

2017

# A Station in Motion: Termini as Heterotopia

Simone Brioni Dr.  
simone.brioni@stonybrook.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://commons.library.stonybrook.edu/eng-articles>

 Part of the [European Languages and Societies Commons](#), [Film and Media Studies Commons](#), and the [Race, Ethnicity and Post-Colonial Studies Commons](#)

[Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial 4.0 License](#)

This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial 4.0 License](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Brioni, Simone Dr., "A Station in Motion: Termini as Heterotopia" (2017). *Department of English Faculty Publications*. 8.  
<https://commons.library.stonybrook.edu/eng-articles/8>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Department of English at Academic Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Department of English Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of Academic Commons. For more information, please contact [mona.ramonetti@stonybrook.edu](mailto:mona.ramonetti@stonybrook.edu).

## **A Station in Motion: Termini as Heterotopia**

### **Abstract**

Drawing on Michel Foucault's definition of heterotopia, the article analyses the filmic and literary representation of Stazione Termini, Rome's main train station. The Fascist architectural project, which mirrors an idea of the nation as homogeneous, monolithic, and white, begins to be challenged in the post-World War II representations of Termini which depict the station as the place where liminal and unexpected experiences can occur and accepted moral codes of behaviour are put into question. The article then focuses on the recent representation of Termini as a key place of contact with and among immigrants. While migration literature describes the station as a place of belonging, other contemporary representations of Termini depict it as a non-place, revealing the fear of a globalised world. The representation of Termini either as an isolated place in the urban geography of Rome or as a place that mirrors the multicultural reality of present-day Italy highlights a tension between different ways of practicing the same space.

### **Key Words**

Colonial legacy, heterotopia, migration, non-place, Rome, train station, urban geography.

## A Station in Motion: Termini as Heterotopia

[Heterotopias] are meant to detonate, to deconstruct, not to be poured back comfortably in the old containers.<sup>1</sup>

The lyrics of Quartetto Cetra's song 'Canzone della Stazione Termini' (1954) summarise some recurring themes which characterise the representation of Rome's main train station. First, they describe Termini as a place that is like no other in the city: 'È una cosa d'eccezione: La stazione, la stazione'. The exceptionalism of Termini might be related to the fact that this station brings social and cultural mobility to a city whose representation 'relied, almost incessantly, on notions or echoes of a classical city: from the "Caput Mundi" or the "Eternal City", to the "Divine City" of Christendom or the "City of Ruins" of the Grand Tour'.<sup>2</sup> By choosing to celebrate Rome through a place where 'il "qui" si combina ossimoricamente con l' "altrove": intendendosi per qui la località di appartenenza e per "altrove" i centri raggiungibili dalla stessa' rather than historical identitarian places of Rome such as the Colosseum or Trastevere,<sup>3</sup> Quartetto Cetra is depicting a city where 'urban transformations are intertwined with global processes'.<sup>4</sup> The song refers to Termini as a place where

---

<sup>1</sup> Edward Soja, 'Heterotopologies: A Remembrance of Other Spaces in the Citadel-LA', in *Postmodern Cities and Spaces*, ed. by Sophie Watson and Katherine Gibson (Oxford; Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1995), pp. 13-34 (p. 76).

<sup>2</sup> Dominic Holdaway and Filippo Trentin, 'Introduction', in *Rome, Postmodern Narratives of a Cityscape*, ed. by Dominic Holdaway and Filippo Trentin (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2013), pp. 1-18 (p. 1).

<sup>3</sup> Vittorio Roda, 'Stazione', in *Luoghi della letteratura italiana*, ed. by Gian Mario Anselmi and Gino Ruozi (Milan: Bruno Mondadori, 2003), pp. 352-61 (p. 352)

<sup>4</sup> Isabella Clough Marinaro, and Bjørn Thomassen, 'Introduction. Into the City: The Changing Faces of Rome', in *Global Rome: Changes Faces of the Eternal City*, ed. by Isabella Clough Marinaro and Bjørn Thomassen (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014), pp. 1-18 (p. 3).

Italians encounter foreign travellers, who are described through stereotypical traits. For instance, the English-ness of Mr. Foggy, a passenger coming from London, is described by referring to his punctuality and wealth. One of the members of Quartetto Cetra attempts to seduce a second passenger, Mademoiselle Lillà, who arrives from Paris and whose French-ness is described by referring to existentialism, champagne, and romanticism. By analysing the lyrics, it is possible to see Termini as a place that reifies how otherness is seen in Italy. The lyrics also insinuate that Termini is a place for exotic sexual encounters. In fact, to quote Vittorio Roda, the station is a place where one's 'propri codici abituali' are suspended and 'un nuovo modo di registrare la realtà, che alla propria tradizionale visione delle cose surroghi una visione diversa, dissacrante, contraddittoria e demolitoria dei precedenti stereotipi' can emerge.<sup>5</sup> The Quartetto Cetra also welcomes a Mexican traveller who has just arrived from Sierra Madre, suggesting that Termini is like a 'magic' portal which can link together two locations and cultures even if they are not geographically in proximity. 'La canzone della stazione Termini' describes the station as a place that – to use Lieven De Caeter and Michiel Dehaene's reflections about stations and their social environment – 'interrupt[s] the apparent continuity and normality of ordinary everyday space [and] inject[s] alterity into the sameness'.<sup>6</sup> This representation echoes what Michel Foucault defines as heterotopia, or a 'heterogeneous site' that 'juxtapose[s] in a single real place several spaces, several emplacements that are in themselves incompatible'.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> Roda, 'Stazione', p. 353.

<sup>6</sup> Michiel Dehaene and Lieven De Caeter, 'Heterotopia in a Postcivil Society', in *Heterotopia and the City: Public Space in a Postcivil Society*, ed. by Michiel Dehaene and Lieven De Caeter (London: Routledge, 2008), p. 3-9 (p. 4).

<sup>7</sup> Michel Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', in *Heterotopia and the City: Public Space in a Postcivil Society*, ed. and trans. by Michiel Dehaene and Lieven De Caeter, pp. 13-29 (p. 19). Since Foucault's ideas 'were never reviewed for publication' (Soja, 'Heterotopologies', p. 14), I will refer to De Caeter and Dehaene's translation which also presents useful paratextual remarks about Foucault's original work. Some of the quotations used in this essay refer to the translators' paratext rather than Foucault's original text, and they are referred to as 'translators' comment'.

