

UC Berkeley

TRANSIT

Title

European Cinema in Motion: Migrant and Diasporic Film in Contemporary Europe, ed. Daniela Berghahn and Claudia Sternberg

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/6v24b1jr>

Journal

TRANSIT, 8(1)

Author

Yaren, Özgür

Publication Date

2012

DOI

10.5070/T781012977

Copyright Information

Copyright 2012 by the author(s). All rights reserved unless otherwise indicated. Contact the author(s) for any necessary permissions. Learn more at <https://escholarship.org/terms>

Peer reviewed

Book Review

Daniela Berghahn and Claudia Sternberg (eds.), *European Cinema in Motion: Migrant and Diasporic Film in Contemporary Europe*. New York and London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010. Pp. 321. Cloth, £55.00.

As transnational mobility and migration are reconfiguring Europe, their echoes and reverberations in cinema are attracting more and more academic attention. Scholars are seeking ways to rethink the classical conception of European cinema as a set of national cinemas. Daniela Berghahn and Claudia Sternberg's recent volume, which features the contributions of a large group of film scholars, brings together many such efforts.

European Cinema in Motion is largely the product of an international research network that explored migrant and diasporic cinema in contemporary Europe, alongside expert contributions outside the network. Without ignoring modes of production and sources of funding, the volume's contributors treat films as cultural products and discursive texts that articulate transnationality. The films mentioned in the book were mostly produced in Britain, France, and Germany from the 1980s on, but there are sufficient examples from other contexts, including peripheral regions of Europe. Starting with a concern similar to Shohat and Stam's seminal work *Unthinking Eurocentrism* (1994), Berghahn and Sternberg attempt to diverge from a Eurocentric model that posits Europe as a center enriched by peripheral migrant contributions. This project entails the redefinition of "European identity as constructed and narrated by European national cinemas" (4).

In the Introduction and opening chapter, the editors outline overlapping concepts and terms for migrant and diasporic film, including 'accented cinema', 'intercultural cinema', 'transnational cinema', 'hyphenated identity cinema.' The editors also discuss more context-specific terms, such as 'Black-British' film, '*beur* film,' or '*banlieue* film'. This discussion prepares readers for later chapters, which are mostly case studies that narrow the scope of 'migrant and diasporic film' to focus on certain themes, motives, categories of identity (e.g., gender, sexuality, age), or geographical/historical contexts.

Dina Iordanova explores one such content in Chapter 2, examining the post-1989 transnational movements triggered by the collapse of the Eastern Bloc, the Yugoslav Wars, and the expansion of the European Union. Iordanova stresses the differences between post-World War II migrants and post-1989 Eastern European migrants. She also presents an intriguing structural and historical analogy between post-colonialism and post-communism. Birgit Beumer's contribution (Chapter 4) has a similar focus. Beumer explores migration from the Socialist East to the Capitalist West in Post-Soviet cinema, and develops Svetlana Boym's distinction between ironic (distanced) nostalgia and utopian (nation-building) nostalgia. Two other geographically / historically-focused case studies are those of Sarita Malik and Isabel Santaolalla. Malik examines the ethnic fragmentation of postcolonial diasporic cinema in Britain, which was once unified under the label of Black British cinema (Chapter 6). She also deals with changing production modes in new diasporic cinemas, such as British Asian cinema, a story of a successful independent, transnational cinema; and Black British cinema, a constrained local cinema. Santaolalla, on the other hand, focuses on

the shifting status of Spain, Italy, and Greece from countries of emigration to those of immigration—shifts that have affected their film cultures since the 1990s (Chapter 7). These new countries of immigration are now witnessing films by non-migrant filmmakers focusing on the hardships of migrant life—corollaries to pioneering films of the 1970s by directors including Rainer Werner Fassbinder and Helma Sanders-Brahms.

Encarnación Gutiérrez Rodríguez's chapter on German and Spanish migrant and diasporic cinema focuses on two particular films portraying the lives of undocumented migrants: *Princesses* and *A Little Bit of Freedom*. Rodríguez explores these films in relation to the anthropological concept of 'transculturation,' as defined by Cuban theorist Fernando Ortiz. With the concept of transculturation, Ortiz foregrounds the material conditions that produce and influence cultural contact and transformation; he concentrates on the habitation of "social spaces where people are coerced to labor and live" (114). Having this concept in mind, Rodríguez focuses on films that present "cross-cultural intimate encounters at the margins of the nation" (ibid.).

Two chapters in the book treat the topic of migrant and diasporic film through the lens of gender and sexuality. Carrie Tarr focuses on diasporic women filmmakers in Western Europe, and describes various films in terms of the 'feminine mode' (Chapter 8), while James S. Williams is more interested in correspondences between queer and migrant identities (Chapter 9). Williams notes the similarity between notions of transformation, transsexuality and transnationalism, and he observes recurring themes in queer diasporic cinema, such as "the conflict between gender and nationhood and the quest for identity and self-affirmation in the face of continuing marginalization, racism and homophobia" (211).

By contrast, Daniela Berghahn focuses on youth in her query of migrant and diasporic cinema (Chapter 11). She compares Hollywood youth films with European migrant 'coming-of-age' films, and discerns salient differences between the maturing protagonists of these two sets of films.

Some chapters utilize general concepts to elaborate more broadly on the topic of migrant cinema. Deniz Göktürk focuses on the use of music in Fatih Akın's films, and on Tony Gatlif's musical melodramas (Chapter 10). Her main idea is that the use of music shifts the outdated narrative of migration as leaving home and settling down in a new home to more multi-centered, non-linear narratives, which are closer to transnational mobility. Claudia Sternberg refers to historical relationships between migration and motion pictures by focusing on the representation of moviegoing and the use of cinema-related elements in narrative films about migration and/or diasporas in Europe (Chapter 12).

The book also includes two useful chapters on funding sources for migrant and diasporic film production. While Anna Jackel evaluates state, pan-European, and other funding initiatives for migrant, diasporic and world cinema (Chapter 3), producer and filmmaker Gareth Jones provides his perspective on Babylon, a cultural forum and film development program in which diasporic and migrant filmmakers from across Europe can meet, compare notes, and share their creative aims (277–292).

The editors distinguish between migrant filmmakers, who have taken part in a migratory experience, and diasporic filmmakers, including second-generation migrants. This distinction relies on the generational difference of migrant communities, ignoring varying motives of migration, and equating post-colonial migrants, labor migrants, diasporic subjects (in the classical and narrower sense), and exiles. Thankfully, *European Cinema in Motion* does not limit itself to this rather

stringent and narrow framework. Instead, the volume provides a necessarily multidimensional view on migrant and diasporic film.

—Özgür Yaren (Yüzüncü Yil University)

Bibliography

Higson, Andrew. "The Limiting Imagination of National Cinema." In *Cinema and Nation*, edited by Mette Hjort and Scott MacKenzie, 57–68. London: Routledge, 2000.

Shohat, Ella and Robert Stam. *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media*. London: Routledge, 1994.