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PLACES, NON-PLACES, AND THE ABANDONED INDIVIDUAL: AN AUGIAN
INTERPRETATION OF *THE TERMINAL* AND *BABEL*

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The work presented in this MA thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original and my own work, except as acknowledged in the text. The work in this thesis has not been submitted, either in whole or in part, for a degree at this or any other university.

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Abstract

This study examines the French Philosopher, Marc Augé's concept of 'non-places' and if it can be extended beyond the classification provided by Augé. Since the conception of the theory of the non-place, a lot has been said and written about what makes a space a non-place but there's still very little emphasis and research on a place becoming a non-place and vice-versa. This study will indicate that places and non-places have the potential of colliding and merging into the other. In order to achieve the desiring result, the example of border has been explored as a space that can be transformed into a place when in theory it's a non-place. Additionally in the latter part of the study, non-places and the individuals trapped in these spaces are treated as 'homo sacers', a concept provided by Giorgio Agamben, where the individuals are abandoned in a sort of no-man's land, legally and otherwise, and have to fend for themselves.

This study will also focus on the areas that Marc Augé didn't take into consideration while conceptualizing non-places. However, despite all this, Marc Augé's concept can still be a prominent tool in the analysis of supermodernity and capitalism.

Key Words: Marc Augé, supermodernity, spaces, places, non-places, borders, homo sacer

Introduction

If a place can be defined as relational, historical, and concerned with identity, then a space which cannot be defined as relational or historical, or concerned with identity will be a non-place.

Marc Augé, *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*

Over the past century, there has been a dramatic rise in the curiosity about places and non-places, and whether non-places actually have the potential of becoming a place. Accompanying this vivid spark in interest around this topic, there has also been a great deal of discussion and scholarly research on the subject, since the publication of Marc Augé's theory of non-place in 1995. However, there is still very little discussion focusing on how the concept of a place and a non-place varies with regard to spaces like borders, which go beyond geographical boundaries. Using Marc Augé's theory as a framework, and considering his ideas in relation to new forms of modernity such as 'supermodernity', the aim of this study will be to discuss the ideology of a non-place and its relationship to borders and how it transcends its basic definition and has the potential to transform into a place. Primarily, by understanding the significance of borders and what they mean in today's world, and then going on to examine what places and non-places are and how they can be related to borders, this study aims to establish the concept of a border as a non-place. In the pages that follow, I will argue, however, that even though the border in theory is a non-place, it can sometimes blur its own lines and become a place, and vice-versa.

This study will deal with the manner in which Augé develops his theory of places and non-places and will discuss the limitations of his theory. The analysis has been divided into three chapters. The first chapter elaborates what borders signify in today's world, and

specifies the theoretical background; expressing what supermodernity is, and how Augé and de Certeau define a place and a non-place. The second chapter discusses a highly acclaimed movie of 2004, Steven Spielberg's *The Terminal*, where the protagonist transforms an airport, which would conventionally be considered a non-place, into his home. The third chapter will focus on Iñárritu's 2006 movie *Babel*, which has parallel storylines running throughout, transcending borders and boundaries to bring out links between the lives of select people spread across three different continents. The movie also raises the question of who is displaced and placed, and what makes one placed and non-placed.

In the detective novel, *The Lady in the Lake* (1943), Raymond Chandler writes, "I seemed to need a new place,' she said. 'Not necessarily an interesting place. Just a strange place. Without associations. A place where I would be very much alone. Like an hotel.'" (Buchanan 393). In the review article *Non-Places: Spaces in the Age of Supermodernity* (1999), Ian Buchanan writes that we are associated with a "familiar paradox" (393), wherein a known place is still an unknown place. One of the striking features of the generic spaces in modern life is that we are already familiar with these spaces, even if we have not previously visited the specific airport, restaurant, bar, mall, etc. These places are almost unavoidable in the contemporary world, and an individual spends a large portion of his time in these spaces. These geographical sites can be termed spaces, as opposed to places; they were consequently also termed 'non-places,' by the French anthropologist Marc Augé. With the advancement of globalisation and technology, mobility has become a common practice in the contemporary world, and the locations that support these practices, following Augé should be classified as "non-places". What makes it imperative to understand these concepts is the great deal of overlap between 'places' and 'non-places'; the two categories are far from distinct, and this can complicate our ability to categorise them. The trickiest question arises: can the space that is a place for one, become a non-place for another? According to Augé, non-places and

places are two sides of a coin, “there is non-place in every place, and in all non-places places can be recomposed” (Hermans 32). Can they only be restricted to the classification Augé has set for them, or could the practice go beyond Augé's theory? The classification becomes more important when it is applied to borders.

In this light, the focus of my study is to explore the validity of Augé's theory in relation to borders, where there is a constant tension between place and non-place. The subjectivity or this reversible state of flux that is associated with place and non-place especially in the age of supermodernity is the focus of my analysis. Through this study, I wish to assert the role that borders play in the formation of identity, and elaborate on how borders, which are non-places according to Augé, are not supposed to provide a sense of identity, by definition. This divergence brings us to the question that I aim to answer; can a border - traditionally a non-place - have the potential to become a place?