This article analyses some filmic and literary representations of Stazione Termini, in order to show how the heterotopic space of Termini has 'function[ed] in a very different way' and has acquired diverse meanings from its original construction to more recent times.<sup>8</sup> Without any claim of offering a comprehensive view of this space, the article identifies three different periods and layers of meaning that are present in the representation of Termini. First, I will describe the Fascist project for the station and the fixed, immobile, undialectical, and utopic image of Italian-ness that it conveys. I will then focus on the post-World War II representations of this place, which portray Termini as – to use Benjamin Genocchio's words – 'a counter-site', a space 'in contestation of, or [...] opposition to (but also within which and depending upon for [its] difference)' with the original Fascist project.<sup>9</sup> These representations reflect Foucault's definition of heterotopia as the antipode of utopia.<sup>10</sup> Finally, I will outline a shift in the representation of Termini as 'heterotopias of crisis'<sup>11</sup> – or a place that outlines a 'state of stressful personal transition'<sup>12</sup> – to more recent portrayals of the station as a 'heterotopia of deviation',<sup>13</sup> a place inhabited by 'individuals and social groups who do not fit into the modern social order [...] people who are not expected to return to productive and accepted roles within dominant society'.<sup>14</sup> Stazione Termini is considered as an anamorphic image of Italy's process of modernisation and its anxieties, and as a 'mirror' of the country's conflicted relationship with alterity,<sup>15</sup> in particular with immigrants. In this regard it should be

---

<sup>8</sup> Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', p.18.

<sup>9</sup> Benjamin Genocchio, 'Discourse, Discontinuity, Difference: The Question of "Other" Spaces', in *Postmodern Cities and Spaces*, ed. by Sophie Watson and Katherine Gibson (Oxford; Cambridge, MA: Blackwell), pp. 35-46 (p. 38).

<sup>10</sup> Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', p. 17.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

<sup>12</sup> Soja, 'Heterotopologies', p. 15.

<sup>13</sup> Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', p. 18.

<sup>14</sup> Marco Cenzatti, 'Heterotopia of Difference', in *Heterotopia and the City: Public Space in a Postcivil Society*, pp. 75-86 (p. 76).

<sup>15</sup> Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', p. 17.

noted that Italian net immigration surpassed net emigration in 1972, and the presence of immigrants started to become more visible in the 1980s.<sup>16</sup>

Borden W. Painter Jr. maintains that 'the origins of the Termini Station go back to the papal Rome of Pius IX. Work began in 1867 and proceeded at a slow pace. It came to a halt in September 1870, with the seizure of Rome from Pius by the new Italian state. Work began again in 1871 and was finished in 1873'.<sup>17</sup> The construction of Termini therefore coincides with the move of the Italian capital from Florence to Rome in 1871, showing that 'l'introduzione delle ferrovie nella vita economica e sociale dei paesi europei ebbe anche, e particolarmente in paesi che stavano vivendo un processo di unificazione politica e costruzione di un'ideologia nazionale, una notevole valenza politica (e militare)'.<sup>18</sup> The plan to remodel the station to its current design and its emergence as the central hub of Rome dates back to 1938, when Angiolo Mazzoni's architectural plan was approved. The Esquiline hill was probably chosen as the site for construction because it is one of the highest points of the city, 59 meters above sea level.<sup>19</sup> The 'imperial character' of the atrium, 'constructed with Carrara marble stretching more than two hundred meters in length and supported by columns of eighteen meters each', fit Mussolini's plans for Rome 'to have large spaces, giving the impression of power and authority'.<sup>20</sup> The project aimed to celebrate 'the memory of imperial Rome', which is 'echoed in the austere travertine arcade of the flanking wings'.<sup>21</sup> The size of the station – Termini occupies

---

<sup>16</sup> Russell King and Jacqueline Andall, 'The Geography and Economic Sociology of Recent Immigration to Italy', *Modern Italy*, 4.2 (1999), 135-158 (p. 136).

<sup>17</sup> Borden W. Jr. Painter, *Mussolini's Rome: Rebuilding the Eternal City* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Mc Millan, 2005), p. 123.

<sup>18</sup> Remo Ceserani, *Treni di carta. L'immaginario in ferrovia: l'irruzione del treno nella letteratura moderna* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2002), p. 19.

<sup>19</sup> Piero Ostilio Rossi, *Roma. Guida all'architettura moderna 1909-2000* (Rome; Bari: Laterza, 2000), p. 160.

<sup>20</sup> Painter, *Mussolini's Rome*, p. 124.

<sup>21</sup> Terry Kirk, *The Architecture of Modern Italy. Visions of Utopia, 1900-Present*, 2 vols (Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press, 2005), II, p. 105.

nearly 225,000 square meters of total surface area and is 6 kilometers in diameter – mirrors the important role of trains in national propaganda: a running refrain which celebrated Mussolini's efficiency and modernising mission claimed that he 'made the trains run on time'.<sup>22</sup> The new project to remodel Termini was included in a broader plan to 'tie fascism to Italian nationalism and to articulate fascism's fulfilment of the Risorgimento and unification' by naming 'the streets and piazzas nearby' after 'the seacoast town in Sicily where Garibaldi landed with his one thousand volunteers' (Via Marsala), 'the principal battles leading to the declaration of the kingdom of Italy in 1861' (Via Solferino and Via San Martino), and the five hundreds Italian soldiers who died fighting against Ethiopia in the battle of Dogali (1887) (Piazza dei Cinquecento).<sup>23</sup>

In other words, the remodeling of Termini and the surrounding area was imagined as a realization of utopia, a unified and cohesive example of Italian-ness, conceived as a modern, grandiose and white space – signalled both by the colour of the marble and the celebration of colonial victories in Africa. Italo Insolera clearly recognises the utopic aspect of the project and notes that the building was criticised from the very beginning as 'inutilmente prezioso e costosissimo'.<sup>24</sup> Termini 'non rispondeva alle esigenze tecniche',<sup>25</sup> and 'non riuscì mai a soddisfare pienamente le esigenze di un traffico in continuo sviluppo'.<sup>26</sup> To acknowledge the utopic character of the Fascist project is crucial in order to understand the heterotopic nature of the representations of Termini after the fall of the regime. Thus, heterotopias cannot but be defined in relation to other spaces both in geographical or temporal terms, and they

---

<sup>22</sup> Painter, *Mussolini's Rome*, p. 123.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 124. Francesco Azzurri's monument that commemorates the Italian victims of the battle of Dogali was placed in front of the main entrance of Termini in 1887. In 1924, it was moved to via delle Terme di Diocleziano, where it is currently located.

<sup>24</sup> Italo Insolera, *Roma Moderna* (Turin: Einaudi, 1971), p. 190.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 190.

