Chapter 4

A Feminist Perspective Analysis of Gender in Cinema of Saudi Arabia: Wadjda

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ABSTRACT

In this study, Wadjda (2012), directed by Haifa El Mansur, will be analyzed from a feminist perspective in the context of the concept of gender. Mansur demonstrates to the cinema audience through a 10-year-old girl that women get out of their passive positions and get their rights partially. In this study, firstly the social structure of Saudi Arabia and the position of woman, the concept of gender and feminist film criticism, which is the analysis technique of the film, will be examined and the position of women in Saudi Arabian society will be examined through Wadjda shot by a Saudi female director.

INTRODUCTION

Saudi Arabia is ruled by the kingdom, but it is a closed society. Although it is one of the important countries of the Middle East, it is a country where education level is low compared to other Arabic countries, polygamous marriages are made and women are deprived of many rights. It is very difficult for cinema to exist as an art in such a closed society. Therefore, it is almost impossible to see films that

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-1774-1.ch004

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criticise the view of the society on women. However, in such a closed society, Haifa El Mansur emerged as the first female director of Saudi Arabia and reflected the position of women in the society in a critical way. She also revealed that women exist and have rights in this society and that they should not ignore these rights as if they were a man.

In this study, *Wadjda* (2012), directed by Haifa El Mansur, will be analyzed from a feminist perspective in the context of the concept of gender. Mansur demonstrates to the cinema audience through a 10-year-old girl that women get out of their passive positions and get their rights partially. In this study, firstly the social structure of Saudi Arabia and the position of woman, the concept of gender and feminist film criticism, which is the analysis technique of the film, will be examined and the position of women in Saudi Arabian society will be examined through Wadjda shot by a Saudi female director.

**WOMEN’S POSITION IN THE SOCIETY OF SAUDI ARABIA**

Saudi Arabia is a country ruled by the kingdom in the Arabian Peninsula. Saudi Arabia is a closed society compared to other countries. Non-residents can enter the country only through pilgrimage, and during these visits, pilgrim candidates undergo a long and intrusive procedure to determine the suitability of their visit (Flynn, 2015: 56). Cebeci (2017: 2380) describes Saudi Arabia in this way:

“*Saudi Arabia is the founding member of many international organizations as it is one of the important countries of Arabic world, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and the Middle East. However, in terms of its social structure, it is a country that does not comply with the standards of today’s world, from women’s rights, freedoms, access to education and democratic representation.”*

Saudi Arabia has a literacy rate of 62 percent which is the lowest literacy rate in the Gulf countries. In Saudi Arabia, female literacy is estimated to be 50 percent and male literacy is 72 percent (UNDP, 2003. quoted Hamdan, 2005: 42). Among these rates, it is seen that the education of women is half lower than the education level of men. “Against the abundance of historical research on gender relations in the West, the issue of women in Muslim societies is still dominated by the extrapolation of the basic principles of Islamic religion and their impact on women” (Kandiyoti, 2013: 119). An example of these countries is Saudi Arabia. It is not surprising that women in such a closed society are also oppressive and secondary in society. According to Hamdan (2005: 45), the problems of women in this society and the
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