Borders, Places and Non-Places

In this world of sections and compartments, we do not always consciously perceive the distinct lines or borders of what would be a place, or what is in Marc Augé's terms, a 'non-place'. Changes in the nature of borders may be explained in terms of different historical phases in the shaping of states and territoriality. But before we examine the nature of borders in this light and understand its significance, it is crucial for us to study how we can distinguish the border as a place or a non-place. A starting point to this is to first outline the concept of a place, analyse the spatial forms of a place, and examine how French social scientist Michel de Certeau talks about the transformation of a place into a space when activated by people. In his book *The Practice of Everyday Life*, de Certeau draws a clear distinction between a place and a non-place and proposes:

A place is the order (of whatever kind) in accord with which elements are distributed in relationships of coexistence. It thus excludes the possibility of two things being in the same location. The law of the "proper" rules in the place: the elements taken into consideration are beside one another, each situated in its own "proper" and distinct location, a location it defines. A place is thus an instantaneous configuration of positions. It implies an indication of stability. (117)

Marc Augé (54), developed de Certeau's ideas further in his book *Non-places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity* with respect to relational perceptions, where elements in a space correlate, coexist and share identities in the same space. He argued that people want anthropological places to be a historical combination of relations and

identity, whereby the individual carries out customs or rituals not directly related to them, but carries them out as they continue to live in the history of that space (53). These rituals of a space and build form a memory pertaining to the history of a place. In today's supermodern society these rituals still exist, but they are increasingly being displaced and are losing their original purpose. The ethics, rules, morals and principles that modernity has, are lacking in what Augé terms "supermodernity," which thereby produces non-places that have no anthropological meaning, empty of any religious or spiritual feeling. Noticeably, Augé lays down clear guidelines that empower him to unravel which places are in fact non-places. Augé proposes a theory of asking a question with three basic elements to decipher a non-place: Does this place hold cultural meaning, historical significance or a sense of identity? This brings us to Augé's celebrated definition of non-places: "if a place can be defined as relational, historical, and concerned with identity, then a space which cannot be defined as relational or historical, or concerned with identity will be a non-place" (78).

Augé established his theory by organising and distinguishing between anthropological places and non-places. He explains that non-places are derivatives of the non-descript spaces such as supermarkets, hotels, airports, train stations and so on, which create a wordless environment that is non-relational, unhistorical and unconcerned with identity. However, this is quite different from de Certeau's explanation of a non-place, which accounts for a higher probability of a place to be transformed into a non-place, by the simple absence of the place from itself through "an injunction coming from the other (a history...)" [...] But can a name alone be sufficient to produce 'this erosion or non-place, gouged' out of a place 'by the law of the other' [...] These names create non-places in the places; they turn them into passages" (85). It is hence the naming of the place along a route, creating a passage, and then crossing this route, that creates a non-place. In simple terms, in these places, an individual does not reside, occupy or activate the space, but merely crosses through them. This simple concept

indicates that every place may simultaneously exist as a place or a non-place by merely traversing through it. But Augé's perception of a non-place is based on how it is expressed by the words it indicates to us, like the signs on a motorway or the use of a cash-machine, where you are exposed to an intangible space without boundaries and identities (117). Travellers on a plane journey, for instance, share nothing beyond the simple and accidental fact that they have been brought together by the circumstances, for a few hours. Augé also implies that groups of people express their identity by the arrangement of space, and thereby give meaning to it. Thus he explains that places and non-places have points of connection and often work as a crossover, like 'opposed polarities', where one is never totally removed, and the other is never entirely completed (79).

With a clear idea of place and non-place in mind, the discussion can move onto the significance of borders especially in the age of supermodernity. Borders define our daily routines and give us a sense of identity and belonging to groups and places, while at the same time, they bring about the notion of differentiation and isolation. The border has always been associated with law and the role it plays, because it is by definition the extent of national dominion. Acuto (2) contends that borders have to be studied for their presence or absence, and the role they play in building social relations. The implication and significance of borders, as well as their geographical location, can alter drastically over time and space insomuch as they have both symbolic and material meanings along with their associated regions (Anderson and O'Dowd 593). The need to understand borders becomes more necessary in the age of mobilisation because it has become the primary axe of "global inequality" (Turner 514) and as Agnew proposes, "the map image of the borders of the state still exercises a major influence on the territorial imagination of whose security is at stake, and who most threatens it" (300). With the onset of contemporary 'globalization' and the

vision of a potentially borderless world, through selective lowering of borders as barriers there has been increasing penetrability to flows of capital, commodities, information and most importantly, people. A border represents a political, geographical, social, cultural and linguistic boundary and is “world-configuring” and not just jurisdictional (Balibar 79). Identities are created and redefined by borders, which are overloaded by meanings of cultural, social and political contexts. However, it should be noted that borders tend to treat each individual differently. As Balibar wrote:

[Borders] do not have the same meaning for everyone [...] Today's borders are, to some extent, designed [...] not merely to give individuals from different social classes, different social experiences of the law, the civil administration, the police and elementary rights, such as the freedom of circulation and freedom of enterprise, but actively to *differentiate* between individuals in terms of social class. (81-82)

