The Image of Women in Algerian and Tunisian Cinema
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The Image of Women in Algerian and Tunisian Cinema

Women, taken as cinematographic figures, evoke multiple images of a cultural and social discourse and draw attention to gender and family relations in a broader sense. Tunisia and Algeria, countries in which the process of research and analysis of the films goes beyond a simple collection of female figures. Rather, it focuses on the representation of female identity in the films and how this identity (as a mirror of society) has changed and continues to change.

An analysis of the female figure in Tunisian and Algerian films must take into consideration one of the dominant characteristics of the cinema of these countries, namely their short history, as they came into being only with national independence (in 1956 and 1962 respectively). As they are of recent creation, their political history and social dynamics are still undergoing a period of rapid change. The cinema is seen as a way of expressing a social-cultural discourse and imposing images drawing attention to specific political intentions. The representation of women in films has thus been influenced by the interpretation of women’s role in society.

Mother, wife and daughter: representation in early films

There was no lack of films about women in the 1960s and 1970s. However, limited and generalized images were conveyed. Female figures were always present in the films, even if their representation was without significance. They appeared alongside main male characters or were utilized as part of the environment where the action took place. The representation of the woman in her roles as mother, wife and daughter, was linked to a socio-political discourse. The tendency of these films was, in fact, based on the need for national self-affirmation, Algeria and Tunisia, to create a national identity. The family acted, for example, as a microcosm of the whole social system. In the familial sphere, the representation of women, in roles defined only by their relationships with male figures, constituted religious, social and political values.

In a number of Tunisian films of the 1960s, the figure of the woman is often represented as a weak and self-confident mother who enjoys considerable decision-making power within the family. However, in the profuse Algerian productions which idolized the idealized image of the war of independence, stressing and mythifying the strong and heroic character of the main male characters or were utilized as part of the environment where the action took place. The representation of the woman in her roles as mother, wife and daughter, was linked to a socio-political discourse. The tendency of these films was, in fact, based on the need for national self-affirmation, Algeria and Tunisia, to create a national identity. The family acted, for example, as a microcosm of the whole social system. In the familial sphere, the representation of women, in roles defined only by their relationships with male figures, constituted religious, social and political values.

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