

Deconstructing “Dirty Pretty Things”

By
Ismana Carney, Ph.D.

This is an exploration of how Third Cinema invites the viewer to caress the “skin of the film”, and in the “touching” know in deeper ways the story being told and untold, being shown and not-shown. It is also a deep witnessing of exiled human beings caught in a matrix between-worlds, inter-cultures; caught in a maze of no-where land, forced to be constantly on the move, for to settle, even for a short while means risking being sent back - where-ever that might be; and finally, being caught in a tenuous web of fearful relations too fragile for the powerful undercurrent of love to surface.

The Steven Frears film I plan to “work” from a depth psychological perspective is a British independent film titled: “Dirty Pretty Things”. For the discussion dealing with individual trauma and the human community, I have relied on Cathy Caruth’s *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, and essays therein by Van Der Kolk, Van Der Hart, and Kai Erikson. I have also based much of my analysis of the film on Laura Marks’, extraordinary book on Third Cinema and intercultural film, *The Skin of the Film*. According to Marks, “intercultural cinema is characterized by experimental styles that attempt to represent the experience of living between two or more cultural regimes of knowledge, or living as a minority in the still majority white” (Marks, 1995, p.1).

The film takes place in London’s under-world. A world which in the last twenty years has become increasingly defined by a diasporic population composed of Africans, East Asians, Chinese, Middle Easterners, and Eastern Europeans among others. Crime rates have soared as organized crime has rooted itself deep into the heart of Soho and East London while, at the same time, the black market booms, and the under-ground economy flourishes as it leverages goods on the upper and under-world markets, exploiting in one way or another all who enter its sphere of operations. Our story takes place in this under-world. Though we know it is London, in fact it could be any large Western city. The players are illegal aliens, a contingent political refugee, a sympathetic legal immigrant, the incumbent immigration and naturalization agents, who hover like angels of death (being deported might literally mean the death squad), or like scavengers nervously pacing waiting to feed upon the carcass of a fresh kill, or the whore, the doorman, or the devil himself. So . . . let’s begin the unfolding.

Opening scene: A tall, magnetic black man stands outside the exit doors of an international airport. He fills the screen as he aggressively asks uninterested travelers if they want a cab or a casa (hotel). Finally, when a couple of businessmen, who are looking for their airport contact, ask him which company he might be representing, he says "I am here to rescue those who have been let down by the system."

The stage has been set. The viewer is pulled into the world of high-level travel, business, and international movement; into a world filled with desperate people jostling for customers, desperately trying to make a living, all desperately trying to land the client and clinch the deal. In this case, our aggressive young taxi cab driver gets his "ride". The images on the screen immediately suggest the haptic vision that Laura Marks discusses. These are images that "invite the viewer to respond ... in an intimate, embodied way, and thus facilitate the experience of other sensory impressions as well" (Marks, 1995, p. 2). In the first few minutes inside and outside the airport, moving back and forth between the exit and entrance doors, as they open and close upon streams of people, the viewer is also "moving" with the flow. I was immediately transported in bodily memory to my own excitement in airports, my thrill for travel, the constant amazement at the miracle of flight, my love of *being* in other countries, walking on another ground, and the intoxicating liberation that comes with leaving home. The images on the screen are "in your face". Everything is close-up and the nearness is disconcerting, challenging, and demands attention, demands engagement. These haptic images mark the "visual" character of the film throughout.

Scene 2: Black man is driving a taxi with the two men businessmen in the back. The city is filtered through the camera in such a way as to wash it in sweeps of gold and red that fade to deepest black in the shadows. They drive through the perennially rain-washed charcoal streets of London through a series of tunnels and under railway bridges.

The viewer now transitions. There is an intimacy established with the taxi driver, as we look deep into his black eyes that fill the screen. We look into them for long moments. It seems that he *knows* he is being watched from somewhere else, and the realization occurs that he is also *permitting* this kind of intimate viewing. So we drive *with* him through the city streets, the alternating warm glow of the red/gold and the cold of the deep shadow intriguing us to go with him. Then back to long moments of looking at his face; roughly handsome, gentle, scarred, his eyes betraying breeding, intelligence and pain. In fact the whole the film is characterized by long moments, long looks; viewing empty spaces, corridors where unintelligible sounds perpetuate, and this pulls one into enigmatic space, wondering, puzzled, wanting more yet pulling away at the same time; uncomfortable, knowing that this is not one's own real world, but that it is, with all certainty, somebody's own real world, some-where. Again this is haptic viewing which demands that the viewer relinquish the cerebral knowledge of what the image obviously is, and instead "see" haptically, in other words, intuitively, aesthetically, or, to use a depth psychological term, *mythopoetically*, as if for the very first time; to allow the image to gradually unfold/reveal it's beautiful or disturbing self. Where I speak of stillness in the film, Marks speaks of the "thinness" of haptic images. "The moments of thinness, suspension, and waiting in these films are not encounters with a dreadful void but with a full and fertile

emptiness. The thought that cannot yet be expressed appears paralyzed, petrified. Hence the quality of stillness that characterizes many of these works” (Marks, 1995, p. 29).

Scene 3: The black man drives up to the taxi station, gets out and hands his drivers license over to another black man wearing a gold crucifix and headed out to the cab. Our protagonist laughs and reminds his colleague that he is, according to the license, an official Muslim! The next-shift driver laughs and tucks his crucifix into his shirt away from sight.

