

The art of directing by Algerian women between Ideology and the Sociology of Reality in the 21st Century Artistic readings of a selection of films

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Abstract:

This study aims to shed light on the ideological discourse of Algerian feminist cinema in the 21st century, in which female filmmakers have emerged and presented artistic works that have gained significant popularity and been well received by fans of the seventh art. These filmmakers have distanced themselves from the revolutionary history of cinema and the efforts of women during the colonial period. This is evident in the themes of feminist films, which almost universally defend the rights of Algerian women, whose freedoms have been curtailed in a patriarchal society that subjects them to various forms of violence, such as rape, deprivation of education and repeated assaults. This sends a clear message about the need to liberate women from the oppression imposed on them, while recognising their role in Algerian society. At the beginning of the 21st century, collaborative films contributed to the expansion of this discourse, free from the Algerian state's censorship of cinema, especially in terms of depicting the suffering of Algerian women following the security crisis that hit the country in the 1990s. This laid the groundwork for ideologies advocating the liberation of women from societal constraints and outdated traditions, while preserving their Algerian identity.

Keywords: woman, directing, feminist cinema, director, ideology, sociology of reality.

Introduction:

Since its inception, cinema has held a special place among its audience. Since its birth, cinema has gone through different stages that have contributed to its development in terms of form and content. It began with silent films, either comic or tragic, presented in black and white. This evolved into colour films, and the transition from silent to animation, which increased the aesthetic appeal, especially with the variety of filming techniques and shots.

In terms of general ideological direction, several schools emerged, such as Russian cinema of the 1920s, French realism, British cinema and Brazilian cinema, followed by German expressionism and Italian realism. After the Second World War, cinema played an important role in reflecting current events and documenting real life during this period. It reflected human experience with political and cultural dimensions that were relevant to the films, with most scenes shot in locations outside of studios, such as markets, streets and public squares, treating citizens as fictional actors to be used in productions. In this way, cinema became a reference point that, on the one hand, contributed to the documentation of events and realities and, on the other, served as a means of entertainment and recreation. This was reflected in the general trend of cinematic art throughout the world during this period.

In Algeria, which was colonised by France, the first signs of colonial cinema documented all aspects of life in Algeria during the occupation. The French wanted to erase Algerian identity and use it as a tool to force the population to accept the prevailing situation and impose its legitimacy. They used cinema as propaganda to reinforce their presence in the region. In response, early Algerian filmmakers used cinema to serve and raise awareness of the Algerian cause, marking the birth of Algerian cinema during the war of liberation. This laid the groundwork for the emergence of a cinematic edifice that nurtured talent in the seventh art, aspired to independence and embraced the joy of living in freedom.

After independence, Algerian cinema shifted its focus to depicting the themes of the armed revolution and the achievements that helped secure independence. In particular, it highlighted the mujahid (freedom fighter) as an active and influential character in the narrative, celebrating his revolutionary heroism and his impact on the armed struggle against the oppressive coloniser.

Following the dominant ideology that emphasised revolutionary themes in post-independence Algerian cinema, the seventh art in Algeria, similar to global and Arab cinema, began to address various issues. Filmmakers drew inspiration from the experiences of international filmmakers and various film schools, which helped to capture aspects of life and lived reality in an artistic framework and contributed to shaping public opinion on many contemporary issues. Cinema shifted from mere entertainment to a focus on important issues with implicit, purposeful messages, serving as an important arena for the transmission of diverse beliefs and cultures.

It is also worth noting that during the 1970s and 1980s, cinema was under state control, transmitting numerous messages and reinforcing the socialist ideology adopted by the Algerian state. Subsequently, cinema reflected the political changes that Algeria underwent from the early 1990s to the third millennium, leading producers and directors to focus on films about the “black decade”.

Discussing Algerian cinema leads us to recognise the importance of focusing on the characters that drive the films within the narrative texts, particularly the female gender, which asserts its presence either as a support to men or as a simple, weak character struggling to survive. Many Algerian actresses emerged and attracted attention with their cinematic work, defying customs and traditions that rejected the visibility of women on screen. In addition, women have become leaders in the fields of production and direction, tackling themes that are more familiar to them than to men, in a stylistically aesthetic way that is free of complexity.

