

Arts: Film Directors and Film Stars

Arab States

Arab states were at first reluctant to admit women to the world of film, both in front of and behind the camera. Nevertheless, women soon supported and began working for the new medium. The speed of this development, however, differed considerably from one Arab region to another. Women's access to film making and the film industry has remained difficult as a result of weak cinematic infrastructures, except in Egypt; of moral reservations on the part of women's families; of male-dominated professional networks (except for television); and of producers who have been reluctant to entrust high budgets to female directors.

Although traditionally women were excluded from almost all public forms of entertainment, Arab women did author poetry, recite religious verses and songs (*madrî*), and work as secular singers and dancers for weddings and other celebrations. Fields of partial or complete mimicry, such as storytelling (*haki*), shadow play (*khayâl al-dîl*), comic sketches (the *mukhâbrazîn* in Egypt, known since the late seventeenth century), and the round theater of the marketplace (*masrah al-halaqa* in the Maghrib) were usually reserved for men.

The earliest female theater performers of the region appeared in the developing, European-inspired, classical Arab theater, and at the end of the nineteenth century were either Jewish or Christian Syrians. However, Muslim women soon joined the numerous evolving troupes, and some of them, such as Fâtima Rushdi during the late 1920s, headed their own troupes. In Egypt women even played a constitutive role for the development of national cinema. 'Azîza Amîr, Assîa Dîghîr, Fâtîma Rushdi, and Bahîga Hâfîz worked in the late 1920s and during the 1930s as performers, script writers, and directors, venturing their own money for their films. One of the first full-length Egyptian fiction films, *Laylâ*, was co-directed and produced by theater actress 'Azîza Amîr in 1927. Lebanese Assîa Dîghîr did the same with *Ghâdat al-sabrâ* (The lady from the desert) in 1929, and she remained one of Egypt's most important producers until the 1980s. Others' contributions were more short-lived but not less important, namely those of Fâtîma Rushdi, Amîna Muhammad, and the congenial Bahîga Hâfîz, a musical composer who in 1937

starred and directed the lavish costume drama (and nationalist allegory) *Laylâ al-Badawîyya* (Layla the Beduin). However, this female presence ceased after the foundation of Studio Misr in 1934, along with the consolidation of the film industry. It took Egyptian cinema almost five decades to re-accommodate professional and prolific women on a larger scale. The year 1981 represented a kind of turning point. A total of three films by three different women were released: those of Nâdiya Sâlim, Nâdiya Hânza, and, most important, Inâs al-Dîghîdî, with her social drama *'Afwan ayyubâ al-qânîn* (Pardon me law). Al-Dîghîdî subsequently became the most prominent and most wanted Egyptian commercial female director, with more than a dozen popular fiction films—mostly family dramas, comedies, or thrillers. She has been followed since the mid-1990s by Sîndrâ Nash'at, who has specialized in the entertaining, so-called "shopping-mall films." Other female directors, such as Assâ' al-Bakrî, Hâla Khalîl, and Kamîla Abû Zîkârî, have managed to direct two films each since the end of the 1990s.

In general, women had easier access to less cost-intensive formats, including dependent professions such as editing, set design, and script writing, particularly after the foundation of the public Higher Film Institute in 1959. One of the first women to direct documentaries for television was Sa'dîyya Ghunîm in 1961. Others followed, such as 'Atîm Muhammad 'Alî, director of the spectacular war film *Al-tariq ilâ Aylâ* (The way to Eilat, 1995) and the popular television serial *Umm Kulthûm* (1999). All sorts of formats—children's, developmental, and animation—were directed for the National Film Center, among others those by Farîda 'Arman, Mîna Maghîdh, Fîryâl Kâmil, and Nabîha Lûthî. One of the first independent documentary filmmakers was 'Atîyât al-'Abnîdî, who appeared in 1971 with *Husân al-tîn* (Mud horse).

