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***Screening Strangers: Migration and Diaspora in Contemporary European Cinema*, Yosefa Loshitzky. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2010 (214 pages). ISBN: 9780253221827.**

A Review by Aidan Power, University College Cork

In her introduction to *Screening Strangers: Migration and Diaspora in Contemporary European Cinema*, Yosefa Loshitzky points to the evolution of a globalization process whereby previously "classical countries of emigration" including Portugal, Greece and Ireland have themselves become desirable destinations for third world migrants seeking a better life in the European Union. The intricacies of writing a book as wide-ranging as Loshitzky's, coupled with the continuing and unpredictable fallout from the economic crisis, ensure that even shrewd observations about the state of contemporary Europe run the risk of immediate obsolescence. That Loshitzky should single out these three nations (along with Spain) in outlining an introductory section on "Fortress Europe, Diasporas and Globalization" is hardly a slight on a book that is well argued, engaging and detailed; moreover, it should serve paradoxically as an endorsement of her central treatise: namely that far from being a utopian cultural melting pot, European society has struggled to come to terms with the realities it faces and the obligations inherent in its history. Dire fiscal realities in the aforementioned triumvirate of nations have impacted hugely upon employment opportunities afforded to "natives", let alone those who, seeking a new life, migrated to them in the latter years of the 1990s and the early twenty-first century. Resultant side effects of the current crisis, surges in popularity amongst the extreme right, tightening of borders (as evinced most recently by French and Italian reactions to Libyan refugees, for example) and a scarcity of jobs highlight *Screening Strangers* as being a particularly relevant and even prescient publication, a most welcome addition to the growing number of books centred around the ever-perplexing premise of unravelling societal and by extension cinematic identity.

Divided into five chapters, *Screening Strangers* charts the progress of European cinema as it strives to keep up with the societies it purports to depict and principally in its dealings with those on the peripheries of such societies. Setting out a cogent, argumentative style, Loshitzky's introduction flows into her first two chapters, encompassing a diverse range of films that interact with firstly borders and migration, and latterly "the cinematic cityscapes of fortress Europe". The book, then, can be said to mirror the migrant's route, setting forth from the old world and into the new, before interacting with the very epitome of the first world: the heaving metropolis. Loshitzky's range is broad, her analysis incisive, as she moves from Vienna, the site of the defeat of the Ottoman Empire to the trauma of a war-torn Balkans, and into the heart of a London far removed from the fairytale world of royal weddings and postcard imagery. A particular highlight

here is a rigorous analysis of Stephen Frears's *Dirty Pretty Things* (2002), wherein the author extends conceptions of the "them and us dialectic" and lays bare the multi-layered nature of exclusion, dissecting in the process the often overlooked spectre of settled migrants exploiting those who arrive after them. The detailed nature of such close textual readings are lent perspective by a keen appreciation of context on the author's part, whilst references to texts as diverse as Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927) and Joseph Conrad's masterwork *Heart of Darkness* (1993) lend the narrative a weight that never encumbers a lucid writing style that is accessible and clear. Such strengths serve her well in her later chapters: ambitious undertakings that continue her narrative while operating simultaneously as case studies of specific films.

