

2012

Screening Strangers: Migration and Diaspora in Contemporary European Cinema. By Yosefa Loshitzky

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Recommended Citation

Brioni, Simone Dr., "Screening Strangers: Migration and Diaspora in Contemporary European Cinema. By Yosefa Loshitzky" (2012). *Department of English Faculty Publications*. 10.
<https://commons.library.stonybrook.edu/eng-articles/10>

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Screening Strangers: Migration and Diaspora in Contemporary European Cinema.

By Yosefa Loshitzky. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2010 (214 pages). ISBN: 9780253221827.

The book addresses many issues that inquire into the representation of immigrants and refugees in "mostly hegemonic rather than minority" European films from the late 20th and early 21st centuries. In particular, it analyses how movies negotiate, articulate and visually elaborate European identity in a time when security issues have broadly reduced civil rights for migrants. The brief but well argued introduction to the volume makes this point clear, by outlining the controversial measures that make transnational migration into the European Union more difficult and marginalize diasporic subjects.

Loshitzky identifies three genres in which these movies can be categorized, which recalls "the physical and ideational trajectory of the migration to Europe itself". First, she examines films that focus on the travel of migrants and border crossings, such as *Last Resort* (Pawel Pawlikoski, UK, 2002). This section is entitled "Journey of Hope", by referring to the eponymous prize-winning film by Xavier Koller (Switzerland, 1990). These movies usually feature impoverished migrants, whose lives are suspended between a past of misery in their home country and an uncertain future. Loshitzky splendidly emphasizes how the physical journey is connected to an identitarian change. Their initial great expectations, metaphorically contained in suitcases, collide with the disillusion found in the destination land. Secondly, the arrival to the supposed "Promised Land" and the migrant's life abroad is examined, by describing the cinematic cityscapes of Fortress Europe. The representation of the urban environment as spaces of sameness or generispaces often emphasizes the cultural alienation and lack of acceptance of migrants in the receiving society. In this regard, Loshitzky scrutinizes the lives of Bosnian refugees after the Yugoslav War in Vienna and London, respectively in *Northern Skirts* (Barbara Albert, Australia/Germany/Switzerland, 1999) and *Beautiful People* (Jasmin Dizdar, UK, 1999). Chapter three examines the ambivalence toward racial mixing in Bernardo Bertolucci's *Besieged* (Italy, 1998). and focuses on the arrival of the main character to Rome. Finally, the last two chapters focus on the "ideological journey of the second generation", respectively in the *banlieues* of Paris in *La Haine* (Matthieu Kassowitz, France, 1995) and in relation to the restrictive policies taken in the aftermath of September 11, 2001, in Michael Winterbottom's *In this World* (UK, 2003), *Code 46* (UK, 2004), and *The Road to Guantanamo* (UK, 2006).

Another theme addressed throughout the text is "the blindness of postcolonial Europe to read its present in light of its recent past", especially in relation to the experience of the Holocaust. Significantly, her analysis of the representation of immigrants in contemporary European cinema is sporadically connected to the classic figures of German movies of the

beginning of the 20th century, which were employed in order to discriminate against Jews. These references suggest an implicit cultural reference to Siegfried Krakauer's critical work, which Loshitzky occasionally quotes. As *From Caligari to Hitler* shows the link between totalitarianism and the apolitical approach to reality of expressionism, *Screening Strangers* analyses the varying degrees of complicity with – or resistance to - the filmic representation of migrants and their actual control by European governments and societies, either through surveillance or medical examination. This explains the triple meaning of the word "screening" in the title. For instance, Loshitzky examines *Dirty Pretty Things* (Stephen Frears, UK, 2002) in relation to *Metropolis* (Fritz Lang, Germany, 1927), and highlights Frear's denunciation of the advantage taken of the bodies of immigrants as well as their expulsion from the body politic. This element of physical exploitation is also central in other coeval works, such as Damijan Kozole's *Spare Parts* (Slovenia, 2003). Another interesting comparison between the present and the past victims of discrimination in Europe is Loshitzky's analysis of Europe's new 'others', such as the Romany and the Muslims in Tony Gatlif's *Gadjo Dilo* (France, 1997) and *Exils* (France, 2004), in relation to the historical figures of European 'otherness' such as the Jews and the Gypsies. The analysis of *La Haine* challenges the "black/blanc/beur" composition of the film's central characters and questions the "whiteness" of Vinz (Vincent Cassel), by highlighting his Jewish origins. Finally, Winterbottom's camp trilogy is considered in relation to Agamben's "fundamental biopolitical paradigm of the West", the concentration camp, which is the place where the state of exception becomes the rule.

Through a compelling and argumentative style, *Screening Strangers* engages with an insightful and detailed analysis of several crucial major works of European cinema. As Loshitzky's approach deliberately privileges cultural studies over cinematographic analysis, it is a valuable and stimulating book that addresses a heterogeneous readership. The book is not exclusively for film scholars, and anyone interested in studies of migration will benefit enormously from its quality. As a consequence, the social and political commentary occasionally prevails over the descriptions of the metaphorical aspects and narrative conventions of these fictional representations. For instance, Loshitzky equally considers as "social documents" movies as diverse as *Besieged*, which is inspired by James Lasdun's short story "The Siege", and *A Road to Guantanamo*. This movie is a docudrama based on a true story, in which the fictional narration is functional to accompany the archive news footage and the interviews of three second generation British young men of Pakistani and Bangladeshi origins who were unjustly captured and imprisoned after September 11, 2001. Loshitzky's analysis of movies in order to talk more broadly of the European culture and its drift toward intolerance can also be appreciated in the afterword, where she describes her

Simone Brioni. "Screening Strangers: Migration and Diaspora in Contemporary European Cinema. By Yosefa Loshitzky", in *Crossings: Journal of Migration and Culture* 3.1 (2012), pp. 163-165. This preprint differs from the published version. Do not quote or photocopy.

personal experience as an immigrant. This informative and well-paced essay makes a valuable contribution to the recognition of a set of recurring thematic analogies and equally illuminating differences in contemporary European movies about migration and to envisioning a fruitful intertextual dialogue between them. The transnational perspective of this volume challenges the utopian notion of the European Union as a pacified, boundless and multicultural political institution. Future research might perhaps draw from Loshitzky's work in order to investigate more in detail some aspects that have been purposely put aside in this wide-range volume, such as a comparative study between movies authored by representatives of the immigrant-receiving society and by members of the minority community, or the position of these movies in relation to the geopolitical and social specificities of each European country throughout different periods of migration. These studies might perhaps further enforce what Loshitzky brilliantly demonstrates in her volume: consensus or silence over freedom-restrictive policies is strictly connected to the representation of the "strangers".

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