Borders are different for all the classes, especially for the individuals who are in the “deportation class”, because they are easily removed against their desire (Turner 516). The border functions by including and excluding an individual from the jurisdiction of the sovereign state. Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben highlights this in his theory of the state of exception, which readily applies to individuals caught in the border zone, where “the ordinary relation of the law of life is not application (of the law) but the abandonment (from the law)” (29). There is a divide between those who can traverse the border and those who cannot. In the movies *The Terminal* and *Babel* we see how the characters' fates are in the hands of the border controllers, and to what extent they succumb to their power. Both of these movies have treated the subject of the border differently, but they both convey a similar message: there's always a filter of who can or who should cross a border, and if an individual

falls on the other side of the category, he is abandoned and has no rights in the eyes of the law.

Borders have thus been established as spaces where identities are created and redefined, where different individuals are treated differently based on their circumstance. It is interesting to note a divergence in this finding by looking at Marc Augé's definition of the border - as the "traveller's space", a representation of supermodernity. He refers to them as spaces without a discernable history or identity, which are simply transposable and transient points for travel and communicative exchange. Borders then become a place of transit, and not a place to stay. This brings out a clash between borders that are places, which define identities; and borders that are non-places, which are devoid of aspects concerned with identity, relation or history. This duality in the significance of borders that are in a constant flux, is what will be explored in the chapters that follow.

A Fluid Border Space- *The Terminal* (2004)

Augé proclaimed that the airport terminal is symbolic of a non-place; a place that has expended its potential of representation. In the airport, all the symbols and signs point towards the exit, which makes it a place of transit; an everlasting suspension but not a place where people search for some comprehensible or intrinsic meaning. For most of the travellers when entering a new city, they are made acquainted with the unknown and it is the terminal that acts as the starting point for many, and it will not be wrong to assert that one can feel a sense of belonging and of being at home even in an unknown location. Even in the unfamiliar location there are often triggers that let one feel at ease within the unknown spaces of the world. For the traveller, the non-place could be as inexperienced and as unfamiliar as possible, but there will be some elements and fragments of recognition and awareness in any and every non-place. The black and white colour of the non-place gives way to a greyer shade in this area where the classification of non-places becomes obscured.

Conversely considering the terminal as a border, one can argue that every border in existence has a distinct political and historical significance associated with it. A good example to consider while analysing the past and present borders, is the busiest land crossing in the European Union - Kapitan Andreevo. This 100 year old border was named after Captain Andreev, who was martyred in the First Balkan War to free Bulgaria from the resilient Ottoman Empire, whose statue still stands guard at the border (Johnson and Jones 1). Similarly, several borders around the world are adorned with romanticized statues of armed

border guards and other such monuments of historical significance. This invokes a sense of history and meaning to the border, and offers an individual a chance to relate to their identity with respect to that place, giving them an existential imperative. Augé explains that monuments constructed in such spatial arrangements, even if no longer functional, stand as a break in space, allowing individuals to relate to the history and not just perceive it (60). The reorganisation of space in terms of monuments, information boards or other statistical signs make the history of the border explicit to those who cross them. This clearly establishes a border as a place. Even if international borders are present in airport terminals, the anonymity and neutrality of the non-place is virtually deemed non-existent by the ritual of presenting a passport to show one's identity. Osborne (189) was critical of Augé's notion of a non-place, as ambivalent, contradictory and merely poetic. He believes that a complex subject like a non-place, cannot be over-simplified and analysed in the anthropological sense by considering a non-place to be lacking of history, identity and relational aspects. He states:

Critically, it oscillates between a backward-looking romanticisation of the anthropological conception of place and a forward-looking positive 'ethnology of solitude'. This is the result of the restrictions of the anthropological perspective.(189)

However, Augé reconstructs place into some sort of a vague form, or a dot on the map and according to him, it is the physical location and quantity of these dots on the map that transforms each one of them into a non-place. Created by the world of tourism, voyagers and momentary existence, they are categorised and thus transformed into non-places from places (86). He says that non-places can only be understood in terms of "air, rail and motorway routes, mobile cabins we call 'means of transport' (aircraft, trains and road vehicles), the airports and railway stations, hotel chains" (79), and finally the complexity of communication systems. Augé describes that "the passenger through non-places retrieves his identity only at

Customs, at the tollbooth, at the check-out counter” (103) and further adds that “the space of the non-place creates neither singular identity nor relations, only solitude and similitude” (103).