Numerous women have also become script writers for television. During the 1990s, Mîna Abû Nasr launched one of the most successful animation series on television, *Bakâr*. Since the late 1990s, the field of documentary, short film, and experimentals has been characterized by immense diversity, fueled by the introduction of the less expensive digital format and the activities of a considerable

Arab women unless they worked in the film industry. The only exceptions were Lebanese singers Fayrûz and the less known Shâhîra, Qamar, and Nawâl Farîd, among others, who appeared before the outbreak of civil war in 1975 at a time when the Lebanese film industry almost overtook Egyptian production. Lebanese cinema

trinity socialist feel and almost exclusively addressed the creation of new rail links and economic ties. The Central Asian film studios that emerged in the 1920s and 1930s largely produced documentary films and newsreels. The Second World War sent shockwaves through Soviet artistic communities, but for Central Asia it presented a unique cultural opportunity. Writers, artists, and filmmakers descended on the region to escape the plight of Leningrad and Moscow. During the war, the Kiev, Leningrad, and Moscow Film Studios evacuated to Alma-Ata and created TsOKS, the Unified Central Film Studio. As Sergei Eisenstein completed his great epic, *Ivan the Terrible*, young Central Asian filmmakers gained firsthand experience. After the war, new studios emerged and regional film making reached a prolific new era in the 1950s and 1960s when Central Asian directors were given opportunities to direct their own films for their respective national studios. The relative lateness of their directorial debuts is thus connected to their delay in native film production.

Dinara Asanova (1942–83) is a female director from Central Asia who worked in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan and with the Kyrgyz Film Studio. While working in Larisa Asanova decided to become a director. She graduated from the VGIK (the All-Russian Institute of Cinematography), one of the best film schools in the world, in 1968. Her successful career included Elena Tsygalkina Marina Levtova. He and rendered a harsh and temporary issues. She worked in the transformative frame of family drama *Never Has a Headache* (1976), *The Wife of a Tough Kid* (banned), *Beloved, My Only One* (1976), and *My Only One* (1976), which was tragically cut off in Russia and became a cult film in Tajikistan.

The next generation of Central Asian directors, in the 1980s, was led by directors born in Dushanbe, Tajikistan. They graduated from the directorial program at the VGIK. Their films explore questions of tradition and modernity within the context of the civil war that has ravaged Tajikistan since independence. She is best known for *The Time of the Yellow Grass* (1991), which anticipates the tragedies of Tajik civil war through

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Dîma al-Joumdî, Joanna Hadjithomas, co-director of *Al-kayf al-kalîf* (Around the pink house, 1999); and Danielle 'Arbid with *Marâkî babû* (In the battlefields, 2004).

Two of the only three female Algerian directors who have succeeded in directing a full-length feature film in Algeria with local funds, Hafsa Zinat-Kouldî (1992) and Yamina Bachir-Choukh (2002), were less concerned with film form than in their visual attacks on Muslim fundamentalism and its effects on women. The third, novelist Assia Djébar, made an exception with her highly experimental television film *Nâbat nisâ Jabbal Shînawwa* (The Nouba of the women of Mount Chenoua, 1978).

In all these countries, the largest number of female filmmakers have joined the field of experimentals, short fiction, or documentaries: for example, May Maseî, Liyâna Badr, and 'Azza al-Hassan (Palestine); Wâha al-Râhib (Syria); Fâtîma Jebli Ouzzani and Izza Genini (Morocco); Nadia al-Fanî (Tunisia); Jamîla Sahraoui, Nadia Cherabi, and Yamina Benguigui (Algeria); Rania Stephan and Olga Nakkash (Lebanon); and Nadia Fares, Tahani Rashid, and Safaa Fathy (Egypt)—to name only a few. Many of them are based abroad and have gained an international reputation in their respective fields.

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VIOLA SHAIKH

Central Asia

The history of Central Asian film has been traced back more than 70 years for various reasons. While earlier Soviet perspectives emphasized the cultural links between Russia and Central Asia including early Soviet documentaries shot in Kazakhstan, more recent views take pride in their film's longevity. Nevertheless, the first documentaries had a dis-

trinity socialist feel and almost exclusively addressed the creation of new rail links and economic ties. The Central Asian film studios that emerged in the 1920s and 1930s largely produced documentary films and newsreels. The Second World War sent shockwaves through Soviet artistic communities, but for Central Asia it presented a unique cultural opportunity. Writers, artists, and filmmakers descended on the region to escape the plight of Leningrad and Moscow. During the war, the Kiev, Leningrad, and Moscow Film Studios evacuated to Alma-Ata and created TsOKS, the Unified Central Film Studio. As Sergei Eisenstein completed his great epic, *Ivan the Terrible*, young Central Asian filmmakers gained firsthand experience. After the war, new studios emerged and regional film making reached a prolific new era in the 1950s and 1960s when Central Asian directors were given opportunities to direct their own films for their respective national studios. The relative lateness of their directorial debuts is thus connected to their delay in native film production.