The viewer is slowly beginning to move into synch with the rhythm of the film, the narrative is truly an unfolding event, both in language and image. We move from world to world and too are on a journey, maybe a pilgrimage, after all a sacred image has appeared, unceremoniously to be sure, but it is there. A flash of gold, a spark of the Christ, the sacrificed, the beloved redeemer, the Jewish heretic who sat with bleeding women, tax collectors and worked on the Sabbath. Here we are following Marks’ advice on the presence of auratic objects (objects encoded with human history, with human experience) in the story. She asks us to explore this image-fragment of the gold crucifix hanging around the African neck of a “false Muslim” taxi driver, by tracing the object back to its source. In my own case, a crucifix pendant holds a lifetime of concentrated personal and social history, as it did for our protagonist, whose protective instinct came into play for both the sacred object and also for his friend’s false identity. As Marks reminds us, “the auratic character of things is their ability not simply to awaken memories in an individual, but to contain a social history in fragmentary form” (Marks, 1995, p. 120).

Scene 4: The black man walks into the taxi station and is beckoned by his boss into the back office. As soon as the office door is closed, his boss, also a black African, pulls down his pants. Our man gets down on his knees and examines his boss’s penis. The Clap is diagnosed. His boss asks him how he knows, and although we now suspect that our protagonist is much more than a taxi driver, he insists that he is only just that. The boss asks if our man can get him something to help, insisting that it's more for his wife's sake than his own. Our man hesitates, but when his boss promises all the taxi runs in South London, he agrees to see what he can do.

A micro-community has now entered the story, as has false identity, in fact multiple false identities, here at the taxi station. The community is multi-culturally black African. They are all male; they are all illegals. The boss obviously looks up to the black man, understanding that he is someone much more than he pretends to be. We are faced with an unseen black penis covered with sores, and a wife needing protection from sexual contagion. Somewhere other unseen women are being sexually exploited and deeply and permanently contaminated. Marks insists that we note the importance of absent images, and references Gilles Deleuze who insisted that the absence of an image called on the viewer to search for its hidden history (Marks, 1995, p. 42). It has also been revealed that our man apparently has a way to help, has another, parallel life being lived somewhere else.

Scene 5. Exterior night street scenes are filtered to reflect blue and green, the viewer feels cold and slightly nauseous. Then we are at the entrance to the Baltic Hotel, lit in warm reds and golden shades, it is inviting, and feels safe.

Scene 6. We are in the hotel basement, steel, grey linoleum, yellow-green sickly shades. Our man changes into a hotel receptionist uniform, and looks at the clock. It's 2 am.

Scene 7. He is at his desk in the beautifully appointed hotel lobby watching a row of TV screens monitoring the hotel entranceway, corridors and room numbers. The hotel seems asleep, vague sounds are muffled; it is night and there is an interminable electric hum from basement generators, florescent lights, and the low roar of city traffic infiltrating the interior. Our man looks at the clock. It's now 5 a.m. and on the TV monitors we see the early morning shift arrive. The maids.

Suddenly, our disheveled day shift taxi driver is now a beautifully uniformed night shift hotel receptionist, in a small, upscale boutique London hotel. He answers the phone, monitors for security. This is a man who never sleeps. This is a man who in the darkest night, in a sleeping hotel, stares long and hard into the artificial light. The viewer might almost taste the unrevealed secret he carries like a drowning weight in a sea of pain. He is terribly silent surrounded by the man-made quiet roar all around him. We are captivated. We must know more.

Scene 8. A beautiful young woman looks knowingly straight into the camera lens; her face fills the monitor for a long moment. She walks through the hotel revolving door and the black man purposely bumps into her. They have a few seconds to exchange surreptitious words. We finally find out from her that his name is Okwe, and from the Doorman that she is Turkish. We find out too from the doorman's comments that Okwe rents her couch in the mornings while she works the day shift at the hotel and that the hotel staff are beginning to gossip about this. Okwe says to the doorman, "We're never there at the same time, she has rules." The doorman replies, "Yes, I know she is a Muslim, which means she is a virgin, a little angel."

Scene 9: The hotel whore, a black Cockney East Ender named Juliet, walks down the stairs into the lobby, presumably after a hard nights work, exclaiming to Okwe, "Can you believe it? One of those fuckers wants to put me on his Visa card! Oh my bloomin' feet! Lucky I don't work standing up!" she grins at him as comes up to the reception desk, giving him a quizzical look. "Okwe, what, you don't have hookers where you come from? Where are you from? Somewhere with lions I bet!" Expressionless, Okwe says nothing and lights her cigarette. Juliet says sweetly, "I like lions." Okwe smiles the first genuine smile we have seen. She says, with controlled nonchalance, "you might want to have someone check on the room." He replies, "is there a problem?" she says, as she smiles and walks away, "how should I know, I don't exist do I?"

The beautiful Turkish woman's first long look—extreme camera close-up—into the TV monitor is breathtaking (embodied response), her large dark eyes, to use a much-used term, are like deep pools one could swim in for a very long time. Her skin is alabaster, her youthful bravado inspires and her naïve innocence is radiant. Then again . . . in the length and breadth of that same moment something imperceptible about her shimmers

and shadows. Marks, quoting Balasz, reminds us that “close-ups are often dramatic revelations of what is really happening under the surface appearances” (Marks, 1995, p. 94). A tension subtly curls inside the viewer’s belly, as she uncrosses and re-crosses her legs in the cinema seat. Something has been triggered.

Through the as-yet-unnamed young Turkish woman we are finally introduced to the black man. He is named; he is Okwe. It is a beautiful, earth-bound, strong name, steady and dignified. Here is our first personal relationship and we observe immediately that it is secret, inter-racial, inter-cultural, precious and extremely fragile. She is a single Muslim virgin-angel, who allows an African man to rent her couch to sleep while she works the day shift. Then in the very next scene, enters the beautiful Jamaican whore, Juliet who works the night shift. She is, on the surface, self-contained, in control of her business, street savvy and completely self-accepting. She is simply playing the hand life has dealt her. She is sweet, high-spirited, funny, and radiant in her way, and somehow great-hearted. But the viewer remembers the cankerous African penis in the taxi station office, and the world of vaginal contagion and transmission it visits. So here we have it, the paradox, the contradiction, the “gap”. And too, the archetypal casting thus far of the hero, the virgin and the whore, the doorman, and the crucifix. Let the unfolding continue.