<sup>26</sup> Rossi, *Roma*, p. 160.

might be seen 'as the antipode of utopia, the latter being imaginary, heterotopias being real arrangements, i.e. the way in which utopias crystallize in realized form'.<sup>27</sup>

This 'real arrangement' that can be observed near the station is represented as a threshold where different cultures and moral codes of behaviour meet. Since the aftermath of World War II, Termini has served in movies and literature as a stage which represents Italy's anxieties regarding different kinds of alterities, in terms of gender, race, and class, by placing them in contrast with the uniform background of the rationalist building and the idea of magnificence and uniformity that it carries. Luigi Zampa's *Signori in carrozza* (1951) features a train porter, Vincenzo Nardi (Aldo Fabrizi), who conducts a double life: he spends time with and takes care of both his family in Rome and his mistress and her daughter in Paris. Zampa's Termini serves as a transition space between two realities described in dichotomic terms: Paris symbolises elegance and modernity, while Rome is a working class city; Nardi's French mistress is an independent, emancipated, and beautiful woman, while his unkempt and provincial Italian wife allows her opportunistic and selfish brother to take advantage of Nardi's stable income. While passengers at Termini change their train, Nardi has the opportunity to change his life, his woman, and his social status.

Similarly to *Signori in carrozza*, Termini is the place where the ambitious main character of Mario Monicelli's *Un eroe dei nostri tempi* (1955) goes in order to change his identity, after he is caught in a misunderstanding and wants to disappear to escape the consequences. In fact, Vittorio Roda argues that a station in its representation is often a 'contenitore di serrati confronti tra il sé presente e il sé possibile, fra il personaggio qual è e quale può essere o sceglie di essere'.<sup>28</sup>

---

<sup>27</sup> Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', p. 25 [translators' comment].

<sup>28</sup> Roda, 'Stazione', p. 353.



Termini also functions as a backdrop for a transgressive love affair and the possibility of a new life in Vittorio de Sica's *Stazione Termini* (1953). The movie, also known in English speaking countries as *The Indiscretions of an American Wife*, focuses on the moment in which a married American woman, Mary Forbes (Jennifer Jones), and her Italian lover, Giovanni Doria (Montgomery Clift), have to decide whether to end their clandestine relationship, or run away together. Near the end of the movie, the two main characters have a moment of intimacy in an abandoned railway car. This scene presents close ups of the faces of the actors, and it is shot with a prevalence of dark tones, which stand in stark contrast with the lights and the crowded backdrop of the station. Mary eventually seems decided to remain in Italy and leave her husband, but the presence of the two lovers on the standing train is signalled to the police. The commissioner promises not to denounce Mary and Giovanni, but only if she leaves Italy and returns to Philadelphia.

According to Anna Maria Torriglia, the English title captures well the 'problematic encroachment between [...] the public and the personal'<sup>29</sup> that plays out in the movie: 'the term "wife" qualifies Mary's social persona, while the noun "indiscretion" hints at the trespassing of some boundary and at her incapacity to appropriately discern and discriminate'.<sup>30</sup> Torriglia also argues that the mediation between these two spheres is 'shown through the interaction between Italy and America'.<sup>31</sup> 'Mary is the model of an emancipated though very gentle, American woman',<sup>32</sup> while 'Giovanni is obviously proud of his Italian blood and the inherent virility it seems to guarantee',<sup>33</sup> and he is 'an extremely passionate man, and violently

---

<sup>29</sup> Anna Maria Torriglia, *Broken Time, Fragmented Space. A Cultural Map of Postwar Italy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), p. 104.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 105-6.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 107.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 108.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 107.

so'.<sup>34</sup> Cesare Zavattini's original script for the movie did not identify the otherness of the main female character in terms of nationality, since he found it more plausible that an American wife could divorce her husband and go to Rome with her lover while an Italian Catholic wife could not.<sup>35</sup> However, the choice to further stress the foreignness of Mary in the movie underlines the clash between the persistence of the Fascist idea of family and gender roles in post-World War II Italy in the context of the larger social, political and cultural influence coming from the United States in those years.<sup>36</sup> Catherine O'Rawe's analysis of the construction of space and gender in *Stazione Termini* highlights visual elements in order to support this claim. In fact, she maintains that the 'transformation of the interior into exterior in the characteristic deep-focus long shots of the station does not suggest a place for women, nor a resolution to the bourgeois triangle other than that of melodrama, the return of the woman to the home'.<sup>37</sup> At the end of the movie, Mary has to leave Italy in fear of being denounced by the police for her affair, and 'the sphere of (female) sexuality [is] brought back within the reassuring, legally sanctioned, boundaries of the nuclear family'.<sup>38</sup>

It should be noted that De Sica's movie highlights Termini as a place of encounters between different classes. In a significant scene, Mary finds the first class waiting room occupied, and so she is forced to sit in the waiting room for passengers with third class tickets. Here a woman who is not feeling well calls for Mary's attention, and this contact frightens Mary. The woman is travelling with her husband, a Sicilian miner, back to Italy from England because he was unable to find

---

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 108.

<sup>35</sup> Gabriel García Marquez, 'Indiscreción de una esposa', in *Entre cachacos. Obra periodística 2. 1954-1955* (Barcelona: Mondadori, 1992), pp. 266-67 (p. 266).

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Catherine O'Rawe, "'I padri e i maestri': Genre, Auteurs, and Absences in Italian Film Studies", *Italian Studies*, 63. 2 (2008), pp. 173-94 (p. 192).

<sup>38</sup> Torriglia, *Broken Time. Fragmented Space*, p. 109.

work. The third class waiting room is characterised by the presence, in the background, of gigantic shadows of the trams passing by outside the station. These ominous shadows might suggest an intrusion of the external world within the closed environment of the station, or they might be seen as reflections of both Mary's worries about her sentimental life and the Sicilian woman's concerns about her pregnancy. Mary helps the woman, thus underlining the fact that she follows her feelings rather than the rules of bourgeois society, which would discourage people from crossing the class divide.

In *Il ferroviere* (Pietro Germi, 1956) the alterity is identified with a working class character, the train operator Andrea Marcocci (Pietro Germi). The train station is employed here to represent the rapid social and economic changes taking place in Italy at the end of the 1950s, to which Andrea is not able to adapt. Andrea's story of isolation, alienation and alcoholism has an impact on his relationships and family, as he seems to consider leaving his wife for another woman. Like *Signori in Carrozza* and *Stazione Termini*, *Il ferroviere* presents the station environment as one that lends itself to extramarital affairs. Moreover, Andrea's workplace is depicted in stark contrast with his home environment. Andrea's job is a source of emotional trauma – he witnesses the suicide of a desperate man who jumps in front of his train – and humiliation, as he is forced to accept a salary cut because he is an alcoholic. In addition, he is harassed and accused of being a strike-breaker by other colleagues. His home instead is a welcoming place where, at the end of the movie, he celebrates Christmas Eve with his friends and family. The station in *Il ferroviere* highlights the class division, precariousness and desperation that modernisation has brought rather than celebrating the opportunities of modernity.

