



“Following the film industry’s global trend toward privatization, corporate ideologies, and populist aesthetics, women filmmakers today mostly have to strive towards the production of ‘big-budget films’ suitable for international audiences and the demands of the free market. In order to estimate the ‘status’ they receive once engaged in this endeavor, however, we should consider not only their (often painful and frustrating) advances in the film industry, but also their participation in a larger phenomenon called ‘film culture.’ Film culture includes the industry’s production, distribution, and exhibition mechanisms as well as the more diffuse and contradictory critical, educational, promotional, and activist discourses and commentaries that surround films. Film culture includes practitioners and thinkers who criticize the increasing corporatization of the arts, and women filmmakers have been at the forefront of this enterprise. Whereas national film boards in countries such as Canada, Australia, and the United States have become more market driven and have severely cut down on the funding of independent filmmakers and feminist film organizations, women’s activism, academic research, and alternative practices are still a solid foundation for a vibrant film culture in the next century.” (*Women Filmmakers and their Films*, p. xix)

“I can’t imagine any feminist feeling wildly optimistic about the current state of women in mainstream film. Even though we read how deplorable anorexia and botched boob jobs are, the business has become like a fashion job for women. Looks are prescribed as narrowly as the eye of a needle, and talent takes a far backseat.” (Susie Bright, *Ms. Magazine*, April/May 1999, p.96)

“Originally the camera was very valuable to me as something that was immediate. It was my diary. It was like having a pen and being able to write things down. It was that immediate. Turn on the camera, and just being able to edit in the camera. And in some ways I don’t think that writing in a diary could have been as accurate - you have the power of performance and using your voice, as well as text. I never really saw it as a toy. I didn’t feel like I was playing. I did feel secret: I didn’t want anybody to see this, this is private it wasn’t made for an audience at all.” (*Film Comment*, Nov./Dec. 98, p. 31)

“Women are commonly in a state of dependence ... art is practically the only field open to them ... so long as a woman remains in what they term “her place” she suffers like vexation. Yet let her assume the prerogatives usually accorded to her brothers and she is frowned upon ... I have a right to be where I am. It is a constant conflict when a

woman in a French studio attempts to handle and superintend men in their work.” (*Women Film Directors*, p.160)

“I have done nothing but depict reality. When I say I am a realistic film-maker, this is what I mean. When I shoot village films, I show women exactly as they are in the village. If I were to show women in any other way, you would be the first to tell me it looked wrong ... There have been directors who have made films about women in the city. In my next film I will show a woman who is the set director, who drives cars and even trucks, who conducts interviews, who works, just as a director would. I would not in a million years show her washing so much as a sock.” (“Abbas Kiarostami in Interview,” *Sight and Sound*, December 1993, p. 28)

“There are five other [female film directors] apart from me. It’s not easy, but it’s not impossible either. There are laws that are written and laws that are unwritten, but which people really believe in: our problem more than anything is one of cultural tradition. No one says a woman can’t be a director, but the way they treat you in school, you grow up as a second-class citizen. And how, as a second-class citizen, can you have a first-class job?” (Samirah Makhmalbaf, *Sight and Sound*, January 1999, p. 20)

“... Arab female dance, the belly dance, ... is one of very few venues, if not the sole one, through which modern Arab women express themselves sexually in public. Belly-dancing is widely viewed as a very erotic art especially when performed by professional dancers. However, when performed by Arab women across the classes, the eroticism associated with the dance is continuously re-negotiated, teased out, or in rare occasions, even flaunted. There are two sides to belly-dance ... First, that it is a social activity, particularly among women in their own segregated social gatherings (parties, weddings, celebrations). Second, it is an artistic activity, performed by professional dancers in night-clubs, restaurants, theatres and films. The costume that the belly-dancer wears is very sexy, reinforcing the dance’s eroticism, heavy shaking of the hips and the breasts. Historically, only professional dancers performed the belly-dance in public (before a male audience). These women came from the marginalised groups in society: gypsies, minorities, and the poor. Though their performance was sought after, notably by men of all classes, they were nevertheless seen as disreputable and loose - whorish. Very few of them achieved a high and respectable social status in their art, or had patrons and providers in rich men, merchants, pashas, kings and sultans.” (Lama Abu Odeh, *Feminism and Islam*, p. 169 )