Scene 10. Following Juliet’s cryptic suggestion, Okwe slowly and deliberately checks out room 510. It is filthy, with left over food spilling from plates, bottles of beer and wine all over the floor. The bed is disheveled and badly stained. He hears water running in the bathroom, and walking into it sees that the sink, the bathtub and the toilet bowl are all overflowing. Okwe checks the toilet bowl; apparently he’s the hotel plumber too! He digs with his hand deep into the orifice of the bowl and to his horror pulls out a human heart. Visibly shaken and distraught, he wraps the heart in a plastic garbage bag and takes it downstairs.

The world is turning inside out. The whore who does dirty work, night work, secret work in hidden rooms in hotels, with men who hide their disease from the daylight, men whose upper-world lives are bleached and stain-free, and whose under-world furtive excursions delight in subtle destructions. It is she who provocatively points Okwe to what will become a hazardous—literally and soulfully—journey toward himself, toward his own return, his own community and redemption. What will propel him and others in his sphere, toward a renewed life and a new destiny are precisely what Marks refers to as the auratic images. Let us trace the resonant images in this scene. The room is the whore’s workplace. Objects testifying to her work, the aesthetic involved and the residues are witnesses to the facts of her life. As Okwe bends down slowly to meticulously examine the bed and the stained sheets, one can almost smell the sex. As he looks around, picking up the food from the floor, the bottles from end of the bed, the cigarette butts littering the bedside tables, one can feel the sticky, grimy layers on the skin. These objects “see”, “know”, and “realize” the world they constitute by their very presence. For Marks, “...objects are not inert and mute ... they tell stories and describe trajectories. [They reveal] the discursive layers that take material form in them, the unresolved traumas that

become embedded in them, and the history of material interactions they encode” (Marks, 1995, p. 80).

Scene 11. The doorman comes up to the reception desk. Okwe is holding the heart in the bag, and checking out emergency numbers. The doorman exclaims, "What's that? You're stealing stuff already? If Senor Juan... oh speak of the fucking devil!" A man in a car is yelling for the doorman.

Scene 12. The same man drives into the hotel basement carport in a polished Mercedes. Dapper, and self-assured in a cheap sort of way, he begins complaining immediately, and ordering staff around, it's obvious he is a manager at the hotel.

Scene 14. Juan goes into his office and before he changes into his hotel uniform takes a few shots of scotch. Okwe walks in with the heart and tells him that it is a human heart. Juan says, "What the fuck do you know about human hearts Okwe?" Okwe's response is, "Perhaps you should telephone the police". Juan replies, "What? Are you out of your mind?" Okwe insists, "Senor Juan, someone is dead!" Juan laughs as he phones the police station, and says to Okwe, "What is your full name Okwe, and where are you from? Oh and why are you here in this beautiful country?" Okwe's expression reveals the fact he will not be able to give anyone any information. Juan puts the phone down and smirks. He holds the power to silence Okwe and is clearly complicit in the fact of the human heart. Juan continues, "You will learn Okwe, that the hotel business is about strangers who will always surprise you. They come to hotels in the night to do dirty things, and in the morning it's our job to make things look pretty again." He offers Okwe money that he refuses. Juan says, "Oh, you think if you don't take the money you are more innocent? Take it!" Okwe walks out in disgust.

We know now he has been dealt a brutal wound. Here is where, “speak of the devil himself” Juan walks in. A human heart lodged deep in a hotel toilet bowl bespeaks the presence of human trauma and tragedy and there are always brokers in such transactions. Now we come to understand that entrapment, desperation, dark histories and compromised hearts, literally and metaphorically have come to play their parts in the unfolding. We also know that Okwe has done much more than simply make a particularly horrific discovery that needs covering up. We know that he has been shocked and at the same time cracked open. It is the first time we see the facade of controlled dignity, the distant look and the detached demeanor, falter. He has been traumatized in fact by what he has discovered, and by the consequent response on the part of his boss Juan. Kai Erikson describes trauma as a “blow to the tissues of the body - or more frequently now, to the tissues of the mind - that results in injury or some other kind of disturbance. Something alien breaks in on you, smashing through whatever barriers your mind has set up as a line of defense. It invades you, takes you over, becoming a dominating feature of your interior landscape—:”possesses you” (Erikson, 1995, p. 183). And the “heart” does become a herald, as it were, to revelations both dangerous and redemptive.

Scene 15. Okwe leaves the hotel when his night shift is over. As he enters the Turkish woman's flat, he brings in a postcard that displays a photo of New York City. He collapses on the sofa, but instead of falling asleep, looks around the shabby room with an expression of silent despair on his face, as if to say, what am I doing here? And where is here? One feels his silent past almost pushing its way out from under his skin; but not quite, not yet. He gets up and leaves the flat.

Scene 16. Okwe makes his way through alleys and the back entrance of a hospital to the morgue where we see a Chinese physician, he's the hospital mortician, sweeping pools of blood off a gurney.