This representation of Termini in *Il ferroviere* mirrors that of a previous film by Germi, *Il cammino della speranza* (1950), a movie that focuses on the travels of a group of Sicilian emigrants to France. As many of these emigrants worked as miners and had never previously left their village, Capodarso, the camera shows their expressions of joy, hope and marvel when they see St. Peter's Basilica from the train window. Their arrival at Termini, however, is announced with the black smoke of a gloomy train, which foreshadows the troubles that are waiting for them at the station. The transition to the next scene superimposes the smoke upon the image of Ciccio (Saro Urzi), the person who recruited workers in Sicily and who will eventually report to the police Vanni (Franco Navarra), a migrant who realizes that Ciccio has no intention to take them to France. *Il cammino della speranza* visually highlights that migrants are helpless in Rome, by creating a contrast between their insignificant figures within the looming architecture of Termini. When Vanni escapes from the police, the camera frames him through a long shot as a small figure in the enormous empty entrance hall of Termini, emphasising his powerlessness. The subsequent scenes focus on Antonio (Angelo Grasso), who is detained by the police because he is an illegal migrant and his fiancé Lorenza (Mirella Ciotti), who follows him and tries to stop his arrest. We see Lorenza from Antonio's perspective: she runs towards the camera screaming 'Antonio', perhaps evoking Pina (Anna Magnani)'s famous run after her lover Francesco (Francesco Grandjacquet) in Roberto Rossellini's *Roma città aperta* (1945). The three following shots show respectively a tram, a car, and a truck passing by, signalling the abrupt separation between the two characters. The next scene shows Lorenza saddened, disoriented, and shocked, but the frame is dominated by the monumental water tower of Termini Station, which is located in Via Giolitti. The distance between the characters and the camera in these

two scenes stands in stark contrast with the one that depicts the migrants walking on the railway platform as they arrive in Termini, where the camera is located at a close distance from the crowd that is transiting within the station. In both cases, the camera position emphasises the character's loneliness and desolation in this environment.

The representation of Termini as a space that marks otherness persisted in Italian films and literature of the 1960s and 1970s, although the station did not maintain the prominent role it held in the 1950s. The reason that Termini loses its centrality in urban geography could have something to do with the increasingly congested traffic, which is underlined in Federico Fellini's film *Roma* (1972), which is made up of several loosely connected episodes.<sup>39</sup> In one of these episodes, *Roma* signals that cars and motorcycles have become the new main means of transportation for Italians starting in the 1960s, and provides an ironic fictional representation to the fact that Rome is the city with the most motorcycles and cars per capita in Europe.<sup>40</sup> In another sequence, the young autobiographically inspired main character gets to Termini, and is approached by a man who asks him if he is interested in having sex with a prostitute, thereby confirming the generic representation of the station as a place of sexual promiscuity.

In the 1960s and 1970s, Termini is frequently mentioned in generic terms as a place where various criminal activities take place, such as the hawking of stolen goods, drug dealing,<sup>41</sup> and male prostitution.<sup>42</sup> In fact, Termini plays a key role in one of Rome's most notorious murder stories, which is the assassination of Pier Paolo

---

<sup>39</sup> On the narrative structure of this film, see Filippo Trentin, 'Rome, the Dystopian City: Entropic Aesthetics in Fellini's *Toby Dammit* and *Roma* and Pasolini's *Petrolio*', *Forum Italicum*, 50.1 (2016), pp. 222-43 (pp. 232-36).

<sup>40</sup> Francesco Ermani, *Roma: il tramonto della città pubblica* (Rome: Laterza, 2013), pp. 74-85.

<sup>41</sup> Eugenio Santoro, Anna Maria Mammoliti, Antonio Manca, Carlo Patrizi, and Giovanni Bandiera *Peccato capitale: la droga a Roma* (Bari: Dedalo, 1982).

<sup>42</sup> Andrea Pini, *Quando eravamo froci. Gli omosessuali nell'Italia di una volta* (Milan: Il Saggiatore, 2011), pp. 76-77.

Pasolini, who met his killer Pino Pelosi at this station. According to Angelo Restivo this place has a role as important as Ostia – the place where Pasolini was murdered – in the narrative of the homicide:

Like the more ancient city gates but vastly more complex, Termini is a point of permeability in the city's texture, the point of transition between inside and outside. But the liminal quality of Termini extends beyond the station itself and into the surrounding 'zone' or neighbourhood, where porno movie houses are the sites of transgressive sexual exchanges, where the ruins of the Baths of Diocletian are charged with the mystery and danger of desire.<sup>43</sup>

Fabio Giovannini observes that the killing of Pasolini brought about a discussion within the Italian Communist Party about the discrimination of homosexuals and their concentration in specific urban areas, and he calls Termini a 'mostruoso monumento all'emarginazione'.<sup>44</sup> The media's representation of Termini in relation to this famous case has affected later representations of this space: Pasolini's killing has arguably been used to symbolise the dangers of spending time in this 'other' space and participating in illicit activities, such as soliciting male prostitutes.

Starting in the 1980s, Termini came back to occupy a more central symbolic role in the urban geography of the capital of Italy, since the historic district Esquilino became the most multi-ethnic neighbourhood of Rome, with immigrants comprising 15% of the total population.<sup>45</sup> Peter Del Monte's *L'altra donna* (1981) is perhaps one of the first movies to represent the area near the station as one of the main meeting points for immigrants. The story features a middle-class Italian woman named Olga

---

<sup>43</sup> Angelo Restivo, *The Cinema of Economic Miracles: Visuality and Modernization in the Italian Art Film* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2002), pp. 147-48.

<sup>44</sup> Fabio Giovannini, *Comunisti e diversi: il PCI e la questione omosessuale* (Bari: Dedalo, 1980), p. 12.

<sup>45</sup> Pierpaolo Mudu, 'The New Romans: Ethnic Economic Activities in Rome', in *Landscapes of the Ethnic Economy*, ed. by David H. Kaplan and Wei Li (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006), pp. 165-76 (p. 172).

