

*El Hadj Sy: Painting, Performance, Politics* is a beautifully produced volume. Its visual and bilingual textual content reflect meticulous research, scholarship, and attention to detail. It will greatly appeal to a broad audience of those interested in the arts of Africa.

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**Robert Lang. *The New Tunisian Cinema: Allegories of Resistance*.** New York: Columbia University Press, 2014. Film and Culture Series. xxii + 380 pp. Illustrations. Preface. Acknowledgments. Notes. Filmography. Glossary. Bibliography. Index. Paper. \$35.00. ISBN: 978-0-231-16506-8.

In *New Tunisian Cinema: Allegories of Resistance*, Robert Lang offers a timely and compelling analysis of the generation of Tunisian filmmakers active from 1986 to 2006, a group that includes the directors Nouri Bouzid, Férid Boughedir, Moncef Dhouib Nadia El Fani, Moufida Tlatli, and Mohamed Zran. Lang defines the New Tunisian Cinema movement as beginning with Bouzid's *Man of Ashes* (1986) in the waning days of Habib Bourghiba's presidency and continuing through the twenty-three-year dictatorship of Ben Ali. During this period Tunisian cineastes sought to engage the public in debates about national identity, to cultivate a vibrant space of resistance against the authoritarian state, and to define a cinematic aesthetics that departs from the prevailing Egyptian tradition of melodrama.

There is much to admire in Lang's work: it is not only rigorously researched, but also eminently readable for both cinephiles with no expertise in North Africa and specialists. Published three years after the Tunisian Jasmine Revolution of January 2011 sparked the Arab Spring and catapulted the nation into the international spotlight, the work joins a growing body of criticism in English on North African film including *What Moroccan Cinema? A Historical and Critical Study 1956–2006* (Sandra Gayle Carter, 2009), *Screening Morocco: Contemporary Depictions in Film of a Changing Society* (Valerie Orlando, 2011), *Screens and Veils: Maghrebi Women's Cinema* (Florence Martin, 2011), and *Algerian National Cinema* (Guy Austin, 2012). It is, notably, the first English language monograph on Tunisian film, despite the oft-acknowledged status of Tunisian cinema as "the most daring of all the Arab cinemas" (iv). Lang's authority is appreciable; he lived in Tunisia at critical moments (first in 1993 at the time of the Oslo accords between Arafat and Rabin and then following the al-Qaeda attacks on the Twin Towers in 2001), and conveys an intimate knowledge of the diverse languages of Tunisian cinema, as well as of local audiences and critics.

Throughout the book, Lang argues that the films of the New Tunisian Cinema movement constitute "allegories of resistance against the authoritarian

state” (12). Drawing on Frederic Jameson’s assertion that Third-World writing inevitably functions as national allegory, Lang shows how, unlike the first generation of postindependence Tunisian filmmakers who focused on colonial or neocolonial oppression, directors from the mid-1980s on were more concerned with “oppressive/repressive structures within the society itself: the neopatriarchal family, government corruption, the authoritarianism of the state, the mafia-like activities of Ben Ali’s family, the growth of political Islam, and so on” (21). The emphasis on allegorical reading gives the study a coherent, overarching narrative often lacking in critical surveys; at the same time, Lang is careful to problematize the notion of allegory and each of the theoretical concepts (neopatriarchy, nostalgia, Third World, hybridity, etc.) he deploys. Lang positions Bouzid as the driving intellectual force behind the movement (and accordingly includes three of Bouzid’s films in his analysis, whereas he addresses only one film of each of the other directors considered). In a seminal lecture titled “Sources of Inspiration” at Villepreux in 1994, Bouzid laid out the six points he considered essential to his oeuvre: “memory as baggage, defeat as destiny, the filial relationship, the image of the body, pain as emotion, and the face and the veil” (36). Lang uses these points to structure his readings of other Tunisian *auteurs*, showing how they collectively wield film as “a particular kind of cultural strategy . . . that seeks not only to ‘imagine’ the nation, but to overcome the phenomenon of ‘subalternity’ (19).