Scene 17. He rolls a small table up to Okwe upon which is a chess game. They both sit down. Okwe asks his friend, whose name is Gorgi, for medicine for his taxi boss's problem with the Clap. Gorgi says, "You're still driving cab in the day? Okwe you're going to kill yourself!" Okwe replies "I do not care to sleep". There is a moment of silence. Then he talks about the human heart in the lavatory, and says "I'm only telling you because you are a rational man, maybe there's an explanation. It was a healthy heart." Gorgi asks, "Maybe someone brought it with them?" Okwe is shocked. "Who carries around human hearts?" Gorgi tells him to leave the whole thing alone reminding Okwe, "You have no position here, you have nothing, you are nothing, you are merely an illegal alien."

The auratic human heart has become what Marks terms "radioactive". As Okwe lies sleepless on the couch, as the camera fills the screen with his face and we look for a while deep into his eyes, we "feel" the past approaching, we can almost "see" the memories clustering close to the surface, crowding the barrier, looking for a weakness in the chain, we can almost hear them whispering like a thousand ghosts. And then we finally meet Okwe's best and truest friend, Gorgi, who happens to be a Chinese mortician, a legal alien, and works with dead bodies in the hospital morgue, "dressing them up" so that they will be presentable when they arrive in the next world. He also is Okwe's source for medication and supplies when they are needed. His advice, based on Confucius and the Greek Gods, is sensible, amoral, and always leaves Okwe troubled and unresolved.

Scene 18. Okwe is in a cafe drinking tea in the Middle Eastern section of the city. He sees the Turkish woman walk by and follows her; she runs past him to her upstairs flat. He says "Shanay having only one key is making this impossible!" She retorts, "I do not want you coming in when I am there!" Okwe, "We're friends at the hotel! I'm no different here!" She pleads, "How would it look Okwe?" but finally lets him in.

Here we are introduced by name to Shanay; A romantic, exotic, faraway name. And we understand Shanay's deep concern about her spotless reputation in her community as a single young Muslim woman in a foreign country. We also recognize that she and Okwe are deeply though platonically bonded.

Scene 19. Okwe is cooking lunch. The tiny kitchen counter space is spread like a chef's workspace with beautifully chopped vegetables, herbs and spices. Shanay is washing her face, and gets furious as the bath water peters out. Meanwhile, Okwe asks if she had

cleaned on the 5th floor the morning before. Room 510. She comes running out to see if he can fix the bath faucet, to find that he has prepared a wonderful meal. "Okwe, in Africa is it the men who cook and clean?" He laughs, and hands her the postcard from New York. Later they sit down to lunch and Okwe asks if she has friends in New York. She replies, "I have a cousin in New York, and ever since I was little she has written to me." Okwe says, "I wish London was like New York it would be easier to drive a cab." Shanay surprised asks, "You have been to New York? And you came back?" Then she paints an idealized picture for Okwe, "In the winter they put lights in the trees, is that true? And you can skate in the parks, and some of the policeman ride white horses, not all of them, but some. What did you do there?" Okwe quietly answers, "I worked in a hospital." Shanay asks, "A cleaner?" "No," Okwe replies, "I was there to study." Shanay, "So why are you working in a hotel?" Okwe sighs, "It is an African story". Okwe, "Do you drink wine Shanay?" Shanay shakes her head, "Do you want to know why I left Turkey?" "Because you wanted to live like your cousin?" Shanay replies harshly, "No, because I do not want to live like my mother and yes I do drink wine."

This is a wonderful scene; the first really intimate encounter in the film so far; the first tender moments, sensitive and real. We discover that Okwe is Nigerian and that he studied medicine in New York. And, we are brought into his life as a Nigerian African through his food, his cooking, *his* place in the kitchen. We also see him at his most intimate with his beautiful young friend as he reveals more of himself to her in response to her self-revelations. The meal apparently is splendid, almost ritual. This viewer, knowing the heady scents of North African cuisine needed no effort to trigger her taste buds at the thought of fresh cilantro, nutmeg and cinnamon, honey and almonds coating tender morsels of lamb. The images of the carefully sliced food, and freshly chopped herbs, the beautiful laying out of the foods ready to cook, Okwe's comfort working in the kitchen, these all are images that Marks would refer to as recollection images, which for her are, "Images that ... cry out to tell the forgotten histories of which they are the index" (Marks, 1995, p. 71). In this case images that point to Okwe's "African story" which he partially recreates through the memories of smell, taste and ritual cooking.

In this scene we also learn more of Shanay. In her sheer innocence, her true virginity, she is completely at ease with Okwe in her flat, as she takes a bath and wanders around in her bathrobe. Her trust is complete. We also learn of her dream to go to New York; her icon of freedom. The place where she would be sure that she would not live the life her mother led. At this, "thin" telling, the viewer wonders at the transparency. Why would a "good" young Muslim girl, a virgin in her own right, rigid in her insistence on respect from the community, want to leave her mother? And will leaving protect her from her own fear for her self and for what "destiny" has in store for her? Here is a thought that cannot yet be fully articulated, or even surface to closely. There is a paralysis, even a petrification in the silence; an absence of connection, the absolute turning away. But it is precisely here, in the gaps, in the thing left unspoken or uncompleted that Marks says the transparencies come alive gradually. In her words, "The petrified object regains life only in the process of developing a thought that can think it, a language in which it can be spoken"(Marks, 1995, p. 29). Sometimes, the language may not articulate in the spoken

word but in the body. Finally, for Shanay the gift of the moment is also that in the telling of *her* dream, she discovers Okwe in his true image.

Scene 21. Okwe is at the hotel in the early hours of the morning. He has a snack with the doorman and begins to question him about people coming into the hotel, and possibly not leaving. The doorman says, "Okwe, if you want to keep your job at this hotel, don't concern yourself with who comes and who goes."

Okwe cannot shake the situation with the human heart. It has gripped him tightly and he cannot let go. He continues his own personal investigation and in this scene we discover that the doorman too is complicit yet also concerned for Okwe.

