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Dogs of Democracy

REVIEW

Reviewed on April 1, 2018 | Video

In 2014, filmmaker/narrator Zournazi, an Australian of Greek descent, traveled to Athens with the intent of finding and appreciating her ethnic roots. This brief documentary is less a personal travelog than it is a commentary on the stray dogs in Athens and the country's relatively recent economic crisis and recovery. It seems that strays have been an issue since the 1980s. A change in living standards resulted in the dogs being treated better and left alone. Prior to the Olympics in 2004, the government wanted to remove the dogs, but public sentiment ran high for letting them peacefully wander the streets. One dog in particular—Loukanikos—is referred to as the "activist dog" and becomes a symbol of the 2011 anti-austerity rallies. Loukanikos died two years later of tear-gas poisoning and is memorialized as the dog who gave hope in the midst of hopelessness. Over half of the film serves as a eulogy to Loukanikos, with events held to raise funds in support of animal welfare efforts on behalf of the more than three million Greek strays. The final segment switches gears and addresses child refugees who pass through the island of Lesbos on their way to other cities in Greece and farther into Europe. The study guide refers solely to the economic conditions, financial crisis, immigration, and austerity measures, leaving viewers guessing about the focus of the film on the dogs.—Edell Marie Schaefer, Brookfield P.L., WI