2. Problematic:

Cinema in Algeria, in its artistic endeavour, has remained a model for reflecting reality in all its manifestations and issues, prioritising its artistic content for different segments of society and addressing their concerns. One of the most important issues to which cinema has devoted considerable attention in recent decades is that of Algerian women, which is imbued with social, cultural and even psychological meanings and dimensions. The seventh art has thus become a window through which Algerian women can express their concerns and aspects of their daily lives to the world. Moreover, the role of women has not been limited to that of the protagonist in films; it has extended beyond that, as women have entered the realm of cinema to become the main protagonists by taking up the craft of filmmaking professionally.

These filmmakers have also benefited from co-productions outside Algeria as a strategy of openness, independent of state control, especially with Franco-Algerian directors and their numerous productions, despite their different ideologies and perspectives. In addition, feminist experiences in directing began to emerge in the late 1970s, starting with the writer “Assia Djebar”, who directed her first film “Mount Chenoua” in 1978, establishing herself as a leading figure in African cinema and laying the foundations of a feminist film movement, paving the way for many other female directors such as “Yamina Benguigui”, “Bachir Chouikh” and “Jamila Sahraoui”.

The artistic portrayal of women by Algerian women filmmakers varies according to the context in which the female character is portrayed, including the raped woman, the divorced and abused woman, the working woman, the migrant woman, the responsible woman, among others. It also refers to the cultural contexts surrounding them, such as values, customs, traditions, lifestyles and language. The portrayal of women in this way has sparked considerable debate among critics, as it represents a social framework with supporters and opponents. There has been much discussion about the artistic and ideological elements that drive the narrative structure of these films and who controls it, or whether there is an urgent necessity imposed by the realities of everyday life that dictates the approach to such issues.

From this perspective, this research paper aims to address the following question:

Is the art of directing by Algerian women directors dependent on a specific ideology, or is it an attempt to reconstruct social reality?

3. The concept of cinematic art:

Cinema is the moving image that is “presented to the audience either in buildings with screens, called cinemas, or on smaller screens like those of televisions” (Said Tawfiq, 1997, p. 237). On the screen, it is also “the place where film scenes are shown” (Al-Munjid Al-Abjadi, 1997, p. 512). It is defined as “an abbreviation of the word cinematography, which is the art of producing and directing films; it includes the technique of filming and displaying moving images, as well as the production and distribution of films” (Mohamed Munir Hijab, 2003, p. 145).

Cinematography literally refers to a term with multiple meanings, indicating both the technical style of film production (cinematic works) and its presentation in the

form of “film screenings”, along with the exhibition hall and various activities in this field, as well as a collection of film works in sectors such as American cinema, silent cinema, fantasy cinema and commercial cinema (Journaux Marie Thérèse, p. 169). It is also defined as “a mass media tool that aims to persuade, educate, and enlighten, and can serve as a means of mass destruction or popular corruption if it is abused and its content is corrupted” (Ali Fadl, 2012, p. 112).

In our contemporary era, cinema is referred to as “the visual document that has shaped a fundamental pictorial language, transforming all that is fantasy, dream and even nightmare into realities of light and shadow. It is a universal art form that has benefited all the arts known to mankind” (Ahmed Badr, 1998, p. 59). It is an important medium that contributes to shaping public opinion, as it “combines moving images, dialogue, music and performance, thereby deepening ideas in the minds of viewers” (Al-Mashhadani Salman, 2014, p. 56).

4. The history of Algerian cinema:

Algerian cinema has gone through different historical phases, with a remarkable diversity of themes, whether political, security, social, cultural or religious. It has experienced a struggle in the exchange of roles between men and women, leading to the emergence of ideological ideas that distinguish the seventh art in Algeria from that of other countries, as it is inspired by the spirit and identity of society. Accordingly, we will focus on recounting the main historical periods of Algerian cinema, both before and after independence, highlighting the characteristics of each era as follows:

4.1 Algerian cinema before independence:

Discussing the origins of cinema in Algeria leads us to a historical period during the French colonial era, when Algerian cinema was born out of suffering and emerged as a reaction to the French colonisers’ mocking cinematic representations of the oppressed people, such as the films “Musulman Rigilo”, “Bouffe à l’huile” and “Jardin d’Allah”. An important response came in 1957 from Abbas Ramdane, a member of the National Liberation Front, who created what was known as the “Ecole du Cinema du Maquis” (Maquis Cinema School), in coordination with and under the supervision of Vantier René, a fighter in the ranks of the FLN (Armes Roy, 2006, p. 22). The role of this school was to defend and promote the Algerian cause, both internally and externally, and to counter all forms of malicious French propaganda.