Scene 24. Shanay arrives home to find Okwe ironing. She says anxiously "Okwe you must not tell them at the hotel that you have a key, and show them that your back hurts so that they know you sleep on the floor." Suddenly a violent knocking on the door announces the immigration authorities. Both rush to hide any evidence of Okwe's presence. The immigration agents barge into the flat, and in the process of their search, maliciously destroy the apartment. We find out that Shanay is petitioning for political asylum and is in a tenuous position herself. It would damage her status to have an illegal staying with her and paying rent no less. Okwe manages to escape detection by jumping out of the bathroom window. He runs barefoot through the streets ending up at a local cafe where an obviously aware and sensitive cafe owner brings him a pair of sneakers that he gratefully accepts.

Here we are beginning to deepen our sense of this young woman who is turning out to be quite tough and rebellious in her own right. Where did this characteristic come from? Where did the courage to leave home and her mother come from? And even as she insists on respectability, she nevertheless does have a man, a black African non-Muslim living with her, albeit platonically. As an illegal immigrant in the process of obtaining legal political asylum she is also risking everything by having Okwe live with her.

Scene 25. Okwe is at the hotel reception desk. Suddenly from behind Okwe hears a voice, "Immigration officers—good morning!" Okwe turns half frozen with fear. They ask if they might wait for the maids to clock in. Okwe, trying to remain expressionless, says, "Not at all". One of the immigration officers lights up a cigarette. Okwe, quietly and authoritatively asks him to smoke in the designated area. They move but continue to stare suspiciously at him. Okwe calls down to the basement office where Juliet and the doorman are having sex. Okwe interrupts and says, "Shanay will be here in 2 minutes you must stop her!"

Now we begin to see the true colors of relationship bleeding through critical events. Okwe will protect Shanay at all costs. The doorman does what is necessary for all concerned.

Scene 28. Okwe and Shanay are walking in the streets of London talking. Shanay cannot go back to the hotel now, and is discussing working in a sweatshop. Okwe disagrees. She insists, "It's better than cleaning up after whores, and it's better money!"

Scene 30. Meanwhile Okwe goes back to the hotel to see Juan. In the office he sees an old black man collapsed in the arms of another black man who only speaks French. Juan comes in and says, "What the fuck are you doing here Okwe?" Okwe informs him of Shanay's decision to leave and asks for the pay still owed to her. Juan goes to get the money. Meanwhile the black man begins to cry out in pain. Okwe immediately goes over to him telling him to calm down, and announcing for the first time that he is a doctor. He discovers a gaping infected wound in the man's side. He tells Juan that the man needs emergency care immediately. Juan replies "If you are a doctor, then you can do something for these guys." Okwe angrily responds, "This is the wound of an operation!" He asks the injured man's companion, "Where did he have this operation, which country?" Juan knowingly responds, "They won't go to a hospital." It is clear they are illegals.

The auratic human heart has somehow led Okwe finally to the source of his own need, namely to identify himself in truth, and in turn to the need of members of his own community. He is literally traumatized into returning to himself in order to retrieve his own history, his own living past, and in the process discovers a community tragedy to which he must, and can only, attend to with his whole being once more intact.

Scene 32. Okwe is in an apartment where the injured man is being taken care of by his family with folk medicine, and now also with injections and medications supplied by Okwe's friend. When Okwe asks which hospital they had the man's kidney removed, he discovers that it was in the hotel, and that the price of a British passport, and immigration papers was a kidney! The family members are visibly overwhelmed by Okwe's generosity.

Here we see the kind of community bonding that occurs among individuals sharing the same patterns of trauma. Exiled from home and land-based cultural realities, illegal, and thus criminalized in the country they have sought safety in, de-graded in so many ways, individuals sharing the same kinds of suffering gravitate toward each other. In this sense then, as Erikson reminds us, there is a social dimension to trauma. "Trauma shared can serve as a source of communality in the same way that common languages and common backgrounds can. There is a spiritual kinship there, a sense of identity, even when feelings of affection are deadened and the ability to care numbed"(Erikson, 1995, p. 186). Okwe's sense of connectedness and responsibility toward those of his own community deepens and takes on a new urgency as his true identity comes into sharper focus. Meanwhile he now sleeps at the hospital morgue.

Scene 36. The immigration authorities raid the sweatshop where Shanay is working. At the alarm, the women disappear in seconds, leaving the shop empty with only the Indian owner hand-finishing his garment. The agents announce that they are looking for Shanay and ask him to inform them if he should meet her.

Scene 37. The women who have hidden up on the roof of the building begin to return to their sewing machines. The Indian man takes Shanaya behind the curtains and blackmails her. In order to keep her secret she will have to provide him oral sexual services and that due to his respect for her, he would not demand her virginity. She is trapped and does so. This becomes a regular torture. We see from the expression on the other women's faces that they know exactly what she is going through.

Now the dream begins to unravel and the unspoken thought, the well-hidden past filled with whispering unseen remembrances begins to crowd the screen and the viewer's sense of the onrush of a destiny not to be denied. Erikson tells us that, "Our memory repeats to us what we haven't yet come to terms with, what still haunts us" (Erikson, 1995, p. 184). And there is a haunting going on. Our virgin-angel is now only partially undone, yet deeply and permanently so. She has been trapped in her own escape.

