigrant named Mikhail. Nick Rees-Roberts's observation about *Wild Side*, which, he suggests, attempts to find some common ground between 'gay assimilation' and 'precarious immigration' (Rees-Roberts, 2007: 154), could be applied to all three films. The perceived threat to the nuclear family and by extension to the body politic is acknowledged in these films' attempts to construct alternative family structures. The explicit establishment of surrogate families in these films (whose culmination is the gay, transgendered wedding ceremony in *Chouchou*) serves to offset such a threat -- it is notable that all three films emphasize the construction of alternative family units based on elective affinities rather than biology. In *Wild Side*, Mikhail, who speaks almost no French, indicates that he misses his family in Russia, and Djamel points to himself and Stéphanie in order to convey the idea that they are his family. *Drôle de Félix*, about a gay man's road trip from Dieppe to Marseille to find his father, whom he has never met, is punctuated by on-screen titles assigning familial roles to people Félix befriends along the way ('mon petit frère', 'ma grand-mère', 'mon cousin'). The final title, 'Mon père', refers not to Félix's biological father, whom he ultimately decides not to meet, but to a kindly older man (played by Maurice Bénichou) whom Félix encounters shortly before arriving in Marseille.

Sometimes, as in Stephen Frears's landmark film *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985), spurning the traditional nuclear family is equated with spurning the traditions of the 'old country'. Frears's film itself is something of a transplant in that it was originally

made for television before gaining a theatrical release. *My Beautiful Laundrette* unfolds primarily from the perspective of the gay Pakistani Omar, who is torn between the desire to love Britain -- as represented by his relationship with his white British schoolmate Johnny -- and his commitment to maintaining his standing in his Pakistani family. The fact that some in the Pakistani family have used their move to Britain to bolster their status as members of the financially stable bourgeoisie is complicated by the fact that this status is made possible primarily by their ready recourse to criminality. The oxymoronic idea of a beautiful laundrette parodies the notion of capitalism as a beautifying agent that one finds in many discourses that promote globalization. However, as an old-school image of capitalist villainy, Omar's cousin Salim does everything but twirl his mustachios. In his investment in both his own ethnicity and in unfettered moneymaking, Salim, unlike his father, is a robber who has no desire to be a baron. Omar's father, on the other hand, prefers the assimilationist path that leads through the fetishized site of 'university'. Finally, the working-class entrepreneurship that Omar embraces is, according to his father, nothing more than 'cleaning dirty underpants'. It is the proximity of Omar's enterprise to the life of the body and not that of the mind that his intellectually accomplished father finds most disreputable. The film's ending suggests that the impossibly complicated dynamics of relating to one's ethnic compeers can be transcended by the assumption of life as a queer couple. It is notable that the interracial gay relationship succeeds while the interracial heterosexual one is revealed to be untenable, suggesting that, although ostensibly threatening to the reproductive values of the nation-state, homosexuality is actually a reassuring alternative that does not in fact threaten the 'white' metropolitan nuclear family in the same way that the

single male postcolonial subject or the heterosexually reproductive immigrant family is represented as doing.

Similarly, in the French context, Carrie Tarr has suggested that audiences may find the portrayal of homosexual or transgendered Maghrebi men less threatening than that of heterosexual Maghrebis, whose sexuality is perceived as intimidating to white Frenchmen (Tarr 2007: 17). As early as *La Haine* (Mathieu Kassovitz, 1995), the critically acclaimed box-office success that was the first film to bring the social unrest of life in the French *banlieue* to the attention of a large international audience, immigrants from former African colonies (especially those of the Maghreb) have largely been depicted in French films as young men separated from (or simply shown outside the context of) their families. As Jill Forbes has described the film's three protagonists: 'Though they reject the cultures associated with their families [...], they have not been accepted into the national community in a way that community accepts' (Forbes 2000: 172). There are no major female characters in *La Haine*, and only the briefest glimpses of the family life of the three central male characters. The single male characters in these films confirm viewers' preconceived notions of patterns of postcolonial immigration, namely the invitation to Maghrebi males to work in France in the 1950s and 1960s. The majority of these workers ended up settling in France, eventually bringing their families over to join them. In the mid-1990s, when *La Haine* was made, second- and even third-generation Beur men would be historically somewhat removed from their immigrant forefathers, yet the emphasis on single males is a ghostly evocation of the past, in Jean-Luc Nancy's sense of the perpetual 'intruder', which enables him to speak of: 'a general law of intrusion: there is never a