For the sake of argument, we will consider the example that has been depicted in the 2004 movie *The Terminal*, starring Tom Hanks as the protagonist. The movie sets its tone in the first couple of minutes when a customs officer asks the protagonist, “Purpose of your visit? Business or pleasure?” For Augé, in the world of supermodernity, commerce and travelling play a key role in making a space non-place. We witness an unusual occurrence within a non-place through the protagonist Viktor Navorski who “manages to make (build) the ‘twilight zone’ of the terminal into a place” (Baumeister and Lee 357). Viktor Navorski, a tourist from Krakozhia (a fictional country) finds himself stranded when he arrives at JFK airport in New York. Due to a civil war, his homeland Krakozhia which he departed from few hours ago doesn't exist anymore. Since his passport is no longer recognised, he can neither go back to his homeland nor cross the American border. Viktor can no longer be categorised as a tourist or an immigrant (Manzanas and Benito 122). In their book *Cities, Borders and Spaces in Intercultural American Literature* (2011), Manzanas and Benito explain Viktor Navorski’s situation further:

We are never given its coordinates: where it is, what countries it borders, and so on. What we are told is that borders are sealed and nobody is allowed in or out. Navorski, fully entangled in a bureaucratic loop, is neither a tourist nor an immigrant. Strictly speaking, he comes from a non-country [...] His bar code, that holographic image where identity narratives converge, is nonexistent, and alarms go off. His passport is legally void. He is literally “unacceptable.” He is just bare life. He cannot return to his (former) country, but he cannot seek asylum in a host country because he has no nationality. The United States thus exercises its right of admission by closing its doors on him. America is literally closed.

Until his legal situation clears up or something happens in Krakozhia, he is to remain in the vast in-between area of the International Transit Lounge (122).

This movie's inspiration was the figure of an Iranian refugee, Mehran Karimi Nasseri, who fled Iran because his life was too dangerous there in the mid-1970s. He lived in various places in northern Europe, and in 1988 he decided to move to England. He took a flight from Paris to London, but the British customs officers didn't let him enter since he didn't have a valid passport. When he returned to Paris in the Charles de Gaulle Airport, he was asked to wait in the transit area. The wait was so long that he had to live in Terminal One until 2006, when he was transferred to a charity center in Paris.

In an interview, Tom Hanks, who plays the protagonist Victor Navorski, said that JFK "is representative of everything [Viktor] would see and the people he would meet elsewhere" (124). For Viktor, America would be a place full of people that are helpful and kind, where one can buy anything, and everyone is constantly on a move. According to Hanks, if Viktor had never left the terminal, he would have assumed that the life in America, outside the airport, is similar to the one inside. In the airport there is always a sense of familiarity; "we see the same colors, smell the same food, see the same neon signs, hear the same kind of music. As a self-enclosed 'place without a place,' the airport is a 'purified space' that, as Bauman notes, 'has been cleansed of variety and difference', which makes one feel safe" (Manzanas and Benito 124).

Inside the airport, almost everyone has the equal status and there is no bias and distinction. Though he is in a situation of not belonging to any country, Viktor manages to make the terminal his home even if it is temporary. At one point when Viktor was shaving in the rest room of the terminal, a man who comes to use the toilet asks: "Ever feel like you are living in an airport?", because Viktor looked completely at home in the non-place of the terminal. The way he walks around in his bathrobe, works on the construction of the

bathroom of the terminal, and much more, gives the viewer a glimpse of a normal life of a man, with the only exception that it is all happening in a terminal which is traditionally a non-place. It could be said that Viktor was locked in the paradox of a traveller as Augé describes:

A paradox of non-place: a foreigner lost in a country he does not know (a 'passing stranger') can feel at home there only in the anonymity of motorways, service stations, big stores or hotel chains. For him, an oil company logo is a reassuring landmark; among the supermarket shelves he falls with relief on sanitary, household or food products validated by multinational brand names (106).

For months, Viktor stays in the terminal but in a way that transforms this non-place into a place. Obviously, what happens in the terminal duplicates to a large extent what is happening outside in America; so Viktor is emplaced as well as outplaced for he is conditioned by the outside (125).

In an interview Steven Spielberg, the director of this movie said exactly why he chose to make this movie:

I believe all of us have felt a little bit like Viktor at some time in our lives - this displaced person in search of a life. And I don't know anyone who hasn't, at some point, spent longer sitting in an airport chair than on the airplane ride itself. Airports have become small microcosms of society: they're places to eat, shop and meet people.

We spend an increasing amount of time in spaces like airports, hotels, supermarkets and more, to the extent that these non-places have become the real measure of our time (Wilken and Goggin 11). At the airport Viktor remains stuck for nine months, and discovers that for many travellers the airports have become a comfortable place like their own world, laboratories for the current forms of commerce, information, nourishment, fear, entertainment and romance. Those non-places suddenly offer warmth and comfort and thus they seem to

have the ability to become self-sustaining. Even in these unknown spaces, there are often triggers that provide one with comfort and familiarity. Sharon Zukin writes in her essay titled *Politics and Aesthetics of Public Space: The American Model* (1998):

In North America, this model of re-aestheticizing public space has gone to an extreme by considering retail space- shops, restaurants, coffee bars- as public space. Similarly, streets and parks are designed as if they were spaces of consumption... the ideal city no longer influences the real city. Instead, the stores, entertainment complexes, and art museums that are important interventions in public space are shaping an ideal city based on consumption. The common symbols of public space are increasingly derived from the nexus of aesthetic display and commercial culture (38).