Scene 39. Juan and Okwe walk down into the bowels of the hotel where the walls are painted with red "warning" signs bordered with arrows pointing in all directions. Juan tells Okwe that eventually he always finds out about everyone working at the hotel including the reticent Nigerian physician. He shows Okwe a perfectly forged passport, naming it a work of art. Juan says, "Okwe, it's simple, you give me your kidney and I give you a new identity. I sell the kidney for 10,000 and I'm happy, the person who needs the kidney gets cured so he's happy, and the person who sold his kidney gets to stay in this beautiful country so he's happy! So . . . my whole business is based on happiness! But for a doctor . . . I have a better idea. Each time you operate you get 3000.00, a passport for you and one for Shanay." Okwe shudders, "I do not want to get involved!" Juan smiles darkly, "You could even go back to Africa and no one would know who the fuck you are! Your choice, no rush, I just wanted to put a little wasp in your head." Juan walks away down a darkening corridor and we swing back to Okwe whose expression has become desperate, helpless.

Scene 40. At the hospital morgue Okwe tells Gorgi about it all. Gorgi's cryptic response is, "There's nothing so dangerous as a virtuous man. Well, Okwe, if you're so concerned you should go to the police, go get yourself deported." Okwe explodes with emotion, "Do you think if it were just for deportation I would not do it? I'm a wanted man Gorgi!" Gorgi asks disbelievingly, "Okwe do you mean to say you didn't know people sold their organs?" Okwe quietly replies, "Not here." Gorgi laughs, "What do mean not here in London? In London it's 10 grand for a kidney! People take risks! If I had the courage Okwe I'd sell my own kidney just to get out of here, just to save my brain!"

These are two very powerful scenes testifying to, witnessing the deeply embedded layers of trauma that all the players are weighted down by and also working through by whatever means available to them. Trauma haunts the human soul in ways that have to do with how personal experience shapes the event, and molds the memory. The haunting is everywhere; it is as deeply embedded in the traumatized individual as it is in the traumatized community. According to Cathy Caruth, "To be traumatized is precisely to be possessed [repeatedly] by an image or event. The traumatized, we might say, carry an impossible history within them, or they become themselves the symptom of a history they cannot entirely possess" (Caruth, 1995, pp. 4 & 5).

Everyone in this film except, seemingly, the happy whore Juliet, is looking for a way out of the under-world. But it also “seems” that if that were to occur, it would have to happen in under-world terms, or disguised as an under-world event. Juan moves in-between the upper and under-worlds via, on the one hand, his material persona; his black Mercedes, his flashy fashioned self, his successful businessman demeanor, and on the other hand, in the hotel basement, his small-minded, petty criminal persona wreaks havoc with the lives and bodies of helpless, placeless aliens who themselves caught in the web of their own demise. They cannot go back to their beginnings or resource their own histories to find their way “home” wherever that may ultimately be. But Juan does have the power to produce *the* artifice of inestimable value to alien folk. The perfectly forged passport along with perfectly forged immigration documents. For these desperate people will risk all, if not for themselves, for their loved ones to obtain precious freedom and the human dignity that that may offer. And Juan, like Gorgi, sees this all through a detached and logical perceptual lens thus rationalizing their respective positions as perfectly logical. Gorgi though, unlike Juan, can still love, and his friendship with Okwe runs deep. Okwe has been unwillingly thrust out beyond his own self-defense, out of his own emotional numbing back into a maelstrom of internal anguish, conflict and re-collection. He has to face his reality as-it-is when Juan offers him salvation and includes his beloved Shanay in on the deal. But the price for salvation is “impossible”. He grimly walks away from it. He will sacrifice Shanay and all the others in order to not lose himself. Juan’s dark smile churns in the viewer’s gut. Haptic seeing is embodied seeing.

Gorgi’s attitude, shared with Juan, is that a kidney is just a kidney for goodness sake. We have spares. It just takes guts or extreme desperation to decide to give or sell one. The human heart and its auratic effects, its hermetic function has brought Okwe and the viewer to the actual heart of the trauma in the story, the “spare” kidney. For a body to become free, a body part must be sacrificed and, in the process, a life must be risked. I want to describe the kidney as the *recollection-object* Marks describes. As an object or image, for we never actually see the kidney, just the gaping un-healing wound, that is fundamentally irreducible and that encodes collective memory. The collective memory here being the communal memory of all the individuals in the city’s many districts who have visited Room 510 and have either never returned, or have returned and died at some point in time; those who have “purchased” freedom for their own folk in the sacrifice, or died in vain due to “complications”. But, in spite of this story, the beacon of hope; the word on the street still spreads like a virus and every week Room 510 needs an especially careful cleaning. The human kidney is now a product to be black-marketed, while desperate people become the raw material to be mined as it were and then left to rot among their loved ones. The human kidney, like Shanay, Okwe and their like; refugees, the undocumented workforce, becomes the *transnational object* that Marks identifies as being “created in cultural translation and the transcultural movement [that we see in] the diasporic movements of immigrants and exiles.” The market in human *transnational* kidneys, organs where race is not necessarily included in the equation is also explained by Marks as the “The gross transformations and disarticulations of reality under the pressures of intercultural movements” (Marks, 1995, pp. 77, 78, 79). In this film we trace the transactional movement of the human kidney exchange among cultural and

economic agencies and individuals in just one city, we walk the path of this auratic, radioactive object as it becomes fully commodified.