Despite limited resources, the school achieved remarkable results, producing a series of short documentaries that recorded the suffering of Algerians under French oppression. “The work of these soldier filmmakers focused on creating a media archive of the revolutionaries, their battles and movements in the mountains, helped by the natural scenery in which the events were filmed” (Brahimi Denis, 1997, p. 21). Among the most important films of this period are “Les Réfugiés” (1957), directed by De Kogis, “Algeria in Flames” (1958), directed by René Fonta, “Saqiyat Sidi Youssef”, directed by Libar Clément, and the films “Yasmina” and “Voix du Peuple” (1961), directed by Lakhdar Hamina, and “Cinq Étoiles” (1962), directed by René Fonta. “All these films were produced in collaboration with the cinema department of the provisional government of the time” (Benjamin Stora, 2012, pp. 181-182).

4.2 Algerian cinema after independence:

Anyone who follows the history of Algerian cinema knows that, after the liberation revolution, it took many paths in its cinematic approach and addressed many issues in different periods of cinematic production. It began with the first generation of filmmakers in the 1960s, who celebrated the achievements of the Algerian revolution and translated them into their works. The main challenge of this period, after independence, was to revive the cinematographic sector after the French authorities had confiscated the equipment and means used for filming. The Algerian authorities sent missions to Eastern Europe to train them in cinematography and acquire the necessary know-how to develop the sector.

It is worth noting that the film industry during this period was an attempt to reshape the characteristics of Algerian identity after the legacy of French colonisation. In this way, the Algerian authorities exerted their control over film production institutions and established a specific direction in which cinematic works focused on glorifying the achievements of the revolution and the government. The only hero agreed upon by all filmmakers was the Algerian people. Among the most famous films of this period are “Silm Hadith Al-‘Ahd” (1962) by Jacques Charby, “Fajr Al-Mu’adhdhin” (1965) by Ahmed Rachedi, “L’Opium et le Bâton” (1969), “Al-Layl Yakhaf Al-Shams” (1965) by Mustafa Badi, the well-known “Douriya Nahu Al-Sharq” directed by Amar Al-Akkari, “La Bataille d’Alger” directed by the Italian director Gillo Pontecorvo, and “Waq’a i

Sinin Al-Jamr” directed by Mohamed Lakhdar Hamina (Brahimi Denis, 2009, p. 23).

In the 1970s and 1980s, Algerian cinema gave way to a second generation of filmmakers who sought to engage with lived reality through their work. Critics considered these to be “the most fertile years of cinematic creativity in Algeria”, during which 40 films were produced (Armes Roy, 2008, p. 161). Directors sought to keep up with developments, especially the socialist approach of the state, which was changing the living conditions of the people. They tried to produce cheaper films that were different from their predecessors and more daring, “linking their work to the socio-cultural and economic reality of the country” (Bensalah Mohamed, 2005, p. 100).

During this period, the directors who came to prominence adopted a realistic approach in their films, focusing on themes such as agriculture, industry and development. This period is recognised as the most fruitful for Algerian cinema. Notable directors from this period include Merzak Allouache with his film “Omar Qatlato Al-Rijla” (1976), “Rih Al-Jnoub” (1975) by Mohammed Slim Riad, “Al-Fahham” by director Mohamed Bouamari and “Wardat Al-Rimal” (1989) by Mohamed Belhaj.

The third phase is referred to as the “cinema of the years of embers” and the security crisis, which began with the political, social and economic changes following the events of October 1988 and continued into the 1990s. During this period, the state withdrew its support for the cinema sector, coinciding with the security breakdown that the country experienced. This led to a stagnation in film production due to the restrictions placed on both directors and actors, who faced threats to their lives. There was also a shift in the themes of film texts. Many directors were forced to go abroad to complete their works, taking greater risks as the themes they were addressing dealt with political upheaval and its security implications, resulting in incidents of violence and terrorism. Among the most notable directors were Lakhdar Hamina, whose film “Kharif Oktobar Al-Jaza’ir” (1992) dealt with the political turning point before the events of October, followed by Merzak Allouache in his film “Bab El Oued City” (1994).