(Francesca De Sapio), who is experiencing a personal crisis, and her Eritrean maid Regina (Fantu Mengasha), who helps Olga to redefine her life. In one of the most significant scenes of the movie, Regina leaves Olga's house in order to find her brother, and when Olga realises Regina is gone she heads to Termini to find her. Olga encounters a world that she was unaware of: Stazione Termini at night is gloomy and populated by African immigrants who sleep on the floor. The first person that Olga meets in the station is an African man, whose gaze is concealed behind sunglasses even if it is night. The camera follows Olga's journey through the station and shows her fear when she enters this unknown space. However, Olga soon watches while those she is initially afraid become the victims of two young racist men who prey on immigrants for fun, and she witnesses them beating an African man for no reason. Del Monte places the camera inside the car which the violent Italians come out of, forcing us to watch the scene through the front windshield. In other words, the camera position leads the audience to feel complicit with the perpetrators. Overall, *L'altra donna* represents Termini as a place of urban ghettoization, where the law is suspended and while immigrants can find a temporary place to stay, they are in constant danger. The ambiguous representation of Termini in the movie reflects Olga's attitude towards Regina. On the one hand, the relationship between the two is imbalanced in terms of power and Olga is presented as a very selfish character. On the other hand, Olga becomes very fond of Regina and she considers Regina her friend. In fact, when Olga meets Regina's brother in the underground level of Termini, she introduces herself as a friend of his sister. However, we are unsure of how Regina feels about this relationship, as she does not seem to be a fully developed character and she acts merely as a counterpart to Olga.

The association between Termini and immigration which has prevailed since the 1980s is not unprecedented, since the station was frequently represented as a meeting place for internal migrants following World War II. In a 1958 article about the Termini area, Carlo Levi notices the importance of the station as a meeting place for migrants from the South of Italy and seasonal workers: 'la Stazione è il centro, il luogo di contatto e di ritrovo; è anche il posto dove si può tentare di dormire se non si ha casa, e cercare un lavoro; o semplicemente passare le ore in una folla anonima e fraterna, vicino ai treni che vengono di laggiù'.<sup>46</sup> A documentary of the same year, Giuliano Tomei's *Tutti i treni fermano a Roma*, also highlights that newly arrived migrants from the South of Italy frequently met at the station. A recent TV programme about people experiencing homelessness and immigrants who live in Termini, Matteo Minissi's *Vite a Termini* (2013), seems to suggest a continuity rather than a difference in Termini's role as a place of socialisation for migrants. Pierpaolo Mudu's sociological research further confirms that the arrival of non-European migrants did not change the composition of the social environment of the station: 'la stazione Termini ha sempre costituito un polo di attrazione per la popolazione più marginalizzata italiana occupata in lavori saltuari e malpagati, in attività illegali o addirittura senza tetto. Nella seconda metà degli anni Settanta l'ambulantato costituiva una delle attività più diffuse nella zona della stazione'.<sup>47</sup> As the analysis will show there are at least two main differences in the representation of Termini as a place of socialisation for internal migrants versus a meeting place for immigrants. First, hegemonic narratives that talk about immigrants often criminalise them and represent them in explicitly racialised terms. On the other hand, the films

---

<sup>46</sup> Carlo Levi, *Roma fuggitiva*, ed. by Gigliola De Donato (Rome: Donzelli, 2011), p. 84.

<sup>47</sup> Pierpaolo Mudu, 'Gli Esquilini: contributi al dibattito sulle trasformazioni nel rione Esquilino dagli anni Settanta al Duemila', in *I territori di Roma: storie, popolazioni, geografie*, ed. by Roberta Morelli, Eugenio Sonnino, and Carlo M. Travaglini (Rome: Università degli studi di Roma La Sapienza, Tor Vergata, Roma Tre, 2002), pp. 641-80 (p. 657).



and movies about internal migration that have been previously analysed mostly represent Termini as a place of transit. Secondly, immigrant writers, unlike writers coming from the South to Rome, seem to have more frequently set their stories at Termini thus resignifying the experience of the place through their own gaze and words.

The movies previously analysed associate being in Termini with the feeling of fear: Marcocci is afraid of losing his job because he is an alcoholic in *Il Ferroviere*; Mary is afraid of losing her respectability because of her affair in *Stazione Termini*; the Sicilian immigrants in *Il cammino della speranza* are overwhelmed by the crowd in the big city and are afraid of getting arrested. As the analysis of *L'altra donna* has pointed out, fear in more recent representations of Termini is elicited by the presence of foreign subjects. The anxiety brought about by the scary otherness that is present in Termini can be found in newspaper articles as well as in literary representations. Laura Serloni, in a 2012 article for *La Repubblica*, portrays Termini as 'una città dentro la città':

di giorno è il crocevia di pendolari e viaggiatori, di businessman e vacanzieri, dopo il tramonto [...] a passeggio per le strade dei romani non c'è neanche l'ombra, si incontrano solo extracomunitari, prostitute, ubriachi e turisti, soprattutto ragazzi in cerca di un weekend 'low cost'.<sup>48</sup>

Serloni describes her experience of walking in the streets near Termini where there are no Italians as a mixture of 'paura' and disgust: 'l'odore delle spezie orientali si mischia al tanfo che sale da sotto i portici dove il pavimento non viene pulito da tempo tra incrostazioni di sporcizia e l'urina di chi preferisce farla a terra piuttosto

---

<sup>48</sup> Laura Serloni, 'Termini, la notte ha un altro volto. Degrado nelle vie senza più italiani', *Repubblica.it*, 14 July, 2012  
<[http://roma.repubblica.it/cronaca/2012/07/14/news/termini\\_la\\_notte\\_ha\\_un\\_altro\\_volto\\_degrado\\_nell\\_e\\_vie\\_senza\\_pi\\_italiani-39024907/](http://roma.repubblica.it/cronaca/2012/07/14/news/termini_la_notte_ha_un_altro_volto_degrado_nell_e_vie_senza_pi_italiani-39024907/)> [accessed 25 September 2016].

che trovare un bagno'. It is significant to notice here that Serloni criticises immigration by stressing the lack of public decency of foreigners, which is a concept that – as Tamara Pitch argues in *Contro il decoro* (2015) – is frequently used in order to discriminate against the lower classes.<sup>49</sup>