Scene 42. At the hotel, Okwe picks up the ringing phone. A weeping Shanay begs him to come with her to New York. We see and feel Okwe's increasing desperation. He goes to Shanay's flat where he finds her dancing erotically to Turkish nightclub music. As we look at her tear-streaked face close-up, then to her hypnotically seductive body we note a frightening hysteria in her once quietly deep eyes. Okwe shouts over the hauntingly wild music asking what has happened. She cries out, "The sweatshop does not suit me, my hands are too soft, I have cut my fingers, so I have decided to go to America". He shuts the tape recorder off. "For America you would need a visa Shanay." She turns the music back on and continues her dance. "Or maybe a European passport!" he shouts. Then he stops and thinks. He grabs Shanay firmly, "You keep away from Senor Juan!" "Okwe he says it's just like taking out a tooth!" Okwe is furious, "He's lying! They will cut you here and here, they will gut you like an animal and leave you to rot Shanay!" "Well, the laundry girl did it and now she's free!" "But Shanay, there are others who are now dead!" "Yes Okwe, and they are free too!" Shaking his head desperately, he asks quietly, "What would your god say Shanay?" "My god does not speak to me anymore." He pleads with her, "Don't break now Shanay, save your money, work hard and keep New York in your mind." She screams hysterically laughing, "Okwe, do you know what kind of "work" I do? I bit Okwe, at the factory, the boss said he would report me to immigration, he made me suck Okwe, but today I bit, I bit, I bit!"

Shanay has been brought to her knees literally in the Indian shopkeeper's office and in the face of her past as she looks toward the future. Her own traumas are speaking themselves out through her body. From the fully embodied virgin-angel image we see something else revealed through her blood and bones and it shimmers like a veil around her dancing body; a body that has an inherent sexual knowing impacts the viewer with its caress. The music is come-on nightclub music, for belly dancers to turn-on male clients in cheap bars in Istanbul. But she is singing the words and knows the moves. She still habitually carries cultural and past references in her body. The song itself is an auratically evocative image that, according to Marks, "can speak to us of the past, without ever letting us completely decipher it. [For Shanay] it is a brush with involuntary memory, memory that can only be arrived at through a shock" (Marks, 1995, p. 81). For the viewer the shock registers with a battery of questions. Is this what she left behind? Is *this* her mother's life that she would not lead? Does 'sucking' mean that she is no longer a virgin; that the angel has deserted her? Is she now like a nightclub whore? Or does "sucking" not count? Maybe if she "bit" the angel might return? Maybe if she "bit" the virgin light in her eyes might strike a glow once again. Whatever it takes, physically leaving is imperative, and Shanay like others in the story is willing to leave the underworld or the whole world for that matter if that is what freedom costs.

Scene 46. In the hotel basement Okwe is ironing his work shirt, he weeps.

His tears mirror Shanay's. They are also collectively part of a traumatized alienated community who exist day-to-day, one way or another, with their back up against the

executioner's wall. The despair is contagious in the film and reaches out through the "skin of the film" onto the skin of the viewer. We too feel trapped, imprisoned, there is nothing else to do but fight, run or capitulate and all choices seem to be untenable. Like Shanay, Okwe too has been brought to the edge. His defenses, his dream of the safety of anonymity has faded, his self-distancing from responsibility and knowing has collapsed into the immediacy of the desperate moment. We know him now. He is an extremely well brought up and well-educated Nigerian doctor. His past is deeply troubled and criminal for he is a wanted man in his own country. But we know him also as a moral man, a man with a heart, who despite himself has formed loving, loyal and communal relationships with simple, basically good people in dire need. He has been "infected" by the "aura" of the things around him. He has succumbed to their radioactivity which has released from the depths personal memories of such pain and loss that we can see the grief appear in the pores of his own dark skin which fills the screen, his tears are so close to the surface of the film, that as they trickle down to his lips we can almost taste the salted wounds they testify to. As Okwe felt impelled to follow auratic human heart to its source and began to discover the story behind its haunting presence, he could not have imagined the outcomes. For Marks, and this is Okwe's experience, ". . . the danger is in realizing that there exist histories that are contradictory to those one knows, cultural knowledge that shake the security of one's own cultural position in the world . . . it is an unsettling, de-composing experience . . . [it contaminates]" (Marks, 1995, p. 71). Both Shanay and Okwe have reached a crossroad.

Scene 48. Shanay and Okwe are walking down a street toward a church. Shanay is holding on to him for dear life. Her love for him shines. Okwe's for her has always been hidden and he discourages any attempt on Shanay's part to divulge her feeling for him. Now he tells Shanay that he has no religion but that he comes to the church to think about his wife. Shania tenderly cradles his face as he insists that they should not see each other any more. He walks away. She is once again lost. She runs after him, "Do you love her? Do you love her?" He gives her money to save for her New York dream. She cries " Okwe! Do you love her?" Okwe is brutal, "Shanay! For you and I there is only survival! It is time you woke up from your stupid dream!" They walk away from each other.

Two young people in love and unable to realize that love. It seems that people and communities in the midst of traumatic events or circumstances cannot afford to love. Maybe emotional or even affectionate attachments, soul connections, are even more costly than human organs, the loss of which cannot be borne. Erikson notes that in traumatized communities persons, "often come to feel estranged from the rest of humanity and gather into groups with others of like mind. They are not drawn together by feelings of affection (in the usual meaning of the term, anyway) but by a shared set of perspectives, rhythms and moods that derive from the sense of being apart. Among those shared perspectives, often, is an understanding that the laws by which the natural world has always been governed as well as the decencies by which the human world has always been governed are now suspended—or were never active to begin with" (Erikson, 1995, p. 194).

Scene 50. Senor Juan escorts Shanay to Room 510. After her shower, she looks at herself in the mirror, imagining the cuts on her body. Juan asks her for identification details. Shanay creates her new identity. She wants to remain 22, but will take an Italian name, Isabella Incarigo, born in Napoli, who owns a cafe in New York.

Scene 51. Meanwhile Okwe is searching the neighbourhood for Shanay.

