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Sensuous Cinema: The Body in Contemporary Maghrebi Film, by Kaya Davies Hayon. Bloomsbury Academic, 2018, 181 pp.

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In *Sensuous Cinema: The Body in Contemporary Maghrebi Film*, Kaya Davies Hayon sets out to examine "how cultural, gendered, religious and sexual identities are articulated on and through the body in cinematic representations of people of Maghrebi heritage" (20). She takes as her focus corporeality as a site of common concern in eleven films and makes the claim that no scholarship to date has focused exclusively on this point. Indeed, not only is the scholarship scarce, but actual representations and depictions of bodies, corporeal desire and emotional and sensual embodiments are rare in North African cultural expression. Her study aims to fill this gap "by providing the first longitudinal and comparative account of how Maghrebi people of different genders, ethnicities, sexualities, ages and classes have been represented corporeally in Maghrebi and French cinemas since the year 2000" (1–2). Davies Hayon offers a very readable volume that is well-researched and employs a thoughtful approach to the films under consideration.

In her lengthy introduction, Davies Hayon painstakingly explains her use of terminology—especially the term, "Maghrebi"—in her study. Indeed, this has proved a fraught exercise for many scholars of Maghrebi cultural production who debate how to name the artist and the subject, and even the geographic region. In French, the term "Maghrébin" refers to someone or something from "the former French colonies of Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia, north of the Atlas Mountains, and in contrast with the territories to the east, known as the *Machrek*" (2). Davies Hayon outlines the value of drawing on transnational and transvergent approaches so that meaning can be teased out both locally and across regions and diasporas. The theoretical and methodological frame of the volume is dense, drawing on "Western notions of embodied subjectivity and theoretical and philosophical perspectives" from the Middle East and North Africa MENA region, theories and writing on corporeal phenomenology and feminist and film theory to come to an understanding of "representations of embodied subjectivity" (2). In justifying her corpus of chosen films, she states that she deliberately chose films that present "subversive or challenging" depictions of bodies through a wide spectrum of topics and spaces, including the Maghreb, France and Switzerland (21).

In her second chapter, titled "The Materiality of Exile", Davies Hayon looks at three influential return-journey films that feature youth in France and Switzerland whose main goal is to return to their parents' country of origin: Algeria. Drawing on the work of Michael Gott and Thibaut Schilt in their recent edited volume titled *Open Roads, Closed Borders: The Contemporary French-language Road Movie*, Davies Hayon describes how the protagonists of

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Tony Gatlif's *Exils* (2004) experience positive aspects of movement and travelling, such as space and freedom of body movement, unlike the protagonists of Rabah Ameur-Zaïmeche's *Bled Number One* (2006) and Mehdi Charef's *La fille de Keltoum* (2002), who find themselves increasingly isolated, depressed and restricted in corporeal terms, in rural Algeria. Displacement, however, is a theme that links the characters of all the films discussed in this chapter. Davies Hayon very astutely illustrates how characters in all three films enact responses to the impossibility of return and integration: the frantic camera that follows the protagonists' nervous and ultimately futile movements in *Exils* is contrasted with the long takes and long shots in the "stilted passage of time for Kamel (played by Rabah Ameur-Zaïmeche) in rural Algeria" in *Bled Number One* (42). And finally, the shot/reverse shots in *La Fille de Keltoum* emphasise protagonist Rallia's (Cylia Malki) increasing alienation and physical withdrawal from the very society and family she had hoped to embrace.