single intrusion; as soon as an intrusion takes place, it multiplies, and manifests itself in its ever-forming internal differences' (Nancy 2000: 31-2; our translation).

The flipside of this representation of young immigrant males as alienated loose cannons is that of the hyper-fertile Maghrebi woman, whose capacity, like that of the alien mother in the classic science fiction *Alien* quadrilogy, to create seemingly endless numbers of unassimilable subjects threatens to swell the ranks of 'unwashed immigrants' into a flood that will sweep away all of the things that make 'us' human. If it is the dangerous activity of the male that represents social threat, it is the generativity itself of the female body that positions alien women as disruptive forces. These opposing and yet complementary figures revive tired stereotypes from the colonial era, whose potency is still apparent in its continued application to women in developing countries. The dearth of Maghrebi women in French films is all the more remarkable considering that, since the late 1980s, issues of postcolonial immigration in France have revolved around recurring incidences of what has come to be known as 'the headscarf affair', in which girls of Maghrebi background have been forbidden to wear the traditional Muslim headscarf to school on the grounds that the expression of religious affiliation is a violation of France's integrationist model of secular republicanism. (This ban was voted into law in March 2004, after decades of fudging the issue.) In the French republican context, the wearing of the headscarf would transgress the taboo of making private faith a public issue, through the exhibition of individual religious belief in an institutional public setting. Similarly, in the tradition of the Muslim hijab, a woman's bare head could (on a structural level) be analogous to a sexual organ, as a body part that is an intimate representation of femininity; like the sexual organs, the woman's hair or entire head is covered, to be exposed only to

her husband. To bare the head in public in this context is in some respects tantamount to pornography, the moral equivalent of the exhibition of the genitals in a public forum. Both instances of exposure -- the literally and the metaphorically pornographic -- are antithetical to the preservation of the nuclear family. (This dynamic of exposure is emblemized in *East is East* when one of the sons, an art student, makes a graphically realistic rubber cast of female genitalia, the exhibition of which ultimately prompts the breakdown of relations between his family and another immigrant Pakistani family with whom the father is trying to organize an arranged marriage.) In the fundamentalist Islamic context, sex outside of marriage threatens the Muslim family and thus the very fabric of Muslim society, whereas, conversely, from the French republican perspective, the proliferation of the Muslim nuclear family is itself perceived as destabilizing.

It thus comes as little surprise that an exception to the virtual absence of female Maghrebi characters in French films is, again, the figure of the prostitute. In Coline Serreau's *Chaos* (2002), the central character is Noémie, a French-Algerian woman who runs away from her father when he is about to force her into an arranged marriage back in Algeria. She is abducted by a pimp, coerced into taking heroin until she becomes addicted, and then forced into prostitution. One evening, she is beaten and left for dead by the men who run the prostitution ring, and the attack is witnessed by a bourgeois couple on their way to a dinner party, who do not stop to help. The woman, Hélène, overcome with guilt, tracks down Noémie in hospital and visits her assiduously until she slowly returns to health. Hélène and Noémie then plot to escape together, and to avenge their physical abuse and emotional neglect, respectively.

Noémie is escaping from a repressive patriarchal society, but so is Héléne. Both women reject their families, who do not have their best interests at heart, and form a community of women, a surrogate family, composed of Héléne, her long-suffering mother-in-law (neglected by Héléne's estranged husband Paul), as well as Noémie and her younger sister (whose father attempts literally to sell them into marital servitude). Noémie breaks free from the constraints of patriarchal tradition, but so do Héléne and her mother-in-law.

