

Arab Women and Cinema



By **Mohammad Soueid**

In this special double issue, Al-Raida presents a multi-faceted file that deals with Arab Women and Cinema. Many film makers and Arab film critics have contributed to it. The questions raised not only include the image of women and women's issues in Arab cinema, but also her position in the cinema industry. Moreover, the file sheds light on women's participation in the creation of a new language that has accompanied the development of the Arab film throughout the previous decades, taking into consideration the specificities of each film in every Arab country.

There is no doubt that the pioneering role of Egyptian cinema, its abundant production as well as its creation of stars received a large share of analysis. It is worth noting that this examination went beyond cinematic criticism and attempted to understand the position held by Egyptian cinema, its impact on Arab social life as well as the role it played in reflecting the turbulent political events in Arab societies and its awareness of problems of our century.

The recession witnesses in Egyptian cinema over the last decade - characterized by a slowdown in production, reduced budgets, narrow markets and the TV competition - has enabled other Arab cinemas to come to the forefront, particularly after their success in securing joint production with foreign producers and in getting support from funding agencies in their countries.

However, aside from the present situation and the current crisis Arab cinema is facing, the spread in video production and the developments in its use have contributed in creating an atmosphere of freedom and independence that accompanied the birth of a new generation of film makers and artists visual. Women's presence became more greatly felt than ever. Yet, this did not lead to the disappearance of traditional women's issues from most films on the screen. No film succeeded in changing the stereotypical discriminatory mentality prevalent in society.

Despite that, the number of female film directors has increased thus giving women more space to express themselves and discuss their problems. However, this led to challenges and obstacles which unveiled the differences in the status of women in various Arab countries and the variance in the perceptions of female film makers regarding that status.

Here several questions could be raised: What is the impact of these perceptions on the course of contemporary Arab cinema? Has the history of cinema done justice its women?

In answer to all this, Al-Raida attempts, in this issue, to depict reality through a collection of articles, studies, and interviews that explore the situation of Arab women in cinema. It also sheds light on prominent figures and important stages in the history of cinema through critical analysis, documentation, reviews, interviews as well as a report on three film festivals that took place in Beirut recently, namely the Maghrebi Film Festival, the Ayloul Festival, and the Beirut International Film Festival.

**Translated by
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