In Chapter Three, "Dance, Performance and the Moving Body", Davies Hayon compares how belly dance is represented in *Satin Rouge* (2002) and *La graine et le mulet* (2007), arguing that in both films, the main characters are represented as sources of agency and female sexual empowerment. The chapter begins with an overview of the history of belly dance and trance in the Middle East and North Africa. Originating as an expressive dance form, it "provoked fascination among the white (male) colonizer and images of *la danse du ventre* were widely disseminated in the colonial *métropole* via orientalist artworks and postcards" (60). Most importantly, Davies Hayon is successful in demonstrating that the filmmakers subvert orientalist "(mis)conceptualizations" of Maghrebi and Maghrebi-descended women and challenge the male gaze construct. The chapter ends with an interesting analysis of the function of the Sufi trance scene in *Exils*. Naïma (Lubna Azabal), the film's protagonist, submits to the ritual in an effort to reconnect with her past and her parents' heritage. Davies Hayon underscores the fact that this second last sequence in the film is an example of the link between phenomenology and Sufism identified earlier in the volume's introduction.

Challenging patriarchal religious discourses and expectations is the focus of Chapter Four, "Embodying Islam". Through an analysis of the films: *Millefeuille* (Nouri Bouzid, 2012), *Amours voilées* (Aziz Salmy, 2008) and *L'enfant endormi* (Yasmine Kassari, 2004), Davies Hayon describes how women's bodies are often considered the property of their male relatives in Islamic family law, but proceeds to explain how family law codes differ between Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia. She draws on the work of Mounira Charrad, who "argues that family law codes in Algeria and Morocco function to position women's bodies as (sexual) commodities for exchange between members of their patrilineal kinship" (Charrad qtd. in Davies Hayon, 93). Tunisia's 1956 Code of Personal Status allowed women divorce rights, improved rules of inheritance for women and banned repudiation and polygamy (93). This is helpful for understanding women's embodied and lived experiences of Islam in the three films under discussion, and although, as Hayon Davies argues, the female protagonists all challenge patriarchal authority in the films, negative perceptions of Islam still seem to permeate the films' narrative structures, no matter how successful the women are in controlling their own bodies and identities.

Chapter Five's focus is on male bodies in films set in the Maghreb and France. This chapter, titled "Queer Desires in the Maghreb and France", offers the reader an interesting and fresh perspective on how male same-sex desire is depicted in *L'armée du salut* (Abdellah Taïa, 2014),

Tarik el hob (Rémi Lange, 2001) and *Un fils* (Amal Bedjaoui, 2003). Following a lengthy analysis of queer theory and its penchant for constructing the "body as a site of subversion", Hayon Davies argues, in concert with George Ioannides, that it is necessary to consider "lived experiences or subjective modes of existence" (129). This facilitates her argument that the male protagonists in the three films "experience their sexuality as a fundamental component of their existences" (152). Explaining that *L'armée du salut* is the first Moroccan feature film to openly deal with the theme of homosexuality, Davies Hayon analyses the film as a coming-of-age narrative in which the teenage protagonist, Abdellah (Said Mrini), discovers and experiences corporeal desire. The film, she argues, depicts Morocco as a stifling and exploitative space for homosexual men, unlike *Tarik el hob* in which the protagonist Karim (Karim Tarek) embraces his sexuality through his Maghrebi cultural heritage, and *Un fils* in which the protagonist Selim (Mohamed Hicham), looks to "(queer) French codes of gender and desire" in his relationships (153). In contrast to the previous chapter, religion is not foregrounded as the reason for intolerance and oppression, yet, as Davies Hayon writes, the films' deep structures end up reinforcing perceptions of Islam as homophobic.

In her conclusion, Davies Hayon returns to what she considers to be the limitations of her study – the fact that she cannot speak or read Arabic, and so her corpus is delimited by this "limitation" (163). Yet, what she considers a limitation actually compels her to dig deeper into the representational potential of the films, unpacking their deep structure in terms of ideology, narrative structure and visual aesthetics. The films are generally accessible on DVD, which makes this volume quite useful for film and gender studies courses. A major quality of this volume is the contextual background to gender relations and issues of corporeality that Davies Hayon provides by taking the reader back to early Islam, explaining how conceptions of gender have evolved over the years, shaped by the forces of colonialism and changing political and social landscapes. In the end, Kaya Davies Hayon is successful in uncovering the significant role of corporeality and embodiment in shaping identities in films featuring Maghrebi characters.

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