Along similar lines, *The Terminal* points to the fact that even non-places have the potential to be places, under the right conditions. Nothing is so symbolically insolvent that place cannot establish or re-establish itself. An airport as already indicated, is conventionally a non-place according to Augé. Despite this, Viktor manages to find his lost identity through the JFK Airport, but on the other hand we see flight attendant Amelia Warren for whom the terminal is only stretched to the classification of Augé; that is, the airport continues to remain a non-place for her. Even though an airport terminal may not be the ideal representation of a border, Viktor is caught in a space that is a non-place, which becomes a border for him. He becomes an exile in a country foreign to him, and in order to traverse this border, he is required to get an entry stamp to pass through immigration and as Augé explains these non-places “permit individuals to have presence only by dint of passport, credit card, travel tickets and the like, undermining the human attachment to location” (80). Augé’s perspective of these non-places is very critical, as when he describes them as “empty, uniform, solitary: multiple, certainly and pointlessly so” (81).

To summarize, in the contemporary world, places and non-places are weaved together, and the probability of the existence of a non-place is never far away from any place. Considering the transition between modernity and supermodernity and the onset of an increasingly borderless world due to the rapid globalisation, Augé's definition of the border as a 'traveller's space' is quite justifiable to a large extent. Augé's view of the non-place as an anthropology of supermodernity, is not subject to rules and principles of modernity, and hence the non-places tend to be devoid of anthropological meaning, and empty of any religious or spiritual feeling. But as Osborne contends, the complex concept of non-places should not be simplified and analysed in the anthropological sense since there are too many restrictions involved with the anthropological perspective (189). However the movie *The Terminal* is quite an extremist and over-optimistic take on the concept of non-places transforming into places. It should not be overlooked that in supermodernity, even though an individual caught in the non-place can retrieve his identity momentarily, he still cannot create a lasting singular identity.

The (Dis) Placed and Abandoned in *Babel* (2006)

In the previous chapter, we analysed *The Terminal* (2004) through a particular focus where the border was studied as a place that is conventionally deemed to be a non-place, solely for its geographical accounts. However, the idea of a non-place goes beyond that. As explained previously, Augé asserted that non-places are places that are non-relational, unhistorical and unconcerned with identity (85), but sometimes the concept of non-places becomes murkier, and even more so when non-places become places, and vice-versa. A notable instance of this can be found in the movie *Babel* (2006), by the Mexican director Alejandro González Iñárritu. Being portrayed through six different languages across three different continents, this movie has four interconnecting storylines running parallel, but “it is the shot of the rifle that sets the tragedy in motion” (Manzanas and Benito 11). The story starts with a Moroccan man selling his gun to a goat herder, who casually leaves it with his adolescent sons. There is an American couple trying to reconcile and make their marriage work while travelling through the Moroccan territory, leaving their two kids with a Mexican nanny in the United States. The Mexican nanny is anxiously compelled to go to Mexico for her son’s wedding, but she can’t find a replacement to take care of the kids for a day. In Japan, there is a deaf-mute girl; who finds it hard to fit in to a technologically advanced country where communication is everything, and yearns for love and affection by trying to casually offer sex to anyone.

The movie has been aptly titled *Babel*, as we find that language plays a quintessential role in making borders more complex and incomprehensible for the characters. It’s not just simple geographical borders that the director portrays; but it’s also a border of language, of culture, and of trust, and goes to show how one isolated event sets the wheels in motion by

interlinking the lives of the select individuals across the globe. In the well-known biblical story of Babel, the people at a certain point had one common language. As they migrated from the east, they started creating a city with a Tower so high that it would reach the heavens, to make a name for themselves, and not be dispersed across all over the world. When God came down to see the city and the tower they were building, he decided to confuse their language; for sharing one language would make it possible for them to achieve anything. By doing so, he scattered them across the lands, and the people eventually stopped building the tower, which interestingly deemed Babel as a transient non-place. Thus, the city came to be known as Babel, which in Hebrew means ‘confusion’.

In *Babel*, language occupies the centre stage, due to which the characters face some form of displacement sooner or later. We see a struggling Richard Jones who is trying to save his wife Susan Jones after she was hit by a bullet. Immediately after she was shot, we discover how big a role language played for this American couple travelling in Morocco who didn’t speak the local language; seeking help became an uphill task. We see Richard Jones (Brad Pitt), desperately running like a maniac on the road, and eventually even managing to stop a vehicle to take them to the hospital. But it goes all in vain because the man didn’t understand him, and it wouldn’t be wrong to assume that if it wasn’t for their bilingual guide Anwar, Susan wouldn’t have been alive in the end. Here we witness a displaced Richard, with his equally displaced wife. It is interesting to note that the couple comes from a place (San Diego), to what is perceived as a non-place for them (Morocco), in order to save their marriage. As they journey through the non-place as mere tourists, they struggle to maintain their aseptic distance and detachment. Susan Jones was a woman who was obsessively paranoid about everything. In the beginning when Susan and Richard are having a drink in Morocco, we see her cleaning her hands with a sanitizer and even her plate. A minute later she throws away the ice, the waiter has brought for their Coke:

SUSAN. Throw out the ice.

RICHARD. The Coke is warm.

SUSAN. Yeah, but you don't know what kind of water is in there.