The fourth phase is referred to as cinematic realism, which emerged at the beginning of the 21st century and was characterised by a qualitative leap in the seventh art after the restoration of security and Algeria’s emergence from the

danger zone thanks to civil reconciliation. The themes dealt with became more credible because they were rooted in reality. Cinema in the private sector dealt with issues arising from the security crisis, covering diverse topics such as poverty, migration and unemployment. Most scenes were filmed in popular neighbourhoods, capturing the daily lives of citizens. The films ‘often relied on non-professional actors for the main roles, ultimately conveying the director’s personal visions through their interpretations of reality’ (Mansour Karima, 2013, p. 122). Nevertheless, Algerian cinema has struggled to move away from the revolutionary cinematic narrative, especially in the public sector, where film production continues to glorify historical figures and present their biographies and heroics, as seen in films such as ‘Ben Boulaid’, ‘Zabana’, ‘Lotfi’ and ‘Kareem Belkacem’.

Critics have noted an important trend from 2000 to the present regarding the seventh art’s shift towards celebratory or event-based cinema through the works presented. This offers filmmakers the opportunity to make their presence felt through films that participate in festivals and special events (Mansour Karima, 2013, p. 113), such as the Year of Algeria in France, the Arab Capital of Culture in Constantine, or the Islamic Capital of Culture in Tlemcen. These occasions provided directors with the opportunity to receive state support for their films, after subsidies for the cinema sector had been withdrawn on several occasions.

The history of Algerian cinema since independence, which spans more than sixty years, reflects several characteristics that give the seventh art a uniqueness that distinguishes it from other countries. These include revolutionary films, the security crisis of the early 1990s and its impact on the lives of citizens. Women have played a significant role in Algerian cinema, both as directors and actors, in addition to films produced abroad, often as co-productions.

5. Cinema and Algerian women:

The term “feminist cinema” emerged worldwide in the 1920s, coinciding with women’s entry into the fields of photography and directing (Hayward Susan, 2001, p. 112). In Algeria, women’s presence in cinema began in the early 1960s with revolutionary films in which they played roles, albeit often secondary, especially in the armed struggle alongside men. The representation of women at that time was traditional, mainly as wives, mothers, fighters and patriots.

As women began to penetrate the realm of Algerian cinema through female directors who asserted their presence, they benefited from the openness and rich diversity of themes and directions in Algerian cinema in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Women appeared in dual roles, sometimes as narrators and directors who focused exclusively on women's issues in cinematic representation, while at other times women were used as the driving force in scenes, serving as actresses and protagonists around whom the film's themes, closely linked to feminine concerns, revolved, depending on the director's perspective. The aim was to present a clear image of society. It is noteworthy that "Algerian cinema has highlighted many female existences in this regard, which have managed to leave a clear mark on Algerian works" (Nafisa Nayli, 2013, p. 153).

The emancipation of women and their access to education and universities, following the changes in Algerian society with the political opening and economic revolution, as well as women's involvement in trade union activities, coincided with the era of realistic cinema. This had a positive impact on the seventh art, which underwent a qualitative change at the beginning of the 1980s and continues to this day, particularly in its treatment of women's issues. These include their struggles at work, their relationships with men, the issue of polygamy, rural women and rape, among other themes that have provided artistic diversity.

When discussing feminist cinema in Algeria, we have to reflect on the immense sacrifices made by Algerian women, who entered the field of directing in significant ways. They competed with men to ensure that women were not simply relegated to roles, but were able to portray the role of women in society from a unique perspective, given their understanding of female interests. Many female names emerged, focusing on important and fundamental issues in different historical phases, leading to changes in the cinematic representations of Algerian women directors from decade to decade, due to various ideological shifts and the social realities of the Algerian people.

6. The Ideology of Feminist Film Direction in the 20th Century

Algerian women drew inspiration for directing from men's perspectives on the role of women in cinema. The first to do so was the novelist and writer Assia Djebar, who made her film debut in 1979 with "Tawbat Nisā' Shnūwa", which dealt with the role of Algerian women in the Algerian War of Liberation. This was followed by her film "Al-Walimah or Anashid Al-Nisyan", released in 1982.