If there is a standout element of *Screening Strangers*, it is surely in the author's meticulous dissection of key films: case studies that include Bernardo Bertolucci's *Besieged* (1998), Michael Winterbottom's trilogy *In This World* (2002), *Code 46* (2003) and *The Road to Guantanamo* (2006) and, intriguingly, Mathieu Kassovitz's *La Haine* (*Hate* 1995). Loshitzky's expert rumination on the latter film deserves particular mention here. Focusing on aspects of Jewish identity in *La Haine*, she succeeds in breathing new discursive life into a much scrutinised production. Kassovitz's insight into *banlieue* culture has been commented on elsewhere, a reality noted by the author in the opening passages of her chapter wherein she addresses its relevance to the social unrest prevalent throughout France in 2005 and 2007. *Banlieue* films existed before *La Haine* of course, its genesis as a subgenre having its aesthetic origins in (amongst other influences) the *policier* films of the 1980s and early 1990s, yet few were as successful as *La Haine* in puncturing the apathy of a wider French public toward those on the margins of their cities. In a section entitled "Intifada of the Banlieues: La Haine Revisited", Loshitzky posits an exploration of the film through the prism of Jewish identity, itself amongst the most ancient exemplars of migratory discourses in Western Europe. Such a construct enables her to elucidate on the theme of the settled migrant as a distinct entity from the later generations of emigrants that flocked to Europe in the late 1950s and early 1960s as well as engaging directly with the Holocaust, the very nadir of that same continent's ambivalence toward the other. Kassovitz, she states, constructs a "new image of the diasporic Jew, which responds not only to traditional images of the Jew in Western culture but also to the weakness and vulnerability associated with the Jew as a victim of the Holocaust". Read this way then, his central protagonist Vinz (Vincent Cassel) can be seen as the embodiment of the postcolonial nomad, one who though settled in Europe, is denied full integration as a consequence of the horrors visited upon his forefathers. His outsider status reinforced by the strategic location of the *banlieues* themselves, Vinz spends his time amongst others for whom the spectre of colonial memory complicates the nature of their national identity. Citing two key scenes in the film—a meandering parable recited by a Holocaust survivor in a public bathroom and an ambush by a group of young skinheads—Loshitzky posits that *La Haine* delivers amongst other things, an allegorical meditation on "the blindness of postcolonial Europe to read its present in light of its recent past". That the Jewish Kassovitz himself plays the role of one of the skinheads does not go unnoticed, an occurrence that embodies a duality at the heart of contemporary Jewish identity. Indeed, watching the ambush scene again, it is difficult not to speculate that the provocative showdown between the shaven haired Vinz and a neo-nazi (played not without irony by a Jewish director/actor) plays upon the myriad, semantic complications that inform the more hard-line stances adopted by various Israeli politicians and military leaders, for example, or indeed the sense of incomprehension and fury that burnished the popular consciousness in the wake of the

Second World War. Torn between rage and social impotency, Vinz occupies a liminal space, one that shapes his conception of himself and the environment he finds himself in: a "symbolic space that he occupies as the post-Holocaust imaginary Jew who has to negotiate Jewish ultimate subjection to organized violence in the form of the Holocaust". Viewing the film through such fresh perspectives, Loshitzky addresses the endemic limitations of the much commented upon "black/blanc/beur" composition of the film's central characters. The result is something of a revelation. Whereas for many, the street riots it foreshadowed serves testimony to *La Haine*'s relevance, Loshitzky looks to its interrogation of the past to decode semantical layers that imbue the film with renewed merit, while questioning assumptions pertaining to Vinz's "whiteness".

Whereas a number of similar studies in recent years have sought to link films from exilic, transnational and interstitial directors in a bid to identify recurring themes and patterns, Loshitzky opts for a broader analysis, one that though challenging is never unwieldy. Therefore, when she surveys the work of a migratory director of a different hue in Bernardo Bertolucci, she does so in the knowledge that his own personal migrant status is altogether different from that of the characters he presents in *Besieged*. Bertolucci's relocation to London was facilitated with comparative ease owing to his status as an accomplished and well regarded E.U. citizen, quite unlike the African refugee Shandurai (Thandie Newton) whose interracial relationship with an English expatriate forms the basis for his meditation on identity in Rome. Coupled with informative sections on directors as diverse as Tony Gatlif, Barbara Albert and the aforementioned Winterbottom, Loshitzky presents a multiplicity of viewpoints, backgrounds and motivations in keeping with the manifold permutations pertaining to migratory and diasporic issues. Consequently, she is never in danger of lapsing into repetition, as a beautifully judged afterword demonstrates, wherein she reflects on her personal experiences as a migrant before finishing (perhaps appropriately, given the nature of the book) with a telling reference to Michael Haneke's *Caché* (*Hidden* 2005).

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