Goffredo Parise narrates a similar fictional experience of Termini in 'Roma', a short story written 1982. A man 'che si sentiva straniero senza però esserlo' gets to Rome by train at dawn and finds a city which is completely Africanised,<sup>50</sup> where there are no Romans and 'gente di colore [...] camminava e si muoveva come padrona della città'.<sup>51</sup> This description shows that starting in the early 80s, Piazza dei Cinquecento has become 'anticamera per la socializzazione di comunità etniche e stranieri che l'hanno eletta a luogo privilegiato d'incontro'.<sup>52</sup> In front of the station the man notices 'le sagome goffe di alcuni soldati italiani e di altri etiopi dai capelli crespi a criniera, in gruppi separati' and 'gruppi continui di donne beduine nei loro costumi bianchi da cui uscivano delle gambette nere, nervose e anziane, e sulla fronte una crocetta tatuata'.<sup>53</sup> He later encounters another 'etiope, forse', who moves his hands 'tra il mendico e lo sbruffone', with 'grazia minacciosa', and has the cornea of his eyes 'bianchissima, venata di pazzia'.<sup>54</sup> The nightmare-like sequence ends when the main character meets a second Ethiopian man who kills him with a knife.<sup>55</sup>

This uncanny short-story adds another layer to Termini's heterotopic experience: employing an imagery that reminds us of colonial descriptions, Parise highlights how the presence of immigrants in a square dedicated to Italian battles in

---

<sup>49</sup> Tamara Pitch, *Contro il decoro: l'uso politico della decenza* (Rome; Bari: Laterza, 2015).

<sup>50</sup> Goffredo Parise, 'Roma', in *Sillabari* (Milan: Adelphi, 2004), pp. 327-32 (p. 327)

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 329.

<sup>52</sup> Giovanni Attili, *Rappresentare la città dei migranti: storie di vita e pianificazione urbana* (Milan: Jaca Book, 2008), p. 147.

<sup>53</sup> Parise, 'Roma', p. 328.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 329.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 332.

Africa brings to mind what Sandra Ponzanesi calls 'a forgotten chapter of Italian history'.<sup>56</sup> In this sense, Parise illustrates another important feature of heterotopia, namely being 'more easily identified by its time than by its space'.<sup>57</sup> According to Foucault, heterotopia is 'linked to slices in time – which is to say that they open onto what might be termed, for the sake of symmetry, heterochronies. The heterotopia begins to function at full capacity when men arrive at a sort of absolute break with their traditional time'.<sup>58</sup> A station fully embodies this quality, being a place of time compression: 'the train threads its way through our history at an accelerated speed; relentless, it commutes without fail and in both directions, among great people, high places, and great moments'.<sup>59</sup>

The colonial memory that the presence of African migrants in Piazza dei Cinquecento has brought to mind occupies a prominent role in Italian literature by immigrants from former colonies, such as Somali writers and writers of Somali origins.<sup>60</sup> Piazza dei Cinquecento is also featured in a scene of Haile Gerima's *Adwa: An African Victory* (1999), a documentary that focuses on the memory and legacy of a key battle of the 1895-96 Italo-Ethiopian war, the battle of Adwa (1896), which saw the victory of Ethiopia. Shelleen Greene argues that this sequence functions as a transition point which links Ethiopia in the past to present-day Rome. Greene notes that 'Gerima forces a re-evaluation of Italian colonialism, shifting from the traditional narrative of Italians as *brava gente*, to one of Ethiopian resistance to Italian colonial

---

<sup>56</sup> Sandra Ponzanesi, *Paradoxes of Postcolonial Cultures. Contemporary Women Writers of the Indian and Afro-Italian Diaspora* (Albany: State University of New York University Press, 2004), p. 105.

<sup>57</sup> Lieven De Cauter and Michiel Dehaene, 'The Space of Play: Towards a General Theory of Heterotopia', in *Heterotopia and the City: Public Space in a Postcivil Society*, pp. 87-102 (p. 92).

<sup>58</sup> Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', p. 20.

<sup>59</sup> Marc Augé, *In the Metro*, trans. by Tom Conley (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), p. 17.

<sup>60</sup> Simone Brioni, *The Somali Within: Language, Race and Belonging in 'Minor' Italian Literature* (Cambridge: Legenda, 2015), p. 49.

aggression'.<sup>61</sup> These literary and filmic works show that the contradictions connected to otherness and other spaces are related to a lack of reconsideration of Italy's own history rather than to the mere presence of immigrants in this space.

One of the contemporary narrative films that 'dramatise[s] the relationship between colonial past and postcolonial present in the light of transnational migrations' is Claudio Noce's *Good Morning Aman* (2010).<sup>62</sup> The movie focuses on the friendship between two outsiders: a retired boxer named Teodoro (Valerio Mastandrea) and Aman (Said Sabrie), a Somali expatriate who lives in Rome and works as a car cleaner at a used car dealership. Thanks to Aman's help, Teodoro learns to no longer live in isolation and reconnects with society. *Good Morning Aman* uses Termini as one of the settings for Aman's social interactions. The movie opens with Aman dreaming about a better life while sitting in a car which is on showcase for sale at Termini. He later meets a friend of Somali origins who is leaving Italy to go to London to work, thus presenting the *topos* of the station as a place where people can transition into a new life. Stazione Termini is also the place where Aman meets a woman (Anita Caprioli), who is also struggling to make her living in Rome. This encounter between two people from different cultures later develops into a love story between a first-generation Italian citizen of Somali origins and a native Italian woman who survives on her wits.

The beginning of *Good Morning Aman* proposes two coexisting and yet opposite images in the contemporary representation of Termini: the gentrified 'non-

---

<sup>61</sup> Shelleen Greene, 'Envisioning Postcolonial Italy: Haile Gerima's *Adwa: An African Victory* and Isaac Julien's *Western Union: Small Boats*', in *Postcolonial Italy: Challenging National Homogeneity*, ed. by Cristina Lombardi-Diop and Caterina Romeo (New York: Palgrave, 2012), pp. 253-62 (p. 255).

<sup>62</sup> Derek Duncan, 'Shooting the Colonial Past in Contemporary Italian Cinema. Effects of Deferral in *Good Morning Aman*', in *Postcolonial Italy: Challenging National Homogeneity*, pp. 115-24 (p. 119).

space' where immigrants are marginalised,<sup>63</sup> and the space of socialization for immigrants. Francesco Zardo defines Termini a 'non-place',<sup>64</sup> drawing on Marc Augé's definition of these spaces as those 'which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity'<sup>65</sup> and are 'formed in relation to certain ends (transport, transit, commerce, leisure)'.<sup>66</sup> Zardo argues that the station smells like any other Mc Donald's in the world: 'per cercare di respirare un'aria diversa a Roma sarete comunque costretti ad allontanarvi dalla stazione Termini di almeno mezzo chilometro'.<sup>67</sup> Arguably, the alternative names that were given to the train station in 2006, Termini-Giovanni Paolo II, and the metro station in 2013, Termini-Vodafone, underline the gentrified dimension of Termini. The dedication to Pope John Paul II celebrates one of the main economic activities in Rome, religious tourism, and reaffirms the Catholic identity of the city against its multicultural and multireligious environment.