In the opening chapter, Lang provides a fascinating overview of contemporary Tunisian history and its many contradictions: on one hand, the country has enjoyed a “public image as a safe and friendly tourist destination and as the most progressive society in the Arab world,” largely due to Bourghiba’s emphasis on secular modernity and the advancement of women; on the other, Tunisia under Ben Ali was “the most repressive state in the Maghreb” with “no freedom of political expression whatsoever and [a] record of human rights abuses” (ix–x). The reader will be struck by the parallels between Lang’s account of Ben Ali’s increasingly authoritarian and profiteering leadership and discrediting of journalists and intellectuals and the current political climate in the United States. In each of the subsequent eight chapters, Lang offers close analysis of one feature film, proceeding chronologically from Bouzid’s *Man of Ashes* (1986) to Boughedir’s *Halfaouine* (1990), Bouzid’s *Bezness* (1992), Tlatli’s *Silences of the Palace* (1994), Zran’s *Essaida* (1996), El Fani’s *Bedwin Hacker* (2002), Dhoubi’s *The TVs Coming* (2006), and Bouzid’s *Making Of* (2006). These readings focus on issues of sexuality, state surveillance, authoritarian fathers, the class divide, historiography, and the revolutionary potential of the Internet. Lang grounds each film within the economic, political, historical, and psychoanalytic contexts in which it emerged, while also responding to and extending the observations of previous critics. His wide-ranging references to Tunisian scholars alongside major Francophone and Anglophone critics constitute a particularly rewarding aspect of the book.

In his final chapter, Lang acknowledges the significant role the New Tunisian Cinema played in laying the ground for the Arab Spring uprisings.

It provided Tunisians with an image of themselves and identified values worth fighting for. Nonetheless, the movement had run its course by 2006. The Ben Ali regime had ceased to respond to criticism; the conflict gripping the Tunisian nation increasingly pitted “an unscrupulous global free-market capitalism on one side . . . [against] a ruthless ideology of religious fundamentalism on the other” (269). This situation called for renewed reflection on Islam, a task that the predominantly secular filmmakers were ill suited to take on. In fact, the secular liberalism and art house sensibilities of filmmakers seemed more and more out of step with the deep-rooted conservatism of audiences who lacked the film culture of previous generations. Perhaps most significantly, new media had replaced the cinema. The national narrative was now sustained and elaborated “with unprecedented speed and immediacy . . . in photo, audio, video, and text postings via media such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Dailymotion, . . . which—contested, competing, and jostling for position—become the basis for a narrative we call history” (261).

There are a few inconsistencies in this impressive study. Lang asserts that the Abraham myth eclipses the Oedipus story in importance in the Arab world, although several of his readings undermine this argument (particularly that of *Halfaouine*, in which the child protagonist is cast out of the maternal, feminine world as he comes of age—a trope found in much Maghrebi autofiction and one that Hédi Abdel Jaouad identified in a 1996 article, “Too Much in the Sun: Sons, Mothers, and Impossible Alliances in Francophone Maghrebian Writing” (*Research in African Literatures* 27 [3])). Over all, however, *New Tunisian Cinema: Allegories of Resistance* is an exemplary piece of film scholarship. Lang’s selection of eight films from a period of over two decades is by no means exhaustive, but the depth of his analysis is compelling. Meticulously researched, finely nuanced, and eloquently written, the work offers important insights into the distinct cinematic discourse of Tunisian filmmakers from the 1980s to 2006.

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## EDUCATION

**Daniel Magaziner.** *The Art of Life in South Africa*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2016. xxvii + 376 pp. Photographs. Notes. Bibliography. Index. \$34.95. Paper. ISBN: 978-0-8214-2252-6.

When writing about artists and artistic expression, scholars typically focus on known or renowned works and individuals: artists with the biggest careers, popular music genres, and critically acclaimed fiction. Seldom do we focus on the mundane or unspectacular. Daniel Magaziner’s *The Art*