(Babel)

This non-place keeps getting stranger for them; first a gunshot, ambulances not being available to take Susan to a nearby hospital, and the casual reaction of the locals on witnessing a gunshot victim. In the later part, we see Anwar's grandmother calming Susan by offering her to smoke from a hash pipe, when Susan desperately wanted to speak to her kids and was in no condition to do so. Susan takes drags from the pipe and slowly calms down, something which surprises Richard as well, making one wonder how she finally let go of her prejudices against the people of the underdeveloped country, transcending the border of trust. Even the look that the grandmother and Susan shared while the former was holding a pipe for her, could be seen as one moment where Susan was in a place, for a place makes individuals interact on a social level rather than an individual one, and offers them a sense of identity.

Language is also responsible to a large extent in characterising a non-place, as "language learning itself serves as a non-place: an engagement with abstract" (Schwartz 42). The process of language learning as a non-place can be witnessed further in the words of Augé:

But the real non-places of supermodernity — the ones we inhabit when we are driving down the motorway, wandering through the supermarket or sitting in an airport lounge waiting for the next flight to London or Marseille- have the peculiarity that they are defined partly by the words and texts they offer us [...] This establishes the traffic conditions of spaces in which individuals are supposed to interact only with texts, whose proponents are not individuals but 'moral entities or institutions' [...] sometimes their presence is explicitly stated [...] sometimes it is only vaguely discernible behind the injunctions, advice and

commentaries and 'messages' transmitted by the innumerable 'supports' [...] that form an integral part of the contemporary landscape. (96)

The process of language learning can become a non-place, when an individual is learning a language with no desire of investing a personal interest in it. For instance, a student learning a foreign language as a part of his curriculum without any desire to visit that place, makes his language learning 'journey' a non-place, in and of itself. However, it doesn't hold true in the movie *Babel* in the case of Amelia, the Mexican nanny who takes care of Richard and Susan's children. Even after spending her time in America for more than a decade, Amelia speaks in broken English. Learning English cannot be a non-place for her, as she has an invested interest and motivation behind learning, since she not only lives in America, but also wishes to continue her life there and nowhere else, not even Mexico, her homeland. The same goes for Viktor Navorski in the movie *The Terminal*, where the little English he spoke when he first lands at the JFK airport, goes beyond "where is Nike store?" and he eventually starts learning English. Though both Amelia and Viktor learned a new language away from their homeland, in a place that didn't provide them with identity in the beginning, the language learning became the central element by which they managed to transform the non-place into a place.

Augé defines non-places in terms of supermodernity and only to the extent of commerce and travelling. He focuses on globalisation, modernisation and commercial aspects, and leaves behind the important aspect of 'home' and what it means to different individuals. Ideally, 'home' would be a place because it is concerned with identity. But what would happen when the meaning of 'home' for one person differs from another? Would it still be called a place for them? Or should we then talk about the non-home? In another story of *Babel*, we see Chieko Wataya, a deaf-mute Japanese girl who is traumatised by her mother's suicide. Her behaviour is promiscuous. No one actually understands her attitude,

like the dentist who throws her out of his clinic. Only the policeman offers her comfort, which was probably what she was looking for all along. She lives in a technologically advanced world, where communication is of great significance. Not being able to communicate, express and be understood definitely does not make her own home a place for her. Another such instance of a home becoming displaced in the movie takes place in Morocco, when the police under political pressure start searching for the man who shot Susan. The brutal way the police officers treat Hassan (who had sold the gun to Abdullah) and his wife makes one raise a question again, whether a home can still be called a place, if one is not secure in his own home. Surely, the police could have carried out the interrogation in a more humane manner, but the first thing they did was to point a gun at him and his wife, instead of asking questions. Home is usually a place where one feels protected and like in *The Poetics of Space* (1958), French philosopher Bachelard said, “the house shelters day-dreaming, the house protects the dreamer, the house allows one to dream in peace” (6). But was the home a place, a secured space for Hassan and his wife who were attacked brutally, or even for Abdullah and his two young sons who were trying to flee, knowing that even though what happened was a tragic accident, they wouldn’t be forgiven and would be punished severely? This leads us to question whether this makes their place a non-place, even though their homeland provides them with their history, is relational and concerned with the identity.

Interestingly for the Mexican woman, Amelia who is nanny to Richard and Susan’s kids, the non-place (America) has now become the place. It has been suggested that she left Mexico fifteen years ago for a better life, but has been unable to achieve full citizenship in all these years. In his book *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (1998), Giorgio Agamben emphasises how the concept of citizenship occupies an important place in modern biopolitics. Agamben believes: “One of the essential characteristics of modern biopolitics (which will continue to increase in our century) is its constant need to redefine the threshold

in life that distinguishes and separates what is inside and what is outside” (131). The distinction between who is deemed a citizen and who isn’t, becomes fundamental in the exercise of biopolitics (a term that Agamben borrows from Foucault). More importantly, identifying the benchmark in determining who can have citizenship and who can’t, also gives birth to the concept of non-citizenship. Agamben writes:

Until this time, the questions “What is French? What is German?” had constituted not a political problem but only one theme among others discussed in philosophical anthropologies. Caught in a constant work of redefinition, these questions now begin to become essentially political, to the point that, with National Socialism, the answer to the question “Who and what is German?” (and also, therefore, “Who and what is not German?”) coincides immediately with the highest political task (130).

