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Review Of "Screens And Veils: Maghrebi Women's Cinema" By F. Martin

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Screens and Veils: Maghrebi Women's Cinema

BY FLORENCE MARTIN

Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2011.

x + 271 pp. ISBN 9780253356680 paper.

Florence Martin's recent book, *Screens and Veils: Maghrebi Women's Cinema* (2011), offers an insightful and novel alternative to the usual postcolonial feminist approaches to Maghrebi women's film studies. Rather than providing the reader with an encyclopedic summary, or a historical accounting of the topic, Martin's work argues for a transnational feminist reading of Maghrebi cinema that speaks to the fluid interplay between various cultural systems, narrative structures, and aesthetic forms across borders and among diverse cultural audiences. In line with Will Higbee's theorization of "cinema of transvergence" and Hamid Naficy's concept of "accented cinema," Martin's book aims to examine the fertile dynamics that traverse women filmmakers' practices in Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia. Her

work explores the complex interface between national and transnational, local and global, in a region where filmmakers are bicultural, bi- or tri-lingual, and where their films are financed and viewed both domestically and abroad. Borrowing the notions of “transvergence” and “accented cinema” (which usually refer to migrant or diasporic cinema from directors of both genders), Martin’s work posits a broader reading, where Maghrebi women’s films are seen as part of a larger cultural and gendered “interdiscursivity,” instead of a quest for a specific national or gendered identity.

Each chapter analyzes a single movie to highlight a particular facet of the notion of transvergence that Martin is exploring. These chapters, in turn, are organized into three main sections that “retrace the cinematic pattern of delivery” (210). The first section, “Transnational Feminist Storytellers,” examines the innovative narrative structures deployed in Assia Djebar’s *The Nuba of the Women of Mount Chenoua* (Algeria, 1978) and Farida Benlyazid’s *Door to the Sky* (Morocco, 1988). In the middle section, “Transvergent Screens,” Martin focuses on the performative aspect of the tales in Bachir Chouikh’s *Rachida* (Algeria, 2002), Raja Amari’s *Red Satin* (Tunisia, 2002), and Nadia El Fani’s *Bedwin Hacker* (Tunisia, 2002). Finally, the third section, “From Dunnyasad to Transvergent Audiences,” turns toward the construction of simultaneous modes of reception on both sides of the Mediterranean through Yasmine Kassari’s *The Sleeping Child* (Morocco, 2004) and Selma Baccar’s *Flower of Oblivion* (Tunisia, 2006). This structure allows Martin to explore a diverse body of works and to provide a balanced perspective of the region’s women’s cinematic output, although no mention is made of major filmmaker Moufida Tlatli and productions from the 1990s are absent.

While the entire book will provide a valuable resource to colleagues teaching these films, the chapters on El Fani’s *Bedwin Hacker* and Kassari’s *The Sleeping Child* should be of particular interest. In her analyses of both movies, Martin offers a complex analysis of embedded screens, for example, in *Bedwin Hacker*, Martin notes that the multiplication of TV and computer sets stresses a “globally shared cyber-vision” that simultaneously reveals and disrupts authoritarian discourse (131). In *The Sleeping Child*, on-screen videotaped images of *harragas* (illegal migrants) translate the physical and cultural boundaries that separate them from their wives. Martin shows those images as not just divisive, though, but also as a source of liberation: freed from the desiring gaze, women become the viewers of their disembodied husbands, inverting “the stereotypical politics of the gaze” (181).

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