

Book review

Ballestors, I. (2015). *Immigration cinema in the new Europe*. Bristol: Intellect. 288 pp.

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Ever since Hamid Naficy (2001) coined the term ‘accented cinema’, there has been a spectacular growth in scholarly work on diasporic and exilic filmmaking. Nourished by the expanding number of migration-related films, a vast range of scholarship has emerged. In the last years alone, a few dozen new titles (including monographs, edited books and journals) have appeared. How to make a contribution in a field that is seemingly saturated and that often analyzes the same handful of films and filmmakers? This is the challenge of Isolina Ballesteros’ book *Immigrant cinema in the new Europe*, which mainly adds to her previous work on Hispanic film and Spanish immigration cinema. The book commits to theorizing immigration cinema ‘in relation to notions such as gender, hybridity, transculturation, border crossing, transnationalism, and translation’. And despite some flaws, it comes close to achieving this ambitious task.

Immigrant cinema in the new Europe consists of seven essays, each tackling immigration cinema through a different thematic lens such as masculine identities, female and queer migrations, human trafficking, family metaphors, border-crossing, and diasporic identity. These are preceded by an introduction that outlines the major theories of immigrant cinema, but also of important related concepts such as world cinema and third cinema, among others. The introduction clarifies some of the terminological vagueness that characterizes studies on migration and cinema. More particularly, Ballesteros discusses side-by-side concepts such as world cinema, third cinema, accented cinema, and, importantly, immigration cinema – the central concept of the book. She defines immigration cinema mainly along thematic lines as cinema that depicts a particular subject matter (the lives and identities of immigrants and their children) with a clear ideological orientation (revealing how societies deal with otherness). While this definition is suitable for the purpose of the book, it is not always clear how the concept relates to other theories of cinema and migration. The main argument is that immigration cinema is ‘unmappable’ and that it resists any categorization in terms of authorship, nationality, production or reception.

The most important achievement of the introduction, and perhaps the entire book, is that it critically analyzes the link that exists between how societal

boundaries are mediated (through cinema) and the enormous challenges that Europe faces today in terms of multiculturalism and solidarity. To better understand, and possibly remedy, the challenges caused by racism, social polarization and populism, it is necessary to look not only at outbursts of violence but also at the structural issues of discursive neo-racism (Van Dijk, 2000) and heterophobia, that is, the rejection of the other in the name of no matter what difference (Memmi, 2000). These concerns are revisited throughout the book as Ballesteros analyses a range of different immigration films, thus showing that cinema can be a valuable entryway to discussing Europe's current challenges and changing identity. The films cover different regions and time periods, and include 'usual suspects' such as Fatih Akin's *Gegen die Wand* (2004) along with a range of lesser-studied films and documentaries.

Two main conceptual discourses are discerned, according to which Europe is being identified as both a 'family of nations' and as a 'fortress'. The chapters on human trafficking (chapter three), family relations and 'the Other' (chapter five), and cross-border road movies (chapter six) offer the finest analyses of how immigration cinema can tackle these two opposing discourses. These three chapters demonstrate very well the tension between globalization and national security, and between (macro) institutional and (micro) social discourses, and how these affect individuals caught up in migration trajectories. Ballesteros' strong ethical position, as outlined in the introduction, is most effective in these three chapters. Moreover, these chapters offer something truly new in the field of cinema and migration; they discuss some lesser known films. These chapters are potentially of interest to a broader readership (e.g., scholars working on borders, justice and migration). In contrast, the final and longest chapter on diasporic identities and cinema offers few new insights to the field, discussing *Beur* and *Banlieue* cinema from France, South Asian filmmaking in the UK, and directors of Turkish origin in Germany. Still, this chapter can be a useful introduction for students or scholars who are new to this topic.

Given the broad scope of the chapters, *Immigrant cinema in the new Europe* would have benefited from a synthesizing concluding chapter. It is surprising that there is no conclusion that matches the excellent introduction. This would have offered the author the occasion not only to summarize the main findings of the book but also to reflect on some issues, such as the very different distribution, reception contexts and impact of the many films that were discussed in the chapters, or questions on film policy. Moreover, the work is not particularly easy to navigate because it lacks an index of authors and topics, and because references are listed per chapter rather than at the end of the book. Therefore, I recommend readers to approach *Immigrant cinema in the new Europe* as a collection of essays rather than as a work with one overarching argu-

ment. When doing so, readers will discover a well-written, conceptually rich and timely exploration of the complex relations between Europe's changing identity and immigration cinema.

References

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