Agamben explains using the instance of Nazi Germany, that those who are non-Germans, i.e. non-citizens, will be abandoned by the law and will be considered politically inappropriate. A similar situation takes place in *Babel*, when Amelia tries to convince the police officer that she belongs to the land of America, since she has been living there for over a decade now and has built her life there. However, the officer tells her that taking the kids to Mexico without their parents’ consent is a serious offence, for which she would be deported. He goes on to say that even if she wanted to have a lawyer to take the matter to court, she’ll just end up in jail, as an immigrant who wouldn’t be able to exercise any rights in the eyes of the law. The factors that influence citizenship here are beyond an individual’s power and control. Agamben asserts that, “every society sets this limit; every society—even the most modern—decides who its ‘sacred men’ will be” (139).

In the film, Amelia's not-so-perfect English is enough for the police officer at the border to interrogate her thoroughly and link her with the non-citizenship, for which Agamben justifies in the state of exception, “citizenship was something of which one had to

prove oneself worthy and which could therefore always be called into question” (132). In the film, Amelia is being reduced to her bare life and stripped of her rights, and the US-Mexican border here becomes a potent signal. It is interesting to note how the problem arises only when they were going from Mexico to America, while they had easily travelled from America to Mexico the very same morning without any trouble. It could be said that Amelia's nephew had an inkling that if the officers found him in the wrong, he would be deported from America. That is probably why he fled from the border checkpoint, and also deserted Amelia and the two kids in the middle of nowhere. He knew what would be at stake, if he were viewed as a criminal in the eyes of the law. For Amelia and her nephew, in the state of exception, there is always a risk of instability and danger because in some ways, the law already abandons people like them.

According to Agamben, once an individual is denied belonging, he completely replicates the image of the “homo sacer,” a figure which is characterised by two main aspects: “the unpunishability of his killing and the ban on his sacrifice” (73) meaning that even if someone kills the homo sacer, he won't be punished since it is not considered a grave crime, and at the same time, the homo sacer cannot be sacrificed (killed) through a legal procedure like capital punishment. For homo sacers, who according to Agamben project an image of the un-citizen caught in a legal non-place, there's never any assurance of safety for themselves and their rights. Everything comes at a price, since they are not within the law and are thus abandoned by it. Agamben points out that they are “simply set outside human jurisdiction without being brought into the realm of divine law” (82); even though they stand outside the law, they are still entwined with it. The homo sacer relates to the law by being abandoned by it, “the original political relation is the ban (the state of exception as zone of indistinction between outside and inside, exclusion and inclusion)” (181). Since the homo sacer is excluded from the law, the law cannot protect him nor can the homo sacer appeal to

it. The homo sacer's abandonment from the orbit of law, brings him to his bare life; from a citizen who was within the law and equally protected by it, the homo sacer is left unguarded and can be killed or punished by anyone. For Agamben, “human life is politicized only through an abandonment to an unconditional power of death” (90) and giving the example of Jews in the Nazi Germany demonstrates his point further:

The Jew living under Nazism is the privileged negative referent of the new biopolitical sovereignty and is, as such, a flagrant case of a homo sacer in the sense of a life that may be killed but not sacrificed. [...] The truth – which is difficult for the victims to face, but which we must have the courage not to cover with sacrificial veils -is that the Jews were exterminated not in a mad and giant holocaust but exactly as Hitler had announced, “as lice,” which is to say, as bare life (114).

Being reduced to a bare life and abandoned by the law doesn't necessarily mean that the homo sacer will be murdered. It means that the homo sacer cannot appeal to the law for help, as the law no longer applies to him. In *Babel*, we see Amelia in a similar situation, when the police officer after knowing the fact that Amelia has left the children alone in an isolated place in order to search for help, focuses only on her legal status. Since she was an illegal immigrant who was living and working in the U.S. without possessing all the documents necessary, she becomes a bare life, someone who is ill-equipped to comply with the rules of the border. In *Babel*, we are cleverly made aware about what is at stake when a person is transformed into a homo sacer and reduced to bare life. It paints a vivid image of the risks and dangers that can be found in the state of exception, when an individual is abandoned by the law.

While *Babel* projects an intense picture of a homo sacer, *The Terminal's* approach is quite light hearted, even though both Amelia and Viktor can be classified as homo sacers. The law abandons them both; with the only difference being that Amelia becomes a homo

sacer by illegally living and working in America, and the law chose not to protect her as her punishment. Viktor on the other hand, becomes a homo sacer by chance; his passport becomes invalid when he lands at JFK, with the outbreak of a war in his homeland, due to which Krakozhia is no longer a sovereign nation; meaning he is caught in the non-place: he can't enter America, or return back to his homeland.