Another writer who was fascinated by the seventh art was Hafsa Znai, who wrote many novels. She was influenced by her work as an assistant director to Amin Mernissi in 1991 for the film “Radhia,” which “allowed her to enter the field of directing, using her expertise in storytelling, as she adapted one of her novels, ‘Al-Shaytan Imra’a,’ into a film in 1992” (Ahmed Balia, 2012, p. 116).

Among the successful examples of Algerian feminist cinema is Samia Chala, who emigrated to France after the war years and directed her first film, “The Birds Still Sing in the Casbah”. In 1997, the award-winning director Mekrani made her directorial debut with “Tahan Saint-Gobert”, followed by “Amna”. It is worth noting that most of the films made during this period were produced outside Algeria, due to the security crisis and the years of civil war that the country was experiencing. Almost all the themes were ideological in nature, as women directors expressed their condemnation of the state of Algerian society and the struggles of Algerian women on issues related to terrorism, migration, rape and violence.

7. The ideology of feminist directing in the 21st century:

The exhaustion of Algerian women at the end of the 1990s, following their struggle to survive in the wake of security problems, served as a powerful motivation for Algerian women directors to address issues related to women’s oppression, making them a central theme in cinematic discourse. Women were given a special place to express their suffering, and they did not remain confined to this narrative; in many films they went on to explore wealth.

One of the most notable points is the influence of global and, in particular, European cinema on many Algerian women directors, which led them to incorporate various Western values into their cinematic narratives. They associated Algerian women with themes of wealth and poverty, the desire for freedom, love and instinct, as well as drugs and the world of fashion and art. This shift somewhat displaced moral issues and changed the stereotypical image and collective perception of women.

Algerian feminist cinema found a cultural refuge in Paris, which became a magnet for female directors from all over the Arab world, especially from former French colonies. Most of them went there to escape censorship, political persecution or social surveillance (Aouatif Zarari, 2013, p. 57). They paid a high price for the implicit message of an ideology with a Western character, encompassing the

duality of cultures that women must embody. This perception remains in a state of acceptance and rejection among Algerian audiences.

Another example of feminist cinematic discourse with Western influences can be found in films that have stirred cultural circles because of their themes related to loyalty to France. Most of these films are co-productions or financed from outside Algeria, where the portrayal of women often shows them as enslaved, living under the oppression of men under the guise of traditions and customs. The privileges enjoyed by some female directors, such as the film “Barakat” by director Jamila Bouhired in 2006, is an example of this trend, as it is one of many Algerian films that have attracted the attention of numerous French film companies and publishers, a total of 42 films from the beginning of the third millennium to the beginning of 2024.

8. The ideological background of selected films by Algerian women directors at the beginning of the third millennium:

8.1 The film “Rachida”:

Directed by Yamina Bachir Chouikh in 2002, this film won 15 international awards, underlining its artistic value. It is considered one of the artistic works in which the director excelled in portraying the innocence, spontaneity, simplicity and dreams of women in the midst of a society full of contradictions due to various political, security and social reasons.

The importance of this work is enhanced by the fact that the director is also the scriptwriter. The film describes the character of Rachida, a rural Algerian teacher, a young divorced woman forced to leave the capital to live with her mother in a small village. Her life was turned upside down when she was pursued by terrorist groups for being a free, unveiled, rebellious woman. She was pressured by one of her former students to blow up the school where she worked, but she refused and was subsequently attacked, suffering a gunshot wound to the abdomen.

The film unfolds as Rachida goes through a severe psychological crisis after surviving a near-death experience. Her decision to live in voluntary exile with her mother in a small village initially brings her stability and hope. However, she soon experiences another shock when she sees a terrorist, which brings back memories of the horrors she experienced in the past. She tries to hide her fears by forming a close relationship with her pupils, especially with the pupil “Karima”.

Rachida discovers that the violence in the village is much greater than in the city. She encounters false barriers, the kidnapping and rape of girls, daily killings, the expulsion of inhabitants and their terrorisation. During a wedding celebration, while everyone is rejoicing, a horrifying scene unfolds: the father of her beloved student Karima is seen with a group of terrorists, who begin to kill, steal and humiliate. Rachida wants to run and hide, but her determination is stronger this time, as director Yamina Chouikh shows. The next day, in a moving scene, she decides to go to school, her steps heavy. Some students attend the dilapidated school to learn lessons of courage and resilience.