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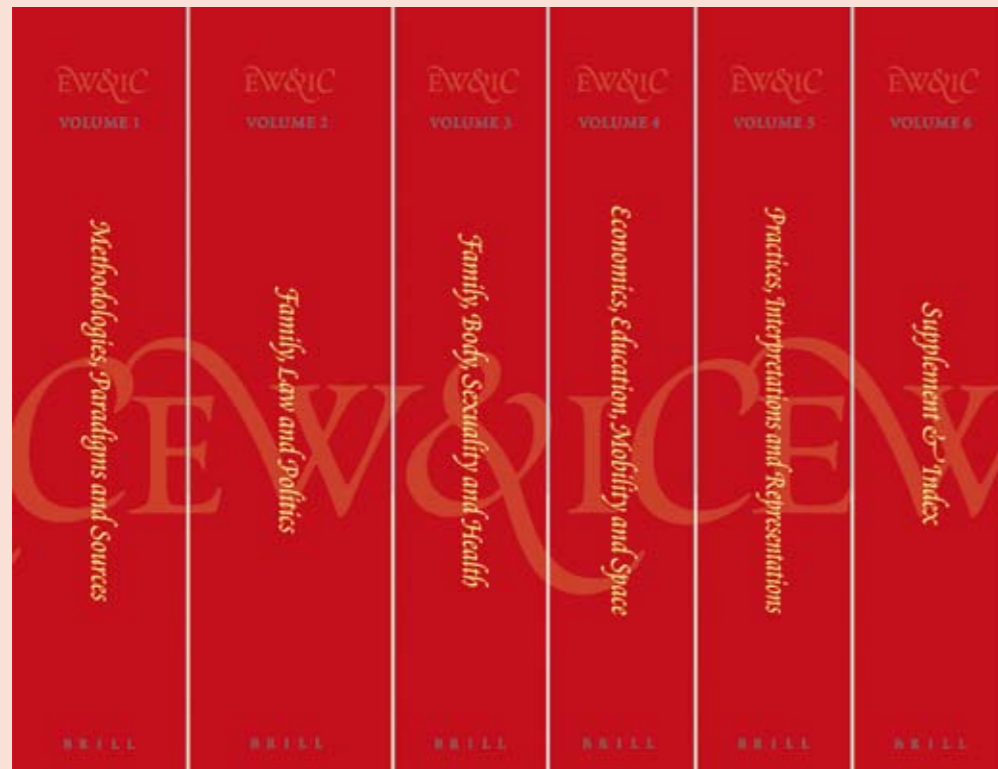


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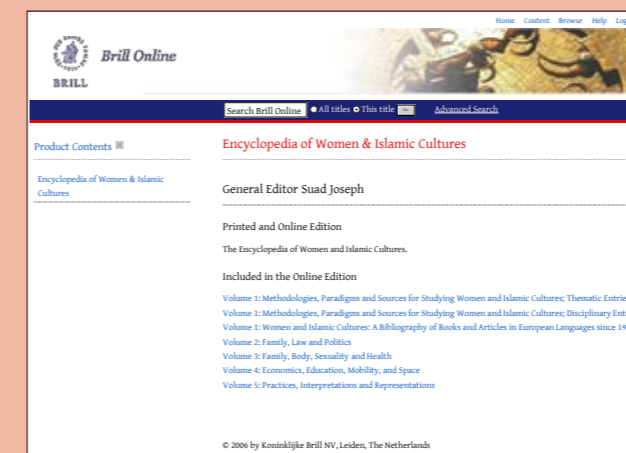
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