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SAUDI ARABIA

Girls on film

In Saudi Arabia, women aren't allowed to vote or even leave the house without a male guardian. But that didn't stop Haifaa Al-Mansour from directing feature-length film *Wadjda*

Haifaa Al-Mansour's debut film, *Wadjda*, is not just a first for her – it's also the first home-grown movie to ever be produced in Saudi Arabia. That the movie is a story about a girl and directed by a woman – in a country ranked as one of the worst for women's rights – is nothing short of astonishing. We speak to its 39-year-old director ...

mc: Why did you decide to be a filmmaker in a country with no cinemas?
Al-Mansour: I started to make shorts, just as a hobby or as a kind of therapy, as I've loved film since I was little. My father used to bring home VHS tapes for us to watch. We don't have any film theatres in Saudi Arabia, but we have a lot of DVD stores as there's no entertainment basically, except for watching films. I fell in love with the medium. When I got a little older I would go to the shop myself, but they wouldn't allow women inside, so I'd wait outside and they would bring me the

catalogue. I would choose what I wanted and then they would bring it out to me.
mc: What films do you remember from your childhood?
Al-Mansour: I remember watching *Snow White* and all the Disney movies. It was so uplifting for us kids, especially because in Saudi Arabia we don't have any nature. No trees, birds or animals, so it was amazing just to see them on TV.
mc: What challenges did you come up against when making *Wadjda*?
Al-Mansour: Whenever we went to locations I couldn't be on set with the

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Saudi director Haifaa Al-Mansour has broken the mould for both women's rights and filmmaking in her homeland. She's the first person ever to shoot a feature movie entirely in the kingdom.

director of photography or the actors [because women and men aren't allowed to mix in public]. I had to be in the back of a van where we had a monitor set up for me and a walkie-talkie. It was really frustrating, but my goal was to make a film. If that meant I had to be in the van, there was no point in being angry. I think staying focused on what we want to achieve and working within society is the way we can push the envelope and move forward in a place like Saudi Arabia, where people are afraid of change.

mc: Given the restrictions, why didn't you make your film elsewhere?

Al-Mansour: Nobody really knows a lot about Saudi Arabia and I wanted to show my culture. It's good for the Saudi people and it's good for the project itself – it makes it more authentic and real. One guy came to me after one of the screenings and said to me, "I know now how Americans feel when they see an American film" and I was really touched.
mc: Given some Saudi women were hesitant even to have their faces on ID cards, was it hard to find a lead actress?

Al-Mansour: We only found Waad Mohammed [who plays *Wadjda*] a week before filming because many parents were hesitant to have their daughters act in a film. When Waad auditioned she was so natural and charismatic.

mc: What has the film's reception been like in Saudi Arabia?

Al-Mansour: Young people like it because they can see themselves in it. Plenty of people don't like it because it's about empowering girls and it examines society and says things they don't want to hear – especially from a woman. I knew that some people would be upset by it, but we need to create debate. *Wadjda is out in March.*

– AS TOLD TO ANNE FULLERTON

GLOBAL

Explorers of Instagram

Take a break from the cat snaps with these extraordinary accounts that offer glimpses into hidden worlds.

@bipolaire61

Where: Arctic/Antarctica

Why: With a passion for sailing, this anonymous Instagrammer travels from pole to pole delivering shots of stark landscapes and the animals that inhabit them. Think glowing igloos, sunrise over icebergs and lots of penguins.

@glennagordon

Who: Glenna Gordon

Where: West Africa

Why: Gordon publishes shots from all over Africa, but it is her images of the everyday lives of women, from Somali refugees at a waterpark (left) to Liberian Girl Scouts, that make her a must-follow.

@dguttenfelder

Who: David Guttenfelder

Where: North Korea

Why: Offering a peek into the daily routines and big events that unfold inside this secretive state, it's no wonder David Guttenfelder was named *TIME*'s Instagram Photographer of 2013.

@nina_berman

Who: Nina Berman

Where: Syria

Why: New York documentary photographer Nina Berman is regularly on assignment in Syria, uploading heart-wrenching photos of the individual faces behind the humanitarian crisis.

@ciaraleeming

Who: Ciara Leeming

Where: Manchester

Why: Photojournalist Ciara Leeming offers an insight into a world few of us will ever see – that of Europe's Roma population.

GLOBAL

MORE PEOPLE OWN A MOBILE PHONE THAN A TOOTHBRUSH.*

Of the more than seven billion people in the world, an estimated four billion of them own a mobile phone – but only three and a half billion own a toothbrush.



Clockwise from left: no stigma ... many beauty contestants in Brazil admit to cosmetic procedures; celebrated plastic surgeon Dr Ivo Pitanguy (centre right) has offered his services pro bono to the country's disadvantaged; residents of Favela do Metro, a slum situated near Maracanã stadium – home to the upcoming FIFA World Cup – fight demolition of their homes as part of state plans to give the area its own face lift.

BRAZIL

Pro-bono beauty

Charity gets a new face – and body – in Brazil

As Brazil spruces up its streets in time for the FIFA soccer World Cup in June, the country's plastic surgeons have been getting into the spirit of things by offering free cosmetic procedures to its poorest citizens.

Brazil's focus on beauty is well documented and now more than 220 clinics are offering pro-bono cosmetic services to the underprivileged through the national health system. With more than 11.5 million operations a year, Brazil ranks behind only the US in terms of the number of procedures performed worldwide.

Meanwhile, millions of people continue to live in poverty; 35 per cent of the population survives on less than

\$2 a day, and the country still battles deadly diseases such as tuberculosis.

The man behind the pro-bono beauty movement, Dr Ivo Pitanguy, considers it a duty to fly from his private island to Rio to perform surgeries on favela dwellers. "The poor have a right to be beautiful, too," he has said, claiming his work lifts self-esteem.

There's little stigma attached to such surgeries in Brazil. Juliana Borges, who represented her country in the Miss Universe pageant in 2001, openly admitted to 19 procedures, while psychologists and obstetricians regularly refer their patients to plastic surgeons.

– NAOMI CHRISOULAKIS



GLOBAL

Appy ever after?

New mobile phone technology is reuniting families

Imagine your house is swept away by floodwater or you're fleeing civil war. Posing for an iPhone snap might be the last thing on your mind, but for many kids it's their best chance of finding their families. RapidFTR (Family Tracing and Reunification) is a mobile phone app developed by UNICEF to

help children and parents find each other after disasters and conflicts. The app allows aid workers to photograph and record details of minors and upload it to a database, which can be accessed by aid workers in other parts of a country or by those in neighbouring states. ■

– ANNE FULLERTON



Unaccompanied refugee children can now be registered through UNICEF's mobile phone app in the hope of finding their families.

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