

REPORT: Film Festivals

By Myriam Sfeir

Maghrebi Film Festival

The opening ceremony of the Maghrebi Film Festival took place on August 13 at Empire Sodeco Square. The festival organized by Crystal Films lasted for two weeks. Most of the films that were screened have merited commendations in various international film festivals. Only one, **Looking for my Wife's Husband**, is Moroccan while all the rest are Tunisian. It is interesting to point out that five of the seven films screened touch upon the situation of Arab women and are narrated from a female perspective.

■ **Silence of the Palace** by Moufida Tlatli is set in one of the Tunisian palaces during colonized and post-independence Tunisia. It is the story of Alia, daughter of one of the female servants working in the palace. Through flashbacks Alia embarks on a journey down memory lane where she uncovers memories of her childhood and adolescence which she manages to retrieve when she returns to the palace she had fled from to pay her condolences upon the death of Prince Sidi Ali. The film depicts the continuous harassment, hardship, degradation, abuse and pressures exerted on lower class women.

■ **Halfaouine** by Ferid Boughedir discusses the problems of a twelve-year old Tunisian boy who is in a hurry to grow up and find out everything that needs to be known about women. His boy turned man predicament robs him of the privileges he enjoyed earlier namely being allowed into the women's Turkish bath: "he must then leave the women's world where he was tenderly loved and where he was told tales ... for the masculine universe where everything seems harsher and more rigorous, where he often has to learn how to harden, in order to become a 'man'."



■ **Bent Familia** by Nouri Bousid highlights the life of three Arab women trying to find their identity, create their own reality, and find freedom and contentment. The film touches upon issues such as family, marriage, divorce,

abuse, the veil, etc. Through their friendship these three women manage to cope with their problems and liberate themselves from the constricting society they are living in.

■ **Looking for my Wife's Husband** by Mohamed Abdel Rahman Tazi recounts the story of Al-Hajj Bin Musa who upon divorcing his third wife regrets it. So he embarks on a mission to find her a temporary husband so that he can

remarry her. The film touches upon polygamy in the Arab world, marriage patterns and divorce laws. According to Tazi "the little world of my childhood harem takes on in my



imagination a nostalgic color which I am trying to restore in the film ... And since I am not polygamous, I considered that the best way for me to shake the preconceived ideas, was to tell a broad story where the touch of humor and the right word substitute for

analysis and where the characters are affectionately outlined. It is my own way to denounce by entertaining."

■ **Le Collier Perdu de la Colombe** by Nacer Khmir is set in Andalusia. The film tells the fairytale story of Hassan who is obsessed with love and who embarks on a journey to find the princess for whom an ancient love poem was written.

■ **Poussiere de Diamants** by Mahmoud Ben Mahmoud presents the coming of age of a Tunisian aristocrat who is hated by his own son. While walking on the street one day he is attacked and left lying on the streets. He is saved by a young lady who gives him assistance and receives a jewel from him as a token of his appreciation. The events that follow are very unexpected.



■ **Soltane El Medina** by Mouncef Dhoubib tells the story of Ramla a young girl who is to marry her imprisoned cousin once he serves his jail sentence. Ramla is confined to a small room by her mother-in-law until her wedding day. With the help of Fraj, her fiancé's retarded brother, she manages to flee to the city, and there she falls prey to a group of men who attempt to rape her.

Ayloul Festival - Film Section

For its third session, the Ayloul art manifestation presented a video series that included four new videos produced by Ayloul. Besides, a selection of Lebanese and Palestinian videos which the organizers found worth showing to their audience were screened.

Those included re-runs of Ayloul productions during the past 2 sessions. The festival hosted for this year a selection from the Videobrasil Festival in Sao Paulo. Eighteen videos were presented from Brasil, Chile, Australia and Argentina.





The festival curator Solange Farkas was present in Beirut to introduce the Videobrasil selection along with video artist Eder Santos and Carlos Nader.