Director Yamina Chouikh attempts to convey many ideological messages in a weary Algerian society, defending the rights of educated women to free themselves from social constraints and highlighting their role in society as symbols of giving despite their suffering. It portrays Rachida's struggle against the challenges she faces for the sake of knowledge. The film also addresses the subjugation of women to male authority, illustrating the suffering they endure under the burden of symbolic family violence, especially after Rachida is forced to marry another man following her father's rejection of the young man she loved.

Another important message is the profound suffering of Algerian women during the Black Decade, who were raped by terrorist groups who used all forms of torture, culminating in sexual violence. Ultimately, these women are rejected by society for a crime they did not commit, as the families of the raped young women refuse to take them back into their homes.

8.2 “My country?”

This is director Fatima Belhaj's first feature film, released in 2007 and presented on the occasion of Algeria's designation as the Arab Capital of Culture. Her skills as a screenwriter and actress, as well as her background as a journalist, helped her to create this work. The title of the film poses a question about the state of the country during the Black Decade: “My country?” - a question many have asked after enduring the long darkness of the tunnel that Algerians have entered, characterised by chaos, terror and instability. The film serves as a window for viewers to dissect the cultural and social fabric after the domination of masculinity, the Umayyad tyranny and the breakdown of femininity due to violence against women.

The director's feminist perspective is reflected in the film's narrative, which focuses on the main character, especially the mother, "Batoul", who lives in the Casbah. Left with five daughters after the death of her husband, she takes on the role of father, exercising control over her daughters out of fear for their safety from rape by terrorist groups and the unforgiving environment for women. Every day she goes to the market to sell her wares, which consist of couscous and various types of traditional pastries. Her daughters, who have lost hope of marriage after turning thirty, lead a miserable life and find warmth in the embrace of their neighbour, "Khalti Tamani", during their mother's long absences.

Batoul's fears increase after her neighbour Rabia is kidnapped and raped by terrorists. When she is released by the security forces, her father, fearing for his reputation, refuses to acknowledge her and claims that his daughter has died. Batoul's concern for her daughters grows daily, and as the days pass she begins to watch their movements more closely. This continues until the fateful day when, on her way home from the market, she is afraid to leave the house after witnessing a policeman killed by a terrorist. She had shouted a warning to him that there were terrorists among the crowd, an image that remained in the mind of the leader of the armed group, who was hiding among the crowd and decided to punish her. Days later, in a tragic and painful scene, he returned and murdered her in her home, along with her daughters. The only one to escape the slaughter was her mentally unstable cousin "Hessine", who hid in a wooden trunk.

Director Fatima Belhaj has clearly addressed the phenomenon of violence against women with a strong dramatic construction, starting with domestic violence, where women are confined to their homes and deprived of their freedom. It includes the repeated kidnapping of girls without warning, the use of women as hostages or trophies of war, and the denial of their existence by their families after the rapes they suffer in the absence of specialised care centres for this section of society. The final realistic image presented by the director shows that women are oppressed and have no place in a society that has dehumanised them in the most horrific ways, culminating in the death of female characters at the end of the film.

8.3 The film "Papicha":

Directed by Mounia Meddour in 2019, this film focuses on ideas prevalent in Algerian society at the end of the 1990s, amid the country's deepening security crisis. It critiques many of the conditions imposed on Algerian girls by extremist

Salafist groups, contrasting this with the negative attitude of young people who submit to the orders of those who incite chaos. This oppression deprives young women of the opportunity to be elegant and beautiful, to assert their femininity. The director tries to bring us closer to reality, as the story is inspired by real events, mixed with fictional elements to evoke sympathy for women.

The film deals with the phenomenon of gender discrimination and emphasises the need for equality between women and men. Men are often portrayed as slackers and failures, as terrorists or harassers, or as fleeing reality in the hope of emigrating to escape the hell of death. In contrast, women are portrayed as fighters, activists and patriots, which some film critics interpret as a form of incitement and hatred against men.

