

Representation of Refugees in European Cinema

Ipek A. Celik Rappas
Assistant Professor
Koc University, Istanbul, Turkey

Abstract

This paper explores the representation of refugees in contemporary European cinema, including films produced in Europe by non-European directors. The filmic visibility of refugees, similar to mass media representations, is frequently inflected by concerns of humanitarian crises, and directors take or are given the role of humanitarian activists. Refugees are portrayed as the victims of human trafficking in border spaces or of exploitation as undocumented workers in the destination countries. The filmic representations of refugees in Europe often emphasize bodily suffering, suffocation, and voicelessness, tropes that resonate with the contemporary regime of asylum in Europe. Anthropologist Didier Fassin, in his work on the post-1990s treatment of refugees in France argues that while in the 1970s a refugee's narrative of trauma was taken into account as evidence in courts for asylum applications, currently the evidence of abuse has to be corporeal. The asylum-applicant refugee needs to show a wound to make his pain believable. The wound is proof of how full life with social value turns into bare life with no value other than its mere existence. This paper suggests that victimized refugee bodies in films similarly attempt to show bodily wound to appeal for the humanitarian conscience of their spectators. Such appeal to humanitarianism will be analyzed in films such as Jacques Audiard's *Dheepan* (2015), Phillip Lioret's *Welcome* (2009), Alfonso Cuarón's *Children of Men* (2006), and Michael Winterbottom's *In This World* (2002).