Like in *Good Morning Aman*, Termini is represented as 'a place of belonging'<sup>68</sup> and 'the hub of the city'<sup>69</sup> – rather than a space of transition or a 'non space' – in literature by immigrant writers. *Immigrato* – a co-authored text by Mario Fortunato and Salah Methani which narrates in the first person the personal migration story of the latter author – represents Termini as the main meeting place for

---

<sup>63</sup> Sandra Ponzanesi, 'Imaginary Cities. Space and Identities in Migration Literature in Italy', in *Italian Cityscapes. Culture and Urban Change in Italy*, ed. by Robert Lumley and John Foot (Exeter: Exeter University Press, 2004), pp. 156-65 (pp. 158-59).

<sup>64</sup> Francesco Zardo, *Come sopravvivere agli italiani. Anche voi potete farcela* (Rome: Castelvecchi, 2004), p. 19.

<sup>65</sup> Marc Augé, *Non-places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, trans. by John Howe (London: Verso, 1995), p. 78.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 94.

<sup>67</sup> Zardo, p. 19.

<sup>68</sup> Jennifer Burns, *Migrant Imaginaries: Figures in Italian Migration Literature* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2013), p. 128.

<sup>69</sup> Jennifer Burns, 'Outside Voices Within: Immigration Literature in Italian', in *Trends in Contemporary Italian Narrative 1980-2007*, ed. by Ania Gillian and Ann Hallamore Caesar (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2007), pp. 136-54 (p. 147).

immigrants in Rome.<sup>70</sup> *Immigrato* tells the story of different ethnic groups meeting in different streets and places around the station, including the Libyans in via Gioberti, the Senegalese in Colle Oppio, Filipinos in Piazza Risorgimento, and Tunisians in Piazza dei Cinquecento.<sup>71</sup> This representation not only 'mette in evidenza come il processo immigratorio abbia alterato la geografia della città, creando una sorta di geografia parallela',<sup>72</sup> but it also shows how national belonging is reterritorialised elsewhere. A similar representation can be found in Amara Lakhous' *Scontro di civiltà per un ascensore a Piazza Vittorio* (2006). This detective novel is set in the multicultural environment of Piazza Vittorio Emanuele II in Rome, a place that Paolo Bartoloni and Francesco Ricatti define as 'the apparent and often debated symbol of migrants' large presence in the city of Rome'.<sup>73</sup> *Scontro di civiltà per un ascensore a Piazza Vittorio* features twelve main characters who tell their version of the events leading to the stabbing of a man called Lorenzo Manfredini. One of the characters of this novel significantly describes Stazione Termini as a meeting place for Peruvian immigrants, and as the destination of a long trip rather than a place of passage: 'Termini vuol dire che il viaggio è finito. Questa città ha qualcosa di strano. È molto difficile andarsene'.<sup>74</sup> This passage mirrors Amara Lakhous' own experience of the station, which he describes in these terms: 'When I felt my soul awash with homesickness and melancholy, I would run like a shipwreck survivor to Stazione Termini for comfort. There I would see people on the move, in search of new

---

<sup>70</sup> Mario Fortunato and Salah Methnani, *Immigrato* (Rome: Theoria, 1997), p. 53-54.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 56.

<sup>72</sup> Vera Horn, 'Reinterpretazione degli spazi urbani nella letteratura italiana della migrazione', in *Shifting and Shaping a National Identity: Transnational Writers and Pluriculturalism in Italy Today*, ed. by Grace Russo Bullaro and Elena Benelli (Leicester: Troubadour, 2013), pp. 169-86 (p. 176)

<sup>73</sup> Paolo Bartoloni and Francesco Ricatti, 'Italian Transcultural Atmospheres. A Comparison of the Italian Forum in Sydney and Piazza Vittorio in Rome', *Italian Studies*, 70.4 (2015), 537-53 (p. 539).

<sup>74</sup> Amara Lakhous, *Scontro di civiltà per un ascensore a Piazza Vittorio* (Rome: Edizioni e/o, 2006), p. 166.

destinations, new faces, and new experiences'.<sup>75</sup> These narratives challenge the depiction of the station as a non-space: Termini is represented as a meeting place loaded with nostalgia or as a gateway to join other parts of the world.

Representations of Termini as an affective place of socialisation and companionship for immigrants as seen in *Immigrato* and *Scontro di civiltà per un ascensore a Piazza Vittorio* confirm 'the widespread agreement that the Esquilino is an area with an identity separate from the rest of Rome's historical center'.<sup>76</sup> There are visual reasons to represent Termini as – to use Arjun Appadurai's terminology – an 'ethnoscape' separated from the rest of the city.<sup>77</sup> For instance, Pierpaolo Mudu argues that the separation of the area around Termini from the rest of the city is somehow signalled linguistically by the over '1,500 signs in languages other than Italian', which 'are intended for immigrants only (e.g. with painted ideograms on the walls)'.<sup>78</sup> However, the representation of the historic district Esquilino as an ethnic enclave in newspaper articles is used frequently to discriminate against immigrants:

Chinatown, Bronx, kasbah, souk, and other comparable terms [...] clearly point to a conflation of immigration with dilapidation, reflecting the resolve to describe the Esquilino as a case of 'alien space' [...] a once-beautiful district now shed of its 'exquisitely Roman traits' as typical local products are threatened by the bric-a-brac imported by hundreds of illegal immigrants.<sup>79</sup>

---

<sup>75</sup> Amara Lakhous, 'Piazza Vittorio: A Cure for Homesickness', *Review: Literature and Arts of the Americas*, 42.1 (2009), 134-37 (p. 135).

<sup>76</sup> Mudu, 'The New Romans', p. 172.

<sup>77</sup> Arjun Appadurai, 'Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy', in *The Globalization Reader*, ed. by Frank J. Lechner and John Boli (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2015), pp. 94-103 (p. 97). Arjun Appadurai defines the ethnoscape as 'the landscape of persons who constitute the shifting world in which we live: tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles, guest workers, and other moving groups and individuals constitute an essential feature of the world and appear to affect the politics of (and between) nations to a hitherto unprecedented degree' (p. 97).

<sup>78</sup> Mudu, 'The New Romans', p. 172.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 173.