Viktor landed at JFK as a tourist, an activity which has become a popular trend in the age of globalisation and capitalisation. For Augé, travelling is a very good illustration of non-places. He writes:

Space, as frequentation of *places* rather than a place, stems in effect from a double movement: the traveller's movement, of course, but also a parallel movement of the landscapes which he catches only in partial glimpses, a series of "snapshots" piled hurriedly into his memory and, literally, recomposed in the account he gives of them, the sequencing of slides in the commentary he imposes on his entourage when he returns. (85)

To reach our destination we move through spaces in a way that we fail to absorb and identify the actual journey itself. Since we have little interest in understanding and recollecting these spaces, like the numerous landscapes that pass us by when we travel from one place to another, these spaces in between are transformed to a non-place. In *Babel*, we see Susan and Richard on the bus, passing through landscapes without even a fleeting glance. We also observe the scene where Chieko was under the influence of drugs, travelling with her friends to a night club, and the spaces that pass her by unnoticed, all can be viewed as non-places.

As discussed in the previous chapter, Augé describes the attributes of a non-place as a space, opposed to that of a place. The new sites become non-places, as they are unable to hold a past, due to the negligent amount of time spent passing through them; where people

don't interact with each other, but instead become “solitary figures alone in this alienating contemporary landscape” (Hendry 23). This points towards what Augé wrote, “As anthropological places create the organically social, so non-places create solitary contractuality” (76). The identity of the subject in this solitary environment ceases to be of significance, leaving them isolated as outsiders, unable to 'belong to' or 'identify with' a place (Hendry 23). Although there are criteria through which one can distinguish between a place and a non-place, these concepts are far more complex, and such abstract terms cannot be categorized in black and white terms. This is reaffirmed by Augé:

In the concrete reality of today's world, places and spaces, places and non-places intertwine and tangle together. The possibility of non-place is never absent from any place. Place becomes a refuge to the habitué of non-places...Places and non-places are opposed (or attracted) like the words and notions that enable us to describe them (86).

Thus it can be said that the meaning of a non-place is not entirely at odds with that of a place, and that both these terms are far more complicated than simply stating their opposite qualities. Moreover, even though non-places involve minimal interaction, it does not mean that it can't be experienced as a space, and is devoid of its value.

Conclusion

To conclude, the analysis above suggests that the border can traditionally be considered an anthropological place with relational and historical significance, and concerned with one's identity. Augé made a distinction between his notion of a non-place and de Certeau's viewpoint on the topic, thereby implying that it is not just about being in constant transit, but residing outside the constructs of an anthropological place. While traversing the border, by any means of travel, travellers relocate their own self from their familiar surroundings and the setting of similarity, and in the process, they simply involve themselves with a different similarity for a fleeting moment. Augé's view of the non-place as an anthropology of supermodernity is not subject to rules and principles of modernity, and hence the non-places tend to be devoid of anthropological meaning, and empty of any religious or spiritual feeling.

In the transient moment of traversing a border, an individual in the post-modern society is often incapable of relating with the cultural or historical significance of the place, or finding his/her identity with the unfamiliar space. Even though there may be features and aspects around him that instill identification or recognition, where he can retrieve his identity momentarily, he is unable to create a lasting singular identity or relation. For the brief instant of a traveller's transit through a border, the border can definitely be looked upon as a non-place. However, the idea of non-places goes beyond the border and all non-places can have a place-like characteristic in them; an idea that Augé has not focused on in depth, "but are characterised by a sense of place of their own" (Gebauer, Nielsen, Schlosser and Sørensen 58).

In the era that Augé terms supermodernity, non-places are places of governing- they govern lifestyles and behaviours, and act as a medium to make the individuals adhere to the standards of the society. In other words, “diversity is homogenized, visibility strictly controlled, compartment standardized” (Gebauer, Nielsen, Schlosser and Sørensen 62). However, it is also a fact that there is no place that can be deemed as a non-place, or one devoid of meaning (Korstanje 106). A non-place for one could easily become a place to another, like we have seen in the movie *The Terminal*. For the air hostess Amelia Warren, the airport is a non-place, even though she has spent a substantial part of her life there. But Viktor manages to transform the non-place into a place in only a couple of months. Augé has only focused on non-places in regards to tourism and commerce. But, as discussed earlier, the concept extends its branches quite further. In the case of Mexican nanny Amelia in the movie *Babel*, her home in Mexico becomes a non-place and she creates her whole new life and identity in the US. A great majority of the time, when the people try to break the politically established norms and transform non-places into their personal places, they become “homo sacers” in the eyes of the law, and are thus abandoned in a form of legal non-place.

Both these movies deal with the concept of places and non-places differently, with the only exception that the characters trying to create a place for themselves in a non-place, have to fend for themselves. It can be said that the non-places only acknowledge the politically acceptable individuals, and they could prove this by having a solvent bank account or a legal citizenship. These individuals can effortlessly traverse the border as a non-place on a regular basis, without the fear of being caught in it. On the other hand, immigrants, refugees, or the poor may easily get caught and be trapped within the non-place, thus bringing about a subjectivity for that space which puts it in a state of constant flux. However, more work needs to be done to determine how the blurring lines between places and non-places affect spaces

like borders and what the circumstantial effects are when a non-place becomes a place and vice-versa.

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