Scene 52. Juan opens a bottle of champagne and makes a move on Shanay. She retorts angrily, "Go to hell!" He smiles and says very quietly, "This is hell! I'm helping you to get away! Now, take off your clothes!" She pushes him away violently and reaches for the champagne bottle that she wields like a sword of vengeance. "Let me tell you Shanay, your role right now is what the Americans call a "deal-breaker" so?" He walks away tearing up the paperwork for her passport and visa. She whispers loudly, "Wait." Her only request is that it takes place in the dark. When it is done, Juan's final and deepest blow is dealt. He tells her that Okwe ran away from Lagos because he murdered his own wife. Now she weeps.

So it has happened, the virgin-angel has been transformed. It is she, who in her vulnerability as a young Muslim woman, surviving without family in a strange land who has had to compromise everything. It's almost as if once a trauma cycle begins it takes on an agenda of its own, thickening and sedimenting in the tissues and in the soul, even to the extent that surviving it at all entails a re-traumatization. According to Caruth, "We come to understand that an event in and of itself may constitute only an aspect of a larger traumatic occurrence that includes the issue and process of surviving. The *fact of survival* may itself, constitute a far greater crisis for the individual, may represent the deeper, more enduring trauma" (Caruth, 1995, p. 9). She has given up the thing most precious, the thing that represented for her a destiny apart from her past, her mother and whatever all that that signified. And in the giving up, she has obtained two new identities, the Italian New York cafe owner and the whore. Her life's only light, Okwe is now revealed to be a man who is able to kill his wife.

Scene 53. Okwe arrives at the hotel. He asks the doorman, "Shanay is here?" The doorman shamefacedly looks down at the pavement as he gives him the answer.

Scene 54. Juan is driving out of the hotel and comes face to face with Okwe. He screeches to a halt and jumps out of the car. The two strange adversaries face each other now like equals. "I won't allow you to butcher her!" Okwe says grimly. Juan raises his eyebrows. "You won't allow Okwe?" "I will operate on her myself, it is the only way I can be sure she will not die. In return I want a passport, a new identity." Juan whistles, "Well, holy shit! So you are human Okwe!"

Okwe has been pushed over the edge of his own personal abyss. We know now that he has already lost the woman he loves and somehow we cannot yet believe that he was responsible for her death. But here and now he is galvanized into action. He will not lose another beloved woman in his life. He will make the compromise. He will engage the under-world on its own terms. But can he?

Scene 55. Room 510. Juliet knocks and comes in. "Okwe told me to bring these, they're 'morning after' pills." Shanaya whispers. "So he did not care enough to bring them himself." Juliet laughs, "Oh Okwe's an angel!" Shanaya takes the pill, while Juliet smokes. They have both just showered and are wearing identical spotlessly white bath-robos. Juliet says encouragingly, "There...it never happened!" and she passes a cigarette to Shanaya who takes it and inhales deeply as if she's been smoking for years. Juliet asks, "So, what happened?" Shanaya whispers, "Before it happened, I was a virgin?" "Jesus!" Juliet softly exclaims. Shania shaking her head laughs and says, "Mohammad!" Juliet sighs, "What a pair, the virgin and the whore!"

This is such a disturbing scene. The 'morning after' pill, the cigarette, the reflective images of the virgin-whore dichotomy, the mutual irreverence toward the holy men their respective sacred traditions, the special kind of "knowing" intimacy that is unheard between them, but felt on the skin. What is playing out here for Shanay? The viewer is conflicted. Surely fate can be fought and if not defeated, at least negotiated with? Images of this brave and beautiful, ill-fated young woman, selling her body on the streets of New York struggle with images of her successfully running her boutique cafe in Manhattan, independent, strong and able finally to hold her own.

Scene 56. Okwe now moves very fast. He gets the best taxi the station can give him. Gorgi, helps him to obtain all the surgical equipment and medication he needs. Room 510 is transformed into a surgical room. Juan, who has come into assist, finds Shanay already drugged. Okwe insists that Juan have a beer before they start so that he can relax. The beer is drugged and once Juan is down for the count, he is placed on the gurney, while Shanay and Juliet assist Okwe as he removes Juan's kidney. In the subsequent scenes while the kidney is exchanged in the hotel basement for the passports, visas and cash, Juan is rushed to the nearest hospital.

This is a fitting climax to the story, for the potential for human compassion, concern and love is realized. Our key players represent the transnational exilic community gravitating around the shared reality of their circumstances. Within the framework of communal trauma it is the community that is ultimately the source healthy confrontation, reconciliation and healing. In Erikson's words, "When the community is profoundly affected, one can speak of a damaged social organism in almost the same way that one would speak of a damaged body. [In the healing process] it is the *community* that offers a cushion for pain, the *community* that offers a context of intimacy, the community that serves as the repository for binding traditions" (Erikson, 1995, p. 188).

In the next few scenes we see that the virgin and the whore, the doorman and the Chinaman and the taxi cab drivers all collude in tricking the under-world, in tricking, "speak of the devil himself", Senor Juan, so that at least two can obtain freedom and move toward a future filled with hope and some kind of promise. If this can happen for just these two, it means it can happen for others. And for this *all* can be risked. As Erikson reminds us, "Traumatized people calculate life's chances differently. They look out at the world through a different lens" (Erikson, 1995, p. 193).

In the final scenes, Okwe and Shanay are dropped off at Heathrow Airport where during the parting conversation they realize that their dreams and destinies have taken different shapes and that *America* is for her what *Africa* is to him. In their final parting though, Shanay and the viewer are provided with the final brushstroke to Okwe's portrait. We discover that he did not murder his wife, but was held captive and tortured to elicit information he simply did not have. His captors threatened to kill his wife if he did not confess, and did. He has a surviving daughter to return home to. Their final goodbyes contain all the unspoken feeling trembling under the surface of the skin of the story and a final poignant and simple admission of love.