Issues of Representation in Arab Animation Cinema:
Practice, History and Theory

By
Tariq Alrimawi

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Abstract:

This practice-based research addresses the challenges that face the animation practitioner in the Arab region. In engaging with this topic it highlights the contrast with international animation producers, and also seeks to analyse how Arab animation cinema is represented and understood in the West. It introduces Arab animation history, and the animation industry as it currently exists in the Middle East. I suggest the reasons why there have been so few animated shorts and feature-length films successfully produced in the Arab world, in spite of their being a rich literary and cultural heritage. This study reveals a number of cultural, religious, political and economic issues related to Arab animation cinema, both in relation to its history and in regard to its place domestically and internationally. This research explores how YouTube and other social media became the main platform for Arab animation artists to distribute their political works during and since the ‘Arab Spring’ in the Middle East. The immediate consequence of this is an explosion in the exposure of Arab animation artists and their work to the world, in comparison to the very limited opportunities and freedoms of the past. Moreover, this study seeks to open up a conversation about the possibility of showing animated films that include Arabic content to Western audiences. This is complex in the sense that the place and presence of Arab animated stories are affected by how the representation is perceived within its production context and conditions of exhibition. My research will result in original knowledge, to be made available to Arab filmmakers, the Arab film industry and international academics addressing and championing animation, by engaging with conceptual questions, creating a critical practice methodology, and applying research-led practice methods.

Keywords:

Arab animation, Arab filmmakers, Muslim filmmakers, Arab cinema, Middle East, representation, visual culture, Arab Spring, political communication.