The descriptions of the area near Termini as an urban ghetto remove this space from the rest of the city and connect it to other national or transnational environments.

Returning to the analysis of places in *Scontro di civiltà per un ascensore a Piazza Vittorio*, it should be noted that the representations of Termini and Piazza Vittorio Emanuele II share not only a geographic proximity, but they are also centres of encounters, transit, socialization, and affectivity for migrants. This representation emphasises the extension of the station environment and its heterotopic qualities towards the centre of the city. Looking at Termini from the perspective of the migrants who – to use Michel De Certeau's terminology – 'practice' its spaces,<sup>80</sup> Giovanni Attili argues that Termini cannot be separated from the historic district in which it is located, the Esquilino neighborhood:

I confini storici del rione Esquilino devono quindi pensarsi come frontiere disperse [...], spazi di attraversamento migrante, luoghi indeterminati di incontri, scontri e malintesi. Da questo punto di vista [...] l'area del mercato non è separabile dalla stazione Termini.<sup>81</sup>

Esquilino comes from the Latin expression *ex-colere*, indicating a place outside the centre of the city, and it is delineated by 'Piazza di Porta S. Giovanni, Mura Aureliane fino a Porta S. Lorenzo, Via di porta S. Lorenzo, Via Marsala, Piazza dei 500, Via Giolitti, Via Gioberti, Piazza di Santa Maria Maggiore, Via Merulana, Piazza S. Giovanni'.<sup>82</sup> Attili suggests that the entire area should be read

non come un'unità territoriale chiusa e omogenea, piuttosto come un insieme di luoghi dinamici dove soggettività fluide si sfiorano e interagiscono attraverso interfacce porose: uno spazio disperso dove gli attraversamenti

---

<sup>80</sup> Michel De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. by Steven F. Rendall (Oakland: University of California Press, 1984), p. 124.

<sup>81</sup> Attili, *Rappresentare la città dei migranti*, pp. 139-40.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 139.



migranti portano in primo piano coaguli di compresenza, esplosioni di conflitti e tensioni tra zone di frontiera [...] Si tratta di un'immagine territoriale fluttuante e indeterminata che sfugge al congelamento topografico dello spazio e all'ansia del controllo tipica della pianificazione moderna.<sup>83</sup>

Attili's perspective challenges those representations of Termini that see this part of the city as an insular and self-contained place. His invitation to extend the imaginary perimeter of the station to the whole surrounding area might be useful to view the station within the broader geographic, urban, social and cultural context in which it is located and to better understand these contemporary narratives that have represented Termini as a symbol for the multicultural Italian reality.

The presence of migrants has not only reshaped the representation of Stazione Termini and its position within the affective geography of the city but also the perception of the whole city. Termini is a nodal point of the city that embodies the tension between the centre and peripheries (or 'new centres'), and the internal tension between Rome as the centre of one of the first imperial projects and of a monotheist religion and its multicultural peripheries; or, changing the perspective, its new centres, which are alternatives to yet also coexist with historical, political and tourist spaces. Placing Termini at the centre of the urban geography allows us to see the multicultural dimension of the capital of Italy, which is not limited to Esquilino. In this sense, Termini might be regarded to as a heterotopic and 'aporetic' space, which 'reveal[s] [...] something about the society in which [it] reside[s] through the way in which [it] incorporate[s] and stage[s] the very contradictions that this society produces but is unable to resolve'.<sup>84</sup>

---

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., p. 140.

<sup>84</sup> Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', p. 25 [translators' comment].

In conclusion, the ways in which users practice the space of Stazione Termini transform a place geometrically defined by urban planning and the idea of Italianness that is attached to it. The representations of the main railway station of Rome after World War II have come to 'suspend, neutralise or invert the set of relations designated, mirrored or reflected by [it]' during Fascism,<sup>85</sup> showing the station as a place of contradictions and cultural diversity, where symbolic and moral systems and practices can change, and people of different social classes and ethnicities can meet. In particular, writers who experienced migration illustrate how "spatial practices" [...] innovatively and strategically interpret the relationships between areas which have developed out of the [...] urban space defined by Fascism – a model which outlived the regime and endured well into the post-war period'.<sup>86</sup> Moreover, these narratives openly contest the sense of social anxiety and the fear of the alterity that has often accompanied the representation of the station in the last three decades.

The representation of Termini as the hub of the migrants' togetherness contests its depiction as a space of alleged anonymity, which is how the station is frequently perceived by its most privileged users. Those who see Termini as a 'non-space' deny others who see Termini as 'la mia prima casa a Roma' – like Daouda Sanogo, an immigrant who arrived in Italy in 2009 from the Ivory Coast – the possibility of Termini being a space of belonging.<sup>87</sup> In this sense, the representation of Termini by immigrants displays another feature of heterotopic spaces: their role to define in- and out-groups which Edward Soja describes in these terms:

Heterotopias always presuppose a system of opening and closing that simultaneously makes them both isolated and penetrable [...] Here the

---

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>86</sup> Pierluigi Cervelli, 'Rome as a Global City: Mapping the New Cultural and Political Boundaries', in *Global Rome: Changes Faces of the Eternal City*, pp. 48-61 (p. 48).

<sup>87</sup> Rosa Mordenti et al., 'Daouda Sanogo racconta la Stazione Termini', in *Guida alla Roma ribelle* (Roma: Voland, 2012), pp. 108-111 (p. 111).

heterotopia takes on the qualities of human territoriality, with its surveillance of presence and absence, its demarcation behaviours, its protective definition of the inside and the out. Implicit in this regulation of opening and closing are the workings of power, of disciplinary technologies.<sup>88</sup>

The representation of Termini as a place where outcasts meet is connected to the full ambiguity, even indecisiveness, of whether to attribute to it 'eutopic' or 'dystopic' qualities: Termini is both a place of discipline and sedation, where marginalised subjects are ghettoised, as well as a place of cultural hybridisation and resistance to assimilation. Looking at how one of the main stations of Italy is represented shows what have historically been considered in and out groups throughout time, and might allow us to rethink space in a more inclusive way.

### **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank Fabio Camilletti and the Arts and Humanities Research Council funded network, 'Roman Modernities', for organising research seminars and activities that encouraged and questioned my research on Stazione Termini. In particular, the seminar 'Narrating Rome' – which we co-organised at Associazione Culturale 001, Rome, on March 29-30, 2014 – has proved an important ground for the exchange of ideas on the urban and social geographies of Rome. I also would like to thank Leonardo De Franceschi for generously sharing information and insight about some of the movies discussed in this article.

---

<sup>88</sup> Soja, 'Heterotologies', p. 16.