Although it is possible to read the film's representation of Islam as a negative caricature of fundamentalism, the fact that all the women in the film -- regardless of their nationality, age, marital status, or religion -- are oppressed in some way by men, suggests more continuity than distance between Islamic Maghrebi culture and secular French culture. Héléne and Paul's son Fabrice, a womanizer whose callousness resembles that of his father, gets his own comeuppance when two of his girlfriends join forces and take over his flat. Although Noémie's Algerian father cruelly sacrifices his daughters' hopes of happiness for the sake of tradition, it is significant that Noémie's most violent tormentors are the French pimps and kingpins of the prostitution ring into which she is abducted. Noémie's escape from prostitution thus coincides with the dissolution of Héléne and Paul's marriage. Héléne and Noémie can join forces so effectively, the film suggests, because their situations are somehow analogous: both are objectified within the patriarchal order, Héléne within the nuclear family structure, and Noémie both within this structure (she is oppressed by her father) and outside of it (in her job as a sex worker). But their situations are not only analogous, they are also linked: the marginalized sexuality that Serreau depicts in the

form of prostitution ostensibly threatens but ultimately reinforces the French republican patriarchal order.

Similarly, in both French and British films depicting immigrant communities, homosexual or transgendered relationships are often presented as viable, indeed in many ways preferable, alternatives to hegemonic domestic structures. These alternatives have a dual nature, at once utopian and instrumental, in that they do not threaten the forms and functions of the nuclear family and the attendant forces of reproduction. Single heterosexual Maghrebi males in French narratives of immigration, isolated from their immediate families and roaming the streets in search of potential conjugal partners, pose a far greater threat to French family life than do homosexual or transgendered subjects. Emblematically, the commodification of bodies in prostitution, a form of labour to which the transgendered and immigrant women are often driven, is a particularly destructive form of the reification of both human subjectivity and corporeality in the exploitation of labour.

Postcolonial transplants in both British and French films tend to be imperfectly assimilated, achieving an uneasy status as resident ‘intruders’, admitted into the body politic only to be perpetually marginalized. As transplants, they are detached from their cultural, political, and, in the case of the transgendered, even biological histories and grafted on to sites of illicit or semi-licit employment far from the legitimating eye of mainstream visibility. What all of these films reflect is the degree to which narratives of cultural and sexual difference, regardless of how disinterested they may seem in the physical reality of the body, are inevitably grounded in corporeal difference and exploitability or commodification. The ‘body politic’ is not just a

metaphorical body, but a physically heterogeneous one as well. Recent filmic depictions of immigrants in European metropolitan centres, particularly those of Britain and France, underscore an instrumentalization of different groups and individuals analogous to that of the various limbs and organs of the biological body. Similarly, representations of the postcolonial transplant as the object of globalization, and of the 'transplantation' as the site of this objectification, can help us understand the dynamics of acceptance and rejection in which assimilation on the one hand and the maintenance of cultural distinctiveness on the other are the agonistic poles of globalization as a lived experience.

## Notes

1. In this essay we will be using the term 'body politic' in its most basic sense as 'the people of a politically organized nation or state considered as a group'. For instance, the 'French body politic' consists of those people who in terms of national and international recognition can legally refer to themselves as French and for whom being 'French' is their primary form of civil self-recognition.

2. See the debates surrounding concepts such as 'host' country and 'guest worker' in Rosello (2001).

3. For instance, in Julian Jarrold's *Kinky Boots* (2005) the 'kinky boots' themselves are necessary because drag queens are physically male and men tend to have bigger feet than women.

4. For an extensive consideration of the physical, psychological, and social consequences of organ selling from the perspective of the ‘donors’ see Scheper-Hughes.

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