■ **Train - Trains** by Rania Stephan presents a "visual journey following the tracks of empty stations and forgotten people."



■ **The Shower** by Michel Kammoun "enters the domain of water and draws the struggle which binds it with man. A story unfolding under a shower turns into a nightmare where a man finds his death."

■ **Before it Rains** by Wael Deeb describes the homecoming of Walid after his mother's death. The film touches upon the themes of loneliness, solitude, guilt, etc.

■ **Mulhaq** (post-script) by Zeina Osman traces the endless obstacles and complications Hala faces while seeking a divorce. In order to comprehend her situation and fend off her depression, she decides to take charge of her life single-handedly.

■ **Majnounak** (Crazy of You) by Akram Zaatari highlights sexuality and gender relations. Through the testimonies of three men who openly recount their sexual encounters, the film attempts to expose how men view the other sex, as well as their own sexuality and masculinity.

■ **On Seduction** by Ghassan Salhab and Nisrine Khodr takes up the issue of seduction as a powerful tool empowering women. Women of different age groups discuss their relationship with seduction.

■ **Tango of Yearning** by Mohamad Soueid is an autobiographical endeavor which exposes the director's relationship with film theatres, his friends, his environment, and his personal experience at Tele Liban.



■ **Jocker** by May Kassem traces the experiences of Syrian workers in Lebanon. Through inter-

views we learn about their conditions and the hardships facing them in a foreign country.

■ **Muscles** by Talal Khoury documents the body building/gym culture where different people recount their experiences/relationships with this art.

■ **Beirut-Palermo-Beirut** by Mahmoud Hojeij is a parody of performance, success, acting, interview format and video technology. This short film does not lend itself to easy categorization and establishes an ambiguous relationship between form and content. Sounds and images are manipulated in order to create a non-linear piece which challenges habitual ways of seeing.

■ **Drag Questions** by Naz is a five minute documentary

where people are questioned about their drag predicament.

■ **The Dead Weight of a Quarrel Hangs** by Walid Raad deals with the subject of war. Through its "fake documentaries," the film attempts to offer an in-depth and multi-faceted examination of the Lebanese civil war.

■ **Sa Carapace** by Mahmoud Hojeij highlights one's fear of confronting the camera and the taming process that takes place.

■ **Solitude** by Walid Hoayek opens with a large number of people on toilet seats where every one evokes a different story of solitude. Issues such as battery, drug addiction, unemployment, etc. are raised.

■ **Grand Theatre** by Omar Naim takes the story of the Grand Theatre to expose different issues relevant to the destruction and reconstruction of the city.

■ **Divorce Iranian Style** by Kim Longinotto and Ziba Mir-Hoseini is shot in a religious court where divorce cases are presented and discussed.

■ **Legend** by Nizar Hassan documents the Palestinian experience of displacement and dismemberment. It recounts the experience of a displaced Palestinian family scattered around the world and the difficulty involved in re-uniting them.

■ **Women in the Sun** by Sobhi Zoubeidi attempts to shed light on the issue of violence against women in Palestinian society.

■ **Koshan Moussa** by Azza Hassan describes the Palestinian experience of occupation where the audience witnesses the building of an Israeli colony on confiscated Palestinian land.

Beirut International Film Festival

The opening session of the 3rd International Beirut Film Festival took place on October 7, 1999. The festival, that lasted one week, screened twenty well acclaimed international films by renowned



directors such as Pedro Almodovar, Bernardo Bertolucci, Wim Wenders, Regis Wargnier, Isiar Pollain, Tony Gatlif, Juan Pablo Villa Senor, Jan Sverak, Luc and Jean-Pierre Dardenne, Michael Hoffman, Chen Kaige, Abbas Kiarostami, Jean Pierre Limosin, and Danny Boyle. Lebanese and Arab productions also featured along with student films. The festival held several workshops, conferences as well as special events and hosted numerous movie celebrities.