The plot revolves around “Nadia”, the film’s protagonist, a fashion designer and creative university student with remarkable skills in sewing, embroidery and design. She has a great influence on her fellow 18-year-old students in the university dormitory, encouraging their enthusiasm for life and fashion. They engage in nightlife outside the dormitory walls, paying night guards to keep their activities secret, which is depicted in the film’s opening scenes.

The development of the film reflects the ideas presented by the director from the outset, as the essence lies in expressing the suffering of women under the tyranny of men and the security reality that forces them to remain confined within the walls of their homes and university dormitories. It highlights the oppression and injustice of a patriarchal society and demands that women be granted the right to choose their own lifestyle, free from the religious authority imposed by certain individuals, even to the point of death threats.

The choice of the title “Papicha” means a spoiled and elegant girl. The plot progresses after the murder of “Nadia’s” sister, the journalist “Lina”, who fought terrorism with her pen and all forms of violence. Nadia tries to continue her project at the university, despite the opposition of many of her peers, who consider it taboo to study with her and to speak French.

As events unfold, Nadia insists on organising a fashion show with her classmates on the university campus, focusing on traditional Algerian clothing as a way of avoiding the scrutiny of extremist groups. The aim of this initiative is to show the beauty of Algerian women, who remain prisoners of outdated traditions. Despite numerous obstacles, she manages to realise her dream of organising the show and,

with the help of her classmates, initially achieves remarkable success, dazzling everyone with her creativity, especially in designing the main outfit, which features the “traditional Algerian haik”.

Disappointment sets in, however, when a group of terrorists launch an armed attack and storm the venue. Nadia miraculously survives, but loses many of her supportive friends in the chaos. Some return to their hometowns in a very poor psychological state, each with a different story, culminating in an open-ended conclusion. This serves as a powerful message from the director that the challenges faced by Algerian women in the context of limited freedom know no bounds. Yet all this is met with brutal repression from those who oppose their success, highlighting the negative, complacent role of men.

9. Conclusion:

A closer examination of the issues raised by feminist cinema in the 21st century reveals different ideologies held by female directors, although their works generally fall within a similar framework. They express their views on reality from a subjective perspective that is largely empathetic and supportive of women, advocating for women’s rights and the enhancement of their social roles, while also addressing the struggles they face against men, reflecting a continuation of social culture. This is particularly evident in the context of a male-dominated society that has denied women their rightful place, such as depriving girls of education, especially at higher levels.

This has led the directors to adopt an approach influenced by globalisation, especially following the increased activity of international organisations that have reported negatively on the decline of women’s rights, particularly in third world countries, including Algeria.

The directors have sought to present a project for Algerian women that raises social awareness, distancing themselves from the censorship previously imposed by the state on local film productions. Consequently, at various times they have chosen to rely on external sources of funding in order to freely express their ideas inspired by the depths of Algerian society. They adopt a secular approach, advocating the liberation of women, while at the same time emphasising adherence to national constants, especially linguistic and religious ones. These implicit messages call for rebellion and uprising for their rights.

Notably, almost all the films were set in the popular neighbourhoods of major cities such as the capital, with some modest representations of rural women. This suggests that the directors want to focus on a sample of urban women struggling for a dignified life, while life in rural areas seems to be akin to existing in mass graves.

Diaspora cinema has had a strong influence on the ideological discourse of women directors, who have experienced a different culture that they have tried to convey to Algerian society. This is manifested in the embodiment of innovative ideas related to identity, particularly in cinematic works that deal with migration, the lifestyle of the Algerian community abroad and the need to accept the “other”. These choices present women with the choice of living in comfort abroad, particularly in France, or returning to face the chaos and dangers that followed the collapse of state institutions during the Black Decade.

Algerian women directors have adopted certain Western values through a series of feminist films dealing with issues of wealth, power and romantic relationships. This has raised questions among film critics about the social responsibility of Algerian cinema, which calls for the preservation of social identity. Critics acknowledge that behind the presentation of such films lies pure commercialism and financial gain for the directors.

Despite the fervent defence by several directors that their true motives are to combat the violence and brutality faced by Algerian women and to initiate a collective consciousness based on women’s rights to progress in all possible spheres, there is also an emphasis on openness to others, free from coercive traditions and customs. They see women as a source of contribution and the basis for the progress of the Algerian state through the roles assigned to them.

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