

FILM AND CINEMA STUDIES IN REVIEW

KAYA DAVIES HAYON. *Sensuous Cinema: The Body in Contemporary Maghrebi Film*. (New York: Bloomsbury Academic Press, 2018). Pp. 181; \$27.96 paperback. ISBN 9781501335990.

In a turn away from the sociopolitical-oriented scholarship of Maghrebi (-French, -Swiss) filmmaking, Kaya Davies Hayon presents an analysis centered instead on a pattern of aesthetic sensuality and corporeality that marks a stylistic connection between what she calls a “new cohort” of contemporary Maghrebi films (Davies Hayon 4). This cohort comprises films that represent examples of the cinema of transvergence, which situates Maghrebi women’s cinema within respective national and post-colonial contexts while also rejecting the homogenizing tendencies of the term “transnational” as a marker of identity. Building on this cinema of transvergence that recognizes Maghrebi (-diasporic) identities as both interstitial and mobile, Davies Hayon aims to investigate this mobility beyond sociopolitical issues and identities as it pertains to the material, bodily experiences of agentic *Maghrebi* subjects. In four chapters, she addresses different interpretations of gendered agency as categorized by exile, dance, religion, and queer desire; then, through close analyses of three films, she offers another perspective based on feminist phenomenological discourse and organized around sites of embodied knowledge and sensory experience.

In her first chapter, “The Materiality of Exile,” Davies Hayon looks to the road-movie genre to examine the ways in which Maghrebi (-French, -Swiss) characters navigate and negotiate their encounters with their country of origin in Tony Gatlif’s *Exils* (2004), Rabah Ameur-Zaïmeche’s *Bled Number One* (2006), and Mehdi Charef’s *La Fille de Keltoum* (2001). Davies Hayon explores how these protagonists’ bodies mediate their experiences of exile in these pseudo-return journeys as they become increasingly disoriented and displaced by close physical contact with the spaces and people of their shared homeland – rural Algeria. While each film employs different cinematographic techniques, Davies Hayon establishes thematic and sensory connections through the characters’ corporeal forms as they move through space and experience physical discomfort and distress, drawing

distinct similarities between the women's bodies as sites of conflict, violence, and controversy.

Continuing her exploration of movement as a process of identity formation, Davies Hayon transitions from inter- and trans-national mobility to representations of belly-dance and trance in "Dance, Performance, and the Moving Body." First, she provides a brief overview of belly-dancing within a colonial and critical context, contextualizing contemporary feminist attempts to reclaim this traditional form and the dancers themselves from the orientalist fetishization of the belly-dancer as exoticized Other. Then, she examines the drawbacks of these reappropriations, for example, that they function only in specific contexts (the religious and the Western) and that they critique patriarchal values but ultimately cannot deconstruct them. It is here that Davies Hayon begins her intervention. Drawing on Simone de Beauvoir's work on existential philosophy in relation to women's experiences, Davies Hayon employs feminist phenomenology to argue that the relationship between dancer and viewer as one of mobilized "kinesthetic empathy" simultaneously fosters understanding between the self and "other" and rejects an over-identification with the "other" that ignores difference, thus crossing cultural boundaries without erasing intersectional identities (69). She then applies this methodology in her analyses of Raja Amari's *Satin rouge* (2002), Abdellatif Kechiche's *La Graine et le mulet* (2007), and Tony Gatlif's *Exils* (2004), emphasizing the ways in which these directors' haptic and kinesthetic styles establish an affective response for the spectator that constructs spaces for – and mobile, sensory experiences of – empathy.

Next, Davies Hayon shifts focus from (trans)national and embodied experiences to the lived sociopolitical contexts of religion and patriarchy in the Maghreb. Focusing on the external influences and pressures exerted upon women's bodies, "Embodying Islam" begins with an introduction to the nuanced debates regarding gender in Qur'anic interpretations, Islamic family law, and veiling, with each section broken down to delve into nation-specific historical and contemporary religious backgrounds. In *L'Enfant endormi* (Yasmine Kassari 2004), *Amours voiles* (Aziz Selmy 2008), and *Millefeuille* (Nouri Bouzid 2012), Davies Hayon explores the material realities of agentic subjects who reject patriarchal attempts to control or limit them through their bodies. Whether by subverting embodied spiritual practices and family laws to empower themselves or rejecting social mores to gain independence and control over their own bodies, these protagonists resist dominant stereotypes of Muslim women as

powerless and vulnerable. Davies Hayon points out, however, that these representations also reinforce perceptions of Islam as oppressive and misogynistic, with no space for representations of Muslim women for whom religion is an empowering and meaningful part of their identities.

The final chapter changes course as Davies Hayon applies her analytical framework not on female protagonists but on non-heteronormative male subjects who desire other men. Explained in the contextual overview of “Queer Desires in the Maghreb and in France,” this chapter focuses on male rather than female same-sex desire because female same-sex acts are not only restricted but “rendered invisible by patriarchal Islamic societies” (127). Davies Hayon demonstrates that, in the absence of opportunities to study female Maghrebi same-sex desire, cinematic representations of male same-sex desire similarly fit in her phenomenological framework due to the embodied experiences of these men, whose material realities are defined by their marginality. Via analyses of *L’Armée du salut* (Abdellah Taïa 2013), *Tarik el hob* (Rémi Lange 2001), and *Un fils* (Amal Bedjaoui 2003), Davies Hayon examines the lives of three protagonists who are alienated in different ways depending on their relationships to the Maghreb or their Maghrebi roots. This chapter, while not out of place due to its focus on marginalized, embodied subjectivities, is a jumping-off point for future scholarship using this methodology on films that represent female same-sex desire.

Drawing on previous scholarship on feminist and queer phenomenology and on philosophy and theology regarding the body in the context of the Middle East and North Africa, Davies Hayon synthesizes and expands these critical lenses to form a new methodological framework. The application of this framework complicates sociopolitical interpretations of marginalized identities, framing them within complexities of their lived, embodied experiences. *Sensuous Cinema* is intended for an academic audience; however, with its considerable yet concise overviews and clear writing style, her engagement with phenomenological and haptic film theory demonstrates a dedication to accessibility that would make this text an appropriate and constructive secondary source to pair with relevant films in graduate and upper-level undergraduate classrooms ranging from those in MENA area-specific studies to more global film and *francophonie* courses. ✨

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